



## Cultural and Aesthetic Constraints in Two Arabic Translations of Wordsworth's *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*: A case Study of Two Arabic Translations

Ahmed Abraheem Eisay

Faculty of Education, English Department Gulf of Sidra University

[ahmedabwhdmh@gmail.com](mailto:ahmedabwhdmh@gmail.com)

تاريخ الاستلام: 2026/02/16 - تاريخ المراجعة: 2026/03/13 - تاريخ القبول: 2026/03/14 - تاريخ للنش: 2026/04/28

### Abstract

This study investigates the cultural and artistic restrictions that control two Arabic translations of William Wordsworth's poem *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, with an emphasis on translations by Mahmoud Al-Marudi and Mohammad Saleh Al-Gharsi. The study adopts a comparative analytical approach, drawing on descriptive translation studies as well as key theoretical contributions by Toury, Levever, Nida, and Venuti. It investigates how each translation navigates the gaps between English Romantic poetics and Arabic literary traditions, particularly in terms of natural imagery, symbolism, emotional explicitness, rhythm, and poetic voice. The findings show that, while both translations are subject to common cultural and aesthetic restrictions, they produce diverse translational outputs influenced by individual stylistic choices and levels of domestication. Therefore, this paper comes to the conclusion that, rather than being a formal replication, literary translation is a culturally conditioned act of creative rewriting.

**Keywords:** poetic translation, cultural constraints, aesthetic constraints, Wordsworth, Arabic translation, comparative study

### الخلاصة

تتناول هذه الدراسة القيود الثقافية والجمالية التي تحكم ترجمتين عربيتين لقصيدة ويليام وودزورث *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*، مع التركيز على ترجمتي محمود المرودى ومحمد الصالح الغريسي. واستنادا إلى دراسات الترجمة الوصفية وإلى إسهامات نظرية بارزة لكل من توري، وليففير، ونايدا، وفينوتي، يعتمد البحث مقارنة تحليلية مقارنة. ويستكشف كيفية تفاوض كل مترجم مع الفروق القائمة بين الشعرية الرومانسية الانجليزية والمعايير الأدبية العربية، ودرجة التصريح العاطفي، والإيقاع، والصوت الشعري. وتظهر النتائج أنه على الرغم من خضوع المترجمين لقيود ثقافية وجمالية مشتركة، فإنهما تفضيان إلى مخرجات ترجميه متباينة تشكلت بفعل التفضيلات الأسلوبية الفردية ودرجات مختلفة من التدجين. ويخلص البحث إلى أن ترجمة الشعر تمثل فعلا إبداعيا لإعادة كتابة مشروطة ثقافيا، لا مجرد إعادة إنتاج شكلية للنص الأصلي.

### Introduction

One of the most well-known poems of English Romanticism is William Wordsworth's *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* (1807). In line with Wordsworth's description of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" resulting from "emotion recollected in tranquility," the poem presents a view of nature as a source of deep happiness and emotional rejuvenation (Wordsworth, 1800/2002, p. 611). Several Arabic translations of the poem have been produced, each of which reflects unique reactions to the aesthetic and cultural requirements of rendering poetry. In order to investigate how translators operating within the same target culture develop different poetic rewritings, this dissertation examines two Arabic translations: one by Mahmoud Al-Marudi and another by Mohammad Saleh Al-Gharsi. The study does not attempt to rate the translations in terms of accuracy; rather, it looks into how cultural and aesthetic limits influence translational choices outputs.

### 2. Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this research is Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS). Based on Toury (1995), translation should be examined in light of the standards guiding their creation and

reception since they are realities of the target culture. Depending on Lefevere (1992), translation is limited by prevailing poetics and ideological frameworks. The impact of the translated text on the intended reader is highlighted by Nida's (1995) emphasizes a further distinction between foreignization and domestication, pointing out that in literary systems that promote fluency and cultural familiarity, domestication frequently emerges out. Consequently, these theoretical viewpoints govern the comparative investigation of Al-Marudi's and Al-Gharisi's translations.

### 3. Cultural Constraints

The translator may face cultural difficulties when rendering a poem from Arabic into English, which forces him or her to make decisions during his translation in order to improve the translation of the text. It may be divided into three basic issues, which are as follows:

#### 3.1 Nature and Romantic Ideology

Wordsworth's poem exemplifies a distinct Romantic ideology in which nature serves not solely as a physical backdrop nevertheless as a moral, emotional, and spiritual presence that actively shifts human awareness. Based on Abrams (1971), Romantic poetry is distinguished by the internalization of nature, in which exterior landscapes are transformed into expressions of the poet's inner emotional and mental existence. In this view, nature is transformed from a neutral or decorative element to one of contemplation, moral instruction, and spiritual refreshment.

In contrast, the Arabic poetic tradition has historically treated nature from a distinct aesthetic and cultural perspective. According to Allen (2000), natural elements in classical Arabic poetry usually serve descriptive, decorative, or symbolic functions, supporting themes like nostalgia, praise, or longing without assuming autonomous philosophical or spiritual agency. While nature imagery is common in Arabic poetry, it rarely plays the important, contemplative role attributed to it in Romantic literature. Therefore, this basic discrepancy in poetic philosophy is a major cultural limitation in rendering Wordsworth's poetry into Arabic, as the translator must reconcile two opposing views of the relationship between self and environment. By enhancing the emotional connection with nature, Al-Marudi and Al-Gharisi both try to overcome this limitation and bring the TT closer to Romantic sensibilities. Therefore, their approaches, however, differ in how they are carried out and how they work. Al-Gharisi's translation preserves nature's reflective function as a trigger for introspection while staying more closely aligned with the contemplative and meditative tone of the original text. Al-Marudi's version, on the other hand, presents nature as a heightened affective force that forcefully evokes emotion rather than subtly influencing awareness, amplifying the emotional response more blatantly. Consequently, this approach increases the poem's immediacy and accessibility for the Arabic reader but it also runs the risk of detracting from Wordsworth's signature philosophical nuance and restraint.

#### 3.2 Solitude and Memory

In Wordsworth's poem, solitude is portrayed positively as a state that allows for reflection and emotional rejuvenation. The term *the bliss of solitude* captures this Romantic value. In Arabic literature, loneliness frequently connotes estrangement or longing (Badawi, 1993). Both interpreters redefine solitude as a state of contemplative stillness. Al-Gharisi's translation renders solitude into Arabic as *نعمة العزلة*, preserving the original's contemplative aspect. In contrast, Al-Marudi's translation emphasizes emotional introspection by clearly verbalizing psychological states.

#### 3.3 Floral Symbolism

The daffodils frequently appears in pastoral and Romantic poetry, reinforcing its strong associations with joy, rebirth, and the regenerative power of spring in English cultural and literary tradition. The flower serves as more than just a visual feature in Wordsworth's *Daffodils*; it also symbolizes spiritual harmony with nature and emotional renewal. In contrast, a separate constellation of emotions, drawn from both its etymological and mythological

resonances as well as from ancient Arabic poetry, are associated with the Arabic symbol النرجس. Therefore, these associations include physical attractiveness, yearning, and, in certain cases, narcissism. Such culturally ingrained symbols seldom have exact translations in other languages, as noted by Newmark (1988), which makes their translation especially vulnerable to semantic and symbolic loss. Both translators employ a technique of symbolic neutralization in response to this possible culture mismatch, emphasizing shared positive connotations-most notably joy and vitality-while downplaying or eliminating associations that are culturally contradictory. By guiding the TT into an interpretive space that is nonetheless accessible to the Arabic reader without adding unexpected meanings, this strategy aims to reduce avoidable loss. However, the stylistic realization of this method varies between the two translation. Al-Gharisi's version emphasizes visual imagery and kinetic detail, retaining Wordsworth's original feeling of collective motion and energy. Expressions like *ترقص و تختلج* maintain the poem's emphasis on movement and spatial dynamics, allowing the flowers to act as an alive natural presence. Therefore, this option is consistent with the ST's imagery-driven symbolism, in which delight is expressed through visual and physical energy rather than explicit emotional commentary. Al-Marudi rendition, on the other hand, emphasizes emotional resonance and changes the symbolic weight from visual economy to affective intensity. The translation makes the daffodils' symbolic meaning more obvious and clear for the intended audience by emphasizing emotional reaction. This methods makes the flower more emotionally accessible, but it also subtly changes its symbolic meaning by shifting the joy from the actual natural scene to the poet's emotional response. Consequently, the daffodil turns into a stimulus for subjective emotion rather than an independent emblem of rebirth. Overall, the treatment of flower symbolism in both translations demonstrates how cultural restrictions influence not only vocabulary decisions, but also symbolic hierarchies within the translated text. The translators' contrasting emphases-visual motion verses emotional affect-show that negotiating cultural symbols in translation requires more than just equality, but also interpretative prioritization.

#### **4. The aesthetic constraints**

The aesthetic constraints of the poetic text are among the issues that arouse the translator's interest. This type of restriction is considered the core of the true poetic text because it attracts the readers' attention and promotes them to the atmosphere of the poem. They are divided into:

##### **4.1 Rhythm and Musicality**

The poem is written in iambic tetrameter, a metrical pattern that creates a light, flowing rhythm that complements the poem's themes of movement, joy, and spontaneity. The constant alternation of unstressed and stressed syllables provides a natural flow that mirrors the daffodils' delicate swaying and dancing. This strong association between metre and meaning is a distinguishing aspect of Romantic poetry, in which form is frequently used to reinforce subject content. In contrast, Arabic poetry prosody relies on fundamentally different foundations. Classical Arabic poetry follows Al-arud, a quantitative system based on large and short syllables and prescribed metrical patterns. Modern Arabic poetry has embraced free verse and prose poetry. Therefore, it is practically impossible to achieve formal equivalency with English stress-based meter. Replicating iambic tetrameter inside Arabic metrical rules runs the risk of creating a strained or forced rhythm that is at odds with the TL's natural cadence. As translators may be compelled to prioritise formal patterning at the price of semantic clarity and stylistic naturalness, Holmes (19880) warns that attempts frequently end in distortion of meaning or tone. Because of this, both translators purposefully forgo metrical imitation in favour of rhythmic prose as a countermeasure. This decision implies a search for functional or aesthetic equivalency at the level of overall melody, tempered by an acknowledgement of unavoidable loss at the level of formal metre. The two translations use different approaches to rhythm in spite of this common methods. Al-Gharisi create a regulated rhythm that reflects the thoughtful pace of the original text by constructing musicality through syntactic balance,

parallel structures, and controlled repetition. This style maintains a sense of constraint and discipline, allowing rhythm to develop naturally from phrase construction rather than overt lyrical excess.

#### **4.2 Imagery and Descriptive Density**

Wordsworth's imagery is defined by economy and constraint, depending on a small number of accurate visual aspects to portray a more complex emotional and intellectual experience. This imagistic restraint is consistent with the English Romantic style, which emphasizes suggestion and visual clarity over rhetorical excess. In contrast, Arabic poetic aesthetics has always prioritized imagistic density and rhetorical completeness, with images frequently extended through repetition, amplification, and descriptive accumulation, attributes generally linked with eloquence and expressive richness (Jayyusi, 1987). The translators' approaches to imagery within this disparate aesthetic framework show various reactions to stylistic and cultural limitations. Al-Gharisi's translation is comparatively conservative, avoiding undue elaboration and maintaining the visual purity of the original text. Even when such constraint deviates from traditional Arabic literary preferences, this method shows an attempt to remain faithful to the imagistic economy of the original poem.

In contrast, Al-Marudi's translation enriches the visual field with additional modifiers and affective nuances while enlarging the imagery and intensifying descriptive language. The Arabic reader will find the poem more aesthetically familiar as a result of this extension, but there will also be more interpretive intervention. Therefore, the differences between the two translations shows how aesthetic limitations allows for different levels of imagistic development within the same cultural context rather than imposing uniform results. In this way, translation becomes a site of negotiation between adherence to the poetics of the ST and accommodation to the aesthetic standards of the target culture.

#### **4.3 Emotional Explicitness**

Wordsworth's emotional tone is typically muted and reflective, conveying emotion through inference, imagery, and calm contemplation rather than outright emotional revelation. This constrained affective state is congruent with Romantic introspection, in which emotional depth is gradually revealed through interaction with nature. In contrast, the Arabic literary tradition has frequently favoured vivid emotional articulation, citing clarity of feeling and expressive intensity as indicators of poetic eloquence. According to Baker (2018), translators routinely change emotional intensity in order to reconcile the translated text with target-culture affective standards, especially when source-text restraint may be viewed as emotional thinness. Al-Gharisi uses a mediating approach in this situation that strikes a balance between expression and inference. In order to assure accessibility for the Arabic reader, his translation subtly improves emotional clarity while maintaining the thoughtful restraint of the original language. In contrast, Wordsworth's subliminal joy is transformed into a clear emotional confession by Al-Marudi, who externalizes emotion more forcibly. This change makes the emotional experience less subtle but more instantaneous by emphasizing affect over contemplation. The differences between the two translations thus demonstrate how similar cultural and aesthetic limitations can produce different rendering results, reflecting varying priorities between expressive intensity and emotional nuance.

#### **5. Poetic Voice and Translatorial Presence**

The poetic voice of Wordsworth's poem is calm, reflective, and observational, with the speaker positioned as a contemplative witness rather than an assertive lyrical presence. The first-person voice works quietly, enabling the natural situation to take precedence over obvious self-expression. Conversely, Arabic poetic tradition has frequently preferred a more prominent and self-articulating lyrical "I", in which the poet's subjectivity is clearly foregrounded as the poem's essential organizing element. Based on Lefevere (1992), poetic voice is influenced and governed by dominant literary conventions and cultural expectations within the target system.

Both translations, which accept Arabic lyrical styles, somewhat emphasise the speaker's presence inside this context. The level of intervention varies, though. The speaker's function as an attentive observer whose presence is subordinated to the natural imagery is preserved in Al-Gharisi's version, which maintains comparatively contemplative and observing voice. Contrary to this, Al-Marudi's rendition introduces more distinct indicators of subjectivity and emotional involvement, emphasizing the lyrical self more assertively. In addition to improving immediacy and interpersonal interaction, this shift makes the translator's interpretive position more apparent. These variations illustrate how translation function along a domestication continuum with different translator visibility levels. Although both translators address similar cultural limitations, their different approaches to poetic voice indicate different priorities between maintaining the reticence of the SL and bringing the poem into compliance with the standards of lyrical expressiveness of the target culture.

### 6. Comparative Discussion

The assessment of the two translations supports Toury's (1995) claim that translations are inherently norm-governed but uniquely realized. That is, while translators work within a common set of cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic norms that affect what is acceptable or understandable in the target culture, these norms do not guarantee a specific translational outcome. Instead, they allow for personal interpretation, stylistic preference, and strategic option. The current comparison indicates that even when faced with comparable cultural and artistic constraints, translators can arrive at very diverse conclusions. Both Al-Gharisi and Al-Marudi operate within the same target-cultural framework, overcoming similar issues relating to Romantic ideology, flower symbolism, emotional restraint, and rhythmic mismatch. Nonetheless, their translational methods differ in fundamental ways. Al-Gharisi's translation constantly promotes artistic restraint and thoughtful balance, focusing delicate emotional modulation, visual purity, and controlled rhythms. This method is closely in line with the ST's Romantic ethos, keeping its introspective tone while minimizing over involvement. His translation exhibits a larger emphasis on source-text poetics, even as it adapts to Arabic literary traditions. Al-Marudi's translation, on the other hand, concentrates affective expression and expands imagistic and rhythmic aspects, demonstrating a higher level of emotional amplification and poetic assertiveness. This technique connects the original text with prevailing standards of emotional explicitness and lyrical intensity in Arabic poetry, reflecting a more marked domestication of the language. This method strengthens the translator's interpretive presence while improving accessibility and cultural familiarity for the target reader, producing a text that is more obviously influenced by target-culture aesthetics. When combined, these variations support Tour's assertion that translational standards serve as limitations rather than guidelines, allowing for various interpretations of the same ST. The difference between amplification and constraint draws attention to the translator's function as an active agent whose decisions mediate between conflicting poetic systems, resulting in different but normatively acceptable translations within the same cultural context.

### 7. Conclusion

This paper examines the cultural and aesthetic restrictions that shape Mahamoud Al-Marudi's and Mohammad Al-Gharisi's Arabic translations of *I wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, focusing on how each translator deals with the obstacles provided by various poetic traditions. The study proved, through a comparative analysis of imagery, symbolism, emotional tone, rhythm, and poetic voice, that poetic translation is a culturally situated creative rewriting process rather than a formal reproduction act. Each translation is a unique interpretive response to the ST, influenced by both target-culture standards and personal aesthetic preferences.

### 6. Findings

The results support the idea that aesthetic and cultural limitations shouldn't be viewed as the only limiting factors. However, they serve as creative forces that provide several equally valid

readings of the same poem. Even though both translators work in similar linguistic and cultural context, their different approaches-which range from contemplative restraint to passionate amplification-showcase the adaptability of poetic translation and the translator's function as an active cultural mediator. These differences bolster Lefever's theory that translation is a kind of rewriting influenced by literary systems and Toury's idea of norm-governed but independently realized translations.

This paper adds to larger conversations in comparative and descriptive translation studies by combining two Arabic translations into a single analytical framework, especially with regard to poetry translation between culturally disparate traditions. It reinforces the usefulness of comparative analysis in demonstrating how common limitations can result in a variety of translational results and emphasizes the significance of taking into account both macro-cultural norms and micro-stylistic decisions. In the end, the study confirms that poetic translation is best viewed as a dynamic international process that strikes a balance between creative adaptation to the target culture's aesthetic expectations and integrity to the original text.

### References

- Abrams, M.H. (1971). *Natural supernaturalism: Tradition and revolution*
- Allen, R. (2000). *An introduction to Arabic literature*. Cambridge University Press.
- Baker, M. (2018). *In other words: A coursebook on translation* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Routledge.
- Holmes, J. S. (1988). *Translated! Papers on literary translation and translation studies*. Rodopi.
- Lefevere, A. (1992). *Translation, rewriting, and the manipulation of literary fame*. London: Routledge.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. Prentice Hall.
- Nida, E.A. (1995). *language, culture, and translating*. Shanghai Foreign Language .Education Press.
- Jayyusi, S. K. (1987). *Trends and movements in modern Arabic poetry* (Vols. 1-2). Brill.
- Toury, G. (1992). *Descriptive translation studies and beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.