

On the Rise of the Egyptian Novel*

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Although the novel as a literary genre is relatively new in Arabic literature, the narrative element has always been an integral part of it. This is evident in the seven pre-Islamic odes known as *Mu'allaqāt* and in the prose romances of the early days of Islam (eighth century A.D.), known as *sīra*, which depict true historical events and idealize many heroic figures. In addition, a considerable number of romances about fascinating folk heroes were created in Egypt during the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries and transmitted orally.¹ Some of these are still being narrated by professional reciters (*rāwi*) in marketplaces and country fairs. Other early narrative genres are the tale and the anecdote. These short forms (*qaṣaṣ*) are noted for their fantastic, didactic, and humorous features. Once collected in encyclopedias and compendiums, these witty stories enjoyed great popularity and had—along with the historical, pseudohistorical, and heroic romances—a considerable influence on the rise and development of the Egyptian novel.²

During this period prose writing was regarded as an art in itself, and a group of professional writers indulged themselves in rhetorical and ornamental figures employing a rather pretentious style (*saḥīḥ*) in narrating a new kind of story (*maqāma*) which revolves around the pranks, humorous tricks, and quick wit of a pivotal character. The narrator of these satirical picaresques³ usually meets the protagonist at the beginning of the story, follows his path, explains his motivations, and comments on the events.⁴ When subsequent generations of writers began to disregard the content and neglect the narrative aspects of this genre in favor of an inflated and bombastic style, the *maqāma* lost its literary prominence, although it did not disappear entirely.⁵

The development of these different narrative forms was interrupted by the political and cultural decline of the Arab world, and was arrested completely by the arrival of the Ottoman Turks in the sixteenth century (Cairo fell in

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¹Such as "Antara," "Abu Zayd al-Hilālī," "Sayf ibn dhi Yazan," "al-Zahir Bibars," "Ali al-Miṣri," and "Fayruz Shah." In his book *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabi* (History of Arabic Literature), Muhammad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt calls these stories "the Iliad of the Arabs" (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, n.d.), p. 394.

²See Ṭāha Wādī, *Madkhal ala Tārīkh al-Riwayah al-Miṣriyah*, 1905-1952 (Introduction to the History of the Egyptian Novel), (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyah, 1972), p. 21.

³Because of its episodic structure and adventurous content, the *maqāma* has often been regarded as a forerunner of, if not a model for, the European picaresque novel. See Gero von Wilpert, *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1964), p. 406; also *Kleines literarisches Lexikon* (Berne: Franke, 1966), p. 249.

⁴In the *maqāmāt* of al-Hamadhāni (967-1007), the narrator is 'Isa ibn Hisham, and the hero is Abu al-Faḥ al-Askandari; in the *maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī (1054-1122), the narrator is al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām, and the hero is Abu Zayd al-Surūjī.

⁵Both Naṣīf al-Yazīji (1800-1871) in his *Majma' al-Bahrayn* and Muhammad al-Muwilhi in *Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham* (1905) tried to revive this genre; in 1949, Yusuf al-Siba'i took the form of the *maqāma* as a model for his book *Ard al-Nifaq*.

1517, Baghdad in 1534). When Turkish replaced Arabic as the language of government, the latter—which remained the language of religion—was used only in folk literature. A substantial number of fantastic, erotic, and adventurous stories were created in this morally decadent and politically corrupt epoch of Arabic history. Although these exciting, sensual, and rudimentary stories⁶ have—with the exception of *Alf Layla wa Layla (Thousand and One Nights)*⁷—a very limited literary value, their fanciful subject matter inspired many works in subsequent centuries.

In spite of all these various attempts by the Arabs in the field of fiction, they did not develop, on their own, the novel as we have it today.⁸ However, when modern Egypt—not without the aid of a few Syrian and Lebanese writers—imported, translated, and imitated the European novel in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the big reservoir of narratives which had accumulated over the years served as an inexhaustible source of themes, motifs, and styles for the Egyptian writer. In the following few pages an attempt will be made to examine the intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of the early Egyptian novel, and to discuss the influence of the European novel on the rise and development of this genre in Egypt.

The most important translator-adapter of this period is Muṣṭafa Luṭfi al-Manfaluti (1876-1924). His translations of Alphonse Karr's sentimental novel *Sous les Tilleuls* (entitled *Magdulim*, 1912), François Coppée's play *Pour la Couronne* (adapted as a novel entitled *Fi Sabil al-Taj*, 1920), Édmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (adapted as a novel entitled *al-Shā'ir*, 1921), and Bernardin de Saint Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (entitled *al-Fadilah*) were read and admired by his generation. The popularity of these four translations⁹—which are noted for their highly poetic style—has undoubtedly helped to introduce this “new” form to the reading public and to establish the novel as a “respectable” literary genre.

Another writer who contributed to the rise of the Egyptian novel was Jirji Zaydān (1861-1914). His twenty-two historical novels had a considerable impact on the emergence and development of this genre.¹⁰ It has often been mentioned that Zaydan was influenced to a great degree by the works of

⁶Al-Zayyat blames the spreading use of drugs in Egypt during this period for the emergence and popularity of this kind of “hallucinatory” literature; *Tarikh al-Adab al-'Arabi*, pp. 393-94.

⁷The Persian frame story *Hazar Afsana* (A Thousand Tales) of King Shahryar and his bride Shahrazad was used by Arabic and Egyptian storytellers as an enveloping structure for their numerous romances, fairy tales, and adventure stories. This collection, later called *Alf Layla wa Layla*, is in its present form a masterpiece of storytelling; its influence on world literature is unquestionable. See Fatma Moussa-Mahmoud, *The Arabic Novel in Egypt* (1914-1970), (Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Organization, 1973), pp. 8-9.

⁸Some of the Egyptian prose narratives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Rifa'a al-Tahtawi's *Takhkīs al-Ebriz fi Talkhīs Bariz*, 18??, 'Ali Mubarak's 'Alam al-Din, 1883, Muhammad al-Muwilhi's *Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham*, 1905, and Hafiz Ibrahim's *Layali Satih*, 1906, are—in spite of some novelistic elements—related more to the *maqama* than to the novel.

⁹Al-Manfaluti, who was not in command of the French language, depended on other people to translate the works for him, or to give him an outline of the plot, which explains his deviation from the original text. The first work was translated for him by Muhammad Fu'ad Kamal, the second by Hasan al-Sharif, the third by Muhammad 'abdel-Salam al-Jindi, and the fourth one is based on 'Othman Jalal's translation.

¹⁰Egyptian novelists such as Muhammad Hasan Haykal and Taha Husayn were influenced by Zaydan's novels. See Taha Wadi, p. 21.

Walter Scott,¹¹ but a thorough examination of Zaydan's novels would reveal an amazing similarity between his works and the very popular historical novels of the German Egyptologist Georg Ebers (1837-1898). Ebers and Zaydan have always chosen a crucial phase in the history of Egypt as the subject matter of their novels.¹² Although the novels of both writers revolve around a love story with a happy ending, and while they share with Walter Scott what Louis Maigrón calls "un vague parfum de poesie,"¹³ these two authors write like historians rather than novelists; they share an unsophisticated attitude towards characterization, motivation, and narrative techniques.

Among the earliest attempts in this genre are Muhammad Lutfi Gom'a's *Fi Wādi al-Humūm* (In the Valley of Solicitude), 1905, and Maḥmūd Tāhir Ḥaqqi's *'Adhrā' Dinshwāi* (The Virgin of Dinshwai), 1906. The first is a didactic novel which deals in a simplistic fashion with many social and moral questions of its time. In a rhetorical and pretentious style, the author tells the pathetic story of the downfall and destruction of a decadent family. Neither the characters nor the actions, however, are able to counterbalance the weak structure of this story; the former are the naïve embodiment of evil, and the latter are poorly motivated.

From a literary and artistic point of view, *'Adhrā' Dinshwāi* compares very favorably with Gom'a's story. In it Ḥaqqi incorporates an important historical event (the killing of innocent peasants in Dinshwai in 1906 by the British) into a simple tale of love, jealousy, and intrigue. Its great popularity at the time (it could be regarded as the first Egyptian best seller),¹⁴ was due to the actuality of its topic, to the unpretentious style, and to the realistic presentation of the Egyptian countryside. Also the author uses both the classical Arabic (for narrating the incidents) and the colloquial (for the dialogues)—maybe for the first time in the history of the Egyptian novel.¹⁵

In 1910, four years after the publication of *'Adhrā' Dinshwāi*, Muhammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888-1956) began writing his novel *Zaynab* which was published in 1914. The fact that his story takes place in the Egyptian countryside, and that in it he uses both the classical and the colloquial styles might indicate a relationship between his and Ḥaqqi's novel.¹⁶ Whether Haykal is indebted

¹¹See Martin Seymour-Smith, *Guide to Modern World Literature* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1973), p. 171; also Taha Wadi, p. 19, and Muhammad Hasan, "Jirji Zaydan," *al-Hilal*, May 1972, pp. 5-17.

¹²Ebers's first novel *Eine ägyptische Königstochter*, 1864, deals with the conquest of Egypt by the Persians; Zaydan's second novel *Armanusa al-Misriah*, 1897, depicts the Arabic invasion of Egypt. For a further study of Ebers's so-called "Professorenromane" (Professorial Novels) see Saad Elkhadem, "Georg Ebers und sein Werk" and "Der Einfluß des spätgriechischen Romans auf die Werke Georg Ebers," in *6 Essays über den deutschen Roman* (Berne: Herbert Lang, 1969), pp. 26-34.

¹³Louis Maigrón, *Le roman historique à l'époque romantique* (Paris: Champion, 1912), p. 13.

¹⁴See Yahya Haqqi, *Fajr al-Quissah al-Misriah* (Dawn of the Egyptian Story), (Cairo: al-Hai'a al-Misriah al-Amah lil-Kitab, 1975), p. 156.

¹⁵H. A. R. Gibb overlooked this novel when he noted that "*Zaynab* was the first work of fiction, to my knowledge, in which the dialogue was phrased in the colloquial idiom." *Arabic Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 299.

¹⁶See Yahya Haqqi, pp. 158-61.

to Haqqi or not, the majority of literary historians and critics consider *Zaynab* the first original Arabic novel of literary merit,¹⁷ while very little has been said or written on Haqqi and his achievement.¹⁸

Zaynab (1914)¹⁹ is the sad story of a peasant girl, Zaynab, her unfulfilled love, and her untimely death. Into the main plot the omniscient narrator—a sophisticated and pretentious intellectual—tries frantically to incorporate the story of Hämīd, a young man in his puberty. The unhappy blending of this fragmentary—and autobiographical—*Entwicklungsroman* with Zaynab's love story is responsible for the formlessness of this novel.

The real narrative sections of this novel are the ones that deal with Zaynab's love to Ibrāhīm, her marriage to Ḥasan (according to her parents' wish), her woes, sickness, and her death. The passages that describe Hämīd's love for his cousin 'Aziza, his griefs, depressive moods, and disappearance, are not only too subjective and lyrical, but also boring and poorly motivated. Haykal's novel seems to be loosely constructed due to the narrator's tedious comments and explanations, the many letters and lengthy speeches, the elaborate descriptions of things, persons, and situations, as well as from the innumerable lyrical passages, monologues, footnotes, and quotations.

The nonuniform style, the constantly shifting point of view, the apparent inconsistency in the narrator's attitude towards his subjects, and the author's awkwardness and obvious contradictions in drawing the characters and establishing their motivations, are other deficiencies of this novel.

In spite of these literary and artistic flaws, it must be admitted that this "novelistic attempt" has a few positive aspects. For instance, the author's effective use of leitmotifs and leitsymbols,²⁰ and his vivid description of the Egyptian countryside. No doubt the importance of this work—which was greatly influenced by the French novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries²¹—is based on the fact that it compares very favorably with the few immature and naïve stories that preceded it; however, this should not mislead us into overlooking its many deficiencies and flaws. The historical, sociological, and anthropological aspects of this novel have been overpraised over the years. We should, therefore, note that the literary value of this humorless and extremely subjective work is very limited, and that the only justification for reading and analyzing it nowadays is that it is one of the earliest Egyptian imitations of the European novel.

¹⁷See H. A. R. Gibb, pp. 291-92; Fatma Moussa-Mahmoud, *The Arabic Novel in Egypt*, p. 19; John A. Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature 1800-1970* (London: Lund Humphries, 1971), p. 136; Hilary Kilpatrick, "The Arabic Novel—A Single Tradition?" *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 5, p. 97; Yahya Haqqi, p. 41; and Taha Wadi, p. 27.

¹⁸Yahya Haqqi—a nephew of Mahmud Tahir Haqqi—is justified in his complaint that '*Adhra*' *Dimshwai* has been ignored by scholars and critics for no apparent reason. See *Fajr al-Quissah al-Misriah*, p. 170; also his introduction to the 1963 edition of the novel.

¹⁹*Zaynab: Manazir wa Akhlaq Rifṣya bi-Qalam Misri Fallah* (Zaynab: Rural Scenes and Morals by an Egyptian Peasant), published anonymously in 1914. The book has been adapted twice for the screen, 1930 (silent), and 1952. Quotations are from the 1974 edition, published in Cairo by Dar al-Ma'aref.

²⁰Such as the moon, pp. 20, 116, 214, 215; the seasons, pp. 35, 36, 55, 57, 85-86, 138, 141; nature, pp. 18, 28, 33, 138; the mosque, pp. 37, 41, 189, 306; the handkerchief, pp. 267, 295, 310; and the cotton plants, pp. 14, 56, 57, 72.

²¹Haykal, who spent 3 years in France, was a great admirer of French literature, especially the works of J. J. Rousseau. See Haykal's Book *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, 1921.

The next major novel of this epoch is the first volume of the autobiographical novel *al-Ayyām* (1927)²² in which the author, Ṭaha Ḥusayn, succeeded in molding his early reminiscence in the form of a *Bildungsroman*. There is no doubt that the important role played by the detached, humorous, and ironic narrator is what makes Ṭaha Ḥusayn's life story one of the greatest novels in Arabic literature and not a mere autobiography of an eminent man of letters.²³ It is, therefore, unjustifiable that this remarkable work has been overlooked by a number of historians and literary critics such as Ṭaha Wādi and Fatma Moussa Mahmoud. The fact that it is an autobiographical novel is presumably the only reason such critics do not deal with it. It should be stated that by narrating his story in the third person, and by maintaining a safe distance between himself and his protagonist—that is, to say, between himself and his ex-self—Ṭaha Ḥusayn has transferred the story of his own life from the field of autobiography into the field of belles lettres.

Al-Ayyām starts with the narrator depicting the life of a blind child who lives with his poor family in a small Egyptian village. Although it opens on a sad and elegiac note, the child's story never becomes pitiable or pathetic. We see how he discovers his physical disability and how he adapts himself to his dark environment without any bitterness or self-pity. We then follow him to Cairo where he overcomes other obstacles and is admitted to the old and renowned University of al-Azhar.

It is true that toward the end of the novel (pp. 120-22)—when the blind child is moved by the death of his sister and of his brother—the narrator loses his detachment and condemns in strong terms the ignorance of his people and holds them responsible for the death of their children and for the protagonist's loss of eyesight. Also the last chapter of the book—which is in the form of a letter written by the narrator, addressed to the protagonist's daughter, and signed by the author himself—gives us the impression that the author-narrator-protagonist has suddenly lost interest in the game he had invented.

Aside from these and other artistic flaws,²⁴ there is no doubt that this novel—which was also influenced by the European novel²⁵—is much more advanced than Haykal's *Zaynab*. Nevertheless, a comparison between these two works would be of great interest to literary historians. For instance, the merit of using the colloquial Arabic in Haykal's novel would lose some ground if compared with Ṭaha Ḥusayn's skillful use of the classical Arabic in his dialogues, even when the characters quarrel or insult each other (pp. 61, 92). Also a comparison between the way these two writers describe the Egyptian countryside and the life of the peasants could be very illuminating (for instance, the way Ṭaha Ḥusayn, p. 91, and Haykal, pp. 242-43, depict the Egyptian religious custom of *dhikr* is very significant of their style and poetic diction).

²²Appeared as a series of articles which were published in 1927 in book form (translated into English, 1929, under the title *An Egyptian Childhood*); the second volume was published in 1939 (translated into English in 1943 under the title *The Streams of Days*); the third volume was published in 1972. The edition quoted here is the 54th edition (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1976).

²³Ṭaha Ḥusayn (1889-1973) who lost his eyesight at an early age, studied at al-Azhar (1902-1912), received his Ph. D. in 1914 from Cairo University, and spent four years (1915-1919) in France where he was exposed to French literature (Doctorate, 1918). In 1925 he was appointed professor at Cairo University; in 1930 Dean of the Faculty of Arts. In 1942 he was appointed President of Alexandria University and in 1950, Minister of Education. He published more than 25 books and a great number of articles.

²⁴Style breach (pp. 109, 122); unjustifiable shifting of the narrative point of view (pp. 31, 33, 97, 98, 109); too many anecdotes (pp. 21, 74, 84, 87, 94, 95); footnotes (pp. 55, 58, 63, 94, 124, 125); long comments and sophisticated explanations (pp. 25, 56, 59, 79, 88, 89, 111).

²⁵See Haywood, p. 196.

Should one accept the argument that the novel, as a literary genre, has been created and developed mainly to cater to the broad public,²⁶ one would have to admit that al-Mazni's *Ibrāhīm al-Kātib*, 1931, is, due to its beguiling content and unsophisticated form, more "novelistic" than the novels we have just discussed. The plain style, the limited intellectual content, and the entertaining fable (a few of the elements that made the genre of the novel the most popular one) are some of the obvious characteristics of *Ibrāhīm al-Kātib*. In spite of the fact that al-Mazni's novel is (like the other four "masterpieces" of this early phase: *Zaynab*, *al-Ayyām*, *'Awdat al-Rōh*, and *Sarah*) an autobiographical work, it is, due to al-Mazni's ironic, humorous, and sometimes sarcastic attitude, the most objective one of them.

The book opens with the protagonist, Ibrāhīm al-Kātib (Ibrāhīm the Writer), arriving at his relatives' home in the Egyptian countryside to spend a few days away from the big city in order to forget his love affair with a Syrian nurse named Mary. Instead of finding the peace and tranquility he sought, he falls in love with Shushu, his younger cousin. Being a mature and experienced man (he has lost his wife eight years ago), Ibrāhīm decides at first to suppress his feelings, but later yields to this new love and proposes to the young girl.

Due to an Egyptian custom which decrees that elder daughters should marry first, the family insists that he marry Shushu's elder sister instead. Feeling bitter and disenchanted, Ibrāhīm flees once more and hides in upper Egypt. There he meets Layla, a liberated girl with whom he starts a new love affair although he is still very much in love with Shushu. When Layla discovers that she will never be able to possess him completely, she leaves him—although she carries his child—so that he may go back to Shushu. Left alone again, Ibrāhīm resigns himself to the idea of living without a woman to love. Later on we are told that Shushu has married a young doctor and that Layla has left the country after getting rid of Ibrāhīm's unborn child.

If compared with both Haykal and Ṭaha Ḥusayn, al-Mazni is definitely not as "poetic," yet it is clear that, as a storyteller, he is a very gifted one.²⁷ His main concern is the narration of an amusing story rather than the composition of a literary masterpiece. Although his novel contains many stylistic flaws and technical deficiencies, it is the most entertaining story we have met so far.

Al-Mazni's use of colloquial Arabic is awkward and inconsistent when compared with Haykal's use of it. It is not true, as Ṭaha Wādi maintains,²⁸ that the colloquial style is reserved for the proletariat, while the middle and upper classes use the classical Arabic. Often enough we come across simple uneducated peasants who talk in classical Arabic,²⁹ and members of the upper class who use a very colloquial, if not uncouth, language (p. 81). This inconsistency becomes ridiculous when a certain character oscillates between the

²⁶See Rudolf Helm, *Der antike Roman* (Göttingen: Vanderboeck und Ruprecht, 1956), p. 52; also Karl Vossler, "Der Roman bei den Romanen," in *Zur Poetik des Romans*, ed. Volker Klotz (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965), p. 3.

²⁷Like his contemporaries, al-Mazni was a great admirer of European literature; he translated the works of Galsworthy into Arabic.

²⁸Taha Wadi, p. 50.

²⁹Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir al-Mazni, *Ibrahim al-Katib* (Cairo: al-Sha'b, 1970), pp. 6-7.

two styles (such as Aḥmad al-Mayyit on pages 6-7 and 211-12; or the child on pages 176 and 214-15), or mixes them within the same sentence (p. 120). Apparently al-Mazni also does not distinguish between the direct and indirect interior monologues, for he sometimes mixes both points of view in the same paragraph, if not in the same line (pp. 71, 112-13, 196).

In spite of these inconsistencies and other artistic flaws which he, like all writers of his generation, inherited from the traditional European novel,³⁰ one is inclined to label this work as the first "modern" Egyptian novel. Never before has an Egyptian writer been able to narrate an amusing and plausible story like this one, or to depict the incidents, portray the characters, and analyze their feelings and motivations in such a convincing way. Also the author's (as well as the protagonist's) Byronic attitude towards life and nature, his intentional destruction of the traditional illusion associated with the conventional novel, his effective use of modern narrative devices (such as changing the sequence of incidents to maintain the suspense, or the parallel narration of two or more stories), and his dealing with themes and motifs untouched before in the Egyptian novel such as free love and abortion, combine to justify our claim that *Ibrāhīm al-Kātib* is the first modern Egyptian novel.

Another very entertaining novel is Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm's *'Awdat al-Rōh*, 1933 (The Return of the Spirit). Al-Ḥakīm's style, which is plain, sober, and unaffected, his witty dialogues, and his keen eye for the farcical, comical, and grotesque, are a few of the elements that made this work one of the most popular novels in Arabic literature. The very objective realism of this story (which often borders on naturalism) must have been a shocking experience to the reader of that time. Some of the uncouth expressions used in the Egyptian novel of the fifties, and which were acclaimed by readers and critics as being honest and genuine, are very mild indeed if compared with the obscene expressions used by al-Ḥakim in this novel.³¹

In *'Awdat al-Rōh* al-Ḥakīm depicts the life of a family that consists of a forty-year old illiterate spinster, her two brothers, a cousin, a nephew, and a servant. The fifteen-year old nephew falls in love with the playful seventeen-year old girl from next door. One of the brothers, a university student, also loves the same girl. The cousin, a corrupt and vain man who has been dismissed from the police department for his scandalous behavior, is attracted to this girl. Even the servant secretly admires her. Driven by jealousy, the members of this family start to distrust each other. When they realize that a newcomer to their street, a rich and handsome bachelor, is the only man this frisky girl really loves, they all feel betrayed and cheated. The ugly spinster, who had hoped to win the newcomer's heart by magic charms and sorcery, leads a vicious campaign against the girl and her family. When the Egyptian revolution breaks out in 1919, all male members of this family take an active part in it, mainly to break the monotony of their empty lives and to forget their failures in love. Shortly, however, the British colonial army arrests them and puts them in jail where they mend their differences and become close again.

³⁰Such as the long speeches (pp. 115, 166, 167, 193, 201, 249, 259, 264); the many quotations from other works (pp. 55, 78, 154, 171, 278); and continuous reference to major authors and thinkers (pp. 24, 116, 134, 137, 138, 203); the irrelevant digressions (pp. 28, 115, 203, 206, 207, 208); and fondness for foreign words (pp. 119, 223, 225).

³¹Tawfiq al-Ḥakim, *'Awdat al-Roh* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Namuzajya, 1973), II, 89, 90, 135.

From the first pages of the novel, it becomes clear to the reader that al-Ḥakīm's real talent is not in narration or description, but rather in his mastery and constant use of dialogues and monologues. Al-Ḥakīm is by common consent the Arabic playwright par excellence (70 plays), and even his narrative works (8 novels) testify to his great ability as a dramatic writer. His spicy and witty dialogues alone would rank him with other masters of the so-called conversation piece, such as A. Dumas, O. Wilde, and S. Guitry.

A closer look at al-Ḥakīm's style reveals some interesting aspects. In spite of his hackneyed style and the many uncouth and vulgar expressions he uses, al-Ḥakīm introduces some very fresh metaphors and original similes (I, pp. 144, 171, 172). His dialogues, which are laconic, crisp, and trenchant, truly reflect the social classes with which he deals. The prose he uses to portray the characters, depict the background, or narrate the incidents, is always lucid, exact, and vivid. Al-Ḥakīm has undoubtedly succeeded in giving the reader a very clear and objective idea of Egypt in the late teens and early twenties, and the attitude of its people towards many social, political, and philosophical questions. It should be added, however, that in certain instances, al-Ḥakīm, for purely theatrical reasons, overstates the ironic, humorous, and comical aspects of some of his characters and situations. Thus he creates caricatures instead of round characters and farcical scenes instead of dramatic ones.

About al-Ḥakīm's narrative techniques one should mention that the narrator, who is present in both parts of the novel, plays a very marginal role in the first book. In the second book, which is less dependent on dialogues than the first one, the narrator holds all narrative strings in his hands; he not only narrates the incidents, but often offers his own observations and comments, which are sometimes superfluous and tedious. The majority of scholars who have examined this novel seem to agree that the passages in which al-Hakim praises the disdained and downtrodden peasants and prophesies the resurrection of modern Egypt, do not constitute an organic part of the novel.³² There is no doubt that these nationalistic and rhetoric passages³³ have, together with the long speeches and the many irrelevant anecdotes, done some harm to the intrinsic and extrinsic structure of this work. It must be stated, however, that this rather traditional novel is one of the most amusing novels in Egyptian literature, due largely to its witty and humorous nature.

Al-Ḥakīm's second novel *Yaumiāt Na'ib fi al-Ariāf* (Diary of a District Attorney), 1937, is a mystery story written in the form of a journal. The narrator—a sarcastic district attorney—records the futile investigation of a murder case which lasts eleven days and leads to other crimes and more enigmas. In spite of being a story of love, jealousy, and murder, *Yaumiāt Na'ib fi al-Ariāf* is not a simple mystery story or a pure event-novel, but—due to its naturalistic description of the Egyptian countryside with all its grotesque and absurd realities—a novel of great literary merit and noticeable intellectual substance.

Al-Ḥakīm's third novel *'Asfūr min al-Sharq* (Oriental Bird), 1938, deals with the impact of European culture and Western civilization on a young Egyptian

³²Yahya Haqqi, pp. 128-31; Fatma Moussa-Mahmoud, *The Arabic Novel in Egypt*, pp. 26-27; and Fu'ad Dawarrah, "Tawfiq al-Hakim Riwa'ia," *al-Hiwal*, May 1972, pp. 70-71.

³³After the Revolution of 1952 these nationalistic passages were exploited politically, and al-Hakim was awarded the highest Egyptian Medal for his prophesy concerning the rebirth of Egypt. See Tawfiq al-Hakim, *'Awdat al-Wa'i* (The Return of Consciousness), 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Shoruh, 1974), pp. 36, 41.

student who—like the author himself—spends a few years in Paris.³⁴ Due to its lengthy dialogues and ponderous discussions about the spirituality of the East and the materialism of the West, this typical time-novel is undoubtedly one of al-Ḥakīm's most labored and tedious books.

Another important work of this early period is al-'Aqqād's *Sarah*, 1938. The lyrical nature of this story and the lack of a novelistic plot in the traditional sense, are two of the most striking characteristics of this "novel." In it al-'Aqqād, who had never accepted the novel as a respectable literary genre, does not deal with incidents and events as much as he deals with feelings, moods, and impressions. The extreme subjectiveness of this work, its highly poetic style, and its taut structure place it nearer to an ode than to a novel.

Sarah consists of sixteen chapters (or stanzas) of similar length; the first eight of them describe the feelings of a mature, but passionate intellectual, called Hammām, toward an attractive coquette, Sarah, and depict the jealousy that torments him and forces him to end this love affair. In the following two chapters (which resemble a caesura or a diaeresis) the narrator presents a portrait of Sarah, a playful divorcee who enjoys every minute of her life without regard to any moral codes or social norms. In the last six chapters the narrator goes back to the very beginning of this love affair and describes, mainly from Hammām's point of view, the first meeting between the two, explains Hammām's feelings and motivations, and justifies his actions.

The reader of this novel will immediately notice that al-'Aqqād is a very skillful and sophisticated writer. His style compares favorably with that of other writers of his generation (in spite of a few archaic expressions), including even the style of Ṭaha Ḥusayn, the most eminent philologist of his time. Al-'Aqqād increases the poetic merit of his style by using a great number of rhetorical figures, and by introducing many new images and vivid similes. Although al-'Aqqād does not use the colloquial Arabic at all and even arabicizes such foreign words as cinema and cigarette, his style is never awkward or pretentious. Nevertheless, his insistence on using the classical Arabic, even in dialogues and conversations, makes some of his scenes and dramatic situations sound humorless and unwitty.

In respect to al-'Aqqād's narrative techniques, one also notices that the lyrical and elegiac character of his book is caused mainly by the subjectiveness of the narrator, who is always closer to Hammām than to Sarah, and who sees everything from Hammām's point of view. Like most novels of this early phase, *Sarah* contains some inconsistency in the narrative viewpoint and in the use of the interior monologue; but because al-'Aqqād has never lost sight of his main fable or incorporated any subplots into his story, in spite of his many digressions and philosophical comments, his novel remains a tight unit.

Al-'Aqqād's excellent psychological profile of Hammām and his analysis of the characters' emotions and feelings are two important modern aspects of this work. This is due to the direct influence of the European psychological novel on al-'Aqqād, and also to the fact that he is mainly recording his own feelings and analyzing his personal emotions. It is this subjectiveness that makes this book more of a poem in prose than a narrative work.

³⁴Other Arab writers who have dealt with this theme are Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, Beiram al-Tunisy, Yahia Haqqi, al-Taib Saleh, and Sa'd al-Khadim. See Fatma Moussa-Mahmoud, *The Arabic Novel in Egypt*, pp. 31-38, also her article "A New Oriental Bird with Lead Wings . . ." *IFR*, 2 (1975), 69-70; and her study *Fi al-Riwaiah al-'Arabiah al-Mo'asrah* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglo, 1972), p. 232.

This survey has shown that the novel as a literary genre is a latecomer to Egyptian literature, and that in spite of some of the early attempts in the field of fiction, the Egyptian novel had depended to a great extent on the European novel. Our discussion of the novels of al-Manfalūṭi, Jirji Zaydān, Lutfi Gom'a, Ṭahir Ḥaqqi, Haykal, Ṭaha Ḥusayn, al-Mazni, al-Ḥakīm, and al-'Aqqād has revealed some of the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of these pioneer works. A thorough examination of the more sophisticated works of the following generation (the generation of Najib Mahfūz and 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sharqāwi) will also indicate that these early novels—despite their artistic deficiencies—have had a great impact on the contemporary Egyptian novel.