

Introducing and Translating Al-Fuzai's 'The Slap'

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ABSTRACT

In 'The Slap'¹, Al-Fuzai depicts a conflict between a husband's mother and her daughter-in-law. This is a problem every newly married couple faces because in many Arab communities, a bridegroom usually prefers, and is socially encouraged, to live with his parents. Hence, the issue is cultural; cultures might be introduced through translation. Al-Fuzai addresses this social issue in 'The Slap', trying to criticize the social context a new wife is put in (Dohal, 2018 a, p.27). A responsible individual should create a healthy environment where all members of the family can practice their rights and continue their life in comfort and prosperity; such an environment is not provided in this story. 'The Slap' represents an example of Al-Fuzai's literary writings (Dohal, 2021, p.746). It is translated and introduced here for the first time for readers who have no access to Arabic. In addition, it handles a social issue some people may not give enough attention to.

INTRODUCTION

In a patriarchal society, some women, particularly those coming from outside the family, are marginalized and ignored; the wife in this story is the best example. Though she argues from the beginning, "It is useless... as long as you believe that your mother is right."² (Al-Fuzai, 1979, p. 93). The husband ignores her statement and tries to justify his point of view: "I know now why you chose not to tell me when my mother beat you." For him, his mother "has authority over her." Here a human right is denied; beating a wife is not usually investigated, and rarely are husbands punished if they do so.

More than this, the protagonist continues speaking on her behalf, "Are you saying that you did not want this outcome." Her mouth is muzzled, and her voice is denied. Her opinion is expressed through subdued crying. Her husband informs us of this through his question, "Are you crying?" Traditionally, she should be submissive, silent, and passive; this view will be expressed clearly in 'Wednesday Train.' Indeed, Al-Fuzai tackles many social and cultural issues similar to the one addressed here in this story and found in his society. His stories are brief and straightforward, but they are innovative and insightful.

Though the wife tries to justify her behavior—"I don't want to make her angry"—the husband stresses his power

and control by threatening her: "I will take [the children] away from you... a good mother is one who preserves her marital life." Here he makes a connection between marriage and children; for many people, both men and women, in Saudi Arabia, though this may not be the viewpoint of the new generation, the wife is no more than a mother. In other words, in a patriarchal culture a woman is the one who gives birth to children and takes care of her home—that includes observing and attending the husband's close relatives.

Translation is a critical tool for supporting individuals in becoming acquainted and connected to one another. The process of translating 'The Slap' will educate readers to a piece of the Arabian culture as well as the author, Al-Fuzai (1940-). Al-Fuzai's 'The Slap', will enable readers to search for more related items to read and learn more about this culture (Dohal, 2018 b, p.1). Translation can help in communicating among people and cultures.

TRANSLATION: 'THE SLAP'

The train makes its way across the desert, advancing into the darkness that has started weaving its web to change the universe into a darkness where nothing tears its curtains except those lights emerging from the locomotive and passenger trailers... and from time to time, a sudden, shining brightness

flashes from one of the oil excavation groups' sites scattered about the desert, yet it disappears as suddenly as it appears. There is a coach that is so full of travelers that it is about to eject them from the seats, to wander about the embargo trailer, or the train café, or the reading area so as not to permit those people who dream of spending a few interesting hours with a book... achieving this dream... and in one of those seats... a sullen man sits—he seems to get angry for trivial reasons—and beside him sits his wife. The tone of her voice oozes with despair and announces her despondence, subservience... perhaps that despair is the cause of this subservience. and desperately she pleads, "It is useless... as long as you believe that your mother is always right... I don't want to make her angry, but what can I do since she invents various reasons for dispute?"

She speaks in a way that attracts the attention of other people sitting nearby, although they pretend that they are busy with their private affairs; she does not care if they hear her... and it is as if she wants the world to witness the injustice of her case... when she talks loudly... the looks of the travelers leak with pity and they sneak looks at her.

The husband, continuing his dispute, as if he had not heard his wife talking after staring at her, strikes her with a predatory look and says, "I was mistaken... because I married you. she is my mother and she knows what is good for me... there is no way that she lies... you are accustomed to lying, so you think that other people lie... you are always unfair to her, so no way do I believe you; don't you know anything? These two, one of whom you are carrying in your womb and the other in your hands... I will take them away from you. a good mother is one who preserves her marital life... and since you are not able to protect your marital life. since you have changed my life into a hell, I will not let them live with you. what? Are you crying...? Crying does not influence me... you can cry forever, I will not change my opinion... Are you saying that my mother is behind all this? NO. You are at fault... She is my mother, I have to have her, but you are a shoe on my foot that I can take off whenever I want; right now I am taking you to your family where we are not to meet again... oh... why are you crying... aren't you ashamed of yourself?... It's the bad ending that you wanted to arrive at; are you saying that you did not want this outcome, and that it is my mother who sought this end?... You are lying again; I know now why you chose not to tell me when my mother beat you... you say that you don't want to disturb my life, but you say that you are patient, and the fact is that you are wrong, because she would not beat you for no reason.

"Are you saying that she has no right to beat you?"

"Why?... she is my mother, and she has absolute authority over you... I did not choose you... She chose you for me, and accordingly she is in charge of you. do you want me to waste my time busying myself with you. you know that this is impossible for me... because I spend the whole week at my work site, and I don't come home except on Thursday and return to work on Friday, so when I come home... I find life tumultuous and loaded with hostility between you and my mother; my mother says you are wrong and I believe her, and you say that she is wrong and I don't believe you.

"You ask, why can't I take you and move to my work location?"

"What a silly question! You know that such an act means that I would have to move my mother too. and have dispute, difference and tumult with you both.

"What... am I to leave her and bring you with me... who says that I will accept this proposition... for me, she is more important than you are. And you say that she is behind my separation with my two previous wives; these things are not your business. It would be better to shut up and let me sleep a little. What a slow train!... time passes so tediously that I imagine we will not arrive at all.

"At the beginning of my practical life, I dreamt about a happy household; shivers of hope afflicted me whenever I thought of a good, honest, obedient, loyal wife... and I married... but my first wife deflated my hopes, so that incessant glimmer of happiness which I had dreamt about went out... and she used to say that my mother was behind the foundering of the boat of our marital life... it was tossed by fierce waves, and whenever I tried to guide it to a safe shore, my efforts went with the wind... no use... my mother and my wife embodied the tragedy of the cat and the mouse... no harmony... no conciliation... even no temporary truce... and we separated... I left my wife in order to please my mother... she is always right... she might seem strict in certain situations, but generally she wants nothing other than my good.

"And I married for the second time... and the tragedy recurred... and repeated what happened the first time.

"And the tragedy occurs for the third time.

"And I wouldn't need to repeat the same scenario for the third time if she had not chosen you to be my wife, but it seems that her choice is inappropriate; you deny her kind acts and treat her unjustly, all of you do wrong to her. she is my mother and she does not want anything but the best for me, and my good is everything for her.

"See how our lives end up.

"The beginning was beautiful and pleasant... I thought that I was the happiest person... but that became a mirage... a dream I remember as I remember any charming dream... I remember it but without regret, because my mother is more important to me... Silence the baby, don't let him cry, and you, don't cry... keep your tears for tomorrow... you will cry a lot... what? Don't cry over me, but cry over the beautiful dream that you imagined for marriage. you are the one who did not protect the beauty of that dream.

"Another thing I am telling you, don't mention my mother's name in vain. I'll slap your cheek if you mention her name again... O Allah... how stupid I was when I thought that you would be honest to my mother because she chose you to be my wife... and why do you swear that she has been wrong, since I don't believe you. is this her reward... she chose you to be my wife because she is a friend of your mother... my mother is the one who gives orders, and you have to obey... and when she bids you neither to visit anyone nor to be visited by anyone, you have to yield to her demands. I spent three years in a hell of differences. Even when I went to the site of my work, your dispute lived with me... I tried to convince myself that since I was far from you both, I would

be far from your dispute, but it still chased me... lived with me; sometimes I tried to forget, but that only forced me to remember... apparently I am getting tired of talking uselessly.

“Again you disrespectfully mention my mother?”

And travelers who are sitting close to her seat turn around on the sound of an echoing slap that the man with the dark face, who appears to become angry for any trivial reason, strikingly slaps his wife on her face.

CONCLUSION

In ‘The Slap’, Al-Fuzai addresses a social issue that may occur to any newly married couple in the author’s Arabian community (Dohal, 2019, p.121). A husband is expected to take his wife to live with his family. Hence, a necessary contact will take place, and any contact has its consequences.

Another point raised in the story is that a female relative is responsible for choosing a girl to marry her son or brother. Addressing his wife, the protagonist says, “I did not choose you. She chose you for me.” He uses such a statement as an excuse despite the cultural tradition that few men know the girl they will marry before marriage.

However, in this story, the wife spends the whole week with his mother as if she were a nurse or a maid, not a wife, while he must “spend the whole week at [his] work site.” He comes home only on Thursday, and returns to work on Friday. In brief, he neglects his wife; she is his third wife. More than this, it is his mother whom he wants “to please... she is always right...” but if, as he states, “her choice is inappropriate,” then we question whether “she is always right” (Al-Fuzai, 1979, p. 93).

Such a wife should not go to her family and stay with them until her husband has his own house because, after marriage, traditionally a wife is the responsibility of her husband, who in this society tends to leave her with his family.

In brief, this story characterizes the wife as an oppressed person in the author’s society. Accordingly, it depicts a social problem that might be a topic for feminists to explore, search, and analyze.

The desire to learn and understand other civilizations is a universal passion; translating this story will provide a doorway for those who do not have access to the original Arabian text but want to learn about this culture. Literature can indeed assist people in understanding and experiencing the hardships and challenges that others encounter. Communication between nations and cultures can be aided by translation; translating ‘The Slap’ gives readers a window to look through when they want to know about the culture in question.

END NOTES

Note 1. This story was translated from the following Arabic source: Al-Fuzai, K. I. (1979). *Thursday Fair*. (سوق الخميس). Taif: Taif Literary Club, pp. 91-96.

Note 2. Every now and then there are few dots found in the source text, and I kept as close as possible to the original text.

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