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Mohamed Choukri's Preface to *Al-Khbuz Al-Hafi* / الخبز الحافي / ("For Bread Alone")

TRANSLATED BY MAHMOUD GEWAILY

Mohamed Choukri is a Moroccan writer who writes in classical Arabic. In his early years, having no money, he would live in mosques or sleep on the streets. Educated people helped him with Arabic, and a turning point in his life was his graduation, in his twenties, from colloquial Moroccan Arabic to classical Arabic. He became one of the most respected and widely read writers in North Africa. His novel *Al-Khbuz Al-Hafi* / الخبز الحافي was written in classical Arabic but was first published in Arabic in 1982, later than its three other versions in translation. Choukri wrote a preface to the Arabic original. This preface is entitled كلمة and is dated 17 May 1982. In this preface, Choukri not only refers to three other languages into which the original was translated – English, French and Spanish – but also draws the attention of the Arab reader to the significance of the history of the untranslated Arabic preface. I shall elucidate below the significance of Choukri's preface before giving my translation of it, in order to gauge whether to recommend the inclusion of the preface in Paul Bowles's English version of the novel – should any revision of that translation be undertaken in the future.

The Arabic preface كلمة, specifically addressed to an Arab audience, is all the more important because the Moroccan Board of Censorship banned the Arabic text in 1983, a ban which remained in effect for seventeen years until the book was allowed to circulate freely in 2000, three years before Choukri's death. The preface naturally focuses on the problem of the political and imaginative freedom of literature and the cultural and personal consequences of censorship. It is almost a cry of despair by Choukri at the problems of his time and at the misinterpretation of his original text.

The title of the Arabic original, الخبز الحافي, means plain bread or bread without anything to go with it. The rendition of the title in its English version as *For Bread Alone* is highly consistent with the depth of the novel, because a literal translation of the original's title is "The Bare-footed Bread". Additionally, the Arabic original has a subtitle (Arabic) which may be translated as "An Autobiographical Novel 1935-1956". *For Bread Alone* is the first volume of a fictional autobiography, and the second one is *Streetwise*. The main cover of *For Bread Alone* mentions the name of Paul Bowles as the translator, but the second page in the documentation mentions both Bowles and Choukri. Choukri probably never told Bowles that he should include the preface in the English version, but the preface was finally published in Arabic nine years after the publication of Bowles's English version. The English translation *For Bread Alone* does not include this preface of course because it preceded the original. Since Bowles did not read classical Arabic, the preface had to be translated by Choukri into colloquial Moroccan Arabic (Mughelon), which Bowles did understand. It is possible that the "Arabic version of the novel" already had a preface, when Choukri and Bowles cooperated, but that Choukri preferred not to have it translated into English. Perhaps Bowles ignored it because the version translated into Mughelon did not have the preface at that time, before the publication of the English version in 1973. Or perhaps the translator ignored it and replaced it with the translator's "Introduction" (pp. 5-6).

Shades of meaning of words in Arabic were partly determined by the use of French and Spanish equivalents. It is in relation to his use of French and Spanish equivalents to help him

French and Spanish, it is important to examine the degree of difference between the words of the preface written in classical Arabic and the response of the translator to the basic story narrated in colloquial Arabic. It would thus be useful to translate Choukri's Arabic preface, as this shows Choukri's unique style with all its verbal virtuosity. (Note: the underlined Arabic word زئبقِي is given in the original as رُبْقِي . However, I went with the meaning closest to the form of the word and the surrounding context, to mean زئبقِي "mercurial" as an adjective so as to express the quality of ceaseless changing – for example, a mercurial mood. You may say that the time is mercurial when it is not gracious.)

كلمة

صباح الخير أيها الليليون

صباح الخير أيها النهاريون

صباح الخير يا طنجة المنغرسه في
زمن زئبقِي

ها أنذا أعود لأجوس. كالسائر نائما. عبر الأزقة و الذكريات.
عبر ما خططته عن حياتي الماضية. الحاضرة...كلمات و
استيهامات و ندوب لا يلثمها القول.

أين عمري من هذا النسج الكلامي؟

لكن عبير الأماسي و الليالي المكتظة بالتوجس
و اندفاع المغامرة يتسلل الى داخلتي ليعيد رماد الجمرات
غلالة شفافة أسرة.

منذ سنتين مات "عبدو فروسو". البطل الحقيقي الذي

أبقت مخيلتي و أعانني على تحمل القهر و الحرمان و عنف

الصراع الجسدي. مات قبل أن أنشر قصة " الخيمة" التي

استوحيتها من حضوره و تدفقه و شغفه بالحياة. أنتظر أن

يفرج عن الأدب الذي لا يجتر و لا يراوغ: مثل هذه الصفحات

عن سيرتي الذاتية. كتبتها منذ عشر سنوات و نشرت ترجمتها

بالانجليزيه و الفرنسية و الأسبانية قبل أن تعرف طريقها الى

القراء في شكلها الأصلي العربي.

WORD

Good morning, the day-time people.

Good morning, the night-time people.

Good morning, Tangier, the one rooted in a
mercurial time.

Here I am back, moving like a sleep walker
across ramps and memories, across what I have
planned for my life in the past and the present.
Saying is not enough to heal words, inspirations
and wounds.

Where is all my age in this verbal texture?

But the flavor of nights full of worries and love
of adventure creeps within me in order to renew
the ashes of stones, a transparent captive gown.

Two years ago, Abdu Froso died. He was the
real hero who had inspired my imagination and
helped me to be courageous in facing the need
and the violence of a struggling body. He died

before the publication of the short story "Tent".
The presence of Froso and his love of life
inspired me to write the "Tent". I am waiting
for the heroic literature to be no longer
censored. The following pages present my
biography. It was written ten years ago. It was
translated into English, French, and Spanish
before it comes to you in its original Arabic
form.

لقد علمتني الحياة أن أنتظر. أن أعي لعبة الزمن بدون أن
أتنازل عن عمق ما استحصدته: قل كلمتك قبل أن تموت فانها
ستعرف، حتما، طريقها. لا يهم ما ستؤول اليه. الأهم هو أن
تشعل عاطفة أو حزنا أو نزوة غافية.. أن تشعل لهيبا في
المناطق اليباب الموات.

فيا أيها الليليون و النهاريون. أيها المتشائمون و المتفائلون.
أيها المتمردون أيها المراهقون. أيها العقلاء "...: لا تنسوا أن
لعبة الزمن أقوى منا. لعبة مميتة هي . لا يمكن أن نواجهها الا
بأن تعيش الموت السابق لموتنا، لاماتنا: أن نرقص على حبال
المخاطرة نشدانا للحياة.

أقول: يخرج الحي من الميت

يخرج الحي من النتن و من المتحلل. يخرج من المتخم و

المنهار...

يخرجه من بطون الجائعين ومن صلب المتعيشين على "
الخبز الحافي".

م.ش

طنجة 1982/5/17

Life taught me to wait, to understand the time
game without abandoning the depth of what I
have gained: before your death, say your word
that will have its effect of course. It is not
important what it will come at, but the most
important is to ignite a passion or sadness or a
silent lust, to make a fire in the areas of the
dead.

O, Night-time and day-time people!

O, Pessimists and optimists!

O, Rebels!

O, Adults!

O, "Reasonable" people ...:

Do not forget that the "time game" is sturdier
than us; it is a fatal game. We can not challenge
it unless we do live the death, which is
precedent to our death, to our nothingness: to
dance on the risky rows in a celebration of life.

I say: He, Our Lord, creates the live from the
dead.

He creates the live from the rotten, from the
dissolved, and from the disappointed.

He creates the live from the bellies of the
hungry and from the power of those living on
"For Bread Alone".

M. C

1982/5/17 Tangier