

8 Even in a *maqāma*!

The shift of focus from “trickster” to “narrating subject” in
Fāris al-Shidyāq’s *al-Sāq ‘alā l-sāq* (1855)

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This chapter was first published in a volume on “ego documents” that assembled contributions to an earlier workshop on the same topic.¹ The term “ego documents” covers a comparatively wider range of phenomena than the rather late, ‘modern’ one of “emerging subjectivity”, but my micro-analysis of a chapter in Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq’s *Sāq* of 1855, doubtlessly a foundational text of Nahḍa thought and literary sensibility, had a focus on exactly that emerging subjectivity already before I began to see the many features appearing in this key text under this umbrella. My close reading of the *Sāq*’s thirteenth chapter, “On a *maqāma*”, therefore not only confirms the ‘in-betweenness’ – mentioned earlier in several chapters of the present book (especially Chapter 5) – of the traditional genres in the transitional period, but it also returns to other aspects, all interrelated, of emerging subjectivity, such as the subject’s wish to assert itself as public intellectual, as an instance of critical observation, sharp analysis, and witty, playful comment, as well as a knowledgeable mediator and superior arbiter between indigenous tradition (a rich and valuable heritage, but sometimes also an obstacle on the way to progress and civilisation) and innovation (promising rupture with dated customs and institutions, but very often also imprudently imposed, and introduced without solid knowledge and thinking of possible consequences).

The chapter also links up to the question of periodisation of the Nahḍa, addressed above in, among others, Chapters 1 and 2, as it places the *Sāq* between what in the West is called Romanticism and Realism, and right in the middle of a ‘global’ period of “Reproductionism” (W. Falk) in which individual subjectivity seeks to rebel against an Old Order, or System, that is not only experienced as dated but also as unhuman, and where this individual subjectivity in the end still

1 Elger and Köse, eds. 2010. – In its turn, this article built on a paper that was first given on a panel, organized by Stefan Reichmuth and Raoul Findeisen, on “The Genesis of the Intellectual in Asian and African Context since the 19th Century”, held September 22, 2004, in Halle a.d.S., Germany, on occasion of the 29th Congress of German Oriental Studies (DOT).

has to accept the System's hardly shakeable power and so eventually to content him-/herself with an individualising reproduction of the Genreal and Lawful.² Al-Shidyāq practised this reproductionism not only in his very individualising interpretation of what a *maqāma* can be (while inscribing himself in the very same genre tradition), but he also lived it in everyday life in Paris (where he emphasised his being an 'Oriental', proud of his indigenous tradition, in the way he dressed and behaved).³

The results of my micro-analysis can serve as a fine evidence of the fact that al-Shidyāq was already fully integrated into global discourses of modernity. This means that the process of the emerged subject's individuation can be considered to be completed already at that time and that, consequently, it must have begun much earlier, making itself felt in early nineteenth century at the latest, but probably much earlier.⁴

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8.1 Introduction

Among the classical Arabic genres that continued to enjoy wide popularity in pre-modern times was also the one which is often labelled the 'most Arabic' of all,⁵ the *maqāma*. Of the tens, if not hundreds of *maqāmāt* that were written during the whole nineteenth century,⁶ fairly a dozen is esteemed to be worth mentioning – *en passant* – in older literary histories, among these also the four *maqāmāt* that (Aḥmad) Fāris al-Shidyāq (1805–1887) included in his seminal work, published in Paris in 1855, *al-Sāq 'alā l-sāq fī-mā huwa l-Fāryāq*.

Al-Shidyāq is unanimously regarded one of the few great *udabā'* (men of letters, *literati*) of his time, as a most enlightened intellectual and a great reformer.⁷

² For the componential structure of 'global' "Reproductionism" according to W. Falk, see above, end of introductory section to Chapter 4, and in particular (sub-) Chapter 18.3.

³ See below, note 36.

⁴ For pre-nineteenth century subjectivity, see notes 15 and 55 in Chapter 6.

⁵ Cf., e.g., its characterisation by [C. Brockelmann-] Ch. Pellat 1986, 107, as "a purely and typically Arabic literary genre".

⁶ A number of them are listed, e.g., in [Brockelmann-] Pellat, *ibid.*, or Hafez 1993, 108–11; cf. also the short summary in my own *Brückenschläge* (Guth 2003b), 180–83. Hämeen-Anttila 2002 does mention al-Shidyāq's *maqāmāt*, but only briefly and without going into further detail.

⁷ Karam 1964, 800, even calls him "the forerunner, if not actually the first, of the progressive reformers". – For biographical information, cf. *ibid.*, but also many others, among them Roper 1998, *passim*, and Bushnaq 2002.

(He is especially known as the editor of one of the first Arabic weeklies, *al-Jawā'ib*, which appeared from 1861 to 1884 in Istanbul and was distributed in the whole Arab world; and he is also famous as the 'founder' of independent journalism and the one who helped the modern newspaper article, the *maqāla*, to its final breakthrough.)⁸ But since the *maqāmāt* contained in his *Sāq* are *maqāmāt*, i.e., because they belong to what has come to be looked upon as a dying tradition, they had not been submitted to closer examination for one and a half centuries. It was only in 2005 that Katia Zakharia dedicated a detailed study to them in *Ara-bica*⁹ and thus started to fill a lacuna the existence of which is all the more astonishing because, if al-Shidyāq is really such a great reformer and enlightened intellectual, then the fact that he did insert some of these symbols of the classical tradition in his text, must be as interesting and significant as the way how he complied with the norms of the genre.

The present study will try to highlight *al-Sāq* 'alà l-sāq as an 'ego document'. The method followed is that of a micro-analysis of the first of the four *maqāmāt* contained in *al-Sāq*, taking it as a *pars pro toto* in which the author's stance vis-à-vis his own literary heritage, and contemporary society and traditions, is expressed in an exemplary way. I will start with an analytical description of the *maqāma*'s features that tries to assign them a place on a scale between 'tradition' and 'innovation'. From my analytical findings I will conclude that what al-Shidyāq does here can be interpreted as a kind of 'subjectivist revolution' in that he uses the classical genre in order to focus on the narrating subject rather than on the 'trickster' character that is at the center of attention in premodern *maqāmāt*.

8.2 Continuities

Al-Shidyāq's *maqāma* shows all the main ingredients that have become typical of the genre:¹⁰

It is written in a highly rhetoricized rhyme prose (*saǧʿ*). The beginning of the internal narrator's story may serve as an example (*italics* indicating rhyming elements, with the rhyme changing from time to time):

⁸ Karam 1964.

⁹ Zakharia 2005.

¹⁰ For these, cf., for instance, the entries "Maqāma" (R. Drory) in *EAL*, ii (1998), 507–8, or [Brockelmann-] Pellat, in *El²* (1986). – A short overview over the history of the genre is Devin Stewart's "The *Maqāma*" (2006). A concise, but very good introduction can also be found in Al-len 1992b, 15–20.

'araqtu fi laylatin khāfiyati l-kawkab * bādiyati l-haydab * ṭawīlati l-dhanab * mal'ā min-a l-kurab * 'ilā l-karab * fa-ja'altu 'anāmu 'alā ṣahrī marratan wa-'alā janbī 'ukhrā * wa-ataṣawwaru shakhṣan nā'isan 'amāmi yatathā'abu wa-'ākhara yankhuru *nakhrā* * wa-'ākhara yatahawwamu *sakrā* * fa-'inna l-ṭaṣawwura fi-mā qālū yab'athu 'alā fi'li mā tarhabu n-*naḥsu fih* * wa-yunshītu 'ilā mā ṭaṣbū 'ilayhi wa-*tashtahīh* * ...¹¹

(al-Shidyāq, ed. Davies, 1855/2013, 190, I:13,2)

To drive rhetorisation still farther, most classical *maqāmāt* also contain, and sometimes to a large part even consist of, poetry. Al-Shidyāq's *maqāma* follows this 'rule' in that it culminates in a poem (of 16 verses, see below.)

Like most pieces of the two major exponents of the classical *maqāma*, 'Badī' al-Zamān' al-Hamadhānī (968–1008) and Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim b. 'Alī al-Ḥarīrī (1054–1122), al-Shidyāq's *maqāma*, too, has two main characters. As in the classical tradition, one of them is a first-person narrator and the other a rather strange, sometimes rogue-like, but always very witty and eloquent (*baligh*) person (often referred to as a *pícaro*). With the name of his narrator al-Shidyāq also makes a direct reference to al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī (see below) and thus almost overdoes his inscription into the classical tradition.

Moreover, al-Shidyāq imitates also the classical way of opening a *maqāma* with a *isnād*, the formula characteristic of a *ḥadīth* (report on sayings and/or deeds of the prophet Muḥammad).¹² Together with the names of the narrators

¹¹ In René Khawam's French translation: "Au cours d'une nuit d'insomnie, une nuit qui avait caché ses luminaires et fait pendre jusqu'à terre ses lambeaux de nuées, une nuit qui n'en finissait pas de tirer sa traîne, où s'accumulaient de sinistres figures, je m'efforçai de dormir, me mettant tantôt sur le dos, tantôt sur la côté, et me figurant avoir devant moi quelqu'un qui tombait de sommeil, bâillait et ronflait comme une cheminée, accompagné, pour faire bonne mesure, d'un ivrogne qui dodelinait du chef. On dit en effet que l'imagination incline à réaliser l'acte où le désir vous pousse, et seconde l'âme dans l'élan qu'elle veut prendre" – Shidyāq, tr. Khawam 1855/1991, 129–30. – Davies' English rendering also imitates the internal rhymes (*italics*): "Sleepless I lay on a night on which the stars were *concealed*, the clouds *revealed*, a night *never-ending*, full of worries to anguish *rending*. Now on my back to sleep I *tried*, now on any other *side*, placing before my eyes the image of a person drowsing or yawning or *snoring*, or of another into a drunken stupor *falling*. Imagination, they say, is conducive to the doing of the thing for which you *burn*, and stimulates the achievement of that for which you *yearn* [...]" – al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 191.

¹² On account of this *isnād*, some scholars argue that the genre was already meant to be a parody on scholarly *ḥadīth* when al-Hamadhānī 'invented' it, cf. (Brockelmann-) Pellat 1986 and Drory 1998.

(*ḥaddathanā X...*, *ḥaddathanā Y...* ‘X resp. Y reported to us that...’), this has become a kind of generic ‘marker’ for *maqāmāt* in general, and al-Shidyāq remains faithful to tradition, here again.¹³

As in classical *maqāmāt*, the story told by al-Shidyāq’s narrator, too, is quite a ‘dramatic’ one,¹⁴ and it also culminates in a sudden resolution of the dramatic suspense through the pointed speech of the *baligh*, the eloquent witty second protagonist. In al-Shidyāq’s *maqāma*, the story starts with the narrator, a certain al-Hāris b. Hithām (for this name, see below), being unable to find sleep one night.¹⁵ In order to pass his time, he goes to fetch a book from his library.¹⁶ In the book, an old authority holds an opinion that al-Hāris can hardly approve of,

13 In addition, Zakharia notices that not only the *isnād* reminds of al-Shidyāq’s forerunners, but also the first sentence as a whole, since it is clearly modeled after the beginning of al-Ḥarīrī’s *maqāma faraḍiyya* – see Zakharia 2005, 502.

14 Based on A. Kilito’s model (1976; revised by J. T. Monroe in 1983), Stewart gives a typical sequence of elements as follows: “1. The transmitter arrives in a city; 2. Formation of an assembly or gathering for learned discussion; 3. The protagonist enters the assembly; 4. The protagonist undertakes an eloquent performance; 5. Rewarding of the protagonist by the transmitter or other characters; 6. The protagonist leaves assembly, which breaks up; 7. The transmitter realizes the protagonist’s true identity; 8. The transmitter follows the protagonist; 9. The transmitter accosts or reproaches the protagonist; 10. Justification by the protagonist; 11. Parting of the two; 12. Departure of the transmitter from the city (implicit)” – Stewart 2006, 147. – As a matter of fact, this scheme was not always strictly followed, but modified and changed time and again, not only by later authors, but also by representatives of the classical age. However, it *has* constantly remained a point of orientation for intertextual reference – which is the case in al-Shidyāq’s *Sāq* too.

15 “Sleepless I lay on a night on which the stars were *concealed*, the clouds *revealed*, a night *never-ending*, full of worries to anguish *trending*. Now on my back to sleep I *tried*, now on any other *side*, placing before my eyes the image of a person drowsing or yawning or *snoring*, or of another into a drunken stupor *falling*. Imagination, they say, is conducive to the doing of the thing for which you *burn*, and stimulates the achievement of that for which you *yearn* [...]” – al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 190–91.

16 The book’s title is *Muwāzanat al-ḥālatayn wa-murāzanat al-ālatayn*, the author a certain Abū Rushd Nuḥya b. Ḥazm. Davies translates the title as *The Book of Balancing the Two States and Comparing the Two Straits*, adding that it “may be intended to evoke the *Kitāb al-Muwāzanah bayna Abī Tammām wa-l-Buḥturī* of al-Āmidī, although the latter compares not good and evil but the literary accomplishments of two poets” – al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 339, note 220. As for the author, Davies renders his name as “the Honored Shaykh and Productive Scholar of Perfect Virtue, Abū Rushd ‘Brains’ ibn Ḥazm” (ibid., 192–93), explaining that this “evokes two of the best known writers of the Maghreb – Ibn Rushd, known in the West as Averroes (520–95/1126–98), and Ibn Ḥazm (384–456/994–1064) – although the significance of the choice of these writers is not obvious. *Nuḥyah*, literally ‘mind’, is not part of the name of either writer” (ibid., 339, note 221).

namely that in life pleasure prevails over suffering. The next day, he immediately goes to see five living authorities, all of them representatives of the educated elite of that time: a bishop (*muṭrān*), a teacher (*mu'allim*), an expert in *sharī'a* law (*faqīh*), a poet (*shā'ir*), and a scribe/secretary/writer (*kātib*). However, none of them is able to help the narrator solve his existential problem. Their answers to his question about the acceptability of the old philosopher's opinion are all totally inadequate and testify to a formalist thinking far removed from the practical demands of everyday life: the *mu'allim*, for instance, suggests to cut out from the old authority's book the passages in favour of the preponderance of pleasant over unpleasant things, as well as those maintaining the contrary, and then weigh both on a pair of scales, and the *faqīh* proposes a mechanical word-counting. Disappointed at the answers of those whom people hold to be the most learned of their time, the authoritative representatives of knowledge, the narrator now sets out to seek help from a *dhū ḥadātha* (which can either mean “young man” or, more probably here, a “modernist”, an “innovator”), and this man – the second protagonist – is very quick in providing a solution: the eloquent hero who he is extemporates a short poem that simply but very convincingly states that everyone endowed with common sense knows that pleasures in life are only like “a drop in the sea” – that's it!

'ataytanī mustaftiyan fi 'amrī

* *ya 'lamuhū kullu 'mri'in dhī ḥijrī¹⁷*

al-khayru 'in qābaltahū bi-l-sharī

* *fi l-'umri kāna quṭratan min baḥrī*

[metre: *rajaz*]

You came to me seeking an answer –

* One to mindful men¹⁷ already known – to a question.

Good, compared to evil

* Is, over a life span, as a drop to an ocean.

(al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 198–99)

Taking together the elements listed so far, it is clear that al-Shidyāq is very conscious of the classical *maqāma* tradition and in a way even seeks to inscribe himself into it.

¹⁷ “mindful men” (*dhī ḥijrin*): an echo of Qur'ān, *Fajr* 89:5 – al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 340, note 226.

8.3 Ruptures and Changes

On the other hand, there are a considerable number of alterations. I will name only a few.

Unlike in the classical tradition, where several *maqāmāt* usually form a book in themselves, i.e., a mono-generic collection, al-Shidyāq's *maqāmāt* are only one of several other options within the generic diversity of *al-Sāq*. Rotraud Wielandt has aptly characterized the whole book as a blending of "travel account, autobiographical novel, *maqāma* parody and lexicological study"¹⁸ that serves, as it may seem, quite a number of heterogeneous purposes:

presentation of his own life, discussion of philosophical questions and issues of social politics, information on the countries where he had traveled, display of philological mastery, questioning of literary conventions, entertainment.

(Wielandt 1980, 80; my translation, S.G.)¹⁹

The *maqāmāt* are therefore to be treated as parts of a multi-generic diversity that the author is eager to display as being under his command. This diversity is however not a random mixture but a complex whole in which each element seems to be functional; the *maqāmāt* therefore are not only one among many disparate elements, but an *integral* part of that whole.²⁰

18 "ein Zwischending zwischen Reisebericht, autobiographischem Roman, Maqāmenparodie und lexikalischer Studie": Wielandt 1980, esp. 77–98, here 73 (my translation, S.G.). – The question of genre is explicitly addressed by Peled 1985; the author concludes that the *Sāq* is best characterised as a "Menippean satire" (ibid., 44 ff.). Cf., however, Al-Bagdadi 1999a, 391, who terms the *Sāq* a "novel".

19 Original German: "Darbietung [d]er eigenen Lebensgeschichte, Diskussion philosophischer und gesellschaftspolitischer Fragen, Information über die von ihm bereisten Länder, Demonstration philologischer Feinheiten, Infragestellung literarischer Konventionen, Unterhaltung". – Al-Bagdadi 1999a, 391, assigns the *Sāq* "a twofold goal: the rejection of prevalent social and cultural norms and their inherent *Weltanschauung*, and a claim for the legitimacy of the new age of modernity."

20 This becomes clear, among others, from the fact that, in the opening passage of the first *maqāma*, the author has already a distinct idea of the structure of the whole *Sāq*: after this first *maqāma*, he says, there will be three others to follow, each of them as 'chapter 13' of a total of the four 'books' of the *Sāq*, so that "[t]he total number of *maqāmāhs* in it will [...], I believe, be four" – al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 190–91. – For the integral function of seemingly still more disparate elements as, e.g., the long lists of vocabulary items, cf. Zakharia 2005, 509–16, and before her already Peled 1991, passim; for in-depth studies of the phenomenon, see Junge 2019a and id. 2019b.

From the chapter's title, which is "*Fī maqāma*" (*On a maqāma*), it follows that al-Shidyāq's piece is in itself meant to be a comment on *maqāma* writing in general.²¹ This 'meta-dimension' testifies to a distance to the genre which seems at the same time reflexive and playful.

It is certainly also an element of irony. The *maqāma* abounds in these, but I will only mention the most disrespectful instances:

The *maqāma* proper is preceded by a short introduction which goes like this:

A while has passed now since I tasked myself with writing in rhymed prose [*saj'*] and patterned period [*tajnis*²²], and I think I've forgotten how to do so. I must therefore put my faculties to the test in this chapter, which is worthier than the rest – because it's higher in number than the twelfth and lower than the fourteenth – and I shall continue to do so in every chapter branded with this number till I've finished my four books. The total number of *maqāmahs* in it will therefore, I believe, be four.

(al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 190–91)

As if an educated person with some respect for the great classical tradition could ever forget about *saj'* and *tajnis*, at a time when ornate prose still used to be one of the fundamental writing skills and a respected man of letters had to legitimize his claim to belong to the educated elite by producing something in ornate prose! Al-Shidyāq underlines his disrespectful mocking of these norms not only by the lapidarity of the words "and I think I may have forgotten it" (*wa-aḥsibunī nasītu dhālik*) but also by the nonsense reason he gives for including a *maqāma* at exactly this position of the *Sāq*.

21 This is also Katia Zakharia's interpretation, cf. Zakharia 2005, 498, where she renders the expression *Fī maqāma* as "à propos d'une *maqāma*". René Khawam circumscribes the title as "Une séance, ou comment ce chapitre treizième enseigne à s'asseoir" – al-Shidyāq (Chidyāq), tr. Khawam 1855/1991, 129 – and thus suggests that the subtitle of the first *maqāma* should be read somehow parallel to the subtitles of the remaining three, which are (2) *Fī maqāma muq'ida*, (3) *Fī maqāma muqīma*, and (4) *Fī maqāma mumshiya*, i.e., in Khawam's rendering, (2) "une séance qui (...) oblige à rester sur son séant", (3) "une séance qui amène, paradoxalement, à se lever", (4) "une séance qui (...) fait marcher" (ibid., 291, 494, 670, respectively) [Zakharia has: (2) "à propos d'une *maqāma* qui laisse impuissant", 'privé de mouvement' ou '... qui lasse assis', (3) "la *maqāma* qui fait se lever", (4) "la *maqāma* qui fait se mettre en marche" – Zakharia 2005, 499]. Since the first *maqāma*'s subtitle does not have a *muf'il* (form IV) participle denoting a type of movement, it is however not very plausible that the notion of 'instruction how to sit down' is contained in *Fī maqāma* – this is why I prefer simply "about a *maqāma*".

22 Also called *jinās*, in many, if not most (but by far not all) cases equalling our 'paronymasy', a rhetorical figure playing on homonymy.

That al-Shidyāq is ironicizing the very fundamentals of *maqāma* writing here will be even more obvious when the remarks of the introductory paragraph become paralleled with the disrespect of pure *saj'* as expressed a little earlier in the book. There, the writer despises *saj'* openly as being “like a wooden leg for him who wants to walk”.²³

A major element of irony in the *maqāma* is, as a matter of course, also the way in which al-Shidyāq sarcastically portrays traditional learning and respected institutions of knowledge like the bishop, teacher, *sharī'a* law expert, poet, and scribe/secretary (see above). We may also add to this group the old ‘philosopher’ whose book the narrator happens to take out from his library the night he cannot find sleep. Not only is the latter’s opinion on the preponderance of pleasure over suffering in life reduced to absurdity in the end (and, earlier, through the narrator’s own experience already²⁴), but al-Shidyāq also mocks him by attaching a strange name to him.²⁵

The opening sentence which in al-Hamadhānī’s *maqāmāt* usually is “ḥaddathanā ‘Īsā b. Hishām...” (‘Īsā b. Hishām reported to us...) and the name of al-Ḥārīrī’s trickster, al-Ḥārith b. Hammām, are blended into each other and in al-Shidyāq’s *maqāma* become “ḥadasa al-Hāris b. Hithām”. That is, the good old Arabic names al-Ḥārith and Hishām become softened and, if one can say so, ‘lispalized’ into Hāris and Hithām (*h>h, th>s, sh>th*),²⁶ while at the same time the narrator’s name now means something like “the Crusher, son of the Smasher”;²⁷ and the honorable formula of transmitting a *ḥadīth*, probably a parody already

²³ “al-saj’ li-l-mu’allif ka-l-rijl min khashab li-l-māshī”, *al-Sāq*, book 1, opening of ch. 10 (my translation; S.G.). Sulaiman Jubran collected still a number of other sayings on the uselessness of *saj’* for its own sake, cf. Jubran 1989, here 150.

²⁴ Cf. the narrator’s immediate reaction after reading the philosopher’s words: “[I said to myself], ‘Glory be! Every writer, however great, must on occasion be out of joint’” – al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 192–93.

²⁵ As Zakharia 2005, 505, has it, “Abū Ruṣd Nuhyā Ibn Ḥazm est un composé construit à partir des noms de deux célèbres penseurs originaires tous deux de l’Occident musulman, Ibn Ruṣd (Averroes, m. 1198) et Ibn Ḥazm (m. 1064). [Fn. 33:] Nuhyā est parasyndrome de ‘aql”.

²⁶ To imitate the “lipping tones”, Davies renders the name as “al-Hāwif ibn Hifām” – al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 191. – Cf. Zakharia 2005, 501, adds that, “Hiṭām, c’est la manière dont une personne qui aurait un ‘cheveu’ sur la langue, confondant dentale et interdental spirants sourdes, prononcerait Hiṣām”. A similar confusion is noticed, *ibid.*, for ‘Hāris’ instead of ‘Ḥārīrī’ and thought to be hinting at “les orientalistes ou traducteurs officiels européens” among whom the two kinds of confusion were “courantes à l’époque de Ṣidyāq”.

²⁷ Davies translates it as “Masher, son of Pulverizer” – al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 339 (fn. 219), while Zakharia 2005, 500, has “Pulvériser fils de Broyé”.

with al-Hamadhānī,²⁸ has become ridiculously distorted, since the verb of the classical *isnād*, *ḥaddatha* “he reported”, has been replaced by al-Shadyāq with *ḥadasa*, turning the trustworthiness and seriousness of ‘transmitting a report’ into pure ‘conjecturing’; the comic effect of parodying a parody is underlined again through the *th>s* shift and the softening *dd>d* from classical *ḥaddatha* to al-Shidyāq’s *ḥadasa*.²⁹

As regards content, an overall intellectualisation is to be observed. The theme – pleasure and suffering in life – is a philosophical question, the narrator is an intellectual (he owns a large library!), and the witty trickster of the classical *maqāmāt* too has now become a witty intellectual. Furthermore, the whole *maqāma* is used as a vehicle for a specifically intellectual activity – social criticism (cf. the very unpleasant comments on the learned authorities’ stupidity). With this, the *maqāma* is the whole *Sāq* in a nutshell, since al-Shidyāq meant his book to be a treatise containing *observations critiques* (critical observations), as the French subtitle translates the Arabic ‘*ajm*, which literally means “to bite on a coin in order to know if it is genuine”.³⁰ While for the classical genre social criticism cannot safely be assumed to have been a major motive of writing,³¹ it has explicitly become one in the *maqāmāt* of al-Shidyāq’s *Sāq*. (NB: The fact that the purpose of composing a *maqāma* has been subdued here to the purpose of the

²⁸ See above, fn. 12.

²⁹ For contemporaries this opening must have sounded similarly shocking as did Richard Wagner’s *Tristan* chord for its listeners as it went until the very limits of what was allowed in classical and even early Romantic harmonics (only a few years after the *Sāq*, by the way!) and in this way created an immense and highly expressive inner tension. In the *Sāq*, this tension is, of course, not tragic and serious as in *Tristan*, but nonetheless challenging and provocative; for the contemporaries, its effect must have been almost obscene.

³⁰ The whole subtitle literally reads “Days, months, and years [spent in] putting Arabs and non-Arabs to the critical test” (*ayyām wa-shuhūr wa-a’wām fi ‘ajm al-‘arab wa-l-a’jām*) which the author himself translates into French on the cover as “(La vie et les aventures de Fariac,) Relation de ses voyages, avec ses observations critiques sur les arabes et sur les autres peuples”.

³¹ While there is an “obvious humorist intent” (Drory 1998) in most of the classical *maqāmāt*, a reading as social criticism may well be too modern an interpretation. For al-Hamadhānī (d. 1008) the “comic relief” after serious sessions is probably the starting point from which he indulges in “parodic variations on familiar, often well-chewed pieces of *adab* knowledge”, while with al-Ḥarīrī (d. 1122) the main purpose is already the display of “eloquence and stylistic dexterity”, and he focusses on “language, style and edifying subject matter” (*ibid.*). – Cf. however J. Christoph Bürgel’s arguments in favour of ‘social criticism’ in his “Gesellschaftskritik im Schelmengewand” (Bürgel 1991).

whole book may serve as a further evidence of the author following a holistic vision rather than simply putting together disparate elements for mere entertainment, see above.) The overall tone is anti-idealist, eventually even pessimist:

<i>fa-laysa dunyānā li-ahli l-khibrī</i>	*	<i>siwā balā'in dā'imīn wa-khusrī</i>
<i>yūladu fihā l-'abdu ghayra ḥurrin</i>	*	<i>wa-hākadhā yamūtu ragħman fa-'drī</i>
This world of ours, to those who know,	*	Is naught but loss and tribulation that we must endure.
Man's born enslaved, not free,	*	And so he dies, of that you may be sure.
		(al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 200–01)

Making the *maqāma* a vehicle for 'ajm also means reclaiming content from the rhetorical mannerism into which much of *maqāma* writing had fallen by al-Shidyāq's times (this is why the whole genre could become so despised by the new educated elites during the second half of the century and why it eventually died out). This anti-mannerist turn is in itself paralleled by the emphasis on 'natural' thinking, on common sense (cf. "the man endowed with common sense", *imru' dhū ḥijr*, in the verse quoted above), and on empiricism (cf. the way the narrator confronts the medieval philosopher Abū Rushd's idea that pleasure and delight may be evoked by facts [*fī'l*] as well as through imagination [*taṣawwur*], with the fact that he himself had still been unable to find sleep although he had imagined himself in front of a person yawning etc. – al-Shidyāq, tr. Davies 1855/2013, 192–93).

A further significant deviation from the classical model, and probably the most important one in the context of 'ego documents', is the eminent role attributed to the narrating subject in/by al-Shidyāq's text.³² A classical *maqāma* has an author (say, al-Hamadhānī or al-Ḥarīrī) who 'installs' a first-person narrator (ʿĪsā b. Hishām in al-Hamadhānī's case, al-Ḥārith b. Hammām in al-Ḥarīrī's) who in turn tells the story, as if it were a *ḥadīth*, of his encounter with the intradiegetic hero, the witty eloquent trickster/*pícaro* (Abū l-Faṭḥ al-Iskandarī with al-Hamadhānī, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī with al-Ḥarīrī). In an average *maqāma*, the trickster and his deeds are at the center of attention, and they are also allotted the

³² Cf. for the following also Zakharia's section *Les voix de la narration* – Zakharia 2005, 499–500. – Al-Bagdadi, too, holds that it is "in the author's construction of the authorial personae" that "[t]he most radical and significant alteration [vis-à-vis traditional narratives] occurs" – Al-Bagdadi 1999a, 392.

most space. In al-Shidyāq's text, however, things are different and much more complex (cf. Fig. 1).

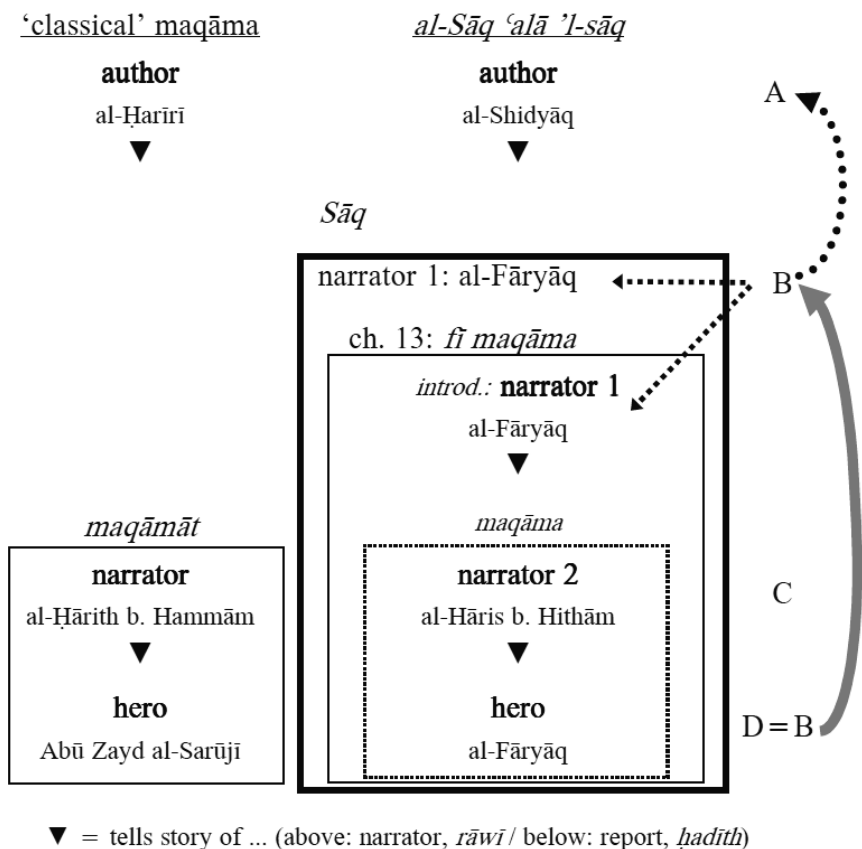


Fig. 1: Author and narrator – Levels of narrative, and reference to author al-Shidyāq

There, al-Shidyāq the Author (as figuring on the book's cover) installs a first-person narrator, whom he calls "al-Fāryāq", as the narrator of the whole book. It is easy to discern that this rather strange name refers back to the author himself because it is composed of the first part of **Fāris** and the second of Shidyāq: Fāryāq. Now, this Fāryāq, who serves as the author's *alter ego* throughout the *Sāq*, in the 13th chapter of the book gives a short introduction to the *maqāma* which is to follow, then appoints another first-person narrator (al-Hāris b. Hithām), who

eventually meets the second protagonist, the eloquent trickster. While a classical *maqāma* would normally focus on the *pícaro*'s trickery and his verbal art, in al-Shidyāq's text the modern counterpart of the trickster does not make his appearance earlier than on the last but one of a whole of five pages, i.e., the emphasis here is on the narrator of the *maqāma*, al-Hāris b. Hithām, rather than on the character who would be the real hero in classical texts. Moreover, when the modern *pícaro* finally *does* appear he turns out to be a narrating subject again – he is nobody else than al-Fāryāq, the narrator of the *Sāq*! As a result, there is a double emphasis on the narrating subjects, and especially al-Fāryāq *a.k.a.* al-Shidyāq.³³

Whereas in the classical *maqāma* the hero usually “appears in a certain public place (a market, a mosque, a cemetery, a public bath, a traveling caravan, etc.) [...] and tricks people into donating him money by manipulating their feelings and beliefs” (Drory 1998), these elements are absent from al-Shidyāq's text. The public space has been substituted with the room where al-Fāryāq is very busy with copying (*naskh*),³⁴ and although the protagonist shares some of the characteristics of the classical *pícaro* (the strange beggar-like appearance which makes the narrator feel pity with him, and eloquence), he does not fool his audience but rather guides his visitor to the simple truth in the philosophical question (see ‘intellectualisation’, ‘realism’, ‘common sense’, ‘empiricism’ above).

8.4 Conclusions

I think it has become evident from my analysis that Arabic literature could be very lively and innovative already *before* it came to feel the need to conform to non-Arabic, Europeanizing modes of writing. The adoption of the latter became widespread by the 1870s, especially with translations from French and English as well as the type of stories Salīm al-Bustānī serialized in his *al-Jinān* (Beirut).³⁵ Al-Shidyāq's approach to the *maqāma* (and all the other classical genres on which he

33 Zakharia calls it a “dédoublement, faisant vivre l'auteur tant dans le narrateur que dans le héros” as well as a “jeu de miroir”; she too thinks that this “fragmentation de l'instance de l'auteur démultiplie ses images et renforce dans le texte sa présence parce qu'elle la fait éclater” – Zakharia 2005, 499–500.

34 This may be read as another reference to al-Shidyāq the Author, since it is known that in his youth al-Shidyāq had earned his living as a copyist, that he kept the habit of copying whole books with his own hand and that large parts of his private library consisted of books he had hand-copied himself. Cf. Roper 1995, 211.

35 The first ‘Western-style’ Arabic narrative is probably Khalil al-Khūrī's *Wāy 'idhan lastu bi-ʿifranjī!* (Woe! So I am not a European then?, 1859). [See Chapters 4 and 9 of the present volume. –

heavily draws in *al-Sāq*) however shows that critical thinking, reform and innovation was possible also from within the autochthonous indigenous tradition (and would probably have been carried on from there had the East been spared colonial intervention and the total overthrow of self-esteem as well as the loss of trust in the own traditions that accompanied it). Pre-Westernized Arabic literature is therefore extremely worth a closer look; though still wearing a more or less traditional garment, a text from this epoch may express very modern thoughts and may well be a document of what we call Modern Times.³⁶

If we look at literature as forming an integral part of an overall *cultural* system and at literary genres as being also *cultural* norms, then al-Shidyāq's treatment of the *maqāma* tradition testifies to the formation of an intellectual culture from *within* the autochthonous tradition.³⁷ Al-Shidyāq then could be seen as representative of a group of individuals within the old educated elite who strove to conquer a domain, rich in symbolic capital, from traditional authorities like the bishops, the teachers, the *fuqahā*' etc., and this group of reformists tried to beat the old authorities at their own game, using a classical genre – the mastering of which had been a symbol of their claim to an elitarian standing – against its misuse through this very same old elite.³⁸

Last point: periodisation. The search for 'individuals' and/or 'egos' outside the European context has been so intense in recent years because in the West their emergence is believed to mark the beginning of new eras, be it Modern Times, or Renaissance, or Enlightenment, etc., whereas Orientalism had denied the 'backward' East its participation in these epochs on account of, among other reasons, an alleged lack of individual, anti-traditional thinking and a missing ego-perspective. These, it was believed, were introduced into the East only with

For a recent edition of one of Salīm al-Bustānī's most important novels, *al-Huyām fī jinān al-Shām*, see al-Bustānī 1870, ed. Jonsson and Guth 2023. – An own study of another of al-Bustānī's novels, *Bint al-'aṣr* (1875), is Guth 1999 = Chapter 10 in the present volume.]

36 The text, then, mirrors the habitus of its author, who even when he was living in Europe for several years "resolutely refused to wear European clothes and remained always faithful to his tarboosh and Turkish fashion" and who therefore "must have been a remarkable spectacle on the streets of Victorian London and Paris of the Second Empire", as A. J. Arberry 1952, 156, imagined; but despite his 'Oriental' appearance he was undoubtedly modern.

37 Cf. the findings of Carter Findley as summed up by Geoffrey Roper: "In the forefront of th[e] process [...] which amounted to nothing less than the modernisation and renewal of the literary and intellectual culture of the Middle East, were certain litterateurs – *udabā*' – who [...] came from the old literary scribal elite, but evolved into the vanguard of the new culture" – Roper 1995, 210, with reference to Findley 1989, 132.

38 Cf. also Roper 1995 who holds that al-Shidyāq represents "the Transition from Scribal to Print Culture in the Middle East" (title of article).

the advent of the Europeans, and it was only when the ‘Orientals’ began to imitate Western forms that they came to know subjectivity, et cetera. It is obvious, however, from my above analysis that despite al-Shidyāq’s use of ‘very Arabic’ literary genres such as the *maqāma*,³⁹ he made a very individualistic, subjective use of the elements of tradition that he had at his disposal, and that he thought of himself as an individual in quite the same way as his Western contemporaries. To stress my point, I would even dare to conclude that he already participated fully in the global discourses of his time. While Orientalism tended to let cultural ‘evolution’ happen in the East with a time-lag of almost a century when compared to the West (Enlightenment, e.g., which is an eighteenth-century phenomenon in the West, was said to have gained momentum in the East not before the late nineteenth century), I would think that what al-Shidyāq does in *al-Sāq* has let Enlightenment already far behind and is rather to be localized, on a European scale of cultural/literary history, somewhere between Romanticism and Realism, i.e., at the same point of ‘evolution’ at which his European contemporaries had arrived by the same time (cf. Fig. 2). As a whole, *al-Sāq* is certainly closer already to Realism than it is still to Romanticism, and in this it mirrors exactly the European scene by the middle of the century when Realism had, for the most part, ‘taken over’ from Romanticism, but many Romantic elements simultaneously still remained active. With his aim of critically observing “Arabs and other people” and commenting on the social situation and cultural phenomena, al-Shidyāq resembles authors like, say, Georg Büchner, Heinrich Heine, or the Russian realists. The realists’ (anti-Romanticist) call for an objective observation and description of the world “as it is”, so extensively transformed into literature by Honoré de Balzac in his *Comédie humaine*, a series of almost a hundred novels, is paralleled by al-Shidyāq’s call for common sense and empiricism as the basis for perception and arguing, and his anti-elitist down-to-earth stance that emphasizes Reality (as opposed to the old educated elite’s formalism and the self-referentiality of language that has lost all touch with life). Against the culture of an educated elite (be it the indulgence in mere verbosity and scholasticism in the East or Romantic idealism in the West) both European realists and al-Shidyāq turn to the culture of everyday life and ‘ordinary’ people (though not neglecting intellectual questions). Linguistically, both favour anti-mannerism and a simple prose (al-Shidyāq’s *maqāma* may, at first sight, not be the best example of this, but we have seen that, in contrast to many contemporary *maqāmāt* which are fireworks of verbosity and mere

³⁹ For instance, he also wrote (in 1850) a panegyric on Queen Victoria, in which he compared her to the virgins of Paradise! Cf. Arberry (1952), who gives the whole text in Arabic (157–60) and English translation (160–64).

displays of linguistic dexterity, it reclaims content from the empty form, it *has* an entertaining, pointed story, it *has* a message, and when compared to, say, al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt* it is much more readable, much less demanding).

Tab. 1: al-Shidyāq's *Sāq* between 'Romanticism' and 'Realism'

al-Shidyāq, <i>al-Sāq 'alà l-sāq</i>	Western Romanticism
– blending and juxtaposition of genres, going beyond generic convention and norms	– longing for melting contradictory elements into a harmonic whole – “Universalpoesie” ! (Fr. Schlegel), fusion of poetry, science, philosophy – “Gesamtkunstwerk”! (R. Wagner)
– prominence of/emphasis on narrating subject	– calling for complete subjectivity [cf., e.g., author and narrator of Romantic stories (< Goethe, <i>Werther</i>), solo-part in concerts for instruments solo]
– display of (individual) virtuosity, of ‘geniality’, of highest intellectualism	– cf. piano and violin virtuosos like F. Liszt or N. Paganini (cadences!); the “ingenious thinker”
– meta-dimension: organisation of material, commenting on playing with conventions, self-reflexivity, self-irony	– author takes superior position vis-à-vis his work – “Romantic irony”: marking the ‘falseness’ (illusionism) of a work of art, internal references to fictionality
– antinormativity: irony/parody	– desire to go beyond limits and boundaries, to overthrow norms, call for freedom → ridiculing everything normative
– anti-mannerism: naturalness!	– search for authenticity (fairy tales, sagas, popular songs and dances, myths; experiencing nature, the ‘natural state’ (Rousseau)), the ‘truth’ of the simple, the original, the ‘naive’
– stressing fictionality, phantasy, free play ⁴⁰	– importance of phantasy and creativity (freedom, antinormativity), the artist as the free creative ‘genius’

⁴⁰ Both N. Al-Bagdadi and K. Zakharia stress the ‘play’-fulness of al-Shidyāq's approach: Al-Bagdadi speaks of “consciously played games [!] of self-referentiality” (1999a, 394), while Zakharia calls it a “jeu [!] de miroir” (see above, fn. 33).

al-Shidyāq, <i>al-Sāq 'alā l-sāq</i>	Western Realism
– social criticism, intellectual comments on life (<i>ajm</i>)	– cf., e.g., Georg Büchner, Heinrich Heine, Russian realists
– strong reference to, and rootedness in, reality, common sense, empiricism	– ‘objective’ observation of the tangible, of the world “as it is”; Balzac, <i>Comédie humaine</i> (almost 100 novels)
– anti-mannerism	– against stylisation and over-rhetoricisation, unornamented prose
– against losing contact to normal/everyday life, anti-scholasticism, attacks on elitism of the old educated elite	– against romantic idealism → everyday life, banality, bourgeois and citizens, workers, ‘ordinary’ people

On the other hand, there are still many traces of Romanticism in *al-Sāq*. The blending of various genres within one single book, where *maqāmāt* are embedded in a mixture of autobiography, travel account, lexicological study, philosophical treatise, etc., which makes it often difficult to decide what sort of text we are dealing with (if seen against the background of classical genres) reminds me of Western romantic ideas of overcoming the essential deficiency and inadequateness of artistic means vis-à-vis the totality and unlimitedness of reality and the universe by dissolving the generic boundaries and a fusion of poetry, science and philosophy in the type of “universal poetry” (*Universalpoesie*) that Friedrich Schlegel called for, or Richard Wagner’s idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a “total”, “integrated”, or “complete artwork”, “an operatic performance encompassing music, theater, and the visual arts”⁴¹). The desire to go beyond the limits and boundaries and to overthrow all norms and conventions is paralleled by, and in fact an expression of, the romantic individual’s longing for absolute freedom, which make take on sentimental tones, but very often is sublimated into an ironical attitude, the expression of the writers’ insight into the tragic transcendence of absolute freedom, and a kind of artistic compromise: ironically, the freedom of ‘total’ objectivity is to be reached only in a metafictional reflexion about the createdness, and thus subjectivity, of a work of art. We have seen that al-Shidyāq’s *Sāq* has this dimension, too: the author disguising himself as “al-Fāryāq” and

⁴¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gesamtkunstwerk> (accessed March 15, 2008). – The idea was developed in 1851, only four years before the publication of *al-Sāq*, in Wagner’s theoretical treatise *Oper und Drama*.

thus pointing to the createdness of the protagonist, while at the same time endowing the ‘fictional’ character with his own traits; cf. also the vexing identity of the *maqāma*’s second protagonist with the narrator of the *Sāq*, al-Fāryāq; very much reminding of European Romantics’ metafictional devices is also al-Shidyāq’s ending a passage of *saj*’ with the self-ironical words: “The *saj*’ ends here because it has filled up the page”;⁴² cf. also N. Al-Bagdadi’s fine characterisation:

His [sc. al-Shidyāq’s] sense for the gap between the word and the world is consciously bridged in al-Shidyāq’s work by his insistence and maintenance of a classical tradition that has lost, as he points out, to a certain extent, its binding authority in the production of sense. Irony fulfills here the function of reconstructing the harmony of a thing and a meaning that is no longer existent –

(Al-Bagdadi 1999a, 401)

a typically Romantic dilemma! – Finally, the most Romanticist element in *al-Sāq* is certainly the emphasis on the narrating subject. It makes itself felt not only in the references the author makes to himself through his narrator(s), as we saw above in his *maqāma*, but throughout the *Sāq* also in the display of the author’s virtuosity, of his unparalleled ‘genius’ and highest intellectualism, which enable him to handle tradition not only with perfect mastery, but also from an ironic distance, as someone who freely plays on and with it and takes it only as a starting-point for his own flights of phantasy.⁴³ It goes without saying that this can easily be compared, e.g., to the prominent role of the virtuoso in Western Romantic music (it suffices to mention, e.g., piano and violin virtuosos like Franz Liszt, 1811–1886, or Nic(c)olò Paganini, 1782–1840, who toured Europe as a kind of ‘supernatural’ beings, heroes gifted with almost devine, ‘demonic’ qualities for whom the brilliant cadences in piano or violin concertos were written, or who improvised them) and the emergence of the ‘ingenious thinker’, who enjoyed equal reverence because of his individual originality, the free creativity of his ‘genius’, the rhapsodic flight of his phantasy.

The assumption that al-Shidyāq, in spite of his rooting in autochthonous traditions, is already fully under the influence of the same global discourses that had ‘taken hold’ of his European contemporaries, may further be substantiated by drawing on another model of periodisation, one which is not so laden, as terms like Romanticism and Realism are, with specifically European associations.

⁴² Quoted by Jubran 1989, 156–7.

⁴³ G. Roper goes as far as saying that “a vibrant individualism, even egotism” can be sensed “throughout al-Shidyāq’s writings”, not only *al-Sāq*, because much of his work “is indeed directly about himself” – Roper 1995, 222.

The term used by German scholar Walter Falk to describe the period between, roughly, 1820 and 1880, is Reproductionism (cf. Fig. 2).

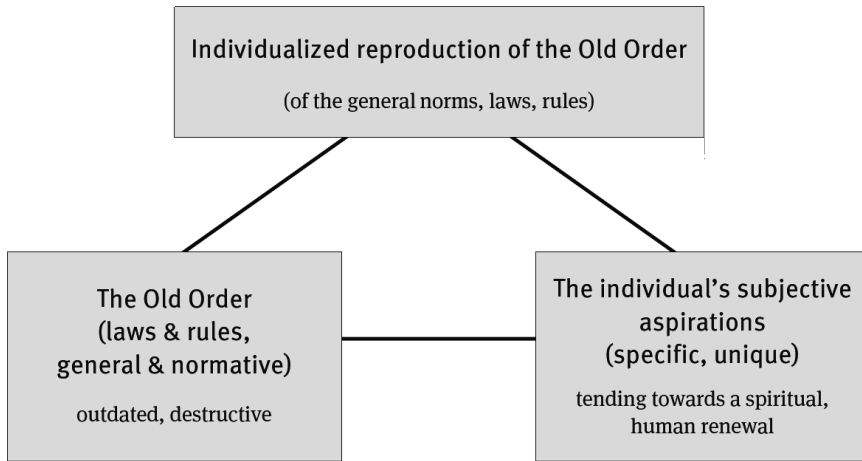


Fig. 2: The ‘Reproductionist’ Period (c. 1820–1880), according to W. Falk⁴⁴

According to Falk, this period is characterized, on the one hand, by the overwhelming experience of an Old Order, a dated system of norms and general rules which are experienced as tending to destroy all life, and on the other hand by an individual subject who tries to reclaim life from this order through a restoration of essentially human values to it; however, the individual is eventually forced, time and again, to realize that the system is essentially unchangeable, and there remains nothing for man therefore as to content oneself with an *individual* reproduction of the Old Order. No question that this is exactly what also al-Shidyāq does and why his individuality and subjectivity stand out even more against the background of his time.

⁴⁴ Falk 1984, 31. [For a discussion of this model, cf. above, Chapters 1 and 2, and introductions to Chapters 4 and 5.]