

From New Values to New Aesthetics

Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature

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1. From Modernism to the 1980s

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Preface

GAIL RAMSAY & STEPHAN GUTH

The novel as a primary source for existential, social and psycho-social truth in Western as well as Arab societies is the main theme of Frode SAUGESTAD's article *The Modern Novel and its Aesthetic and Textual Transformation: The Arabic Novel and its Western Counterparts*, in this volume. The modern Arabic novel as we are familiar with it today, once took form in the West. During the past century and up to the present it has been shaped by the historical vicissitudes including cultural, social and political turning points in Arab societies. Today, the Arabic novel, indeed, Arabic literature as expressed in its panorama of modern genres, constitutes a mirror and existential source of inspiration for people in the Arab world as well as for Arab communities in Western societies.

At the 8th EURAMAL colloquium, held at Uppsala University 11th-14th June, 2008 and hosted by the Department of Linguistics and Philology, 32 papers were presented. These papers included a wide range of in-depth analyses of aspects of change in Arab societies which resulted in a breach between the literary styles of the pre-1960s and experimental styles emerging thereafter in Arabic literature. The discussions following each paper and panel focused on literary elements that represent turning points in Arabic literature and aimed at improving our understanding of them in the light of the contexts in which they have taken form.

The proceedings of the 8th EURAMAL have been compiled in two volumes, the first volume titled *From Modernism to the 1980s*¹ and the second *Postmodernism and Thereafter*. As the 8th EURAMAL proceeded it became clear that one author, namely Naguib Mahfouz, who had passed away two years prior to this colloquium, served as a focal point for several papers. Hence, the reader of the first volume of this series will soon become aware that Naguib Mahfouz, the 'Master Rupturer with Form', to quote Rasheed EL-ENANY in this same volume, represents one central axis around which these papers and their ensuing discussions and panels gathered. In both of the volumes it becomes clear that Naguib Mahfouz encompasses Arabic literary creativity in his life and work from its beginnings and to its latest forms in the 21st century. In fact, Naguib Mahfouz not only mastered the art of creating an Arabic novel inspired by its Western counterpart, but he stayed in the vanguard of modern Arabic literary creativity; not only did he keep abreast with changes in his own society's literature, but he created them.

This volume, *From Modernism until the 1980s*, begins with Dounia Abourachid BADINI's article on the pivotal role of Yūsuf al-Khāl and the magazine *Shi'r*, in which he to-

1 In the context of modern Oriental literatures, the term 'modernism' is often used to signify the experimental styles of the 1960s and later. But these represent already an intentional rupture with the 'modern' (as opposed to 'classical') styles that had emerged since the middle of the 19th century (usually labelled 'romanticism' and 'realism'). We therefore decided to refer to the styles preceding the breach with mimetic realism—in itself a major turning point!—as 'modernism' whereas the styles that came to replace this modernism should, consequently, be called 'postmodernism'.

gether with the co-editors Adonis and Unsī al-Ḥājj created a platform for experimenting with modernistic poetical styles. It ends with Ulrike STEHLI-WERBECK's article on *Gālīrī 68*—the Egyptian literary magazine which was especially founded for the sake of encouraging Arabic, literary creativity. Organised chronologically between these two articles, the reader will find presentations in which other examples of new aesthetic and cultural values leading to literary turning points in Arabic literary expression through the 1960s.

Lorenzo CASINI contributes with an analysis of the East-West encounter in Egyptian novelistic writing. He sets out to demonstrate in which ways Arab nationalism influenced the representation of Europe simultaneously producing a collective Egyptian identity. He proceeds to exemplify this through a close-reading and analysis of Fathī Ghānim's novel *al-Sākhin wa'l-bārid* (The Hot and the Cold, 1960). In her article *Muḥammad Bannīs and Doubt*, Francesca Maria CORRAO also sheds light on the East-West cross-current in Arabic literature as she analyses the linguistic style of his poetry and observes the message of humanism and readiness to embrace new modes of expressions in his poems. A third article in which the East–West dimension is treated is the article by Frode SAUGESTAD referred to above. He analyses phenomena leading to and consequences of the rise of the modern novel in Western as well as Arab societies as he delves into an analysis of novels by four authors who are recognized as loadstars of modern literature from a world perspective—Knut Hamsun, James Joyce, Naguib Mahfouz and Tayeb Salih. Following four distinct lines of thought he demonstrates how works by these authors represent turning points in the formation of modernism in their respective literatures on four levels; the socio-political, cultural, psychological and textual.

While Stephan GUTH centers on trends in Egyptian fiction after the 1960s, Mousa KHOURY treats a turning point in Palestinian literature founded in political and historical reality. He describes a movement which has taken place in Palestinian literature from literature as an arena for collective memory and experience towards offering room for expressing the individual and personal. At the point of the launching of the Oslo Accords, he argues, Palestinian literature moved from being captive to the assumption that literature should provide clear-cut role models for Palestinian men and women to constituting a space in which individuals could look forward to a fresh start and a society promising fulfilment of hopes for individuals. Modern Arabic drama as exemplified by the Egyptian poet, literary critic and playwright Najīb Surūr (1932-1978) is the subject of Monica RUOCCO's article "*I Tell the People*": *New values and new aesthetics in Najīb Surūr's theory of drama*. By mastering Western techniques of drama and staging and bringing them into an Egyptian social and cultural setting he was able to establish an avant-garde theatre that spoke to the hearts and minds of a broad Egyptian audience.

Alongside the wide range of literary turning points included in this volume the centrality of Naguib Mahfouz, to which we have referred above, does not escape the reader. Roger ALLEN gives us an historical interpretation of one of Naguib Mahfouz's most controversial novels—*Awlād Ḥāratinā*. He sets out to re-read it in a frame including the key elements that would lead to the attempt at Naguib Mahfouz's life in 1994 and finishes by giving us a new perspective on this novel. Rasheed EL-ENANY brings to light the inventive and experimental form, style and content to which Naguib Mahfouz was devoted throughout his life in his article *A Master Rupturer with Form: Maḥfūz as a post-Maḥfūzian Novelist Par Excellence*. This article pays special attention to Naguib Mahfouz's last fictional work, the

minimalist narratives of *The Dreams* which he composed during 2000-2006 and which were published during this time as a serial in the Cairo magazine *Nisf al-Dunyā*. To Rasheed EL-ENANY *The Dreams* stand out as a ‘Maḥfūzian’ indulgence resulting from old-age nostalgia. It is in these short stories that the disciplined craftsman Naguib Mahfouz lets pathos, a sense of mystery, enchantment and love of the poetry of the language take over, he argues. Also Tania AL SAADI focuses on a novel by Naguib Mahfouz while exemplifying her observations on the techniques of beginning in Arabic novels after the 1960s with an analysis of *Thartharah fawq al-Nīl*. It becomes clear that this novel points towards a sense of loss of hope and reluctance to take on responsibility on the part of the intellectuals in Egyptian society after the 1960s.

This volume only covers a fraction of the myriad of pivotal events and turning points in Arab societies which have inspired to new aesthetic values and forms of expression in modern Arabic literature. Nonetheless, it gives us an historical glimpse of the vitality of Arabic literary creativity and it deepens our understanding of the *perpetuum mobile* of society and literary expression, the one inspiring and influencing the other as they are intertwined in an unending spiral.

Oslo / Stockholm, May 2011

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