

University of St Andrews



Full metadata for this thesis is available in
St Andrews Research Repository
at:

<http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

This thesis is protected by original copyright

**Anomie and Affiliation: Portrayals of the
Cultural Elite in Modern Egyptian
Literature
(1952-1985)**

Kwame J. Lawson

*A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
the University of St. Andrews*

May 2000

St. Andrews



Declarations

I, Kwame J. Lawson, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 84,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date: 12/05/00 Signature: .

I was admitted as a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy in 1994 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1995; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1994 and 2000.

Date: 12/05/00 Signature: .

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date: 20.3.01 Signature: .

Copyright Declaration

In submitting this thesis to the University of St. Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any *bona fide* library or research worker.

Date: 12/05/00

Signature: .

Table of Contents

<i>Dedication</i>	
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	
<i>Declarations</i>	
<i>Note on the Transliteration of Arabic Characters</i>	
<i>Abstract</i>	
Introduction	1
Chapter One: <i>The Cultural Elite: Preliminary Considerations</i>	
1. Qualifying/Defining the Cultural Elite	4
2. Rifā'ī al-Taḥṭāwī as Prototype of the Modern Cultural Elite	14
3. Methods of Criticism of Contemporary Arabic Literature	26
4. Introduction to the "Crisis of the Intellectuals"	35
Chapter Two: <i>The Intellectual & the Greater Society: Facing Tradition</i>	
Introduction	47
1. Al-Jabal	51
2. Sirruhu al-bāṭi'	58
3. Dawmat Wad Ḥāmid	66
4. Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a	73
Chapter Three: <i>A Question of Leadership</i>	
Introduction	83
1. Al-'Amaliyya al-kubrā	85
2. Al-Riḥla	91
3. Ḥadīth al-qarya	94
4. Akāna la budda yā Līlī an tudī' al-nūr?	98
5. Safsāfa wa 'l-Jinerāl	103
6. Al-Lajna	106
Chapter Four: <i>Kulluhu Bāṭil: Disenchantment and Assertion of the Individual</i>	
Introduction	118
1. Lughat al-Āy-Āy	124
2. Snūbizm	130
3. Mu'jizat al-'aṣr	136
4. Sharq al-Nakhīl	140
Chapter Five: <i>Luqmat 'Aysh - Shifts of the 1970s & 1980s</i>	
Introduction	149
1. Al-Madīna al-Nā'ima	151
2. Al-Balda al-Ukhrā	154
3. Al-'araba al-dhahabiyya la taṣ'udu ilā al-samā'	162
4. Dhāt	170
Conclusion	180

Appendix One - Original Arabic for Select Quotations	184
Appendix Two - Spectrum of the Cultural Elite	185
Appendix Three - Sample of the 'Cut-Up' Technique	186
Bibliography	187

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to four individuals:

*My parents, Winston and Verona Lawson,
For their boundless support
And the example of their lives*

*Secondly, to the two people most responsible
For my interest in Arabic Studies-*

*Dr. Maḥmūd al-Baṭāl
and
Dr. Lucia Rawls*

Many thanks

Acknowledgements

This research has been made possible through the assistance of many individuals, some of whom deserve particular mention here. I would like to express my thanks to:

My supervisor, Mrs. Catherine Cobham, for her unflagging support and guidance

The various funding bodies which have provided the means for the research: The Robert T. Jones Foundation, the Overseas Research Awards Scheme, the International Rotary Foundation, and, of course, the Mother & Father Save The Kwame Foundation

The Department of Arabic & Middle Eastern Studies of the University of St. Andrews: Dr. Richard Kimber, for last-minute technical assistance, Dr. Ihāb al-Sakkūt, for keeping my spoken Arabic alive, Letizia Osti and Fabio Caiani, for diligent proofreading above and beyond the call of duty, non-judgemental computer assistance and for entering Gilles Peterson competitions (additional thanks to Dr. Angua Stewart in this regard)

The Center for Arabic Studies Abroad at the American University in Cairo: Many thanks to Zaynab Ṭaha, 'Azza Wākīd, Raghda al-'Īsawī, 'Abbās al-Ṭonsī and Ustādh Gāber for laying the foundations

Dr. Sāmīya Mehrez, Maḥmūd al-Wardānī, Dr. Maḥmūd Amīn al-Ālim, Salwa Bakr, Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Majīd, Dr. Ḥamdī al-Sakkūt Marina Stagh and William Hutchins for interviews and consultation

Andy Kershaw, Gilles Peterson, David Sillers, Java Jive, Loose and radio sonicnet for musical diversion

My Aimée, for patience, above all else

Note on the Transliteration of Arabic Characters

Consonants

ء ' (alif ma'adha)	ض d	ا, at (construct state) ة
ب b	ط t	
ت t	ع ' (ayn)	
ث th	غ gh	
ج j (g in colloq.)	ف f	
ح ḥ	ق q	
خ kh	ك k	
د d	ل l	
ذ dh	م m	
ر r	ن n	
ز z	ه h	
س s	و w	
ش sh	ي y	
ص ṣ		

Long Vowels

اى	ā
و	ū
ي	ī

Diphthongs

و	aw
ي	ay
ية	iyya
و	uw

Abstract

The following research is a survey, by no means comprehensive, of portrayals of the cultural elite in modern Egyptian literature and an analysis of the development of these portrayals over a period of roughly thirty-five years (1952-1985). The original idea for this research stemmed from a smaller Masters' degree project, evaluating intellectual responses to popular Islam. Further reading revealed an entire sub-category of literature addressing similar ideas - intellectuals torn between faith in their community and disillusionment/isolation, leaders torn between the ego and the good of the governed, educated men and women caught between pursuit of wealth and commitment to collective uplifting. This body of work - the 'narratives of the Egyptian cultural elite' - has as yet received little critical attention. The present research attempts to address this lack.

Relying on the close reading of 25 novels and short stories and utilising socio-historical analysis, the primary questions we attempt to address are the following: who are the cultural elite? What are the criteria for entry into this categorisation? How do we define the writings of the cultural elite? Do their visions of society differ from that of the majority? How are these elites' allegiances described and how have these allegiances evolved over the roughly thirty-five year period of this study?

This research consists of five parts. Chapter One lays a theoretical and historical foundation, defining the primary term 'cultural elite', positing historical precedents for portrayals of the cultural elite, establishing a critical method, and finally, setting the stage for the 'crisis of the intellectuals' by providing some of the socio-historical background which informs the readings of the texts.

The remaining four chapters deal specifically with the literature and are organised into thematic categories. Chapter Two addresses the position of the cultural elite within the modernity/tradition debate. Chapter Three examines portrayals of leadership and authority. Chapter Four investigates individualism and disillusionment as concepts pertaining to the period of the 1967 Six-Day War with Israel, while Chapter Five examines the shifts in literary tenor which emanate from the wake of 1967, in particular the manner in which the cultural elite is portrayed as a result of the subsequent shifts in political and economic administrations during the 1970s and 1980s.

This research concludes by asserting that a particular conception of the Egyptian cultural elite has experienced a decline, if not its demise, but that the primary function and understanding of the cultural elite remains vital within the literature.

Introduction

The primary objective of this research is to suggest a new frame of reference for analysis of the portrayals of a particular segment of Egyptian society herein termed the cultural elite. This new frame of reference is necessary for there seems to be a relative lack of scholarship devoted to the *literary* depictions of the group that comprises the intellectual, spiritual and temporal leadership of that society. Many scholars have addressed the issue of the cultural elite (*al-muthaqqafūn*) from political angles,¹ their titles being variations on a theme of “The Intellectual and Authority,” “Authority and Intellectuals,” etc., but very few have provided a substantive element of literary analysis. Notable exceptions to this are Samāḥ Idrīs,² whose research focuses on literary portrayals of reactions to the administration of former president Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir, and ‘Abd al-Salām al-Shāzili,³ whose work precedes the 1952 revolution, surveying the portrayals of the cultural elite in the Arabic novel in its incipient forms, during the period 1882-1952. In short, the field is in need of thematic broadening and updating⁴.

This research has at its foundation the tenets of reflection theory, as espoused by critics such as Roland Barthes, Pierre Macherey and Maḥmūd Amīn al-‘Ālim which asserts that literature is not merely a direct transcription of reality, but is instead a *reflection* of that reality, rooted in a particular historical moment, invested with a particular worldview and ultimately enhanced in some way by the creative energies of the artist (Wolff 1981, pp. 55-66). Thus, one of the critical concerns of this study is interpretative: searching for meaning in the assumed “distortions” of the mirror of literature. The other issue is aesthetic: demonstrating the method and technique which

¹ See most recently: Ghālī Shukrī, *Al-Muthaqqafūn wa 'l-sulṭa fī Miṣr* (Cairo, Dār Akhbār al-yawm, 1990), which features a testimonial chapter by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, but no real literary analysis; Marina Stagh, *The Limits of Freedom of Speech* (Stockholm, Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1993) which thoroughly assesses issues of censorship under Nāṣir and Sādāt but uses literary analysis only insofar as it relates to expurgated portions of novels and short stories; Muṣṭafā Murtaḍa ‘Alī Maḥmūd, *Al-Muthaqqaf wa 'l-sulṭa*, which brings the issue to the modern day, 1995, but again, from a political angle, with very little specifically literary element.

² Samāḥ Idrīs, *Al-Muthaqqaf al-‘arabī wa 'l-sulṭa* (Beirut, Dār al-Adāb, 1992).

³ ‘Abd al-Salām al-Shāzili, *Shakhṣiyyat al-muthaqqaf fī 'l-riwāya al-‘arabiyya al-ḥadītha 1882-1952* (Beirut, Dār al-Ḥadātha, 1985).

⁴ This thesis deals with the historical period 1952-1985. Several of the novels and short stories included in this work have been written after this time, but most are set within this specific period.

the artists used to arrive at their particular visions. Many writers⁵ see in the cultural elite useful material, if not their primary source, through which the contradictions and disparities of Egyptian society can be explored. Likewise, Egypt's intellectual climate and the manner in which the vagaries of politics have affected that climate can perhaps best be gauged through the portrayals of the cultural elite. But who comprises this rather nebulous association, the "cultural elite" of Egyptian society? Is there a body of work that can genuinely be classified as "writings pertaining to the cultural elite?" How do their visions of society differ from the masses, if at all? How are these elites' allegiances described? How have conceptions of the Egyptian cultural elite changed in the latter half of this century? How do the authors convey their convictions that the cultural elite have a responsibility towards the rest of society? What do the authors have to say about the value systems of the cultural elite and the way these values might change? Lastly, but certainly not least important, is there anything unique about the portrayal of the cultural elite in Egypt, or are these depictions common to elites in any literature? It is towards these sorts of questions that this research is aimed.

This study consists of five parts. Chapter One defines the fundamental terms under analysis and supplies a theoretical foundation for analysis of this sort. These sections of the research are informed by a variety of sources, both Arab and foreign. Additionally, Chapter One offers a historical precedent for portrayals of the cultural elite in the form of the writings of the nineteenth century traveller and man of letters, Rifāʿ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī. Particular emphasis is given to his most famous work, *Takhlīṣ al-ibriz fī talkhīs Bārīs* (1834), which is herein posited not only as one of the forerunners to the Arabic novel, but as one of the direct antecedents to the portrayals of the cultural elite analysed in the following chapters of this work. Finally, the first chapter provides a considerable amount of socio-political background, the events and catalysts motivating the writings so that the reader may more fully appreciate the contexts in which the works were created.

Rather than deal with the subject in a strictly chronological manner as Al-Shāzili has, this study attempts a thematic approach. The four chapters subsequent to Chapter One consist of close readings of twenty-five works, set within the historical period which immediately follows Al-Shāzili's study, 1952-1985. These chapters include a combination of novels and short stories carefully selected primarily for their artistic

⁵ In this group I would include, among many others, the earlier writers Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm, Yūsuf Idrīs, and Sulaymān Fayyāḍ and, of the later generations of writers, examples such as Ṣun'allāh Ibrāhīm, Munā Rajab and Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Majīd.

integrity and organised into four broadly distinct but occasionally overlapping thematic concerns: Chapter Two examines the relational position of the intellectual to the greater society in the light of the modernity/tradition debate. Chapter Three explores the crucial question of leadership and authority - the cultural elite as the authority and the cultural elite in response to an authority. Chapter Four witnesses the rise of disenchantment among the cultural elite as an overarching theme, particularly in reference to the defeat of the Arab powers in the 1967 Six Day War. Chapter Five examines the cultural elite's response to a post-ideological world, where economic and political shifts necessitate an artistic evaluation different from that of the generations which preceded it. The conclusion of this work evaluates this accumulation of information, assesses the evolution of the portrayals of the cultural elite and proposes that although Egyptian writing has experienced a tremendous shift in sensibility over the course of the thirty-five years of this study, the cultural elite are still perceived of, within the literature, certainly if not without, as vital and necessary to the well-being of society.

Chapter 1

The Cultural Elite - Preliminary Considerations

1. Qualifying/ Defining the Cultural Elite

Yūsuf al-Qa'īd's *Rabāb ta'tazil al-rasm* (Rabāb Gives Up Drawing, 1982) provides a suitable point of departure for discussion of portrayals of the cultural elite in contemporary Arabic fiction. The short story lends itself particularly well to this discussion for at least two reasons: first, it furnishes a framework for defining the meanings and functions of the cultural elite. Secondly, it illustrates a number of criticisms often levelled against contemporary prose writing in Arabic. It is the present writer's firm belief that the issues and theories of criticism should emanate and be elicited from within the texts themselves, rather than be imposed arbitrarily. It is hoped therefore, that an examination of this story will supply valuable material for a subsequent theoretical discussion of the terms "intellectual" and "cultural elite." Having equipped ourselves with a concrete reference against which to view the theory, we remain grounded in the literature, which is, after all, the ambition of this research.

Rabāb ta'tazil al-rasm is essentially an exposition of freedom and its consequences; artistic freedom in the very abstract sense and freedom in a more pointed, political sense, what Edward Said describes as the ability to "speak the truth to power" (Said 1993, Lecture 5). Rabāb is a young girl whose talent for portraying reality in her drawings lands her in a continuous string of difficulties. The story relates how her parents and family, themselves neither well-educated nor skilled in the arts, deal with and react to the presence of this talent in their lives.

The sequence of events begins as the drawing instructor calls Rabāb's father in for a meeting with him at school in which he describes the young girl's rare artistic ability and encourages the father to nurture this talent. Rabāb's father balks at the suggestion, questioning the utility and the future of the life of an artist. Recognising the father's hesitation, the teacher takes the matter into his own hands and plants the seed which is to become both Rabāb's credo and her downfall: he urges her to observe everything around her, search for the inspiration from within and paint the world exactly as she sees it, remaining true to no one else but her inner muse.

Only a brief period of time elapses before the mandate of "to thine own self be true" causes distress for those close to the young artist. When the father returns from

work that day, he asks his daughter to draw him a picture. She decides to draw her father's office. We are told that Rabāb's vision of her father's secretary takes on an exaggerated quality, her breasts heaving toward the father, the scent of her skin wafting into the father's nose. The office boy she creates is likewise true to her own vision - he is broken down, dirty and unshaven, with "a body like an inverted pyramid." The father disputes the girl's depiction of the office boy, while Rabāb insists that this is the image of most office helpers. Amid this argument, the mother enters the room, notices the secretary in the picture and is enraged. When the husband explains that the painting is the young girl's version of reality, the wife responds by beating Rabāb as punishment. The episode concludes with Rabāb tearing up her picture and vowing never again to attempt to draw.

With each reluctant return to drawing, the girl's images take on a greater force and consequence. From this point onward, the story takes on a surreal and initially comical quality in which Rabāb's creations assume a life of their own, interacting with the characters in the "real world" of the story. In the second episode, Rabāb decides to draw the owner of a huge plot of land on a neighbouring farm. His is a stereotypical portrayal - protruding gut, pudgy face, bulging veins. As soon as the last detail is filled in, her character becomes animated, breathing and yelling at the little girl to complete the picture by furnishing the owner with some servants to work the land. The servants are depicted diminutively, and they too leap into life on the page, clamouring for food, clothing and shelter from their creator. A row ensues between the owner and the workers which becomes so tumultuous that the girl is forced to tear up the picture. Once again, when the forces are set into motion, Rabāb's creations exceed her ability to control them. Elimination of the work of art seems the only solution.

A similar unfolding occurs in the third episode in which the girl attempts to flee the problems previously experienced by drawing subjects further removed from her immediate experience. Her depiction of the ruler of the country and a citizen in like manner descends into farcical chaos, however, as the citizen pleads to its creator to be released from prison and the leader begs for another citizen over which to rule. The din from the page finally compels Rabāb to destroy her composition.

Up until this point, the surreal fusion of "fact" with fiction, the actual world of the story and Rabāb's illustrated productions, could be read as the typical workings of a child's overactive imagination. The fourth and final drawing, however, transcends this boundary and brings the story to its disturbing culmination. Rabāb's brother, a boy with aspirations to become a soldier, asks his gifted sister to draw an officer for

him. The girl dutifully complies, and once again, her creation springs to life in mid-depiction. As Rabāb attempts to sketch a gun, the soldier objects, pointing to the television, where a dancer performs, singing the lines, "the war is over." The brother pleads with the girl's creation to allow her to finish drawing the gun, arguing that it will cause no harm. Again, the soldier protests, saying that he can not be held responsible for the consequences since the war was over. The brother insists, and Rabāb finishes the rifle. Now armed, the soldier thinks to himself, "As long as I have the gun, I must use it, and since instructions forbid my using it against the enemy in front of me, I shall use it against those behind me until the day comes when I will be able to decide for myself against whom to use it." With this, the soldier turns and fires seven rounds into Rabāb's brother.

The story concludes with a court scene which is vital to the totality of the work: Rabāb is deemed responsible for the criminal actions of her creation, though her sentence is alleviated in the light of the fact that she was goaded by her brother to create this offender. The young girl apologises and declares publicly her intention to lock up her imagination and cease drawing altogether. The judge asks her to put this statement in writing, at which point Rabāb realises that her hands have disappeared. The judge asks about this, and the girl replies that her hands existed purely for the function of drawing, and that they will reappear whenever "she has made up her mind to draw again, when she has decided to draw the soldier who is free to determine his own fate, absolutely freely and independently." But because she has decided once and for all never to use her skills, no such statement is necessary.

Yūsuf al-Qa'īd's short story deserves attention, particularly for the questions it raises concerning intellectuals, their position within society and their responsibilities to that society. His usage of a young girl as the focal point challenges the notion of exactly who comprises this body of individuals we call "intellectuals," or the "cultural elite." How broad a definition is feasible? Issues of representation, the determining of one's reality and the responsibility for that self-determination are similarly presented as vital questions. And the metaphor of Rabāb's disappearing hands suggests the author's conviction that an artist's inability to use her talent as she sees fit is tantamount to death. Yet for all its potent questions, the story suffers stylistically in its overt emphasis on a "message" and its reluctance to veer from a staid, formal Arabic, even in the dialogue. Egyptian commentator 'Abd Allāh Abū Hayf suggests that this critique could be made of the Arabic short story as a genre, particularly during and after the 1970's:

The short story has developed to the point where it is primarily

concerned with its *subject* well before any thought is given to the style. It is a well-founded institution before it is ever allowed to be art. ...The demands that society has placed on the Arabic short story have weighed heavily on the *craft* of the short story writing, to the extent that it often loses its unique specialness, does not fulfil its literary role, and then does not result in art.⁶

With this commentary in mind, the story nonetheless provides an excellent starting point from which to begin qualifying the subject of this research. I would therefore like to propose a definition of the term "cultural elite" in the light of what has been presented by first analysing two crucial words: "intellectual," and "culture."

Perhaps the best way to begin would be to arrive at some sort of *functional* definition for the word "intellectual." My interest here is not in quoting demographic evidence to prove the existence of an intellectual elite⁷, nor is it in offering a litany of names of authors and their characters preoccupied with this subject. Rather, my aim is to describe the types of people I am calling intellectuals in an Egyptian literary context and, more importantly, to qualify the role that these individuals play in society. It would therefore be instructive to examine a range of interpretations of the term "intellectual" and the significance of such a person to his or her society.

One of the most salient points in this initial discussion is also one of the most obvious. It holds that the intellectual plays a vital determining role in the way we view the world. Israel Gershoni begins his argument in this regard with the supposition that "human behaviour is not influenced directly by reality per se, but by the *image* that human beings have of reality" (Boulding in Gershoni & Jankowski 1986, p. 77). He then contends that it is the intellectual whose task it is to fashion this reality. Indeed, this is to be one of the intellectual's key functions. Expertly equipped with an ability to express ideas and represent a larger body politic, be it an establishment or a public, it is only this type of individual who can mediate and interpret the world at large for us. Given this capacity, their primary role is, as he puts it, "the inception and diffusion of public or collective images" (Gershoni & Jankowski 1986, p. 78). In a specifically Egyptian sense, this has meant that it is this select group of individuals that has been responsible for creating, in a sense, an Egyptian identity as well as articulating the ambitions of the country. Aḥmad Dayf, noted Egyptian

⁶ 'Abd Allāh Abū Hayf, "Al-Qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra wa awhām al-ibdā'," *Al-Mawqif al-adabī* 131 (March 1982), p. 391, from Gaye Walton-Price 1990, pp. 130-131, italics mine.

⁷ For an informative statistical study - and 'introduction to the economic elite,' if you will - see Ralph R. Sell's "International Affinities in Modern Egypt: Results from a Social Distance Survey of Elite Students" in the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, No. 22, 1990, pp. 59-84.

writer and critic, recognised the force of this idea in 1917, when he posited the notion of a distinct Egyptian "literary personality." Dissatisfied with the outmoded themes of Arabic writing, Ḍayf advocated an "Egyptianisation" of Arabic literature (in an attempt to use writing to genuinely reflect the local environment.) The new equation he advanced was for literature "Egyptian in its subjects and perceptions, Arabic in its language and styles" (Gershoni & Jankowski 1986, p. 78). It was this call for reform that led to a greater involvement of writers in the anti-imperialist movement during this period.

Gershoni is one of many to appreciate the importance of the intellectual in shaping our reality. The book *Intellectuals in Developing Societies* by the Filipino author Syed Ḥusayn Alatas bemoans the prevailing condition in that (Southern Pacific) country where intellectuals certainly exist, but it does not imply the existence of "a group sufficiently influential to provide the leadership in thinking which is the *very function* of the intellectual" (Alatas 1977, p. 9, italics mine). Alatas' definition of the intellectual is relatively broad; neither academic qualifications nor economic class considerations figure in his interpretation of the word. According to this author, the intellectual is "any person who is engaged in thinking about ideas and non-material problems using the faculty of reason" (Alatas 1977, p. 8). Again, that the emphasis is on the function rather than qualification is in keeping with the definition of "intellectual" I should like to advance for the purposes of the literature with which I am dealing. Intellectuals, in both Alatas' view and in the range of literature I shall be examining, emerge from a number of socio-economic backgrounds, are concerned with the dissemination of information, the explanation of problems of society, but above all else, are responsible for preparing "the climate of opinion" (Alatas 1977, p. 92). Alatas asserts this time and again in his book, that national consciousness and self-awareness is *instilled*, not necessarily pre-existent. Accordingly, the intellectual's role is crucial. He cites as an example Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century. With the restoration of Meiji leadership in 1868, an interest in contemporary Western learning was inaugurated.⁸ A series of study missions, foreign language trainings and translation of Western texts was introduced under the initiative of this group of "low-ranking samurai," intellectuals and politicians. Alatas isolates this historical moment as decisive. The difference between Japan's ascendance and the stagnation of so many developing nations, the author maintains, is one of the will of

⁸ A relevant and useful example, as we will be exploring the impact of Muḥammad 'Alī's cultural missions later in this chapter.

the leadership of Japanese society (that is, the cultural elite). "It is the leading elites who define the situation. It is they who condition the nature of the response" (Alatas 1977, p. 88). Where an assimilation of the new learning is possible, a type of regeneration occurs. When this process fails, however, a different situation obtains: a condition that Alatas calls "backwardism." He uses the term to characterise the state of the cultural elite in his native country as well as in a large portion of the developing world. For Alatas, "backwardism" implies a fundamental lack of scientific interest or critical thought among these elites and the coexistence of a traditional orientation which hinders progress.⁹ Though deeply critical of European colonial history and the economic havoc wreaked on the developing world, the author refuses to rely on imperial explanations for "backwardness in social (and cultural) habits, particularly twenty to twenty-five years after independence" (Alatas 1977, p. 95). He attributes this 'backwardness' to the collective leadership, who, Alatas argued, have failed "to exert their influence to introduce positive habits" (Alatas 1977, p. 95). The depiction of this "struggle with backwardism" has long been a theme in contemporary Arabic literature, as it has been in the literatures of many 'developing' countries, and it is towards these types of portrayals that I shall turn my attention in chapter 2.

Like Alatas, Egyptian journalist and critic 'Ādil Ḥamūda is concerned with providing a definition of the cultural elite that is applicable to the developing world. His too is a functional definition within which is implicit an understanding of issues such as national levels of literacy and access to formal education. Distinguishing between "knowledge" (as in formal, book-learned information) and "culture," Ḥamūda argues that Egypt's cultural elite are those who a) have an awareness of their culture and era, b) are conversant with the issues of their time and c) work towards the transformation of their society with this awareness (Ḥamūda 1985, p. 46). This third element is crucial to the author's understanding of the term,¹⁰ and is echoed, as we shall see, throughout the literature on the subject.

The Reith Lectures of 1993, given by Edward Said, examine the nature of intellectual activity at the close of the twentieth century and the responsibility such activity involves. What Said provides in these talks is a brief encapsulation of contemporary Western thought on the question of the intellectual's place in society.

⁹ For more detail, see chapter 3, "Bebalisma," Alatas 1977, pp. 25-34.

¹⁰ Referring to Anwar 'Abd al-Malik's definition of the "organic intellectual," Ḥamūda stresses the importance of this component of active involvement. The words he uses are "*munghamis fī anfīhi*," or literally, "in it up to his nose." (Ḥamūda 1985, p. 51).

Although the discussion is filtered primarily through the lens of Western literature, his main points are worth considering. Throughout the series of six lectures, Said stresses his belief in a moral and public obligation attendant with the life of the intellectual. Secondly, he narrows the notion of representation to connote representation of the *disenfranchised*.¹¹ Thirdly, if at all possible, it is the intellectual's task to find elements of the universal in the particular local situation with which he is involved.

The vision articulated by Said is idealistic and abstract. He begins with the premise that the intellectual is by definition a public being. There is no such thing as a private intellectual, he argues; the very act of speaking and publishing precludes this possibility (Said 1993, Lecture 1). It is only later in the series that he addresses issues of the inability of certain intellectuals to voice their opinions due to government repression, exile, etc., but he starts with a definition in abstract: "the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, ... articulating a message to a public *in public*" (Said 1993, Lecture 1). And it is in this task of representation that the intellectual proves a cohesive force for all society. Here, Said echoes the thoughts of sociologist Edward Shils who argues that the intellectual is to serve as the source through which so-called 'high' culture is diffused and, as a result, is responsible for the development of a culture common to all strata of society.¹² But Said then goes one step further, qualifying the position of the intellectual to authority as antagonistic of necessity. He likens the intellectual to a gadfly: he or she must "raise embarrassing questions, confront orthodoxy and dogma rather than producing them and represent those who are routinely forgotten" (Said 1993, Lecture 1). In short, the intellectual must be "embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant" (Said 1993, Lecture 1). This task, the vocation of representing, requires a great deal of dedication and willingness to place one's career or reputation in jeopardy. The later chapters of this research are meant to explore the feasibility of carrying out such a duty in countries like Egypt. A

¹¹ Said's notion of enfranchisement is informed by the theories of his predecessors, such as Paulo Freire, as well as contemporary writers such as Carlos Fuentes and Tāhir Ben Jelloun.

¹² In his encyclopaedia entry entitled "Intellectuals," Shils writes: Since most societies are too large, in terms of territory and population, to be united through kinship connection and firsthand experience, the development of a common culture ordinarily depends on reproductive intellectual institutions such as schools, churches and newspapers. Through these intellectual institutions ordinary persons become aware of each other's existence as members of the same society. ...By means of preaching, teaching and writing, reproductive intellectuals infuse into these sections of the population which are intellectual neither by propensity nor by role beliefs which they would otherwise lack. By the provision of such techniques as reading writing and calculation they enable the laity to enter into a wider universe." Shils 1968, p. 411

discrepancy between Said's theoretical assertions and the concrete situation in Egypt is apparent. Set against a political reality of censorship and the threat of arrest, the representation of social reality has necessarily become more oblique, with writers making greater use of symbolism, self-censorship and exile in an effort to elude such consequences. And even when given full voice, the writers (and their "intellectual" characters, by extension) find the lack of a sympathetic audience overwhelming. The resulting alienation has been a leitmotif of the Arabic short story for quite some time, manifesting itself most noticeably toward the end of the 1960's.

As to the question of who constitutes the body we call 'intellectuals,' Said turns to two opposing ends of the philosophical debate for his answer. On one end stands French philosopher Julien Benda, who in his work, *La trahison des clercs* (1927) sets forth a very specific definition of the term. For Benda, Said tells us, intellectuals are a "tiny band of super-gifted, morally endowed philosopher kings" (Said 1993, Lecture 1) who represent the conscience of a society. Theirs is not an esoteric coterie whose musings matter little beyond their circle.¹³ Rather, they represent the narrow strata of society equipped to "denounce corruption, defend the weak and defy oppressive authority" (Said 1993, Lecture 1). The Italian thinker and political activist Antonio Gramsci, on the other hand, finds fault not with Benda's articulation of the function of intellectuals, but with the narrowness of entitlement to the term. In his *Prison Notebooks* (1929), Gramsci argues that an exclusive focus on the function of intellectuals essentially limits the definition to a professional category. Gramsci prefers to argue for a wider conception of the intellectual, acknowledging humankind's intrinsic nature as sentient, intellectual beings. This qualification is vital to our understanding of the term 'intellectual' as it is to be used throughout this research, and thus we quote here at length:

What are the 'maximum' limits of acceptance of the term 'intellectual?'...The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations. Indeed, the worker or proletarian, for example, is not specifically characterised by his manual or instrumental work, but by performing this work in specific conditions and in specific social relations (apart from the consideration that purely physical labour does not exist and that even Taylor's phrase of 'trained gorilla' is a metaphor to indicate a limit in

¹³ Benda's citation of Socrates, Jesus, Spinoza and Voltaire as examples of his definition of an intellectual gives credence to this statement.

a certain direction: in any physical work, even the most degraded and mechanical, there exists a minimum of creative intellectual activity.) And we have already observed that the entrepreneur, by virtue of his very function, must have to some degree a certain number of qualifications of an intellectual nature although his part in society is determined not by these... All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals. ...There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* (Man the maker) cannot be separated from *homo sapiens* (Man the thinker). Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher,' an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought (Gramsci 1971, pp. 8-9).

A reasoned definition of the term 'intellectual,' particular to the contemporary Egyptian situation, must lie somewhere in between these polarities. Yet it seems that the broader conceptions, articulated by Gramsci, Alatas, Ḥamūda and others are more appropriate to Egypt's specific historical situation. Let us turn briefly now to an even larger concept: culture.

"...True culture is one thing and talking about it is another... Intellectual culture alone does not constitute culture in its entirety and... complete culture is something much more comprehensive than that. The prerequisite of culture is not mere knowledge of it but a *feeling* as well as the taste for and assimilation of the various arts of that culture. Culture is not words with which we fill our heads, but a *consciousness in all our faculties and senses.*" Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm ('Awaḍ 1986, p.200)

It is hoped that the irony of the preceding passage is not lost on the reader. For what is research of this sort, if not an "intellectualising" of culture? Nevertheless, the point that Al-Ḥakīm makes is a valid one - our understanding of the term culture must first be sufficiently broad to include emotional as well as verbal responses and secondly, have as its foundation the idea of a continuing process of development, or evolution. In his book entitled *Culture and Society* (1967), the Marxist critic Raymond Williams touches on this point in his discussion of the development of certain key concepts in English society, particularly during the Industrial Revolution. The word "art," for instance, witnessed a tremendous change in meaning from its pre-mechanisation era definition of "a trade" or "a skill," to its current "work of some creative or imaginative capacity." Similarly, the term "industry," once viewed as an individual human attribute (i.e. - one's resourcefulness) has now assumed a collective definition - "our manufacturing and productive institutions and their general

activities." Culture, that is to say human culture, also experienced a series of transformations in meaning from its original "process of human training," to "a general state or habit of the mind," and finally, "a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual" (Williams 1967, p. xvi). The underlying reasons Williams provides for these shifts in meaning are of little concern for this study. What is significant, however, is the totality of this final definition. It is this holistic sense of the word culture that Tawfiq al-Ḥakim describes in his book, and it is this definition that I would like to apply to the purposes of this research.

Williams suggests that there are three distinct but inter-related methods of viewing culture - the ideal, the documentary and the social. The ideal method sees culture as the embodiment of that which is timeless, that which is pertinent to and representative of the universal human condition. The documentary method sees culture as the genetic code of all human activity. Here, culture is considered as "the body of intellectual and imaginative work in which human thought and experience are recorded" (Williams 1961, p. 41). The social method looks to the interaction of humans, "the structure of the family...organisations of production, etc." in order to paint a picture of a particular way of life (Williams 1961, p. 42). Any thorough analysis of culture must take all three of these elements into consideration.

Having outlined in a very general manner what is meant by the two terms "intellectual" and "culture," I would now like to turn to the phrase, "cultural elite," for it represents, in a sense, a fusion of these two concepts. "Cultural elite," within the limits of this study, connotes those who by dint of their education, intellectual capacity or exposure *consciously* explore and interpret the problems of society. This is not to say that the other members of society do not possess the faculties to interpret the world in which they live, rather that this is not their *primary function*. Noticeably lacking from this definition is any reference to economic status or material well-being. This is deliberate, as I am attempting to make a distinction between the "cultural elite" and the narrower term "bourgeoisie." For although the relationship between material prosperity and access to education, employment opportunities, etc., is indisputable, mere affluence does not necessarily imply membership within the cultural elite. Indeed, one may belong to the lowest of economic classes and possess the leadership skills and/or acumen characteristic of the cultural elite. This is particularly important in the Egyptian context, as the writers and the characters which populate their works hail from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Ḥamūd 'Auda and 'Ādil Ḥamūda corroborate this assertion in their respective works in which the cultural elite is defined not as a class, but as a wider grouping composed of many

classes.

The primary interest of this investigation, however, is not to apply certain criteria to each story in an effort to determine the existence of a particular genre, but to analyse the methods by which authors describe this particular, sometimes difficult to define group.

2. Rifā'ī al-Ṭaḥṭāwī as Precursor and Prototype of the Modern Cultural Elite

In his book *Mawsim al-hijra ilā 'l-shimāl* (1966), the Sudanese novelist Al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ describes a dilemma common to the modern Arab intellectual. The theme is a recognisable one - a young man leaves his home in traditionally-bound Khartoum for London in order to study. He returns some seven years later, only to find himself a stranger in his own home, unable to relate to family members and friends following his period of exposure to the cosmopolitan life of England's capital city. At the same time, the protagonist recognises the implausibility of life in London. The task of the remainder of the novel, and indeed, this character's life, is to achieve some sort of reconciliation between the two worlds.

How to face this deep sense of anomie and attempt to achieve the "golden mean" is also the underlying theme of this overview of the life and ideas of Rifā'ī al-Ṭaḥṭāwī. Generations before the fictional presence of Muṣṭafā S'īd, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was one of the first true modern intellectuals to integrate the ideas of the Arab/Muslim world and Western Europe, and do so successfully. As such, his influence on the Arab intellectual renaissance (*nahḍa*) and more specifically, the development of the modern Arabic novel, is noteworthy.

The decision to include a survey of the life and work of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī is informed by two concerns. The first is to provide evidence of a thriving literary culture and models of the cultural elite prior to and at the first stages of interaction with the West. Secondly, although Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's memoirs strictly fall into the category of travel literature, they illustrate one of the key elements in the present author's definition of the function of the cultural elite, which is namely, mediation of one's surroundings and experiences for a wider public. Accordingly, it is hoped that Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's experience, as reflected in his writings, might serve as a model for the roles and functions of characters referred to as the cultural elite later in this research.

Born in 1801 to a religious family of very modest means in Ṭaḥṭa¹⁴, Upper

¹⁴ Ṭaḥṭāwī's family claimed to be of *Ashraf* descent. That is, they claimed direct lineage to the Prophet. Brugman 1984, p. 18.

Egypt, Rifā'ī Badawī al-Ṭaḥṭāwī began his life in a traditional manner. His primary education was largely Qur'ānic in nature. Memorisation of passages from the Qur'ān and studying the Ḥadīth - in the schools known as *katātīb* - served as the cornerstone of his education. By the age of 16, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was prepared to begin intensive Qur'ānic learning at Al-Azhar university. There he studied under the tutelage of Shaykh Ḥasan al-'Attār, who played a pivotal role in re-fashioning the rather traditional mould of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's learning.

During France's occupation of Egypt only two decades earlier, Shaykh Al-'Attār was sent to France as part of Napoleon Bonaparte's scholarly exchanges (Hourani 1983, p. 63). In Al-Azhar, the *shaykh* had acquired a reputation as a progressive instructor, known for his attempts to "reform the curriculum...by introducing secular studies with particular emphasis on Arabic literature" ('Awaḍ 1986, p. 25). 'Awaḍ makes no mention of the specific authors taught. Nevertheless, an innovation of this sort signifies a clear tempering of an intellectual environment that had previously "viewed literary studies as a pointless indulgence" ('Inānī 1975, p. 8). The *shaykh* conveyed his knowledge of the "new sciences" with enthusiasm and sparked Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's interest. Within seven years (an unprecedentedly brief period) Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī had completed his course of study and had himself become a teacher at Al-Azhar, where he taught logic, metaphor and prosody in addition to Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. Students flocked to his classes, we are told, appreciative of his ease of style and clarity in conveying complicated ideas ('Inānī 1975, p. 9). Two years later, it was Al-'Attār who was responsible for requesting that Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī accompany (as an *imām*) an army regiment which was being sent to Paris for training and study. The aim of the mission was to augment Egypt's awareness of the military and scientific capabilities of France and the West. Though his services were required solely as spiritual advisor, this sojourn to France was to prove an important stimulus for a personal renaissance as well.

The young scholar stayed in Paris for five years, beginning in 1826, and chronicled this experience in what has become his most famous work, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīs Bārīs* (The Purification of Gold in the Summary of Paris, 1834). Ultimately, the force of *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz* rests not so much in its literary value as its expression of modern ideas and its treatment of the world, which was clearly influenced by the events of the 1830 July Revolution, to which he was a witness. Muḥammad 'Amāra, a critic and editor of one of the more recent editions of *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz* has written praising Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī for not "venerating antiquity" in his text as so many of his

contemporaries had ('Amāra 1973, p. 18). Brugman likewise commends the work for its style, "uncommonly simple... for its day," its broad-minded assessment of women and inclusion of Christians as full citizens of Egypt (Brugman 1984, p. 21).

The text itself is divided into six basic sections, which coincide with the major portions of his trip: the preparatory stages of the journey from Alexandria to Marseilles, a period of quarantine in Marseilles and then a large section on Paris itself. In its format and structure, the book resembles much of the *ādāb* literature of the time. That is to say, it is a text whose distinguishing features are a wide, encyclopaedic subject matter and a digressive discursive approach interspersed with lines of verse¹⁵. A brief survey of the subjects covered demonstrates this wide-ranging aspect: Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī addresses the mundane (the dining habits of the French, the comparatively liberal position of Parisian women, for instance), the sacred (the theological Mālikī/Ḥanafī debates on the virtues of quarantine, Egyptian converts to Christianity in France, etc.) and that which lies in between the two poles (the theatre). However, *Takhlīṣ* breaks with *adāb* tradition in its sparing usage of rhymed prose. Often, the prose reads as if it had been written in an Arabic of the early twentieth century, not the nineteenth, as this excerpt from the first section illustrates:

We headed for Alexandria on small ships, riding on the back of the blessed Nile for four days. We stayed in Alexandria twenty-three days. And although we ventured out into the city infrequently, it seemed to me that (this place) was closer in its attitude and position to the European countries...this I discerned from what I saw as compares with other Egyptian towns, the abundance of Europeans, the fact that most of the crowd speak some Italian, things of this sort, and this was confirmed for me upon my arrival in Marseilles. Indeed, Alexandria was a taste of Marseilles... (Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī in 'Inānī 1975, p. 14, translation mine)¹⁶

The usage of relatively simplified Arabic along with the first person narration and foreshadowing could be considered a precursor to the narrative styles of contemporary Arabic fiction. Yet Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's inclination towards a more clear, sometimes prosaic method of writing did not preclude the possibility of poetic moments. Upon arrival at the shores of Marseilles, for example, the writer hears the echoes of a church bell pealing. The commentator Muḥammad Zakariyya 'Inānī tells us that Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was struck by the fortuitous occurrence of bells ushering in his

¹⁵ For a fuller explanation of *Adāb* literature, see Cole 1980, pp. 30 & 32-34.

¹⁶ For the original Arabic text, see Appendix One, example 1.

arrival in a new country. The first night of his stay, he was moved to record some of this experience in rhymed prose, a *maqāma*, whose opening lines are included in *Takhliṣ* and set the tenor for the entire trip:

I ardently love everything which possesses beauty
I am not afraid of my passion
Nor is there any hesitation in the air
Only my disposition of propriety (Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī in 'Inānī 1975,
p. 14, translation mine).¹⁷

The significance of rhyme and meter is all but lost in this "workhorse" translation. Nevertheless, the sentiment of anticipation remains intact. What Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī does here is steel himself for this new, unfamiliar experience and declare unequivocally his commitment to knowledge and beauty, no matter its source, with the proviso that this new knowledge comply with his Islamic worldview. This commitment served as the underpinning philosophy for Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's Parisian journey, the activities of the remainder of his life, and indeed, an entire strain of Arabic reformist thought.

Among the experiences which were to make the deepest impression on Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was his observation of women actively and openly involved in Parisian society:

[the saying goes:] The beauty of man is his mind, the beauty of a woman, her face. The saying does not apply in these lands. Indeed, here one asks about the mind of a woman, her talents, her knowledge and understanding ('Inānī 1975, p. 15, translation mine).

Of particular note in this regard was the field of French journalism, in which Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī found quite a few women working in various positions with national newspapers and magazines. This both pleased and amazed the *imām* and was a catalyst for his calls for universal education upon his return to Egypt. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's rather broad-minded approach is appreciated all the more when viewed in light of the attitudes of his contemporaries. Al-Jabartī, for instance, in his account of the French occupation soundly criticises the French for "infecting" Egypt with the ideas of women's liberation ('Awaḍ 1986, p. 31). What generally distinguishes Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and his work from that of his contemporaries was his ability to view societies through a different lens, the lens of tolerance, in which the parameters of the subject might have changed slightly, but the essential elements of the picture remain the same, as

¹⁷ For the original Arabic text, see Appendix One, example 2.

this extended quote corroborates:

It would be wrong to think that the French, because they are not jealous about their women, are lacking honour. It is ample proof of their sense of honour, more than anything else, that though they are devoid of jealousy, they react with destructive violence against their womenfolk, their lovers, and themselves in cases of infidelity. Their real mistake is simply that they let themselves be guided by women. However, no danger can possibly come to a chaste woman if left free...

...In speaking of women's chastity, *the causes of misbehaviour have nothing to do with veiling or unveiling their faces, but lie in their good or bad upbringing...*

(‘Awad 1986, p. 43, translation and italics mine)

Similarly, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's comments on differences in class, as evidenced in the rituals of cafe-frequenting society and the eating habits of Parisians, demonstrate an acute awareness that transcends nationality. Many facets of Parisian life, however, were novel and ever the spectacle for the young *imām*. Quite literally, in the case of the theatre:

Among their places of entertainment there are those called *théâtres* and *spectacles* in which are performed imitations of everything that happens in life... In truth, such performances are highly serious though they are mere plays, for one can draw from them great lessons, since they represent all actions, good and evil, lauding the former and condemning the latter so that the French say that they reform morals and refine men's character...

While these plays contain many laughable things, they also contain many things which bring tears to the eyes. On the curtain which comes down at the end of the performance is written in Latin what would mean in Arabic:

"Customs may be improved by entertainment" (‘Awad 1986, p. 40).

Beyond its novelty, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī found the theatre engaging for two reasons. First, because it was another example of a public endeavour in which men and women were participating together. Secondly, and more importantly, the populist sentiment behind the French theatre of that time appealed to him. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī saw the theatre as a creative means of enlightenment and education for a mass audience, attempting to reach beyond the constructs of socio-economic class and educational standing. The message it conveyed to Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was clear: if the aim of any form of writing - literary or scientific - is wider appeal and greater access to the world of ideas, ease of reading ability is a necessary precondition. Though he appreciated the rhetorical arts of Arabic, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's experience in France proved to him how outmoded the traditional style of writing was. Thus, it became his intention to rid the language of elements which he saw as "excessive (*zākhira*), cumbersome (*muthaqqala*) or feeble

(*rakīka*)" ('Amara 1973, p. 21). Small wonder, then, that one of the first books the *shaykh* wrote upon return from Paris, *Al-Tuḥfa al-maktabiyya li-taqrīb al-luḡha al-'arabiyya*, dealt exclusively with the question of language reform.

Shortly after his return to his homeland, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī immersed himself in the fields of translation and journalism. His translation work was prolific and varied, ranging from medical and military texts to purely literary works. In 1835, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī established and directed a comprehensive language school, the *Madrasat al-alsun*, which set the standard for translations of the time and was a cornerstone of the intellectual resurgence soon to occur. Before the first half of the nineteenth century, students and teachers in secular education outnumbered their traditional Azharite and *kuttāb* counterparts by nearly two to one¹⁸. The school itself taught Arabic primarily, along with five other world languages - French, Turkish, Persian, Italian and English - and offered a variety of subjects in additional faculties, including law, literature, jurisprudence, history and geography. Here, the French Civil Code was translated into Arabic for the first time. This document was later used as the basis for Egyptian constitutional law, still in existence and operation to this day. With literary texts, the scribes took certain liberties, adapting form along with content to suit the sensibilities of the Egyptian reading public¹⁹. A student of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's, Muḥammad 'Uthmān Jalāl, went on to translate Moliere's *Tartuffe* almost entirely in Egyptian colloquial Arabic (Ḥāfiẓ 1993, p. 58). And in 1849, in exile in Khartoum imposed by the retrogressive regime of 'Abbas I, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī translated Fenelon's *Telemache* into Arabic (*Waḡā'i' al-aflāk fī ḥawādith Tilimāk*). The work was widely regarded not only as a literary sensation, but also as Egypt's first piece of contemporary political allegory, wherein the story of Penelope fending off rapacious suitors as Telemachus wanders in search of Ulysses seemed aptly descriptive of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's situation as a demoted headmaster in Khartoum, desperate to return to Cairo²⁰. One commentator reckoned that a translation movement of this breadth had not occurred since the caliphate of Al-Ma'mūn in the ninth century A.D. ('Awaḍ 1986, p. 27).

¹⁸ According to 'Abdallāh Nadīm in the journal *Al-Ustādh*, 15 November, 1892, quoted in Ḥāfiẓ 1993, p. 65.

¹⁹ Ḥāfiẓ 1993, pp. 87-89. Rhymed prose titles and simplified plots closer to *maqāmāt* were characteristic traits. Even though the translation movement was in its "primordial" stage, the public demand for increased variety in subject matter was great, indicating an evolution in the artistic sensibilities of Egyptian audiences.

²⁰ See Brugman 1984, p. 24 for commentary on the literary quality of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's translation and 'Awaḍ 1986, p. 28 for analysis of the political implications of the work.

(Newspapers) are circulated in the city and sold to all people who want to buy them... all French men are authorised to write what they think, to praise or criticise anything they might find praiseworthy or inviting of criticism... they have complete freedom to do so, provided they do not cause harm (Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī in 'Awaḍ 1986, p. 40).

The populist spirit of the French press imbued the thoughts of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, inciting him to revolutionise the fledgling Egyptian print journalism industry. Although the Arabic printing press came with the French in 1798, it also left with them following the end of the occupation in 1801. Two decades later, the Būlāq printing press was founded in 1824 at Muḥammad 'Alī's request. Shortly thereafter, the first Arabic newspaper, *Al-Waqā'ī' al-Miṣriyya* went into circulation (1828). *Al-Waqā'ī'*... was originally a bi-lingual paper - Arabic and Turkish - with precedence given to the Turkish portion. The first draft of the news was apparently written in Turkish and then translated into Arabic ('Awaḍ 1986, p. 29). Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī joined the staff of the newspaper in 1834, but resigned after only a year, disgruntled with the overt bias towards Ottoman news.

In 1842, however, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was offered full editorial control of the newspaper. He accepted, and embarked on a project of transformation of *Al-Waqā'ī'*... He reversed the precedent of translating Turkish into Arabic and gave priority to Egyptian news, relegating the French, Ottoman and foreign information to secondary pages. The content of the editorials, previously praise pieces for the Pasha, were also supplanted by edifying, "analytical... articles on domestic and foreign affairs" ('Awaḍ 1986, p. 29). In fact, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī is credited with having written the first *maqāla* (article) in Arabic (Brugman 1984, p. 22). Additionally, he introduced literary articles and expanded the circulation, personally ensuring that literate individuals outside of the *bey* class received copies ('Awaḍ 1986, p. 30). So drastic were the modifications that he was forced by the government to withdraw the format changes one year later. Clearly, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī had touched a sensitive nerve of the administration. Yet despite the fact that he had to rescind the alterations in form, the content as advocated by the *imām* remained essentially the same ('Awaḍ 1986, p. 29). Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī had voiced the nationalist aspirations of his countrymen, and that drive would be difficult to squelch.

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's next foray into the field of journalism was not until very late in his life, in the form of an appointment by the liberal ruler Ismā'īl to the post of editor of Egypt's most prominent bi-monthly magazine, *Rawḍat al-madāris*, in 1870. Here, the *imām* found a vehicle to promulgate the issues only alluded to some decades earlier in *Al-Waqā'ī'*. Louis 'Awaḍ notes that under Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's editorship, women's rights figured highly among the subjects discussed, laying ground for future advocates of

universal education and equality of the sexes like Qāsim Amīn ('Awaḍ 1986, p. 30). Ever the educator, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī made provision for students to receive the magazine free of charge. Through these reforms and his pro-nationalist articles, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was not only exposing the Egyptian reading public to concepts prevalent in Western democracies, but was also engaged in redefining the terms of dialogue altogether. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and the journalists of his generation "planted the seeds" for a different conception of affiliation and community and assisted in altering the sensibility of their readership. These magazines and newspapers brought the issue of *al-waṭan*, the nation, to the forefront. This, as opposed to the Azharite concept of *umma*, the Muslim community, or *milla*, any other particular religious affiliation, marked a real unifying point for the country (Ḥāfiẓ 1993, pp. 98-99). The *Madrasat al-alsun*'s emphasis on teaching national history and geography along with language helped to concretise this notion. Finally, the new reading public demanded information and literature which reflected their reality. As the progressive elements of society began to gain ground, a more direct, less ornate approach to writing was appreciated (Ḥāfiẓ 1993, p. 103).

Much is made of the assertion that the ideological component of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's reforms is rooted in a foreign philosophical tradition²¹. That is to say, the young scholar's assertion of Egypt's autonomy as a nation-state (separate and distinct from Anatolian rule) whose essence is rule by natural right or popular mandate, the separation of religion and state and most importantly for the purposes of this study, the modernisation of the Arabic language, was based primarily on ideas "imported" from France and therefore incompatible with any indigenous mode of thought. The auspicious timing of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's stay in Paris does little to refute this argument. Undoubtedly, the uprisings that culminated in the July 1830 revolution against the French monarchy left their mark on Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī. However, the usage of terms such as "foreign" and "imported" in this context implies reductive thought at best and an imprecise understanding of history at worst.

The intellectual and cultural flourishing which occurred during and after Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's time was not merely a function of Western values finding their way into Egypt and taking hold. Though 1798 is commonly given as the date for both Egypt's initial "encounter" with France and the onset of the *nahḍa*, Ḥāfiẓ looks further back, contending that the *nahḍa* had been underway for nearly a century before that time

²¹ See Brugman 1984 and M.M. Badawī's introduction to the Modern Arabic Literature volume of the Cambridge History of Arabic Literature (1992) for examples of this assertion.

(Ḥāfiẓ 1993, p. 39).²² The evidence of this flourishing was manifested most visibly in the proliferation of Sufi orders, or *turuq*, around the turn of the eighteenth century. These orders served as forerunners to the literary salon, or *majlis*, which came into being in the fourth decade of the century. Al-Amīr Raḍwān al-Jalfī is credited for having initiated the first *majlis* in 1738, bringing together Azharites and literary scholars to discuss issues of classical poetry, language and theology²³. These salons reflected the emergence of an educated merchant class and new demographic shifts to urban centres. Of greater significance, however, is that these salons brought about what Ḥāfiẓ calls "the rebirth of a critical consciousness among writers of the middle classes" (Ḥāfiẓ 1993, p. 41). This honing of the sensibilities meant that the cultural elite was then able to respond to French culture with a measure of discernment in 1798 (Ḥāfiẓ 1993, p. 41). The extent to which the salon movement affected the wider reading and writing public is difficult to ascertain. Ḥāfiẓ provides no indication of the size of the movement itself.²⁴ Regardless of the numerical significance of the movement, the point the author makes is noteworthy for two reasons: First, it establishes that there was (at least) a period of cultural and intellectual germination prior to the French invasion of Egypt. Secondly, one can imagine that the dialogue and ideas generated at these gatherings would have reached Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī by means of his mentor and benefactor, Shaykh Al-‘Aṭṭār, who was in regular attendance at one or more of the salons.

As concerns the issue of authenticity, however, Juan Ricardo Cole's research, which traces Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's philosophical grounding to eleventh century thought is more convincing. Examining Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's often cited work on ethics, *Manāhij al-albāb al-Miṣriyya fī mabāhij al-ādāb al-‘aṣriyya* ("The Paths of Egyptian Minds in the Joys of Modern Manners"), Cole points to uncredited references and quotations from two influential tenth and eleventh century Arab philosophers, ‘Alī b. Ḥasan al-

²² Earlier in his book (p.19), Ḥāfiẓ poses an interesting rhetorical question: If the arrival of new narrative forms was simply a matter of wholesale "importation" from the West, then why did it take more than a century following the introduction of the printing press for the Arabic novel and short story to emerge in their mature forms?

²³ The most prominent of these *majālis* were the *Wafa’iyya* and *Bakriyya* salons, Ḥāfiẓ 1993, p. 41.

²⁴ Ḥāfiẓ tells us that by 1881, 554,930 people in Egypt roughly qualified as "literate." The population at that time was 5,803,381, which meant that 91.7% of the population was still illiterate. An additional impediment to the literary movement was the simple fact the prices of monthly journals were relatively high, what amounted to 15-20% of the per capita monthly income, which was, in the 1880's, approximately \$5.14, pp. 83-84.

Māwardī (974-1058) and Abū 'Alī b. Muḥammad Miskāwayh (932-1030). The inclusion of these extracts in his own book suggests first that Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī wished to popularise the beliefs of these philosophers and secondly, that both writers had a profound impact on Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's own way of thinking, equal to or greater than that of the French philosophers usually cited (Rousseau, Montesquieu, etc.). Al-Māwardī's work, entitled *Adab al-dunyā wa 'l-dīn*, was pivotal in impressing upon Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī the "division of civilisation into spiritual and material" sectors and the necessity of "a moderate emphasis on the material" (Cole 1980, p. 44). The influence of Miskāwayh appears to have been more extensive and awaits thorough exploration. Here, a brief summary of his life and philosophy must suffice.

Miskāwayh was a man of several professions - librarian, historian, but above all, philosopher of the Mu'tazilī tradition. He spent most of his life in the cities of Rayy and Baghdad, great centres of Mu'tazilī learning at the time. Miskāwayh's book, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, was to enjoy a wide readership at the turn of the twentieth century, thanks in large part to Muḥammad 'Abduh's appeals to have it included in the Azhar curriculum, but in Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's time, few were familiar with the work²⁵. It was Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's firm rooting in the Mu'tazilī tradition, which he acquired primarily through Miskāwayh, that was most probably the source of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's openness to Western philosophy and science.

Defining Mu'tazilī doctrine is no small endeavour, for in actuality, it came to encompass a number of varied schools of thought as the movement spread from Baghdad to Persia and, much later, Egypt. The Mu'tazila originally came into being due to a debate within the community of legal scholars over the defining of Muslims guilty of serious offences. For the purposes of this research, however, we need only to focus on the tenets concerning the acquisition of knowledge. At its centre lies the conviction that scientific inquiry and spirituality are complementary elements of a higher process whose aim is achieving "nearness to God." Miskāwayh expresses it in this manner:

no man...can reach the stage of happiness and perfection save through the pursuit of philosophy and the attainment of a degree of objectivity, including the acceptance of truth *no matter where or with whom it may be* (Cole 1980, p. 40, italics mine).

The implications of this statement are tremendous. If it is as Miskāwayh sees it,

²⁵ This would explain why Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was able to include sections of *Tahdhīb* in his own *Manahij al-albāb* without giving credit. Cole, p. 36.

that "the distinctive virtue of the human soul...lies in seeking science and knowledge" (*'ulūm wa ma'ārif*) in the larger sense, then observance and study of the *Sharī'a* figures only as a component of this process; an integral part, but incomplete on its own, nonetheless (Cole 1980, p. 39). It is significant, Cole notes, "that when Miskāwayh came to speak of the highest level of man's attainment, he identified it *solely* with philosophy and did not even mention the *Sharī'a*" (Cole 1980, p. 39). The pursuit of secular knowledge is therefore critical to the spiritual development of the individual, Miskāwayh might argue, for it brings him one measure closer to an understanding of the nature of God. Additionally, Miskāwayh's argument implies that knowledge knows no nationality, an appealing assertion for the likes of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī. In its most distilled version, Miskāwayh's position is one which views secular study not only as complementary to one's religious duties but as *part and parcel* of one's religious duties (Cole 1980, p. 41). Given this background, it is hardly surprising that Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī would become such a staunch advocate for universal education and instilling scientific inquiry.

What emerges from the pages of *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz* and *Manāhij al-albāb* is not so much evidence of a new understanding of the world and scientific knowledge as a "revival of tenth and eleventh century practical philosophy." Whereas the traditional Azharites chose to view the world in terms of believers and non-believers (*Mu'minūn vs. Kāfirūn*), Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's worldview held civilisation and ignorance (*Taḥaddūn*, or *Tamaddun vs. Jāhiliyya*) to be on opposite ends of its spectrum. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's outlook saw society consisting of three distinct strata, the first and lowest being the *martabat al-ḥāml al-mutawaḥḥishīn*, which was comprised of primitive, polytheistic peoples. One step above was the *martaba al-barābara al-khishinīn*, in which he would include the bedouin, who he claimed "have a measure of sociability and harmony," an awareness of honour, ...knowledge of religion, farming, building, etc." It is significant that the bedouins' religious awareness does not earn them membership in the highest level of society, which he calls the *Ahl al-ādāb wa 'l-taḥaddūn wa al-tamaddun* ('Amara 1973, p. 19).²⁶ This third group is characterised by sedentary civilisation (*'umrān*), literacy and knowledge of science and industry. Throughout *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz*, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī reiterates the point that the fundamental trait of the *Ahl al-adāb* is a nature of scientific inquiry. In the introduction to that book, he criticises the limitations of the *'ulamā'* (scholars/learned people) of his age, insistent on the study of

²⁶ Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī alternates usage of *tamaddun* with the synonymous word *tamaṣṣur* (lit. "Egyptianising") to connote civilisation.

jurisprudence to the exclusion of other essential elements, including, notably, the development of the language (Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī in 'Amara 1973, p. 20). Neither did Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī limit his critique to the Muslim majority. In another section of *Takhlīṣ*, he compares the Christian orthodoxy of France with the Copts of Egypt, and argues that like their Muslim counterparts, the Copts lack the disposition of scientific inquiry that the French seem to encourage among a majority of their people ('Amara 1973, p. 22). And in yet another discussion, he states his point in no uncertain terms:

The 'Ulamā' of France are not (necessarily) men of religion, for theological exegesis is not the knowledge that builds a civilisation and a cultural life and he who believes otherwise is deluded (Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī in 'Amara 1973, p. 23).

Another scholar who noted that many precepts of French Enlightenment thinking were not unfamiliar to Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was Albert Hourani. In his brief biography of the *imām*, Hourani states that it was the resonance that he felt with French Enlightenment thinking, because of his exposure to the likes of Miskāwayh, which led him to believe that the ideals of democracy and Islam could be reconciled (Hourani 1983, p. 70). A pioneer in many respects, it was also Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī who first pointed out the relationship between education and democracy. In the new framework of Egyptian Islamic democracy, the common man was to play an active role in government (Hourani 1983, p. 70). Education and improving literacy were pre-requisites to achieving his goal. If love of country and equality were to be inculcated, these principles would have to be explained in a systematic way (Hourani 1983, p. 71). This meant first and foremost a universalisation of education - for boys and girls (Hourani 1983, p. 72), a shift from *katātīb* pedagogy to a more secular, scientific-based curriculum, and most of all, modernisation of the Arabic language (Kilpatrick 1974, p. 1).

This, then, is the essence of Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's contribution: some deem him a "masterful assimilationist," never fearing the assault of technological innovation, looking to methods of benefiting from such developments while at the same time standing firmly against the imperialist aims of foreign powers ('Amara 1973, p. 18); others see his strength in his role as a sympathetic mediator. Both assertions are essentially correct - two sides of the same coin. And these qualities are both essential to and typical of this category of individuals termed the cultural elite. For it is the cultural elite who are uniquely qualified to hold a mirror to their own society and adjust the image accordingly, as the following passage from *Takhlīṣ* demonstrates:

It seemed then that the café extended indefinitely, *until I saw my own*

reflection in the mirrors and realised that the sense of roominess in the café was due to the properties of reflecting glass. The mirrors in Egypt simply double one's image... The European mirrors function as they do because there are several mirrors on each of the walls (Naddaf 1986, p. 80).

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's description of one of the first French cafés he visited is very telling. Here, the west is not simply an object to be described, distant and unrelated to the observer. Instead, the image is one in which Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī himself figures noticeably, playing an interactive role. The mirror "provides a *locus of exchange of mutual reflection...* between two seemingly oppositional forces" (Naddaf 1986, p. 76, italics mine). In this process of reflection, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī came to discover himself and his own culture more fully and obtained the insight of the West without drastic compromise.

Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's life story plays a fundamental role in a study of this nature in that it encompasses so many aspects of our definition of the term *cultural elite*. Within the pages of his life, we find numerous examples of mediation of one's environment for a wider public, confrontation with the structures and representatives of authority and a lifetime of interpretation of an ever-changing, modernising world.

3. Methods of Criticism of Contemporary Arabic Literature

Criticism of any sort is meant to be a tool to elucidate the meanings and artistic qualities of a work. It is the present writer's firm belief that criticism should neither serve as an end unto itself nor should it be artificially or arbitrarily imposed on a text. The issue at hand, then, is to define the position of criticism in relation to the particular situation of modern Arabic literature and to determine "in what sense a specific critical approach can help not only in rendering a true account of its nature and development, but also of giving it meaning and relevance within the context of the contemporary situation" of Arabic literature (Irele in Haywood 1977, p. 11). Negotiating the fine balance between interpretations of history and fiction is the aim of this method. The Egyptian critic Sāmiya Meḥrez identifies the objective of the critic of Arabic literature in this manner, citing the thoughts of another literary analyst:

[He or she seeks] to develop approaches that are historically informed and critically alert to interpretation of specific artefacts without being narrowly historicist [in reducing texts to mere documentary symptoms of contexts] or formalist [in isolating and remaining vigorously but ascetically - at times rather precariously - within the internal workings of the texts] (LaCapra in Mehrez 1994, pp. 11-12).

The spirit conveyed in the passage quoted above corresponds cogently with the intentions of this research. The question we wish to pose is not simply, "what makes a text good and what tools does one use to evaluate this?" but "what makes a text good in a particular context and does it vary?" There remains much groundwork to be done from within and without the Arab world before the criticism of twentieth century Arabic literature is to achieve a thorough and coherent description of its subject. Here, it must suffice to deal with three topics briefly: First, in order to proceed towards a theory of Arabic criticism, the question of cultural specificity and criticism must be addressed. Secondly, a cursory look at the history of the development of contemporary Egyptian criticism will be provided. Thirdly, a few of the modes of criticism will be presented and a particular emphasis placed on the sociological approach, which is to be one of the primary methods utilised throughout this research.

Speaking at a conference in 1968 on African literature, the writer Abiola Irele delivered a paper dealing with the criticism of modern African literature in which he asserted the need for indigenous methods or schools of criticism. Although his comments were directed towards the works of Africans writing in English, certain parallels with Arabic literature may be drawn:

The terms of reference of evaluating modern African literature are being provided at the moment by the critical tradition which has grown up alongside western literature (Irele in Haywood 1977, p. 13).

This type of 'analysis from without' has resulted in two very different conditions, Irele argues. First, the language of criticism has become so rarefied as to exclude most outside readers of the coterie of critics - including, often, the writers themselves. In Irele's own words:

Our writers are analysed and commented upon with the use of concepts which in certain cases may be at a level well above what the writer himself is offering. Related to this use of an over-sophisticated critical approach is the application of such rigorous standards of evaluation that works with a certain interest and a certain value in themselves tend to be dismissed out of hand and treated without any sympathy (Irele in Haywood 1977, p. 13).

The effects of this approach are often demoralising for the writer, the author argues, defeating the ultimate purpose of criticism, which is, after all, constructive dialogue and mediation between the writer and a greater public.

An equally detrimental, if opposite, outcome has resulted from this method of 'analysis from without.' Irele explains:

At the other extreme is the kind of indiscriminate attention given to insignificant writers which has tended to create a confusion of values from which our better writers may eventually suffer (Irele in Haywood 1977, p. 13).

Here, the author condemns the "...uncritical acclaim of any and every African writer solely on the grounds of his origin; ...the kind of blanket appraisal that is unable to make the necessary discrimination between what is valuable and what is not" (Irele in Haywood 1977, p. 13).²⁷

Thus, both ends of the spectrum result in a kind of marginalisation of the entire field.

Many critics argue the need for a distinct indigenous approach on grounds more fundamental to the texts themselves. Questions of thematics, usage of language and genre are culturally determined and should be appreciated as such, they assert. In his book on modern African literature, David Cook offers the theme of alienation in order to illustrate how differing cultural contexts determine the impact or weight of a subject. While alienation might be indicative of a universal condition in a Western context, Cook argues that African writers and readers view this as an exceptional state (Cook 1977, pp. 5-8). With regard to language, Abiola Irele explains (in the previously cited paper) the varying levels of formality within certain Nigerian languages like Ijaw and Yoruba and the problems entailed in conveying these levels in a second language (Irele in Haywood, 1977, p. 20). We are met with similar difficulties in Arabic, not only in translation, but in the original as well, where a writer's choice to use standard or colloquial forms determines the extent of his or her readership.²⁸ Yet another crucial consideration arises with regard to mapping out

²⁷ Many post-colonial critics have touched on this subject. See, for instance, Aijaz Ahmad's commentary on the manner in which certain texts are immediately valorised upon translation into English and the authors bestowed with such sweeping sobriquets as, "The Voice of Malaysia," etc., Ahmad 1994, pp. 74-81 & esp. pp. 96-98.

²⁸ Indeed, this is a situation which obtains the world over. Throughout the Maghreb, the issue of authenticity versus expanded readership plays an important role in determining whether writers choose to write in Arabic or French. Paraguay is another suitable parallel in which the country's writers are

genre in contemporary Arabic fiction, for some critics assert that hybrids of the stereotypical Western novel or short story have emerged, and therefore, a different standard of evaluation is required²⁹. Sāmiya Meḥrez is one such critic who maintains that the material conditions of writing in the Arab world have placed upon authors the responsibility of serving as "underground historian" in addition to the duties of the traditional author of fiction:

Not only are writers involved in producing a story, but very frequently they are equally intent on producing the story *behind* that story: the historical, ideological and political context in which such a story (and not another) was not just possible but necessary" (Meḥrez 1994, p. 8).

She terms these types of writing "(hi)stories," and then proceeds to explain how various stylistic devices (multiple voices, interior monologue, the use of actual documents, references to earlier Arabic literary forms, etc.) assist in conveying this distinct form.

All three of these issues, then - language, theme and genre - appear to solidify the case for a culturally specific alternative critical form. Yet there are those who would take issue with this assertion, or at least point out the flaws inherent in this understanding. Writers such as Aijaz Aḥmad suggest that if the concern is that of "ghettoisation" of a national literature, this call for a distinct, culturally specific, alternative form of criticism might only expedite and exacerbate that situation of marginalisation. The only true alternative is an intertextual approach which refuses to treat the literatures of East and West as polar or binary opposites, emphasising instead what Aḥmad terms the "profound overlaps" between the writings of rural areas of the United States and Nigeria, for instance, or overlaps the present writer sees between Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Şun'allāh Ibrāhīm's *Al-Lajna*, or Flannery O' Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard To Find* with Fathī Ghānim's *Al-Rajul al-munāsib*, all the while cognisant and appreciative of the socio-cultural factors which make a particular national literature distinctive (Aḥmad 1992, pp. 103-113). Aḥmad's theory is grounded in an understanding of Marxist analysis which questions the validity of

factionalised according to the very political decision of whether to utilise the local Guarani or the language of their colonisers, Spanish.

²⁹ One critic in particular, Gaye Walton-Price, throughout her thesis on 1970's short stories in Egypt poses the supposition that the Arabic short story has been overburdened with the responsibility of representing history and that a new term for this form of "documentary-story" is necessary." Walton-Price 1990, p. 130.

applying terms like "First, Second and Third" to world cultures. This critic prefers to view the world as a unitary system, operating under a single mode of economic production in which various stages of development of capital are manifested. This qualification might appear to be purely semantic and the dangers of relying on Marxist analysis for literary interpretation are to be acknowledged³⁰, but the distinction is crucial: it alters the balance of power which critics such as Irele decried and allows for a dialogic relationship between the literatures of the world. In this sense, the "One World" theory is not so much a refutation of what preceded it, as an expansion of the general concept.

In the local sphere of Egypt, contemporary literary criticism remains a fledgling discipline, particularly with regard to prose literature. Although groups of recent critics may be loosely categorised by the literary magazines to which they contribute³¹, a brief survey of the development of criticism in the country demonstrates that very few "schools of thought" have solidified and gained widespread currency. A different sort of history bears itself out, in which individuals advanced an argument or criticised a predecessor, but claimed no adherence to any particular theory. David Samāḥ has written extensively on the subject, citing four luminaries as the predecessors of this still developing field: 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, Ṭaha Ḥusayn and Muḥammad Mandūr. To this list we may add Sayyid Quṭb, Salāma Mūsā and a handful of nineteenth century scholars who are equally worthy of mention.

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, critics schooled in a more traditional fashion began to depart from their original moorings and attempted to analyse the literary qualities of their contemporaries and the esteemed Arab writers of the past in a more objective and systematic manner. One such scholar was Ḥusayn al-Marsafī, a

³⁰ One of the crucial shortcomings of Marxist analysis of literature is its reductionist tendency, viewing all literary output as pure reflections of an economic mode of production and failing to acknowledge, for lack of a better phrase, the mystery of creation. The critic R.P. Blackmuir put it this way:

"While it is true and good that the arts may be used to illustrate social propaganda - though it is not a great use - you can no more use an economic insight as your chief critical tool than you can make much out of the Mass by submitting the doctrine of transubstantiation to chemical analysis" (Scott 1962, p. 328).

³¹ Madḥat Al-Jayyār refers to the writers for the critical magazine *Fuṣūl* as a prototype or a burgeoning literary school in his lecture entitled *The Development of Literary Criticism in Egypt*, given at the Center for Arabic Studies Abroad, Cairo, 31/1/96. Prior to this Eighties and Nineties generation magazine, there were, of course, a handful of seminal critical journals, including the short-lived *Gāliri* 68, edited by Idwār al-Kharrāt and *Al-Majalla*, edited by Yahyā Ḥaqqī.

blind *shaykh* trained at Al-Azhar, who in his text, *Al-Wasīla al-adabiyya li-'l-'ulūm al-'arabiyya* (1879), outlines the stylistic elements as well as the rules and tools for interpreting literary works. He taught the text for sixteen years at Dār al-'Ulūm, where *Al-Wasīla* was well received (Al-Jayyār 1996). The book represented part of the growing trend of looking to the West for inspiration: Al-Jayyār informs us that the book is in essence a translation of portions of Aristotle's logical writings, the *Organon* (Al-Jayyār 1996). Another writer rooted in the Aristotelian tradition was Qistājī Al-Ḥamsī, who at the turn of the century wrote *Manhal al-ruwwād fī 'ilm al-intiqād*, a book which detailed the requirements and characteristics of a high quality piece of work. Critical writing took on a more original form just a few years later in the first piece of comparative literature, *Fī muqārana bayn al-shi'r al-'arabī wa 'l-shi'r al-gharbī* by Muḥammad Rūḥ al-Khālidi. In this text, published around 1904, the works of Victor Hugo were contrasted with those of earlier Arab poets.

The seminal critics earned their reputation neither through translation nor comparative studies, however, but through a penetrating look within at the canon of Arabic literature. 'Abbās al-'Aqqād (1889-1964), for instance, established himself with his critique of the popular nationalist poet, Aḥmad Shawqī. In his book, *Al-Dīwān* (1921), Al-'Aqqād set forth the argument that Shawqī's poetry had very little intrinsic value but that he was held in such high regard purely because of the pro-nationalist sentiment evident in most of his work. Al-'Aqqād made the differentiation between *shi'r al-qushūr* (the poetry of externals or superficialities) and *shi'r al-jawhar* (the poetry of substance or essence), accusing Shawqī's work of belonging to the former (Al-Rabī' 1992). The aim of *shi'r al-jawhar*, Al-'Aqqād maintains, is to inspire humanity through its representations of beauty and freedom (Walton-Price 1990, p. 102). In this manner, Al-'Aqqād views poetry and literature in general as a national tool eminently more capable of transforming reality than mere sloganeering:

literature has always served society in its own way, and...it could not have been otherwise...the poet who teaches us to love beauty, teaches us to rebel against oppression. ...Poetry has its own special way of uplifting the life of nations, a way different from that of the politicians and social reformers (Walton-Price 1990, p. 103).

With its keen attention to the inner workings of the text and the text's ability to convey ideas of beauty and freedom, Al-'Aqqād's approach could be said to most closely resemble that of the formalist school. Together with 'Abd al-Raḥmān Shukrī and Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Qādir al-Māzinī, Al-'Aqqād formed an association - perhaps the first of its kind - concerned with the study of contemporary aesthetics (Al-Jayyār 1996). The *Madrasat al-Dīwān*, as it was commonly known, contributed articles to

the leading literary magazines and newspapers of the day, most notably, *Al-Risāla* and *Al-Dustūr* (Al-Rabī' 1992). Later, Al-'Aqqād moved from aesthetic concerns to a psychological approach to criticism in his book, *Ibn al-Rūmī: Ḥayātuhu min shi'rihi*. Al-'Aqqād's pioneering role in bringing modern literary notions to an Egyptian audience was crucial to the development of the field of study.

While some scholars assessed the form and function of poetry, others chose to examine the very essence of language and its suitability for a local audience. Salāma Mūsā (1887-1958), Copt, Fabian, referred to as "the greatest populariser of modern knowledge Egypt has ever produced" ('Awaḍ 1986, p. 182), devoted his attention to such a task. Mūsā took issue with those who held that the portrayal of beauty was to be the aim of literature, advocating instead a truthful representation of reality written in populist language in order to reach the widest audience possible. An extract from his personal testimony is worth quoting in full:

my struggle (is)...to create a popular Arabic writing style and to ensure that literature, science and culture as a whole should be within the reach of the people and not the privilege of a particular class. I have been reproached for having written about *mulukhiyya*, *bāmiya* and beans. Those who criticised me did so because of their distance from the people and their attachment to overblown literary doctrines according to which one should never lower oneself to mentioning such vulgar dishes, concentrating instead on "entertaining the spirit." I hold the contrary view that the writer's vocation is a humanitarian mission with the service of society and the promotion of mankind as its aim. The poor amongst our people, those whom foreign imperialism and local despotism have impoverished and starved, have no need of our descriptions of the beauty of a flower or the fragrance of jasmin. Humanity, not beauty, is the purpose of literature. And humanity demands of the humanist writer that he concern himself above all else with the subsistence of the people. Flowers and jasmine can wait (Mūsā in 'Abd al-Malik 1980, pp. 164-165).

Mūsā's emphasis on a "literature for the people written by the people in their own language" was entwined with the national struggle for independence from the British; literature was viewed as a vital and necessary weapon for the liberation of Egyptian minds. This approach, stressing the participation and engagement of the majority working classes to the development of a national culture, inspired a number of Marxist-oriented critics such as 'Abd al-'Azīm Anīs and Maḥmūd Amīn al-'Ālim (Al-Rabī' 1992).

Another pro-nationalist critic was Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888-1956), who is perhaps better known for his novel *Zaynab* (1913), which is widely regarded as the

first modern Egyptian novel³². The novel itself is an extension of the populist/nationalist philosophy of literature espoused by writers such as Mūsā and Haykal. Indeed, even the title page of the book attributes authorship anonymously to "a peasant Egyptian" ('Awad 1986, pp. 124-125). This title page provides a significant clue to Haykal's critical approach. Accordingly, all literature is seen as the product of a collective consciousness, not the effort of any individual artist. In order to fully understand a text, therefore, one must first turn to the collective (nation, religious affinity, etc.) which determined that work (Walton-Price 1990, p. 105). Armed with this sociological data, one can with near-scientific precision attribute cause to effect, environment to its literary manifestations. Walton-Price informs us that "this objective, scientific and deterministic approach to literary criticism held sway in Egypt up until the 1950s when strong voices of opposition began to discredit it and dispute its relevance to the study of literature" (Walton-Price 1990, p. 106).

The writer Ṭaha Ḥusayn (1889-1973) and his student Muḥammad Mandūr (1907-1965) represent a shift from both the reliance on societal analysis exhibited in Haykal's approach and the exclusively nationalist/class-based methods of Mūsā. Both Ḥusayn and Mandūr asserted that no societal theory could fully explain and account for the individual creative process. They also felt that the criticism of literature should reflect the nature of literature itself; that is to say that criticism too should be creative, artistic and evocative (Walton-Price 1990, p. 111). Ḥusayn acknowledged that contemporary Arabic literary criticism was still in its nascent stages, with its medieval predecessors passing on precious little in the way of theory. Therefore, Ḥusayn developed a very practical, collage-like approach to criticism in which borrowing and adapting European inspired modes of criticism was both permitted and desirable.³³ This was all in keeping with his general philosophy of knowledge which sought to link Egypt with a wider Mediterranean culture, its traditions, history and modes of thought. Ḥusayn was a voice of moderation between the advocates of modernisation

³² This assertion is currently in dispute among literary critics. While the vast majority accept *Zaynab* as the first of its kind in contemporary Egyptian writing, others cite Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Ḥaqqī's 1906 *qasīdat 'Adhrā' Dinshāway* as the first to employ the form. Other critics are attempting to look back even further. For more information on the debate, see Allen 1992, p. 190.

³³ It is worth noting that many of these early critics, despite their interest in establishing indigenous forms of criticism, were inspired by the ideas of European thinkers: Haykal's literary determinism was influenced by Hippolyte Taine, Mandūr's insistence on an intrinsically artistic method was inspired by Gustave Lanson, Mūsā drew inspiration from the Fabians of England during his period of doctoral study there, and Ḥusayn's questioning of the origins of *Jāhili* poetry had its philosophical roots in a Cartesian approach to gaining knowledge. For a more detailed development of these ideas, see Semah 1974, pp. 71-162.

and retrogression: "He urged the modernists who were calling for a cultural revival to learn from the past, rather than to reject its values, and incorporate the inherited values to build what is new" (Walton-Price 1990, p. 108). Ṭaha Ḥusayn's student, Muḥammad Mandūr, attempted to realise this objective in his thesis, *Al-Naqd al-manhajī 'ind al-'Arab* (1943), in which he outlined the elements of successful criticism: evaluation (*taqyīm*), interpretation (*tafsīr*), guidance (*tawjīh*) and reasoned explanation (*ta'līl*) (Walton-Price 1990, pp. 112-113). He then set out the requirements in order to achieve these objectives. With sensitivity to genuinely creative work, a wide exposure to a variety of texts and "a belief in certain human and social values...concerned with the origins, functions and aims of all arts," the critic can serve as the mediator between the writer and his or her wider audience, maintaining a balance between adherence to strict literary theory and cultivated personal taste (Walton-Price 1990, pp. 113-114). It is these tenets and this delicate balance to which this research aspires.

Having provided a brief and admittedly incomplete survey of some of the leading figures in the history of Egyptian literary criticism, it is now our task to fashion these ideas into a workable form. To summarise, these Egyptian critics represent at least four distinct approaches which may be generally classified as moral, psychological, sociological and formalist.³⁴ The moral critics examine ideologies within the text and emphasise this element, often to the detriment of stylistic considerations. They view literature as a critique of reality and concern themselves with the manner in which literature served humanity as a means of edification. The writings of Salāmā Mūsā typify this category. The psychological approach views literature as a manifestation of an individual and societal subconscious. Just as a psychoanalyst assesses the dreams of her patient, so too the critic serves as an analyst of the text, searching for evidence of conscious and particularly unconscious reference to the society and the self and their influence on the work. The later books of Al-'Aqqād represent this trend. Similarly, the sociological critics addressed the milieu of the artist and the manner in which the writer responds to his or her surroundings. Haykal and Mūsā were pivotal in bringing this method to the fore. Finally, there are the formalists, who base their analysis primarily on the inner workings of the text. Turning to specific elements such as language usage, plot structure, character development and literary devices, the formalists endeavour to "investigate the way in which these literary elements work on, and transform ideology," (Wolff 1981, p. 66) and assess "how these elements...are

³⁴ Here I am utilising terminology from Scott 1962.

integrated into a meaningful and distinct whole" (Walton-Price 1990, p. 92). Ṭaha Ḥusayn and Muḥammad Mandūr exemplify this tradition.

Ultimately, all four general methods will be utilised throughout the course of this research, but considerable weight will be given to both the formalist (often described as practical criticism) and sociological trends. It is hoped that this fusion of close textual analysis with sociological contextual evidence will provide an insightful reading of the literature at hand. The need for further close reading of Arabic texts is great and justifies a formalist approach. Here, I would like to mention briefly the impetus behind the sociological approach.

Any attempt to interpret literature from a sociological standpoint has at its base two assumptions: "that the fundamental impulses to these activities are themselves social, and that those aspects of human personality significant for them are the creation of society" (Spearman 1966, p. 227). Viewing literature as an art form whose primary impulse is social, it follows that analysis of any work must recognise and consider the "existing aesthetic conventions" of a society in order to place the work in a framework against which its innovation (or lack thereof) may be judged (Wolff 1962, p. 61). Likewise, the conditions of literary production must be understood and acknowledged. Our awareness of these 'extra-literary' influences, taken in conjunction with close readings, helps us to determine the significance of what is stated and, often even more important, what is left unsaid.

4. An Introduction to the "Crisis of the Intellectuals" (*Azmat al- Muthaqqafīn*)

Coming to terms with much of Egyptian literature written since the 1952 revolution necessitates an understanding of the political activities and responses to the Nāṣir and Sādāt regimes, for these activities, their impact on the lives of Egypt's citizens - the intellectuals and others - and the reactions of opposition groups to the policies of those regimes imbue the works of most of the writers of the period. The question of the pivotal role that the Nāṣir administration and the exigencies of a newly independent developing nation played in tempering the artistic sensibility would furnish a topic worthy of separate, detailed research, and has done in the past³⁵. Here,

³⁵ See, most notably, Muḥammad Hasanayn Haykal's *Azmat al-muthaqqafīn* (Cairo, 1961), Ghālī Shukrī's books *Al-muntamī fī 'l-adab al-'arabī* (Cairo, Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1969) and *Al-Muthaqqafūn wa 'l-sulṭa fī Miṣr* (Cairo, Dār Akhbār al-Yawm, 1990), his shorter article *Al-adab al-Miṣrī ba'd al-khāmis min Yūniyo*, *Al-Ṭalī'a*, vol. 5, no.5, May 1969, Selma Botman's article, "Egyptian Communists and The Free Officers, 1950-1954," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 22 (1986) pp. 350-366 and Samaḥ Idrīs' book *Al-Muthaqqaf al-'arabī wa 'l-sulṭa* (Beirut, Dār al-Ādāb, 1992).

we must content ourselves with a simple backdrop against which to refer to the short stories and novels to be discussed later.

From the early years of the 1960's, authors of fiction and non-fiction alike spoke of the condition of writing in Egypt with a twin sense of urgency and regret: urgency in that the writers of this newly independent country felt a responsibility to urge the reading public to ask a variety of questions about the progress of the country; regret at their inability to do so. Acquiring a sense of the true nature of this creative dilemma is no easy task, for each individual writer assessed the situation differently. Several writers, most notable among them Najib Maḥfūz, Iḥsān 'Abd al-Quddūs and Yūsuf al-Sibā'i, were in agreement that the lack of publishing opportunities posed a tremendous technical difficulty.³⁶ As the number of magazines declined through the decade, commercial demands forced the existing magazines to give precedence to the better-known, well-established authors. All three writers contend that Egypt had no shortage of writers at the time. Al-Sibā'i deems the crisis a "qualitative" one, but fails to elaborate on this statement.³⁷ Yūsuf Idrīs helps to define this qualitative deficiency when he labels the narrative crisis (*Al-Azma al-qīṣaṣiyya*) as one of "an inability of society to face itself in the art of the writer."³⁸ The suppression of the critical voice in literature, a condition which would only reluctantly begin to alter following the disastrous defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, perhaps represented an unwillingness on the part of the reading public and the editing and publishing establishment to face their society's shortcomings truthfully.

Ghālī Shukrī, literary critic and commentator, seems to place the blame more squarely in the hands of the Nāṣir administration. In a retrospective article dealing with the literary trends of the 1960's, Shukrī decries the ever-widening gap between the cultural elite (*Al-muthaqqafūn*) and the revolutionary leadership, a heedlessness on the part of the government towards the work of novelists such as Najib Maḥfūz, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī and the playwright Sa'd al-Dīn Wahba (Shukrī 1969, pp. 104-105). Writers' call for the establishment of more democratic institutions (i.e. - free speech and increased political participation) to accompany the economic reforms already initiated by the administration seemed to fall on deaf ears, Shukrī argues.

Majdī Wahba cites a series of characteristic features of the crisis in 'Abd al-

³⁶ *Ḥiwār ḥawla azmat al-qīṣa al-qāṣira fī 1965*, pp. 124-128.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Malik's book, the most important of which were:

- The absence of involvement of the intellectuals in the actual military action of July 1952.
- The particularly heterogeneous nature of intellectual groups in Egypt, which led to the lack of a unified "vanguard," especially in comparison to the situation in other developing nations in Africa.
- On a related note, the lower-middle class socio-economic status of a considerable number of Egyptian intellectuals, which meant that this group could stand to make substantial financial gains by acquiescing to the government's well-intentioned, if poorly defined aims, rather than choosing to remain as disinterested critics.
- Finally, the proliferation of "foreign models" of political organisation and noticeable absence of any indigenous philosophy of society around which the cultural elite could rally and promote ('Abd al-Malik 1968, p. 195).

'Ādil Ḥamūda suggests the fragmentation of the educational system into two separate and distinct tracks, religious and secular, and the resultant "schizophrenia" this has produced in intellectual circles as a key element of the crisis.³⁹ But Ḥamūda concurs with Waḥba's fundamental point, which is that the intellectual crisis in Egypt stems primarily from the strained relationship between the temporal authorities and the cultural elite.

Anwar 'Abd al-Malik, in his work on the influence of the military on life in Egypt, identifies the intellectuals as "the chief force of renewal and national motivation" prior to 1952 ('Abd al-Malik 1968, p. 190). The history of intellectual involvement in Egypt's nationalist struggle is extensive, dating back to 1882, he argues (although surely, one can trace evidence of advocacy of Egyptian nationalism to at least half a century before this date - see the above section on Rifā'ī al-Ṭaḥṭāwī) when one of the leading reformist religious scholars, Muḥammad 'Abduh, offered his support, and consequently, a considerable amount of legitimacy, to the 'Urābī revolt ('Abd al-Malik 1968, p. 202). Following the 1952 overthrow, however, this intelligentsia began to falter, or rather, failed to lend its wholehearted support to the

³⁹ 'Ādil Ḥamūda, *Azmat al-muthaqqafin* (Cairo, Maktabat Madbūlī, 1985), p. 63. Many writers cite this problem as one of the crucial factors in determining this crisis. The contemporary writer Salwa Bakr described this condition as the "randomisation of education" (*'ashwāiyyat al-t'lim*) in a personal interview, April 1998 and in an as yet unpublished article entitled "The Roots of the Randomisation of Education of Women in Egypt," arguing that the lack of consolidation and integration of the religious and secular curricula of Egyptian education has led to a disjointed, undereducated, and 'randomised' society which is destined to produce the types of ideological clashes the country is currently witnessing.

revolution's goals. This reluctance to advance the aims of the revolution seemed to stem from several sources. The first, and most important reason in this context, was related to the essence of the writer and his craft:

The intellectual feels that Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir is basically right, but at the same time he feels the need to formulate a certain amount of criticism by the very fact of his nature. This internal contradiction in the very heart of the Arab intellectual's personality tears him apart inside and makes him an unproductive being.⁴⁰

From the outset of the Free Officers' assumption of power, the cultural elite questioned the legitimacy of the term "revolution" with regard to the events of 1952. Novelist and playwright Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm refers to this dispute early in his critique of the Nāṣir administration, *'Awdat al-wa'ī* (1974). Revolution, many intellectuals argued, typically implied a genuinely transformative uprising led and carried out by civilians. Upheavals in nineteenth-century France, Russia in 1917 and Egypt in 1919 exemplified this tradition. The 1952 take-over, on the other hand, amounted to little more than a military overthrow, which then attempted to co-opt the vocabulary of revolutionary activity. What began as a "movement," and was even termed "the blessed movement" by members of Egypt's literary circles was rather rapidly and simplistically redefined by the Free Officers as The Revolution. The cultural elite complied with the semantic shift but disputed the essence of this transformation (Al-Ḥakīm 1974, pp. 20-21). Consider the comments of the Egyptian Communist Party leader, Ismā'īl Ṣabrī 'Abd Allāh:

We were confused first because of two contradicting things. We thought that objectively the overthrow of the King was something very positive but due to our political education we believed that nothing good and durable could come from the army. The army was a tool of oppression, conservative by definition and to us there was nothing that could be called a progressive coup d'etat (Bottman 1986, p. 354).

The overarching sentiment of the cultural elite mirrored the concern expressed in 'Abd Allāh's statement above. Had the nation struggled to achieve the ouster of a despotic regime, only to replace it with another? The intellectuals' point that the *very structure* of governance required amendment was given little consideration by the military regime. This was particularly evident during the first eight years of Free Officer control, when Nāṣir was most skilled in the ability to elicit the support of rival

⁴⁰ Majdī Wahba, speaking at a conference on the "Crisis of the Intellectuals," June 12, 1961. Taken from 'Abd al-Malik, p. 195.

opposition groups (the Communists and the Muslim Brothers, for instance) and subsume their concerns to the rather nebulous "revolutionary" platform of the Free Officers. Najīb Maḥfūz makes great use of these ideas in his novel, *Mirāmār* (1967), a story which recounts the interactions of the guests of the pension Mirāmār in Alexandria, with each guest representing a varying political/philosophical strain, competing for the affection of the Egypt symbol, a servant girl from the countryside named Zahra. Utilising techniques of multiple narration, Maḥfūz provides us with a broad microcosm of the political scene of the late 1950's. All of the characters - the landed elite *bey*, Ṭalba Marzūq, included - pay "lip-service" to the need for a revolution, yet even the most "committed" of the characters expresses his misgivings. Following his review of the political vacillations of his era, the ageing Wafdist 'Āmir Wajdī can only supply tacit support to the Revolution. (Maḥfūz 1967, p. 12) And Sirḥān Baḥayri, the active, engaged member of the Arab Socialist Union, appears at times only slightly more convinced:

"Some people don't like the Revolution. But look at it this way: What other system could we have in its place? If you think clearly, you'll realise that it has to be either the Communists or the Muslim Brotherhood. Which of those would you prefer to the Revolution?"

"Neither," he [Ṭalba Marzūq] replies hastily.

I [Sirḥān] smile in triumph. "Exactly. Let that be your comfort" (Maḥfūz 1967, p. 168).

The lack of definition or certain ideology left intellectuals precious little to embrace or shun. Just as the characters of Maḥfūz's novel must rely in negative definitions and elusive notions of the aims of the revolution, so too in reality were the cultural elite forced to lend uncritical support to the cause. An unwillingness to condemn the movement which they viewed as fundamentally beneficial and favourable combined with a genuine absence of free speech led to a kind of literary retardation, a situation in which authors were rendered powerless and indifferent. The situation that obtained was a crisis (*azma*), indeed. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm likened the condition to that of a tree, whose trunk is infested with woodworms: As long as the tree maintains an exterior semblance of health, no real cause for alarm or investigation exists (Al-Ḥakīm 1974, pp. 32-33). But eventually, Al-Ḥakīm argued, the failings of the regime would manifest themselves in an even more extreme fashion.

Quick to meet the charges of the intellectuals, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal, Nāṣir's chief policy advisor and editor of the establishment newspaper *Al-Ahrām*, was

more critical of the cultural elite themselves, arguing that they had, in effect, relinquished their role "as the vanguard in the leadership of the masses" (Cobham 1974, p. 93). Haykal cites the 1956 appointment of Major Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn as Minister of Education as a glaring example of this failure of the elite to assume their position in society. Ḥusayn was appointed not only to the post of minister of education, but was declared secretary of nuclear energy as well. This, from a man whose sole education was that received in the barracks (Ḥamūda 1985, p. 242). His was hardly an exceptional case. Indeed, Semah Idrīs reports that only 12% of the Free Officers were either university graduates or members of political parties prior to their assumption of power (Idrīs 1992, p. 36). Under Major Ḥusayn, criticism of the regime emerging from the universities was swiftly curbed, and the spirit of Western liberal reform (as advocated by educators such as Ṭaha Ḥusayn and Aḥmad Luṭfi al-Sayyid) was likewise denounced (Cobham 1974, pp 92-94). What is curious is that Haykal seemed to believe that the intellectuals had genuine outlets of expression and recourse against appointments such as these in 1956, when it appears that the "establishment of a virtual state monopoly" on means and modes of expression was well on its way as early as 1953.

Typical of this state control of intellectual endeavour was Major Salāḥ Desūqī's reply to critics who stressed the powerlessness of the cultural elite when he asserted that the military was, in effect, the intelligentsia of the country and that any voices of dissension were merely the product of foreign agitation ('Abd al-Malik 168, p. 196). Thus, the government orthodoxy dismissed the Muslim Brothers as a small band of "fanatics" and the Communists were deemed Zionist agents. The military was in search of an ideology, an ideology propounded by Egypt's intellectuals, but synchronous with the outlook of the commanding forces, not independent and autonomous. The slogans of the Revolution ("No sound above the sound of the battle," (Al-Ḥakīm 1974, p. 56) "All freedom to the people and no freedom to the enemies of the people," (Stagh 1993, p. 24) "compliance before competence," "control before creativity," and finally, "trust before expertise") (Ḥamūda 1985, p. 240) illustrated both the absence of a consolidated ideology and the military's intent to wholly eclipse the purveyors of national cultural thought.⁴¹

The extent and breadth of the regime's direct involvement in the organisation and

⁴¹ 'Abd al-Malik reiterates this thesis in *Egypt: Military Society* - that there was, in fact, no ideology underpinning the Free Officers' assumption of power, only an ill-defined commitment to a general idea of reform under banners ("Unity, order and work," "Double the national income in ten years.") which could only be regarded as over-simplifications.

presentation of artistic output was vast. In 1956, for instance, a Higher Council for the Guidance of Arts and Letters (*Al-Majlis al-a'lā li ri'āyat al-adab wa 'l-funūn*) was established. Headed by the writer and Colonel of the Cavalry Corps, Yūsuf Al-Sibā'ī, it was this council's aim "to direct, supervise and channel literary, artistic and research activities within the prescribed goals of the Revolution" (Vatikiotis 1961, p. 126). Al-Sibā'ī's 'prescriptive presence' was felt in a number of cultural circles. In addition to his responsibilities with the Council, al-Sibā'ī served simultaneously as the editor of one of Egypt's most prominent literary monthly magazines, *Al-Risāla al-jadīda*. A government subsidised journal, *Al-Risāla* fell under the typical constraints of the Higher Council. And finally in this same year, Al-Sibā'ī was the president of the Short Story Club (*Nādī al-qīṣṣa al-qaṣīra*), an organisation whose monthly contests were instrumental in giving the new names of Egyptian writing greater exposure. Vatikiotis tells us of a young writer whose work on labour conditions in the countryside failed to receive the highest acclaim "because," in Al-Sibā'ī's estimation, "the writer's ideology was confused" (Vatikiotis 1961, p. 127).

"Overnight," Ḥamūda comments, "they (the military) became experts in every one of life's affairs...from foreign affairs to social concerns...from atomic and nuclear energy to football and pitches" (Hamūda 1985, p. 239). And nowhere did this scheme seem more incongruous than in the field of artistic and literary output. As was the case with *Al-Risāla al-jadīda*, the regime established itself as the sole benefactors of intellectual and cultural life. In 1953, *Al-Jumhūrīya*, an official newspaper was created, edited by the young Free Officer Anwar al-Sādāt; in 1956, a more progressive, intellectual-based newspaper, *Al-Masā'*, was brought into existence under the leadership of Khālid Muhī al-Dīn, a left-wing officer. *Al-Majalla*, for years regarded as the vehicle for exposure of new literary work, was established in 1957, with its editorial board carefully selected and approved by the military as well. That same year, the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance was created and a series of yearly grants and scholarships for writers and artists was initiated. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm compares this situation with the general state of the arts in his youth in which diversification of ownership seemed to allow for greater levels of freedom of speech:

The government did not even think about a literary competition which was announced in the twenties for playwrights. The one who thought about it and put up the money for its prizes was a private individual who paid out of his own pocket. In the 1952 revolution, politics, thought, civilisation and every activity was undertaken by a single hand and emanated from a single head....When the political side of the 1919 revolution ended, the civilisational and intellectual

revolution in Egypt began (Al-Ḥakīm 1974, pp. 70-71).⁴²

By the mid-1960's, virtually every new magazine (*Al-Kātib* in 1961, *Al-Ṭalī'a* in 1965, for instance) either had ties to the ministry of culture or to the establishment publishing houses like *Al-Ahrām* (Stagh 1993, p. 27).⁴³ The Nāṣirist system had achieved what writer Jamāl al-Ghiṭānī described as the "domestication of the intellectuals" (S. Idrīs 1992, p. 51).

Perhaps it would be useful to review briefly the literary, academic and political situation just prior to 1952 in order to gain a greater sense of the transformation of the literary milieu following the Free Officers' assumption of power. In his historical account of cultural forms in Egypt, Jacques Berque chronicles that country's literary and academic output, with a special emphasis on the post World War II period, a time in which intellectual activity re-emerged from a period of relative dormancy. Basing his assessment on the national annual literary bibliography issued by the Ministry of Education, *Al-Sijill al-thaqāfi* (1948, first edition), Berque enumerates the developments in the academic world. Aside from the predictable advancements in the already well-established fields of literary history and heritage, the author reports the burgeoning of social studies as an Egyptian field. "Essayists such as ('Abbās) al-'Aqqād examine(d) the relations of Islam with democracy" in a systematic manner for the first time, "Father Aryout's study of the peasantry, in its sixth edition, had now appeared in Arabic" (Berque 1972, p. 635). And great strides were being made in philosophy, where thinkers such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī were attempting a synthesis of Greek theories of knowledge with Arabic heritage (Berque 1972, p. 635).

In the wider realm of popular culture, the arts and print journalism experienced similar expansions in and around the post-World War II era. By the late forties, the film industry was already two decades in the making, with several films addressing the plight of the rural peasant worker (Aryout 1945, p. 158). By 1949, Egypt boasted no fewer than 18 daily newspapers, 11 hailing from Cairo. The weekly Arabic journals and papers numbered a staggering 192 by that same year (Berque 1972, p. 636). It was upon these weeklies that the early generations of writers of fiction relied almost exclusively as venues for their work. Elsewhere, the serial book industry

⁴² Najib Maḥfūz reiterates this sentiment in an interview with Fu'ād Dawwāra, explaining that the literary growth of the 50's and 60's paled in comparison to that of the 20's and 30's and that a primary source of the difference between the two periods was one of a general lack of freedom of expression in the later two decades, cited in S. Idrīs 1992, p. 51.

⁴³ A notable exception to this was *Gālirī* 68, created shortly after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, partly in reaction to the defeat.

began to gain ground, mostly under the advocacy and supervision of Taha Ḥusayn. Both *Iqra'* and the Golden Book series commenced under his tutelage in 1943 and 1951, respectively. And *Al-Hilāl* inaugurated its publication of novels in 1949. Marina Stagh informs us that the press was experiencing another upsurge just prior to the revolution: "By September 1951 the citizens of Cairo could choose between 21 dailies, 121 weeklies and 172 bi-weeklies, monthlies, quarterlies and those of more irregular issue."⁴⁴

Politically, the prevailing force advocating transformation and the national independence struggle was the Marxist intellectual wing. In the preface to his book, 'Abd al-Malik advances the idea that the limited amount of contact between the Soviet Union and Egypt from 1939 to 1952 led to the elaboration of an indigenous version of Marxism, but fails to develop this assertion ('Abd al-Malik 1968, p. xxii). Indigenous or no, the role that the Marxists played in bringing together the various progressive strains in Egyptian society was paramount. Shortly after the turmoil of the Second World War, trade unionists, intellectuals and "Wafdist youth" all assembled under the aegis of the Marxist-led and inspired National Committee of Workers and Students in 1946. For more than half a decade, this organisation proved to be instrumental in promoting the independence/national movement. It was this committee that was responsible for bolstering national support for the Wafd party and bringing them back to political primacy in 1949 ('Abd al-Malik 1968, p. xiii). Through the committee's influence, the Wafd was persuaded to remain critical of the partial independence offered in the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty. The organisation was not averse to direct action, as the four month spate of guerrilla raids on the British base in the Suez Canal (October 1950-January 1951) indicates ('Abd al-Malik 1968, p. xiii). What was emerging was a viable, broad-based political party, termed the "United National Front... based on popular action, inspired by the left and under the patronage of Muṣṭafā al-Naḥḥās, ageing leader of the Wafd" ('Abd al-Malik 1968, p. xiii).

What the committee had not anticipated was the assumption of power by the Free Officers on July 23, 1952. Nor had they expected the repression of progressive forces to be as severe. The detrimental effect this had on political and cultural optimism was predictable. Even a cursory look at the manner in which the Free Officers consolidated authority demonstrates this point:

⁴⁴ Stagh 1993, pp. 10-11, from Ibrāhīm 'Abduh, *Taṭawwur al-ṣahāfa al-Miṣriyya*, (Cairo, 1982), pp. 346-348.

As early as August of 1952, members of the Communist party were targets for incarceration and, occasionally, death by official order. On August 12, 10,000 workers at the Miṣr Company textile factory in Kafr al-Dawwār went on strike. Several workers were killed and many injured as the army attempted to quell the uprising. The following day, two workers suspected of leading the insurrection were executed and many more jailed, including 30 suspected communists (Aoude 1994, p. 3).

Any indication of regard for political opposition and diversity was soon relinquished. On 16 January 1953, all political parties were dissolved and their property sequestered (Cobham 1974, p. 88).

Censorship of the press was well under way from the latter quarter of 1952, but culminated in the closing of the prominent leftist newspaper *Al-Miṣrī* in May of 1954 (Cobham 1974, p. 88). 1954 was a significant year in the administration's assertion of cultural ascendancy. Cairo's universities were particularly hard-hit that year, with nearly 70 professors - some Wafdist, some Marxist - summarily ejected for anti-regime sentiment ('Abd al-Malik 1968, p. 214). Following an assassination attempt on 26 October of the same year, the Nāṣir administration turned its attention towards another dynamic source of opposition: the Muslim Brotherhood (*Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*). 1,000 Muslim Brothers were tried and six executed shortly thereafter (Aoude 1994, p. 4).

Repression was by no means indiscriminate. Indeed, it seems that the communists bore the brunt of the regime's wrath, and that for a while the *Ikhwān* were allowed to promulgate their message relatively unchecked (for reasons to be discussed later). And although there did remain one or two opposition newspapers,⁴⁵ the overarching mood was one of circumscription. How this translates into literary terms is that the writing of the 1950's was marked by a noticeable absence of scrutiny towards the Nāṣir administration. Instead, the authors of the period focused on broader questions of nationality, expressions of "Egyptianness" and realistic portrayals of the lives of the citizens for whom the independence struggle was aimed. This exploration of the portrayal of intellectuals in what is commonly known as the realist phase of Egyptian literature is one of the subjects of chapter 2 of this work.

It is important in the course of this discussion to emphasise that the focus of the Nāṣir administration's repression was on organised political opposition as it

⁴⁵ Catherine Cobham makes particular mention of the newspaper *Al-Masā'*, which openly critiqued and advised the Nāṣir regime in the late 1950's, Cobham 1974, p. 92.

manifested itself in the political parties and the press, and not literature, *per se*. Marina Stagh notes that this might be attributable to Nāṣir's personal appreciation of literature and admiration for the luminaries of the previous generation of writers, especially Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (Stagh 1993, p. 25), whom he regarded as one of the fathers of the revolution (Al-Ḥakīm 1974, p. 36). Another explanation would be that the relatively lower levels of readership of works of fiction posed less of a threat to the administration. Ironically, it was Sādāt, a man with years of publishing experience at Dār al-Hilāl, an editor of a national newspaper and an author of short stories himself, who directed his restrictions more specifically towards the cultural elite (Nasser 1990, p. 10).

Sādāt, we are told, "distrusted the intellectuals, assumed that they were his enemies and referred to them as the *Effendim* (the former Turkish rulers of Egypt) in its most pejorative sense" (Stagh 1993, p. 33). This distrust, informed perhaps by an insider's perspective, coupled with a certain lack of appreciation of cultural endeavours and a greater interest in reversing the tide of nationalisation that swept the Egyptian economy under Nāṣir prompted his successor to effectively "dismantle the cultural edifice" previously established under Nāṣir (Stagh 1993, p. 33). The Sādāt administration began with a series of purges of leftist and Marxist elements within the print industry and a spate of closures of a large number of cultural magazines including *Al-Masrah*, *Al-Sinimā*, *Al-Majalla*, *Al-Qiṣṣa*, and *Al-Fikr al-mu'āṣir* (Nāṣir 1990, p. 11 & Stagh 1993, p. 30). Following these expulsions and closures, press controls were relaxed, and in fact, by 1974, press censorship was officially abolished. But by this point, writers had lost faith in their government's commitment to ensure freedom of speech. The Sādāt regime was marked throughout by a series of vacillations in policy regarding freedom of the press. Criticism of Nāṣir was widely permitted while examinations of the Sādāt regime were firmly discouraged. This sort of wavering and the reduction of outlets for publication had a noticeable negative effect on the quality of the literary output of the decade. The Seventies author Maḥmūd al-Wardānī describes himself and his peers as belonging to a "peripheral generation," a generation of writers offered less support from government institutions, whose readership had subsequently dwindled and whose society as a whole had become disillusioned with politics.⁴⁶ Some writers chose exile over continued circumscription. Some conceded defeat and exercised self-censorship of their works. Others were forced to print editions of their books in xerox or offset versions and

⁴⁶ Personal interview with Maḥmūd al-Wardānī, Cairo, April 1998.

distribute their work themselves (Stagh 1993, pp. 35-36).⁴⁷ None of these options proved a suitable solution to the problem.

Thus, the first three decades of Egypt's independence posed a number of challenges for its writers, most of them stemming from the relationship of authority to the writing industry. These struggles are all reflected in the literature and testify to the creativity and variety of methods with which authors sought to address and resolve the crisis of the intellectuals.

⁴⁷ The opening story of this study, *Rabāb ta'tazil al-rasm*, by Yūsuf al-Qa'id is an example of an offset publication. See Stagh 1993 , p. 250 for further details.

Chapter 2

The Intellectual and the Greater Society - Facing Tradition

Introduction

In this chapter, we examine one of the perennial themes of Arabic literature, namely, the conflict between tradition and modernisation. By 'tradition' here we mean something close to Frantz Fanon's concept of 'custom' as a static, unalterable, culturally-determined entity, a perpetuation of social attitudes and institutions, a method of behaviour based on and rooted in the past.¹ Modernisation as a concept stands in direct contradiction to this principle, challenging that which remains fixed, examining the nature of custom and suggesting novel, often radically different, solutions to the questions of the day. Within the developing world, modernisation has often been spuriously equated with *westernisation*, an equation with which the Syrian poet Adonis takes issue. Modernity in its truest sense, he argues, is "a way of seeing before it is production," and also, therefore, before it is geographical/geopolitical location (Adonis 1990, p. 79). Viewing modernity as a mode of *thought* that seeks to renew and recreate, Adonis could look beyond nineteenth and twentieth century western hegemony and argue that some of the 'Abbāsid poets were, as a case in point, true modernists of their time.

For the purposes of this chapter, we are utilising the terms 'modernity' and 'modernisation' in a very specific sense. Here, the focus is on the manner in which the issues of modernity play themselves out within the greater society and how this struggle between modernisation and tradition is perceived through the eyes of the cultural elite. In this debate between westernisation/modernisation and tradition, the cultural elite occupies a unique position in that, unlike the bourgeoisie who, in very broad and general terms, are portrayed as aspiring to the trappings of modernity (that

¹ In *The Wretched of the Earth*, in his chapter on national culture, Fanon delineates his understanding of 'custom' using the example of intellectuals who, in order to gain education, employment, etc., spend considerable periods of time away from their native cultures, only to return, clinging to 'custom' and tradition:

"The culture that the intellectual leans towards is often no more than a stock of particularisms. He wishes to attach himself to the people; but instead he only catches hold of their outer garments. And these outer garments are merely the reflection of a hidden life, teeming and perpetually in motion. ...Culture has never the translucidity of custom; it abhors all simplification. In its essence it is opposed to custom, for custom is always the deterioration of culture." Fanon 1967, p. 180. For further analysis of these concepts, see Cobham 1974, pp. 118-119 and Cobham 1997, p. 218.

is to say, westernisation), and the undereducated, often illiterate majority² who are typically portrayed as custom-bound, the cultural elite tend to be caught somewhere in between these polarities; it is they who are most often portrayed as genuinely grappling with the shifts and innovations in their society. It is they whom authors often describe as best suited to forge a compromise between westernisation and tradition which allows for an indigenous conceptualisation of modernisation.

The contrary is, of course, equally possible, and the less well-known short story *Kunshirtu al-nāy* (Concerto for the Nay, 1984) by Muḥammad Salmāwī presents us with an introductory example of a portrait of the Egyptian cultural elite who harbour misguided conceptions of the West which lead them to mimic and aspire to all things Western. It is an unusual and innovative story in that the protagonist is a bamboo reed, and the narrative is related from the perspective of this inanimate object. Along the banks of the Nile in Upper Egypt, a bamboo reed grows distinctively taller and more beautiful than its peers. Self-awareness and hubris combine to produce in him a condescending attitude towards the “primitive country surrounding him.” The reed believes himself destined for greater things than a life of languor in the black rich earth of the Nile and being admired by the flocks of passing birds. This protagonist places all his hopes in what is for many Egyptians the embodiment of high culture, so-called civilisation and cosmopolitan life - Cairo:

He was forever dreaming of going to Cairo like some of his higher standing peers... which were cultivated with exceeding care in special plantations and were transferred to the city where they were made into fishing poles, or... furniture and decorative objects. (Salmāwī 1984, p. 99, translation El-Maghrabi)

Yet even the aspirations of his ‘higher standing peers’ are too low for the reed. This exquisite reed yearns to be fashioned into a bamboo flute, or *nāy*, upon which will be composed the first ever concerto for the *nāy*. The narrator describes the reed’s thought processes in detail, as the piece of bamboo stands in the river, dreaming of a day of ‘salvation’ when he is snatched from the mire and allowed to fulfil his destiny. The reed’s daydreaming reveals genuine self-loathing and a fixation on gaining approval in Western circles symptomatic of a colonial mindset. Accordingly, the cultural products of Western society (the ‘sublime music’ of the Brandenburg concertos and Beethoven’s Emperor concerto, for instance) and even the trappings of Western society are valorised (the dignitaries in attendance at the Cairo Opera House,

² The World Development Report of 1993 set its estimates for illiteracy of the total Egyptian population at 52% and female illiteracy at 66% . Data from the Third World Atlas, Second Edition, Buckingham, Open University Press 1994, p. 74.

the visiting European conductor), while local culture is viewed as contemptible (“the insipid folk songs sung by the local people,” the “monotonous tunes [played by village people] on their local nays - oh how it had bored him!” and even the very environment in which he lived, with its nauseating “black mud at his feet, small river creatures, ugly snails and algae,”). A lifetime of reflection in this manner has produced not only self-contempt, but an overly developed desire to assimilate Western values and culture to the exclusion of indigeneous, Egyptian civilisation:

everyone would be waiting to hear oriental melodies, those usually played on the *nāy*, but his music would be purely Western and gradually the audience would forget that they were listening to an Egyptian concerto composed for an oriental instrument. As they became captivated by the beauty of his music, they would think they were listening to Beethoven’s Emperor concerto, or one of Bach’s Brandenburg concertos. (Salmāwī 1984, p. 101, translation El-Maghrabī)

Just as hubris is typically rewarded with its comeuppance in Greek tragedy, here too the author implies in the conclusion of the story that a perpetual denial of the indigeneous self ultimately reaps adverse consequences as the West invariably fails to meet the expectations placed upon it: when the farmers harvest the bamboo and place the reed on a truck bound for Cairo, the protagonist is optimistic that his destiny to become a great musical instrument is sealed. However, when he awakens, he finds himself in a luxury Cairene flat, nestled in a flower pot supporting a drooping plant. His surroundings contradict and mock his formerly idealistic visions of his future: “Everything surrounding him,” we are told, “was artificial,” from the harsh and unfamiliar air conditioning to the soil in which the bamboo stalk sits. And the only music generated in this sterile environment is electronic, emitted from a cassette machine which the stalk has never before seen. As time passes and the reed realises that a mistake has not been made, that this is to be his fate, nostalgic sentiments of his past life replace the feelings of repulsion previously voiced. Now, paradoxically, the reed yearns to hear the authentic sounds of a *nāy*, its oriental scales emanating from boats passing along the riverbank. And it is the previously derided soil of the Nile, that most salient symbol of Egyptian identity, that is missed most of all.

Written in 1984, *Kunshirtu al-nāy* might be read as a response to the social and economic transformations Egypt witnessed during the decade of the 1970s in which a new openness to Western (particularly American) investment engendered attitudes similar to those exhibited by the personified bamboo reed. Yet the underlying sentiments and concerns of the story, to do with the incursion of the West, westernisation and the threats posed to Egyptian cultural identity, date back to the beginnings of modern Egyptian narrative genres and beyond. This chapter aims to

chart some of the development of this portrayal and explores the various responses of the cultural elite to tradition and transformation.

1. Al-Jabal (The Mountain, 1957)

"Everything I used to believe in and have faith in as a means for reform for our society has dissipated in my head like water in a vessel over the fire." (Ghānim 1957, p. 7)

"I will write up a new report, devoid of the things I witnessed; what I feel will remain hidden in my heart and I will smell that putrid scent rising within me forever after - the scent of a dead conscience." (Ghānim 1957, p. 106)

Al-Jabal is a semi-fictional recounting of the efforts of noted Egyptian architect Ḥasan Faṭḥī in 1946 to resettle the people of the west bank of Luxor, that community's antagonistic response and an inspector's attempts to mediate between the two factions. The novel - Faṭḥī Ghānim's first attempt at full-length creative writing - is representative of an earlier mode of portrayal³ of the cultural elite caught in the middle of the modernisation debate, with its straightforward method of first-person narration, overt expression of political and social commitment (or *iltizām*), and its frequently didactic tone. In the novels and short stories of this earlier period, questioning, reinterpretation or even rejection of the dominant values of the society does not yet imply a diminishing sense of affinity with the society as a whole (Ḥāfiz 1982, p. 18). Here, the cultural elite are typically depicted as positive, proactive figures in the narratives, despite any personal equivocation or sense of unease with traditional society. One of the characteristics that these portrayals hold in common with later depictions, however, is that the cultural elite almost inevitably view themselves and, in turn, are viewed by others as an entity apart. *Al-Jabal* in no way illustrates Faṭḥī Ghānim's full potential as a writer, but it is instructive insofar as it explores the issue of development and provides us with a representation of the cultural elite prior to an era in which disillusionment and military defeat would alter literary sensibilities and temper approaches to both custom and westernisation.

The novel is, at its core, a simple crime drama. Allegations of "tomb robbing," plundering of the Pharonic vaults in the mountain community of Gurna on the west bank of the Nile near Luxor reach the Ministry of Information in Cairo. At the same

³ By the rather vague categorisation 'earlier mode' I am referring to an historical period, beginning in 1929, of roughly twenty-five to thirty years during which both the novel and the short story underwent a maturation process. Examples of this 'early' type of portrayal may be found in *Yawmiyāt nā'ib fī 'l-aryāf* (1937), by Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm, Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's *Qandil Umm Hāshim* (1944), Yūsuf Idrīs' *Sirruhū al-bāti*' (1958, to be discussed later in this chapter) and perhaps, although to a lesser extent, Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn's *Hadīth al-qarya* (1929). To this list may be added texts written later but representative of the earlier style, such as Muḥammad al-Bisāti's *Al-Taḥaddī* (1970).

time, there are reports of vandalism of a proposed model village for the Gurna community. An investigation is ordered. We are witnesses to the investigation of these affairs through the eyes of the homonymous narrator, a young inspector for the Ministry. At the heart of the dispute lies an engineer's desire to relocate and resettle the community in his newly designed model village and the conflicting wishes of the mountain folk to continue living in and among the tombs. In a protracted manner further elements of this dispute come to light as Fathī, the narrator, encounters a variety of characters and perspectives in this Upper Egyptian village. In the process of the investigation the narrator has to come to terms with his own attitudes towards more traditional lifestyles. By the end of this journey, his sympathies rest almost entirely with the mountain community.

Within this fictional account, the essential facts of the project and the dispute remain true to life. The name of the village, Gurna, is not fictionalised and the primary complaint of the villagers - namely, that the design of the new village, with its elaborate dome structure, remind the mountain people of tombs and mausoleums - is exactly as it was in reality (Fathī 1973, p. 183). Furthermore, in an effort to make the narrative credible, it seems, Ghānim uses a device in which the narrator is the author, or at least, shares his name. In this way the subject matter of the novel encompasses both public and private events, presenting invented figures whose destiny is involved with actual events. However, such a technique also results in losing any aesthetic distance between the character and the author. It is this proximity to reality which troubles the work and which leads the present writer to describe the text as 'semi-fictional.'

The novel relies almost entirely on the internal monologue of the omniscient narrator for its development. It is his comments to himself that enrich, enliven, and occasionally, overstate the narrative. The Fathī Ghānim of *Al-Jabal* is self-aware and introspective almost to a fault, as we learn from the opening pages where he is given the assignment of the Gurna investigation:

From the time my eyes fell upon the first lines [of the report] I felt as if I had been transported to a strange world... far removed from reality... this is the way of us city folk when we enter another society... we turn the reality into a fiction, a story, a film or a legend... This is our way of envisioning this remote, far off region in the heart of the country. A total schism occurs in families... blood ties and relations are disrupted, with each one going his own way - one living in the snare of the countryside, one in the snare of the city. (Ghānim 1957, p 10)

This portrayal of a young Cairene unable to fathom life in the more traditional

countryside was hardly novel in 1957. Indeed, Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn addressed the same issue more than a quarter of a century earlier⁴. Here, Ghānim exploits the length of the novel form and develops the exploration of class issues in a manner that Lāshīn perhaps could not.⁵ Fathī, the narrator, is depicted as a suave, sophisticated individual whose command of French and knowledge of European fashion and colognes attest to his upper class aspirations⁶. Yet he is not above admiration of the people of Upper Egypt. As he travels down to Luxor in the first class compartment of the train, we see him enthralled with the sounds of the Sa'īdī dialect, whose "gracefulness" and "delicateness" he compares to the French being spoken around him as well (Ghānim 1957, p. 14). When he steps into the third class car, however, he realises his level of privilege and removal from the ordinary passengers:

A tremendous disparity between the third class and the air conditioning in car no.1 ! A wastebasket filled with tea, sugar, eggs and the remnants strewn among the benches on one side, opulent leather suitcases filled with silks, woollen clothes, bottles of perfume, neckties and dressing gowns on the other... The difference between the stiff benches and the cotton seats with freshly washed and pressed covers... between the barefooted boy with his galabiya hoisted over his shoulders trying in vain to sell bottles of coloured water from a pail and the elegant garçon in the white jacket and black trousers, bowing politely as he serves Turkish coffee and Indian tea in fine china... (Ghānim 1957, p. 16)

Fathī continues to describe the feelings of fear, isolation and introspection that intensify incrementally as he leaves familiar territory and approaches what he calls "the world of the Third Class passengers." (Ghānim 1957, p. 18) Throughout the novel, Fathī struggles with his own socio-economic background and the needs of the mountain villagers in this manner. This mood of introspection is conveyed with varying degrees of efficacy. At times, Fathī's confessional style serves its purpose with credibility and conviction:

In my eyes, Cairo had turned into a mass of triviality, with no men, no problems, just the inane commotion, the clamour of camels. (Ghānim 1957, p. 178)

⁴ See Chapter 4 for an analysis of his short story *Hadīth al-qarya* (1929).

⁵ Although it could be argued that Lāshīn's accomplishment was in part based on achieving a very complex portrayal while adhering to the economy of the short story format.

⁶ Jad 1983, p. 276, suggests that Ghānim's use of a sophisticated narrator here in contrast to the other characters around him is typical of much of his writing, pointing to the narrators in *Al-Sākhīn wa 'l-bārid*, Cairo 1960, and *Min 'ain*, Cairo 1959 as examples. Jad continues by intimating that these narrators are direct reflections of Ghānim himself.

Elsewhere, and more often than not, the author's editorial commentary in the voice of his narrator is glaring, as if Fathī is a foil for the author's polemics:

The village is a symbol... a symbol for the repeated projects which we applaud with enthusiasm... only to swiftly forget following its failure because we are too ashamed to mention it. (Ghānim 1957, pp. 224-5)

This blatantly didactic style permeates not only the dialogue and thought processes of the narrator, but it influences the portrayals of the other main characters as well. A simplistic dichotomy is established early on, positioning modernisation categorically against tradition. Thus, the proponent of modernisation, the engineer, is portrayed almost exclusively in terms of his vices, while the villagers are seen as more representatively human. From the beginning, it seems, there is little question as to where the reader's sympathies should lie. The engineer is depicted quite simply as a self-seeking opportunist. A French educated Egyptian steeped in European culture, his sole concern is for his professional reputation, and he is given to making flippant remarks like, "people don't want to be urbanised unless it's by the lash of the whip" (Ghānim 1957, p. 218). Ensuring that the model village is inhabited as quickly as possible is the engineer's aim. Here, he is portrayed as the unflagging villain of the story, so it is hardly surprising that he is given such a one-dimensional characterisation.

The *'umda* is the stalwart protector and preserver of the dreams of the village. It is he who fervently reminds the 'people of the mountain' that "the rocks of the mountain hold the sweat and tears of their ancestry, and the treasures they amassed..." (Ghānim 1957, p. 87) Through his impassioned pleas, he goads the villagers to continue the excavation of the tombs in hopes of discovering their "inheritance." In near evangelical tones, the unearthing of this store of riches is equated with Judgement Day (Ghānim 1957, p. 57). And though the futility of the search is readily acknowledged by most of the villagers, the *'umda's* reputation remains untarnished. He is uneducated, yet he possesses a keen understanding of the ways of the world. And his sole allegiance is to his people and their best interests.

If the *'umda* is the keeper of the traditions, Ḥusayn 'Alī is the embodiment of the mountain villagers' hopes and aspirations. Reared on the platitudes of the *'umda*, Ḥusayn is the catalyst for the actions taken on the proposed model village. Like the ageing spokesman, Ḥusayn has sacrificed his entire life to the mining of the tombs. The loss of his father and sister at the hands of the faltering rocks of the caverns only serves to intensify his desire to uncover the supposed treasure. Fathī describes Ḥusayn as an imposing figure, a model of local pride, self-esteem and above all, manhood, the

likes of which no longer exist in Cairo. In fact, one senses that the narrator himself feels quite small in the presence of such a character (Ghānim 1957, p. 123). In short, Ḥusayn 'Alī represents that which is pure and strong in the local environment. And even if it could be argued justifiably that the narrator runs the risk of waxing sentimental about Ḥusayn's valour and intrepid nature, two other characters are quoted as admiring the image that this young man represents⁷.

The unnamed foreign woman is the most enigmatic, yet perhaps one of the more satisfying and successfully depicted characters. Here we have a French woman, originally trained as an eye doctor, who, along with her husband, buys statues from the mountain folk to resell to the Egyptian archaeology ministry. Following a return trip to France, she decides that she can no longer tolerate life in Europe. She leaves her husband, comes back to Gurna to live with the people of the mountain, defend their right to live there and encourage them to carry on with the excavations. In addition to her native language, the nameless woman speaks the local Sa'īdī dialect, and this is reflected in her dialogue. We are first introduced to her by the engineer, who describes her as "a lover of primitive people," one who "wants them to remain primitive" (Ghānim 1957, p. 43). Her motives remain suspect to all the parties involved in Gurna. At times, she seems genuinely devoted to the mountain community, and particularly to her lover, Ḥusayn 'Alī - "Whenever he embraced her with his strong arms, she felt as if she were united with the entire mountain..." (Ghānim 1957, p. 184). At other times, she appears shrewd and calculating, her voice, "serpentine" in character, urging Ḥusayn to continue digging (Ghānim 1957, pp. 147-48). One wonders if she doesn't indeed have ulterior motives behind her desire to assimilate. Is it love of money garnered from the sale of Pharonic treasures, or is it a pure love for the mountain people?

Besides the unnamed foreign woman, who is characterised in at least a partially sympathetic light, all other representatives of the West or of western influenced lifestyles are the object of satire. Nowhere is this hyperbole more clearly exhibited than in the scene involving the visit of one of the King's daughters to the model village. The Egyptian princess comes to Gurna to inspect the newly completed village on behalf of her father. An assembly of *fallāḥīn* from the east bank of Luxor (not the Gurna villagers themselves) are forced by the engineer and the local police authorities to welcome her. The princess, along with her American entourage, makes a spectacle of herself, drinking and entertaining visions of jungle fantasies as the 'umda earnestly and futilely attempts to plead his people's case before her. The heedlessness depicted

⁷Namely, the 'umda and the foreign woman, who has an affair with Ḥusayn for this specific reason.

in this stereotypical portrayal seems to imply that even affiliation with elements of the West leads to debauchery and a loss of sympathy for local needs.

It is no coincidence that the external appearance and topography of the mountain is only rarely described, for the novel is, at base, an internally focused, psychological work. And it is when the author explores this aspect, the internal, and eschews commentary on development and the West that the novel most succeeds. Although it is the source of enormous disappointment ultimately, excavating the tombs is described as meeting a deep, psychological need for the people of the mountain. Several characters - the *'umda*, the peripheral Abu Ḥusayn, Ḥusayn and the foreign woman - fall victim to varying degrees of insanity or delusions as a result of their persistence in this futile search. Though only alluded to in most cases, the widespread nature of the illness demonstrates how all-consuming their goal is. Ghānim describes the perseverance of the villagers in fatalistic terms. The psychological agony and claustrophobia of the scenes inside the tombs is palpable. Consider the following scene, for instance, where Ḥusayn's sister, Maryam, scrambles through the passageways in search of their father, whose life she fears might be in danger:

Maryam plucked up all of her strength and drew in a breath of dust and stagnant air. She carried on crawling, thinking of nothing but the ringing of the pickaxe, chipping away. She forgot what had brought her to the vault, what compelled her to press on, she forgot her wounds, that her robe had been shredded to bits and the sting of the stones in her flesh. She forgot that she had a body, hands and legs. It was as if the thing that was crawling, creeping onward was something inside her. An inexplicable, feverish insanity (Ghānim 1957, p. 137).

In the case of Ḥusayn, excavation is a purgative process. He uses the mining as a method of "chipping away" at a number of anxieties - the ever-elusive treasure, his fiancée, his future, etc. In the following scene, we see that digging serves as a sublimation of his violent desires towards the foreign woman:

He struck the stone with his pickaxe, and the foreigner's bed and bedsheets would appear before him, her naked body on one side. He would strike away at this prominent image before him... as if he wanted to shatter it, as if he wanted an end to the bed, the foreigner and himself. It was as if the sound of the blows of the pickaxe caused the words of the foreigner to reverberate in his ears - you are my master...you are my master (Ghānim 1957, p. 160).

Again, it is this depiction of the inner tension and drama which is the novel's strength, rather than the narrator's unequivocal assessment of the situation. This is not to say, however, that the novel is entirely devoid of subtlety or moments in which the

narrator refrains from editorialising. Early in the novel, for instance, there is the striking segue into the story of Ḥusayn 'Alī. 'Segue' is indeed the appropriate word here, for what the author presents is a brief musical interlude. Fathī meets the reticent Ḥusayn at night on a pathway as the narrator returns from his first visit to the mountain. Following initial suspicion, Ḥusayn realises that Fathī is sincerely interested in hearing the mountain people's point of view, and decides to share the story with him. Crouched in an open field, the sounds of the mountain people singing and dancing within earshot, the narrator paints the following picture:

We were right beside one another like two friends whispering secrets...in a dream-like atmosphere. The sounds of songs, the mizmār, and the tambourine came to us clearly, but we didn't see any of the mountain folk. It was as if the sound were being sent from some enormous loudspeaker in the heavens, the voice being transmitted pure and plaintive... The voice of Abu Layla [the village singer] was strong, solemn and beautiful, monotonous in scale, but full of emotion and sorrow. (Ghānim 1957, pp. 124-25)

The song that is performed tells of a woman unjustly charged of a crime and her subsequent conviction. The judge is an unsympathetic man, more concerned with the tilt of his tarboosh on his head than properly meting out justice. The story is meant to mirror the plight of the mountain community - theirs too is a story of a people misunderstood by uninterested authorities, a people whose entire way of life is in jeopardy. The tears Ḥusayn cries when he hears the song tell us just how strongly the words of the song resonate with him. Like the Greek chorus in a classical tragedy, the interlude of Abu Layla encapsulates the previous action of the story and is an innovative way of marking the break from one segment of the narrative to the next.

In the protagonist's character, *Al-Jabal* presents us with a portrayal of the cultural elite torn between commitment to authority and a burgeoning sympathy for the villagers who have little else other than the artefacts discovered in the tombs. Halfway through the novel, Fathī imagines the reaction of his director to a genuinely objective assessment of the situation in Gurna, pointing out the fact that the villagers had not been consulted in the construction of the prototype. Immediately, the fears of being branded with the stigma "Communist" race through his head (Ghānim 1957, p. 106). Written at a time in which censorship, blacklisting and imprisonment were acutely real considerations, the novel is keen to make this point. And Fathī's decision not to write a report at the end of the novel is telling. This intellectual, when confronted with the clear-cut choice between untrammelled modernisation and the traditional lifestyle of the Gurnawis that provides sustenance, sense of purpose and hope in the future, chooses to affirm the traditional way of life by default.

Al-Jabal is an early, flawed work whose lack of sophistication in craftsmanship can largely be attributed to the author's inexperience. Additional consideration must be given to the historical and cultural moment in which the novel was written, in which many authors strived to assert the primacy of Egyptian cultural symbols - the valour and virtue of rural Egypt, as a notable example - over the cultural symbols of the West. It is the representation of speech itself which contributes most to the establishment of Egyptian identity, for the dialogues are written in dialect appropriate to each character. All of the dialogue of the 'umda, as well as the other characters of the mountain, is written in the Upper Egyptian (*Sa'īdī*) dialect. Faṭḥī's dialogue, by contrast, is in Cairene Arabic. Ghānim was an ardent proponent of the use of colloquial in the dialogue of several of his works and the inclusion of local dialects in *Al-Jabal* lends a very natural, realistic quality to the narrative. And yet it is precisely this element of realism that mars the novel. The difficulty stems from the fact that the work is so rooted in reality that it often fails to sustain itself as a work of fiction; such a burden of 'real' persons, places and events as this work contains inevitably detracts from its qualities as fiction.

2. Sirruhū al-bāti' (His All-Encompassing Power, 1958)

Despite an already emergent antipathy to dissident Egyptian voices, the late 1950s (1958 in particular, the year in which political union with Syria, one of the key tenets of Nāṣir's pan-Arab philosophy, was achieved) remained one of the peak periods of national optimism. This sentiment of optimism was reflected and explored in much of the literature of the time, as several writers sought to corroborate the macro-political experience with their own portrayals of characters examining and, in most cases, validating, the essence of Egyptian cultural identity. During the early 1950s, the philosophy of literary *engagement* (*al-adab al-hādif* or *al-adab al-hātif*) gained ascendancy, especially among younger, leftist-leaning writers who had participated in and come of age during the national independence struggles of the previous decade. Central to the idea of *al-adab al-hādif* was the tenet that each writer's output should truthfully reflect the indigeneous society, paying particular attention to those segments of society typically under-represented in literature, namely, the rural and urban poor. In this manner, the *multazimūn* (the *engagés*) argue, literature provides both aesthetic inspiration and a sense of urgency to inspire social change. Prior to the 1952 revolution, several attempts to establish a genuinely Egyptian literature were made, yet relatively few were effectively realised. In 1946, Ṭaha Ḥusayn, the then editor of *Al-Kātib al-Miṣrī*, published a series of polemical

essays and portrayals of ordinary Egyptians which he later collected and published as a book entitled, *Al-Mu'dhabūn fī al-'ard* (The Wretched of the Earth), the following year.⁸ The book proved to be one of the germinal influences for Yūsuf Idrīs, whose early period of short story writing⁹, particularly his first collection, *Arkhaṣ Layālī* (1954), epitomises this spirit of authenticating and 'localising' Arabic literature.¹⁰

The cultural elite, insofar as they figure at all in this literature, are typically depicted in contrast to, occasionally at odds with, the rural and urban poor. Yet, as was mentioned in our discussion of *Al-Jabal*, in this earlier period, the differences between the cultural elite and broader society do not appear irreconcilable. The cultural elite are here seen attempting to relate to, comprehend and identify with the traditions of the rural and urban poor, partly in order to validate their own existences, but mostly, to assert and affirm that which is distinctly Egyptian. Idrīs' early novella *Sirruhu al-bāti'* (1958) offers one such portrayal, combining the story of an educated boy's search for meaning in a local legend with a revisitation of actual events in the history of the national independence movement. In the following section, we examine both of these facets of the work and the extent to which the novella fulfils the criteria of *al-adab al-hādif*.

Sirruhu al-bāti' is, in effect, two separate stories with one common thread: the first half recounts a young boy's determination to explain the popularity of a village saint, 'Sultan' Ḥāmid, as he is known. Following years of fruitless searches, the second half reveals Ḥāmid's identity and significance through a letter unearthed in an archive. This letter assumes the framework of the novella, one story within another, and remains the focus of the rest of the narrative. Idrīs skilfully portrays the young narrator of the first half as an anomaly in his village; the young boy is questioning, observant, not terribly religious, well educated (English is among the many subjects he studies) and is, above all, adamant in his refusal to be taken in unwittingly by the cult of personality surrounding 'Sultan' Ḥāmid. He (the young boy) views himself as a free agent of sorts, liberated from the strictures of superstition and popular folklore. Note the bold admission he makes from the outset of the novella:

⁸ Ḥusayn's work only gained an Egyptian readership some years later - *Al-Mu'dhabūn fī 'l-'ard* was banned by the Egyptian government the same year as its publication and was only reissued after the 1952 revolution.

⁹ I am here referring to Idrīs' first four major collections of short stories, *Arkhaṣ layālī* (1954), *Alaysa kadhālik?* (1957), *Ḥādīthat Sharaf* (1958), and *Ākhir al-dunyā* (1961).

¹⁰ Ṭaha Ḥusayn, wrote the introduction to the third edition of *Arkhaṣ Layālī* (1967), endorsing the work and asserting that Idrīs' collection represented the creative fulfilment of his earlier expository project.

Offerings, ghosts, smelling onions on the holiday *Shamm al-nasīm* - these were all things in which I did not believe, not because we were taught in school that they were sacrilegious and one of the devil's abominations, but because everyone seemed to take it as undisputed fact. How could I do the same? What then is the purpose of my education and suit (i.e., school uniform)? (Idrīs 1958, p. 127)

This strong sense of self, of freedom from the collective will of the village emanates from the narrator's voice and permeates his every thought. He is contemptuous of the villagers for their inability to reason and question more thoroughly. Furthermore, the young boy resents the sway that this elusive 'Sultan' possesses over his fellow country people:

I would laugh at the naiveté of the people of our village, who would squander their pennies and throw them into the sand - for what? For this Sultan who has no gatekeeper, no mosque, no one seeking refuge, not even a grave which hints of veneration? (Idrīs 1958, p. 129)

The shrine of Sultan Ḥāmid bears no resemblance to those the narrator had visited before in Cairo, with their plush carpets, gold awnings and ornate windows which inspire humility and awe. The shrine of Ḥāmid's walls were, by contrast, made of worn, bare stone which bore the colour of old flaccid muscles, we are told. When the child gives the news of upcoming exams to his grandfather, he is told to make a votive offering to the Sultan. The boy reluctantly makes his way to the tomb, chastising himself for allowing himself to be taken in by his grandfather's superstitions, wishing that he had spent the money on caramels instead.

Yet Idrīs is careful not to cast the narrator as a mere cynic. The young boy is well developed as a character, exhibiting frailties and self-doubt in spite of his condescension towards the community. As he lights a candle in blind imitation (*taqlīd* is the Arabic word used which, interestingly, may mean both 'imitation' and simply, 'tradition') of his grandfather and the villagers, the boy confesses to us that he utters an opportunistic promise under his breath to return with a dozen candles if he succeeds in his exams. And on another occasion, he has the experience of imagining seeing the spirit of Sultan Ḥāmid through the window of the shrine. After receiving a terrible fright, the boy recovers, laughing at himself as he realises that there was no monster or a spirit of Ḥāmid present, but merely the shadows of the inner tomb and a tree.

What upsets the narrator more than anything else is how Sultan Ḥāmid is taken for granted as a cultural icon. He notes that even the Sultan's name has become

subconsciously assimilated into the everyday colloquial speech of every man, woman and child in the village, and has spread to several of the surrounding villages, yet no one knows a thing about him or his contribution to the area. It is ultimately this discrepancy between reverence and understanding which compels the young man to determine the origin of the Sultan's following.

The reaction of the villagers to the narrator's inquiries illustrates very pointedly the monolithic nature of the community. The young man is made aware of his unique status as 'doubter of the traditions.' He is the object of derision from friend and foe alike:

The strangest thing...was that I felt as if they [the villagers] thought that I was a dimwit for being amazed by these things. It was as if I had asked who carved out the river or who named the village...Why should I ask them about things which existed before they were born, have remained as they grew older, and will most likely remain fixed until the Day of Judgement? (Idris 1958, p. 139)¹¹

Thus the conversations transpire between the narrator and the villagers, its participants at divergent points of departure, hopelessly at cross purposes with one another: "Me with my European dress, my clean shaven face and my tongue ceaselessly delving into any subject and them with their long beards and short sight and their knowledge which knows its limits, where to stop and when to set out..." (Idris 1958, p. 139.) This impasse prompts the narrator in anger to liken the villagers to people who have accumulated a vast sum from some illicit, undeserved source (Idris 1958, p. 140)

The narrator's passion for a definitive answer to the mystery drives him to extreme lengths. He attends a *dhikr*, a gathering of mystic believers, in hopes of arriving at a lead. In the middle of the ceremony, however, self-awareness and embarrassment overcome him, causing him to get up and leave, dismissing the whole experience as so much senselessness. One evening, a Sufi visitor to the village offers the narrator a fragment of the myth, explaining how Ḥāmid was a virtually invincible defender of Egyptians against the French until 'the enemy' learned how to defile him by urinating on him and then slaying him. But this too seems entirely too fantastic and inconclusive to be of any worth. He does his own research at Cairo University, and discovers a great many things about modern Egyptian history, we are told, but comes

¹¹ On several occasions in the novella, we see the same phrase used to describe the status of the Sultan Ḥāmid phenomenon - it is, for most of the villagers, a given, established feature of the cultural landscape, '*ka al-qadiya al-musallam bihā*,' p. 146, for instance. Even educated members of the community such as Aḥmad Effendī view Ḥāmid without scrutiny. When the narrator asks Effendī why Ḥāmid is deemed sacred, Effendī retorts, 'why do we have five fingers?'

no closer to an answer about Ḥāmid. The perpetual state of uncertainty drives the narrator to madness - he begins to see coloured spots in front of his eyes, talks to himself and his health in general begins to deteriorate.

The conclusive piece of the puzzle comes in a letter, sent by a European woman to the narrator, which includes extracts from a collection of correspondence between a Roger Clement and a Guy de Rouen. The backdrop to 'Sultan' Ḥāmid's rise to near-saint status is the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt. Clement is an archaeologist who accompanied Napoleon in the occupation of Egypt in 1798 and then, apparently, 'went native.' Through Clement's letters to his friend back home, we are ultimately made privy to the details of Ḥāmid's exploits. We learn that Ḥāmid was essentially a political martyr. Following a series of tit-for-tat assassinations between the French and the village of Shatānūf (an Arabized version of the title, Chateaufort, given the town upon invasion), Ḥāmid turns himself in to the authorities to be executed in the place of the shaykh of the village. In the confusion of a disrupted court, however, Ḥāmid flees. The authorities order that the shaykh and several others be arrested and killed in revenge. Ḥāmid remains elusive. The search for this one man becomes the obsession of the French authorities. He is eventually found and shot in the marketplace of the village, but not before French credibility has been utterly shattered and a following of Ḥāmid supporters emerges. Calling themselves the 'Children of Sultan Ḥāmid,' they wear the tattoo on their cheek as Ḥāmid allegedly does (a popular folk tradition supposed to improve eyesight, we learn). Prayer calls from minarets and church halls alike resound with supplications for Ḥāmid, much to the consternation of the French authorities. And when he is killed, a shrine is established on the very spot where he died. Attempts are made to desecrate the shrine. Ḥāmid's body is removed twice by the French. But this only serves to strengthen the resolve of his followers and, in the case of the first incident, where Ḥāmid's body is chopped up and strewn into the Nile, extends his rapidly growing following to villages throughout the region. Shrines are established in every village in which a portion of his body lies. Candles are lit at every shrine, his memory becomes part of a Sufi mystical incantation, and his very name becomes, as Roger (the Frenchman recording the events) puts it, "like an amulet and magic...indeed...more dangerous than all of the firearms of our army ...his influence on the morale of our troops was greater than the bullets (we possessed)." (Idris 1958, p. 183)

As the extract proceeds, the reader discerns a clear shift in Roger's attitude towards his Egyptian hosts from one of initial disdain to eventual respect and admiration. He describes them as a fiercely defiant and resilient people whose long history of occupation has made them indifferent to their occupiers. Roger initially

characterises the locals as a crass people who only know how to speak to one another at a screaming pitch, hurling insults about. And when the peasant farmers disrupt the trial, he uses the opportunity to mention the French army's fears, rooted largely in ignorance, of widespread cannibalistic tendencies among the locals (the army medic calls it '*fellāhīn phobia*,' we are told (Idrīs 1958, pp. 178-179). "How often I made light of their faith in this Ḥāmid," he reports soon afterward, "To my mind, they were like children when they take hold of something, and whenever you tried to take it [from them] they held on further" (Idrīs 1958, p. 184). Yet by the end of his account, we witness a transformed person, a person who not only finds himself repentant for his swift dismissal of Egyptian custom and culture, but feels compelled to visit one of Ḥāmid's shrines himself. It is here that the transformation occurs. Here Roger moves beyond the uninformed observations from a distance which marked the characterisations of the early portion of his account to an impassioned and personal commentary. Here, he comes into contact with *sirruhu al-bāti*, which here perhaps best translates as 'his all-encompassing power.' "I felt for the first time in my life," Roger notes, "the immensity of life and the astonishment that we as mankind and humanity possess this miraculous power." (Idrīs 1958, p. 191) The passage detailing Roger's visit to the shrine warrants quoting in full here:

So I did it [visited the tomb] yesterday, which was a Thursday, the day of tomb-visiting, a day in which thousands of people from the far corners of the earth, with the dirt of the fields and the blazing heat on the sun on them came to meet at the tomb. How extraordinary was what I witnessed: a tremendous gathering, as if it were Judgement Day, many men in their pure white robes, the women in their black coverings/clothes. And so many lights - lit torches and street lamps and others whose source you didn't know. It was as if the light was generated from the throng of people. Tambourines were beating, astounding the people (causing the heart to pound). Foreheads shining with sweat, inscrutable eager eyes, hands waving and tens of thousands of throats giving out tens of thousands of hoarse beseeching and imperious cries - Oh Sīdī Ḥāmid! A single word born of the millions of words emitted from chests pressed together. A huge, colossal word which accumulated above the tomb like a sacred cloud of luminous, trembling music which quivered and expanded to the beat of the drums. I realised that what was underneath the dome of the tomb wasn't the important thing. What mattered were the rough, burly bodies circling the tomb. What mattered was the single cry coming out of tens of thousands of wide open, starving mouths. What mattered was the other face of the legendary untamed beast that scared our soldiers stiff with a single blow of its hand. What mattered was what the crowd was giving off, what arose from it, gathered, crystallised and intermingled with the torches, street lamps, the pounding of the drums and the swaying of bodies. My friend, I stood there perplexed - it was as if I were witnessing this amorphous mixture hanging between earth and sky, *as if I were viewing the*

collective will, as if I were viewing all the love the people possessed, brought together in a single cry. It was as if those rough bodies soiled with mud and dust were giving off a substance more sublime than living bodies, more sublime than life, the essence of life. A composite of all of life, powerful and victorious, a composite of everything which cannot be resisted. A supreme, extraordinary power - the secret of life. (Idrīs 1958, pp. 189-190, italics mine)

The story closes with Roger concluding his letter to his friend, stating that he has been changed by the experience of the visitation and, melodramatically, he states that he fears that he too might join the followers and light a candle in Ḥāmid's name.

Ḥāmid, then, is a symbol. The title of 'Sultan' is merely one of respect. And whether Ḥāmid killed a French officer in retaliation for the murder of a *fallāḥ* is neither here nor there; an embellishment to the legend. What does matter is Ḥāmid's salience as a symbol. He provides for the people of the village an unquestioning attachment to the past, their heritage, the land. And he embodies Shatānūf's subconscious conviction of faith in the community. They are, as Roger notes in the letter, a people whose faith is based on love for each other and the community, not rigorously tested ideas. The 'secret,' if *sirr* is to be translated as such here, is that the mere mention of the name, generations afterward, still resonates and serves as a sort of psychological elixir for its believers. Like many other legends (the Judeo-Christian notion of the Fall of humankind or Christianity's Resurrection story immediately spring to mind), Ḥāmid offers a sense of belonging. It is as one anthropologist put it,

the traditional feeling of a real and intimate connection with the land; the concrete reality of seeing the actual spot of emergence in the middle of the scenes of daily life; the historical continuity of privileges, occupations, and distinctive characters running back into the mythological first beginnings - all obviously makes for cohesion, for local patriotism, for a feeling of union and kinship in the community... The story of origin literally contains the legal charter of the community. (Malinowski 1929, pp. 56-7)

An important question that must be addressed here is the extent to which the story of Ḥāmid, his following and Roger's reluctant but inevitable conversion is a function of what the author wishes us to see rather than a reflection of 'reality.' It is difficult to determine if the novella was intended to contain a didactic component which could then be viewed as a contribution to the nationalist cause, or if Idrīs was merely revisiting an historical event for his own sake. What is more certain is that the historical events which most likely informed and inspired the lengthy explication of Ḥāmid's following actually occurred in the early twentieth century, not the nineteenth. Although Idrīs' village exists, a cursory survey of Al-Jabartī's history of

the Napoleonic occupation of Egypt reveals no references to the Delta town or any similar symbol of peasant rebellion. Readers, particularly those of Idris' local Egyptian audience, may well recall, however, the Dinshawāy incident of 1906, an occasion which served to crystallise Egyptian solidarity and opposition to a later occupier, the British. In June of that year, a group of British officers embarked on a pigeon shoot in Dinshawāy, a village in the Minufiyya province of the delta. A series of accidental misfirings led to uproar in the village: a threshing floor was set on fire and a peasant woman was wounded by another bullet. The villagers retaliated, assaulting the officers with clubs. One officer escaped, but "fainted after running several miles and died of sunstroke." (Goldschmidt 1988, p, 179) The British authorities, eager to reassert their jurisdiction and exact swift punishment, staged a perfunctory court case in which fifty-seven peasants were brought to trial. Four were declared guilty of premeditated murder and sentenced to death by hanging. Many of the accused peasants were flogged.

Few localised incidents in the first half of the twentieth century occupy as privileged a position in Egypt's collective consciousness as Dinshawāy. The flagrant abuse of authority and the villagers' resistance to such abuse was a critical event in Egypt's collective history, for it marked one of the first moments, certainly within the twentieth century, of peasant rebellion, countering the long-held belief in the passivity and compliance of the fallāḥ. The Dinshawāy incident was pivotal in rallying local support for Muṣṭafā Kāmil's nationalist cause and it triggered the imaginations of at least two generations of writers and critics. The same year as the incident, Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Ḥaqqī wrote the didactic qaṣīda *Adhrā Dinshawāy*, commemorating the event. Fabian and literary critic Salāma Mūsā attributes the path his career took and his philosophical stances directly to this historical event: "Had it not been for the Dinshawāy incident, I would not have turned to politics, studying its principles and carefully pursuing its details during the first decade of this century" ('Awad 1986, p. 183). Jacques Berque, writing in 1972, claims that the popular poetry of the village still recalls the incident (Berque 1972, p. 238). To be certain, Idris would have been aware of the Dinshawāy incident and its literary reflections from history lessons in high school and university and *Sirruhu* bears too much of a resemblance to Dinshawāy for a correlation not to be made. The novella deliberately evokes the pride of the common Egyptian and attempts to unite the cultural elite with the majority. And although we never return to the original perspective of the Egyptian narrator within the work, we may certainly infer his reaction to the Frenchman's letter: if a foreigner finds so much resonance in the power of 'Sultan' Ḥāmid and the fortitude of ordinary Egyptians, how much more so the Egyptian cultural elite?

3. Dawmat Wad Hāmid (The Doum Tree of Wad Hāmid, 1967)

"[Culture] in its essence is opposed to *custom*, for custom is always the deterioration of culture. The desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned traditions to life again does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing one's own people." (Fanon 1967, p. 180)

"...In your letters, when you shall these deeds relate, speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice: then, must you speak of one that lov'd not wisely but too well..." -W. Shakespeare, "Othello," Act V, sc.II

"When you leave us tomorrow...It will be fitting if you do not curse us but rather think kindly of us and of the things that I have told you this night, for you may well find that your visit to us was not wholly bad." (Şālih 1967, p.91, translation Johnson-Davies)¹²

One of the many issues Frantz Fanon addresses in his chapter on national culture in *The Wretched of the Earth* is the portrayal of transformation in traditional society. For Arab authors writing in the metropolitan¹³ centres of the world, removed from their home environment, the challenge of representation is compounded. The dilemma is rooted in the very nature of the impetus for writing from the peripheries, namely, the desire to represent one's culture as remembered without becoming mired in retrogressive sentimentality and nostalgia. Fanon speaks of the precarious position which Third World writers within and without their homelands occupy, and he insists that authors must shun ossified and nostalgic representations in favour of ones which demonstrate the continuing obstacles that modernisation poses. The objective for the writer in this case, if writing can be said to have an objective, is neither "to make or break images," nor is it "to make colonialism blush for shame by spreading out little-known cultural treasures under its eyes," (Fanon 1985, pp. 179-80) but simply as the Jamaican poet Edward Lucie-Smith once said, "to tell the truth so that it sounds true" (Lucie-Smith 1965).

Negotiating this balance is a writer like Al-Ṭayyib Şālih, who has spent the majority of his adult life outside of the Sudan. His efforts to capture the essence of life in a small Sudanese village, the reworking of that well-known phrase from Othello, "Speak of me as I am," stem from a desire to achieve Fanon's objective of organic

¹² All translations dealing with this text are from Johnson-Davies 1976.

¹³ Here I am using the term 'metropolitan' to connote the capitals of the former (eighteenth and nineteenth century) colonial world order, most notably London and Paris.

representation. Ṣāliḥ's writing must be seen as a reflection of the hybrid society in which he was nurtured: at once Arab and African, Muslim and animist, contemporary and traditional. The heterogeneous nature of his home culture is the subject of most of Ṣāliḥ's writing, although nowhere else in his series of inter-connected works does he deal with the question of modernisation with such singularity of purpose as he does in *Dawmat Wad Ḥāmid*. The short story is, in both the current writer and Ṣāliḥ's estimation, one of the author's finest pieces of work and is herein presented as both a contrast to and a corroboration of images and themes found in contemporary Egyptian literature. If Fathī Ghānim's *Al-Jabal* reads as flat and didactic *reportage* rather than genuinely creative fiction, and Idrīs' *Sirruhu al-bāti* moves too far to the other end of the spectrum, coming close to romanticising local folk traditions, *Dawmat Wad Ḥāmid* is a more well-rounded work, and marks a maturation of this genre of story.

Surprisingly, up until his work was first published in *Encounter* magazine in 1962, Ṣāliḥ had not thought of himself a "serious writer." Consider these extracts from his autobiography:

In all honesty, I don't consider myself part of the literary movement. I have a genuine desire (*raghba*) for "non-commitment" to literature. Thus, I never attempt to join what are called literary salons or writers' unions. I am a man on the peripheries and I prefer it that way. I wrote (his choice of past tense) to extend a bridge between myself and a locale which I left for no justifiable reason. I feel a [sense of] internal guilt (*al-tawbikh al-dākhilī*) because I realise that fame came to me because of my denial of my environment and an attempt to erect a bridge with it through writing (Ṣāliḥ 1996, p. 20).

Despite his belittling opinion of himself and his less than prolific output, Ṣāliḥ's contribution to Arabic fiction has been considerable. Using the traditions of popular Islam as his vehicle, here specifically the symbol of the doum tree, Ṣāliḥ demonstrates the tenacity of such customs, yet he also suggests that pre-Islamic customs and the contemporary world need not be seen as mutually exclusive. *Dawmat Wad Ḥāmid* may be seen as an address to the Sudanese cultural elite, a plea to a younger, urban, educated generation to consider the significance of traditional ways of life and the means by which such customs sustain the community, without giving rein to sentimental dwelling in the past. Let us examine the text in more detail.

One of the distinguishing features of *Dawmat Wad Ḥāmid* is its method of narration. From the outset, an obvious relationship of village storyteller to onlooker/listener obtains and remains throughout:

Were you to come to our village as a tourist, it is likely, my son, that you would not stay long (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 83).

The narrator is an elderly man, native to the village of Wad Ḥāmid. Though unnamed, his character is easily discernible in his style of speech. The continuous use of the paternalistic diminutive "my boy/my son" (*yā bunayya*) - some twenty-nine times, nine of which, incidentally, appear in the first two pages of the story (Toorawa 1991, p. 215) - the digressive manner in which the tale is related¹⁴ and the deliberate manner of repeating the questions of the silent, embedded listener¹⁵ all convincingly evoke the image of a raconteur, full of wisdom, patience and experience. The narrator is primarily, however, a construct to amplify the differences between himself and the implied or embedded listener. The old man serves a twin function, symbolising both a waning generation and the disparities between town and country life. The contrasts between the younger urban generation's lifestyle and that of the village are initially spoken of with a tone of resentment:

No doubt, my son, you read the papers daily, listen to the radio and go to the cinema once or twice a week... I know, my son, that you hate dark streets and like to see electric light shining out into the night...Oh I wish, my son, I wish - the asphalted roads of the towns - the modern means of transport - the fine comfortable buses. We have none of all this (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 83).

Later in the text, we detect condescension from the old man as he scoffs at the ways of the city:

You townsfolk hurry to the hospital on the slightest pretext. If one of you hurts his finger you dash off to the doctor who puts a bandage on and you carry it in a sling for days; and even then it doesn't get better (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 89).

Yet the prevailing sentiment is one of resignation to his own way of life and a process of change beyond the narrator's control. The old man is neither so stubborn nor so proud as to deny the stringent conditions of Wad Ḥāmid:

My son is in the town studying at school...and it is my hope that he will stay where he is and not return (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 94).

On five occasions in the story, this sentiment is given voice in the following

¹⁴"Be patient, my son - have another cup of tea," "Let us go home, my son, for this is no time for talking in the open." And later, "Excuse me son, while I perform the sunset prayer...Ah, ah...For a week this back of mine has been giving me pain. Oh to be young!" etc.

¹⁵"You ask who planted the doum tree?" "My son, have you asked me what we do when we're ill?" And halfway through the story, "Shall I tell you the story of Wad Ḥāmid, my son, or would you like to sleep?" etc.

manner:

Tomorrow you will depart from our village... and you will be right to do so.¹⁶

A vivid illustration of the hardship of the life in the village is provided in the opening passages as the old man describes the insects that besiege Wad Ḥāmid each season, a "dark cloud" of sand flies in the winter and "savage flies... the size of young sheep" in summer. He tells of an *imām* visiting from the capital city who after only a period of days is forced to flee, having contracted malaria, a swollen face and dysentery. Through all of this, the narrator maintains a self-deprecating tone, declaring Wad Ḥāmid a village of "thick-skinned people, ...accustomed to this hard life, in fact we like it, but we ask no one to subject himself to the difficulties of our life" (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 84).

The sole source of pride in Wad Ḥāmid is the doum tree, the embodiment of the joy and struggle of the village. The remainder of the story is devoted to the explanation of the significance of this village emblem. The tree itself is a syncretic symbol, a fusion of popular folklore and orthodox Islam. Legend and local pre-Islamic custom feature noticeably in the practice of contemporary Islam in the Sudan, according to Aḥmad Naṣr, among others, who view popular Islam as a median point "between modernity and strict adherence to tradition" (Naṣr 1980, p. 103). Islam initially found its way into the Sudan through the teachings of the Sufis. Thus, the mystical elements of the faith have had a profound impact on the daily practice of Islam in the Sudan. Miracles of the sort elaborated in Surat Maryam, for instance, had a particular resonance with villagers whose pre-Islamic traditions included the relating of similarly incredible accounts (Naṣr 1980, p. 92). Here, Ṣāliḥ gives voice to one such example.

Employing *isnād*, the traditional method of verifying sayings of the Prophet, the old man begins to relate the tale of the man Wad Ḥāmid. The effect is to bestow a certain amount of credibility to an otherwise fantastic story. Ḥāmid, the slave of an unjust unbeliever, is freed from captivity by praying to Allah in supplication. Ḥāmid was told to set out to the riverbank, lay his prayer mat out on the water and follow its course until it stopped. Legend recounts that the mat descended on the exact spot where the dawm tree was planted. Ḥāmid is, then, a reminder of God's might over oppressive situations. Secondly, he is a model of pious behaviour and the rewards that

¹⁶ Twice on p. 84, and again, for instance, pp. 85-6: "Tomorrow you will depart from our village, of that there is no doubt...", p. 91: "When you leave us tomorrow - and you will certainly do so" and finally, p. 94.

such a life may garner. And the tree planted in his name signifies permanence and stability for the villagers. No one can remember the village without the tree. Even the word *doum* has as its derivation the root *dāma*, which means "to persist or persevere."

The legend of Wad Ḥāmid has long been embedded in the collective subconscious of the community, then, and the tree has been accorded certain mystical powers, we are told. In the most poetic portion of the story, the reader learns how even the dreams of the villagers are imbued with visions of the sacred tree. For one villager, the doum emerges as an image of fruition and plenty, an oasis beyond an arduous expanse of desert:

A man awakens from sleep and tells his neighbour how he found himself in a vast sandy tract of land, the sand as white as pure silver; how his feet sank in as he walked so that he could only draw them out again with difficulty; how he walked and walked until he was overcome with thirst and stricken with hunger, while the sands stretched endlessly around him; how he climbed a hill and on reaching the top espied a dense forest of doum trees with a single tall tree in the centre which in comparison with the others looked like a camel amid a herd of goats; how the man went down the hill to find that the earth seemed to be rolled up before him so that it was but a few steps before he found himself under the doum tree of Wad Ḥāmid; how he then discovered a vessel containing milk, its surface still fresh with froth, and how the milk did not go down though he drank until he had quenched his thirst (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 86).

For another, a vision of the tree and the sage Wad Ḥāmid mark salvation from the tempestuous waters of the river, symbolising recovery from dire illness (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 87). In waking time, offerings are made at the foot of the tree in gratitude for Wad Ḥāmid's blessing. In circumstances of grave danger or illness, the people of the village pray and make pilgrimages to the tree with every confidence that the spirit of Wad Ḥāmid will provide succour. The narrator relates the story of a woman with a fatal disease who goes to the tree and experiences visions of Wad Ḥāmid. Her testimony is another striking lyrical moment in the story, worth quoting in full:

While midway between wakefulness and sleep I suddenly heard sounds of recitation from the Qur'ān and a bright light, as sharp as a knife edge, radiated out, joining up the two river banks, and I saw the doum tree *prostrating itself in worship* ... I saw a venerable old man with a white beard wearing a spotless white robe come up to me, a smile on his face. He struck me on the head with a string of prayer-beads and called out: "Arise." ...I swear that I got up I know not how and went home I know not how. ...I have never again been afraid, nor yet ill (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 90).

The dilemma arises when this symbol of permanence and salvation is threatened by the innovations of the outside world. Here, the resilience of the community in

upholding their traditions shows itself in a dramatic way. The old man relates three separate instances where outsiders bring with them a direct challenge to the customs of the village. The threat of the decay of the traditions prompts the citizenry to resist. A water pump for irrigation is proposed by the colonial government in the first instance. The ideal site for the scheme is the spot where the doum tree is located. At the mention of chopping down the tree, the narrator tells us that an otherwise passive body of people "rose up as one man" and prevented the district commissioner from having his way (Şālih 1967, p. 85). So deeply ensconced in the village's psyche was the tree, the old man recounts in an amusing embellishment, that even the horseflies played their part in expressing their disapproval, launching into the foreigner with intensity (Şālih 1967, p. 85). In exasperation, the commissioner relents and rescinds his proposal.

The arrival of independence brings with it the idealistic vigour and intention characteristic of a newly liberated country, the old man tells us. What is lacking is sympathy for the sanctity of the tree. In the second scheme, the new government proposes that the riverbank which the tree overlooks be used as a harbour for a steamboat, thereby providing the villagers with access to the outside world. Upon the suggestion that the people of Wad Ḥāmid change the day of their visitations to the tree so as to facilitate the steamboat, the narrator tells us that the citizens once again "rose up as one man" and forcibly ejected the government representative (Şālih 1967, p. 88).

Şālih's scepticism towards politicians of every stripe - black, white, foreign and local - surfaces most visibly in the third tale of confrontation with the people of Wad Ḥāmid.¹⁷ Administration after administration continue to attempt to assert their will upon the village, to no avail. In the third example, the villagers' resistance is utilised to the politicians' advantage. Once again, a steamer-stop is proposed at the site of the doum tree, and following the now customary refusal and violent opposition by the locals, the government returns, buttressed by the force of the military. Twenty villagers are imprisoned on the grounds of their insolence. A month later, the government changes hands, they are released and given a heroes' welcome. Rallying around the imprisoned citizens of Wad Ḥāmid, the original independence government attained the ouster of the members of parliament responsible for the villagers'

¹⁷ Al-Şālih's political quietism sounds more like outright, if well-founded, cynicism, as the following quote from an article in *Al-Ḥayāt* points out:

"The opinions of men of politics fluctuate according to their circumstances and vagaries. What they want of the intellectual is that he vacillate along with them, and this is a thoroughly exasperating process."

He then leads into a critique of the transformations of the Numeiry regime, *Al-Ḥayāt*, 14 Sept., 1996, p. 20.

detention. The same individuals who had previously acted in ignorance of traditions seemed to have at least recognised the salience of religious symbols for their citizenry. For as the narrator notes, Wad Ḥāmid is a microcosm of the country. "In every village, there is some monument like the doum tree...which people see in their dreams" (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 93). But their action must be seen as purely opportunistic, a token gesture to win the hearts of a constituency. The old man is aware of the government's designs, but is simply content that the tree, along with the tradition, remains standing.

Here, the old man's narrative ends, and the reader discovers, not unlike in a tale from *One Thousand and One Nights*, an external narrator - in this case, the young listener:

When the old man had finished what he had to say he looked up at me with an enigmatic smile playing at the corners of his mouth like the faint flickerings of a lamp (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 94).

The young man speaks for the first time, addressing the elderly villager. Convinced that the village's resistance is ultimately no match for the inevitable march of progress, he asks the old man when he foresees the arrival of changes. The man waits, then replies that an influx of outsiders would herald the breakdown of the village customs. In the last few words of the elderly gentleman's dialogue the reader can discern the faintest trace of optimism. Just as the protagonist of Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's *Qindil Umm Hāshim* (1944) comes to a point of reconciliation between the traditions of popular Islam in Sayyida Zaynab and modern science, so too the old man suggests a coexistence of the tools of modernisation and long-standing religious rite:

What all these people have overlooked is that there's plenty of room for all these things: the doum tree, the tomb, the water pump, and the steamer's stopping-place (Ṣāliḥ 1967, p. 94).

The pregnant pause which follows the story-teller's retort, however, suggests that even the old narrator questions the likelihood of such a world.

4. *Ayyām al-insān al-sab‘a* (The Seven Days of Man, 1969)

“Where is the world of the past...where are the generousities, the priorities, the invitations of men and women? ...the world has fallen irretrievably, violently ripped apart. Nothing. Indescribable darkness and sorrow” (Qāsim 1969, p. 212).

In the introduction to a survey collection of Egyptian short stories written in the 1970s, the editor, Idwār al-Kharrāt, notes the constancy with which the themes of nostalgia, recollections of childhood and life in the countryside recur. He alludes to several young writers - most notably, Jār al-Nabī al-Halw, Māhir Tawfīq and Muḥsin Yūnis - who have appropriated these themes as their stock in trade (Al-Kharrāt 1982, pp. 6-9)¹⁸. What Al-Kharrāt fails to provide, however, is any explicit explanation for the thematic recurrences of childhood and nostalgic portrayals of the countryside. He depicts the decade as a period of significant political and cultural upheaval; a time which witnessed the waning of the concept of socialism following Nāṣir’s death and saw the “debilitation of the cultural elite” as a whole (Al-Kharrāt 1982, p. 10).¹⁹ From portrayals such as this, we may infer that the political and psychic climate of the country at the time was conducive to very little other than these sorts of reminiscences. Many writers, it seems, found it easier to address a distant past, redolent with pleasant memories, than to probe the present day.

‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim’s first novel, *Ayyām al-insān al-sab‘a*, published in 1969, was perhaps a harbinger of this mood²⁰. Viewed from the exterior, the book involves the rather mundane and often detailed recounting of seven different stages of the events of the celebration of the *mawlid* (birthday) of the popular Sufi saint Sayyid Aḥmad al-Badawī - the “mystical gathering” (*Al-Ḥaḍra*), “bread-baking” (*Al-Khabīz*), “travel” (*Al-Safar*), “service,” (*Al-Khidma*), “the big night” (*Al-Layla al-kabīra*), “the farewell” (*Al-Wadā‘*) and finally, “the way” (*Al-Ṭarīq*). The account of the “seven days” is given to us by an omniscient, unnamed narrator who focuses on the thoughts and perspectives of the young boy ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. The events are narrated with great

¹⁸ Some writers - particularly Māhir Tawfīq and Muḥsin Yūnis - incorporate Freudian analysis in their works as a means of exploring their familial ties, the writer tells us. Al-Kharrāt 1982, pp. 6-9.

¹⁹ “*Baḥtit...kalima wa mafhūm al-ishṭirākīyya...wa na if al-muthaqqafīn al-miṣriyīn.*”

²⁰ Marina Stagh informs us that an initial draft of *Ayyām al-insān al-sab‘a* was written during Qāsim’s four year detention for leftist activities (December 1960 - May 1964). In prison, he solicited the advice and constructive criticism of his fellow cellmates Ṣun‘allāh Ibrāhīm and Kamāl al-Qalash, (Stagh 1993, p. 304.)

sympathy to 'Abd al-'Azīz's point of view, leading the reader to believe that the author and the narrator are one and the same - an older 'Abd al-'Azīz, perhaps, writing in an effort to recapture pivotal moments of his life. The narrative spans at least 8 years, following the young 'Abd al-'Azīz from primary school in his village to university in Alexandria. During the course of those years, we witness an emotional and intellectual transformation as the protagonist grows increasingly aware of his environment and becomes more analytical of the traditions of the village, only to revise his ideas as the old ways of life recede.

We have seen that *Sirruhu al-bāti'* and *Al-Jabal* are based on events outside of the fictional realm. While these two works relied on historical events and *reportage* for inspiration, *Ayyām al-Insān al-sab'a* draws directly on the personal experience of the author. Indeed, the story of 'Abd al-'Azīz in this novel virtually mirrors Qāsim's own early years. Born in 1935 in Al-Mandāra, a small village near Ṭantā, Qāsim grew up with his grandfather (upon whom the father-figure of the novel was presumably based) in another village called Mit Ghamr, where he attended primary school. The author's secondary schooling was in Tantā followed by a university career in Alexandria. In 1959, he pursued further studies in Cairo and became politically active. He was consequently imprisoned for a few years and began writing fiction shortly after his release in the mid-sixties. He published five novels, two novellas and four collections of short stories. After having lived in West Germany for some years, Qāsim returned to Egypt to work with the civil service there. He died in 1990.

Providing a thorough account of a novel which dwells on what might seem rather ordinary elements of daily life is a challenge. The temptation is either to linger in the detail or hastily summarise. It is hoped that a balance is achieved here. We are introduced to the main characters in chapter one as the evening gathering of dervishes, the *jalsa*, is getting underway. The peaceful coolness of sunset, a sharp contrast with the heat of the stern daytime sun, provides an ideal setting for the men to relax and seek solace in storytelling and banter. Functioning much like a camera, the young boy sits to the side and captures the proceedings as they occur. This camera analogy is particularly appropriate here, for we are provided with very little beyond external descriptions of the characters. It could be argued that the other characters exist only in as far as their lives impinge on his. As they enter the hall, the narrator gives us a "snapshot:" in walks Aḥmad Badawī, a round-faced, jovial man who reads for the illiterate members of the *jalsa*, followed by 'Alī Khalīl, the shop owner and Muḥammad Kāmil, the oldest dervish who leads the *dhikrs*. This first group is then followed by Al-Aṭrash al-'Irāqī, the mute, Muḥammad al-Āyyiq, the foppish dandy known for wearing women's clothes, and Salīm al-Shirkāsī, the carpenter. At first

blush, these rather limited descriptions appear to be the work of an inattentive writer. When we remember, however, that the narrator is attempting to portray the gathering as experienced through the eyes of an eleven year-old, such descriptions strike the reader as suitable and even, on occasion, quite perceptive:

Muḥammad Kāmil 'amiq al-ṣawt 'amiq al-malāmiḥ 'amiq al-'uyūn ibtisāmatuhu ḥazīna, huznuhū juz' min takwīnihā tashruq minhu wa taghrub fihi...wa Al-'Irāqī yataqāfaz ka-qird fi salla... (Qāsim 1969, p. 130).²¹

The reader must then rely upon the conversations of the evening to broaden his or her impressions of the characters. Aḥmad Badawī, for instance, mentions the death of his sons. Muḥammad al-Āyyiq is chided by the rest of the group for his wife's notoriety as the village thief. 'Alī Khalīl, a self-righteous character, berates Al-Āyyiq for his womanish ways. The narrator comments that young 'Abd al-'Azīz fears 'Alī Khalīl's moralising tone but above and beyond this, the boy worries about the capability of 'Alī Khalīl's donkey to withstand the weight of such a heavy-set man.

Throughout, 'Abd al-'Azīz's perceptions of the gathering determine the reader's impressions. He speaks in loving terms of his father, Hājj Karīm, and the gathering. His love and admiration for his father will remain untarnished throughout the novel, but as we shall later see, his sentiments towards the gathering will change.

In chapter two, *Al-Khabīz*, we are granted an audience with the women of the village as they complete their preparations for the *mawlid*. The technique of narration is similar to that of the first chapter; the young boy is present but remains a nominal participant in the activities which, in this case, center around the detailed process of making bread. Qāsim utilises this technique of the detached observer (through the use of internal dialogue and the actual positioning of 'Abd al-'Azīz to the side of most activity) to great effect in these initial chapters, portraying 'Abd al-'Azīz as a highly perceptive child. The young boy is aware, for instance, of a certain amount of competition between his father's two wives. Though he admits to finding the other wife more attractive, 'Abd al-'Azīz feels a natural sympathy towards his mother, whom he sees as a model of generosity and sacrifice. The daughter of a government employee in Cairo, 'Abd al-'Azīz's mother found the adjustment to the life and responsibilities of the countryside daunting, we are told. She has acquired over the years, however, an essential role in the training of the younger women of the village and passing on the traditions of cooking. The milk of Umm 'Azīz's water buffalo (*gamūsa*) is reputed throughout the region, particularly in its bread form, which never

²¹ For the original Arabic text, see Appendix One, example 3.

fails to impress the participants of the *mawlid*.

The process of making bread - from scooping the cream of the milk to covering the fermenting mixture as the women utter their "*Bismillāhs*" over the rising dough - is recounted in great detail. The baking is interspersed with amusing and enlightening bits of banter between the women. Rashīda, a strong, independent-minded woman, criticises the local men for fleeing to Tanta and leaving their women behind. She then expresses her desire to marry a gentleman (*effendī*) from Tanta, to the sympathetic titters and laughter of the other women (Qāsim 1969, p. 75). The mockery continues with an anecdote of ‘Amr Farhūd, a man of the village who secretly attempts to read his wife's book of spells. Unaware of the power of the book, he accidentally conjures up a genie who then gets his retribution by placing the man head-first into the ground and leaving him there, his *galabīya* and private parts flying to the wind (Qāsim 1969, pp. 62-64). Amid the chuckling and joviality, both the reader and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz are given insight into the usually more private domain of women's activities in the country.

As we enter chapter three, *Al-Safar*, a year has elapsed and the seeds of dissension have been planted in the mind of the young protagonist. The time has come yet again for the journey to Tanta, only this year ‘Abd al-‘Azīz feels the stirrings of contempt for the group and the thoughtless manner in which they proceed to prepare for another year's festivities. Thus, the title of the chapter bears a dual, if not triple, significance: it marks the cyclical return to the travel arrangements, it signifies the Sufi notions of the spiritual journey or quest for awareness of the unseen and it indicates the point of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz's mental ‘departure’ from his village community. The source of this rift is the books the boy has begun to read, which the narrator describes as

his illness and cure, the words of which led him into weird mazes. There was nothing fixed in his life any more. The fiercesome cudgels of knowledge were smashing all his illusions one after another. They made him feel brazen and bitter, and the sharp pain of it all had him addicted (Qāsim 1969, p. 83, trans. Allen 1982).

It is an enduring paradox of the lives of intellectuals, and one of the perennial themes of Arabic literature, that education, which should by rights alleviate economic and emotional hardship, is often the source of further anxieties. In this case, the young boy becomes aware of the narrow confines of his village and seeks liberation. As Aḥmad Badawī reads the epic of the Banū Hilāl tribe meeting Abu Zayd in Tunis at one of the weekly gatherings, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz's mind wanders: "That longing which he felt at the time became a pure thing stirring in his soul - the deep desire to travel, to

escape” (Qāsim 1969, p. 85).

Meanwhile, the village bustles with activity, making ready for departure. A handful of the women prepare to travel while the rest assist enviously. Many villagers ask Hājj Karīm to recite the *fātiḥa* at the grave of Sayyid Badawī in honour of their sick and dead. The shaykh of the dervishes’ mystical order arrives from Sharqīya to accompany them to the *mawlid*. ‘Amr Farhūd, one of the regular attendants at the *jalsa* arrives carrying the bulk of his baggage on a camel. The sight of the camel triggers a flashback for ‘Abd al-‘Azīz of being nearly thrown by that same camel a year before. Amid the commotion, the boy tells us, Hājj Karīm remains calm and dignified, diligently noting the requests of the villagers for blessings and carefully organising the entourage. At this stage, though he has become critical of the group of dervishes, the boy remains enamoured of his father, perhaps a sign that the innocence of childhood has not yet been completely lost:

*wa ‘uyūnuhu malī’a bi al-jalāl wa al-ḥanān wa al-shawq lam yara
‘Abd al-‘Azīz dhālīka ‘l-t‘bīr fī ‘uyūn insānīya abadan. zalla
maḥfūran fī khayālihi... (Qāsim 1969, p. 95)²²*

The chapter ends with ‘Abd al-‘Azīz on the train, with tears in his eyes as he stares out of his window at the ties of the railroad tracks and the seemingly infinite string of telephone wire. The young boy sees his future embodied in these two symbols of modernity. His is to be an extensive, far-reaching existence, not one tethered to the village.

“I am very much afraid that the city will work its magic power, dissolving and destroying, on ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and will grind up his seven days and turn them into millions of grains, of seconds, minutes, hours and insipid problems. The life of the village will become remote to him. His visits to his *fallāḥ* family will dwindle, become rare, and slowly cease altogether... And if he will return it will only be in order to feel “*fallāḥ*”... I am afraid, I say this with my hand on my heart.” (Al-Nassāj in Elad, 1994, p. 14)

By the time the reader arrives at the fourth of the ‘seven days’ of man, he fully recognises the sense of cognitive dissonance within the young protagonist. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz has now made a modest “escape,” having moved to Tanta to attend school, and has developed some of the sensibilities of a city dweller. His is hardly an impartial vision of the city, as we see the boy marvelling at the clean streets, the promenades lined with bougainvillaea trees, the cinema, shops with sarcastic salesmen, cars darting to and fro, leaving dust clouds in their wake - and not a single critical word to

²² For the original Arabic text, see Appendix One, example 4.

say about the city. The disparity between town and country is brought into sharp relief when 'Abd al-'Azīz meets his father and the dervishes at the station for the annual festivities. His appraisal of the band of men waiting, here quoted in full, illustrates the shame sometimes experienced by one who has "left the fold" and is forced to view his origins more objectively:

These men in their cheap clothes, their red wool caps and their gaunt, malnourished, pockmarked faces stained by the sun, these people standing around afraid are the fathers of 'Abd al-'Azīz - his heart and his eyes gathered around and staring at him. But he wished that they were cleaner and braver, not this poor, ignorant and terrified lot before him. In school, he would openly and strongly boast of being a *fallāḥ* among the children of the town, but something within him grew hostile and resentful...if only they were different. As if they had sensed the struggle within him, they looked at him apprehensively and Aḥmad Badawī spoke:

"Master 'Abd, if one of your schoolmates saw you with a bunch of *fallāḥīn* like us... it would probably be better if you stayed away from us...we'll see you (from afar) and you'll see us."

Their shrewd eyes stripped his insides bare and clothed them for a moment with a sharp kind of shame, like a cold sting.

"What're you talking about? It doesn't matter to me!"

Quickly, he thought about what he'd said, how his response held a confession of his real feelings for them. He wanted to cry out, "You all are the best folks in the world," but didn't. Perhaps he sensed in advance how weak and contrived it would be..." (Qāsim 1969, pp. 126-127)

What began as an unadulterated love for Hājj Karīm, his friends and their traditions has now become open to question. As the villagers perform their *khidma* duties - visiting the elderly and infirm, searching for a house to rent for their stay, and praying at the tomb of Sayyid Badawī, 'Abd al-'Azīz sees himself moving further and further away, repulsed even by what he sees as the perfunctory nature of these activities. The narrator draws an analogy in this manner: he describes the villagers as "flecks of iron all attracted in an orderly manner towards the magnetic pole" (Qāsim 1969, p. 130). As for 'Abd al-'Azīz, he is made of "some strange non-magnetic metal."²³ The final snub of the chapter comes when the boy refuses to accompany the villagers on their annual trip to the cinema, having seen the same film previously with

²³ Qāsim writes, "*Ammā 'Abd al-'Azīz fa huwa waḥīd baynahum dharrāt al-ḥadīd jamī'an fa judhibat fī niẓām naḥw quṭb al-maghnaṭīs ammā huwa fa min ma'dīn gharīb ghayr mutajānis.*" For the original Arabic text, see Appendix One, example 5.

his friends from Tanta.

From the outset of the “Big Night” of the festival, we are given clear indication as to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s position in relation to his society and their traditions - he has been pulled to the peripheries. What began as a kind of physical distance from the group in chapter one, due to the boy’s youth and inexperience, has now become a deeply entrenched intellectual distance. As the dervishes scurry about the hall they have hired, preparing the place for the grand meal, the boy sits in the back of the hall, crouched down, hugging his knees, staring incredulously at the piles of shoes before him. He is dumbfounded as he watches the bare feet kick up clouds of dust and odour and feels disgusted by the lack of cleanliness around him. To add to this sense of removal, the narrator tells us that ‘Abd al-‘Azīz doesn’t understand the jokes that are being told. In an effort to seem useful amid the beehive of activity, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz offers to make coffee, but this does little to alleviate his sense of uneasiness, as he envisions himself as the *kanaka* (coffee pot), “brimming over inside with something black and bitter.” (Qāsim 1967, p. 154) When those gathered stoop to the floor to eat, the narrator clearly conveys ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s distaste for the entire scene:

The dinosaurs ruled the earth for a million years. Enormous bodies with tiny brains and gnawing mouths, jostling about just like this with no order. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was on the verge of crying in despair that he was a descendant of these who were demolishing the meal with a strange bestiality. He wanted to stop and scream out to them that they stop and consider that the way they were dividing up (the food) into small pieces and hovering over it with such fierce competition rejects thought, abandons it and tramples it underfoot (Qāsim 1968, pp. 257-258).

The protagonist’s judgmental reaction signifies something much deeper than characteristic adolescent embarrassment or rejection. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s exposure to education and the mannerisms of the city have led him to believe that the demeanour of his kinsmen is not only outmoded but subhuman. By behaving in such a manner, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s friends and family have stepped outside of the bounds of “ordinary” human behaviour and lowered themselves to the level of primal creatures satisfying primal urges. The boy’s response to the gathering is violent, perhaps exaggerated, but it illustrates the depth of the perception of the divide between the town and country.

Seen in another light, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s response is not unfamiliar. Indeed, the portrayal of educated individuals who wholeheartedly embrace their folk traditions in Arabic literature is extremely rare. Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī’s *Qandil Umm Hāshim*, published in 1944, furnishes us with another, if not *the* archetypal, example of this. The protagonist of this novella, Ismā‘il, is compelled to come to terms with a similar sort of cognitive

dissonance after having spent years abroad in England receiving medical training, only to discover the people of his quarter in Cairo still practising the ritual treating of ailing eyes with the oil of the lamp of Sayyida Zaynab. Ismā'il's impressions of his countrymen are as disdainful as 'Abd al-'Azīz's, if not more so. Witness Ismā'il's sentiments as he surveys the people in the square, for instance. He describes himself as surrounded by

a chattering revolting race, hairless and beardless, naked and barefooted, with blood for urine and worms for stools. They received blows on their elongated napes with but a smile of humility that distorted the whole of their faces. Egypt herself was nothing but a sprawling piece of mud, lying senseless in the middle of the desert. Above it clouds of flies and mosquitoes were buzzing and on it a herd of lean buffaloes moved knee-deep in mud (Ḥaqqī 1944, pp. 43-44, trans. Badawī 1993).

For 'Abd al-'Azīz, it is the herd-like mentality of the throng that triggers his outburst. Following the meal, the boy joins the procession towards the saint's grave. The sensory overload that results from the festival atmosphere - shaykhs with their various orders, side-show stalls and a blinding array of lights - leaves 'Abd al-'Azīz "dizzy, on the verge of vomiting" (Qāsim 1969, p. 166). The boy attempts to resist the shoving of the multitude but is unable to. By the time he gets home, his nerves are frayed and he can take no more. When one of the dervishes praises the people who organised this year's mawlid, the boy lashes out indiscriminately in dialect:

Umam min ghair 'aql...min ghair tafkīr...Umam bitdūs zayy bahā'im? mish 'ārifīn rāyḥīn fain...mish 'ārifīn gāyīn minayn...bit'lamū eh...rāyḥīn fain... gāyīn minain ya 'abbād al-aṣnām?!

"A people with no brain, who don't think? Who trample around like cattle? Unaware of where they're going and where they've come from? What do you know? Where are you going? Where are you coming from, you idol worshippers!" (Qāsim 1968, pp. 171-172)²⁴

Hājj Karīm then loses control of his emotions and curses his son - and most of the dervishes are stunned into silence. Tensions are smoothed over when Muḥammad Kāmil suggests that they recite the fātiḥa. As the evening draws to a close, however, the young boy remains unassuaged, his mind aflurry with activity, "like crickets crawling inside his brain, with no respite to this torture and no sleep with the stings inside him" (Qāsim 1968, p. 173).

Chapters 6 and 7 conclude the novel with a sense of melancholy and resignation.

²⁴ For the original Arabic text, see Appendix One, example 6.

A few years have elapsed, 'Abd al-'Azīz has gone off to university in Alexandria and is summoned back by reports of his father's ailing health. He returns to witness the decay of the village community. One of the dervishes has died, another has gone blind and the weekly gatherings have lost their essential cohesive function, having now been supplanted by the cafe and the wireless radio. "Kochina [an Egyptian card game], Kennedy and Kruschev" now dominate the thoughts and conversations of the men. At home, the *gamūsa* collapses at the water wheel, another potent symbol of the fall of the old ways of society. The older, perhaps more mature 'Abd al-'Azīz becomes introspective about the changes and displays uncharacteristic regret at their passing. "Where is the world of the past," he asks, "the world has fallen irretrievably..." And as if asking these questions is too painful for the young man, the story concludes with 'Abd al-'Azīz sitting in a cafe, seeking solace in the distractions of political conversation and the intoxicating escape that smoking a water-pipe provides.

Mention must be made of some of the stylistic concerns of the novel, most notably the author's usage of colloquial Arabic in the dialogue. We have already made brief reference to the application of the colloquial as it concerns the novel *Al-Jabal*. Let us begin here with a few general remarks about manipulation of the colloquial. In his preface to his book *Rāwiya* (1956), the critic Muḥammad Amin Hasūna neatly summarises the dilemma facing any Arab writer of fiction:

if he wishes to satisfy his artistic inclinations and writes his dialogue in the way his artistic conscience dictates - I mean in the spoken language - he will lose some of his brothers in art and in belief among the readers of his works in the Arab world, and he will incur the anger of the fanatics of the literary language. And if he clings to the principles of the language, the grammar, the syntax, and writes in the literary style, he will be a traitor to his conscience and his artistic integrity, and will place on his pages dumb statues deprived of the elements of life (Elad 1994, p. 34).

Thus, a variety of religious, political and cultural imperatives have prevented some writers from employing forms of the colloquial in their writing. Those who elected to use colloquialisms - particularly those who wrote prior to the Free Officers' consolidation of power in the mid-1950s - seemed to have done so deliberately, with one or two ends in mind, possibly both: they either wished to assert the validity of Egyptian nationalism through use of its language or else demonstrate their affiliation with the great majority of the population who understand nothing but the colloquial. To the present day, these concerns have not yet completely lost salience. However, the additional consideration of artistic integrity, truthfully rendering idiomatic

expression in print, began to emerge. Furthermore, substantial demographic shifts from the villages to Egypt's major cities in the late 1940s and early 1950s meant that the experience of the village was still very strong in the minds and on the tongues of village writers. 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's usage of colloquial in the novel reflects these changes. All of his characters speak a form of the colloquial - Sa'īdī or otherwise - and nearly all the dialogue is written as such. Even the educated characters - the sheikh, Hājī Karīm, 'Abd al-'Azīz, etc. - speak entirely in colloquial. The result is a very honest portrayal of reality which provides detail and nuance in the tones and rhythms of speech.

The author's interest in portraying such detail is surely a measure of the extent to which Qāsim felt contemporary Egyptian society to be moving away from this rural existence. The three main works of this chapter all exhibit authorial intent to depict segments of society or Egyptian history that might otherwise be overlooked. And the role of the cultural elite in bringing these histories, these scenes to the attention of a broader public, is viewed as essential. Insofar as the cultural elite are portrayed within these novels dealing with tradition, it is significant that they are the characters who typically overcome indifference, mediate for a people, question the nature of custom and, on occasion, lament the passing of traditions. It is their attentive and dissenting minds which bring the issues of so-called development and progress into focus. The implication is here and in each of the texts examined in this chapter that the cultural elite functions as the ever present conscience of the society. And while it is self-evident that the extent of each character's success to articulate a middle ground between absolute dissolution of tradition and the wholehearted embrace of westernisation depends upon the individual protagonist's sense of affinity with the regions and customs portrayed, the depiction of the *function* of the cultural elite changes very little. The primary function of the cultural elite is one of interpretation: their role is to interpret their society's sense of being. Texts dating from the initial decade of Egyptian independence characteristically depict the cultural elite celebrating the society's sense of being (which is not necessarily the same as celebrating its *well-being*), while later works, particularly those written after the 1967 defeat, presented a cultural elite with a more critical eye. It seems that the differences in portrayal among the stories assessed here - from *Al-Jabal* through to *Kunshirtu al-nāy* - are a reflection of, and a reaction to, the very different socio-political circumstances under which each work was written. This issue of aesthetic shifts and the socio-political conditions which produced them is the subject of the latter two chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 3

A Question of Leadership

Introduction

This chapter examines the crucial and often contentious issue of portrayal of leadership. Here, we focus primarily on varying stances of the cultural elite to figures of authority and leadership, but will also analyse portrayals of the cultural elite as leaders themselves. As was mentioned at the outset of this research, political and/or socio-cultural analysis of the cultural elite's place within leadership is a burgeoning field¹. However, examination of the literary reflections of this subject remains, for the most part, an underdeveloped area. In *Al-Muthaqqaf al-'arabī wa 'l-sulṭa* (The Arab Intellectual and Authority, 1992), the Lebanese critic Samāḥ Idrīs offers us one of the few literary studies of the contentious relationship between the cultural elite and political leadership. Idrīs limits his discussion to the Nāṣir period, yet from this framework we may glean a model for viewing stances towards leadership as a whole. The author isolates seven essential literary manifestations of intellectual responses to Nāṣirism: absolute support, apologism, opportunism, critical support, antagonism, escapism and rejectionism. The present writer has attempted to place the categorisations along an ideological continuum² (see Appendix 2) for visual ease.

The absolute supporter and its complementary sub-group, the apologist, are to be found in characters who viewed the 1952 revolution, particularly in its initial stages, as a transitional phase. Accordingly, the Free Officers' regime was blindly given sanction, elements of national heritage and culture were to be affirmed and any violations or infractions of human rights were downplayed, viewed as temporary and necessary to rid society of its reactionary elements. Absolute supporters and apologists typically overlook repression and unjustifiable imprisonment, for their own experience reflects very little of the often harsh and negative consequences of autocracy. These characters were typically official spokespeople for the government, or else were close to the government and stood to benefit from such affirmation. Such persons chose to suspend their own criticism in order to witness an end to the

¹ See most recently: Muḥsin Jāssim al-Mūsawī, "Al-Nakhba wa 'l-inshiqāq," *Al-Adāb*, January 2000 (an extract from the author's forthcoming book entitled *Khiyānat al-muthaqqafīn al-'Arab*)

² None of these categories, Idrīs hastens to point out, are fully self-contained; there is a certain amount of overlap as some of these classifications necessarily represent sub-groups of larger ones.

corruption and factionalism of the previous era (Idrīs 1992, p. 69)³

'Opportunist' characters, who paid little heed to ideological concerns and utilised their connections to governmental agencies for their personal benefit, featured more prominently than either absolute supporters or apologists during the Nāṣir period and beyond.⁴ This Idrīs attributes to the actual situation of the cultural elite's extreme state of dependency on national governmental structures which oversee and control huge swathes of the culture industry (newspapers, TV, publishing houses, etc.) (Idrīs 1992, p. 119).

However, the critical supporter comprised the broad majority of the cultural elite, both within and without fiction. And as was mentioned earlier in this thesis, most intellectuals yearned for fundamental and systematic change following the revolution, but the critical supporter viewed the introduction of the military and an expansive bureaucracy into many aspects of daily civilian and cultural life with suspicion and disapproval (Idrīs 1992, p. 86) Maḥfūz, for example, in an interview with Ḥalīm Barakāt in 1974, exemplifies this stance: He applauded land reform, nationalisation, free education and other social reforms, but objected to the negative elements, most notably the regime's undemocratic nature, which corrupted it in the implementation (Idrīs 1992, p. 87). Critical supporters generally admit that the achievements of the 1952 revolution were but a component in the struggle towards genuine transformation (Idrīs 1992, p. 93), and their literary manifestations reflect this position and are shown either satirising figures of leadership (typically with hopes of prompting reform) or else struggling to resist their autocratic tendencies altogether. Many authors resorted to 'literary subterfuge' in order to voice their dissent, addressing inconsistencies of leadership of previous eras - the Pharaohs or the Mamelukes, for instance - or of different societal contexts - the despotism of the village *shaykh*, for example.

As time passed, and the military governments continued to prove intractable, a variety of negative responses began to emerge. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood and certain Communist elements were portrayed, albeit infrequently, as outright rejectionists.⁵ The testimony of students and intellectuals who were imprisoned and tortured under military governments came to the fore in the guise of the so-called

³Idrīs cites as examples the characters Ḥamdī and Ḥassan from Yūsuf al-Sibā'ī's *Layl lahu Ākhir* (1964) and Doctor Sādiq 'Abd al-Ḥamid and Qadri Rizq from Najīb Maḥfūz's *Al-Marāyā* (1972), Idrīs 1992, pp. 68-70.

⁴ Quintessential examples of opportunist characters may be found in Ra'ūf 'Ilwān in Najīb Maḥfūz's *Al-Liṣṣ wa al-kilāb* and 'The Doctor' in Ṣun'allāh Ibrāhīm's *Al-Lajna*.

⁵ For full explanation of this character type, see Idrīs 1992, pp. 97-112.

antagonised characters. But perhaps the most common of negative responses was that of escapism or retreat. In the face of governmental repression and military defeat, the cultural elite sought solace in personal preoccupations, nostalgic reverie, absurd mental wanderings or, in its most extreme manifestation, physical exile.⁶ The Sādāt years, as depicted in the two novels analysed in the latter portion of this chapter, tell of an increasingly strained relationship between the cultural elite and leaders, as intellectuals became further reluctant to lend even tacit or critical support.⁷ This chapter charts the development of that ideological shift from critical support to the negative strains.

1. Al-‘Amaliyya al-kubrā (The Major Operation, 1969)

“He made us feel by every possible means that in Egypt and even in the whole Arab world there could only be found one single intelligence, one power, and one personality, namely, ‘Abd al-Nāṣir. Thus it was with fascism, Hitlerism and Nāṣirism, all of them stand on a single basis, which is the elimination of minds and wills other than the mind and will of the leader” (Al-Ḥakīm 1974, p. 44).

“The mistake stemmed from the day that the professor began practising surgery for its own sake; when operations and patients - most of them poor and powerless - became a platform upon which to prove one’s power and proficiency” (Idrīs 1969, p. 995).

In *Al-‘Amaliyya al-kubrā* (The Major Operation, 1969), Yūsuf Idrīs treats the June 1967 War and Nāṣir’s role in “the setback” (*naksa*) metaphorically, using the operating theatre as his stage and two doctors - one junior and one senior - as his principal players. The story relates how the young doctor ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf loses faith in the revered chief surgeon, Dr. Adḥam, in the course of a rather clumsily managed operation, and is forced to relinquish his role model in order to hold on to his ideals. The short story is at the same time an acute criticism of Nāṣir and an exploration of the function of leadership in Egypt.

One of the distinctive features of the story is its manipulation of narrative time. The reader begins the story virtually at the end of “chronological time” and in alternating sections moves between the present and the past until the end of the sixth section, at which point all of the background has been provided and the story nears its

⁶ The portrayal of escapism is one of the central themes of Chapter 4 of this thesis. For examples of escapist characters, see especially my treatment of *Thārthara fawq al-Nīl*, *Kulluhū bāṭil*, *Al-Muzāhara*, *Taht al-mazalla* and *Sharq al-nakhīl*.

⁷ For thorough sociological analysis of the impact of ideological shifts and censorship under Sādāt, see Stagh 1993, pp. 29-40.

conclusion. In the seventh and final section, narrative time and chronological time are synchronous, and the narrative moves one step beyond the “present” alluded to in earlier sections. Upon a first read, this has a rather disjointed effect. With a second read, however, the reader comes to appreciate Idrīs' attempt to replicate the mind's sophisticated processes of reflection.

The reader is introduced to the protagonist, as he and a nurse named Inshirāḥ attend to a dying patient in the final moments of her battle with cancer. Dr. ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf is impatient and bored with his company in the form of the cheerless nurse, whom he labels, “*Inshirāḥ bi-lā inshirāḥ*” (Loosely, “Joy with no joy”). She sits, patient and distracted, doing her knitting, while the young doctor laments that his shift couldn't be shared with any member of staff other than this ‘Mother Theresa’. ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf stares incredulously at the thin, dying patient as she rests “with the peace of children sleeping,” astounded that this small woman was the source of such uproar just a few hours before. He recalls the operating room and shudders as he remembers how the space had been transformed into a place in which “a Satanic struggle had taken place, a struggle whose traces were still quite fresh” (Idrīs 1969, p. 973).

This mode of reflection provides an ideal juncture for the narrator to supply the reader with the background of events leading up to the “major operation.” Sections two and three are devoted to the development of the protagonist's character and his relationship with the senior doctor, Adḥam. From the outset, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf is portrayed as a doctor whose motivations for joining the medical profession are suspect. No mention is made of conscience, or of social, moral and public responsibility. His is in fact the sort of blind ambition which motivates many of the cultural elite. Following graduation from medical school, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf is uncertain as to which branch of medicine he should specialise in. Previously, the young man's sole aim had been to become a doctor. Having achieved this, he is now directionless. ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf's reflections on his situation are strikingly similar to those of Ḥadīdī, a doctor in an earlier Idrīs story, *Lughat al-Āy Āy* (1964), as the following passages indicate:

[from *Al-‘Amaliyya* :]

It's ironic how it seems that after your attaining a certain goal - a goal which you've spent long years attempting to achieve - you discover that it wasn't your goal, and that you have to search for another (Idrīs 1969, p. 975).

[and then, from *Lughat al-Āy Āy* :]

I've spent my life as if it were an arithmetical equation whose goal is “arrival,” and when I “arrive,” I am no happier, for there lies another

“arrival” ahead of me (Idrīs 1964, p. 255).

Finally, after much scrutiny, the protagonist concludes that his calling is in surgery. The factors informing ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf’s decision have little to do with the healing and restorative process, altruism or social commitment. Personal power and control, it seems, are the concepts which fuel his ambition: “Here [surgery] is where you could, by your own will and ability, bring about a cure... Here is where the role of the doctor fuses with that of the ancient magician, and science becomes a profession raised to the level of an art form” (Idrīs 1969, p. 975). The protagonist gives himself over entirely to his occupation. Members of the hospital staff suspect that the young doctor’s determination is politically motivated; that is to say that ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf’s work ethic stems from a desire to impress the senior doctor, Adḥam. However, our omniscient narrator informs us that this is not the case: “He wasn’t working to satisfy him (Adḥam), but to fulfil that thing residing within that is never satisfied - his soul.” (Idrīs 1969, p. 976) While most of the young doctors are content to view their work merely as a way of earning a lucrative salary, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf is otherwise motivated by a kind of internal logic.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the protagonist, driven and so enamoured of the power of surgeons, would find in the equally-driven Adḥam not only a mentor, but an idol as well. In his capacity as chief surgeon, dean of the medical college and consultant to the Ministry of Health, Adḥam wields a tremendous amount of influence and his awe-inspiring presence is felt wherever he goes. During surgery itself, the narrator tells us, the slightest nod of the senior doctor’s head prompts the dutiful responses of his staff (Idrīs 1969, p. 984). Though others fear the doctor’s wrath and begrudge him his dictatorial manner in and out of the operating theatre, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf refuses to see anything but virtue in the chief surgeon. Indeed, for the protagonist, Adḥam is “the embodiment of God in all His power, benevolence and perfection,” a man whose very hands “have become a part of the history of surgery in Egypt” (Idrīs 1969, pp. 978 & 983, respectively). So great is his admiration for the senior doctor that ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf emulates Adḥam’s very manner of speech and the way in which he stares at people (Idrīs 1969, p. 980).

In truth, Adḥam is a self-obsessed man whose notions of personal promotion precede all other considerations. Rarely does the doctor frequent the halls of the public hospitals (Idrīs 1969, p. 981). His interest, it seems, is in “specialty cases,” unusual ailments never seen before in Egypt. Such cases, he reasons, afford him the accolades of the local medical community and the opportunities to publish his findings in American and European journals, surely a boon to any doctor in the

developing world. On this level, Adḥam's character may be read as a critique of the academic community as a whole: through him they are viewed as neglectful of the plight of the ordinary individual and too deeply immersed in an exclusive world of analysis and competition to be cognisant of this fact.

It is only as we move into the story of the operation itself that the chief surgeon's character assumes a deeper political and metaphorical significance. The "major operation" begins in routine fashion - a woman complaining of numbness in her leg is diagnosed by Adḥam as having cancer in the cartilage of her spinal cord. Following two months of tests and x-rays, Dr. Adḥam decides that exploratory surgery is in order. As the surgery proceeds, a tumour is located and a biopsy is taken. 'Abd al-Ra'ūf is sent to the laboratory with the tissue, but the specialist is nowhere to be found, and the necessary tests cannot be performed. When Adḥam receives this news, he is irate, but soon regains his composure. Refusing to have his reputation tarnished by incompetent underlings, the doctor suggests that they proceed without the results and quickly remove the tumour. No one, of course, questions his judgement.

Hastily, the assistants begin the preparations for the emergency excision. The negligence of standard operation procedure is glaring. Dr. Adḥam smokes as the oxygen tanks are being exchanged, he accidentally tips over one of the tanks with his foot, the sterilisation of the instruments is haphazard, the patient's blood type isn't determined until the last minute, and finally, the chief surgeon, tired of waiting, proceeds with the operation before a single drop of blood flows into the patient's veins. Keeping in mind Idrīs' original profession as a doctor, the reader recognises the depiction of disregard for standards to be a critique of the incompetence of many within the medical field and the appalling state of Egyptian hospitals as much as it is a comment on heavy-handed leadership.

Just then, tragedy begins. As the doctor attempts to remove the tumour, he accidentally cuts an artery. All the faces around the table go pale when it is discovered that the aorta is damaged. Quickly, Adḥam reaches for a piece of cloth and obstructs the bleeding in a makeshift manner. With the bleeding temporarily stopped, the surgeon is able to save face. In an effort to downplay such an egregious mistake, Adḥam addresses his team of young doctors with platitudes about the kind of steely constitution required to perform surgery:

The successful surgeon is the one who doesn't flinch regardless of a surprise development, even if the aorta is affected. Surgery is about nerves, and if you don't have nerves, you should look for other work (Idrīs 1969, p. 991).

However, as soon as the stitching begins, the wall of the aorta gives way to the

pressure of the blood flow, and a “sea of blood” bursts from the woman’s body. The sight is a gruesome one, with an incredible amount of blood spurting onto the faces and uniforms of all around the table. The room disintegrates into pandemonium, with everyone attempting to stop the flow amid screams and curses. The scene takes on a surreal quality, as the narrator suggests:

All of this was going on, and no one could believe that it was occurring, as if it were happening in a zone beyond reason or as if the room mutated along with them into a place in which reality becomes a nightmare, the people and things become symbols and the environment is overcast and heavy-laden (Idrīs 1969, p. 993)⁸.

Eventually, the flood is held back with eight hands and a mass of cotton wool. “What began as a game and an exploration,” ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf comments, “had now turned into an irreversible tragedy” (Idrīs 1969, p. 992).

At this point, the assistants concede defeat - the death of the woman seems almost certain. Yet Adḥam, headstrong as ever, denies this possibility and urges a gambit: that they repair the aorta using an artery taken from the thigh. The attendants follow the doctor’s orders with the usual respect and sense of duty, but their faith in him has been shattered.

Miraculously, the woman survives the protracted operation, but she doesn’t have much longer to live. In very grandiose terms, Adḥam declares the ordeal a victory for science and for Egypt itself, maintaining that any difficulties experienced during the operation were due to inadequate supplies and lack of air conditioning. Looking back on the failure with more objective eyes, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf argues that the surgeon’s pride and academic approach to surgery are to blame:

The mistake stemmed from the day that the professor began practising surgery for its own sake; when operations and patients - most of them poor and powerless - became a platform upon which to prove his power and proficiency (Idrīs 1969, p. 995).

Life after the “major operation” is bleak, yet liberating in a peculiar sense. The narrator is despondent, of course, having seen his idol toppled, but he no longer harbours the illusion of an omnipotent, flawless leader. The concluding section makes no mention of the chief surgeon, a comment perhaps on Adḥam’s immediate loss of prominence in the minds of all of the characters of the story. The final section brings to culmination the opening scene of the story with ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf, Inshirāḥ and the

⁸ The verbs Idrīs uses in this passage - *dāra*, *inqalaba*, and *tahāwwala* - all suggest revolution and emphasise the surreal sense of upheaval occurring in the operating room.

dying patient. Throughout the course of the narrative, this crucial sub-plot is being developed, starting with section three which opens with an Arabic adage, “*Mā ijtaṃa’ rajul wa imra’a illa wa ’l-shayṭān thālithuhumā*,” which loosely translates as “There is no meeting of a man and a woman without the Devil as the third party” (Idrīs 1969, p. 978). The narrator asserts that the third party in this case was not the Devil (i.e. temptation) but Death, in the guise of the patient suffering from cancer. A more incisive reading of the story would conclude that both the Devil and Death were present in the room with the couple. As the two wait on the patient, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf finds himself growing quickly fond of the nurse, wondering about the possibility of a romantic encounter. This, then, is temptation. Death takes on two forms in the hospital room: First, the very present, physical manifestation - the dying woman - and secondly, the symbolic death of ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf’s image of his great leader, Adḥam. As these metaphorical partners commingle, the protagonist begins to see in his amorous advances an act of defiance. Frustrated by the images of death all around him, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf reaches out to Inshirāḥ “as a final plea for help,” only to find that she too is in need of solace from Death’s impending stare. “Driven,” as if there were “no force on the face of the earth that could prevent them,” the couple make love on a table beside the dying woman. The small, ailing woman stares emptily, eyes wide open and drifting in and out of consciousness. ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf returns the stare, looking Death in the face as if to say “no.” One moment before her death, the woman slips back into consciousness, and only her face can react to the scene before her. Recognition flashes over her face, “a slightly surprised smile like the smile of a child opening his eyes on life for the first time, amazed at what he sees” (Idrīs 1969, p. 999). The moment of life’s inception coincides with Death’s claim of the woman.

In his assessment of the causes of the political and social situation following the *naksa*, the Lebanese commentator Fouad ‘Ajami urges against an exclusive focus on the “cult of personality” surrounding leadership in Egypt, arguing, among other things, that Egypt has had a lengthy history of autocratic rulers imbued with god-like status, dating as far back as the Pharonic period, and that this mode of governance is, therefore, in no way remarkable or novel (‘Ajami 1981, pp. 83-84). Scholars like Dr. ‘Ajami would rather we focus on the historical moment and not The Man of The Moment. Yet what stories such as *Al-‘Amaliyya al-kubrā* demonstrate so poignantly is the reluctance of a nation to do just that. It requires a disaster as great as the “Major Operation” to transform the faith of a people in their leaders. The religious reference is wholly appropriate here, for large sections of the population in Egypt and the entire Arab world invested Nāṣir and his mission with such sanctity. We see reflections of this fact throughout Idrīs’ story: What once was described as “The Cradle of Islam,”

the “Holy of Holies” and ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf’s “sacred mihrāb” (Idrīs 1969, p. 973) becomes an ordinary operating room after Adḥam’s grave error. Anwar Sādāt described Nāṣir as a “living corpse” following June 5, 1967 (Sādāt, 1978, p. 218), and true to this depiction, we are given no sight of Nāṣir’s fictional spectre after the operation. Idrīs leaves it to the junior members of the elite to wrest the creative power out of the hands of Egypt’s mythical leaders.

2. *Al-Riḥla* (The Journey, 1970)

One year after writing *Al-‘Amaliyya al-kubrā*, and on the three-year anniversary of *Al-Naksa*, Idrīs returned to an exploration of leadership and the ailing Nāṣir administration in particular with the short story *Al-Riḥla*. We say “returned,” but in fact, there had been no real departure from this subject. The collection from which the story comes, *Bayt min laḥm* (House of Flesh, 1970), is replete with critical assessments of the extent to which, both locally and internationally, Nāṣir’s presence and policies were felt and demonstrates even more clearly the sense of despondency with which Egyptian writers viewed their leaders. These stories, although more politically pointed as a whole, exhibit a greater usage of symbolism to convey their ideas. Consequently, the collection is more textured, with its stories displaying multiple levels of meaning. *Al-Riḥla* is no exception. Stylistically and thematically, the story is representative of a new mode of writing, a quality which writer and critic Idwār al-Kharrāṭ describes as a “new sensibility,” typical of many writers of the 1970s (Al-Kharrāṭ 1982, pp. 4-49). This new sensibility emerged as a reaction to and reflection of the mood of the post-Nāṣir era, in which an interest in politics and ideologies “waned” and the cultural elite had been “debilitated” by that administration. (Al-Kharrāṭ 1982, p. 8). This sense of disillusionment, confusion and upheaval manifested itself in the usage of literary techniques such as the interior monologue, multiple points of view, terse lines of prose, stream-of-consciousness, the incorporation of dream states into waking “reality” and a self-conscious obscurity.⁹ While some of the young writers dispensed almost entirely with traditional elements of plot and structure, older writers such as Idrīs preserved enough elements of the “old sensibility” in order to retain coherence, yet managed to convey effectively the contemporary fears and preoccupations following Nāṣir’s decline.

Al-Riḥla could be viewed, in a sense, as an extension of the narrative in *Al-*

⁹ For a thorough analysis of modernist literary techniques and comparison to previous periods and modes of writing, see Ḥāfiẓ 1994, pp. 93-112.

'Amaliyya al-kubrā. It was pointed out in the previous section that Dr. Adḥam disappears from the narrative following the debacle of the "Great Operation." *Al-Rihla* is essentially a monologue addressed to a character similar to Dr. Adḥam and it begins at a moment quite like the one in which Adḥam vanishes in the previous story: "You and me, and after us, the flood," the story curtly opens (Idrīs 1970, p. 80). The narrator is a young person who is preparing an older man for a journey of some kind. Great care and attention is given to the preparing of this gentleman's clothing and grooming and it is apparent that he is no longer capable of caring for himself. The narrator speaks with great love and admiration of every detail of the gentleman and his habits. The old man is not sick this time, a fact which pleases the narrator all the more. As the couple prepare to depart and the narrator assures the gentleman that he should have no fear and no concern for the stares of the passers-by on the street, the reader gets the impression that what Idrīs is describing is either an illicit type of love affair or a very close father/child relationship. The ambiguity is there from the outset of the story and remains for many more paragraphs, seeming to fluctuate between the two possibilities. Initially, one assumes the former, with all the talk of keeping this outing a secret and suggestions that the two are departing on a distant journey to a place "where no one will get either you or me" (Idrīs 1970, p. 80). As the two set off and descend in the lift, however, our impression changes as the man is told to lean against the younger person, while the narrator reflects on the number of times he or she feigned tiredness in the past in order to seek solace in the gentleman's arms. Shortly after this, we are forced to reconsider, as the couple enter the car and the narrator revels in the fact that they are alone together for the first time and that they will be with each other forever.

This state of ambiguity is made slightly more clear when, in the midst of a traffic jam, the narrator yells incredulously at the staring passers-by, "Haven't you ever seen a young man driving a car before with a man wearing a dark blue suit and red tie at his side? What's so incredible about that?" (Idrīs 1970, p. 82) At the next stop, it becomes clear that the couple of men are related when the officer asks the older man for identification, at which point the young man intervenes, "Where is his card? I'm his card...can't you see that my nose takes its shape from his, that my eyebrows are rounded like his, even my sweat has the same taste as his own" (Idrīs 1970, p. 83). The young man asserts his familial connections with the utmost pride. Although the story hesitates to provide us with enough detail to be absolutely certain, it is likely that the narrator is the eldest, and by extension, most favoured, son. The young man's love for the voiceless father-figure is evident throughout and is poignantly exhibited in the narrator's remembrance of his father's feet being massaged after work by his

children. The big toe, we are told, he reserved exclusively for himself. The smell which rose from the tired, sweaty feet was not a source of repulsion, but the opposite.

The sensory experience of smell is the predominant theme of the story. As the narrator sits impatiently at a traffic light, sight and smell begin to merge as he stares at the red light and imagines time itself becoming red. The wait becomes interminably long and the redness of time takes on a smell in his mind, the smell of his own flesh burning. Such surreal musings emphasise the delusional state under which the narrator is operating and the urgency with which the narrator feels the need to escape from the city. In each successive stop, outsiders point out a foul odour emanating from the car which the narrator roundly denies. At a petrol station, the attendant suggests that the older passenger is dead, which, again, the narrator refuses to accept. Ultimately, after driving beyond the first town, the narrator is forced to accept that the being beside him is in fact a corpse. He escapes from the asphyxiating fumes of the car and sets off on foot alone to continue his journey, torn between sadness over the death of his beloved father-figure and relief over being free from an environment which would have killed him as well.

Al-Rihla may be read as an exploration of Anwar Sādāt's depiction of Nāṣir after the '67 war as "a living corpse." The element of the macabre is heightened by the mode of narration in which the narrative world is mediated entirely through the experience of the young man, leaving the father voiceless and indeed, lifeless. More fundamentally, however, this form of narration illustrates how peripheral the leadership had become: In *Al-'Amaliyya*, the Nāṣir figure is the prime mover of the narrative. Only one year later in *Al-Rihla*, the Nāṣir symbol is essentially a non-character, silent and passive. With each successive read, the reader comes to appreciate more deeply to what extent the narrator lives in denial of the living corpse. Accordingly, when the old man leans on the narrator in the lift, it is not out of affection, but weakness. Likewise, the feeble man requires assistance getting into the car, yet the narrator denies his sickness. By the time the pair reach the first stoplight, we discover that the old man has either already died or is dying, his head nodding with the motion of the car. The narrator, however, misinterprets this nodding as a sign of agreement with his nonsensical monologue. Later, the young man expresses surprise that his elder has not objected to his smoking in the car. What he fails to realise is that the father-figure has lost the will to live, let alone object to a cigarette.

In the aftermath of "the setback," certain segments of Arab society preferred to exist in ignorance or denial of the failings of their leaders. Up until the closing of *Al-Rihla*, the narrator of the short story exemplifies this contingent. With the story's conclusion, the narrator experiences a transformative "return of consciousness" and

must face the challenge of travelling in a state of metaphorical loneliness, free from the delusion of immortal, indestructible authorities.

3. Ḥadīth al-qarya (Talk of the Village, 1929)

“If you see a writer who is not concerned with the Egyptian *fallāh* , this means only that he does not care for him. If he does not care for him, he also hates Egypt, for all of us are *fallāhīn*.” (Salāma Mūsā in Gershoni and Jankowski 1995, p.206)

Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn’s *Ḥadīth al-qarya* embodies the spirit of Egypt’s first generation of mature short story writers, a group commonly known as *Al-Madrassa al-ḥadītha* , or “The New School.” Together with writers such as the Taymūr brothers, ‘Īsā ‘Ubayd and Yāḥyā Ḥaqqī, journalists such as Aḥmad Khayrī Sa‘īd and Salāma Mūsā and translators such as ‘Ā’isha Fahmī al-Khalfāwī and Zakī al-Dīn al-Suwayfī, Lāshīn harnessed the momentum of Sa‘d Zaghlūl’s 1919 nationalist uprising and strove to create a new type of writing that was indigenously Egyptian and respectable as an art form. Although written nearly a quarter of a century before the earliest other works analysed in this study, *Ḥadīth al-qarya* exhibits a sensibility well in advance of its time, addressing issues such as religious leadership, tradition and the intellectual’s relation to community in a similar manner to that of many writers of the late 1950’s. It is hoped, therefore, that the inclusion of this text will demonstrate the perennial nature of these concerns to Egyptian writers. Of particular interest here is its commentary on the figure of the *shaykh* and the pivotal position he holds as the leader of a typical rural community. This depiction will later be contrasted to that of a spiritual leader in an urban environment in another of Yūsuf Idrīs’ stories, *Akāna la budda yā Līlī an tuḍī’ al-nūr?* as a means of demonstrating the varying and often determining effects of surroundings on the efficacy of religious leadership.

As its title suggests, one of the central issues to *Ḥadīth al-qarya* is that of location: the physical setting of the story in the countryside and the connection (or lack thereof) with people of that locality. The story is a first-person account of an urban intellectual’s weekend visit to a friend’s village and the nightly conversation that ensues in the village centre. From the introduction of the scenario, the reader is made aware of a fissure between the two worlds, urban and rural. The narrator, a product of the city environment, comments on the experience of travelling to the village by train and, in the process, betrays his bias. As the train passes along, scenes of reed and thatch houses and their sweaty, tattered inhabitants cross his vision. The images are evocative for the narrator. “Mixed up within me,” he tells us, “were

feelings of pity for the half-naked *fallahīn*, bent over the soil, working it with hoes or scythes" (Lāshīn 1929, p. 136) and a kind of admiration of simplicity and nature, a "beauty which charms city folk." The struggle between condescension and a yearning to remain blissfully ignorant of one's immediate condition of deprivation will play itself out in the course of the evening the narrator spends in the village. Yet as he journeys to the village, he carries with him the assumption that life in the city is intrinsically more enlightened and enriching, in spite of its lack of beautiful natural surroundings. The narrator's friend, a native of the countryside, finds the naiveté of his companion laughable, and is quick to assure him that his fellow villagers don't view their circumstances as impoverished or benighted in any way. The friend also hastens to dispel the narrator's misconception of the *fallahīn* as noble paupers, suggesting that their appearance conceals a sly, treacherous nature. As evening falls and the people gather, the narrator sits among them, still incredulous that his companions fail to see their existence as impoverished.

Shaykh Muḥsin exploits the village location and his status within the village quite effectively. No mention is made of any other religious scholars in the community and it would be safe to assume that he holds the monopoly on the rights and duties of this position. Even his entrance to the story seems to suggest his critical role in the community. As the villagers and the visitors gather in the open square, the *shaykh*'s messenger arrives, carrying a *fānūs*, a paraffin lamp. He is the harbinger of the holy man. The figurative darkness in which the villagers were gathering and the subsequent light brought by their leader are crucial images. When the *shaykh* appears, the tenor of the gathering shifts instantly from the polite greetings to the serious affairs of the community and matters of religion. As the bearer of knowledge and information, this *shaykh* is all too aware of the sway he holds over the people of the village. His "flock" are a captive audience, who seek human companionship in the nightly gatherings as well as spiritual sustenance.

The religious leader in *Ḥadīth al-qarya* speaks in measured tones. He is eloquent and understands how to manipulate speech. When *Shaykh* Muḥsin leads into his storytelling, the plaintive strains of a *nāy* playing in the distance reaches the crowd. It is important to remember that the story is told from the perspective of the urbanised visitor whose sentimental views of the countryside necessarily influence the portrayal of the gathering. Nevertheless, the inclusion of this detail, the seemingly unintentional choreography of music with speech heightens the *shaykh*'s image as a man possessed of a powerful, mesmerising quality. Lāshīn likens the background noises to an orchestra which starts and stops at the behest of its conductor (Lāshīn 1929, p. 140).

The narrator is, by contrast, unconvincing and ineffective. When the urban

visitor gives an impassioned speech on the importance of transcending one's immediate station and surroundings, he meets with no response. Any talk of asserting one's own free will or indeed, any contradiction of 'their man' whatsoever, is met either with resistance or silence.

The rhetoric of the village *shaykh* is forceful, rooted in an understanding of the world, and man's station in the world, as fixed. In strident, evangelical tones, Muḥsin condemns the evils of urbanisation and the warns of the dangers of exerting one's own will over and against God's wishes. Witness the cursory exegetical manner in which he links the predicaments of life with the assertion of free will:

Disasters befall us, but we don't cry. This lack of tears stems from the recalcitrance of the eye, which in turn comes from hard-heartedness, which stems from an excess of sin, and this from abundance of hope, which stems from love of the temporal whose source is free will. ...My children, the world is submission, not free will, and the good is what God chooses (Lāshīn 1929, pp. 139 & 144).

The *shaykh's* comments are received with indiscriminate acceptance. In obeisance to their leader, the pious utter a series of formulaic responses whose aim it is to affirm the speaker and to publicly prove their convictions, like so many indiscriminate "amens" in the Christian gospel tradition. The leader is aware of his ability to influence others with his words. On two separate occasions during his dialogues, Muḥsin turns to the visitors and flashes a smug, self-contented look, as if to say, "my speech isn't bad, is it?" (Lāshīn 1929, pp. 137 & 143) The village friend explains the difference between the two receptions as one of belonging. The *shaykh* is "their man," he reminds the visitor; he is a man who speaks to their hearts and emotions, rather than their intellects.

These distinctions - urban/rural, hapless victim of fragmented and secularised society/demagogue, etc. - were by no means new or novel, even when Lāshīn was writing *Ḥadīth al-qarya*. At roughly the same time, the Italian political thinker Antonio Gramsci also touched on the qualitative differences between the rural and urban intellectual in his *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci's very broad, egalitarian definition of the intellectual (Gramsci 1971, pp. 8-9) and subsequent distinction of urban/rural intellectuals is applicable to the *shaykh* and the narrator in question here. Both characters meet the conditions for the term 'intellectual,' yet the *shaykh's* efficacy within his community is greater, due in no small part to his location and the position of privilege he occupies within that rural setting. Gramsci argues that in the process of elaboration of capital, the countryside is generally less affected by the fragmentation of society into various economic classes. As such, the intellectual in

this environment is much more likely to be well connected to the masses as well as the petite bourgeoisie. This intellectual quite often serves as an mediator between the two. The rural intellectual, therefore, is generally more well-respected, occasionally the object of envy, but typically vital. Gramsci elaborates:

One can understand nothing of the collective life of the peasantry and of the germs and ferments of development which exist within it, if one does not take into consideration and examine concretely...this effective subordination to the intellectuals. Every organic development of the peasant masses, up to a certain point, is linked to and depends on movements among the intellectuals (Gramsci 1971, pp. 14-15).

The centrality of the *shaykh* to the hearts, minds and wills of the village is never under question in the narrative. This is made particularly evident as the leader refutes the narrator's comments on free will with a moral anecdote of a man whose attempts to assert his own free will proved disastrous. The villagers are continuously portrayed as docile, servile and superstitious as they dutifully mimic both the quotes from the Qur'ān and the popular folkloric expressions which suffuse the *shaykh*'s speech. The narrator, however, recoils in outrage at how his words are manipulated to serve the religious leader's aims, referring to the *shaykh* contemptuously as "this mistaken beard" (Lāshīn 1929, p. 139).

The story the *shaykh* tells - once again with the enhanced orchestration of the *nay* - of 'Abd al-Samī' is a parable whose goal it is to denounce the forces of urbanisation (a relatively new phenomenon at the time of Lāshīn's writing) and free will. In this episode, we have a distillation of the entire story. The *shaykh* speaks contemptuously of a man who "wasn't content with what God ordained for him" (Lāshīn 1929, p. 140). The man he is describing, 'Abd al-Samī', attempts to rise above his lowly status as a cobbler by taking a higher paying position as a doorman in the city. Although he benefits materially, the experience of modernisation / urbanisation is not without its negative consequences. Muḥsin takes advantage of the simple-mindedness of his audience by spuriously equating free will and urbanisation with sexual promiscuity: returning from work one evening, the *shaykh* tells us, 'Abd al-Samī' discovers his wife in bed with the man he works for. Furious with rage, the protagonist brutally bludgeons the couple to death with an iron rod. The *shaykh* revels in recounting the gory details of the incident, making sure to include the fact that 'Abd al-Samī' does not flee from the scene of the crime, but chooses to spend the rest of the evening sitting with the two corpses, nonchalantly smoking and drinking tea. This vengeful response is deemed fitting by the village audience as they nod their heads and curse this phenomenon of urbanisation. As the narrator's friend turns and asks, "what

horrific thing is this?" the narrator utters the perplexing statement, "I wish I had been there with them that evening."¹⁰ The *Shaykh* concludes the story just as much in control of his audience as when he began: "*fa yā awlādī, al-dunyā 'ibāda la irāda, wa al-khayr fī mā ikhtārahu Allāh.*" ('So, my children, the world is *submission*, not free will, and the good is what God chooses (Lāshīn 1929, p. 144, italics mine). The final poignant scene confirms the narrator's assessment of *Shaykh* Muḥsin and the village as the 'talk of the village,' really just a monologue, ends: the religious man leaves the lamp in the village square and leads his flock away from the square and into the darkness.

With *Ḥadīth al-qarya*, Lāshīn gives voice to a portrayal of the leadership and the cultural elite which more closely typifies the sentiments of a generation of Egyptian writers working within a very different historical situation some thirty years later. The narrator is an idealist who, by the end of the narrative, perhaps senses the inappropriateness of his theories: when he realises that the consequences of taking life into one's own hands can often be very different from the result he had envisaged, it gives him pause. At best, in the face of the very certain authority of *Shaykh* Muḥsin, the narrator can only wish for deeper understanding and a greater sense of connectedness to a broader public.

4. Akāna la budda yā Līlī an tuḍī' al-nūr? (Did You Have To Turn On the Light, Lily?, 1971)

Shaykh 'Abd al-'Āl, the protagonist and narrator of Yūsuf Idrīs' *Akāna la budda yā Līlī an tuḍī' al-nūr?* provides us with a contrasting image and model of leadership to Lāshīn's *Shaykh* Muḥsin. In the following section, we will explore this divergent portrayal, the story's multiple levels of meaning and the implications of such a portrayal for the world beyond the text.

The central image of the story, and indeed, one of the central themes, emerges from its opening scene. We are introduced to the young *shaykh* 'Abd al-'Āl as he steals away from his congregation in the middle of their early-morning prayer prostrations, leaving the men on their hands and knees awaiting the *imām*'s final utterances. The *shaykh* meanwhile tiptoes next door to visit the object of his affections, a young half-English girl called Lily. What begins as comedy soon becomes farce, as the time extends and the leader fails to return, leaving the gathering

¹⁰ This single line of dialogue has been the subject of a variety of readings throughout the years. For a thorough analysis of at least two differing interpretations of this passage, see Ḥāfiz 1984, pp. 376-379.

of men at a loss, fearful of sitting up, lest they annul the prayers of everyone around them. In a process of “backtracking” common to Idrīs, the events which precipitated this ludicrous situation are then related.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Āl is portrayed as an idealist whose commitment to his principles is altered by his surroundings. The young graduate from Al-Azhar describes himself as one committed to God from the days of his youth, as evinced in his memorisation of the Qur’ān at an early age. Endowed with a beautiful voice, he denies any interest in self-aggrandisement, rather, he chooses to use his gift to the glory of God and for the benefit of his flock. “My flock, my responsibility - more precisely - my failure in the desire to awaken God in spirits wishing to forget the idea of His existence” (Idrīs 1971, p. 25). In the community of Baṭīniya, Old Cairo, an area historically known for its inhabitants’ indulgences in Sufism and drug use, the *shaykh* finds the greatest challenge to his faith and commitment. He describes his constituency as a “nest of opium and hashish” users who routinely attend prayers intoxicated, if at all. (Idrīs 1971, p. 19)“...Their lives couldn’t take God the Perfect One. He either accepts them as they are, worshipping him as they do or not” (Idrīs 1971, p. 26). The *shaykh* concedes that his following is tiny and that those who are of a more traditional religious persuasion choose to pray at the larger, more prestigious Al-Azhar mosque nearby. ‘Abd al-‘Āl is drowned out by the “forest of muezzins” with their electronic amplification overpowering his lone voice (Idrīs 1971, p. 24). While *Shaykh* Muḥsin of Lāshīn’s village tale *Ḥadīth al-qarya* carries himself with an air of surety, of self-confidence verging on arrogance, ‘Abd al-‘Āl can afford no such luxury. His tone is generally one of self-deprecation and humility. “I call for myself,” he states, crestfallen, “...It is enough that God hears me, knows that I do the obligatory as he ordered and that he forgives the inhabitants of the neighbourhood - sleeping and awake” (Idrīs 1971, p. 24). The competing claims to human attention pose a threat to ‘Abd al-‘Āl’s work, rendering him ineffective, at best.

Recognising his failing to be one of lack of credibility, the young *shaykh* decides that the best way to reach his congregation is neither to distance himself nor to harangue them, but to make his presence felt in their daily lives. In order to conduct God’s work, he must appear to be one of them, just as Muḥsin of *Ḥadīth al-qarya* proved to be a more effective leader because he was seen as “their man.” ‘Abd al-‘Āl therefore decides to come down to his “flock,” descending both literally and figuratively from the minaret to spend time on the streets and in the cafes. Slowly, his voice begins to be heard. Men begin to solicit advice. The women of his congregation warm to him as well, visiting him under the pretext of religious consultation. It soon becomes apparent, however, as their enquiries take a particularly personal and sexual

tone, that the young leader runs the risk of transgressing the bounds of propriety. The temptation increases when he is introduced to young Lily who approaches him for lessons in prayer. ‘Abd al-‘Āl is enamoured and resorts to spying on the girl lying provocatively in her bed at night. With a guilty conscience and a tarnished soul, the *Shaykh* realises that he has gone too far.

Ten times throughout the story the *shaykh* poses the rhetorical question, “Did you have to turn the light on, Lily?” The force of the narrative hinges on the usage of this rhetorical device. This repetitive usage has a poetic effect, functioning as a reprise in a musical passage might do. Sometimes, it refers specifically to the deep sense of regret ‘Abd al-‘Āl feels over having ever seen the girl. At other times, the question conveys the broader feelings of lament over the entire situation of his descent into the realm of more worldly concerns (Idrīs 1971, p. 28). And yet again, when paired with the other chorus, “*yā Rabb!*”, frequently repeated towards the end of the story, the question assumes the quality of supplication. With each recurrence of the question, the reader is made more aware of the depth of emotions experienced by the narrator and we sympathise with his dilemma.

What informs *Shaykh* ‘Abd al-‘Āl’s powerful call to prayer early the following morning, therefore, is his ironic situation. The call is plangent, sweet, inspiring and it is so because for the first time, it is genuinely heartfelt. Before the young *shaykh* immersed himself in the lives of his neighbourhood, and notably, the alluring Lily, prayer calls were an abstract, dispassionate utterance on behalf of the community at large. When he himself experiences the temptations of life in the secular world, he must ask God for forgiveness and salvation. The searing truthfulness in the *shaykh*’s desperate voice stirs the entire neighbourhood. The sounds of his beautiful voice which had previously provoked so little response are described as a perfume wafting or a melody which appears in a dream, attracting even the most hardened of residents.

Thus we return to the opening scenario of the praying men, “recent returnees to the house of God,” who are likened to remorseful truant children, fearful of any further infractions of the moral and legal code (Idrīs 1971, p. 22). With this scene, we are reminded that this story is equally a comment on the “followers” or the masses as it is to do with leadership. What otherwise must prompt a kind of pity in the reader’s response is mitigated here by laughter, the transforming element through which human foibles are seen through the more tolerant lens of folly. As one of the observers outside the mosque laughs and mocks, so do we, and the blind obedience becomes funny to us. This is what engages our interest in them and, through the effect of distance that humour creates, makes possible our perception of their representative characters. The laughter is redirected towards the *shaykh* as the story concludes with

the religious leader giving in to temptation: in the middle of leading prayers he escapes to Lily's door, only to be snubbed by the girl, who announces that she has bought an English phonograph recording on how to pray which she finds more clear and instructive.

On this very literal level, the story reads well and believably as an amusing anecdote with certain moral overtones. There is at least one additional layer of interpretation, however, which enhances the work's overall significance. As with many of Idrīs' short stories of this time, *Akana la budda* may also be read as a sustained political allegory. During this later period of Idrīs' writing, the author often utilised the symbolic leadership of society in order to comment on the failings of the political leadership. That is to say, he saw in characters such as doctors and *shaykhs* an opportunity to comment indirectly on leadership in general. 'Abd al-Āl's voice is a salient symbol of Nāṣir's dynamic and robust oratorical skill, a skill and efficacy which was overwhelmed by the political circumstances of the late 1960s. We may recall that the actual events which preceded the writing of this story were the continuing wars of attrition between Israel and Egypt in the years following the 1967 war and the 1970 Rogers Plan which, although it negotiated a cease-fire, was viewed in many Arab circles as a form of acquiescence. Idrīs' satirical gaze is directed largely at Nāṣir, but the whole of Egyptian leadership is implicated in this critique. 'Abd al-Āl's moral entanglement reminds the politically aware Arab reader of Nāṣir's commanding a blindly obedient, if wayward, throng, condemning the West for years, only to be swayed by the enticing yet elusive ideas of a Western peace dividend and ultimately, his leaving his followers leaderless¹¹. To be sure, there is a danger in carrying allusions such as these too far: Lily's character, for instance, writhing naked on a bed in unstudied poses of seductiveness is, if not a caricature, then certainly a stereotype. Yet the phenomenon she represents, namely the "foreigner complex," is very real. Similarly, the portrayal of the Egyptian people as the stoned rabble is an image rooted in obvious hyperbole and distortion. But through these distortions, the reader is made aware of the depth of Idrīs' discontentment with both the leader figure and those who follow.

It might be of some worth, finally, to assess the evolution of the Nāṣir figures depicted in the three Idrīs stories examined in this chapter. As the years progressed,

¹¹ This interpretation of the story is less than obvious. P.M. Kurpershoek explains in his study of Idrīs that the author had to clarify his intentions in a personal interview: "For twenty years Nāṣir preached hatred of the United States and kept the people prostrated (in this position). Then he jumped through the window in order to meet Rogers. So why did he inveigh against America? That is the reason why I put all the blame on the preacher." Kurpershoek 1981, p. 161.

Idrīs chronicled the grieving and re-examination of a national hero: *Al-'Amaliyya al-kubrā* began the cycle as a testimony to Nāṣir's greatness and charted his fall, while *Al-Riḥla* simply declared the leader a corpse. *Akana la budda...* resumes this process of evaluation and resurrects Nāṣir as a questioned figure, a flawed individual, but ultimately a more honest, human character:

Idrīs' Portrayals of Nāṣir

<i>Al-'Amaliyya</i> (1969)	<i>Al-Riḥla</i> (1970)	... <i>Yā Līlī</i> (1971)
secular	secular	religious
confident	(a dead figure)	diffident
voice overpowers all	“ “	voice overpowered
in control despite “setback”	“ “	swayed by circumstances
arrogant	“ “	humble
invincible hero	“ “	human

Of equal significance is the appraisal of these Nāṣir figures by other characters and their responses to these models of leadership. Consistently this wider public, including many characters that could themselves be termed members of the cultural elite, express sentiments of utter disappointment over having been deceived, deluded or simply misled by their leaders. In *Al-'Amaliyya*, the sexual act which concludes the narrative is a symbolic representation of rejection of or resistance to death as embodied in the failures of Dr. Adḥam. Similarly, with *Al-Riḥla*, abandoning the rotting corpse of the father figure in a car on the roadside represents an awakening, an act of defiance as well as a means of survival. *Akana la budda*, presented through the eyes of the Nāṣir figure, offers no explicit alternatives, but clearly satirises the paralysis of a life after Nāṣir and a life of misguided dependence on one or another foreign power.

5. Safsāfa wa 'l-Jinerāl (Safsāfa and the General, 1988)

Up until the early 1980s, the portrayal of the Egyptian military remained a fledgling, if not entirely taboo, subject. This may be partially explained by the vast concentration of power in the hands of the military-based regimes of Nāṣir and Sādāt and the virtual state monopoly on creative outlets, literary or otherwise.¹² In an effort to legitimise his own authority, Sādāt encouraged writers to assume critical stances to the Nāṣir regime (Stagh 1993, p. 319). Accordingly, works detailing military arrest, “disappearance,” detention and even torture under Nāṣir were published in the following decade.¹³ The process of chronicling these events well after the fact led the journalist and Nāṣir confidant, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal, to comment in despair, “I feel sad for the Egyptian reader because he does not know what’s happening in the world, or even in his own country, until events become passing history” (Nāṣir 1990, p. 25).

Radwā ‘Āshūr’s *Safsāfa wa 'l-Jinerāl* (1988) avoids both the grim, sometimes macabre elements of military rule and the question of criticism post facto, choosing instead to explore issues of dependency, specifically the extent to which the military relies on popular figures for endorsement and credibility. Implicit in ‘Āshūr’s representation of the General is an indignant denunciation of the military’s sense of moral, social and economic superiority and its self-promotion as the sole repository of the nation’s prestige, honour and pride. In her fictional rendering of the General, ‘Āshūr parodies the military by presenting its representative as a desperate, pathetic figure, yearning for validation from the masses, as symbolised by the other main character, Safsāfa.

Set in an unnamed village, the narrative begins in mid-action, in the middle of a play being performed for the village’s children. The actress Safsāfa is about to take to the stage again when she hears from a fellow actor that the General has requested her presence at his seaside home, presumably in Alexandria. Safsāfa assumes her position on stage, at which point we are provided with an excerpt from the play. The technique represents an ongoing experiment in contemporary writing which attempts to fuse elements of theatre and prose fiction. In Arabic it is known as the “*masriwāya*,” or a

¹² See Chapter 1 of this thesis, “An Introduction to the Crisis of the Intellectuals,” pp. 33-43, for more details.

¹³ Most prominent among these is Najib Maḥfūz’s *Al-Karnak* (1974) and Fathī Ghānim’s *Hikāyāt Tu* (1974), but also included less well-known short stories such as ‘Alī Shalash’s *Azīzātī Al-Haqīqa* (1977).

fusion of the *masrahiyya* (theatre/play) with the *riwāya* (novel)¹⁴. The content of the play is indirectly related to the development of the short story, which is certainly the reason for its inclusion. Safsāfa plays a queen who must arbitrate a dispute between two of her citizens, a character who deceives the other by sending him on a wild goose chase while he usurps the man's property and his wife. This scene may be interpreted as a harbinger of the dispute for Safsāfa's affections that is to occur shortly afterwards.

The invitation to the palace puts the social and economic disparity between the village performer and the military leader into sharp relief. Safsāfa, whose name literally means "nonsense," is a product of her rural environment. The story highlights the rather mundane, backwater existence the inhabitants of such a small town lead. All around her, the process of subsistence continues - baking bread, milking farm animals, collecting dung for fuel, etc. The imminent visit to see the General becomes the talk of the town and produces an abundance of gossip and idle speculation. The men and women of the village present her with piles of letters, complaints of inflation, shortages of water and requests for reductions in electricity bills. Safsāfa is portrayed as a woman who has long since relinquished any respect for or trust in the military. She asks one of the village mainstays, incredulously, "do they still have hopes in the general?" Umm Aḥmad describes their faith in the great man as that of a people with nothing to lose and everything to gain. Burdened with the hopes of the entire community, Safsāfa boards the cityward train.

In the presentation of the three primary characters, the General, Safsāfa and her true love, Yūsuf, we are granted a clear illustration of the distinctions between the bourgeois intelligentsia, the masses and the cultural elite. As she depicts the attempted courting of Safsāfa, 'Āshūr posits a series of opposites: The leader is a vision of crisp, military attire who can afford to send roses and cards before and after they meet. Safsāfa, in her *galabīya* borrowed from one of the villagers, recalls how her father never owned a pair of shoes in his life. The General exhibits features representative of the pre-revolutionary Turko-Circassian ruling elite: "...his face hairless and round, his pale complexion infused with a light reddish tinge. His fine, straight, chestnut-coloured hair was arranged carefully and parted on the left" ('Āshūr 1988, p. 136). Safsāfa is told by the military man that her "form, my facial features, my plaited hair, my height and upright carriage all reminded him of that exquisite statue of the peasant woman which stands atop the green hill" ('Āshūr 1988, p. 136).

¹⁴ I was introduced to this term during a series of lectures on the Egyptian short story with Dr. Ḥamdī al-Sakkūt at the American University in Cairo, Autumn 1997.

The theatre director Yūsuf, on the other hand, “reads books, travels on aeroplanes and speaks to important people as if he were one of them” (‘Āshūr 1988, p. 137). From the fleeting glimpse of him, it is evident that Yūsuf closely resembles ‘Ādil Ḥamūda’s definition of the “organic intellectual” provided in Chapter One: he is authentically rooted in Egyptian culture, committed to the work of the theatre and removed from any connections to a landed elite. His genuine commitment to the artistic process attracts Safsāfa and highlights the difference between him and the General. After the General proposes marriage to the actress and she refuses, the leader attempts to convince Safsāfa that Yūsuf’s utility and vision are limited. As a director with only a small following of people interested in esoteric subjects, Yūsuf can provide very little for the village girl, the General argues. But as “the General’s wife,” she will be accorded any manner of prestige. Safsāfa remains resolutely opposed and observes the limp in his stride as he walks away clutching his cane, the first in the proverbial chinks in the armour of this esteemed figure.

A few years elapse, and Safsāfa and Yūsuf marry. The union forged on mutual interests and love for one another is abruptly curtailed, however, as Yūsuf dies. Predictably, the general attends the funeral to offer opportunistic condolences. “We have lost a major artist,” he states, contradicting his comments a few years previous. Immediately following the required mourning period, the General proposes to Safsāfa again. Once again, he is rejected.

Many years on, Safsāfa is summoned again, this time to dine with a group of the General’s attendants. The leader is a decrepit shadow of himself at this point, perched above the diners in a secluded glass quarter, perhaps a symbolic indication of his approach to governance. When she is summoned to his chambers, Safsāfa notices the tell-tale signs of an ageing man - balding and false teeth. His tenacity in both pursuits - military career and the woman who best symbolises the people of Egypt - has become derisible and pathetic. He announces that for the fiftieth commemoration of his rule, he will descend from his fortress to visit the people. Self-satisfied, he comments, “What a gift!” With crocodile tears in his eyes he asks Safsāfa to accompany him, because she has become a popular icon in the years since last he proposed. The General then embarks on a paternalistic and egotistical speech to his audience of one, cataloguing his accomplishments over the years, his earnest dedication to the people and the strides made by the country. Having long since grown exasperated with the rhetoric of leaders, Safsāfa leaves in the middle of the General’s monologue. Oblivious, the man continues his self-congratulatory speech, while Safsāfa observes that his diminutive figure, deteriorating with time, resembles a doll sitting in his throne, legs dangling helplessly. She escapes to the shore to

remember Yūsuf, who first took her to the sea.

The tone of this short story is very personal and sceptical. In Chapter One, in the definition of our terms, a distinction was made between the bourgeoisie and the cultural elite. With this story, we have the literary manifestation of this phenomenon. The contrast between Yūsuf and the General is only briefly developed, but it is sufficiently done to amplify the point. And the repetition of the phrase, “Why has the general sent for me?/ What does the general want from me?” like a refrain serves to underscore the central theme of the story,¹⁵ namely, that there are no pure motives with people such as the General. Self-absorption and concern with status leads to a kind of estrangement from the public-at-large, and one of the methods of re-establishing legitimacy and maintaining a sense of permanency is to co-opt the artists. ‘Āshūr’s character Safsāfa suggests an awareness on the part of the public of such contrivances and a renewed commitment to scrutinise the aims and intentions of leadership.

6. An Era as Protagonist: Al-Lajna (The Committee, 1981)

“If the writer is engaged in making speak the silences of history, then the critic, ...has the task of making speak the silences of the literary text itself.” (Meḥrez 1994, p.7)

The relative dearth of portrayals of Anwar Sādāt in contemporary Arabic fiction is cause for consideration as much as is the abundance of literal and symbolic portrayals of his predecessor. Only a few works come immediately to mind: Yūsuf Al-Qa‘id’s *Yaḥduthu fī Miṣr al-ān* (1977), for example, offers a satirical presentation of class conflict in a village set against the backdrop of President Richard Nixon’s controversial state visit in 1974. The story implicates Sādāt in a kind of collusion in advancing an American world order at a time in which Nixon was disgraced domestically and abroad for his Watergate scandal. Sādāt also figures directly in several works dealing with the late period of his career, exploring local reactions to the Camp David peace accords with Israel and the aftermath of a sporadic policy of repression followed by a ‘loosening of the reins’ on Islamic resurgents¹⁶. The era of Sādāt’s administration is dealt with metaphorically in many texts¹⁷, but again Sādāt,

¹⁵ We see a similar stylistic device used in Yūsuf Idrīs’ *Akāna la budda ya Lily an tudī’ al-nūr?*

¹⁶ See most notably, Maḥfūz’s *Yawm ma Qutila al-Za‘im*, 1985 and Idrīs’ *Uqtulhā*, 1981.

¹⁷ See Jamāl Al-Ghitāni’s historical novel *Risālat al-baṣā’ir fī ‘l-maṣā’ir*, 1989 and my chapter 5 for further examples.

the leader, largely evades portrayal. This omission may only partly be explained by the fact that a new trend in writing had emerged, experimental, labyrinthine and often surreal in nature, whose thematic concerns no longer necessarily revolved around issues of political commitment.¹⁸

This “silence of the literary texts” in this regard is significant, for it indicates precisely how intertwined social reality is with aesthetic impulses. Marina Stagh reminds us that although official censorship of the press ended relatively early in the Sādāt administration (in 1974, to coincide with the introduction of new economic liberalisations), censorship of books continued for another three years (Stagh 1993, pp. 31-40). Munīr Nāṣir asserts that Sādāt made clear his antipathy to certain segments of the writing community from the beginning:

while (Jamāl ‘Abd al-)Nāṣir was obsessed with the fact that Western powers were plotting against him, Sādāt was obsessed with the idea that the Soviets were plotting to disrupt his programs through the state party and the press. Therefore, he harbored suspicions of Marxists and made concerted efforts to weed them out of the media (Nasser 1990, p.11).

Thus, Sādāt’s administration began with a purging of “Marxist elements” and leftists. “By mid-1972, ...sixty-four intellectuals were dismissed from the ASU,” losing their positions in newspaper, radio, television and theatre. Included “among those were four top editors of Al-Ahrām” (Nasser 1990, p. 11). This series of initial purges meant that when censorship was lifted, many writers were loath to offer either support or dissent. Self-imposed censorship prevailed, or at least, a collective “silent protest” emerged against shifts in policy, particularly economic and foreign policy, which writers saw as too uncritically accommodating of American interests in the region. Many writers (‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, Gamīl ‘Atīya Ibrāhīm, Bahā’ Ṭāhir and Ṣun‘allāh Ibrāhīm, just to name a few) felt compelled to live abroad in a state of virtual exile in order to pursue their craft or seek alternative means of employment.¹⁹ The reduction in literary output, lack of support for the arts and the resultant decline in reading levels as economic pursuits dictated a reduction in leisure time, led the writer Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Majīd to conclude despondently, “people did not read at that time. Most good poets and writers were out of Egypt, and it was no use

¹⁸ See, for instance, Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Majīd’s novel *Masāfāt* (1980) and the short stories of authors such as Muḥammad Makhzanjī, Jār al-Nabi Halw and Maḥmūd al-Wardānī in Idwār al-Kharrāt 1982. Also see Ḥāfiz 1994.

¹⁹ Consequently, many of the works of these and several other authors were not published in their unexpurgated form until after Sādāt’s assassination in 1981.

publishing anything” (Stagh 1993, p. 243).

In such an environment, those who chose to write about leadership under Sādāt, no matter how obliquely, occupied a privileged position, invested with a certain amount of responsibility. Samia Meḥrez refers to these authors not only as creators of fiction but as ‘underground historians:’

they are not simply engaged in representing ‘reality’ from an alternative viewpoint, rather they are equally committed to representing the very material conditions which enabled/disabled these narratives within the confines of such a ‘reality’ (Meḥrez 1994, pp. 8-9).²⁰

Al-Lajna (The Committee, 1981) by Sun‘allāh Ibrāhīm is one such text which, through its inclusions as well as its “silences,” represents the sum of this era’s criticisms. This section’s objective is to demonstrate how Ibrāhīm uses an era rather than a particular character to illustrate the situation of leadership and its effects on the country as it progressed through the period of economic ‘Open Door’ (*Infitāḥ*) policy and beyond.

Relating the sequence of events of *Al-Lajna* is no easy task, for the novella is a complex work of an experimental nature, whose primary objective, it would seem, is not the laying out of a narrative in a linear, causal manner. In a lecture given in 1988, Ibrāhīm described *Al-Lajna* as the first of his works written with total disregard to the conventions of fictional writing. Indeed, the novella marks a genuine shift in aesthetic trends, for here, traditional narrative serves merely as a framework for, and thereby takes a secondary position to, three other elements: the usage of autobiographical experience, overt editorialising or social commentary and the inclusion of historical documents/ evidence. This fusion of the factual with the fictional is a technique Sun‘allāh Ibrāhīm had employed before in *Najmat Aghuṣṭus* (1974) and *Beirut Beirut* (1984) (and would later refine in his experimental novel, *Dhāt*, 1992 and again in *Sharaf*, 1997), although his previous writings purported to be less works of fiction and more documentary or reportage.

Four actual events in the author’s life play a significant role not only in informing the text, but determining it.²¹First, Ibrāhīm was imprisoned for five and a half years for leftist activities under Nāṣir (1959-64) and subjected to a dusk till dawn

²⁰ One of the fundamental questions critics of contemporary Arabic fiction must now begin to ask is whether the responsibilities of an ‘underground historian’ do not excessively hamper the works these writers produce from an aesthetic/literary standpoint .

²¹ The primary source for this autobiographical information is a lecture the author delivered entitled “*Fann al-riwāya* (“The Art of the Novel”) at the Center for Arabic Studies Abroad, Cairo, 20/11/88.

curfew for quite some time after his release. Following his period of incarceration, the author developed a keen interest in the media, as he came to discover that the strides attained by the revolution, so prominently reported on the radio in jail, seemed a gross exaggeration of reality. Secondly, in 1966, he was asked to defend his novel *Tilka al-Rā'iha* before the National Bureau on Censorship (Stagh 1993, p. 197). Thirdly, in the early 1970's, Ibrāhīm applied for a scholarship to study film in Russia. His interview, in which he was asked very demanding questions and forced to act before the panel, was a demeaning experience for him. In a lecture on his work, he comments, "I felt as if I had been dancing in front of them," with all of the negative connotations that dancing in public in the Arab world sometimes implies. These three events were the original seeds of the narrative, initially penned as a short story in the early to mid-1970s. However, it was the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978 and the resultant sense of betrayal felt by intellectuals towards the Egyptian leadership which served as the catalyst for re-examination and expansion of the short story.

The first portion of the novella reads in a straightforward manner yet it conveys the air of existential vagueness, tension and uncertainty that is to prevail throughout the work. We are introduced to the unnamed narrator just moments before he is scheduled to have an interview with an unidentified committee. The purpose behind the interview is not made clear. The narrator has been preparing for this day for a year - revising general knowledge and studying the language of the committee, an unnamed language which he will be required to use throughout the interview. He knows that questions will be asked of him to test the extent of his cultural awareness, but his information is no more specific than this. In order to glean some facts about the committee, its goals and the interview process, the narrator seeks out previous interviewees, but almost all of them deny any involvement with the committee. The only bit of information garnered from these people, namely, that the committee's aims are not defined, does nothing to advance his knowledge.

Thus, the narrator and the reader are thrust synchronously into the unknown expanse of the committee. The syntax of the opening pages of the novella is simple and sparse, a device which heightens the eerie uncertainty of the experience. The tension is built on the narrator's prolonged anticipation of the day and the delays experienced before his meeting. He is forced to stand (there is only one chair in the waiting room, which is occupied by a reticent old attendant who periodically enters the committee's meeting room, only to return to tell the narrator that they are not yet ready to meet with him), smoking copiously in an effort to relax. Three and a half hours after his arrival, sweating and unable to concentrate due to a headache from not

sleeping, the narrator is finally asked in.

The atmosphere into which the protagonist enters is grave, and tinged with elements of the absurd, leaving the reader the task of assessing the committee's authority. As soon as he enters the room, the narrator immediately closes the door. Somehow, he perceives that this was the wrong thing to do, that his very entry to the room was subject to scrutiny. But he tells us that he is glad to have failed this portion of the test, that there is a part of him which is afraid of succeeding. Seated before him at a long table is a group of mostly bespectacled men and women, the majority of whom are wearing military uniforms. As the committee consider the papers before them (papers which the narrator can only assume are to do with him), the chairman of the committee, an elderly man, speaks: "As everyone knows, presenting before our committee is not mandatory. In this age, man enjoys complete freedom of choice" (Ibrāhīm 1991, p. 12). The evidence of the proceedings calls this opening statement into question. As the interview begins, a series of embarrassing demands are made of the narrator. He is asked to dance, which he does dutifully with his necktie tied around his waist. Following this, he is asked to account for his whereabouts during a certain year and why he was unable to have sex with a woman during this particular time - was it due to impotence?²² Finally, he is required to remove his pants in order

²² Here we have a reference to the author's appearance before the Bureau of Censorship in 1966, in which Tala'at Khālid asked him the same question as was posed to the protagonist of his novel, *Tilka al-rā'iha*. Stagh 1993, p. 197.

to determine if he's a homosexual. After being bent over and probed, the narrator tells us that the committee comes to the conclusion that he is indeed gay. Throughout the proceedings, the position of the narrator in relation to the committee is one of inexplicable frailty, subjection and ultimately, submission. A symbolic and actual manifestation of this is the fact that the narrator goes through most of the interview with his trousers down.

The meeting does take a turn towards the more predictable in its line of questioning at least, as the narrator is then asked to name the single most memorable cultural symbol of the twentieth century. The question prompts an interior monologue as he attempts to answer. He lists the potential responses, from Marilyn Monroe to the exploration of space to the advertisements on the way to the airport which provide a laundry list of the most important companies of our time: Nestle, Shell, Kodak, Ford, Marlboro, etc. A lengthy digression ensues during which he describes the industrial process, how workers are often manipulated and turned into mere tools, consumers are seen as numbers and nations viewed as markets. Finally, he arrives at a suitable answer: "In a time in which the words "God," "love," and "happiness" differ in meaning from country to country and from one language to the next, Coca-Cola(tm) means the same thing everywhere" (Ibrāhīm 1981, p. 20).

In his analysis and deconstruction of Coca-Cola(tm), Sun'allāh Ibrāhīm diverges from the traditional mode of Arabic narrative. For rather than having the narrator summarise his answer to the committee, the writer allows his narrator to embark upon a detailed explanation of the vitality and significance of the soft drink in modern cultural politics. What follows is an extended essay of sorts, outlining the soft drink's historical origins, its rapid conquest of the world market following the second World War, the tremendous impact advertising had in furthering the drink's appeal, and the crucial role it played in inaugurating the "throwaway era" (Ibrāhīm 1981, pp. 20-22). As evidence of the wide-scale ascendancy of the soft drink, he cites an article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (and he provides the exact dates) which reveals a link between the president of Coca-Cola(tm), politicians in the Carter administration, including Carter himself, and a multinational association whose aim it was to destabilise Third World nations and leftist movements in particular.

This unconventional technique, a method which is repeated in the novella, subverts the notion of narrative as plot and blurs the lines between the realm of the actual and fictional, thereby forcing the reader to reflect on the nature of this interaction. But at this early stage in the sequence of events, it remains uncertain as to whether the committee is benefiting from this discourse or how it advances the text in any significant way. Meanwhile, the narrator remains trouserless, in both a literal and

figurative sense, he says, for the committee were still not responding to his comments, leaving him figuratively exposed and wholly at their mercy. Finally, the committee responds with no more than a comment to the effect that the narrator has shown himself to be conversant with the modern period, and they hoped that he is equally aware of history.

The questioning continues as one of the committee members asks, vaguely, “you were talking about the structure of the company and its pyramidal organisation. No doubt you have much to tell us about the Pyramids - feel free” (Ibrāhīm 1981, p. 24). The narrator takes the opportunity to reveal what he feels is a well-hidden secret: namely, that the great pyramid of Khofu was built with considerable technical advice, supervision and technological wherewithal from an Israelite tribe. Here too, the narrator expounds on the subject, providing detail and analysis in a manner that seems quite disjointed from the narrative. Again, this surreal interview becomes a pretext for launching a contention. This is made all the more frustrating for the reader by the fact that he or she has no knowledge of the aims or intentions of this committee’s interview. The narrator’s explanations are met with terse expressions of approval and finally, he pulls his pants up. The first chapter ends in the same mood of vague uncertainty as it began, as the committee hand him their documents on him and state that they will contact him shortly.

From the second chapter onward, it becomes more apparent that the novella is essentially a critique of shifting Egyptian mores during the 1970s, a shift particularly noticeable among its leadership. After some months of anticipation, the narrator receives a request from the committee that he compile information on the most prominent figure in contemporary Arab history. This rather open-ended project provides the narrator an opportunity to survey the standing of Egypt’s cultural elite through the decade. As he considers the modern period, he finds very little worth consideration at first. Writers, we are told in a particularly striking moment of self-consciousness, had either fallen into despair or fear, denying any attachment to the concept of committed literature (Ibrāhīm 1981, p. 37). Social organisations, businessmen and journalists had all ceased to work for justice in the highest sense. Even singers had cheapened themselves lyrically and in their public demeanour. Having concluded that the standards for prominence have changed, he reasons that he too must alter his understanding of the words “most prominent” to connote “most influential and effective in the age of Open Door (*Infitāḥ*) politics” (Ibrāhīm 1981, p. 53). With this new paradigm, the choice becomes much more obvious. The most prominent figure is an entrepreneur, a man known to the public solely by his nickname, “The Doctor.” In a lecture on his work, the author divulged that he chose

to use the figure of the Doctor to represent a class of leaders that emerged from the political and economic liberalisations of the period, from Sādāt himself to Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad to Adnan Khoshqaggi, all people whom Ibrāhīm derisively terms, “agents of America” (Ibrāhīm 1988).

The research begins and with it, the critique continues. The narrator finds very little in the local press, but in a trip to the US embassy library, he discovers a Time magazine article on the Doctor’s daughter’s marriage to a Gulf *shaykh*. The article provides a synopsis of this “prominent” character’s life: The Doctor was a businessman who began with very modest means. A nationalist, and a revolutionary of sorts (he had connections to the Free Officers), he benefited from ties to the revolution and became involved in the trading of foodstuffs, arms, cars and planes. The magazine tells of the deals which made him famous, leaving him with his hand in a wide variety of commodities, including his attempts to secure the local bottling rights for Coca-Cola(tm). The article explains the controversy this last deal aroused among the religious and nationalist communities, following a ban on the soft drink throughout the Middle East because the company granted the regional rights to bottling to Israel. The disregard for ideological principles and single-minded pursuit of wealth is viewed as contemptible by the narrator, as is the wedding of the Doctor’s daughter to a wealthy Gulf Arab. Yet the narrator betrays a sense of fascination in the process of his discoveries, as he and the reader assume that this information will foreground the hypocrisy so prevalent in his own society.

Before the narrator completes his research, several members of the committee show up at his doorstep demanding a progress report and stating that they wish to adjust the focus of the research slightly. The narrator pleads with them to allow him to continue researching the Doctor, outlining his findings thus far. The committee reluctantly agree, but on the condition that a member of the committee stay with him to monitor and expedite his progress. This man, who is only referred to as “the short one,” soon intrudes on every aspect of the narrator’s life - he changes clothes in his presence, shares a bed with him, he even enters the bathroom as he’s using it (Ibrāhīm 1981, pp. 67-8). For an extended period, the narrative pace slows dramatically, as the narrator describes the experience of having his daily activities watched by a permanent observer. This deliberate listing of the details of the narrator’s existence is almost certainly done for effect. It evokes the feelings of awkwardness, frustration and sheer ennui experienced by one living under surveillance. Clearly, this is a reference to Ibrahim’s days of house arrest. This is a particularly curious and absurd version of surveillance, however, for the committee as a body has no real jurisdiction. The narrator discovers that the short man is carrying a gun, yet the observer tells the

narrator himself that the committee holds no power over him. Whether out of personal motivation or some unstated compulsion, the narrator presses ahead with his research under the omnipresent guardian eye. And as this condition of circumspection extends, the animosity between the men grows.

It is not entirely clear with the narrator's second presentation to the committee how much time has elapsed or what events have transpired. The previous chapter ends with the two men in the narrator's kitchen, serving up tea, with the narrator staring at a knife in a cupboard drawer, thinking to himself that he's never felt such a sense of relief and satisfaction in his life. No explicit mention is made of a murder, leaving the reader bewildered at first to discover the short man missing from the meeting. In his place is a picture of him. The interview hall is full of flowers and cards with consolations from people the world over. The list of consolers is a testimony to the committee's wide sphere of influence - leaders of the so-called developed world are represented (then US president Carter, Kissinger, Nixon, Rockefeller, leaders of France, Germany, Britain and Japan) as are many multinational corporations (Mercedes, Boeing, and of course, the ever-present Coca-Cola(tm)) and members of the developing world (Chile, Pakistan, Indonesia, Mama Doc of Haiti, Zaire's Mobutu, Israel's Begin and Dayan, members of the Shah of Iran's family, various Arab Gulf leaders, Romania) (Ibrāhīm 1981, pp. 85-6). The listing of such varied organisations, companies and individuals is instructive, for if examined closely, it might provide some clues as to the hitherto unknown nature of the committee itself. The only consistent theme linking most of these names is a history of antagonistic relations to leftist movements through the world. Might the committee be a multinational counter-insurgency agency? This is implicitly suggested by the association of such a list.

Following a moment of silence for the departed, the leader of the committee addresses the group, at which point the intentions and objectives of the committee finally begin to come to light. The old man states that one of the committee's primary goals is the creation of a United States of Earth, with no particular party affiliation or governmental tie (Ibrāhīm 1981, p. 89). He describes the committee as a revolutionary group, committed to the principle of fostering freedom in the broadest sense. The gentleman concedes that the means of achieving their ends are scrutinised by outside observers as is the rather demagogic structure of the organisation. Still, he stresses the nobility of the committee's aims and urges his fellow members to prosecute the narrator for his attack on the short one and the committee as a whole.

Urgent in his need to counter the charge, the narrator interrupts in Arabic, hoping to convey his thoughts in the most accurate manner. He is silenced, however, and told

to speak only when requested to do so. Finally, he is allowed to address the charges facing him, which he does in the committee's language. The narrator argues self-defence, reminding the group that the short man was carrying a gun and that he was an obtrusive, coercive force, depriving him of sleep and the basic liberties of privacy in the name of expediting his research. What happened had to happen, we are told. These arguments are met with resistance, and the committee accuse him of collaboration, using metaphorical language which the narrator doesn't fully understand (we are told parenthetically that the committee often used their language to confuse the narrator) (Ibrāhīm 1981, p. 92). The narrator denies engagement with any group, to which the committee respond by playing a recording of a conversation between the short man and the narrator in his house in which he jokingly refers to having access to a great deal of information. This the committee misinterpret to imply participation in a conspiracy and they immediately demand the names of the collaborators. Again, the narrator denies any conspiracy. He is asked for his sources of information for his research on "the Doctor." When he announces that his sources were magazines and newspapers, the committee bursts into incredulous laughter. The implication here is that such a controlled media could never yield such lucrative research.

Still the narrator defends his sources and leads into another discursive commentary based on information gained from his readings over the course of the year. This time, he builds on the information he provided in his previous Coca-Cola(tm) commentary. Here, he discusses the phenomenon of corporate diversification (*tanwī'*) and its effects on the Egyptian market economy. He describes how the term gained currency in the 1970s, became a standard model of growth for multinational corporations and ultimately affected both foreign and domestic governmental policy in the region. Again, the information the narrator provides has very little bearing on the immediate events and unfolding of the story (i.e. the tribunal and the potential murder charge), but this is precisely the author's intention, for it is the symbols of the decade and its leadership rather than the protagonist and his outcome that genuinely matter. In this innovative reversal of protagonist and setting, the narrator functions rather like a guide through an unfamiliar, unstable world. Thus, the narrator explains to the committee the various aspects of diversification: an expansion of product diversity (various aerated and still waters, citrus fruits, the harvesting of coffee and tea), technological innovations (water desalinisation and the like) which created a market for bottled water in Egypt and led to purifications in the local tap water, the symbiotic relationship of Coca-Cola(tm) and American politicians, the allotment of academic scholarships which further promote the product

and finally how this concept had a “ripple effect” on various other underdeveloped Egyptian markets at the time such as cars and cigarettes. Nearly a decade and a half before the term “globalisation” would enter into common parlance, Sun‘allāh Ibrāhīm began to illustrate this process’ wider-reaching implications.

The narrator’s commentary suspends the motion of the novella for a moment, after which a member of the committee demands a confession from the unnamed man. The narrator remains undaunted. His encounter with the committee ends as the committee deliberates and decides that his crime of murder and withholding evidence of collaboration are worthy of the “harshest punishment.” With this nondescript verdict, the members pack up their files and leave the hall. Muddled, the narrator exits through the door to the waiting room, where he asks the old attendant what the harshest punishment is. He is told nonchalantly that he must eat himself.

The final chapter of the novella is anticlimactic, developing ideas that have, for the most part, already been expressed. The narrator leaves the building and walks the streets in dazed distraction. The people and products which pass him by are signifiers of the degradation of society and of a resignation to consumer culture, yet only he seems capable of acknowledging this fact. Coca-Cola(tm) is ubiquitous, but even “The Real Thing” is an unsatisfactory attainment: the vendors sell warm drinks, claiming they are cold. The newly-imported American public buses fall apart at an alarmingly rapid rate, prompting the public to change their nickname for the buses from “Carter,” after the president to the colloquial Arabic, “ṭarṭar,” for urine or piss (Ibrāhīm 1981, p. 108). Fragmentation has occurred, as those who can afford to choose to isolate themselves from the teeming crowds of the buses in their “armoured cars,” while the majority left to ride the buses have lost both their manners and their sense of humour. A confrontation on a bus in which the narrator attempts to defend the honour of a woman groped in the crowd results in his arm being dislocated by the accused man. Lack of personnel at the public hospital forces the narrator to seek exorbitantly priced but inadequate treatment at the private clinic. The flurry of these images puts the narrator in a contemplative mood when he finally seeks solace in his home. He describes his fellow countrymen as “despicable” and expresses regret over having appeared so submissive to the committee. If given another opportunity to meet with the group, he might have been more bold, he thinks to himself, for his task, in the final evaluation, really was not to stand before them, but to stand against them (Ibrāhīm 1981, p. 119). Still, he belittles his punishment, as he considers the suffering experienced by colleagues of his generation. The novella concludes as the narrator listens to classical music until dawn, at which point he begins to eat himself.

The conclusion of *Al-Lajna* is obviously metaphorical. The committee is an

illusory board of no consequence and therefore, so is their punishment. One might view the *Lajna* as a bizarre parody of the various governments of the Sādāt era, fearful of conspiracies, prone to semi-official censorship and observation. The surreal act of eating oneself most likely represents a form of acquiescence to the overwhelming forces of social, political and economic change in the country (Al-‘Ālim 1985, p. 164). The surprising factor is the narrator’s self-motivated compliance to this absurd sentence, an action which demonstrates the hopelessness felt by many in the face of antagonistic figures of authority.

The narratives presented in this chapter begin to provide a sense of the delicate nature of portrayals of authority figures, particularly temporal/political leaders, and display some of the methods with which the artists attempted to address the issue. It is difficult to assess from this handful of examples whether the writers have arrived at a more ‘truthful’ portrayal of their leaders with the progression of time. It is evident from these examples, however, that the trajectory of portrayal has changed. Returning to Semaḥ Idrīs’ spectrum, we see that the portrayals of Nāṣir typically begin from the positive (support) ends of the spectrum, conveying at least an initial attachment to the personality and charisma of the leader. Sādāt, on the other hand, is only obliquely referred to (if at all) in the writings of the *Infitāḥ* and beyond and the initial posture is one of suspicion. Distance, anonymity and an even greater sense of antagonism pervades the depictions of Sādāt. The fact that Sādāt, not to speak of Mubarak, goes largely unrepresented in no way indicates a loss of interest in examining issues of leadership, but perhaps indicates the extent to which writers felt themselves - whether through self-censorship or official means - unable to honestly assess figures of authority. The following two chapters begin to chronicle that inability, focusing on the shifts in literary sensibility following the 1967 defeat and later reactions of the cultural elite to the new Sādāt regime and the economic upheaval of the *Infitāḥ*.

Chapter 4

Kulluhu Bāṭil: Disenchantment and Assertion of the Individual

"...Mankind of old faced absurdity, and escaped it through religion. And today again, man faces absurdity, but how can he escape this time? It is pointless to entertain hopes of communicating with people in a language other than the one they use; and we have acquired a new language, which is science. This is the only language in which we articulate greater and lesser truths. For they are the old truths after all, once contained in the language of religion; and they must now be represented in the new language of man.

Let us look to the scientists for example and method. It seems that they are never trapped by absurdity. Why? Perhaps because they have no time for it! Perhaps also because they are permanently in contact with reality. Relying on a successful methodology of proven worth, they are not assailed by doubt or despair. One among them may spend twenty years solving an equation; and the equation will provoke new interest, and consume new lifetimes of research, and thus another firm footstep will be taken along the path of truth. The abode of scientists smells sweet; it is the smell of progress, of success." (Maḥfūz, 1966, p. 93)

"Whatever else we get to hear, this world of ours will still be here, the same as it ever was, absolutely nothing happening at all."

"And what's more, the world does not concern us any more than we concern it. In any way at all." (Maḥfūz, 1966, p. 18)

Introduction

If it remains axiomatic within contemporary Arabic literary criticism that the June 1967 war may be isolated as one of the key historical events which determined transformations in the literary sensibilities of both the writing and reading communities, this chapter seeks to place that comment within a wider context, presenting several novels and short stories which predated the defeat of the joint Arab forces in addition to those written afterwards. The intention is to illustrate the evolution of literary portrayals of disenchantment and individualism as precisely that: *evolutionary*, rather than *revolutionary*.

As has been seen in previous chapters, the existential condition of the cultural elite is, and always has been one of relegation to the peripheries. "An intellectual," writes Edward Said in his Reith lectures, "is like a shipwrecked person, who learns how to live *with* the land, not on it. Not like Robinson Crusoe, whose goal is to colonise his little island, but more like Marco Polo... who is always a traveller, a provisional guest..." (Said 1993, Lecture 3). Despite a certain amount of romanticisation in this last comment, there are times when, to extend Said's metaphor,

the landscape appears to conform more sympathetically to the aims and ambitions of the cultural elite than others. The challenge for the literary observer, then, is to note these differences of degree. In the particular situation of Egypt, it seems that from the mid-1960s on, the aims of the cultural elite and the reality on the ground became increasingly disparate, if not irreconcilable entities.

Manfred Malzahn, in an article exploring issues of Scottish nationalist literature, posits the notion of fiction as a manifestation of the collective unconscious, a "national dream," to use his words (Malzahn, 1984, p. 16). If we accept the hypotheses of Freud and his disciples of the dreamstate as a "creative workshop" in which our anxieties and aspirations are analysed, explored, dispelled, etc., how do we interpret the products of the Egyptian national psyche in the mid to late 1960s? The prescriptive critiques of the "socialist-realist" school, along the lines of Faḥī Ghānim's first novel, *Al-Jabal*, Al-Sharqāwī's *Al-Ard* and others had given way to distressing articulations of individual powerlessness, apathy and helplessness, questioning the notions of community, the position of the intellectual and progress itself. Is there a place for the intellectual in Egyptian society? What of democracy? Must a society rely on government to legislate philosophy and morality or can individuals lead the way? When the cultural elite is rendered powerless, what is to be done? Are there countries whose nationalist aspirations and setbacks mirror Egypt's, and thus offer a model of development worthy of emulation - Cuba? Japan? Russia? North America? Or are these considerations in the end no more than idle, unproductive chatter? Such are the endless drug-fuelled musings of Maḥfūz's congregation of journalists, middle-level bureaucrats, lawyers and actors aboard a houseboat on the banks of the Nile in his 1966 novel *Tharthara fawq al-Nīl* (Chatter on the Nile). The emotion expressed, the sense of malaise evinced in this work was typical of the sentiment voiced by many writers of the period. The images that the author presents are of a cultural elite not yet weary of engaging in discussion of substantial issues, but frustrated that their questioning has led to no fruitful reward for themselves or the people at large. In the face of such incapacity, disillusionment and a kind of acquiescence results. So too in literary terms was progress - the sequential ordering of narrative - called into question, as writers made greater use of the tools of their trade - flashbacks, flash-forwards and stream-of-consciousness techniques - in order to convey the mood of disarray that prevailed. Gone were the epic multi-charactered narratives of Maḥfūz's realist period, for instance. A more accurate reflection of the perceived collapse of sense of community could be found through the focus on individual characters. Equally reflective of the rise of individualism was the

substitution of examinations of space or setting with experimentation with time. Sabrī Ḥāfiẓ articulates this clearly in his article on the literary transformations of the 1960s:

The dissolution of time and its liberation from the logical flow...was essential in order to portray confusion, to juxtapose events that are not logically connected, and to convey the disorder of his life (sic) fragmented state. It is also a device for manifesting the random nature of outside reality, and the character's growing loss of interest in the outside world. *The character's only existence becomes his existence within himself, so he retreats into himself and travels in time instead of space, which involves society* (Ḥāfiẓ 1976, p. 75, Italics mine).¹

Fārūq Khurshīd's *Kulluhu Bāṭil* (The Futility of It All), published in 1964, exemplifies the spirit of the period through its manipulation of time and its prevailing mood of despair. The narrator is an educated man, crestfallen and on his own in a busy cafe, quite possibly Fishāwī, a cafe in the Al-Ḥusayn quarter of Old Cairo. All around him, the narrator describes the cacophony of sounds that merge and swell in his head, a handful of conversations whose speakers are completely oblivious of one another. The narrator himself is uninvolved in any of the activity; he is either too weak or too indifferent to enter the fray. His primary visual and mental focus is a frail, aged man who seems to be having difficulty manoeuvring himself about:

He shuddered again, supporting himself with his hand against the wall, as he stood in the corner. "Oh God!" he whispered. He found it difficult to open his lips; they twisted when he tried to. His left hand came up slowly to his eyes to wipe away a tear, which was too small for me to see at that distance. But I could see his right hand. It hung there against his thigh, motionless. He trembled once again and staggered. His left foot moved forward, while his hand was still held there against the wall, helping him to move his right foot, slowly and with difficulty. My eyes were riveted to his foot as it took a step and then paused, in a desperate effort. He lowered his left hand to pick up the thin walking-stick. He tottered again, and with a lurch of the waist, his chest moved ahead, followed and obeyed by the rest of his body. He was walking forward.

"Shoeshine, sir?" (Khurshīd in Manzalaoui 1985, p. 359)

The juxtaposition of such deliberate, detailed analysis of the old man's every motion with the blunt utterances and supplications of every shoeshine boy, Qur'ān

¹ Ian Watt, in his seminal work on English fiction entitled *The Rise of the Novel* (London 1957), follows Max Weber's analysis, correlating the rise of both capitalism and Protestantism to the emergence of individualism and, ultimately, to its reflection in literature (see especially chapter III). To my mind, there exists no parallel study for Arabic fiction, accounting for the rise of individualism in the mid to late 1960s and the socio-cultural context that produced such a reality.

salesman and beggar that passes through the cafe creates an almost cinematic effect: the old man operates in slow motion, while the rest of the world continues to move brusquely ahead at full speed. And the reader is left with the impression that the narrator is caught somewhere between these two worlds, or perhaps nowhere at all.

The narrator's sense of alienation is further enhanced by the inclusion of portions of conversations from adjoining tables, which, removed from their context, seem nothing short of absurd. One group of men discusses the importance of Arabic grammatical constructions. An actor tells a joke to his entourage. While these conversations echo in the mind of the protagonist, the narrator recalls the events of a recent party. The narrator's observation of the old man provides the only continuity in the narrative. As the old man struggles to move again, the narrator reflects on the inevitability of growing old and infirm:

I drew a hand up to my moist eyes - enough - some people call our age an age without any miseries, but this man was the tail-end of a long story which may have contained some happiness, a family, love, a child - and then, this end (Khurshīd in Manzalaoui 1985, p. 367).

The instantaneous return of the cries of the street-salesmen suggests that the narrator has either resigned himself to a fate beyond his control, or else he has given up entirely and allowed life's absurdities and unconnected moments to wash over him.

Of course, no world literature can legitimately lay claim to the monopoly on expressions of indifference, apathy and depression in the face of the modern condition. The sentiments voiced in *Kulluhu Bāṭil* are prevalent, perhaps even universal in literature. In late nineteenth century Russia, for instance, these themes gained currency with the publishing of Ivan Goncharov's novel, *Oblomov* (1859). In the ensuing years, the protagonist's name became synonymous with a passive, lethargic "quietism" common among members of "the idle rich in pre-Revolutionary Russia" (Alatas 1977, p.25). A related phenomenon, argues Syed Alatas, is that of the "superfluous individual, developed by Russian writers before the Revolution, ... who vainly struggles against his environment, too idealistic and too honest to accept the ills and vices of contemporary society but too weak and too civilised to bring about its destruction. Such a person becomes displaced from his proper function and doomed by the influences of the very forces he tries to avoid" (Alatas 1977, p. 25).

It is difficult to determine if Arab writers were aware of Goncharov's phenomenon of *Oblomovschina*. Many earlier writers, Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī in particular, have expressed an awareness of and indebtedness to nineteenth century Russian literature, while later authors Bahā' Ṭāhir and Yūsuf Idrīs, for instance, cite

Dostoevsky and especially Chekov as direct influences. Though Goncharov held a prominent position in the canon of nineteenth century Russian literature, outside his native country his fame was considerably less. To the extent that Oblomov became a national symbol of the indifference of the bourgeoisie, a stereotype which was ingrained in the minds of many of the later nineteenth century writers, his impact may be indirectly felt. Certainly the phenomenon extended to Arabic literature in spirit, if not in name. Indeed, as one English translator of Russian literature remarked in the mid 1950s, "...there are thousands of Oblomovs scattered all over the world."²

Unlike *Kulluhu Bātil*, which relies on the deliberately disengaged observations of its narrator, *Al-Muḏāhara* (The Demonstration, Bahā' Ṭāhir, 1966) directly involves its narrator in the activity of the story. Here, however, the author moves his main character through a series of events which have no discernible connection to one another. Ṭāhir's story is thus less stream-of-consciousness and more what might be termed "stream-of-sequence." *Al-Muḏāhara* has, in fact, all the qualities of a dream, with its wandering narrator and unrelated sequence of events. The story thus arrives at a similar result as the previous one, namely, it questions the significance of human existence, but by different means.

The progression of events begins with the narrator attempting to negotiate the sale of his share of a recently acquired inheritance. When his brother refuses him this right, the narrator leaves his brother's house, exasperated. In an effort to distract himself, he steps into a cinema where he meets an attractive woman. Within moments, the couple begin to grope and fondle each other. They leave the film and proceed to an outdoor cafe, beside which there is a female fire eater performing. Set against this rather odd backdrop, the two become engaged in an intimate discussion of their personal lives. He expresses his mixed feelings of loss and relief at the death of his abusive father, and she empathises, relating her story of her neglectful husband who despises her for her inability to bear him children. An immediate, if unlikely, bond develops between the couple. The conversation continues, "...What does anything mean?" the narrator asks. "My father died and what was the meaning of his life? What's the meaning of my life? Every morning I go to work and I do the same thing - I bury papers in folders and cabinets and no one ever asks about these folders...at work, at home with my friends it's the same..." (Ṭāhir 1992, p. 76)

As if to emphasise the narrator's reflections on meaninglessness, the plot takes

² David Magarshack, introduction to the 1954 edition of Ivan Goncharov, *Oblomov*, Penguin Books, p. vii .

another unrelated turn in its culminating scene, where the young man excuses himself to get cigarettes and is carried away by a crowd of football supporters celebrating a victory in the finals. The zeal of the throng, with its dancing to the drums and mizmars and the effigies of the defeated team, is compelling, causing the narrator, a man uninterested in football, to claim allegiance to the victorious team. So great is the pressure to conform to the crowd that the man participates in a brawl with supporters of the rival team as the throng passes by the rivals' cafe. The final scene has the narrator being transported with several others in a police van after sustaining injuries in the dispute.

In the wake of the 1967 debacle, few were the number of the cultural elite that emerged with their political, social and psychological moorings intact and unshaken. Najīb Maḥfūz, in an article entitled *Qaḍāyā 'Arabīya*, explains how the outcome of that war and its implications led to a fundamental revision of his approach to writing. "...The traditional novel classifies society, whereas an unstable society drives the writer to meditate rather than describe it" (Maḥfūz in 'Ali 1983, p. 78). A very telling indicator of the sense of upheaval and chaos the cultural elite experienced after June 5, 1967 is to be found in Maḥfūz's title story of the collection *Taḥt al-maẓalla* (Under the Bus Shelter, 1967), his first attempt to consolidate and put in print his feelings for his countrymen and the Egyptian government following the terrible defeat.³

Taḥt al-Maẓalla's vision of society is bleak; the world the author describes is one governed by the absurd. In the midst of a rainstorm, a group of Cairenes are witness to scenes of absolute anarchy as they wait for their respective buses. A crowd emerges, chasing after a thief, who is caught and violently assaulted. A policeman observes the scene indifferently. Two cars rush past, crash and explode, leaving two victims to die beside the wreck. The policeman remains idle and uninterested. The group in the bus shelter, on the other hand, is horrified. Chaos continues, as the thief makes what appears to be a speech and then proceeds to disrobe and begins dancing while his assailants experience a change of heart and dance around him in a circle. Meanwhile, a couple strip and make love on top of one of the crash victims. The confusion escalates as a tribe of Bedouin, complete with camels, enters the square and sets up camp. A group of tourists arrive as well to observe the scene. Construction

³ Although some have contended that the stories of this collection were written prior to June 1967, and that this was testimony to Maḥfūz's visionary abilities as a social critic, Rashīd al-'Inānī points out in his biography of Maḥfūz that the author spared no effort to clarify the situation, indicating himself on "the back of the flyleaf ...that these stories were written in the period between October and December 1967." from Al-'Inānī 1993, pp. 200-201.

workers follow the tourists, assess the scene and hastily erect a tomb, in which they bury both the corpses and the couple making love. Fights ensue between the tourists, the thief's circle and the Bedouin, while other groups sing and make love.

Throughout the bizarre unfolding of events, the bystanders at the bus stop gaze passively, wondering to each other if the calamity and pandemonium is genuine, or merely the filming of a scene for a movie. The story is therefore as much a comment on the apathy of the spectators as it is an expression of the upheaval felt after the defeat. The disorder is compounded, non sequiturs follow one after the other, yet the bystanders, most likely a symbolic representation of the Egyptian populace, remain uninvolved, certain that the logic of the situation will eventually reveal itself. Maḥfūz suggests tacitly here that the ordinary citizens, the public at large, must bear a certain amount of the responsibility for the *naksa*, as well as the military leadership and the intellectuals .

A man in black clothes walks in with a magnifying glass muttering, "not bad...not bad" to himself as he surveys the scene. A severed human head rolls before the bus queue, spurting blood. The man in black yells directions to the couple making love. And just when it appears that the man in black will offer an explanation for the madness, he runs off, only to be chased by another crowd. The story concludes in a fittingly absurd manner, with the police officer approaching the bystanders, asking them for identification, accusing them of assembling illegally and assassinating them with his machine gun. In this senseless conclusion we find a summation of the feelings of confusion, upheaval and lack of control experienced by many throughout the country. I should now like to move beyond these impressionistic images, however, and discuss several short stories in greater detail, giving particular emphasis to some of the works of Yūsuf Idrīs, in order to convey a clearer picture of a cultural elite thoroughly disillusioned and utterly on its own.

1. *Lughat Al-Āy Āy* (The Ow Ow Language, 1965)

Egyptian fiction of the mid to late 1960s witnessed a considerable rise in the articulation of individualism as an ethos, particularly among members of the cultural elite. For those who in the main enjoyed greater access to education and certain material resources (although we must reiterate that wealth does not *directly* correlate with membership in this study's categorisation of the cultural elite), the fragmentation of civil society as a whole and increasing disappointment with the leadership of the country often led to distressing acknowledgements of isolation, pain and despair.

Yūsuf Idrīs' *Lughat al-Āy Āy* was one of many to give voice to these sentiments, and his work during the period of the mid to late 1960s stands out for its attention to craftsmanship and complexity of meaning. *Lughat al-Āy Āy* predates the 1967 *debacle* by two years, but it is characteristic of a prevailing mood of introspection and an assertion of the individual which dominated the entire period, pre- and post-*naksa*. Like many of Idrīs' short stories written during this time, *Lughat al-Āy Āy* may be read on at least two levels: The story is on one level a depiction of the excruciating experience of pain in both its expressed and repressed manifestations. It is on another, more profound level, the portrayal of one man's search for meaning in life, an analysis of the phrase "the worthy life." Through a striking use of an unintelligible language of pain, the story obliges the reader to examine and question the compromises often made in the name of achievement. Indeed, the very nature of that word is here called into question.

The story begins dramatically with Fahmī Abū 'Anza's cries of pain jolting the narrator, Al-Ḥadīdī, and his wife out of their sleep in the middle of the night. The wailing is intense, not quite screams, but powerful enough to awaken other members of the ordinarily peaceful, fashionable neighbourhood in which Al-Ḥadīdī lives. The similes Idrīs uses to describe the sound are graphic. He likens the clamour to bones shattering at the hand of some legendary, merciless giant; the sound, he says, of vocal chords being ripped, loud enough to burst the eardrums of any who heard it. Fahmī's cries "electrified the atmosphere of the house entirely...like scores of sharp poisoned needles shooting off in every direction" (Idrīs 1965, p. 248). Al-Ḥadīdī's wife, 'Iffat, recoils in terror at the sounds emanating from her kitchen, while Al-Ḥadīdī remains calm. From the beginning, he experiences a sort of empathy for the voice. Al-Ḥadīdī is, after all, responsible for bringing Fahmī into their flat, allowing this pained individual to spend the night before having him admitted to the hospital the following morning. 'Iffat finds this intrusion in their home unbearable, urging Al-Ḥadīdī to put the ailing man up for the night in a hotel or at least, downstairs in the doorman's room. Torn between feelings of guilt and responsibility, the narrator resignedly accepts his obligation and pleads with his wife to do the same.

As the title of the story suggests, much of the impact of the narrative rests in its striking aural quality. The writer makes frequent use of onomatopoeia to evoke specific properties of the voice. In the opening paragraph, the noise is described as "like bones...which they (a giant's hands) crushed," (*Ka'izām....tudashdish*) This Egyptian colloquial verb, *dashdasha*, recurs in other sections of the story describing the effect of the wailing on the otherwise silent neighbourhood. In that same

paragraph, the sound becomes a “muttering,” or *ghamghama*, and shortly after, dies down to a “whisper,” or *washwasha*. These words are all evocative of the sounds and utterances which precede actual language and emphasise the instinctual, precognitive nature of cries of pain, as does Idrīs’ occasional usage of pure gibberish:

Fartak martak shartak dī dī dī dān... (Idrīs 1965, p. 251)⁴

On other occasions, Idrīs’ depiction of the sounds exhibits a lyrical quality. Notice here, for instance, a string of adjectives describing the “Ays,” whose force rests in its repetition of either the *tā marbūṭa* or the *alif*, creating a rhyming effect:

*Āy āy ṭawīla wa qaṣīra, mamdūda wa mabtūra ‘āliya bi kull qūwa
yarfa‘uhā munkhafīda bi jamā‘ arādatihi yakhasifuha, majrūḥa
dāmiya, lāsi‘a...* (Idrīs 1965, p. 240)⁵

And when the silence returns, it is described in very immediate, tangible terms: a “miracle medical cure, which, had it not come at that moment, and with that totality, some or all of them might have lost their minds” (Idrīs 1965, p. 241).

For Al-Ḥadīdī, hearing these cries of agony is no new experience. As a doctor, prominent organic chemist and former member of the Health Ministry, he has built a career on dealing with the sick, the lame and the dying. Now inured to the pain of others, the only emotion he feels is that of deep resentment - resentment towards a world which expected him to perform "miracles" on a regular basis (Idrīs 1965, p. 246) and spend his waking hours with the wretched of the earth (Idrīs 1965, p. 249). And the stresses of life and work spare him no mercy even in sleep: on at least two occasions, the narrator reminds us that “there is always a difficulty between himself and the moment of sleep” (Idrīs 1965, p. 240). Yet when he hears Fahmī’s cries, there is an unusual resonance. The wailing next door moves the narrator, for Fahmī is no ordinary patient, and the doctor’s connection to this suffering man is deeper than it would be to a typical patient.

Fahmī Abū ‘Anza is a dear comrade and friendly rival from Al-Ḥadīdī’s school days in the village of Zinayn. Al-Ḥadīdī remembers Fahmī as the only student in school more diligent and intelligent than him. In fact, if anyone or anything is responsible for Al-Ḥadīdī’s success, it is Fahmī and the friendly competition he provided in school. The narrator goes on to describe Fahmī as a boy of unmatched

⁴ For the original Arabic text, see Appendix One, example 7.

⁵ For the original Arabic text, see Appendix One, example 8.

dignity and generosity (the affectionate name Abū 'Anza was given to Fahmī when he stole a goat in order to sell it to buy medicine for his father). Al-Ḥadīdī was continually impressed with the young boy's concern for others and his self-sacrifice. So great was his admiration for him that he named his son after him. Some thirty years later, when this shell of a man, barely able to speak - "either a mummy dug up from the grave or preparing to enter it," as he describes him - enters Al-Ḥadīdī's office claiming to be Fahmī Abū 'Anza, the doctor is dumbstruck. If anyone from the village seemed destined to rise above their peasant background, it should have been Fahmī. Circumstances, however, had dealt him a difficult blow. Forced to quit school and work the land for his family, his potential had never been realised. As if this were not tragedy enough, a case of bilharzia contracted in the fields had led to an acute cancer of the urinary tract, devastating Fahmī's body. Compelled by sympathy and loyalty to his childhood friend, Al-Ḥadīdī offers him lodging in his house for the night.

The irony on which the story hinges is that it is Al-Ḥadīdī who seems to be in greater pain and need than Fahmī. And it is through the encounter between the two that the story transforms itself. Just as work in the countryside has taken its toll on Fahmī's body, the relentless pursuit of "success" has shattered Al-Ḥadīdī's emotional and spiritual well-being. However, the doctor has no outlet, no acceptable means of manifesting his pain. And the more he turns an inward eye on himself, the more Al-Ḥadīdī wishes he could be suffering from a tangible, physical affliction like Fahmī. Evaluating the course of his life, Al-Ḥadīdī sees that this sense of dissatisfaction with his life and vocation was long in the making. Following high school, al-Ḥadīdī's father struggled to pay for his continuing education, going to great pains to ensure that his son wouldn't have to work in the fields. Caught up in the self-centeredness of rapid acquisition and status seeking, Al-Ḥadīdī sees that he has lost the ability to feel compassion. Indeed, he has lost a passion for life itself. "I've spent my life as if it were an arithmetical equation whose goal is arrival," He says. "And when I arrive, I am no happier, for there lies another arrival ahead of me." And then again later, Al-Ḥadīdī comments:

the arrival is worth nothing at all if you arrive by yourself. What's the value in being king... or an expert in his field who has obtained the Nobel Prize, but is surrounded by a desolate desert, what's the value in anything in the world in and of itself if you feel alone? (Idris 1965, p. 259)

Painfully aware of his status as a member of an elite, Al-Ḥadīdī envies Fahmī his more prosaic life. Unrelentingly critical of himself, he fails to regard his own

existence as a life well-spent, if indeed it is a “life” at all: “The single measure for life,” he asserts, “is that one *feel* it, and I have not and do not feel” (Idrīs 1965, p. 255, emphasis mine). He envisages the perpetual chase in which he is involved, sees himself passing people by and pictures a screen full of broken relationships and missed opportunities. At the very least, he reasons, Fahmī and his family enjoy each other's company and are content with what they have, be it even a simple radish for a meal. This is no romanticisation of life in the countryside, but a straightforward acknowledgement that true happiness has very little to do with the objects and objectives around which Al-Ḥadīdī has centred his life. The narrator concludes that a life of physical pain is infinitely preferable to a life in which there is no sensation, a life which has taken care of alleviating all physical and material need, yet fails to include consideration for others. He compares this realisation to “the clarity of the moment of enlightenment of the Sufis”(Idrīs 1965, p. 258). With no opportunity to vent his frustration (the doctor admits to having an almost overpowering urge to scream out loud in one of Cairo's busiest squares, Mīdān al-Taḥrīr, but suppresses this, fearing the consequences) (Idrīs 1965, p. 253), Al-Ḥadīdī's only option is to experience suffering vicariously through Fahmī. The acrimonious “Ay Ay” language has a paradoxically redemptive quality for the narrator, “entering into all his being and shaking the foundation of life to awaken his instinctual love for it” (Idrīs 1965, pp. 258-9).

Al-Ḥadīdī therefore leaves his bedroom and approaches the kitchen. Symbolically, each step forward marks a step taken towards confronting his own pain. As he approaches, he feels as if a “volcano of tears was on the verge of erupting.” When he enters, he finds the poor man crumpled on the floor, stains of uric acid everywhere. The sight of the kitchen is horrific, “an innumerable number of drops of yellowish blood stained the floor, the door of the refrigerator and the white tables... it was as if it were the scene for a fierce battle which had occurred between a defenceless human and some giant invisible opponent” (Idrīs 1965, p. 248). Despite the repulsive scene, Al-Ḥadīdī endures and sits down next to Fahmī. As the wailing intensifies, the doctor feels a kind of relief; it is as if he is face to face with his mirror image. And for the first time since childhood, he feels an urge to cry. In an effort to reconcile himself with his past, he pleads for forgiveness from his former friend:

Give me your hand, Fahmī. Put it here on my chest. It's empty, as you can see. I know that you're sick. I feel for you and wish that I too could share in the pain, but I can't. My heart's wooden. I abandoned you all - all of you in Zinayn, Sa'd in Benha, 'Abd al-Muḥsin in Assiyut, the university crowd, the literary society, everyone. I assumed that you were taking the ordinary route, a path that you'd

regret. The fast track, now that's the way to go. The result is that I died a long time ago, while you all remained alive. I'm a corpse, convincing myself that I'm the one avoiding people, when it is they who are turning away from me - what do they need a corpse for? Even my wife and son - I feel as if they can't bear the smell of me. I want to come back, Fahmī. I want a new start. I'm begging for another chance. Who's going to take me, Fahmī? Who wants a corpse? You're the only chance I've got, Fahmī. Will you accept me? (Idrīs 1965, pp. 260-1)

The story's true moment of transformation occurs immediately after Al-Ḥadīdī offers this confession, when Fahmī, so moved by his former friend's words, speaks for the first time in a discernible, intelligible language. The sick man urges Al-Ḥadīdī not to cry, but calls him by his first name, Maḥmūd, which the reader has not heard before and which presumably no one has used since childhood. Fahmī's gesture here is what makes the story work; his character is transformed from its previous role of the passive victim of indescribable pain and ear-rending nuisance to that of a sentient being in control of his faculties, if only temporarily, and capable of expressing pity for the doctor's equally lamentable situation. The story concludes with Al-Ḥadīdī carrying Fahmī out of the apartment. When his wife asks where he's going, the protagonist offers this slightly enigmatic reply: "I'm going on a different, very difficult path. Will you come with me?" (Idrīs 1965, p. 262) The woman protests his departure, but the doctor is oblivious, for ahead of him lies the opportunity to make peace with his past and the chance to pursue a future whose goal is not arrival, but enjoyment of the journey itself. The doctor and the tortured man exit the neighbourhood, a neighbourhood Al-Ḥadīdī describes as teeming with living corpses such as himself, presumably never to return.

Thirty-five years on, Al-Ḥadīdī's mental and spiritual agony, embodied in Fahmī's unintelligible screams and portrayed so vividly here now reads as a common, recognisable depiction of contemporary society. The plight of the aspiring, urban professional, often estranged from his or her more humble origins and torn by the competing interests of career and commitment to others is a much more familiar phenomenon in Egypt today than it was at the time of Idrīs' writing. As such, it could be argued that this story has lost some of its force, but not its relevance. And as we shall see in the following chapter, the tone of defiant resistance to the forces of the market and the commodification of human beings illustrated here soon gives way to utterances of helplessness in the face of economic changes brought in by the new regime's Open Door (*Infitāḥ*) policies. *Lughat al-Āy Āy* remains a vital representation of a cultural elite grappling with the issues of success and achievement and it marks a time when resistance to what were believed to be spurious definitions of achievement

was still deemed possible. It is noteworthy that this story was written two years prior to *al-naksa*. In the following section, we turn to another Idrīs short story written three years after the defeat and analyse the very obvious shifts in mood, tone and literary responses to society.

2. *Snūbizm* ('Snobbism,' 1970)

Although personal cries of angst and symbolic political commentary gained prominence in the writing of the late 1960's in Egypt, these were by no means the sole modes of expression. Satire proved to be a particularly effective means of dramatising the increasing inconsequentiality of the life of the intellectual as well, and is the focus of the next two sections of this study. Within the realm of caricature we are provided a slightly different angle from which to view intellectuals, doctors and other members of the cultural elite, as elements of humour and hyperbole displace the gravity of previous portrayals, showing us that intellectual concerns are, on occasion, trivial, and not beyond the realm of comic attack.

The cultural elite have often been the object of parody in Egyptian fiction, with portrayals dating back to the end of the nineteenth century. By the mid-twentieth century, intellectuals were frequent targets of satire in the plays and short stories of writers such as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm⁶, Faṭḥī Ghānim⁷ and Yūsuf Idrīs. *Snūbizm* is one of Idrīs' most striking examples of this form, illustrating the constant struggle intellectuals face between living a life of removed, 'objective,' 'academic' observation and showing interest or compassion in individual cases. Utilising a very everyday scene, the author throws the otherworldly preoccupations and concerns of the story's protagonist, Doctor 'Uways, into striking relief. 'Uways' contradictory impulses and inadequacies are very quickly revealed, and the scene that results leads the reader to question the validity of such a life of abstraction.

Like so many Idrīs vignettes, the opening scenes of *Snūbizm* are remarkable for what they accomplish in a brief space; a vivid visual picture is etched in swift, but precise strokes so that even after the first few paragraphs we have a sharp sense of the personality involved and a feeling for the kind of life that is in question. The narrator

⁶ See especially the short stories *Anā al-mawt* and *Mu'tamar al-ḥubb* in Al-Ḥakīm's 1954 collection of philosophical short stories, *Arīnī Allāh*.

⁷ One of Ghānim's later collections of short stories, *Al-Rajul al-munāsib*, features several satirical portrayals of men pursuing power and position for the wrong reasons. The archetype of this variety is *'The Would-Be Minister.'*

provides the premise of the story in a manner similar to many of Idrīs' stories - it begins as an oral recounting:

The story of Dr. 'Uways is a story indeed. The funny thing is that he hasn't told it, doesn't speak about it and has no interest in it whatsoever. It is a trivial story in his opinion. The important subject is the bill. The bill is Dr. 'Uways' obsession of the season. For every season, practically every month he has an obsession (Idrīs 1970, p. 107).

The account begins with the chance meeting of the unnamed narrator - a playwright - and the academic Doctor 'Uways amidst the jostling and confusion of Midān al-Taḥrīr. 'Uways seems desperate to reach his destination, but stops to talk to the writer. Besides the fact that the narrator has never seen the professor break his calm, dignified stride, something else is different about him. His characteristic glasses are missing, and his right eye has swollen into a tremendous blue bruise. When the narrator inquires as to the cause of the injury, 'Uways waves off the whole affair as a minor scuffle with a couple of hooligans, riff-raff whom he calls "snobs."

The American author John Kennedy Toole achieved a similar effect ten years later with his novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980). Here too, the intellectual is presented as an oddity, a creature slightly out of step with ordinary society. Notice how *Confederacy* opens in a similar fashion, immediately placing its protagonist on the fringe of society, looking in on the centre judgementally:

In the shadow under the green visor of the cap Ignatius J. Reilly's supercilious blue and yellow eyes looked down upon the other people waiting under the clock at the D.H. Holmes department store, studying the crowd of people for signs of bad taste in dress. Several of the outfits, Ignatius noticed, were new enough and expensive enough to be properly considered offenses against taste and decency. Possession of anything new or expensive only reflected a person's lack of theology and geometry; it could even cast doubts upon one's soul (Toole 1981, p.1).

Before we embark on the story of how the bruise was acquired, the narrator provides us with a bit of background information on the professor. 'Uways is a man whose commitment to the study of anthropology informs his every waking moment. Rather than worry about his glaring black eye, the doctor redirects conversation to his current mental preoccupation, a bill (*lā'iḥa*) to regulate the behaviour of students in his college, which he hopes will have wider implications for the entire university and perhaps the world at large. 'Uways' concern that there is resistance on the committee to his bill - perhaps even a conspiracy (*mu'āmara*) against him - emphasises his

alienation from the real world and his apparently abstract sense of commitment to social reform. The narrator assumes a derisory stance towards 'Uways' current obsession, noting that the professor speaks of the committee's dissension as if it were the conspiracy launched against Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's play (Idrīs 1970, pp. 110-1). His aims are nothing if not noble, though his sense of self-importance is grossly exaggerated. The narrator portrays him as a man who believes his mandate to rectify the wrongs of the world was given to him from on high (Idrīs 1970, pp 109-10). His opinion is gospel, and failure to agree with the distracted Dr. 'Uways qualifies you as a member of the benighted throng he derogatorily calls 'snobs,' people with whom he must inevitably come into contact, but whose behaviour and thinking he seeks so desperately to reform:

These thoughts about his getting beaten up are all prompted by a truly excessive awareness of this status of his. And when I use the words 'truly excessive,' I'm being very low-keyed; ...Paranoia, delusions of grandeur, something along these lines might be a better way of putting it; a feeling that he is the emissary of some divine concern aiming not merely at reforming a corrupt world but being designated through some absolute heaven-sent right from a higher universe as a reformer of this corrupt world in which he lives. Oh yes, freedom is certainly guaranteed to exist in this world; that much is true enough. But woe betide anyone who tries to use it to question any of his opinions. Freedom means that *he* is free to express an opinion that you are free to accept. If you don't, if you have another opinion, then you're one of those boors he calls 'snobs' (Idrīs 1970, pp 109- 10).

The reader in turn assimilates the narrator's less than sympathetic attitude to the professor and enjoys a certain amount of laughter at 'Uways' expense. This business of high-minded commitment to reform in an abstract way is only alluded to in this passage, but it is an issue which will soon come to the fore when the professor is forced to question his own understanding of his position as a scientist and supposed reformer.

With this in mind, the reader enters the heart of the story in a scene all too familiar to anyone who has spent some time in Cairo - negotiating personal space on the crowded morning buses. 'Uways shoulders his way into the 999 bus, his briefcase containing his precious lectures "raised above him like a black flag," to find himself standing extremely close to a demure, devout looking woman. In an effort to stave off embarrassment, the doctor attempts to turn his back to the woman, to no avail. Preserving his personal space is not merely an issue of decorum for the professor, however. Lost in the convolutions of the anthropological world, 'Uways sees this

primarily as an intellectual question - how does the individual maintain his corporeal autonomy amid tremendous pressures to submit to the will of the mass? Struggling to force his briefcase between them, 'Uways is finally able to 'assert his own corporeal autonomy.'

This state is short-lived, however, as the ticket-collector moves through the human sea, leaving in his wake a series of shifts and turns in the delicate balance of bodies pressed against one another. A short man comes between the woman and 'Uways, groping about ever so slightly, to the distress of the woman. The professor's reaction is not to ask the man what he's doing, or to force him to stop, but to run through a mental list of the scholars who have dealt with the phenomenon of pickpocketing in the group context (Idrīs 1970, p. 116).

Eventually, the woman turns around and asks the shorter man to step back a bit. 'Uways, unaware that he is not being spoken to, replies in a level of Arabic indicative of his status, "Are you directing this speech at me, madam?" (*Ḥadrātik bitwagahīlī anā 'l-khiṭāb?*) (Idrīs 1970, p. 117) The woman allays his fears, and says (in pure colloquial, a noticeable contrast to the professor's awkward mixture of *fushā* and colloquial) that she is speaking to the rude short man directly behind her (*La, ana bakallim al-gada' illī warāya da*) (Idrīs 1970, Ibid.).

Similar contrasts in levels of language and education may be found in Toole's novel, accentuating the differences in perception of the world. Notice, for instance, this exchange between the protagonist and his mother:

Mrs. Reilly looked at her son slyly and asked, "Ignatius, you sure you not a communiss?"

"Oh, my God!" Ignatius bellowed. "Every day I am subjected to a McCarthyite witchhunt in this crumbling building. No! I told you before. I am not a fellow traveller. What in the world put that into your head?"

"I read someplace in the paper where they got plenty communiss at college."

"Well, fortunately I didn't meet them. Had they crossed my path, they would have been beaten to within an inch of their lives. Do you think that I want to live in a communal society...sweeping streets and breaking up rocks or whatever it is people are always doing in those blighted countries? What I want is a good, strong monarchy with a tasteful and decent king who has some knowledge of theology and geometry and to cultivate a Rich Inner Life" (Toole 1981, pp. 183-4).

Back on the bus, the man's overtures continue, and 'Uways is not the only

passenger to notice the spectacle. As the man lifts her robe, the professor thinks to himself that it is not his place to interfere, but to remain an objective, disinterested academic observer. The following passage, quoted here at length, illustrates the assumptions and expectations of the professor when confronted with such a situation:

Dr. 'Uways had to summon up his scientific personality with all his might so as to not get involved directly as the social and behavioural reformer. That (sort of) work and direct daily interference wasn't the concern of a man of science such as himself. The man of science's interests are much more wide-reaching - to change all of humanity. If he deals with them one by one, case by case, he gets bogged down in the sorts of things that the man of the day to day does and his message is totally lost. He is a scholar, and as a scholar he should observe disinterestedly, as if he were watching an experiment with mice, his sole concern being to extract the information from the experiment in order to discover the correct scientific explanation for the phenomenon and not to intrude to alleviate the temporary suffering of one of the mice. Those are the concerns of *futūwa* and the law, policemen and brave, gallant types - all of whom are mice in the experiment as well... (Idrīs 1970, p. 114).

After an undue amount of silent torture, the woman yells out that she is being assaulted. The bus stops, the diminutive man feigns innocence, another passenger stands up for the man and the whole bus seems to turn on the woman. A cat-fight ensues and the woman is summarily ejected from the bus.

This sudden shift of sympathy confounds Dr. 'Uways. In his years of experience as head of the department, he has never seen an apparent victim turned on in this manner. This piques his academic curiosity, and so he feels compelled to ask the passengers for an explanation. Clearing his throat, he addresses the entire bus as if he would a classroom of students (again, in his rather stilted form of speech),⁸ stating

⁸ "Ismahūlī bikalima. Uqaddim lakum nafsi awwalan. Anā Ad-Duktūr Fūlān al-Ustādh bikuliyyat kadha bigām'at kadha... wa argükum lā ta'taqidu ananī aqsud atadakhul fī shu'unikum al-khāṣa. Wa innamā anā ustādh mādat al-anthropolgiyya wa lā yahimmunī mā ḥadatha abadan min an-nāhiya al-akhlāqiyya aw al-qanūniyya. Anā yahimmunī al-nāhiya al-'ilmiyya."

"Permit me to have a word with you. Allow me to introduce myself first. I am Doctor So and So, Professor of such and such faculty in the university such and such... And I beg of you, do not think that I mean to interfere in your private affairs. But I am a professor of anthropology, and I'm not interested in what happened from a legal or moral standpoint. What concerns me is the scientific viewpoint..." *Snobizm*, pp. 122-123, translation mine. For the original Arabic text, refer to Appendix One, example 9.

This is contrasted with the very blunt colloquial response of one of the passengers: "Inta āyiz eh yā ustādh biḍḍubt? Eḥna mish fāḍiyyin!"

"What exactly is it you want, professor? We don't have time for this!", p 123. For the original Arabic text, refer to Appendix One, example 10.

that his interests in the affair are purely academic but that he must know why she became the focus of the passengers' wrath. Several passengers are offended by 'Uways' pompous manner, and he too is given a sound drubbing, ending up flat in the street beside the woman.

The story ends with the narrator saying farewell to Dr. 'Uways as he runs frantically to catch a 999. Only now the professor has resigned himself to a life of acquiescence. Never again will he speak out against a passenger's violation, nor will he even decry an infringement of his own rights:

It seems that this woman was the last one to stand up and cry out for help, and I was the last fool to say that I saw. That is to say that that was the last beating up. Now if you ride the 999 or any other, you'll see that everything's fine. The game continues in silence and no one transgresses the rules - the rules being that you don't see (what's going on) and if you do see, you pretend you don't... Ingenious solution, isn't it? (Idrīs 1970, p. 124)

What emerges from the conclusion is a twofold comment on the intellectual and society. 'Uways' thrashing and subsequent retreat to a private life of the mind emphasises the portrayal of an academic life as detached from reality and of little wide-reaching consequence. To be certain, the professor's decision to turn even further inward represents a deliberate choice on the academic's part, rather than a universal truth. Earlier in the story, the narrator intimates that this alienation fuelled by a sense of arrogance existed long before the incident on the bus.⁹ However, if, in a general sense, the role of the intellectual is to be a *public* advocate and critic, one who "confronts orthodoxy and dogma and represents those who are routinely forgotten" (Said 1993, Lecture 1), as Edward Said, among others, has suggested, then what we have in *Snūbizm* is in large part a lament over the loss of a more candid, civic role. The absurdity and powerlessness of the intellectual combined with a sense of distance from the masses which leads to irresponsibility and inactivity is a recurring theme in Idrīs' work of this period.¹⁰ Equally important is the presentation of society as callous and indifferent to the needs of the individual. The short story is just as much a critique of the rise of what Egyptians call '*anamāliyya*' (literally, "what's-it-got-to-do-with-me-ism," more figuratively, apathy) as it is a comment on the pathetic

⁹ "I felt, as if through revelation, that this was not the first time that he (Dr. 'Uways) was looking at me, at others, or perhaps events through this swollen bruised blue eye... Only before it had been swollen on the inside and the punch it received did nothing more than to make it plainly visible." pp. 112-113.

¹⁰ See especially *Mu'jizat al-aṣr* (1966) and *Al-Nuqta* (1968).

situation of 'Uways. In a world governed by "Snūbizm," any concept of collective responsibility is quickly discarded. The bus itself, forcing hundreds of individuals into such proximity and obvious contact while carrying them on to their separate and distinct destinations, is a fairly accurate, if conventional, metaphor for life in contemporary Egyptian society: here the intellectuals, along with everyone else, are barely holding on, to say nothing of maintaining 'corporeal autonomy,' and though there are any number of potential relationships on the bus, very little 'relating' actually occurs. Any attempt to concern oneself with anyone else is viewed as overstepping one's rightful bounds. The result is the estrangement and censure experienced by 'Uways and the woman. Thus, the title of the story may be read as indicative of two separate and distinct phenomena: 'Snūbizm,' as the word is literally used by Dr. 'Uways connotes the rise of 'hooliganism' and domination of crass individualism as articulated and demonstrated in the bus scene. *Snobbism*, an actual mistranslation of the title based on our understanding of the English concept is, curiously enough, appropriate here, representing the assumption of a more distanced, elitist mode of thought and behaviour on the part of the good doctor following his 'drubbing.' Written at the end of a decade of thwarted idealism, *Snūbizm* is a penetrating critique of the learned life and encapsulates Idrīs' concern for the breakdown of a community spirit in Egypt and the increasingly marginal role that the intellectual seems to play in uplifting society.

3. Mu'jizat al-'aṣr (The Miracle of the Age, 1966)

As has been said in the discussions of *Kulluhū Bāṭil*(1964), *Al-Muṣāhara*(1966) and other stories, the perception of the cultural elite as an ineffectual segment of society, stripped of its utility and its very function in the collective is one which had been germinating in Egyptian literature for at least half a decade prior to the publishing of *Snūbizm* . A particularly striking example of such a portrayal in Idrīs' work may be found in *Mu'jizat al-'aṣr*, published in 1966. Here, in a very pointed manner, the author considers the issue of intellectuals' stature not only by making the intellectual protagonist insignificant in the eyes of those around him, but by presenting him quite literally as an extraordinarily diminutive character, almost microscopic to the eye. In this story, the author incorporates elements of the fantastic and the comical to dramatise the increasingly circumscribed position of the cultural elite. These elements of fantasy serve both to entertain the reader and to elicit his or her sympathies. In spite of its implausibility, the impact of portraying an intellectual

as an infinitesimally small individual is hardly lost on the reader.

The story opens with a crowd scene on the shores of Muntaza beach in Alexandria. A sizeable gathering has formed, jostling and jockeying for position, crouched “as if they were searching for a needle which had fallen in a pile of sand.” A friend of the narrator asks if the narrator has had a chance to see the ‘miracle of the age.’ The narrator replies in the negative, and his friend drags him to the midst of the crowd to see. It is shortly revealed that the ‘miracle’ is not the long-awaited return of the *mahdī*, as the narrator had hoped, but a sighting of the world’s smallest man, Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ. The true miracle, we shall soon see, has less to do with the man’s size and more to do with his enormous mental capacity.

Before we reach this point, however, the narrator establishes the framework for “the Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ phenomenon,” providing us with a series of amusing prefatory anecdotes and details about the small wonder. Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ (his name is itself a colloquial play on the word *nuṣf*, which means half - ‘*nuṣṣ nuṣṣ*’ is a common expression in Egyptian meaning ‘so-so.’) is born to normal parents following many years of their inability to conceive. The mother gives birth to this fairy-tale being without noticing him passing the uterus. This, we are told, is because the tiny man is no larger than half of a joint of a finger. His parents require a magnifying lens in order to view their son properly, he is fed with a syringe and exercises by running the length of a ruler and swimming several lengths of a cup of water. In symbolic terms, however, his size is less of an issue than the fact that *he has no voice*. If it is the case, as we shall see, that Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ has much to offer the world, than it is all the more poignant that he cannot be heard. This important detail is the first of several subtextual comments on the inability of the cultural elite to effect change; the author refuses to deny the existence of a cultural elite, but here he seems to assert that they remain a mythical sort of entity with scarcely a voice. Idrīs saves his protagonist from total muteness with the help of a fantastic device: through the use of a special transistor, his voice is amplified and he can communicate with the outside world.

In contrast to his physical stature, Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ’ mental prowess is of gargantuan proportions. By the time he is five years old, he has completed the *Ibtidā’īya*, or primary level of education. He manages to complete his secondary education at an equally swift rate and then moves to university, where he studies a host of subjects simultaneously, allowing him to fulfil the requirements for every one of the bachelor’s degrees available. And on the postgraduate level, Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ continues to shun specialisation (unlike *Snūbizm*’s Dr. ‘Uways), opting instead to study the principles which govern all disciplines. Within a few years, we are led to believe that

this amazing little man has completed fourteen doctoral degrees! The committee convened for his doctoral exams acknowledge Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ' genius, likening his breadth of knowledge to that of the medieval philosophers Ibn Sīna and Ibn Rushd. However, deeply involved in discussion of Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ' findings, the committee disregard the tiny man's actual presence, and he departs without the professors noticing.

The theme of Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ' novelty, rather than his humanity, temporarily seizing the interest of the outside world is to recur. When he returns to the university, his requests for employment are met with explosions of laughter. University prohibitions on human experimentation prevent them from even employing him in this manner. The news of Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ' achievements receives a great deal of media acclaim, only to be ignored again when his story becomes no longer newsworthy. A filmmaker expresses interest in his story, but chooses to employ the popular comic actor Ismā'īl Yaṣīn to play the lead role, relegating Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ once again to the peripheries.

A life devoid of a sense of purpose or genuine connection to others fills Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ with self-loathing and despair. Death seems a more noble option than the uninvolved life. The narrator tells us, "...the treasure trove of knowledge from which he had drunken ravenously made him refuse any life other than the one he desired" (Idrīs 1966, p. 109). The tiny man attempts suicide, but even his efforts to end his life assume farcical dimensions. When he places himself on one of the ties of a railroad track, for instance, the speed of the train is sufficient to blow him off the track before he meets his end. On another occasion his efforts to drown himself in the Nile are thwarted by his sheer lack of weight, which allows him to float delicately on the surface of the river.

Despondent but not quite yet defeated, Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ resigns himself to a life of relative obscurity. Following his suicide attempts, the protagonist experiences a moment of realisation that he must persist, living in defiance of the rules and regulations set by ordinary men, if necessary. Here, as in Yūsuf al-Qa'īd's *Rabāb ta'tazil al-rasm*, we have the assertion that the cultural elite must utilise their talents or suffer spiritual, if not actual death: to live is to use one's voice (one's art, one's talents), even if it goes unheard by the masses. In this regard, this portion of the narrative may be read as an exploration of the theme of the assertion of the will, amid prohibitive circumstances, a subject addressed frequently in Idrīs narratives. Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ holes up in unoccupied rooms of the Nile Hilton and establishes a laboratory of his own, setting himself to his calling - the life of the mind. Within these closed confines, the protagonist's discoveries are most impressive, although again, fantastic

and outlandish. First, he discovers a method of space travel which relies on manipulation of the laws of gravity rather than rockets and fuel. He then improves the technology, which permits travel at a rate faster than the speed of light. Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ likewise makes strides in the field of neurology, in which he is able to isolate areas of the brain and locate areas of creativity. Analysing the chemical makeup of these areas, Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ is able to invent vaccinations which would make a Beethoven or Shakespeare of the ordinary individual. And in the area of behavioural science, the small wonder discovers a chemical which, when taken with water curbs inclinations of capitalist avarice. Idrīs exhibits his love for his original training as a doctor and his continued voracious reading of scientific journals in the elaborate detail given to the descriptions of the cures of various diseases and social ills. In light of these discoveries, the reader only wonders why Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ is incapable of addressing his own height problem. This aside, the protagonist's findings are ultimately for nothing, as he is met in committee once again with incredulity and vociferous laughter.

Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ's exasperating situation finally prompts him to seek escape in exile. Utilising one of his inventions, he hurtles through space and arrives at another planet inhabited by human life. Only here, all of the planet's inhabitants are exactly Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ' size. Within this context, the protagonist's contributions to humanity are fully appreciated and implemented. Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ becomes something of a revered figure on the new planet, yet he is not fully satisfied. Aware of his status as an oddity, if not a pariah, at home and a saint abroad, he still feels a desire to return to earth. He thus chooses ignominy and obscurity amid familiar circumstances over being revered. It is only when a few of the tiny aliens land in Switzerland, explaining to the earthlings that their advanced technology was all provided to them by an earthling named Nuṣṣ Nuṣṣ that the protagonist's reputation begins to change. The scientists that once scoffed now deny underestimating the little man. Once again, the media converges on Cairo in search of him, but, in an unexpected turn, the 'miracle of the age' is nowhere to be found.

With stories such as *Mu'jizat al-'aṣr*, Yūsuf Idrīs chronicled a phenomenon which began to emerge in the mid-1960s and would become one of the predominant thematic features of the next decade, namely, the growing sense of powerlessness and insignificance of the cultural elite in the minds of the Egyptian authorities, the wider public and even many of the writers themselves. When such a situation obtains, self-imposed exile is here alluded to by the author as only a marginally tenable solution to the dilemma, a method of temporarily staving off this sense of obscurity at the tremendous cost of detachment from the people and causes the intellectual claims to

represent. Yet rather than wallow in the futility and despondency of this state of being, Idrīs addresses his subject with characteristic sense of humour, utilising the tools of parody and farce to elicit laughter, a necessary survival mechanism in the face of continued diminishing status.

4. *Sharq al-nakhīl* (East of the Palm Trees, 1985)

“...the defeat knocked me down and marked the dividing point between two phases, two lives: *words became emptied of their meaning, all words*, and wrapped in their cloak of history and economics I seek in facts shelter from words, all words, head bowed and eyes cast down for fear of meeting other people’s eyes. ...Oh my God, how many arrows you have showered upon me as I dragged on in my failure, my rancour and my desire for revenge as words lost their meanings, all words.”(Al-Zayyāt 1992, pp. 52-3, emphasis mine)

The legacy of the 1967 *naksa* for Egypt’s writing community can hardly be overstated. In an environment where, within the span of days, the rhetoric of Arab politicians was revealed to be largely empty and many of the aspirations of a people were dashed, writers found themselves at a particular impasse: their very tools were suspect, words had lost their meaning. To ply their trade in the aftermath of such an upheaval necessitated for many a retrospective approach; a return to a time when words and text were, in their eyes, more reliable. Some found inspiration in the commanding history of the Pharonic period, while a larger contingent chose to explore the microcosms of personal history and childhood. In childhood, many writers, including Jār al-Nabī al-Ḥalw, Māhir Tawfīq and Muḥsin Yūnis found a template, sufficiently removed from the immediate experience of defeat in war.¹¹ ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim’s treatment of the subject in his 1968 novel *Ayyām al-insān al-sab’a* set the standard for what would become one of the predominant themes of the following decade and beyond. Within this sphere, orality and memory came to the fore, as writers examined and recalled stories, often from their rural upbringings. Bahā’ Ṭāhir’s *Sharq al-nakhīl*, published in 1985, is a testimony to the endurance of this early post-*naksa* mode of writing. It attempts to fuse two themes - the loss of innocence in childhood and the loss of faith in value systems in adult life - as it presents the story of one university student’s disenchantment with his world. Portrayals of the student movement in Egypt, its debilitation in the face of

¹¹ See Al-Kharrāṭ 1982, pp. 6-9, and Baha’ Ṭāhir, from the introduction to *Khālatī Safiyya wa ’l-Dayr*, p. 24.

antagonistic authorities, and the overarching air of paranoia among its adherents may be seen prior to this time, Maḥfūz's 1974 novel *Al-Karnak* foremost among them.¹² In its creative exploitation of the metaphor of childhood, however, *Sharq al-nakhīl* represents an advancement on many of the works which preceded it. The introduction of childhood as a theme broadened the canvas on which the general subject of loss could be examined and from which certain parallels and contrasts between the past and present could be drawn.

The problematic classification of 'early post-*naksa*' utilised moments ago begs an interesting prefatory question to do with the validity of ascribing such a term to a novel written nearly two decades after the event. For although *Sharq al-nakhīl* is set in the mid to late 1970s¹³, the novel bears very few of the characteristic traits of *Infitāḥ*-era writing¹⁴. The mood and disposition of its characters and the novel's engagement with politics, even if in a disillusioned manner, harkens back to a conventional mode of writing two decades prior to the publication of this work. Thus, the issue of classification is a vexed one. Unquestionably, generational affiliation plays a crucial role in determining Ṭāhir's approach to his subject. Recent interviews with representatives of subsequent (post-1967) generations point to a natural decline in the force of the defeat as a historical and literary touchstone.¹⁵ For the majority of the writers in this study, typically classified as belonging to the late fifties and sixties generations, however, the 1967 defeat could not but leave an indelible mark on the literary psyche. Bahā' Ṭāhir is no exception. His first collection of short stories, *Al-Khuṭūba*, first published in 1972 and his first two novels, *Sharq al-nakhīl* and *Qālat Duḥa*, both published in 1985, feature characters and themes which evoke that mood of confusion and despair.¹⁶ Each successive work in this, his early period represents, among many other things, a step in a continuum of the search for suitable means to

¹² See also Fathī Salāma's short story, '*Uyūn al-aṣḍiqa*', translated as Friends' Eyes in Hutchins 1988.

¹³ The student uprisings related in the novel could refer to one of several demonstrations which punctuated this period, but in all likelihood either refers to the 1975 protests against the signing of the Sinai agreement with Israel or the mass expressions of disapproval to the Camp David accords in 1977 and 1978.

¹⁴ See my next chapter for more specific information on the *Infitāḥ* period.

¹⁵ Tony Calderbank and Madeleine Stein, "The World Through Grey Eyes," *Cairo Times*, 10-23 December 1998, pp. 14-15.

¹⁶ See Barbara Romaine's introduction to the English translation *Aunt Safīya and the Monastery*, (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1996), p. 3.

interpret the setback and the subsequent repercussions of the defeat - political and/or cultural shifts in the Arab world, particularly regarding issues connected to the relationship of the Arab world with the state of Israel¹⁷. The following section attempts to illustrate how *Sharq al-nakhil* is representative of this strain of writing and assesses Ṭāhir's use of the theme of childhood recollections in order to enhance the illustration of this sentiment of despair.

Like many of Bahā' Ṭāhir's early short stories, *Sharq al-nakhil* is primarily a psychological drama. The deliberately disjointed sequence of time in the novel reflects the narrator's preoccupation with the past. The entire novel takes place within the span of one day, but is augmented with a series of flashbacks which provide the broader context for the narrator's motivations and behaviour. The unnamed, first-person narrator embodies the experience of disappointment of the student movement a quarter of a century after the 1952 revolution. The idealism of the early years of revolution and participatory politics has long since given way to disillusionment, if not regret. A self-professed "failed student at the age of twenty-six," the protagonist emits this sense of defeatism from the outset. An air of stagnation and dulled senses pervades the narrator's every action. The story opens with the narrator sitting in the garden of his university campus on a patch of grass underneath a palm tree. He has mustered the energy to come to university, but cannot bring himself to attend his lectures. Instead, we find him reading a letter sent to him by his father in the countryside. Having been forced to abandon his own studies at Al-Azhar to work the fields, the father expresses his ardent aspirations for his son's successful completion of a degree. He urges his son to persevere and pay less regard to requests for money. The letter closes with an attempt to embarrass the son into continuing with his work: the father states that if the narrator is contemplating dropping out of university again, he should simply come home so that his father can raise him like his "other two girls" whom God has seen it fit to bestow upon him. But the protagonist is impervious to such taunts: he has lost the will to read, write or study. He resorts to drink for solace and escape. Drunk, in a complete state of mental and physical torpor, he attempts to write a letter to his family, but can only complete the traditional introductory greetings. His father's letter prompts a flashback to the countryside in the previous summer, during which he receives a letter from the university announcing his failure of examinations.

¹⁷ To be certain, Ṭāhir disillusionment also stemmed from his personal experience with the authorities while he was head of Radio Cairo's cultural division and then effectively censored or silenced, which prompted a lengthy period of voluntary exile in Switzerland.

He is brought out of his recollections by his former girlfriend passing by. Layla attempts to determine why the narrator, a young man who once inspired many, including herself, to read and question has given up on his life. She fails to elicit any conclusive answers. She mentions that many of the students are away today protesting against Israel's occupation of Sinai, while only the 'cowards' and girls forbidden from participating in the protests by their families remain to attend classes. Oblivious to the implied accusation, the narrator continues to listen passively. Layla expresses maternal concern for the protagonist's health and well-being, only to be met with cynicism. The narrator states that shortly after Layla's graduation this year, she'll forget all about him. Exasperated, Layla storms off. As she leaves, the narrator attempts to murmur an apology, but it goes unheard. He allows the sun and his own state of intoxication to wash over him, while more girls go by, commenting on the 'cowardly' students hanging out on campus instead of challenging the authorities. In the midst of a second flashback, an ant bites him, waking him up. He crushes the insect in two and observes it limping feebly in different directions. Critical attention to the patient and deliberate detail of the first several pages furnishes significant clues to the broader concerns, themes and structure in Ṭāhir's story. This portrayal of the narrator's state and his observations carefully illustrates how isolated and introspective he has, and, by extension, many members of the cultural elite have, become. Barely in control of his own faculties, the narrator can at best exert his authority over the infinitesimal insect.

The depiction of the protagonist's severe indifference and despondency is further developed as he leaves the university. On every street corner and bridge are assembled squadrons of counter-demonstration riot police, the narrator tells us nonchalantly. The author's economical usage of language and simple verb/object sentence structure here evokes the narrator's lethargic spirit. His primary concern is neither the enormous police presence on his street nor the threat of violent clashes, but whether or not he can obtain beer and cigarettes on credit from his local shop owner. Unable to obtain the cigarettes, he smokes the ends of used ones in his ashtray, making himself nauseous. The bleak sense of desperation presented here is typical of writing leading up to and following the 1967 defeat. This catastrophic event, its ramifications and the writing which sought to interpret it gave rise to a figure seldom seen previously in Arabic literature: the anti-hero. *Sharq al-nakhīl* represents one in a

succession of works to feature a protagonist of this sort¹⁸. Here, our narrator is beholden to no one, values no one anymore and holds very few principles beyond self-satisfaction.

Still preoccupied with his cigarette cravings, he is visited by Suzy, a woman who is a prostitute and friend of his flatmate Samīr, and whose outlook on life resembles the narrator's. She asserts that she would like to change her lifestyle, but declares it futile in light of a society which refuses to view her in any other way. The narrator's flatmate Samīr stands in direct contrast to this apathetic pair, having participated in the day's protests in Midān al-Taḥrīr. Samīr, it seems, has newly become politicised due in large part to conversations with Palestinian friends. Suzy expresses concern for the flatmate's security while the narrator registers shock upon hearing of Samīr's involvement. Suzy describes the recent transformations in Samīr's personality with dismay, fearing that his impassioned speeches on Palestine will result in imprisonment or police brutality. The narrator attempts to console Suzy, assuring her of Samīr's safety and his disinterest in politics, while inwardly remaining doubtful of his own words. Several weeks have passed since he has seen his flatmate at home. In actuality, Samīr's safety is not central to the narrator's preoccupations and concerns. The narrator is more absorbed in visions of his past. As Suzy leaves the room, he experiences another flashback. He recalls a semi-comical moment in the countryside when he, his cousin Ḥusayn and their sisters fell into a ditch full of thorns. As they extricated themselves, the narrator's uncle appeared to announce the boys' arranged future marriages to their female cousins. The narrator recalls that his sister actually went through with the arrangement and married Ḥusayn, while Munīra, his cousin, couldn't wait for the narrator to complete his education and married someone else in the village. With this image in his mind, the narrator ponders how different his life might have been had he married the village girl.

The conflict between the past and the present, and metaphorically between the values they represent is further elucidated in the extended flashback sequences of chapter two. As the narrator lies in bed, torn between a desire to see his life come to an end and a cowardliness which prevents him doing anything about it, he recalls an earlier time when he felt similarly and the circumstances that produced such emotions. The entire chapter devotes its attention to the final night of the narrator's summer vacation two years previously. Here the reader learns of deteriorating

¹⁸ According to conventional wisdom, the first true anti-hero in modern Egyptian fiction may be found in the character of Sa'id Mahrān in Maḥfūz's 1961 novel, *Al-Liṣṣ wa 'l-kilāb*. For further information on this issue of the emergence of the anti-hero in Arabic fiction, see 'Alī, 1983, p. 79.

relationships in the countryside due to a land dispute between the narrator's extended family and another powerful village clan. Within this framework, the author develops the portrayal of the narrator's ancestry and their attachment to the land. The narrator and his cousin Ḥusayn wander through the fields "east of the palms" and recount the mythical tales of their grandfather, an honourable horseman whose agricultural skills and determination brought life to a plot of land once thought permanently fallow. That legacy stands under threat as the narrator prepares to return to Cairo to resume university: the rival family lay claim to a portion of the garden area. Yet the real rift is internecine, between the fathers of Ḥusayn and the narrator, who differ on the significance of the plot of land. The narrator's father, having spent time away from the country studying in Cairo, sees little harm in relinquishing a small portion of the land, while Ḥusayn's father, who tilled the soil along with their grandfather, views the issue as one of honour; honour which may only be preserved in the maintenance of the land as an integrated whole. The sons' sentiments mirror their fathers', representing opposing poles not only in the land dispute, but in their approach to life. As we saw in the earlier writings discussed in chapter two, commitment to the land, typically presented as a value of the past, is portrayed as inextricably linked to the traits of honour and courage, while an urban-informed indifference, the present value, is viewed by tradition-bound characters as a negative, cowardly trait.

Conversation between the cousins veers from the contentious issue of land for a moment as the two trade stories of earlier days. These stories serve to further confirm the reader's impressions of each character's disposition. Ḥusayn recounts mistaking a herdsman in the forest of palm trees for a ghost at age eight. With the help of his father, the narrator's cousin overcame his fear of strangers and now recalls the moment as a coming of age. The narrator remembers his first days in Cairo and how his naiveté led him to mistake a birthday invitation from Layla for an offer to approach the girl's family to request her hand in marriage. Both characters have since lost their innocence in their respective ways, and the narrator agrees, as Ḥusayn's thoughts return to the land dispute, that life has become misshapen, transformed for the worse. Their fathers have lost respect for one another and Ḥājj Ṣādiq's (the head of the rival family) clan refuse the narrator's proposal to buy their claim. It is only after his return to Cairo that the protagonist discovers exactly how much the world has been transformed: a few months later the narrator learns that his cousin and uncle have been shot dead in a confrontation with Ḥājj Ṣādiq. Ḥusayn attempted to protect his father and in the process sacrificed his own life.

Upon return to the present time in chapter three, then, the reader has a better

sense of the circumstances which led to the narrator's virtual withdrawal from society. And certain parallels between the protagonist's relationships with his cousin in the countryside and his flatmate in Cairo become more evident. In both relationships, his friends seem willing to defend the honour of families or take courageous political stances while the narrator remains a feckless, apathetic figure. He drinks both to stave off the memories of the countryside and to erase thoughts of fractured friendships in Cairo, but above all else, he drinks to relieve himself of his own sense of disappointment with his achievements.

Thus we find the narrator in an increasingly desperate state as he wakes from his haunting flashbacks. Clutching for his cigarettes and constantly reiterating how much he wants a drink, he contemplates stealing money from his flatmate's room. As he enters the room, he stumbles across a number of political tracts which appear to confirm Suzy's suspicions of Samir's activities. But he is given very little time to ponder the situation, as the secret police suddenly arrive at the flat looking for Samir. They ransack the apartment despite the narrator's protests. Despite his drugged and nauseous state, the protagonist summons his wits and demands that the group produce a search warrant. The chief inspector replies by threatening to imprison the narrator if he causes trouble. As the police proceed to search for evidence, the inspector maintains that the narrator's activities as a student had given them cause for concern, but that they were content to leave him alone now that they knew he has left university and taken up residence in the bar instead. The disgust the narrator feels over being observed is too much to bear, and he rushes to the bathroom to vomit. But by the time he recovers and cleans himself up, the police are gone. As he rearranges the dishevelled sitting room, vivid images recur of Husayn and his father being shot. Suzy returns, notices the state of the flat and the narrator's sallow face and asks what happened, but the narrator is reticent. His sole desire now is to drink and forget. As Suzy departs again to purchase beer, the protagonist looks at himself in the bathroom mirror and experiences another flashback. This time, he pictures his cousin Munira spitting in his father's face for being absent at the time of the killing. The narrator is painfully aware that he too is implicated in this charge of neglect and struggles to shake himself out of the delusion.

Amid the psychological turmoil of the narrator's grief and yearning for escapism, physical upheaval is raging in the streets of Cairo. It is the tension between this disturbed, introverted world and a community publicly voicing its dissatisfaction that drives the narrative. The reader is only provided glimpses of the outside, thus heightening the tension between the personal and the public. Earlier in the day, Suzy

recounts the scene on a tramway car near Midān al-Taḥrīr. In an effort to evade the police, a student jumps onto the tram car in which Suzy is riding and hides beneath an old woman's basket. He is soon found out by a policeman who climbs aboard in search of protesters, but the old woman pleads on the student's behalf and the policeman feigns ignorance of the student's presence. As another contingent of security forces passes by, however, an old man who himself participated earlier in protests against the British occupation points the student out, and he is taken away, and clubbed by batons as he leaves. The old man's son, who had previously remained a voiceless figure, defiantly decides to get up and off the train, joining his fellow students as they sing the national anthem. It is this scene which causes Suzy to fear for Samīr's safety.

The two themes of outer and inner turmoil merge in the final scenes of the narrative. When Samīr finally returns to the flat and sees the state it is in following the raid, he is convinced that the police intend to crack down on the students in Midān al-Taḥrīr. He urges the narrator to follow him downtown in order to retrieve Layla before nightfall. The protagonist reluctantly agrees. There they find throngs of students, Layla among them, singing and engaged in debate. Layla is surprised to find the narrator here and berates him for feigning interest in her when in truth he seems incapable of feeling love for anyone or anything. Before the narrator has an opportunity to respond fully, a microphone announces that the army intends to advance in ten minutes. The narrator attempts to pull Layla from the crowds, but she refuses. The narrator therefore decides to stay with her in the square. A riot scene ensues. As the tear gas billows, the protagonist is hit over the head by a canister. Layla tends to his bruised head, indicating a kind of reconciliation between the two. Moments before he passes out on the sidewalk, he recalls a moment in the countryside when, as children, he and his cousins stumbled across a snake. Only Ḥusayn was courageous enough to approach it and discover that it was merely a shed skin. The novel closes with a separate and distinct reminiscence, a final return to the world of childhood: The narrator remembers a moment during a shaykh's visit to the village and his father's request that he kiss the hand of the shaykh. The boy adamantly refuses and runs to his mother, whereupon she takes him to a separate room filled with dolls, glass and decorated china. The mother allows him to play in this room, provided he doesn't break anything. The meaning behind this second flashback is not altogether clear. Certainly, as the protagonist slips into unconsciousness on the sidewalk, it seems plausible to interpret it as his yearning for moments of full happiness and security like this one with his mother. A more profound interpretation

might acknowledge the parallels between the narrator's reluctance to involve himself with these communal faith-inspired activities as a child and the narrator's political quietism and apathy as a young man.

Sharq al-nakhil gives voice to the loss of idealism among certain members of the cultural elite and expresses the cynicism of many within the student population towards the possibility of change in the authoritarian status quo. Yet it constantly reminds us that opting out of that tumultuous present - looking back, whether by means of romantic mental escapism, drug and alcohol-induced amnesia or a literal return to the past by fleeing to the countryside - is no longer feasible either. The narrator of the novel invokes childhood as a metaphor of innocence and time untarnished by pain. But as his more recent flashbacks suggest, that time has long since past, and a new, more realistic approach is necessary. This new approach finds its articulation in the next period of narrative evolution, which is the subject of the writings of the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Luqmat 'Aysh - Shifts of the 1970s & 80s

"*Yā Baṭal al-'Ubūr, rāh fayn al-fuṭūr?*" ("Hero of The Crossing - where's the breakfast gone?") - Popular slogan of the January 18 & 19, 1977 food riots.

"During the past few years the problems of our daily life have reached alarming proportions at an astounding speed. In this way the gap between the life we were living in the past and the present one is the same gap we know today between the realistic rational theatre which we knew in the sixties and what I am writing today depicting the new reality which the seventies bestowed on us.

Therefore, perhaps what I write is realism itself, since our reality today is so absurd. For us to change it, we must first grasp how absurd it is."

- "*Al-'Abath wa al-wāqī'*" program statement,
Muḥammad Salmāwī, Masrah al-Ṭalī'a,
Cairo 1984.

Introduction

If disenchantment with the mixed legacy of the Nāṣir project was one of the hallmarks of writing of the late 1960s, the following decade witnessed a similar, if not stronger, literary reaction to the political tidal shifts ushered in by Sādāt and his administration's Open Door (*Infitāḥ*) policy. This chapter concerns itself with the social, political and economic transformations of the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s and the manner in which these cultural shifts (in the widest sense of the words) translate to the world of the text. It hardly needs reiterating that a survey of a handful of novels and short stories written in or about this period cannot purport to provide conclusive statements about the field of Egyptian literary production as a whole. Instead, in a rather impressionistic fashion, this chapter attempts to explore some reactions of the cultural elite to aspects of the *Infitāḥ* policies and the social shifts that those policies engendered.

In essence, the transfiguration of policy from Nāṣir's Arab Socialist Union to the *Infitāḥ* amounted to nothing short of a counter-revolution, or to use the terminology of the Sādāt administration, a "rectification" of the excesses of the revolution. Aided by the moral victory of the 1973 "Crossing" of the then Israeli-occupied Suez Canal, the exploitation of the wealth of the natural resources of the region and the reclamation and reassertion of the religious heritage, the radical secular nationalism of the 1960s was waning in favour of a new vision of development. In the words of noted journalist and Nāṣir confidant, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn Haykal, *thawra* (revolution)

was giving way to *tharwa* (riches/wealth) (Haykal 1978, p. 262). This trend was already underway in the late Nāṣir period, particularly following the disillusionment of the 1967 “Setback,” but it found its fullest literary expression following the economic *volte-face* in 1974. Critiques of the soulless, single-minded pursuit of success and the general loss of social cohesion were published nearly a decade prior to Sādāt’s *Infitāḥ* policies, as we saw in Chapter Four. But with this new era came a different tenor in the writing. A tone, characterised not necessarily by acquiescence, but of neutrality and, above all else, *helplessness* at the rapid rate of change and corruption within the system emerged. Literary critic ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Abū ‘Awf, among many others, describes the cultural elite of the 1970s as “an exhausted, disappointed generation” (Abū ‘Awf 1993, p.181). War-weary and frustrated with what they viewed as the unproductive and often unsavoury domain of Egyptian politics, the cultural elite retreated from the political and allowed the newly emerging market forces to define the terms of discussion. This, combined with continued diminishing support for publishing houses¹ and academic endeavours as a whole² led to a further marginalisation of the cultural elite. “The young radicals,” Fouad ‘Ajami comments, “were convinced that the old order was bankrupt, that its leadership was discredited, that its symbols were battered. In all that they were probably right; but they drew the wrong conclusions about the inevitability of the dominant order’s collapse. An exhausted world can still hang on after it loses its vitality; it can cover up its weaknesses and pull off semi-victories; it can rely on the built-in human preference for normalcy, play for time, and then reassert itself. That is what the men in power did with and after (the) October 1973 (war with Israel)” (‘Ajami 1981, p. 151). “Faced with the choice of vague notions of revolution and secure prosperity,” ‘Ajami notes, “most Arabs chose to side with prosperity” (‘Ajami 1981, p. 150).

But this prosperity promised in the wake of economic liberalisations proved elusive for the vast majority, and the gulf between the rich and poor widened.

¹ Bibliographical and statistical information on the period of the mid-1970’s to the mid-80’s remains scant. Based on estimates compiled by Sayyid al-Baḥrāwī in his *Al-Maṣḥ al-ijtimā’i al-shāmil li ‘l-mujtama’ al-Miṣri 1952-80*, and Ṭaha Wādi in his *Bibliyuḡrāfiyat al-riwāya al-‘arabiyya fī Miṣr 1882-1974*, Marina Stagh concludes that the early 1970s witnessed a mild recovery from the record-low levels of literary output and publishing following the ‘67 debacle, only to lapse to pre-1960s levels of publishing from the mid-70s to the end of the decade, from Stagh, op. cit., pp. 45-46, p. 48, and pp. 56-57.

² Ghāli Shukrī, assessing the impact of the *Infitāḥ* in 1981, writes: “...the citizen was no longer able even to dream of housing, food, clothing or education. Trading in university books became one of the most monstrous manifestations of economic deviance; this encouraged the poor student not to learn, but to look for work. And in the calm and silence, the companies in the nationalised sector were going into liquidation one after the other. Today, the master of the situation as regards essential commodities is the private sector.” Shukrī 1981, p. 213.

Tensions flared most visibly in the beginning of 1977, when, under World Bank edict, Sādāt attempted to halt subsidies on basic foodstuffs (flour, rice, sugar, oil, etc.). The result was predictable: “Into the tidy, benign world of the middle men crept a new force, *hiqd*, resentment, hatred of corruption, a feeling of relative deprivation” (‘Ajami 1981, p. 183). Thousands of citizens poured into the streets of wealthy neighbourhoods and took their wrath out on any signs of outward displays of wealth - cars, nightclubs, etc. The services of the army were enlisted (for the first time since 1952) to quell the two-day riots which ended in the deaths of 79 people in Cairo alone (Hopwood 1990, p. 109). Sādāt was forced to summarily rescind the abolition of subsidies.

Likewise, Sādāt’s *rapprochement* with Israel later that same year demonstrated a leadership hopelessly at odds with the collective will of its populace. As the years immediately following the Camp David Accords failed to yield a peace dividend for the masses commensurate to the ignominy and ostracism involved in recognition of the thirty-year enemy of the Arab nation, iterations of ‘negotiating from strength’ and ‘an honourable peace’ rang hollow. Sādāt’s exercise in *realpolitik* and ‘wealth without politics’ provided rich material for Egypt’s artists. The writers of the period confronted the abiding theme of helplessness sometimes with impatience and frustration, sometimes by fleeing to the realm of the absurd, and at other times by literally fleeing Egypt’s immediate surroundings. Migration, both physical and mental, then, becomes one of the serious topics of examination. Class re-emerges as a crucial issue of consideration and the language of commodification becomes prominent in the vocabulary of many writers of the period. The portrayals of co-optations, contradictions and compromises of this period are the focus of this chapter.

1. *Al-Madīna al-nā’ima* (The Sleeping City, 1988)

A less critically acclaimed figure in Cairo’s literary establishment is Munā Rajab. A journalist for *Al-Ahrām* by trade, her output has been relatively small, with three collections to her credit.³ Thematically she explores the effects of *Infitāḥ*-era policies, particularly as they impinge on the lives of women. Although occasionally she exhibits tendencies towards obscure symbolism⁴ emblematic of the “new sensibility”

³ *La’bat al-aqna’* (Cairo, Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), *Indama tathūru al-mar’a* (Cairo, Dār al-Qiba’, 1991), *Wujūh bilā rutūsh* (Cairo, Dār al-Qiba’, 1997).

⁴ See particularly the short stories *Mughāmara* and *La’bat al-aqna’* from the collection of the same name, op. cit.

writing of the 1970s, straightforward narratives which treat the pressures of overpopulation, corruption within the Egyptian building industry, unwanted pregnancies and female independence are her stock in trade. *Al-Madīna al-nā'ima* offers us a clever, tragi-comical exploration of societal response to the *Infitāh*, including the responses of representatives of the cultural elite, and was therefore thought to be an important inclusion in this study.

Al-Madīna al-nā'ima is a modern-day parable, a short story which depicts the relentless onslaught of price increases in the early 1980s and one city's collective response to the difficulty of affording even basic foodstuffs. In the face of mounting inflation, the community concludes that action must be taken. With the spirit of revolutionaries, the omniscient narrator tells us, the community unanimously decides to eat nothing but *fūl*, the inexpensive mashed broadbean which is a staple throughout Egypt. The collective decision reverberates through the city with the potency of a war-cry, we are told. "From this day on, we won't eat meat...we will eat nothing but *fūl*!" With the full consent of the community and its leadership, the city embarks on what they perceive to be a radical project of protest and survival.

Many weeks elapse without a break in the resolve of the city, until the fifth week when the effects of such a monotonous diet begin to manifest themselves. Workers become sluggish and incapable of fully carrying out their duties. The town accountant can no longer decipher his figures which appear to him to be a foreign language. Even the citizens' speech becomes slurred and slowed down. Still, no one questions the logic of the town's decision and no one posits an alternative. Indeed, as the narrator queries rhetorically, "why look for alternative solutions, when in the *fūl* they had the ideal solution before them?" (Rajab 1991, p. 23)

Only a local intellectual, the "resident thinker," as he is called, remains wary of resorting to simple, reductive answers to the complex questions of economic want. "We haven't thought it through, we've rested easy with an inexpensive, ready answer...we must give it some more thought." The citizens ask him to suggest an alternative, but he too has been rendered lethargic by the *fūl*. "I will think it over...but I can't come up with anything right now" (Rajab 1991, p. 23).

The blind devotion to solidarity and the "*fūl* solution" persists, even against the better judgement of the town's more educated citizens. Even the town doctor is convinced by the townsfolk to desist from recommending a more varied diet. The doctor willingly complies, remembering the "higher good" of the community stance. A pregnant woman, crying out in pain from the lack of variety in her diet, acknowledges that she has no choice but to follow the will of the majority: she has sold her water-buffalo in order to maintain a semblance of allegiance to the city's

protest and can now afford nothing but *fūl*. Government officials aid and abet the new community mandate: by the seventh month of their protest, a decree is issued declaring the slaughter of animals illegal. By the seventh year, we are told, the city virtually forgets that there is anything to eat other than beans.

The long-term results of this insipid diet are highlighted by the arrival of a foreign man and his wife some twenty years later. The citizens are so mentally stunted by the *fūl* that when the foreigner asks them a question in the morning, they offer a reply in the evening. Collectively, the city has lost the ability to move, think or respond quickly. Most of the town's citizens simply no longer understand the language of those who live outside the town. Even the "resident thinker" has lost his ability to pose alternatives, or indeed, to think at all. When the stranger, an enterprising businessman, sets up a butcher's shop, his meat remains hanging on the hooks, unsold and unnoticed.

The stranger does begin to make inroads, however, with the burgeoning foreign community which chooses to settle in the sleepy town. With meat, then, designated 'For Foreigners Only' in bold signs throughout the marketplace, we have the symbol of the introduction of a multi-tiered, stratified society where the vast majority are fed a steady diet of very little, while those who by dint of their foreign status and higher economic position are entitled to products that both sustain their lives and assist in maintaining their position of dominance in that society. Here, meat represents the sum of the products and privileges to which an upper strata of society are entitled when such a situation obtains.

This fracturing of society is described in further detail as the story reaches its *denouement*. The newcomers from across the river settle in the city, assume political power and then legislate that the city's residents work on their agricultural plantations. The Sleeping City's original inhabitants are too feeble-minded as a result of their eating habits to mount any resistance. The wealth of the outsiders continues to grow and the new leaders of the town hold a public celebration showing their appreciation for the citizens' response (or lack thereof) to the new work laws and their adherence to the *fūl* clauses. Only one person in the city questions the state of things - a little boy, not quite yet addled by the diet, who forces his mother to buy and prepare him a small portion of meat. To his delight, the food is delicious, but when he attempts to gain a response from his mother as to why the citizenry succumbed to eating *fūl*, he gets nothing. She is too weak to comprehend the question, let alone muster a satisfying response.

The significance of *Al-Madīna al-nā'ima* resides in its satirical critique of tradition and those who adhere exclusively to it. The implied comical scrutiny of a

town relying on *fūl* to solve its economic woes would not be lost on the average Egyptian reader, who surely would recognise within this story the distorted echoes of the Islamists' credo, "Islam is The solution." For if the meat being bought and sold by the foreigners represents privilege and disparity between classes, *fūl* must symbolise tradition in a general sense, if not Islam itself. The *Infitāḥ* years witnessed a curious bifurcation in ideological directions: free-market economics brought with it a Darwinian social and economic hierarchy (as depicted here in the story), while a concurrent Islamic revival sought to counter that mode of thought. *Al-Madīna al-nā'ima* calls into question those who would rush to reductive, ill-conceived answers to the problems posed by the *Infitāḥ*. Yet even more important is the story's reiteration of the theme of helplessness described in the introduction to this chapter. *Al-Madīna al-nā'ima* portrays a cultural elite very much at the mercy of the majority will, helpless to resist both the ethos which was rapidly gaining ascendancy during the *Infitāḥ* and a social milieu which discourages critical thinking and alternative viewpoints by its very diet of tradition and reliance on solutions of the past. In a sense, this story represents an extension of the tradition/modernity debate with which we began this study, illustrating the enduring force of this issue. Unlike many of the earlier novels and short stories, which by and large featured straightforward narratives, *Al-Madīna al-nā'ima* exhibits a more sophisticated use of metaphor. Invested in the *fūl* and the meat are many of the ideological clashes of this era. Still, the overarching sentiment of the story remains clear: a monochromatic approach to rather complex issues of economic and political injustice without the full and active mediation of the cultural elite is bound to be detrimental for most of society in the end. The result is a sleeping city.

2. *Al-Baldā al-ukhrā* (The Other Country, 1988)

"Oil as a world and a topic may help us uncover some novelistic aspects in our contemporary life in the Arab world."

- 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muṇif 1996.

"From now on, I must write, and I must lie and say that I am fine and tell every nightmare as if it were a beautiful dream. This is what all expatriates do, out of love for others. This indeed is the age of beautiful lies and I am a man of this age" - 'Abd al-Majid, 1988, p. 25⁵.

⁵ All translations for this section by Fārūq Muṣṭafā, 1997.

The desert serves as a lucrative metaphor for life in Egypt during the *Infitāh* era. With notions of commitment to the Arab cause and the spirit of Arab nationalism on the decline, economic transformations which effectively resulted in punitive measures for the vast majority and drastic increases in inflation, and considerable reductions in financial support for artistic endeavours, the political, economic and cultural landscape often seemed barren indeed. In his assessment of the period, sociologist Sa‘d al-Dīn Ibrāhīm concludes, “what matters now in most cases is really where one is geographically situated, i.e., on which side of the wealth divide” (Sa‘d Ibrāhīm 1982, p. 91). And wealth, ironically, lay in the desert.

At the same time, in the cities and towns of Egypt, a population explosion was occurring, the likes of which modern Arab history had never experienced. Egypt, one of the Middle East’s largest repositories of skilled labour, suffered from a lack of viable employment opportunities. Migration to the oil-producing countries of the Gulf provided an outlet for a considerable number of Egyptian men and women during the decade. By 1976, Hānī Shukrallāh estimated that over 10% of the working male and female population in Egypt was living outside of the country (Tripp and Owen, eds. 1990, p. 77). The impact on Saudi Arabia alone was staggering. “The number of foreigners visiting Saudi Arabia in 1979 was about 2.5 million from some seventy-two countries,” Ibrāhīm reports (Sa‘ad Ibrāhīm 1982, p. 107). This number equals about half of the total native Saudi population.” By the late 1970s, the commodification of human beings had become a well-established trend. It is to this world of enormous demographic shifts, furious pursuit of economic gain and the cognitive dissonance of life abroad that writers such as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf and Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Majīd devote themselves. And as the initial quote by Munīf indicates, it is hoped that this exploration may yield some fruitful observations about the transformation of the cultural elite and the Arab world as a whole.

Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Majīd’s novel *Al-Baldā al-ukhrā* is set in a northwestern town of Saudi Arabia called Tabuk in 1978. Its protagonist and narrator, Ismā‘īl Khidr Mūsā, is a teacher from Alexandria who has given up hope of the Ministry of Education’s intentions to send him to teach abroad. With an extended family to feed and provide for following the death of his father, Ismā‘īl ties his fate to an unnamed foreign oil company, working primarily as a translator. From the moment Ismā‘īl steps off the plane, the reader is made aware of how different Tabuk is from the narrator’s seaside Mediterranean home. The atmosphere is arid, hot and empty, and so, it seems, is the cultural climate in Saudi Arabia: as he passes through the customs queue, the Saudi official attempts to confiscate a medical magazine on pregnancy which Ismā‘īl has brought for a friend. The official eventually waves him through, but not without what

he thinks to be a derisory comment: "Why do you Egyptians love to read so?" From the outset, then, this juxtaposition in the narrator's mind is evident; Saudi Arabia is the land of natural and financial resources, Egypt, the land of human and mental resources. Much later in the novel, he spells this sentiment out more clearly: "The bedouin has possessed the wealth and doesn't realise that it isn't of his own doing. And woe to the sons of civilisations and towns" (Al-Majid 1988, pp. 285-6).

The Saudi Arabia Ismā'il describes is a highly stratified country, and life in the foreign company reflects, if not intensifies, this sense of stratification. The native Saudis typically comprise the highest rung of society. Of all the foreign "visitors," the Americans and Europeans, with their technical skills, represent the most favoured community. Next down the rung are people like the narrator who, along with his fellow Egyptian and Palestinian workers, are primarily service-sector functionaries, signing the workers in each day, and translating files from English to Arabic. Those Egyptians without higher educational qualifications work at the meanest level as tea boys, car washers and drivers along with their Sri Lankan, Yemeni and Pakistani counterparts. None of the work the men do is described in any great detail, nor is it particularly important. What matters, again, is one's geographical stance in the "great wealth divide." Living quarters are similarly cordoned off, segregated by nationality: the Asians in their compound, the Egyptians sharing a house, the Americans in their suburb, the black Africans in a neighbourhood derogatorily nicknamed Omdurman. Such an atomised existence leads to a curious worldview which perceives others strictly in terms of immediate material conditions, relative pay scales and levels of favour. These preoccupations Ismā'il relates in great detail. Wajih, an Egyptian doctor, frequently assesses and compares the salaries of nurses to doctors and American workers to those on contract from the developing world. Similarly cognisant of the hierarchy, the Pakistani workers capitalise on Ismā'il's status as a "middle rung" employee in order to request the use of a company truck for the pilgrimage, among other favours. One Sri Lankan worker, desperate to have contact with his home in Colombo, steals an expensive shortwave radio from the office. Between remittances and living expenses, members of the lowest tier of the working community can scarcely afford such luxuries.

To this element of economic and regional *apartheid* is added the dimension of moral circumscription, which figures prominently in the narrator's portrait of "the other country." This aspect of society takes on a surreal quality in the novel, as if it were part of a disturbing, recurring dream, periodically emerging to remind its citizens of its existence. Early in the novel, Ismā'il is taken to the centre of town to a cacophonous market scene. Suddenly, a police truck goes by with a young woman in

it. The vehicle parades her while the megaphone declares her crime - meeting with a Yemeni boy. She is expelled from middle school and the boy is sent to jail for three months, to be expelled from the country soon afterwards. As the truck zooms past, the regularity of the market scene is quickly resumed.

For the foreign workers, beholden to their sponsors, the oil companies, who are, by rights, liable for their moral conduct during their stay, the threat of deportation looms regularly, and so their situation is equally, if not more, precarious than that of the Saudis⁶. Those who dare buck convention do so at their own peril. One such figure achieves notoriety within the expatriate community. A doctor, Sayyid al-Gharīb, performs an illegal abortion for an unmarried woman. She dies in the process and he is summarily placed under house arrest. Periodically, Ismā'il passes the villa where the doctor is detained. The image of house detention becomes a wider metaphor for the experience of the foreign worker in this country. Perched on his balcony and attired in black, the doctor makes eye contact with Ismā'il. Sayyid al-Gharīb seems to understand the narrator's sense of despair over living as an expatriate; similarly, the doctor is both the object of Ismā'il's pity and the embodiment of his fears that he too may somehow transgress the bounds of propriety during his stay.

Implicit in this story is the conflict between exterior appearance and the interior self. And as 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf suggests in the opening quote, the subject of oil throws light on the contradictions of the inner and outer spheres in both rich and poor Arab countries. But these discrepancies are most obvious in the Gulf. Throughout *Al-Baldā al-ukhrā* the reader is forced to consider the societal burden that oil wealth has placed on Saudi Arabia. A semblance of strict piety must accompany the profiteering in order to rationalise the enormous divides of wealth. The mutual isolation of each community, combined with stringent moral requirements regarding external deportment produce a situation for the foreign workers in which their domestic life becomes the sole source of diversion and solace. But even these distractions seem cold comfort for the narrator. Ismā'il creates the image of a community warily getting through the hours of its boredom, only to repeat the process the following day. After hours, the workers gather at the Egyptian house to joke and commiserate, often repeating the expatriate's adage, "Tabuk makes you forget your mother and father." The inner life they share, slightly removed from the disapproving gaze of the authorities, is replete with banal, minor transgressions, which only serve to

⁶ For a clear description of the "culture of broker/sponsorship", see sociologist Sa'd Eddin Ibrāhīm's study of migration, 1982, pp. 11-13.

underscore the pathos of their situation. The men gamble, and then, absurdly, return each other's money at the end of each month. American television is a another temporary measure for curbing loneliness. Disconnected from wives, fiancées, lovers and mothers (i.e., the primary care-givers of their society), these men give the reader the impression that every meal prepared collectively is an achievement. At the height of their desperation, the men buy non-alcoholic beer and implore their friend, the doctor Wagīh, to bring alcohol home with him from work. Word of this "incident" escapes the confines of the home, and has repercussions for several characters. One Egyptian is hastily deported, and Ismā'īl is prohibited from giving private English lessons to a young girl in town.

This deprivation and loneliness often leads to a state verging on madness. Ismā'īl is told the story of a doctor sent to work for a clinic in a small town outside of Tabuk. He is forced to stay in this town for several days due to the volume of work in the clinic. The bread supply in the town runs out, along with most other products, however, and the man's diabetic condition necessitates a constant supply of such foods to regulate his system. Tempted to eat himself, the doctor attempts to hitchhike on the empty road leading back to Tabuk. Eventually, an ambulance appears which takes him to town. Upon his arrival at the local Lebanese bakery in Tabuk, the man buys out the entire store's supply of bread as a precautionary measure. In another incident, an Egyptian worker loses touch with reality after receiving news of the marriage of his fiancée to a more successful family member in Kuwait. He continues to work, but when asked to fulfil his promise to prepare a traditional Saudi Arabian feast for the company executives and the town emir, instead of preparing lamb or beef, he slaughters his pet monkeys and lizards to serve to a stunned crowd. Perhaps the best example of this point, however, is given as the narrator relates the experience of his first Feast of the Sacrifice (*'Īd al-Aḍḥā*) away from home. Most of his fellow workers have returned to their families for the holiday, leaving Ismā'īl by himself. As the days wear on, only the trapping and killing of mice in his house punctuates the passing of time. Here, Ibrāhīm conveys the sense of the mind's process of random association in the state of loneliness. The narrator decides to take a walk through the centre of town, only to find it completely empty. Amid this lonely wandering through Omdurman, he experiences surreal visions, including film and dream snatches of an apocalyptic nature:

A large square in a devastated city. All the houses around the square are on fire, smoke billowing out of the windows. A soldier among the corpses rises, looking around in fear, aiming his rifle at nothing or anything that might appear suddenly. The soldier walks in the midst of the smoke rising from the burning cars and tanks on top of

which are more corpses with heads bent down. The soldier keeps circling, turning around, expecting an enemy every movement. He sees a woman with an agitated face in front of the door of a house with burning windows. The sun lights up her white face framed by a black shawl; the dazzling, attractive figure gleams; the contours of her svelte figure are defined under a dress that is also black. The camera moves down to her black shoes and shimmering legs, follows the tap-tapping of her shoes as she runs across the big black tiles of the square and enters a narrow, dirty alley..." ('Abd al-Majīd 1988, p.88)

The author says nothing explicitly here; he simply allows the scene to unfold before our eyes. When the narrator re-emerges from this dreamstate, there still remains no one present. The figure of the woman in the sequence seems to be a symbol of longing. And the passage as a whole metaphorically conjures up Ismā'īl's sensations of destitution and isolation. Solitude and marginality are two of the predominant themes of the novel, and Ismā'īl is portrayed as a character for whom both solitude and marginality are an inevitable destination for as long as he remains in "the other country." The suggestion here and elsewhere in the novel is that the foreign national is invariably "a being set apart and that his mode of life, his process of engaging with it, can only be represented realistically as a series of discontinuous performances" (Said 1993, Lecture 3).

Yet this state of discontinuity is not without its advantages. It grants an outsider such as Ismā'īl a unique vantage point from which to view both his country of migration and his homeland. When the narrator gets the opportunity to return to Egypt for business, we are witness to a deeper introspection and more critical, if uncertain, view of Alexandria:

My longing increased as the days went by and as I walked the streets of Alexandria as if it were some city I didn't know; the crowds were unbearable, transportation slow, the streets muddy, the paint on the walls faded. Television was showing strange programs that lacked the intimate quality that had developed between me and *Television Magazine*, ...*The Incredible Hulk*, or the programs of Shaykh Tantawi. The calls to prayer here lacked that wounded note of sadness coming from a faraway mountain, nor were they accompanied by those plaintive, prayerful chants that moved the soul to seas of serenity. One couldn't find the dry air of Mount Uhud here or the dark red colour of the tranquil mountain. I really wanted to go back ('Abd al-Majīd 1988, p. 220).

Cairo, with its chaotic traffic and more coarse and intense methods of communicating, proves to be a disappointment as well. His observations of the capital city send him into a reminiscence of his first trip to Cairo in 1968. As he recalls his visit to the famous Bayn al-Qaşrayn cafe, he remarks on the noticeable absence of

noble characters similar to those who populate the pages of Maḥfūz's Trilogy. This, he notes to himself, makes his first realisation that life and art do not directly replicate one another. Or at least, that Maḥfūz's memories bear little resemblance to the Cairo of the end of the decade of the Sixties. This truism, that life is rarely as noble, as romantic, as poetic as fiction is made all the more clear in Ismā'il's latest trip, as he is violently mugged one night near Opera Square. Torn between two insanities- the isolation of the desert and a diminished opinion of home, Ismā'il's impulse is to return to the other country.

Similarly, political commentary scattered throughout the novel illustrates the narrator's sense of dislocation from Egypt. The Saudi newspapers and television are sated with negative commentary on Sādāt. The Camp David settlement is an object of total derision. In a conversation with a Pakistani driver at the office, Sādāt is likened to the notoriously unpopular dictator, Zia al-Haq. Most often the critiques are voiced, understandably, by one of the Palestinian employees of the company. Ismā'il shares the Palestinian's perspective. On one occasion, as he contemplates the consequences of pursuing a relationship with one of his students, the narrator curses his fate, describing himself as a "cursed Egyptian, like his president, who the Muslims day and night wish dead for having set his foul foot in Jerusalem and because he sat with the Jews who God has commanded us to kill..." ('Abd al-Majid 1988, pp. 161-2).

The cultural elite are not the only group suffering this sense of dislocation in the novel. The bedouin too, are witnesses to tremendous upheaval in their society. As the author chooses to relate the experience of the novel through the eyes of a foreign national who has very little access to bedouin society, this issue is not fully exploited. The author does subtly illustrate a point, however, through the reticent character of a Yemeni bedouin at work. Nearly every day at mid-day, Ismā'il notices an old Yemeni man outside his window. He wears European clothes, but can often be found sitting on the ground, bedouin-style, unmoved by passing cars, the dust or the formidable heat of the sun. With clockwork consistency, the old man approaches Ismā'il's window at mid-day, chewing on a *siwāk*, a fragrant stick from a plant, staring at the narrator and smiling. The two share no other meaningful interactions, but this regular moment in the day is charged with significance. Though no words are exchanged and we are told that the man is illiterate and hired on an informal basis as a driver, there seems a wisdom behind his smile. His regular appearance, wry smile and subsequent disappearance may be read as a symbol of the departure of an old way of life and of suspicions regarding the motivations of the foreign visitors. This subtle, regular communication reminds the narrator of his own transitory existence and forces him to question his own utility to the company.

An initial response to this novel might be to argue that the characters lack development, including the protagonist. The portrayals seem superficial, with most characters being presented almost exclusively by reference to their outward appearance. The method of narration and simple sentence structure throughout recalls the child narrator of 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's *Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a*. By the end of the novel, we feel neither attached to nor repulsed by the main character, merely indifferent. This could, however, be interpreted in another manner. The lives of economic exiles are, in the main, functional existences, purely purpose-driven and allowing little time for self-fulfilment or personal development. Similarly, the loss of an explicitly noble political cause must necessarily be reflected in the motivations and behaviour of the novel's characters. Of greater concern, however, is the dilemma of much of the writing of this period, namely, that the *themes* of the novel seems to take precedence over the *form* in which it is presented. When such a precedence is allowed, when 'Abd al-Majīd sets himself the task of capturing the emigre's plight, certain aspects of the narrative, Ismā'il's frustrated love interests, for instance, appear episodic and peripheral to the main thrust of the writing.

In the end, circumstances and environment change, but the stance of the cultural elite remains consistently on the margins.

3. Al-‘araba al-dhahabiyya la taṣ‘udu ilā al-samā’ (The Golden Chariot Does Not Ascend to the Heavens, 1991)

Amid the *de jure* liberalisation of both the press and the publishing industries in the late 1970s and early 1980s and statistics attesting to a dramatic reduction in political internment⁷, prison remained a salient setting for the Egyptian novel. The force and persistence of the depiction of the penitentiary may be seen to the present day in the form of Ṣun‘allāh Ibrāhīm’s most recent work, *Sharaf* (1997), among others. In a lecture dealing with the specific issue of ‘the prison novel,’ critic Nāzia Abū Niḍāl estimates that at least fifty novels were written during the period of this present study utilising the prison as one of their primary thematic interests (Abū Niḍāl 1998).⁸ As has been stated earlier in this research, a significant number of Egyptian writers of merit held in common the experience of incarceration in some form or another and were therefore naturally inclined to examine prison life, if only as a means of ‘exorcism.’ Many looked to prison as a valuable indicator or reflection of the health of society. Indeed, the statistic citing the incarceration of nearly one-third of all black men under forty in certain metropolitan areas of the United States, for instance, speaks volumes on issues of racism and economic justice in that country, providing more information than many other non-prison related sources. Arab critic Sulaymān al-‘Aṭṭār describes prison as an ideal literary framework for reflection on the wider philosophical question of freedom (Al-‘Aṭṭār 1998).⁹ While the setting of the houseboat of Maḥfūz’s *Tharthara fawq al-nīl* illustrates poignantly the state of flux experienced by the cultural elite following the 1967 war and the pension *Miramār* neatly provides a space for a dialogue between generations and political perspectives, it is the prison, he argues, with its literal condition of circumscription which best metaphorically highlights the economic, political and psychological confines imposed by a society.

⁷ Marina Stagh 1993, writes, “During the reign of Sadāt imprisonment of political opponents is not the major trait it was under Nāsir. Though there are some significant waves of internment: in May 1971, in the period 1972-75, after the food riots in January 1977 and then finally in September 1981. In each of these campaigns some prose writers are imprisoned, but altogether they do not amount to more than eight, and most of the detentions are short, or very short, as compared to the Nāsir period. Still, many writers look upon the seventies as a time of severe repression, and one of the reasons is that, while left in freedom, they were shut out of the media and prevented from publishing...”, p. 80.

⁸ Taken from a paper entitled, “*Riwāyat al-sijn: al-simāt al-fanniyya fī riwāyat al-qam’ al-‘arabiyya*” delivered at the first annual Cairo Conference on the Novel, Greater Cairo Library, 26 Feb. 1998.

⁹ Taken from a paper entitled, “*Riwāyat al-sijn - takniyya am mahtāwi*” delivered at the Cairo Conference on the Novel, op. cit.

Of particular interest during this late *Infitāḥ* period was the emergence of women's perspectives on the prison experience. Previously, writers such as Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt made mention of their prison experiences within broader discussions, but few used the setting as a principal backdrop for any of their works. Most of these narratives, including those written during the *Infitāḥ* period, arose from autobiographical experience. One of the most well-known of these is Nawāl al-Sa'dāwi's *Al-Mar'a 'inda nuqṭat sifr*, written in 1975 and not published until a few years later. The account is based strictly on interviews conducted with women prisoners during al-Sa'dāwi's tenure as an inspector of health. The novella relates one woman's struggle for independence as she is driven from an abusive household into prostitution. As the protagonist awaits execution for the murder of her pimp, she concludes that prostitution is a far preferable condition to the ignominy of slow, daily abuse suffered by many women in Cairo. Six years after writing this novella, Nawāl al-Sa'dāwi was detained and arrested (along with as many as 1,500 writers, political dissidents and other prominent figures) for her vocal opposition to the Camp David accords and *Infitāḥ* policies in general. Her three month detention would inform many of her subsequent works. Less well known is Zaynab al-Ghazāli, whose 1977 work entitled *Ayyām min ḥayātī*, details the author's emergence as a leader of the Muslim Women's Association, the female arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the role of this organisation in prisons under Nāṣir.¹⁰ Salwā Bakr too developed an antagonistic relationship with the authorities during Sādāt's governance, and was later imprisoned for two weeks in 1989 accused of inciting workers to strike in Helwan. Her 1991 novel, *Al-'Araba al-dhahabiyya la taṣ'udu ila 'l-samā'*, emerged in part from her personal experience of detention. Unlike her predecessors, however, Bakr achieves a slight measure of narrative distance from her protagonist and the other characters, further blurring the lines between autobiography and fiction. This section assesses the success of that project.

In *Al-Baldā al-ukhrā* we had an illustration of physical migration prompted by the pressures and demands of *Infitāḥ* era transformations. With *Al-'Araba al-dhahabiyya*, we are offered an example of 'mental migration,' or psychological escapism engendered by those same forces. Set in an Alexandrian prison block reserved for the elderly, disabled and 'special' (a euphemism for the mentally ill), the novel focuses on the experience of 'Azīza, a woman who exhibits signs of madness a few years after her arrival in the prison and is placed in a solitary confinement cell

¹⁰ A detailed description of the work may be found in Miriam Cooke's article "Ayyām min Ḥayātī: The Prison Memoirs of a Muslim Sister" in the *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. XXVI, 1995.

contiguous to the 'special' wing. The protagonist speaks to herself in Greek, the omniscient narrator tells us, and is widely known for her erratic behaviour - smiling broadly at certain inmates, staring solemnly at others. The reader soon comprehends 'Azīza's condition not as madness, but as the external symptoms of an elaborate coping mechanism, her escape into the mind by means of a golden chariot. In order to pass the fourteen hours of daily solitary confinement, 'Azīza dwells in an imaginary world where she sips wine and projects to the grand day of her escape on a regal winged chariot, selecting the inmates to accompany her on an illusory ascension to heaven. The testimonials of the women, related to us through the omniscient narrator, serve as 'Azīza's criteria for inclusion or exclusion on the magical journey, and comprise the bulk of the novel's text. Though generally unrelated, these accounts are cohesive insofar as they display a common theme of helplessness. The women of *Al-'Araba al-dhahabiyya* (and many of Bakr's other works) exhibit a dual, if not triple sense of helplessness: helplessness before a patriarchal society, lack of recourse to the law and an inability to alter their fate due to lack of education and economic opportunities, diminished even further by the *Infitāh*. Mild forms of madness are often manifested by the author's protagonists as an unconscious reaction to such a state of impotence. In much of Bakr's work such delusory behaviour is seen as the only logical response.¹¹ 'Azīza is representative of this trend.

The protagonist is atypical, however, in that she comes from an upper-class social background. Class commentary figures prominently in many of Salwā Bakr's stories¹², with particular sympathy given to women of the working class. Customarily the author concentrates on the contrast between the classes and privileges the industry and resourcefulness of working class women over the means of their more affluent counterparts. Here, 'Azīza is portrayed with a measure of sympathy, the focus being the universal plight of women before the Egyptian justice system. The protagonist belongs to an established Alexandrian family of high social standing. In daytime reveries we see 'Azīza reminiscing on the property and gardens of a former life, the Armenian dress-maker and choice hairdressers that bespoke elegance. Similarly, that she speaks Greek recalls a pre-revolutionary Alexandria in which elites of a variety of nationalities intermingled. In spite of her privilege, her education is scant, having only

¹¹ See especially the short stories *Al-Dhahāb ila ḥadīqat al-ḥayawān* and *Al-Dūd fī ḥaql al-wurūd* in the 1992 collection '*Ajīn al-fallāha*' and *Iḥḍa wa thalathūn shajara jamīla khadrā*' in the 1986 collection *Maqām 'Atiyya*.

¹² Most notable in this regard are the stories *Umm Shahāta allati fajarat al-mawdu'* and *Nūna al-sha'nūna* in the 1986 collection *Zaynat fī jinā at al-ra'is* and *Al-Nawm 'alā al-jānib al-ariḥ* from the 1992 collection '*Ajīn al-fallāha*..

attained a primary level degree. In essence, 'Azīza would most appropriately be categorised as a member of the bourgeoisie, rather than the cultural elite. The legal system pays little heed to her social standing, however, and punishes her for the murder of her husband just as it might any other woman.

In the recounting of the women's stories, the novel gives testimony to a consistent pattern of abuse suffered by women primarily at the hands of men, followed by efforts to seek reprisals against the men, for which they, the women, are then harshly and summarily charged and punished. The women's stories are relayed mostly in the form of flashbacks as 'Azīza sits in her cell smoking. Each chapter follows a fairly similar format in which a woman is introduced, her story developed, and the chapter concludes with a return to the present time with the protagonist in solitary, contemplating where to position the women in the chariot. Within the cell walls we learn of Shafīqa, known by the inmates as "Silent Shafīqa." As 'Azīza considers her story, we discover that her reticence stems from the "honour killing" of her sister in Upper Egypt. Stunned into silence by the cruelty of her family, she flees and is forced into a life of begging, which ultimately lands her a permanent position in the prison.

The politics of sexuality informs the destiny of many of the inmates of the 'special' ward, as in the case of Hinna, a woman whose husband's insatiable sexual appetite drives her into an early old age and near insanity. Upon discovery of the man's adulterous intentions, Hinna decides to murder him in his sleep, leaving the gas taps of their kitchen opened. In what perhaps represents an oblique reference to Yūsuf Idrīs' *Bayt min laḥm*, 'Azīza's own story tells of her long-standing incestuous relationship with her much older stepfather, unbeknownst to 'Azīza's blind mother. After 'Azīza's mother dies, the stepfather decides to take a second wife, equally youthful but better educated than 'Azīza. Feeling deceived, exploited and threatened, the protagonist decides to prevent the marriage by taking the man's life. In a fit of rage, she stabs him in his sleep and then burns their house down, along with the naive memories of their relationship. Even the warder of the prison has a similar tale to tell, having been abandoned by her love and compelled to resort to prostitution. In 'Azīza's portrayal of her society, men are granted immunity for their crimes of abuse, murder and neglect while the repercussions are met with society's gravest consequences. Small wonder, then, that for almost all of the women, the penitentiary ironically represents a refuge and provides a wellspring of solidarity. What may come as some surprise to the reader is the manner in which the women internalise their condition and explain it through the prism of 'fate.' As Maḥrūsa the warder considers the common links between her situation and the inmates', it is 'fate,' and not men,

which provides both cause and consolation:

She became aware of the comforting truth that she wasn't the only oppressed woman in the world as she had thought, nor was she alone in suffering from misfortune, there were many other women to whom fate had dealt a terrible blow and had robbed of happiness and mercy. (Bakr 1995, p. 121)¹³

Similarly, Hinna employs the vocabulary of fate to describe the circumstances which led to the murder of her husband:

When all was said and done, everyone must accept his lot in life: her husband had met his end as ordained by God, and she had taken up residence in the strange world of the women's prison (Bakr 1995, p. 38).

The relative infrequency of portrayals of political prisoners and members of the broader cultural elite in the novel may confirm Marina Stagh's claims that the *Infitāḥ* era marked a less repressive (at least in an official sense) period than that of Nāṣir's rule. What is certain is the manner in which 'Azīza sees the prison population as representative of shifts in the priorities of the society as a whole. Representation and political struggle here have been superseded by the pursuit of self-gain, and this is made clear to the reader in the portrayals of the cultural elite. In chapter four, the brief appearance of a political prisoner provides an opportunity for parody. A young girl is detained for supposed communist activities, a crime which neither 'Azīza nor the other less well- educated inmates can fathom. Several of the inmates become irritated with the girl's incessant talk of politics. 'Azīza herself admits to fully understanding neither the girl's rants on class conflict nor the government's objection to such a nice, if chatty, young woman, but recognises the girl's isolation from the world of the poor she claims to represent. In the end, the girl's swift release is a welcome event, sparing the inmates from tiresome lectures and vociferous protests against living conditions in prison. Besides, 'Azīza muses, if she were taken on the chariot, the government would send a plane to shoot the whole group down. Thus, the cultural elite are viewed either as the object of ridicule and irritation, or of pity, as in the case of doctor Bahīga, a woman whose education coupled with her lower class background fails to afford her either full job satisfaction or an attainable love interest. Embedded in this second form of portrayal is the strong sense of longing for a recent past in which education and talent were more desirable than economic savvy. A romanticisation of the role and potential of the educated elite during the Nāṣir years, quite clearly issuing from the author herself, is evident here and elsewhere in the novel. The following paragraph is

¹³ All translations for this section by Dinah Manisty 1995.

typical of this sentiment and warrants quoting in full:

In the years that followed her graduation, Bahīga awakened to the reality of her humble status as a doctor which the state had valued at no more than one hundred and twenty Egyptian pounds. This barely covered the cost of one or two pieces of clothing necessary for work or four pairs of shoes which only lasted two or three months, possibly stretching to another month if she took them to be repaired instead of buying new ones. To be more precise, at that time her doctor's salary was no more than the price an upper middle class woman would pay to have her empty head tinted. This class was on the way to extinction in the shadow of new social changes in which learning was no longer valued. The West had smashed such aspirations after the fall of Nāṣir when the cherished memories of the Day of Celebration also fell from the collective consciousness. On this special day the brightest students in schools, institutions and universities had been honoured by Nāṣir, not only in his role as President of the Republic but also in his capacity as loyal leader who stood for the hopes of all Arab peoples living between the Gulf of black oil and the Atlantic Ocean, where the poor of Morocco, a country squatting on the edge of the sea, are even deprived of the vegetation gathered from the forest to provide their basic sustenance" (Bakr 1995, p. 146).

The narrator/author seizes on several opportunities in the narrative to elucidate her sense of dismay over dwindling interest in the arts and intellectual interests following the *Infitāḥ*. While describing the circumstances of 'Azīma, a woman who finds her calling as a professional mourner, our narrator/author accounts for the rise in traditional religious activity by criticising the very field of writing:

Lately these ceremonies had become more popular for reasons she never knew, but she suspected they responded to a need for something which had been lost through the empty words sung by the poets which inundated the public day and night on the radio and television. Equally, those obscure poems written by poets who fancied themselves avant-garde writers and which were occasionally published in magazines and newspapers did not in any way address the issues and sentiments which preoccupy the public. Nor did poems by the other outmoded poets who insisted on writing in the old Amudi style, weaving their poetry from worn out threads of a chivalry which no longer existed, for the values of the noble knight were no longer suited to the trials of daily life and the bitter struggle for survival (Bakr 1995, pp. 56-7).

The digressive nature of the narrative realistically produces the sensation of vast amounts of idle time being filled by 'Azīza's musings. For the reader this digressive style is at the same time an authenticating device and a hindrance to the flow of the narrative. Occasionally, these digressions assume the format of a multi-framed story, a narrative 'nested' within a larger framework of a story. Within the third chapter, for

instance, the narrator makes reference to an old Arabic proverb in order to describe one of the inmates. The origins of the proverb are then detailed, using one of the animal fables from *Kalila wa dimna*. Several pages later, the narrative returns to the predicament of the inmate. Within modern criticism there remains the temptation to over-accentuate the influence of *Alf layla wa layla* in an effort to validate these circuitous forms of discourse. To be certain, references to the classic prototype for the 'story within a story' exist here, however sparsely. More often, Bakr's prose exhibits a tendency to ramble, stringing one relative clause upon the next, thereby diverting attention from the original idea of a sentence or paragraph. In outlining the circumstances under which one of the inmates - a pickpocket - is caught, for instance, the author feels it necessary to comment on the pressures of public transportation and current tastes in Egyptian fashion:

One day she was working on the Underground in Masr al-Jadida(sic), which she considered one of the most lucrative sites for withdrawing money from the pockets of the long-suffering passengers who were slow to start in the morning. She succeeded in removing a colourful pearl-studded purse - the kind made in Taiwan, which women are mad about and which became widespread after Egyptians went to the Gulf where these sort of goods are ten a penny, like the artificial silk blouse appliquéd with pearls which the young owner of the purse was wearing (Bakr 1995, p. 31).

At times a lively sense of humour informs this banter, as in this extract from a paragraph whose primary focus is an inmate's discovery of an adulterous husband. The paragraph begins with the inmate Hinna describing a picture of another woman in her husband's pocket and ends with a digression on the other things in his pocket, items bought from peddlers on the city buses:

He preferred to buy these from peddlers for no other reason than that he enjoyed the way they called out their wares; some told a brief tragic story before the bus started off, while some sang in the style of the well-known songs which were relayed from the enormous broadcasting building standing on the banks of the Nile, but shorter because of the lack of time available to sing them, so they were less likely to cause a headache (Bakr 1995, p 49).

On other occasions, the distance between author and narrator narrows, and it becomes apparent to the reader that he or she is witnessing pure editorial comment. Notice the disruptive nature of editorialising in this passage, in which the narrator justifies 'Azīza's decision to include Umm 'Abd al-'Azīz in the chariot:

'Azīza was neither swayed by the prayer rituals she performed day and night and her incessant reading of righteous verses nor, for that matter, by the long periods she spent tuned into the station which

broadcast the Glorious Koran on a small transistor radio stuck close to her ear. *This radio was made by Telemasr, a testimony to Egypt's failed attempt to enter the field of manufacturing and become self-reliant in the days when there was tumultuous propaganda about the rocket known as Qahir and its brother Zafir, both of which failed to serve any kind of victory in the 1967 war.* The reason 'Azīza decided... (Bakr 1995, pp. 174-5, italics mine)

Yet such commentary is instructive in its capacity to illustrate the depth of loss experienced by many Egyptians following the *naksa* and the transition from a deliberately statist regime to one driven more by *laissez-faire* economics. Economic and social commentary routinely sidelines ideas originally expressed in passages of this novel. Both the narrator/author and 'Azīza reveal a type of schizophrenic attitude towards the West and its most recent and prominent incursion: there exists an admiration for the innovation and ingenuity brought from the West, coupled with an absolute contempt for the manner in which Western cultural and material exports supplant local ones. As we saw with Ṣun'allāh Ibrāhīm's novella *Al-Lajna*, this duality often manifests itself in curious ways, the most common of which may be found in the tone of lament for the Egypt of a bygone era in which the country had not yet experienced so dramatic a cultural and economic decline. Observe, for instance, the manner in which a wealthy and attractive prisoner is portrayed in one sentence:

Before this event Zaynab had led a charmed life full of joy and affection like the heroines in movies *with the exception of Egyptian movies, naturally, as they would only make the comparison demeaning* (Bakr 1995, p. 150, emphasis mine).

In other instances the cultural critique shifts from this perplexing form of self-hatred to outright denunciation of the leader behind the *Infitāḥ*. Within the context of the discussion of these individual women's lives, such commentary seems incongruous and unnecessary. The best example of this comes in the story of Silent Shafīqa, whose sister is murdered by her family for her involvement with a Copt:

This fastidious and conscientious sister, who also worked as a teacher, always used the private lessons she gave to young male and female students as a pretext to meet her lover out of official working hours. When she returned she would hasten to conceal any trace which might disclose her relationship with him, like the little presents he gave her from time to time. These were nothing more than bracelets or silver rings or a bottle of perfume called 'Destiny' which was locally made. *The imported perfumes were not well-known at the time due to the economic boycott of the West which had been applied more stringently since the defeat of 5th June but ended like a storm in a teacup by the mere implementation of Sādāt's new economic policy.* She had recently begun to offer these simple

gifts...(Bakr, p. 167, emphasis mine)

Because so many of the individual women's stories share a similar theme, what stays with the reader most is not their testimony, but the narrator's slightly out of context editorial comments. Salwā Bakr's prison is a vehicle for a much broader type of reflection, incorporating political, economic and gender critique. The negative title of the novel informs us from the outset that there is to be no salvation for these particular women. 'Azīza dies in prison, along with her vision of the golden chariot. As the blood clots rise to her brain, the protagonist witnesses the day of ascension in her mind. Her chariot is beautifully decorated, as are her passengers. The prison authorities attempt to prevent the group from escaping, and the chariot falters but eventually, majestically, takes flight. The irony of death coinciding with ascendancy suggests that the pursuit of justice, in its broadest sense, remains an elusive, sometimes purely symbolic endeavour.

4. *Dhāt* (Dhāt/Self, 1992): Notes from Underground

"The fantastic occurs daily in our world - a simple scan of a newspaper reveals this fact. In this regard, the 'exceptional' is reality." -Fedor Dostoevsky, from Alcott 1973, p.68.

"To give an account of everything would be impossible, for we should need at least one volume for each day in order to record the multitude of insignificant incidents that fill our lives. Selection is therefore necessary - and that is the first blow to the theory of 'the whole truth.'" -Guy de Maupassant, introduction to 'Le Roman,' from Alcott 1973, p. 70.

In a 1989 lecture on the language and technique of Ṣun'allāh Ibrāhīm, the critic Ṣalāḥ Faḍl describes the author as "poorly grounded" in the Arab heritage of writing (Faḍl 1989). That is to say, Ibrāhīm exhibits little inclination towards traditional Arabic poetics, a point which the writer himself willingly concedes. Although Faḍl describes Ibrāhīm's writing as "naked," empty of standard metaphors, analogies and other forms of verbal embellishment, he continues to praise the writer for advancing a radically new vision and for looking to influences outside of the traditional Arab canon. In another lecture given at the American University in Cairo, Ṣun'allāh Ibrāhīm admits a reluctance to heed the stylistic conventions of traditional writers (Ibrāhīm 1988), just as he had argued elsewhere against the thematic prescriptions of the previous generation of writers: "I began my work," he writes, "from a position of dissent, along the lines of what was then called socialist realism. However, I felt (as

did others) that it was a distortion and embellishment of reality, and I was of the opinion that this ruse didn't help people, but deluded them" (Barrāda 1981, pp. 292-3).

Therefore, Ibrāhīm began experimenting with a variety of narrative strategies, influenced by, to be certain, his interests in translations of texts written in European languages and the cinema. Whereas most writers chose to design their narrative worlds deliberately with linear sequences of plot and development, Ibrāhīm often preferred to manipulate his writing in the manner of a camera sitting in the corner of a room, recording the mundane, the banal and the physiological along with the heroic, the tragic and the beautiful.¹⁴ The referential element to Kafka in Ṣun'allāh Ibrāhīm's work, particularly his early writing (*Tilka al-rā'iḥa* and the accompanying short stories), is an observation many readers of his work have made. This is categorically denied by the author.¹⁵ What is sometimes overlooked, however, is the debt the writer owes to the aesthetic contributions of the American post W.W.II literary avant-garde, a strain of which became known collectively as the 'Beat' generation. This section attempts to illustrate some of the stylistic links between Ibrāhīm and the Beats and aims to demonstrate how Ibrāhīm's 1992 work, *Dhāt*, in particular proved a valid and innovative aesthetic response to the dramatic social and economic changes occurring in Egypt during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Much maligned for its now clichéd external trappings, its sometimes directionless wanderings bordering on vagrancy and its liberal experimentation with homosexuality and consciousness-expanding drugs, the Beat movement did nonetheless constitute a genuine critique of the existing American sensibilities, literary and otherwise. Leroi Jones, black American poet and one of the generation's proponents, described the movement as an "open and implied rebellion - of form and content. Aesthetic as well as social and political" (Jones 1984, p. 156). The affectations, the constant urge for innovation and experimentation for its own sake was a "calculated attempt... to put distance between themselves" and what one writer called "the mindless gibberish of 'square' i.e., commercial maximum-profit minimum consciousness values that ran the United States."¹⁶ In this regard, the disaffected youth of America's mid-1950s had a

¹⁴ Ṣalah Faḍl makes the distinction in his lecture between the *riwāyīn khalq*, the novelists who create the scenarios of their work primarily from the realms of the imagination and the *riwāyīn tasjīlī*, the novelists who simply attempt to record "reality," placing Ṣun'allāh Ibrāhīm in the latter category.

¹⁵ In his 1988 CASA lecture, Ibrāhīm jokingly refutes this assumed influence saying, "*La Kafka wa la Maḥka*."

¹⁶ Amiri Baraka, from Mona Lisa Saloy in Lisa Phillips (ed.) 1995, p. 155.

great deal in common with Egypt's *Jil al-sittināt*, the "Sixties Generation" of writers, who by the late 1970s were witnessing 'square' America and its values beginning to take hold in their own country.

Informing the philosophy of the Beats was the aesthetic of modern America's only indigenous art form, jazz music. The spontaneity and improvisatory nature of the jazz medium appealed to the writers of this generation, who attempted to translate its fluid arpeggios and syncopated themes to print. Just as a soloist is given no 'second takes' in a performance, these writers adhered to the principle of production as performance, a creative outburst of 'the moment,' requiring very little editing or self-censorship. The original version of Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* (1958) was typed on a hundred-foot spool of teletype paper with very little attention to punctuation and other pre-established conventions of syntax, etc. His colleague and fellow poet Allen Ginsberg described the work, which subsequently became the archetype and manifesto of the movement, as nothing short of "spontaneous bop prosody." Şun'allāh Ibrāhīm was reportedly fascinated with this mode of "first thought, best work" writing, and attempted to incorporate it in his first work, *Tilka al-rā'iḥa* (Ibrāhīm 1988).

The idea that captured Ibrāhīm's imagination most, however, was the "cut-up" technique, pioneered by Beat poets William Burroughs and Brion Gysin. In the late 1960s, the two American writers collaborated on a series of graphic collages, consisting of edited portions of newspaper headlines and photos. The result was a bold re-examination of context and subjectivity. A single example will illustrate the force of the experiment. (See Appendix 3) In no perceptible order, five separate and distinct news headlines have been pasted together and displayed on one page. The piece is untitled. Their sole apparent link, the only detectable theme, is the repetition of the number 23. 23 DIE IN SAIGON declares the first headline, positioned askew and to the left of centre. To the right and just below in even larger print is the announcement of a disaster on a grander scale: TORNADO DEAD: 223. To the left in equally roughshod fashion lies the announcement of an explosion in a block of flats: APARTMENT BLAST KILLS 23, it states plainly as pictures of 3 of the dead in their flat accompany the headline. A lone cutting 223 sits apart and away from the remainder of the print, underneath which can be found the picture of a Vietnamese child bloodied and wounded, walking the streets of Saigon barefoot. To the side are three stories crudely cut, photocopied and positioned one on top of the other: 'Draftsman, 23, Grilled in Love-Lane Slaying,' followed by another report of the apartment explosion, complete with a picture of the building burning, and followed by more coverage of the Saigon killings. 'A Street is Bathed in Blood...' the first cutting

reads in small print, followed by three terse clippings in a pronounced font: BOMB, 23 DIE IN SAIGON, and RIPS. Underlying the pastings is a white piece of paper which has been divided into approximately fifty one-inch squares. A portion of these squares is visible in the areas not occupied by print. The black ink with which the squares have been outlined smears and splotches, as if to accentuate the palpable sense of bloodshed. Finally, in very fine print in the lower left-hand corner, we discern a story declaring the wealth of one family: Insurance Magnate Chubb Left 23 Million, the headline reads.

The systematic collection and presentation of what initially seems such disparate and unrelated information has a number of effects. The first consequence is that it overwhelms the reader with the abundance of information - in this case, the tragedy so prevalent in life. As if one story were not sufficient, the collage compounds misery upon misery, reminding the reader of the everyday reality of such terrible events. When the reader has recovered from information overload, a second effect occurs, which is a restructuring of perspective and context. As with a jazz solo, the listener is unsure of the direction of the run, or even if it has a direction. But as the notes deftly weave in and out of the loosely established structure of the song, the listener enjoys what she hears and comes to appreciate the relationship of the single line to the totality. The 'cut-up' demonstrates to us the subjectivity of the manner in which news is presented by forcing the reader to re-examine these seemingly unrelated events and see the world as a greater interrelated whole. The devastation in Saigon is great, but no less tragic is the local news of the apartment explosion. Similarly, we are forced to question whether the loss of the life of one man, aged 23, is any more or less significant than the 223 killed in the tornado. Finally, the bequeathal of 23 million throws the varying fortunes of humankind into sharp relief. What this collective image results in is a new way of seeing and recording the events of the world.

Above all else, such a technique prompts the reader to question the intentions of the work's silent, omniscient architect, the narrator. The text of *Dhāt* features interchanging chapters of traditional narrative and, alternatively, the 'cut-up' technique, relying on a wide variety of news sources for documentary evidence. The variety of narrative styles, which is carefully orchestrated, contributes much to the book's effect. In the introduction to her book on the intersection of history and fiction, Samia Meħrez describes the effects that certain narrative strategies achieve. The reliance on multiple narration allows writers to "expose their undermined authorial voice and simultaneously pose as 'objective' historians" (Meħrez 1994, pp 14-15). An omniscient narrator, by contrast provides the writer an opportunity to "parody and satirise power by adopting its godlike, prying position vis-a-vis their subjects"

(Meḥrez 1994, p. 15). The unconventional introduction of documents not only subverts the notion of narrative as ‘plot,’ as we pointed out earlier in our discussion of *Al-Lajna*, but it also “...advances the sharp critique of the...practice of the authorities” (Meḥrez 1994, p. 15). *Dhāt* exhibits elements of all three of these techniques, in addition to the traditional mode of narrative. The subject matter of the novel is comprised of both public and personal events, presenting fictional characters whose fates are intertwined with actual incidents. As such, this challenging piece reads more like a primer on the period than a novel. The alternation between what Ṣalāḥ Faḍl calls *al-kitāba al-tawthīqiyya* (i.e., the usage of actual news clips and documents) and *al-kitāba al-sardiyya* (traditional narrative) (Faḍl 1989) illustrates the dialogic exchange of the theoretical and the applied.¹⁷ Many of the events of the news chapters impinge directly on Dhāt’s (the protagonist’s) life. And although it is impossible, as the quote from de Maupassant at the beginning of this section states, to recreate a period in its entirety, Ibrāhīm’s technique provides a wider angle from which to view the circumstances of this time. Again, for the purposes of this research, our interest lies less in the plot than in the portrayal of the cultural elite, and it seems that through the narrative techniques implemented in the novel, some inferences may be made about the position of the cultural elite in this historical moment. It is the anonymous, omniscient narrator who here best represents the cultural elite: unseen, peripheral, completely out of control of his environment, yet positing, ever challenging the conventions and leaving determination open to debate.

Many critics have commented on the autobiographical aspect of Ṣun‘allāh Ibrāhīm’s literature and the fact that the author’s work may be regarded as varying points along a continuum.¹⁸ If *Al-Lajna* ended with the surreal act of eating oneself, behaviour which was interpreted earlier in this thesis as acquiescence to the forces of capital influx and an acceptance of the narrator’s helplessness to resist, Dhāt begins several years later, with the process of acquiescence having long since been mentally assimilated by the public at-large. Only the omniscient narrator remains cognisant of the changes in society and feels compelled to resist. The character Dhāt is the axis of the novel and is in many ways representative of a broad body of Egyptian society. She

¹⁷ Maḥmūd Amīn al-‘Ālim describes this alternating pattern as indicative of the author’s intentions to capture both the general and the specific in his portrayal of the period. Al-‘Ālim 1994, p. 207.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Al-‘Ālim 1985, which posits that Ibrāhīm’s five-year period of imprisonment for Communist activity from 1959 to 1964 produced in the writer what can be called a ‘Rip Van Winkle’ effect, in which the progress of the Nāsir revolution reported on the radio while he was in jail did not correspond with the reality of life in the streets of Cairo. Observing this discrepancy between statement and actuality had a crucial impact on Ibrāhīm’s writing process, and as these disparities seemed to widen throughout the period of the 1970s, so they became a lasting theme of Ibrāhīm’s work.

is a relatively ordinary person, educated through the secondary school level, whose marital and familial life denies her the opportunity to pursue a university career. The very choice of the name 'Dhāt' for the protagonist, meaning at varying times, *being, essence, self, person, personality* and *the selfsame* is indicative of the author's intention to utilise the character to represent the heart of Egyptian society. The novel begins with Dhāt marrying into a good family, slightly above her own station. Her husband, 'Abd al-Majīd, is described as cultured, a man whose ownership of an apartment block in Heliopolis entitles him to some of the finer things available in Egypt, and can more appropriately be categorised as part of the nascent bourgeoisie rather than a member of the cultural elite. His is a stereotypical portrayal of the bourgeoisie, often seen in Ibrāhīm's works. As a businessman, he views the Camp David peace accords as a positive step towards opening Egyptian manufacturing to international investment. Correspondingly, he and his similarly minded neighbour decry the intrusions of the public sector and the loss of life that allegiance to Nāṣir and the philosophy of pan-Arabism have caused. The narrative chronicles the development of Dhāt and 'Abd al-Majīd's relationship, the determining role that the marriage plays in affecting Dhāt's worldview, the growth of their nuclear family and the influence the outside world has on the two main characters.

However, it is the *method* in which the story is related which remains the distinctive element rather than the narrative itself. The narrator approaches his task with a playful self-awareness, which assists in achieving varying levels of narrative distance and heightens the sense of sarcasm throughout. In describing Dhāt's honeymoon, for instance, the narrator steps aside and offers this passing comment: "The current situation in publishing prevents us from presenting in detail one of the most amazing moments in the entire life of Dhāt and 'Abd al-Majīd, so we will leave them for a while..." (Ibrāhīm 1992, p. 16). Euphemism and deliberate wordplay are tactics the narrator must resort to in order to evade the scrutinising eye of the censor. This technique is all the more poignant when we recognise that the narrator is in fact speaking from the direct experience of the author. Instead of dealing with masturbation in a blunt, physiological manner, as he did in his first novella, *Tilka al-Rā'ihā*,¹⁹ notice how he depicts Dhāt's husband and his neighbour masturbating while watching an American television series late at night, consciously turning the *laissez-faire* capitalist terms of the era on their head: masturbation is "relying on oneself" (Ibrāhīm 1992, p. 93). Later, as the narrator relates the reunion of Dhāt and an old

¹⁹ Ibrāhīm's first novella incurred the censure of the official censors and the older literary establishment for its frank treatment of masturbation, among other subjects.

university friend, we are offered this comment: "...She had to listen to a long story, told in the manner of conventional novels, i.e., with soporific details which side-track from everything that is essential" (Ibrāhīm 1992, p. 118). The novel is characterised by obviously self-conscious and hyperbolic humour such as this, often reaching the level of satire. This wry sense of humour has the effect of humanising the corresponding text-based/cut-up world in which corruption, poverty, censorship and disparities of wealth might otherwise produce only pessimistic despair.

An examination of excerpts from the documentary chapters further illustrates Ibrāhīm's self-conscious, satirical method. As with the Burroughs/Gysin experiments, these chapters consist of nothing more than incomplete sentences, newspaper headlines and paragraphs extracted from magazines. Themes and issues are often repeated, but only rarely are they presented in sequential or logical manner. Within these chapters, the narrator falls completely silent. Additional commentary is deemed superfluous. It is therefore the reader's responsibility to "read between the lines," piece together the parts of what initially seems an abstruse puzzle and elicit meaning from the collage.

Occasionally, the intention behind the extracts is self-evident, as is the case with the very first example chapter two provides:

The addition of the name **Anwar Sādāt** to the memorial monument Israel has erected entitled, "Martyrs of the War of Oppression and Silence" (Ibrāhīm 1992, p. 29).²⁰

The implication here being that the former president betrayed his own country's cause and has now become a hero in the eyes of the enemy. But this last sentence of explanation is undesirable in the novel. The extracts move on immediately to issues of local economic corruption.

The method behind the randomness is sometimes immediately discernible. In chapter four, one headline has president Mubarak praising Ronald Reagan for his potential to bring peace to the Middle East region, while the following caption documents the simultaneous (US-funded) Israeli destruction of a village in southern Lebanon (Ibrāhīm 1992, p. 74). Re-configuring the news in this manner reminds the reader that these stories do not necessarily represent distinct, isolated incidents, but are in fact part of a contiguous, interrelated whole. Also implicit in this reconstruction of the need for a mediator, a member of the cultural elite to bring this interconnectedness of these events to the attention of the masses.

In other instances, captions seem to bear no relation to those surrounding it, as is

²⁰ Boldface appears in the original text.

the case in the documentary chapter six, which has as its prevailing theme blatant corruption in a new hospital scheme, when suddenly, this brief caption appears:

Shaykh Sha'rāwi: "Those who go to sleep with the sound of Beethoven don't know God" (Ibrāhīm 1992, p. 106).

This type of anomalous excerpt repeats itself in other chapters, as we see in chapter four, which is in the main to do with an initiative to design an indigenously produced car in Egypt, and then, the following passage is quoted:

The Herald Tribune newspaper: "USAID issued Egypt the pesticide, Phosphel, whose use is illegal in America and which caused the deaths of a group of *fallahīn* and their crops" (Ibrāhīm 1992, pp. 72-73).

Both passages quoted here appear to be well outside of the scope of the thematic interest of each corresponding chapter. Yet both of these seemingly 'exceptional' excerpts illustrate the extent to which the influence of the West has pervaded, and in some respects, threatens to destroy, elements of Egyptian society. In this regard, they are still very much in keeping with the overall theme of each section. Just as a jazz musician alternates scales to appear 'outside' of the tonal element of the chords over which he is improvising, so too does the author vary the presentation of subjects in order to keep both himself and the reader engaged.

In another act of seeming incoherence, we have the periodic presentation of empty boxes in the middle of a page, with a caption underneath describing the missing picture. It is unclear whether the pictures have been excluded for legal/libel reasons or whether the costs of publishing prevented their inclusion. The immediate impression these spaces in the text creates is that of information expurgated for political purposes.

A criticism that could be levelled against the documentary sections is that the sustained themes of neglect, corruption, pollution, the privileged position of American industry and its representative in the Middle East, Israel, are iterated with such regularity and frequency, however, as to render the reader inured to the innovation of the whole documentary technique after the third or fourth of these 'cut-up' interludes. The specific cases and instances vary from chapter to chapter, but the general subject alters very little. In the end, the result is the kind of information overload described earlier. The interaction between *al-kitāba al-tawthīqiyya* and *al-kitāba al-sardiyya* from chapter to chapter, however, is a much more subtle process and deserving of some attention.

Having access to both elements of the text, the reader occupies a privileged

position and can witness the manner in which the general trends cited in the newspaper sections directly affect the microcosm of the specific characters of the novel, and vice-versa. Thus, chapter two (a docu-chapter) presents images of the shift of the nation towards a more consumerist-oriented society: announcements of the opening of large shopping centres, citations of investment by multi-national companies, etc., while in the following chapter, we observe the way in which these processes play themselves out on the ground. Chapter three deals primarily with the domestic concerns of Dhāt and her neighbours: the manner in which household items, originally made locally, are replaced by dearer, imported ones. A great deal of attention is given to the introduction of foreign ceramic tiles and how every occupant in Dhāt's building clamours to install them in their respective flats. One neighbour, Samiḥa, comes by to discuss a pyramid investment scheme with Dhāt and 'Abd al-Majīd. As this scheme is talked about and Dhāt's husband contemplates the various ways of spending the returns, Dhāt stares at the wall of the kitchen and visualises the ghost of 'Abd al-Nāṣir, busily involved in the shattering of these tiles. Behind him, she also detects an apparition-like form of Sādāt, engrossed in carefully positioning a piece of expensive coloured ceramic tile on the floor (Ibrāhīm 1992, p. 63). This process of fact reinforcing fiction or of fiction informing and contextualising the fact is a recurring aspect of the novel. In chapter five, for instance, Dhāt's daughter misses a day of school due to a fever on the same day that a busload of her schoolmates collides with a train while on an outing. Later in chapter eight, there are a series of captions describing a spate of malfunctioning trains. The critical assessment of the state of Egyptian industry, public works and transportation constructed by the narrator is personalised through the events of the narrative sections.

At other times, events occurring even within Cairo seem to have little immediate impact on Dhāt and her family. Chapter eight chronicles riots and tear gassings which occur in Kafr al-Dawwār over an increase in prices and the elimination of subsidies, while the reader imagines Dhāt obliviously sitting at home watching television, envying her other middle-class neighbours who have relatives in the Gulf and have supplied themselves with full-sized refrigerators, hot-water heaters and the like.

The characters of chapter five of this thesis occupy a radically different Egypt than was seen before in chapters three and four, where resistance, disenchantment and disillusionment was at least an indication of vitality. If the narrator Ḥadīdī responds to the screams of Fahmī and questions the pursuit of success which defines itself solely in materialist terms in Yūsuf Idrīs' earlier short story *Lughat al-Āy Āy*, it is because he can still react. Here, that vitality has been forced further underground, as a wider body of the public, Dhāt included, accepts the new mode of life and takes it for granted. As

in Ibrāhīm's earlier *Al-Lajna*, the prevailing sensation in *Dhāt* is one of paralysis. Less lugubrious and sinister, its characters exhibit a similar numbness of spirit, nonetheless.

Dhāt often subsumes development of plot in favour of experimentation with technique. It is in this technique that the novel's strength lies. The various modes of narration illustrate the continual marginalisation of the cultural elite. In *Al-Lajna*, the narrator was at the centre of the story. In the space of the eleven years since that narrative, the character has continued this process of 'eating himself,' further distancing himself, and can now only be heard insofar as he structures the experience for us and provides occasional comment. Our narrator now speaks in code, ciphers, in between the lines. He can do little more than to hold up the headlines, organise them in such a way as to get his point across. Within the structure of the work, however, the reader discerns the call for greater participation of the cultural elite in political and social affairs, an emergence from underground.

Conclusion

“For me, there is one certain truth: the only thing in the world that cannot be vanquished, resisted or challenged is time. Despite our conscious understanding of this truth, since we all know that life has a determined end through death, the glory of humanity is that it refuses to surrender. It resists to the end. True, death is forthcoming and fate is inevitable, but the human glory lies in this challenge which is at times visible but more often invisible.”

- Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī (Ghazoul & Harlow, eds. 1994, p. 25)

The fundamental aim of this research has been to examine the nature of the interaction of the social and the aesthetic as it applies to the cultural elite in Egypt. If a writer considers himself free to explore ideas artistically, it is in large part because his society furnishes him the opportunities to do so. Failure to acknowledge the link between the social and the aesthetic implies a failure to understand the very essence of human existence. In this examination, we have attempted to determine the extent to which contemporary Egyptian literature offers a representative reflection of the situation of the cultural elite and the manner in which these portrayals have evolved over a roughly thirty-year period. These developments have, by and large, coincided with the transformations in literary sensibility which influenced the portrayal of all segments of society and indeed, the portrayal of ‘reality’ itself.

Yet, within these ‘narratives of the cultural elite’¹ we find a heightened sense of awareness of these transformations, emphasised perhaps by the particular function of the cultural elite in the wider community. What emerges most clearly from the themes explored within this study is a widely shared belief among Egyptian writers that their cultural elite have a unique role to play in society, that of mediation between various classes, generations and strata of society. This role is perhaps most clearly articulated and given form in the example of the Yūsuf al-Qa‘īd character Rabāb which opened the story, but is equally manifest in characters from each of the thematic chapters herein assessed². And just as Rabāb loses her psychic and physical essence when she opts to refrain from interpreting her world, so too do most of the protagonists examined in this study testify to similar consequences as a result of their role being

¹ These novels and short stories do not necessarily constitute a genre, but represent instead a body of narrative output using the cultural elite as its focus and subject matter.

² We see this role of mediation explicitly embodied in the characters of Fathi Ghānim in F. Ghānim’s *Al-Jabal*, the unnamed narrator in Ṣ. Ibrāhīm’s *Al-Lajna*, Dr. ‘Uways in Yūsuf Idrīs’ *Snūbizm* and Isma‘il in I. ‘Abd al-Majīd’s *Al-Balda al-Ukhra*, among many others.

circumscribed by tradition, antagonistic authority, war and upheaval, unrelenting economic constraints and self-censorship.

It is hoped that the reader has discerned within this study a marked difference between what writers *purport* to be the ideals of the cultural elite and the *reality* of attaining (or, as is more often the case, *not* attaining) those ideals. This was one of the intentions behind providing a theoretical component in the introductory chapter. Chapter One laid a foundation for a working definition of the cultural elite, then examined the portrayal of the cultural elite in a historical antecedent to the works analysed in this study in an effort to further clarify the present writer's conception of the role of the cultural elite. Consideration then turned to issues of critical methodology, providing a brief survey of the nascent field of contemporary Arabic criticism and justifying the present research's usage of a fusion of sociological and formalist approaches.

The remaining chapters squared theory with praxis and told a slightly different story. The history of the portrayal of the cultural elite in this period (1952-1985) speaks in very broad terms of an inability of the cultural elite to fully live out their theoretical role and of a consequent *decline* of the notion of representation. As the nation-state gained new definition in the early 1950s, so too were the literary art forms redefining themselves, exploring and, mostly, validating notions of "Egyptianness." Chapter Two of this study is in this sense as much about the cultural elite chronicling tradition for future generations as it is to do with interpreting and reconciling themselves with tradition. With the passing of time, however, a curtailing of the ideas of participatory government and freedom of expression demonstrated a political and religious superstructure increasingly uncondusive to the aims of the cultural elite. Chapter Three of this study offered examples of the cultural elite's critical response to such a situation of leadership, Chapter Four explored specific portrayals of disillusionment and the rise of individualism, while Chapter Five illustrated a new mode of acquiescence or neutrality following years of exclusion or compromised co-optation. The very recent resignations of prominent 1960s generation writers Jamāl al-Ghiṭānī and Bahā' Ṭāhir from the Egyptian Writers' Union (in July 1999 and April 2000, respectively) seem to confirm the sentiments of indifference and ineffectuality voiced throughout the final chapter of this work³. This

³ In a recent article in *Al-Ahrām Weekly*, Maḥmūd al-Wardānī explains that Gamāl al-Ghiṭānī posted his letter of resignation in specific response to attempts by the Minister of Culture, Fārūq Ḥusnī, to further align the Writers' Union with government institutions and thereby decrease its independence, while Bahā' Ṭāhir told Wardānī quite bluntly, "It was my duty after three years in the council to announce my inability to effect change which results not only from my own limitations, but also from the general conditions." from "Frenzied Resignation," *Al-Ahrām Weekly*, Yūsuf Rakha and Maḥmūd al-Wardānī, March 30-April 5, 2000.

is not to say, however, that writers have lost faith in the transformative power of literature, but that as political and cultural circumstances continue to impede their ability to function effectively, many writers have come to question the notion of representation of anyone other than themselves. It is noteworthy that the newest generation of authors - the so-called 1990s generation - remains essentially absent from the fray in this recent Union debate. Reared in a different era, devoid of any sense of obligation to defend a particular ideology or represent any specific group, these writers pursue their craft, in spite of a host of impediments, in the harsh light of "individual realism."⁴ What we are witnessing is the return of a cycle: the new generation's sentiments in many ways mirror those of the 1960s generation immediately following the 1967 defeat, and thus warrant an in-depth comparative/contrastive examination separate from this present research.

Another issue which could only be alluded to within this study, but certainly warrants further exploration, is the extent to which contemporary Arabic literature (and many of these 'narratives of the cultural elite,' in particular) seems to privilege the documentary over the creative. Embedded in this wider issue are the notions of usage of autobiography within fiction and the burdensome condition of the contemporary Egyptian writer as both purveyor of a literary craft and 'underground historian.' The former issue of autobiography has been the subject of much recent scholarship⁵, but the latter remains a fairly unexplored area. That the present situation of literacy and a relatively limited scale of readership imposes on the Egyptian writer a particular set of dictates and obligations is no novel concept, nor is it a condition necessarily particular to Egypt. Indeed, throughout the developing world there appears to exist a similar sense of urgency to record and represent, stemming from similar political, economic and educational circumstances. Yet rather than argue, as some have⁶, that a new genre be established to accommodate such 'docu-fiction,' it would behoove us as students of comparative literature to remember and acknowledge

⁴ Accordingly, emphasis is placed on the personal experiences, concerns and apprehensions of the writer. An individual's reality, these writers argue, must reflect all aspects of a life - the beautiful, the grotesque and the mundane. For a brief introduction to and survey of the aims and intentions of the 1990s generation of writers, see "The World Through Grey Eyes," Cairo Times 10-23 December 1998, Tony Calderbank and Madeleine Stein.

⁵ See Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor & Stefan Wild (eds.), *Writing the Self* (London, Saqi Books, 1998) and particularly Chapter 11 within this collection of essays, Stephen Guth, "Why Novels - Not Autobiographies?" pp. 139-147.

⁶ Here I am thinking primarily of Dr. Gaye Walton-Price, who makes the case for a new mode of describing such works of 'docu-fiction' within her thesis, "The New Generation of Egyptian Short Story Writers of the 1970s," Georgetown University 1990, pp. 128-133.

that Arabic literature, for one, has an established tradition of privileging the documentary, the didactic and even the programmatic over the creative. As the relatively new forms of the novel and the short story continue to evolve, it is to be expected that they bear at least vestigial marks of their literary heritage. It is the task and the challenge of the non-native student of Arabic literature to recognise these differences of approach and adapt his or her sensibilities accordingly, not vice-versa.

Again, this research has been a survey of representative portrayals of the cultural elite. Omissions are an inevitable part of the process of selection of a body of work. Within the canon of critically assessed works from the period of this present research, the writings of Sulaymān Fayyād, Ibrāhīm Aṣṣalān, and Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Majīd remain as yet underemphasised by foreign critics. Likewise, the surprising dearth of comparative analysis - between images of the cultural elite in the literatures of Latin America and Egypt, for instance - must now be redressed. Egyptian poetry, currently experiencing an underground renaissance⁷, also deserves further attention for its ability to distil images of the cultural elite.

Amid all this discussion of transformations, decline of former conceptions of the cultural elite and omission, it is important not to lose sight of the fundamental assertion which pervades each of the works analysed within this research which is that the mediatory role of the cultural elite continues to be both vital and essential. Though their voice has been threatened, and has experienced - and must continue to experience - modulations, as the quote by Al-Ghiṭānī attests, it will not be extinguished.

⁷ For an informative treatment of the contemporary poetry scene in Egypt, see Clarissa C. Birt, "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: The Canonical Sieve and Poems from an Egyptian Avant-Garde," *Journal of Arabic Literature* XVIII, 1997, pp. 141-178.

Appendix One Original Arabic for Select Quotations

١. فركبنا زوارق صغيرة و توجهنا إلى الإسكندرية، وأقمنا على ظهر النيل المبارك أربعة أيام... و مكثنا (في الإسكندرية) ثلاثة و عشرين يوما... و كان خروجنا إلى البلد في هذه المدينة قليلا... غير أنه ظهر لي أنها قريبة الميل في وضعها و حالها إلى بلاد الأفرنج أصلا و إنما فهمت ذلك مما رأيته فيها دون غيرها من بلاد مصر و لكثرة الأفرنج بها و يكون أغلب السوقة يتكلم ببعض شيء من اللغة الطليانية و نحو ذلك و تحقق ذلك عندي بعد وصولي إلى مرسيليا فإن الإسكندرية عينة مرسيليا...
(^cInāni 1975, pp. 13-14)

٢. أصبو إلى كل ذي جمال

و لست من صبوتي اخاف

و ليس بي في الهوى ارتياب

إنما شيمتي العفاف

(^cInāni 1975, p. 14)

٣. محمد كامل عميق الصوت عميق الملامح عميق العيون
إبتسامته حزينة، حزنها جزء من تكوينها تشرق و تغرب فيه...
و العراقي يتقافز كقرد في يده سلة...
(Qāsim 1969, p. 130)

٤. و عيونه ملئة بالجلال و الحنان و الشوق، لم ير عبد
العزیز ذلك التعبير في عيون انسانية أبدا. ظل محفورا في
خياله

(Qāsim 1969, p. 95)

٥. اما عبد العزيز فهو وحيد بينهم ذرات الحديد جميعا
فجذبت في نظام نحو قطب المغناطيس اما هو فمن معدن غريب
غير متجانس
(Qāsim 1969, p. 130)

٦. امم من غير عقل... من غير تفكير... امم بتدوس زي
بهايم... مش عارفين رايعين فين... مش عارفين جاينين
منين... بتعلموا ايه... رايعين فين... جاينين منين يا عباد
الاصنام
(Qāsim 1969, p. 171-2)

٧. فرتك مرتك شرتك دي دي دي دان
(Idrīs 1965, p. 251)

٨. آى آى آى طويلة و قصيرة، ممدودة و مبتورة، عالية
بكل قواه يرفعها، منخفضة بجميع ارادته يخسفها، مجروحة
دامية، لاسعة كالنار في العين
(Idrīs 1965, p. 240)

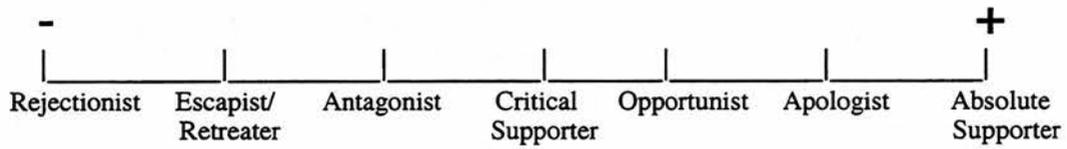
٩. اسمحو لي بكلمة . أقدم لكم نفسي أولا.. أنا الدكتور
فلان الفلاني الأستاذ بكلية كذا بجامعة كذا، و أرجوكم لا
تعتقدوا أنني أقصد التدخل في شئونكم الخاصة... و إنما أنا
أستاذ مادة الانثروبولوجيا و لا يهمني ما حدث أبدا من
الناحية الأخلاقية او القانونية. أنا يهمني الناحية
العلمية
(Idrīs 1970, p. 122-123)

١٠. انت عايز ايه يا أستاذ نالضبط؟ احنا مش فاضيين؟!
(Idrīs 1970, p. 123)

Appendix Two:

Spectrum of the Cultural Elite

(The Essential Literary Manifestations
of Intellectual Responses to Nāṣirism)



(According to Samah Idris in *Al-Muthaqqaf al-'arabi wa 'l-sulṭa*, Beirut, Dār Al-Adāb, 1992)

Appendix Three

Sample of the 'Cut-Up' Technique

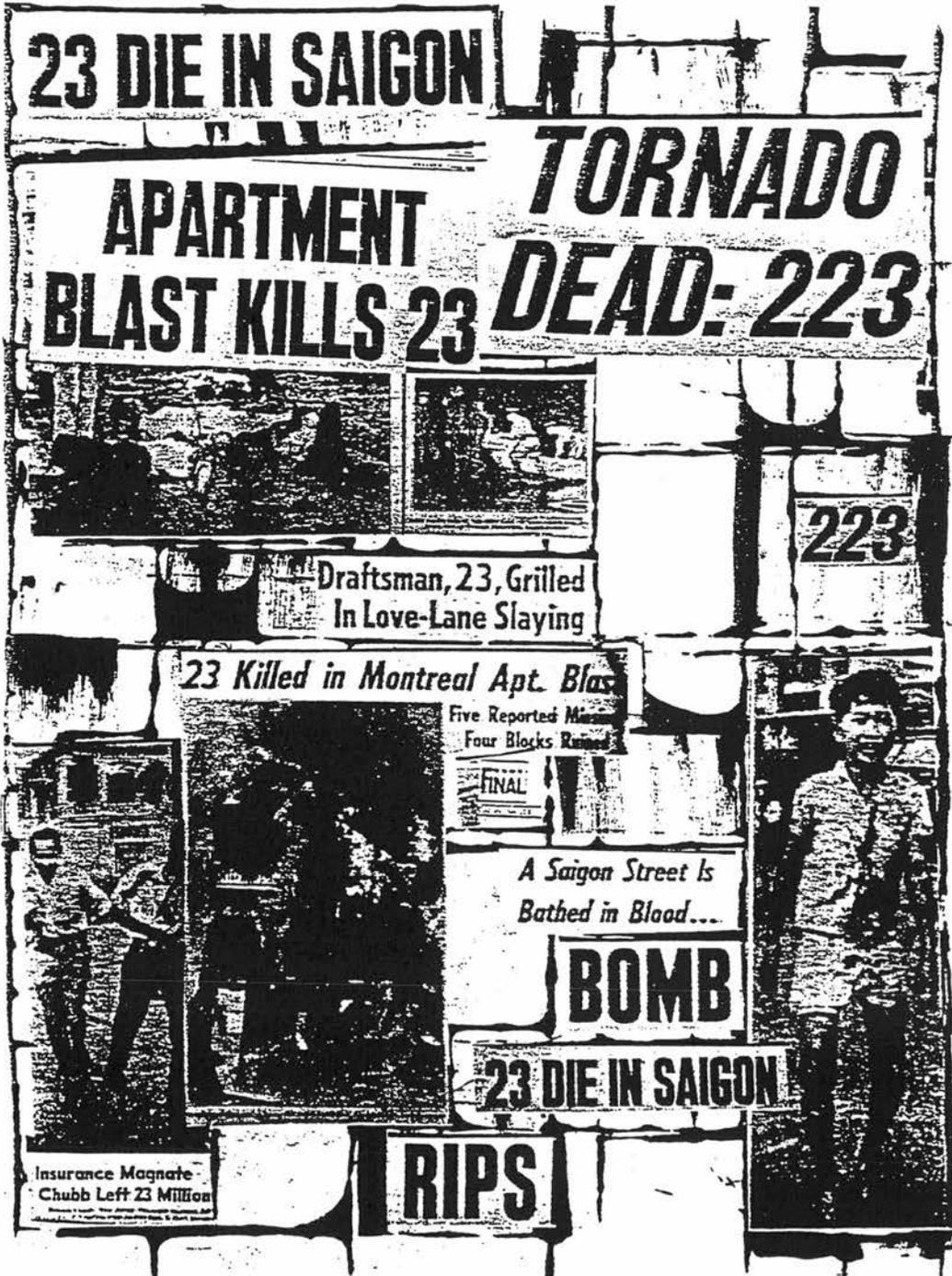
William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin

Untitled (Tornado Dead: 223), from *The Third Mind*, c. 1965-70

Offset lithography, newsprint, ink, letterpress, and graphite on paper.

8 3/4 x 6 3/4 (22.2 x 17.1)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Purchased with funds provided by The Hiro Yamagata Foundation



Taken from Lisa Phillips (ed.), *Beat Culture & the New America 1950-1965*. Paris: Flammarion Press, 1995.

Bibliography

1. Primary Sources¹

- ‘Abd al-Majīd, Ibrāhīm. *Al-Baldā al-ukhrā*. Cairo: Maktabat Madbūli, 1997; English translation: *The Other Place*. Translated by Fārūq Muṣṭafā. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998.
- ‘Ashūr, Radwa. “*Safsāfa wa ‘l-Jinerāl*.” Cairo: Unpublished; English translation: “Safsāfa & the General.” Translated by Marilyn Booth. London: Quartet Press, 1991.
- Bakr, Salwa. *Al-‘Araba al-dhahabīya la tas‘ud ilā al-samā’*. Cairo: Sina Press, 1991; English translation: *The Golden Chariot*. Translated by Dinah Manisty. Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1995.
- Ghānim, Fathī. *Al-Jabal*. Cairo: Maktabat Ruz al-Yūsuf, 1989.
- Ḥaqqī, Yahyā. *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*. Cairo: Publisher unknown, 1944.
- Ibrāhīm, Sun‘allāh. *Al-Lajna*. Cairo: Dār al-Mustaqbal al-‘arabī, 1997.
_____, *Dhat*. Cairo: Dār al-Mustaqbal al-‘arabī, 1998.
- Idrīs, Yūsuf. *Sirruhu al-batī’*
_____, “*Lughat al-Āy Āy*.”
_____, “*Al-‘Amaliyya al-kubrā*.”
_____, “*Al-Rihla*.”
_____, “*Mu‘jizat al-‘aṣr*.”
_____, “*Akāna la budda yā Līlī an tudī’ al-nūr?*”
_____, “*Snūbizm*.”²
- Khurshīd, Fārūq. “*Kulluhu Bātil*.” Cairo; English translation: “The Futility of It All.” Translated by Mahmoud Manzalaoui. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1985.
- Lāshīn, Maḥmūd Ṭāhir. “*Ḥadīth al-Qarya*.” Cairo: Publisher unknown, 1929.
- Maḥfūz, Najīb. *Mīrāmār*. Cairo: Dār Miṣr li’l-Ṭībā‘a, 1979.
_____, *Tharthara fawq al-Nil*. Dār Miṣr li’l-Ṭībā‘a, 1966.
_____, “*Taḥt al-mazalla*.” Cairo: Dār Miṣr li’l-Ṭībā‘a, 1967.
- Al-Qa‘īd, Yūsuf. “*Rabāb ta‘tazil al-rasm*.” Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda, 1982.
- Qāsim, ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm. *Ayyām al-insān al-sab‘a*. Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-‘arabī li’l-Ṭībā‘a wa ‘l-nashr, 1969.
- Rajab, Mūnā. “*Al-Madina al-nā’ima*.” Cairo: Dār Qibā’, 1998.

¹ i.e. The body of texts chosen for analysis

² All citations of Idris short stories used within this research refer to the compilation *Al-Qiṣṣaṣ al-qaṣīra*, vols. 1 & 2. Cairo: Dār al-Sharūq, 1990.

Şālih, Al-Ṭayyib. "Dawmat Wad Ḥāmid." Beirut: 1966; English translation: "The Dour Tree of Wad Hamid." Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies. London: Heinemann Press, 1976.

Salmāwī, Muḥammad. "Kunshirtu al-nāy." Cairo: Publisher unknown, 1984; English translation: "A Concerto for the Nay." Translated by Amīra el-Maghrabī. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1988.

Ṭāhir, Bahā'. *Al-Muḏāhara*. Cairo: Dār Shuhdī, 1984.
_____, *Sharq al-nakhil*. Cairo: Dār al-Mustaḡbal al-'arabī, 1985.

2. Secondary Sources

'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Shākīr, "Ṣurat al-dhāt wa ṣurat al-ākhar 'inda Yūsuf Idrīs," *Al-Ādāb*, August 1988.
_____, "Al-Mawt wa 'l-ḥilm fi 'ālam Bahā' Ṭāhir," *Fuṣūl*, Vol. 12, No. 2 Summer 1993.

'Abd al-Malik, Anwar. *Egypt: Military Society*. New York: Vintage Press, 1968.
_____, ed. *Contemporary Arab Political Thought*. London: Zed Books, 1983.

Abū-'Awf, 'Abd Al-Rahmān. *Yūsuf Idrīs wa 'ālamuhu fi 'l-qīṣṣa al-qaṣīra wa 'l-riwāya*. Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organisation, 1994.
_____, "Dalālat al-rū'ya fi 'l-'ālam al-qīṣṣī li Yūsuf Idrīs," *Al-Majalla*, No. 165, 1970.
_____, "Tragidiyya al-thawra wa 'l-qahr fi riwāyāt jil al-sittīnat," *Fuṣūl*, Spring 1993.

'Ajami, Fouad. *The Arab Predicament*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

'Alī, Muḥsin Jāssīm, "The Socio-Aesthetics of Contemporary Arabic Fiction: An Introduction," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XIV, 1983, pps. 67-84.

Al-'Ālim, Maḥmūd Amīn. *Thulāthiyat al-rafd wa 'l-hazīma*. Cairo: Dār al-Mustaḡbal, 1985.
_____, *Arba 'ūn 'āman min al-naqd al-taḡbiqī*. Cairo: Dār al-Mustaḡbal, 1994.
_____, *Al-Ibdā' wa 'l-dalāla*. Cairo: Dār al-Mustaḡbal, 1997.

'Amara, Muḥammad, "Nazra 'amiqa fi 'l-ḥadāra al-ḥadītha," *Al-Kātib*, May 1973.

Ashūr, N'mat, "Ilā ayna yatajaha adabuna al-yawm?" *Al-Kātib*, No. 140, November 1972.

'Aṭīyya, Aḥmad Muḥammad, "Al-Riwāya al-Miṣriyya wa 'l-muqāwama al-waṭaniyya," *Al-Ṭalī'a*, vol. 7, no. 8, August 1971.

- ‘Auda, Ibrāhīm G., "From National Bourgeois Development to Infitah: Egypt 1952-1992," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 16, no.1, Winter 1994, pps. 1-23.
- ‘Awaḍ, Louis, ed. *The Literature of Ideas in Egypt, Part I*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986.
- ‘Aziz, Daud, " *Yowmiyyat Thowra 1919* ," Unknown source
- Al-‘Azm, Sādik Jalal, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," *Khamsīn*, No. 8, 1981.
- Adonis, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*. London: Saqi Books, 1990.
- Aḥmad, Aijaz. *In Theory*. London: Verso Press, 1994.
- Alatas, S.H. *Intellectuals in Developing Societies*. London: Frank Cass, 1977.
- Alcott, Miriam. *Novelists on the Novel*. London: Routledge, 1973.
- Allen, Roger. *The Arabic Novel, An Historical and Critical Introduction*. New York: Syracuse UP, 1982.
- _____, *A Library of Literary Criticism*. New York: Ungar Publishing, 1987.
- _____, (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Yūsuf Idrīs*. Colorado: Three Continents Press, 1994.
- _____, "Egyptian Drama and Fiction in the 1970's - An Introduction," *Edebiyat*, vol. 1, 1976.
- _____, "Snobbism," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XVIII, 1987.
- _____, "Arabic Fiction and the Quest for Freedom," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXVI, 1995.
- Ayyād, Shukrī, "Al-Adab wa 'l-ḥurriyya," *Fuṣūl*, Spring 1992.
- Badawi, M. M., ed. *Modern Arabic Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- _____, *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1993.
- Barrāda, Muḥammad. *Al-riwāya al-‘arabiyya: wāqi‘ wa ufuq*. Beirut: Dār Ibn Rushd, 1981.
- Berger, Morroe, "Cairo Notebook," *Encounter*, June 1960.
- Berque, Jacques. *Egypt, Imperialism & Revolution*. (trans. Jean Stewart) London: Faber & Faber, 1972.
- Birbalsingh, Frank, ed. *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*. London: Macmillan, 1996.
- Booth, Marilyn, ed. *My Grandmother's Cactus: Stories by Egyptian Women*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

- Bottman, Selma, "Egyptian Communists and the Free Officers: 1950-1954," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol.22, no. 3, July 1986, pps. 350-366.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.
- Brennan, Timothy. *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*. London: Macmillan Press, 1989.
- Brugman, J. *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*. Leiden: Brill, 1984
- Cachia, Pierre. *An Overview of Modern Arabic Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990.
- _____, "Freedom From Clerical Control: The Portrayal of Men of Religion in Modern Arabic Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXVI, 1995.
- _____, "The Prose Stylists." *from The Cambridge History of Modern Arabic Literature*. Ed. M.M. Badawi. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
- Calderbank, Tony and Stein, Madeleine, "The World Through Grey Eyes," *Cairo Times*, 10-23 December 1998.
- Cobham, Catherine, "Sufism and Irony: al-Taslim by 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥamdūshī" *Oriente Moderno*, XVI, 1997.
- Cole, Juan Ricardo, "Rifā'ī al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and the Revival of Practical Philosophy," *The Muslim World* 70, 1980.
- Cook, David. *African Literature - a Critical View*. London: Longman, 1977.
- Danziger, Marlies K. and Johnson, W.S. *The Critical Reader*. New York: Frederick Unger Publishing, 1978.
- Darrāj, Fayṣal, "The Arabic Novel: Flow in Writing and Decline in Reading," *Banipal*, Spring 1999.
- Draz, Céza Kassem, "In Quest of New Narrative Forms: Irony in the Works of Four Egyptian Writers," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XII, 1981.
- Echevarria, Roberto Gonzalez. *The Voice of the Masters*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.
- Elad, Ami, ed. *Writer, Culture, Text: Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*. Fredericton: York Press, 1993.
- _____, *The Village Novel In Modern Egyptian Literature*. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag Press, 1994.
- _____, "Ideology and Structure in Fathī Ghānim's *Al-Jabal*," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XX, 1989.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1967.
- Faqir, Fadia. *In the House of Silence*. Reading: Garnet Press, 1998.
- Fathī, Hasan. *Architecture for the Poor*. Chicago: Univ, of Chicago Press, 1973.

- Featherstone, Mike, ed. *Undoing Culture*. London: Sage Press, 1995.
- Gershoni, Israel and Jankowski, J. *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- _____, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation 1930-1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Ghazoul, Ferial and Harlow, Barbara, ed. *The View from Within: Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arabic Literature*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1994.
- Goldschmidt, Arthur. *A Concise History of the Middle East*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1988.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.
- Ḥāfiẓ, Sabrī. *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*. London: Saqi Books, 1993.
- _____, "Azmat al-ḥurriyya fi 'l-riwāya al-'arabiyya al-mu'āšira," *Ḥiwār*, May-June, 1964.
- _____, "Mahmūd Tāhir Lāshīn wa milād al-aqṣuṣa al-Miṣriyya," *Al-Majalla*, No. 134, February 1968.
- _____, "Al-Mawja al-jadīda fi 'l-riwāya al-Miṣriyya," *Al-Ṭalī'a*, vol. 7, no. 8, August 1971.
- _____, "'Ālam al-bara'a wa 'l-daynuna wa 'l-taḥqīqāt al-mustamira," *Al-Ṭalī'a*, September 1972.
- _____, "The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties," *Journal of Arabic Literature* VII, 1976.
- _____, "A Conversation with Yūsuf Idrīs," *Azure*, Vol. 1, October/November 1977.
- _____, "A Complete Bibliography of Collections of Egyptian Short Stories," *Journal of Arabic Literature* XI, 1980.
- _____, "The State of the Contemporary Arabic Novel: Some Reflections," *The Arab Cultural Scene Literary Review Supplement*, 1982, pps. 17-23.
- _____, "The Maturation of a New Literary Genre," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 16, 1984.
- _____, "The Modern Arabic Short Story: Problematics of Scholarship," *Journal of Arabic Literature* XXIII, 1992.
- _____, "The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response," *SOAS Bulletin*, Vol. LVII, pt. I, 1994.
- Ḥakīm, Tawfiq al- *Arinī Allāh*. Cairo: Dār Miṣr li 'l-Ṭibā'a, 19??
- _____, *'Awdat al-wā'ī*. Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1974.
- Ḥamūda, 'Ādil. *Azmat al-Muthaqqafīn wa thawrat Yūliyo*. Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1985.
- Ḥanafī, Ḥassan, "'An al-lā mubālā: baḥth falsafī," *Al-Kātib*, July 1970.
- Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *The Sphinx and the Commisar*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.
- Heywood, Christopher, ed. *Perspectives on African Literature*. London:

- Heinemann, 1977.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond A. "Children of the Elite: Political Attitudes of the Westernized Bourgeoisie in Contemporary Egypt," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Autumn 1982.
- Al-Ḥiwārī, Aḥmad Ibrāhīm, " Al-Rahil ila 'l-ā'maq: qira'a naqdīya fī qiṣas Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī ," *Fuṣūl*, July/August/September 1982.
- Hourani, Albert. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Hopwood, Derek. *Egypt: Politics and Society 1945-1984*. Boston: Unwin Hyman Press, 1990.
- Hutchins, William. *Egyptian Tales and Short Stories of the 1970s & 1980s*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1988.
- Ḥusayn, Ṭaha. *Al-Mu'dhabūn fī 'l-'ard*. Cairo: Dār al-M'ārif, 1992.
- Ibrāhīm, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, "Al-qiṣsa al-Miṣriyya wa ṣurat al-mujtama' al-ḥadīth," *Al-Kātib*, June 1973.
- Ibrāhīm, Sa'd Eddin. *The New Arab Social Order: A Study of the Social Impact of Oil Wealth*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1982.
- Ibrāhīm, Ṣun'allāh, "Shahāda," *Fuṣūl*, Autumn, 1992.
- Idrīs, Samāḥ. *Al-Muthaqqaf al-'Arabī wa 'l-sulṭa*. Beirut: Dār al-Adab, 1992.
- Al-'Inānī, Muḥammad Zakariyya, "Qira'āt fī Adab Rifā'i al-Ṭaḥṭāwi ," *Al-Kātib*, No. 171, June 1975.
- _____, "Takhliṣ al-Ibriz...bayn Ṭab'atayn," *Al-Kātib*, No. 181, April 1976.
- Al-'Inānī, Rashīd. *Naguib Mahfouz, The Pursuit of Meaning*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Jad, Ali B. *Form and Technique in the Egyptian Novel 1912-1971*. London: Ithaca Press, 1983.
- Al-Kharrāt, Idwār. *Muḥtarat Al-Qiṣsa Al-Qaṣīra fī Al-Sab'ināt* . Cairo: Dār al-Majīd, 1982.
- Khūrī, Ilyās, "Al-Riwāya wa 'l-baḥṭ 'an lugha jadīda," *Aḵḥbār al-ādāb*, July 4, 1999.
- Kilpatrick, Hilary. *The Modern Egyptian Novel: a Study in Social Criticism*. London: Ithaca Press, 1974.
- _____, "Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim and the Search for Liberation," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 26, 1995.
- King, James Roy, "The Theme of Alienation in Contemporary Middle Eastern

- Literature," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 68, 1978.
- Kirpichenko, Valeria, "Al-Riwāya al-Miṣriyya ba'd al-sittinat," *Fuṣūl*, 12:1, 1993.
- Kudsi-Zadeh, A. Albert, "Political Journalism in Egypt," *Muslim World*, vol. 70, 1980.
- Kurpershoek, P.M. *The Short Stories of Yūsuf Idrīs*. Leiden: Brill, 1981.
- Lamming, George. *The Pleasures of Exile*. London: Allison and Busby, 1984.
- Lucie-Smith, Edward, "Recessional," *Sunday Times*, Oct. 3, 1965.
- Maḥmūd, Muṣṭafā Murtada 'Alī. *Al-Muthaqqaf wa 'l-sulṭa 1970-1995*. Cairo: Dār al-Qibā', 1998.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Myth in primitive psychology*. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1926.
- Malzahn, Manfred, "Aspects of Identity: The Contemporary Scottish Novel (1978-81) as National Self-Expression," *Scottish Studies*, 1984.
- Marcus, George E., ed. *Elites: Ethnographic Issues*. Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico, 1983.
- Matar, Nabīl, "Encounter with the Snake God," *The Middle East*, June 1979.
- McDermott, Anthony. *Egypt from Nasser to Mubarak: A Flawed Revolution*. Sydney: Croom Helm, 1988.
- Mehrez, Sāmiya. *Egyptian Writers Between History and Fiction*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1993.
- _____, "Kitābat al-qarya fī al-adab al-Miṣri al-mu'āṣir," *Mawāqif*, 1993.
- Milson, Menechem, "Najīb Maḥfūz and Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir: the Writer as Political Critic," *Asian and African Studies*, 23, 1989.
- Moussa-Maḥmūd, Fatma, "New Developments in the Arabic Short Story During the Seventies," *Journal of the British Society of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol 10, no.2, 1983,.
- Munif, 'Abd al-Raḥmān. *Al-Kātib wa al-manfā*. Beirut: Dār al-fikr al-jadīd, 1996.
- Naddaf, Sandra, "Mirrored images: Rifā'ī al-Ṭaḥṭawī and the West, Introduction and Translation," *Alif*, No. 6, Spring 1986.
- Al-Nassāj, Sayyid Ḥāmid, "Al-Ḥalqah al-maftūḥa fī 'l-qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra al-Miṣriyya," *Fuṣūl*, July/August/September 1982.
- Nāṣr, Aḥmad, "Popular Islam in Al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XI 1980.

- Nasser, Munir K., "Egyptian Mass Media Under Nasser and Sadat: Two Models of Press Management and Control," *Journalism Monographs*, no. 124, Dec. 1990.
- Ostle, Robin. *Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*. England: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1975.
- _____, (ed.) *Modern Literature in the Near and Middle East 1850-1970*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- _____, deMoor, Ed & Wild, Stefan (eds.) *Writing the Self*. London: Saqi Books, 1998.
- Phillips, Lisa (ed.) *Beat Culture & the New America (1950-1965)*. Paris: Flammarion Press, 1995.
- Pierce, Judith, "The Twin Threat to Arab Culture," *The Middle East*, August 1985.
- Qāsim, 'Abd al-Ḥakīm, "Al-Nashāt al-thaqāfi fi 'l-gharb," *Al-Ādāb*, June, 1980.
- Al-Qutt, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd 'Abd Al-'Azim. *Yūsuf Idrīs wa 'l-fann al-qīṣṣaṣī*. Cairo: Dār al-M'ārif, 1980.
- Al-Rabī', Maḥmūd, "Kayfa aqra' al-'amal al-adabī," *Al-Kātib*, No. 170, May 1975.
- _____, "An qaḍiyat al-adab wa 'l-mujtama'," *Al-Kātib*, No. 185, 1976.
- _____. *Qira'at al-riwāya: namūdhaj min Najīb Maḥfūz*.
- Rabī', Mubarak, "Al-Wāqī' wa 'l-wāqa'iyya al-riwā'iyya," *Al-Ādāb*, February-March, 1980.
- Richardson, Thomas C. "Reinventing Identity: Nationalism in Modern Scottish Literature," *Scottish Studies*, vol. 8, Verlag Peter Lang, 1989.
- Al-Sādāt, Anwar. *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography* London: Fontana, 1978.
- Said, Edward. *Reith Lectures*. BBC Radio 4, 1993.
- Al-Saides, "Al-Sulṭa: bayn al-ṣafwa wa 'l-jamāhīr," *Al-Kātib*, November, 1970.
- _____. Part 2, December 1970.
- Saiti, Ramzi, "Paradise, Heaven and Other Oppressive Spaces: A Critical Examination of the Life and Works of Nawal Al-Sa'adawi," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXV, 1994.
- Al-Sakkūt, Ḥamdī. *The Egyptian Novel and its Main Trends 1913-1952* Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1971.
- Scott, Wilbur S. (ed.) *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*. New York: Macmillan, 1962.
- Ṣāliḥ, Aḥmad 'Abbās, "Ḥayāt al-kātib fi ḥil irhāb al-sulṭa," *Fuṣūl*, Autumn, 1992.
- Samah, David. *Four Egyptian Literary Critics*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974.
- Shaheen, Muḥammad. *The Modern Arabic Short Story: Shahrazad Returns*.

- London: Macmillan Press, 1989.
- Sharabi, Hisham, "Cultural Critics of Contemporary Arab Society," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1987.
- Al-Sharqāwi, Gamāl, "Al-Naqd al-dhātī ba'd al-hazīma," *Al-Kātib*, No. 94, January 1969.
- Shārūni, Yūsuf. *Dirāsāt fī 'l-adab al-'arabī al-mu'āşir*. Cairo: Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, 1964.
- _____, "Āthār al-taṭāwwur al-ijtimā'i 'alā taṭāwwur al-ashkāl al-faniyya fī 'l-qişşa al-Mişriyya al-ḥadītha," *Al-Awrāq*, No. 2, 1979.
- Al-Shāzili, 'Abd al-Salām. *Shakhşiyat al-muthaqqaf fī 'l-riwāya al-'arabiyya al-ḥadītha*. Beirut: Dār al-Ḥadātha, 1985.
- Shils, Edward, "Intellectuals," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 7, 1968.
- Shuiskii, Sergei A. "Some Observations on Modern Arabic Autobiography," *Journal of Arabic Literature XIII*, 1982.
- Shukrī, Ghālī. *Egypt: Portrait of a President 1971-1981*. London: Zed Books, 1981.
- _____, "Al-Adab al-Mişrī ba'd al-khamis min Yuniyo," *Al-Talī'a*, vol. 5, no. 5, May 1969.
- _____, "Yūsuf Idrīs Yataḥadath 'an fannihī al-qişāşī wa 'l-masrahī," *Hiwār*, 19, November-December, 1985.
- Al-Sibā'i, Yūsuf, "Al-Kātib wa 'l-iltizām," *Al-Kātib*, No. 177, Dec. 1975.
- Spearman, Diana. *The Novel and Society*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966
- Stagh, Marina. *The Limits of Freedom of Speech*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1993.
- Ştaif, 'Abd al-Nabī, "The Question of Freedom in Modern Arabic Literary Criticism," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXVI, 1995.
- Starkey, Paul, "From the City of the Dead to Liberation Square: The Novels of Yūsuf Al-Qa'id," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXIV, 1993.
- Stewart, Desmond, "Egypt's Embattled Writers," *Encounter*, August 1973.
- _____, "The Rise and Fall of Muḥammad Heikal," *Encounter*, June 1974.
- Suwayf, Muşţafā, "Al-Shūrat al-ijtimā'iyya li 'l-ibdā'," *Fuşūl*, Spring 1992.
- Talha, Jibrīl, "Al-takwīn fī 'l-qarya al-sūdāniyya aba'd min khaṭūt 'alā al-raml," *Al-Ḥayāt*, September 10, 1996.
- _____, "Qalaq fī 'l-mawqif min al-jam'a wa itijāh ila kasb al-'aysh fī 'l-Sūdān," *Ibid.*, September 11, 1996.
- _____, "Al-takyif al-şa'b fī Lundun wa thalj mawsim al-hijra ilā 'l-shimāl," *Ibid.*, September 12, 1996.
- _____, "Manākhāt sharqiyya wa intilāqa adabiyya min Bayrūt Yūsuf al-Khāl," *Ibid.*, September 13, 1996.

- _____, "Mashhad al-tasāmuḥ al-Sūdāni: fi sayfisa' talawwun waṭan," *Ibid.*, September 14, 1996.
- _____, "An la'anat al-kitāba wa 'l-abṭāl al-ghāmiḍin wa tawbikh al-shuhra," *Ibid.*, September 15, 1996.
- Toole, John Kennedy. *A Confederacy of Dunces*. London: Penguin, 1981.
- Toorawa, Shawkat Mahmūd, "Now You See Me, Now You Don't: Point of View and the Embedded Narrator in Al-Tayyib Ṣāliḥ's *Dūmat Wad Ḥāmid*," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 28, 1991.
- Tripp, Charles & Owen, Roger (eds.) *Egypt Under Mubarak*. London: Routledge Press, 1990.
- Uthman, I'tidal, "Bayn al-ightirāb wa 'l-intimā'," *Fuṣūl*,
- Vatikiotis, P.J. *The Egyptian Army in Politics*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1961.
- _____, "Al-Muthaqqaf wa 'l-mujtama' al-jadid," *Hiwār*, no. 4, May-June 1963.
- Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel*. London: Hogarth Press, 1987.
- Wauthier, Claude. *The Literature of Thought of Modern Africa*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1966
- Wendell, Charles. *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*. Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1972.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Long Revolution*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1961.
- _____, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1967.
- Wilson, Menahem, "Naguib Maḥfouz and Jamal 'Abd al-Nasser: The Writer as Political Critic," *Asian and African Studies*, 23, 1989.
- Wolff, Janet. *The Social Production of Art*. London: Macmillan Press, 1962.
- Yadlin, Rivka, "The Egyptian Personality: Trends in Egyptian Character Literature," *Asian and African Studies*, no. 14, 1980, pps. 1-19.
- _____, "Society in the Mirror: Representations of Social Cohesion in Egyptian Fiction," *Asian and African Studies*, no. 17, 1983.
- Al-Zayyāt, Latīfa. *Ḥamlat al-taftīsh: awrāq shakhṣiyya*. Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1992.
- Uncredited, "The Dilemma of the Short Story: A Symposium," *Al-Hilāl*, no. 77, August 1969.

Unpublished Theses

- Cobham, Catherine. *The Importance of Yūsuf Idrīs' Short Stories in the Development of an Indigenous Egyptian Literary Tradition*. Manchester: University of Manchester, 1974.
- Cohen, Dalya. *Symbolic and Surrealistic Features in the Short Stories of Yūsuf*

Idrīs. Washington: Georgetown University, 1988.

Goaifli, Muḥammad Sula. *Realism: Contemporary Arabic Literary Criticism of Fiction: A Study of the Realist Trend*. Michigan: University of Michigan, 1987.

Park, Heong-Dug. *Nawāl al-Sa'adāwi and Modern Egyptian Feminist Writings*. Michigan: University of Michigan, 1988.

Walton-Price, Gaye. *The New Generation of Egyptian Short Story Writers of the 1970s*. Washington: Georgetown University, 1990.

Recorded Lectures from The Center for Arabic Studies Abroad (CASA), Cairo, Egypt:

Abū Zeid, Nasr Ḥāmid, "The Dimensions of Freedom of Thought in Egypt," 12/4/93.

Bakr, Salwa, "The Portrayal of Women in Arabic Novels," 29/3/94.

Faḍl, Ṣalaḥ, "The Works of Ṣun'allāh Ibrāhīm," 12/3/89.

Hetata, Sherif, "Literary Creativity in Egypt - Issues and Problems," 29/9/92.

Ibrāhīm, Ṣun'allāh, "The Art of the Novel," 20/11/88.

Al-Rabi', Mahmūd, "Modern Critical Directions in Egypt," 3/11/92.

Al-Sa'adāwi, Nawāl, "Freedom of Women," 8/7/92.

Shūsha, Farūq, "The Contemporary Arab Intellectual and Problems," 30/10/86.

Miscellaneous

Abū Niḍāl, Nāzih, "*Riwāyat al-sijn: al-simāt al-fannīya fī riwāyāt al-qam' al-'arabiyya*," First Annual Conference on the Novel, Greater Cairo Library, 26 February 1998.

Al-'Aṭṭār, Sulayman, "*Riwāyat al-sijn: takniyya am maḥtāwi*," First Annual Conference on the Novel, Greater Cairo Library, 26 February 1998.