Globalization Speaks English:
The In (visibility) of Algerian Literature and Its Resistance to Translation

Yasmina DJAFRI
Department of English Language
Faculty of Foreign Languages, Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University
Mostaganem, Algeria

Soumia OSAMNIA
Department of English Language,
Faculty of Foreign Languages, Mostapha Stambouli University
Mascara, Algeria

Abstract
The urge to adjust curricular and pedagogical contents of what texts of literature teach to learners of a foreign language, notably English, implies an understanding of the concept of global literary canon. Global or world literature then entails a literature that does not abide by the rigidity of the borders, which imprison texts within the local confinements of national identity traits. It is rather a process which allows the circulation of texts across national borders for the purpose of forming one huge hybrid culture that mixes various literary flavors. In an era of globalization and while the very notion of Western canon seems obsolete and out dated, there still exists some sort of discrimination among the texts allowed to enter the global literary canon. Some literary texts are considered not exotic enough or too exotic to meet the expectations of a wide and translational readership. For that reason, a great number of texts is deliberately marginalized and dropped from the canon confirming then the Western monopole operating upon the marketing and publishing houses. In this view of things, the present paper addresses the particular status of the Algerian literature in French within the global literary canon. It, also, aims to analyze its resistance to translation as major obstacle to its circulation and, thus, invisibility.

Key words: Algerian literature written in French, in (visibility), literary canon, translation

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Introduction

The present discussion is premised on the view that the conservative and consecratory characteristics of the literary canon do not match with the expected revolutionary, liberal and open spirit of globalization. Hence, addressing the issue of the global literary canon requires an objective perspective which would regard all text similar whatever their origin or status. This same perspective would also take into account the inherent qualities of literary texts rather than considering them mere eyes on a contextualized culture that only provides an anthropological understanding. While the issue at stake is not another lament on the fate of the literary canon in the world of today, we will make our own complaints by analyzing the unique status of Algerian literature written in French in a world monopolized by English speaking authorities.

The age of globalization has given birth to the globalization of literary studies, which led to the emergence of the notion of World literature. When first coined by Goethe in 1827, the term world literature ‘weltliteratur’ referred to the multicultural production of literary works in a universal context. Goethe was visualizing, as purported by Hassan (2000), a future state for the literary canon. Wellek (1995) defines world literature as a “... scheme of evolution of national literatures in which they will fuse and ultimately melt into a great synthesis.” (p. 221) Hassan (2000) comments that for Goethe that ideal future is to be distinguished by an open dialogue between nations. Through this dialogue, every nation would display its prominent writers who, in their turn, would reflect, in the words of Herder, their nations’ Volksgeist, or national spirit so as to express the universality of the human experience.

However, Hassan (2000) further argues that the notion of world literature was fraught with difficulties, for even if it aimed to represent a universal and a harmonious dialogue between different national and cultural literatures in the world, it was still Eurocentric. This same literature was primarily synonymous with Western literature that was rooted in its “Enlightenment universalism.”(p.39) In their turn, the socio-economic factors, including a growing wave of nationalism, the post-Cold War era, the increasing globalization of world economy and the rising waves of immigrations in the mid nineteenth and twentieth centuries seemed to have triggered a reconsideration of the very notion of world literature, leading then to a revision of some initial notions.

The aforementioned factors, Hassan (2000) advances, are well illustrated in ‘The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces’, whose first edition of 1956 was exclusively dedicated to Western European and North American works. Then, it changed into a new expanded edition of 1995 with considerable non-Western works and with the title altered from ‘Masterpieces’ to ‘The less exclusive Literature’. In ‘The World Republic of Letters’, Casanova (2002) notes how the works of certain peripheral or minor writers had to circulate into metropolitan centers in order to be acknowledged as works of world literature. He also emphasized the inequality and the discrimination of the Western canon that monopolized world literature.

In ‘What is World Literature?’ Damrosch (2003) argues that world literature is less an enormous canon of works and more a matter of transmission, circulation and reception. He adds that...
works which successfully flourished as world literature are those that gained wider appeal in the field of translation and were, subsequently, translatable. On similar lines, on her influential book ‘The Translation Zone’, Apter (2006) examines the crucial role of translation studies in the invention of comparative literature as a discipline, the tension between textual and cultural translation, the resistance to Anglophone dominance and the role of translation in creating a global literary canon (our focus).

When we turn over the pages of World literature and land at Maghribe literature, the Algerian literature manifests itself through the seminal works of Mohamed Dib, Yasmina Khadra, Kateb Yacine, Kamel Daoud, Meloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, Assia Djebar, Rachid Boudjedra and many others. Algerian literature is characterized by the cultural fusion of Arabic, Berber and French. The focus of this study then is on the Algerian literature that is written in French. Though written in French, Elimelekh (2015) states, Algerian literature reflects Algerian culture and thought and the revolution against colonialism. However, despite its rising tide, this literature has not achieved recognition yet within the universal literary canon. Thus, our aim is to examine the ambiguous status and the complex identity of Algerian literature written in French, which actually seems to impede its circulation universally and lead to its invisibility.

1- An Overview of the Algerian Literature and its Status

The French language is the most remarkable remnant of the French colonialism that lasted 132 years in Algeria. Walker (1998) assumes that at the very beginning of the French colonialism, schools were mainly attended by a few Algerian bourgeois and European settlers who became French in 1889. However, at the beginning of the nineteenth century a great number of Algerians began to attend French schools. Chaulet (1998) comments that after the independence the French language was still prioritized for intellectual productions despite the strenuous efforts of the Algerian government to instill an extensive programme of arabisation. Subsequently, most of the Algerian literature during colonialism and even after independence was written in French. Saad (2007) states that Algerian literature written in French has witnessed four fundamental periods. The first period relates to Algerian writers coming from wealthy families who assimilated the French culture and, hence, remained loyal to the French values. In contrast with the first period, the second period is distinct by a literature of resistance that endorsed and praised the Algerian struggle for independence as it also revealed the real conditions in which Algerians lived in that period. The third period is characterized by two waves of writers. The first one continues to sustain and praise the Algerian revolution and the second is confined to tackle socioeconomic and political aftermaths of the newly independent Algeria. Finally the fourth period is identified by a need to write autonomously in an attempt to understand the plight of current Algeria.

Salhi (1999) claims that the early francophone novels written by Algerians were published in France and, hence, were assimilated into the culture of the motherland (France). Importantly, the first stage of Algerian literature written in French from 1920 to 1950 was mainly pioneered by privileged Algerian intellectualsa named ‘les évoulués’, who were receptive to the integration of Algeria into France. They were exponents of the policy of assimilation and the vast majority of them were doctors, teachers whose parents were wealthy people, military officers or civil servants. Their writings cast
light on the advantages Algeria had acquired thanks to the amount of civilization brought by the French or what they dub “la france pays civilisé”. In ‘Le Problème algérien vu par un indigène’, Zenati (1938) was honored to advocate that he was indebted to France and that the Algerian people were fortunate enough to be run by the most civilized society. Regarding this Riche (2014) states:

It is true that the first stage in Algerian literature in French is marked off by Algerian writers following the lead of the French authors of the time such as Louis Bertand and Jean Pommier by writing exotic novels with suggestive titles like The Female Dancers of Ouled Nail and Meriem in the Palm Trees (1930) by Slimane Ould Cheikh. The publication of such folkloric novels in the 1930s was an evidence for the success of the French policy of assimilation. (p.40)

It is compelling then to argue that some Algerian novels in French were written by French Algerian settlers who were born in Algeria, and who began writing in the late 19th century like the pier noir Albert Camus, whose absurdist novels gained him the Nobel Prize. However, over the course of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, a burgeoning literature has spread tackling Algeria’s struggle for independence and the consequent endeavours to set up a new national identity. Nevertheless, the outburst of the Algerian war of independence in 1954 inaugurated a new stage in the Algerian literature written in French. Supporting this idea, Riche (2014) adds:

The reverberation of the revolution was translated in the tipping of this literature toward modernism. Because of the revolution, the conqueror’s language assumed a totally different status for the Algerian writer. From a token of assimilation, it became booty of war. (Cf. Fanon Frantz, 1965). At the level of the theme, one of the effects of the war was the shaking of the French readers’ literary expectations as concerns Algerian literature. (p.40)

Hence, the second period of Algerian literature written in French aimed at shaking the French readers’ deeply ingrained mentalities. Significantly, those readers recognized that the pacific and peaceful tribes of Algeria they were used to in precedent ethnographic literature was was not true. Thus, they became receptive to new themes from the previous Algerian indigenous population. (Riche, 2014)

Equally, the Algerian writings of the second period (1945-1962) displayed the malaise and the search for an identity of their own, as well as a name and a land. Their beginnings were mainly associated with the opening of French schools to a greater part of the Muslim community. This era was characterized by an increasing frustration and despair among the indigenous inhabitants of Algeria. Such feelings were mainly articulated in the works of writers like Mouloud Ferraoun, Mohammed Dib, Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Mammeri and Assia Djeboar, most of who belonged to humble and impoverished families. These writers presented themselves as beholders of an ambiguous reality as never seen before. For Lacheraf (1963), this literature supplied an outstanding image of Algerian reality because it dared reveal a bitter reality, “Cette littérature va refléter pour la première fois dans les lettres françaises, une réalité algérienne qu'aucun écrivain, même Camus, n'avait eu le courage de traduire...”(p.209). To illustrate, Saad (2007) presents the following examples: Mouloud Ferraoun’s ‘Le Fils du pauvre’ (1950) and ‘La Terre et le sang’ (1953), describe the miserable and poor circumstances in which Algerians were living. His main objective was to provide French readers with a genuine picture of the living conditions of the indigenous population. In his turn, Mouloud
Mammeri in ‘La Colline oubliée’ (1952) depicts the injustice and racism that dominated the period. La Grande Maison (1952), L’Incendie (1954), ‘Le Metier à tisser’ (1957) and ‘Un Eté africain’ (1959) by Mohammed Dib highlight relatable thematic issues such as misery, inequality, ostracism, exclusion, and social devastations. Kateb Yacine is also an Algerian writer who has been deeply affected by the massacres of May 08th, 1945. His novel ‘Nedjma’ tackles many themes, such as revolution, resistance and quest for identity. On parallel lines, Malak Haddad, through ‘Malheur en danger’ (collection of poems, 1956), ‘La Dernière Impression’ (1958), Je t’offrirai une gazelle (1959) and ‘L’Elève et la leçon’ (1960), places a great emphasis on perplexing situations where difficult decisions had to be made because of the war against France.

Interestingly enough, Algerian women writers emerged to denounce women low status and reclaim their rights. Such a literary endeavour was pioneered by the first Algerian woman novelist Taos Amrouche with her book ‘Jacinthe noire’ in 1947. This was followed by Assia Djebar's books ‘La Soif’ (1957), ‘Les Impatients’ (1958) and ‘Les Enfants du nouveau monde’ (1962), which generate a call for independence from colonialism and from patriarchy. In doing so, Djebar exposed the tough life women endured under the double oppression of the colonizer and patriarchy. (Saad, 2007)

The third period of the Algerian literature written in French is distinguished by the dilemma between praising the revolutionary war and the search for a real identity and truth. Mohammed Dib’s ‘Qui se souvient de la mer?’ and Mouloud Mammeri’s ‘L’Opium et le Bâtonare’ pertinent examples of the ambiguous search. The issue is still present in recent literature as in Le champ des oliviers by Nabile Farès, ‘Le vainqueur de coup’e by Rachid Boudjedra, ‘Le fleuve détourné’ by Rachid Mimouni and ‘Les chercheurs d’os’ by Tahar Djout. (as cited in Saad, 2007)

Yet, following a short period of time in which most of the writings were basically centralized on glorifying the war of independence, many questions concerning the nature, content, style, and language of Algerian literary productions began to reappear. Numerous writers such as Azzegagh (1966) insisted to stop for an end to praise and glorify the war and the Algerian revolution, he urged: «Arrêtez de célébrer les massacres, Arrêtez de célébrer des noms... Arrêtez de célébrer l'histoire.” (n.p)

Saad (2007), further, expounds that Mohamed Dib along with other writers used the French language as a means of liberation. He explains:

Malek Haddad, Dib and others who regarded the use of the French language as an effective means of liberation. It was considered to be very important to speak the same language as the enemy. Malek Haddad claimed that it was in French that he pronounced the word ‘independence’ for the first time. As argued by the Moroccan author Laâbi, Algerian literature was for the French but against the French. ‘On a écrit contre et pour les Français peut-être plus que pour les Algériens’. (p.6)

The fourth stage of the Algerian literature is considered a continuum and a search for identity. It is known as the literature of 1990s. New names started to emerge namely, Malika Mokeddem, Latifa Ben Mansour, Maissa Bey, Mohammed Kacimi-el-Hassini, Abdelkader Djemaï, Hassan Bouabdallah and many others.
Despite the uniqueness of the newly born profile of the Algerian literature of the 1990s, it was still featured by the need to relate to the past through the use of 'flashbacks' so much used by pioneers of Algerian literature to decline the values inscribed by French colonialism. Additionally, these 1990s narratives were meant to defy existing political, social and cultural conventions. Hence, this Algerian literature continues to reflect the social realities and personal experiences of its people.

2- Algerian Literature Written in French and Sense of Double Identity

The main intricacy of the Algerian literature is the strong divide between French, Arabic and Berber. This complexity attributes a double-edged identity to the Algerian literature due to the diversity of cultures adduced to it. Chaulet (1998) describes the relationship between Algerian writers and French language as complex at times and clashing at other ones. She asserts that Algerian writers do not possess an ultimate linguistic independence, since they are noticeably influenced by a history of which their destiny is the primary element. Along similar lines and in her reflection on this cultural identity split, Elimekh (2015) argues, in an article entitled 'Muhammad Dib and Algerian Resistance Literature' that,

Caught between conflicting linguistic and ideological worlds, Algerian literature saw periods of ebb and flow…The conflict, interaction and mutual influence among these three cultures eventually gave birth to an Algerian literature that was written in French but described an Arabic and Berber reality. The linguistic, ideological environmental, historical and human elements all came together to form a new multi-faceted literature whose sources and roots are very diverse. The authors stress their affiliation with two worlds and the tension between their Arab and Western heritage. (p.464)

It is worth mentioning that certain Algerian writings are to a certain extent autobiographical as they chronicle daily life experiences. These works reflect the conflict between the Algerian heritage and the colonial culture, in that both their affiliation to both worlds and also their frustration to be perfectly comfortable in appear highly problematic. Not only did Algerian writers who write in French hold those feelings of alienation, but so did the pied noir writers. In her article “I See Myself Elsewhere: the Works of Marie Cardinal and Assia Djebar’ (2015), Chuang writes:

As a pied noir exiled involuntary from her birthplace, Cardinal feels French and Algerian and paradoxically, neither French nor Algerian. Cardinal’s double consciousness and in-between existence is echoed by Djebbar as the latter writes in French, which is seen as an act of betrayal under the control of post-independent Algeria’s regime. Writing in French outside Algeria, Djebbar suffers the pain of dislocation and exile. Although Cardinal and Djebar appear distinct from each other when placed within an ethnic and political context, they both share an inner struggle of biculturalism, which results in them a sense of displacement. (p. 18-19)

Through their recollections, both writers endeavour to reconcile with their French and Algerian ancestry. Djebar (1995) distinguishes herself as a stranger in her native soil Algeria. In this regard, she advances: « je m’installai désormais dans de constants allers-retours, me résignant à cet entre-deux vies, entre deux libertés. » (188). Those feelings of dislocation became intense when she admonishes herself for not standing by Algeria victims’ side when they were fighting. Djebar claims:
« Simplement, je ne bois plus L’Algérie…Vous toujours là-bas, et moi, expulse de désert…je me vois ailleurs…je suis là-bas sans terre natale. » (146-47)

3- The Status of French Language Literature Worldwide and the crisis of Algerian Literature untranslatability

Despite the striving efforts of certain francophone writers, who took up the challenge to claim French language as a global language, Tilman (2014) asserts that French language is confined to the Maghreb where it is mainly used as a teaching language for a number of modules at university levels. In her essay, entitled ‘The Algerian Linguicide’, Saadi defines the Algerian language politics that uses the French language as a politics of death. She uses the words mutilation and castration to convey the wounds inflicted to the linguistic body of Algeria and she views the linguistic history of Algeria as a history of war constantly waged against a kind of outdated phallic mother. Gafaiti, ‘as cited in Berger, (2002) purports that to deconstruct the politics which uses binary oppositions between Arabic and French. Furthermore, Berger (2002) maintains that Algerian nationals tend to describe France as a step-mother figure. This analogy evokes the wicked step-mother stereotype and its accompanying feelings of mistrust, hatred and rejection. The step mother (French) dares to hold the place of the irreplaceable mother (Arabic). Notwithstanding, Berger reflects on a number of essays revealing that this indelicate step mother turns to be a good stepmother since it represents the language of its Algerian intellectuals.

Reflecting upon the future of Francophone literature, Goerge (2013) argues that the future of francophone literature is less and less French, but more and more Anglo-Saxon. Hence, if kept untranslated the Algerian literature written in French will remain invisible and, thus, will never reach the global canon. Even though francophone writers stress the fact that literature is a global practice, they still reject complete contributions made by colonized nations. As a result, Goerge (2013) calls many prominent writers to replace the label Francophone literature by literature-monde which has received support but also cynicism and plain refusal on the part of various other writers and critics. She states further that the world francophone is really controversial as it links people who share no commonalities or affinities apart from the French language. Nonetheless, Goerge (2013) assumes that the word francophone will dissipate or go through a drastic change.

This prevailing danger then seems to reinforce the idea that the Francophone Algerian literature is in a perilous situation simply because French is not a world language. As an Algerian woman and writer in exile, Djebar (1995) feels disappointed and powerless about the white silence of Algerian people, she advanced, “Le blanc de l’écriture, dans une Algérie non traduite? Pour l’instant, L’Algérie de la douleur, sans écriture; pour l’instant une Algérie sang-écriture, hélas! » (p.245) Commenting on Djebar’s essay « Le Blanc de l’ Algérie », Zimra (2004) blames “a whole generation of writers and thinkers, herself among them, who have not spoken soon enough and loudly enough.” (p.28)

Among the thorny questions Djebar raised, Seyhan (2003) includes the followings: “How does one deal with silent voices and the blank page of the dead, How does one represent Algeria with its conflicts and horrors not translated to words?” (p.164). Djebar, Seyhan (2003) argues, find no proper solution or answer to those answers. She insists on opening a horizon for writing, for she
believes that words have a great redemptive power which must be shared and that the Algerian literature has a legacy that must be transmitted among generations.

Guardi (2005) explores some of the reasons why Algerian literature is still invisible in the global literary canon. She states that this invisibility is due to the lack of translation. Moreover, the Algerian literature written in French has recently been considered a self-studying entity if compared to the past. Interestingly enough, the significance of Arab countries was not acknowledged due to the widespread fallacy that made the Arab world and its literature a monolith. Therefore, publishing and translating Sharqi authors’ works for instance was more favorable because of historical and ideological reasons which promoted the view that sharqi writers are more Arab than maghrebi authors (Arab authors from North Africa that is the Maghreb). Though, few Algerian works written in French are translated into English, many works are bountifully translated into Italian. To probe this further, Guardi (2005) pointed out the number of translations of Algerian literary works written in French into Italian and shows the ideological justifications behind the enterprise as well. According to Guardi (2005) the aim is to transmit the idea that the Algerian intellectual does not speak Arabic and that the premium language is French and not Arabic. This, ultimately, reveals that Algerian publications are published thanks to the contribution of the French Ministry which could be seen a sign of cultural colonialism. This suggests also that French is a natural language in Algeria which was not imposed by force, while Arabic was. (p.98)

Henceforth, the Italian translation does not really portray the truth of the Algerian literature and its essence. On the contrary, it rather perpetuates the stereotypes that thwart its circulation in a wider global space. To restore the Algerian literature vitality, Guardi suggests: “The Algerian novel is ripe both from its aesthetic and topical points of view, and I strongly believe it deserves to be appreciated within a sensitive and sensible intercultural context.” (2005, p.100) It can be argued that the paucity of translation constitutes an obstacle for the circulation of Algerian works, “A translation anthology… is ‘one of the most enlightening and memorable ways of transferring culture internationally.’” (Wilczek, 2012 p.1687) However, for this literature to hold a global torch, its Anglo-Saxon translation is urgently required. Another key element to ponder on is the status of literature in Arabic which appears to be very slow to expand as claimed by Elimelekh (2015). This seems to stem from numerous political, cultural and social factors. Furthermore, the low status of Arabic is due to the dearth of communication between the Maghreb and the Mashreq which culminated from a purposeful French policy of curtailing such communication and, hence, results to “the disinterest of the Algerian press in matters of Arabic literature.” (465)

In the wake of the post 9/11, translation became a difficult issue in the United States, particularly in matters of the Arab theology, namely the Islamic religion. According to Apter (2006), translation is considered compellingly “essential to the dissemination and preservation of textual inheritance; it is also understood to be an agent of language extinction for translation especially in a world dominated by the languages of powerful economies and big populations.”(p. 17) Not only are small literatures of minoritarian traditions put on the breadline, but they are also rendered to obsolescence due to the small number of translation that would foster access to their cultural heritage and hence put these literatures in the danger of extinction. Apter (2006) draws a comparison between
the delicate survival prospects of animals and plants in an endangered environment and the prospects of endangered languages. She states:

In many ways, the rush to globalize the literary canon in recent years may be viewed as the “comp-lit-ization” of national literatures throughout the humanities. Comparative literature was in principle global from its inception, even if its institutional establishment in the postwar period assigned Europe share of the lion’s critical attention and shortchanged non-Western literatures. (p.41)

In this passage, Apter is referring to the initial aim of national literatures which harkens back to Goeth’s notion of worlds’ literature whose original objective was to open space for universal cultures to display their literary heritage; a fact that would pave the way to the trendy discipline of comparative literature. However, Eurocentric literature monopolized the global canon leaving no space for minor literatures.

When tackling the status of the Algerian literature written in French, Apter assumes that it is sadly and ironically true that the Algerian novel is relevant to a French audience. She adds, Algerian writers are frightened in their native soil, Algeria. Hence, France became their refuge. In this context Apter (2006) infers that certain Algerian writers have contracted a language fear; the fear to speak in Arabic, Berber or French. That fear stems from “the fear of accusations, of blasphemy and apostasy; the fear of fatwa unilaterally issued by hardline Islamists against those who would liberally interpret Koranic references and the fear of death.” (p.97)

Apter (2006) mentions that Tahar Djaout is among the Algerian writers who have resisted death. He believed that silence is also a form of death, though speaking cost him his life. Djaout writes: “if you speak, you die, if you keep quiet, you die. So speak and die.” (as cited in Apter, p.97)

Apter (2006) also refers to this lack of translation as a politics of linguistic genocide. She represented Assia djaber dissatisfaction with the current status of the Algerian novel written in French advancing that for her, there are no Algerian literary productions to be translated. Instead, there is a void or a gap that is occupied by a body prolific that can be damaged by a suicidal anemia and, becomes “a corpse wrapped in white linen.” (p.97) She sees contemporary writings as a writing desert or blank territory. Regarding this, she infers “the white of writing, in an untranslated Algeria? For the moment, an Algeria of pain without writing; for the moment an Algeria of pain, without writing; for the moment, an Algeria without literature written in blood, ((sang-e´criture), alas.” (p.97) Her view of Algeria as what she dubs a ‘literature-less place’ is emphasized by its low visibility in the universal market of translation.

This shift of attention towards universally translatable monoculture is endorsed because of the growing competition of European languages to win international recognition. Apter (2006) compares “these competitors as gladiators fighting among themselves for the international market share.”(p.99) For example, in French bookstores both translated and untranslated books are rather piled in the shelves. This alludes that French is far away behind English, thus, it is losing the battle against it, “Most cynically perhaps, it implies that France no longer maintains its special hold on the
market in “hot” fiction, philosophy, and theory—a novelty deficit that must be made up domestically by translations.” (Apter, 2007, p.99)

In Algeria, untranslatability seems to acquire a given global market. However, only few works by Algerian writers whether in French or English have international list distribution and the English translation of Algerian writings remains extremely limited and invisible.

Conclusion
The discussion so far has attempted to highlight the ideology which seems to dictate the inclusion of certain literatures in the global literary canon at the expense of others. At the core of the issue, Algerian literature written in French seems to suffer drastically as it finds no echo in the wider world simply because poorly welcomed by the English dominant marketing enterprises. The discriminatory, narrow and one-sided characteristics of the literary canon seem but confirm that the very notion of global canon is a myth. Unfortunately, the deliberate resistance to translation of Algerian works of literature into English is impeding the circulation of these texts out of the confines of the French speaking world. Huge names are dropped out of the global literary canon and great œuvres are overshadowed by less appealing ones. On the basis of all these depictions, reconsidering the status of Algerian literary texts in the global literary canon, would necessarily offer more visibility to the Algerian culture in general and the Algerian identity in particular.

About the Authors:
Yasmina DJAFRI is senior lecturer of English literature at the department of English language, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University, Mostaganem, Algeria. She holds a PhD thesis on the teaching of Literatures to Algerian Learners. Her scopes of interest include: feminine literature, stylistics, Maghrebi literature and women writings. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2919-5716

Soumia OSAMNIA holds a magistere degree in English literature. She is currently reading for a PhD in Anglo-Saxon literature. She is assistant teacher at the department of English language and literature at the University of Mustapha Stambouli Mascara, Algeria. Her main research interests are: British and American Literature, world literature, Anglophone literature, women writings, literary stylistics, discourse analysis, comparative literature, modern/postmodern fiction and world literature in translation. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6047-8300

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