

Perspectives on Translating Mahmoud
Taymour's Short Story 'Many Happy Returns'

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Theoretical Framework:

Translation between two different cultures means transferring the systems of one language into the systems of another language. Bell (1991, xv) defines translation as:

"Transformation of a text originally in one language into an equivalent text in a different language retaining as far as possible, the content of the message and the formal features and functional roles of the original text".

But how is this transfer done? Who is undertaking that transfer? And lastly what is the type of text to be transferred? These questions mean that there is an underlying strategy or 'theory' that the translator adopts in translating :

'In reality . . . all persons engaged in the complex task of translating possess some type of underlying or covert theory, . . . a theory should provide a measure of predictability about the degree of success to be expected from the use of certain principles, given the particular expectations of an audience, the nature of the content, the amount of information carried by the form of the discourse, and the circumstances of use (Nida, 1989:2).

Yet, whatever the theory adopted, 'the status of the source text as a social product, its intended readership, the socio-economic circumstances of its production, translation and reception by target language readers are all relevant factors in the translation process' (Hatim & Mason 1990).

Bearing in mind all these factors, the translated text could thus be representative of the source language social product in the target language culture despite Sapir and Whorf hypothesis that "no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as

representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the world with different labels attached" (Basnett, 1993; 145) and despite the fact that some critics denounce translation and call for reading in original languages. Yet, we are of the opinion that translation illuminates the original giving readers a better sense of the original's text. Translation is 'a kind of uncovering, that it suddenly exposes culture and language, to literary and linguistic criticism in a different cultural climate, or... 'space'? (Nida, 1991: 164).

Purpose of Study:

This paper highlights the importance of considering the translated text as the source language social product in the target language culture. Mahmoud Taymour's short story 'Many Happy Returns' was chosen for translation. It represents an important phase in the art of short story writing. In 1950, Many Happy Returns and Collection of Other Stories won Taymour the award of King Fouad the First. Yet, no study was available on this short story. One of the reasons for choosing it for translation is that it deals with a social and religious situation that a person comes across on more than one occasion. It deals with a universal and a local experience. It is universal because of the similar conditions, types of celebration, manners of celebration irrespective of one's religion. It is local in describing the 'itinerary' of a typical Muslim Egyptian bachelor on the eve of the feast. Rich and poor, educated and non-educated pass by the same experience. Thus, certain points in the source text call for the translator's attention and understanding to accept the translated text as the representative of the original text in the target culture. The translation is preceded by a study of the method and language of narration in Mahmoud Taymour's writing with examples from 'Many Happy Returns'. This procedure was necessary to unveil the writer's intentions and reasons for the choice of words, the circumstances of production; time and place of events that could lead to an honest representation of the original text in the target culture. It has been my intention as well to emphasize that translation is not a haphazard operation, rather an intellectual creative one.

Mahmoud Taymour and Short Story Writing :

Mahmoud Taymour(1894-1974) chose to write the short story following the footsteps of his brother, Mohamed Taymour, who devoted his life and career to the art of short story writing. Thus

Mahmoud Taymour worked on improving his skill in short story writing after including his personal insight and conscious study together with his continuous awareness of the techniques used by other writers of the art all over the world. The short story then, became the only art that preoccupied his mind, and dominated him both as creative artist and a scholar. We can say that 'he himself is the history of the short story in our modern literature in Egypt' (Al Nassag, : 1968: 311).

Method of Narration :

In the beginning of his writing career, Taymour depended in most of his short stories on narrating in the third person. He used the narrator who was not involved in the action, as a means to present the events of the story. The writer was then an outsider and a mere observer though he was acquainted with his characters. This gave Taymour a clear presence in these stories as it allowed him to interfere, to comment and make judgements. As he was a domineering force, he was able to control his characters and their motives. At the same time, he built an imaginary barrier between the world of the writer and the world of the story - a barrier to be felt by the reader himself (Salah Rezk, 1984).

He used to narrate in the past tense which led the narrative element to become the most influential element in the story that left the reader always watching events that happened in a time and place far away from the present moment. This made the story lose much of the vivid momental action that attracted the reader to the events and enabled him to get involved in the characters' lives and deeds.

Moreover, the writer's presence and interference in the action gave the story a direct diegetic technique. This is what Taymour used to do. He presented everything to the reader, commented on everything as if the reader was unaware and unable to do any of these activities by himself. No doubt that such approach gave a dull and monotonous atmosphere to the story. It brought the reader to boredom and it detached him from the events of the story and its characters.

At a later stage, Taymour developed his writing of the short story. he no longer uses the past tense which used to dominate his stories. He no longer says :

/qa:lat/ /qa:lə/ /qɪtu/*
(she said) (he said) (I said)

Yet, he used verbs which depicted the characters' reactions which he found suitable in beginning a dialogue. We cite examples from 'Many Happy Returns'.

/fesihtu bihi we ente fiʃarrin yæ seyidi/
I shouted at him: (And a bad one to you, Sir)

/feʃ ihtu in lem teskut lekum ɖawɖa:ʔ fɪlɔqtu ʔedmigetekum/
So I shouted "If you do not stop your noise I would smash your heads).

At the same time, we find Taymour using different words which evoke emotions such as:

/gemgeme/
(he mumbles)

/wattexetɪtu itʌri:qɑ ile menzili wa ene ugemgimu ʃa:xitɑn θæʔir
ʔannefsi/
(but I recovered taking the way home while mumbling in anger and irritation)

Another development in Taymour's short stories is the method of narration which was not only limited to the technique of diegesis but he also started to change the way he presents the story. He began to write in an 'autobiographical' way as he became one with the hero. Taymour thus gave us more pleasure in reading the story since we get more involved with the character. He began to employ the internal monologue in his short stories which gave him the chance to give us an image of life as the character saw it because he drew it from the character's conscious and subconscious worlds. Since Taymour followed a psychoanalytical methodology, we find that the internal dialogue was the ideal method for narration which helped him achieve what he wanted, namely a close study of the characters and presenting them to the public by drawing a cross section of their intuitive, natural and intellectual life (Nigm: 76).

* See the reading symbols in Appendix.

This autobiographical element is presented in 'Many Happy Returns' since we have one main character narrating the story. It starts by :

/beriñtu mʌʃrʌb nyu:ba:r bimeydæn ibpirʌ mʌʃrʌbi ilmufʌdʌl elleʃi
ezgi fi:hiʌkbʌr wʌqtin fi idʌwa:hi wel emæsi/

(I left the "Newbar" café in the "Opera" square, my favourite café where I spend most of my time, in the forenoons and evenings.)

The internal monologue is also evident in 'Many Happy Returns' in various parts. For instance, the hero is always questioning himself:

/mæ buku:ri fi ilʃewde ile menzili/
/limæʃe esteʃʃiru enni mustegriqun fi iʃewægil/
/limæʃe enne da:ʔiq/

(Why am I starting so early home)

(Why do I feel that I am preoccupied with much business)

(Why am I distressed)

The hero depicts his true feelings towards his uncle, his cousin and marriage through an internal monologue:

/we enni le?eʃisu bi?enna eʃedu innæse ʃedæweten li: hum ulæ?ike
əlʔaqa:ribu elleʃi:n exælehum yeʃudu:nə ʃeley mæ uʃi:b min
luqʌymæt/

(I do feel that my most bitter enemies are those kinsmen who to my belief count the very morsels of food that I eat).

About his cousin Fekriyya he says :

/emme ibnetehu fe?eʃterif bi?ennehe ʃele ʃey?in min əl wesæmə wə
inni le?eʃisu bi?ennehe temi:lu iley kul əlmeyl/

(as far as his daughter is concerned, I admit she is rather pretty and I do feel she likes me very much).

And concerning marriage :

/ille enna 8aqli yenhæni enarða: bihæja azzewæg alleji yuheddid
ðarweti wə hel izzewægu ille nafaqa:t iðra nafaqa:t testenzif il?əmwæl
we tehdim iðarawa:t/

(However my reason forbids me to accept this marriage which could threaten my wealth . . . Is marriage anything other than expenses after expenses which swallows up wealth and ruins fortune".

Furthermore, the hero expresses his hatred towards the day of the feast:

/bi?sə yewm il8i:d min yewmin 8ebu:s aqdi:hi fi hæjihi ilqara:f
albægi:dæ fetegeme8 fihi 8ele kæhili ælæm il8umr wə humu:m
əssini:n/

(What a gloomy day of the feast which I spend in this hateful cemetery where all the troubles of life and worries of years cluster around me).

Taymour did not find any method but the internal monologue to break the walls of the conscious mind. He himself called upon fellow writers to get concerned with the subconscious mind. He believed that "the writer whose concern was basically with the conscious mind was a writer who only believes in the surface of things, thus receiving a false image which displays no true life. On the other hand, the writer who can break the walls of the conscious mind, holds the magic lantern that discloses the character's innermost feelings" (Taymour cited in Al Nassag 1984).

Language and Style

The language of Mahmoud Taymour and his style seemed close to the language and style of the "Arabian Nights". It was an ordinary simple language that has features of the commonality. What was most outstanding about the style in most of his short stories, its tendency towards imagery and an inclination to hyperbole. However, in some situations, Taymour abandoned the use of hyperbole and adopted a sort of reported and realistic imagery with keenness to present factual life as it is.

This is the case with 'Many Happy Returns'. Taymour gave us

his obvious prolixity, adopted a type of summarization and abandoned many of the insinuations that fail to be attained by prolixity.

Language of discourse :

Taymour's first stories witnessed his preoccupation with the language of his works. Is he to write in classical Arabic or colloquial Arabic? Which of the two is more appropriate? Or is it preferable to use both? The problem was not with the language to be used in the narration or description, for Taymour is of the opinion that it must be written in classical Arabic but neither pedantic nor simple which is evident in "Many Happy Returns". The problem was with the dialogue which sometimes took place between the illiterate or servants. In this case, should the writer present the dialogue in classical Arabic? Or should he report it just the way these characters speak it according to their social status, or their culture, and their modes of expression?

In the introduction of the first edition of his first collection of short stories "El Sheikh Goma and Other Stories", Taymour proclaimed that the realism he believes in following the footsteps of Emile Zola, necessitates that "the dialogue be written in the language of the character himself because this is nearer to factual life and truth". Moreover, Taymour admits that this approach is new for realistic literature in Egypt. However, he has not applied it in all his stories, but he limited it to some as an attempt he hoped it would succeed.

No sooner that Taymour changed his mind about this approach than he realized his idea was wrong. He became convinced that the dialogue should be written in classical Arabic irrespective of the character's social status or language used in real situations. This is due to the fact that art has its unique presence apart from real life, even if both are related to each other in one way or another. The writer has a presence that cannot be neglected. Moreover, there are certain prerequisites for the expressive utterance which should not be submitted to non-linguistic or non-artistic influences.

In the introduction to the Second Edition to El Sheik Gom'a and Other Stories 1927, Taymour states :

"In the beginning I was convinced that the dialogue in the stories has to be written in the colloquial language because in truth, it is nearer to life and I did write many dialogues in my stories in this language. Yet, I shunned after many attempts that showed that I was wrong. The chasm between the two languages is present, so if we used both types side by side, one for description and one for the dialogue we would feel a tangible repulsion in the writing that shocks the reader when he moves from one level of language to another. There is only one of two alternatives : that is, we either write the whole story in classical Arabic or in colloquial Arabic to overcome this awkward discrepancy and replace it with harmony and appropriateness. Since the classical arabic is considered the language of writing, therefore we have to abide by this rule and write the whole story, with its characterization and dialogue, in classical Arabic. The writer must be careful with his dialogue and make it as simple as possible. There is no harm if the writer made use of some colloquial terms or phrases if he was forced to. This is the system that I follow at present in my new story writings, and following this pattern I publish my second edition of my published works".

The new approach is clearly applied in 'Many Happy Returns' as Taymour writes all the dialogues in classical Arabic irrespective of the types of characters participating in the dialogue. For example, the dialogue between the protagonist speaking to his cook's son :

/æ texʃə beʔsen ayuhə əlʔebleh tilkə ħuletu ilʃi:d mə kuntə
liteħlum bilħuʃu:li ʃelə miθlihe mə ħeyi:t feʃrug bihe wʌqʃir
ʃelə əlbukæ?/

(Don't you fear any harm, you silly that is a suit for the feast, the like of which you would never have dreamt to have as long as you live. So enjoy having it and stop crying.)

The cook speaking to his son :

/iʃheb ʃqabil yedə seyidik əlʕeʃi gædə leka bima lem yegud bihi
liʔehedin ʔablik waltedʒu lehu biʔu:l ilʒumri we rəgd əlʒeyʃ wə
əʃurriye əʃʃa:liħe beni:n wə benæt yeʒi:ʃu:ne fi ʔebætɪn wə nebæt/

(Go and kiss the hand of your master who has given you what he has offered no one before and let us pray that he may have a long, prosperous life and virtuous offspring of boys and girls who would live ever after).

- /kul ʒæm wə entum bixeyr/
- /wə ente bixeyr yə buney keyfə ħæluḵ/
- /elħemdu lillāħ wə entum keyfə ħæluḵum/
- /ləbeʔs læ gedi:d/
- /məʃə tefʒelu:n əlʔæn yə ʒemmi/
- /neħnu əlʔæn mugtemiʒu:n teʔehuben lisemæʒi ilginæ?
fi: ħefleti illeyle/
- /wə lækin ʔemetu ʃarqin beynene feʔentum usratun kebi:rātu
əlʒededi wə ene wəħid ʃrd/
- Many Happy Returns.
- The same to you, my son . . . How are you?
- Thank God . . . and you, how are you all ?
- Fair enough . . . Nothing new.
- What are you doing now, uncle?
- We are now gathered preparing to listen to the radio for tonight's concert.
- A happy coincidence . . . this is the same with me too!
- We are doing the same thing.
- Yet there's one difference between us. For you are a family of several people while I am all alone.

Thus Taymour wrote all his dialogues later in classical Arabic even if

the characters were of a lower social status as the cook, or of a close kinship as the protagonist and his uncle.

Taymour's stories appeared thus, in the light of this approach, having their narration, characterization and dialogues in a framework of simplicity, harmony, and spontaneity of performance.

Localism in Taymour's Short Stories :

Taymour was honest in exposing his society, its merits and demerits, and putting them in the appropriate literary genre. He was honest with himself as well as in depicting the events of real life people by choosing his characters from the Egyptian society whether in the city or the countryside:

"It is a shame on our part while we are at the beginning of our revival, that we do not have an Egyptian literature that speaks on our behalf and expresses our morals and emotions. A literature that describes our customs and our environment in the most truthful way. In my opinion, this literature is the most important thing we have to look at because it is the truthful mirror that reflects our real image - As a matter of fact, it is more than that. It is everything that represents us physically, psychologically and emotionally.. it is nothing less and nothing more"(1)
(Taymour's collection of El Sheikh Gom'a in the Introduction of the second edition 1927 p. 10).

Taymour emphasized his view in a letter to Mohamed Amin Hassouna which was published in Al Seyassa Al Osbouèya in the issue of 26 July 1930 in which he said, "... yet we want to set foundations for a new, highly artistic literature, which has an Egyptian coloring in mind and in style" cited in El Ibyary, 1994 p 108. 'Alam Taymour Al Kassasi.

In *Many Happy Returns*, Taymour delves into the local environment by using the names of places as they were during the time of narrating the story without changing them or attempting to look for their equivalents in

classical Arabic. For instance he starts his story 'Many Happy Returns' by mentioning local areas such as :

- * Newbar
- Alazbakeya
- Shobra
- El opera

Any reader can discern the type of life of a typical Egyptian bachelor by following the footsteps of the protagonist and at the same time his relating of the type of life which his married friend lives.

Conclusion :

Hence the translated text can be treated as the only text that could be considered for its authenticity and upon which other cultures can draw their judgements about a particular period in time and space. Literary translation in part of a country's cultural heritage. As Toury said 'the translated text exists as a cultural artifact for the replacement of a source text by an acceptable version in the receiving culture' (quoted from Gentzler 1993: 128).

* Newbar Café, was a landmark café, with its unique arrangement of tables, white table napkins, reservation cards and distinguished frequenters. It was the talk of middle class society in Cairo.

The Translated Text

Many Happy Returns

I left the "Newbar" café in the "Opera" Square, my favourite café where I spend most of my time, in the forenoons and evenings.

I left for home at dusk to prepare for a sitting to the radio to listen to the great singing concert held at "Al Azbakiya Garden Theatre" with all Egypt's song stars participating.

Why am I starting so early home when the show does not start before ten thirty and needs no more than a few seconds to turn the knobs of the radio and the tunes would flow harmoniously?

I could not find a satisfactory answer to my question. I just found myself giving up the backgammon game in the circle of my friends, leaving behind the bright light, renouncing those pedlars with whom I used to find pleasure bargaining and haggling and winning in the end a few bargains at a low price.

I shook my hands off this all and hastened to the house, though the night was a feast ever which ought to excite joy and radiate cheerfulness. Yet I did not feel joy. Rather, I felt irritable and grumpy.

"Many Happy Returns"

How weary was my tongue for having repeated this hackneyed phrase. Indeed, how loathesome its ring into my ears!

Why do I feel that I am preoccupied with much business and that my shoulders carry the burden of important tasks, and when I search into myself to find out what so preoccupies and weights heavily on me, I would find nothing to excuse the feeling or support the argument.

I got on to the "Shubra" tramway taking a standing place in the second class. I suffered the pressure of the crowd around me, but I did not heed that for I got so used to such standing and to put up with its discomfort in adherence to an economical policy to which I committed myself in life.

Why am I distressed?

I met all the demands of the feast . . .

I prepared the cards and letters by which I congratulated family and friends.

I ordered the pastries to be made and the fruit and flowers to be bought in preparation for going to the cemetery in the morning.

I made out a list of the feast gifts which I have to give to the needful and unneedful who are accustomed to my bounty on his happy day.

I found my hand pushing into my pocket taking out of it the account book. I become engrossed in checking the feast budget, trying hard to cut down what could be curtailed following the rules of good economy.

I kept to my book and calculations until the tramway was about to pass the stop where I ought to alight when I jumped out of the car my foot slipping, but I recovered taking the way home while mumbling in anger and irritation.

No sooner had I made a few steps than a dishevelled dusty man leaning on a stick emerged before me with a cold flattery smile on his face. he held out his dirty hand saying :

A happy year to you . . .

I shouted at him:

And a bad one to you, Sir, . . . I have nothing to give you!

I sent into the narrow lane to reach my small house.

It is my cherished house though it is old and small. I inherited it from my father and I am concerned about it owing to the cracks that has befallen it. How similar to a patient whose chronic disease is about to put and end to him.

In fact, it would be merciful to finish off such a patient to ease his pains and to relieve him of his sufferings and that is what I intend to do with my cherished house. I shall certainly pull it down to build in its palce a new house of a modern architectural style.

I shall inevitably do that . . . but when?

I do not know . . . for I intended to do that and resolved to do it, ever since my father passed away.

Yet, fifteen years already passed while I was drawing on paper the designs of the new house putting the final touches to it according to the latest fashion in architecture and the discoveries and inventions for the comforts of life. The house is still standing defying time with patience and durability.

I entered the house and threw my fez aside the started wiping out my perspiration.

No sooner had I settled down than a child's voice came to my hearing, weeping and wailing as if he were severely ill.

He is the cook's son, that one who lurks in a corner of the kitchen not leaving it "night or day" the way a cat waits to catch anything that comes.

Only God knows what loss that greedy troublesome boy costs me. He is his father's right arm in grabbing and exploiting!

What for is his wailing and weeping ?

Does not he enjoy my bounty and live wholly on my money?

These small worms are the ones which help destroy the houses as do weevils to thick wood.

I got impatient with the continuous ring in my hearing of this irritating buzzing in which the cook's son persisted. So I shouted "If you do not stop your noise I would smash your heads."

The sound stopped; silence prevailed, and I bent on my table looking into my book checking my accounts.

My income is still abundant, thank heaven! and my wealth is still growing

How lucky is this economical policy of mine which I adhered to since I succeeded my father on his wealth. . . It provided me with plenty of wealth. Yet I remained alone in life, served only by this cook and his greedy son. And here I am, nearing forty, full of health and enjoying an easy life.

I wonder at those who would not let people live in peace and security.

What about these covetous people who are gazing at me with eyes expressive of envy and venom ?

I do feel that my most bitter enemies are those kinsmen who to my belief count the very morsels of food that I eat.

Here is my uncle "Lateef bey", how horrid and boring; a stature like a bare pole and a long neck like a snake; lips that show a dim smile when speaking to me. His mouth waters at my wealth which exceeds his and continues to grow... and he tries every device to entangle me by making me marry his daughter. He sets for me that attractive trap but how far am I from falling as his victim.

As far as his daughter is concerned, I admit she is rather pretty and I do feel she likes me very much. For how could such a thing escape me while I am such a person whose sagacity does not miss anything nor does it beat me to find out what is hidden behind the scene.

However, my reason forbids me to accept this marriage which would threaten my wealth and bring it to the verge of disaster. Is marriage anything other than expenses after expenses which swallows up wealth

and ruins fortune.

My uncle was dissappointed and his ambitions have gone to the wind.

I found my hand fiddling in the table's drawer with papers which happened to be the designs of the new house which I meant to have built. I studied the various schemes intently, comparing between one another seeing to it that my projected house be of the latest style, provided with means of confort and safety.

I remember a day when my uncle came to me while I was spreading these drawings, examining them. He joined me, putting in observations as regards the children's rooms and the like. While he was talking he was revealing to me, through his deceptive smile, his yellow decayed teeth.

How boring he truly is! How boring!

I shall inevitably meet this uncle of mine at the cemetery in the morning. He is ahead on every occasion and on every feast.

He considers his visit to the cemetery a pleasant recreation and, hence, I see him there with a cheerful face and a pleased heart.

I wonder at him, manifesting his persistent optimism, even at the abode of the dead!

I shall meet my uncle in the morning and I would inevitably greet him on the feast. I shall meet with him a group of my relatives, those who should reveal their intentions, would be shouting in one voice when greeting me :

"We wish to see you dead next year".

How hard for me is that day of the cemetery !

How annoying are these vile customs of distributing pastry and fruit to people who would not eat them, but collect them to sell for a few piasters.

I am convinced that no sooner would I leave the cemetery than those bunches of flowers I had so carefully selected and for which I paid a high price in veneration of those of my family who are buried than these flowers would be sold to those who want them as a decoration for a gathering or bouquets for a wedding.

Who is the prime exploiter of these expenses ? It is the "grave digger" "The grave-digger" . . . Oh. God!

That man who assumed piety and religiousness; the long black rosary never leaves his fingers. You never see him but reiterating the name of God and his gratitude to the Almighty, and only God knows what malice, evil and greed he conceals in the depth of his soul.

This "grave-digger", meeting him also tomorrow stands at the top of the road marking my arrival. As soon as he sees me coming, he lets his

legs carry him pretending to be happy as he says to me :

"I wish you a happy feast" . . .

Then he holds my hand greeting me with joy and respect while my hands in his. I feel a shiver that runs through me. This lean and emaciated hand with which he greets me is the same hand that will bury me in my grave and place upon it the great stones. I can almost see him sitting at the entrance of the grave, guarding it as if to prevent me from getting away from the prison of the earth to the world of freedom and light!

I can see this "grave-digger" in my imagination gathering around him those relatives of mine, headed by my uncle, while sharing in their meeting my money and distributing among themselves my wealth, that wealth which I toiled to collect and save while they were yawning in their laziness.

It is a wealth for which I kept late hours, exhausted my effort and tended to with my tact and sagacity.

Many a bargain have I made of these compulsory sales which I ultimately obtained.

Similarly many were the crises and misfortunes of people who had to offer their wares for sales which I very profitably exploited.

Am I to leave this wealth to be grabbed by those relatives of mine who are full of greed and avarice ?

Do I have to visit the cemetery?

Is it not time for us to rebel against those old customs which are of no good or benefit?

Should I force myself to do what I don't feel happy about?

Also, the day of the feast; What a gloomy day of the feast which I spend in this hateful cemetery where all the troubles of life and worries of years cluster around me.

I turned to the account book with a moan.

I kept myself busy with the figures for a while, adding and subtracting.

I spared nothing in doing my duty towards the memory of both my parents, on this auspicious occasion.

Here I am giving my instructions to the reciters of the Qur'an to cite at the proper times providign them with the customary fees.

Where then is that niggardliness attributed to me by those liars!

I spend the money in the right place and I a accomplishing my duties.

Suffice it that I am satisfied with myself, and shame and disgrace to the envious and spieful.

God will extend my life and I will keep that wealth in my hands which makes the mouths of those greedy relatives water.

I caught sight of the radio set and looked at my watch. There is yet some time before the concert starts.

Thank God for what he has endowed me with sense to conduct my affairs and discretion with which to control my conduct.

I preferred to return home to enjoy a comfortable sitting so that I can listen to the concert in peace and quietness.

I began taking off my suit and replacing my shoes with the house slippers.

Could I have been in such a comfortable condition had I gone to the theatre to attend the concert. That theatre, overfull with the audience, and its stifling atmosphere with the smoking of tobacco.

Could that theatre be compared with this comfortable sitting in my happy home where I can do what I like.

I opened the window to let in the gentle breeze and there I saw those high buildings as if they were tall giants closing the way to my quiet house. I went on wiping my forehead wet with perspiration while trying to breathe some air. Then, I started turning my eyes around me.

What a happy little home where I enjoy living!

yet, how quick I behold in the weak light of the lamp its falling walls and that dilapidated furniture.

My fault which I admit is that I am faithful and conservative, reverse to change and alteration. However, the law of the universe will win in the end and time will come when I will be forced to give away that old nest and build in its place a new modern abode.

I stopped slowly while fanning my face with my handkerchief uttering:

Oh! how lovely this quietness is!

How wonderful to be alone with myself!

Solitude is a blessing, silence is also a blessing!

At that moment rose the voice of the cook's son crying asking for help and assistance so I shouted:

I told you over and over again that I do not want this noise . . . silence them.

I found the boy burrying to me with a weeping eye, his father following him. So I said to the cook in an angry voice:

Are you not going to cease this noise? Have you no shame?

The boy wants a new suit for the feast and he insists not to wear any of his old clothes.

I frowned as I replied :

What has that got to do with me? You have taken the feast's gift and you have to manage your affair.

I soon told him to get away and he went dragging his weeping son.

I have no doubt that the gift I allocated this cook cannot be a price for a new suit, but I am not responsible for the arrangement of such matters for I am not a father to that child.

I turned to mediate while the shadow of the boy appeared to me behind the door in misery and destitution.

Had I been married, I would have had such a bad boy as this.

Strange that such a thought crosses my mind.

What marriage? and what lad?

Could I have liked to have such a son who would irritate me with his weeping and worry me with his demands?

Then I caught sight of the radio set and I thought deeply about it.

How useful this radio is !

It caused me to save a whole pound which I could have had to pay tonight for the ticket to say nothing of the other expenses which my staying at home has saved.

The theatre . . . The theatre !

Kept imaging what I could have seen there : right lights, pleasurable scenes, and audience with cheerful and happy faces among whom jokes and pleasantries go around.

How could it be otherwise when the audience are about to enjoy one of the year's most gorgeous concerts on the eve of the feast.

Why do I feel now grief and depression while the whole atmosphere calls for joy and cheerfulness ?

Why do I feel loneliness and anxiety though I am in my happy home with no cause for concern.

I started pacing the room to and fro while the images of the theatre dance in various forms before my eyes.

I found myself going to the telephone calling the tobacconist whose shop stands at the top of the road, that man whom I know to manage to get tickets for big concerts and trade with them among those who frequent his shop.

When he answered, I said:

I only called to wish you a happy feast as my habit with acquaintances and friends.

The man returned my greeting with civility and courtesy, as if went on to say :

How is business? And what about the tickets for tonight's concert?

He quickly said with evident satisfaction in his voice:

I sold the tickets for double their price and all the tickets are sold out. As for the booking office in the theatre, it was closed since the forenoon. Do not imagine, Sir, that you can get a ticket now.

I hastened to say in an afflicted voice :

Am I out of my mind to try to buy a ticket? Do you want me to give up my comfort and leave my house to push myself in the tumult of a boisterous crowd?

I replaced the phone receiver and went back to pacing the room to and fro in a state of depression.

How have my notice to invite a few of my friends to spend this evening with me by the side of the radio and so find in their company solace.

Yet, could it have been right for me to invite them without preparing some kind of food and drink in honour of their visit?

This food and drink, however, would cost more than the price of the ticket to spend the evening in the theatre. So what use would that have been? It was a bad thought.

The sound and good idea is to limit myself to inviting my favourite friend, my childhood mate "Housny", and the entertainment of one person would cost me but very little.

However, I know for sure that "Housny" is spending his night at his house, beside the radio, his wife and children around him.

"Housny" has raised a family which he claims to lead a happy life, but, is he really truthful in his claim?

How often have I blamed him for getting married and I considered that that was a mistake on his part.

Marriage! What is marriage?

Is it not a complete disposal of the husband's freedom?

Is it not an endless chain of expenses, day after day, particularly, on such a feast day which is called the Happy Blessed Day? What blessing and what happiness for one who is required to spend and spend for what they call duties and customs? He has no sense, he who submits his neck to the yoke of marriage!

Thank Heaven for my sound mind which has saved me from becoming a husband.

I would not forget what "Housny" said, arguing with me on marriage and fatherhood.

Man should not be selfish in life as to claim everything exclusively for himself. Marriage is attachment, sympathy and aid. It is the means to

virtuous offspring, which is the very foundation of society. It is the continuation of the parent's life after their death. It is the proper means for the realization of the idea of immortality.

Reaching this point of his argument "Housny" used to hold my shoulder and shake me enthusiastically saying : You will not perish in this world as long as you have a son !

And in beating me by his argument on the philosophy of immortality, "Housny" reminds me of his stand in our old times before the teacher of the Arabic language. He used to recite memorized pieces of poetry and prose winning for them the highest degree in the marks book. As he reiterates his words on the philosophy of immortality, he does no more than repeating to me what he has learned from the magazines and books on which he spends lavishly.

During school days, "Housny" was an ideal pupil, punctual in his attendance, dutiful about his lessons and obedient to his teachers. hence, it is not surprising that he should be an ideal husband shouldering all his responsibilities and duties.

The last time I visited "Housny's" house was a fortnight ago when I went to congratulate him on the birth of his third child. I cannot forget his sight as he proceeds towards me in joy and happiness, his new born babe in his arms. No sooner had he caught sight of me than he said as he unveils the child's face in excitement :

Behold . . . behold, do you not see in him my features clear and distinct? look at his nose, is it not the same as mine ? Look at his eyes, do you not find they are my eyes ? What do you say ? This child is my living image, a part of me. I do feel I live in him another new life. Is it not immortality, immortality itself?

I found myself staring at the child's face, caressing him for a while !

How handsome is this little creature in which the whole of man's elements are represented !

I wonder looking at this quivering bundle, how could it eventually become a proper man of some significance.

The child's cries rose and "Housny" went around the room rocking him while the child continued crying without interruption. His father take him back to his mother.

As I took leave of him outside his place with a pitiful smile, he repeated : This is immortality, immortality itself. Lord save us from such immortality. O! deluded friend !

While I was in the thick of such fancies and thoughts, the clock strokes coming from the neighbours radio drew my attention and the

association of ideas which had occupied my head disappeared. I stretched my hand to the radio about to switch its knobs when I heard the cook's son persisting in his groaning and I wanted to shout silencing him but I did not.

How clear is the ring of sadness in the child's weeping ! Indeed, it betrays the misery and distress which fills his heart.

This new suit which I regard as insignificant and of no importance, that boy considers as his utmost wish and his valuable treasure. he spends days and nights waiting for the feast day, that day which allows him to go out in his new dress proud of it among his friends and companions. And here he is tonight torn with sorrow as he finds himself deprived in his morrow of that treat for he will go out in his old suit ashamed and hiding from the eyes of his companions who are strutting in their new suits.

But what can I do for him ?

Many are those who are like him whose wishes are not realised by the feast.

The world is fraught with afflictions and all kinds of deprivation and God has not created me the supporter of humanity, in charge of making all the miserable happy.

The child's wailing continued with a sad ring. This reminded men of Housny's baby in his father's arms, his crying never coming to a stop while his father tirelessly paces the room rocking him gently and compassionately.

The echo of Housny's words still ring in my ear:

This boy is my living image, part of me. I feel I live in him another new life.

And I found myself pacing the room, overshadowed with loneliness all around me. Then I stopped before the drawings of the house which I have intended to have built. On them I threw furtive looks. Then I imagined that that house had been completely built after the latest style and that it was inhabited and full of the joy of life. I imagined I was approaching the house and the shadow of Fekreya, my cousin, appearing in the window waving to me with a handkerchief in her hand and a smile on her lips.

No doubt I am completely exhausted or such hallucination would not have occurred to me nor would such stupid fancies have come to pass in my mind.

I went to the window to have a breath of air and I looked out.

There were the wayfarers coming and going, happy with radiant faces, exchanging feast greetings.

The cook's son was still weeping.

I found myself going to the dressing room where clothes and precious objects were kept. I searched in them till I took out an old box where jewelry and precious things were kept. I put it carefully on the table and opened it, contemplating its contents, when a ring of my mother emerged before my eyes and I remembered her saying :

This ring you keep for your spouse, son. Don't lose it and don't offer it but to the one whom you choose for a wife.

I kept feeling the ring between my fingers. It is an ageing ring handed down from one generation to another as is the custom in many precious things and trophies other than that ring.

Here is a gold watch which belongs to my father. He advised me to keep it for my eldest son and my lips murmured :

My son ! My son !

The weeping of the cook's son kept following me wherever I went.

I have no choice but to silence him anyway.

I returned the jewelry to their old box and I carried the box to its safe place. I went searching in the cupboard till my hands came to a small embroidered suit that belonged to me as a child. It was made for me on a special occasion and my mother kept it since, in memory of that occasion.

I soon seized this suit and hurried with it to the kitchen.

The fate of this suit would no doubt become food for the moth. So I lose nothing in silencing with it the boy who does not stop crying.

No sooner has the boy seen me than he was frightened and took refuge with his father for safety. Extending my hand with the suit, I told him :

Don't you fear any harm, you silly. That is a suit for the feast, the like of which you would never have dreamt to have as long as you live. So enjoy having it and stop crying.

The boy took it jumping with joy and the cook opened his mouth in wonder then shouted at his child saying :

Go and kiss the hand of your master who has given you what he has offered no one before and let us pray that he may have a long, prosperous life and virtuous offspring of boys and girls who would live ever after.

The boy came to me, excited, falling upon my hand with his mouth and I found myself caressing his hair and looking at his face attentively starting to feel comfort and satisfaction.

I looked around me and it seemed to me the kitchen was covered with brightness and splendor !

Then my eyes fell on the cook and kept gazing in his face brnaded with various wrinkles, his back bent as if he were an old tree affected by time and about to be blown away by the wind of doom !

Then I turned my eyes from him to the lad with his blooming face and young features as if he were a young branch shooting out with leaves of new life from the root of the old dying tree !

Tomorrow, the gardener will be uprooting that old tree and be free to dedicate his care and cultivation-growing to that fresh twig until it takes its place in the horizon !

But, would that old tree really perish ?

It preserved all its characteristics in that growing twig which resumes its life and renews its age.

I returned to my room having shaken off my loneliness. I kept switching the radio knobs fiddling with them. Then I took out my watch and found that the concert will start within a short time.

While facing the radio, fiddling with it, my hand furtively crept into my pocket touching something in here.

What ? How strange ! It is my mother's ring, the one she advised me to make a wedding present to my wife.

How came it that I put it into my pocket ?

How did I forget it there ?

I kept examining the ring while the image of Fekreya, my cousin, kept coming to my mind, greeting me cowly and smiling to me gently.

I do not deny she is an affable girl and do not doubt her heart is full of love for me.

As for me, my feeling towards her is an unsoluble riddle.

I kept throwing the ring up high and catch it with a smiling face.

I went back to pacing the room to and fro in excited steps.

Suddenly, I found myself before the phone and I dialled unconsciously. Within a moment I found myself talking to my uncle saying :

- I wanted to be the first to greet and congratulae you for the feast. . .
- Many Happy Returns.
- The same to you, my son How are you?
- Thank God. . . . And you, how are you all ?
- Fair enough . . . Nothing new.
- What are you doing now, Uncle?
- We are now gathered preparing to listen to the radio for tonight's concert.
- A happy coincidence . . . This is the same with me too !

- We are doing the something.
- Yet there's one difference between us. For you are a family of several people while I am all alone.
- And why the solitude, my son ?
- That's how it is . . . And it's no secret that I am feeling lonesome.
- . . . May I make a suggestion ?
- Suggest whatever you wish.
- Why won't you be among us so that we enjoy your company and you share with us our gathering ?
- How ? Do I come to you now when it's already late ?
- My son. No need for formalities between us. Your visit at any time is welcomed !
- I don't know what to answer ?
- let me press you into coming immediately . . . You will add to the pleasure and cheerfulness of our evening.
- Really !
- Do you have any doubt about that ? Don't be lazy or try to find excuses .
- ...
- I will try, uncle.
- We are waiting for you.
- I hope I will, but don't blame me if anything kept me from coming. Thank you very much, uncle. Good evening . . . My regards to the whole family . . . My compliments to Fekreya.

I found myself hurrying immediately, getting out my new suit. It was only a few minutes before I was neatly dressed, with radiating perfume and I was at the outer door very excited and waiting for the taxi for which the cook's son went to fetch.

From time to time, I put my hand in my pocket to make sure of the existence of the luxurious box within which lies the ring my mother advised me to make a wedding gift.

Appendix
Reading Symbols

Consonants

(I) Plosives

- ? = a glottal stop plosive
- ʃ̥ = a voiceless denti-alveolar emphatic plosive
- ɖ̥ = a voiced denti-alveolar emphatic plosive
- t̥ = a voiceless denti - alveolar emphatic plosive
- q = a voiceless uvular plosive

(II) Fricatives

- ħ = a voiceless pharyngeal fricative
- X = a voiceless uvular fricative
- ʁ̥ = a voiced pharyngeal fricative
- g = a voiced uvular fricative

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