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Title: <u>Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii: A Non-recognized Voice in the Chorus of the Arabic</u>

<u>Literary Revival</u>

Abstract Approved: __Rachelle M Smith__

Abstract

Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii, a modern Egyptian writer with classical style, is not studied by

scholars of Arabic literature as are his contemporary liberals, such as Taha Hussein. This

thesis provides a historical background and a brief literary survey that helps contextualize

al-Rafii, the period, and the area he came from. Al-Rafii played an important role in the

two literary and intellectual schools during the Arabic literary revival, which extended

from the French expedition (1798–1801) to around the middle of the twentieth century.

These two schools, known as the Old and the New, vied to shape the literature and

thought of Egypt and other Arab countries. The former, led by al-Rafii, promoted a return

to classical Arabic styles and tried to strengthen the Islamic identity of Egypt. The latter

called for cutting off Egypt from its Arabic history and rejected the dominance and

continuity of classical Arabic language. Al-Rafii contributed to the Revival by supporting

a line of thought that has not been favored by pro-Westernization governments, which

made his legacy almost forgotten. Deriving his literature from the canon of Arabic

language, culture, and history, al-Rafii produced a literature based on a revived version of

classical Arabic literature, an accomplishment which makes him unique among modern

Arab writers. This thesis also provides a historical background and a brief literary survey

that helps contextualize al-Rafii, the period, and the area he came from.

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MUSTAFA SADIQ AL-RAFII: A NON-RECOGNIZED VOICE IN THE CHORUS OF

THE ARABIC LITERARY REVIVAL

A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of English

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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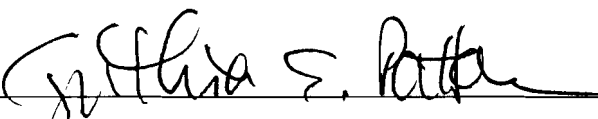of the Requirements for the Degree
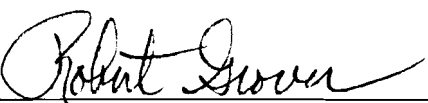
Master of Arts

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by

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Chapter I

Introduction

Taha Hussein once wrote, "[t]hey claim that the most prominent characteristic of a man of letters is his keenness to create a bond between himself and the people." (*A Man of Letters* 1). I myself feel that I have been bound to men of letters due to the bond created by their literature, al-Rafii being one of them. I should admit that the first literature I had the great pleasure of reading was Arabic literature. Arabic is known as a beautiful language and an elegant tongue whose literary heritage is very moving. This heritage comes from different stages in the history of the Arabs: the pre-Islamic era with its sophisticated and descriptive poetry, the appearance of Islam, with the Qur'an as the most superb expression of Arabic; and the subsequent periods that produced a literature that is still read today with high appreciation in the Arab world and elsewhere.

When I started reading English literature, I began to appreciate all literature, regardless of nationality. English has enabled me to savor foreign literatures and to step beyond my native tradition. Arabic and English combined have provided me with a unique perspective on how people throughout the world, past and present, render their experience in literary forms and give us a source of joy, reflection, and research. This perspective has motivated me to be more interested in world literature, for which I modestly dedicate my thesis.

This thesis was initially motivated by the desire to contribute knowledge about Arabic literature to expanding English studies. This work aims at casting light on Arabic literature during a period known to historians as the Arab revival. During this revival,

which began with the French expedition into Egypt in 1798 and lasted until the end of the first half of the twentieth century, Arabic literature was influenced by the West, as well as by the resurrection of classical Arabic studies and the desire to protect Egypt's Arabic and Islamic traditions from the foreign impact. As the Western presence was manifested through the European colonization, mainly French and British, Eastern identity of colonized Egypt faced a dilemma. On the one hand, European modernity was extremely appealing to European-educated or Western-oriented Arab intellectuals who wanted a quick recovery from the four centuries of Ottoman control. On the other hand, traditionalism was strongly advocated, mostly by those whose education had followed traditional disciplines and who were resistant to change, afraid of different thought, and worried about their own values, faith, language, and heritage.

European modernization and Arabic traditionalism found a ground for confrontation during the Arab revival in Egypt, where this archetypal clash was at its strongest. After all, what can be more advanced than Western modernism at that time? Also, what can be more traditional, at least in the liberal sense of the word, than an Arabic society such as the Egyptian one, which still has some people looking for reestablishing an Islamic state based on past models? As Egypt became more influenced by the West, a renaissance, revival, or *nahda*, began to take roots. Literature expressed, or rather shaped, the spirit of the time. In the context of this "confrontation" between the East and the West, Arabic Literature entered a new era, where it witnessed a division between modernists and traditionalists, a division which yielded up new fields and garnered critical attention. But as each side now has its own legacy, whether it is celebrated or neglected by current literary scholarship, I argue that while the legacy of the

modernists, as embodied by Taha Hussein, is still of immense literary and intellectual value, the traditionalist legacy receives meager attention and enthusiasm. One such unsung figure is Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii, a traditionalist who led almost single-handedly a literary battle against the modernists, directly targeting their representative, Taha Hussein.

The "battle," (as it is literally called in Arabic) that al-Rafii launched against the modernists or the New school involved many issues related to religion, language, literature, politics, society, and history. The revival addressed all these issues at a time of uncertainties, during a swift shift from Arab and Islamic traditions to new trends of life and thought. The process of Egyptian modernization started noticeably with the initiatives of Muhammad Ali (1805–1848), the ruler who succeeded the Ottomans and established a modern Egyptian state. Although Ali had introduced Europe to Egypt and vice versa, it was not until Egypt experienced the aforementioned battle that the acquaintance between Egypt and the West was significantly questioned. The battle dictated that it was time to choose between the traditions of Islam and Arabism on the one hand, and the campaign of Westernization on the other. Even though intellectuals on each side claimed that they were sincerely seeking the best for their country, as well as the broader Arab and Muslim *umma* (or nation, as repeatedly used by Arabic writers referring to the entire Arab race or the whole Muslim world), their views were so conflicting that they created a split in the Arab public opinion. Or, as the orientalist Hamilton Gibb put is "[w]hatever the ultimate result may be, however, there can be no question that the conflict has torn the Arabic world from its ancient moorings, and that the contemporary literature of Egypt and Syria breathes, in its more recent developments,

a spirit foreign to the old traditions ("Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature," 746-47).

In this thesis, I try to introduce the legacy of the traditionalist Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii. In order to recreate the context of this legacy, I discuss the main issues concerning the revival and set al-Rafii in position to a representative figure, Taha Hussein, from a rival modernist camp. While this thesis does not rely on literary theories in interpreting the actual events or the literary texts of the revival, it is theoretically informed by postcolonial studies, as it investigates a literature that has been to some extent influenced by different cultures and languages within the context of Western domination and native resistance. While resistance is represented by the traditionalists who struggled to preserve a certain identity independent of the colonizer, the modernists are equally resilient in their desire to identify with Europe, no matter what results can be inflicted regarding their identity, language, and heritage. Since I do not go beyond the revival to reach theory—not even postcolonialism, as inviting as it may appear—I think that further (and more) theoretical research on the same subject is needed and can draw on my factual information.

Due to the unfamiliar cultural and historical references in my thesis, Chapter II deals with the main stages of Arabic and Islamic history together as one due to their interchangeable nature. It spans the period from the pre-Islamic times up until post-World War I, when Arabs were no longer under the Ottoman control. After World War I, Arabic history divorced itself from the Islamic one, at least politically, as a result of the demise of the Islamic role played by the Ottoman Empire or Caliphate. Thus, the historical account has to be stopped at this point. After all, World War I resulted in a different

world map, among many other things, and the emergence of dependent Arab countries which adopted different trends in order to shape their own modern history separate, from each other for the first time.

Chapter III focuses on the main constituents of Arabic literature, highlighting the true value of pre-Islamic poetry, as it was manifested in its unique eloquence and referential diction, still appraised today. The chapter further stresses the crucial contribution of the Qur'anic diction and style to the main body of Arabic language and literature. It also touches upon some literary figures during the prosperous stages of Arabic and Islamic history.

Chapter IV provides the context that relates my previous chapters with the subsequent ones. This chapter is dedicated to the Arab literary revival in Egypt, whose history is introduced with more emphasis on the factors that contributed to the revival. The chapter gives a detailed account of the birth of the revival in Egypt, examining the circumstances of its occurrence. It especially investigates the role of the French in the revival, both as activators and contributors. Also, due to the huge impact on the social and political life of Egypt, the reign of Muhammad Ali (the founder of Modern Egypt) is extensively explored. The Arabic literary scene during the revival is also discussed in the chapter, in an attempt to shed light on the main literary figures, issues, and activities of the period in question.

Chapter V covers the two schools of thoughts in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century, representing the highlight of the Arab renaissance, especially in the field of literature. These schools are the New and the Old, respectively represented by their leaders, Taha Hussein and Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii. After giving an account of

Hussein's contribution to the revival movement in Arabic literature, the chapter tries to highlight the literary and intellectual contributions of al-Rafii, who has been less recognized than his counterpart, Hussein. One of the goals of this thesis is to create a rebalance in the representation of these schools, emphasizing al-Rafii's role in Arabic literature during that period. While Hussein has been highly acclaimed, even on the international scale, al-Rafii, whose contributions are no less significant than Hussein's, has not been given his worth of recognition and appreciation in the studies on Arabic literature. When I researched this topic, I did not find a single article or book on al-Rafii written by a non-Arab scholar. My interest in bringing al-Rafii's work to the Western study stems from my belief that he represented an important line of thought that requires further investigation and better understanding. Another reason is my admiration of al-Rafii's tenacity in his intellectual battle for his thought and beliefs.

Chapter VI revolves around the conflict between the Old school, represented by al-Rafii, and the New school, represented by Hussein. The chapter examines and compares the intellectual achievements of al-Rafii and Hussein. In addition, it tries to explicate and delve into the reasons behind the injustice done to al-Rafii by downplaying and ignoring his substantial intellectual contributions to the Arabic thought and literature.

Chapter II

Historical Overview: The History of Arabs from Islam to Demise of Collective Islamic

Rule.

Before we embark on discussing the Arabic Revival in Egypt, since this revival is

located within a historical and geographical setting, it will be more convenient for a

Western audience of such unfamiliar Eastern topic to be familiarized with its historical

and geographical context. Defined briefly by Rudi Matthee as "the Egyptian-Arab

cultural 'reawakening' (152), this revival occurred in the modern history of Egypt. It

witnessed cultural debates about main issues of traditions and modernization,

represented, as will see in the third chapter, by Mustafa Sadiq Al-Rafii (1880-1937) and

Taha Hussein (1889-1973). Robin Ostle from the Oriental Institute at Oxford argues that

this revival was "referred to as an era of rebirth or resurrection (*nahda*), and from its

earliest stages this period saw a dual process of aspirations to political emancipation and

creative waves of cultural regeneration" (184). In this brief historical overview, I will

provide the necessary information that puts the revival that occurred in Egypt (as will be

discussed in Chapter IV) within its broader historical and the geographical frame, as it

existed in a culture and an area unfamiliar to many. This historical overview aims at

briefly providing the reader with a geographical glimpse of the Middle East and main

stages and development of Arabic Islamic history. Chapter III will provide an overview

of Arabic literature, giving an account of its main structure before the revival that

changed its direction. Of Western audiences, I find American readership especially

unaware of the history of the Middle East in general and of the existence of such revival

in particular. The reason behind this unawareness is explained by A. S. Eban in "The Modern Literary Movement in Egypt":

> This conflict is secluded from European observers [and Americans as well] by the ruthless barriers of the Arabic language, barriers impregnable against all but the most persistent and tenacious assault. Therefore many whose business is to study and, where possible, to anticipate the social and political impulses which agitate the Near East are prone to disregard the modern literary movement whose center is Egypt and whose circumference is the Arabic-speaking world. (166)

It is the purpose of this thesis to introduce to the Western audience this revival, trying to shed more light on its context, historically, geographically and, mainly, from a literary point of view.

It is well known that when we refer to Egypt, the country where this revival in question takes place, the reference in the Western mind will form a conception of three identities of this country: Middle Eastern, Arab, and Muslim. In order for these three identities of Egypt to be explained, we need to go beyond the Egyptian borders or Egyptian history and see what makes this country Middle Eastern, Arabic, and Muslim

To start with the Middle Eastern identity of Egypt, there is a Western-formed, geographical reference that labels Egypt and its adjacent countries as Middle Eastern. Generally speaking, the area that encompasses the countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea can be all considered part of the Middle East, a term that has been, historically speaking, difficult to define. Surprisingly enough, the term, Middle East, is not that old. It was the American naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan who, in

the *National Review*, September 1902, first used "Middle East" to refer to the area in southwest Asia. Historically speaking, this area was a "cradle of ancient civilizations. It also has been, particularly, in the second half of the 20th century of paramount economic importance to the world because of its vast oil resources" (Magnus). Nevertheless, the Middle East is not defined according to a specific number of countries. As Magnus argues, the Middle East area was sometimes narrowed down to refer only to the Levant (Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan). At times, however, it expanded to refer to the whole East: that is, every country that did not belong to the West could be labeled as Middle Eastern. Although the United States has established a strong relationship with Middle East, it has failed to make a specific geographical profile for this region. We see this inability to draw lines around a specific area called the Middle East well demonstrated in the first publication of the new series titled *ISSUES in Foreign Policy*, released in 1968 by the U.S Department of States. In this issue entitled *The Middle East*, American foreign policy theorists admit that "there is no universally accepted definition of the territory of the Middle East. For the purpose of this paper the Middle East includes Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Turkey, Iran and the 'Arab world.'" (United States 4).

The Middle East now includes countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, or any other country that fits a certain geopolitical description set by the United States or the West in general. It is noteworthy, however, that these different countries of the Middle East are diverse in their cultures, climates, political systems, and ethnicities. The Arab world, as the State Department indicated in its above-mentioned document, is a sub-region in the Middle East where Arab countries are located. These countries are different in language and culture from Iran, a Persian country, and Turkey, a country whose Turkish language

is different from Arabic and Persian. While all the Arab countries are Middle Eastern, not all Middle Eastern countries are Arab. Minorities in countries of the Middle East in general, have also different languages: the Kurds speak Kurdish, the Armenians have Armenian language, and the Arameans (also known as Syriacs) speak Aramaic, the liturgical (ritual) language of the Syrian Orthodox Church which is still spoken today by some people in Syria.

The history of the Middle East is rich and diverse, following the same pattern of diversity in languages and ethnicities that exist on the lands of this region. For example, the people of ancient Phoenicia gave the world the first recorded alphabet. According to Bernard Lewis, "Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic alphabets are all derived from the first alphabet devised by the mercantile people of the Levant coast" (*The Middle East* 9). It was from this area that the pharaohs appeared, and in this land, according to Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr., "Rome's Emperor Constantine (r. 313-337)...ordered the construction of a new capital, strategically situated on the straits linking the Black Sea to the Aegean. He called it Constantinople after himself" (17). Constantinople would become later the capital of the Ottoman Empire, in an amazing shift in the history of the region. Furthermore, being the land where the three monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—emerged makes the Middle East a cradle of the spiritual heritage for so many people in the world. Moreover, the legacy of Middle Eastern civilizations like Persia, Mesopotamia, Byzantium, Egypt, Babylon, and Islam still receive a remarkable appreciation by the entire world. Indeed, today's art, science, philosophy, religion, law, architecture, and even some traditions are indebted to the ancient civilization of the Middle East.

The Middle East is also an area with a long history of tense warfare, due to the fact that it has a geographical location linking three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa. The Middle East gained a strategic position that made world powers, ancient or modern, try to gain a handy access to that area or an entry through it. Lieutenant-General Sir John Bagot Glubb, an Englishman who spent twenty-five years of military service in the Arab world, describes this pattern of conflict and warfare in the Middle East as follows:

> Then, as now, what we call, the Middle East was torn between the rivalry between Eastern and Western power blocs. The West was presented by the Greco-Roman Empire of Byzantium. The East by that of Persia. In general, the upper Euphrates and Tigris formed the boundary between the two. The Arabs lay slightly to the south of, and in contact with, both parties. (*The Greatest Arab Conquests* 19)

Because of the exceptionally strategic importance of the Middle East, European countries, especially Britain and France, colonized most of its countries. This colonization resulted, among many other things, in interaction between the East and the West, hence initiating the Arabic revival that started after the Napoleon Expedition to Egypt in 1798. Moreover, in modern history two blocs were engaged in gaining some ground in the area: the Soviet Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). They both tried to have partners in that strategic area, and the tension between them increased as they differently approached the Arab-Israeli conflict. Since Israel was established in 1948, in the middle of the Arab world, there has been a conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis and their allies. The whole international community tried to engineer a peace agreement between the two parties, but without much success so far.

Furthermore, whether there is a conflict in the Middle East or over it, and whether this conflict is old or new, the Middle East, as part of the East, has been frequently conceived by the West—mainly by Western colonizers and some of the orientalists who worked for them—as an inferior area to the West. In centuries of European colonization, the East was perceived as an area in need of guardianship, patronage, and even military actions that were justified by different reasons. This perception stemmed from an occidental point of view that the East needed the discipline, the enlightenment, and the civilization of the West.

When we want to investigate the Arabic and Islamic identity of Egypt, after we have elaborated on its Middle Eastern identity, we find that the further we go back in history, the more Egypt loses its uniqueness as an Arab or Muslim country. The reason is because Arabs used to be one nation and so did Muslims. Hence, it is essential that we take a look at the history of Arabs, which is, by default, the history of Islam in order to view the revival from the right perspective.

Arabs and Islam: One Race in One Religion

The Arab identity of Egypt is manifested by being part of what is known, at least to Arabs, as the Arab World or Arab nation ("Umma") where people from twenty two countries, from Morocco in the west to Oman in the east, speak Arabic and share the same Arabic history. The word "Umma" in Arabic is close to the world "umm" (Mother), which is not just a linguistic coincidence. According to tradition, Arabs descend from Adnan (who has a lineage that goes back to Abraham and Hagar) and Qahtan. This ancestry makes Arabs more than just a Semitic people with the same historical

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background. Rather, Arabs have traditionally considered themselves bound to each other by origin, brotherhood, language, traditions, and later the religion of Islam. The phrase "Brother of Arabs" was commonly used before, and at the time of the advent of Islam, to address someone coming from the desert to the settled community, if people did not know his name yet. As the majority of them became Muslims, brotherhood became an Islamic obligation for all Muslims, Arabs and non-Arabs, as emphasized by the Qur'an as well as the traditions of Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an states: "The believers are nothing else than brothers so make reconciliation between your brothers and fear Allah that you may mercy" (49.10), and Prophet Muhammad says: "Do not hate one another, do not be jealous of one another, and do not desert each other, and O Allah's worshippers! Be Brothers." (Abdul Baqi 349). Muslims have also had familial relationships that go beyond the national borders of the countries to which they belong.

The history of Arabs changed drastically after the advent of Islam. In 610, the forty-year-old Muhammad started to spread the religion of Islam (in Arabic, Islam means "submission," or surrendering to God), to be the first call of its kind in Arabia since the time of Abraham. Before the advent of Islam, Arabs were a tribal people but not all were Bedouins that lived in different places in the desert. Some of them were merchants, exchanging merchandises by traveling mainly to the Levant and Yemen. Tribal ethics prevailed in Arabia. An Arab should respect the leader of his tribe, support the tribe, right or wrong, and try to be a good representative of his clan by doing things worthy of praise. Poetry was used to acknowledge the good deeds of the tribe of the poet, or his own honorable actions and noble personality, which eventually led to a great appreciation of the tribe to which he belongs.

Before Islam, the majority of Arabs were idol-worshipers. As Carl Brockelmann illustrates, "Through the ritual, at the core of which there lay the sacrifice, the gods entered into a blood tie with the worshiping tribe; they became its patron and often its ancestral lord, so that their original nature becomes very indistinct" (8). There were also rituals related to the security of the tribe. If a man is killed or a woman is violated, the injured party as a clan should do everything possible to avenge the wrongdoing and hence preserve their honor. The tribe also gives protection for any refugee escaping persecution from another tribe. Since the tribal people believed men were the only source of strength, some of them used to bury their girl babies alive, considering them freeloaders who cannot provide anything to the clan. Males often felt ashamed of female children. When it came to sexual activities, Arabia used to have organized prostitution. Certain prostitutes would put something on their tents to indicate that they were offering sexual gratification for money. Wild parties, where wine makes men lose their senses, were so common that even poems were written about wine itself. For example, Amr Ibn Kulthum, a sixth century Arabic poet says in one of his poems:

> Up, maiden! Fetch the morning-drink and spare not
>
> The wine of Andarin,
>
> Clear wine that takes a saffron hue when water
>
> Is mingled warm therein.
>
> The lover tasting it forgets his passion,
>
> His heart is eased of pain. (Lichtenstadter 149)

This poem and many others were recited in celebration of wine-drinking. The afore-mentioned Andarin is one of lots of different types of wine pre-Islamic Arabs used to drink in more public than private places.

When Arabs came to worship only one God, in Arabic, Allah, it changed all these, and many other aspects of Arabic life. Allah's laws replaced tribal laws, and one's membership to a tribe came second to his or her connection with the new religion, a connection that soon proved to be stronger than familial ties. Some new converts were ready to fight their fathers and brothers who did not accept Islam. Moreover, traditional activities of revenge, burying girls, drinking, prostitution, tribal raids, and the like were strictly forbidden. As for morals, Prophet Muhammad said that he came to perfect the best of morality. He also made it clear that the best people before Islam would be good Muslims, as well. In this regard, the good Muslim is the one who is honest and trustworthy, fears as well as loves God, cares about the Muslim nation, and practices Islam according to the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet.

The Qur'an describes the life before Islam as the "Jahiliya" (in Arabic, ignorance). "When those who disbelieved had put in their hearts pride and haughtiness, the pride and haughtiness of the time of jahiliya (ignorance), then Allah sent down his sakinah (calmness and tranquility) upon the believers" (48.26). This verse admonishes Muslims not to practice the customs of the pre-Islamic period—jahiliya. Hence, any non-Islamic practices, such as the aforementioned, would be considered an act of jahiliya, another way of condemning many other non-Islamic acts. Later, in modern times, the jahiliya became a concept that extends the time limitation of that pre-Islamic period. Therefore, a Muslim society where Islam was not fully practiced was considered by some

fundamentalists a "jahiliya" society, and as such should be revolutionized. The reestablishment of a glorious Muslim society and restoring an Islamic nation based on the "sharia" (Islamic law) was the call among conservative thinkers, like Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii in the twentieth century, and some other intellectuals who came after him. Especially since the 1980s, when the Egyptian president al-Sadat was assassinated by an Muslim extremist during a parade in 1980, Muslim countries have witnessed the emergence of militant Islamists that increasingly adopted this concept of reborn jahiliya. Therefore, these Islamists have tried to enforce establishing a pure Islamic society by targeting its secular authority. Secularism, for these revolutionary Muslims, is the new jahiliya that Islam put an end to a long time ago.

With the basic meaning of jahiliya (ignorance) related to the state of lack of knowledge, it was Islam which made Arabs interested in reading and writing and other forms of education, as a response to the teachings of the Qur'an. The first verse in the Qur'an was "Read," and Prophet Muhammad stated that the best among Muslims is the one who learns the Qur'an and teaches it. Promoting learning among the believers yielded later remarkable results. Gradually, Muslims were acquiring and spreading the best knowledge—theological and scientific—available at the time.

Arabs were the first people to adopt Islam and to spread it beyond Arabia. Therefore, the history of Islam and Arabs is inseparable, and hence they integrate each other. The major shifts in the history of Arabs are the same as those in Islam, and the changes and the developments in the history of Arabs reflect the major historical landmarks of Islam. That is why historians traditionally break the history of Arabs, as well as Muslims, into stages, based on the most distinguished and major shifts in the

political system that used to run the Islamic Arabic nation. These stages are the pre-Islamic period, Islam during the life of the Prophet Muhammad (which is mentioned below under the subtitle Dawa stage), the Khilafa al-Rashideya (the Pious, Rightly Guided Caliphate), the Umayyad Caliphate, the Abbasid Caliphate, the Age of Mamluks, and the Ottoman Caliphate. It is worth noting here that after the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate, and as the caliphate was a unifying ruling system that started since the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Arabs and Muslims were no longer united in terms of government and political relationships. Therefore, their history became no longer subject to collective surveying as it was before—from the dawn of their history until the time when they got independent from the Ottomans. Instead, each Arab or Muslim country in modern history is studied individually and in a separate manner, with no connection to other Arab countries that had their own political and governing systems.

Dawa Stage (610-632): Muhammad Becomes the Prophet of Islam

This stage in Arab and Islamic history is a turning point in the history of humanity in general. During this stage, Muhammad Bin (son of) Abdullah, who was born in 570 to a father whose tribe, Quraysh, was a very influential one in Mecca, received a message from God. The message came to Muhammad when he was forty years old, and it was revealed to him through the angel Gabriel, who appeared to Muhammad when he was mediating in the Cave of Hiraa, North of Mecca.

This stage is called "dawa" stage: dawa means in Arabic invitation or calling. In this sense, dawa is calling the non-Muslims to accept Islam, which was what the Muhammad doing immediately after he received the message of Islam. These revelations

were later revelations that announced him a prophet. These revelations were incorporated in the Qur'an, the word of God, according to Muslims. "Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner; surely your Lord best knows those who go astray from His path, and He knows best those who follow the right way" (The Holy Qur'an, 16.125). The people of Mecca in Arabia resisted the dawa or calling people to embrace Islam and to follow the word of God revealed to Muhammad, who was not among the leading heads of the Arabian tribes. The Meccans, especially the powerful and the rich, "did not accept his claim to be a messenger of God, and they saw him as one who attacked their way of life. 'O Abu Talib,' they said to his uncle, who was his protector among them, 'your nephew has cursed our gods, insulted our religion, mocked our way of life, and accused our forefathers of error'" (Hourani 17). The Meccans launched a severe persecution against the dawa and the people who accepted it and tried to prevent the spread of Islam by any possible means. They tortured the new converts, boycotted their business, and directed verbal and physical abuse toward the Prophet Muhammad, who eventually decided to move with his followers to Yathrib. The flight from Mecca to Yathrib, which later became known as al-Madina (the City), took place in AD 622, the year which later became the starting point for the Islamic calendar.

Al-Madina became the base where Prophet Muhammad used to call for Islam more openly, receiving delegations from different parts of Arabia that wanted to know about or convert to Islam, sending letters of Dawa to non-Muslim rulers, and providing the increasing Muslim territories with some of his companions to teach Islam. "Make things easy, not hard, and bring glad tidings to people and do not scare them away," is

part of what he asked one of his companions to do when he sent him to Yemen (Ibn Hisham 590). From al-Madina, the Prophet Muhammad made a bloodless conquest of Mecca in 630, and by his death in 632, the majority of the people of Arabia became Muslims. These Muslims were so devoted to the teachings and principles of Islam that they were ready to spread Islam beyond the borders of Arabia. Indeed, even after the death of Prophet Muhammad, Islam remained the religion that calls people to accept its faith and practices. Motivated by the teachings of Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, which require them to reach non-believers and enlighten them about Islam, Muslims organized themselves and started an increasing expansion of Islam in terms of people and land.

Whether by Muhammad himself or by his Muslim followers, calling people to join Islam included asking them to believe that there was only one God and that Muhammad is His Prophet. Bearing witness to the oneness of God and the belief in Muhammad as a messenger is the first of the "Five Pillars of Islam." The second pillar, a highly required one, is the five daily prayers. The third is almsgiving, which is due when a Muslim has a certain level of resources where he can contribute to the welfare of the fellow Muslims. The forth, a highly observed one, is Fasting Ramadan, which is the holy month of prescribed fasting for Muslims. It was during this month that the Qur'an was revealed, and it is during this month that the Qur'an is highly read. The fifth one is one lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca, if the physical and financial ability is available.

Though they have their own practices of their faith, Muslims do believe that their religion is not different from the other heavenly revealed religions, the monotheistic Judaism and Christianity. In fact, they consider Islam a continuation of the same message

sent to humanity by the same God of Abraham, Solomon, Moses, Jesus, and many other biblical figures whom Muslims consider as prophets or messengers. Wilfred Cantwell Smith in *Islam in Modern History* explains this Islamic notion of continuity of revelation, which yet came to an end by the coming of Prophet Muhammad, as he is known to Muslims as the Seal (the last) of Prophets.

> God [in Islamic thought] has not left mankind without guidance on this matter of how it should live. On the contrary, so soon as man was created he was told what the moral law is. In Islamic terms, Adam was the first 'Prophet' (or 'messenger'). That is, God set man in the universe and at once delivered to him the message: thus-and-so he must do, thus-and-so he must avoid doing...human history opens with man knowing what he ought to do—but proceeds with him failing to do it. (19)

Apart from being believed by Muslims to be a true religion that has a universal truth as a heavenly message, Islam is also religions entrusted to guide and maintain the morality of humanity. Therefore, any attempt to replace this religion with man-made systems and laws will be rejected and considered misleading to the Muslim society. Al-Rafii and some other Muslim intellectuals, who are committed to their faith, consider themselves religious guardians of the morals of society. Therefore, their responsibility is to enlighten Muslims of the "conspiracies" that some anti-Muslim intellectuals are thought to be plotting against Islam. In this regard and within this context, al-Rafii devoted so much of his time to write in defense of Islam, a task that he undertook motivated by his belief in Islam, his wish that the Muslims go back to their religion and live up to its values and

practices, and his hatred toward those whom he believed were trying to weaken the religion by bringing anti-religious ideas from the secular West.

The Khilafa al-Rashidiya (The Pious, Rightly Guided Caliphate) (AD 632-61)

The caliphate was the system of rulership in Islam, which was initiated immediately after the death of the Prophet. The caliph, the person in charge of the caliphate, was the successor of the Prophet, selected by a council or appointed by a previous caliph. The caliph was given the honorific title "The Prince of the Faithful" and he served as the spiritual and political leader of the whole Muslim nation and all Muslims were obliged to pledge allegiance to him, as part of their religious duty towards the leader of the Muslim nation. On the other hand, the caliph's religious duty was to be dutiful, devout, and caring of his subject Muslims, treating them as the Prophet Muhammad used to do. Thus was the case of the first four caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar ibn al-Khattab, Othman ibn Affan, and Ali ibn Abi Talib, the closest companions of the Prophet Muhammad. Later on, the phase of Arabic and Islamic history when these caliphs ruled was named after what distinguished them with the incredible quality they had: being pious, rightly guided or, in Arabic, "Rashidi". The period in which the aforementioned caliphs ruled was, according to Smith, "often put forward as an ideal age…[and] highly idealized form, in a picture embodying the legendary embellishments of the subsequent pious tradition and [it is] still today receiving favors from devout imaginations" (247). Smith refers here to the fact that Muslims still look back in admiration to the type of caliphs or rulers that led the Muslim nation during that stage to expand and prosper. Their leadership was characterized by the intention to set a model of humbleness,

righteousness, wisdom, and a genuine, vast knowledge of Islamic law. It was during this

caliphate that Egypt and the rest of today's Arab world became Islamic lands. During that

time, the Roman Catholic church was sending missions to Britain to convert the Anglo-

Saxons to Christianity, after Pope Gregory I (AD 540–604) had sent Saint Augustine to

be the first Archbishop of Canterbury, from AD 601 up till his death in AD 605

("Augustine of Canterbury, Saint").

Abu Bakr, the first of caliph, witnessed during his two years of ruling (AD 632-

634) the start of the fall of Persia to Islam, as an Islamic army were emerging from the

deserts of Arabia to reach the Euphrates. Persia, according to Glubb, "included what we

call today Iraq, [and] was one the greatest Powers of the seventh century world" (24).

The other great power Muslims confronted was Byzantium, which, after the fall of the

Western Roman empire, became the strongest naval power in the Mediterranean (28).

Both Syria and Palestine were restored from the Byzantine empire by Umar ibn al-

Khattab (AD 634-644), the second Muslim caliph. When the third caliph, Othman ibn

Affan, came to rule the Muslim nation (AD 644-656), the growing empire of Islam

included in 649 Cyprus. However, the assassination of this pious caliph, who was one of

the first individuals to convert to Islam and to fund its causes, made the Muslim nation

start to suffer from domestic tribulations. Muslims started showing dissatisfaction with

how things were being run by men in power and that led to subsequent conflicts between

the ruling and ruled Muslims. By the accession of Ali ibn Abi Talib in 656, the highly

respected cousin of the Prophet Muhammad who embraced Islam even before becoming

an adult, the situation continued to get worse.

Muslim historians call the troubles that happened at this time *fitan* (trials, tests), connoting that God tests the faith and good conduct of His believers in certain disastrous situations. These trials included many events. Muawiya, the governor of Syria, who was born into a strong clan, took the initiative to raise up the case of Othman ibn Affan's murder. He insisted on investigating the assassination of Othman and the duty to punish the assassins, a responsibility that he thought Ali ibn Abi Talib was not taking seriously. Based on his disagreement, Muawiya did not acknowledge the caliphate of Ali and hence an armed dispute occurred and the battle of Siffin, near the Euphrates, took place. However, soon after the battle started, both Ali and Muawiya accepted mediation by delegates representing both sides, but another event of *fitan* took place at this time. Some of Ali's soldiers opposed the negotiation, finding no excuse for him to stop fighting Muawiya as long as they were fighting a just battle. These who rose in rebellion against Ali were called Kharijites. Fatima Mernissi defines the phenomenon as follows: "The Kharijites raised the question of whether you must obey the imam [another word for Caliph] if he does not protect your rights. Should you blindly obey, or can you trust your own judgment? The Kharijites answered by saying that you are not obliged to obey; you can 'go out' (kharaja) from obedience. 'To go out' is the title they gave themselves" (27). At this time, Shiite come into existence dividing Muslims, till now, into two sects: Sunnis, who still follow the mainstream of Islam and make the larger division of Islam, and Shiites, who were so partisan with Ali that they claimed all the three caliphs before him as illegitimate and that the caliphate should have started with Ali and should only continue among his descendants, a partisanship that Ali himself was not reported to

acknowledge. When Ali was assassinated in 661 by one of the Kharijites, his death put an end to this era (the Khilafa al-Rashideya).

The Umayyad Caliphate (AD 661-750): An Empire under Construction.

This era of Arabic and Islamic history was a very tense one and it witnessed huge changes in the Muslim system of government. It started with the establishment of a capital in Damascus, away from the sacred places of Mecca (where the Sacred Mosque "the Kabba" is) and al-Madina, which was the center of leadership since Prophet Muhammad immigrated to it in AD 622. Adopting Damascus as a new center of the Islamic government, with the ongoing conquering of new lands to spread Islam, showed a progressive Islamic spirit that continued to exist few centuries to come. Following this spirit, Muslims started to build cities. As Damascus became the first of these cities, its function was to be the headquarters of what historians know as the Umayyad Caliphate.

This caliphate came to existence when Muawiya became a caliph in 661, after his political rival Ali, the last of the previous stage (the Rightly Guided Caliphate), was murdered. This historical stage is called Umayyad because when Muawiya took over the caliphate, he made it restricted to the Umayyad dynasty to which he belonged, and in an unprecedented manner, he assigned the position to his son Yazid. The Umayyads as a clan were strong and rich, which helped in establishing them as rulers in Islam. Making the position of caliph in Damascus not in al-Madina—as it was before—and the shift to make the caliphate based on heredity, rather than collective counseling among Muslims, were among the main changes that this phase brought

One of the Umayyads' most distinguished caliphs after Muawiya was Abd al-Malik (r.685-705), a strong caliph who made the Muslim empire extend from Spain to Central Asia and India. Another achievement of Abd al-Malik is to mint Arabic coins, replacing the Byzantine and Sasanian ones (Lapidus 61). Besides Abd al-Malik's achievements, more appreciation for the Umayyad dynasty goes to Abd al-Malik's cousin Umar ibn Abdala al Aziz. Umar became a caliph in 717, and was a pious leader whom some Muslim historians call the "Fifth Rightly Guided caliph," adding him to the unmatched al-Rashidiya Caliphate. During Umar's caliphate, the Islamic territories were prosperous and peaceful due to his devotion for justice and genuine commitment to Islam. He was raised in al-Madina where there were still some individuals who met with the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. The fact that he came to Damascus from al-Madina contributed to his being, as Brockelmann points out, "in the midst of the pious successors of the companions of the Prophet" (92). It seemed that he was influenced by those pious people and became himself one of the last pious caliphates in the history of Islam.

The Umayyad dynasty could not keep giving the Muslim caliphate strong leaders, like Muawiya and Abd al-Malik, or pious ones, like Umar ibn Abdala al Aziz. Rather, there were some caliphs who cared more about securing the position of the caliphate even if that led to plotting against or killing members of the same family that could be prospective candidates for caliphate. In fact, the caliphate, during the Umayyad and the subsequent eras, was generally treated as position of power over Muslims not serving them. It lost its religious aura, and hence was the reason for the Umayyad dynasty to gain dislike, resistance, and even rebellion from an increasing number of Muslims. Among

these unsatisfied Muslims were the Abbasids, who were named after al-Abbas, the uncle of Prophet Muhammad.

The Abbasids started to rally supporters from areas that were not under immediate control by the central authority in Damascus. Iraq and Yemen were the main bases from which the Abbasids-lead revolution started to march against the Syrian-based Umayyads. The end of Umayyad caliphate is narrated by Ira M. Lapidus as follows:

> By 747, the Abbasids were ready to move. In the villages of Khurasan [now Iran], especially around Marw, Abu Muslim, the Abbasid agent, founded the support he needed. These were the villages settled by the initial Arab conquerors of Khurasan who had become agriculturalists, only to find themselves burdened with taxes and treated as a subject population....[Abu Muslim's army] defeated rival factions in Khurasan , raised Yemeni support in western Iran, crushed Marawan [the last Umayyad caliph] in Iraq, and so seized the Caliphate. (67)

The brutalities that followed the fall of the Umayyad family reached an immense level when the Abbasids wanted the whole family to vanish, due to fears that they might regain the rule of the empire for a second time. Life imprisonment or slaughter was the fate awaiting any member of the family. Historical records show that the new governor of Syria was given an order from the first Abbasid caliph, Abu al-Abbas as-Saffah (AD 721-754), to the wholesale killing of the Umayyads, which was what immediately happened. In one incident, a large number of the family was killed in one huge hall where they assembled hoping for amnesty.

The cruelty of the Abbasids against the Umayyad, which was motivated by the need to secure the newly gained position of the caliphate, could find its like in contemporary Byzantium. Though both the Arabs and the Byzantines were living in civilized societies and states, and though they both belonged to religions that teach mercy, forgiveness, and love, the practice of the men of power did not correspond to these values. For instance, the strong Byzantine ruler Emperor Basil II (surnamed Bulgaroktonos, Bulgar slayer), who reigned from 976 up till 1025, did not show the slightest mercy neither with the rebellious Byzantines nor with his enemies. For instance, when he defeated the Bulgars in one of his battles with them, "he took 15,000 prisoners of war, all of whose eyes were put out before they were sent back to their people" (Glubb, The Greatest Arab Conquests 229). Indeed, some Muslim and Christian rulers showed at the time some sort of deviance from the religious or civilized manners that should have refrained them from unwanted brutalities.

Though the house of Umayyad was persecuted by the Abbasids, they did not vanish completely until another nine centuries later. One member of the family, Abd al-Rahaman al-Dakhal (AD 891-961) escaped and established a state away from the Abbasids' reach. Since the main Islamic regions were no longer in favor of the Umayyads, Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil was obliged to go overseas, to a land that had been already annexed to the expanding Islam. This land was Spain, which had some disorganized Muslims that were later united and led by Abd al-Rahman to establish an independent Islamic state. However, though Abd al-Rahman al-Dakhil is considered by historians the greatest ruler of the Umayyad Arab Muslim dynasty of Spain, a credit went

also to the Muslim leaders whose devotion and great skills paved the way for him by conquering Spain before he could escape to it.

Spain was already conquered as a result of Muslim advancement into North Africa. The dominant ethnicity of North Africa was the Berbers. They belong to "the Hamitic branch of the white race, probably in prehistoric times of the same stock as the Semites. Most of Berbers on the coast had become Christians. Tertullian, St. Cyprian and above all St. Augustine, princes among the early Christian fathers, stemmed from there" (Hiti 62). These Berbers, in a miraculous way, as Philip Hiti puts it, adopted the religion and its language vehemently and they put themselves under the service of Islam. Strong soldiers as they were, they helped in conquering Spain and later establishing what the Muslims called Andalusia, which became exemplary for its social, political, and cultural maturity.

Andalusia was established in Spain when Europe was living in the Dark Ages. This fact, according to John Glubb, gave some European historians the illusion that those ages became "dark" as a result of "the conquest of Europe by the northern barbarians (Glubb, *The Empire of the Arabs* 137). In fact, Andalusia developed a fame that rivaled that of Constantinople, as it became a place where Islamic philosophy, art, and literature blossomed profoundly. The Dark Ages Europe found no reason not to benefit from such handy a source of knowledge and civilization: "The learned men and philosophers of Arab Spain were Christendom's guides to the learning and science of the east" (Roberts 100). Andalusia was also a place where both Europeans and Muslim Arabs could see each other's knighthood, values, and even ways of approaching the subject of love, which is a main topic in Arabic poetry before and after Islam. When Ibn Hazm (AD 994-1069),

an Andalusia Muslim philosopher, wrote his thesis on courtly love, "we find fully

developed all those themes which later became current in the Occident in the poetry of

the Provencal troubadours and the German Minnesingers" (Brockelmann 199). The

Muslim conquest of Spain that was started by Tariq ibn Ziyad in AD 711came to an end

in 1492 with the fall of Granada, the last Spanish-Muslim Emirate. However, Spain was

one of the bridges that linked Muslims and Christian Europeans, and it was through this

bridge that some of the knowledge and scholarship of in the Islamic world found its way

to Europe.

Another bridge that connected Europeans and Muslims in the Dark Ages was

Sicily, which was conquered by Arabs coming from North Africa with a strong fleet and

army. The Arab rule, conducted by a dynasty that moved from Tunis to conquer the

island, continued from the second half of the ninth century till the Normans took it in the

second half of the eleventh century. As Glubb claims "if the Arabs had remained in Tunis

[now Tunisia]…one of the principal channels through which Arab civilization enriched

the life of the West would never have been opened" (*The Empire of the Arabs* 340).

Moreover, even after the Norman conquest of the island that started in 1060, Sicily

continued to play a role in introducing the advancement of the East to the West. Paper

manufacturing was brought to Sicily by Arabs and one of the earliest surviving paper

documents in Europe is an order written in Greek and Arabic by the wife of the Norman

conqueror of Sicily, Roger I (Hiti 157). One of the big names in the court of Roger II was

Muhammad al-Idiris (1100-1166) who was "the most distinguished Arab geographer and

cartographer of the Middle Ages" (158). Surprisingly enough, though some military

actions were taken against the Muslims and Arabs in Spain and Sicily, the Islamic legacy

continued and is well known to have contributed to the European Renaissance (Glubb, The Empire of Arabs 342).

The Abbasid Caliphate (AD 749-1258): The Last Glorious Epoch

The word "Abbasid" comes from the Arabic name Abbas, one of the uncles of Prophet Muhammad. After the Umayyad caliphate was toppled, the people who came to power and eventually ruled the Muslim nation were the offspring of Abbas. The first Caliph from the house of Abbas was Abu al-Abbas as-Saffah (AD 749–54). The Abbasid's capital of caliphate was Baghdad, which was built by Abu al-Abbas' brother and successor, the vigorous Caliph Abu Jafar al-Mansuur (AD 754–775). Of the house of Abbas, Harun al-Rashid (in Arabic, Aaron the Upright) was the most famous Abbasid caliph (786–809). He deserved a high rank due to many great traits, including his piety, which was expressed by the fact that he used to go to Mecca for pilgrimage every year. Moreover, al-Rashid's conquests, mostly under his direct leadership, were expanding the Muslim empire in almost all Asia and the majority of Africa. He also had friendly relations with China and with Charlemagne, the Frankish king that conquered most of Europe and was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by Pope Leo III in the year 800. Baghdad was at its apogee during the caliphate of al-Rashid, thriving with art, literature, philosophy, and science. Therefore, al-Rashid was made a legend and the ruler whom "Scheherazade told her wondrous tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*" (Roberts 68).

The Abbasid in Baghdad continued to rule and enjoy the supreme economic, military, scientific, and literary supremacy of the Islamic nation. However, after the death of Harun al-Rashid, civil wars began to inflict the house of Abbas. The domestic conflict

started because al-Amin changed al-Rashid's will. According to the will, al-Amin was declared caliph, but next to him the caliph would be his brother al-Ma'mun. Nevertheless, al-Amin announced that his son, not al-Ma'mun, would inherit the caliphate, provoking a bitter civil war that led to his defeat. The victorious al-Ma'mun became the caliph (786-833), and made his reign marked with building a huge library, schools, an astronomical observatory, and "facilities for the translation of scientific and philosophical works from Greek, Aramaic, and Persian into Arabic" (Goldschmidt 74). Away from the interior conflicts between the members of the ruling family, the Islamic empire during the Abbasid caliphate reached an advanced stage of civilization that all produced the greatest heritage of Arabs and Muslims. During this era, vast scholarship was produced on Islamic sciences—like interpretations of the Qur'an, Islamic law ("fiqh"), documenting and interpreting the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad ("Hadith"), and Islamic philosophy—and Arabic. Natural sciences, mathematics, and medicine were also among the many other fields that prospered in Baghdad. Muslim physicians made original contributions to medicine after studying the great Greek physicians (Lichtenstadter 101). Arabic literature received during this prosperous era foreign influences from works written in Persian, Indian, and Greek. For example, Ibn al-Muqaffa (died ca. 760) translated from Persian into Arabic the still widely read book, Kalilah wa-Dimnah, which is a collection of fables and legends narrated by animals and meant for giving advice and wisdom (115). The economic life in the Abbasid era was so prosperous that some historians noticed the emergence of a luxurious style of life, which led to the wide spread of non-Islamic activities like drinking wine in public and wild types of entertainment (al-Katib 117). Though the commitment to Islam was influenced by the Abbasid lavish life,

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Islamic thought and spirituality flourished in the form of theological debates between Muslim scholars and the increasing importance of Sufism, or Islamic mysticism that aims at establishing a simple, pure, and close relationship with God by denial of the self and involving in a spiritual love with Him. It is worth noting that Sufism became "increasingly important" (359), as Lapidus put it, in the next historical stage, the Mamluk Age. "The mawalids or the birthdays of the Prophet and of famous Sufi saints were occasions for immense celebrations and many thousands of people participated." (359). Sufism in the Abbasid era, however, produced more original mystical literature than in later times. Al-Ghazali (AD 1058–1111), the most influential Islamic philosopher of the era, was a practicing Sufi and wrote some works on Sufism, such as *Ihya ulum ad-Din* [The Revival of the Religious n Sciences].

Like the Umayyad caliphate, the Abbasid caliphate came also to its end. Dramatically, but slowly, it started to break into pieces, mainly due to the desire of the governors of the provinces to be independent from the central government of Baghdad. The government itself was weakened by the struggle for the caliphate between the fighting heirs. Bernard Lewis gives an account of how this break started to take place:

> In the West, Spain and North Africa (756-800) became virtually
>
> independent under their own amirs (princes).... In 868 even Egypt fell
>
> away when the governor, Ahmad ibn Tulun, a Turkish praetorian sent
>
> from Baghdad, made himself independent and extended his rule to Syria.
>
> The fall of his dynasty was soon followed by the accession of another
>
> Turkish dynasty of similar origin, and thereafter Egypt...was never ruled
>
> from Baghdad....In the east, the process of disruption took a somewhat

different form. The alliance of the 'Abbasid caliphs with their Iranian

supporters were badly shaken by an obscure internal convulsion during the

reign of Harun, which culminated in the degradation and destruction of the

Barmacides [Persian family that had become very powerful during

Harun's reign]. (*The Middle East* 79]

Despite the dissident governors and the revolts against the Abbasids, their rule continued

to exist in Baghdad until the last Abbasid-Baghdad-Based caliph, al-Mustasim, who ruled

from AD 1242 to AD 1258 and who witnessed the destruction of Baghdad by the

Mongol, who were tribes from east central Asia that could lead powerful conquests into

China, Europe and the Middle East in the period between the thirteenth and the fifteenth

centuries (Rupen). After al-Mustasim, the Abbasid caliphs resided in Egypt from AD

1261 up to 1517.

One of the important events in the history of Islam during the Abbasid caliphate is

the Crusades. These religious wars of the West made Muslims for the first time face

organized and long military campaigns launched by Christian Europeans. Though

Christian sentiments were behind the Crusaders, Muslims found it unrealistic to be seen

as enemies with "The People of the Book," a term coined by Islamic tradition which

emphasizes the fact that Christians and Jews have already had heavenly revelations from

God, and hence they are closer to the monotheistic Islam than other religions. Jay Walz

wrote that "Moslems had established a long record of tolerance about use of the holy

places in Jerusalem" and that "Christians, Jews and Moslems had always intermingled in

Jerusalem" (11). However, Walz gave an account of the atrocities made by the European

leaders of the Crusades: "After Godfrey of Bouillon, supported by Raymond and

Tancred, took Jerusalem on July 15, 1099, there was wholesale slaughter. 'The heaps of heads and hands,' records a Latin chronicler of the time, 'could be seen through the streets and squares'" (11). The experience of the Crusades, though they ended up militarily, continued to make Arabs suspect any advancement of the West coming towards them, assuming that it was another attack against them, their civilization, religion, and lands. It was only when Arab and Muslims were united by Saladin—the highly respected hero of Islam in the twelfth century—that they could encounter the Western Crusades and eventually stop them, which is why Arab and, by extension, Muslim unity is still a dream, even today, for Arab and Muslims. This unity means to them strength in front of external threats. As David Lamb puts it, "The Arab came to understand that unity and survival were synonymous, that Western intervention posed a continuing threat to Islam, that isolation was the surest means of enduring. The Arabs do not remember that era fondly" (61). Though the Crusades left enmity between the Muslims of the East and the Christians of the West, it also left some positive cultural encounters experienced by both sides. The Muslims, who in general did not like the morals of the Christians that were fighting them, expressed, however, some kind of admiration for the Crusaders' courage and vigorous combating. The Crusaders, on the other hand, admired the qualities of the Arabs and they recognized Saladin as a chivalrous knight, so much so that Dante, who was born about seven decades after Saladin's death and is considered Italy's greatest poet, included him among the virtuous pagan souls in Limbo. Moreover, *The Talisman,* a novel by Sir Walter Scott dealing with the historical subject of Crusades, showed Saladin as a dignified and noble ruler who would "welcome the Christian princes to his tent with a royal courtesy well becoming

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their rank and his own" (351). On the other hand, Usama Ibn Munqidh, who was born in

Syria in 1095, the same year the Crusades began, wrote a book that showed how Muslims

and the Crusaders differ in their values. Usama's book, *Kitab al-Itibar* [*The Book of

Reflection*], showed how the author, a nobleman and knight, viewed the Crusaders

according to the personal encounters that he had with them, which were either in

Jerusalem or other Islamic cities the Crusaders controlled. After narrating some stories

about how trouble-free a Crusader was when he discovered his wife cheating on him,

Usama comments, "They have neither jealousy [for their wives being with someone,

which is a hasty generalization here] nor zeal [to defend their honor] but they have great

courage, although courage is nothing but the product of zeal and ambition to be above ill

repute" (*The Harper Collins World Reader*, 1000). What Usama might have missed

though was the fact that the above-mentioned woman was perhaps not that Crusader's

wife but rather a mere mistress, which did not require him to care so much about her

fidelity. Usama expected the man to be jealous over his woman, in the same way an Arab

ought to, without considering the differences in relationships between Arabs, who were,

and still are, very sensitive about chastity and fidelity, and Western Crusaders, who came

from a different culture with different perception about man-woman relationships.

Another important event in the history of Islam during the Abbasid

caliphate is the existence of the Fatimid dynasty and caliphate (909–1171) that ruled

North Africa and parts of Egypt. This caliphate was not a Sunni but a Shii one. The

Sunnis are considered the mainstream, or the "established" Islam from which the Shiis

separated, claiming that Ali, Prophet Muhammad's cousin, was the true successor of the

Prophet and that any caliph that came before him, or even after him, was not legitimate.

Being outnumbered by Sunni Muslims, these Shiites, roughly translated into English as partisans of Ali, took advantage of the deterioration of the Abbasid caliphate and its increased weakness, in controlling remote regions such as North Africa and Egypt, and wanted to establish their own state and their own sectarian caliphate. To achieve this goal, an organized force of Shiites toppled the ruler of North Africa (which nowadays includes the countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya). The leader of this rebellion and the founder of the Fatimid dynasty was Ubaydallah al-Mahdi (AD 909-934). When announced, the center of the Fatimid caliphate was Tunis, until the fourth caliph of the dynasty al-Muizz Li-Deenillah (AD 952-975) who conquered Egypt and in AD 972 founded a new capital called al-Qahira (Cairo), meaning "the Triumphant." Cairo soon became a recognized city in the Muslim world, and its grand mosque, al-Azhar, has been playing a central role (even at the time of the Arabic revival in Egypt):

> "Its primacy as an intellectual center was ensured by the foundation of a mosque-university called al-Azhar, [where for two centuries the Fatimids trained Ismaili [a branch of Shiism]. Cairo and al-Azhar outlasted the Fatimids and remained respectively the largest city and the most advanced university in the Muslim world up to the Ottoman conquest in 1517. (Goldschmidt 81)

The time the Fatimid caliphate lasted—from the beginning of the tenth century till 1171, when the last Fatimid caliph died—was somehow a short time, but it was, therefore, enough for a dynasty like this one (Goldschmidt 82). There were actually many factors that contributed to the disappearance of this dynasty before the Ottomans sealed its fate. Suffice to mention that this caliphate was supported by the Sunni Muslims, it got

involved in fights with the Crusaders and the Byzantines, and it witnessed in its territories

the emergence of another types of Shiism that weakened the unity of the dynasty ((Lewis,

The Middle East 92).

The Age of Mamluks (1258-1800): The Age of Decline

History narrates that Baghdad was destroyed on February 10, 1258, by Hulagu

Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan. Hulagu executed the last Abbasid caliph, al-

Musta'sim, putting an end to the Islamic political system (the caliphate) that was based in

Baghdad. The destruction of Baghdad made the Muslim world split into semiautonomous

principalities, and made the unity of the Muslim world fragmented as never before.

Internal weakness in the Muslim nation was increasing till the emergence of the Ottoman

empire that defeated the Mamluks and ended their rule. The word Mamluk means in

Arabic "the owned people," in reference to those soldiers who were originally white

slaves from Turkish origin. They entered the service of the Islamic army in the ninth

century. The first caliph to depend on the Mamluks was al-Mutasim (833-842), and

quickly his successors increased their reliance on them (Lewis, *The Middle East* 87).

However, the Mamluks became so powerful that they could defy their rulers and even

seek independence from them by establishing independent dynasties. They were able to

take over the throne of Egypt in 1249 and became sultans of Egypt.

The most eminent and admired Mamluk sultan was Bayburs (1223-1277), who

was in the service of one Ayyubid sultan of Egypt. (The Ayyubids came to power after

the Fatimid dynasty vanished). After receiving military training in Egypt, Bayburs

became a distinguished leader. In AD 1250 his army captured the Crusader king, Louis

IX, which made Bayburs appear in the eyes of Egyptians and the rest of Muslims the same as the victorious Saladin. In fact, both Saladin and Bayburs are acknowledged in the history of Islam as being vigorous leaders who fought the Crusaders away from the Muslim lands. Bayburs had an extra credit as he could also defeat the Mongols after they captured Baghdad and tried to expand their control of Muslim territories. Moreover, both Saladin and Bayburs united Syria and Egypt and were loyal to the highest Muslim authority, the caliphate. After being the ruler of Egypt, Saladin reunited Egypt to the Abbasid Caliphate. One the other hand, Bayburs "brought the [Abbasid] caliphate to Cairo, by welcoming an Abbasid refugee fleeing the Mongol conquers of Baghdad, and installing him as the first of what became a line of shadow caliphs" (Lewis, *The Middle East* 105). Bernard Lewis describes as "shadow caliphs" the weak and exiled Abbasid caliphs, due to the fact that they had limited authority in Cairo. Unlike those of Baghdad, the Egypt-based caliphs were powerless and ineffective in their ruling. The Mamluks took advantage of their own power and the powerlessness of those caliphs to become the principal landholders and actual rulers of Egypt.

Though the Mamluk tried to keep their states (mainly Egypt and Syria) strong, by having diplomatic relationships with European rulers and focusing on agriculture, and by building fortresses, their age came to its end when the Ottomans conquered Egypt in 1517. After an easy conquest, the Abbasid Caliph was transported to Constantinople, and Sultan Selim I announced himself to be the Caliph of Muslims, which established another stage, the Ottoman empire or caliphate.

The Ottoman Caliphate (1517-1924): The Last Caliphate

The Ottomans are named after Osman I (AD 1259-1326), a Muslim prince who conquered the regions neighboring the Black Sea. Osman I took the Black Sea territories from the Seljuq dynasty, which was a Muslim Turkmen dynasty that ruled Persia, Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Ottoman troops first attacked Byzantium in 1337 and soon afterwards they were making their way into Eastern Europe, reaching the Balkans.

On May 29, 1453 the Ottomans, under Muhammad II the Conqueror (1429-1481), had overcome the Byzantine empire and captured its capital, Constantinople, which became later the Ottoman capital with a new name, Istanbul. Another Ottoman leader with reputed achievements was Selim I (1467-1520), who lead successful military expeditions that widened the territory of the empire to be the largest in the world. Selim took possession of Egypt, destroyed the ruling Mamluks in 1517, and became a caliph by taking the title from the last Abbasid caliph, who was transferred from Cairo to Istanbul to officially hand the caliphate to him (Brocklmann 289).

The Ottomans were advancing into Europe and Asia, relying on a strong military power that made them the largest land or sea force. They were the first to use muskets, which are muzzle-loading shoulder firearms, and their fighting cavalries were highly trained in field battles. As a result, the Ottomans were able to overtake twenty nine provinces in Asia, Europe and North Africa, thus having subjects from different ethnicities: Arabs, Greeks, Albanians, Armenians, Serbs, and Bosnians. The Ottomans

benefited from these subjects as well as from their non-Muslim subjects who were skilled in administrative or military matters (Goldschmidt 128).

The downfall of the Ottoman empire can be attributed to the fact that, at the height of its power, it was a medieval empire depending on the army and the resources of the occupied provinces, without trying to improve in terms of economy, science and arts. Thus, at the time Europe was going through a process of development on many levels, the Ottomans focused and kept focusing on increasing their territories, which caused them interior weakness. Corruption and bribery were not uncommon in the administration of the provinces that were supposed to provide a certain annual amount of money to the Istanbul-based government. The accumulation of these shortcomings made the empire lose its lands and shrink to be what is now known as Turkey, due also to the European increasing colonization of Asia, North Africa, and some other Ottomans-owned territories (Walz 22-23).

Historians made a connection between the decline of the Ottoman empire and its wars. Starting from the eighteenth century, there were Russian-Turkish wars caused by the neighbors' fight over the strategic territories on the Black Sea. However, the actual decline of the Ottoman empire began with the Crimean War, which was caused by the Russian demand to apply protection over the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman empire: "In the course of a complicated diplomatic crisis, the Russians invaded the Danubian principalities in July 1853. Britain and France supported Turkey against Russia" (Lewis, *The Middle East* 284). Though the Ottomans were victorious in the Crimean War, they were exhausted after a two-year war that had worn out their economy. The independence of the Ottoman provinces began with the European states of Romania, Serbia, and

Bosnia, giving a model to other states to follow. The major blow against the empire was

the outbreak of World War I. As Jay Walz proposes, "the finish came when the Ottoman

Turks made the fatal mistake of siding with the Germans. During the war Britain

encouraged the restive Arab subjects of the Ottoman rulers to revolt and promised them

independence if the Turks and Germans were beaten" (24). Of course, the Arab revolt

succeeded in breaking the Arab world from the Ottoman empire which was called—

starting from the nineteenth century—the sick man of Europe, as its army "did not stop

losing wars" (Goldschmidt 157).

Two years after World War I, the treaty of Sevres (1920, in France) officially

announced the end of the Ottoman empire, obliging Turkey to give up any rights over the

Arab world, Asia, or North Africa. Four years later, the Turkish nationalists, who took

over the country in 1922, overthrew the treaty and founded the Republic of Turkey, in

1923. One year later, the last Muslim caliphate was abolished, and Turkey was led

drastically toward westernization, uprooting its Islamic heritage, and making it closer to

the West than to the East. The Turkish constitution emphasized secularism and removed

Islamic law from being the law of the country (Lewis, *What Went Wrong* 106)

One of the biggest advocates of Turkish secularism was Mustafa Kemal (1881-

1938), the military and political leader who was given the name Ataturk ("father of the

Turks" in 1934. Ataturk wanted to eliminate all aspects of the Islamic and Arabic identity

that Turkey had inherited. He considered Arabic script a sign of backwardness and called

for replacing it with the Roman alphabet. He once addressed members of his Republican

People's party by saying, "'We must free ourselves from these incomprehensible signs

[Arabic script] that for centuries have held our minds in an iron vise. You must learn the

new Turkish letters quickly and teach them to your compatriots, to women and to men'"

(Walz 43). Not only would Ataturk make Turkey give up Arabic script, but he also

achieved similar goals that contributed in making Turkey disconnected from its past. He

overhauled the legal system that was based on Islamic law and did not allow any

religious ideology into the country.

Ataturk also imposed some Western fashions to be adopted by women, not

allowing them any more to wear the veil, or the "hijab," which is the covering of the

woman's hair, a highly required practice by Islam. About the hijab Ataturk said, "It is a

spectacle that makes this nation an object of ridicule" (43). Even up till now, women in

Turkey are required to take off the hijab if they want to participate in the government,

which is one of the objections that Human Rights activists raise frequently against

Turkey. In the late 1990s, the world witnessed a big political debate in Turkey when a

Muslim female was elected as the first woman with hijab to the Grand National

Assembly. Merve Safa Kavakci, who won the Turkish 1999-parliament election to

represent the Islamic party "The Virtue," was "forced out of the ceremony because public

officials in the highly secular government are not allowed to wear religious apparel"

(Schiavone). She was suspended from involvement in political activities for five years.

Certainly Ataturk received the kind of resistance that made him appear as the

enemy of religion and the person who destroyed the Turkish heritage of Islam. Mustafa

Sadiq a-Rafii (1880-1937), who was Ataturk's contemporary (born one year before him

and who passed away one year before him), wrote two allegorical essays about Ataturk,

strongly critiquing his anti-religious policies. The first one is "History Speaks," in which

he accuses Ataturk—without mentioning his name—of being a blasphemous tyrant whose goal is to destroy the established religion of God:

> This dictator is a ruling king, who can make his stupidity a factual manner, killing the Muslim scholars by murdering them and killing the religious schools by destroying them, and had he could done it, he would hang every turbaned Muslim by his turban. His blasphemy reached the level that he sees in these acts a sign of power. He does not realize that because he is so meaningless in the eyes of God, He made him like the fly that brings disease to people and the mosquito that kills people with the fever [it carries]. (214)

Al-Rafii shows disgust with what Ataturk did against Islam and Muslim Turkey and translates this disgust into images of trivial parasites attached to Ataturk. He entitled his article "The Blasphemy of a Fly," referring to a parable about a fly that was disappointed with its place in the universe, showing rejection of its nature, and trying, but with no success, to show her superiority to other creatures.

Al-Rafii's disappointment in Ataturk was part of a collective dissatisfaction among Arabs and Muslims who felt that by the secularizations of Turkey, the last base for the caliphate, the spiritual leadership that united them through the position of the caliph had disappeared forever. Though the Arabs started revolting against the Ottomans, as a reaction against the utilitarian procedures that the late Ottoman leaders used in ruling the Arabic districts, they found themselves falling under the European colonization. Disappointment was bitterly felt when they tried to escape the "sick man of Europe" that caused their weakness, to be controlled by the strong, healthy European man who took

advantage of their move against the Ottomans, and gave them in return a colonization

that they would fight for decades. About this sense of disappointment and European

betrayal, Walz wrote:

> This revolt in the desert—graphically chronicled by Lawrence of Arabia—
>
> helped Britain march up from Egypt and take Palestine and Damascus. But
>
> the Arabs, having helped, found their territories divided up by the
>
> peacemakers—not into independent states but into something new called
>
> 'mandates.' This they will regard as a great betrayal of all they had been
>
> promised. (24)

The sense of losing the upper hand has made Arabs grieve this loss of a pioneering

position in civilization in different ways. Some believed that the only way out was to go

back to Islam, as they attributed the miserable situation of Muslims and Arabs to be

because they were swept away from God, and hence providence forsook them. Some

believed that the West could control the East because it separated the church from the

state, and therefore Muslims and Arabs should do the same. Some believed that the

preservation of Arabic and Islamic heritage does not conflict with taking advantage of the

modern sciences and adopting the European methods of development in all of its aspects.

The common thing among the afore-mentioned disputed opinions is that a

revival—to change the recent backward status of Arabs—was necessary. This revival,

however, happened. It took place within many political changes in the Arab world, and

its direction was shaped by the Arab world's immediate contact with the colonizing West

and the voices of moderation and traditionalism that accompanied it. The revival in Egypt

will be treated thoroughly in the Chapter IV.

Chapter III

Arabic Literature at a Glance: Reverence of the Classical.

Arabic literature in the pre-Islamic era was restricted to poetry. Pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry were the only literary production the Arabs knew of. Before Islam, Arabs were people of high eloquence and articulateness. Some of the Arabs used to send their little children from their cities to the Bedouin tribes to learn pure and original Arabic, which was not available in the cities since they accommodated people with different languages and dialects. Eloquence and usage of elegant expressions in speaking was a virtue for both men and women. Therefore, since poetry was the vehicle of expressing eloquence, it was so highly appreciated that the pre-Islamic people of Mecca used to transcribe in gold and hang up on the wall of Kaaba some of the most excellent poems as a gesture of promoting high quality poetry. Making the Kaaba—the most sacred and respected place of worship before and after Islam—carry these poems indicates clearly that poetry was held as sublime and highly valued. From the act of hanging up these poems comes the word "Muallaqat," which refers to "an anthology of seven 'Golden Odes' [...], the masters of pre-Islamic poetry, and each is regarded as its author's masterpiece" (Gibb, *Arabic Literature* 22). These poems or Muallaqat are still considered the gems of Arabic literature, especially for those who have supreme appreciation of classical Arabic poetry. The themes of these poems include, but are not restricted to tribal pride, defiance, self-praise, natural descriptions of desert life, field combats, love, and reflection on life.

When Islam came, it brought along a literary change caused by the the Qur'an, which acted like a real challenge to the pagan Arabs. Though shortly prior to Islam Arabs had reached an exceptional level of eloquence, the Qur'an presented to them a different type of eloquence, narration, musicality, and expressive language that they had never encountered before and could never be on a level with. For those who believed that the Qur'an was God's word, they held its eloquence and language to be heavenly. Those who rejected the Qur'an claimed that it was merely a collection of myths and that Muhammad was a magician or a newly born poet—as he was not known to be a poet before. However, the rejection of the Qur'an as a message revealed by God did not prevent the pagan Arabs from showing appreciation of the book as an extraordinary text that was different from the traditional poetry of their time. The sources on Islamic history tell the story of how a group of the most powerful people of Mecca, who apparently had a good taste for eloquence, was going secretly at night to listen to the Qur'an. When Muhammad became an unwanted man for these pagans and after his message was rejected as being against the Arabs' established traditions and belief in idols, listening to the Qur'an was not something any influential person in Mecca would do without severe criticism from his fellow pagans. Instead, those who wanted to listen to the Qur'an—while Muhammad was reading it at home—would go individually, get close enough to be able to listen to the recitation of the Qur'an in the hours of darkness, and go back to where they came from before dawn (Ibn Hisham 315). As almost all the Arabs eventually accepted Islam, the Qur'an has been ever since both the sacred book and the book that carries the most elevated expression of Arabic language.

Both the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad became the canon of

Islam and the top sources of Islamic legislation and ethics, turning gradually into the

center of admiration, reflection, and vast scholarship (learning and teaching them was

considered a source of reward from God). Linguistic and esthetic standards were no

longer set after the Qur'an and no longer after the high quality of pre-Islamic poetry.

Nevertheless, the vocabulary of the pre-Islamic poetry was helpful to the Qur'an

interpreters when they wanted to explain the meanings of some words in the Qur'an. In

other words, if there was an unfamiliar word in the Qur'an, the interpreter would try to

find some verses in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry that had the same word and try to figure

out the meaning of it. For example, in the *Qur'an Commentary* written by Ibn Kathir, an

eighth-century Muslim scholar, Qur'anic interpreter, and historian, we find that Ibn

Kathir goes back to the poetry of a pre-Islamic poet, Amr Ibn Kulthum, to explain the

meaning of one word in the forty-ninth verse of the fourteenth chapter of the Qur'an. "Al-

Asfad are fetters. Amr Ibn Kulthum said: 'They came, with clothes and prisoners. We

came with fettered kings' [bound with Al-Asfad]" (al-Sabouni 301).

The poets after Islam benefited from, and sometimes adopted some of the

expressions and stylistic devices of the Qur'an in order to deliver their literary

production, but they also benefited from the pre-Islamic heritage of poetry and Arabic

language, especially the rich vocabulary and the rhymed expressions. Commenting on the

manner the Qur'an was adopted as a model for writing and high level of expression, H.

A. R. Gibb stated that "as a literary monument the Koran thus stands by itself, a

production unique in Arabic literature, having neither forerunners nor successor in its

own idiom. Muslims of all ages are united in proclaiming the inimitability not only of its

47

contents but of its style" (36). Valuing the Arabic of the Qur'an very highly and adopting its styles in writing might be the differentiating factor that divides traditionalists (like al-Rafii) and modernist writers. While the latter's first concern is the correctness of Arabic and its imitation of the classical styles of the pre-Islamic, the Qur'anic, and the superior Arabic of the Umayyad and Abbasid epochs, the former's concern is only the expression of the meaning in a clear manner, without being obliged to be eloquent.

To understand this difference between Arab traditionalists and modernists, the following anecdote narrated by Edward Said in "Living in Arabic" might be helpful:

> One of my earliest memories of how much is expected of the classical Arabic speaker, or *khatib*, the word for orator, in a formal situation was a story told to me many years ago by my mother and my great aunt, a teacher of Arabic, after attending an academic speech in Cairo given by a well- known Egyptian personality, who might have been Taha Hussein or Ahmad Lutfi as-Sayyid. The occasion may have been political or it may have been commemorative, I have forgotten which, but I do remember them saying that there were a number of Azhar sheikhs in attendance. Punctuating the very solemn and elaborate speech, my mother had noted, one or another sheikh would stand up and say *"allahoma"*, then sit down immediately, the one word expression explained to me as showing approval (or disapproval) for fineness of expression (or a mistake in vocalisation). (Said)

This incident shows clearly how the above-mentioned traditionalist scholars from al-Azhar, whose education have been in classical Arabic and who studied the language

along with Islam, became impatient if the classical Arabic was violated in terms of grammar or word usage.

Though this brief note is not meant to elaborate the literary achievement of Arabs from pre-Islamic times until the period in which Al-Rafii lived, we can at least highlight the fact that modern Arabic criticism holds that Arabic literary production was at its best from the pre-Islamic era until around 1258, when the Mongols sacked Baghdad and nearly destroyed all its grandeur. The destruction was accompanied by the Mongols throwing enormous numbers of books in the river Tigris. However, according to *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, some researchers claim that the pinnacle of classical Arabic literature was around the eighth century:

> By the end of the eighth century the civilizing process within the Islamic
>
> empire made its impact felt on almost all aspects of life. The urbanization
>
> of the Arabs in the new and old cities of the empire turned the Bedouin
>
> element into a small minority. This was a part of the larger process in the
>
> Abbasid period by which the empire became a multiethnic and
>
> multicultural society, which witnessed the full development of the state
>
> and its institutions. The interaction with other, more developed
>
> civilizations—Persian, Byzantine, Greek, Indian, and Eastern Christian—
>
> accompanied by the quick adoption of Islam by large numbers of the non-
>
> Arab population, many of whom soon made Arabic their language of
>
> expression due to the Arabization of state records, made it imperative for
>
> the Arabs and Muslims to preserve their traditions, especially as they still

retained power as the ruling elite. It was within the eighth century that

literacy and literate culture developed. (Hamarneh)

Among the big names of this area (from the eighth century until 1258) there are famous

poets like Abu Tammam (805–845), Al-Buhturi, (821-898), al-Mutanabbi (915-965), and

Abu Ala al-Maarri (973-1057).

Abu Tammam produced excellent poetry which is still widely read among readers

of Arabic literature. He also left a collection of poetry composed by other previous poets

entitled *al-Hamasah* (Bravery). As Ilse Lichtenstadter notes, *al-Hamasah* is "especially

noteworthy; it was already famous in its own time; but for the modern Arabist its value

lies in the large number of poems and fragments of poetry not found elsewhere in our

sources. These are assembled according to their main contents in ten 'books'" (111).

Al-Buhturi is a poet who mastered description and who contacted Abu Tammam

for literary advice. Al-Mutanabbi is regarded as the greatest poet in the Arabic language.

Abu l-Ala-al-Maarri, a blind and vegetarian poet, is known as the philosopher of poets.

He was "inventive and often forced his ideas into the straitjacket of artificial forms, as in

his famous philosophic work…*Luzumiyat.* But the predominating theme of his poetry

was the expression of his philosophical ideas about his own faith and those of other

religion, in which pessimism, asceticism, and fatalism predominate (109). It is not a

coincidence that Taha Hussein, an influential figure in the Arab literary revival, wrote his

doctorate dissertation on Abu l-Ala-al-Maarri, with whom he shared not only the pain of

being blind but also some indications of skepticism, as he showed in one of his books,

Fil-Shi'r al-Jahili[On Pre-Islamic], causing an outrage among religious and literary

circles in Egypt. This outrage, which will be explained in a later chapter, was intensively

expressed in al-Rafii's critique of not only these skeptical views but of almost everything Taha Hussein represents.

The above-mentioned poets, along with all the averagely educated Arab Muslims of classical times, were supposed to study many subjects dealing with the religious and non-religious needs of education. In providing the credentials of a music expert of the tenth century (during the Abbasid era), historians list the following disciplines that Abu al-Faraj al-Asfahani had taken: "He studied grammar, philology, *hadith* [the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad], Qura'nic sciences, and history. He was very knowledgeable [in]…the narration of anecdotes, fables, poems, and biographies" (Sawa, 1). Like so many Muslim scholars who invested their encyclopedic knowledge in writing specialized books, al-Asfahani compiled the well-known and comprehensive book, *Kitab al-Aghani* [in Arabic, *Book of Songs*], a collection of poems in twenty volumes that records the biographies and works of past and contemporary musicians, song writers, and poets. However, though the highest priority in Islamic classical educations went to Islam and Arabic, other disciplines such as philosophy, astronomy, medicine, and science were also part of that education and history records huge achievements of Arabs in these fields.

Classical Arabic language has later on become a model for traditionalists. It also became a source of argument between modernists, who advocated using it without observing its classical quality of brevity, and traditionalists who admire this brevity. The issue of extravagant diction, which later became common by the rise of Arabic styles that are affected by European languages, is explained by Gibb:

> The intensive modification of the root [of Arabic words] lends itself
>
> peculiarly to economy of words, and the most admired form of expression

is the concise and pregnant sentence. Arabic proverbs rarely exceed three
or four words, and poets were judged by their ability to pack a complete
picture into a single line. That 'Oriental floweriness', which has become a
byword, is foreign to natural Arabic expression and crept into later Arabic
literature from external sources. Yet Arabic took it kindly. (*Arabic
Literature* 9)

In fact, brevity and conciseness were so highly recommended that the Arabic language

has produced some proverbs to emphasize these two characteristics of rhetoric. "The best

of speech is what is less [in the number of words] and more indicative" a popular saying

in Arabic goes. A two-word phrase in the Qur'an, "al-hurumatu Qisas" takes the

following phrase to render its meaning in English: for the prohibited things, there is the

Law of Equality" (The holy Qur'an 2.194). Moreover, a phrase like "same great price as

more expensive brands for less" which I have seen written on the box of Suave soup, can

be equivalent to the style of classical Arabic: with less words, you get a full sense of one

or more meanings.

A revolt against most of the traditional types of Arabic literature came with the

Arabic revival in Egypt. The classicality of poetry was challenged by the modern trends

in composing poetry. New genres of literature were introduced to Arabic literature, and

the men of letters who held the past to be their referential cannon were challenged by

those who were so pro-modernism that they find it a waste of time to stick to the past. All

these changes in literary attitudes in the Arabic literature were part and parcel of the

process of the revival, whose beginning and main issues will be investigated in the

following chapter.

Chapter IV

The Arabic Literary Revival in Egypt: Its Birth, Issues, and Context

Egypt occupied a very important place in Arabic and Islamic history. Especially

from the nineteenth century until the second half of the twentieth century, Egypt was in

some ways playing the same role as that played previously by Damascus during the

Umayyad era (AD 661-750) and Baghdad during the Abbasid era (AD 749-1258).

Nevertheless, the difference was still obvious. Unlike Egypt, Damascus and Baghdad

were the bastions of leadership for the entire Muslim empire for hundreds of years,

giving Muslims their highly respected rulers, the caliphs. Egypt's influence, on the other

hand, was limited to the Arab countries only and for a very short period of time. These

Arab countries took from Egypt the initiative to be influenced by the West. In this regard,

the reason behind the centrality of nineteenth and twentieth-century Egypt can be

attributed mainly to the fact that it was the gate through which European modernization

came face to face with traditional Arab societies. Ruled by the Ottomans from the

beginning of the sixteenth century until World War I, these societies were neglected by

the central government of Constantinople and lost contact with the rest of the world,

falling behind Europe and its modern scientific research and industrial revolution. When

a British-backed Arab revolt took place in the years from 1916 to 1918 (Goldschmidt

319), Arabs were struggling for sovereignty, unification of all Arab countries, and

independence from non-Arab control, an ideology known as Arab nationalism (319).

When a group of Egyptian army officers led a coup that deposed Farouk, the last king of

Egypt (1936–52) on 23 July, 1952, the presidency that followed was strongly led by

Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser came to power in 1954 as a prime minister and then as the president of Egypt in 1956. Until his death in 1970, he was a symbol of Arab nationalism. One of the biggest achievements of the Arab nationalism that Nasser's Egypt vehemently promoted was the merger between Syria and Egypt (1958–61). Moreover, what gave Egypt more weight in the Arab world has been its huge population, which is, even now now, greater than any other Arab country. Furthermore, its geographical position with the possession of the Suez Canal, which links the Red Sea with the Mediterranean Sea, added more to its importance in the entire Middle East.

The influential impact that Egypt left on modern Arabic history was not exclusively Egyptian. It can be considered Egyptian in terms of being geographically in or from Egypt, but its consequences were witnessed in all the Arab countries. As a bridge that Europe crossed to reach other parts in the Arab world, Egypt witnessed the starting point of Arabic revival, *nahda*, which led to development of all segments of Egyptian society and, later, of other Arab societies. This revival, as Robin Ostle points out in "Modern Egyptian Renaissance Man," started "in the nineteenth century [and] has long been referred to as an era of rebirth or resurrection (*nahda*), and from its earliest stages this period saw a dual process of aspirations to political emancipation and creative waves of cultural regeneration" (184). Besides, the revival, which was characterized by seeking modernization, adopting the western type of development, and departing from the traditional structure of Arab societies, influenced Arabic literature so greatly that it gave birth to what historians call the Arabic literary revival, or the literary *nahda*.

Egypt was the first Arabic country (to be the land) to receive the seeds of this inevitable revival, which had to happen for two reasons. The first was the contrast

between what Arabs used to be, a prosperous people who had enjoyed the privileges of Islamic civilization, and what they became in modern history, a people who were closer to medieval ages than to the standards of modern times. The second was the increasing calls, which led to fruitful action, for modernizations. As Europe acted in the nineteenth century as a colonizer and, later, as a partial educator of the Arab world—especially to its pioneering Egyptian students whose education was Western—it was so hard for Arabs not to have a Western impact, and equally hard to ignore reacting to it. Arabs were deprived of the spirit of modernization, which was spreading all over Europe and North America. They found themselves in need to take one of two options, and both options were made available through the first European presence in Egypt during the French expedition (1798-1801). The first option was to work on bringing modernization from the West to Egypt, and then, supposedly, to the rest of the Arab world. The second option was to initiate modernization from the inside, with no Western influences whatsoever. While the first option proved to be a practical one, at least for the Arab governments and mainstream intellectuals, it did not go without reservations from some traditionalists who insisted on taking the second option instead. Nevertheless, the voice of those traditionalists, like Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii, for instance, could hardly be heard except for a few supporters who highly valued and passionately supported the call for returning back to Islam and Arabic traditions and culture. Similar to these two options was the fierce, conflicting debate that, according to Fatma Moussa-Mahmoud, "bedevil[ed] Arabic thought and literature to this very day" (29). That debate was, according Moussa-Mahmoud: "Should we [Arabs] cling blindly to our traditional heritage, or emulate western examples" (29). In fact, there were those intellectuals who went Westward in

their thought and literary orientations, as we will examine in the next chapter, and those who thought that the traditional heritage of Arabic and Islamic culture was sufficient for Arabs and Muslims at all times and everywhere.

Certainly there are many issues that revolve around the revival, but most of these issues are not exclusively related to Egypt, even though they happen to be first raised in Egypt. As we have seen in Chapter II, Arabs used to be one nation under a central government based on the caliphate. The majority of them are Muslims, they speak the same language, and they live in the same geographical region where there are no natural barriers to separate their countries from each other. That is why when historians talk about Arabic revival, whether in Egypt or even in Syria, they make an interchangeable reference to the entire Arab world. For example, when H. A. R. Gibb—the British Oriental who was born in Egypt and who was a professor of Arabic at the University of Oxford and at Harvard (Owen 110)—investigates Arabic literature at the time of the revival, he narrows down his reference to Egypt and Syria:

> During the nineteenth century, which found, at its opening, the Arabic
>
> world still slowly recovering from the nervous exhaustion that followed its
>
> brilliant medieval career, and still closely tied to its old traditions, there
>
> was a progressive infiltration of Western ideas. While the literary
>
> activities of the early part of the century were thus merely a continuation
>
> of those of the preceding centuries, a steady current of European, and
>
> more particularly French, thought was being simultaneously injected into
>
> the minds of two different sections of the community, in two different
>
> centers [Egypt and Syria]. (747)

Therefore, when we refer to any topic, debate, or even a figure in the Arabic revival, we do not imply that they are exclusively Egyptian because they occurred in Egypt. Rather, they are interrelated with the whole Arab world and, to some extent, they are of concern to some Muslims beyond Arab countries. That is so because Arabic literature and Islam tend to be all-inclusive entities that embrace not just an Egyptian Muslim or, say, a Lebanese Arab, but all Arabs and all Muslims.

The Arab revival did not, however, develop only in Egypt. This revival found its way to the Levant or Great Syria (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and, Palestine). This revival, which also started in the eighteenth century, took on the task of introducing Western culture and thought to the Arabic-Western system of education, introduced by Christian missions that came from France and other European countries, as well as from the United States. These missions were active in opening schools and academies that were teaching in Western languages, as well as Arabic. Moreover, "numberless Western-style native schools, printing presses, newspapers, magazines and literary and scientific societies were instituted, especially in Lebanon" (Hiti 200). The academic institutions established by the support of the missions contributed to the modernization of teaching process and of education in general. For this reason, historians customarily describe *nahda* in Egypt as scientific as well as literary, whereas the Levant's *nahda* was described as educational, with revolutionized methods in teaching, especially Arabic literature.

The establishment of the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut in 1866, which later became the American University of Beirut, was one of the early Western educational influences in that area (Allen xvii). After eight years, the Universite St. Josephe was also founded in Lebanon, with the same goal of promoting Western thought and culture.

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However as effective as all these institutions could have been, they were not large enough to make a radical, revolutionary, and ongoing change in that Levant or other Arab countries. Rather, they became institutions of the Arab elite. Nevertheless, the Western influence that came with the French expedition to Egypt or the missionary activities in other areas of the Arab world left their trace on many aspects of the Arab life, paving the way for a significant revitalization of Arabic life that had been stagnant through the four centuries of the Ottoman rule. This stagnation started to be stirred significantly by the interaction with Europe. As Gibb puts it, "Napoleon's meteoric invasion of Egypt in 1798 tore aside the veil of apathy which had cut them off from the new life of Europe and gave the death-blow to medievalism" (*Arabic Literature* 159). Yet, that nineteenth century-transformation, from a medieval Arab world into a modern one, did not take the form of a revolution in the Arab world. It was a slow process of modernization that was later known, in Arabic history, as the modern revival.

The Arabic revival, *nahda*, also sometimes called the Awakening Age, or the Arabic Modern Renaissance, is, to some extent, the Middle Eastern or Arabic version of the Age of Reason. The Age of Reason or Enlightenment saw the light first in the seventeenth-century England and spread throughout Europe as well as the English colonies in America in the eighteenth century. Similar to the European Age of Reason, the Arabic revival caused a great change in the structure of Arab society in the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, as an increasing number of Arab intellectuals tended to adopt, to a lesser degree, the same characteristics of Enlightenment, such as individualism, challenging theology, and rejecting authorities. The Arabic revival, as Francesco Gabrieli points out, established a "noble faith in …the

ideals of the nineteenth century: liberal of the individual and of peoples, human

brotherhood, enlightened progress, democracy. The Arab East took them all from the

West, though the West was even contradicting them in practice in its relations with the

'colored people,' Arabs included" (47). Moreover, during the Age of Reason, "there were

battles to improve the school system. Often, that meant a struggle with the church, which

controlled most of education in Europe" (Stone 3). Similar to the battles that took place in

Europe over education, Egypt had some regarding al-Azhar, a historic, traditional mosque

for teaching all sciences of Islam to Muslims from all over the world. Some pro-

modernism intellectuals passionately argued about the need for updating al-Azhar's

disciplines and methods of teaching, emphasizing the necessity to include secular

subjects, not just theology. In response to these calls, al-Azhar established in 1961

medicine and engineering faculties, which were followed by other humanities and social

sciences faculties.

During the revival, there was also a reevaluation and, sometimes, a liberal attitude

of challenging most of the products of the past. Some intellectuals started to question the

value of standard Arabic and the traditional forms of the language, arguing that the

Egyptian dialect could replace it even in published materials. Others questioned the

authority of Islam that institutes laws and gives Muslims their leaders in the form of the

caliphate. In spite of igniting huge anger, some even expressed openly a disbelief in

Islam, or some taken-for-granted elements of it. However, in what seems to be a

reactionary move, there were also some intellectuals who stood against the tendency of

rejecting the traditions by rejecting what they thought of as Europeanized, anti-Arab,

anti-Islamic thought.

The Arab revival, emerging mostly and initially from Egypt, affected all aspects of life in Arab countries, in different degrees according to each country. Egypt was the first in the Middle East to open its gates—though by force and through European military missions rather than by free will—to the European influence. This influence came mainly through consecutive colonial expeditions that came from France and Great Britain. Needless to say, the status of advancement and development that these two countries witnessed had a debt to the intellectual and scientific legacy of the Age of Reason, a legacy which moving to the East, found its way to Egypt.

This revival started in modern history with the arrival of Napoleon Bonaparte in Egypt in 1798, during the first French invasion into an Arab territory. Bonaparte's army was on a mission that was part of the French-British rivalry to colonize areas in Asia, Africa, and India. Bonaparte wanted to keep Egypt away from the control of the British, who eventually occupied Egypt from 1882 until 1952, so that he could have power over the Red Sea and block the British access to India. After overtaking Egypt however, his focus on Egypt was beyond that of a colonizer. He wanted Egypt to free itself of its Ottoman-made shackles and to become a modern country. He brought to the country the shock that helped in awakening the sleeping Egypt. As Francesco Gabrieli explains in *The Arab Revival*:

> The three-century-long lethargy of the Arab world was shaken by contact with the West at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Whereas in earlier centuries Europe had faced the Ottoman assaults on equal terms, she now showed herself, under Bonaparte, infinitely superior technically and with a fully developed and original political and civil outlook. The

Napoleonic expedition to Egypt is rightly seen as the dawn-star of new

life. Indeed it might be said that the Arab world, until then still wrapped in

medieval slumber, was reawakened by the tread of French feet around the

foot of the Pyramids. (35)

However, it is not safe to assume that all Arabs saw the French expedition as Gabrieli

puts it, a "dawn-star of new life." Indeed, they disapproved of the life style that the

French showed in Egypt. For instance, they did not appreciate the French soldiers' habits

of drinking in public and there was a huge amount of anger after the French aimed their

fire on al-Azhar. After all, the expedition was considered as occupation, which has never

been easy to accept in any Arab country. Nevertheless, the acknowledgment of the

expedition was due to the fact that it helped the Arab world to find out how the more-

advanced world was thinking, what its achievements were, and what kind of systems

were running it.

The French expedition, furthermore, reactivated the Arab's knowledge of

the Europeans and the Europeans of the Arabs, and Easterners in general. This

knowledge had been initiated before through many channels, including the crusades.

This time, however, both the East and the West were mutually involved in *knowing*

each other, not just by trading, fighting, or borrowing scholarship from each other.

Yet, as a scholar like Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*, the West's knowledge of the

East, was deliberately conceived in view of the East as reduced to be just the

controllable "Other" to the West. As Said puts it, "knowledge of subject races or

Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives

power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (36).

Immediately after settling in Egypt, Bonaparte established the Institute of Egypt, whose aims were to "advance and spread science in Egypt, to study and publish the natural industrial, and historical aspects of Egypt, and thirdly, and most important, to provide advice for the government" (Richmond 21). The institute was the first modern academy that undertook the study of Egypt by specialized scholars. These scholars were working in all four sections of the institute: mathematical, a section that Bonaparte himself joined as a member, physical, politico-economical, and literary and artistic. These sections worked together to study Egypt and to introduce scientific knowledge to the country. Moreover, Bonaparte also brought to Egypt two modern printing plants which, for the first time, made Egypt witness the existence of journalism by publishing the semi-weekly newspaper, *Le Courrier de Egypte* and the literary and scientific periodical, *La Decade Egyptienne* (Salem 31).

At a time when Europe was the leading power in industrialization and scientific discovery, the French expedition to Egypt brought Egyptians the awareness of how the East was so far behind the West in many aspects such as modern scientific research, industrialization, administration, education, and modern militarization. To imagine the difference between the French and Egyptian parties at that time, it might be sufficient to realize that while Bonabarte's army was equipped with modern weapons to help accomplish its military invasion of Egypt, the army that went to stop his advancement towards Egypt was still using swords. Most Egyptians realized then, and so did the majority of Arabs, that the Ottoman empire was no longer able to protect them, even

though they were still considered part of it. Due to the growing power of the colonizing European countries, the Ottoman empire started to lose control of many of its long-held regions. It also lost respect among many Arabs because they held the Ottomans responsible for their backwardness. After taking control of the Arab world militarily, the Ottomans were far from improving the conditions of their dependencies, and that is why the scientific and intellectual life of the Arabs was only slightly influenced by the Ottomans. If there was an influence, some might argue, it was that the Ottomans kept the Arabic countries enclosed and not familiar with what was going on in the West. Nevertheless, Muslim Arabs found it hard to accept the Christian European occupation in the same way they accepted the Middle Eastern Islamic dominance of the Ottomans. One of the arguments used during the revival was to question who was more beneficial to Muslim Arabs, the Ottomans or Europeans. While the traditionalists would agree that the Ottomans were better than the non-Muslim Europeans, the liberal, modernists would be very critical of the Ottomans and would admire (instead of the Ottomans) the modernity Europe brought with it to Egypt.

As the French "came not only with an army disposing of the latest technology then available, but also with teams of translators and scientists who were enormously active during that short stay in the area (Cachia, "The Arab World" 33), they stood as a sharp contrast to the Ottomans. No longer were the Ottomans able to compete with those rivals who came well-prepared to dominate the East. The French did not abstain from bringing the latest technology in printing to Egypt; books then could be printed and published on a wide scale, to be available to Egyptian and Arabic readership. As a matter of fact, the short stay of the French in Egypt is considered one of the most central phases

in Egyptian history. As Charles Coulston Gillispie affirms in "Scientific Aspects of the French Egyptian Expedition 1798-1801," the French occupation had some agendas beyond just taking hold of the land:

> The Napoleonic occupation of Egypt may be considered the first instance of nineteenth-century imperialism in that it compromised a cultural component lacking in the mercantile colonialism that precede it. What the French later came to call their "civilizing mission" had its origins partly in Enlightenment and partly in revolutionary ideology. Technical competence was the operational aspect of culture. Bonaparte understood all that, not abstractly, but intuitively, practically, as he did whatever related to the exercise of power. His was the imagination that implanted a clone of French science on the banks of the Nile. (473)

The French expedition, therefore, was not just a Western occupation of a Middle Eastern country, though it was, and still is, considered so by the majority of Egyptian intellectuals, motivated maybe by a sentiment of patriotism and nationalism. Still, these intellectuals and the majority of historians attribute the stirrings of Arabic revival to that expedition.

The Napoleonic legacy in the Arabic revival was so deep that it manifested itself more in culture than in other aspects. It exposed Egypt directly to European cultural influences and hence, the need existed for both the French and the Egyptians to exchange a cultural dialogue, by means of translation from and into Arabic, French, and other European languages. In contrast, the Ottomans who ruled the Arabic speaking countries for four centuries did not take such an initiative of translation, as the French did in the

three years of their stay in Egypt. This contributed more to the unfavorable comparison and contrast that many Arabs drew between the Ottomans and their rival Europeans in the Arab world.

According to many historians, the French expedition was the starting point for modern Arabic literature. Shaykh Mustapha Abd al-Raziq (1885-1947) is one of these historians, and a notable figure in the revival, who wrote about the history of Islamic philosophy and contributed greatly to the Egyptian academia in Islamic and Arabic studies. Shaykh Abd al-Raziq was one of the influential intellectuals who taught Islamic subjects, most notably Islamic philosophy at al al-Azhar, where he became its Grand Imam, or "Sheikh al-Azhar," which is somehow similar to the position of the Catholic Pope in Christianity (but without considering himself the infallible voice of God or having authority over all Muslims). He also taught at the French university, the Sorbonne, as well as at what is now known as the University of Cairo, where one of his students of philosophy was Najib Mahfouz, who later became one of Nobel Prize Laureates in literature. In his English article, "Arabic Literature Since the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century," Shaykh Abd al-Raziq points out the beginning of modern Arabic literature, emphasizing the role that some European educators played at that time:

> Modern Arabic literature dates from the French expedition to Egypt in
> 1797. It is greatly influenced by western civilization and modern thought,
> which contributed a good deal to its contents, but did not affect its
> fundamental characteristics. Among the many forces which co-operated in
> creating such influence was the employment of European teachers in

educational institutions in Egypt and Syria, especially during the reign of

Muhammad Ali. (250)

Until the Egyptian universities had enough Egyptian staff, which was around 1940, these

European teachers continued to occupy different chairs in the Egyptian institutions.

Records show that in the year 1932 Taha Hussein, then the Dean of the Faculty of Letters

at the Egyptian University, nominated four European professors for honorary titles to be

given to them during the visit of one of Muhammad Ali's ancestors, King Fouad (1868–

1936), who was the founder of the University of Cairo in 1906. These professors were

from Britain, France, Italy, and Germany (Rizk), which shows a considerable variety in

staffing Egyptian higher education institutions at that time.

Another remarkable milestone in the Arab revival was the reign of Muhammad

Ali in Egypt (1805-49). Ali built up on what the French had already established in the

country. He is considered one of the biggest pillars in the *nahda* of Egypt, or, as Philip

Hiti puts it, the "father of modern Egypt, who, recognizing the possibilities of this abrupt

contact between East and West, planned to follow up" (200). This abrupt contact that Ali

tried to fix by making the connection with the West more permanent and effective was

initiated previously by Bonaparte, whom Ali followed his example in introducing Egypt

to the West. Surprisingly enough, Muhammad Ali, who devoted his life to make Egypt a

better country in the region, was not Egyptian. He was the Albanian Turkish commander

of the Ottoman contingent that was sent to resist the French who occupied the country in

1798. Ali did little to get rid of the French, who could easily overtake Egypt. Bonaparte

defeated the poorly armed Egyptian Mamluks, who were a strong local power in the

Ottoman-controlled Egypt, and fought his way to Cairo. Participating in one of the

encounters, the Battle of the Pyramids (1798), Ali realized the enormous gap between the

Western advanced military power and the traditional army of the defenders of Egypt.

This experience opened his eyes to the need for the modernization of the Egyptian army

in order to become able to face European invaders. Later, Ali took advantage of the

vacuum of power that existed in Egypt after the French left the country under Ottoman-

British military pressure, and gradually became the strong ruler of Egypt after 1805. His

rule of Egypt was the start to a dynasty that ruled in the country until the revolution of

1952, which made Egypt a republic (Richmond 39).

Ali needed a modern, powerful army for three reasons: First, he wanted to annex

to Egypt other Ottoman territories, trying, but eventually failing, to build for himself a

strong empire in the region. Second, he sought to be able to defend Egypt or any other

territory he could put his hands on from European invasion, which was active in the area

at that time. Third, he wanted the army to be the vehicle for modernization that would

affect not only on the military force, but many other aspects of Egyptian society (Berger

395). The Egyptian army that Ali built for these reasons achieved some of its goals. It

adopted a modern organization, recruited some European administrators, made successful

military campaigns in Arabi, Syria, and Sudan. In addition, the modernization process

that accompanied and followed its set-up did influence the entire structure of the country.

As a matter of fact, historians' acknowledgment of Ali's success in putting Egypt on the

road of modernization was by no means attributed only to the military force that he could

accumulate. He knew well how to deal with a country that turned out to be the best place

to accomplish his dreams of building an empire. He also knew how to direct Egypt the

way he wanted, making himself the only source of power in the country. As Arthur

Goldschmidt, Jr., argues:

> Fortunately for him, the Nile Valley made Egypt a proverbially easy land
>
> to govern, once all rival power centers were wiped out. The Mamluks
>
> posed the major obstacle; in 1811 [he] had them all massacred. Because
>
> the ulama [Egyptian scholars of Islam] enjoyed a great power and
>
> prestige... he weakened them by taking away most of the land they had
>
> managed as *wagfs* (Muslim endowments). He also put most privately
>
> owned land under state control... His government thus gained a monopoly
>
> over Egypt's most valuable resource, agricultural land. (153)

To take full advantage of the rich resources that the Nile Valley had, Ali wanted to

control it entirely from Egypt to South Sudan. Therefore, he sent armies to conquer

Sudan in 1820, which was later jointly administered by the Egyptians and the British.

Muhammad Ali, although illiterate himself, did not ignore the rule of education in

his attempt to achieve his dream of modernizing Egypt and establishing a strong power in

the area. He sent a large number of brilliant students and scholars (most of them were

from al-Azhar University) to different European countries, mainly France, to help in

consolidating a European-like infrastructure in Egypt. At the time of the Arab revival, al-

Azhar was, as Desmond Stewart puts it, "the key to the country's mind and heart. It was

the Oxford and Cambridge of Egypt" (105). One of the al-Azhar scholars sent to France

was Rifaa Rafi Tahtawi (1801-1871). He joined one of the academic missions as a

counselor, absorbed French scholarship, and became later responsible for a translation

school established by Ali. Al-Tahtawi, along with other students, was the bridge that

European influence crossed upon into Egyptian society. Many influential figures in modern Arabic literature were among these students who went to Europe to study different types of fields that could contribute to making their country modernized. They also made Egypt a good example to other countries in the region.

Ali's accomplishments in modernization included almost all sectors of the Egyptian economy. He built a modern water supply system for Cairo and started building irrigation and flood control systems. He brought some European technicians to help in setting up a new base for industry and administration. One of the important commercial products that Ali organized the process of was the selling of cotton, which was traded to European merchants. Yet, a big part of his economic reform, along with his greatest focus, was given to building a modern army and producing modern weapons, which was made possible after he had some help from the French. Muhammad Ali also encouraged the Egyptian-European trade and made use of its revenues to fund his modernization program (Richmond 67-69). It sounds somehow strange that Ali's desire for a strong military power could bring about a whole process of modernization, but this is what happened in the case of nineteenth-century Egypt. Bernard Lewis sheds more light on this case:

> With European weapons and technology and the men who brought them
> came European ideas, no less disruptive of the old order. The growth of
> personal communications through education, diplomacy, trade and other
> forms of travel helped greatly in the dissemination of these new ideas.
> They were carried still further by the increasing study of foreign languages
> among the Middle Easterners, the preparation of a growing body of

translations and the distribution of these by means of the printing press,

and from the 1820s, by periodical and later daily newspapers. (*The Middle*

East 309)

Thus, Ali's actions toward modernizing an army in a country like Egypt did stimulate a

full-scale modernization process. Thanks to the other facets of development that

accompanied reforming the army, Ali made Egypt undergo a course of action that put it

in the path of modernization.

As Ali picked up where Napoleon Bonaparte left off, his efforts succeeded and a

solid ground of modernization existed in Egypt. Together with modernization co-existed

a hard-core debate, which continued from the time Egypt was open to Western influence

until the 1950s. The debate revolved around this main question: How much should

Muslim Arabs in Egypt or other countries take from the West and how much should they

avoid? Or, as A. S. Eban puts it:

Egyptians as a society were forced to make a choice: either to ban

Westernism and maintain the old heritage intact; or to desert the

inheritance of the fathers and abandon the Muslim discipline in favour of

complete Europeanism; or to render their own Arab civilization and its

instruments more congenial to Western ideas by a process of reform and

adaptation. (167)

Certainly there was a strong wave of conservatism backed up with fears that Arab and

Islamic traditions were to become subject to Western materialistic values, that the

intellectual impact of the West was more or less another type of invasion, and that the

East did not need the West as a model of modernization. This current of conservatism,

otherwise known by its partisans as devotion to Islam, strongly opposed Westernization. It held that if Egypt, or any other Muslim or Eastern country, wanted to be somewhat modernized, the West should not get involved. For this current of thought, it was unacceptable for the West to be present in the East, as that presence was conceived as taking the shape of colonizing, posing cultural challenges, and taking the unwanted role of "civilizing." It is worth noting that during the revival, some Egyptian and Arab intellectuals adopted the trend of supporting "the connectedness and solidarity" with the entire East (Jankowski 643). This trend implied calling the East, which for them compromised "most or all of the Asian-African area," to cooperate and gain the same power as that of "Europe and its American offshoots" (643). Later, as we will see in the case of al-Rafii, the tendency was to call rather for more Islamic and Arabic solidarity.

Some influential figures in Arabic politics, literature, and theory believed that no matter how contradictory to our values and traditions, Westernization should be taken as a full package. This liberal, pro-Westernization current, obviously opposite to the above-mentioned one, did not want selectiveness in approaching modernization. Rather, it demanded for the Westernization of all aspects of Arabic society. No matter how contradictory those both currents were, they agreed upon the fact that there was a huge need for modernization and advancement in the Arab world.

The more strongly the East was influenced by the West, the louder were the calls, voiced by conservative intellectuals, for a reconsideration of the Eastern legacy. Upon that legacy, it was believed that there could be built modern Eastern societies similar to those in Europe. The West, however, was probably not in favor of that notion and it paid little attention to these individuals, an attitude which has continued until now. This

attitude has been shown by the fact that conservative Arab intellectuals or men of letters, like al-Rafii for instance, have little or no research conducted about them, while liberal Arabs, such as Taha Hussein, enjoy a great focus. For example, Taha Hussein received several honorary doctorates from Western universities and almost all his books are translated into English and French. Al-Rafii, on the other hand, has had not a single book translated into English. Along with other Western stands on Arabic and Islamic issues, this imbalance in Western attitude—in the debate of Westernization and anti-Westernization—made the West seem suspicious. Many Arabs and Muslims assumed that the West did not really want Eastern countries to be strong, developed, and totally independent from outside control. They considered those pro-Westernization as agents of the West, or at least its culture, an accusation that widely targeted Taha Hussein. Although this sounds like a conspiracy theory, it was however based on the assumption that all that the West wanted was to have other countries dependant on it economically, politically, militarily, and even in terms of culture and arts.

Sentiments rejecting the West were expressed openly during the revival, and were, nevertheless, strongly confronted by expressions of vigorous appreciation of everything that was Western. Those dismissive sentiments were fueled by anti-Western politicians, leaders of parties, religious figures, and men of letters. As the Lebanese poet Chibli Mallat (1875-1961) affirms in the following piece, the West is good, but always when it is away from the East:

> Given the East the holy protection of the Scripture,
>
> Brandishing in one hand the sword, in the other
>
> The flower of knowledge and Wisdom.

You—West—guest of the East—

Go back to mother again.

All that the East wants now is

To see its chains fall, to rise from humiliation.

Only when the West returns its liberty to the East

Will they be able to meet. (George et al. 246)

Mallat's reference to the "meeting" between the East and the West echoes the words of

Rudyard Kipling: "East is East, West is West, and never the twain shall meet." The

former, however, suggests that the ground for the East and the West to meet upon is

mutual respect and acknowledgment of the former's freedom and sovereignty.

The history of Arabic literature shows that some believed that it was more

necessary for Arabs to recall the past in order to start a genuinely modern Arabic

literature. The type of literature they wanted and produced was based on the legacy of

classical literature and not opposite to Islamic norms and morals. These writers, best

represented by al-Rafii, believed that following the West blindly would cut the root of

Arabic culture and civilization. For them, Western literature reflected some values that

were strongly against Arabic and Islamic values. They opposed critical change to the

essential characteristics of Arabic literature, and held that Arabic writers should observe

correctness of language, high-quality styles, and classical-based diction. They, however,

acknowledged how non-Arabic literature might also have human or aesthetic dimensions

that can be shared safely. This moderate attitude, which sounded still conservative to

some of their contemporaries, was a result of the appearance of moderate voices coming

from the people who were preaching Islam in a modern manner. These voices professed

that Islam could not be held as anti-modernization and called for a careful reflection on Western civilization, instead of labeling it altogether as anti-Islamic and evil.

One of the famous Islamic figures that played an important role in the Arab revival in Egypt and followed the above-mentioned moderate reasoning is Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). As Hottinger states, "[Abduh] was one of the most important personalities whom the whole world produced in the latter part of the nineteenth century" (194). Abduh was a knowledgeable scholar in Islamic theology, philosophy and Arabic. He tried to abandon the traditional way of reading the sacred texts in Islam by making use of the new theories in science, sociology, psychology, and other fields. He was a thinker who initiated the dialogue with people of different religions and schools of thought. Abduh's writing had great impact on Muslims inside and outside Egypt (Hourani 306), and they urged the Muslim world, and the East in general, to "wake up" and learn from the other parts of the world how to develop and build modern societies. He believed that Islam wanted a generation that would work in accordance with what had been done by Muslims when they built glorious civilization in the past. He expressed his admiration for European modernization, which he observed closely during his many visits to France and other European countries. One of his famous reflections on the gap between the active Europe and the ineffective Muslim world was said more or less by the following words, which are famously attributed to him: "When I go to Europe, I see Muslims without Islam, and when I come back to the East, I see Islam without Muslims."

Abdu's scholarship was and still is a controversial one. His main work, the *Qur'an Commentary* [*Tafsir al-Qur'an alhakim*] was continued by his disciple, a notable revival figure, Rashid Rida (1865-1935), who established a magazine called *Almannar [(Light]*

and who was a prominent Islamic writer, very loyal to Abduh. The above-mentioned book contained many interpretations that were widely refuted by Islamic scholars who came after Abduh. The book is now not widely read as are other books in the field, maybe because of the criticism that Abduh received for his controversial opinions and theories in interpreting the Qur'an. *Risalat al-Tawhid* [*Treatise of Monotheism*] was another scholarly work by Abduh (Meisami et al. 21), which also had innovative methods in approaching Islam and explaining it. According to many Muslim scholars, Abduh abused rationalism when applying it improperly in reading the sacred texts of Islam, twisting some Qur'anic verses to fit modern scientific discoveries. Other critics believed that Abduh was dazzled by the European enlightenment and took everything European for granted. Nevertheless, as Hottinger asserts, those critics themselves "could not see what Abduh had understood, that modernization was inevitable and that there could only be one choice: modernization with or modernization without Islam" (201).

Abduh's popularity was due to his non-traditional religious scholarship, social reform, and patriotism, which made him opposed to local Egyptian rulers and the occupying British. Accordingly, he became a spiritual father figure for the majority of the Egyptian elite, especially in literature. Many writers of the revival in late nineteenth and early twentieth century considered themselves pupils of Abduh and addressed public opinion with writings inspired by his ideas and insight. Among those writers were Mustafa al-Manfaluti (1876-1924), Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii (1880-1937), Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqaad (1889-1964), and others. In their writings, mainly in the form of literary essay or articles, these writers and men of letters expressed their belief in Abduh's theories. It should be noted that Arabic literary styles of that time traditionally

included eloquent letters and articles written on literary, social, or religious issues. These articles were written in a literary style and had excellent use of Arabic.

In addition to poetry and some essays on Arabic or foreign literatures, the articles written by the men of the revival, as they are called now by Arab historians, established themselves as the main material for newspapers and magazines. These publications were the best medium for distributing the literary production of the time. That is so because the books that had literary material or dealt with literary subjects did not start to be widely circulated until the year 1850, when "the first book on Arabic literature was published by a German orientalist; [...] the work of Brockelman, and a number of Arabs like Gorgi Zeidan, Ahmed Hassan al-Zayat and Shawki Deif" (Saad El-Din). Surprisingly enough, most of the famous Egyptian newspapers were established by Lebanese immigrants. Some of these Lebanese-established newspapers were *al-Muqtataf* by Yaqub Sarruf (1852-1927), *al-Hilal*, by Gorgi Zeidan, (1861-1914), and *al-Ahram* "by the Taqla family in 1875, [which] was later to become the foremost newspaper of the Arab world" (Hourani 304). Some of the most influential magazine and newspapers were instituted and edited by influential Egyptians: Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956), a very well-known figure in the revival for his liberal pro-Westernism, was the editor of *al-Siyasa al-Uusbuiyya*, a magazine that, in the words of Charles D. Smith "advocated reform along Western lines" (517). Ahmed Hassan al-Zayat, a man of letters and literary historian who was anti-Westernization, established *Ar-Risalah*, in 1933, which hosted the writings of the most prominent writers of the revival, especially most of al-Rafii's literary essays.

One of Abduh's pupils, and a very controversial figure in the history of the Arab revival, was Qasim Amin (1863-1908), an intellectual who initiated feminism in Egypt. Amin was the first Arab and Muslim feminist who called for a reevaluation of women's status in the East and for the equality between women and men. He was impressed with how European woman, the same as European men, had access to all levels of education and the workforce, and how they were in a more positive position to contribute to the advancement of society, which was never the case for Eastern women, in especially the areas controlled by the Ottomans. While women of the East had no role beyond the household, Western women could have a considerable influence over the whole society. What Amin realized about women in Europe was indeed something new to him and unacceptable to some conservative Arabs and Muslims. That is why, in 1901, he wrote a book entitled al-Maraa al-Jadida [The New Woman]. In the book, he showed how Eastern women, if they step out of the house, could play more important role in life and contribute more positively to their societies. In another more controversial book, *Tahrir al-Maraa [Emancipation of the Woman]*, which appeared in 1899, Amin insisted on the "reinterpretation of the sharia (Islamic law) in areas appertaining to women, such as seclusion, polygamy and divorce... and advocated Westernization of social mores" (Meisami et al. 86). Amin's revolutionary ideas, partially inspired by Abduh's, were received with heated rejection and strong resistance from the conservative line of Muslim scholars and intellectuals. They attacked him and considered his call to emancipate Muslim and Arab women, a call for corrupting the traditional structure of the Muslim and Eastern family. They regarded such calls as a way to demoralize women by allowing

them to mix freely with men and setting them free to do whatever she wants, without observing religious or traditional authority.

In this regard, the Revival also paved the way for women to participate in the social, political, literary, and artistic life of Egypt. Teaching women in a systematic way started with Muhammad Ali's household. He brought European women to teach his daughters, as schools for women were not established in his time. The rich families in Egypt imitated Ali, preferring to home school their daughters at the hands of European women, mostly from France, making French the language of elite women (Taha). Later, some of these women, along with those coming from less privileged families, came to contribute to the intellectual life of Egypt and even challenge some cultural norms by espousing feminist ideals. One of these women writers was the Palestinian-born Mayy Ziyada (1895-1941), who was a poet, literary essayist, translator, and critic. She used to hold a literary gathering at her place in Egypt that hosted the cream of Egyptian men of letters and intellectuals. Some of the Arab feminists that the revival produced are Huda Sarrawi (1879-1947), who joined other Egyptian Feminists in founding the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923 (Badran 11). Also, Malak Hifni Nasif (1886-1918) had a considerable reputation as poet, writer, and teacher. All these women, and many others, are now regarded as exemplary figures for the modern Arab Egyptian woman.

If Amin was the first intellectual to show Egyptian and Arabic society the accomplishments of the Western women and the usefulness of the adoption of some Western social methods, Rifaa Rafi al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) was the first intellectual to undertake the task of exposing the West to the East by means of translation and comparative studies. Al-Tahtawi can be considered one in the line of those writers who

tried to fill the gap between the commitment to the past and addressing the demands of the present. He was, according to the *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, one of the most prominent nineteenth century scholars in Egypt who "drank deeply and appreciatively of French and European Culture (Meisami 754). He also offered "penetrating, perceptive, and often surprisingly sympathetic account of his encounter with Western (mainly French) culture...[and some of his works] provide an insight into how nineteenth century Egyptian culture was becoming a blend of traditional (Egyptian) and modern (Western)" (754). Al-Tahtawi influenced the line of Arab intellectuals who came after him and learned how to drink from the Western sources of modern civilization without drowning. What al-Tahtawi did individually in terms of translation was certainly due to the collective efforts encouraged by Mohammad Ali. As Abd al-Raziq notices:

> [Mohammad Ali] had a genuine desire to improve the condition of his subjects. As there were no books in the Arabic language on modern science, official translating offices were instituted, in which European and native scholars were engaged; and after some years of such work, in addition to individual efforts, books were available, and some sort of modern education was possible for the people. Individual translations and original works were undertaken by many Egyptian and Syrian natives. (250)

With this wave of translation, which is one of the highlights of the revival, Arabic language regained the role it had played in classical times, as a medium of transferring some of the Greek and Latin heritage into Arabic, and then to world civilization. This role was in effect "in the year A.D. 830 [when] the Caliph al-Mamun directed his

administration to set up an institution called the 'Bayt al-Hikma' (House of Wisdom). In this institution, were combined the three functions of library, academy, and translation bureau" (Anderson xi). Certainly, translation was a keyword in the Arab revival in Egypt: it was the starting point for the Arabic-Western exchange of thought, arts, and literatures. Moreover, the Arabs that took advantage of this translation movement were able to conceive closely the Western culture, thought, literature, and arts. Hence, the West was appreciated by some in the name of modernity, and rejected by others in the name of Islam and Arabic traditions.

The Arab revival witnessed a huge transition in the literary movement in Egypt and in Arabic literature. This transition was the rapid shift that some men of letters took from the traditional norms of Arabic literature to modern ones. The Palestinian critic, Salma Khadra Jayyusi describes how this shift took place as follows:

> The fact that Western fictional genre were highly developed by then [the nineteenth century], and that they were relevant in style, theme, and spirit to modern times, was an attraction that seemed to furnish a shortcut to modern literary methods, and the Arab writers, aspiring to attain a modern spirit in literature, tried to make the transition directly rather than build on the fictional tradition of a medieval literature rich enough for its time. (ix)

Yet, there were many Arab writers who were committed to the traditional way of literary narrative and could obtain considerable readership in Egypt and in the other Arab countries. One of these writers is al-Manfaluti (1876-1924) who was a poet of classical fashion and a short story writer. He was writing literary pieces with a unique style and elegant diction. Therefore, Arabic students have often been advised to read his writings

thoroughly, in order to train themselves to express the meaning in genuine Arabic. Al-Manfaluti's articulate style was more admirable than the content of his writings and this may explain the fact that he put into beautiful, stylized Arabic some of the French novels that had been already translated for him. In other words, after reading the translated text, he would rewrite it in a style, which has been very appealing to the Arab readership.

Besides translated novels, the revival also introduced novels originally written in Arabic. Although the novel was still considerably new to world literature, some early Arab writers of the revival tried their hands at the genre. Muhamad Ibrahim al-Muwaylhi (1858-1930) wrote *The Hadith [Nararative] of Issa ibn Hisham* sarcastically, but with an elegant style, critiquing Egyptian society in the period of Muhammad Ali. The popular poet Ahmad Shawqi wrote the *Maid of India*, a romance with a quasi-historical setting, written with "mastery of language and verbal artifice which gained for Shawqi his outstanding place in modern Arabic poetry" (Gibb, "Studies" 4). Hafiz Ibrahim (1871-1932) wrote *Layali Satih [The Nights of Satih]*, a rhymed prose-narrative commenting on a variety of issues in Egypt (6). There were more well-plotted narratives written by Gorji Zeidan, (1861-1914), a Christian Lebanese-immigrant to Egypt, who was a prolific writer of historical novels, based on the history of Islam. However, rarely do critics consider all these attempts as novel writing. According to Hamilton Gibb, "[w]e can, in fact, speak of a 'development' of the novel in Egypt only by stretching the term 'novel' to include a rather wide range of works with a fictional framework, many of which are not, strictly speaking, novels at all" ("Studies" 1). Nevertheless, most critics agree that the first well-developed Arabic novel which can be labeled as a novel was Muhammad Husayn Haykal's *Zaynab* (1914), a novel expressing "a new way of looking at the countryside,

human life as rooted in nature, and the relationship between the sexes (Hourani 305-306).

Since the publication of *Zaynab*, many modern Arab writers specialized in this genre and have been producing many novels every year.

During the revival, different literary movements in Arabic literature coexisted. Romanticism, for instance, followed the retreat of neoclassicism, while in Europe we find the opposite. Neo-classicism was widely popular in Egypt as well as in the other parts of the Arab world and its prominent figures were mainly poets, like Ahmad Shawqi, Hafiz Ibrahim and Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii. Ahmad Shawqi, well known as the Prince of Poets and the Egyptian court poet, was educated in France and visited many parts of Europe, which contributed to widening his poetic experience and fueling his imagination. He was classical in style but tried to renew the content of Arabic poetry. As Roger Allen puts it, "when he turned to Europe and encountered Lamartine and La Fontaine… his ideas on poetry were truly formed" (232). Nevertheless, Shawki and his Neo-classic counterparts were severely criticized by the supporters of Romanticism. The critique was conducted mainly by three prominent poets and literary critics, Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqaad (1889-1964), Abd al-Rahman Shukri (d.1958), and Abdulkader al-Mazini (1889 1949). In 1921, they jointly worked on a two-volume publication entitled *al-Diwan [Divan]* in which they introduced the critical principals of Romanticism and directly assaulted the bastion of neo-classicism.

The Arab revival in Egypt was a turning point in Egyptian history. It was a rich phase that would take many volumes to cover all of its aspects. The issues that the Arab revival raised were very controversial and sophisticated. They led to a diversity of attitudes and opinions that divided Egyptian society into more than one position. Though

those issues died away, as their initiators departed this life, Arabic and Egyptian history will never forget the names that shone in the sky of Egypt and guided the nation to find a suitable path in culture, civilization, literature, and art.

There can be mentioned many representative names of intellectuals, men of letters, educators, and Egyptian writers who witnessed and contributed to the Arab revival, especially to the main debate on whether Arab society ought to get modernized completely or partially, or reject the Western-oriented modernization altogether. Among the names that are still hailed in the literary circles in Egypt and other Arab countries are Taha Hussein (1889-1973), Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqaad (1889-1964), and Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii (1880-1937). Taha Hussein was a firm supporter of modernization, which gained a very strong current of thought during the revival and afterwards. Al-Aqaad supported a current that combined and balanced modernity and traditionalism. Al-Rafii was acclaimed as a defender of traditionalism, a current that he strongly supported in the domain of literature, as we will see in chapter V and VI.

Chapter V

Two Representatives of the Arab Revival: A Battle of Ideas and Literary Orientations

The first half of the twentieth century can be considered the highlight of the Arab renaissance, especially in the field of literature. This period produced the most remarkable men of letters who led Arabic literature to new vistas. These literary figures helped make Arabic literature on a par with the world literatures that they had been introduced to through the now increasing interaction with Western cultures. So far as the short story is concerned, as early as 1917, some writers, such as Mahmud Tahir Lashin (1894-1954), established Jamaat al-Madrasa al-haditha (the Modern School Group), which later hosted Yahyaa Haqqi (1905-1990), a well-known Arabic writer of short storires. This group welcomed to the highest degree the Western influence of world literature, which came from different countries, as indicated in Sabry Hafez's "The Maturation of a New Literary Genre" points out:

> During the first and less significant stage they [the Modern School Group] read mainly French, American, and Italian authors. The influence of these authors was largely a theoretical one which increased their knowledge of artistic devices but failed to inspire them. During the second and crucial stage, which Haqqi calls the stage of spiritual nourishment, they fell entirely under the influence of Russian literature until it became the *primum mobile* [prime mover] behind their movement and the main source of their inspiration. (9368)

Moreover, other Arabic literary genres, such as short story, novel, and drama, were created to match what had already been established in other literatures, addressing, however, local themes.

The Eastern influence on Arabic Literature was so immense that many writers absorbed and advocated it. However, there were some writers who stood against this influence and defended the Arabic language, culture, and heritage from the Westernization that was strongly winning ground among Egyptian intellectuals. It is right to assume that Taha Hussein and Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii are the best representatives of modernization and traditionalism respectively. Egyptian society was torn apart between these two movements; however, it gravitated towards modernization rather than traditionalism, whose representatives were left unsupported and underrepresented. Al-Rafii is an example of the writer who, despite his significant contribution to the Arabic literary revival, has not been given credit, because all the governments in Egypt have so far been secular and in favor of modernization rather than traditionalism. Just like most other governments in the Middle East, Egypt has some kind of governmental indoctrination, mostly of the ideology adopted by the ruling secular party. This indoctrination is promoted in mass media, educational institutions, including schools textbooks, the publications of literary works, and conferences. This indoctrination usually focuses on secular, nationalistic causes and endorses the intellectual elite in favor of such causes. Reversely, intellectuals who are not in favor of the governmental line of thought will hardly be acclaimed by the government and its institutions that control, sometimes, even the circulation of ideas and literature. Suffice is to mention that the Higher Council of Education in Egypt held a conference in 1998 where "scholars and researchers met to

discuss the subject matter of their conference: Taha Hussein and the Establishment of

Modern Arabic Education" (Chemli, et al. 13). This piece of information comes in the

introduction of *Taha Hussein in the Mirror of Time*, a collection of French essays

translated into Arabic and published by the Ministry of Education in Tunisia, whose

ideology of modernization is not different from Taha's. The above-mentioned conference

and collection of memorial essays are few examples of how a liberal thinker, such as

Taha Hussein, is acknowledged, while conservative thinkers, like al-Rafii, are hardly

remembered by government-funded literary circles.

Taha Hussain

Taha Hussein (1889-1973) was a critic, historian, essayist, and one of the earliest

Egyptian academicians. He was one of the self-made intellectuals in Egypt, who still is

greatly appreciated inside and outside Egypt. His image as a blind man who is yet very

enthusiastic for enlightenment has made him an inspirational figure to many Arabs,

especially liberals:

> His identification with and commentary on the blind Abbasid poet Abu-
>
> Alaa al-Maarri, which began around this time, trained generations of
>
> independent readers as well as university students in the complex art of
>
> poetic interpretation. By his own admission, al- Maarri was "the captive of
>
> two prisons," explained Hussein: that of darkness and that of the house
>
> (the poet never went out); but the prison in which he experienced the
>
> greatest suffering was, ultimately, that of the body. (Rakha)

Though he lost his sight at the age of two, because his ailing eyes were not given proper attention by his poor family, Taha Hussein would make his way out of poverty and the humble life of the countryside to become an influential figure in the literary and intellectual life of Egypt. He was the first Egyptian to be widely celebrated for gaining the support of powerful Egyptian parties, occupying high administrative positions—most notably being the minister of Education in 1950—receiving more than thirty emblems of honor, and gaining the honorific title as the Doyen of the Arabic literature for his huge contributions to Arabic literature. He also received some honorary doctorates from Western Universities and was, according to the web site of the *United Nation's High Commissioner for Human Rights*, one of the recipients of United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights. Hussein's writings "include novels, essays, works of history and literary criticism" (Hourani 341). He also wrote on social and political reform and translated many works from French.

Though Hussein was known for his daring ideas of reform that challenged the long accepted norms in Arabic literature (ideas that have lost their vitality nowadays), his literary legacy is still widely appreciated. His autobiography *al-Ayyam [The Days]*, which appeared in English as *An Egyptian Childhood* (1932) and *The Stream of Days* (1943), is considered by orientalist, Hamilton Gibb, to be the finest Egyptian work with "increasing depth in social and psychological analysis [which] has been matched by more flexible methods of presentation and stylistic devices" (*Arabic Literature* 161). The book was one of the earliest modern Arabic literary works to be acclaimed in the West.

Taha Hussein, one among a household of twenty-four children, started his life in the countryside of Upper Egypt, where he attended the only educational system available

back then: al-Kuttaab, where students were taught in a mosque the principles of writing, math, and Islam by the same teacher. He absorbed the local education of al-Kuttaab, whose highest goal was to make students memorize the Qur'an. Using the third person, which is pretty much his style in writing his autobiography, Taha Hussein narrates in *An Egyptian Childhood* something interesting about achieving this goal of memorizing the entire Holy Qur'an:

> From that day our small friend [Taha Hussein himself] was a sheikh, although he was barely nine years old, because he had learnt the Qur'an by heart; for who memorizes the Qur'an is a sheikh whatever age he be. His father called him sheikh, his mother called him sheikh, and 'Our Master' used to call him sheikh in front of his pupils...Now our youthful sheikh was short, thin, pale and rather shabby. He had none of the dignity of sheikhs, and neither a large nor a small part of their reverent demeanour. (17)

Needless to say, the type of education that Hussein received in his village was almost the only teaching method available for Egyptian children at that time.

After finishing the basic education of al-Kuttaab, Hussein moved to al-Azhar in Cairo where he started his education "with a receptive soul and high expectations. He had [also] in him a genuinely enquiring mind that was thirsty for knowledge" (Cachia, *Taha Hussein* 47). Hussein's thirst for knowledge was not satiated by the traditional curriculum of al-Azhar, whose main focus was on teaching religion and classical Arabic. Hussein had a circle of friends who shared his dissatisfaction with the type of teaching they were receiving and who were highly motivated for the pursuit of modern and more interesting

knowledge. Outside al-Azhar, he started taking some courses in French, while inside al-Azhar, he was interested in the new method of religious instruction adopted by the reformist scholar Muhammad Abduh. The only thing, it seems, that Hussein got from al-Azhar was the vast knowledge of classical Arabic literature and Islam from which he later borrowed some subjects for some of his research, articles, and books. On the other hand, "the conservatism and the limitations of life and thought and the action that the Azhar stood for, he had resolutely turned his back on" (Cachia, *Taha Husayn* 52). Yet, though he was critical of al-Kuttaab and its teachers, as well as al-Azhar and its tough scholars, he did not want the system of teaching Islam to be abolished. Rather, as Robin Ostle argues, he wanted to reform it (189). This desire for reform and renewal made Hussein lead in the first half of the nineteenth century a movement called the School of the New, as opposed to the School of the Old, lead by al-Rafii.

Without getting any degree and after being completely disillusioned and finding al-Azhar not an ideal place for the education he had aspired for, Hussein moved, to the newly established Egyptian University (now known as the University of Cairo), which was staffed mainly by European teachers (Abd al-Raziq 250). About his experience at al-Azhar, Taha Hussein once wrote: "The four years I had spent at the Azhar seemed to me like forty, so utterly drawn out they were. They wore me down. It was like being in a pitch black night when heavy piling clouds admit no gleam of light" ("At the Door of the Azhar" 3). After leaving al-Azhar and joining the Egyptian University, Hussein's dream of getting a more satisfying education seemed to have come true. From this university he learned to approach literature in a completely different way. The new experience of being educated at a modern institution made him yearn for more scholarship. Luckily, the

university at the time had begun a system of sending distinguished students to Western

countries to get higher degrees, with the understanding that they were to return to teach at

the university. After graduating as the first student from the new university and becoming

qualified for a scholarship, he went on to pursue a Ph.D. degree from the Sorbonne

University in France. He became the first Egyptian student to get such a degree. He

returned home to become one of the pioneering teachers at the Egyptian University.

Hussein tried to make the best use of his European scholarship by applying it to

his readings of classical texts in Arabic. Influenced by Descartes (1596-1650), who

rejected medieval authoritarianism, Hussein published *Fil-Shi'r al-Jahili* [*On Pre-Islamic

Poetry*] in 1926. In this book, Hussein doubted that a great amount of the pre-Islamic

poetry was actually composed before Islam, a thesis that was strongly rejected by many

contemporary critics, both Arab and European, as pointed out by Mohamed al-Nowaihi

(190). Motivated by the skepticism of Kant, he also questioned in this book the credibility

of the stories in the Old Testament and the Qur'an about the Prophets before Muhammad.

Thanks to al-Rafii's book, *Taht Rayat Al-Quran* [*Under the Banner of the Quran*],

contemporary readers can still find some of the most daring quotations Hussein included

in his original book, *Fil-Shi'r al-Jahili* [*On Pre-Islamic Poetry*]. As he was among the

first critics of Hussein's book, al-Rafii's recording of these quotations, originally for the

purpose of refuting them, makes them still available. According to al-Rafii's publisher's

note on the back cover of al-Rafii's book, *Taht Rayat Al-Quran* [*Under the Banner of the

Quran*], this book allows you to "see the amazements of that historical era and read the

texts that disappeared by now from any book, except this one."

One of these excerpts that Hussein did not publish in the second edition of his now-less-highly-celebrated book is this one: "the Torah can tell us about Abraham and Ishmael, the Qur'an can tell us about them, too. However, the reference to these two names in the Torah and the Qur'an is not enough to prove their historical existence, apart form the story of the migration of Ismael (son of Abraham) to Mecca" (qtd. in al-Rafii, *Taht Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*] 168). Because it was daring enough to deal with such a taboo subject as religion, this book triggered an outrage in Egypt and was considered, especially by Muslim scholars, a bold apostasy. The book was banned in Egypt and Hussein was tried for heresy, but was not convicted. The court that acquitted him in 1927 concluded that:

> The author had an undeniable contribution [to Arabic studies] by adopting a new methodology that included his imitation of Western scholars. However, due to his excessiveness in such imitation, he involved his research with hypotheses as true facts, while they are not, or they still need to be proven to be facts. He took on a dark path and therefore he ought to go on slowly and be careful not to go astray....For what has been said above, it is clear that the author's objective was not to disprove religion or attack it. (Asfour)

Though officially acquitted, Hussein was still incriminated by his opponents for such daring sacrilege. They also took his thesis to be a Western one, not his own, a claim which modern scholarship can support. In fact, Hussein's thesis was claimed to be one originated by the renowned British Orientalist, David Samuel Margoliouth (1858-1940). According to Mohamed Al-Nowaihi, in his analysis of Hussein's use of Western

91

scholarship, Margoliouth "in the same year 1926, had, as it happened, published identical

views, supported by largely similar arguments" (189).

Hussein was a liberal figure who mastered the traditional knowledge of al-Azhar,

but was more influenced by his European education. He was committed to suggesting

radical and fundamental change in all aspects of Egyptian society, including methods of

teaching in general and the teaching of literature in specific. In general, as Mohamed al-

Nowaihi argues, Taha Hussein spoke, "repeatedly and at length of the need to develop the

scientific spirit, to learn the sciences which have made such splendid progress in the west,

to use them to impregnate Arabic culture in general and the study of Arabic literature in

particular" (201). In his 1938 book, *Mustaqbal Al-Thaqafa fi Misr* (translated into

English in 1954 as *The Future of Culture in Egypt*), Hussein upheld the view that

Egyptian culture is essentially part of a broader cultural heritage of the Mediterranean

and that its future depends on increasing assimilation; hence the need for further contact

with Europe (Rakha).

In *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, Hussein passionately supported the idea that

the Pharaonic history of Egypt should be revitalized, a position which ran counter to the

tradition that emphasized the Islamic history of Egypt. Hussein wanted this revitalization

to help in the Egyptian revival since it showed Egyptians at a glorious stage in their

history. This call was rejected by the majority of Egyptian and Arab intellectuals because

they saw in it a blow to Arab unity and even to the Muslim identity of Egypt. This

identity, according to Hussein, had become influenced by Europe, an influence that went

increasingly deeper in the structure of the Egyptian society than the conservatives

wanted. He believed that former scholars of al-Azhar, who have not witnessed the

changes that their institution went through at Hussein's time, would not be happy to see it so much modernized as it was:

> Indeed, if God were to resurrect the Azhar scholars who lived at the beginning of the modern era, they would beg Him in all sincerity to return them to their graves so that they would not have to look upon the great innovations that have already been introduced into the university. The dominant and undeniable fact of our times is that day by day we are drawing closer to Europe and becoming an integral part of her. (12)

According to Hussein, this closeness between Europe and Egypt was due to the similarities between them in the way they thought, how they were determined to have an advanced, democratic society, and the resemblance in educational methods. He also argued that Egypt would have reached its renaissance at the same time as Europe if it had not been occupied by the Ottomans (13).

In the case of Jurji Zaidan (1861-1914), a Christian Arab intellectual who moved from Syria to Egypt and became well-known for his historical novels, the trend was to stress the Arab Muslim Egypt, not the pre-Islamic one, "in view of the fact that its [Egypt] history after the Muslim conquest is of closer connection with its present state than its history before that, it is more profitable and more necessary to record it. This is what we call the modern history of Egypt (qtd. in Thomas Philipp 144). Hussein was also accused, most strongly by al-Rafii, that in his translations of French literature he chose "vulgar" novels, dealing with sensual themes instead of choosing elevating literature. However, these translations showed that he was more after the simplicity of ideas and language than seeking sophistication and exaggeratedly Arabized styles, as in the case of

al-Manfaluti in Chapter IV. Indeed, Taha Hussein's style may be best described with the Arabic expression, "inaccessibly easy" (in the sense that it is easy but can not be imitated and eventually underestimated for its simplicity). He was inevitably influenced by al-Azhar's schooling to observe accuracy in Arabic grammar and use of words. As Fuaad Dawwarah narrates, Taha Hussein told him about the benefits he had reaped from his al-Azhar's education:

> My study at al-Azhar gave me so many disadvantages, such as great care
>
> for deep understanding of texts and avoiding superficiality and the
>
> knowledge that is based on memorization. The study at al-Azhar at my
>
> time was characterized by improving the skills that sharpen understanding,
>
> insightfulness, and patience in research, and this is by no means something
>
> insignificant (49).

However, unlike the traditional style of writing in the standard language modeled after the language of the Qur'an, which has been a common practice among al-Azhar graduates, Hussein adopted some stylistic devices from the foreign languages he had learned, including French, Latin, and English. While al-Rafii, for instance, was concerned with correctness and showed no tolerance at all for colloquialism, Hussein was after simplicity even if that meant using a non-literary and almost everyday spoken Arabic. Moreover, Hussein was repetitive and his simple style sometimes bordered on the boring. In one example quoted by al-Rafii in *Taht Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*], Hussein shows an obviously excessive repetitiveness.

Other than al-Rafii's quoting Hussein's repetition—especially the word "teachers" which was mentioned five times in two lines, (*Taht Rayat Al-Quran* [*Under*

the Banner of the Quran] 104)—one might consider the following excerpts from Taha's

most famous book, *an Egyptian Childhood*: "He just *uttered* groans which occasionally

died down, and the sounds gradually *died* away. The lad will *forget* all before he *forgets*

the last *groan* which the young man *uttered*, a thin, weak, long drawn-out *groan*" (69).

Disappointed with this style, which he said that he had not found its like in the history of

Arabic language, al-Rafii accuses the New of "incorporating awkwardness in Arabic

language, being like someone chewing speech and put it down in its lowest levels of

eloquence" (102). Though the aforementioned excerpt might not be representative of the

whole diction of Hussein, his style is indeed known to have a frequency of repetitiveness.

One might justify this repetitiveness by assuming that a blind person, such as Hussein,

would write by means of dictation and hence the language spoken is written in a very

simple form. Another reason might be is the fact that "he never revises anything he has

said and does not allow a single page to be read back to him" (Cachia 215). Because of

this redundancy Hussein's style was considered by his opponents, especially al-Rafii, as

flawed.

Regarding the revival, Hussein adopted the liberal line which believed that Arabs

ought to take the European model of development as a full package. This position was

against the moderate line of al-Aqaad and the conservative line of al-Rafii. While al-Rafii

insisted on rejecting adopted European styles, customs, and even thought, Hussein was

one of the most influential intellectuals who disagreed with the line represented by al-

Rafii. Though al-Rafii, who was at the time as popular as Hussein, devoted a great deal of

his work to attacking Hussein and his School of the New, as it was known, his popularity

did not last as long as Hussein's. Hussein is probably the most famous writer in Modern

Arabic history, so famous that schools, streets, conferences and many other monuments still carry his name. He also has been a rich source for many publications on his life, thought, contributions, books, and his achievements.

Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii (1880-1937)

Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii was a classical poet, critic, and writer. Al-Rafii was born in an Egyptian town, Bahtim, in the house of his Syrian grandparent, al-Toukhi. Al-Rafii's father was a judge and so were all his ten brothers. This position made the family well known and highly respected. Al-Rafii moved with his family to the city of Tanta and settled there the rest of his life. He began his education at the hands of his father, who taught him Arabic and the Qur'an until al-Rafii attended primary school at the end of age ten.

At the age of seventeen, al-Rafii was afflicted with a severe disease that forced him to cut his schooling short. According to al-Rafii's pupil and biographer, Muhammad Saeid al-Iryean, the disease affected al-Rafii's hearing, and he became completely deaf at the age of thirty (17). Al-Iryean maintains that this disease was a blessing in disguise, as it made al-Rafii immerse himself in self-education. Al-Rafii would isolate himself from the outside world, and would seek refuge in his father's books. As al-Iryean records, "'if people cannot make me hear them, let them hear from me,' al-Rafii, told himself" (18). Some years later, al-Rafii's wishes came true. People started to listen to his words, as he became a prominent literary figure and one of the active revivalists that contributed to the Egyptian, Arabic, and Islamic culture with his different views on the direction of the literature, language, society, and religion. So different these views were that after al-

Rafii's death his name could keep the same popularity as the names of the pro-westernization revivalists did.

Al-Rafii represented the conservative line of Egyptian intellectuals who rejected the European model of modern civilization. He attacked contemporary writers who favored the Westernized trends of education, literature, and culture. Celebrating a hundred years of Egyptian literature in a special issue, the online edition of the Egyptian magazine, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, gives an account of the role played by al-Rafii:

> [Al-Rafii] could be seen to embody a diametrically opposite frame of reference for the history of 20th-century Arabic literature, and it is even more fitting that his memory should be evoked at the end of the century—the 100 years that witnessed the gradual movement of Arabic literature from classicism to modernism—since he fully embodies the mores and values of the old school; in his work the virtues of traditional Arabic rhetoric are preserved in particularly puritanical, self-conscious form.
> (Rakha)

Though he was as well known as Hussein, al-Rafii is hardly remembered by Egyptian and Arab literary circles for his role in the revival.

Al-Rafii has not been recognized in the same manner as his peers. Since the Egyptian government is secular, it is hardly expected for someone like al-Rafii to be acclaimed for his outspoken rhetoric against Westernization, which he deemed as a menace to the structure of Arabic literature. For instance, he was not satisfied with how Western-educated intellectuals, like Hussein, read Arabic literature and interpret it without completely mastering it. Al-Rafii's method might be simplistic, especially for

non-Arabic scholarship studying Arabic literature, but as shown below, it sets commonly accepted standards that he tried to state with figurative language (at the end of the quotation):

> The historian should collect all what have been said and written on the subject he is exploring, whether on an incident, person, or a certain topic. He should not miss anything... and then he should discard any subjective inclinations or prejudices. He should be someone other than himself, like the judge who becomes in the court a man of law, not just the same man as he himself is.

As al-Rafii was very critical of the increasing tendency to adopt the Western model of modernization, which meant abandoning a huge part of the traditions for the sake of modernity. He was suspicious about the validity of this trend. He accused those who adopted such a trend of being unable themselves to achieve modernization:

> They are the weakest among people to invent something new, originate something novel, or create something magnificent. They are rather influenced by the irregularity of [their] nature, the madness of the thought, and the soul turning against itself. This influence is so much as if the sciences of the [Westerners] were running inside them like the blood of their [Arab] ancestors. If they get a language it means that they have to get out of theirs and if they believe in something, they have to disbelieve in something else, as if it were impossible to have two languages and two literatures, and as if one of them could not be an Easterner while he has a language from London or Paris. (21)

In spite of this passionate anti-Westernization rhetoric, al-Rafii does not seem to be against the West just because it is not the East where he belonged. Rather, he was against a westernization process that put the essence of Egypt in jeopardy, as it meant cutting it off its roots. As a man whose strong point in facing this Westernization was only literature, he produced high quality works with a style that reminds his Arabic readers of the classical writers. As the renowned critic al-Aqaad (1889-1964) once stated, "[al-Rafii] can write in a style of eloquence that even early writers in Arabic could not" (al-Sutouhi 19).

Even when it comes to academic interest and research, the works done on al-Rafii are very few. Since 1939, when Muhammad Saeid al-Iryean wrote *Hayat al-Rafii [Al-Rafii's Biography]*, until 1985, when Mustfa al-Juzu wrote *Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii: The Pioneer of the Arabic Symbolism which is Close to Surrealism*, there were only seven studies on al-Rafii. Among these seven are a summary of a previous work, an analysis of his works, and a critique, or appraisal of al-Rafii (al-Juzu 10-12). This leads to a conclusion that there is a bias against this writer. The bias might be attributed to the fact that he was devoted to the revitalization of Islamic and Arabic values against the Westernization that was coming either directly from Europe or, most effectively, from the Europeanized Arab intellectuals, such as Taha Hussein. However, as one might argue, the legacy of al-Rafii is more literary than religious. He was not a mere eloquent preacher of Islam, though he wrote some pieces about Islamic topics. Rather, he was a literary figure like any other man of letters at his time. Even his "religious" topics can bee seen as themes for artistic expression rather than just preaching. For instance, when al-Rafii wrote in *Wahi Al-Qalam [The Inspirations of the Pen]* about Fasting Ramadan, his

essay's subtitle was: "Philosophy of Fasting." In this piece, he wrote in a beautiful Arabic language about how "mercy is generated by pain" (68). He also went on to say that once the fasting rich have mercy for the fasting poor, "the inner human world will prevail, self-restrain will control the material, and the rich will hear in his conscience the poor saying 'give'" (68).

Though al-Rafii was highly renowned as a poet and was Egypt's poet-laureate from 1926 till 1930, he turned to writing prose which was so poetic and sophisticated that his prose style was labeled as vague. His first book, *Hadith Al-Qamar* [*Conversations with the Moon*], which was published in 1912, was a collection of prose pieces dealing with the subject of love and its philosophy. This book—though written to be a model for excellence in a literary style—was received with criticism for obscure similes and ambiguous images. In this book, as in other subsequent ones, al-Rafii confused his readers in many places, where the density of the meanings made it hard to make sense. Kamal Nashat in *Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii* quotes the following passage as illustrative of the ambiguity that al-Rafii's readers encounter in many other places in his writings:

> O, moon. Now it is dark: stars began to wash the face of nature that became tired due to the day-length spraying of dewy light, which was falling down in tiny drops . . . in which the wakening waves of the oblivion sea, where the big ships of the hearts of deserted lovers, who are afflicted with pains, are and the small boats of the hearts of poor children, whose dreams save them from [those pains]. Those [the lovers' ships] brings into fate tiredness and weariness, and these [the boats] bring playfulness and joy. (94)

Certainly, the ideas that al-Rafii generates here need more clarification and this probably makes him the only modern Arab writer whose writings need explanation and whose images need decoding. Dense as they are, these images are so much interlinked that the average reader of al-Rafii needs to feel the impression of these images rather than trying to see how they are arranged or put together.

Al-Rafii is still, however, one of the most eloquent writers in Modern Arabic literature. Ironically enough, when al-Iryean gives an account of the writers who influenced al-Rafii, he recalls that al-Rafii told him that Victor Hugo's phrase "the morning sky became clear as if washed by angels at night" had an effect on his style: "I liked the simplicity of expression and the straightforwardness of meaning, and I made this to be my type in composition," al-Rafii said (al-Iryean 59). Though we can see this last image echoed in one of al-Rafii's previous images, the difference between Hugo's and al-Rafii's here is like the difference between someone describing the sky and someone describing the impact of the sky on himself and associating this description with meanings generated by imagination so dense that the language cannot handle it easily.

In the same style as that of *Hadith Al-Qamar*, al-Rafii wrote *Al-Masakin* [*The Poor*] (1917), which was a collection of prose pieces dealing with human issues of poverty, love, war, and values. He also wrote three collections of letters on one of his favorite subjects: love. He wrote also many articles on love that appeared in May newspapers and magazines of his time and were collected later and published—along with other literary essays on various topics—in *Wahi Al-Qalam* [*The Inspirations of the Pen*] in 1936. Furthermore, al-Rafii was well known for writing national anthems, two of which remain today: the national anthems of Egypt and Tunisia.

Al-Rafii wrote three books that established his status as the writer of "the Muslim Arab nation," as he has been frequently called. His book, *Tarikh Adab Al-Arab* [*The History of the Literatures of the Arabs*], was his challenge to the Egyptian University, which back then did not have a comprehensive anthology of Arabic literature and its historical phases and figures. When al-Rafii criticized Arab libraries and academic institutions for lacking such an anthology, the Egyptian University advertised a prize for anyone who could compose such a book. Al-Rafii produced an anthology, but he did not win the first-place prize, because he could not have the work published immediately after he completed it. His work came second to another written by the Syrian historian Jurji Zaidan (1861-1914). Al-Rafii's remarkable scholarship on Arabic language and literature was all too evident in the book, which was a model for subsequent books on the same subject. Moreover, al-Rafii was one of the first intellectuals to call for teaching the history of Arabic literature. As early as 1908, the same date the Egyptian University (now known as the University of Cairo) was established, al-Rafii wrote an article in the *al-Jareeda* newspaper demanding that the university teach Arabic literature (al-Rafii, *Wahi Al-Qalam [The Inspirations of the Pen]* 74-5). Nowadays, the history of Arabic literature is one of the basic subjects that almost every Department of Arabic teaches.

Al-Rafii's book *I'jaz Al-Qur'an [The Miracle of the Qur'an]* earned a great deal of attention and acclamation in all Arab countries and added much to al-Rafii's reputation. Popular writers and even politicians praised the book. Saad Zaghlul (1859-19270), the most prominent Egyptian political figure of the time and the leader of a highly celebrated revolution in 1919 against the British, considered the book "a revelation form the Revelation [Qur'an] or a light from the burning brand [live coal] of

the Wise Holy Book" (al-Juzu 80). Critics considered the book a very important addition to the books written on the Qur'an, and a Christian scholar, Yaqub Sarrouf, wrote a review that appeared on the cover of the book saying that everyone who has a copy of the Qur'an should have a copy of al-Rafii's book. It is not surprising then that Fuad I (1868–1936), the first King of Egypt in the modern era, paid from his own pocket for a second edition of the book (al-Juzu 80). The book made al-Rafii an Islamic writer, established him as a creative writer in the field of Qur'anic studies, and made him widely popular among devoted Muslim readers. These readers saw in al-Rafii the defender of Islam and the guardian of the Qur'an and its standard Arabic language. When it comes to Taha Hussein and the conflict that happened between him and al-Rafii (which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter), one can see immediately the contrast between the two. While al-Rafii's book points out the miraculous aspects of the Qur'an (spiritual, scientific, and linguistic) that make it a divine scripture beyond the making of humans, Taha Hussein's book *Fi Al-Shaer Al-Jahili* [*On Pre-Islamic Poetry*] implies a sense of skepticism toward the holy book.

In this regard, al-Rafii himself believed that he was "chosen" to be a prophet in literature and language. "He wished he could be able to leave his job for the government [as a court writer] sarcastically asking: How can we deliver the message, I wonder. A prophet and a government employee?" (al-Juzu 51). As odd as this might be, the reason for this "prophethood" in language is due to al-Rafii's conception of literary language to be perfect and miraculous. Thus, since he was writing in literary language, he believed he was involved in a perfect process. This notion was examined by Hamid Shaaban in *Asraar al-Nithaam al-Lugawi inda al-Rafii* [*Secrets of the Linguistic System of Mustafa*

Sadiq al-Rafii], a comprehensive reverence for the al-Rafii's contribution to the Arabic

theory of language compared with other popular theories. Shaaban argues that al-Rafii

believes in the perfection of language, and that he "exaggerated in idolizing it to a level

that no one had reached before, even among those who are known to exaggerate about

language" (23). Sometimes al-Rafii also believed he was assisted by Providence in his

creative writing. Once, while he was severely critiquing Taha Hussein for the views he

had expressed in *Fi Al-Shaer Al-Jahili* [*On Pre-Islamic Poetry*], al-Rafii narrated that he

stopped for a while, read something in the Quran, found something therein related to his

topic, and kept writing. This anecdote narrated by al-Rafii seems very creative and witty

for his readers, as he provided a shift that is very gripping and involving.

Al-Rafii also claimed that some of the topics and even some of sentences he used

in his articles were revealed to him in visions or dreams (al-Juzu 50). He also imbued

many of his titles religious connotations, even if they were not dealing with religion.

Moreover, some of his article titles are verses, or part of verses, from the holy Qur'an.

For example, one of his articles was entitled as "Truth Stands out Clear from Error,"

which is part of the Qur'anic verse that starts like this: "Let there be no compulsion in

religion: Truth stands out clear from Error..." (The Holy Qur'an 2. 256). Yet, this does

not mean that he was just a man playing a religious role in the revival. Rather, he was a

man of letters, taking advantage of his literary craft to express his views.

When al-Rafii wrote *Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*],

where the afore-mentioned quotation shows how passionate he could be, he wanted it to

be his message to the modern movement in Egypt and in other Muslim countries. His

message was that all directions towards modernizations were subverting the Arab and

Muslim identity and were producing a generation alien to its civilization and culture. In *Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an*, al-Rafii's wrote under "My Opinion about the Western Civilization" that Muslim young men are deceived by this civilization, "as they do not distinguish between its good and bad or between its principles and its consequences" (362). He also discussed what he considered the immorality and decadency of religious commitment in Europe. Generally, al-Rafii's *Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* attacked harshly the most renowned representative of the modern line, Taha Hussein, whom he tried to refute his arguments as they appeared in his controversial book, *Fi Al-Shaer Al-Jahili [On Pre-Islamic Poetry]*. Indeed, al-Rafii was constantly critical of Taha Hussein and his supporters. He considered himself responsible for warning his fellow Egyptians, Arabs, and Muslims in general of the deviation that Egypt was undertaking by answering the calls for modernization. He considered these calls to be not for modernization, but for undermining Islamic heritage and Arabic values and replacing them with Europeanization and secularism.

Rich as it is, al-Rafii's legacy has not received the same attention as the legacies of his contemporaries have. However, his contribution to modern Arabic literature was so huge that it cannot be overlooked or underestimated if one wants to have a good understanding of this literature. Motivated by his devotion to reviving standard Arabic and his resistance to any attempt of departing classical Arabic, which nobody in modern Arabic literature has expressed as eloquently as he did, al-Rafii led one of the most literary debates in Arabic literature. This debate, along with some possible reasons for the lack of popularity his legacy has, will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter VI

The Battle between Two Literary and Intellectual Schools: Al-Rafii Wins Literary

Representation but Loses Popularity

Due to the opposing viewpoints between traditionalists and pro-Westernization

modernists, there was what Arabic historians call a "battle" between the Old and the

New. Unlike the military sense of "battle," which connotes physical aggression and the

use of arms, "battle" here is meant as a heated intellectual dispute between parties with

different opinions, values, or beliefs. This battle was actually part of al-Rafii's legacy. It

enriched Modern Arabic literary criticism as the intellectuals involved in it tried to

defend their views and invalidate those of their opponents. It also depicted the split in

Arabic thought at the turn of the twentieth century. This split was between conservative

traditionalists (also known, within the context of the battle, as the Old or the Old school),

and Islam-oriented writers on the on hand, and liberal, pro-Westernization modernists

(also known as the New or the New school) on the other hand. This battle supplies an

interesting subject for the students of Arabic, post colonial, and world literature to

examine.

In the first half of the twentieth century, there was actually a dynamic

disagreement that urged both the New, represented by Taha Hussein, and the Old,

represented by al-Rafii, to prove that each had a more valid and more effective view than

the other, that one was absolutely right and the other was completely wrong, and that one

was a defender of Islam and Arabic language, traditions, and history, while the other was

advocating the destruction of these essential aspect of Arabic society. The disagreement

was fed by the fact that both the Old and the New saw that they were trying to contribute to the welfare of their society, which was itself divided into supporters of the Old and supporters of the New. They also set themselves to be the intellectual guide of their country. Thus, Egypt witnessed an intellectual fracture between those who wanted her to keep her Islamic and Arabic identity—the main thesis of the Old—and the New—who wanted her to be modernized in a Westernized style, where religion is contained in a religious frame and not allowed to be the dynamic force running society. The position of the New is that language is not a sacred heritage that can not be changed, and that Egypt is an individual country not related to other countries through the bond of Islam. According to Charles. D. Smith, one of Taha Hussein's arguments was that "however tolerant Islam had been in the past, religion had no place in political life in the twentieth century because modern state were formed on nationalism which was devoid of both religious and philosophical overtones" (397). This argument was certainly what the majority of Arab states adopted, separating, in a quasi-Western way, religion from state. Indeed, this argument clarifies why al-Rafii is less recognized by the official institutions in these states. In his writings, al-Rafii was the exact opposite, not only to Taha Hussein or the New school, but to the entire political system that has been running some Arabic societies with secularism, socialism, and other non-Islamic ideologies.

The Old refers to those Egyptians who, at the time when modernization was sweeping Egypt, were not satisfied with what they believed was the decadency of the values that modern civilization brought to modern Arab societies. In particular, as individual freedom in modern times was so revolutionized that human behavior became less restricted by religion or morality, the Old assumed that that this modernization was

dangerous to their religion, values, and identity as Arabs and Muslims. While the New

school fully admired the West, the Old school saw the West as a threat to their entity as

Arab and Muslim people whose inherited traditions were part of their identity. They saw,

for instance, the type of man-woman relationships that the West promoted as completely

conflicting with traditional social norms, which emphasize chastity and censure

premarital sex. They wanted to fortify the Egyptian population against what they

perceived as a corrupting cultural invasion. Al-Rafii once wrote warning his fellow

Egyptians of the dangers of individualism, making a reference to Islamic tradition to

support his argument:

> The Eastern [Egyptian] is now living in his state on the basis that he is an
>
> individual that does not have any connection of place or time with the
>
> other parts. He forgot the tradition of the Prophet: 'work for your life as if
>
> you would live forever.' So what did the greatest among the social
>
> reformers [the Prophet] want to say by 'as if you would live forever' other
>
> than to confirm to his nation that the individual is the spring of all the
>
> coming generations. Therefore, the individual should work to these
>
> generations as well as to himself, as if these generations are dependant on
>
> him and that he continues to live among them. (*Wahi Al-Qalam* [*The*
>
> *Inspirations of the Pen*] 261)

When faced with the fact that the West was more advanced and should, therefore,

be followed as a model of development, the traditionalists tended to be selective. Along

with al-Rafii, who expressed this attitude of selectiveness in his writings, these

traditionalists wanted to take the industrial, technical, scientific, and even literary output

of modern Western civilization, but they did not want to embrace the social values of the West. Like any other conservative people in any society, these people derived their views from religion, which, in their case, was Islam. Religiously minded as they were, they did not want such aspects of the Western culture as alcohol, gambling, and unrestrained sexuality—which are forbidden in Islam—to find their way into Egyptian society. The New, on the other hand, did not share such concerns. Taha Hussein once wrote: "In order to become equal partners in civilization with Europeans, we must literally and forthrightly do everything that they do; we must share with them the present civilization, with all its pleasant and unpleasant sides" (*The Future of Education in Egypt* 15). In response to Hussein's remark, al-Rafii said: "What we are afraid of concerning Taha is that he is a colonizing European tool working on destroying the morality of the nation and breaking the firm handhold of its religion and its literature, language and holy book, and belittling everyone described as a holder of these" (*Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*] 194). Thus, the Old were concerned that the religion of the majority of Egyptians, Islam, would be negatively influenced by the waves of modernism that the New advocated.

The New (also known as the New school or the enlighteners) were Egyptian intellectuals who were so immensely influenced by Western civilization that they wanted it to be a model for Egypt and other Arab countries. This Western influence came mostly from those people who had contact with European culture through tourism, graduate schooling, or even through relationships with the European communities that lived in the British-colonized Egypt. Another source of Western influence was books and other forms of publications. Western-oriented Egyptians wanted a secular Egypt where religion did

not interfere with a democratic society, and where each individual's social life was not subject to the restrictions of Islam or Arabic traditions. As Taha once stated, "[l]et us admit the truth and banish hypocrisy. Only by eagerly welcoming the modern civilization can we have true peace of mind and a wholesome attitude toward the realities of life. A sound philosophy, it seems to me, requires the frank acknowledgement of one's desires and a straightforward attempt to satisfy them" (19). As they were inclined to introduce daring ideas, the New also wanted Egypt to be a place where freedom of expression was given to each citizen without the consequences of persecution. Nevertheless, persecution, which could be incited in Egypt at the time on basis of being sacrilegious or encouraging moral corruption in society, was something the New experienced, as was the case with Taha Hussein whose book, *On Pre-Islamic Poetry,* was once banned in Egypt.

A question might be asked here: Who started this battle, the Old or the New? To answer this question we need to bear in mind that as an Islamic country, Egypt was expected to inevitably face such a conflict between these two forces. Due to the obvious discrepancy between a typical Islamic society and a modern Western-like one, there were two options: either to continue considering Islam the leading power in society or to replace it with the European model of liberal society. For the New, modernization was equated with equal liberal and Western values. For the Old, it was an accumulative process that builds a new society based on the inherited identity of Arabs. This identity, as the Old argued, includes the same Arabic character that participated in the past civilization of Islam. Therefore, the stages of Arabic history should be the roots or foundation of this society, and these roots should not be cut off, to relate Egypt or any other Arab countries to West.

As A. S. Eban argues in "The Modern Literary Movement in Egypt," Egypt was face-to-face with many outside influences that were by no means easy for Egyptians to find a middle ground for:

> The political consequences of this century of interaction between the Near
> East and the Western world do not belong to this discussion. The cultural
> effects were far reaching. Islam, hitherto unchanged, now had to justify
> itself against a rival culture. The traditional Muslim disciplines were beset
> by the keen glance of Western criticism. The venerable orthodoxies had to
> complete for the allegiance of the people with new and freer ideas which
> had imposing material achievements to show as their credit and support.
> (167)

These influences divided the Egyptians into those who favor a system of society based basically on Islam, where the five tenets of Islam were observed and where relationships between the two sexes were based on what the religion and tradition allowed. The other camp, however, wanted a liberal society where people were encouraged to live as those in the West, whether or not that conflicted with religion, tradition, or culture.

Being very active in calling for the Westernization of Egypt, it was the New, we can safely suppose, that started this battle. The Old, on the other hand, considered this kind of bold call for Westernization as a call for departing from Islam and the legacy of the Muslim civilization, which were based, according to the proponents of the Old, on the spirituality of Islam, not on the materialism or the decadency of the values of modernism. As a reaction, and to make the call for modernization more effective, the New started by calling for change in Egypt, a country which, along with other Arabic countries, "had

vanished for six centuries from the pages of history… [and was] projected in the early

nineteenth century into sudden and intimate contact with the West" (Eban 166). The New

argued that a new liberal, Europeanized Egypt ought to be sought after by the entire

society. To them, the values of Europe were apt for Egypt which, they argued, would get

used to them eventually; otherwise, they claimed that "Egyptians who deride[d] European

Civilization and praise[d] the spirituality of the East [were] joking" (*The Future of*

Culture in Egypt 22). Moreover, the New believed that classical Arabic literary norms

should not be a model or a benchmark for modern Arabic styles of composition and

literature. In other words, they did not follow the traditional view that the literary styles

that had flourished in the early days of Islam were the best and, therefore, should be

emulated by modern writers. This position caused them to face an attack from the

traditionalists who insisted on having the same classical Arabic—the language of the

Qur'an —to be the language of literature, education, and media, and education. Striving

to reserve the classical language and refusing, as well as attacking, any attempt to replace

it with colloquial or dialectical Egyptian, the Old appeared as the guardians of the

language of the Qur'an.

The reason for such an appraisal of the classical, sophisticated, and correctly

used—according to classical standards—Arabic is the belief, held strongly by al-Rafii,

that the language of the Qur'an is so amazingly perfect that no one could ever produce its

like. Therefore, the closer the style of Arabic to that of the Qur'an, the more superior the

style is. In the same token, if an Arabic text does not observe the accuracy of grammar

and the correct usage of words, and the incorporation of some musicality by choosing

rhymed words and phrases, then the literature produced is not genuinely Arabic. If the

text, however, does not observe these technicalities, then its value declines, at least according to the Old. Surprisingly enough, as the New school started at the turn of the twentieth century, its writers were reluctant to introduce new styles, with less observance of classical diction. For instance, when Haykal wrote his novel *Zaynab* in 1913 with a contemporary modern theme, using simple language and some colloquialism, which was unprecedented at the time, he did not "admit his authorship publicly [till] only in its second edition, after it had been successful and had gained public and critical acclaim" (Lichtenstadter 118). The reason for such concern about the literary public opinion was, first, due to the fact that Arabic readership had been used to classical styles. At the time of publishing *Zaynab* this readership started to widely read classical Arabic works, which were made more available thanks to the increase in the number of publishing houses.

The New's call for Egyptianzing Arabic and making it very simple and not close to the classical models and the sophisticated style of classical writers was received with an attack by the Old. Khalil Horani, a Muslim scholar from Lebanon, who recently wrote an article in memory of al-Rafii and his defense of Arabic language, states in an online Arabic magazine that "the fanatic calls started to move in parallel, systemized lines that turn altogether to meet one goal: launching a war on Arabic language Islamic faith and calling for despising anything Eastern" (Horani). Like al-Rafii, Horani believes that calls for abandoning the standard Arabic language, with its literature and history, is a call for cultural destruction of Arabic society masked with a call for advancement and following up with West.

In his introduction to *Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*]: *The Battle between the New and Old*, al-Rafii wrote a preface, stating the purpose of

writing the book. "We want to turn the readers' attention that, in this book, we are trying to refute a dangerous idea [the New]. If this idea stands up today with someone we know, it might stand up in the future with someone we do not know. However, our response to this and that person is the same" (5). Al-Rafii responded to those people with a severe attack against their ideology and the modernization claimed by them. Moreover, he wrote an argument defending the values of the Muslim society that these people were critical of:

> [Taha Hussain] and those modernizers, who are like him, are called writers, scholars, and men of letters, which is just because they need titles and description among the people of society. After careful examination, however, they are just human flaws that fortune produced in a scholarly and literary form, to juxtapose it to a truth that people were about to neglect. (Al-Rafii 9-10).

Al-Rafii wanted to show the flaws in these writers' line of thought, criticizing them form his Islamic perspective and trying, at the same time, to validate his perspective. In doing so, he claimed himself to be standing on the side of the Qur'an, its classical language, and spiritual values. The modernizers, as al-Rafii saw them, were misled and blinded by the brightness of anything new coming out of the West, regardless of whether or not it fit the East and its traditions and beliefs.

Taha Hussein and Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii's battle was not just a personal conflict between the two intellectuals. It was, as al-Iryean puts it, "a dispute between two schools involving literature, writing, and methodologies" (127). The personal aspect of the dispute between these two men of letters was embodied in the way they handled each

other's criticism. Taha Hussein once remarked that the complexity in al-Rafii's style indicated the difficulty the latter faced in expressing his ideas and beliefs: "every sentence in this [Rafii's] book gives you the impression that the writer is undergoing birth pains in writing it" *(Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an [Under the Banner of the Qur'an]* 109). Taking it personally, al-Rafii replied that he wrote the book in twenty-six days, and he challenged Hussein to write a similar book in twenty six months. Al-Rafii, thus, went beyond accusing Hussein of being unable to write as well as he did, to claim that Hussein did not have the ability to understand literature. "Dear Wise Professor, Taha Hussein, al-Mutanabi [a classical Arabic poet from the Abbasid era] gives you his compliments and tells you: 'How often someone ridicules a sound speech / And the problem is only in his personality: his bad understanding!" *(Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an [Under the Banner of the Qur'an] 106)*. This and other examples show that al-Rafii's devotion to his cause, as a guardian of traditionalism, makes him unable to compromise with modernization and its active representative, Taha Hussein.

Al-Rafii and Hussein's representation of the Old and the New, respectively, is the outcome of two factors. First, each of them was the leading figure of the side he represented. Hussein was the Egyptian scholar who received the highest degree in Philosophy and Literature (he got two Ph.D. degrees form the Sorbonne University). He is the enlightenment pilot whose early works were constant calls for change, reform, moderation, and daring critiques of the traditional way of life in Egypt, the thinker who believed in logic and science only and gave them precedence over any faith or religious affiliation; and the liberal who somewhat followed the French style of life even in Egypt where he lived with his French wife. Hussein also established a reputation as an

exemplary academic who was well-versed in Arabic and Western literatures, both classical and modern, and whose firm belief in the freedom of thought and expression made him the favorite of the Egyptian elite. After all, he was the first Egyptian professor with a Ph.D. and the renowned Dean of the faculty of letters at the Egyptian University, where he incited a great influence upon the young generation of Egyptian and some Arab students attending the nascent institution.

Al-Rafii was not as highly connected as was Taha Hussein. Unlike Hussein, who mastered Latin and some modern European Languages, al-Rafii was not familiar with Western canons of philosophy, literature, and research except through translation, which was sufficient because translation into Arabic was not a systemized process that covers what an Arab reader needed to know from other languages at that time. Nevertheless, al-Rafii's audience considered him a towering figure in literary writing who once was referred to as a man with a "Qur'anic sentence. He was an artist in Arabic language with a beautiful style of writing that was reminiscent of great Arab writers from the classical times, a fact that even his critics acknowledged. His remarkable knowledge of Arabic and Islamic history, though without a an education higher than elementary level, was a source of admiration. He also appeared like the traditional renowned Arab figures who gained their knowledge by means of painstaking self-education. Al-Rafii was not affiliated with any academic institutions except for al-Azhar—a place where Taha Hussein had many opponents—and he criticized the Egyptian University with great passion, as he saw in it an unwanted rival to al-Azhar.

The second factor that makes both Taha Hussein and al-Rafii good representatives of, respectively, the New and the Old, how uncompromised their positions were. It goes

without saying that they relentlessly tried to show that following modernization (in the case of Hussein) or reactivating the traditions (the case of al-Rafii) is the best way for a better Egypt. If there was something common between the two, it was the fact that both realized that there ought to be something done to improve the status of Arabs—in Egypt and everywhere—to become active participants in modern civilization, as they were in past times. Both of them believed in Pan-Arabism, or the ideology that Arabs are united in history, language, land, and religion, as mentioned in Chapter II. They also believed that the geographical boarders were merely a colonial creation to separate Arabs and make them easy targets for imperial powers. That is why the term "nation" was equally used in the revival's rhetoric of both sides. Nation, or *umma* in Arabic, has, in this regard, three meanings, the state, all Arab countries that formed the past one Arab homeland, or the entire Muslim world. For al-Rafii, nation includes all these three references, with a specific emphasis on the last one. That is why in most of his writings he addresses all Muslims not only Egyptians or Arabs, as in his article, "O, Muslims," (*Wahi Al-Qalam* [*The Inspirations of the Pen*] 240). Out of the three meanings of nation, Taha Hussein often refers to the state, Egypt. In *The Future of Education in Egypt*, Taha tries to prove that his advocacy of Westernization should not be interpreted as threats to the Egyptian national identity (11). He argues that Egypt is unique as a state and separated from the rest of the Eastern countries, due to its attempts to be closer to Europe (11). In other words, there was a division—between the Old and the New—that included also the concept of nation, which implied references to statehood (Egypt), ethnicity (Arabs), and religion (Islam).

Thanks to al-Rafii and his response to the battle initiated by the New, Arabic literature now has an interesting material for readership and scholarship. However, there was also a series of other battles that involved other Egyptian literary figures. However, the consequent battles were mainly related to literary issues, and did not leave the same effect as the one between al-Rafii and Hussein did. This battle engaged not only two persons but also opposing directions in thought where compromise was not possible. Other battles, like the one between al-Rafii and al-Aqaad, Taha Hussein and Zaki Mubarak, or between Mahmoud Shaker and Taha Hussein had to do with specific issues that did not go beyond language, literature, or personal feuds.

Despite al-Rafii's significant contribution to Arabic literature, his legacy has been less recognized, obviously due to his position as an opponent of Westernization and a proponent of traditionalism. As sometimes politics has a retrospect influence on literature, the state of contemporary politics in the Arab world makes it hard for someone like al-Rafii to find a place among other literary figures. Al-Rafii was a man of letters calling for the revitalization of Islam, a call that had been traditionally restricted to Islamic scholars or *ulama*, who would express it in mosques, Islamic universities, al-Azhar, or other Islamic channels, including books and journals. Often times, Islamic scholars can reach only the religious segment of society. In the course of delivering his message about the importance of revitalizing Islam, al-Rafii was relying on literature, and, hence, he gained a wider readership. Yet, both al-Rafii and Islamic scholars share the same goal: to defend Islam and protect Muslims from the Westernization that threatens their cultural and religious identity, or, as al-Rafii put it, "scholars chasing out

anti-Islam" (*Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*] 164). Again, this chasing was not appreciated by secular governments in the Arab world.

Another reason why al-Rafii was not favored by the public, which has been noticeably manipulated by their secular governments, was his calls for Muslim unity, rather than just Egyptian or Arab nationalism. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of Arab nationalism which was prompted by the aspiration for freedom from European colonization. There were also calls for reincorporating Islam in the political, educational, and social structure of society. Unlike al-Rafii, who was the mouthpiece of such stance, there was a liberal intelligentsia which supported the ideology that Arabs, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, should be united against any foreign invasion motivated by their patriotism, not religion. This in fact is still the official rhetoric of most Arab states. Some of the intellectual elite of Egyptian society wanted Egypt to be secular and Westernized in the same way Turkey was under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (best known as the father of modern Turkey. Al-Rafi, however, was so critical of the secular Ataturk and wrote some articles attacking his anti-Islamic policies, as demonstrated in Chapter II. Nevertheless, as Ira M. Lapidus argues, those Egyptian intellectuals who wanted Egypt to be Westernized, "lacked direct continuity with the Ottoman heritage and the military capability, self-confidence, and authority of the Turks, [and could not] carry through the kind of drastic secularization achieved in Turkey" (904). Due to the secular nature of their beliefs, these scholars were backed by their government and, thus, would hardly be critical of their country's official ideology, be it socialism or secularism. On the other hand, al-Rafii was brave enough to be critical of this ideology and those who represented it. He turned his readers' attention to the

alternative of socialism in Islam. Al-Rafii stated: "O, socialists, come and know your great prophet [Muhammad]. Unless Islam gives your socialism life by its virtues and laws, your system is like a dying tree on which you are hanging fruits by a thread . . . everyday you bind and unbind the thread to get fruits, but there is none by nature" (*Wahi Al-Qalam* [*The Inspirations of the Pen*] 64). Therefore, al-Rafii has no good chance to be probably recognized by Egyptian government, which has been a strong advocate of socialism, especially during Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency (1954–1970).

As al-Rafii attached literature and thought with Islam, his popularity could not survive due to the rise of political movements that reinterpreted the history of Islam in a way that disconnected it from Arabic history. Though Islam has always been highly respected among the Egyptian population, Egypt has never been run by Islamic-oriented governments ever since its independence from the Ottoman empire. Most of the non-traditional Arab governments, such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, have adopted ideologies derived from Marxism in the form of socialism. With a considerable number of intellectuals backing up socialism and being supportive of Arab nationalism, intellectuals like al Rafii could not find wide recognition. For instance, Syrian politicians who, as Goldschmidt puts it, "have usually been in the vanguard of Arab Nationalism," (280) formed the Ba'ath party to spread an ideology that aimed at uniting all Arabs within a political and social frame that was hoped to secure them freedom and fair, socialist economy.

The Ba'ath party was officially granted permission by the Syrian government in 1946 and its formal founding congress was held in 1947 (Devlin 1398). As the constitution of the party states, "[t]he Arab nation has an immortal mission which has

manifested itself in renewed and complete forms in the different stages of history and which aims at reviving human values, encouraging human development, and promoting harmony and corporation among the nations of the world" (Goldschmidt 280). This quote from the constitution shows that nationalists, such as those in Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, do not look at the entire Arabic history as interlinked with that of Islam. The stages of Arabic history (see chapter III) reflect, according to them, a mere evolution in Arab life from tribal life to civilization, without giving enough credit to Islam as an activator of such evolution. If these intellectuals and political leaders give such a credit to Islam, as al-Rafii always did, the logical result would be to run Arab societies according to the teachings and principles of Islam instead of adopting a foreign ideology and implanting it in Islamic soils.

In one of the above-mentioned countries, where authority controls almost all facets of society, an activist in the ideology adopted by the government would be more supported than someone advocating so-called out of date ideas. This explains why al-Rafii's legacy is not spread wide. Moreover, liberals did not appreciate the pro-traditionalists who were willing to stay under the Ottoman Islamic caliphate, as explained in Chapter II. The excuse for those pro-traditionalists for such a will is Islam; that is, it is required in Islam to have one caliph as a leader of the entire Muslim nation. As Philipp argues, "it was their belief in a religion, shared with many other people, which caused them to accept the political domination of the Ottomans and to identify foremost as Muslims in a Muslim empire (Philipp 4). Therefore, this political conflict and dominance of liberals and secularists in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world contributed to the dismissal of traditional thought, as that of Al-Rafii.

As change and reform are always appealing to any developing society, one might rightly assume, however, that the reason why al-Rafii has not gained the popularity he deserves is due to his attacking the New. According to al-Juzu, al-Rafii was creative, someone who also aspired for reform and the change of Arabic diction but within the classical adherence to correctness and elegancy of style. "Al-Rafii is a modernizer... and if he had attacked modernization, his attack was directed against that type of modernization that means obliterating Arabic language and reducing to nothing the national and Islamic character. Other than this, he did not have any objections" (343). Thus, A-Rafii can be seen as a true modernizer who voiced concerns about a change that would not detach Muslims from their cultural and religious heritage. In this sense, al-Rafii advocated the adaptation rather than the adoption or copying of Western civilization:

> I am not afraid to say that we [Egyptians] have been afflicted in our
> revival by a group of translators who mastered transmission from Europe,
> including the [European] mind that they transmit and do not have one of
> their own. Whether they know or not, their job in translation is that of pure
> imitation and enslaved emulation. If they think, their mind, due to habit
> and nature, will be attracted to the origin mind, without going or moving
> away from it... They are indeed a danger to the people: its nationalism, its
> individuality, and its characteristics. If the people obey them with
> everything they call for, they are about then to translate it to another
> people. (*Wahi Al-Qalam* [*The Inspirations of the Pen*] 78)

Another reason for al-Rafii's lack of popularity in contemporary Arabic studies might be his conservative, religious views that are expressed in a literary form imbued with a uniquely sophisticated style. In "The Qur'anic Sentence," al-Rafii refers to some publisher's negative criticism of his style, a criticism that recommends him to change such a style by using new diction:

> After reviewing my book, *Letters of Sorrows,* one of the Arabic newspapers in the United States of America brought to my attention some feedback. I was more or less advised to abandon the [style of] "the Qur'anic sentence" and the traditions of the Prophet and adopt something else. Doing so, according to them, would be better for me: I would be very popular, destroy the New school, and establish a school of my own. (*Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*] 26)

In response, al-Rafii rejects this recommendation, insisting that any change in his style will mean betrayal to his Arab Muslim ancestors. His adherence to the Qur'anic sentence was due to his attachment to its "[excellent] Arabic, eloquence, supremacy, talent-cultivation, logic-sharpening . . . and retrieving our past as if we were living in it in the present" (26). Resorting to his best defense that usually includes attacking his opponents, al-Rafii warns the Eastern nations of what he believes is the source of plight coming from the West: "four axes try to destroy the East: Atheism along with European urbanism faults, ignorance of the modern sciences, passing surreptitiously into the nation the views of the false intellectuals—along with imitators and colonizers—to destroy people's morality, and the weakness and division (78-79). We might see here some kind of exaggeration on al-Rafii's part, but his anti-Western stance might be justified by his inclination to promote only Arabic literature and to aspire for Egypt to be in continuity

with Islamic history, as being part of the body of Islam that should not be weakened by imitating Europe.

When realizing how dangerous the New school was to the identity of Egypt, as a product of Islamic and Arabic history, al-Rafii never considered the New school as new or as able to bring anything new to Arabic literature. Instead he believed that all what they can do is affect negatively the long-established structure of Arabic literature. As al-Juzu points out:

> The new school that he attacked is the one embodied with the weakness of [Arabic] language, the neglect of the historical nationalism, the influence of foreign languages on the Arabic language, [and] the partisanship for the foreign literature . . . He specially attacked the sacrilegious modernizers who wanted to confuse people with their religion, values, and language. (341-42)

In this regard, one might argue that al-Rafii's role has been misunderstood, for it is always interpreted as anti-modern. In fact, al-Rafii was against only what he believed to be dangerous to Egypt as an Arab Muslim country. Therefore, his role should not be underestimated due to his conservative views, as these views can exist in every society at any time.

Al-Rafii, however, was hardly known among his literary peers as someone who wanted only to deliver a religious message, or, as one might assume, to be just against Westernization, actuated by Islamic sentiments. Based on his remarkable contribution to Arabic literature studies, manifested mainly in his book *Tarikh Adab Al-Arab* [*The History of the Literatures of the Arab*], al-Rafii is indeed a scholar who showed active

involvement in the studies of Arabic at a time these studies had just started. As a scholar

of Arabic literature, al-Rafii is very meticulous when it comes to reading classical

Arabic poetry and interpreting it in view of the circumstances that participated in

producing it In *Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*], he accuses

Hussein of hasty generalizations and of not being able to extract valid arguments from

reading original sources (273-74). He also argues that if some scholars want to discuss

the styles of classical poets, they should consider not only to the dialect of the poet or

his time, but also his emotions, the meanings he wanted to incorporate in his poetry, and

his aesthetic taste. He also argues that a poet critic can understand poetry better than a

critic who is not a poet, such as Taha Hussein (*Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the*

Banner of the Qur'an] 274).

One of al-Rafii's attempts to bring some innovation to Arabic literature, yet with

observance to classical style, is his adaptation of *Kalila wa Dimna.* This books was

translated from—but not originally written in—Middle Persian (Pahlavi), by Ibn al-

Muqafa (724-59), who lived during the late Umayyad era and the early Abbasid era.

Al-Muqafa is "regarded by many as the creator of Arabic prose style, [and] prepared an

Arabic translation, on which all western versions [of the book in question], as well as

the later Eastern versions of the work are, ultimately based" (Boyle 33). As al-Muqafa's

work contains fables with a frame narration conducted by two jackals, Kalila and

Dimna, so is al-Rafii's adaptation. With the same diction, tone, and sophistication of

style, al-Rafii creates stories that have the same spirit. However, the themes are always

directed to criticize the New school and to show its inability to add creativity to Arabic

prose. The implication of this adaptation is meant by al-Rafii to show his readers that he

alone can revive Arab literature, making it reappear in the same classical, well-expressed, full of images, and musical language. For al-Rafii, the newness in Arabic literature is something innovative but still within the canon of Arabic.

After publishing some of the adaptations of *Kalila wa Dimna,* al-Rafii revealed that he received positive feedback from his readers, which might be a clever way of attracting his reader's attention while writing more of these adoptions. In "Dimna Said..." he started his literary piece by saying:

> Some highly respected scholars and writers write to me asking about my copy of *Kalila wa Dimna* and request me not to hide it from them and to give them a parable from it in every article I write. They say that this is exactly the revival of Arabic literature...not [some authors' failing writings] in language, expression, and narration. (*Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*] 291)

In "Dimna Said...," al-Rafii uses the same tone of thrilling and beautiful way of introducing parables as the one found in the original text, which has been a source of fascination to Arabic readers to date.

> They gathered, and you know what happened?
>
> Kalila: What happened?
>
> Dimna: They appeared to be like the house whose builder thought it was giving birth.
>
> Kalila: How so?
>
> Dimna: They claimed that [a signal phrase exactly taken from the original] there was in a city a sterile man with some *gullibility.* The man said to

himself, "I did not have a child and there is no house without one. If I build a house I will *aspire* for the offspring all people a*spire* for. (*Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*] 293) [my emphasis added, see below]

All the words I emphasized in the above excerpt show to Arabic readers the sense of using classical words, as *louthut* for gullibility, instead of using the commonly used word, *hamaaka*. The word *akib* was used for offspring instead of more familiar words with the same meaning like, *thurriya*. As for *raja*, the verb used for aspiration, it is also more frequently used by classical writers than modern ones. Incorporating these and many other words and expressions in his literature, al-Rafii wanted to breathe some life into Arabic literature to show his readers that the Old is creative but within respect to the spirit of Arabic language and rules.

Surprisingly enough, in *Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii: The Pioneer of the Arabic Symbolism* al-Juzu points out that al-Rafii was a modernizer himself. Al-Rafii's attempts for modernization were limited to the creation of new expressions in Arabic. This tendency places him in the same category with such creative writers of classical times as the Abbasid writer Abu 'Uthman al-Jahiz (AD 776 - 868), whom al-Rafii read as a source of inspiration before he embarked on writing some of his works. Al-Juzu claims that al-Rafii's poetic prose can be categorized as highly Symbolic and pronounces al-Rafii as one of the Arab pioneers of this school. After making an extensive case for this claim in his book *Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafii: The Pioneer of the Arabic Symbolism*, al-Juzu concludes that "Al-Rafii, therefore, is the creator of Arabic Symbolism and he has contributed to it in the same as the French contributed to

European Symbolism" (295). The Symbolists have a careful and sophisticated quality of writing, a description that perfectly applies to al-Rafii's style. Al-Juzu argues that "careful mind, sharp stylishness, and critical insight" are some of the basic characteristics al-Rafii believes a writer should have (*Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*] 117).

Thus, al-Rafii himself can be considered a writer who contributed to new trends in Arabic literature. This fact is not yet well recognized by mainstream criticism in Arabic literature and is hardly studied by non-Arab literary critics. His impact as a leader of the Old school was immense, and yet neglected by modern scholarship. So much so that the British scholar of Arabic literature Hamilton Gibb believes the battle was not won by the New, although I believe that politics made it sound as though the New did really win, "[f]or many decades the partisans of the 'old' and the 'new' have engaged in a struggle for the soul of the Arabic world, a struggle in which the victory of one side over the other is even yet not assured" ("Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature" 746-47). Surprisingly, Gibb himself repeatedly mentions Taha Hussein, whereas al-Rafii is never mentioned, at least in the texts that I have read. As for his fellow Egyptian researchers, we have seen in Chapter V how few of them paid attention to the literature he left.

Expressing his disappointment that Egypt has forgotten al-Rafii, his apprentice and biographer, Said al-Iryean once wrote, "it is al-Rafii, the man whose name was second to none among those who worked to emphasize the Egyptian leadership of the Arab states, elevate her name, build her glory, and pave the way for other men of letters in the Arab world. Indeed, it is al-Rafii, but indeed it is Egypt." Blaming the

government of Egypt for overlooking al-Rafii, al-Iryean wrote these words only one year after al-Rafii's death in 1937. The years that passed since then made the legacy more subject to neglect than before. However rhetorical this might sound, it is indeed only the years that increase this neglect and the fact is still the same: he should be given his due recognition, which he was denied by the government even before his death. As he turned its attention to the importance of writing a comprehensive book on the history of Arabic literature, and wrote one himself, he expected the Egyptian University—which was seeking to adopt such a book in its curriculum—to ask him to teach it, not to give it to someone other than its author to teach it. Such a teacher, according to al-Rafii, "would be more or less like a mature student among novices" (*Tahta Rayat Al-Qur'an* [*Under the Banner of the Qur'an*] 76).

In conclusion, as the Arab revival has been distinguished as a very important stage in the modern history of Arabic language, thought, literature, al-Rafii has as well distinguished himself as an important contributor to this stage. He stood very strong against Westernization and the liberals who tried to endorse such a trend in Egypt. He argued that Egypt is part of a wider enterprise: Islamic and Arabic heritage. This argument did not find any support to continue on in a society run by secular ideologies. His legacy, nevertheless, is worth consideration and reflection by scholars of Arabic, postcolonial, and world literature as a good source on the Arab revival, its intellectuals and literary legacy.

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