

## 12 A manifesto of early *adab qawmī*

### ʿĪsā ʿUbayd’s programmatic preface to “Miss Ihsan” – Introduction and translation

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**This chapter:** While Parts III and IV above were still mainly concerned with the nineteenth century, dealing with genre transitions and various aspects of the emerging subjects’ wish to assert themselves, we move on now, with Part V, to the twentieth century, looking at “The Nahḍa at its zenith” in the period shortly before and immediately following the First World War. We will meet in this section subjects who no longer believe in a future within the political framework of the Ottoman Empire but take the need to build a new type of community – the nation state – for granted.

In the chapter below we are going to listen directly (albeit in English translation) to the discussion about the then current state of affairs, and conclusions to be drawn from its analysis, as described and suggested by ʿĪsā ʿUbayd, one of the members of the Egyptian “Modern School” (*al-Madrasa al-Ḥadītha*), a group of writers who aspired to create a genuinely Egyptian “national literature” (*adab qawmī*). In Chapters 13 and 14 we will become acquainted with two other (and more prominent) members of this group, Maḥmūd Taymūr (1894–1973) and Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn (1894–1954), and in Chapter 15 with one of their Turkish counterparts, Reşat Nuri (Reşad Nūri) Güntekin (1889–1956).

The four chapters in this section, Part V, are meant to shed light on the identity-seeking *national* subject from various angles. In the chapter below (Chapter 12), my translation of ʿUbayd’s programmatic foreword to a collection of modern Egyptian short stories (published in 1921) is intended as a presentation of the universe of theoretical thinking about the project of a “national literature” in its whole breadth, unshortened and as directly as possible (original terminology is provided amply in Romanized transcription in footnotes). The presentation of ʿUbayd’s ideas is followed, in Chapter 13, by an overview of the life and work of the most prolific member of the Modern School, Maḥmūd Taymūr, often called the “father” of the Egyptian short story. As a literary biography, the chapter can/should be read as complementary to ʿUbayd’s *muqaddima*, i.e., as an exemplary illustration of the background such a theoretical text would have in the life

trajectory of a contemporary writer/*adīb* (note that Taymūr published a very similar programmatic foreword himself only a few years after ‘Ubayd’), and also of how one of the authors of the group ‘translated’ the theoretical program into concrete texts. Chapter 14 will then ‘zoom in’ on one specific piece of short fiction, “A Ghost Story” (*Qiṣṣat ‘ifrit*) by Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn, an author who has not become as famous as Maḥmūd Taymūr, although with him the art of short story writing certainly reached a new and unprecedented quality (as already remarked by Sabry Hafez who saw in Lāshīn the mature culmination of the evolution of literary discourse since the nineteenth century).<sup>2</sup>

While the Lāshīn chapter also will return to the question, raised already above on several occasions, of periodisation and coevalness with other ‘global’ developments, the chapter on Güntekin’s *Çalikuşu* (“The Wren”) of 1924 (Chapter 15) will study another specimen of “national literature”, this time from Turkey,<sup>3</sup> and this time also much more prominent and influential than Taymūr’s, ‘Ubayd’s or Lāshīn’s stories, as *Çalikuşu* became a ‘bestseller’ of the newly founded Turkish Republic – evidently, it captured the spirit of the time in an exemplary manner. The focus in the *Çalikuşu* chapter will be on the question of gendering, as this will reveal in a highly interesting (and perhaps also surprising) way the anxieties and vulnerability of the newly emerged ‘national subject’, aspects that may easily be overlooked if one only attends to the surface of the then current ‘Yes, we can!’ optimism propagated by the early nation-builders.

The ‘national subjects’ we encounter in Part V are easily recognisable as extensions of the earlier Nahḍawī subjects we met in Parts III and IV. For the nation-builders, who still see themselves as the *guides*<sup>4</sup> in an *overall renaissance* (now the *nation’s* guides, teachers, doctors, etc.) and *revolution of thinking*, it is still – and in an era of *big* (national) *awakening* perhaps even more than before – the overall goal (and even *duty*) to attain a state of *civilisation*; in order to reach this, one has to continue on the path of *progress*, which includes not only scientific, technological and medical progress, but also *social reform* and a *refinement of morals*, always aiming to become and remain ‘modern’, keeping pace with the spirit of *modernity* (*ḥadātha*) and maintaining a civilisational level that is felt to be ‘universal’, built on *eternal human constituents*.

<sup>1</sup> In Maḥmūd Taymūr, *al-Shaykh Jum‘a, wa-qīṣaṣ ukhrā* (1925).

<sup>2</sup> Hafez 1993, chs. 6 and 7.

<sup>3</sup> Other early Republican texts from Turkey are portrayed below, in Chapter 19.

<sup>4</sup> In the following, *italics* will point to key terminology used by ‘Ubayd in his *Muqaddima* (for the corresponding Arabic terms, cf. footnote section below as well as the word cloud at the end of the translation).

The author of the programmatic foreword is aware of obstacles that are to be overcome on the way to progress, but the general mood speaking from ‘Ubayd’s *Muqaddima* is that of a powerful, energetic, lively, enthusiastic, almost exuberant, passionate optimism, nourished by a belief in *Life* as a fundamental principle governing the world. The *passion* that Khalīl al-Khūrī had begun to call for in the early 1860s (cf. above, Chapter 9) has now gained momentum and turned into a passion for the new nation-to-be, integrating additional influences from Bergsonian philosophy with its irrational belief in the organic impulses of a power called *Life*. This implies a focus on the (living) *present*, not the (dead) *past*, and the conviction that this *Life* is so *vital* and *strong* that all *stagnation* and the *morbid, inorganic sterility* of dated and *static* tradition will soon be swept away.

The subjectivity that now seeks to assert itself is not so much the personal self that Khalīl al-Khūrī meant when he stressed the importance of the “independent self” (see above, Chapters 4 and 9), but rather that of its complementary counterpart in the ‘dualism of selves’ observed by Sheehi in Jurjī Zaydān’s *al-Mamlūk al-shārid* (see above, introductory section to Chapter 11); rather, it is the subjectivity of the new collective ‘*national self*’ in all its *individuality, uniqueness* and local/regional *specificity*, with its own, *national* (here: *Egyptian* and *Oriental*) *personality/character* or *temperament, mentality, tastes, social, emotional* and *moral life, customs, and traditions*. And this is also the reason why the new “national literature”, the creation of which is seen as a “*holy duty*” (note the quasi-religious, now secularised fervour!), should clearly be imprinted by *local colour* – a postulate that according to ‘Ubayd for many of his writer colleagues even implied the use of the Egyptian *vernacular*, the real ‘national language’, in literary discourse (a position ‘Ubayd himself is reluctant to support in full; he rather favours an “*intermediate*” language, a *lughā mutawassīṭa*).

A Nahḍawī spirit also speaks from the methods with which writers, according to ‘Ubayd, should approach the world. As a *rational* subject, the national subject, too, *observes* and *critically analyses* the world as its object, and it does so based on *science* and informed by, or with the aim to produce, plausible *theories*. (The sciences that ‘Ubayd considers most relevant for the project of analysing the *national character* and the Egyptian *temperament* are *psychology, genetics* and naturalist-positivist theories about the influence of *climate* and *social milieu* on the human *psyche*.) As quasi-scientists, the earlier Nahḍawī subjects and the new national subjects alike are eager to obtain *truth*, care for *genuineness, accurateness, exactitude, precision, thoroughness*, and the reliability of *evidence*, and it goes almost without saying that this requires that one sticks to the *facts*, to *life as it is*, and that one as a writer turns away from ‘romantic’ idealism and rather takes a *factualist* approach (*madhhab al-waqā’i*), i.e., *realism*. Therefore, in order to

serve as a reliable basis for a *better understanding* of one's fellow human beings and for a *reform of society*, literature has to *describe, portray, depict, record, register* real life (like in a *dossier*) *without unrealistic exaggeration or reduction*; the *facts* have to be exposed *unembellished, pure and naked*, if necessary even in all their *ugliness and crudeness*. Here, also *art* and writing *technique* come in: For the intellectual subject speaking from 'Ubayd's foreword, fantasy and creativity play a lesser role than, e.g., for the "creativists" of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century (Jubrān, for instance). Nevertheless, they have high aesthetic ambitions: In order to become accepted as a truly civilised nation, the literary production of the new national subject will not only have to be unquestionably genuine, local, authentic, but it will also have to comply with the highest standards of *sophisticated* modern story-telling (as set, first and foremost, by French writers like Daudet, Balzac, Flaubert, Hugo, Zola and, above all, Maupassant). Mastering advanced narrative *technique*, especially that of short stories and novels, and reaching *maturity* in the production of such literature will ensure, it is believed, universal validity of the own, the local, by which the local national subject hopes to be accepted as human subject in general.

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ʿĪsā ʿUbayd is a short story writer and literary critic of Syrian descent.<sup>5</sup> Little is known about his life, not even when exactly he was born. Together with his brother, Shaḥāta ʿUbayd, the two must have come to Egypt in the early 1900s, where they became active in cultural life, supporting the emerging national movement and enthusiastically promoting a new "national literature" (*adab qawmī*) after the 1919 revolt had filled them with hope and optimism. ʿĪsā started his short literary career in 1920 with the publication of a story in *al-Sufūr* and was able to bring out two collections, *Iḥsān Hānim* (1921) and *Thurayyā* (1922), before he died, apparently at an early age<sup>6</sup> (his brother lived until 1961). The Preface, or Prolegomena ("Muqaddima") to *Iḥsān Hānim*, in which the author elaborates on his ideas about realism in literature, is a highly interesting essay in literary criticism. It is especially interesting as a document from within the inner circle of the Modern School who were the main motor behind the creation of what was to become *the* main trend in twentieth century Arabic fiction: national literature and mimetic realism.

<sup>5</sup> Yūsuf al-Shārūnī, "ʿĪsā ʿUbayd", in al-Sakkūt, ed. 2015, 543–44. – Cf. also De Moor 1998d, with further references.

<sup>6</sup> Hafez holds that ʿUbayd died "prematurely in his twenties" (1993, 179 ff.). If this is true we can assume that the author was born sometime in the 1890s.

Given the fact that ʿUbayd’s “Muqaddima” has already been discussed by Sabry Hafez in some detail in his *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*,<sup>7</sup> I have refrained from adding yet another study but rather preferred to let the text speak *itself* and make this manifesto – which certainly can be seen in line with other visions on art at about the same time<sup>8</sup> – accessible to a non-Arabophone public. Of particular interest for further research (which would connect to recent trends in re-writing an intellectual history of the Nahḍa)<sup>9</sup> could be, for instance, a study about the origins of ʿUbayd’s ideas about race, milieu, climate, the ‘national character’, etc., but also a linguistic investigation into the conceptual terminology of the manifesto. For the latter reason, and also in order to make my own terminological choices transparent and let the reader who is familiar with Arabic get an idea of the original Arabic text and its peculiarities, I documented the translation process quite extensively in footnotes.

## ʿĪsā ʿUbayd’s Preface to *Iḥsān Hānim*

### *Kalima ʿan al-fann wa-l-adab al-ḥadīth fī Miṣr* (A Word about Modern Art and Literature in Egypt)

#### One

The art of story-writing<sup>10</sup> in Egypt is a newly-born art that has not yet obtained in the minds of our contemporary writers the prestige/presence/prominent place it deserves, because they are so occupied with producing or Arabizing<sup>11</sup> theatrical<sup>12</sup>

7 Hafez 1993, 179 ff.

8 One may think of Walter Gropius’ “Bauhaus Manifesto and Program” of 1919 or André Breton’s two manifestos about the Surrealist movement, issued in 1924 and 1929.

9 Cf., e.g., Hanssen and Weiss, eds. 2016.

10 *al-fann al-qaṣaṣī* (or perh. better: *qīṣaṣī*): Given that (oral) storytelling has a long tradition in the Middle East and I don’t think that the author completely ignored this, I rendered the expression with ‘story-writing’ or (further down) with ‘narrative prose’.

11 *taʿrīb* ‘Arabizing’: means ‘translation into Arabic’, which often rather implies an ‘adaptation’ of the plot to the domestic context than a translation in the contemporary sense where – an ideally congenial – faithfulness vis-à-vis the original is the desired norm.

12 The author still uses the adj. *marṣaḥī* rather than the more modern *masraḥī*, with metathesis.

plays<sup>13</sup> that, for us [sc. Egyptian writers], dramatic art almost comes before story-writing, in contrast to [the situation] in **France** where **Balzac, Flaubert, Zola** and **Daudet** have created **narrative prose** after **pictures taken from life**,<sup>14</sup> built/based on minute **observation**, faithful **analysis** and **scientific theory**,<sup>15</sup> while only hollow, weak, and [totally] **fantastic** plots<sup>16</sup> had been staged in their [sc. the Frenchmen's] theatres. As a result, and thanks to their powerful and mature works, they [sc. the French] have been able to purify their stages and to liberate them from [the grip of] the lariat of silly childish expressions.

The reason for our [sc. Egypt's] writers' preoccupation with theatre and their neglect of **narrative prose** lies in the fact that theatre better guarantees them material profit and prestige in the literary scene<sup>17</sup> and that the paper crisis brought about by the war<sup>18</sup> put an end to almost all printing activity and prevented the writers from composing [prose] stories. But there are also other factors, as, e.g., the Egyptian writer's inclination and psychological disposition, both of which make him abstain from risking to put too much hope into the advancement/**progress** of this genre in our country as quickly as he would desire [he does not grow this hope]; for the hot **climate** has cultivated in the Egyptian writer the instinct for **fantasy** to an astonishing extent; the bad effect of this **fantasy** namely makes itself felt now in every Egyptian plot<sup>19</sup> in that it avoids **depicting real life**. Moreover, restrictive eastern traditions [gender segregation!] prohibit nearly [any] meeting/encounter among the sexes and [in this way] contribute to intensifying his [sc. the Egyptian writer's] severe psychological dilemmas. On the one hand, he cannot know these dilemmas and the moral development triggered by them in the **human psyche**, and as a consequence it is only natural that he is unable to depict that in his heroes. On the other hand, he is not yet trained in [the technique of] **observation** and **psychological analysis**, which are two skills<sup>20</sup> that only grow with long experience. So, when he tries to write a novel he usually does not have the skill to endow his characters with an individual personality, and they appear to be soulless phantoms for us. When he, for

13 Lit., 'accounts, reports' (*riwāyāt*). For the author's variable use of the term *riwāya*, cf. also below, notes 16, 19, 69, 71, 73, 100, 130, 135, 152, 168, 184 and 195.

14 *ṣuwar al-ḥayāh*: could also mean various *forms* of life.

15 Lit., 'views' (*naẓarāt*).

16 *riwāyāt*: see n. 4, above.

17 This is probably what is meant by *li-fā'idati-him al-māddiyya wa-l-adabiyya* – or would it be more appropriate to render *fā'ida adabiyya* as 'moral benefit'?

18 I.e., WW I.

19 *riwāya*: see above, note 13 (with further cross-references).

20 *malakatayn*

instance, wants to describe a young man who whispers “the eternal song of youth” into his beloved’s ear, you see him making use of **fantasy**, guessing and **mannerism**; he lets the lover address his beloved with expressions that are devoid of **individuality**,<sup>21</sup> as, for example, when he describes to her the beauty of nature and the twittering of the birds, the song of the doves and the murmuring of the water, and similar silly pubertal stuff<sup>22</sup> and **weak, morbid** sentiments; typically this does away with the characters’ **[individual] personality**<sup>23</sup> and deprives them of the element of **vitality**.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, it is the writer’s task to first study the **temperament**<sup>25</sup> of a character of his because it will greatly influence the way he will describe a human being’s **emotions** and **character** [or: morals].<sup>26</sup> The temperament may for instance be the reason for a person’s happiness or sadness. A melancholic pessimist who doubts in everything, even the sincerity of the feelings of the woman he loves and who loves him, will always be haunted by painful conflicting thoughts. When he meets his beloved he will not talk to her about the trees, birds and flowers, but maybe about his thoughts and pains, to the degree that he may charge her with moral depravity and shamelessness<sup>27</sup> or accuse her of not loving him anymore and looking at another one; she will then first try gently to exonerate herself from what he accuses her of, then she will eventually become angry because of his unrelenting insistence that she is a guilty criminal (while she actually loves him truly and faithfully). Her noble and just anger may then sometimes bring her to the point where she drops some injuring, insulting expressions, which in turn may lead to the two separating forever! So, what a difference between such a heated quarrel and that smooth and quiet lyrical flirting [that we find in the romanticists’ books]!

Furthermore, it is also the writer’s task to study in his characters the **genetic influences** they have inherited from their fathers and through their **race** (?),<sup>28</sup> and to **analyze** the **milieu**<sup>29</sup> factors and living conditions that have contributed to the **formation of their personalities**, so that he will show us the **emotions**<sup>30</sup>

21 *khuṣūṣiyya*: also ‘specificity, individual feature’.

22 *sakhafāt ṣibyāniyyat*

23 *shakhṣiyyat al-ashkhāṣ*

24 *ʿunṣur al-ḥayāh*

25 *mazāj*

26 *takyīf ʿawāṭif al-insān wa-akhlāq ʿhī*

27 *al-khalāʿa wa-l-tahattuk*

28 *jinsiyya*

29 *wasat*

30 *mashāʿir*

that they [really] can have. The way a fifteen-year old youth loves is of course<sup>31</sup> different from the love of twenty-five- or thirty-five-year olds, and that person's love is also different from that of an old man.<sup>32</sup> In a similar vein, also the **living circumstances** have a huge impact on the **maturation** of a human being's feelings: many a youth of eighteen may love like a strong, emotionally mature man, while a mature young man may only be capable of loving as purely and naively<sup>33</sup> as a child.

Whenever a writer studies his characters' **temperament** and **natural disposition**<sup>34</sup> it will be very easy for him to describe them without being forced to make use of cold and boring **mannerism**,<sup>35</sup> and this will also allow him to get inspired<sup>36</sup> by their characters<sup>37</sup> for [the description of] a **genuinely human** event in his narrative,<sup>38</sup> [an event] that may result naturally from their temperament and personality, without having recourse to [too much] **fantasy** to imagine what it may look like.<sup>39</sup>

## Two

On the basis of the preceding it is thus evident that the Egyptian writer definitively must have a comprehensive overview of **psychology** to acquire a **thorough understanding of human nature**. In our opinion, the Egyptian author has not so far taken into account its [sc. **psychology**'s] principles, neither in writing (styles) nor in the way he forms the personality of his various characters. It is not our aim in this brief preface to study what is wrong with the Egyptian writer, or his mental diseases – we have attempted to study all this in a book that we are going to publish separately.<sup>40</sup> We are presenting here only a few of these deficiencies so that somebody who finds in himself the talent to

31 Or: 'by nature'?, or: 'in nature, essentially'? (*ṭab<sup>am</sup>*)

32 *shaykh*

33 *al-ḥubb al-ṭāhir al-iḥsās*

34 *ṭabī'a*

35 *al-takalluf al-saqīm al-bārid*

36 *yaqtabis*

37 Or: 'moral disposition and behaviour'? (*akhlāq*).

38 *ḥāditha riwā'iyya insāniyya maḥḍa*

39 *lā dakhla lil-khayāl fī takyīf<sup>l</sup> hā*

40 It is not clear which book 'Ubayd is talking about here – perhaps the same as the one he mentions below (see n. 155)?

create [prose] stories, may become acquainted with them<sup>41</sup> and [try to] repair/attenuate them,<sup>42</sup> and [in this way] may help us introduce this new literary genre into Egyptian literature<sup>43</sup> of our time.

Also, the (to our knowledge) most important defect after those, referred to above, of **[excessive] fantasy**, lack of **observation** and absence of **[psychological] analysis**, is the lack<sup>44</sup> of talent to **describe** and **illustrate**.<sup>45</sup> **Depiction** of the places where the characters have grown up is among the most important requirements for this art, precisely because it will affect the way of designing their thoughts and feelings. An **accurate** and **vivid description** also will have a great mental impact on the reader, as it allows the reader to feel the credibility of a story taken from life and the truth of the existence of the people portrayed by nature.<sup>46</sup>

The reason for the Egyptian writer’s weakness in the field of depiction lies in his lack of training in, or ignorance of, the basic principles of **real art**. If he, for example, has found a beautiful place, he will not try to draw it on a paper as he sees it; rather, he will presume that nature cannot be so beautiful by its own artistically appealing/tangible beauty;<sup>47</sup> instead, he will want to make it still more beautiful, thereby relying on [too much] fantasy, so that he will produce a **sterile, unclear, weak** picture of it, a picture of which nothing will remain when we will try to recall it: it will leave no impression on our minds.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, **[real] art** does not simply aim, as some people imagine, at a beautification of nature and a perfection of the souls in order to highlight a sublime beauty, bare of all defects; rather, it may also lie in the depiction of the **naked, crude, unembellished facts**.

41 Lit., ‘get used to them’: *yataʿahhad<sup>a</sup>-hā* (sc. the deficiencies).

42 *yuhadhdhib<sup>a</sup>-hā*

43 *ādāb* may well mean more than just ‘literature’ here, perhaps ‘culture’, ‘literary culture’, or ‘cultural life’. – See also below, note 49.

44 Lit., ‘weakness’.

45 *malakat al-waṣf wa-l-taṣwīr*

46 Hafez renders this paragraph – the only one he reproduces in full English translation – as follows: “Apart from the lack of creative imagination, inadequate observation and the absence of analysis, there is the weakness of description and illustrative ability. The description of the setting from which the characters emerge is one of the most important requirements of fictional art, because it has a tremendous effect on forming their characteristics and feelings. Furthermore, the vivid narrative and the use of accurate realistic description have a strong impact on the reader, for they convince him of the truthfulness of the story and of its relevance to real life.” – Hafez 1993, 179.

47 *laysat jamīla<sup>tan</sup> jamāl<sup>a</sup>-hā al-ḥissī al-fannī*

48 Lit., ‘our mind will leave [the scene] as empty as it was before reading it’.

This new way in which we define art will create a literature<sup>49</sup> based on reality<sup>50</sup> that will be completely different from yesterday's literature, and from here a whole variety of literary genres<sup>51</sup> and writing styles<sup>52</sup> will emerge, which will enhance further **development**<sup>53</sup> in modern literature the advancement of that which had been stopped by our blind, stiff and stupid imitation of ancient Arabic literature<sup>54</sup> and the emulation of the ancient Arabs' imagery,<sup>55</sup> similes, metaphors, rhetoric embellishments<sup>56</sup> and expressive language.<sup>57</sup>

The Egyptian writer's inclination to make nature more refined<sup>58</sup> and paint it with pure beauty and prettiness is like an instinct, it permeates every line he writes. In order to support our argument, it will suffice to have just a short look at one of our authors. Has not Mr. Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī,<sup>59</sup> the greatest of today's writers, in an attempt to render Alphonse Karr's<sup>60</sup> novel *Sous l'ombre des tilleuls*<sup>61</sup> into Arabic, turned it into a **romantic fantasy**<sup>62</sup> after he had severely butchered<sup>63</sup> "Stéphen"'s character?! We do not criticize/reprimand him<sup>64</sup> for this because we count ourselves among those who respect this man even though his style of storytelling and way of

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49 *ādāb* – the word means more than just 'literature' or 'writings' here, it comprises a whole 'literary culture' (see above, note 43), thereby retaining the general ethic dimension of 'culture' inherent in classical *adab*.

50 Lit., 'the facts', *al-ḥaqā'iq*.

51 *anwā' adabiyya*

52 The term used here is *madhāhib*, pl. of *madhhab* 'way of doing s.th.; school, trend'.

53 *raqy* or *ruqīyy*, vn. of *raqiya* 'to ascend, climb, rise, advance'. From the same root *r-q-y*, the vn. of form V, *taraqqī*, is the Nahḍa's standard term used to render the notion of 'progress, rise, progressive development'.

54 Here, too, *adab* may mean more than just 'literature', cf. notes 43 and 49 above.

55 *khayāl* – could also be 'imagination'.

56 *al-muḥassināt al-badī'iyya*

57 *al-'ibārāt al-lughawiyya*

58 *tahdhīb* – the term is often also used in connection with morals: *tahdhīb al-akhlāq* 'refinement of morals, cultivation of character'; therefore, it would perhaps not be too far-fetched to translate *tahdhīb al-ṭabī'a* with 'making nature more civilised'.

59 Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī (1877–1924), the foremost exponent of the sentimental, emotional trend in early twentieth century Egyptian prose.

60 French author, lived 1808–1890.

61 "Under the Shadows of the Acacia Tree" (1832), rendered into Arabic as *Majdūlīn, aw Taḥṭā zīlāl al-zayzafūn* (1917) by L. M. al-Manfalūṭī.

62 *khayālīyya shī'riyya*

63 *qaḍā' alā*

64 *nu'ākhidh<sup>u</sup>-hū*

composition differs from ours – [unlike him] we call for a diversity/multitude of literary genres and writing trends/schools<sup>65</sup> to make modern literature more lively.<sup>66</sup> But isn’t the fact that he modifies the personality of the characters<sup>67</sup> and makes heavy changes<sup>68</sup> to the plot<sup>69</sup> an indication of his submission to the regime of his **oriental temperament** which urges him to depict [nothing but] human perfection and the highest ideals of spiritual love? Moreover, should not al-Manfalūṭī’s deliberate choice to [considerably] shorten<sup>70</sup> the plot<sup>71</sup> of *Cyrano de Bergerac*<sup>72</sup> – this [highly] idealistic imaginative/romantic story<sup>73</sup> – be regarded as sufficient proof of the presence, in Egyptian authors,<sup>74</sup> of a hidden inclination to show [nothing but] impeccable beauty and sublime perfection, both of which are as remote from reality as heaven is from earth?

This psychological inclination will push Egyptian writers in the direction of the **emotionalist/sentimentalist approach**,<sup>75</sup> [i.e.] **idealism**,<sup>76</sup> and it will obstruct new developments in **modern**<sup>77</sup> literature. For, in our opinion, tomorrow’s literature will be erected on the pillars of **observation** and **psychological analysis**,<sup>78</sup> both of which aim to **portray life as it is, without exaggeration or reduction**, i.e.,

65 *taʿaddud al-anwāʿ al-adabiyya wa-l-madhāhib al-kitābiyya*

66 Lit., ‘to bring the elements of life to modern literature’.

67 Or: ‘the main character’? – *shakhṣiyyat al-ashkhāṣ*, lit. ‘the character of the characters’.

68 *taḥrīf*<sup>68</sup>-hū ... *hādhā l-taḥrīf*

69 *riwāya* – cf. above, note 13 (with further cross-references).

70 *talkhiṣ*

71 *riwāya* – cf. above, note 13 (with further cross-references).

72 Originally a five-act play (publ. 1897) by the French writer Edmond Rostand (1868–1918), “Arabized” by al-Manfalūṭī as *al-Shāʿir*, aw *Sirānū dī Birjarāk* (Cairo 1921; various later editions).

73 *al-riwāya al-khayāliyya al-wijdāniyya*

74 *al-kātib al-miṣrī* is not preceded by a demonstrative pronoun like *hādhā* here. Therefore, we assume that ʿUbayd refers to “the” Egyptian writer *in general*, not specifically al-Manfalūṭī.

75 *madhhab al-wijdāniyyāt*

76 ʿUbayd gives the foreign word here, *al-idyālism*.

77 *ʿaṣrī*

78 Perhaps, *al-taḥlīl al-nafsī* should even be rendered as ‘psychoanalysis’ here. Given ʿUbayd’s positivist-scientistic approach, the term may not only mean the study of a person’s character but already an established scientific discipline. Sabry Hafez, however, would not think so: “The emphasis on psychology and psychoanalysis can be understood only in their literary sense and not as a specialized knowledge of the subject. They are meant as an interest in the character’s psyche through artistic and intuitive insight into the personality and its motivation for the action action” – Hafez 1993, 293 (n. 86).

life **pure and naked**, and that is what is called the **factualist approach**,<sup>79</sup> or **realism**.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, [we expect that] a tough battle will break out between the followers of the old school, **Emotionalism/Sentimentalism**, who are the majority, and the supporters of Factualism, who are [still only] a few in whose hearts/souls new driving forces/incentives<sup>81</sup> have found their way as a result of their acquaintance with the manifold and lively varieties of **art in the West**. This is why it was painful for them to see that their [own] literature was lying in **agony** and **stagnating**,<sup>82</sup> and this is why they wanted to breathe new life into it, so strong as to destroy the thick bonds and the boring conditions that our ancestors had designed for us. Which of the two groups will possibly be victorious?

As for us, we are convinced that the Factualists/Realists<sup>83</sup> will succeed although they are so few in number and that they will defeat their powerful opponents,<sup>84</sup> but only after severe suffering and a long time, for the Egyptian people is, first and foremost, a **conservative** people, **attached to tradition**.<sup>85</sup> They adore their past and venerate/sanctify what the forefathers have created, in the erroneous assumption that what their Arab ancestors have produced is the optimum of creative perfection that one cannot but take as an example to follow with respect and deference. Since the Egyptian people have such an optimistic opinion about their habits and customs,<sup>86</sup> they believe in the purity of these and the solidity of their holy/venerable inherited tradition. Therefore, the brutal, dry and bitter truth will cause them pain, and they will rise in protest against anyone who dares to portray it [as it is], refusing this and trying to show that it is a lie, [just] in order to keep their sweet dreams.

However, we are living [now] through an **era of a big awakening**,<sup>87</sup> induced by our **national movement**. It is common for such an awakening that it brings about a reversal of customs and tradition and a change in orientations and thinking.<sup>88</sup> Such an influence has [already] appeared clearly in the writing of many of the writers of the new emerging generation: they've made it clear to us that they are

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79 *madhhab al-ḥaqā'iq*

80 'Ubayd gives the foreign word here, *al-riyālism*.

81 *'awāmil jadīda*

82 *jumūd ādābi-him al-muḥtaḍara*

83 *anṣār al-ḥaqā'iq* – lit., 'the supporters/followers of the facts'.

84 *'alā khuṣūm 'him al-aqwiya'*

85 ? – *sha'b muḥāfiẓ akhlāqī*. The translation of *akhlāqī*, a nisba formation from *akhlāq*, pl. of *khulq*, is doubtful.

86 'Habits and customs' renders the same word as above, *akhlāq*.

87 *nahḍa kabīra*

88 *al-muyūl wa-l-afkār*

followers of the new. Like us, they are convinced that our current literature is weak and stagnating, and they are very much looking forward to seeing [the emergence of] a new literature that will be a **[real] contemporary<sup>89</sup> of Western literature – science-based, [psycho-] analytical**, and with high **aesthetic ambition**.<sup>90</sup> This is something that cools our hearts a bit and fills our souls with great hope that our modern Egyptian stories and novels<sup>91</sup> will be successful. For what we aim at with them is the creation of an **Egyptian** literature that carries the traits our **Egyptian [national] character<sup>92</sup>** and will be representative of our **social, emotional and national life**.<sup>93</sup>

In his book *Introduction to the Rhetoric of the Arabs*,<sup>94</sup> Dr Aḥmad Ḍayf,<sup>95</sup> Professor of Arabic Literature at the Egyptian University,<sup>96</sup> was shown to be a supporter of our theory when he talked about the necessity of creating an Arabic literature coloured in **[specifically] Egyptian colours**.<sup>97</sup> There is no doubt that this book will create a new era for modern Egyptian literature and that it will sketch a new path for creative writers<sup>98</sup> to follow.

We thank the Professor for coming out with this book, and we hope he's not sparse and will commit to print [also] his valuable lectures. Our request is likewise directed at all other professors at the Egyptian University, especially Professor Ḥusayn Efendi Ramzī,<sup>99</sup> his lectures on psychology could have a [similar deep] impact on modern literature.

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<sup>89</sup> *tuḍārī*ʿ

<sup>90</sup> *bi-l-ṣiḥfa al-ʿilmiyya wa-l-ṭarīqa al-taḥlīliyya wa-l-marāmī al-fanniyya*. In the last adjective, the original meaning of *fann* as 'technique' is still very prominent. ʿUbayd is convinced that mastering storytelling *technique* has to play a key role when modern Egyptian fiction should succeed as an *art*.

<sup>91</sup> *qiṣaṣī-nā wa-riwāyātī-nā al-ʿaṣriyya al-miṣriyya* – for *riwāya*, cf. above, note 13 (with further cross-references).

<sup>92</sup> *ṭabāʿī*ʿ *shakhṣiyyatī-nā al-miṣriyya*

<sup>93</sup> *yumaththil*ʿ *ḥayātī-nā al-ijtimāʿiyya wa-l-nafsiyya wa-l-waṭaniyya*

<sup>94</sup> The title is given as *Muqaddima fī balāghat al-ʿarab* here. The correct form, however, was *Muqaddima li-[dirāsāt] balāghat al-ʿarab* (published Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Sufūr, 1921).

<sup>95</sup> Egyptian literary critic, 1880–1945. “Ḍayf was one of the first theorists of the so-called *adab qawmī*, which aimed to create a new literature marked by realism, local colour and a Western style” – E.C.M. de Moor, in *EAL*, I: 185.

<sup>96</sup> *al-Jāmiʿa al-Miṣriyya*, the first secular university in Egypt, founded in 1908.

<sup>97</sup> *ādāb ʿarabiyya masbūgha bi-ṣiḥgha miṣriyya*

<sup>98</sup> *al-udabāʿ* – could also be rendered, more generally, as ‘the literati’.

<sup>99</sup> I was unable to identify this scholar in the reference works at my disposal.

### Three

The purpose of a narration<sup>100</sup> has to be a **thorough investigation into life** and **depicting** it in a **faithful** and **reliable** manner,<sup>101</sup> [exactly] **as it appears to us** [i.e., as we see it]; [it also has to be] the collection of **observations** and **evidence**<sup>102</sup> about the human being so that the story can serve as something **like a dossier**<sup>103</sup> in which the reader informs himself about a person's biography or a phase of the latter's life.<sup>104</sup> In it, a writer should ideally study the hidden secrets of the human **heart**; [he should also study] **social and moral development** as well as the influence of **civilisation, milieu**, and what is inherited **genetically**<sup>105</sup> in the **characters' psyche**. He should do so while at the same time holding back, to some extent, his [own] judgment or personal opinion, for his primary task should be to **dissect the human soul** and to **record** what he **discovers** via **observation**,<sup>106</sup> leaving the judgment about all that to the reader who will himself draw the conclusion from it, easily and competently<sup>107</sup> without having to bear the troubles of being called on to do so.

We are convinced that this new way of writing will initially meet strong resistance among some of our writers, those who consider themselves as leading masters whom Divine Providence endowed with **guiding the nation**<sup>108</sup> and turning it into followers of their opinions. In contrast, we oppose this idea, and we take on own responsibility for our ideas.<sup>109</sup> For a writer has absolutely no right to make such a claim – none of us is immune against making mistakes. We make up our minds according to our temperaments, preferences and personal tastes – and people's temperaments are numerous, their preferences opposed to each other, and their tastes may be different and contradictory. Therefore, we do not have the right, neither legally nor morally, to force somebody to accept what he cannot

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**100** *riwāya* 'telling a story' almost has the meaning of 'reporting' here; cf. also above, note 13 (with further cross-references).

**101** *bi-amāna wa-ikhḷās*

**102** *mustanadāt*: 'documents to rely on'

**103** 'Ubayd uses the foreign word here: *dūsih*.

**104** *tārīkh ḥayāt insān aw ṣafḥa min ḥayāt-hī*

**105** *'awāmil al-ḥaḍāra wa-l-bī'a wa-l-wirātha* – three key terms that show that the author is well-read in European positivist theories about the influence of civilisation, (social) milieu and genetic factors on human behaviour.

**106** The key words here are *tashrīḥ* 'dissection', *tasjīl* 'recording, registering', and *mulāḥaẓa* 'observation'.

**107** *bi-khiffa wa-mahāra*

**108** *hidāyat al-umma*

**109** ? – *nataḥammal<sup>u</sup> tabi'at āra'<sup>i</sup>-nā*. – Unfortunately, the meaning does not become much clearer if we read *taba'at...* instead of *tabi'at...*

easily swallow and digest. Moreover, these very same tastes and preferences on which we base our judgments – they change from day to day. Today we may appreciate a point of view, love it and defend it, while tomorrow we may realize that we’ve made a mistake and our appreciation was too hurried; so we reject it and fight against it. How then can an author prove that his ideas are beneficial to **society**,<sup>110</sup> not doing harm to it? Those “giant men” who wanted to lay down for humanity rules and laws that would lead them into eternal happiness have actually failed; they did more harm to human society than making it happier.

Nevertheless, we do not say that an author should have no right to pass a judgment or express his views. What we mean is rather that his judgment and view should become clear from his **observations** and **analyses**, not, as in the old days, via calling upon them, saying “Oh people, be reasonable! Oh people, rid yourselves of the bad habits! Oh people, stick to virtue!” – the old barren homily that leaves not the least imprint on the reader’s mind. On the contrary, the effect is often the opposite of what was the writer’s intention. The reader will namely be taken by boredom and dissatisfaction, and he will be annoyed by [all] these virtues to which he is being pushed violently and crudely.

Storytelling has neither a particular style nor general principles, it may include all styles and principles as long as it is based on **observation** and psychological **analysis**. Sometimes [the narrative] can be cast in the form of a letter, as in my story *Miss Iḥsān*, which opens the present collection. [It may also take the form] of memoirs, a confession, a short story, or a dialogue, as long as its [main] pillar is observation, **observation of real life, without reduction or exaggeration**. The author of a modern narrative does not [need to] attach the least importance to narrative flow<sup>111</sup> because this is secondary to the story’s essential objective – isn’t this the study of his characters, the dissection of their innermost feelings and the **analysis** of their thoughts? Therefore, it is imperative that he observes them closely and gains insight into their life crises. For one of the reasons that make authors turn to [irrealistic] imagination and mannerism is [often] his lack of a profound/comprehensive knowledge of the character of his protagonists and the fact that he creates in his narrative characters he has never, or only randomly, been able to watch and study carefully.

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**110** *al-hayʾa al-ijtimāʿiyya* – the Nahḍa’s standard term for the concept of ‘society’. It reflects the *efendiyya*’s look at society as a body, a structure, a kind of mechanism or organism that, if necessary, can be approached – and treated – as such, i.e., from the perspective of the “social engineers”, the “doctors” who, after the dissection (*tashrīḥ*) of this body (see above, note 106), will have found the defect and be able to remedy it.

**111** *al-siyāq al-riwāʿī*

Our intention with all this is [to make] Egyptian writers produce mature, valuable works that will remain new and lively in spite of years and generations passing by. For a narrative will not be immortal unless it is composed of **eternal human constituents**.<sup>112</sup>

This is what we, the authors of the new emerging generation, are aspiring to. We want our works to be **mature** and **valuable** so that they do not die when we die. For we are not writing for the few hundreds of our readers, among whom perhaps only a handful who understand our ambitions and appreciate our efforts. And we do not adventure into the art of literature<sup>113</sup> – which currently is an art that earns its masters nothing but poverty and misery<sup>114</sup> – unless driven by that hope, the hope that all this will make our names respected among our children and grandchildren who will read us and understand to what extent we have sacrificed our blood and heart for their benefit.<sup>115</sup>

#### Four

The **intellectual revolution**<sup>116</sup> that is flowing so powerfully<sup>117</sup> through our veins<sup>118</sup> prompts us to fight against everything old and makes us look forward in joyful anticipation to an **overall renaissance** to happen in Egypt.<sup>119</sup> For such a renaissance tends to follow revolutions and is usually a natural result of them. This renaissance will encompass everything in our political, social and literary life.<sup>120</sup> Having seen veiled, segregated Egyptian women leave home [to go] to work and participate in demonstrations, alongside with Egyptian men, demanding boldly and with determination their country's rights – which they would not have been able to do before the revolution shook our country to its core<sup>121</sup> – , we have [also] seen the writers of

112 *illā idhā kuwwinat min al-‘anāṣir al-insāniyya al-khālida*

113 *fann al-adab*

114 *al-fāqa wa-l-shaqā’*

115 *sa-yaqra’ūn<sup>a</sup>-nā wa-yudrikūn<sup>a</sup> miqdār<sup>a</sup> mā ḍahḥaynā-hu li-ajli-him min dimā’i-nā wa-nu-fūsinā*

116 *al-thawra al-fikriyya*

117 Lit., ‘with an immense power’ (*bi-quwwa ḥā’ila*)

118 *fī dimā’i-nā* – lit., ‘in our blood’

119 *taj’al<sup>u</sup>-nā nastabshir<sup>u</sup> bi-hudūth naḥḍa ‘amma fī Miṣr*

120 Lit., ‘situation(s), condition(s)’ (*aḥwāl*)

121 Lit., ‘shook our nervous system’ (*tahīj<sup>a</sup>... jihāz<sup>a</sup>-nā l-‘aṣabī*)

the new upcoming generation rise to criticize what we used to hold sacred and attack in an extremely brave manner the big heads who represent the literature of yesterday and today.

The revolution that we expect [to happen] in contemporary Egyptian literature will aim to **do away with the static, obscure, and hackneyed old literature**.<sup>122</sup> It will resemble Victor **Hugo**’s revolution against canonical literature,<sup>123</sup> as well as the one **Zola** and his group called for against Romanticism<sup>124</sup> in order to make room for **Realism**,<sup>125</sup> the basis for tomorrow’s literature.

If we take an innocent, disinterested look at the literature of our present days, as an investigator who analyses causes and effects would do, it will become evident that the revolution has actually already infected dramatic arts. For that obscene, sick and licentious type [of plays that we see today on our stages] is actually nothing but a demonstration or a semi-revolution against the old and trite, [as well as?] against the western forms that the Egyptian public [now] rejects<sup>126</sup> and wants to be spared. This type [of plays] has led the ensemble directors to change their theatre practices:<sup>127</sup> They stage contemporary *Egyptian* plots now more often because it has become clear to them that our stages have to express our [national] character<sup>128</sup> because national scenes and **genuine Egyptian colours** tend to stimulate the sense of pleasure and liking.<sup>129</sup> Maybe the obscene and miserable type [of plays] owes its success just to the Egyptian touch that becomes manifest in it, as evidenced by the lack of success of the production of this kind when it features no genuine national scenes.

Above, we said that this kind [of theatre] has led the theatre directors to change their usual programs. [But not all of them did so.] Those, however, who refused to replace the [foreign] pieces<sup>130</sup> with Egyptian ones and insisted, in stupid and naive stubbornness, [to continue] to stage foreign pieces, far removed from **our taste**, opposed to **our mentality**,<sup>131</sup> were either forced to emigrate from

122 *al-adab al-qadīm al-jāmid al-mutashābih al-mubtadhal*

123 *al-adab al-madrasī*

124 *al-madhab al-khayālī*, lit., ‘the School of Fantasy/Imagination’

125 *madhab al-ḥaqāʾiq* (see above, notes 79 and 80).

126 Lit., ‘disgorges, spits out’

127 *taghyīr manhaj<sup>i</sup>-him al-tamthīl*

128 Lit., ‘the necessity of imprinting the stamp of our personality on our stage’ (*wujūb wasm marsaḥ<sup>i</sup>-nā bi-ṭābi<sup>i</sup> shakhṣīyat<sup>i</sup>-nā*)

129 *li-anna l-manāẓir al-qawmiyya wa-l-alwān al-miṣriyya al-ṣamīma tuthir<sup>u</sup> ʿādat<sup>an</sup> ḥāssat al-ladhdha wa-l-iʿjāb*

130 *riwāyāt* – see above, note 13 (with further cross-references).

131 *mazāj*

Egypt, against their will, or to leave the stage, as happened with two big pillars of the theatre scene and geniuses of art. If these two should decide, some day in the future, to return to theatre-making in Egypt, they will be able to do so only on the condition that they stage contemporary Egyptian plots. So, will they possibly acknowledge this truth that we have worked so hard to make them understand?

It makes us sad to say that contemporary Egyptian literature is neither independent nor bears the traits of our [national] character these days. Rather, it is still subordinate to the static and uniform ancient Arabic literature<sup>132</sup> or under the influence of foreign literature, which we have been forced to study in order to learn from it the secrets of **genuine advanced art / sound sophisticated technique**<sup>133</sup> and to adopt its pillars, rules and style.<sup>134</sup> Egyptian-authored pieces<sup>135</sup> are namely – what a pity!<sup>136</sup> – [often/generally] Arabized versions of foreign drama, and our fiction<sup>137</sup> is taken from foreign fiction! If an author sets out to compose a piece, he will either take inspiration for it from a foreign one or [downright] Egyptianize it.<sup>138</sup> The reason that the character traits are so evidently **inorganic** is the fact that such characters usually do not exist in our society and that their **Western features** clearly leave such an imprint on an author's [*lit. his*] piece<sup>139</sup> that it will lack the **natural touch**<sup>140</sup> that is one of the secrets of real art. Often even the plot itself<sup>141</sup> is so foreign to our character<sup>142</sup> that it would probably never occur on the stage of [real] Egyptian life – a result of the author's imitation of foreign productions.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, it is our duty as writers to give our contemporary Egyptian literature **lively** and **colourful** features, peculiar to it and by which it is identifiable as **unique**.<sup>144</sup> We must strive to free our minds from the influence of Western

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132 *al-adab al-'arabī al-jāmid al-mubtadhal al-qadīm*

133 *al-fann al-ṣaḥīḥ al-rāqī*

134 *an na'khudh<sup>a</sup> 'an-hu qawā'id<sup>a</sup>-hū wa-qawānīn<sup>a</sup>-hū wa-uslūb<sup>a</sup>-hū*

135 ? – *al-riwāyāt al-miṣriyya al-mu'allafa*. The meaning of the attributive *mu'allafa* is not really clear to me here. Should we render it as 'fictional'? – For *riwāya*, see above, n. 13 (with further cross-references).

136 *wa-yā lil-asaf*

137 *qīṣaṣ<sup>u</sup>-nā*

138 *immā an yaqtabis<sup>a</sup>-hā...aw yumaṣṣir<sup>a</sup>-hā*

139 *wa-yatajallā fī hādhihi l-hāla idtirāb shakhṣiyyat al-ashkhāṣ alladhīna lā yakūnu la-hum ghālib<sup>m</sup> wujūd<sup>u</sup> fī hay'at<sup>i</sup>-nā l-ijtimā'iyya wa-tan'akis<sup>u</sup> l-alwān al-gharbiyya bi-jalā' 'alā riwāyat<sup>i</sup>-hī*

140 *al-maṣḥa al-ṭabī'iyya*

141 *al-hāditha nafs<sup>u</sup>-hā*

142 *akhlāq*

143 *tarassum al-kātib al-riwāyāt al-ajnabiyya*

144 *ṣifa ḥayya mulawwana khāṣṣa bi-hī wa-yu'raf<sup>u</sup> bi-hā*

literature by avoiding taking foreign narrative[ traditions] as the pillars on which to erect our own. These must [instead] be built on faithful **observation**, extracted from our **daily lives**, as well as on **social** and **psychological analyses**. If we achieve this, we will have added something new, something writers from the West are incapable of doing because of their inability to study our psychology and the way we organize our lives.<sup>145</sup> There will then come the day when they will begin to translate *our* stories and plays into *their* languages, as they have an ardent desire for everything Egyptian, especially after Egypt has attracted the world’s attention through our outstanding authentic national movement.<sup>146</sup> Then, and only then, will it be possible to count the Egyptian nation among the [world’s] **independent advanced nations**,<sup>147</sup> no matter what political system it will have; for literature/culture is the criterion for a nation’s **progressiveness**.<sup>148</sup> A nation that has achieved such a degree of progress and early, promising maturation<sup>149</sup> as the Egyptian nation has achieved, is indeed worthy of an independent, artistically advanced literature/culture bearing its [sc., this nation’s] own distinctive features.<sup>150</sup>

This is the **sacred obligation** that we take as our **public duty**,<sup>151</sup> and we hope that some of the things that this obligation requires will be implemented. We believe that nobody can accuse us of taking the inspiration for *our* pieces/accounts – whether they are stories or plays<sup>152</sup> – from foreign ones, or allege that a Western account has provided us with the model for some scenes or helped us shape our characters, or that the characters do not have real counterparts (*lit.*, have no existence) in the Egyptian nation/people.<sup>153</sup> My intuitive inclination to analyse drives me to immerse myself in the study of the innermost depths of our psychology to describe it as it is, reliably and faithfully, and not the way it should be. For this reason alone, some theater directors have refrained from taking pieces of mine to stage; they found them too real, distressing and cruel – it’s bad manners/not right,<sup>154</sup> as they say, to bring all truths to light.

145 *nafsiyyat<sup>l</sup>-nā wa-nizām ḥayāt<sup>l</sup>-nā*

146 *bi-ḥarakat<sup>l</sup>-nā l-waṭaniyya al-badīʿa al-jayyida*

147 *al-umam al-mustaqilla al-rāqiya*

148 *al-ādāb miʿyār raqy al-umma*

149 *al-raqy wa-l-nuḍūj al-mubakkir al-badrī*

150 *ādāb rāqiya fanniyya mustaqilla khāṣṣa bi-hā*

151 Or: ‘that we try to fulfil’ ? (*natarassam<sup>u</sup>-hū*)

152 *riwāyāt<sup>l</sup>-nā, qaṣaṣiyya<sup>tan</sup> kānat aw marsaḥiyya<sup>tan</sup>* – cf. above, note 13 (with further cross-references).

153 *lā wujūd<sup>a</sup> la-hum fi l-umma al-miṣriyya*

154 *lā yaṣaḥḥ<sup>u</sup>*

We will not dare to study this delicate topic in further detail now to find out whether they are right or wrong, as we will dedicate an extensive chapter to its study in our book *Observations and Perspectives on Art / Aesthetic Contemplations*.<sup>155</sup> What we would like to do here, however, is to express our point of view, without imposing it [on the reader].<sup>156</sup> For we believe that the artist's<sup>157</sup> **duty** lies in [**technically advanced, faithful**] **description** wherever he happens to be. Art, that is to say, must be independent and released from any bonds. Art, as we've said in another context above, does not only lie in the description of beauty and perfection, it may also be a **description** of the **faults** of nature and the **short-comings** of human society. For art, as we understand it, is the ability to arouse [in us] a strong and noble feeling that we enjoy feeling creep into us, producing in our hearts a drunk, capturing **pleasure**. It takes control over us and **refines our morals / makes us civilized**. Nothing can evoke this feeling but Truth because it touches the sensitive fibers in the depths of our **hearts**. Accordingly, every truth is worth being displayed, described and spoken out.

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**155** *Mulāḥazāt wa-naẓarāt fanniyya* – the book announced by the author here (and which is perhaps the same as he pointed to already earlier in this Preface, cf. n. 40 above) does not seem to have seen the light of the day, as 'Ubayd died only the year after the publication of this foreword. Sabry Hafez, however, would not exclude that it existed and actually *was* published; cf. what he says about this and other (perhaps lost) publications: "At the end of his two collections, 'Īsā 'Ubaid advertised his forthcoming publications including two novels, *Bayn al-Ḥubb wa-l-Fann* (Between Love and Art) and *Yaqẓat Miṣr* (Egypt's Awakening); a collection of short stories, *al-'Usrah* (The Family); another collection in French, *Sur les bords du Nil*; a collection of critical essays, *Naẓarāt wa-mulāḥazāt fanniyyah* (Artistic Reflections); and several plays. It was customary at this time for writers to fill the final page of their books with what seems more like a declaration of their literary intentions than an authentic list of completed works awaiting publication. But in 'Īsā's case, one is inclined to take his list seriously, not only because his advertisements were very detailed and because he succeeded in publishing in 1922 the first book on the list which appeared in the final page of his first collection, but also because Muḥammad Bāqir 'Ulwān of Harvard University discovered in Cairo in 1973 the manuscripts of two of his lost plays" – Hafez 1993, 292, n. 72. – The adj. *fanniyya*, m. *fannī*, is a nisba formation from *fann* which for 'Ubayd mainly means art as 'technique', *technē*. *Naẓarāt* 'views, opinions' is rendered as 'perspectives/contemplations' here – 'perspectives' seems to be more idiomatic, while 'contemplations' would be inspired by the title *Naẓarāt*, a collection of essays and stories by M. L. al-Manfalūṭī (see above, note 59), often translated as 'Contemplations'.

**156** *dūn<sup>a</sup> ta'zīz*

**157** *al-fannī*

## Five

We would have liked to dedicate a chapter like this to the study of the language of affects and emotions<sup>158</sup> that the writers of the emerging new generation have begun to employ in their writings, that **vivid flexible** language that is eager to make **sophisticated** use of the vocabulary (?)<sup>159</sup> and invent new expressions that render the intended meaning **powerfully** and **exactly/precisely**. And [I would also have liked to dedicate] another [chapter] to the interpretation of the meaning of art and the definition of its literary, moral and social mission<sup>160</sup> as well as to the explanation of its rules; and yet another on the nature of philology (?)<sup>161</sup> and the future of th(os)e genres that have begun to invade the language. But, well, we feel this preface has already become too long and almost boring. We will therefore postpone the final parts of this study to our book *Perspectives and Observations on Art / Aesthetic Contemplations*, which we are about to publish.

We are following the example of **Balzac**, the master of French story-writers, in his writings, which are characterized by their **humanism**<sup>162</sup> and all stage *la comédie humaine*.<sup>163</sup> That means that in the following stories,<sup>164</sup> we may trace the life of the characters whose lives we had described in some snapshots in these stories,<sup>165</sup> or we present some other page of their lives, as we noticed that this method can help us greatly in describing our [national] social life.<sup>166</sup> Given that the only way for a writer to [really] **study the human psyche** is in *novels*,<sup>167</sup> we will [try to] produce self-contained Egyptian (or: entirely Egyptian?) accounts<sup>168</sup>

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158 *lughat al-ta’aththur wa-l-infī’āl*

159 I am not sure whether this is what the author meant. Literally, he says: ‘the choice of artistic words’ (*ikhtiyār al-kalimāt al-fanniyya*).

160 *ta’rif waẓīfat-hī al-adabiyya wa-l-akhlāqiyya wa-l-ijtimā’iyya*

161 I am not sure about the translation here – what is *ṣifat adab al-lughā* ?

162 *al-mawsūma bi-l-insāniyya*

163 ʿUbayd gives the French expression here.

164 I.e., in the short stories included in the collection *Iḥsān Hānim* to which he is writing this preface.

165 *alladhīna ṣawwarnā ṣafḥa<sup>tan</sup> min ḥayāt-him fī hādhihi l-qīṣaṣ* – the wording seems to be somehow repetitive here. Not being sure whether I got the author right, I leave that as is and try to render it as literally as possible.

166 I have no idea what exactly ʿUbayd intended to say here. For me, it sounds like a redundant “either we portray one aspect of the life of these people, or we describe another one” – which would be rather banal...

167 Lit., ‘long stories’ (*qīṣaṣ ṭawīla*). Italics of *novels* are mine, S.G.

168 *riwāyāt<sup>n</sup> miṣriyya<sup>tan</sup> tāmma<sup>tan</sup>* – it is not clear whether *tāmma<sup>tan</sup>* should be read as an adjective-attribute or as an adverb. For *riwāya*, see above, note 13 (with further cross-references).

that portray a *general* aspect of Egyptian life,<sup>169</sup> as we [also] have indeed written an account of this type that we called *Between Love and Art*<sup>170</sup> and in which we analyzed the finest nuances<sup>171</sup> of the feelings of an Egyptian writer who is eager to become famous, including a description of the Egyptian art scene/milieu.<sup>172</sup>

We have also been eager to **portray Eastern**<sup>173</sup> **life as it is, without reduction or exaggeration**, resorting, in delicate sensitive situations,<sup>174</sup> to double-entendre<sup>175</sup> to express our hidden message,<sup>176</sup> sometimes also to allusions<sup>177</sup> that let the reader feel<sup>178</sup> the meaning we intended without making it explicit. That is, we obscured our message<sup>179</sup> in a way that makes it difficult for young naïve girls to grasp the real meaning. This is also the method followed by the big French writers who think that life must be described as it is, not as it should be. **Maupassant**, for instance, descended to the lowest levels of the most awful dirty quagmires and succeeded in depicting them **without betraying Truth**.

However, I have to confess that the question of the language in which the dialogues<sup>180</sup> should be written has tired my mind and caused me much pain before I eventually found a solution for it. Language, that is to say, is a tricky problem that any serious writer<sup>181</sup> has to face, because there is such a big difference between the language we write in and the language we speak. If we use the former it appears mannered, inadequate, unnatural, far from the type of art that demands that the description of **local colour** be marked by **realism** and **precision**. And if we use the latter we kill the Arabic Language<sup>182</sup> and decide to

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169 *qit'a 'amma*. – Italics of *general* are mine, S.G.

170 *Bayn al-ḥubb wa-l-fann*. This novel seems to be lost – at least, it is not mentioned in any source about 'Ubayd that I was able to get hold of.

171 *juz'iyāt mashā'ir...*

172 *al-wasaṭ al-fannī al-miṣrī*

173 My italics, S.G.

174 *al-mawāqif al-ḥarija al-daḡiqa*

175 *kalimāt al-tawriya* 'words of concealment', a standard rhetorical figure in Classical Arabic, explained by W.P. Heinrichs as "a *double entendre* or pun in which the obvious meaning of a homonym is not the intended one, also called *ihām*, 'delusion'. [...]" *EAL*, II: 660.

176 *maqāṣid-nā l-khaṭfiyya*

177 *kalimāt mulhama* 'inspired words', or probably rather *mulhima* 'suggestive'

178 *tūḥī ilā l-qārī*

179 *ja'alnā 'ibaratā-nā fī ḥāla<sup>fin</sup> min al-ghumūd*

180 'Ubayd gives an Arabic expression *and* the French word here: *al-muḥādathāt al-thunā'iyya* (*dialogue*).

181 *al-kātib al-fannī*

182 I am capitalizing 'Language' here in order to mark the status of the 'Arabiyya as a cultural institution.

ban the fictional and dramatic genres from our literature/culture while we [actually] want these to be the strongest and greatest pillars of Egyptian literature/culture, as is the case in the West, because the effect they have on the mind is most profound and because they help the writer study all the givens and issues, whether practical or philosophical or social or moral or psychological.

How then should we **reconcile the language** people speak in daily life with the high literary language that is to be used in written works? To underline the importance of this problem, let us remind you here of the fact that our late friend, the revolutionary artist **Muḥammad Bey Taymūr**,<sup>183</sup> had decided, after careful consideration, that theatrical plays<sup>184</sup> should be composed in the **vernacular/the language of the masses**,<sup>185</sup> in order to imprint our literature with the [typically] Egyptian character and to make the stories closer to art and Reality/Truth, **devoid of mannerism and stiffness**.<sup>186</sup>

Yet, despite the strong admiration we have for the dear friend we have lost,<sup>187</sup> we cannot agree with this radical and hazardous idea. For we are of those who are strong partisans<sup>188</sup> of the [classical] Arabic language. We do not want Egyptian literature to become independent from Arabic literature. The former should just have a character of its own that distinguishes it from the latter and gives it the freedom to develop and progress.

We are of the opinion that in order to **reconcile**<sup>189</sup> **art and language**, the dialogues should be written in an **intermediate Arabic**<sup>190</sup> that is free from complex linguistic structures<sup>191</sup> and into which occasionally even some dialect words may be blended so that it does not give the feeling of stiffness and artificiality and we can give it the [typically] **Egyptian touch** and paint it with **local colours**. A dialect word may produce a meaning that a sentence written in classical Arabic in its entirety cannot express.

**183** Egyptian dramatist and prose writer, 1892–1921. “His reading of realistic writers like De Maupassant and Zola prepared him to become a pioneer of the modern Arabic short story [...]. [... Around 1918, he was among the co-founders of] the literary circle Madrasat al-ādāb al-jadida, later known as al-Madrasa al-ḥadītha (the ‘Modern School’) [...]” – De Moor 1998c, 762.

**184** *al-riwāyāt al-qīṣaṣiyya al-marsaḥiyya* – I do not know what (if anything at all) the double qualification of these *riwāyāt* as *qīṣaṣiyya* and *marsaḥiyya* possibly can mean.

**185** *al-lughā al-ʿāmmiyya*

**186** *khālīya min al-takalluf wa-l-jumūd*

**187** Muḥammad Taymūr had died shortly before ʿUbayd wrote his Preface, cf. n. 183.

**188** *yataʿaṣṣabūna*

**189** *ḥattā nuwaffiq<sup>a</sup>*

**190** *lughā ʿarabiyya mutawassiṭa*

**191** *khālīya min al-tarākīb al-lughawiyya*

If the dialogues are short and condensed<sup>192</sup> then the best thing we can do is to render them as they are, just as they come out of [the mouth of] characters of different **confessions and races**<sup>193</sup> with their vernacular expressions and foreign gibberish.<sup>194</sup> We do not think that anyone will stand up and disagree with us on that, as even the French writers themselves – who adore their language and are more eager to preserve it than we are to preserve ours – often insert into their valuable writings some foreign constructions, German or English words, as well as words used by the French masses themselves, exactly as they speak their language – and we have never ever seen any of them stand up and claim that this strategy was a failure or an insult to their language.

Our only aim with writing modern Egyptian stories and plays [or: novels?]<sup>195</sup> is to contribute to the creation of a modern Egyptian **literature of our own**,<sup>196</sup> bearing the **stamp of our [national] character and specific identity**<sup>197</sup> and corresponding to the high level of **progress** and early **maturity** that we have reached.<sup>198</sup>

So, have we reached this aim to which we have been aspiring? This is what the Egyptian [reading] public will have to decide – hopefully, their verdict will be unprejudiced/unbiased<sup>199</sup> and encouraging.

December 1921      ‘Īsà ‘Ubayd

192 Or: ‘improvised’? (*muqtaḍaba*)

193 *min al-ashkhāṣ al-mukhtalifī l-niḥal wa-l-ajnās*

194 *bi-alfāẓ<sup>l</sup>-him al-‘āmmiyya wa-raṭānat<sup>l</sup>-him al-a‘jamiyya*

195 *al-qīṣaṣ wa-l-rīwāyāt al-‘aṣriyya al-miṣriyya* – cf. above, note 13 (with further cross-references).

196 *khāṣṣ bi-nā*

197 *mawsūm bi-ṭābi‘ shakhṣiyyat<sup>l</sup>-nā wa-akhlāq<sup>l</sup>-nā*

198 *yattaḥiq<sup>u</sup> ma‘a mā balagh<sup>nā</sup>-hu min al-raḡy wa-l-nuḍūj al-mubakkir al-badrī*

199 *munazzah<sup>an</sup>*

