

7 From water-carrying camels to modern storytellers

How *riwāya* came to mean [NOVEL]: a history of an encounter of concepts

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This chapter: The reader of the present volume will perhaps miss the term “emerging subjectivity” in the chapter below. This is due to the fact that it was written (as a chapter in another book) many years before I began to see the phenomena discussed here in the light of “emerging subjectivity” as an overarching principle, or underlying motor. On the surface level, the chapter is therefore nothing more than what it, originally, wanted to be: an in-depth investigation in the conceptional history of the Arabic term that today is equated with the English genre concept “novel” or, even more general, “fiction” : *riwāya*. However, the development described in this study – which is essentially the result of an encounter of an indigenous concept (called “*riwāya*”) and a foreign one (called “novel” in English, “*roman*” in French, etc.), and which shows a semantic shift, via several intermediate stages, from “(mostly oral) transmission” to “novel; fiction” – this development is without doubt analogous to that of *adab* as described in Chapters 4 and 6: it clearly shows a mutual rapprochement of the indigenous and foreign terms – a ‘*riwāyisation*’ of the imported concept and a concomitant ‘*novelisation*’ of the old inherited one. In the chapter, I identified the emerging middle-class, the *efendiyya*, as the agents behind this development, the newly emerged group of secular-educated intellectuals and *literati* (*udabā*) seeking to establish themselves as a social group between the old elites and the masses. From here, however, it is easy to link the described development up to emerging subjectivity, as the *efendiyya* is also the group in which emerging subjectivity as a virulent factor is most prominent and visible, and because also the ‘*novelisation*’ of *riwāya* can easily be seen as a special case of the ‘*literaturisation*’ of *adab*, which we saw was closely linked to the *udabā*, a sub-group of the *efendiyya*. And just as we were able to observe (in Chapter 5) a ‘realist turn’ where *adab* began to emphasize its reality reference, i.e., its relation to the world as the subject’s object, we will be able to observe a similar tendency also in the interplay between *riwāya* and other terms that could have been suitable candidates for rendering

the meaning “novel”, but never ‘made it’, due to the preponderance of the fantastic in their semantics. Thus, we will see that *riwāya* was the term that united in itself most of the key qualities that mattered for (the *efendiyya*’s) emerging subjectivity: reality-reference, emotionalism, and creativity.

It is not surprising, by the way, that much of what is discussed in the chapter below will remind the reader of the two (‘global’ but also Nahḍa-internal) phases mentioned in several chapters above: “Reproductionism” (with its emphasis on the power exerted on the subject by the givens of the world) and “Creativism” (with its underlining of the subject’s capability to transcend the existing order of things).¹

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7.1 Introduction: The history of a concept revisited

New aspects... and earlier research to build on

A reader familiar with research on modern Arabic literature may at first sight be surprised to find here an article to take up a subject which one would think has already been dealt with in almost every introduction to Middle Eastern literary history. Moreover, numerous books have been written about the development of the novelistic genre proper, most of which also dedicate considerable space to the Nahḍa period when, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the literary landscape began to change due to the emergence of a new educated elite, the sweeping success of the private printing press and, consequently, the steady growth of a new reading public. Aesthetics began to change, old genres had to compete with new ones, literary paradigms and tastes multiplied, diversified, gradually succeeded and replaced each other. Though probably all of these surveys and studies also drop a word or two about terminology, i.e., about the *words* used in Nahḍa literary discourses about the new genres – before they then go on talking just about “the novel” (resp. French “le roman”, German “der Roman”) – , there are others that display a heightened awareness of the linguistic processes accompanying these developments and at least for more than just a

¹ For “Reproductionism”, see introductions to Chapters 4 and 9 as well as (whole) sub-Chapter 18.3. For “Creativism”, see (briefly) end of introduction to Chapter 1 and (with more details and examples) Chapter 18.3.

short *en passant* remark focus on conceptual change. Among the studies of this kind which also pay attention to the semantic development of the old Arabic word which today signifies the genre concept of [NOVEL], *riwāya*, I should particularly mention Henri Pérès' "Le Roman, le conte et la nouvelle dans la littérature arabe moderne" (1937), Charles Vial's "Contribution à l'étude du roman et de la nouvelle en Égypte, des origines à 1960" (1967), Matti Moosa's *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction* (1970/1997), Roger Allen's "Narrative Genres and Nomenclature: A Comparative Study" (1992), Sabry Hafez's *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse* (1993), my own *Brückenschläge* (2003), as well as the *Histoire de la littérature arabe moderne* (ed. B. Hallaq, 2008); there is also an entry on "*riwāya*" in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., by Stefan Leder (1994).

So many so valuable investigations already being available, why then the present study? The main reason is that none of the above strictly follows chronology and none pays detailed attention to the conceptual changes the term *riwāya* undergoes from its first meeting with western generic concepts such as [NOVEL≡ROMAN], [DRAMA], or [SHORT STORY]² until the consolidation of the meaning it has today. Instead, when talking about "the novel" in the times of the Nahḍa, texts from various stages of this period are often dealt with as if they had appeared more or less simultaneously, and although translational studies like Carol Bardenstein's seminal monograph on Muḥammad 'Uthmān Jalāl (2005) were able to highlight the elements of "indigenous assertion" in the process of "Arabizing and Islamicizing the textual field",³ scientific discourse on the Nahḍa's literary landscape even now still tends to continue to use European terminology ("*novel*", "*roman*", "*Roman*"), thereby suggesting, as was common before Bardenstein, that what was to be found in the "renascent" literary field was, essentially, non-intrinsic, non-indigenous, namely the foreign concepts represented by the English, French, German terms today.⁴ In contrast, and much in the

2 Although it is often difficult to separate the meaning of a concept from the term itself, I will use SMALL CAPS in square brackets [] whenever I want to point to the *signified* whereas I use quotation marks " " to refer to, or focus on, the *signifier* aspect. The operator "≡" in [NOVEL≡ROMAN] is there to indicate the identity of meaning in the English and French concepts, [NOVEL] and [ROMAN].

3 Quotations taken from the book's subtitle resp. the heading of ch. 3, "Dressing French Texts in Arab Garb": Arabizing and Islamicizing the Textual Field", Bardenstein 2005, 39–98.

4 Studies in Arabic by Arab scholars are no exception in this regard – despite their use of *Arabic* terminology. The meaning of the terms however has changed in the meantime so that, e.g., 'Abd al-Muḥsin Ṭāhā Badr's *Taṭawwūr al-riwāya al-'arabiyya al-ḥadītha fī Miṣr* (1963) is in fact based on a post-Nahḍa understanding of the term, i.e., on "*riwāya*" = [NOVEL], not on everything that the term could mean in the late nineteenth / early twentieth century.

same vein as Carol Bardenstein, volume 1 (focussing on “1850-1950”) of the *Histoire de la littérature arabe moderne* (2008) refrains from using modern western terminology; instead, it describes the Nahḍa as a movement taking place in basically two modes – *iqtibās* and *iḥyāʾ*.⁵ Whereas previous studies, in using western terminology (“novel”, etc.), stressed, if not exclusively presupposed, the first mode, that of loaning, adoption, taking the “fire” (*qabas*) to ignite one’s own thought (*iqtibās*) from somebody else’s (the west’s) ideas, they neglected the other mode, expressed in the continuation of classical terms like *riwāya*, of continuing and “revitalizing” an own, indigenous tradition. We can therefore expect valuable new insights from a closer look at the chronology of the semantic history of the autochthonous term *riwāya*, combined with a more differentiated analysis of the term’s meaning with the help of tools provided by good old Koselleck’ian *Begriffsgeschichte* (history of concepts). Taking account also of the ‘*iḥyāʾ*’ factor’, this chapter will try to describe a *meeting* of concepts, both indigenous and foreign, the process of foreign genres crossing the borders and interacting in the new territory with autochthonous literary culture, hoping to clarify conceptual diffuseness through providing categories of differentiation borrowed from Koselleck, especially the notion of counter-concepts (*Gegenbegriffe*). This in turn will, I hope, also improve our understanding of the sociological ‘meaning’ of many aspects of the changing concepts.⁶

7.2 “*Riwāya*” before and in the early Nahḍa

Before the Nahḍa, as well as in its early stages (first half / mid-nineteenth century), there is no trace yet of the meanings the term was going to take on during the decades to follow. In particular, there is absolutely no indication in the sources that the term could be equated with “novel” or “roman”. Summarizing the use of the term in classical times, Leder gives as the basic meaning of *riwāya* the “transmission of poems, narratives, *ḥadīths*”, the “authorised transmission

5 Wehr/Cowan (1979), s.r. “*q-b-s*”: *iqtibās* = “learning, acquisition (of knowledge); loaning, loan, borrowing (fig.); adoption, taking over, acceptance, adaptation (of a literary text of passage); quotation, citation (of another’s literary work or ideas)”; (s.r. “*ḥ-y-y*”) *iḥyāʾ* = “animation, enlivening; revival, revitalization, revivification; [...]”.

6 The study was inspired by the ideas discussed on the workshop *West Reads East*, held in May 2009 in Berlin, on “Interdependent Hermeneutics of European and Middle Eastern Literatures”. It can also serve as an example of the kind of research done for my project of an etymological-conceptual dictionary of Arabic language and culture (*EDALC*, see <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/people/aca/middle-east-studies/tenured/guthst/etymarab.html>).

of books”, or “of a written text” in general, “through oral expression”; he adds that *riwāya* “may sometimes appear synonymous with *ḥikāya*” and that in classical Persian it is even used “in the sense of a *ḥadīth*” (Leder 1994). The fact that the underlying root *r-w-y* is associated with transporting and/or giving water to somebody or with the irrigation of plants, serves a classical dictionary like the *Tāj al-‘arūs* as a plausible etymology for the later metaphorical use: the idea of transmission of a *ḥadīth* or of poetry, al-Zabīdī says, derives from the original use of the verb *rawā* for camels or mules carrying water over a distance (Zabīdī [1774] 2001, vol. 38: s.r. “*r-w-y*”).⁷

The fact that Arab-European contacts intensified after the French invasion of Egypt and that Muḥammad ‘Alī initiated far-reaching reforms and started to build new institutions after western models obviously did not affect for a long time the linguistic domains where *riwāya* was in use. Thus, although Ellious Bocthor *does* include the lemma “roman” in his *Dictionnaire français-arabe* of 1826, he does not yet render it with “*riwāya*” but with “*ḥikāya*”, a term which he probably thought to fit best as an equivalent of “roman” because of the notions of fictionality and fabulosity attached to it (the *roman* itself still being quite a young genre at that time, he felt the need to explain it in brackets as “*récit fictif* [!]” and rendered the pertaining adjective *romanesque* – “*qui tient du roman, fabuleux* [!]” – with the Arabic “*mukharriḥ, bāṭil, ka-‘innahu kidhb*”, i.e., something foolish, futile, invalid, false, “as if it were a lie” – Bocthor 1826). Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, else a keen and curious observer of everything French on his study mission to Paris in the years 1826 to 1831, does not say anything about novels in his *Takhliṣ al-ibriz* (1834), which means that the existence of this kind of literature either slipped his attention – which would be rather surprising – or that he simply did not consider it worth mentioning. The only cultural phenomenon he shows an interest in is theatre, which he describes in some detail in the section on “The entertainments of Paris”⁸ (*muntazahāt madīnat Bārīs* = ch. III,7). He does not try, however, to

7 Roger Allen follows this and similar explanations when he states: “The Arabic word *riwāya* is a verbal noun derived from the verbal root *rawā*, an etymon with a very ancient history. The primary meaning of this root is ‘to convey water,’ and it was from that meaning that it came to imply ‘to bear in the memory/know by heart’” (Allen 1992a, 211). – In contrast, Orel and Stolbova think Arabic *rwy* can be associated with Old Egyptian (pyramid texts) *r3* “sentence, speech, language” and propose an Afroasiatic root **rV-/*rVw-* “speak” as the common origin of both OE *r3* and the hypothetical predecessor of Arabic *rwy*, Semitic **rūy-* “to render other person’s words”. As for the semantic complex related to [WATER], they suggest the etymology Arab *riway-* “abundant water” (together with Hebrew *rī* “moistening”) < Semitic **riw-/*riy-* < AfrAs **rūw-* “water”. Orel and Stolbova 1994, #2140 and #2142.

8 Translation follows Ṭaḥṭāwī/Newman 2004.

translate the French words used in this context – “*théâtre*” and “*spectacles*” – into Arabic but rather gives them in transliteration (*al-tiyātr*, *al-sbiktākl*) and confines himself to commenting that this kind of “games” or “plays” (*al-āb*), in which “all kinds of (real) events are staged” (*yul‘ab fihā taqlīd sār mā waqa‘a* – Ṭaḥṭāwī [1834] 1993, 208),⁹ are quite useful because of the moral lessons (*‘ibar*) that can be drawn out of them. So, even if they could seem to be merely light, joking amusement they are in fact to be taken serious (*fī l-ḥaqīqa ... hiya jidd fī šūrat hazl* – Ṭaḥṭāwī [1834] 1993, 208).¹⁰ As we shall see below, a quarter of a century later the standard term for theatrical pieces in Arabic will become “*riwāya*”; al-Ṭaḥṭāwī however does not yet relate the French genre to Arabic “*riwāya*”, and it is therefore highly probable that he does not yet see any connection between classical Arabic [RIWĀYA] and French [THEATRICAL PLAY], although the main argument for introducing theatre (and later also novels) into Arabic in the second half of the century will be this very same usefulness and closeness to reality which the Azhar shaykh already noticed (as we shall soon see below).

The Arabic term “*riwāya*” remains absent also two decades after al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s *Takhlīṣ* when Fāris al-Shidyāq publishes his *al-Sāq ‘alā l-sāq fī-mā huwa l-Fāryāq* (Paris 1855), a hybrid text in which the author displays his familiarity with all kinds of classical genres but at the same time ironically parodies them, thus showing a deep estrangement from them.¹¹ Although the *Sāq* has a number of novelistic elements¹² and although in literary histories it is often classified as a forerunner of the Arabic novel and sometimes actually even termed a “novel” (Al-Bagdadi 1999a, 391), the author himself does neither call it a “*riwāya*” nor use a non-Arabic expression in transliteration but rather speaks, in the subtitle, of *Ayyām wa-shuhūr wa-a‘wām fī ‘ajm al-‘arab wa-l-a‘jām*, adding to this characterisation also one in French: *La vie et les aventures de Fariac: Relation de ses voyages, avec ses observations critiques sur les arabes et sur les autres peuples*. It is the French “relation” that could be interesting for the semantic history of the word “*riwāya*” here. How would al-Shidyāq have rendered it in Arabic? Since he did not, we cannot know. But it is significant in itself that he did not use it but rather preferred to just speak of *ayyām wa-shuhūr wa-a‘wām*... “days, months and years...”.

⁹ On *taqlīd* in this context, cf. Schulze 1994.

¹⁰ On *jidd* and *hazl* cf. Pellat 1957.

¹¹ Cf., among many others, Zakharia 2005 and Guth 2010b.

¹² Rotraud Wielandt characterizes it as “ein Zwischending zwischen Reisebericht, autobiographischem Roman, Maqāmenparodie und lexikalischer Studie” (a blending of travel account, autobiographical novel, *maqāma* parody and lexicological study): Wielandt 1980, 73. The question of genre is explicitly addressed in Peled 1985.

More than a decade after al-Shidyāq's *Sāq*, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's rendering of Fénelon's *Aventures de Télémaque* is published as *Mawāqī' al-aflāk fī waqā'ī' Tilimāk* (1867). It is interesting to observe that the contents of the translation/adaptation is characterized by al-Ṭaḥṭāwī with a word – *waqā'ī'* “events” – pertaining to the very same verb that he used three decades earlier for the description of the theatrical plays he watched in Paris – *waqa'a* “to take place, to happen” –, thus stressing the ‘realism effect’ exerted by French theatre and the novel likewise. However, he does not yet connect this with the old Arabic term “*riwāya*”. Very much in line with this, E. W. Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon*, starting to appear the same year as al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's *Tilimāk*, does not give for “*riwāya*” any other meaning than the classical one: “A relation, or recital, &c. [...]” (vol. iii, s.r. “*r-w-y*”), and Buṭrus al-Bustānī's *Muḥīṭ al-muḥīṭ* of 1870 is even more conservative when it equates “*riwāya*” just with *naql* “transmission” (al-Bustānī 1870, s.r. “*r-w-y*”), in this way not going farther than al-Tahānawī in his *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn* of 1745 (al-Tahānawī [1745] 1862, s.r. “*r-w-y*”). Bocthor's entry, mentioned above, remains unchanged also in the dictionary's forth edition, “*revu et augmenté par A. Caus-sin de Perceval*”, of 1869 (Bocthor 1869, s.v. “*roman*”).

The dictionaries, however, are no longer up to date at that time, the late 1860s. Conservative as dictionaries of Arabic tend to be, they do not yet reflect the semantic changes the term “*riwāya*” had already undergone by the late 1850s, as we shall see now.

7.3 Semantic expansion during the Nahḍa

7.3.1 Reasons

The external reasons that lay behind the semantic expansion of classical terms like “*riwāya*” are well known and widely documented. From the late eighteenth century onwards, political and economic developments initiated the need for reforms, which were carried out all over the nineteenth and early twentieth century in almost all spheres of life and on several levels, resulting in profound cultural as well as social changes. Of the greatest relevance for the field of literature were the following factors:

- the increased and deepened contact with Europe that a group of educated Middle Easterners had on a number of study missions (the first of which headed by al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, see above) to European countries as well as through translations from European languages in a vast number of subjects;
- the establishment and steady expansion of a new secular educational system, parallel to the traditional religious one;

- the gradual replacement of traditional religious institutions with ‘modern’, European-style, secular ones (esp. in the judicial, administrative and educational sectors);
- the concomitant emergence of a new educated class, the secularized *efendiyya*, or the “engineers” as I like to call them because of their pragmatic approach to life and their view of society as a mechanical entity (*al-hay’a al-ijtimā’iyya*); in the Indian context, this group is usually called the “wogs” (an abbreviation for “westernized Oriental gentlemen”), because of their orientation towards Europe;
- the emergence of the printing press and, from the 1860s onwards, of private printing enterprises, conducted mostly by this group;
- the changes that occurred in the genre landscape as a result of the increased influx of European genres (drama and novel, later also short story) as well as the scripturalisation and printing of all kinds of ‘popular’ literature, previously not regarded worth serious attention.

The process taking place in the literary field both as a result and parallel to these developments starts with a change in aesthetic sensibility and, accordingly, also the emergence of new genre concepts. These concepts (and the respective terminology) are met by concepts and terminology coming from outside the Middle East (esp. France, later also England), and in this process both foreign and indigenous terms undergo modifications of meaning (if they survive the competition), and new terms may be coined. Thus, French *romans* and English novels were first read (and translated) without being called “*riwāyāt*”. But when the term “*riwāya*” eventually re-appeared, its meaning had already considerably expanded. In order to linguistically represent the new concept(s) behind these expansions, foreign terminology was only rarely used (if it was, it could have confusing effects, as we shall see below). Instead, the Nahḍa followed the method that had been applied most often in the past in similar cases since the times of the great translation movements of the early Abbasid era, namely that of the integration of new concepts into the indigenous system, i.e., Arabisation (*ta’rīb*), a technique of “indigenous assertion”, as Carol Bardenstein calls it (2005, title and passim). Integration into the indigenous system is however only possible because of overlaps in meaning of the old and the new concepts.

Before we ask *why* it was the classical term “*riwāya*” that was used to represent the new concept let us first look at the new meanings with which it reappears from the 1850s onwards.

7.3.2 The many facets of the modified concept

While dictionaries like Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon* (vol. iii: 1867) and al-Bustānī's *Muḥiṭ al-muḥiṭ* (1870) still perpetuate the classical meanings, the term "*riwāya*" had begun to be used nearly two decades earlier in Syria in order to denote *theatrical pieces* and later also *operas*. Cf. the following examples:

- As early as in 1850, the Syrian Mārūn al-Naqqāsh staged a play he called *Riwāyat Abū l-Ḥasan al-mughaffal*, aw: *Hārūn al-Rashīd*. It was the first of a series of hundreds of plays (labelled "*riwāyāt*") to follow, especially also those penned by Abū Khalīl al-Qabbānī (from 1898 onwards).
- In 1875, Salīm Kh. Naqqāsh translated Ghislanzoni's libretto of Verdi's opera *Aida* into Arabic as '*Ā'idah: trājida dhāt 5 fuṣūl*'. By 1914, Jurjī Zaydān still referred to this opera as "a *riwāya*" (Zaydān 1914, iv: 146).
- Around 1880, a certain Muḥammad al-Sikandarī al-Iyādī published a "*tash-khīṣiyya dhāt khamsat fuṣūl*" (5-act play) entitled *Riwāyat Abī l-futūḥ al-Malik al-Nāṣir* which Brockelmann characterizes as belonging "zu den frühesten dramatischen Versuchen" (Brockelmann 1942, *S III*: 266); according to Brockelmann, the extensive dialogues of this *riwāya* show an alteration of prose and longer lyrical passages and are interrupted, every now and then, by song couplets (ibid., 267).
- Starting from 1890, the Egyptian Muḥammad 'Uthmān Jalāl comes out with the first of a series of Arabized versions of plays by Molière (and others) under the title *al-Arba' riwāyāt min nakhb al-tiyātrāt*.
- The tradition initiated in the middle of the nineteenth century is continued with the staging (1920) and the publication (1922/3) of a "*ūbirā buff*" (opera buffa) entitled *Riwāyat al-'Ashara al-ṭayyiba*, a joint effort to which Muḥammad Taymūr contributed the main text, Badī' Khayrī the *zajal* couplets, and Sayyid Darwīsh composed the music (ibid., 272).
- A few years later (1927), *Riwāyat al-Malakayn* appeared, a 3-act opera with the libretto by Mārūn Ghuṣn and the music by Wadī' Ṣabrā. The subtitle specifies this *riwāya* as a "*maghnāt*" (or "*mughannāt*"?) (ibid., 389), i.e., something to be sung (*vgh-n-y*).

The term "*riwāya*" is however not only used for theatrical plays and operas but, from, roughly, the 1880s onwards, also for pieces of *prose narrative*. The first to use it for the new type of 'social romances' that came to be published in newspapers of the Levant seems to have been

- Nu'mān 'Abduh al-Qasāṭīlī with his *Riwāyat Anīs / Anīs wa-Anīsa* of 1881 or 1882.¹³ Others were shortly to follow:
- In 1884, Sa'īd al-Bustānī had presented his humorous description of Egyptian everyday life¹⁴ still not in plain prose, but cast his *Riwāyat Dhāt al-Khidr* into “Kunstpoesie” (Brockelmann (1938), S II: 723) (republished in 1904 with the same title); because of the predominance of the narrative element it is however more counted in line with the previous and the following here.
- Then, starting with *Riwāyat al-Mamlūk al-shārid* in 1891, Jurjī Zaydān applied the term “*riwāya*” also to the type of “historical novels” which he became the most prominent exponent of. The story of “The Fugitive Mamluk” was to be followed, up to the 1920s, by more than twenty similar *Riwāyāt tārikh al-Islām* (stories/novels from the history of Islam).
- In 1899, also one of the first women writers, Zaynab Fawwāz, called a socially critical text *Riwāyat Ḥusn al-‘awāqib*, aw: *Ghādat al-Zāhira* (“The *riwāya* of Good Consequences, or: The Maiden from [the village of] al-Zāhira”) (Booth 2010, 93).
- Time was ripe now, it seems, for a new translation of Fénelon’s *Télémaque*. It was Sa’d Allāh al-Bustānī who produced it around the year 1900 – and labelled it a “*riwāya*”. Thus, while al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s 1867 rendering of the French original spoke of “... *waqā’i’ Tilīmāk*” (what happened to *Télémaque*) in its rhymed title, it now suffices to call the text just *Riwāyat Tilīmāk*.
- al-Bustānī’s *Riwāyat Tilīmāk* was followed in 1902 by another translation/adaptation from a French novel, this time a more recent one: Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie*, rendered by Faraḥ Anṭūn as *Riwāyat Būlus wa-Firjīnī*.
- Other translations of foreign fiction termed “*riwāya*” included 1909 Ma’rūf al-Ruṣāfi’s *Riwāyat al-Ru’yā* (1909, from the Ottoman Turkish writer Nāmık Kemāl’s short prose piece *Rü’yâ* of 1887) as well as J. and Samuel Yanni’s *Riwāyat al-Bā’isīn* (1911/12, from Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*).
- Keeping abreast of (at least some of) the semantic changes which the term “*riwāya*” by then had undergone, Khalil Saadeh’s “new, practical and exhaustive English-Arabic dictionary” of 1911 eventually suggests Arabic “*riwāya*” (or, alternatively, “*qiṣṣa riwā’iyya*”) as a translation of English “novel” (Saadeh/Sa’āda 1911, s.v. “novel”).¹⁵ This is, to all my knowledge,

¹³ Moosa 1997, 430, gives “1881”, Hassan 2007, 200, has “1881/82”.

¹⁴ Pérès 1937, 315, no. 442, characterizes it as a “roman de mœurs égyptiennes”.

¹⁵ Cf. also the equations “novelette” = “*riwāya qaṣīra*”, and “novelist” = “*riwā’ī*” or “*mu’allif riwāyāt*”.

the first instance where a dictionary entry equates the old Arabic word with a new genre.¹⁶ From now on, the new genre – and with it the term “*riwāya*” in its modified, post-classical usage as [NARRATIVE PROSE] – seems to have definitely gained a place in the literary field; the fact that a writer like Maḥmūd Khalīl Rashīd initiated a whole series of *riwāyāt* (the “*Riwayāt of the Philosopher from the Countryside*”, *Riwayāt al-qarawī al-faylasūf*, 1916 ff.)¹⁷ seems to testify to this as well as the increasing number, in general, of series that were exclusively dedicated to popular prose fiction and had the words “*riwāya*”, “*rāwī*” or “*riwāʾī*” in their titles. Here are some examples (unless stated otherwise, all based in Cairo; * = founded in year): *Muntakhabāt al-riwāyāt* (*1894), *Silsilat al-riwāyāt* (*1899, and again 1909-), *Majallat al-riwāyāt al-shahriyya* (*1902), *Silsilat al-riwāyāt al-ʿuthmāniyya* (*1908, Ṭanṭā), *Ḥaḳīqat al-riwāyāt* (*1909), *al-Rāwī* (*1909, Beirut; continued after 1910 in Cairo), *al-Riwayāt al-jadīda* (*1910), *al-Riwayāt al-kubrā* (*1914), *Majallat al-riwāyāt al-muṣawwara* (*1921) and its supplement *al-Nadīm al-riwāʾī* (*1922).¹⁸

In addition to [DRAMA], [OPERA], and [NOVEL], “*riwāya*” was also used, from the late 1890s onwards, though very sporadically only, for what in today’s generic classification would be termed *history*, *biography*, or *autobiography*. There are, for example,

- Nikola Elias’s *Riwayāt Ḥarb al-ʿUthmān maʿa l-Yūnān* (1897) and Muḥammad Tawfīq al-Azhari’s *Riwayāt Anbāʾ al-zamān fī ḥarb al-dawla wa-l-Yūnān* (1898), both telling the history of the Ottoman-Greek war of 1897 (“Thirty Days’ War”) (Brockelmann 1949, II: 483 [634-5]). And there are also a number of

¹⁶ This equation is, however, still not to be taken without caution since Saadeh/Saʿāda’s dictionary is not meant to reflect the actual contemporary use of words but as the author’s own suggestions of Arabic terms for European ones which according to his view had to be Arabized, “with the view of giving the English language a much wider scope in the East than it has hitherto had, and of raising Arabic into the dignity of a scientific language”. And the dictionary’s long subtitle continues to explain: “To attain these two objects, the Author has coined new Arabic terms, in order to give Arabic equivalents for English words in all the departments of science, art and literature, to meet the requirements of the modern students of both languages”.

¹⁷ The first title in the series was *Ḥabāʾil al-shayṭān*, see Brockelmann 1942, S III: 277, and before him Pérès 1937, 327, no. 600.

¹⁸ Pérès 1937, 269–70, based on Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt, *Tārīkh al-ʿadab al-ʿarabī*, 6th edn (Cairo 1935).

- diaries, most often called “*yawmiyyāt*” or “*i’tirāfāt*” (confessions), but sometimes also “*riwāyāt*”.¹⁹ From a today’s perspective, the situation becomes even more complex after c. 1910 when the pieces of literature termed “*riwāya*” begin to include the *results of ‘genre crossings’* that occurred in the process of ‘translating’ European literature into Arabic. For a modern observer who looks at the phenomena a century *post eventum*, the transformation of a prose piece into verses or of a drama into narrative prose seems to be a major generic modification. For the contemporaries, however, it obviously was not a big affair. The fact that, e.g.,
- Wadī’ al-Khūrī who in 1912 produced a *versified* version of Fénelon’s novel *Télémaque*, chose to call it *Riwāyat Tilimāk*, seems to indicate that he did not really experience a major ‘genre crossing’.
- Nor was it a big affair in 1920 for Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī to render a French drama (François Coppée’s *Pour la couronne*) into *narrative prose* without changing the basic generic label. The fact that he allowed himself to “dispose freely” over the original in some places (“*ma’a ba’d taṣarruf*”, as the subtitle has it) made him specify that his “*récit romancé*” (Pères 1937, 293 no. 196) *Riwāyat Fī sabīl al-tāj* contained the quintessence (*khulāṣa*) of an original *riwāya tamthiliyya*, i.e., a theatrical *riwāya*.²⁰ In al-Manfalūṭī’s differentiation, unspectacular as it may seem, between *riwāya* and *riwāya tamthiliyya*, a tendency makes itself felt that can be interpreted as the last-but-one stage in the semantic development of the term “*riwāya*” before its eventual ‘collapse’, the stage in which a classical term into which new meanings have been stuffed over a period of several decades, has become overloaded to the extent that in order to remain functional/meaningful as a generic term at all, it has to be *followed by specifying attributes*. When the language community gets annoyed with attaching attributes to the term in order to allow for terminological precision and diversity, the next and (for then) ‘final’ stage, that of terminological consolidation, will be reached. But let us first have a look at the diversity that was the result of the incorporation of new semantic aspects into the term “*riwāya*”:
- In 1912, Jurjī Zaydān gives his novel *Fatāt al-Qayrawān* the subtitle “*riwāya tārikhiyya gharāmiyya*” (an historical *riwāya* with a love story).
- In 1914, Mārūn al-Naqqāsh calls his 5-act play *al-Bakhīl* (inspired by Molière’s *L’Avare*) a “*riwāya muḍḥika mulahḥana*” (a comical *riwāya* with music).

¹⁹ For the fictional ones among these cf. Häusler 1990.

²⁰ Full title: *Riwāyat Fī sabīl al-tāj, wa-hiya khulāṣat riwāya tamthiliyya bi-hādhā l-ism lil-kātib al-firansī al-shahīr François Coppée ma’a ba’d taṣarruf*.

- When, in 1918, Muḥammad Taymūr's *Riwāyat 'Abd al-Sattār Afandī* is staged, and when it is published in 1922/23, the author specifies this 4-act *riwāya* as a “*kūmidī miṣriyya akhlāqiyya*” (a comedy on Egyptian manners).
- 'Īsā 'Ubayd, in the famous “Muqaddima” to his collection of short stories, *Iḥsān Hānim* (1921), a programmatic essay on the project of a ‘national literature’ (*adab qawmī*), refers to his colleague Muḥammad Taymūr's plays as *al-riwāyāt al-qaṣaṣiyya al-marsaḥiyya* (*riwāyāt* that put a story on stage) – ‘Ubayd (1921), *‘ayn* [= xvi].²¹ Elsewhere in the “Muqaddima”, he talks about “our *riwāyāt*, be they *qaṣaṣiyya* or *marsaḥiyya*” (narratives or put on stage; *ibid.*, *mīm* [= xiii]).
- A year later (1922), the Lebanese Mishal al-Ḥā'ik comes out with the patriotic play *Baṭal Lubnān Yahyā Bek Karam* simply termed a *riwāya tamthiliyya* (a theatrical *riwāya*) in the subtitle (Brockelmann 1942, S III:416).
- Asmā al-Tūbī's *riwāya* about the killing of the Russian tsar and his family (*Riwāyat Maṣra' qayṣar Rūsīyya wa-‘ā'īlatih*, 1925) is characterized as “*ma'sāt tārikhiyya adabiyya*” (an edifying [?]²² historical tragedy).
- The *Riwāyat Laylā wa-Samīr* of 1927 by the Iraqi poet Jamīl Ṣidqī al-Zahāwī, the title of which seems to suggest a popular love story, is actually a “drame ottoman constitutionnel”.²³
- Wadī' Abī Fāḍil's *Riwāyat al-Mutawālī al-ṣāliḥ* (1927) is a “*qiṣṣa adabiyya tārikhiyya*” (an edifying [?]²⁴ historical story).
- What Brockelmann (1942), S III: 232, describes as “10 Novellen” has been given the title *al-Riwāyāt al-qiṣaṣiyya* by their author, Aḥmad Mukhtār, in 1927.
- In a last, and late, example, *riwāya* has even three specifying attributes: “*riwāya tamthiliyya tārikhiyya shi'riyya*” (a versified historical theatrical *riwāya*) is the subtitle of Naṣīm Mallūl's *Riwāyat Shahāmat al-‘arab*, *aw: al-Samaw'al wa-‘mru' al-Qays* (*Riwāya* on the Arabs' noble-mindedness, or: [the two poets] al-Samaw'al and Imru' al-Qays, 1928).

The semantic expansion that the term undergoes during the Nahḍa can be visualized in the following summarizing scheme:

²¹ [= Chapter 12 in the present volume.]

²² For the many possible notions expressed in the concept of *adab*, cf. Guth 2010b.

²³ Brockelmann 1942, S III: 487, is very critical about the piece when he writes: “Das Stück, das sich wie herausgerissene Szenen aus einem sehr schwachen Roman liest, zeigt nirgends auch nur einen Ansatz zu dramatischem Leben. Die Charakteristik der Personen bleibt ganz blass.”

²⁴ See fn. 22 above.

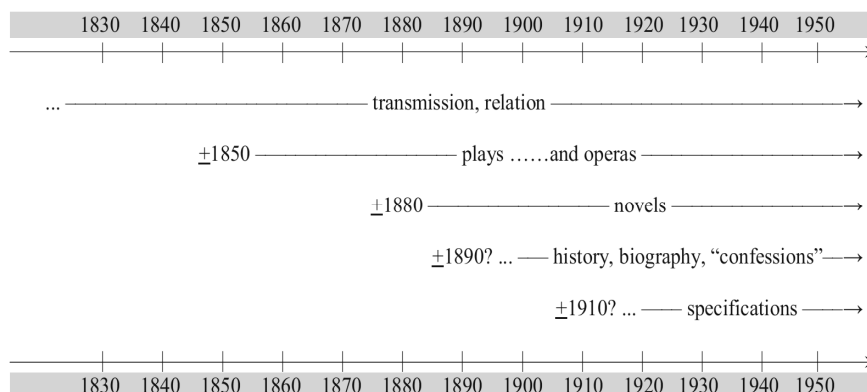


Fig. 1: Semantic expansion of "riwāya" during the Nahḍa

7.4 *Riwāya* in a changing genre landscape: Competitors in the field

7.4.1 The place of [RĪWĀYA] in the system of genres

Before we turn to the question what could be the common denominator in all this variety we first have to give attention to 'the other side of the coin', i.e., to the rest of the system of genres which "*riwāya*" is only one aspect of, though a very important one. This is necessary because in a generic system, each single genre – a concept – receives its specific identity only in relation to the others. The semantic expansion of the term "*riwāya*" described above must therefore have had an effect on the remaining genre landscape and/or in its turn been the result of changes that had occurred there. We will therefore have to look both at European terms used, if ever, simultaneously with "*riwāya*" as well as at other indigenous terms against which "*riwāya*" probably was profiled and which in their turn were profiled against "*riwāya*" and the European terms.

But is this feasible? The advent of the printing press and the establishment of private publishing enterprises in the second half of the nineteenth century flooded the market with such an immense amount of new texts of various types

that the terminological variety is almost overwhelming, as is evident from a quick glance at Fig. 2 (in which I only gathered the most current types/terms).²⁵

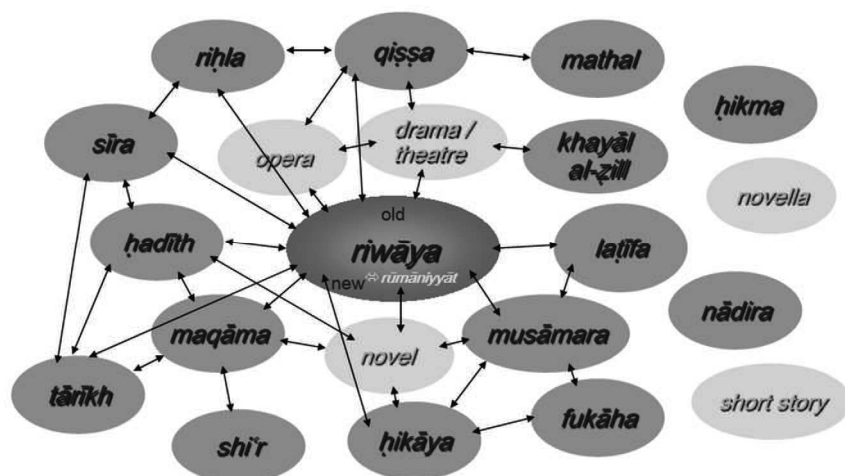


Fig. 2: Semantic relations among most current generic terms during the Nahḍa

Having to profile the meaning of *riwāya* against this huge variety of terms, will we have to check them all then, and also the ways in which they are related among each other? An almost unachievable task, given what Charles Pellat rightly remarked already in 1966 in his entry on “Ḥikāya” in *EF* after an overview of early Islamic narrative genres:

In fact the diversity of the words used in the first centuries of Islam would seem to indicate that tales, legends and stories of all kinds were in vogue and that they were distinguished from one another with great precision; on the other hand, each of them through the centuries has undergone an evolution distinctive enough to merit a special article.

(Pellat 1966)

Our task however is not as difficult to fulfil as it may seem at first sight. Luckily, there has come upon us an article from the pen of a most attentive but also very critical observer of his times, the *shaykh* Muḥammad ‘Abduh, and this document

²⁵ For a detailed survey, with further references, cf. my *Brückenschläge* = Guth 2003b, esp. 169–73, 180–85, and 192–94, as well as ‘Abdel-Meguid 1994.

will allow us to take a short-cut.²⁶ In 1881 – that is, roughly about the time when “*riwāya*”, according to the above scheme (Fig. 1), began to include texts which from our modern perspective usually are called “novels” – ‘Abduh registers, in a rough survey of the book market prompted by the appearance of the Arabic translation of a French novel,²⁷ the contemporary reading public’s increased fascination with three types of books: a) works on history (*tārīkh*), b) moralist stories (*al-akhlāq al-‘aqliyya*), and c) a genre he calls “*rūmāniyyāt*” (‘Abduh 1881, 154), a term obviously coined from French *roman* (or *romance*?).²⁸ Interestingly enough, this category for him does not only comprise that newly translated novel(la) as well as Fénelon’s *Télémaque* but also Ibn al-Muqaffa’s (d. 755 or 756) *Kalīla wa-Dimna*²⁹ and two titles by Ibn ‘Arabshāh (1392-1450), *Fākihāt al-khulafā’* and *Marzubānnāma*.³⁰ This means that while the classical term “*riwāya*” is beginning to incorporate modern-type novels, a modern generic term loaned from French is made to include texts from the classical *adab* tradition – there is definitely movement in the genre landscape!

²⁶ The article has been noticed by others before. But its richness in interesting observations has, in my opinion, not yet been exploited sufficiently. Cf. Pérès 1937, 267, 270; Brugman 1984, 205; Cachia 1990, 35; Allen 1992a, 212 (fn. 11); Hafez 1993, 110.

²⁷ Pierre Zaccone’s (1817–1895) feuilleton novel/novelette *Une Vengeance anglaise* (1878), translated into Arabic as *al-Intiqām* by Salim al-Naqqāsh and Adīb Ishāq in 1880. According to Pérès, this short novel was “le premier roman français dont l’influence se [fais]ait réellement sentir sur le public lettré de l’Egypte” – Pérès 1937, 267; cf. also *ibid.*, 308, no. 354.

²⁸ The appearance of the French word in Arabic seems to coincide with its emergence in (Ottoman) Turkish. While one looks in vain for the Turkish term *rōmān* in Aḥmed Vefik Paşa’s Ottoman dictionary, *Lehce-i ‘Osmānī*, of 1876, it is only four years later, in 1880, that the prolific writer Aḥmed Midḥat uses *rōmān* as if it was a long-established term. Cf. my *Brückenschläge* = Guth 2003b, 193 (with fn. 119 and 120) and 283 (with fn. 490).

²⁹ Originally “an Indian mirror for princes” that was “translated from Sanskrit into Pahlavi and thence into Arabic” – Brockelmann 1993, 694.

³⁰ *Fākihāt al-khulafā’ wa-mufākahāt al-ẓurafā’* (Fruits of the Caliphs and Jokes of the Witty, 1448): edited as *Liber Arabicus sive Fructus Imperatorum et Jocatio ingeniosorum* by Gustav Freytag, Bonn 1832, 1852. *Marzubānnāma*: Brockelmann, in the first edn of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (see previous fn.), mentions this title under the heading “Imitations of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*”. Ibn ‘Arabshāh’s Arabic version is probably based on a rendering into Ottoman Turkish (or Persian?) by a certain al-Warāwīnī, which was “composed between 607 and 633 (1210–1225)” and “enjoyed great[.] popularity.” al-Warāwīnī’s text seems to be in turn the translation of a “mirror for princes in which historic anecdotes are mingled with beast-fables for the edification of the reader” which “was composed about the end of the fourth century A.H. by the prince of Ṭabaristān, Ispahbadh Marzubān in the Persian dialect of his land” but has itself “not survived” (op.cit. in previous fn.: 698). Cf. also Walther 2004, 187–88.

An indication of this movement is also the clear overlapping of ‘Abduh’s classification of “*rūmāniyyāt*” with the characteristics of texts that otherwise, as we have seen, are termed “*riwāyāt*”. It is true that, according to the *shaykh*, “*rūmāniyyāt*” are not identical with history (*tārikh*) and ethics (*akhlāq*), two terms which a few years later appear as possible specifications also of “*riwāya*” (cf. *r. tārikhiyya* and *r. akhlāqiyya*, mentioned above); but they can already be seen together with *tārikh* and *akhlāq* in one group, the popular “*kutub adabiyya*” (education and formation of the self, *Bildung*), because all three aim at “enlightening the minds and refining the manners/morals” (*tanwīr al-afkār wa-tahdhīb al-akhlāq*). Significantly, ‘Abduh does not explicitly mention for his “*rūmāniyyāt*” a number of qualities that have become optional for the new “*riwāya*”, such as being performed on stage (*riwāya tamthiliyya / marsahiyya*); with musical elements or completely as an opera (*riwāya mulaḥḥana*), or without music at all; in plain narrative prose (*riwāya qishaṣiyya*), with some verses, or wholly versified (*riwāya shi’riyya*); comical or tragical (*riwāya muḍḥika – kūmidī*, resp. *ma’sāt – trājidī*); and mostly including a love story (*riwāya gharāmiyya*). What is important for him is that the *rūmāniyyāt*, like the books on history and ethics, are “created to serve noble purposes” (*mukhtara’a li-maqṣad jalīl*), among which he mentions the instruction in *adab*, that is, in a general humanism,³¹ which includes the “call for virtuous actions and the deterrence from vices” (*al-ḥathth ‘alā l-faḍā’il wa-l-tanfīr min al-radḥā’il*), but may also be accomplished via informing the readership about the present and past “conditions” of one’s own and other “nations” (*bayān aḥwāl al-umam*). In this way, ‘Abduh’s *rūmāniyyāt* converge with the nationalist and ethical/edificational *riwāyāt* (cf. the sub-genres *r. miṣriyya* and *r. adabiyya* listed above).

It is, therefore, rather safe to assume that the ever-advancing intersection of western and eastern cultures and literary traditions during the nineteenth century caused the conceptual boundaries of both terms, *roman* and *riwāya*, to become increasingly blurred in the Arabic-speaking world, producing for some time a mixed concept. This mixed concept – we may call it [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT] – could be referred to by contemporaries as either “*rūmāniyyāt*” or “*riwāyāt*” or with other terms that had already been somehow ‘absorbed’ in the meantime by “*riwāya*” as a superordinate term. It is this blurring of boundaries that made it possible for a writer like Jamīl Mikhā’il (Nakhlah) Mudawwar to translate, for instance, in 1884, Alain-René Lesage’s (1668–1747) picaresque novel *Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane* (4 vols., 1715–35) under the decorative rhyming title of *Tasliyat al-*

31 For the equation of “*adab*” and “humanism”, cf. my etymologico-conceptual study “Politeness, Höflichkeit, ‘*adab*’, i.e., Guth 2010b.

ikhwān fī waqāʿi ʿJilblās Santilān (The Entertainment of Our [lit. the] Brothers, or: What happened to Gil Blas of Santillane), in this way letting the reader expect a piece in the manner of classical *adab*, probably in rhymed prose (*sajʿ*), but in reality presenting a text in plain, rather inornate, unembellished prose that, according to the hero's own words in an introductory paragraph, tells the "history of my life" (Lesage: *l'histoire de ma vie*, Mudawwar: *al-ḥawādith allatī waqaʿat li* ³²), marking the – fictitious, but pretendedly real – account, for the Arab reader, as belonging to the category of autobiography, i.e., history (cf. the Arabic words *ḥawādith*, sg. *ḥāditha* "event", and *waqaʿa* "to take place, happen").

Muḥammad ʿAbduh's survey is indeed worth a closer look because it allows us to find out something about the place the new mixed genre of [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT], according to him, had in the literary landscape, as well as about the categories that served a contemporary critic like him to demarcate genres against each other. In this system, the three most popular types of books just mentioned (*tārīkh*, *akhlāq*, *rūmāniyyāt*) together form only *one* of five major categories, that of *adab* (cf. ʿAbduh 1881, 154–5). Thus, the *kutub adabiyya* are set apart from four other categories, and if we consider these to be, in a way, their counter-concepts,³³ a clearer idea of what the new genre was may emerge *ex negativo*, i.e., some features of the [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT] can be inferred from what they obviously are *not*. As *kutub adabiyya*, the *rūmāniyyāt* are distinguished from

(1) *al-kutub al-naqliyya al-dīniyya* "the books of the transmission of religious tradition (s)". Although these too are described as widespread, both in printed and handcopied form, the *rūmāniyyāt* have nothing to do with them. They *rūmāniyyāt* have to be thought of, then, as something more worldly, perhaps even secular.

(2) As *kutub adabiyya*, the *rūmāniyyāt* are also different from *al-kutub al-ʿaqliyya al-ḥikamiyya*,³⁴ which means that their primary feature is *not* the concern with the big philosophical questions of our existence (*al-ḥaqāʾiq al-wujūdiyya*) addressed by these books. The *kutub ʿaqliyya ḥikamiyya* are characterized as being very rare, there exist only a few prints, some handwritten copies, and some foreign editions. Given the fact that they also are quite expensive, they

³² Beginning of ch. "Gil Blas au lecteur", <<http://abu.cnam.fr/cgi-bin/go?gilblas1>> (accessed Feb. 10, 2011), or Vreeland 1900, 1, resp. Mudawwar 1884, 1.

³³ The idea of "counter-concepts" (Gegenbegriffe) as co-constituting the semantics of a given concept is central to Koselleckian *Begriffsgeschichte*. Cf., e.g., Andersen 2003, 38–43.

³⁴ I am not sure if الحكمة should be read as *al-ḥikmiyya* (nisba of *ḥikma*, lexicalised as "gnomic, aphoristic, expressing maxims" – Wehr/Cowan 1979, 229, or, as preferred here, as *al-ḥikamiyya* (nisba of the plural of *ḥikma*, *ḥikam* "wisdoms, sagacity"). A reading as *al-ḥukmiyya* "legal" can be excluded because of ʿAbduh's further explanation, see above.

are bought and read only by “less than a few” people. For the *kutub adabiyya* and, among them, the *rūmāniyyāt*, this probably means that they are less elitist because they do not so much rely on logic, the intellect, rationality, and wisdom, but rather allow more ‘trivial’ things and emotion to play a greater role.

(3) Our *rūmāniyyāt* are however also demarcated against *kutub al-akādhīb al-ṣirfa* “the books of pure lies”. With this term, ‘Abduh mainly denotes invented history (*tārīkh aqwām ‘alā ghayr al-wāqī* “peoples’ history not based on – i.e., devoid of – reality”) which, he deplores, often also tends to be written in a bad, ungrammatical language (*bi-‘ibāra sakhifa mukhilla bi-qawānīn al-lughā*). As examples he mentions, among others, the popular epics (*siyar*, “Volksromane”) of *Abū Zayd al-Hilālī* and *al-Zāhir Baybars*. *Rūmāniyyāt* and other *adab* books, we may infer, have a closer relation to reality and a substantial connection to real history, are written in a ‘higher’, not all too popular, or at least a correct language, and even though they too have quite a broad readership, they are probably not as ubiquitous on the market as the “mendacious books” about which ‘Abduh says that they are “more than many”, that there exist many printings and that they even get quickly reprinted as soon as they are sold out.

(4) From the moralist perspective ‘Abduh takes, another category of books is as dangerous for the youth and therefore as condemnable as the *kutub al-akādhīb al-ṣirfa*, namely those of “superstitious beliefs”, *kutub al-khurāfāt*. Under this heading, the *shaykh* gives a long list of works, among which figure, in the first place, books that “try to establish a relation between man and evil spirits”, or ghosts, try to explain the weather as the result of the activity of irrational forces, and so on. According to ‘Abduh, these books, too, are deplorably popular and, like the *kutub al-akādhīb al-ṣirfa*, can be printed and reprinted very easily because they neither touch politics nor religious issues. The conclusion we have to draw from this characterisation for the *rūmāniyyāt* is similar to the previous one: the *rūmāniyyāt* must be something much more rational and down-to-earth than the works of this category, and they are by far not as dangerous for the youth as these.

(5) Within the category of *adab* books itself, the *rūmāniyyāt* form a sub-category on equal terms with history (*tārīkh*) and ethics (*akhlāq*). As already mentioned above, all three have the same aim of *tanwīr al-afkār wa-tahdhīb al-akhlāq* (“enlightening the minds and refining the manners/morals”), but they are distinct sub-categories nevertheless. ‘Abduh remains silent about the exact differences between them, but given the fact that the *rūmāniyyāt* can contain elements, or may also have the qualities, of both history and ethics, we may well infer that *tārīkh* is used only for pure history and *akhlāq* only for moralist stories in a strict,

narrow sense, while the *rūmāniyyāt* can be history and/or moral refinement *mixed with an 'element x'*.

Thus, the criteria according to which genres (“types of books”, in ‘Abduh’s words) are demarcated here against each other are:

- hand-written or printed vs. oral (an implicit distinction, since ‘Abduh talks about books only)
- having a narrow circle/elite of readers vs. wide distribution, popularity
- religious vs. non-religious
- rational, intellectual vs. less demanding with respect to rational/intellectual capacities
- written in correct language vs. not caring about corrupted (“bad”) Arabic
- referring to reality (factual) vs. (purely) fantastic, imagined, invented
- useful (historical knowledge, moral refinement) vs. dangerous for the youth (esp. because of superstitious beliefs).

Before we continue trying to assign the new concept of [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT] its place in the contemporary genre landscape, it may be useful to ask, in the light of the semantic development of “*riwāya*” described in 7.3. above, what are the common denominators of the classical term “*riwāya*” and the term as it is used from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. In this way we can expect to find additional criteria that can supplement the results of the analysis of ‘Abduh’s survey and will thus give further hints as to the question of the nature and function of the new genre as well as make the merging of classical Arabic and new European genre concepts into the [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT] genre more plausible.

7.4.2 Why is the new concept called “*riwāya*”? Common denominators in [RIWĀYA]^{OLD} and [RIWĀYA]^{NEW}

Roger Allen already notes that “*riwāya*” in origin implied *orality*, and he adds that this is “something which may perhaps make the adoption of the word in the earliest periods of the development of modern Arabic drama [...] more than a little appropriate” (Allen 1992a, 209). However, it was probably not only orality in itself, i.e.,

the fact that in theatre, too, a memorized text was “*transmitted [orally], related, recited, or rehearsed*”,³⁵ which let the old term seem appropriate to incorporate the new notion of theatre productions. For associated with orality proper were still other aspects which equally matched the new genre(s), such as *naturalness* (as opposed to the artificiality of written texts) and *reliability* (oral transmission was traditionally held in high esteem,³⁶ and although, e.g., the Prophet’s tradition can be found in books, all *ḥadīth* collections imitate, in their *isnāds*, a situation of basically oral transmission).³⁷ Through the close association with *isnād* and *ḥadīth*, “*riwāya*” further participated in the prestige of *learnedness* and a highly respected *science*.³⁸ Together with this prestige, the new “*riwāya*” could hence inherit the old term’s aura of *verifiability*, *trustworthiness*, and *respectability*.

On the other hand, the texts that were transmitted orally through *riwāya*, from an early time on used to be *written* texts³⁹ and as such enjoyed a *higher prestige* than other cultural products, expressed through the medium of language, that were not deemed worth to be written down, esp. the ‘trivialities’ of the cultures of the masses. Not only orality, therefore, was an important aspect in [RIWĀYA]^{OLD} as well as in [RIWĀYA]^{NEW}, but rather the terms’ oscillation between the oral *and* the written, its bridging between the two.

35 My wording here reflects the *r-w-y* entry in Lane 1867, vol. iii:1194 (italics as well as square brackets are Lane’s).

36 Cf. Leder 1994 who points to “the great value attached to oral testimony, which is hard to understand for outsiders and which is most characteristic of Islamic scholarship”.

37 The meaning of reliability attached to “*riwāya*” did of course not remain restricted to early theatrical *riwāyāt* but could easily be inherited by later mutations, particularly historical *riwāyāt*. For several decades, their writers do not become tired of insisting on the reliability, despite the light, entertaining mode of narration, of the historical facts presented in their texts. Thus, Jamil N. Mudawwar, for instance, shows himself eager, as late as in the second, 1905 edition of his *Ḥaḍārāt al-Islām fī Bayt al-Salām*, to assure the reader that he “integrated into the book the *isnād* references/details (lit. the witnesses) as a proof of what is written in the travelers’ reports” (*wa-qad akhadhtu fī l-kitāb shawāhid al-isnād lil-dalāla ‘alā mā waqa’a fī ḥadīth al-raḥḥāla*).

38 Cf., e.g., al-Tahānawī’s entry on *riwāya* in his *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn* (first draft finished in 1745), which clearly treats *ḥadīth* as a science and *riwāya* as an integral part of a logically structured system when he says: “*wa-l-muḥaddithūn qassamū al-riwāya ilā aqsām fa-qālū...*” (the *ḥadīth* scholars divided *riwāya* into several groups/categories [lit. sections, parts], namely...) – al-Tahānawī 1745/1862), s.r. “*r-w-y*”.

39 Cf. Leder 1994: “*Riwāya* generally means transmission through the spoken word, including purely oral retelling as well as recitation from notes and books. With the use of writing for the preservation of knowledge, *riwāya* came to mean, in practice, the transmission of a written text through oral expression.”

Equally important besides orality and the mediation between written and oral was certainly also the element of *narrativity* that was already inherent in [RIWĀYA]^{OLD}.⁴⁰ While the aspect of transmission of accounts or reports facilitated the term's use, at a later stage, for all kinds of narratives, not the least because of its closeness to *popular story-telling*, in the early phase of its semantic expansion (when it became used for theatre productions) it was obviously more the aspect of *performativity* accompanying oral transmissions that likened and linked the new genre to earlier tradition.

Furthermore, classical "*riwāya*" not only carried the connotation of Prophetic tradition and history but was also associated with poetry, a *rāwī* often being one who memorized and then recited a poet's verses.⁴¹ The aspect of *high quality literature* attached to [RIWĀYA]^{OLD} through the link to poetry was certainly of great help for the advocates of the genres covered by the expanded [RIWĀYA]^{NEW} to assure them some prestige in the field.

Not so much the association with poetry but certainly that with *ḥadīth* added yet another aspect: it brought "*riwāya*" in close vicinity to *history*⁴² and, hence, also to *reality*, *realism*, *facts* and *factualism*⁴³ (or at least the illusion thereof), as well as *sobriety*, key-values of the new educated elite. In this way, an air of *seriousness* and *down-to-earthness* could be bestowed also upon the new genres, and it facilitated their modelling against the traditionally low-esteemed fantastic genres ('Abduh's *khurāfāt* and *akādhīb* books) as their counter-concepts.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ This aspect is still preserved even in modern media Arabic where one can find expressions like *riwāyāt al-bintāghūn al-mufabraka* "the Pentagon's fabricated reports" or *taḍārabat al-riwāyāt ḥawla l-ma'raka allatī...* "there were contradictory accounts about the battle which..."

⁴¹ This is the *rāwī* whom Jacobi 1994 deals with (exclusively) in her entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn.

⁴² This is the reason why also histories of the Greek-Ottoman war could be labelled "*riwāyat...*" (cf. 7.3.2 above, p. 165).

⁴³ Cf. entry "*riwāya*" in de Biberstein-Kazimirski (1875), s.v. *rwȳ*: "1. Récit, relation (d'un fait, d'une parole) [...]" (my italics, SG).

⁴⁴ Cf., e.g., Muḥammad L. Gum'a who, according to Brugman 1984, 209, "was far ahead of his time, [...] in his coherent defence of literary realism in the introduction to the novel *Fī wādī l-humūm* (1905), where he declared to have given up fantasy (*khayāl*) for reality (*ḥaqīqah*) and to prefer the realism (*ḥaqīqīyah*) of Zola and Balzac to the romanticism (*khayālīyah*) of Scott and Dumas."

7.4.3 The “middle genre”: an attempt at definition

We have now hopefully collected enough criteria to dare an attempt at a more detailed and differentiated description of what the new, modified *riwāya* concept ([*RIWĀYA*]^{NEW}), sometimes labelled “*rūmāniyyāt*”, sometimes “*riwāyāt*”, actually was.

All the types of *riwāya* mentioned above in section 7.3. – be they translations/adaptations from a foreign language or purely indigenous creations, be they theatrical pieces, verse epics, plain prose narratives, or literarised history – had an edifying as well as an entertaining component and were considered to be at the same time useful and pleasant. In this respect, they perfectly matched the esthetic criteria of classical *adab* (which were more or less identical with the Horatian imperatives of “*prodesse et delectare*”), which justified, even for someone like Muḥammad ‘Abduh, their grouping among the *kutub adabiyya* and, thus, the ‘higher’ types of literature. It is not quite clear why ‘Abduh did not use the term *riwāyāt* but preferred the French loanword *rūmāniyyāt*, applying it even to pieces of classical Arabic *adab*; as a *shaykh* with a traditional Azhar background, he may however have felt that the new genre was different from what *he* until then had understood under “*riwāya*” – the transmission of *ḥadīth* (and perhaps other historical information) and poetry on the one hand, or the popular story-telling (*riwāya* in the sense of *ḥikāya*), on the other hand – , and therefore chose a new term that did not carry a ‘burden of the past’ and in this way made clear that the change that had occurred in the genre landscape in his opinion called for a new terminology and modified classification, a terminology and classification that affected the labelling and grouping of some classical genres, too. Another explanation for ‘Abduh’s choice of “*rūmāniyyāt*” instead of “*riwāyāt*” may have been the fact that in 1881, the time he wrote his overview, “*riwāya*” was already in use with a post-classical meaning – theatrical pieces – , and he sensed that for texts like the translation of Zaccane’s *La vengeance anglaise*⁴⁵ which, as a feuilleton novel/novelette, was still a rather new phenomenon then, a distinct label was needed. A third reason for the *sheikh*’s avoidance of the term “*riwāya*” and his preferring the French expression may have been his wish to find a generic term that neither had the respectability and seriousness of the science of *ḥadīth* nor the ‘lightness’ and low respectability of all too popular story-telling about it but, rather, was something in between.

For those coming after ‘Abduh, this ‘*in-betweenness*’ must however have seemed inherent in the term “*riwāya*” already, for this is the term that eventually

45 Cf. note 27 above.

asserted itself, the French-inspired coining “*rūmāniyyāt*”, to all my knowledge, never ever appearing again. At the same time, the preference of an ancient Arabic term meant that the new phenomena had become indigenized, in this way completing the process of which ‘Abduh’s filing of the “*rūmāniyyāt*” among the *adab* books, together with *Télémaque* and *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, was an earlier indication, i.e., the process of the new genres’ further integration into the landscape of traditional Arabic genres.

While ‘Abduh probably wished to see the use of the term “*riwāya*” restricted to more serious and/or prestigious types of writings (Prophetic tradition, history, poetry), most contemporaries seem to have preferred “*riwāya*” because it, on the one hand, *had* this air of learned erudition about it, but on the other still smacked less elitist and more popular than another candidate on the list of possible terms from the tradition that overlapped with the new genres and competed with “*riwāya*”: *ḥadīth*, a term most often used at that time by adherents of neoclassicism for the so-called neo-*maqāma*. As Brugman notes about the novel, one variation of what we called [RŪMĀNIYYĀT=RIWĀYĀT], it developed “along with and often as a reaction to the neo-*maqāma*” (Brugman 1984, 205), i.e., it competed with texts that likewise counted among *adab*, enjoyed the prestige of classical, ‘high’ literature, told entertaining as well as edifying stories, were equally undergoing a generic evolution and had proven to have a high integrative potential, texts which their authors called “*ḥadīth*...”⁴⁶ because they followed the classical tradition in opening with a (fictitious) *isnād* (the formula “ḥaddathanī X ‘an Y ... qāl: ...” introducing the chain of transmitters), a device that not only linked their texts to the *maqāma* tradition but to the more ‘serious’ historical genres (in the same way in which the term “*riwāya*” ‘dignified’ the newly emerging genres by its traditional connection with *isnād* and, consequently, with history, the science of ‘real facts’). Compared to the neo-*maqāmāt*, which we therefore have to consider as a counter-concept of our [RŪMĀNIYYĀT=RIWĀYĀT], the latter were less traditional then, less elitist, less learned, in a way more *sha‘bī*, though simultaneously aspiring at the same high ends.

“*Riwāya*” occupies a similar intermediate position also in a number of (inter-related) other respects. There is, e.g., the aspect of the new genres, in spite of participating in ‘high’ culture, being affordable also for the less well-off. In his *‘Ālam al-Dīn* (1881), for instance, ‘Alī Mubārak lets an Englishman explain a theatre – i.e., one of those institutions where “*riwāyāt*” were staged! – to an Arab who until then was ignorant of this type of useful, edifying entertainment, with

⁴⁶ The most famous among these neo-*maqāmāt* is the – comparatively late – *Ḥadīth ‘Īsā b. Hishām* by Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (serialized in 1898, as a book in 1907).

the words: “*fa-yadkhul al-ghaniyy wa-l-faqīr wa-l-‘azīm wa-l-ḥaqīr*” (so, both rich and poor, mighty and miserable are admitted – Mubārak 1881, ii:402), a fact that obviously deserved explicit mentioning.

The fact that theatrical “*riwāyāt*” used to be in the *dialect* while other types were written in elaborate *fuṣḥā*, further reinforced the [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT]’s oscillation, already observed above, between the written and the oral and in this way its intermediate position between ‘high’ and ‘low’, elite and popular culture.

In addition, the [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT] were building bridges between life and art, reality and literature. The close correspondence between literature and the world ‘outside’, the texts’ ‘realism’, i.e., their referentiality, was something new to Arabic literature (and to Middle Eastern literary aesthetics in general), but from now on a “particular reading contract” was established according to which “the recourse to fiction is nothing more than an artifice used to disclose a ‘reality’ the other instruments of social knowledge cannot or do not want to represent.”⁴⁷ This notion was present from the early stages of the evolution of the new genre when theatre stagings would be watched as “science-based examples (or: parables) in accordance with historical events and the vicissitudes of fate”, to quote once more the description of theatres in ‘Alī Mubārak’s *‘Ālam al-Dīn*.⁴⁸ The same work praised the reference, in Europe, to “a specific real incident or a known event” even in songs and operas, the aim of singing and staging being “to remember” and “re-enact” (lit., repeat) historical events that were deemed appropriate for this purpose.⁴⁹ An additional virtue of these realistic, science-supported lessons was that they could help to promote “the nation’s progress and civilisation”.⁵⁰ The genre’s usefulness in the context of nation-building, its down-to-earthness and anchoring in real life were of course values especially appreciated by the new educated elite, the *afandiyya*, or ‘engineers’. It was only natural for the new social group who had to find their place in society somewhere between the old elite and the masses, to propagate a genre that, with its focus on real life and the world, could serve as a counter-concept of all those genres of traditional literature, associated with the religious and literary establishment, that in many

⁴⁷ Jacquemond 2004, 46. Jacquemond holds that this contract was operative “since al-Muwayliḥi” only, but I think he will forgive me to have implicitly extended the scope of his statement since there is clear evidence of literary ‘realism’ and referentialism as early as in the plays of the 1850s and the social romances of the 1870s in the Levant.

⁴⁸ *amthāl ‘ilmiyya ‘alā ḥasab al-ḥawādith al-tārīkhiyya wa-l-taqallubāt al-dahriyya* – Mubārak 1881, ii: 406.

⁴⁹ *fa-hiya fī l-ghālib ‘ibāra ‘an wāqī’a makhṣūṣa wa-ḥāditha ma’lūma yurād tadhkārūhā wa-yustajād takrārūhā* – ibid.

⁵⁰ *taqaddum al-umma wa-tamaddunihā* – ibid.

people's eyes indulged in theological hair-splitting, juridical nit-picking, and an oversophisticated, overrhetorized literary mannerism, all of which seemed to have lost contact to what was really happening in the country and whose detachment from real life was felt to be an obstacle on the way to necessary reforms.

The new elite's strategy to displace the old one by appropriating some of the latter's 'high' values while simultaneously seeking support from the masses by 'lowering' aesthetical standards and 'popularizing' the field of literature has yet a number of other aspects. Some of them can be subsumed under the heading 'Between "seriousness" and "lightness"'. To start with, the [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT] are always eager to contribute to the noble task of *tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, "the cultivation of the morals" of society, but they achieve their goal in an entertaining and, thanks to their down-to-earthness, easily understandable, practically oriented way that is much less elitist than the detailed sophisticated *akhlāq* treatises mentioned by 'Abduh as a sub-group of *adab* books and labelled "aqliyya", i.e., demanding intellectual, philosophical efforts.

If this attitude could be summarized as 'Ethics? Yes, of course – but let it be entertaining, please!', entertainment in itself, on the other hand, had always to be controlled in order to prevent that the genre would be accused of being *too* popular. Thus, [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT] like, e.g., the early socially critical stories by Salīm al-Bustānī (1870s), when serialized in the magazine *al-Jinān*, were intentionally placed in the *fukāhiyyāt* (humour, funny tales) section, despite their serious moralist content. But this exposed the texts to the risk of being dragged close to the *kidhb-khurāfa-siḥr* categories, so vehemently condemned by the literary establishment. In the fourth edition (1869) of Bocthor's French–Arabic dictionary, for instance, the French "*roman*" is still not rendered with "*riwāya*" but, like in the first edition four decades earlier (1826), with "*ḥikāya*" (popular story), and the adjective "*romanesque*" is not only explained as "qui tient du roman" but also as "fabuleux" and rendered in Arabic as *mukharriḥ – bāṭil – ka-annah kidhb* ("foolish, fabulous – futile, false – as if it were a lie" – Bocthor 1869, iv:s.v.)! And Brugman rightly states that the genre often "found little appreciation" because it

assumed the function of the stories (*aḥādīth*) recited by professional story-tellers. These performed especially for the lower classes and their tales were not considered as belonging to the realm of literature, which had always been an upper-class affair in the Arab world.

(Brugman 1984, 206)

Authors, translators/adaptors, and editors of [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT] therefore were always eager to assure their readers that what they held in their hands was by no means pure entertainment but definitely something more serious. Thus, Jurjī Zaydān, in the preface to his *Asīr al-mutamahdī* (The Prisoner of the *Mahdī*

Pretender, 1892), conceded that the events which the story would be about were indeed framed by a love story; but he was quick to add, “everything that I will mention about them [sc. the Sudanese] is true/real and in no way less reliable than books on history.”⁵¹ And he repeats more or less the same argument still two decades later, in the preface to *Fatāt al-Qayrawān* (The Girl from Kairouan, 1912), when he admits that there are elements of fiction in this historical *riwāya* but in the same breath underlines that historical facts have been truthfully observed.⁵²

Much of the *riwāyāt*’s ill repute stemmed from the beginnings of theatre in the Arab world. Although the educative value of the stage was always an essential that went without saying, for over half a century many critics nevertheless thought of them as something dubious or frivolous, just because the plays were in the vernacular (*‘āmmiyya*), the ‘low’ language of the masses (*‘amma*), and they were considered ‘light’ entertainment also because they were either comedies or melodramas and used to be accompanied by music. In the course of time, however, also this changed, and with it the medium’s (and the *riwāya* genre’s) reputation, especially so after George Abyaḍ had “broken away from the musically-inclined Ḥijāzī’s troupe” and gone on “to present serious drama and tragedies on stage.”⁵³ Thanks to his efforts, a writer like Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, by the early 1920s, experienced Abyaḍ’s theatrical *riwāyāt* as “the closest paradigm of high culture at that time”; clearly, it had become a very “serious” genre now.⁵⁴

Before that, and in the non-theatrical *riwāyāt*, the genre’s “seriousness” and “respectability” was underlined mostly linguistically – through the use of *fuṣḥā* – and, as we have seen, topically – through a focus either on local social problems⁵⁵ or on historical themes,⁵⁶ on biography or autobiography,⁵⁷ or travel accounts,⁵⁸ i.e., through the texts’ reference to “reality”.

51 *kullu mā sa-adhkuru ‘anhum ḥaqīqī yurkan ilayh wa-yu’tamad ‘alayh i’timādan lā yaqillu ‘an i’timād kutub al-tārīkh bi-shay’* – Zaydān 1892, 4.

52 *ma’a taḥarrī l-ḥaqīqa wa-l-muḥāfaẓa ‘alā l-waqā’i’ al-tārīkhiyya* – Zaydān 1912, 4.

53 Amin 2010, 103.

54 Ibid., echoing al-Ḥakīm’s own wording.

55 Most of the plays had this aspect (cf., e.g., Bardenstein 2005), but there were also the ‘social romances’ of S. al-Bustānī or Nu’mān al-Qasāṭīli (cf. Moosa 1997, chs. 7 & 8, passim), or a novel like J. Zaydān’s *Jihād al-muḥibbīn* (1893).

56 See, first and foremost, Jurjī Zaydān’s work.

57 Cf., e.g., the translation of Lesage’s *Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane* (see above, p. 172 with fn. 32). Many later examples of what is usually termed the beginnings of the artistic novel, like Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Māzinī’s *Riwāyat Ibrāhīm al-kātib* (written 1925–31), Ṭahā Ḥusayn’s *al-Ayyām* (1929f.) and *Adīb* (1935), or Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm’s *Yawmiyyāt nā’ib fi l-aryāf* (1937) and *Uṣfūr min al-sharq* (1938), have a strong autobiographical component.

58 Cf. already al-Bustānī’s rendering of *Robinson Crusoe* as *K. at-Tuḥfa al-bustāniyya fi l-asfār*

Back to the other side of the balances of the new “middle genre” again, a means to enrich the ‘dry facts’ of social criticism, historical and travel accounts was to season them with big emotions. Emotion had become a value in itself by that time as a major marker of the new middle class’s identity and moral superiority: it replaced the ‘nobility’ of descent and (traditional) higher education of the old elite with the ‘nobility of the feeling hearts’ of the new one. This is one of the major reasons for the translation of so many foreign love stories and the printing of a great number of popular stories featuring a loving couple, as well as for the Nahḍa’s affinity to tragedy, moving scenes, enthusiasm and pathos, but also to adventure, tension, and suspense. The intermediate position between sobriety and emotion is also reflected linguistically in the choice of an ‘in-between’ language where plain prose is enriched through rhetoricizing elements...⁵⁹

... but, of course, only up to a degree where literary devices were not too intellectually demanding! In fact, most of the rhetoricisation was achieved with the help of poetically-sounding standard formulæ. The risk of being accused of searched difficulty and over-rhetoricisation – for the new middle class a characteristic of the writing of the old elite – was too high and had to be avoided as much as the risk of being too popular. In the course of time, activity, flexibility, liveliness, and naturalness became more and more imperative for the [RŪMĀ-NIYYĀT=RIWĀYĀT], particularly so when the national movement and the call for a national literature (*adab qawmī*) gained momentum.⁶⁰

On the other hand, the loss of aesthetical prestige on account of the implementation of a simplified, less ‘beautiful’ language was somehow compensated for, from the beginnings of the [RIWĀYA]^{NEW} genre, by a higher complexity of the plots of the stories told. Narratives became longer, more complex, but at the same time also more coherent than classical texts that mostly had an anecdotal, mono-linear episodic structure, theatrical pieces lost the improvised character of popular street theatre or the traditional shadow plays, a “red thread” led through the events that had a planned beginning, thickening of the knot, and well-calculated culmination.⁶¹ Perhaps, this ‘geometrical approach’ of the *riwāya* authors to

al-kurūziyya (1861).

⁵⁹ Cf. my essay on the period’s “flood of tears”: Guth 1997b [= Chapter 11 in the present volume]. For more details, and parallels in Turkish, cf. Guth 2003b, §§ 15, 33, 34, 44k, 47, 53, 79a, 81a, 92c.

⁶⁰ Thus, ʿĪsā ʿUbayd, in the programmatic “Muqaddima” to *Iḥsān Ḥānīm*, could acknowledge Muḥammad Taymūr’s use of the dialect in his theatrical pieces as a legitimate means to make the plays “free from *takalluf* and *jumūd*” – ʿUbayd (1921), *ʿayn* [= xvi] [cf. Chapter 12, below].

⁶¹ Cf. Maḥmūd Taymūr’s characterisation of the narrative framework of Jurjī Zaydān’s historical *riwāyāt* as a phenomenon of innovation and modernity because it builds on *ḥādītha*, *ʿuqda* and *nihāya* – Taymūr 1970, 18.

the whole of a literary edifice, its ‘architecture’ and overall structure, rather than the old aesthetics’ focus on the embellishment of smaller units (a syntactic unit, a verse, ...⁶²), can be seen as a parallel of the way the new educated elite of rationalist ‘planners’, sober ‘engineers’ and ‘social engineers’ viewed the society they felt obliged and sent to ‘repair’ and ‘reform’.

Most probably, it was precisely the new concept’s intermediate position described so far, its having ‘a little bit of everything’, that made it a winner in the competition against other candidates. The first and second type of books from Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s list – religious tradition and philosophical speculation and reasoning about the world – as well as the books on history and ethics were serious literature, but lacked the element of light entertaining. Too popular genres like the folk epics and superstitious writings were to be discarded because they lacked respectability. In contrast, the new [RŪMĀNIYYĀT=RIWĀYĀT] could incorporate all these elements without any of them ever getting the upper hand, there was always something to counterbalance a potential predominance of one feature over the other. The intermediateness and absorptive capacity guaranteed it its superiority: compared to [RŪMĀNIYYĀT=RIWĀYĀT], genres like *riḥla* (travel account), *sīra* (biography; popular epic), *tārikh* (history), or *shi‘r* (poetry) had a much narrower scope, while the [RŪMĀNIYYĀT=RIWĀYĀT] could incorporate elements of all of these, sometimes even in one and the same “*riwāya*”; genres like *mathal* (instructive and/or edifying examples), *ḥikma* (aphorisms), *nādira* and *laṭīfa* (anecdotes) were too short, too pointed, had too few characters and too little complexity to offer, while “*riwāya*” could integrate a great number of them at a time in one text; both *musāmara* (lit., pleasant entertainment) and *fukāha* (humorous story) were too exclusively entertaining as to represent a serious competitor. And even among the remaining four terms – *qiṣṣa*, *ḥikāya*, *ḥadīth*, and *maqāma* – none was balanced enough, in the long run, to beat the [RŪMĀNIYYĀT=RIWĀYĀT]’s integrative power that could build a bridge between the elite and the people, i.e., the power most needed in the process of nation building.

It is true that the new genre was often also labelled “*qiṣṣa*”, but it seems that this term, at the end of the day, lacked “*riwāya*”’s notion of factualism – it could be ‘pure’ fiction –, and it had perhaps also a slightly too moralist touch.⁶³

⁶² Cf., for instance, Wolfart Heinrichs’ ideas on the ‘molecularity’ of classical Arabic poetry (sketched, e.g., in Heinrichs 1974 or Reinert’s illuminating description of the *conchetto* style in classical Islamic literatures (Reinert 1990).

⁶³ This assumption is based on the Ottoman evidence where “*kiṣṣa*”, according to Sagaster 2011, 34, is “das Wort für einen kurzen Prosatext mit lehrhaftem Charakter” – cf., e.g., a title like *Qiṣṣadan ḥiṣṣe* “The Moral (to be drawn) from the Story” given by the prolific Aḥmed Midḥat (1844–1912) to a collection of edifying anecdotes he started to write in 1870. If Pellat and Vial in

“*Ḥikāya*”, in its turn, had a high absorptive potential, too; but although its closeness to ‘natural’, popular story-telling was a feature that was much welcomed – sometimes even huge, multi-volume projects like ‘Alī Mubārak’s encyclopaedic *‘Alam al-Dīn* (1884) were presented as a “*ḥikāya*” by their authors – , in the long run it was obviously experienced as *too* popular. “*Ḥadīth*” and “*maqāma*”, on the other hand, seem to have been finally discarded because they smacked too much of the traditional elite, be it the religious or the literary one.⁶⁴

As becomes clear from the preceding analysis, “*riwāya*” during the *Nahḍa* and the period of nation building is probably less of a literally distinct generic term than a term with a primarily *social* connotation. It allows for a large variety of ‘fillings’ of the ‘variable’ whose common denominator it is to hold a balance between characteristics that have traditionally been associated with the two major groups of society, the elite and the masses (cf. Fig. 3). As the new secular educated elite is trying to find a place for themselves somewhere *between* the traditional elites and the lower strata (cf. arrows), with the aim to replace the former, or at least confine them to a less influential, insignificant position, while at the same time establishing themselves as the moral (and later also political) leaders of the latter, the [RUMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT] genre generates individual texts in a process of constant negotiation of the types and ratio of ingredients, always eager, however, to mix elements from both spheres – from the one the contemporary literary system classified as ‘high’ *and* the one classified as ‘low’ culture (Fig. 4) – in a way that holds the balance between both (cf. arrows), incorporating larger sectors of both in order to achieve a new blend – the blend corresponding to the new concept of the [NATION].⁶⁵

their “*kiṣṣa*” entries in the 2nd edition of the *Encyclopædia of Islām* are right, the Arabic term “*qiṣṣa*” (from which the Ottoman is, of course, a loan via Persian) seems to have lost, over the centuries, its earlier religious and edifying connotations, so that the Ottoman evidence would not support my argument. In this case, “*riwāya*” may have superseded over “*qiṣṣa*” because of the former’s length and, therefore, ‘gravity’, and the latter’s too close association with popular story-telling.

⁶⁴ For an example of a ‘modernised’ *maqāma*, see below, Chapter 8.

⁶⁵ [For the ‘*adab*-tation’ of French *patrie*, cf. above, Chapter 5.]

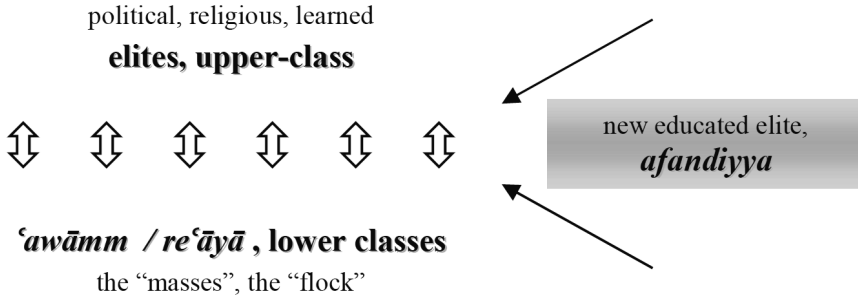


Fig. 3: Social hierarchy during the Nahḍa

genre social group	linguistic level	poetry	rhetorized / rhymed prose	prose
educated elite <i>khāṣṣa</i>	written language (high variety) <i>fuṣḥā</i> / ‘osmānīca	<i>qaṣīdah</i> („ode“)	<i>maqāmah</i>	<i>adab</i> witty, jocular distraction, useful (=edifying) entertainment, polite teaching of (moral) lessons
good, high brow litera- ture	scriptuality	<i>ġazel</i> / <i>gha- zal</i>	‘high’ epics (often <i>meṣnevī</i> / <i>maṣnavī</i>)	incl. travelogues, historical writings (also biography), philosophy, religion
↕ ↕	↕ ↕	↕ ↕	↕ ↕	↕ ↕ ↕
the masses <i>‘āmma</i> / <i>re’āyā</i>	people’s spoken language (low variety) <i>‘āmmīyya</i> / ‘ <i>kaba</i> ’ <i>Türkçe</i>	poetry in the vernacular	popular (‘folk’) epics	popular stories (e.g. <i>1001 Nights</i>), romances etc.
inferior, of minor value	orality	metrics: <i>zajal</i> , <i>hece</i> , ...	<i>siyar sha’biyyah</i> , <i>destan/dastân</i>	told by professional story-tellers <i>ḥakawātī</i> / <i>meddāḥ</i> / <i>naqqāl</i>

Fig. 4: Premodern literary fields and genre hierarchy in the Middle East. Arrows indicate the intermediate position taken by the new genres during the Nahḍa

7.5 Semantic consolidation: “*riwāya*” is reduced to [NOVEL]

As we have seen above, the meaning of the term “*riwāya*” is closely linked to the social position of the new educated elite: while they are establishing themselves as a middle class in society, [RIWĀYA]^{NEW} negotiates its place as a middle genre in the literary field. Our survey stopped at a time, however, when “*riwāya*” did not

yet signify the concept [NOVEL] as clearly and unequivocally as it does today.⁶⁶ When did this consolidation happen? And how was it achieved?

These questions will need a study in its own right. I would assume that the eventual breakthrough of the genre, its assertion as one of the leading genres (if not *the* leading genre) in the literary field, its emancipation from the need to court, and borrow from, traditional ‘high’ as well as ‘low’ genres in order to incorporate them, and its stripping off these elements and mutating into what is usually called the ‘mature novel’ in histories of modern Arabic literature, i.e., [RIWĀYA]^{NEW}’s increasing assimilation to the western concept of [NOVEL] – this process was probably the result of two main factors: a) the increasingly dominant role of the new secular educated elite in Middle Eastern societies and their eventual takeover, b) the process of a steadily advancing globalisation, the Middle East’s integration into ‘the world’ and, consequently, also the literary forms’ ever-growing communication with the system of ‘world literature’.

For the time being, we can only state that the process of consolidation was rather longsome. Although there were, for instance, already hundreds of examples of narrative texts around in the second decade of the twentieth century that called themselves “*riwāya*”, Jubrān Khalil Jubrān, himself a major representative of modern texts of the [RIWĀYA]^{NEW} type, “suggesting [in 1917] to the editor of the review *Hilāl* the holding of a competition for the best story – to promote a genre that ha[d] proved its worth in Europe – use[d] the term *ḥikāya* to describe the genre” (Vial 1980), not “*riwāya*” or “*qiṣṣa*”. On the other hand, “*riwāya*” remained a common term for theatrical productions, while “*marsaḥiyya*” (today: “*masraḥiyya*”) was still not yet in wide use as late as in the 1920s (Amin 2010, 103). In the 1930–40s, “numerous literary reviews sprang up and flourished, dedicating a great deal of space to fictional writing, both translated and original” and (together with “*qiṣṣa*”) “*riwāyah* became [a] common feature[.] in the titles of many of these magazines” (Hafez 2007, 58), cf., e.g., *al-Riwāya* (founded 1937).

Nevertheless, in 1931 ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād called Shawqī’s play on Cambyes *Riwāyat* [!] *Qambiz*; in 1933, Nasīb ‘Arīḍa (New York) published a 4-act drama under the title *Riwāyat* [!] *al-Shā’ir ‘Abd al-Salām b. Raghbān*; and in 1937, a certain Wadī‘ Abī Fāḍil came out with a play, too – *Riwāyat* [!] *Tammūz wa-Ba’la* –, but specified this “*riwāya*” as a “national (or: nationalistic, patriotic?) *riwāya* for the

⁶⁶ I am speaking of the use of the term for a literary genre/concept here only. “*riwāya*” has, of course, retained its older non-specific meaning of “(oral) transmission; report, account” in modern standard Arabic. In their *Dictionary of Arabic Literary & Linguistic Terms*, Wahba and al-Muhandis give a general definition first – “version” –, but then clearly state: “*al-riwāya fī l-adab* [=] Novel” (1979, 103, s.v. *riwāya*).

stage in verses” (*r. shi‘riyya tamthīliyya waṭaniyya*)⁶⁷ – a clear indication of the fact that “*riwāya*” then still meant that ‘open’, unspecified middle genre that had emerged during the Nahḍa, not yet, as it would today, necessarily a novel. This is also clear from the fact that Maḥmūd Taymūr, in calling his longer narrative *al-Aṭlāl* (1934) an “Egyptian *riwāya*”, had to further specify it as a “narrative” one (*qaṣaṣiyya*) (Pérès 1937, 333, no. 673). The examples from the 1930s are the latest known to me in which “*riwāya*”, used in a discourse on literature, does not yet signify [NOVEL]. In contrast, the latest use of another term than “*riwāya*” for a text that is usually considered to be a novel, is Maḥmūd Taymūr’s labelling, in 1970, Haykal’s *Zaynab* a “*qiṣṣa*” (Taymūr 1970, 39).

Given the fact that the processes mentioned above as two possible reasons for the consolidation of “*riwāya*” as [NOVEL] did not take place over night but over several decades, there are certainly a number of events and factors that contributed to a gradual semantic change. We may think of the political take-over of the secular nationalists (cf., e.g., the 1919 uprising in Egypt) as further backing [RIWĀYA]^{NEW} and strengthening its position in the field; of the call of the advocates of *adab qawmī* for an improvement of the artistic qualities of “national literature”, i.e., their insisting on literature as an *art* of writing, as something reversing the earlier inclusion of ‘low’ and ‘simple’ elements and therefore beginning to upgrade the genre while simultaneously narrowing its social points of reference [cf. below, Chapter 12]; of the preponderance of the short story in the writings of the adherents of “national literature” as a factor that contributed to a sharpening of the profiles, by way of contrast, of longer as opposed to shorter genres, a differentiation that had to be followed, in the course of time, by a sharpening of genre terminology, all the more so since, for the short story, terms like *qiṣṣa*, *qiṣṣa qaṣīra*, or *uqṣūṣa* tended to become fairly unequivocal; we could however also think of the newly established language academies as executing a certain normative influence on genre terminology; of the way the ‘great old men’ of the generation of the ‘pioneers’ – Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, ‘Abbās M. al-‘Aqqād, Maḥmūd Taymūr, Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, ... – used a term in their critical writings as setting examples that modified a certain semantic value of a generic term, or cemented it for a certain time; or of Nagīb Maḥfūẓ’s novels, all of which appeared as “*riwāyāt*”, as setting a powerful standard for what from then on should be considered a “*riwāya*”. For all of these possible factors, I still do not have textual evidence yet and am therefore unable to present concrete examples of ‘missing links’ that would document the transition from the semantic breadth of the concept of [RŪMĀNIYYĀT≡RIWĀYĀT] and that of the most recent meaning of “*riwāya*”, i.e., the

67 Brockelmann 1942, S III: 417, characterises it as “mythologisch-symbolisches Spiel” that puts “die patriotischen Hoffnungen seiner Landsleute” on stage.

concept of [NOVEL]. There is, however, at least one dated record that can serve as evidence for a beginning terminological differentiation: In 1942, in the preface to his *Pygmalion*, Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm declares that a number of his theatrical pieces were not written to be staged and could therefore not be considered as “*masraḥiyyāt*”; they were meant to be read, and this is why they are rather pure “*riwāyāt*”.

7.6 Recent developments: postmodern genre-crossings

After modern Arabic literature had, as it seems, further brought its forms in line with the ‘global standards’ and the term “*riwāya*” had seized, in contemporary literary discourse, to mean anything else but [NOVEL], new developments became possible. The first of these to happen were perhaps the coinings made from a combination of “*riwāya*” and “*masraḥiyya*” for novels in which dialogue prevailed, or theatrical pieces with a narrative character. This seems to have happened not long after Nagīb Maḥfūz had published a collection of texts that he himself called “*ḥiwāriyyāt*” (from *ḥiwār* “dialogue”), “q.m.” (i.e., “*qiṣṣa masraḥiyya*”), or “*uqṣūṣa masraḥiyya*”. All texts in this collection – *Taḥt al-mizalla* – were written between October and December 1967, under the direct impression of the catastrophe of the June War. Although not composed to be staged but to be read, these narratives contained so much dialogue that the remaining narrative elements often could just as well be classified as stage instructions in a play (cf. Fāhndrich 1991, 120). This was, with all probability, the starting point after which also terms like “*masrawiyya*” or “*misrawāya*” were coined for what was experienced as a composite genre. Had the terms “*riwāya*” and “*masraḥiyya*” not yet consolidated their meanings as [NOVEL] and [DRAMA, PLAY] at that time, the composita would have been meaningless.

In most recent years, “*riwāya*” seems to have again followed global develop-

ments and readjusted its semantic

range so as to conform to these.

Just as the English word “novel”

tends to become more or less syn-



الجائزة العالمية للرواية العربية
INTERNATIONAL PRIZE FOR ARABIC FICTION

onymous with “fiction” in general, the Arabic title of what is now usually referred to as the Arabic “Booker Prize”, *al-Jāʾiza al-ʿālamīyya lil-riwāya al-ʿarabiyya* (literally, “the World Prize for the Arabic *riwāya*”), has been rendered into English as “International Prize for Arabic Fiction”!⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Cf. the prize’s website, <http://www.arabicfiction.org/>. – The IPAF is granted to Arab novelists since 2007 in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Thus, the history of the term “*riwāya*”, like the history of modern Arabic literature in general, can serve as a paradigm of how Arabs conceived of themselves and their relation to the world and what they experienced as global standards or norms. Until now, this history has generally been a history of a ‘Third World’ region and of ‘Third World’ literary genres adapting to ‘First World’ norms/standards (though trying to retain, and indeed retaining, an identity of their own), i.e., a monodirectional movement from what was felt to be ‘inferior’ or ‘underdeveloped’ ‘up’ to the level of what had the prestige of the ‘more advanced’ and therefore ‘superior’ culture. The direction of this process of adaption reflects, of course, global power relations. As a consequence, neither had ‘First World’ terminology to adapt to Arab(ic) realities nor have ‘First World’ literatures ever felt a need to ‘reach’ standards that would have been inherent in Arab(ic) concepts.⁶⁹ When Nagīb Maḥfūz was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1988, many critics in the ‘First World’ had not even heard of this writer yet, and Arabic novels still have difficulties to find a place in the canon of ‘world literature’ although excellent translations meanwhile are available in many languages and although it is certainly not only Maḥfūz “who, through works rich in nuance – now clear-sightedly realistic, now evocatively ambiguous – has formed an Arabian narrative art that applies to all mankind”.⁷⁰ It seems, then, that, for Western-centrist tastes, this “Arabian narrative art” has still retained too much of the [RŪMĀNIYYĀT = RIWĀYĀT] and is obviously still somehow different from the western [NOVEL] concept! With the globalisation of the world increasing since, say, the past three decades [sc., after ca. 1980], and that is, first and foremost, with its increasing interconnectedness and rhizome-like, web-like structure, traditional genre definitions have of course been called into question and often been considerably modified. In his *What Is World Literature?* of 2003, for instance, David Damrosch did away with an evaluative use of the term “world literature” and replaced earlier catego-

69 I am neither counting here the cases – that remained without long-lasting and/or wide-ranging consequences anyway – of some Romantics imitating ‘oriental’ forms in their own poetry, nor those of Arab and western scholars trying to ‘prove’ that novel, short story and theatre were not new to Arabic literature but had in fact ancestors in the classical tradition (for the theatre, the *Karagöz* shadow plays served as a main argument; for the novel, it was, in the first place, Ibn Ṭufayl’s “philosophical romance” (Kruk 1987, 357) *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, a “philosophical treatise in a charming literary form” (Inati 1998)). The rather temporary phenomenon started, probably, with the ‘Third World’ movements, lasted for perhaps a decade or two, and ended with postmodernism.

70 “The Nobel Prize in Literature 1988”, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1988/index.html (retrieved 24Feb2011).

ries such as ‘literary quality’ or ‘aesthetic value’ with the plain figures of production, publication and circulation. In addition, harsh criticism has been raised against an until then still largely European canon, and the calls to overcome this Eurocentrism have been loud and powerful. Yet, there are also voices who maintain that, due to their peculiar history, Middle Eastern novels (or should we say: *riwāyāt* ?) are indeed essentially different from Western novels,⁷¹ the international recognition of Nagīb Maḥfūz or the Turk Orhan Pamuk as important contributors to world literature notwithstanding.

71 Both Richard Jacquemond and Samah Selim, to mention only two proponents of this tendency, have elaborated on the connection between literature and society that seems to be much closer in the Middle East than it now tends to be in the West. See Jacquemond 2003 and Selim 2004.