ADONIS:

Translation, a Second Act of Creation?

Annual Lecture of the
Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize
for Arabic Literary Translation

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Translation,
a Second Act of Creation?

Internationally renowned poet, philosopher and theoretician of Arab poetics, Adonis, considers the relationship of translation to human identity in this year's Saif Ghobash Banipal Translation Prize Lecture. He explores the fact that human beings live in the same chronological moment, but in multiple, disparate moments culturally. Translation creates a universal cultural time in which the world gains new knowledge, people come to know each other, and each language discovers its creative presence in other languages.

He argues that translation is a second form of creation and so is an inescapable cultural act, in which the Other becomes an element of one's own identity. Adonis raises the issue of the complex identity of the Arabic–speaking world, describing how the subject of translation in the Arab world is organically linked to the subject of identity. He poses the question: what does translation have to do with the nebulous state of this world in whose languages we translate?

He looks in depth at the translation of poetry, how the original poem loses its identity and has to take on a new body and soul. The responsibility of the translator is to breathe new life into the linguistic destruction that is the translated poem, which is as the migrant living in an alien house.

Daniel Lowe, Curator of Arabic Collections,
the British Library, opens the evening
with a welcome to the speaker and the audience
on behalf of the British Library

Paul Starkey,
Chair of the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature,
introduces the third Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize Lecture

[Thank you very much, Daniel, for that introduction and thank you also to the British Library for hosting this event.] It is a great pleasure to welcome you to this lecture in my capacity as chair of the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature.

The Trust was founded in 2004 to support and celebrate the publication of Arab authors in English translation and the production of literature events in the UK with Arab authors.

The Trust has always worked in close collaboration with Banipal magazine, with which many of you will be familiar, which promotes and publishes contemporary Arabic literature in English. Banipal magazine first appeared in 1998 and is now in its 21st year – a significant anniversary. The magazine's success has depended on what one might almost call an 'army' of authors, translators and reviewers, but its continued success has owed most to the extraordinary hard work of Margaret Obank and Samuel Shimon, who have also been responsible for making most of the arrangements for tonight's event.

The Trust's main responsibility has been to oversee the running of an annual prize for Arabic literary translation. The

prize has run every year since 2006 and it has been made possible because of a generous grant from Omar Ghobash and his family in honour of his late father Saif Ghobash. In 2016 Omar Ghobash and his family decided to mark the 10th year of the prize by extending their sponsorship to establish an annual lecture on literary translation.

The first lecture was given in 2016 by Anton Shammas on 'Blind Spots: A millennium of Arabic in translation'. The second lecture, in 2017, was by Robert Irwin (who is present tonight) on Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North (Mawsim al-Hijrah ila al-Shamal) – the most important Arabic novel of the 20th century, as it has been called. This year's lecture, the third in the series, is to be given by Adonis on the theme of "Is this the time for translation: Is translation a second act of creation?"

It is always a particular pleasure – and it certainly makes the task easier – to introduce someone who needs no introduction. And if there is a single living Arab author or poet who needs no introduction it is surely Adonis, who has frequently been referred to as 'the greatest living poet of the Arab world'. It is indeed a great privilege to have him here tonight.

Born Ali Ahmad Said Esber in Syria in 1930, he adopted the pen name Adonis at an early age and has been writing poetry for more than 70 years, winning many awards along

the way. I remember as an undergraduate 50 years ago reading poetry by Adonis as part of my course. His must be a record, I think, in terms of length of career. Much of his work – both individual poems and collections – has been translated into English. There are too many translations to mention them all, but since we are at a Banipal-sponsored event, we may recall that the 2011 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation was awarded to Khaled Mattawa for his translation of Adonis: Selected Poems. Looking to the future rather than the past, we should also perhaps mention that there is a new translation by Karim James Abu Zeid of Adonis's poetry collection Songs of Mihyar the Damascene, which is due out in the first half of next year (2019) by New Directions. That is indeed something to look forward to, and an indication of the continuing interest in Adonis's poetry and the desire to translate it (as Daniel Lowe has already mentioned) into a wide variety of languages, well beyond the usual English and French.

Adonis will deliver his speech in Arabic but at the back of the hall we have Jonathan Wright who will be reading the English translation simultaneously with Adonis's delivery in Arabic. Jonathan Wright is, incidentally, a former Banipal prizewinner. So if you want to listen to the English version, you can do this through your headsets.

ADONIS

Is this the time for translation?
And is translation a second act of creation?

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Speaking on the subject of translation from a European podium, I should remind the audience that translation lay at the foundations of the European Renaissance and was the first building block in the open-mindedness of that age. I should also take the opportunity to mention the role of the translators in Baghdad who paved the way for that age through their translations of Greek philosophy into Arabic, especially the works of Plato and Aristotle.

All human beings, despite their differences and their diversity, live in the same chronological moment. But culturally speaking, they live in multiple and disparate moments. And despite everything that technology – the technology of

things and the technologies of globalisation – has done in the way of bringing people together, the differences remain extensive and profound. That is because time in technology is still horizontal and can set people apart, for many reasons and in more than one respect, especially as humans have both a horizontal dimension and a depth at the same time, and their distinctive feature lies not in the horizonal dimension but in their depth.

Human identity is a vertical existential dimension and for one reason or another, technology has helped to obscure this vertical dimension. Humans now know how to use the horizon, but they are more ignorant about finding out how to open the human horizon that goes hand in hand with the depth.

Let us recall here too the role and importance of translation: it creates a universal cultural time in which people come to know each other and in which each language discovers its creative presence in other languages – in other words each language discovers with greater certainty that what unites mankind does not lie on the surface but in the depths. It does not lie in form, but in content.

And so we are entitled to ask: Is this the age for translation? And is translation a second act of creation?

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I have to start with questions - questions related to the burdens that we Arabs throw on the Arabic language in its encounter with the other languages of the world.

The first question is: in the Arab world as it is today, is language an aspect of nature in its freest possible form?

The second question is: isn't censorship of language another way to kill both nature and humanity?

The third question is: in the Arab lexicon why can't we find modern words to talk about things that are modern in various domains, many of which Arabs use in daily life but cannot express in language?

The fourth question is: is the prospect of freedom in the world of Arab culture, in its free, diverse, broad sense, too narrow to include the prospects of freedom in the other countries of the world? And why?

The fifth question is: can we really translate a culture in which God has died, to use a Nietzschean concept, into a culture that has excluded humankind and in which hardly anything other than God has survived?

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I do not pose these questions in order to answer them, otherwise we would digress from talking about translation. These are questions to consider, questions that throw light on the state of translation in the Arab world and on the complex relationship in Arabic between words and things. If we ignore the light that these questions cast, it might restrict our understanding of the state of translation into Arabic.

However divergent points of view on translation might be, there is an objective matter which it would be a mistake to contest, and that is the need for the translator to master the two languages: the source language and the target language. Refined language in the source text can survive only through refined language in the target language, and the source text will die a death in the target language if the translator has not mastered it.

I don't think anyone today in principle opposes translating to or from Arabic, including translating poetry itself, contrary to the view of the great Arab critic al-Jahiz. Translation is another form of creation, and so it is inescapably a cultural act. People understand themselves well only to the

extent that they understand others well, so translating other people is an ideal way to discover one's self. The way relationships between different peoples have evolved, qualitatively and quantitatively, shows that the Other is no longer simply someone to converse, interact and reciprocate with. It goes beyond that, to become one of the elements that make up one's self.

Besides, when we continue translating into Arabic in modern times we are bound to pay tribute to past eras and to the translators of the past. It means deepening and expanding the translation movement that they initiated and that was an inseparable part of Arab cultural production and cultural identity.

A culture that is self-satisfied and shuns translation can rightly be described as half dead, and in the Arab case that would come as a surprise. How could Arabs adopt all the devices that the technologies of the Other have invented without seeking to translate the philosophical, scientifical and literary works that lie behind those technologies? Translation is therefore also an act that is essential to survival.

We might all agree that the approach that the translation of Arabic works into other languages should adopt is the approach that adds different aspects to the range of those languages – things that make them more aware of Arab creativity and enrich them in their cultural evolution. These

aspects can be related either to anxieties about humanity's role in the world, their future, their problems in life, their relationship with the world and with things or to particular ways of seeing religion, identity, the Other, language and expression. This helps us to avoid translations that fall within the media or socio-political field and that seek to satisfy the Other's desire to look at Arabs, not as equals but with a view to discrediting them or to hold them prisoners to the imperialist stereotype as backward and subordinate.

This requires preparing a selected list of books, both old and new, that have no equals in other literatures and that will therefore add to those literatures artistic values previously unknown to them and give those literatures access to new knowledge and new human and intellectual values.

We may also all agree that the approach that the translation of foreign works into Arabic should proceed is also the approach that gives this language things that it isn't aware of and that enriches it artistically, linguistically, scientifically and on the human level, since translation does not influence only thought and culture but extends to language too.

In this context I pose the following question: what is the relationship today between translation and identity? This is a question that raises another question to be addressed first: what is identity, or what is the identity of the Arabic-speaking world?

This world that is now known as the Arab world, a term that may change after a while, represents the greater part of the territory of the Islamic empire that inherited the Byzantine Empire. It is a collection of polities – kingdoms, emirates and military regimes – variations of the provinces and subordinate principalities that existed in the age of the caliphs. On deep analysis they have not progressed beyond the political theory associated with the caliphal system. Within that system no civil or secular state in the modern sense has arisen in the past fifteen centuries. By that I mean a state in which people are citizens with equal rights and obligations, a state where people have freedoms and human rights regardless of their ethnic, linguistic or religious affiliation. It is a world that inherited the Byzantine Empire in the sense of holding political control, though not in a cultural sense. This world was just an empty space from which the old rulers had been removed and replaced by new rulers. One can say that the Roman Empire was more advanced than the Islamic empires in the way it treated the people under its control. It treated equally all the citizens subject to its authority and gave them a Roman identity. This did not happen in the Islamic Empire, where the rulers extirpated everything that had happened before them, just as Islam had extirpated the pre-Islamic past. They still treat their subjects as subordinates under some form of protection. In this world non-Muslims still pay the

jizya tax and are 'minors'. To put it another way, they have to carry out all obligations but they do not have all political or civil rights. They are governed on the principle that they live in a place ruled by an Islamic authority, although the place is theirs and they are the original inhabitants. Muslims still look at them objectively from the perspective of conquerors.

I refer to all of this in brief to show that translation in the Arab world is organically linked with identity, and it is thorny and complicated and cannot be resolved by the common response that the Arabic language is the locus of identity and a shared locus, because this locus is contested. It is open to question and raises objections at the heart of Islam itself. Most Muslims assert that identity is fundamentally religious and so the identity of the Arab world, as far as they are concerned, is Islamic and not Arab, or at best is Arab-Islamic, a term that makes things more complicated, not as one might expect, especially as historically Islam cast a kind of veil over the Arabic language because of its role as the language in which God himself spoke. It is reminiscent of the veils that it imposed on women – on their faces, i.e. on that which makes them shine.

So now you have the Arab world, or the Arab-Islamic world, living in a state of disintegration with respect to its origins, which is something it has never experienced in all its history. This disintegration is a paradox that is simultane-

ously tragic and comic, though some regimes try to portray it as a victory and enhancement of their power.

What does translation have to do with this fragmented imperial identity? This is a question that raises many problems about what we translate and why and for whom, for which audience or which readers. We know that in this world books are confined within geographical boundaries, while we claim this same world to be a single *umma*, with one majority religion and one language.

We also know that the public at large in this *umma* hardly know the Arabic language and that the culture that prevails is a form of religion that has been transformed into rites and rituals, injunctions and prohibitions, legal rulings and fatwas, devoid of any spiritual or intellectual dimension, and on top of this we know that religious books, even if they are repetitive to the point of banality, are more widely distributed, more readily accepted and more influential than the translated version of any great book by a foreign writer, however great that book or writer might be.

Every day we see an extraordinary coincidence that calls for special study: the state of this Arab-Islamic world, culturally, politically and with respect to identity, the fragmentation of its identity and the fissures in its identity, seem to correspond completely with the actions of globalisation and the culture of globalisation in this field. They are turning

the fragmentation into devastation that is almost total, with neighbours killing their neighbours, friends turning into enemies and some people imploring their foreign friends to occupy and dominate their countries, and submitting to their will.

Once again, what does translation have to do with the nebulous state of this Arab world whose language we translate, or with the blend of cultural and ethnic identities that it contains and for whom we translate, especially when we think of the future? They are linked because the globalised future will most probably mean not only repudiating or marginalising local-national cultures, but also repudiating or marginalising what we call the motherland or the mother language.

We can see these phenomena in practice in our lives today when we consider for a moment what is happening. The dominant culture in the Arabic-speaking world is simultaneously Islamic and non-Islamic, Arab and non-Arab, American and non-American, Anglo-French and non-Anglo-French.

So what is it? It's a world that has lost its individuality and its unique features. Everything is transformed into just a speck in a bland fabric, with everyone following the herd. Meanwhile, the great books that have been translated, from the Greeks until today, have not changed anything in the

Arab social and cultural establishment. Their influence has been confined to certain individuals, a minority for whom books have acted as refuges in which they take shelter. Aristotle, for example, or Marx, Ibn Khaldoun or Ibn Arabi, have been less influential in the Arab-Islamic intellectual schema than any religious book one might name, however superficial it might be.

If we look at all this at this stage in history, at a time when Arab Muslims are losing the role that has given them historical agency, then we might say that it is translation, with all its contradictions and in all its variations, that dictates their culture and hence dictates their history.

Today it is translation that is subsuming the Arabs/Muslims, and this means two things: their effacement when they encounter the Other and suppression of the creative identity of the Arabic language. English and French do not sing in Arabic. On the contrary, they obliterate it and devour it. In this situation translation becomes merely another form of consumption, just a commercial activity, that is. It turns books into commodities, and translation becomes an instrument for subordination and a way to extinguish the remaining embers of Arab-Islamic culture.

What we say about translation would not be accurate if we discuss it only in the abstract, as an absolute. That is because the conditions imposed by translating a philosophical,

scholarly or narrative text, for example, are different from those imposed by translating a poetic text.

So let me speak here about the form of translation that is most difficult, most intricate and on which tastes and opinions might vary most, and also the form that I think I know most about – I mean the translation of poetry, especially as, to say the least, poetry is the high point in the Arab cultural heritage. While on the subject, I will not bring in what I have achieved personally in the way of poetry translations, because these translations were another way of writing poetry in Arabic. In my own language, alongside my own poetry written within the world of my own language, I was writing other poems to which I was linked by a special artistic or intellectual relationship and by my admiration for and friendship with the writers. And so I prefer to say that I did not translate this poetry so much as I welcomed it into my home, opening the arms of the Arabic language to it.

I do not intend here to get into a discussion on poetry translation or to defend a particular point of view. I specifically intend to elucidate my own experience for the reader.

So I shall start by examining a view that with experience I find increasingly persuasive in principle, and that is that a poetic text should not be translated in a way that matches almost exactly the content of the source text, as a prose text might be translated. It is impossible to achieve a

complete match in every aspect – linguistic, artistic, intellectual and aesthetic – between the original poetic text and any translated version.

Even if we admit that such a matching can be achieved in what is said, in the content that is, it could not possibly be achieved in how it is said – in the form.

It is not possible to convey the poetic structure – the composition and the phrasing, the rhythm and the phonetics, sensitivity and choice and specificity associated with the intimate psychological relationship between one word and another and between the word and the thing. Consequently it is not possible to convey the history of the word, to convey its life as air, water and light in its poetic mother-ground.

Maybe something in all this explains the attitude of al-Jahiz, the great Arab critic, towards the translation of Arabic poetry. He completely rejected the translation of Arabic poetry into other languages and described the translation of poetry as demolition and sabotage.

In translation, Arabic poetry loses the music of the language and its associations and the images it evokes. It loses the unique rhythms, which cannot be replicated by the rhythms of any other language.

A translated poem assumes another body and another soul. It loses its identity and acquires another identity. A translated poem is the result of linguistic destruction. So the ques-

tion in the translation of poetry is this: can we give meaning to this destruction? And the answer is yes, and that is the task of translators – they are the other creative artists who breathe life into this ruin and give it flesh and blood, a soul, a heart, and life.

These creative translators know that poetic language is not just a set of words, but that above all else it is a set of contexts and relationships, unique ways of seeing the world and giving expression to it, of setting up creative and distinctive relationships between words and things.

These translators know how to live inside the language of the poets they are translating and how to make the target language open its heart to the poem and welcome it in so that it feels at home. These creative translators also know how to translate aspects that are difficult to put into words, aspects that are implicit in words, that stand in front of words or hide behind them and that lie in the tone, in the memories they evoke and in the context. They also know that the function of a poem as poetry and art takes precedence over its function in conveying information, and that its meaning in general is secondary to its form, unlike with prose texts. So they know that translating the meaning is primarily subordinate to translating the form.

These creative translators know how to translate the form of a poem along with the meaning, how to catch the

memories it evokes and how to frame the context, artistically and historically.

But if the poem is a structure, and if translation necessarily means demolishing that structure, then what does this translation process do and what remains of the poem?

The substance of the poem survives, and the first question here is: how does the translator shape this substance? In line with his or her own language, with its specific features and its building methods, or in line with the original language of the poem and its specificities, imitating its original structure?

The second question is: doesn't the poem lose its "meaning" when it loses its "structure"?

My answer to these two questions, and it is an answer based on experience rather than theory, is that the second choice in translation will be to press on with demolition to the point of destruction.

So when it comes to translating a poem is it a question, not of trying to ensure that its body in translation looks like its original body, but rather of transforming its second body into energy that radiates with the original energy that is stored in its first body?

Let me take an example from French. Arabic and French are completely unrelated morphologically, syntactically, rhythmically, phonetically and musically. They have

roots that reach back into completely different traditions. I could go further and say that it would be hard to find in the two languages two words that would be synonyms in poetry, with the same signified, the same shades of meaning, the same semantic boundaries and the same precise sense. That is because the nature of the relationship between words and things in Arabic is radically different from the relationship in French. If words take their meaning from the way they are used, as Émile Benveniste says[1], then even if we assume there is a French word that matches completely an equivalent Arabic word, the meaning will assume another shading, because its use will be different in the context of an Arabic sentence than it would be in French.

So the same thing does not have the same poetical sense in the two languages, unless we ignore the minor differences and the contexts and the mental, psychological, personal, aesthetic, natural and historical associations that the noun or verb carries.

And so in translation the structure of the poem disintegrates and is demolished. The words in the original version will be replaced by other words in another version, and its sounds, music and rhythms will be replaced by other sounds, music and rhythms. The linguistic bed in which the poem

1 Émile Benveniste, Problèmes de linguistique générale, Gallimard, Paris, 1966, p. 226

sleeps, dreams and wakes up will differ, and consequently it will come to have other contexts, other associations. What was singular in the original might have become plural in the translation, or vice versa. Verbs have been translated as nouns, and nouns as verbs, and a part might have replaced the whole in some context, and these shifts may lead to what some people consider to be lexical errors with respect to the original. But such shifts must sometimes be done intentionally in poetry, precisely in order to avoid error.

Tearing down the structure of a poem and dismantling its parts mean that the poem shifts from one form to another, from one shape to another. This new shape, this new form, cannot be constructed simply by translation. There have to be high levels of skill and creativity as well, and in this building process one has to rely especially on the syntax, morphology, specificity and lyricism of the target language so that the translated poem looks like a text written from the start in its own language.

To do this the translator's concern has to focus on insight into the poetic individuality of the poet he or she is translating, in order to understand how the poet sees humankind, the world and language. This inner fire, this revelation of quintessence, this walk through the night of the world, this horizon that opens up and takes shape – this is what must inspire the translation and must be "placed" in the

translated version of the poem. This helps to approach the poem's identity and convey its inner rays and all its aspects.

When a translation is done in this way, the translated poetic text need not be just a reflection of the first language in the second language or just a shadow or a phantom, or just a parrot-like reference. On the contrary it gives the poem a second identity, poetically, culturally and aesthetically, and the poetic language in the original here becomes an important part of the poetic language in the target language.

I come to the following conclusions:

First, a translation, especially in poetry, should not be done in such a way that the translated text appears to have been written in the source language. On the contrary it must appear to have been written in the target language.

Second, translating poetry is meaningless unless it is another act of creation. What matters in the poem is not conveying the idea of the poem in itself. What matters is the form that this transposition takes, because in a poem the idea is its form.

Third, translation is therefore primarily a linguistic act; an act that thrives on jolting the lexical meanings of words and paving the way for an artistic-intellectual encounter between the dreams, imagination, ideas and life of the poet who is being translated on one hand, and those of the translator

on the other.

Fourth, in its capacity as a second act of creation, translation means a double re-creation: of the source language and of the target language, so that when reading the translated text we don't feel we are reading a foreign language but, on the contrary, that we are reading a foreign lyricism and here we can understand the word "translation" in the sense of "transposition" – in other words, the source language finds a new place for itself in the target language.

Fifth, lyricism – the lyricism of a poetic text – does not generally lie in the words themselves, but rather in the way they are arranged, in the "*nazm*" to use the neat expression of Abdel Qahir al-Jurjani, the great 11th century theorist of Arabic literature. The lyricism is in the context and in the harmony between the various elements. The words themselves may not be poetic in the case of one poet and highly poetic in the case of another.

Translation enriches the target language with the source language, and enriches the lyricism of the former with the lyricism of the latter, so it is not a form of documentation but another form of composition. It is a highly skilled cultural task and an important moral responsibility. This necessitates pointing out that translation can become an instrument for commerce; it turns the translated book into a mere commodity, not to speak of the vulgarity, the incom-

petence, the rivalries that have nothing to do with culture, the decline in the level of knowledge, and the ignorance about everything associated with translation into Arabic with respect to selecting a text, translating it and marketing it, so much so that for Arabs translation is now almost a part of trade, with imports and exports.

Seventh, in the light of the preceding, I would like to refer to a widespread problem – the accusation that the poetry of the modern Arabic poetry movement is just an imitation of translated foreign poetry. My view is that those who make this accusation are ignorant of both foreign poetry and Arabic poetry. What I say is: if only modern Arabic poetry had been influenced by foreign poetry – by Goethe, Dante, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and all the other great poets. Then we would have another kind of Arabic poetry and other readers of poetry. That is because the influence of foreign poetry commonly comes in the form of transposing expressions that the eye sees in books. The poets imitate what is immediately obvious – phrases and expressions in isolation, without considering the ideas themselves, the ways of thinking and expressing, the poet's own poetic vision or the poetic essence itself.

Eighth, in translating poetry there are two possible outcomes for the Arabic language: either we adapt it to suit the needs of the language from which we are translating, or we

adapt this second language to suit the needs of the first. It is natural therefore that we will find discrepancies between the way one Arab translator understands the concept of *nazm* in poetry as Jurjani saw it, aesthetically and semantically, and the way another translator understands it.

The sign of this discrepancy is that the value and aesthetics of a translation are dependent on the lyricism of the target language and the lyricism of the translator.

So judgment cannot be based on comparing the two versions in search of a faithful replica, but based on the lyricism itself – a lyricism that does not replicate, or a lyricism that "betrays" the original, especially as translating a poem means first and foremost dismantling its structure in the source language and giving it a new structure according to the poetic genius of the target language. This dismantling process changes the relationships between many elements in the original text, in form and in music, but they are replaced by other elements that impose other relationships, according to the specific features of the target language.

The translated text has now left home, a migrant living in another house that is alien to it, and it loses its entitative and organic link with its original mother language.

It is impossible to see this text as still living in its original home. Without this "high migration" or this poetic "high treason", which gives the migrant text a different life that ra-

diates in the target language, the translated text might be just a dead body or something like that. The truth nature of the text, i.e. its poetic essence, cannot be copied and cannot be fulfilled through conformity between the text and the things in the outside world. Its true nature lies in the aesthetic, poetic pulse of the language, in that the meaning cannot be separated from the words used to convey it and in that the form cannot be separated from the content.

I would like to end by saying that the self that does not translate the Other will not know how to translate itself or know itself. In living practice it will just be a form of death.

If poetic translation is impossible, it is equally impossible that it will disappear or be eliminated.

We know that in all its history the form of Islam that is in power, whether in kingdoms or emirates or under military rule, has never seen the kind of radical change that has paved the way for a rupture in the way people think, in other words for a new culture and for people of a new kind. And so, because that is the way it is, it is subject to a process of inevitable regression, in which it continues to resist violently the concept of equal citizenship, which includes civil rights and intellectual-human freedoms.

This imposes a substantial new responsibility, with translation seen as making an organic contribution to laying the foundations for a new society, a new culture and people of a

new kind. It is translation that enables Arabs to discover the intricacies of the world in both its misery and its bounty, so that they know themselves better.

In this context Arabic translation will remain an essential need – a liberation movement in which translation looks like decisive repudiation of all tradition, all submission and all subjugation, in which it looks like another act of creation. This Islamic time, the time of perplexity, may well also be the time for translation.

Translated by Jonathan Wright

The Lecture was followed by a Question and Answer session with the audience, at which Wen-chin Ouyang, Professor of Arabic at SOAS, London University, was interpreter

A video of the lecture, given in Arabic, can be viewed at www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/lecture2018.cfm or directly on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKcW_FD4m0w

ADONIS

Adonis is internationally renowned as a poet, essayist, philosopher and theoretician of Arab poetics. Referred to in interviews as "the greatest living poet of the Arab world" and "the grand old man of poetry, secularism and free speech in the Arab world", he has been writing poetry for 75 years and has more than fifty published works in Arabic of poetry, criticism, essays, and translations. His modernist influence on Arabic poetry is often compared to that of T S Eliot on Anglophone poetry. Works in English translation include *The Blood of Adonis*, *A Time Between Ashes and Roses*, *If Only the Sea Could Sleep*, *Adonis: Selected Poems*, *Concerto Al-Quds* and in 2019 *Songs of Mihyar the Damascene*. Also *An Introduction to Arab Poetics* and *Sufism and Surrealism*. Other major works are the three-volume *Al-Kitab* (The Book) and the four-volume *Al-Thabit wa al-mutahawwil* (The Static and the Dynamic).

Adonis was born Ali Ahmad Said Esber in Qassabin village, Syria, in 1930, adopting the name Adonis when he was 17, and in so doing unintentionally symbolising what would become his world view, his "break from all that's religio-nationalistic, and an embrace of all that's human and universal". He co-founded and edited the influential Sh'ir poetry magazine and later established and edited the equally important Mawaqif. He has won numerous awards, including the highest French honour of Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur (2012), Commander of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (1997), Germany's prestigious Goethe Prize (2011, the first Arab author to be awarded), the US PEN/Nabokov International Literature Lifetime Achievement Award (2017), and Turkey's Nazim Hikmet Prize (1994).

The Annual Lecture

The inaugural lecture, on14 October 2016, was given by Anton Shammas at the British Library on:
Blind Spots: A millennium of Arabic in translation – from Ibn Al-Haytham to William Faulkner via Don Quixote

The second lecture, on 7 November 2017, was given by Robert Irwin at the British Library on:
Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North*: 'The most important Arabic novel of the 20th Century'*