

## **From Authoriality in Literature to Authoriality in Translation**

### **Case Study: “The Arabian Nights” English and French versions**

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Received: 01/2025, Published: 04/2025

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#### **Abstract:**

Authoriality in literature and authoriality in translation are two distinct concepts, although they are closely linked. The concept of authoriality in literature refers to the notion of author's authority and control over his literary work whereas authoriality in translation examines the relationship between the original author, the translator, and the translated text. The latter raises critical questions about how translators preserve the author's voice, style, and intent while adapting the work for different linguistic and cultural contexts. Balancing fidelity to the source text with necessary modifications for the target audience is a core challenge of translation. Some translators focus on strict adherence to the original, while others adopt a more creative approach, influencing the work's interpretation. Practical concerns, such as author attribution, cultural adaptation, and ethical considerations, further shape the translation process. The case of ancient texts like The Arabian Nights puts the light on the complexities of maintaining authorial presence across versions. Handling authoriality in translation requires striking a delicate balance—faithfully conveying the original author's vision while ensuring accessibility in the target language. This paper aims at highlighting the translator crucial role and approaches in overcoming the problems of authoriality in translating literary texts.

**Keywords:** Authoriality- Translation- Literature-Control- Fidelity -adaptation- Arabian Nights.

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#### **Introduction:**

The concept of authoriality, or the author's authority over a text, has been widely discussed in the field of literary translation since in original writing, authors face the overwhelming task of creating something entirely new where every word must be carefully chosen to capture something meaningful and distinctive. They must conjure worlds, characters, and narratives from pure imagination. Authoriality in translation deals with the relationship between the original author, the translator, and the translated work. It raises questions about how translators swing between conveying faithfully the author's voice, style, and intentions while adapting the text for the target language and culture. It refers to how the original author's authorial presence is handled and represented in the translated text. Translators must make decisions about preserving the author's linguistic choices, tone, and creativity while considering the expectations and context of the target audience. This perpetual negotiation of balancing between fidelity to the source language and adaptation to the target one is a central challenge of authoriality in translation.

The relationship between author, translator, and translated text is nuanced. Some translators focus on the author as the ultimate authority and seek to remain faithful to the original. Others take a more creative approach, leaving their own imprint and personal touch on the translation.

Practical issues around authoriality arise throughout the translation process. Indeed, Translators face choices regarding author attribution, editorial decisions on structure and presentation, cultural adaptation of references and norms, and ethical considerations around sensitive content. Strategies like paraphrasing, annotations, and stylistic recreation can help handling authoriality and respecting the original author's intention.

"The Arabian Nights," is one of world literature's most influential story collections. Its translation history offers fascinating insights into questions of authoriality, particularly because the work has no single author and evolved from an oral tradition encompassing multiple cultures, including Persian, Arabic, Indian and Egyptian sources, with stories added and modified over centuries. Tales were passed down by generations of storytellers before being compiled into written collections.

The frame story introduces Scheherazade as the fictional narrator, creating an additional layer of authorial complexity - she is simultaneously a character and the voice relating most tales within the collection.

Major translators have taken notably different approaches:

Antoine Galland's 1704-1717 French translation added new tales and shaped Western perceptions

Edward Lane's 1839-1841 English version censored sexual content for Victorian audiences.

Richard Burton's 1885 translation emphasized exotic elements and added extensive annotations.

Hussain Haddawy's modern English translation aims to capture the original oral storytelling style.

The translation of ancient works like "The Arabian Nights" highlights unique authoriality challenges. With its oral traditions, cultural embeddedness, and varied versions, translators must determine how to convey the essence of these tales while making them accessible to the target audience by opting for appropriate translation approaches.

Authoriality in translation can be approached from various aspects, including fidelity to the author, the translator's creativity, and the reception of the translated text. Some translators seek to preserve the authoriality of the source text's author in their translation, remaining faithful to the letter and spirit of the original work. Others take a more creative approach, appropriating the source text and leaving their own imprint on the translation believing that the translated text should be an autonomous work with its own authoriality.

In fact, the perception of authoriality can vary among readers who may interpret the translation differently according to their own cultural and linguistic context. The translator's creativity can also play a key role in how authoriality is approached in translation. Some translators see their role as recreating the work in the target language, using their own style and voice while respecting the intention of the author of the source text. Others take a more conservative approach, striving to preserve the style and voice of the source text author as much as possible in their translation. For

this purpose I opted for the Arabian Nights translations case study and specifically the French version of Antoine Galland and the English version of Richard Burton Both of which are totally different and illustrate complex issues faced in the translation of literary works.

The following examples can show the crucial role of the translator on the way he approaches the original text and the audience.

Example 1 :

Original text :

و قال يا شهرزاد و الله اني عفوت عنك من قبل مجيء هؤلاء الأولاد لكوني رأيتك عفيفة، نقية، و حرة و نقية بآرك الله ...  
فيك وفي أبك وأمك وأصلك وفرعك. ص447

English version :

...and said « By Allah, O Shcheherazad, I pardoned thee before the coming of these children, for that I found thee **chaste, pure, ingenious and pious! Allah bless thee and thy father and thy mother and thy root, and thy branch!** “ p451.

French version:

Ces considérations et les autres qu'ils connaissait en elle le portèrent enfin à lui faire grâce. « Je vois bien, lui dit-il **aimable** Scheherazad, que vous êtes inépuisable dans vos petits contes : il y a assez longtemps que vous m'en divertissez ; vous avez apaisé ma colère, et je renonce volontiers, en votre faveur à la loi cruelle que je m'étais imposée... » p433.

Example2 :

Original text :

و بعد ذلك تكامل الدخان و اجتمع ثم انتفض فصار عفريتاً رأسه في السحاب ورجلاه في التراب برأس كالقبة و أيد كالمداري ...  
ورجلين كالصواري و فم كالمغارة وأسنان كالحجارة و منخار كالإبريق و عيين كالسراجين. ص14

English version;

...The thick vapor condensed and became **an ifrit, huge of bulk, whose crest touched the clouds while his feet were on the ground, his head was as a dome. His hands like pitchforks, his legs long as masts and his mouth big as a cave; his teeth were like large stones, his nostrils ewers, his eyes two lamps.** p29

French version:

Lorsque la fume fut toute hors du vase elle se réunit et devint un corps solide dont il se forma un génie deux fois aussi haut que le plus grand de tous les géants. A l'aspect d'un **monstre d'une grandeur si démesurée**, le pêcheur voulut prendre la fuite.p66

Example 3 :

Original text :

و إذا بباب القصر قد فتح و خرج منه عشرون جارية و عشرون عبدا و امرأة تمشي بينهم وهي في غاية الحسن و الجمال. ص3.

English version :

...a pastern of the palace, which was carefully kept private, swung open and out of it came twenty slave girls surrounded his brother's wife **who was wonderous fair, a model of beauty and comeliness and symmetry and perfect loveliness and who paced with grace of a gazelle.** p12

French version:

Une porte secrète du palais s'ouvrit tout à coup, et il en sortit vingt femmes au milieu desquelles marchait la sultane **d'un air qui la faisait aisément distinguer.** p27

Example 4 :

...فتعجب الشيخ صاحب الغزالة وقال له يا أخي ما دينك إلا دين عظيم وحكايتك حكاية عجيبة لو كتبت بالإبر على آفاق البصر لكانت عبرة لمن اعتبر...ص8

English version :

**O brother, thy faith is none other than exceeding faith and thy story right strange; were it graven on the eye concerns it were a warner to whoso would be warned.** P23

French version:

Le vieillard l'écouta avec étonnement et prenant la parole « **voilà s'écria-t-il la chose du monde la plus surprenante ; et vous êtes lié par le serment le plus inviolable** » p49

The examples above demonstrate a clear contrast in translation approaches. The English translator employed a direct, literal method that preserves the original writer's voice and authority without additions or omissions. In contrast, the French translator chose an oblique approach based on rewriting the text rather than strictly translating it, thereby asserting more control over the original text and allowing his own creativity to flourish.

Issues related to authoriality in translation are numerous and complex. Here are some of the challenges commonly faced by translators regarding their role as authors:

**Author attribution:** Translators may question how to attribute their role as authors in a translation. Should they be considered full authors because of the choices they make in the target language, or merely as conveyors of the original text?

**Fidelity to the source text:** Translators are often faced with the challenge of remaining accurate to the source text while adapting it into the target language. This may involve making decisions on how to convey the cultural, linguistic, and stylistic nuances of the original text in another language while respecting the original author's intention.

**Cultural adaptation:** Translations often involve adapting texts from one culture to another. Translators may face challenges in rendering cultural references, customs, beliefs, and social norms from the source text into the target language. This can raise questions on how to reconcile the authoriality of the original author with the expectations and sensitivities of the target audience.

**Ethical responsibility:** Translators may also face ethical questions related to their role as authors in

translation. This can include decisions on how to handle problematic passages such as stereotypes, hate speech, offensive content, or sensitive subjects in translation.

In conclusion, writing literature and translating texts both present unique intellectual and creative challenges that demand extraordinary skill and sensitivity. Authoriality in literature is linked to the artistic creation of the original author, while authoriality in translation is related to how the translator handles the original author's authoriality when translating a text into another language and culture. Many literary scholars consider translation an even more challenging art form than original writing because the translator must be both extremely faithful and creatively adaptive—preserving the original work's integrity while ensuring it resonates authentically with readers in a new linguistic and cultural context.

The translator may have many solutions to issues of authoriality in translation, as they are complex and depend on the specific context of each translation. Here are some possible approaches to face these challenges:

**Clarifying the translator's role:** The translator should be transparent about his role as a translator and avoid appropriating the text of the original author. This can be achieved by using footnotes to explain particular translation choices.

**Respecting the original author's intention:** The translator should respect the original author's intention while adapting the text to the target language and culture. This involves making appropriate editorial choices to preserve style, and voice of the original author in the translation.

**Taking into consideration the target culture:** The translator must adapt the text to the cultural specificities of the target language.

**Being ethical:** The translator must be aware of his ethical role as an author in translation and adopt a reflective approach by using text revision techniques, seeking feedback, and communicating, if it's possible, with the original author to clarify specific translation choices.

It is essential to keep in mind that the essence of great translation is not just having the control on a text but being able to bridge worlds—to take a text rooted in one cultural context and transplant it so skillfully that readers in another language feel the same intellectual and emotional impact as the original audience.

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