

A Fertile Effort

Misr al-Fatah, 18 May 1953.

It is this effort, violent to the utmost limits of violence, delightful to the furthest bounds of delight, which Dr. Abd al-Rahman Badawi has expended upon Aristotle's book on poetry.

And I say: this effort is violent to the furthest limits of violence; for this book was translated into Arabic in the fourth century of the Hijra, and it may well have been translated before that, in the third century, but it is the fourth-century translation that has reached us, and it is a sickly one, steeped deep in its sickliness, portraying Aristotle's book not as it truly is, nor even approximately as it is, and containing a great deal of confusion and disorder.

And upon this translation, and upon another that likewise appeared in the fourth century but did not reach us, the Muslim philosophers relied when they summarized this branch of Aristotle's learning, so that the knowledge of the Arabs and Muslims concerning this portion of Aristotle's learning was distorted and deficient; then the Greek text of this book became known at the start of the Renaissance, and a group of Italian scholars of that age devoted themselves to it as translators and critics, commentators and analysts, and the book soon crossed beyond Italy into the rest of Western Europe, becoming known in Spain, France, England, and Germany, and the attention of critics and scholars to it grew ever stronger, as their attention grew stronger toward everything that reached them of the works of the Greeks in general, and of the works of the First Teacher in particular.

And this attention continues unbroken to this day; the book soon crossed beyond the circles of scholars and critics into the circles of writers and poets especially, so that the arts of poetry in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries were influenced by it, and writers did not cease to be influenced by it until the Romantic movement arose in the nineteenth century.

So the book passed through the ancient Islamic world as a summer cloud passes — our philosophers knew of it only fragments, which they did not verify and were not content with, but merely touched upon in passing in their books of logic, so as to account for whatever had reached them of Aristotle's philosophy. The Arab world's engagement with

Aristotle's Rhetoric, however, was stronger and deeper, appearing in literary criticism since the time of al-Jahiz, and then represented powerfully and clearly in the arts of rhetoric from Abd al-Qahir down to the present.

But the book's influence in Europe was of very great importance, for, as you have seen, attention to it did not stop with specialist scholars and critics, but passed beyond them to poets and dramatists especially.

And it was a grave deficiency in our literary life that we should know of this book only its name, and only these lines found at the end of books of logic, and it added to the gravity of this deficiency that the moderns remained ignorant even of what the ancients had known of this book, for they did not know the old Arabic translation, nor did anyone but the specialists — who could be counted among the professors of the universities of Cairo and Alexandria — know the philosophers' summary of this translation.

It was therefore inevitable that this deficiency in our Arabic literary culture should be made good, and this flaw erased from it, and the way to that lay in reviving the old translation, and the philosophers' summary of it on the one hand, and in translating the book itself afresh, correctly and precisely, on the other.

And it is this violent, delightful effort to which Professor Dr. Abd al-Rahman Badawi has devoted himself, achieving in it the very best of success.

And I turn, from time to time, to this book, which its author presented to me some weeks ago, and I find in it a contentment and delight, and an exertion and hardship, the like of which I find only very rarely when I give myself over to what is presented to me these last years of books.

As for the contentment and the delight, their source is that an Egyptian professor, one of the professors of one of our universities, has been able to draw from his time and from this contemporary life of his — crowded as it is with events and beset with great matters — a portion that he devotes to one of Aristotle's books, matching the sustained efforts the ancients and the moderns expended to translate it and summarize it, to understand it and criticize it, and in the end to bring it near to the poets, who find in it the foundations of their art as the chief of philosophers set them forth twenty-three centuries ago.

Here, then, is a contemporary Egyptian professor who has scarcely yet left youth behind, who has not forgotten his share of contemporary life with all its good and evil, but who nonetheless — indeed, for that very reason — bears every hardship and expends every effort to study a book on the foundations of poetry composed twenty-three centuries ago, rendered into Arabic ten centuries ago, and occupying Europeans for five centuries; he did not turn away from it because it is excessively ancient, nor did he shun it because it is not among those works connected to immediate material benefit, nor did he find it irksome because it is a book that only very few of the cultured concern themselves with — rather, he loved the book for all these very qualities, and approached it with the deepest passion, with the greatest eagerness, that he might give its delight to others like himself among his fellow citizens, among students of culture and learning, who read the Arabic language.

And he felt a certain shame, for himself and for his people, that English and Austrian orientalist should expend violent efforts over successive years to study this portion of the Arab-Islamic heritage, while we remain heedless of it, scarcely even aware of it, let alone taking part in it.

He loves this kind of research, then, because he finds in it a pleasure for himself, a wealth for his language, and an education for his fellow citizens; its antiquity does not deter him from it, but rather draws him to it, and its difficulty does not turn him from it, but rather entices him to it; and then he expends whatever effort he expends, and attains whatever success he attains, without exaggeration or boastfulness, but rather this success encourages him to take up further forms of research, no less ancient and no less difficult than this one he has just completed.

For Professor Abd al-Rahman Badawi is submerged in the learning of Aristotle up to his very ears. I was among those most eager to see our specialist philosophers devote themselves to the old Arabic translation of Aristotle's *Logic*, for this translation, on which our ancients lived, and in and through which our philosophers excelled, needed to be brought back to life.

And Dr. Abd al-Rahman Badawi has devoted a great measure of his time, his effort, and his money to reviving this translation, publishing what he has published of it, until, reaching the *Poetics*, and finding the old translation of little nourishment, he revived it along with the rest, but was not content with that alone, and so turned to Aristotle's own book

and translated it afresh, with precision.

And he has gathered for us, in this volume I am discussing, his own new translation, together with the translation of Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus, and the summaries of it by al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd, and has prefaced all of this with a detailed study of the history of this book in the ancient Arab world, in the modern European world, and among the orientalist.

Is not all of this fit to stir contentment and delight, and more than contentment and delight, in the soul of one who wishes for Egypt that her sons be occupied with the realities and the essence of culture, not with its appearances and its husks, and with knowledge in its pure form alone, not with what is closer to tinsel and pretense than to anything else?

Is it not a cause for contentment and delight that we find among young Egyptians those who love learning because it is learning, and pursue it because they find in pursuing it and producing within it that supreme pleasure which only purified souls can taste or cherish?

Is it not a cause for contentment and delight that we find among young Egyptians those who pursue learning not because they expect from it some immediate benefit, but because they find in it a pleasure pure of every taint, and find in producing within it a taking hold of the true foundations of culture upon which the glory of peoples rests?

Indeed, and what increases this contentment and delight further is that Professor Abd al-Rahman Badawi is not alone among his fellow citizens in this manner of loving learning and devoting himself to it, but has, in our wronged Egyptian university, peers and equals who, like him, pursue pure learning, and produce, like him, in pure learning, and expend, like him, these efforts which delight those who undertake them and delight those who read their works, but which earn their authors neither fame nor money; for true learning has earned its practitioners fame only belatedly, and has never earned its practitioners money, but has been rather a source of wealth for publishers.

And I said: our universities are wronged — and why should I not say so, when these days we hear nothing but that our universities have failed and have not discharged the tasks for which they were founded, or have not fulfilled their mission, as is said in this age in which everything has become confused? No — our universities have not failed, so long as they continue, from time to time, to produce Dr. Abd al-Rahman Badawi and

his brethren, who work and produce and build our true modern culture without exaggeration, without clamor, without commotion.

And I mentioned earlier that I give myself over to this book, and I find in giving myself over to it not only contentment and delight, but also hardship and exertion; for reading Aristotle, and his old translation, and the Muslim philosophers' summaries of him, is not an easy, simple matter like reading pleasant tales, or this facile literature in which we are drowned these days, but rather a reading that demands the utmost patience, and a kind of thinking in which its practitioner must immerse himself most deeply. And, upon my life, nothing has made the literary life so dear to me as this: that it grants me, from time to time, these books which I read taking my time over them, sharing with their authors in the effort they have expended and the hardship they have borne. And is true literature anything but a fruitful sharing between writers and readers?

Let Dr. Abd al-Rahman Badawi accept from me my most sincere, most heartfelt, and purest thanks; for he has gratified me by devoting this valuable attention to the works of Aristotle, and because he and his brethren have given contemporary Arab culture a worth indeed, and a wealth indeed.