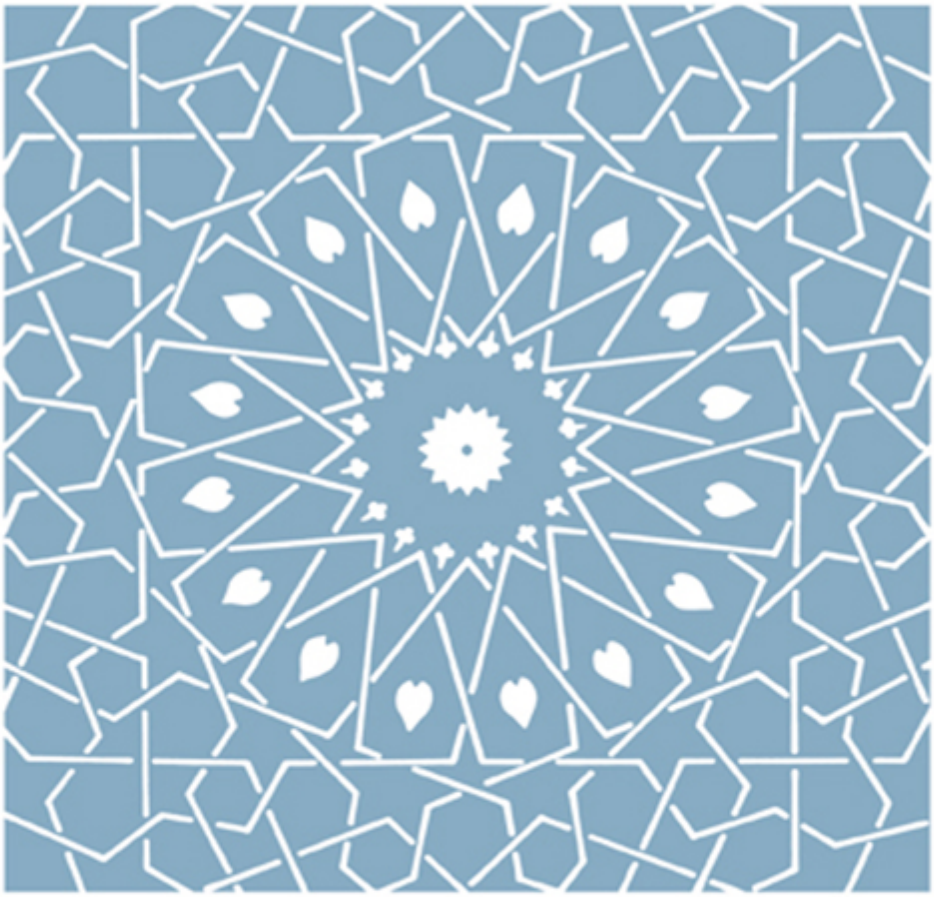
The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature

Modern Arabic literature

Edited by M. M. Badawi



CAMBRIDGE

more information – www.cambridge.org/9780521331975

This page intentionally left blank

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF ARABIC LITERATURE

MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

EDITED BY
M. M. BADAWI
Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521331975

First published 1992
Reprinted 1997

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Modern Arabic literature/edited by M. M. Badawī.
p. cm. – (The Cambridge History of Arabic literature)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-521-33197-8 (hardback)
1. Arabic literature – 20th century – History and criticism.
I. Badawī, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā. II. Series.
PJ7538.M58 1992
892'.7095 – dc20 91-41007-CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-33197-5 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-33197-8 hardback

Transferred to digital printing 2006

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL NOTE

A consolidated bibliography for the whole of this volume would have been too cumbersome to handle and its usefulness would have been somewhat limited. It was decided therefore to have separate bibliographies for individual chapters even at the risk of some repetition. In conformity with the other volumes of the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* contributors have been asked, mainly for reasons of space, to reduce their footnotes as far as possible to the bare minimum and to confine their bibliographies to the more important works, although obviously some have found it easier to comply with this request than others and, indeed, in a number of chapters footnotes have been omitted altogether to make room for text. An exception to this rule has been made in the case of the last two chapters dealing with 'Poetry in the vernacular' and 'Arab women writers', respectively, as these are relatively unknown fields and it was felt that a fuller list of references might be of some help to scholars wishing to carry out further investigations in them. Because of the proliferation of studies of modern Arabic literature in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, and even Dutch and Polish, bibliographies have in general been confined to works in the English language. Since the Short Story has emerged as a major genre in modern Arabic literature, enjoying perhaps greater popularity with writers and readers alike than other genres, more space has been allotted to it in the bibliography to give the reader some idea of its size and scope.

I should like to thank all the staff at the Cambridge University Press who have helped in the production of this volume, especially Dr Katharina Brett. I am also grateful to Mrs Barbara Hird for compiling the index.

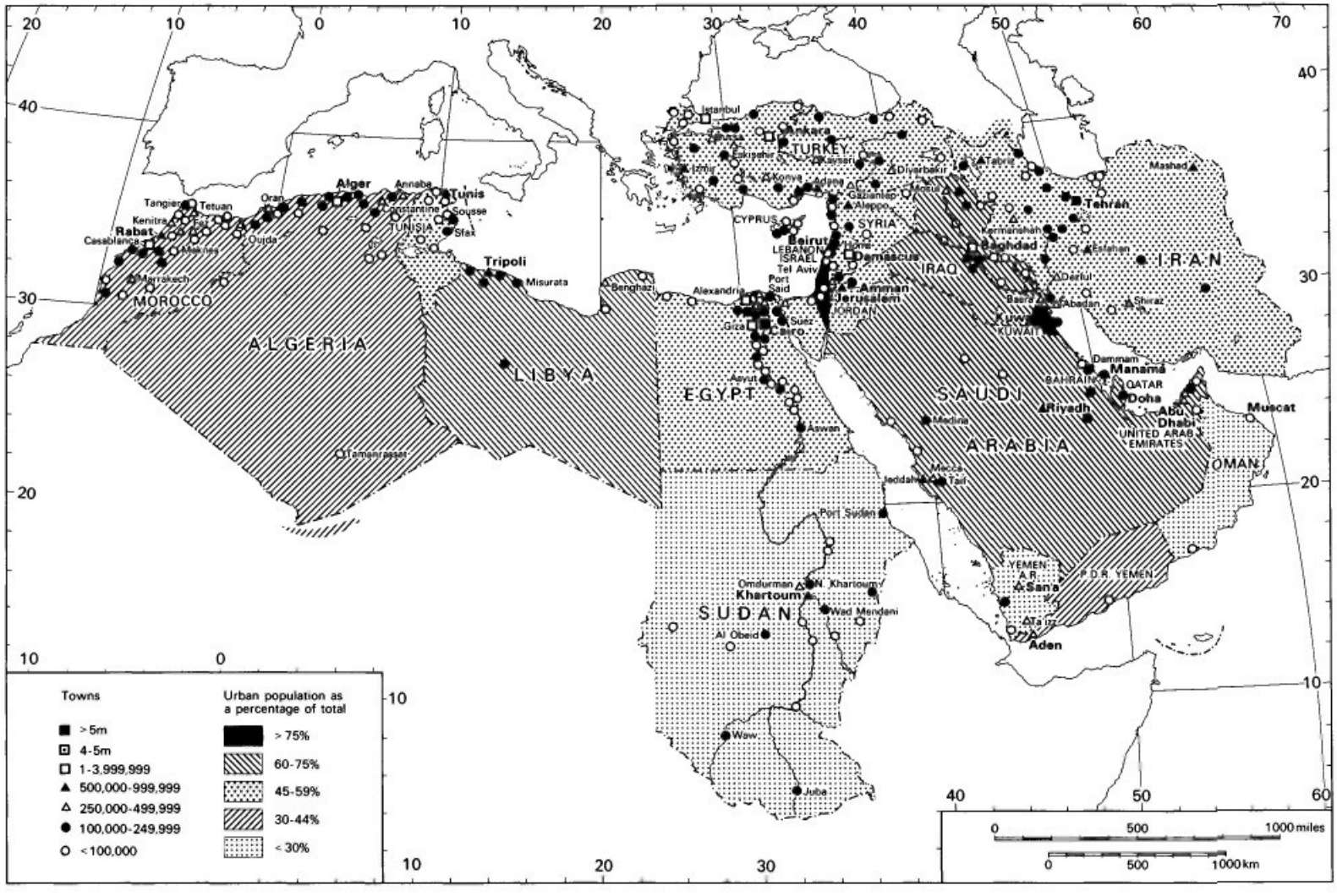
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF EVENTS

1787	Death of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of the Wahhabi Movement in Arabia.
1798	Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt.
1801	French troops evacuate Egypt.
1805	Muhammad Ali becomes effective ruler of Egypt.
1806	Wahhabi forces led by Muhammad al-Saud occupy Mecca, in rebellion against the Ottoman Sultan.
1811	Muhammad Ali wipes out the Mamelukes.
1818	Ibrahim, son of Muhammad Ali, defeats the Wahhabis in Hijaz on behalf of the Ottoman Sultan.
1820s	British pacts with the Gulf Arab Sheiks.
1822	Muhammad Ali's Arabic printing press.
1830	French occupy Algeria.
1831–40	Egyptian occupation of Syria.
1832	Ibrahim defeats the Turks near Konya.
1833	Peace of Kutahya.
1839	British occupation of Aden.
	Turko–Egyptian war.
1840	London conference to settle Egyptian–Turkish relations.
1848	Muhammad Ali dies and is succeeded by Abbas (–1854).
1851–67	Alexandria–Cairo–Suez Railway built.
1860	Construction of the Suez Canal begun. Egyptians occupy Sudan.
	Civil war in Lebanon.
	Persecution of Christians in Damascus.
1861	Creation of autonomous Lebanon.
1863–80	Ismail Pasha of Egypt; in 1866 assumes the title Khedive.
1869	Suez Canal opened.
1875	Mixed Courts introduced in Egypt.
	Ismail sells his Suez shares to Britain.
1880–92	Tawfiq, Khedive of Egypt.
1881	French occupy Tunisia.
1882	Urabi rebellion against Khedive Tawfiq.

	British occupy Egypt, after defeating Urabi at Tall al-Kabir.
1883	Mahdi drives Egyptians out of Sudan.
1885	Khartoum attacked; Gordon killed. Mahdi dies and is succeeded by his Khalifah Abdullahi Abu Bakr.
1896	Kitchener defeats Mahdists at Umm Durman. Khalifah slain.
1901–	Ibn Saud begins reconquest of Najd.
1906	The Dinshaway affair. Cromer's resignation.
1908	Revolution of the Young Turks.
1911–12	Italy captures Libya.
1914	Turkey in World War I. Abbas II deposed and Husayn Kamil made Sultan of Egypt by the British. Egypt declared a British Protectorate.
1916	Arab revolt in Hijaz.
1917	Balfour Declaration issued promising a Jewish National Home in Palestine.
	British take Baghdad. Conquest of Palestine. Fuad Sultan of Egypt.
1918	Arab Hashemite forces occupy Damascus.
	End of Ottoman rule in Arab lands.
1919	Egyptian revolution against the British, led by Saad Zaghlul, head of the Wafd.
1920	French mandates established for Syria and Lebanon, and British for Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq.
	Nationalist revolt in Iraq.
	Arab rising in Palestine.
1924	Abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate by Atatürk.
1924–25	Ibn Saud conquers Hijaz.
1925	Nationalist revolt in Syria.
1932	Saudi Arabian Kingdom proclaimed by Ibn Saud.
	End of British Mandate in Iraq.
1936	Anglo-Egyptian treaty, recognizing independence of Egypt.
1945	League of Arab States created.
1946	Britain recognizes independence of Transjordan, which becomes a monarchy.
	Syria and Lebanon become independent republics after the end of the Mandate.
1948	End of mandate for Palestine, establishment of State of Israel.
	Arab–Jewish war.
1949	First of various *coups d'état* in Syria.
	Assassination of Hasan al-Banna (b. 1906), founder of the Muslim Brotherhood (1928).
1951	Libya becomes an independent Kingdom.

1952	Egyptian army revolution, abdication of King Farouk.
1953	Egypt becomes a Republic. Husayn ibn Talal becomes King of Jordan.
1954	Colonel Gamal Abd al-Nasser becomes President of Egypt.
1955	British evacuation of Suez Canal zone. Baghdad Pact signed with Iraq and Jordan.
1956	Sudan, Tunisia and Morocco become independent. Nasser nationalizes Suez Canal. Israeli invasion of Sinai and Anglo-French expedition in Suez. British/French forces withdrawn in 1956, and Israeli in 1957.
1957	Tunisia becomes a Republic, with Bourguiba as President.
1958	Egypt and Syria form United Arab Republic. Revolution in Iraq, which becomes a Republic with Abdul Karim Kassem as President.
1960	Mauritania becomes independent.
1961	Kuwait becomes independent. Syria secedes from the United Arab Republic. Egypt adopts Arab socialism.
1962	Algeria becomes independent after a prolonged and bloody war of independence. Republican revolution in Yemen. Royalist–Republican civil war.
1962–67	Egyptian forces fight on the side of the revolutionaries.
1963	Baathist revolution in Syria.
1967	Arab–Israeli war (June War). Israeli occupation of West Bank and Gaza.
1968	Republic of South Yemen.
1969	King Idris of Libya ousted by young army officers, led by Colonel Muammar Qaddafi. Yasser Arafat becomes Chairman of Palestine Liberation Organization.
1970	Nasser dies and is succeeded by Anwar Sadat.
1971	General Hafez Asad becomes President of Syrian Arab Republic. Qatar and Bahrain become independent. Formation of Union of Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujaira, Ras al-Khaima, Sharja and Umm al-Quwain).
1973	Arab–Israeli war (October War). Egyptian forces storm the Bar-lev line and cross the Suez canal. Emergence of oil as powerful weapon used by the Arab oil states.

1975–	Lebanese civil war.
1977	President Sadat visits Jerusalem and addresses the Israeli Knesset.
1978–79	Iranian revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini, overthrow of Shah.
1978	Sadat signs the Camp David accord with Israel.
1979	Sadat signs the Israeli–Egyptian Peace Treaty. Egypt isolated and expelled from the Arab League. Saddam Husayn takes over as President of Iraq.
1979–88	Iraq–Iran war.
1981	President Sadat assassinated by Muslim fundamentalists and is succeeded by Husni Mubarak.
1982–84	Israeli invasion of Lebanon to crush the Palestinian Liberation Organisation led by Yasser Arafat.
1987–	Palestinian *intifada*: uprising of Palestinian Arabs in territories occupied by Israel.
1989	(May) Egypt readmitted to the Arab League. (December) Syria restores diplomatic relations with Egypt.
1990	(May) Republic of Yemen formed by the union of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen) and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen).
1990	(August) occupation and annexation of Kuwait by Saddam Husayn's Iraqi troops.
1991	(March) expulsion of Iraqi soldiers from Kuwait by Allied forces of the United Nations.



MAP OF THE ARAB WORLD
(Source: *The Cambridge Atlas of the Middle East and North Africa*, 1987)

Population figures in the Arab World (1989)
(Source: *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1990 *Book of the year*)

Algeria 24,579,000
Bahrain 488,500
Egypt 51,748,000
Iraq 17,215,000
Jordan 3,059,000
Kuwait 2,048,000
Lebanon 2,897,000
Libya 4,080,000
Morocco 24,530,000

Oman 1,422,000
Qatar 427,000
Saudi Arabia 13,592,000

Sudan 27,268,000
Syria 11,719,000
Tunisia 7,973,000
United Arab Emirates 1,827,000

*Yemen Arab Republic 8,834,000
*People's Democratic Republic of Yemen 2,406,000

*Both republics united in 1990 and called Republic of Yemen

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I THE BACKGROUND

The Nahḍah

Compared with earlier periods of Arabic literature the Modern period, often referred to in Arabic as *al-Nahḍah* (= renaissance), requires an approach that is at once simpler and more complicated. While Classical Arabic literature can safely be regarded as fundamentally a continuum, Modern literature constitutes in certain important respects an entirely new departure, even though its break with the Classical has sometimes been exaggerated, for despite its borrowing of European forms such as drama and the novel, Modern literature never really completely severed its link with its past. The *Nahḍah* was in fact a product of a fruitful meeting of two forces: the indigenous tradition, and the imported western forms. Moreover, the change from the past was an extremely slow and gradual process. However, because of the profound influence exercised by western literature on the *Nahḍah*, it seems more natural to divide its treatment into chapters on poetry, the novel, short story, drama and literary criticism, much as one might do in a traditional survey of a western literature. But it would be wrong to be blind to the continuities in Arabic literature, Classical and Modern: continuities that have determined the manner of the Arabs' apprehension and hence adaptation of the imported genres. Equally, we would be guilty of distortion if we ignored the various important issues that seem to be peculiar to Modern Arabic literature, or at least to distinguish it from the literature of the west. By modern Arabic literature, it must be pointed out, is meant literature written exclusively in the Arabic language. The peculiarly modern phenomenon of Arab authors expressing themselves in their creative writing in a European language, be it in French or English, is no doubt both fascinating and important, and merits serious study for literary and extra-literary considerations, but strictly speaking it does not belong to *Arabic* literature and as such it had to be excluded from this survey. There is so much that has been and is being written in Arabic throughout the Arab world, which stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the

(Persian) Gulf and from the Northern Mediterranean to the heart of Africa, that in such a vast and fast-growing field the following treatment must perforce be rigorously selective.

Modern Arabic literature is obviously the literature of the modern Arab world, and this is generally assumed to begin with the French campaign in Egypt in 1798. The date is significant, for it marks the dramatic opening of the Arab world, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire, to the west, ultimately with momentous consequences for its political, economic, social and cultural development. For various reasons the modern renaissance of Arabic literature began to make itself felt in Egypt and Syria (which then included Lebanon), from which it spread slowly to the rest of the Arab world.

The Ottoman period

The Arabs had started their steady decline early in the sixteenth century with the rise to power of the Ottoman Turks who imposed their rule over virtually the whole of the Arab world: the Turks conquered Syria in 1516, Egypt in 1517, Algiers in 1516, Tripoli in 1555, Tunis in 1574, and established their rule in Iraq in 1639 and subsequently in Yemen and Hejaz. Only Central Arabia (Nejd) and Morocco remained independent of the Ottomans. Apart from North Africa, the conquered Arab territories continued to be governed, albeit in some cases nominally, by the Ottomans until early in the twentieth century.

The Arab territories were divided into provinces, each governed by an Ottoman pacha, a ruler responsible directly to the Sultan in Constantinople, with the help of officials, tax collectors and *Sharī'ah* judges, all appointed by the central government, officially for one year only in order to ensure their obedience. Local elements such as ulema or notables were also made use of and gradually these often assumed considerable power, as in the case of Egypt where the Mamelukes regained effective control, with the Ottoman Pacha acting as the nominal governor. The vast majority of the Arabs were illiterate peasants bound to their village communities and families and engaged in a subsistence type of agriculture, though of course they had to pay the heavy taxes imposed upon them by the tax farmers. The rest of the Arabs, who lived in urban centres and enjoyed greater prestige and privileges, were largely craftsmen loosely organized and often affiliated to mystical orders of brotherhood together with merchants and ulema. Alike in town and in country an Arab then belonged to a cohesive body from which he seemed to derive some security. The phenomena of the landless

peasant and the urban lumpen proletariate, which provide the themes of much twentieth-century Arabic literature, were clearly not known prior to modern times.

With the weakening of the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century, the subject peoples suffered from an increasingly heavy burden of taxation, oppression by corrupt officials and tax farmers, insecurity caused by the local rulers' bloody struggles for power as well as periodic raids by Beduin tribesmen. Yet they continued to form an integrated society with commonly held views and assumptions about this world and the hereafter. They may have resented much of the ill-treatment they received at the hands of their Turkish rulers and the rapacious and bloodthirsty warring Mameluke Beys. Nevertheless, in the days prior to nationalism the Arabs felt strongly that they all constituted the Muslim *Ummah*, the Community of Believers, and that as defenders of the sacred law of *Sharīʿah* the Ottoman rulers had the right to be obeyed. Moreover, they lived in seemingly total cultural isolation from the west, smugly convinced of the superiority of the Muslim civilization.

The ulema, the guardians of the faith, were held in respect by the Ottoman rulers, yet because Turkish was the official language of the Empire, Arabic culture generally suffered for lack of sufficient patronage. In fact, the Ottoman period marks the nadir of Arabic literature. Although historians of literature may have exaggerated the decline, there is no doubt that the period is characterized by the absence of creativity and loss of vigour. It is usually described as the age of commentaries and compendia because a considerable portion of the output of writers and scholars consisted of commentaries on texts, and even commentaries on commentaries. By the time we reach the eighteenth century we find that prose writers and poets had become equally enamoured of an excessively ornate, artificial type of style in which more attention is given to manner than to matter. Their work generally lacked seriousness, while those who cared for the content of their writing tended to employ an undistinguished prose which was devoid of literary merit. In creative writing the themes were conventional: *maqāmah* – like prose epistles, pious verses in praise of the Prophet, popular sufi or ascetic poems, empty panegyrics addressed to local notables, celebrations of trivial social occasions and numerous lifeless and passionless love poems. With very few exceptions, such as the Egyptian Ḥasan Badrī al-Ḥijāzī (d. 1718) and the Syrian ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulsī (d. 1731), the imagery poets used was stock in trade and the language cliché-ridden: in short, it was a literature of an exhausted, inward-looking culture, albeit a complacent and perfectly self-satisfied one.

The French Campaign

Out of this complacency Arabic culture was rudely awakened when Bonaparte invaded Egypt in 1798. The extent of the shock suffered by the inhabitants can be gauged from the way the distinguished Egyptian historian ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī (1756–1825) opened his account of the year of the invasion, which he witnessed, in his chronicle *ʿAjāʾib al-āthār fīʾl tarājim waʾl-akhbār*: he regarded it as the year of the ultimate catastrophe, of the disastrous reversal of the natural order of things. Bonaparte, whose expedition in this strategically important country was an episode in the history of Anglo-French rivalry in imperial expansion which was designed to cut off Britain's route to India, made an announcement to the Egyptian people in which he posed as a champion of Islam and a liberator of Egypt from the tyrannical rule of the Mamelukes. Whatever they thought about this specious claim, the easy victory achieved by the French forces over the Mameluke army shocked Muslims out of their complacency, bringing home to them the enormous superiority, efficiency and military might of the west.

Bonaparte brought with him a team of French experts, scientists and scholars who undertook a thorough and systematic survey of Egypt and its resources: they conducted scientific experiments in the *Institut d'Egypte*, founded for that purpose, and published their findings in a newly established French language periodical. Bonaparte invited the chief ulema and notables, whom he regarded as leaders of the Egyptian people, to form an Administrative Council to participate in the French-controlled government of Egypt and in the promulgation of the legislation necessary for his proposed reforms in landownership and taxation, amongst other things. He had brought with him from the Vatican an Arabic language press, the very first Arabic printing press to enter Egypt, for the publication of French proclamations in Arabic.

The response of the Egyptians to the French was understandably a mixed one. They obviously admired their efficiency and organization, and their diligence in the construction of roads and factories. The educated among them, such as al-Jabartī and Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār, the teacher of al-Ṭahṭāwī, who had the chance to visit the *Institut*, were impressed by its library and by some of the scientific experiments which they watched in something like uncomprehending wonder, and they were intrigued by the manners and ways of the French such as their dramatic entertainments. No doubt Egyptians were relieved to be rid of the Mamelukes who had been thoroughly discredited by their ignominious defeat at the hands of the French. On the other hand, despite being given the chance of the experience

of limited representative government, the Egyptians felt humiliated at being ruled by the infidel French whose revolutionary doctrines the Ottoman government had thoroughly condemned. They were critical of the behaviour of the French forces and what they regarded as the immorality of French women, and were alarmed at the dangerous example they had set to some of their own Muslim women. Moreover, when in response to the blockade imposed upon them by the Anglo-Ottoman fleets in the Mediterranean the French forces of occupation had to resort to harsh measures of taxation, the Egyptian people, led by the Azhar, rebelled and the rebellion was ruthlessly put down by the French troops some of whom committed scandalous atrocities.

Although the French expedition is generally judged as a military failure for the French, its significance for Egypt (and the Arab world) cannot be exaggerated, and that is in spite of claims made by some revisionist historians. True, the occupation lasted only three years, the Egyptians' exposure to western learning and science, as well as representative self-government, was too brief to be meaningful, but the campaign brought to an end the isolation of the Arab world from the west. It signalled the beginning of a process of western expansion and colonization, which in the course of time resulted in practically the entire Arab world falling under the domination of western powers, notably France and Britain. France invaded Algeria in 1830, Britain occupied Aden in 1839, France occupied Tunisia in 1881, Britain Egypt in 1882, Italy seized Libya in 1911–12, and in 1920 France acquired mandates over Syria and Lebanon, while the mandates for Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq went to Britain. Even Morocco, which had retained its independence for a long time, fell prey to the ambitions of France and Spain which in 1904 concluded a secret agreement that divided Morocco into two spheres of influence between them, and in 1912 Morocco was declared a French protectorate. Britain imposed her authority upon the Arab rulers of the small Persian Gulf states by means of treaties which go as far back as the 1820s. The bloody and unequal encounter with the west which varied in ferocity and violence from one Arab country to another and according to whether the colonizer was France, Britain or Italy, had such a profound and traumatic effect upon the Arab imagination, even though it was sometimes latent and slow to reveal itself, that to this day the East/West opposition has remained one of the leading motifs in Arabic literature. In their search for identity, Arab writers have for many generations often tried to define themselves in relation to the other, the other being in most cases the European.

Likewise, the nationalist struggle for independence became a permanent, indeed at times obsessive preoccupation for writers for many years: the end

of the mandate in Iraq came only in 1932, the Anglo-Egyptian treaty which gave Egypt her relative independence was concluded in 1936, the mandate for Syria and Lebanon came to an end in 1941. In 1946 Transjordan attained her independence, Libya in 1951, Sudan, Tunisia and Morocco in 1956, Kuwait in 1961, while Algeria achieved hers after a prolonged and bloody struggle as late as 1962. In 1948 the mandate for Palestine came to an end, and the state of Israel was established. Even after the Arab states formally attained their independence, they remained within the spheres of influence of western powers for a long time, in fact until Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir appeared on the scene after the Egyptian Army Revolution of 1952, which in its turn helped to push Arabic literature in other directions.

The rise of Muhammad Ali

The whole course of modern Arabic literature might have been entirely different if it had not been for one indirect result of the French campaign. This was the emergence of Muhammad Ali, the Albanian officer who came to Egypt with the Ottoman forces to help drive out the French and who, in the confusion that followed the departure of the French, managed, through sheer genius, machiavellian intrigues and utter ruthlessness to fill the void and become, in 1805, the ruler of Egypt (1805–1848). He created a dynasty which ruled Egypt until its last descendant, King Farouk, was forced to abdicate by the revolutionary junta led by Nāṣir. Inspired by the example of the Ottoman Sultan Selim III, the ambitious Muhammad Ali launched a more successful and comprehensive programme of military reform along the lines of the superior and well-organized western armies of which he had first-hand experience. To this end he employed all the available resources in Egypt, and in so doing he altered the economic, political and social structure of the country. After he had got rid of the Mameluke adversaries in a notorious massacre, he destroyed the forces that had helped him to attain power, including the class of Azhar ulema, who were shorn of their economic and political influence. He imposed state ownership of land, abolished the old system of tax farming and had the monopoly of trade. By introducing intensive cotton cultivation in the 1820s and improving irrigation, transport and marketing, he laid the foundation of modern Egyptian economy: through the export of cotton Egyptian agriculture became integrated into the international economy. This he achieved with the help of European experts, technicians and officers, who enabled him to create an army and a navy strong enough to wage successful wars in other Arab countries and even to pose a threat to the authority of the Ottoman Sultan himself. When the Sultan refused his request to grant the

governorship of Syria to his son Ibrahim as a reward for his assistance during the Greek rebellion, the armies of Muhammad Ali occupied Syria and threatened Istanbul. The threat was ultimately averted through the interference of the allied European powers whose policy it was to try to protect the weak Ottoman Empire from total collapse. As a result of the 1841 Treaty of London, signed by England, Austria, Prussia and Russia, Muhammad Ali was forced to return Syria to the Sultan and to limit his army to 18,000 men in return for hereditary right to the rule of Egypt under the suzerainty of the Sultan. Muhammad Ali recompensed his functionaries and members of his own family by giving them land to develop, thus gradually creating a new feudal structure, which was to replace the old landed class of Mamelukes and others and which in the course of time and under his successors increased immeasurably the gap between the rich and the poor.

Modernization of education

Muhammad Ali imported not only western technicians and military advisors, but also western forms of education, and sent local Arabs on educational missions to the west (mainly to France), to learn the secret of its military supremacy. In 1816 he started a process of superimposing upon the country a western type of educational system which had very little in common with the traditional religious Azhar system. He set up a number of modern technological and military schools in which modern sciences and European languages were taught and in which some of the teachers were Italian, French and later English. Despite his shrewdness and practical intelligence, Muhammad Ali was not an educated man with any interest in European culture: his aim was strictly limited to what was conducive to the building up of a powerful régime with a strong army. The members of his educational missions in Europe were all technically army officers, with specific ranks; they had to follow an army discipline and were not even allowed to make a tour of the countries in which they were studying. Nevertheless, it was impossible for these young men to keep interest in western technology in the long run entirely separate from interest in some of the cultural values underlying that technology. Furthermore, the setting up of a new secular system of education, different from the traditional theocentric one, a system which produced men who were to occupy important posts in the government, was bound to result eventually in the weakening of the authority of traditional values. Arab Muslim society therefore ceased to be the 'closed' culture it had been for so long. After the frustration of his military ambitions, Muhammad Ali lost interest in his

educational programme, which was also neglected by his successor who was not noted for his sympathy towards the west. The modern technological schools were closed and so was the School of Languages. However, when Muhammad Ali's grandson Ismail came to the throne (1863–1879), he pursued the policy of modernizing education with remarkable zeal, and did so on a much larger scale than his grandfather, reorganizing the entire system of public education. In the course of time western culture and western languages were to play an ever-increasing role in the cultural make-up of the Arab world. Another important development is that because secular education did not grow slowly and gradually out of the indigenous traditional religious system of al-Azhar, but was instead imposed upon it from above, a cultural dichotomy or polarity ensued with grave psychological consequences, which had already worried the religious reformer Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905), and which are still visible today.

Arabic printing press, birth of translation movement and journalism

Muhammad Ali needed books and manuals for his modern schools and the army, so he ordered an Arabic printing press: in fact the very first educational mission member to be sent to Europe went to Italy to study printing (in 1809). This press (set up in Bulaq in 1822) was not the first to be found in the Arab world: even before Bonaparte brought with him an Arabic press to publish his proclamations in Egypt, as early as 1706 the Maronite priests had their own press in Aleppo for the purpose of printing Christian texts. This was followed by others in Shuwayr (1734) and Beirut (1753). Muhammad Ali's press, later to be known as the Government Press, was to play an important cultural role in the Arab Muslim world: it printed translations of European works, at first scientific and technological, but later literary translations as well as Arabic classics such as the work of Ibn Khaldūn, which became more freely available than they used to be when they were accessible only in the form of expensive manuscripts copied out by hand. Likewise the press printed the very first periodical, an official gazette, *al-Waqāʾiʿ al-Miṣriyyah* (1828). This marked the birth of journalism, which was to become a potent factor in the development not only of modern Arab thought, society and politics, but also of modern Arabic literature. Together with translations of scientific works, journalism helped to change gradually the style of Arabic prose, ridding it of excessive rhetorical devices, making it a simpler and fitter vehicle for conveying ideas.

The editing of the official gazette was assigned to the distinguished

Rifāᶜah Rāfiᶜ al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–1873), who is generally regarded as the father of modern Arab thought. An Azharite by training, he was sent in 1826 to France, on the recommendation of his teacher Shaykh Ḥasan alᶜAṭṭār, as an Imam to the large batch of mission students. But he spent his five years in Paris learning French and studying various aspects of French culture, and on his return to Egypt he published in 1834 his observations and impressions of his trip, in a book which became very well known and was translated into Turkish: *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz ilā talkhīṣ bārīz*. In it as well as in his numerous other writings, particularly *Manāhij al-albāb al-miṣriyyah* (1869), he expressed his respect for the rationality and the good organization of social and political institutions of the west, and the civic virtues such as the love of the fatherland (*al-waṭan*), qualities which he advocated as necessary for the betterment of Islamic society in Egypt. Al-Ṭahṭāwī was also appointed director of one of the important modern schools founded by Muhammad Ali in 1835, the Cairo School of Languages for the teaching of Italian, French and English, which produced a number of distinguished translators and writers. A Translation Bureau was set up in 1841. This marks the beginning of a significant translation movement, which at first was limited to technological and military books (graduates of the School of Languages are said to have translated some two thousand works from European languages), but in the course of time included literary and historical writings, so that during the last two decades of the nineteenth century literary works alone formed no less than one third of the total output of translations.

Muhammad Ali's various projects resulted in a remarkable rise in the number of Europeans residing in Egypt, and hence in the spread of European schools as well as missionary activity. His liberal attitude towards Europeans made the decade of Egyptian occupation of Syria (1831–1840) one of crucial importance in its cultural history: it resulted in a dramatic increase in French, British and American missionary and educational activities. These culminated in the Americans founding a college in 1847 which became the American College in 1866, later to be named the American University of Beirut, the Jesuits transferring their College (the University of St Joseph) to Beirut in 1874. Missionary schools for girls were also opened. The graduates of these western institutions were naturally more receptive to western ideas, with the result that they played a pioneering role in westernization. Coming after the earlier generation of Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī (1800–1871), who were among the first Christian writers to develop a keen and serious interest in Arabic language and literature, these younger Christians were eager to experiment in new forms hitherto unknown in the Arabic literary heritage. Whole families, such as those of al-

Yāzijī, al-Bustānī and al-Naqqāsh, became associated with these new forms, together with translations and adaptations, as well as serious journalism of a general cultural and literary type. Mārūn al-Naqqāsh, for example, wrote the first play in Arabic (1847) and was followed by his nephew, Salīm al-Naqqāsh. Salīm al-Bustānī was the author of the first novel (in 1870), Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819–1883), who probably translated *Robinson Crusoe*, wrote the first Arabic encyclopaedia. Sulaymān al-Bustānī produced his verse translation of Homer's *Iliad* (1904), a *tour de force*, accompanied by a lengthy introduction which includes a comparative study of Greek and Arabic poetry. In 1861 Fāris al-Shidyāq launched the important newspaper *al-Jawāʾib* (in Constantinople), which was read throughout the Arab world and continued to appear until 1884. Yaʿqūb Ṣarrūf and Fāris Nimr founded their epoch-making cultural periodical *al-Muqtaṭaf* in Beirut in 1876, which gave the Arab reader much information about western thought, science and technology (in 1885 it was transferred to Egypt where it continued to appear until 1952). The prolific Jurjī Zaydān, among his various activities in Cairo, published the monthly cultural periodical *al-Hilāl* (begun in 1892) which still appears to this day.

Ismail and westernization

As a result of the religious conflicts and disturbances in Syria in the wake of the enforced evacuation of the Egyptian troops, which culminated in the massacre of 1860 and the harsh rule of the Ottomans, many Syrians left their country; some went to America and were eventually to make a significant contribution to Arabic writing, known as the literature of *al-Mahjar* (the Emigrants or Expatriates). Others went to Egypt, lured by the reports of the munificence of Khedive Ismail (1863–1879). Ismail had been educated in France, and despite his foolish extravagances, which brought financial ruin to Egypt and which in turn led to European interference in the government of the country and ultimately to British occupation in 1882, he showed remarkable interest in promoting culture. Unlike Muhammad Ali, who cared only for the technological type of school immediately relevant to the needs of his army, Ismail was genuinely interested in popular education (including education of girls), which was organized by his able minister of education ʿAlī Mubārak (1824–1893), an engineer who was himself a product of the new secular school system. By the 1860s Arabic had replaced Turkish as the official language of Egypt. Ismail also allowed a large number of Christian missions to establish schools, where many Egyptian children, girls as well as boys, received their education in a European language, mainly French. In 1872 he established Dār al-ʿUlūm (The

Teachers' Training College), which aimed at combining traditional Islamic Arabic culture with western learning. He founded learned societies, a museum and an observatory, and patronized exploration, scholarly research and the arts. In 1870 he set up Dār al-Kutub (The National Library). He founded the Opera House in Cairo, which was opened in 1869 with a performance of *Rigoletto*, as part of the extravagant celebrations of the opening of the Suez Canal. He encouraged (for a while) the first Egyptian dramatist Yaʿqūb Ṣannūʿ, as well as visiting theatrical troupes from Syria. He gave financial aid to Buṭrus al-Bustānī to enable him to work on his Arabic Encyclopaedia. Ismail was intent on making Egypt, as it were, part of Europe. European methods of administration and finance were followed and legal codes were translated. Even European dress was adopted by Egyptian civil servants and members of the professions. Under his rule many of the major topographical changes in Cairo took place, his inspiration being Baron Haussmann's elegant city of Paris; over a hundred European schools were opened, the number of Europeans residing in Egypt rose from a few thousand in 1860 to over a hundred thousand in 1876. In short, the course of westernization was assured.

Westernization and Islam

Westernization, however, was problematic in a Muslim country; not even Ismail himself was prepared to shed some of his 'oriental' ways such as, for instance, polygamy, an attack on which seems to have been the reason why the dramatist Ṣannūʿ incurred his displeasure and was ordered to close down his theatre. The key issue that preoccupied the minds of Arab intellectuals was how to westernize or modernize while remaining Muslims. The problem, of course, did not arise in the case of Christian Arabs, some of whom, like al-Shidyāq, adopted an anti-clerical stance or even advocated secularization, like Shiblī Shumayyil (1860–1917) and Faraḥ Anṭūn (1874–1922), who believed in the need to separate secular and religious powers. The need for modernization, however, was keenly felt by all when the superiority of the west was a fact that could no longer be ignored. It would, of course, be wrong to assume that the revival of religious thought and the reconsideration of the fundamentals of Islam came only as a result of the encounter with the west: already in the eighteenth century an indigenous puritan movement of religious reform arose in Arabia, led by Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (1703–1787), who preached a return to pristine Islam unencumbered by the saint worship and superstitious accretions that had developed across the centuries, and who had the support of Ibn Saud, the founder of what became Saudi Arabia. But

Wahhabism was essentially an inward- or backward-looking movement, unlike the nineteenth-century forward-looking religious reform movement in Egypt and Syria, the two leading intellectual centres of the *Nahḍah*, which was promoted by the desire to catch up with the modern world. The members of what Albert Hourani called the first generation of modern thinkers (up to 1870), that of al-Ṭahṭāwī of Egypt and Khayr al-Dīn of Tunisia (1810–89), were impressed by what they saw in Europe, which for them stood for material progress and science rather than the political power and aggressive expansion of which later generations were made painfully aware. Their problem was how to reconcile reason and the rationalism of the French Enlightenment with *Sharīᶜah*, the divine law of Islam, how to reconcile the needs of the *Ummah*, the Community of Muslims, with those of the *waṭan*, the nation, including the adoption of the political institutions of the west, generally regarded as the source of its strength.

For the subsequent generation the situation had changed radically. It was no longer a question of Islam trying to copy or catch up with the west, but one of survival, of fighting against external danger. As Hourani put it (in the Introduction to the 1983 edition of his *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age of 1789–1939*), 'Europe had become the adversary as well as the model' for

> its armies were present in Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia, and its political influence was growing throughout the Ottoman Empire; its schools were forming students whose processes of thought and view of the world were far from those of their parents; the cities were being remade on a European model, and the familiar signs of urban life were being replaced by others.

The main problem for Muslim thinkers such as the Messianic and controversial Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839–1897), who lived in Egypt from 1871 until his expulsion in 1879 by Khedive Tawfīq for fear of his revolutionary views, and al-Afghānī's most influential disciple Muḥammad ᶜAbduh (1849–1905), became not so much how to convince their contemporaries to adopt western institutions without losing their Muslim identity, as 'to reinterpret Islam so as to make it compatible with living in the modern world, and even a source of strength in it, and to convince those formed in a new mould that they could still hold on to something from their own past'. Al-Afghānī preached the need to revitalize Islam, to oppose the autocratic government of Muslim despots, to limit absolute rule by constitutions, to unite the Muslims so that they could fight against European intervention. His lectures on Islamic thought and philosophy were well attended by the young intellectuals of Cairo, who were spellbound by his rhetoric and who welcomed his rejection of *taqlīd* (blind imitation of traditional thinking), his advocacy of the need to exercise *ijtihād* (individual judgement) and above all his insistence that Egyptians

should endeavour to achieve national unity in order to fight British occupation. Muḥammad ᶜAbduh was more moderate than Afghānī, his position was one of eclecticism with a strong rationalist Muᶜtazilite component. He held that Islam was never opposed to science or rational enquiry, that a distinction must be drawn between the permanent core of Islam, namely its simple doctrines, and its inessential elements, which may be changed according to individual judgement. To this school of thought belonged the Islamic reformer and modernizer Qāsim Amīn (1865–1908), who in his books *Taḥrīr al-marʾah* ('The emancipation of woman', 1899) and *al- Marʾah al-jadīdah* ('The new woman', 1901) argued, against much conservative opposition in Egypt, that the emancipation of women, which was essential to the revival of Muslims, is in no way against Islamic doctrine.

The defence of Islam in the writings of these thinkers must also be seen against the background of western attacks on this religion in the latter part of the nineteenth century by people as different as the French philosopher and philologist Ernest Renan, and the British Consul-General of Egypt, Lord Cromer, as well as by many orientalists, who maintained that Islam actually hindered progress. The younger generation of writers and littérateurs who had been profoundly influenced by Muḥammad ᶜAbduh continued this Islamic apologetic tradition, especially as after the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate by Atatürk in 1924 it was felt in some quarters that Islam was in grave danger. In Egypt Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889–1973), Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888–1956) and ᶜAbbās Maḥmūd al-ᶜAqqād (1889–1964), and even Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898–1987), tried to defend Islam or to make it more relevant to the problems of contemporary Egyptian society, by treating themes from Islamic history from certain angles or by writing a large number of Islamic biographies, including that of the Prophet Muhammad, or else by pointing out that Classical Arabic, the language of the Koran, is no obstacle to progress. Seen in this context, it is not surprising that the very writers who were enthusiastic about western literature and thought and were anxious to introduce these to the modern Arab reader, devoted so much of their energy to writing about Islam. It was not, as it has been put, simply a question of these writers, who had once espoused the cause of westernization, becoming subsequently disillusioned with the west, turning their backs on it and returning to their Islamic roots: this would be crude oversimplification. For instance, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wrote his book on 'The future of culture in Egypt', *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah fī Miṣr* (published 1938), in which he argued that Egypt was part of the Mediterranean civilization, at the same time as his religious books *ᶜAlā hāmish al-sīrah* (1937–43). Indeed he went on to edit his distinguished

cultural periodical *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* (1945–48), which published serious articles on leading modern writers and poets of the west.

However, in the course of the century many changes took place. These included the growth of nationalist feeling, be it religious, territorial, ethnic or linguistic, the emergence of, and subsequent disillusionment with, political parties, the failure of the liberal democratic experiment in Egypt, and the deterioration of the economic situation as a result first of the Depression, then of the inflation brought about by World War II, the alarming rate of population growth, the gaping gulf separating the urban and rural poor from the greedy and often corrupt rich, and the emergence of the lumpenproletariat as a result of the mass migration of destitute peasants to the overcrowded cities in search of employment. Many people were driven therefore to the Islamic fundamentalist position of the Muslim Brothers started in 1928 by Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1949), a follower of ᶜAbduh's disciple and biographer Rashīd Riḍā, while others turned to an equally extreme leftist position. After the war, the loss of Palestine and the creation of Israel in 1948 enforced both Islamic fundamentalism and Arab nationalism of the secular variety, and indirectly led to the Egyptian army revolution of 1952, which under the spreading influence of Nasserism was followed by a series of army coups in other newly independent Arab states. New régimes arose whose ideals were often a mixture of Arab nationalism and socialism. Among the important changes mention must be made of the significant growth of the middle classes leading to some monarchies and feudal or semi-feudal ruling houses being ousted by the middle class or lower middle class, usually army officers, who assumed power and ruled in the name of the people. This was accompanied by the spread of education and the decrease of illiteracy, and the rise in importance of the position of women, especially in socialist régimes. The constant pursuit of the ideal of Arab unity, prompted by the awareness of the Israeli threat, has been frustrated by interminable inter-state strife, fed by differences and contradictions between the political systems of these states, and their polarization as they were caught up in the Cold War between Russia and America, the two superpowers which since the 1950s have gradually replaced Britain and France as the dominant foreign forces in the region. Other developments include not only the sufferings of the Palestinian diaspora and the victims of the long-drawn-out Arab–Israeli conflict as well as the tragic Lebanese civil war, but also the dramatic rise in importance of the role of oil in the economy and position of some of the states in the region and subsequent migration of labour from the poor to the richer Arab states. Added to that is the phenomenon of the exiled and self-exiled intellectuals fleeing from hostile authoritarian governments.

These developments are reflected in the literature of the time. To take but one example, one comes across the serious and indeed at times tragic struggle of the individual against coercive authority – initially foreign under western occupation, and subsequently native, tyranny – often of the military rule variety in the wake of national liberation. Such a struggle provides one of the most recurrent and haunting themes, the authors' passionate cry for freedom under authoritarian rule is an assertion of the democratic rights of the individual in a modern state, those rights which ironically enough are sometimes suppressed by the authorities in their very endeavour to achieve modernization.

New conception of literature, new reading public

For literature to reflect such developments a radical change had to take place in modern Arabic writings in the conception of literature and the function of the writer. The mediaeval view which had dominated until well into the nineteenth century and which regarded writing as either morally and spiritually edifying or else entertaining through mastery of language and verbal skill, gradually gave way to the attitude that literature should reflect and indeed change social reality. The patron prince or ruler who encouraged poets to flock to his court to sing of his achievements and immortalize his name in memorable *qaṣīdas*, formal sonorous odes, was being replaced by a middle-class reading public, educated in secular and not theocentric schools, who as a result of the introduction of printing had access to printed books and did not rely on a few copied manuscripts, and who were wooed not through oral recitation or declamation but by the pages of newspapers and magazines. Admittedly in a society where the degree of illiteracy was extremely high, the size of the reading public was initially very small, but their number grew rapidly with the spread of popular education. (In Egypt the illiteracy rate dropped from 92.7 per cent in 1907 to 70.3 per cent of the population in 1960.) Gone therefore was the poet craftsman who offered his panegyrical verse to the highest bidder; in his place came the 'inspired' poet, the man of feeling who valued sincerity or the campaigner who had strong views about wider issues, particularly the ills of his society. The traditional prose writer who sought to entertain the privileged learned minority by drawing, but not too heavily, on diverse aspects of knowledge (*al-akhdh min kull fann bi ṭaraf*) or who embroidered his epistles to fellow writers or his *maqāmahs* (narratives of sorts in rhyming prose) with all kinds of figures of speech (*badīʿ*), in the most artificial manner imaginable, gave way to the concerned essayist or journalist burning with reforming zeal in matters intellectual, religious, social and

political, no less than in language and literature. Whatever might be the attitude to the mimetic view of literature nowadays in the era of Post-structuralism and Deconstruction, it is the emergence of literature as a *mimesis*, as an imitation of life, that signalled the arrival of modern Arabic literature on the scene. Instead of the ideal types provided in traditional mediaeval literature, presented in the most elaborate language ('what oft was thought but ne'er so well express'd'), concrete observable reality became the subject-matter of writers, particularly in the newly imported forms of drama and fiction.

Three periods of development of modern Arabic literature

The history of modern Arabic literature could be divided into three main periods: the first from 1834 to 1914, which may be termed the Age of Translations and Adaptations as well as Neo-classicism; the second is the inter-war period, which may be described as the Age of Romanticism and Nationalism; the third is from the end of World War II to the present: it embraces a wide variety of schools, approaches and styles, but may conveniently be called the Age of Conflicting Ideologies.

1. Translations, adaptations and Neo-classicism

The year 1834 is an important landmark, because it marks the publication of al-Ṭahṭāwī's account of his trip to France, *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz ilā talkhīṣ Bārīz*. The book contains specimens of al-Ṭahṭāwī's translations of French verse, perhaps the first to be undertaken in Arabic. Although they are of an indifferent quality and are much more adaptations than translations, nevertheless they are important insofar as they signal the very beginning of the process of introduction to, and assimilation of, western literature. In his account al-Ṭahṭāwī also tells us that during his mission in Paris he read works by Racine, Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu, amongst other things. It is true that his major literary translation of Fénélon's *Télémaque* was to appear much later (1867); nevertheless it was during his stay in Paris that he studied the art of translation, what he called *Fann al-tarjamah*, and according to him he translated twelve works (obviously technological and historical rather than literary). After his return he occupied the position of head of the newly created Translation Bureau which produced a large number of distinguished translators of literature. In 1835 the anonymous translation of *Robinson Crusoe* was published in Malta.

Equally 1914 is an appropriate date to end this first period, for around that date significant works appeared in which Arab authors seemed to go beyond the stage of translation or adaptation, revealing their mastery or near-mastery of the imported literary forms, namely Haykal's novel *Zaynab*

and Ibrāhīm Ramzī's comedy *Dukhūl al-ḥammām* (Admission to the Baths) and his historical drama *Abṭāl al-Manṣūrah* (The Heroes of Mansurah).

This early period witnessed the emergence of the Arabic printing press, which not only made more available the Arabic classics to which authors turned for inspiration in an attempt to assert their identity in the face of external danger, but also produced an increasing number of governmental and, more importantly for our purpose, non-govermental periodicals of a general cultural nature in which early translations, adaptations and imitations of western fiction were published. They catered for a new type of reader, the product of missionary institutions in Syria or Ismail's new, more secular type of school, a reader who was not deeply grounded in the Arabic classics but who sought entertainment in a simpler and more direct Arabic style than that provided in the traditional *maqāmah*. The newspapers provided a forum for political activists and religious and social reformers, resulting in the birth and development of the modern Essay from the rather crude and informative attempts in official and semi-governmental periodicals made by the pioneer generation of al-Ṭahṭāwī, to the more powerful and impassioned work of politically committed Egyptian and Syrian essayists, mostly the disciples of al-Afghānī, who published their articles in, for example, *al-Ahrām*. Under the influence of Muḥammad ʿAbduh they sought to express their views in a less ornate style, a sinewy prose, relatively free from the artificialities of *badīʿ*. These include Adīb Isḥāq, Salīm al-Naqqāsh, ʿAbdallah Nadīm, Muḥammad ʿUthmān Jalāl, Muḥammad ʿAbduh himself, Ibrāhīm al-Muwayliḥī and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī. Their work was further developed under British occupation by ʿAlī Yūsuf in the conservative *al-Muʾayyad*, Muṣṭafā Kāmil in *al-Liwāʾ*, the organ of the Nationalist Party, and particularly Ahmād Luṭfī al-Sayyid (1872–1963) in *al-Jarīdah*, the mouthpiece of the *Ummah* Party which represented the more liberal Arab intellectuals and stood for intelligent westernization, rationality and the scientific attitude in education and social reform. Luṭfī al-Sayyid's thoughtful essays, in which he stated his responsible and enlightened secular, liberal and patriotic position, earned him the title of *Ustādh al-jīl* (the Master/Mentor of the generation) and through *al-Jarīdah* many of the leading writers and essayists found their way to the public: ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Shukrī, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Bishrī, Ibrāhīm Ramzī, Muḥammad al-Sibāʿī, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Ḥamdī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, al-Māzinī, al-ʿAqqād, Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Rāziq and Salāmah Mūsā, as well as women essayists like Labībah Hāshim, Nabawiyyah Mūsā and Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif. In the hands of some of these writers, particularly al-Māzinī and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, it can be said that the essay had attained its most elegant form.

During this period a close connection between journalism and serious

literature was established to the extent that towards the end of it we find not only *qaṣīdas* by the major poets and short stories, but whole novels, such as Jurjī Zaydān's, appearing (serially) in the papers. In fact this connection was only strengthened in later periods: leading novelists and even literary critics (such as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn) first published their works in newspapers. Even today Najīb Maḥfūẓ's novels first appear in instalments in *al-Ahrām* and the literary page of a newspaper is still regarded as one of its distinguishing features and a valuable asset. No doubt this is also due to the fact that it has been extremely difficult for a modern Arab writer to live on the royalties of his books alone, hence the need to have another regular job which often tends to be journalism, something that suits newspaper proprietors because having a distinguished author on their staff increases the circulation of their papers. However, this close link between literature and journalism proved to be a mixed blessing, for while on the whole it helped to raise the standard of journalistic writing, often it contributed to the superficiality of some of the literature published.

2. Romanticism and nationalism

It is not surprising that the period between the two world wars was the Age of Romanticism and Nationalism. The Great War resulted in the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the placing of its remaining Arab provinces under British and French mandate. Egypt, already under British occupation, was declared a Protectorate in 1914. The strength of nationalist feeling erupted in a series of major revolts first in Egypt (1919), then in Iraq (1920) and Syria (1925). The search for specifically Egyptian literature and for the Egyptian identity was a slogan of many authors in Egypt, especially a group of young men associated with what became known as *al-Madrasah al-Ḥadīthah* (The New School), such as Maḥmūd Ṭahir Lāshīn and the Taymūr brothers (Muḥammad and Maḥmūd) who later distinguished themselves both in fiction and in drama. Related to this is the call for the use of the Egyptian colloquial at least in dialogue. The emphasis on the Pharaonic past of Egypt by writers such as Haykal and al-Ḥakīm is paralleled by the need to relate to the Phoenician civilization expressed by Saʿīd ʿAql in Lebanon.

This is the period in which Arab countries tried to shake off foreign domination and attain statehood. In Egypt, attempts were made by, for example, Ṭalʿat Ḥarb to establish national industry and banking. The desire to achieve progress and modernity (which meant westernization) was keenly felt, and this entailed a critical and at times rejectionist stance to traditional values. In the wake of Kamal Atatürk's abolition of the caliphate in Istanbul in 1924, two famous debates took place as a result of the

publication of two revolutionary books: ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rāziq's *al-Islam wa uṣūl al-ḥukm* ('Islam and the principles of government', 1925), in which he argued that the caliphate is not an integral part of Islam, and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Fīʿl Shiʿr al-jāhilī* ('On Pre-Islamic poetry', 1926) which cast doubt on the authenticity of Pre-Islamic poetry and the historical veracity of certain allusions in the Koran. The former caused its author to be expelled from the body of ulema, while the latter cost Ṭāhā Ḥusayn his job and brought about calls for his trial and imprisonment. In literary criticism several iconoclastic works appeared such as the Egyptians al-ʿAqqād and al-Māzinī's *al-Dīwān* (1921) and the Mahjari Mikhā'īl Nuʿaymah's *al-Ghirbāl* (1923), and the Tunisian al-Shābbī's *al-Khayāl al-shiʿrī ʿind al-ʿArab* ('The Arab poetic imagination', 1929). Other considerations apart, it was quite natural for Arab writers, particularly poets, to turn for their inspiration to European Romanticism, which was a literature of revolt. Unlike classicism which, with its stress on polish and good form, is an expression of a fairly stable culture in which there is common agreement on fundamental issues, Romanticism is a product of a society which is at odds with itself and in which the individual questions the relevance of traditional values. As I have tried to show in my *Critical introduction to modern Arabic poetry* (1975), since the traditional Arab conception of literature shares many of the fundamental assumptions of European classicism, it was understandable that when the desire to break with their past and enter the modern world was genuinely felt, Arab writers found in European Romanticism, which was professedly anti-classical, the assumptions and ideals which seemed to them to fulfil adequately their own needs. It must be emphasized however, that the Arab Romantics, whether in the Arab East or in the Americas, were not simply imitating western postures. The heightened sense of individuality, the agonizing feeling of social and cultural change, the political malaise, the occasional awareness of loss of direction and of being strangers in an unfamiliar universe, were in one way or another facts of Arab existence for some time. Nor were the Arab Romantics mere dreamers inhabiting an ivory tower: many were politically committed nationalists, and they were keenly aware of the ills of their society.

The role of journalism grew more important during this period as a result of the rise of political parties in Egypt which tried to enlist the help of distinguished writers in their partisan daily or weekly newspapers: such as *al-Siyāsah al-Usbūʿiyyah* which published Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, al-Bishrī and Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, and *al-Balāgh al-Usbūʿī* in which al-ʿAqqād's articles appeared. Literary periodicals (long- and short-lived) also appeared, such as Abū Shādī's *Apollo* (1932–1934), Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt's *al-Risālah* (1933–1952) and Aḥmad Amīn's *al-Thaqāfah* (1939–

1952), all of which appeared in Cairo. In Damascus *al-Rābiṭah al-Adabiyyah* (1921–1922) was published, while Beirut saw *al-Amālī* (1938–1941), *al-Makshūf* (1936–1947) and *al-Adīb* (1942–), among others.

3. Recoil from Romanticism and rise of conflicting ideologies

After the Second World War Arabic literature, indeed the whole of the Arab world, entered a new phase. While Romanticism was discredited, political commitment increased and competition grew fierce between clashing loyalties and ideologies, against a background of internal and external changes.

In the aftermath of the war Britain and France ceased to be the dominant foreign powers in the area; their roles were gradually assumed, albeit in a different form, by America and the Soviet Union which, unlike Britain and France, were not simply two rival superpowers with imperialist ambitions, but stood for opposite ideologies. This no doubt contributed to the polarization of the Arab states and of intellectuals within the same state. But what proved to be the most important single external development for the Arab world was obviously the creation of Israel in 1948 and the series of Arab–Israeli wars which ensued and which generally ended in frustration and bitter disappointment and helped to determine Arab attitudes to the outside world. The impact of this upon Arabic literature, both prose and poetry, has been overwhelming.

The Second World War accelerated the process of independence of Arab states and the League of Arab States was formed in 1945. Some of the energy of resistance against the external enemy was therefore directed at the enemy within: war was waged on the privileged communities and feudal rich who had collaborated with the foreign occupier, or the ruling élites who, in the opinion of the people, were guilty of corruption and mismanagement. This corruption and mismanagement was glaringly evident in the disastrous defeat of the Arab armies in the first Arab–Israeli war of 1948, in which some Arab troops were fighting with defective arms supplied to them by their own government. In Egypt the disillusionment with the short-lived democratic experiment and with the performance of political parties coincided with the rapid growth of an educated urban middle class suffering from the result of inflation caused by the war and the inevitable profiteering that ensued. The gap between the rich and the poor, particularly the masses of the destitute who migrated from the countryside in search of a meagre living in overcrowded cities, became wider than ever, thus giving rise to popular movements and mass demonstrations in which students (and workers) figured prominently. With the failure of the liberal democratic experiment, the populace looked for salvation either to the extreme Right (Muslim Brotherhood) or to the extreme Left (Marxism).

The need for literature to promote socialist values was reiterated by the radical Egyptian thinker Salāmah Mūsā (1887–1958), who fell under the influence of the Fabian Society and who continued the tradition of the early Lebanese secularizers such as Shiblī Shumayyil. In 1929 he published his progressive review *al-Majallah al-Jadīdah*, which advocated the adoption of the scientific attitude to life and society and demanded that literature should be written for the people about the problems of the people and in a language that the people could understand. Salāmah Mūsā's ideas found response in many distinguished critics and writers such as Luwīs ʿAwaḍ and Najīb Maḥfūẓ. Other leftist magazines appeared in the Arab world, for example *al-Ṭalīʿah* (1935) in Damascus and *al-Ṭarīq* (1941) in Beirut. Marxist ideas were propagated by ʿUmar Fākhūrī in Damascus and Raʾīf Khūrī (1912–1967) in Lebanon. During the war years young intellectuals from Egypt and other Arab countries became increasingly interested in Marxist philosophy as favourable information about the Soviet régime became more available in the cultural centres of the Middle East, since Russia was one of the allies. Influenced by Marxist English literary criticism, Luwīs ʿAwaḍ (1914–90) published his Marxist interpretation of leading English writers in his articles in Ṭaha Ḥusayn's distinguished review *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* (1945). In 1945 the more influential critic Muḥammad Mandūr (1907–1965) gave up his academic career to engage in active leftist politics, and after the 1952 revolution became editor of the Arabic Soviet cultural periodical *al-Sharq*, supporting the cause of socialist realism, at least in a moderate form. A stream of novels of angry social protest began to pour out in 1944: heavily documented works which describe in great detail the misery and deprivation of Egyptian urban life, adding social injustice and class struggle to national independence as political themes. The pursuit of social realism in fiction was not confined to the younger generation of ʿĀdil Kāmil and Najīb Maḥfūẓ, but can be found in the work of the older generation of Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī and Ṭaḥā Ḥusayn in Egypt.

The early 1950s witnessed the eruption of noisy debates about commitment in literature, in which leading critics and writers, young and old alike, took part. The Arabic word for commitment, *iltizām*, obviously a translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's *engagement* used in his articles first published in *Les Temps Modernes*, later collected in his *Qu'est ce que la littérature* (1948), became an essential part of the vocabulary of literary criticism soon after its first appearance on the literary scene around 1950. Its meaning was diffuse, to be sure: sometimes it meant the adoption of a Marxist stand, at other times an existentialist position, but at all times it denoted at least a certain measure of nationalism, Arab or otherwise. In other words, it emphasized the need for a writer to have a message. This need was explicitly expressed in the manifesto-like editorial note to the first

volume of Suhayl Idrīs' Beirut monthly periodical *al-Ādāb* (January 1953), which, more than any other, helped to determine the course of modern Arabic literature by publication both of creative work and of criticism and evaluation of contemporary literature. In August 1954 one contributor to the *Ādāb* wrote that 'the idea of committed literature dominates the Arab world now'. In the same year a controversy arose in Cairo newspapers about the relation of form and content in literature, in which the older generation of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and al-ʿAqqād were vehemently opposed by the younger Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlim and ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Anīs who later published their Marxist contribution in Beirut (1955) in an influential book *Fī'l-Thaqāfah al-Miṣriyyah* ('On Egyptian culture') with an introduction by the distinguished Lebanese Marxist critic Ḥusayn Muruwwah, the author of *Qaḍāyā adabiyyah* ('Literary issues', 1956). In 1955 a celebrated formal debate was held in Beirut between Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Raʾīf Khūrī on the subject 'Does the writer write for the élite or for the general public?' The debate was really about the issue of commitment and the text was published in full in *al-Ādāb* (May 1955).

Against this background the recoil from Romanticism in modern Arabic literature must be seen. The reaction was prompted by a growing painful awareness of the harsh political and social realities of the Arab world, an awareness that was later reinforced by subsequent developments ranging from the horrors of Arab–Israeli wars, the plight of the Palestinians, oppressive Arab régimes, the Iran–Iraq war, to inter-Arab strife and the civil war in the Lebanon. The early success of the 1952 army revolution and the rise of Nasserism gave a boost to Arab nationalism and created a mood of euphoria and optimism. One expression of this nationalistic pride and self-confidence was the hectic search for autonomous or indigenous Arab art forms, such as the specifically Arab or Egyptian or Moroccan theatre, which swept all over the Arab countries. Optimism, however, turned into bitterness when the dream of Arab unity was shattered, civil liberties were crushed by totalitarian régimes, and the Arabs suffered the disastrous defeat of 1967. Despite the disillusionment and set-backs the search continues in some quarters for cultural autonomy, for independent narrative and dramatic art forms, for authentic Arab or more specifically Islamic values. This is undertaken even by those who, like Ḥasan Ḥanafī, themselves received western intellectual or philosophical training and therefore employ western categories in their search and in their rejection of the west, a rejection which may in some measure be explained by the generally unsympathetic if not at times downright hostile attitude adopted towards the Arabs in their various conflicts by the western powers, in particular by

the United States. Indeed the limited Arab victory of 1973, revealed in the destruction of the Bar Lev line and the crossing of the Suez Canal, may have restored some of the Arab dignity, but it coincided with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, which may not be unrelated to this search for total cultural independence by more moderate Arab or Muslim intellectuals. Yet it is a mark of the complexity of the current Arab cultural scene that several Arab intellectuals have at the same time not been immune to the allure of the latest western fashions of Structuralism, Post-structuralism and Deconstruction.

Obviously the dates suggested here for the three periods of development of modern Arabic literature do not constitute sharp lines of demarcation, since there is considerable overlap between the periods. Furthermore, although nearly every Arab state at present boasts one or more practically identical-looking glossy cultural or literary reviews, not all the Arab states have developed at the same rate: for instance, the states of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula began to make their distinct literary contribution only some time after the Second World War. However, it is to be hoped that these dates are useful pointers. But before the proper survey of modern Arabic literature begins, it may be helpful to provide a discussion of the translations and adaptations, which is the subject of the next section of this Introduction.

2 TRANSLATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS 1834–1914

Between the time when Arabic-speaking peoples acquainted themselves with Greek thought and the beginning of their modern renaissance, not one of their scholars or men of letters is known to have mastered any European language.[1] The contrast with the period we are considering could scarcely be greater.

The emulation of the west

What happened was that the ascendancy gradually acquired by European powers, and demonstrated in many ways but perhaps most glaringly on the battlefield, forced the Arab intellectual élites out of their illusions of self-sufficiency and redirected their energies towards far-reaching reforms for which acquaintance with the achievements of 'the west' has been and to a large extent remains essential.

[1] On how limited the interest of Muslims in Europe was, see Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the west*, Bloomington, 1964; also his *Islam in history*, London, 1973, especially pp. 92–114.

It was natural that the need should first have been felt at the heart of the Ottoman Empire, and in the eighteenth century military and administrative reforms were initiated there that were bound to widen in scope and to percolate to the Arab provinces. The stimulation, however, came more directly and dramatically to the Arabs with the Bonaparte expedition to Egypt in 1798, especially as the French came not only with an army using the latest technology then available, but also with teams of translators and scientists who were enormously active during their short stay in the area.

How deep and lasting a mark the French left is a matter of some debate.[2] Certainly their initiatives were meant to benefit them, not their temporary subjects; by the latter they were resented and at best imperfectly understood. Nevertheless, to a leavening of open-minded men they had given a glimpse of a way of thinking and acting that bore the stamp of power and seemed to promise all manner of worldly benefits. It is no accident that the next ruler of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, set about creating an army on the French model, and he brought about far-reaching changes which he perceived to be necessary to such an army. Besides, the association of western ways with power and success first demonstrated by Bonaparte's forces were all too soon to be confirmed, as virtually every part of the Arab world fell under the sway of one western European nation or another.

In fact, western models have played so prominent a part in almost every aspect of the Arab *Nahḍah* that one needs to guard against the assumption that the relationship was merely one of tutelage. It is worth recalling that 'westernization' was a direction taken by local élites even before they had to bend to lasting foreign rule; that the driving force behind it was never submission but the desire for emulation as the surest means of self-assertion; that 'the west', adopted as an example, viewed as monolithic and often idealized, was an abstraction tinged by Arab perceptions of their needs and aspirations; that the imitation was intended to be selective, even though accompanied by grave miscalculations about what was jeopardized by the choices; and that the progress achieved was seldom on an even front.

This last point bears a little elaboration. The most immediately impressive feature of modern western civilization is its technological attainments, and men of will and action – like Muhammad Ali – were quick to see the benefits they would reap from adopting and imitating them. Appreciation of the intellectual curiosity that informs them came later, and acceptance of the philosophic and aesthetic values that are part of the same package later still. At the same time, each act of accreditation of a foreign-inspired innovation facilitated the next, and by a process not of careful sifting but of validation by association, the civilization that had produced

[2] J. Brugman, *An introduction to the history of modern Arabic literature in Egypt*, Leiden, 1984; pp. 10–11.

such clearly beneficial inventions as the steam engine and wireless telegraphy came to be looked upon as holding the answers to virtually every problem of modern life.[3]

By the end of the nineteenth century a new educated élite had come into being in the leading Arab countries that did not so much assert as take for granted the overall superiority of the west in almost every aspect other than revealed religion. Here – as one of countless examples – is the way Jurjī Zaydān (1861–1914) introduces a comparison between 'European and Oriental writers', specifically in connection with their influence on public affairs:[4]

> It may occur to you on reading this title that there is no comparison between the two groups. You may say, 'What is there to link the outstanding writers of Europe, the tips of whose pens determine the politics of their country, with the writers of the East who cut no thread and knot together no rope?' I do not deny this, for I am not unaware of the immense disparity there is between the two countries in degrees of civilization, nor are we ignorant of the high status enjoyed by European writers who hold the reins of government either directly by occupying high positions, or else indirectly by the views they propagate among the leading parties. They are indeed the leaders of thought, the luminaries of civilization, the advisers of the State.

What strikes me most forcibly in this is that he speaks not of different civilizations, but of degrees of attainment in what he takes to be one civilization.

This bespeaks a momentum of change of which many activities were a part. To pick translation out of these is necessary for purposes of analysis, but it is arbitrary, and would be a distortion if not accompanied by a reminder that it was intimately linked with the spread of printing and of journalism, to say nothing of a radical redirection of the priorities of writers and readers alike.

Sources of energy

Thanks largely to the work initiated by Jāk Tājir who as Librarian to the King of Egypt had access to first-hand material, we are well-informed about who the early translators were and what they translated.[5] Rather than reel off names and titles available elsewhere, let me therefore point out what seem to me the main bursts of energy that I detect in the movement.

[3] For a fuller exposition of the process, see my 'The assumptions and aspirations of Egyptian modernists', in *Islam: past influence and present challenge*, ed. Alford T. Welch and P. Cachia, Edinburgh, 1979, pp. 210–35.

[4] 'Kuttāb Ūrubbā wa Kuttāb al-Sharq', *al-Hilāl*, VIII, 8 (15 January 1900), p. 230.

[5] *Ḥarakat al-tarjamah bi Miṣr khilāl al qarn al-tāsi ʿashar*, Cairo [c. 1945]. See also Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Shayyāl, *Tārīkh al-tarjamah fi Miṣr fi ʿahd al-ḥamlah al-faransiyyah*, Cairo, 1950, and *Tārīkh al-tarjamah wa ḥarakat al-thaqāfah fī ʿasr Muḥammad ʿAlī*, Cairo, 1951.

Governmental initiative

We need to acknowledge that the first impulse was given by the ruler of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, whose interest was almost entirely in the technology needed by his army. He took advantage of previous efforts, reprinting twenty of the technical translations made in Turkey from about 1780 onward,[6] and attracting to his service at least one of the Syrian Christian translators who had worked for the French, Father Rufā'īl Zākhūr Rāhib (d. 1831).[7] But with characteristic energy and single-mindedness, he was to carry the movement a great deal further forward.[8] The lessons taught by foreign experts in his schools were translated on the spot, and some after revision were printed for wider diffusion. He demanded of students sent abroad that they translate the texts they used. Between 1809 and 1816 he had an agent scouring Italy and France for more books. And in 1835, he founded a School of Languages that improved the quality of the work produced and ensured its continuity and extension, governmental initiatives never ceasing to play an important part in the movement.

His and his immediate successors' right-hand man in the most onerous of these ventures was Rifā'ah Rāfi' al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–73), who has good claims to be considered not only a translator and administrator of prodigious energy, but also the leading intellectual figure of his age.

Needless to say, literary texts had no place in these early efforts, but new ideas were being disseminated and Arabic was being forced into new moulds in order to express them; in time the combination was profoundly to affect linguistic habits.

The Christian contribution

To the stream thus started, a sizeable tributary came from Christian missionary work. Christian Arabs – mainly Syrians – were in fact to make disproportionately large contributions to several aspects of the *Nahḍah* in its early stages, if only because (at a time when group loyalties were formed on religious rather than national or ethnic axes) they found it easier than did the Muslims to accept ideas originating in, or transmitted by, Christian Europe. The transmission was facilitated when the Anglican Church Missionary Society, established in Malta, began printing Arabic texts for

[6] J. Heyworth-Dunne, 'Printing and Translation under Muhammad Ali', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (July 1940), p. 336.

[7] Matti I. Moosa, 'Early 19th-century Printing and Translation', *Islamic Quarterly*, XIV, 4 (Oct.–Dec. 1970), pp. 207–9.

[8] See Heyworth-Dunne, 'Printing', especially pp. 341–2, 332–3.

diffusion in the Arab world from 1825 onward. It was soon joined by the American Presbyterian Mission, which then transferred its activities to the Lebanon in 1834. When this provoked a riposte from the Jesuits, more was done for cultural stimulation than for Christian witness.

Of direct relevance here is that rival translations of the Bible were undertaken. Until then, the only parts of the Bible that had been printed in Arabic were the Gospels, produced by the Medici Oriental Press in 1591[9] but apparently not in wide circulation at the time with which we are concerned, and the Psalms, printed in Rome as early as 1614.[10] In the new undertaking, alongside western scholars, some of the foremost Arab writers of the period were engaged, namely Fāris (later Aḥmad Fāris) al-Shidyāq (1804–87), Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819–83) and Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī (1800–71).

In addition, a number of Protestant hymns came into use in Arabic translations which are of little distinction in themselves, but which can be seen to have affected the diction and – in secularized form – the notions of some later poets, mainly Syro-Americans.[11]

Evidently these Christian translations were intended for a restricted public, but the training provided by such extensive labours in collaboration with western Arabists was invaluable. Besides, some cross-fertilization between Christian and Muslim communities was inevitable, especially as new bridges were built between them to some extent by freemasonry in the 1860s,[12] and later and on a larger scale by common national aspirations.

Individual efforts

Probably the most significant surge forward occurred when individuals, no longer waiting for the promptings either of the state or of foreign missionaries but directly addressing a new kind of readership, turned their hands to the translation or adaptation of texts for their literary or entertainment value alone.

The first such effort on record (if we except Rufā'īl Zākhūr Rāhib's *Fables* of La Fontaine, produced in France, and an anonymous *Robinson Crusoe*, printed in Malta[13]) is Ṭahṭāwī's translation of Fénelon's *Télémaque*, not surprisingly the result of a period of retrenchment in governmental activity under ʿAbbās, when Ṭahṭāwī was reduced to the headmastership of a primary school in the Sudan.

[9] Robert Jones, 'Arabic publications of the Medici Oriental Press, 1584–1614', paper presented to the *BRISMES/MESA* International Conference, 9 July 1986.

[10] Mārūn ʿAbbūd, *Ṣaqr Lubnān*, Beirut, 1950, pp. 49–50.

[11] Shmuel Moreh, *Modern Arabic poetry 1800–1970*, Leiden, 1976, pp. 24–32.

[12] Moreh, *Modern Arabic poetry*, pp. 98–101. [13] Moosa, 'Early 19th century printing', pp. 210–11.

This appears to have been a somewhat isolated pioneering attempt, but it was not long before the movement gathered strength. Muḥammad Yūsuf Najm[14] mentions some seventy French works of fiction translated in Egypt between 1870 and 1914. Some English and Scottish ones also (notably by Sir Walter Scott) began to appear after the British had made their presence directly felt.

The mushroom growth of non-governmental journalism – beginning with *Ḥadīqat al-Akhbār* founded in Beirut in 1858, but finding its greatest scope in Egypt thereafter – gave a great fillip to this development.[15] Short stories in particular found a ready outlet in journals and even in newspapers, but many novels also first appeared in serialised form in this ephemeral medium, or as special numbers of a periodical.

Understandably, literary histories make much of the masterpieces that then became known to an Arabic-reading public. The bulk of what was translated, however, was not of such a high calibre. It consisted mostly of sensationalist material – thrillers, spy and later detective stories, and 'penny dreadfuls'. The reason is not far to seek: in a genre so new to the Arabs, taste was as yet unformed, and swung to the extreme opposite of the formal, diction-conscious literature previously held in honour. Thus a novel that created enough of a stir in 1880 to attract the attention even of Muḥammad ᶜAbduh (1849–1905) was the now forgotten Pierre Zaccone's *La Vengeance*, translated by Adīb Isḥāq (1856–1885) and Salīm al-Naqqāsh (d. 1884).[16]

The theatre also has some claim to pioneering efforts in this field, for the very first Arabic play produced in European style, Mārūn al-Naqqāsh's (1817–1855) *al-Bakhīl* staged in Beirut late in 1847, is broadly based on Molière's *l'Avare*, and direct translations were soon to follow. Throughout the period under review, however, the live theatre was mostly in the hands of actor-managers whose interest was overwhelmingly in the performances, so that the translations, adaptations or original works which they wrote themselves or commissioned were hardly ever printed in their time, and therefore reached only their own patrons.

It was someone unconnected with any of the acting companies who was first to contribute substantially to written drama. This was a pupil of Ṭahṭāwī, Muḥammad ᶜUthmān Jalāl (1829–1894) who, in addition to his onerous activities in government service as an official translator, as a judge, and at one time as a Cabinet minister, gave Arabs versions of at least one novel and (in verse) of the fables of La Fontaine, but whose heart appears to have been in the theatre. It is not clear whether it is to him we owe a volume

[14] *al-Qiṣṣah fī 'l-adab al-ᶜarabī l-ḥadīth*, pp. 13–21.

[15] Henri Pérès, 'Le roman, le conte, et la nouvelle dans la littérature Arabe moderne', *Annales de l'Institut d'Études Orientales*, Tome III, Année 1937, pp. 266–337, lists one journal after another that included translated narratives.

[16] Pérès, 'Le roman', p. 267.

of plays translated from the Italian under the title of *Alʿāb al-Tiyātrāt* advertised in *Wādī' l-Nīl*, IV, 58 (11 November 1870), the novelty of which is stressed in the notice, which is headed: 'A literary innovation and a work of Arabization, or the introduction of a new form of authorship in the Arabic language'.[17] What is certain is that he paid particular attention to the French classical theatre, translating five plays by Molière and three by Racine. A remarkable feature of his work is that – even though not concerned with the box-office – he went further than most writers for the theatre in that he chose colloquial verse for the rendering of even the loftiest of tragedies.

Apart from such verse plays (including several of Shakespeare's[18]), the church hymns mentioned earlier, and the monumental but isolated translation of the Iliad by Sulaymān al-Bustānī (1856–1925) in 1904, poetry did not arouse nearly so much interest among the translators as did the other genres. There are some notable approaches to European lyric poetry, such as Aḥmad Shawqī's (1868–1932) translation (now lost) of Lamartine's 'Le Lac', made while he was a student in France between 1887 and 1891, but this does not seem to have made a profound impression even on his own poetry. As for the English Romantics, it was not until the appearance of the Dīwān school early in the twentieth century that they received much attention, and this mostly in journals. A book on Byron containing seven translations was published by Muḥammad al-Sibāʿī in 1912, but the most ample and authoritative translations of English poems were by ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād (1889–1964), whose poems were not collected in book form until 1929.[19]

It is tempting to relate this phenomenon to the general observation that the concrete products of the west had more immediate appeal than the abstract, but the simpler explanation is that the narrative and theatrical genres were totally new to high Arabic literature, so that the only models to be followed were foreign ones, whereas poets had in their own culture a rich treasury to draw on.

That the public's interest in western perceptions was constantly widening and deepening is indicated when translators on their own initiative went beyond texts that may be held to have entertainment value to thought-provoking, philosophical ones. An important pioneer in this line was Fatḥī Zaghlūl (d. 1914), who translated several of Jeremy Bentham's

[17] 'Bidʿah adabiyyah wa qiṭʿah taʿrībiyyah aw idkhāl uslūb jadīd min at-taʾlīf fī 'l-lughah al-ʿarabiyyah', quoted in Yūsuf Rāmītsh, *Usrat al-Muwaylihī wa atharuhā fī l-adab al-ʿarabī*, Cairo [1980], p. 153.

[18] See the chapter 'The Arabs and Shakespeare', in M. M. Badawi, *Modern Arabic literature and the west*, London, 1985.

[19] See Muḥammad ʿAbdul-Ḥai, 'A Bibliography of Arabic Translations of English and American Poetry (1830–1970)', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, VII (1976), pp. 120–150.

books – the earliest in 1888 – as well as sociological works by Gustave Le Bon and one by E. Desmoulins entitled *À quoi tient la superiorité des Anglo-Saxons*.[20] The significance of this last choice in British-occupied territory is self-evident. No less evident is the fact that such initiatives were quick to multiply.

Difficulties encountered

The energy and initiative displayed by Arab translators is all the more impressive as they have had to face peculiar problems in addition to those familiar to any of us who have ventured into this field, perhaps with the comfortable assumption that fluency in two languages is all that is required. Shidyāq, one of the pioneers, expressed himself in verse on the subject[21]:

> He who has missed out on translation knows not what travail is:
> None but the warrior is scorched by the fire of war!
> I find a thousand notions for which there is none akin
> Amongst us, and a thousand with none appropriate;
> And a thousand terms with no equivalent.
> I find disjunction for junction, though junction is needed.
> And terseness of style when the context calls for
> Elaboration, if the purpose is to be attained.

Obviously the most basic difficulty was the absence of a technical vocabulary, not only in the new sciences but also in the new literary genres. In discussing novels in 1881, Muḥammad ʿAbduh had no word for the new genre other than a coinage from the French, *rūmāniyyāt*,[22] and for several decades thereafter *riwāyah* often did duty for both a novel and a play.

A revealing example of the pressure under which an Arab intellectual had to function, of the ingenuity he displayed and of the way that disparate endeavours supported one another, is Shidyāq's fumbling for an Arabic rendition of 'socialist'. This was when, as editor of *al-Jawāʾib* and no doubt as rushed for time as most editors are, he had to comment on the activities of various left-wing groups in Europe, such as the French *communards*; he resorted to various circumlocutions such as *al-ṣushyālīst al-qāʾilīn bi 'l-ishtirāk fī 'l-amlāk* before finally coining *ishtirākī*, to which he was led by his own earlier translation of 'The Acts of the Apostles' 4:32.[23]

The challenge was compounded by the Arabs' long-established reverence for their language as both the medium of revelation and the repository of past glories. Because the issue has long been played out, it is easy to lose

[20] Jāk Tājir, *Ḥarakat al-tarjamah*, pp. 127–8.
[21] Quoted in ʿImād al-Ṣulḥ, *Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq: Āthāruh wa ʿaṣruh*, Beirut, 1980, p. 144.
[22] Pérès, 'Le roman', p. 267.
[23] On Shidyāq's labours as a translator, see ʿImād al-Ṣulḥ, *Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq*, pp. 144–165.

sight of the fact that there was a substantial body of conservatives to whom it was dogma that Arabic was perfect and complete and who – mainly between 1910 and 1925 – engaged the modernists in heated polemics,[24] contending that only ignorance of its treasures made it necessary for them to add loan words or even new coinages to it.

Furthermore, Shidyāq's hint in the verse I have quoted at the difficulty of deciding what had to be abridged and what was to be elaborated shows that, from the start, Arab translators did not view their task as one of slavish transposition, but rather of adaptation to the needs of a new public. When working on the Bible, Shidyāq did not hide his impatience with his English collaborators over their excursions into etymology to decide the precise meaning of a word and their suspicion of stylistic flourishes suggestive of the Qurʾān.

At the very least, the choice of the material and the style in which it was rendered were reflections of prevailing standards. Thus in the translations produced in the nineteenth century, even when the story-line was fairly faithfully maintained, elaborately rhyming titles bear witness to the persistence of the stylistic preferences of previous centuries. A good illustration is *Paul et Virginie*, the climax of which has the heroine on a ship that is foundering within sight of shore, but refusing the chance of being saved by a sailor because she literally would rather die than take off her voluminous skirts; this was translated three times, and in Muḥammad ʿUthmān Jalāl's version[25] it becomes *al-Amānī wa 'l-Minnah fī Ḥadīth Qabūl wa Ward Jannah*. Not only are the protagonists given names that are phonetically close to the originals yet recognizably Arabic (although not without some strain), but the text is in rhymed prose throughout and studded with verses and philosophical reflections.

Muḥammad ʿUthmān Jalāl did the same with the plays. A detailed comparison of his *al-Shaykh Matlūf* with the first scene of Molière's *Tartuffe*[26] shows that, having converted the characters to Islam, he then toned down both the criticism of the man of religion and expressions of children's rebellion against their parents, to say nothing of other arbitrary changes, all at some cost to the characterization and the dramatic effect.

At the other end of the spectrum are adaptations so free that a later critic[27] was to say that most of the writers of the first quarter of the twentieth century were 'creators when translating, and translators when creating'.

[24] For an echo of this controversy, see Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Ḥadīth al-Arbiʿāʾ*, vol. II, Cairo, 1937, pp. 327–9.

[25] See H. A. R. Gibb, 'Studies in contemporary Arabic literature', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, V, Pt 3, pp. 1–2.

[26] In Shimon Ballas, 'Iṭlālah ʿalā Manhaj Muḥammad ʿUthmān Jalāl fī l-tarjamah', *al-Karmil*, 6 (1985), pp. 7–36.

[27] Ḥabīb Zaḥlāwī, 'Kitābān wa Kātibān', *al-Risālah*, xvii, 821 (28 March 1949), pp. 379–81.

This is well exemplified by Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī (1876–1924), who 'translated' several French novels although he knew no French. I have even been told that – at least at the height of the Romantic wave in the twenties and thirties of this century – hopeful young writers used to submit to journals effusions of their own labelled 'free translations', in the belief that the prestige of things western was such that they stood a better chance of having them published than if they presented them as original works.

Two of the terms used in this process were *taʿrīb* and *tamṣīr*, literally 'Arabization' and 'Egyptianization'. These are not always used in a precise sense (for example, Muḥammad ʿUthmān Jalāl's use of *taʿrīb* for rendering into the colloquial is peculiar to him), but both imply a good deal more than mere translation into standard Arabic or into Egyptian colloquial. Especially in the theatre, what was involved was nothing less than the transposition of the plot to an Arab or Egyptian milieu, and that in turn entailed making the characters behave in accordance with locally acceptable customs. On the practices that took shape at about the time of the first World War, we have the personal testimony of the main architect of modern Arab drama, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898–1987):[28]

> The 'Egyptianized' foreign play used to be described as *iqtibās* [literally, 'lighting a piece of wood from a fire', hence 'acquisition' or 'adoption'], just as a foreign novel freely translated (as was done by al-Manfalūṭī) was described as 'Arabization' – i.e. 'Arabization' [was the term used] in [fictional] literature, and 'Egyptianization' in the theatre. The word *iqtibās* was not used in its strict linguistic sense. In common usage, it meant that the play was neither pure creation nor pure translation. It consisted rather of transferring the topic from one milieu to another, changing the foreign characters into Egyptians or Orientals . . .
>
> Amongst us, theatrical *iqtibās* . . . amounted almost to semi-authorship especially in those long departed days when we used to write before women abandoned the veil. At that time, in our sex-segregated society, we had to alter the social relations that existed among men and women in an integrated one; so if we wanted to adapt a play in which a man met a woman, we got into all sorts of complications . . . It was impossible to make the wife of So-and-So 'display herself' in front of the husband of Such-and-Such. We used to get round this in various ways, making this woman the paternal or maternal cousin of that man, and so on, so that men and women in all the plays of that period were related . . . The alteration of social relations in accordance with the demands of our milieu in turn necessitated changes in the dialogue, the characterization and some of the situations of the play, adding up to considerable departures from the original . . . These activities were tantamount to a school for the training of playwrights, giving the opportunity to such of them as wished to spread their wings in the future to fly solo . . .
>
> None of us allowed himself to write the word *taʾlīf* ['authorship'] unless that was what had actually taken place, or if his inventiveness and effort had reached the point of creative writing. If the play was translated, then the name of the foreign

[28] *Sijn al-ʿumr*, Cairo, 1988, pp. 194–6.

author was mentioned in all advertisements, no matter how valuable the contribution of the translator or 'Arabizer' was . . . But if this was not practicable – because the play had been so changed that it had become something else – then it was enough to say, '*iqtibās* from the pen of So-and-So'. It so happened that ᶜAbbās ᶜAllām wanted to get rid of this word *iqtibās* that had become customary, so he adopted – and perhaps he was the first to do so – that obscure, ambiguous formula when used by itself: 'from the pen of . . .' . . . This practice spread among all writers until it came to seem natural.

A small factor in the equation, but one usually overlooked, is that inherited Arab notions of plagiarism are not identical with western ones, or are at least more elaborately graded, the concern with choice diction being such that only word for word reproduction is condemned outright. The liberties taken by such as al-Manfalūṭī did give rise to some debate at the time, but in terms of what they contributed or failed to contribute to Arab readers, not out of an obligation of faithfulness to the originals. A view closer to that prevailing in the west was bound to develop in time.

Indeed many Arab translators impress us as much with their selfless devotion as with their energy. Those who assume an immediate economic motivation behind every initiative would find it hard to explain Muḥammad ᶜUthmān Jalāl's persistence in the use of the colloquial, for he could find no patronage for his first book and had to publish it at his own expense, and even the most celebrated of his plays, the adaptation of *Tartuffe*, was never staged in his lifetime.[29] Much is owed to the determination or out-and-out idiosyncrasies of some men of learning. A French–Arabic dictionary that deserves to be better known is that of Mohammad El-Naggary Bey,[30] a judge who – besides giving special attention to legal terms – was so fond of La Fontaine that under such words as 'loup' or 'renard' he reproduces the whole of the relevant fables with Arabic verse translations, most signed by the same Muḥammad ᶜUthmān Jalāl. Mīkhāʾīl Nuᶜaymah's (1889–1988) *cri de coeur* has often been repeated:[31]

> We are in a stage of our literary and social evolution in which many spiritual needs have awakened – needs which we did not feel before our contact with the West. As we have not the pens or the brains that can fulfil those needs, let us then translate! And let us honour the translators because they are the mediators between us and the larger human family.

In trumpeting his call, he was unnecessarily and unjustly derogatory towards his contemporaries' creative powers, but he was also putting into

[29] Ballas, 'Muḥammad ᶜUthmān Jalāl', pp. 8, 13.

[30] *Dictionnaire français-arabe*, 2 vols, Alexandria, 1903, 1905.

[31] Taher Khemiri and Georg Kampffmeyer, *Leaders in contemporary Arabic literature*, Pt 1, Leipzig, 1930, p. 31, translating from *al-Ghirbāl*, p. 127; see also M. M. Badawi, *A critical introduction to modern Arabic poetry*, Cambridge, 1975, p. 182.

words the broad concern with culture evinced by those already engaged in the task he advocated.

The stimulation of creativity

One more aspect of our question deserves consideration. We all know that a shelf laden with books is no guarantee that the owner is a well-read man. How much of the translators' sizeable output was in constant currency, impinging upon young minds and helping in their formation?[32]

Once again, we have cause to be grateful to Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, the city-bred son of a judge, for his candid account of the effect some foreign works had upon him in a period extending roughly from 1910 to 1918, when he was still a schoolboy.[33] After recalling his delight at his mother's recounting of folk tales, he writes:

> There began to appear on the market European narratives translated by the Syrians who were good at languages and had been educated in the missionary schools. My mother became fond of these too, and re-told them to us as she had done with previous ones . . .
>
> My pride at passing the primary school certificate at the first attempt had the effect of making me irresponsible, lax, contemptuous, and neglectful [of my studies] – this is to say nothing of the lack of constraint I experienced as my parents were away from time to time, and the existence of the 'American Cosmograph' [showing] episodes of the adventure serials that entranced me: after the Zigomar serial came the episodes of Fantomas! Add to all this the Rocambole novels which were available for hire in bookshops . . . I had only to pay five piastres a month to become a member, and I could then hire and read the twenty parts of a long story like Rocambole, or the collected works of Alexandre Dumas père.
>
> I remember that I bought out of my pocket money a book newly translated into Arabic: it was by the English philosopher Spencer, on ethics, and I felt proud to be reading philosophy, although I do not now believe that I understood anything worth mentioning in this book or its likes. Our knowledge of English was not such as to enable us to read English philosophical books, and even if it had been, we would not have found the wherewithal in our pockets. As for the Arab philosophers, such as al-Ghazali, Averroes and Avicenna, no one ever directed us to them . . .
>
> The only [literary] translations that had appeared then were the first part of Hugo's *Les Misérables* translated by Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm in grand Arabic style which we used actually to intone. Then there appeared a poor translation of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* which was incapable of suggesting to us that it was of lasting literary quality. It is true that Fatḥī Zaghlūl had translated something by Montesquieu, perhaps *L'Esprit des Lois*, and my father had many copies of this which he was to distribute, but that book did not attract me at the time . . .
>
> What I was really eager to read at that age was the plays which we used to see at

[32] For a present-day critic's estimate of the most significant translations. See Luwīs ʿAwaḍ, 'Maskh al-Kāʾināt', *Ahrām*, 24 November 1972, p. 7. [33] *Sijn al-ʿumr*, pp. 79, 114–15, 132–7.

the Opera House and other theatres, . . . but despite long searches I found only a few, poorly printed, such as *Buridan*, *The Martyrs of Love* [i.e. *Romeo and Juliet*] with all its poetry, *Othello*, and then *Louis XI* with which I was greatly delighted, memorizing from it the entire part of Louis. But I did not find *Hamlet* although I was eager to read it as it had been staged in Arabic, nor did I find a single one of the Molière plays which ʿUthmān Jalāl had translated into colloquial verse.

This may be compared with the books that another eminent writer of about the same age, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889–1973), remembers as having been on sale in the shops of provincial towns. These were mainly devotional works and hagiographies, books of magic, and some folk tales, with not a single translation among them.[34]

The contrast is striking. And yet even Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's list is not particularly impressive, nor did the difference ensure that he should become a man of wider culture than his more humbly born contemporary. Even more decisive were their temperaments, their consciously made choices, their mastery of languages giving them direct access to other literatures. Indeed Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was to comment on one of his own translations:[35]

> The aim of those who transpose poetry from one language to another is not to convey to their readers a true picture of it. The aim must be to give their readers an inkling of it, and to lead those who have the time and the resources to get to know it, and to drink of it at the source.

At a time when elements of two cultures were meeting, vying, clashing or intermingling, translation was a revealing index of new directions and new priorities, as well as an important channel for the diffusion of new information and new perceptions; but it was only one of a complex of interacting forces produced by and producing change.

[34] *al-Ayyām*, I, tr. as *An Egyptian childhood* by E. H. Paxton, London, 1981, p. 50.
[35] *Suḥuf mukhtārah min al-shiʿr al-tamthīlī ʿind al-Yūnān*, Cairo 1920, p. 50

CHAPTER 2

THE NEO-CLASSICAL ARABIC POETS

1 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Neo-classical poetry in modern Arabic literature in the nineteenth century was not the outcome of the sudden incursion of a new literary model upon the established system of literature. Neither was it the product of a literary grouping around an innovative poet (or group of poets) endowed with revolutionary zeal. Quite the contrary. Its development was quiet, involving no visible upheavals. The main trend of this school (if school it was) was to go back to an old, venerable model, and to relive the glorious experience of ancient poets. The model is, of course, that of medieval Arabic poetry at its peak, as represented by the spirited bards of the *Jāhilī* (Pre-Islamic) and early Islamic periods and, more emphatically, by the great urbane poets of the heyday of Abbasid creativity: al-Mutanabbī, al-Buḥturī, Abū Tammām, Abū 'l-ʿAlaʾ al-Maʿarrī and al-Sharīf al-Raḍiyy.

In point of fact, modern neo-classical poetry does not constitute a phase of literature that can be sharply separated from its immediate ancestry. Arab poets, writing in traditional fashions, never ceased operating in the Arabic-speaking regions. Even in the darkest of times, for example between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, the production of poetry in *fuṣḥā* (= literary Arabic) and according to the traditional metres continued. Admittedly, this was generally dull poetry of uninspired literary quality and recondite language. It was composed by imitative versifiers who very rarely employed it as a means of expressing fresh human experience. The bulk of late medieval *dīwāns* (collections of verse) are replete with rhetorical devices and puns. Rather than addressing the major issues of life and society, these works dabbled in trifling matters; and rather than demonstrating individual poetic voice, the late medieval poet was prized for his ability to display a variety of imitations, verbal tricks and chronograms. The public for whom these poems were meant was, as a rule, a select group of ulema and privileged *literati* who saw the poet as an entertainer and boon-companion. The poet was in the main a reciter of his own poetry, since the printing press was not in general use in Arab lands before the nineteenth century, and a

reading public in the proper sense was virtually non-existent owing to the paucity of general education among the masses.

With the rejuvenation of cultural life in Lebanon, Egypt and other Arab regions in the course of the last century, the awareness that something was radically wrong with poetry – and with literary life as a whole – began to dawn upon authors and readers alike. The exposure to European literature, directly or through translations, posed a great challenge to Arab authors. The spread of popular education, the advent of printing and the emergence of the mass press all created a set of new cultural realities and, above all, a reading public of growing numbers and of a new social background. Some basic assumptions in the realm of literature had, therefore, to be reassessed, and certain practices had to be changed to cope with the new realities.

Prose was quick to respond. In the second half of the nineteenth century it was already undergoing radical changes through the adoption of new literary and journalistic genres and through the coining of new words and phrases suited for the needs of modern life. Medieval prose, along with its rhymes, parallelism and *hendiadis*, was giving way to a new pliable style, accessible to the common reader. Toward the end of the last century the prose style of many modern Arab writers had little in it that resembled late medieval prose (which, like poetry, was recondite and burdened with verbal acrobatics). Poetry, however, was unable to forsake its ancient moorings. Fourteen centuries of continuous tradition was at stake. It was doubly difficult for Arabic poets to adopt 'imported' literary models and concepts since that would have involved a violation of the very paradigm of cultural values. Poetry in its traditional forms and language was enshrined in the history of Arab-Islamic civilization, invoking its finest hours. Furthermore, the 'Arab ear' was so accustomed to the rhythms of that poetry, so entranced by it, that any experimentation that affected the inherited rhythmic structure was bound to alienate the reading (or auditive) public.

Therefore, instead of adopting a new set of operative principles, Arabic poetry in the nineteenth century opted for a 'return to the sources', and set out to bridge the gap of long centuries of immobility. The aim of the neo-classical poets was to produce verses which were reminiscent in their 'masculinity' and lucidity of al-Mutanabbī and his peers, and to refrain as much as possible from the trivial pursuits that characterized the poetry of the 'period of decline'. The idea of a radical undermining of the norms of classical poetry was not entertained by any major poet or critic of the early *Nahḍah* (Renaissance). Such notions as deviating from the stylistic norms of medieval poetry or reforming the old metrical system were hardly ever treated seriously, and it was only in the second half of this century that they

gained popularity. Admittedly, poets sometimes expressed a desire to diverge from the accepted poetic practices. One such expression is the famous statement of Aḥmad Shawqī, in his introduction to the first volume of *al-Shawqiyyāt* (1898), concerning his efforts to introduce new features into his poetry. Shawqī asserts that he had to employ devious means in order to make these poems palatable to his editors and mentors. But what was the nature of these innovations? Judging by the poetry he published at that early stage of his career, it is possible to assume that in spite of his familiarity with French literature, Shawqī never intended to effect a far-reaching change in the structure of the poem or in its language. The poetic text that he provides in his introduction to illustrate his point is highly indicative of a neo-classical rather than a modernizing bent. Instead of opening his panegyric with a *nasīb* section bewailing the deserted campsite of the beloved, as in *Jāhilī* poems, he produces an amorous prelude reminiscent of Abbasid or Andalusian love poetry.

The impact of western poetic concepts on nineteenth-century Arabic poetry was negligible. Translations from European poetry into Arabic were few and far between. This fact is noteworthy in view of the profusion of translated western prose (fiction, drama, history and so on) in Egypt and Lebanon in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although some of these translators (such as Najīb al-Ḥaddād [1867–1899], a Lebanese who settled in Egypt) were themselves poets, it was only on rare occasions that they translated poetry into Arabic.[1] Admittedly, western plays in verse were translated into Arabic, but this activity was totally divorced, at least in the minds of Arab authors and readers, from the world of the 'poem' although it stimulated the rise of a local verse drama (whose most prominent practitioner in the first decades of our century was Aḥmad Shawqī).

It is of interest to note that those poets and intellectuals who were very much at home with European literature never dared, in the early stages of *Nahḍah*, to urge Arabic poetry to expose itself to the influence of western poetic concepts. Najīb al-Ḥaddād once again comes to mind in this context. His work as a whole testifies to an impressive familiarity with western poetry, old and new. This familiarity is well represented by his famous article 'A comparison between Arabic and European poetry', which constitutes a systematic and illuminating analysis of the distinctive qualities of each, touching upon issues of themes, prosody, language and imagery. However, in the conclusion of his article he has these things to say:

[1] The remarkable translation of the *Iliad* by Sulaymān al-Bustānī (1856–1925) into versified Arabic was published in Cairo in 1904.

To sum up: they [the Europeans] have excelled over us in certain things, while we excelled over them in many things. Our poetry embraces the best qualities of theirs, while their poetry embraces none of ours. This is undoubtedly due to the superior nature of the Arabic language. No other language possesses the richness of its lexicon, the abundance of its expressive devices or the grandeur of its eloquence. The Europeans themselves have described it as 'the most perfect language in the world'. This acknowledgment suffices to demonstrate its superiority over all languages, as well as the superiority of our poetry over all others.[2]

The adherence to tradition, however, was less binding when it came to the subject matter of poetic expression. True, here too the early poets and critics did not explicitly advocate a change in the topics of poetry although some of them, including Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī, one of the earliest and greatest of the neo-classicists, occasionally hinted at the need for change. Al-Bārūdī expressed, in his introduction to his *dīwān* as well as in some of his poems, a new attitude concerning the function of poetry and the subject-matter on which it draws.[3] However, al-Bārūdī and other poets went on composing poetry according to the traditional *aghrāḍ* (normative thematic types). The poets' exposure to the winds of change in the modern Arab world, as well as the changing nature of their audience (readers of mass circulating papers and printed *dīwāns* as opposed to listeners at private or public gatherings), brought about a greater awareness on their part that it was their duty to reflect 'modern' topics without deserting the traditional modes of expression. In the year 1900 the Lebanese-Egyptian poet Khalīl Muṭrān (who was not himself a neo-classicist in the strict sense of this term) expressed this awareness as follows:

The [classical] Arab way (*khiṭṭa*) in poetry should not necessarily be our own. The Arabs lived in their own age, and we live in ours. They had their manners, mores and sciences, and we have ours. It is imperative, therefore, that our poetry should reflect our own conceptions and feelings rather than those of the ancients. However the expression of these should conform to the same set of formal and verbal modes as theirs.[4]

This is one of the most lucid expressions of what may be described as the implicit ideology of modern Arabic neo-classical poetry: to be traditional in form and contemporary in content; to express the outlook and concerns of our age while adhering to the compositional principles of another. Indeed, neo-classical poets went a long way in ridding themselves of trifling concerns and grappling with current issues. But the distinction between

[2] See Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī (ed.), *Mukhtārāt al-Manfalūṭī*, Cairo, n.d., p. 138.

[3] See M. M. Badawi, 'Al-Bārūdī: precursor of the modern Arabic poetic revival', *Die Welt des Islams* n.s., XII (1969), pp. 232–4.

[4] *Al-Majallah al-Miṣriyyah*, July 1900, p. 85; quoted in Adunīs (ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd), *Al-Thābit wa'l-mutaḥawwil*, III, Beirut, 1978, p. 94.

'form' and 'content' inherent in the above formulation and in many similar ones was an impracticable course of action, for the old prosodic and stylistic constraints were very often detrimental to the poet's desire to be 'contemporary'. On the other hand, the classical model itself has not remained untouched, as we shall see, in the course of the last hundred years. Some of the basic medieval Arabic poetic norms underwent gradual but important changes at the hands of the major neo-classical poets.

The main epoch of Arabic neo-classical poetry spans the last third of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth. The year 1932 marks the death of two of Egypt's foremost neo-classical poets, Shawqī and Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, and at least in that country it signifies the end of an era. As we shall presently see, the neo-classical type continued to live after that date, and many important poets who write in that style are active in several Arab countries up to this day. However, a new type of poetry, commonly referred to as Post-classical or 'Romantic', which had its beginnings in the first and second decades of our century, occupied a central position in the world of poetry in the 1930s and 1940s, and rendered the neo-classical type outmoded. After the rise of the romantic type and even before that, we find many poets vacillating between the norms of classical and post-classical poetry.

The question now arises as to what corpus falls into the category of neo-classical poetry. The primary distinctive feature of that poetry as represented by its major practitioners may be summed up as follows:

1. The poems of the neo-classical poets are composed in the traditional metres of classical Arabic poetry, with minor derivative metres. As a rule, they are monorhyming.

2. Neo-classical poets continue to use the classical *aghrāḍ* (thematic types), and most of their *dīwāns* are arranged accordingly. These *aghrāḍ* often impose a pre-determined structure, and sometimes affect the choice of metres.

3. The poems are frequently impersonal, and the poet's experience is hidden beneath layers of convention. Sections of these poems which sometimes impress their reader as 'confessional' often turn out to be genre-bound rather than spontaneous.

4. The neo-classical language is essentially dependent on that of mediaeval Arab poetry, especially that of the Abbasid period. Not only the lexical inventory but the choice of figurative language is derivative in this fashion. The invocation of classical place-names, images and personages is a major feature in the art of most representative neo-classical poets.

It is to be emphasized that not all these features function equally prominently in the works of the different poets who belong to this trend.

Some have little recourse to the traditional *aghrāḍ* (for example Jamīl Ṣidqī al-Zahāwī); others are less attuned to the language of classical poetry, drawing heavily on the modern prose style and occasionally on the vernacular (for example Aḥmad al-Ṣāfī al-Najafī). Moreover, there are poets who, though employing classical *aghrāḍ* and language, display in some of their poems a sensitivity and structure which render their poetry in part romantic rather than strictly neo-classical. A case in point is Khalīl Muṭrān (1872–1949), one of the most distinguished Arab poets of this century, whose poetry betrays neo-classical features but also certain elements that stand in stark contrast to the spirit of classicism. Finally, we find today a great number of poets who employ the neo-classical model only in a fraction of their poetry (mainly in poems meant to be recited at public gatherings) while the bulk of their poetry is of a blatantly post-classical, even modernistic, nature.

The major neo-classical poets have received their due share of critical appraisal in the last fifty years or so. However, Arab critics and scholars have so far not reached an accepted term by which to designate this poetic school. Several terms are in use for this purpose, two of which are fairly common: *shiʿr al-ʾIḥyāʾ* (the poetry of revival) and *al-madrasah al-taqlīdiyyah/al-ittibāʿiyyah* (the traditional/classical school). In recent years one frequently comes across the term *al-shiʿr al-ʿamūdī* (poetry based on the norms of medieval poetics). Other current terms are *al-shiʿr al-turāthī* (poetry pertaining to the heritage), *madrasat al-Bārūdī wa-Shawqī* (the school of al-Bārūdī and Shawqī); and, finally, *al-madrasah al-klāsīkiyyah al-jadīdah* (the neo-classical school).

2. HISTORY

It is possible to discern three stages in the history of modern neo-classical poetry. The first begins at the middle of the nineteenth century and ends at its end, with the appearance of the fully developed poetry of Shawqī. During this period the late-medieval poetic paradigm was still paramount, but poets in Lebanon and Egypt were gradually deviating from it. These poets, Christian and Muslim, were, consciously or unconsciously, aiming for the restoration of the radiant classical model and were following in its footsteps. They had no ambition to evolve a new poetic tradition unknown to the Arabs; neither were they purposely trying to transform old concepts and practices to suit their time.

The second stage spans the first thirty or so years of the twentieth century, a period in which Shawqī was the dominant figure, with other Egyptian poets (Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm, Ismaʿīl Ṣabrī) as cohorts. It was during this

period that the distinctive features of what might be termed 'high neo-classical poetry' took shape, and new centres of the poetry of revival, as it is sometimes called by Arab authors, came to the fore, notably in Iraq and Syria. Unlike the first period, however, the age of Shawqī was already witness to the rise of more audacious trends in Arabic poetry and criticism which at times were blatantly anti-classical. The appearance of such proto-romantic or romantic figures as Muṭrān and Shukrī in Egypt, as well as Gibrān and Nuʿaymah in the American offshoot of the Lebanese centre (*al-Mahjar*, that is, parts of America to which some Arab writers emigrated), had a considerable, if unacknowledged, influence on the ways of the neo-classical school during its 'golden age' and thereafter. It is conceivable that the advent of a wave of militant anti-neo-classical criticism (as in the early writings of al-ʿAqqād in Egypt and Nuʿaymah in *al-Mahjar*) might paradoxically have forced the neo-classicists to entrench in the traditional modes rather than demonstrate a greater measure of modernity. The dialectic of literary evolution, however, teaches us that a dynamic literary movement (and the neo-classical school was definitely dynamic at that stage) can under no circumstances be effectively insulated from innovative trends and, indeed, from interacting with its very rivals. Consequently, we witness a variety of new features – conceptual, thematic and stylistic – gradually percolating through the thick layers of convention, rendering the neo-classical poetic text at once 'restorative' and 'relevant'.

The third stage, which carries us down to the present day, is characterized by the virtual stagnation of the poetic model, although several neo-classical poets of merit did make their debut after, or shortly before, the death of Shawqī.

Early neo-classicism

It is a platitude to say that modern Arabic poetry, like modern Arabic literature in general, was set in motion by the social, political and cultural developments which swept the Arab world during the nineteenth century. Literary history, however, is called upon to pay special attention to those factors within the literary system and in its vicinity which contributed to the rise of a new breed of literature. One such factor is, without doubt, the repercussions caused by the coming of the printing press. All the different types of literary production were affected. Texts of medieval literature were being printed by this fledgling industry, thus becoming accessible to wide circles of readers. The reading public itself was not only growing in numbers but also exhibiting new literary predilections, different from those of the lucky few who had been the main connoisseurs of literature in pre-modern times.

Within the literary system itself a realignment of the constituent elements was taking place. A new kind of prose was emerging which was simpler than that of the past, introducing its ever-widening public to a range of new, dynamic genres: the novel and the short story, the magazine article and the feuilleton, a variety of historical and biographical writings of remarkable lucidity. Poetry thus found itself confronting an aggressive contender that was threatening to dislodge it from the supreme status that it had enjoyed throughout previous ages.

Therefore, Arab writers of traditional training who had the opportunity to obtain a glimpse of European culture were quick to recognize that poetry had to be invigorated if it was to stand up to the challenge. Complacency had to be left behind, and the trivial preoccupations of the pre-modern poets had to be replaced by more serious concerns. The increasing availability of the printed *dīwāns* of ancient Arabic poetry familiarized the reading public, as well as the poets, with the masterpieces of the golden age of that poetry; and it was in these masterpieces that the neo-classical poets found their inspiration as well as their operative models.

Lebanon was evidently the first country in which the old corpus was emulated. The new wave of poets came mainly from amongst the court poets whom rulers, princes and church prelates employed in their service. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the court of Bashīr al-Shihābī was the scene of much poetic activity. In that court, poets of some note, such as Nīqūlā al-Turk (1763–1828) and Buṭrus Karāmah (1774–1851), continued to write in accordance with the late medieval style, and a great many of their poems consisted of elaborations of older poems (*tashṭīr* and *takhmīs*). But it was in the selfsame court that one of the precursors of neo-classicism rose to prominence. Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī (1800–1871) was a scholar and poet, steeped in classical Arabic lore. After leaving the court he participated in the new translation of the Bible into Arabic. His many books on grammar and rhetoric attest to his great erudition in the traditional branches of knowledge. His interest in Abbasid poetry is reflected in his edition of the *dīwān* of al-Mutanabbī. His own poetry, though not demonstrably free of artifice and trivial concerns, rises high above that of his immediate predecessors in the richness and lucidity of its language. At times, his panegyrics addressed to Prince Bashīr are truly reminiscent of those of al-Mutanabbī and al-Sharīf al-Raḍiyy, and the last poem he wrote, lamenting the death of his son Ḥabīb, is in its sincerity and simplicity far superior to the elegies of the late medieval versifiers.

In emulating the style of the great Abbasid poets, al-Yāzijī showed the way out of the stagnation and immobility in which Arabic poetry had languished for centuries. Many of his followers, including his sons Khalīl

and Ibrāhīm, were later to emerge as notable participants in the development of neo-classical poetry. His daughter, Wardah al-Yāzijī (1838–1924), along with the Egyptian poetess ʿĀʾishah al-Taymūriyyah (1840–1902), was among the first Arab women in modern times to write and publish poetry.[5]

Many of the Lebanese writers and poets emigrated to Egypt in the second half of the nineteenth century, and left their mark on the development of modern Arabic literature and journalism in that country rather than in the country of their origin. Others emigrated to far-off places, including the New World, where they maintained their loyalty to Arabic language and literature for a long period. It was from amongst these emigrants that the first anti-classical revolution emanated in the early decades of our century under the leadership of Gibrān Khalīl Gibrān (Jibrān).

Closely related to the Lebanese centre (Beirut and its environs) were the other centres of traditional learning in greater Syria, including Damascus and Aleppo. In some of these centres poetry was slowly breaking loose from its medieval fetters. Although no major neo-classical poet arose in these centres in the nineteenth century, we do find in Aleppo a number of groupings or families of writers who made their contribution to modern Arabic literature. One such family is that of al-Marrāsh. Two brothers, ʿAbd Allāh and Faransīs, as well as their sister Mariyāna, were among the earliest Arabs of those regions to evince a modernizing spirit. Faransīs Marrāsh (1836–1873) studied in Aleppo and in Paris. His poetry book, *Mirʾāt al-Ḥasnāʾ* ('The beautiful maiden's mirror', 1872), is a curious mixture of classicism of language and modernity of outlook. In his introduction to this book, he rejects the traditional poetic *aghrāḍ*, notably the panegyrics and the lampoons. Indeed, his poetry is free of the conventional amatory preludes and word jugglery. His sister Mariyāna al-Marrāsh (1848–1919) was equally at home with the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, the medieval Sufi poet, and with Lamartine; but her own poetry, published in her collection *Bint Fikr* ('Daughter of thought', 1893), was of a distinctly traditional bent.

The hotbed of neo-classical poetry, however, was Egypt. As in Lebanon and Syria, the mid-nineteenth century witnessed a flurry of poetic and other literary activity in that country. But the leading poets of that period (Ismāʿīl al-Khashshāb and ʿAlī Abū' l-Naṣr, among others) were not far removed from the practices of their predecessors, and their poetry, though plentiful, had little in it that was original.

[5] Wardah al-Yāzijī, *Ḥadīqat al-ward*, Beirut, n.d. [1867]; ʿĀʾishah al-Taymūriyyah, *Ḥilyat al-ṭirāz*, Cairo, n.d. [1885].