

6 What does it mean to design a plot?

Space, time, and the subject's agency in the new narrative genres of the 19th century

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This chapter: In histories of modern Middle Eastern literatures, the emergence of the new narrative and dramatic genres (the novel, the short story; theatrical plays and operas) is typically contextualised as a process resulting from massive political and social change¹ and European cultural influence (study missions, translations, etc.). However, little attention has been given so far to the psychological-anthropological dimension of what the introduction of the new genres and the ‘modernisation’ of the literary system actually meant, for authors and their audiences alike. As genres are expressions of world views, the replacement of an existing set of genres by a new one is tantamount to a massive epistemological and cultural-historical re-orientation, a fundamental shift in the way human beings view the world around them and interact with it, a process also during which identity is at stake. What exactly did that mean for writers and readers in the nineteenth century Middle East?

This chapter argues that the most essential feature of the new, ‘pragmatic’ genres was ‘worldliness’ (*factualism*) cast into fictional plots, combining the *objectivity of the world* with a *subjective approach* to it. In this way, the new genres became, for the emerging Middle Eastern subjects, a site of discovering, experiencing, testing out, and asserting their new identity and agency: as *rational*, intellectual, thinking, critically analyzing subjects; as *feeling* subjects on whose bodies and souls the interaction with the world showed; as subjects whom these emotions *ennobled* and made into members of the imagined global community of a ‘modern’, civilised humanity; and as *creative* subjects who had the freedom and capacity to re-create the world according to their own views. The chapter explores what the *emplotment of the world* actually meant for the authors in terms of the essential choices they had to make – topic, characters, settings, structure, language –, given, on the one hand, an inherited set of ‘high’ and ‘popular’ genres and the prevalent literary taste, and their wish to assert their subjectivity, on the other.

¹ Omri 2008, 248, even speaks of an “overcontextualisation”.

The chapter is arranged here in Part III, which is about genre transitions; but with its interest in the anthropological-psychological dimension of these transitions it could likewise have been placed in Part IV, which will ‘single out’ certain narrative markers of emerging subjectivity seeking to assert itself, such as satire and the new emphasis on the narrating “I” (in Chapter 8), on first attempts to mediate between rationalism and emotionalism in an aesthetics of “truth mingled with passion” (Chapter 9), and on the authors’ moralism (Chapter 10) and emotionalism (Chapter 11), all likewise read as expressions of the (middle class) subjects’ wish to assert themselves. – In the present section, Part III, meanwhile, the focus is on *continuities and ruptures*. It shows the newly emerged subjects in their attempts to come to terms with the new *from within* existing traditions, so that we can observe two epistemic systems approaching each other, overlapping, intermingling. In all these cases we become witness of a complementary ‘fusion’ of traditional (‘Oriental’) *adab* with modern (Western-style) *literature*, so that we can speak of the ‘*adab*-tation’ of (European-style) literary genres and a concomitant ‘*literatur*-isation’ of *adab*. In Chapter 4, we saw (from the example of two early Arabic and Turkish novels) that traditional *adab* is taking over new functions and the writer, as a public intellectual, is becoming an arbiter and guide who is expected to master the ‘art of making the right choice between local tradition and new Western values’. In Chapter 5, we could observe how Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī treated the new concept of ‘homeland, fatherland’ (*waṭan*) with the help of old, tried and tested *adab* techniques, to the effect that these techniques proved to be applicable indeed, but *adab* simultaneously underwent a modification in that it was made to follow the author’s turn to realism (while the reality of the ‘here and now’ had been subjected to a ‘philologicalisation’ and ‘*adab*-tation’ in the beginning of the *Risāla*’s treatment of the term *waṭan*). While Chapter 7 will continue in this same line by following the mutual rapprochement of the indigenous term *riwāya* and the ‘foreign’ *novel*, this present chapter turns to the very essence of the new genres, the plot and its main features.

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6.1 Space and time... and the subject’s agency in the world

According to the Egyptian literary critic Jābir ‘Uṣfūr (Gabir Asfour), the gradual shift from a *poetry*-based aesthetics in which linguistic beauty had stood central, to narrative *prose* (and drama) was accompanied by a shift away from “the moment”, as the domain of poetry, to “space and time”, as the domains of the

novel and drama.² The processes of *spatialisation* and *temporalisation* addressed in 'Uşfür's observation point to the new role that space and time began to play in Middle Eastern literatures, as novels and dramatic pieces have *plots* while poems usually don't. Thus, it seems worthwhile to have a closer look at the implications of what it actually means to have a plot.³ On the other hand, this feature cannot be the only one that made novels and theatre so attractive for nineteenth century authors and their public, as plots are found also in some premodern genres, esp. the *maqāmāt*,⁴ popular drama (including shadow plays), and popular story-telling (the *Arabian Nights*, heroic epics, love romances, etc. – see below).

'Uşfür nevertheless comes close to the essentials. As *European* literary history teaches us, *spatialisation* and *temporalisation* are the consequences of yet another and still more fundamental process, namely that of *secularisation* and the concomitant *emancipation of the human subject* in the era called Modern Times, or Modernity (cf. Protestantism challenging the Church's authority, the Scientific Revolution promoting empirical observation as a new method of approaching the world, Humanism's focus on the human being, etc.). Taken together, these developments meant, first and foremost, a turn away from the Hereafter to the Here and Now as the major point of reference and orientation of one's life; second, and as a result of the first, a new interest in the human being and its perspective (cf. the spread of central perspective in painting and architecture; Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, i.e., making the existence of the world dependent on the perspective of the thinking-reasoning subject); third, combining the other two, the *subject's agency* in this world, interacting with it and effecting change in it.⁵ Corresponding developments can be observed in literature: a focus on the human subject, its perception of the world and its experiences in it.

2 Uşfür 1999, 2nd rev. edn 2019 (under the title *Zaman al-qaşş: shi'r al-dunyā al-ḥadītha* "Narrative Time [or: The Time of Narrative]: The Poetry of the Modern World"). – The difference between poetry and the genres that involve action is known also in Western literary studies where fiction and drama can be addressed as the "pragmatic" genres, i.e., those having *prāgmata* 'deeds, acts', i.e., events, where things not only *are* (as in poetry), but *are done, happen*.

3 For an introduction to plot and emplotment in general, see Dannenberg 2010, or Kukkonen 2014.

4 Short anecdote-like stories in elaborate rhyme-prose (*saj'*), told by a first-person narrator, about a smart and eloquent *pícaro*/trickster (often a beggar or rogue); the origins of the genre date back to the fourth/tenth century.

5 For a brief account of emerging subjectivity in Europe, cf., e.g. the entries "Subjekt" (W. Mesch), "Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung" (id.), "Subjektivismus" (H. Gronke / P. Prechtl), and "Subjektivität" (M. Esfeld), Prechtl and Burkard, eds. 1999, s.vv.

Recalling ‘Uṣfūr’s two categories, space and time, we see that they encompass the above-mentioned central aspects of Modernity: *spatialisation* mirroring the increased importance of the world, the worldly, the environment in which the human being moves around and with which it interacts; and *temporalisation* corresponding to the world’s operating on the subject as well as the subject’s own agency, its capability of effecting changes in this world, both necessarily unfolding *in time*. The latter is tantamount to the subject experiencing *causality*, i.e., the world’s impact on the course of the human being’s life and, still more important, the impact of the human subject’s own agency on the world – in a way, the subject itself becomes a kind of ‘God’, a little creator.

In the following, I will elaborate in more detail on the implications that come with the above-mentioned changes, in the Middle Eastern literary genre landscape as well as, mirrored in it, Middle Easterners’ attitude towards the world. At the same time, I will contrast the aspects of the *modern* genres with what they could or could not tie in with among the *traditional* genres, with the aim of highlighting, on the one hand, continuity with the past and, on the other hand, fundamental differences between the pre-modern and the modern worldviews that needed major intellectual and psychological accommodation.

6.2 Referentialism – the fictionalisation of the factual world

One major consequence of the subject’s turn to the world was nothing less than that this world (and the subject acting in it as part of it) now became the topic of fictional narrative, a world narrated in fiction. This may sound banal from today’s perspective; at the time, however, it came as a veritable revolution and therefore often caused considerable confusion as to the ‘ontological’ status of narrated/staged events. Of course, “that is *not* to imply”, as R. Allen rightly remarks, “that the premodern Arabic literary heritage did *not* have its share of narratives of various types” (Allen 2014, my italics) – as examples, he mentions the *maqāmāt*, Ibn Ṭufayl’s (d. 1185) *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān* and the “Epistle of Forgiveness” (*Risālat al-ghufrān*) by Abū ‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (d. 1058), all of which “clearly invoke imagined worlds to achieve their generic purposes” (ibid.). One should probably add also the animal fables in the tradition of *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and, mostly in the Persianate tradition, the great national-mythical⁶ and (erotic-

6 E.g., Ferdowsī’s *Shāhnāme*, or the old Turkish *Dede Korkut* stories.

)mystical epics,⁷ as well as, from the oral heritage of popular story-telling, the entertaining stories of the type found in collections like the *Arabian Nights* or the Turkish *Karacaoğlan* or *Kerem ile Ash*, not to forget the extensive heroic epics typically recited by professional storytellers during the long Ramadan nights or on similar occasions.⁸ However, while popular story-telling never had been treated as something referring to the real world – it counted as purely fantastic (*khurāfa*⁹), belonging to the realm of incredible ‘lies’, without any foundation in reality, hence also without an acknowledged literary-aesthetic value – the fictional genres of the written tradition derived their recognition as valuable cultural products (*adab*) from the degree of rhetorisation (linguistic refinement, as in the case of the *maqāma*) or their edifying/educational/philosophical-discursive purpose (animal fables, national and mystical epics, the above-mentioned *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān* and al-Ma‘arrī’s *Epistle*): the former were appreciated, like poetry, as intriguing fireworks of wit and a fascinating play with meanings and sounds, while reference to the real world was secondary, serving the subordinate function of supplying an additional (not particularly necessary) titillation. In contrast, the latter always *had* an element of reference to the real world,¹⁰ but only indirectly, via the intended applicability of the examples told, their implied moral benefit. However, in none of these genres were the narrated events believed to have taken place in a concrete real space and time¹¹ because the real world was not considered the domain of fiction but that of facts, i.e., the topic of factual accounts, of history, *tārīkh* (with all its subgenres, particularly the *sīra* or *tarjama* ‘biography’, *ḥadīth* ‘reliably transmitted report, news’, *khavar* ‘news, information, anecdote about a real-life person’, and the *riḥla* ‘travel account’). A typical marker of factuality was the *isnād*, the chain of transmission, opening the narrative with the enumeration of the

7 All composed in rhyming couplets (*maṣnavi*), e.g., Neẓāmī’s *Khosrow o Shirin* and *Leyli o Majnun*, or the story of *Yusuf o Zuleykḥā* from Jāmī’s *Haft awrang*. Not a love story but of equally mystical content is Faridoddin ‘Attār’s *Manteq oṭ-ṭayr*.

8 I.e., the popular epics, such as the *Sīrat ‘Antar b. Shaddād*, etc.

9 Generally used to denote ‘incredible tale, ridiculously impossible story’: legends, fables, myths, incl. the *Arabian Nights* – Abdelmeguid n.d., 19–20.

10 Cf. Stefan Leder’s remark (1998) that, “[w]hen reading these texts, the assumption of factuality, and the impression that there is narrative fiction involved, are almost constantly conflicting perceptions” – qtd. in Allen 2014.

11 Cf., for the Ottoman-Turkish context, Dino 1973, 14: “L’absence de rationalité, sur le plan temporel et spatial, qui caractérise ces récits est le reflet de la permanence d’une vision du monde archaïque, conditionnée par le statisme fondamental de la société et de la culture turque-ottomane” (my italics).

transmitters and their source. It signalled authenticity and credibility and was there to guarantee that these were facts, not fiction, and that human fantasy had not invaded the world of facts and distorted their truth. (In Arabic, the word for ‘fact’ and ‘truth’ is one – *ḥaqīqa!*) Exceptions from this ‘rule’ seem to be the *riḥālāt* (non-fiction, but without *isnād*) and the *maqāmāt* (fiction, but with opening *isnād*), but these are in fact no genuine exceptions: as first-person narratives, the travelogues are *per se* perceived as first-hand accounts and therefore do not need an *isnād* to be counted as reports about the real world;¹² and in the *maqāmāt*, the initial *isnād* only serves as a device of parody, imitating (factualist) scholarly discourse – for the listener, it is always clear that this *isnād* is fake and the *maqāma* narrator is not part of the real world. Thus, the strict separation, in the Classical tradition, between the two spheres, fact and fiction, was kept intact also in these two cases.

In the meantime, this fundamental structural distinction did not mean that factualist accounts could not be rhetorically embellished to achieve a ‘value enhancement’ – the highly ornate chancery style (*inshāʾ*),¹³ originally used to aestheticise official correspondence but often also applied in historiographical writing, is a good case in point. Yet, even in these cases did the scribe not alter the ontological status of his material; he would add internal rhyme (*sajʿ*), metaphors, similes, paronomasia (*tajnīs*, play with sounds), etc., but this would never mean turning it into a piece of fiction. The idea to use fiction to achieve (via ‘formula’-like symbolic representation) a higher degree of truth than in factualist historiography was not very widespread in the *premodern* Middle East, so that a fictionalisation of history/facts would have meant turning reality into ‘mere’ fantasy, an act of ‘illegitimate’, reality-distorting intrusion by human hubris into the world of facts, of ‘objective’ history, or even an attempt to imitate God and his creation of the world.¹⁴ For a *modern* author, in contrast, it is

¹² This holds true even though many travel accounts contain mirabilia, e.g., about ‘exotic/strange creatures’ (*ʿajāʾib al-makhlūqāt*).

¹³ Cf., e.g., H. R. Roemer, “*Inshāʾ*” [2012], in *EP*².

¹⁴ This is not to say that the premodern Middle Eastern literary heritage did not know genres that made use of symbolic representation, cf., e.g., the *Karagöz* shadow plays with their character types, or fables like those of the *Kalīla wa-Dimna* collection, featuring animals endowed with human traits. None of these, however, takes place in the real world, and the featuring characters are non-human (puppets in *Karagöz*, animals in the fables). The shadow plays’ and other genres’ relation to non-fictional reality may have been reflected upon occasionally (on a Neo-Platonic basis), e.g. by ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1641–1731) (I am grateful to a reviewer of the present article/chapter to have reminded me of this fact); but shadow puppets nevertheless always remained *perforated*, to make sure that the puppets could and should not by any

essential to underline exactly this subjective intervention, to express his own agency by highlighting that the world gets changed by human agency and by emphasising that, in the narrative about the world, the material has been shaped according to the author's view and his own creative choices.¹⁵ According to some theoreticians of literary history,¹⁶ form-giving is the marker of modernity *par excellence*: the world has become the *material* that the subject works on, and the subject expresses its being the 'master' of the world by giving the material a *form*, and it is this form-giving that is the very essence of modern aesthetics, hence also modernity in literature.

Thus, when Middle Eastern writers – presumably as early as in the 17th century – began to feel the wish to underline their own *subjective* approaches to the world, this wish expressed itself increasingly in the transformation of traditional forms and the gradual preference of newer genres, and in both cases authors tended to choose the 'twin pack' of factualist fiction to underline their agency in the world: *fiction* because it gave room to express the emerging subject's perspective and its feeling of freedom, emancipation, independence, agency, and power of form-giving (which, by the way, also explains the preference for genres with *plots*, as plots are the result of subjective form-giving: they turn the *fabula*, as Viktor Shklovsky called the merely chronological sequence of events, into a meaningful story, a *syuzhet*, in which the events may have been arranged differently, following a causality that shows a subjective perspective on them); and

means be believed to have a soul and thus be "real" living beings; see also note 26, below. – In other cases, where fictional elements were added to factualist accounts (as was not uncommon in travelogues), these additions served other aims than symbolic representation; mostly, they were meant to underline the strange-/otherness of the regions described and their inhabitants – see, e.g., below, 6.6 "Choices to be made (III): Space" (on '*ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* "exotic creatures").

15 Earlier tendencies to highlight the agency of the narrating 'I' from within *traditional* genres can with high probability be regarded as indicators of the transition from a premodern to a modern attitude towards the world. In this context, we may mention (with my reviewer – thanks again!) authors like Muṣṭafā al-Bakrī (1688–1749; on him, see Elger 2004), Abū l-Barakāt Muḥammad al-Raḥbī with his *Nuzhat al-mushtāq* (ca. 1760) (see Sievert 2010), Abū l-Thana' al-Ālūsī (1802–1854) with his travelogues and the wonderful novel-like *maqāma* (see Masarwa 2011 and Reichmuth 2018); cf. also the analysis of some of R. R. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's writings in McLarney 2016, where the author found that in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's thought, "disciplinary training in *adab* is crucial to the citizen-subject's capacity for *self-rule*, as he submits to the *authority of his individual conscience*" – *ibid.*, 25 (my italics); furthermore, there is, of course, also the iconic Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq with his *al-Sāq 'alā l-sāq* (1855) (on the modernity of his way of using traditional genres, cf. Junge 2019a and 2019b, as well as my own study, Guth 2010a = Chapter 8 in the present volume; see also below, n. 55.

16 See, e.g., Willems 1996.

factualist in order to make clear that the point of reference for the critically commenting subject is the real world, the world of facts, especially the present, and that this fiction has to be taken as serious as if it were traditional non-fiction.¹⁷ This becomes evident also in genre terminology: novels and drama are never termed (Ar.) *khurāfa*, *uṣṭūra* or (Persian/Turkish) *afsāna/efsane* but either labelled (in Persian and Turkish) with the French word, *roman*, or (as in Arabic) with words that, in premodern usage, denoted an account of facts (*ḥadīth*, *sīra*, *tarjama*) or any kind of ‘story’ (*qiṣṣa*, *ḥikāya*) or ‘report, reliable transmission’ (*riwāya*).¹⁸ The bivalence (facts *plus* fiction, objective world *plus* subjective creativity) of the new types of narratives is evident also from the preference given to drama (incl. opera) and novels with historical or other ‘realistic’ topics, as, e.g., J. Zaydān’s historical novels¹⁹ or the social romances written by Salīm al-Bustānī and others:²⁰ all of these genres are fictional, but the events told in them are presented, or appear (on stage), *as if* they were real.²¹ This is true also for the early translations from French literature: however adventurous and/or romantic-pathetic – and as such reminding of traditional popular narrative – these texts may have been, there was still one remarkable difference between, say, *Kerem ile Ash* and *Leylâ ve Mecnûn*, on the one hand, and *Robinson Crusoe*, *Le*

17 No wonder then that Roger Allen saw “the primary generic purpose of modern fiction” in a “critical analysis of society” (no matter whether this feature showed in ‘modernised’ genres, like the neo-*maqāma*, or the newly introduced ‘Western’ forms, like the novel or drama); see Allen 2000, 167.

18 Cf. my “From Water-Carrying Camels to Modern Story-Tellers...”, Guth 2011 (= Chapter 7).

19 Quite significantly, Zaydān’s historical writings were influential also among Ottoman Turks of the early twentieth century and continued even into the early Republican era – Strauss 2003, 57.

20 For a detailed, though little analytical description of many of these romances, cf. Moosa 1997, 157–83 and 191–218.

21 It was exactly this *as-if* mode, the realist illusion, that fascinated the head of the Egyptian study mission to France, Rifā‘a R. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, when he made his first acquaintance with the theatres of Paris. He described the performances he attended there as “re-enact[ing] everything that has happened (*taqlid sā’ir mā waqa’a*)” by way of symbolic representation (*taṣwīr*): “for instance, if they [*sc.*, the French] want to imitate (*taqlid*) a sultan and the things that happen to him, they convert the stage to make it *look like* [my italics—S.G.] a palace, create an image of his character (*ṣawwarū dhātahu*), recite his poetry and so on and so forth. [...] In these spectacles, they represent everything that exists (*yūṣawwirūna sā’ir mā yūjad*)” – al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1834) 1993, 209–10 / English tr. Newman 2004, 229–30). – On al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s use of the term *taqlid*, cf. Schulze 1994. – Quite significantly, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s travelogue “was translated into Turkish in Egypt as early as 1839 and seems to have been popular with the Ottoman reading public” – Strauss 2003, 57.

Comte de Monte-Cristo and *Les mystères de Paris*, on the other:²² the translations are characterised by the absence of the supernatural and purely fantastic and in this way meet the new reading public's demand for *realist* fiction

6.3 Re-creating the world – The challenges of plot-designing

For the writers who preferred to try their hand at the new genres rather than attempting to reform inherited models, form-giving in narrative, i.e., the re-creation of the world from a subjective perspective, posed *the* major challenge,²³ as creative form-giving in narratives, i.e., the “discipline of plot”,²⁴ had, until then, not been a concept of art in the Middle East yet, neither in general²⁵ nor in literary production in particular.²⁶ As the examples of texts like those mentioned in footnotes 14 and 15 prove, the transformation of old, established genres was not impossible and, for a long time, also the most natural thing to do; for many, however, such genres seemed to represent sluggish resistance while more radical innovation was needed, and as soon as the new genres began to spread in the Middle East they soon became fashionable alternatives that seemed to give more ample room to subjectivity than the old genres did. It does not come as a surprise then that many an author decided to meet the challenge of new forms needed for a freer unfolding of subjectivity by translation, or rather adaptation, of existing foreign novels, dramas or operas. These stories could be reproduced as they were, or trimmed to fit the public's taste or the space available in a newspaper column, and they could also be made more realistic by ‘localising’ their settings and the names and features of the acting characters.²⁷ The big

22 For a list of novels that had been translated into Turkish before the first “genuine” Turkish novels began to appear, cf. Dino 1973, 52–53. See also Strauss 1994, 151–61.

23 In Dino's words: “N'ayant d'autres traditions que celles des contes et des narrations qui (les « *mesnevi* » mis à part) ont leur source dans la tradition orale, il était difficile aux premiers romanciers turcs de découvrir des règles qui puissent leur permettre d'élaborer un récit continu, fondé sur la réalité, traité d'un style sérieux” – Dino 1973, 43.

24 Omri 2008, 257.

25 Cf., on the semantic history of Arabic *fann*, Mestyan 2011.

26 *Ibdā'* ‘creativity’ was in itself suspicious, as the only power capable of creation was God, the ideal being harmony with the well-established tradition, *Sunna*, and God's well-arranged world order (*niẓām*). Etymologically, *ibdā'* is akin to *bid'a* ‘(heretical) innovation’.

27 Carol Bardenstein has presented a fine analysis of the methods of domestication and the creativity implied therein, speaking of “indigenous assertions” (Bardenstein 2005, subtitle) made through Arabisation. It goes without saying that, as assertions of indigenous identity,

advantage with foreign texts was that the translator-adaptor did not have to invent and design a plot himself.²⁸ However, when Middle Eastern writers started to compose novels or dramatic pieces themselves, they found themselves faced with the very essentials, as a plot is a complex configuration and interplay of several elements: How to structure/form the “worldly” material, the factual world they wanted to write about? Which *topic* should they choose from this world? *Where* and *when* should the events of their narrative take place? What kind of *events* should be described? And how, from whose *perspective* should they be told? Who should feature among the story’s *characters*, i.e., become (via symbolic representation) the ‘heroes of the (fictional-factualist) world’? How should one describe these characters’ *interaction with the world*? How produce the desired effect of verisimilitude and rationality? What should be the logic of the narrative’s internal coherence? What kind of causality should be shown to be at work, how to motivate the characters’ actions? What *type of story* should be told: comical, tragic, edifying, contemplative? And which *language/style* should be used (by the narrator, by the characters)?

6.4 Choices to be made (I): The topic

As a matter of course, the choice of realistic topics was not in itself a problem, given that the many aspects of the world could easily be addressed, in the traditional genre landscape, by historical writings, in travel accounts, religious or philosophical treatises (*rasā’il*), etc. Moreover, since the 1860s, the private press – in many respects also a *presse d’opinion* – gave writers ample room to express their personal, subjective views on the world, utter subjective criticism, suggest reforms, etc.; after all, it is the time when the traditional *adīb* (‘man of letters’) transforms into the modern-type ‘public intellectual’ (*muthaqqaf*, *munawwar/münevver*),²⁹ strongly asserting his presence in the new discursive genre of the newspaper article (*maqāla/makale*). Nevertheless, drama and the novel, the

Arabisation also implied both the assertion of the indigenous “ego” and its *subjectivity* as well as an emphasis on the *factual*, the local environment met by the local subject as its *object*.

²⁸ Until quite recently, there was no word for ‘plot’ in Arabic. The term used today in literary studies to render the English technical term ‘plot’, *ḥabka*, does not appear with this specialised narratological meaning before the late 1970s in the dictionaries I was able to consult.

²⁹ On the intellectual, cf., e.g., Pepe 2019.

pragmatic genres, had a very strong additional appeal,³⁰ probably for two main reasons: first, these plot genres went beyond the ‘dry’ discussion of the pros and cons of a topic as done, e.g., in a *risāla*; rather, they allowed for a *dynamic* presentation, i.e., *temporalisation*, which was necessary in order to ‘destaticise’ the world and demonstrate its changeability³¹ (see below); second (and connected to the first), fiction had a still more intense focus on the subject as it allowed for the expression and treatment of *feelings*. It is for this reason that one topic gained specific attention: *love*.³² Not the idealised type of love, however, that was known from the ‘high’ literary tradition (poetry and the *meşnevi*, in particular): it is this “conception abstraite de l’amour, purement esthétique et littéraire, d’allure mystique, en quelque sorte déshumanisée, sans contenu psychologique ou érotique”³³ against which the modern writer has to develop his own new, modern-type love stories.³⁴ Modern love is the passionate, concrete, ‘worldly’ love as experienced in real life by the emerging subject, as an empirical “fait vécu, dynamique, pris dans l’intimité de la vie de chacun”,³⁵ so

30 Cf. Strauss 1994, 126: “Selon toute apparence, c’est le genre nouveau du roman, devenu le mode le plus répandu d’expression littéraire en Occident, qui fascinait le plus les Ottomans”. Even Sultan ‘Abdülhamid is known to have been an ardent reader of novels – *ibid.*, 126–7.

31 Philosophical narratives like F.F. Marrāsh’s *Ghābat al-ḥaqq* (The Forest of Truth, 1865), significantly one of the earliest examples of the novelistic genre in the Arab world, can be regarded as a combination of the discursive, ‘objective’ rationalism of *rasā’il* and newspaper articles, on the one hand, and the new ‘subjective’ novel writing, on the other.

32 Thus, not only translations from French (cf. Strauss 1994, 127), but also many of the narratives that are counted among the first examples of genuinely Middle Eastern novelistic fiction are essentially romances: cf., e.g., Vartan Paşa’s *Akabi Hikāyesi* (1851), Khalil al-Khūrī’s *Way! Idhan lastu bi-Ifranji* (1859), Salīm al-Bustānī’s *al-Huyām fī bilād al-Shām* (1870), Şemseddin Sāmī’s *Ta’aşşuk-ı Tal’at ve Fitnat* (1872), Aḥmed Midḥat’s *Felātūn Beğ ile Râkım Efendi* (1876), Nāmık Kemāl’s *İntibāh, veya: Sergüzeşt-i ‘Alī Beğ* (1876), etc. – Love stories were, by the way, also on top of the ‘bestsellers’ of *traditional* literature. Strauss 2003, 58, provides a list of what he thinks “was really ‘popular’ reading material” in the late 1880s in Istanbul. The most important category on this list are “the *hikāyes* from the Muslim tradition: the love stories of Kerem and Aslı, Aşık Garib, Tahir and Zühre, Leyla and Mecnun; Melikşah and Gülli Hanım, Tayyazade, Shah İsmail and Gülizar Hanım, Asüman and Zeycan, Shirin and Ferhad [...]”

33 As Dino 1973, 122, says about Nāmık Kemāl.

34 For a similar trend of ‘romantisation’ of a *traditional* genre, cf. Stefan Reichmuth’s fine analysis of an early nineteenth century *maqāma*, al-Ālūsī’s *Sağ’ al-qumriyya fī rab’ madrasat al-qamariyya* (composed probably already in 1822), see Reichmuth 2018.

35 Autobiographical statements as those by Nāmık Kemāl, quoted in Dino 1973, 132, clearly show that it were own feelings and personal experiences for which novelists like Kemāl sought adequate modes of expression (“en correspondance avec mes sentiments”, Kemāl in an article of 1876, tr. Dino).

that the writer has to achieve a “démystification de la conception quasi-symbolique ou allégorique” and a “révaloris[ation de] ce thème sous un aspect réaliste”.³⁶ The love narratives that have come down to us from the early years of the novelistic genre in the Middle East show that the transition from a premodern, idealising concept of love to a modern, more ‘down-to-earth’ one did, as a matter of course, not happen abruptly, from one moment to the next, but could only be achieved in a long process of negotiation during which many compromises had to be made, or were made unconsciously, in order to render a realistic love story acceptable to the reader. Thus, in the beginning, the role of the partner in a ‘real’ love relationship as represented in a novel or on stage was typically filled by an ‘angel’ who was of an almost ideal beauty, both physically and morally, described with an imagery that borrowed heavily from traditional poetry.³⁷ The writers did so in what is probably best described as a mixture of inexperience, lack of models to draw upon, and accommodation to conventional taste assumed to prevail on the side of the average reader: neither had they ever written psychologically realistic love stories themselves, nor would they find the like of it in their own literary tradition,³⁸ nor could they afford to do something that would have offended the reading public’s expectations and patterns of value judgment too brutally.³⁹ For instance, had the novelist not used an idealising poetical language and had the described ‘real’ romance not been given ‘heavenly’ traits, he might not only have been criticised for a lack of literary talent but also been accused of offending public morals by presenting obscene, ‘pornographic’ scenes, and all this in a coarse, ‘unprofessional’, perhaps even ‘disgustingly plain’ language. (It is well known, for example, that in early theatre performances the roles of female characters were played either by men or by Christian women, due to moral sensibilities on the side of a primarily Muslim

³⁶ Dino 1973, 121 and 131, respectively. – For similar tendencies in al-Ālūsī’s *maqāma*, cf. Reichmuth 2018, *passim*.

³⁷ Cf. Reichmuth, *ibid.*, on ‘romantic’ idealisation.

³⁸ Cf. N. Kemāl’s autobiographical statement in an article (1876) about “Love”, in which the author says he knew many ‘romantic’ pieces from the classical tradition, “mais je n’ai trouvé aucun d’eux en correspondance avec mes sentiments” – qtd in Dino 1973, 132.

³⁹ Building on Moretti’s idea that in cultural encounters, “the discernible manifestation of local form is related to narrative voice”, Omri rightly observes that the unease felt by many writers due to being torn between the wish to innovate and the constraints of traditional genre conventions typically shows itself in a narrator who “tries to dominate the plot and often loses control of it” – Omri 2008, 249. This is, of course, a legitimate way of explaining the strong presence of commenting, reasoning, criticising, moralising narrators in these early texts. At the same time, however, it is a clear indication of an emphatic assertion of agency – the agency of the narrating subject.

audience. As for literary language, we have several very valuable in-depth studies of the techniques of early ‘translations’ that highlight the enormous stylistic differences between source texts and their Arabic or Turkish renderings, revealing that the often simple, unpretentious language of the originals was, in the beginning, generally transformed into a rather ‘high’, canonised literary idiom, reminding of the *maqāma* or ornate *inshā’/inṣā*.⁴⁰ At the same time, describing worldly love with exquisite language and endowing the lovers with the best of traditional virtues functioned as a means of additionally ennobling the ‘subjectivation of the world’ so that worldly love, with all the emotions accompanying it – and *moving* scenes described in novels or presented on stage – could itself become a token of modernity and civilisation.⁴¹ Another way of saving face and simultaneously ennobling an own attempt at a modern narrative about ‘real’ love was to associate it with the Prophet Muḥammad and his praise of love as a token of humanity. In this way, a contemporary, ‘modern’ love story could be connected to Islamic humanism and likened to Prophetic *ḥadīth*, as an acknowledged form of factualist discourse about all aspects of human life, intimate feelings included.

While such and similar compromises with the aesthetics of traditional genres were usual, and apparently necessary,⁴² resulting in a constant dialogue

⁴⁰ Cf., e.g., the opening lines of Fénelon’s *Les aventures de Télémaque* (1695/96) and their renderings in the first Arabic and Ottoman ‘translations’, as compared to the original by Peled, 1979, and Özön (1936) 1985. The initial passage, consisting, in the French text, of short main clauses, 114 words in total, held in an almost colloquial language, is rendered in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s version (1859, printed 1867) by no less than 202 words and in a highly sophisticated *maqāma* style, with internal rhymes, rare words, semantic, syntactic, and/or morphological/rhythmic parallelisms, much paronomasia (*jinās/tajnīs*) and ‘phantastic etiology’ (*ḥusn al-ta’līl*). In a similar vein, Yūsuf Kāmil Paşa’s Ottoman version (1859), though with 121 words only slightly longer than the French original, nevertheless resembles the Arabic rendering in its highly sophisticated, ‘elitarian’ language – cf. Peled 1979, 141–6, and Özön (1936) 1985, 119. – Dino rightly remarks that, in the early stage of transition from premodern to modern literary language, a less embellished style would have been experienced by the unprepared reader almost as an offence to good taste; therefore, a writer/translator felt that “cette nudité, pour ainsi dire, du mot, il lui faut l’habiller, la rendre présentable à son public” – Dino 1960, 572–3. For a similar study of the development of early *Arabic* prose style, cf. Cachia 1990, 43–58. – For *maqāma* and *inshā’*, see above, pp. 135 (note 4) and 138 (with note 13), respectively.

⁴¹ On the role of ‘civilising emotions’, see the writings of Margrit Pernau, esp. Pernau 2019 and (for an introduction) Pernau and Jordheim 2015, 1–18. – Cf. also my own study, Guth 1997b (= Chapter 11 of the present volume).

⁴² Omri addresses as “resilient” those formal features of traditional genres that continue to assert themselves in spite of a normative pressure to modernise. In contrast, a corresponding tendency to negotiate form can be observed also on the other side, i.e., that of the traditional

with tradition (Omri 2008, 256), the main effort made by many authors to go beyond traditional love narratives, both elitist and popular, consisted in designing a *psychologically motivated* plot in which the emotions and affects of the protagonists were the main driving force. The authors' eagerness to do so can be explained, again, from the new relevance of the world and the worldly. The interest in the emotional-psychological logic of a 'real' love affair corresponds to the 'new worldliness' in that it focuses on the love-experiencing subject, who, like the beloved and love itself, forms part of the real world and is as such subject to the laws of nature, *causality* in particular, that govern this world. In this way the new narratives not only subject the characters in a story to the laws of real life, but also address the reader as an *animal rationale*, a fellow human being with a mind that seeks to *understand* and *explain* the world s/he is living in, asserting his subjective agency in its mental, intellectual aspects (*cognition, reason, critical analysis*).⁴³

genres themselves. While the modern genres try to be innovative but often (have to) 'give in' to the pressure of "resilient" norms, the old established genres, though regularly used to mark resistance against 'Westernisation', often (have to) make compromises in their turn and modernise in at least *some* respects. For the *maqāma*, for instance, a genre that remained strong and popular all over the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Omri describes the process of negotiation as a "partial story of resistance, compromise, and transformation" – Omri 2008, 246. On the changes in the *traditional* genres – all of which are, in my opinion, motivated by a wish of emerging subjectivity to assert and unfold itself –, cf., e.g., Elger, Masarwa, Reichmuth, Junge, etc. (as in n. 15); see also below, n. 55 and 56 (on the tendency to include more 'I' and more 'world', respectively). – However, if traditional elements are retained, this does not necessarily mean that it is done out of reverence for them; writers may also do it in the modus of parody, i.e., complying with norms while at the same time critically subverting them – Omri 2008, 249 – yet another indicator of the subject's intervention into the objective world. – On the challenges of modernity in general as a "trial", cf. El-Ariss 2013).

43 Cf. what has been said above about the '*cogito ergo sum*' component of emerging subjectivity, the new figure of the public intellectual, the longing for plausibility and verisimilitude, etc. Another result of the wish to assert oneself as a *thinking* subject is the prominence of *satire* in this period, both in the press (incl. cartoons) and in literature, where the narrator often marks his self-confident, superior rationality through biting satire. Linguistically, he can continue the old tradition of invective poetry here; but the function of invective has changed now: it no longer serves the purpose of contrastively praising one's tribe or a ruler etc., but mainly underlines the power of the ridiculing subject, i.e., the writer himself.

6.5 Choices to be made (II): The characters

In her brilliant analysis of Nâmık Kemâl's *İntibâh* (1876), Guzine (Güzin) Dino has described in some detail the challenges a modern Turkish writer had to cope with when trying to introduce into literary narrative the realism, rationality, and verisimilitude that fascinated him and his contemporaries so much in Western literature. We have seen above what this meant for the topic(s) that had to be chosen. But it had consequences for the choice of characters, too. For one, there was the idea of representation, of writing about 'the typical'. Moreover, psychological plausibility had to be achieved, especially due to the favourite love topic. This demanded from the writers not only a deep knowledge of the human psyche but also familiarity with techniques of *showing* the characters' traits and their emotions through their actions and in dialogues rather than simply listing and *describing* them, like in a scientific treatise. As in the case of the topic, authors here, too, had *something* to draw upon in the literary heritage, but only little, and available only in different genre contexts. Collections of proverbs (*amthâl*, pl.) and general life maxims could provide insight into patterns of human behaviour; animal fables often highlighted the consequences of certain character features, be they virtues (generosity, honesty, ambition, politeness, modesty, intelligence, understanding, wit, etc.) or vices (arrogance, greed, selfishness, laziness, lack of confidence, etc.); on some of these, extensive treatises or collections of sample episodes, like al-Jāhiz's famous "Book of the Misers" (*Kitāb al-Bukhalā'*), existed and could serve, to a certain extent, as references. So could also *ḥadīth* collections with their compilations about sayings and doings of the Prophet, often under categories of psychological relevance (motivation, intention), like piety, parental love, forbearance, pity, charity, or envy, hatefulness, negligence, disrespect, hubris, etc. However, none of these, like also the character stereotypes of the popular literary heritage, e.g., the *Karagöz* shadow plays, provided examples of *emotional complexity*; human beings did not appear in them as individual subjects but only as one-dimensional types, and their deeds, thoughts and feelings were subjected to moral normativity rather than psychological observation and explanation. Moreover, traditional Islamic 'psychology' showed interest in the self primarily as a site of spiritual perfectibility, where one has to make constant efforts to fight "the self that commands to evil" (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi'l-sū'*), a struggle that, according to a famous saying by the Prophet, is considered more demanding than armed combat and therefore called the Greater Jihad (as opposed to the Lesser Jihad in

physical confrontation with an enemy).⁴⁴ Autobiography in the modern sense had not developed yet,⁴⁵ due to authors' constant anxiety not to appear boastful and to be accused of hubris,⁴⁶ so that the agency of the subject in the world had for a long time remained an aspect to be treated, if ever, with great caution. In addition, "for a sense of the 'inner' self", a premodern reader "would have searched for evidence of intellectual, spiritual, or mystical experience and the cultivated expression of emotion in poetry",⁴⁷ i.e., in aspects that tolerated to be made public, not in the types of intimate, 'private' emotions that the new nineteenth century writers and readers were interested in. Like in Europe (as described by G. Lukács and N. Luhmann), the new genres were a site where the private became public – an effect the emerging middle class was, on the one hand, eager to achieve, due to their wish to assert themselves as a new player in politics and society; on the other hand, it implied the exposition of potentially embarrassing events, feelings, thoughts. Therefore, many early Middle Eastern novels built heavily, as did Nâmk Kemâl's *İntibâh*, on their authors' private life experiences as the richest, most reliable and most authentic source for designing the characters of the protagonists of the new narratives.⁴⁸ In contrast, the characters of other narrative personnel often remained rather schematic, close to the stereotypes of popular story-telling or the ideal types of erotic-mystical romances, etc.

6.6 Choices to be made (III): Space

Similar statements can be made, *mutatis mutandis*, about style and the 'furnishing' of literary space. As for style, we have already come across a telling example above.⁴⁹ Regarding literary space, practically no precedent in classical literature existed that would have described worldly space as an environment that formed the background, or setting, in relation to a subject's agency. Myriad descriptions of places in prose and poetry or travel literature notwithstanding, in premodern Middle Eastern literature space was generally not chosen and

⁴⁴ Article "Nafs" in Ali and Leaman 2008, 87–88.

⁴⁵ ... which is not to say that there hadn't been autobiographical *tendencies* or *elements* also in pre- and early nineteenth century writing (travelogues, *maqāmāt*, etc. – see again n. 15, above).

⁴⁶ Boullata 2001, review of Reynolds, ed. 2001.

⁴⁷ Reynolds, ed. 2001, 245.

⁴⁸ For autobiographical novels and the impact of the private/public dichotomy in society on the type of narrative, cf. my study, Guth 1998.

⁴⁹ See above, note 40.

designed from a holistic perspective, in relation to the actions or events, and usually spatial details did not play a decisive role. Theories of composition like the classical three Aristotelian units (action, time, place) were, as far as I can see, unknown to premodern Middle Eastern literary theory. In non-fictional texts, like travelogues and geographical literature, the description of places was, of course, the writers' major concern, so that modern fiction could draw on this⁵⁰ (perhaps also on the *waṣf* discipline of classical poetry⁵¹). In traditional fiction, however, space had generally been either idealised and symbolically loaded (like the typical 'garden' in Ottoman *divan* poetry, functioning as a marker of the space of the in-group, the Ottoman court elite, as opposed to the outsiders),⁵² or a site of amazing encounters and fantastic curiosities (exotic countries, often home to '*ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* 'strange creatures', etc.). None of these could provide a writer like Nâmık Kemâl with a model of how to realistically describe the places where his protagonists would fall in love, where they would meet, how the houses in which the characters lived should look like from inside, etc., and how such spaces should be described in relation to the respective events and agents. But it was exactly this, the interaction between acting subjects and the world around them that was at the centre of the modern way of story-telling that the writers aspired to. Where such a modern conception of space had made, and for a long time continued to make, itself felt in *traditional* genres, like travelogues or *maqāmāt*, these texts quite significantly began to take on *novelistic* features and are therefore often classified as 'precursors' of the novel.⁵³

50 Moreover, Ralf Elger has shown that larger parts of medieval travelogues may actually be 'fiction' rather than non-fiction and that 'lying' in such texts probably should not be regarded as malicious distortion of reality but "as a form of art" – see Elger 2010, 72.

51 On *waṣf* and its sub-genres (wine poems, hunting poems, etc.), cf., e.g., Saden 1998.

52 Cf. Andrews and Markoff 1987.

53 In addition to the works mentioned above (see esp. note 15), one may think of al-Shidyāq's *Sāq* (1855, see *ibid.*), 'Alī Mubārak's '*Ālam al-Dīn* (1881/82) or, of course, Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī's *Ḥadīth 'Isā b. Hishām* (orig. published serialized under the title *Fatra min al-zaman*, 1898 ff.). Sometimes, as in the case of 'Abdallāh Fikrī's *al-Maqāma al-fikriyya al-saniyya fī l-Mamlaka al-bāṭiniyya* (1872), the space 'traveled' to is the inner self, and we encounter a hybrid fusion of travelogue, *maqāma* style, and (quasi-mystical) self-exploration.

6.7 Choices to be made (IV): Temporality and the dynamics of the plot

The new centrality of the subject and its agency in the world was even more decisive in another respect. The emerging group of ‘subjects’ who were eager to assert their agency in politics and society, the new *efendiyya* middle class, or the ‘engineers’, as I like to call them,⁵⁴ not only sought to include ‘more world’⁵⁵ and ‘more I’⁵⁶ in their narratives through the description of realistic settings, characters, and feelings; and realism not only also meant rationalism, verisimilitude, *as-if* representation and, hence, causality. As already mentioned above, it also implied a new approach to *time*:⁵⁷ the world was no static world any longer, but a dynamic world where things changed and could be changed.⁵⁸ Nor was time progressing simply chronologically, with chronology and causality in it being nothing but an illusion while in reality it was God who was recreating the world in each single moment, so that the connection between individual moments was purely contingent on His will and benevolence and the ‘habitual’ logic and causality could always be interrupted (*kharq al-‘āda* ‘rupture with the

54 Due to their scientific approach to society as a ‘social structure’ (*hay’a ijtīmā’iyya*), functioning more or less mechanically and supposedly repairable like a broken car, or curable, like a patient, by a knowledgeable ‘doctor’.

55 The tendency to include ‘more world’ in one’s narratives can, by the way, be observed also in the neo-*maqāma*. While classical *maqāmāt* were about witty rogues, the many modern examples of the genre – “[t]here was hardly any significant writer of talent who did not try his hand at *maqām* writing” (Hafez 1993, 109) – had as their topics, among many other things, the French campaign in Egypt (Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭār, *Maqāmāt fī dukhūl al-Faransāwiyyīn...*, 1799/1800); the ignorance of the contemporary learned elite (A.F. al-Shidyāq, first *maqāma* in his *al-Sāq ‘alā ’l-sāq*, 1855 – see my study, Guth 2010a / Chapter 8, see n. 15), or a comparison of Cairo under colonial rule to the city as it was under Muḥammad ‘Alī (M. al-Muwayliḥī, *Ḥadīth ‘Īsā b. Hishām*, 1898–1900/1907); Bayram al-Tūnisī’s *maqāmāt* are not only written in the most worldly, ‘down-to-earth’ language, the Cairene vernacular, but also focus on ‘trivialities’ of the contemporary everyday life, like “socks, fish, sausages, telephones, automobiles, and so on” (Omri 2008, 258). – For general overviews, cf., e.g., Hafez 1993, 108–11, and Moosa 1997, 121–55.

56 For earlier attempts to highlight the agency of the subject from within the traditional genres inherited from premodern times, cf. above, note 15.

57 For a general introduction into the matter, cf., e.g., Fludernik 2010.

58 Indications of such a new approach to time may be detected, perhaps, with Victoria Holbrook, as early as in Sheikh Galib’s *Ḥüsn ü ‘Aşk* (Beauty and Love, 1783) which, according to Holbrook, displays a “congeniality between the poet’s embrace of a theory of perpetual creation and the sultan’s [i.e., Selim III’s] concern for progress and reform” – Atis 1996 (review of Holbrook 1994), 161–2.

habitually recurrent') if He so decreed.⁵⁹ Rather, similar to the temporalisation processes described by R. Koselleck as gaining momentum during the European *Sattelzeit*, the new time now had a direction – advancement/progress (*taqaddum*, often combined with a movement upwards: *taraqqī* 'rise, ascent', *nahḍa* 'rising, upswing') towards a better future,⁶⁰ it was moving from a past (of perceived *takhalluf* 'backwardness' and *inḥiṭāt* 'decay') towards an era of civilisation (*tamaddun*)⁶¹ –, achievable *in time* through the subject's agency (i.e., its causality),⁶² if sometimes with possible setbacks, delays and tragic failures (as natural parts of the very same temporalisation).

The *temporalisation* of the writers' world view can be observed in many fields. For instance, a lexicostatistic study of diachronic change in the frequency of Arabic lexemes revealed, for the late nineteenth / early twentieth century as compared to previous eras, a significant increase in the use of the temporal adverbs *qabla'idhin* 'previously, formerly, once, before that', *ba'da'idhin* 'then, thereafter, thereupon, afterwards', and *'inda'idhin* 'then, at that moment, thereupon'⁶³ – clear evidence of the fact that, obviously, time, especially the temporal relation between past, present, and future, had begun to gain more discursive attention. A similar tendency was noticed in a study on late nineteenth century Arabic dictionaries:⁶⁴ while dictionaries traditionally had a "panchronic"⁶⁵ approach to the vocabulary of the language, ideally compiling *all* the meanings a lexeme ever had taken during the past, conceived as a reservoir of quasi-

59 For the classical Islamic concept of time and causality, cf., e.g., ch. II, "The Completion of Occasionalism in the Teaching of al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935)", in Rudolph 2016, 354–357. – In the Ottoman Empire, Māturīdī theology with its emphasis on human reason and its belief in free (though God-created) will probably facilitated the transition to a modern worldview that focused on the human subject's agency and freedom of choice – thanks again to the reviewer who inspired this remark.

60 For corresponding key concepts in the European *Sattelzeit* ('saddle period'), cf. Koselleck 1985 (orig. 1979). Terminology was often calqued on the corresponding (mostly French) terminology – see the seminal studies by Monteil (1960), Stetkevych (1970) and Versteegh (1997/2001), expanded upon, with a focus on socio-political terminology, by Ayalon (1987), Lewis (1988), and Rebhan (1986); cf. also my own article, Guth 2021b / Chapter 3 (cf. note 62).

61 For "Time and the Structure of 'Civilisation' and 'Progress'", see in particular the subchapter of ch. 2 ("A Conceptual View of Arabic Modernity through Two Key Concepts, 'Civilisation' and 'Progress' (*Tamaddun* and *Taqaddum*)" in Abu-'Uksa 2016, 54–72.

62 For the significance of the grammatical form of conceptual terms, cf. above, Chapter 3 on "Morpho-Semantic Evidence of Emerging Subjectivity in the Language of the Nahḍa" (= Guth 2021b).

63 Zemánek and Milička 2017, 123–128.

64 Zachs and Dror 2020, 15–32.

65 Seidensticker 2008 (pr.)/2011 (online).

timeless semantic possibilities, suddenly, a philologist like Buṭrus al-Bustānī began to leave out, in his *Quṭr al-muḥīṭ* (1869), lexemes and meanings that had become obsolete by his time, a tendency he expanded upon in his monumental “Encyclopedia” (*Dā’irat al-ma’ārif*), apparently in a wish to transform Arabic into a *dynamic*, living language, relevant to the present and future, and to get rid of elements of the past to which the present world had lost connection. Temporalisation is also evident not only from the whole project of a *nahḍa* itself, which, by its very nature, is a project of *perfectibilité* and as such presupposes the possibility of change in time, but also from a genre like *utopia*. A study of some sample texts – appearing for the first time in exactly this period, certainly not by mere coincidence – shows a development of the utopian genre that resembles the one the genre had gone through in Europe: from initially merely spatial utopias (imagining secularised, i.e., worldly, though still unreachable ‘paradises’ located somewhere else, *allotopias*) to subjectivised and temporalised utopias (better worlds, achievable in a concrete future, by human agency).⁶⁶

Actually, however, there is no need to point to the rather specialised genre of utopia, since temporalisation is inherent already in *any* novelistic or dramatic plot. As the premodern Arabic theatrical performances of masked acts, clowning, acrobatics or hobby horse dancing had discontinued the classical Mediterranean Hellenistic tradition that had been present in the Middle East until Late Antiquity, to be replaced by a larger Asian tradition with rather different functions (entertainment, ridicule, acrobatic show-off, etc.),⁶⁷ Aristotle’s drama theory (with its unity of time/plot as a central pillar) was no longer remembered. Nor had ideas that would have been comparable to Aristotle’s played a role in traditional shadow theatre, the Turkish *orta oyunu*, or the Shi’ite passion plays (*ta’ziye*), so that ideas on dramatisation or dynamisation had not developed in these genres either. Similarly, for prose, no theory of time structuring in narrative plots existed. As an element of good entertainment, narrative suspense was of course appreciated; but it was so only intuitively, and suspense was often

⁶⁶ Cf. Hill 2020, and my own article, Guth 2021a (= Chapter 17 of the present volume). – In Europe, the temporalisation of utopia during which previously spatial-static models of a perfect order of things were assigned a place in the future and the *process* of creating such an ideal order came in the focus, was effected from the last third of the 18th century onwards – Voßkamp 1996, 1932. At this stage of the development of the utopian genre, attention shifted from *perfectio* (as in the static, spatial utopias, like Morus’s *Utopia*) to *perfectibilité* (as in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*) – *ibid.*, 1938. Significantly, *Robinson Crusoe* was among the first and most widely translated texts in the early modern Middle East, cf. Hill 2015.

⁶⁷ See Moreh 1992.

created only by way of accumulation (as in the *Arabian Nights*), i.e., by the insertion of new stories into a loose framework, with the aim of extending the time of narration, not by designing the sequence of the elements of the narrative from a *holistic* perspective in which each individual ‘building brick’ was *necessary* for the story to function *as a coherent whole* (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, catastrophe). Now, however, time had become a *dynamic* time, progressing not as a random sequence of moments and events, but as a causally motivated succession of elements that were interrelated by either necessity or probability.⁶⁸

However, despite this lack, or perhaps rather thanks to it, modernist Middle Eastern writers no doubt enjoyed the challenge of emplotment and being the masters of (narrative) time. It is well safe to assume, with Viktor Shklovsky, that the fictionalisation of the world and its casting in man-made plots with their own man-made causality and ‘subjective’ temporality produced a strong effect of defamiliarisation, “making strange” (*ostranénie*), as Shklovsky calls it;⁶⁹ it suspended traditional ways of looking at the world and drew the readers’ attention to the processes of change, in its many stages, in this way opening their minds for the idea of changeability, reformability itself, the possibility of re-engineering the present and paving the way for a better future – the real-world counterpart of the subject’s agency as imagined in fiction/drama.

As Dino’s sharp analysis of the challenges of designing a plot with regard to “action et structure” (ch. I) makes clear, the *as-if* presentation of the subject’s agency in the world was indeed something quite unfamiliar and strange to pre-modern Middle Eastern literature and had first to be experimented with, and tested out, by the authors, so that in this respect, too, change in literary aesthetics did not come abruptly, but was, and had to be, negotiated slowly, with the effect that ‘modern’ features often overlapped, in one and the same work, with ‘premodern’ ones, or that the works that have come down to us demonstrate their authors’ hesitation between conflicting narrative structures.⁷⁰ It is out of

68 Cf. modern definitions of a ‘plot’ as a cause-and-effect sequence of significant events in a given story – significant because they have important consequences.

69 First developed 1917 in an article entitled “Iskusstvo kak priëm”; English translation: Shklovskij 1965.

70 Cf., e.g., Baber Johansen’s analysis of M. Ḥ. Haykal’s *Zaynab* (1913) which demonstrates a conceptual split running through the Egyptian writer’s (highly autobiographical) novel, owing, with all probability, to a shift in the author’s attitude towards the countryside and the fellahen: while patriotism suggested a positive, rather ‘romantic’ description of life in the countryside, the longing for social progress rather demanded harsh criticism of several traditional, ‘backward’ customs – see Johansen 1967, 22–38.

question, however, that nevertheless, the writing of factualist fiction and the designing of corresponding plots must have granted the writers a high degree of satisfaction, not only because it allowed them to negotiate, in the disguise of symbolic representation, crucial aspects of their own lives and world-views, but also because the many choices they had to make for their plots assured them, in every moment of writing, of their own agency, freedom, and power – as *feeling* subjects; as *reasoning*, critically analysing, intellectual subjects who were finding ‘formulas for the world’; and as subjects who were capable of re-creating the world according to the choices they themselves made: *they* were the engineers who could find the general in the specific and decide who should feature in a symbolic representation of the world; what should happen, and how, and why, and what should be the consequences.⁷¹ Thus, for them, *emplotment* definitively meant experiencing a form of *empowerment*, of superior ‘control’ over this world.

⁷¹ Moretti has a darker view on the overlapping between modern and premodern features. For him, it is essentially a “faultline running between story and discourse, world and worldview: the world goes in the strange direction dictated by an outside power [sc., the colonizer]; the worldview tries to make sense of it, and is thrown off balance all the time” – Moretti 2000, 65.