



# Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language (Middle East Literature in Translation )

*Abdelfattah Kilito*

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It has been said that the difference between a language and a dialect is that a language is a dialect with an army. Both the act of translation and bilingualism are steeped in a tension between surrender and conquest, yielding conscious and unconscious effects on language. First published in 2002, Abdelfattah Kilito's *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language* explores this tension in his address of the dynamics of literary influence and canon formation within the Arabic literary tradition. As one of the Arab world's most original and provocative literary critics, Kilito challenges the reader to reexamine contemporary notions of translation, bilingualism, postcoloniality, and the discipline of comparative literature. Wail S. Hassan's superb translation makes *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language* available to an English audience for the first time, capturing the charm and elegance of the original in a chaste and seemingly effortless style.

At the center of Kilito's work, is his insistence on the ethics of translation. He explores the effects of translation on the genres of poetry, narrative prose, and philosophy. Kilito highlights the problem of cultural translation as an interpretive process, and as an essential element of comparative literary studies. In close readings of al-Jahiz, Ibn Rushd, al-Saffar, and al-Shidyaq, among others, he traces the shifts in attitude toward language and translation from the centuries of Arab cultural ascendancy to the contemporary period, interrogating along the way how the dynamics of power mediate literary encounters across cultural, linguistic, and political lines.

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