14 The *Modern School* and global modernity

The example of an Egyptian ghost story of the mid-1920s: Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn's *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt*

First published in *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 10 (2007): 231–250

This chapter is the third chapter in Part V which I called "The Nahḍa at its zenith". While Chapter 12 showed a representative of the Modern School (ʿĪsà ʿUbayd) in the 'Yes, we can!' mood of early Arab nation-building and thereby probably fulfilled expectations raised by the term 'zenith' as meaning a kind of glorious 'culmination', Chapter 13 with its survey of the life and works of Maḥmūd Taymūr, another member of the Modern School, has already begun to make clear that this 'zenith' is not only a point of culmination but also a turning point, a moment of change at which the developments that have led up to here come to an end, giving way to something new. The 'zenith'/culmination of the Nahḍa thus also means, in a way, its end.

But there are various types of 'endings'. In the case of Taymūr, we could observe that the moment the author no longer felt a need for self-assertion as (a mouthpiece of) the new national subject with the help of local colour, he had his 'psychological turn', which combined attention to local specificity (characters, the "Egyptian personality", social milieu, etc.) with an interest in the general human condition. The emerged subject's quest for self-assertion thereby became sublimated, its rationalist-analytical-critical mode quasi merging with the sentimentalist and other modes to produce a new quality. This is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, for Taymūr's post-World War II call for an *adab hādif*, i.e., committed literature, which not only shows the influence of Sartre (*littérature engagée*), but equally its provenience from the reformist thinking of Nahḍawī intellectuals and their belief in their mission in the service of the "social body", the *hayʾa ijtimāʿiyya*. Thus, in the case of Taymūr (but also others), the Nahḍa is not dead after having reached its zenith; rather, it lives on in a modified form, in modernist mutations, so to speak.

In contrast, in the chapter below, we will become witness to a case where the zenith also could mean 'crisis', and even 'death'. In my reading of the "Ghost Story" of yet another member of the Modern School, Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn, fundamental Nahḍawī convictions are being questioned, and only a few years after the publication of this story, the author (and many of his contemporaries) fall in

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111350837-014

utmost despair after having gone through a phase of deep disenchantment and disillusion, because they started to lose, and eventually gave up, all hope in the Nahḍa ideals. It is true that Lāshīn in the "Ghost Story" reaches a degree of technical mastery and artistic sophistication that fulfils all the requirements of the type of advanced, 'modern' storytelling that the Modern School dreamt of and had postulated as an indispensable precondition for obtaining recognition among the (literatures of the) nations of the contemporary 'civilised world'. On the other hand, what meant the fulfilment of the Nahḍawī dream of perfection in the field of narrative technique in face of a shattered belief in the agency of the rational subject, as topicalised in "A Ghost Story"? The story challenges the hitherto unquestioned belief in the non-existence of the supernatural and in the capability of the reason-gifted human subject to deal with any attack on the rational constitution of the world. It replaces the belief in Reason as the all-reliable instrument in dealing with the world with a statement of uncertainty, of impotence instead of former agency, and of a disenchanted sobriety instead of the exuberance of previous 'Yes, we can!' optimism. In another of Lāshīn's stories, *Ḥadīth al-qarya* ("Village Small Talk", 1929), published only a few years after the "Ghost Story", the author will expand on the ironical style used in the latter to point to the eclatant discrepancies and irreconcilable contrasts, using irony to highlight the ridiculously 'tragical' position of the enlightened urban intellectual who, by enthusiastically trying to explain to a group of ignorant villagers the importance of human self-determination and the Free Will, reaches the exact contrary, namely that they follow their local sheikh into even deeper darkness. Again a few years later, in his novel *Ḥawwāʾ bi-lā Ādam* ("Eve without Adam", 1934), the author goes still a step farther in that he lets the heroine – representative of all the best Nahḍawī virtues – commit suicide, as her successful self-emancipation from a milieu characterised by poverty and superstition does not help her in any way to find personal love. In the light of the obvious persistence of social barriers, her exemplary Nahḍawī career does not only appear as highly questionable; rather, the whole educational and self-emancipatory project, the formation along Nahḍawī principles, seems to be something artificial, while the superstitious grandmother's belief in charms emerges from the story as 'authentically Egyptian', as did the belief in ghosts in the "Ghost Story" and in the deterring warning example told by the ignorant village sheikh in "Village Small Talk".

This chapter thus re-addresses the question of periodisation, raised already in several preceding chapters, on two levels: Nahḍa-internal and -external. As for the first, it seems that we can discern at least four major stages in the history of the Nahḍa: a "reproductionist" phase, a "creativist" phase, a stage of consolidation (when the emerging subject is politicised and expresses itself as national

subject, the Nahḍa at its zenith), and a last stage (when Nahḍawī objectives are either given up or integrated in other, less subject-focused projects). The other level is that of the Nahḍa's temporalities as compared to 'global' temporalities. While previous chapters often recurred on Walter Falk's model of 'global' periods and the implicit assumption of 'multiple modernities' (Shmuel Eisenstadt), the chapter below tests another model, namely Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's "essay on historical simultaneity" as demonstrated in his seminal 'encyclopaedia' of the year 1926. Here, too, the result of the application of a universal model demonstrates that the Nahḍa's internal temporality is clearly compatible and coeval with a global temporalities.

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The importance of Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn (1894–1954) as a – or even the – "leading representative" of the so-called "New (or Modern) School", *al-Madrasa al-ḥadītha*, is widely acknowledged (Gamal 1980, 30). Sabry Hafez, for example, considers him the School's "major figure" and maintains – with good reason, I think – that his "arrival [...] on the Egyptian literary scene in the 1920s marked a turning-point in the history of modern Arabic narrative discourse in general and the short story in particular" (Hafez 1993, 215). Hafez also seems to be at the origin of Lāshīn's designation, so often repeated since, as the 'Chekhov of Egypt'.[1] And yet, the uncontested "fact" (Gamal 1980, 30) that he holds an eminent position in Egyptian, and Arabic, literary history and that he is therefore mentioned in almost every survey of modern Egyptian, and Arabic, fiction has lead only very few scholars to deal with his works in detail, and it is perhaps not exaggerated to call him still largely under-researched – especially so when compared with two of his fellow Modernists. Both Muḥammad Taymūr and his brother Maḥmūd have become the object of scholarly research in extensive monographies[2] and numerous articles. Not so Lāshīn. In 1980, Adel Sulayman Gamal, an Egyptian scholar then based in the US, had been awarded a grant by the University of Arizona to collect and study Lāshīn's unpublished works,[3] but his investigations resulted in only one short article (Gamal 1980). Sabry Hafez (Ṣabrī Ḥāfiẓ) from SOAS, a life-long admirer of Lāshīn, dedicated the last two chapters of his *Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse* to the writer and to one of his stories, equating Lāshīn with "The

1 Gamal 1980, 39, note 7, traces this 'label' back to an article of Hafez's on "Lāshīn and the Birth of the Egyptian Short Story", published in Arabic in *al-Majalla*, no. 134, February 1968.

2 De Moor 1991 and Wielandt 1983, respectively.

3 Cf. http://fp.arizona.edu/neareast/Gamal_long_vita.htm (visited February 22, 2005; unfortunately not available any longer).

Maturation of the New Narrative Discourse", and *Ḥadīth al-qarya* (Village Small Talk) with "The Culmination of a Sophisticated Discourse" (Hafez 1993, chs. 6–7, pp. 215–32 and 233–61, respectively);[4] Hafez also edited Lāshīn's complete œuvre together with an introductory study in Arabic (Ḥāfiẓ 1999). Apart from these and a few other studies, however, scholars have obviously not deemed Lāshīn worth further consideration.[5]

But not only Lāshīn is neglected. A similar research lacuna can be observed with regard to the "Modern School" as a whole. In their case, the lack of scholarly interest may be due to an underestimation, which in turn is obviously the result of the role which is usually ascribed to the movement by historians of Egyptian 'national literature'. On the one hand, these historians generally hold the Modernists in high esteem, especially because of their "valuable contribution to furthering the development of the Arabic short story" (Gamal 1980, 28) and their role as "pioneers" (*ruwwād*) who paved the way for later developments in literature,

4 An English translation of *Ḥadīth al-Qarya* is given as an Appendix: Hafez 1993, 262–68.

5 Gamal (1980, 28) holds that Lāshīn, as "the most prolific writer" of the School, has been the subject of "not a few studies", but he cannot mention a single monograph and, apart from the article by Hafez indicated in fn. 1 above, lists only a limited number of works in which Lāshīn is dealt with, mostly amongst others and/or *en passant*, e.g., S. Ḥ. al-Nassāj's *Taṭawwur fann al-qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra fī Miṣr* (1968), A. Ibrāhīm's *al-Qiṣṣa al-miṣriyya* (1973), and Yaḥyà Ḥaqqī's introductory forword to Lāshīn's first collection, *Sukhriyyat al-nāy* (1964). In European languages, the story which is most widely studied, is the already mentioned *Ḥadīth al-qarya*, from Lāshīn's second collection of short stories, *Yuḥkà anna...*, published in 1929; apart from Hafez' study quoted above (fn. 4) and an earlier version of his ch. 6 ("The Maturation of the New Literary Genre", *IJMES* 16 (1984): 367–389), there are two articles by Nieves Paradela (Alonso) that concentrate on this story, "Estructura narrativa y cruce de discursos en el relato *Ḥadīṯ al-qarya* de Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāšīn: la *juṭba* como elemento retórico", *Miscelánea de Estudios árabes y Hebraicos: Sección árabe-Islam* 51 (2002): 219–243, and the earlier "Un escritor egipcio de entreguerras: Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāšīn y su cuento 'Conversación en la aldea'", *al-Andalus – Magreb* [Cádiz] 5 (1997):235–254 (for the main part [244 sq.] a translation of *Ḥadīṯ al-qarya* into Spanish). Lāshīn's novel *Ḥawwā' bi-lā Ādam* (Eve without Adam, 1934) was translated into English by Saad el-Gabalawy, in id. 1986, 49–94. The translation is preceded by a short introduction-study by the translator. Hilary Kilpatrick treats the novel quite extensively in "*Ḥawwā' bi-lā Ādam:* an Egyptian novel of the 1930's", *JAL* 4 (1973): 48–56, and again in her monograph on *The Modern Egyptian Novel: A Study in Social Criticism* (London: Ithaca, 1974), esp. 51–54. It is also mentioned, but not really analyzed or studied, by most of the common surveys of modern Egyptian fiction. Hafez, in a short note (1993, 303, endnote 87), maintains that the reason for the critics' relative neglect of Lāshīn may be his "sarcastic and satirical attitude" with which he exposes "certain social phenomena", elsewhere considered taboo, to public criticism; and a feeling of shame may also be responsible for concealing the author from European translators.

especially (social) realism. On the other hand, it is probably just this label, "pioneers", which has been responsible for the lack of more, and more sincere, scholarly attention, since 'pioneer' almost inevitably means 'still a bit immature'. And indeed, while praising the Modernists for their innovative approaches, most critics accuse them of continuing too many traits of nineteenth and early twentieth century writing, assigning them a position between what is generally termed Romanticism, and Realism: still too didactic, still a bit too 'romantic', still inclined to sentimentalism, not yet 'genuine' realists, and still too weak from the point of view of narrative technique[6] (Lāshīn's *Ḥadīth al-Qarya* being a more or less rare exception, the "culmination", as Hafez has it, which is generally reached neither by Lāshīn himself nor by his colleagues). Needless to say that what is judged to be deficient and incomplete here is an "assimilation of the artistic features of the short story [...] as developed in the *West*" (Gamal 1980, 28, my emphasis), since for most histories of modern Egyptian literature (and modern Arabic literature in general) the Western model has always been the norm. As a consequence, the old Orientalist and Eurocentrist prejudice of a 'lagging behind' of Arabic literature (the 'child', or the 'adolescent') with regard to its Western counterparts (the 'parents', the 'grown-ups') has been perpetuated even by those native historians who usually praise the Modern School as a most progressive movement and as the creators of a truly Egyptian 'national literature', an authentic *adab qawmī*.

Looking at the literary production of the *Madrasa Ḥadītha* in this way, i.e., as representing the first pieces of 'national literature', is indeed very common – and surely not wrong, since the Modernists themselves wanted to create this 'national literature', and so the 'national' perspective will, in my opinion, always remain indispensable. Nevertheless it has produced another doxa. The idea that authenticity is to be reached by sticking to specifically *Egyptian* characters and themes, however successfully it may have become transformed into literature, has often earned them the verdict of being 'too local' with regard to their choice of subjects.[7] And it has reduced the frame of possible investigation to an exclusively Egyptian context.

As a consequence, there are a number of aspects of both Lāshīn and the Modern School which have not been studied at all (although they may have been observed already and/or even mentioned repeatedly). In the present study, I will

6 For Lāshīn, e.g., Hafez talks of clear traces of "labour pains" (*ālām al-makhāḍ*) and a "primitivity (*bidā'iyya*) that we cannot ignore despite its relative maturity", cf. Ḥāfiẓ 1999, 48.

7 Gamal 1980, 29 sq., tries to establish a distinction between 'sketches' and 'short stories', maintaining that Lāshīn makes less use of local colour in the latter in order to allow for a wider, universal significance, while in the 'sketches' local colour is the main purpose.

deal with two of them. First, in every history of modern Arabic literature you will find the statement that the members of the Modern School were eager readers of European fiction and aspired to raise Egyptian literature on to what they conceived to be the global standard, and that they first read French and English authors, and later were influenced by Russian literature, the former appealing to their intellect, the latter to their heart (according to Yaḥyà Ḥaqqī, at least: Ḥaqqī 1975, 81; cf. also Hafez 1993, 217). There is however almost no study on the exact nature of this relationship, or 'influence'.[8] Second, the writers of this group lived in a world which had since long been exposed to processes of globalisation, not only in the field of literature, but in almost every other field as well. Nevertheless, nobody has yet tried to integrate this fact into the reading of the texts, which, when viewed from this perspective, may appear much less 'local' in their meaning than they have previously been held to be. They have been smiled at or even pitied as unable to deal with problems of a more general human significance – an accusation that should have been dismissed even earlier on, given at least *some* statements by authors themselves, among them Lāshīn, who tell us that only the setting and the characters of their stories had to be 'typically Egyptian', but the problems they dealt with were always universally human.[9]

In order to make my points, I have deliberately chosen one of Lāshīn's stories that seems to embody, at first sight, most of the alleged deficiencies of the writings of the Modern School and, because of its seemingly banal topic – it is "A Ghost Story" (*Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt*) – could also be read as a confirmation of Orientalist prejudices against Arabs (as though nothing had changed since E. W. Lane and his description of the *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, written during the years 1833–1835, the tenth chapter of which opens with the words "The Arabs are a very superstitious people, and none of them are more so than those of Egypt", Lane [1896] 1986, 231)[10] as well as against much of modern Arabic literature in general. This latter prejudice, that of triviality, Western Arabists, in their privileged role as mediators between cultures, should always be prepared to counter with good arguments. I hope to have them in this article. As a side-effect, my study may then also serve as an Arabist's contribution to the study of the 'world literature of ghosts,' i.e., ghost fiction in general.

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8 Gamal's "comparative study" of "The Sketches of Dickens and Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn" (Gamal 1980) makes a first attempt to fill the gap but, to my knowledge, has remained the single step in this direction.

9 See below, p. 328.

10 Cf. also the fact that Otto Spies, for his 1949 German translation of a selection of Turkish and Egyptian short stories, chose the title *Das Geisterhaus* (The Haunted House) – quite an Orientalist choice!

14.1 The Story

Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt appeared in 1929 in Lāshīn's second collection, *Yuḥkà anna…* (It is told that…),[11] and was probably written a few years earlier, i.e., in the second half of the 1920s.

In an opening chapter (ch. i, pp. 159–160), an unnamed first-person narrator tells his readers that, as a rationalist, he had never believed in the existence of ghosts. But only so until recently, when his friend, a young civil servant named Dāwūd, told him a story which he finds difficult not to believe because Dāwūd is an "enlightened intellectual" (*muthaqqaf mustanīr*, 159), has a perfect intellect (*kāmil al-ʿaql*) and is absolutely trustworthy – *ḥattà idhā mazaḥ fa-lā yaqūl illā ḥaqqan* "even when he's joking he tells nothing but the truth" (160).

Now (ch. ii, pp. 160–165) comes Dāwūd's story as told by himself. One day he is transferred from Cairo to a post in Luxor, Upper Egypt. There, he and his wife move into a house which turns out to be haunted. Their fellow occupant is an *ʿifrīt*, or demon.[12] According to the locals, this *ʿifrīt*, like others in the area, could be the ghost of an ancient Egyptian who had lost his live as a forced labourer when building one of the famous monuments of Egyptian antiquity.[13]

The couple have three encounters with this ghost, the first two of which seem to pass off quite harmlessly. On the first occasion, Dāwūd's wife feels that she has been beaten at night, but there is nobody who could have done it. She thinks it's been just a dream, but in the morning her arms clearly show bruises. There is, however, no plausible explanation, so they forget about it. A month later, at night again, the couple wake up at the sound of the steps of somebody coming up the stairs. They are frightened because this might be a thief, and thieves tend to be very brutal these days. But when Dāwūd eventually overcomes his fear and

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11 I am using the 1964 edition (al-Maktaba al-ʿArabiyya, Cairo) where *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* figures on pages 157–169.

12 According to Chelhod 1970, *ʿafārīt* (plural of *ʿifrīt*) appear in the Qurʾān (xxvii, 39) as a special group of *jinn* and represent "particularly powerful chthonian forces, formidable and cunning"; in al-Jāḥiẓ's classification, a *ʿifrīt* is "still more powerful" than a *shayṭān*, and even than a *mārid*.

13 Cf. Lane (1896) 1986, 236: "The ancient tombs of Egypt, and the dark recesses of the temples, are commonly believed […] to be inhabited by 'efreets. […] Many Arabs ascribe the erection of the Pyramids, and all the most stupendous remains of antiquity in Egypt, to Gánn Ibn-Gánn and his servants, the ginn, conceiving it impossible that they could have been raised by human hands." – Aḥmad Amīn, too, mentions the belief of "some Egyptian men and women" in houses inhabited (*maskūna*) by *jinn/ʿafārīt*, esp. if a case of murder (*ḥādithat qatl*) had happened in them, cf. Amīn 1953, 142–143 (*s.v.* "jinn").

searches the house he cannot find anybody – although the steps can still be heard, now moving down the stairs.[14]

(Ch. iii, pp. 165–167) Similar incidents recur within the next weeks, but Dāwūd and his wife stay in the house, getting used to this kind of minor disturbances by an *ʿifrīt* that seems to be harmless. One day, however, Dāwūd comes home from office only to find his wife totally scared and severely injured. She tells him that a black man has attacked her with fire, hit her in the face, and, when she tried to protect herself with her arm, struck her arm. Upon hearing this story, a friend of Dāwūd offers to host the couple in *his* house until they have found a solution. They accept the invitation.

(Ch. iv, pp. 167–169) The same friend then calls for a Christian priest, who performs a certain ritual and obviously manages to exorcise the *ʿifrīt*. The couple return to their house and live there without any disturbance for the rest of their time in Luxor.

Upon moving out, however (when Dāwūd is re-transferred to Cairo), his friend receives a violent kick in the leg when they are just carrying a tall, heavy chest over the threshold. The *ʿifrīt* had obviously not been driven away completely but just locked into the chest! So, Dāwūd and his friend ask some passers-by to help them and eventually succeed in removing the chest from the house. Last sentence: *wa-taraknā tilka l-dār al-laʿīna tandub man shādahā wa-tanʿī man banāhā* "so we left that damned house wail over the one who erected it and mourn for the one who built it".

14.2 Reading the story as a piece of *adab qawmī*

In many respects, *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* is not untypical of the writings of the *Madrasa Ḥadītha* and it can be read in accordance with the categories which Egyptian 'national literature' provides for interpretation. Following the 1919 uprising, Egypt had been accorded independence in 1922 (formally, at least) and was now to take charge of her affairs herself, as an Egyptian nation, in the same way as was being successfully demonstrated by contemporary Turkey under Mustafa Kemal 'Atatürk'. In order to build a better future it was necessary, however, to cure society of the diseases that stood in the way of progress. Intellectuals like Lāshīn identified a number of such diseases, e.g., alcoholism and gambling, the corruption and hypocrisy of religious leaders, the disparity between the sexes and arranged

14 Cf. Amīn 1953, 143: people "sometimes hear a scrooping (or sobbing, *anīn*), sometimes someone throws stones on the house, or similar things."

marriages, the lack of education, superstition, etc.[15] They saw themselves as their society's doctors and believed that literature could fulfil the function of a remedy. In order to do so successfully it had to be as authentic and realistic as possible, and this in turn should be reached by creating 'typically Egyptian' characters and dealing with 'typically Egyptian' problems.

There are of course many elements in Lāshīn's ghost story that the author probably intended to be 'typically Egyptian'. There is the world of the civil servants with their clothes, their habits, their psychological make-up;[16] there is the 'authentic' Upper Egyptian world of Luxor, and also Ancient Egypt as represented in the ghost's alleged background;[17] and there is of course the *ʿifrīt* himself, whom Lāshīn no doubt intended to be a 'typically Egyptian' element.[18]

But – is there a disease that society should be cured from? Sabry Hafez holds that the story aims at showing "the dramatic effect of superstition on family life" (Hafez 1993, 224). If that were true the story would be in line indeed with a num-

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15 Cf., e.g., Wielandt 1983, passim, esp. 32–37, and chs. ii & iii; de Moor 1991, passim, esp. 2ème & 3ème partie; Hafez 1993, passim, esp. 182–185, 201–211, 219–227; Guth 2003b, esp. 377–384.

16 Having stated (in a chapter entitled "Narrative Survey of the Society") that Lāshīn "endeavours to make ever larger areas of social reality accessible and comprehensible to the individual" and that the "people who matter in Lāshīn's world represent the whole spectrum of middle-class life", Hafez mentions *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* as an example of stories about civil servants who "spend a great deal of their time in pavement cafés, chatting over a cup of tea and a hubble-bubble pipe about their fears, interests, and superstitions" (Hafez 1993, 219–220).

17 Only a few years earlier, Howard Carter had discovered the tomb of Tut-ʿAnkh-Amen (1922) and the Pharaoh's mummy had been opened (1925) (cf. Gumbrecht 1997, 149, *s.v.* "Mummies"), which led to a wave of Egyptomania spilling over not only into the West, but also back into Egypt, where it helped the Pharaonic version of Egyptian nationalism (which insisted on the 'Pharaonic', rather than Arab or Muslim, identity of the country's inhabitants) to gain momentum.

18 By letting the narrator of ch. i give the names of some ghosts in the existence of which he had formerly not believed – *al-muʾtazara* "she of the *izār* (i.e., with a 'long wrapper, loin cloth (used particularly during the pilgrimage to Mecca', Badawi/Hinds 1986, *s.v.*))", and *dhū l-rijl al-maslūkha* "he of the flayed foot" –, the author creates a specifically local setting. I have not been able to trace *al-muʾtazara* in any of the reference works that I thought could be relevant (Wehr's, Lane's, and Badawi and Hinds' dictionaries; Lane's *Manners and Customs*, Aḥmad Amīn's *Qāmūs*; in his edition of Lāshīn's complete works, Ḥāfiẓ explains *al-muʾtazara* as "al-ashbāḥ wa-l-ʿafārīt", cf. Lāshīn 1999, 296, fn. 2). As for *dhū l-rijl al-maslūkha*, Badawi and Hinds 1986 give (*s.v.* s-l-kh) "*ʕabu rigli masluuxa* the bogey-man (a creature described as half man and half donkey and having flayed legs)"; the same description is given already by Amīn (1953, 17, *s.v.* "abū"); not commented upon by Ḥāfiẓ in Lāshīn 1999.

ber of other ghost stories of the same period – not only from Egypt and the Modern School, by the way,[19] but also from Turkey[20] or Central Asia,[21] for example. As Rotraud Wielandt has shown (in the case of Maḥmūd Taymūr), ghosts in these texts either become unmasked as deceitful human inventions or appear as mere delusions of a neurasthenic person, the belief in ghosts is always shown as superstitious and in most cases also harmful.[22] By contrast, Lāshīn's *ʿifrīt* is neither shown to be a delusion nor does it throw the couple into a marital crisis, its apparition rather strengthens the marital bonds.

Another difference between Lāshīn's ghost narrative and those of other authors is that the *ʿifrīt* is not presented as something unreal here.[23] What is harmful is not the belief in ghosts, but the ghost himself!

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19 Other Egyptian ghost narratives include, e.g., Maḥmūd Taymūr's *Rajab Efendī* (1927), *ʿIfrīt Umm Khalīl* (1929), and *al-Shayṭān* (1930). These stories are summarized and commented on in Wielandt's inventory as nos. [35], [45], and [50], respectively.

20 Cf., e.g., *Perili Köşk* (The Haunted Villa, 1919) by Ömer Seyfettin (continously reprinted, e.g. in *Seçme Hikâyeler*, ii, Istanbul 1992, 14–23; the text is also to be found on the internet, in Latin as well as in Ottoman characters); German translation by Otto Spies, in Spies 1949, 11–20.

21 Cf., e.g., *Aḥmad-i devband* (Ahmad the Exorcist, 1928) by the Tajik intellectual and leading representative of the reformist *jadīdī* movement, Ṣadruddīn ʿAynī (1878–1954); English translation in ʿAynī (1928) 1998, 195–219.

22 Ghost narratives then are only a variant of Taymūr's "Lieblingsthema von der verheerenden Wirkung zwanghafter Ideen" (favourite theme, the destructive effect of obsessive ideas; Wielandt 1983, 369; cf. also ibid., 56). Other stories falling into this category would be *al-Mahdī al-muntaẓar* (1923), *al-Shaykh Sayyid al-ʿabīṭ* (1926), and *al-Maḥkūm ʿalayhi bi-l-iʿdām* (1928) (Wielandt's inv. nos. [5], [26], [38]). (For another ghost story by Taymūr, *al-Ḥājj ʿAlī* (1933) [74], see next footnote.) Lāshīn himself also contributed to this kind of stories, cf. e.g. his *al-Zāʾir al-ṣāmit* (The Silent Visitor, in *Yuḥkà anna...*, 1929), where a case of "faith healing" (Hafez 1993, 224) is exposed. Superstition is depicted as something harmful to be overcome also later in his only novel, *Ḥawwāʾ bi-lā Ādam* (1934). – Ṣadruddīn ʿAynī's *Aḥmad-i devband* (cf. previous note), which deals with the appearance of *dev*s, *pari*s and *jinn*s, concludes: "In one of the[.] scientific books, Ahmad read that one of the components of bone is a chemical substance called phosphorus, which at night – especially in warm weather – can appear like a flickering light. This 'phosphorescence' can occur whenever bones decompose. The lights that appear in graveyards, old mosques, dunghills and the like are a result of this, since such places are full of rotting bones. Ahmad [...] realized that the Will o' the wisp that had scared all his colleagues was nothing more than phosphorescence. – Once he had learned this from his reading, Ahmad was convinced that there were no such things as devs, paris and jinn. All the supernatural beings that people feared were either pure figments of the imagination or things that could be explained by physicists and chemists." ʿAynī (1928) 1998, 219.

23 A rare parallel in this respect is Maḥmūd Taymūr's *al-Ḥājj ʿAlī* (1933) [Wielandt's inv. no. 74]. Wielandt qualifies this story as exceptional among the author's early works because it seems to

If, however, the story does *not* unmask the ghost as a harmful superstition, what then could have been its purpose according to the historians of 'national literature'? Was it meant to be just an essay in 'authentically Egyptian' writing – in portraying Egyptian civil servants, for instance, their love of chatting and telling curious stories?[24] Local colour for its own sake, an end in itself? Or, as Hafez suggested, a parody that aims at exposing to public criticism the 'boasting' of civil servants with 'heroic' experiences?[25] Or an essay in the technique of story-telling?

There could, of course, be a bit of all this in *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt*. But, let us be honest – even if we acknowledged that Lāshīn has produced here a good and entertaining, 'typically Egyptian' story, this would not prevent an average Western reader (nor his/her Arab colleague who has internalised the Western standards) from smiling at it a bit condescendingly, because one cannot really take it as a piece of serious, high-quality literature, can one? Its pioneering quality notwithstanding, the reader would, with all probability, state that *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* suffers from a lack of depth and, above all, of an extra-Egyptian significance, so that it can certainly not be regarded as being on a level with what was going on in the literary scene in the West at the same time. The story would never be read as a 'modern' text. Apart from scientific curiosity, the only motive to look at it could be, for a native reader, a kind of nostalgia (looking back into times when 'we Egyptians' still believed in ghosts) or, for a Westerner, exoticism (a story from an 'oriental' country where there are still ghosts, just as in *The Thousand and One Nights*).

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have no other 'purpose' than to produce a good spine-chilling story ("allein um der Gruselwirkung willen", 108; "Erzeugung des Gruselns als Selbstzweck", 392), the author having given in, probably, to the temptation of writing something more popular in order to increase the number of his readers. Cf., however, fn. 52 below.

24 Cf. Hafez' view, quoted above, fn. 16.

25 Hafez 1993, 220. Contrary to Hafez, I cannot read in this story anything that would suggest that Lāshīn had intended it as a parody. There is indeed some irony in the text; on several occasions the narrator shows himself amused at what his friend tells him, thus acting as a representative of enlightened rationalism, which is also the mental attitude expected to prevail on the readers' part. But all 'attacks' of irony rebound here on the aggressor, and it is not the belief in ghosts which in the end is questioned but the sense of superiority which the rationalist 'non-believers' display.

14.3 Irritations

I am convinced, however, that this picture is, to say the least, defective and that Lāshīn, even in this ghost story, is not at all as superficial, banal, or 'local' as it might seem. Among the many reasons let me only mention the following:

1) It is quite unlikely that an author who constantly called for, and worked hard to, produce literature of a high quality[26] and for whom vulgarity was "a mortal sin" (Hafez 1993, 227), an author who in other stories of his also displayed a high consciousness of narrative technique and complexity[27] would have included in his collection as a shallow, insipid exception a story which was not up to his own standards, answering the majority of the reading public's desire for entertainment.[28] (We may add that when he wrote *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* he was already in his early thirties, so it may reasonably be assumed that he knew very well what he was doing.) And indeed, as, e.g., language is concerned, any reader will sense from the very beginning that Lāshīn displays great linguistic skills here, using a fine, elaborate, and at the same time very pleasant *fuṣḥà* which is exactly appropriate for the action (story-telling) and the story-tellers' social background (civil servants / intellectuals). The same holds true for the style: its vividness and diversity (addresses to the reader, descriptions, reports, many dialogues) and, above all, a great feeling for suspense[29] make the story a good read from the beginning to the end.

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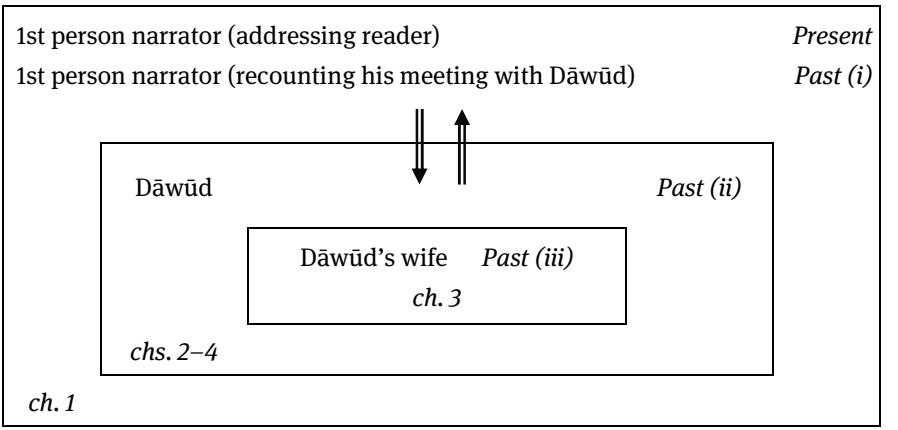
26 Hafez 1993, 218 reports, for instance, that Lāshīn "commenced writing short stories as early as 1921 or 1922, but he refrained from publishing any of his early attempts and continued to improve on them until late 1924". He also underlines that Lāshīn is the least didactic among all Arab writers before the 1930s: "He tries to bring about reform not through exhortation, but through the provocative effect of his art" (ibid., 226).

27 Cf. Hafez 1993, 226: "strongest sense of structure".

28 This is Hafez's main explanation for what he considers as "superficiality" (*tasṭīḥ*), technical "neglect" (*ihmāl*), and too much of melodrama (*taʿmīq fī l-mīlūdrāmiyya*) in a number of Lāshīn's stories (*Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* not mentioned explicitly though). Cf. Ḥāfiẓ 1999, 38–39, and also 42–43, where Hafez follows Yaḥyà Ḥaqqī who, in his foreword to Lāshīn's collection *Sukhriyyat al-nāy*, says that the writer occasionally makes use of lachrimosity (*nagḥamat al-ḥuzn wa-l-bukāʾ*) in order to captivate the reader with elements of "romanticism", the way paved by al-Manfalūṭī and his likes.

29 Cf., for instance, the progression of the ghost encounters according to the well-known model of an escalation in three steps: forgotten incident → frightening incident → dangerous incident. Cf. also the insertion of 'retardatory' passages in several instances in order to increase suspense. For instance, the climax of the story seems to be reached when the *ʿifrīt* has been exorcised successfully, but the story still continues, finding its pointed end, the ghost's reappearance, only after the situation has been described as calm and secure.

2) As a matter of course, Lāshīn's "Ghost Story" contains elements of gothic novels or tales of terror: e.g., the mysterious sounds, the invisibility of the ghost, the descriptions of seemingly normal atmospheres which create an uncanny suspense; the beating, the fire, the blood, the exorcist ritual, etc. The story is however not of a simple "event-centered" or "action-focussed" type.[30] Despite its seemingly 'banal' and perhaps rather popular topic, an analysis of the narrative structure of *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* reveals that it is a rather complex text:



There are three narratives, one embedded in the other, and to these correspond four different time levels. In the opening chapter, the first-person narrator addressing his readers establishes a present tense layer (contemporareity with the reader), then shifts back *ilà ʿahd ghayr baʿīd*, to a "not distant past", the time of his meeting with Dāwūd and the latter's reporting his story [past (i)]; Dāwūd turns to an earlier past [past (ii)], starting his account – the central ghost story – with his transfer to Luxor "in the year 1920"; the first two encounters with the ghost are still told by Dāwūd (through the first narrator's mouth), while in order to report the *ʿifrīt*'s attack on Dāwūd's wife – the crucial event which makes the couple leave the house – Lāshīn gives the floor to the victim herself: when Dāwūd returns home one day he learns what has happened during his absence [analepsis into the past (iii)] (the wife speaking through Dāwūd's mouth, and Dāwūd still through the first narrator's).

30 These are two of the categories which Wielandt 1983 found useful to classify Maḥmūd Taymūr's stories.

A structural analysis also makes clear that it is not only Dāwūd's report about his encounters with the ghost that matters; at least as important as his story is the general question that is being discussed in the frame story on the basis of the ghost events, the question whether ghosts are real and, if so, how this would affect the enlightened rationalist identity of Dāwūd and the narrator. In addition to the introductory chapter where the focus is on exactly this question,[31] Lāshīn lets Dāwūd's narrative become interrupted every now and then by his narrator's comments and their conversation that always revolve around the same problem.[32] In this way the author adds at least three dimensions to his narrative – temporal, spatial, and topical ones; the time of the occult events becomes linked to the time of the two friends' conversation, Upper Egypt is looked at from a Cairene perspective, and Dāwūd's ghost story gains a meta-level on which his encounter with the mysterious is commented upon. The effect Lāshīn reaches by interlocking the two levels (cf. the arrows in the figure above) is that not only the representative of Rationalism questions the Believer in ghosts, but vice versa: the Believer in ghosts also challenges the Rationalist. The same relation is again doubled, although with reversed roles, on another level. When the narrator starts telling his story, he seems to have become convinced of the existence of *ʿafārīt*, his own former position of a non-believer now being assigned to the reader.[33]

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31 The story begins as follows: "– Have you ever seen an *ʿifrīt*, dear reader? – No... – Did you ever have an experience with an *ʿifrīt* without seeing it, dear reader? – No, no... – Do you believe in the existence of *ʿafārīt* at all, dear reader? – No, no, no... – Pardon, dear reader! You are, without doubt, *kāmil al-ʿaql* and *qawiyy al-nafs*. And I *was* like you until not long ago. Yes, I had refused, with all my bravour, to admit [the existence of] *al-muʾtazara*, and it had not occurred to my mind that I could fear from *dhū l-rijl al-maslūkha*, and I always thought that *if* he, or she, [...] would dare one day to appear in front of me, then I would smash his, or her, face in a way that would teach him, or her, an unforgettable lesson and prevent him, or her, from annoying anybody else. / However, my friend Dāwūd, a man approaching his forties who is *kāmil al-ʿaql* like you, well-educated (*muhadhdhab*) and an enlightened intellectual (*muthaqqaf mustanīr*) [...], told me what happened to him with an *ʿifrīt*, a real *ʿifrīt* [...]" (159–160).

32 When, e.g., Dāwūd has just mentioned the bruises that were to be seen after the ghost's first 'visit', the first narrator interrupts his friend's account asking him: "And did you see these bruises with your own eyes (*bi-ʿaynay raʾsika*)?", whereupon "my friend replied with absolute sincerety: – Yes, I saw these bruises. The ... the material [evidence] that cannot be doubted (*al-māddī alladhī lā shakk fīh*) [...]" (161).

33 According to Ḥāfiẓ, addresses to the reader in Lāshīn's early narratives have no other function than to try not to lose them because at that time an author could still not count on the automatic attraction of the relatively new genre for an audience used to action-centred entertaining 'stuff'; from the artistic point of view, these addresses and the accompanying "justificational style" (*manhaj tabrīrī*) cannot be viewed as an element of modernism but are an inorganic "unjustified addition" (*tazayyud lā mubarrir lahū*) that make a rather artificial impression. Hāfiẓ

3) Like other believers in the idea of a 'national literature' (and also 'national music', and other arts) at that time, the Egyptian representatives of this global trend too were convinced that local colour was not an obstacle but the very key to success.[34] One of the conditions for becoming 'modern', and in this way reaching international standards – and this is what the call for the short story's *ʿaṣriyya* or *muʿāṣara* (which accompanied that for Egyptianness, *miṣriyyat al-qiṣṣa*) really meant: 'modernity, being up to date' (cf. Ḥāfiẓ 1999: 33)[35] – one of these conditions was to become a nation, and a condition of becoming a nation was to have a national identity of one's own – and vice versa: local specifity would ensure national identity, and being a nation meant to be modern, on a level with global norms. "If", according to ʿĪsà ʿUbayd, one of the theoreticians of the Modern School, "we succeed" in portraying our own condition and write as authentically Egyptian as possible, "extracting" our observations "from the depth of our daily life", "then we will have contributed something which Western writers ignore because they are incapable of studying our personality and the order of our lives", and the result might be that, one day, Egyptian literature will even become translated into Western languages, i.e., will be accepted as the West's equal.[36]

4) This leads me to the next point, another aspect of the fact that Egyptian literature of the 1920s was produced in contexts that were, to a large extent, 'global'. The Middle East had by then already been closely integrated into global developments politically and economically, and in the spheres of cultural

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1999, 37. Once the friendship with the reader is established, Lāshīn soon turns to an artistically more demanding style, in this way putting the friendship to the test quite heavily – ibid., 42.

34 This idea remained especially popular, and still gained attractivity before and after World War I, on the margins of the former centres, e.g., in Scandinavia, in the Slavonic regions, or on the Balkans, where the arts had stood, until the first half of the nineteenth century, "in the shadow of the great *Kulturnationen*, the Italians, French, British, Germans" (Honolka 1979: 197) – cf., for instance, the music of the Finn Jean Sibelius, the Czechs Leoš Janáček and Josef Suk, the Hungarians Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók, or the Rumanian George Enescu who, in search of authenticity, continued earlier efforts to find a 'national' expression until quite late into the twentieth century, whereas in the center the idea had by then lost much of its earlier charm already.

35 To underline his being up to global standards, an author like Maḥmūd Taymūr even used to sign his stories with *Mūbāsān al-miṣrī* "the Egyptian Maupassant", cf. ibid., 35.

36 *yajib an tushād [riwāyātunā] ʿalà asās al-mulāḥaẓa al-ṣādiqa al-mustakhraja min aʿmāq ḥayātinā al-yawmiyya waʿalà l-taḥlīlāt al-ijtimāʿiyya wa-l-nafsiyya, fa-naḥnu idhā ḥaqqaqnā dhālika la-ataynā bi-shayʾ jadīd yajhaluhū kuttāb al-gharb liʿajzihim ʿan dars nafsiyyatinā waniẓām ḥayātinā*: ʿĪsà ʿUbayd, preface to *Iḥsān Hānim*, 1921, *mīm* [= xiii]. [For a translation of the complete foreword, which is generally considered a kind of manifesto of the Modern School, cf. above, Chapter 13.]

achievement and civilisation, too, Cairo was hardly lagging behind Paris or London. One only needs to consider contemporary urban architecture, the parks, the hotels and theatres then built, modern means of transport and communication, styles of dress, the rich variety of newspapers, or objects in use in everyday life like, in Lāshīn's story, the American-style lamp (*fānūs min al-ṭirāz al-amrīkānī*) which Dāwūd takes into his left hand when he sets out to search for the supposed 'thief' and of which he says that "it has become a custom to leave it burning in the *ṣāla* the whole night."[37]

As a result, the writers of the New School not only read French, English and Russian literature, but also discussed world politics, followed the scientific and philosophical debates that were going on worldwide, and so on.

How can these aspects add to the understanding of Lāshīn's "Ghost Story"?

14.4 *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* echoing global discourses

The acknowledgement of technical maturity and the discovery of a surprisingly high structural complexity may make us put Orientalist prejudices aside and allow Lāshīn's *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* to be studied in the genre context of ghost fiction in general. One can try to delineate congruencies and points of difference with texts from non-Egyptian literary traditions and assign Lāshīn's story its place vis-à-vis the bulk of gothic novels, tales of terror, and other ghost fiction from other national literatures. Since we know high quality examples of ghost fiction from our own literary tradition,[38] it will also be easier then to allow for the possibility of some depth in this story despite its 'oriental' and specifically Egyptian appear-

37 *jarat-i l-ʿāda an yutrak fī l-ṣāla muḍāʾ^an ṭūl al-layl*, 162.

38 The history of ghost fiction is usually said to begin in England with Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764) and its successors, especially Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolfo* (1794), M. G. Lewis' *Ambrosio, or the Monk* (1796), or Mary W. Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). It was continued, and modified, by writers like Edgar Allen Poe, Guy de Maupassant, Henry James, and even Oscar Wilde (*The Canterville Ghost*, 1887), or in Russia by Gogol' and Turgenev (see, e.g., Wilpert ⁶1979, *s.v.* "Gespenstergeschichte"). Given the fact that much of this literature had been translated into Arabic during the nineteenth and early twentieth century and that the Egyptian Modernists were eager readers of Western authors, it is highly probable that Lāshīn knew many of these Western ghost stories. For Maḥmūd Taymūr, Wielandt mentions the influence of Maupassant's *contes phantastiques* (Wielandt 1983, 55 sq.). It cannot be excluded, then, that the Modernists who wrote ghost stories also wanted to contribute to what they conceived of as a 'global ghost/gothic fiction'; at least, they certainly knew the norms which they had to write up to in order to reach internationally recognized quality.

ance, despite its local colour and, above all, despite its seemingly ridiculous, trivial topic. One could perhaps try to read it as a parable of the situation of contemporary Egypt, a few years after the "brutal destruction of Egypt's aspirations during the 1919 revolution" when a feeling of "deep suffering and humiliation" had prevailed (Hafez 1993, 221), and after (formal) independence: for instance, a 'house' [Egypt] newly built [new constitution etc.] but haunted by a 'ghost from the past' [the heritage of the 'Age of Decadence', *ʿaṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ*] with which the intellectuals/civil servants have to cope and that is difficult to get rid of.[39] In such a reading (with which we would still not leave a purely Egyptian, local frame of reference), the characterisation of the 'house' as *ḥadīth al-ʿahd,* [...] *ḥasan al-tansīq, mustakmal shurūṭ al-rāḥa wa-l-ṣiḥḥa* ("newly built, well-designed, and perfectly equipped with all means of comfort and hygiene", 169) would surely have to be interpreted, as would the dates given by Lāshīn, for the story to be made sense of.[40] To all my knowledge, the works of the Modern School have never been read in this way yet, since the categories provided for interpretation so far, esp. 'realism', seemed to exclude a metaphorical reading from the very beginning – although a high metaphorical potential has been observed in some narratives.[41] It would be promising to go into detail here, but this would produce a study in its own right, and I prefer to follow another track.

The text's technical maturity and structural complexity are equally apt to convince us to direct our attention to the layer that is skillfully (and quite 'obstinately') interwoven with the ghost story. Thus, it may be more fruitful to concentrate on the questions the text *itself* raises, such as the existence of ghosts and the challenge posed to enlightened rationalism by a 'parallel reality'. These questions touch upon universal issues that align with the Modernists' goal of achieving global standards through national specificity. The Modernists believed that a literary work could only possess lasting value if it grappled with the "eternal aspects of the human condition".[42] To establish the plausibility of these issues being

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39 I am indebted for this idea to a student of mine, Hans Furrer (Bern). Thank you, Hans!

40 Why, for instance, are Dāwūd and his wife said to have moved into the house "in 1920"? Why should the house have been built "in 1914"? And why does it house the local Sharīʿa Court (*al-Maḥkama al-Sharʿiyya*) "though it had been used [in this function] [...] from morning until midday only" (p. 160)?

41 Just think of the prayer place (*al-muṣallà*) in Lāshīn's *Ḥadīth al-qarya* (1929), or the train in Muḥammad Taymūr's equally famous *Fī l-qiṭār* (1917).

42 *wa-l-riwāya lā takūn khālida illā idhā kuwwinat min al-ʿanāṣir al-insāniyya al-khālida*, as ʿĪsà ʿUbayd had it in the preface to *Iḥsān Hānim*: ʿUbayd (1921) 1964, *yāʾ* [= x] [see above, end of Chapter 13].

significant, it would be beneficial to locate the themes of the story within contemporary discourses outside of Egypt that can be characterised as global and inherently modern. Given Egypt's integration into global processes during that time, it is probable that these discourses formed a part of Egyptian authors' life-worlds. In essence, if literature serves as a reflection of an author's life-world, and if we assume that the happenings of the 1920s around the world formed an indispensable part of an Egyptian author's life-world, then it is possible to utilize the categories discovered by historical research for the 1920s outside of Egypt and reevaluate contemporary Egyptian texts to determine if these global categories can also be applied to them.

In order to do this I have consulted the seminal study *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time* (1997) by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, professor of Comparative Literature at Stanford University, California. In what he calls "an essay on historical simultaneity" (Gumbrecht 1997, 433),[43] the author arranges "the most frequently observed phenomena and configurations in the year 1926 [...] into three categories", which he calls *dispositifs* (or *arrays*), *binary codes* and *collapsed codes* (ibid., 434). *Dispositifs*, for him, are ways in which "artifacts, roles, and activities influence bodies", because these "artifacts, roles, and activities (for example, Airplanes, Engineers, Dancing) [...] require the human bodies to enter into specific spatial and functional relations to the everyday-worlds they inhabit" (ibid.). Clusters of *arrays*, or *dispositifs*, coexist and overlap in a space of simultaneity and "tend to generate discourses which transform [their] confusion into [...] alternative options", such as Individuality *vs*. Collectivity, or Authenticity *vs*. Artificiality. Since these *binary codes* "provide principles of order within the unstructured simultaneity of everyday-worlds, one might", according to Gumbrecht, "reserve the concept of 'culture' for the ensemble of such codes" (ibid.). When the codes loose their de-paradoxifying function, Gumbrecht calls them *collapsed codes*. Collapsed codes, he says, "are particularly visible because, as areas of malfunction and entropy, they attract specific discursive attention and, often, specific emotional energy" (ibid.). Dispositifs (arrays), codes, and collapsed codes are connected to each other "via myriad labyrinthine paths of contiguity, association, and implication", altogether to be seen as "an asymmetrical network, as a rhizome rather than as a totality" (ibid., 435).

43 The main purpose of the book is to allow the reader to jump right into the 'world of 1926' which, like any other world of a synchronous section, was a complex system of correspondences, oppositions, concepts, ... It is an attempt to write history again after the proclaimed 'end of history', not by writing *about* the past, however, but by making it more or less accessible to *direct* experience in providing as much concrete material as possible, and letting it 'speak itself'.

Among the many *dispositifs* which Gumbrecht identifies as characteristic of the world of 1926 we find, e.g.,

artifacts like	airplanes, assembly lines, automobiles, elevators, gramophones, movie palaces, mummies, ocean liners, railroads, telephones, trains
and roles like	employees, engineers, hunger artists, or reporters.[44]

Among the *codes* there are

Action vs. Impotence	Authenticity vs. Artificiality
Center vs. Periphery	Individuality vs. Collectivity
Male vs. Female	Present vs. Past
Sobriety vs. Exuberance	Uncertainty vs. Reality

and *collapsed codes* include

Action = Impotence (Tragedy)
Authenticity = Artificiality (Life)
Individuality = Collectivity (Leader)

These categories are, of course, drawn from *Western* (though not exclusively European) environments and discourses, as Gumbrecht explicitly concedes (sources in German, English and Spanish, also covering the two Americas). But we shall see now that surely not all, but at least some of them may be appropriate to describe also the Egyptian world of the mid-1920s, and because Lāshīn's "Ghost Story", as one of a myriad of other elements, forms part of this historical reality, it will be possible to identify them in this narrative, too.[45]

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44 *In 1926* is written as an 'encyclopedia' with entries in alphabetical order. You may start reading wherever you like. In every entry you will find references to other related entries, and in these again references to still other entries. So, after having 'entered 1926' through one door you will soon start moving around in this world in an associative manner, exploring one phenomenon after the other.

45 If *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* was written shortly after 1926 this would surely not matter too much, since the dispositifs, binary codes and collapsed codes did not cease to be categories of ordering the everyday-worlds abruptly when that year ended. It is permissible, therefore, methodologically, to

To begin with, *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* is without a doubt a story about *employees (civil servants, see below), and it may also be read as an *engineers' story.[46] Not only because its author was himself an engineer by profession (he had studied at the *muhandiskhāna*, the Technical College, in Cairo, obtained a diploma in 1917 and a year later entered the Public Works Department, *tanẓīm* (cf. Brugman 1984, 252), of which he later became chief, but also because it is a story about a certain kind of engineers. Civil servants like Dāwūd and the narrator conceived of themselves, as Lāshīn and other intellectuals of the emergent Egyptian middle classes did, as 'social engineers' or 'social technicians', they "viewed 'society' itself as an abstract entity, determined by universal, scientific laws and principles of organization (*al-hayʾa al-ijtimāʿiyya*)" (Selim 2004, 6–7).[47] This is also evident from the metaphore of the 'doctors' who felt themselves obliged, and able, to cure the diseases of their society (i.e., the 'body', *al-hayʾa*). The role of the social engineer had of course been inherited, in the Middle East, from nineteenth and early twentieth century reformism (*tanẓīmāt*, *iṣlāḥ*, etc.), and found exemplary representatives in reformists like, e.g., Atatürk, the 'architect' (another technical metaphor) of modern Turkey; the role was however not at all restricted to Middle Easterners, cf. for instance *the* social reformer, and revolutionary, of early twentieth century, Vladimir Il'yich Lenin.

Prior to their confrontation with the *ʿifrīt*, the attitudes of the two friends in the story can be described with terms like rationalism, matter-of-factness, or *sobriety.[48] These terms, however, are also categories with which Gumbrecht's engineers order their everyday-world.[49]

Underlying the fascination with rationalism, matter-of-factness, sobriety is the "constant search for norms and models that would make it possible to assess

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extend Gumbrecht's "essay on historical simultaneity" to Lāshīn's story even if there may be no absolute simultaneity.

46 In the following, I will mark with an asterisk (*) Gumbrechtian terms that figure in the above list of categories.

47 Cf. Timothy Mitchell who "argues that the diagnosis and reform of this abstract social order – 'conceived in absolute distinction to the mere individuals and practices composing it' – was the principal object of nationalist reformers across the political and social spectrum"; Mitchell 1991, 127, quoted in Selim 2004, 7. – For 'social engineering', see Gumbrecht 1997, 97.

48 Cf. the qualities which the narrator in the opening section presupposes in his readers and which had characterized Dāwūd and himself prior to the ghost experience: "enlightened intellectual" (*muthaqqaf mustanīr*, 159), endowed with a "firm/stable character" (*qawiyy al-nafs*, 160) and "perfect reasoning power" (*kāmil al-ʿaql*, ibid.) that is used to look for "material evidence" (*athar māddī*, 161) only. – Cf. Gumbrecht 1997, 95: "The engineer relies on 'facts,' not on vague 'convictions.'"

49 Cf. Gumbrecht 1997, 93–101 ("Engineers"), 329–335 ("Sobriety vs. Exuberance"), 336–348 ("Uncertainty vs. Reality").

and shape reality" (Gumbrecht 1997, 329), i.e., especially man's surroundings. The very foundations of the world-view of Gumbrecht's engineers had, however, begun already to show cracks in several places. Einstein's theory of relativity had severely shaken the scientistic belief of all these teachers, architects, technicians, and also 'social engineers' in the one and only *reality and aroused in them a feeling of *uncertainty about which version of *reality was true (although the theory of relativity, too, could of course be relied upon and calculated with as a law of nature). Following World War I, *the* cataclysmic key experience which had shown "the power with which modern weaponry (could) transform nature and landscape" (ibid., 338), there was also a general feeling of instability, the world was being experienced as chaotic, the metaphor of the world as an 'unstable ground' had become a widely accepted commonplace (ibid., 337)[50] (and chaos should be warded off through order, norms, laws and so on – this is how sobriety and uncertainty are interconnected). As a result of this *uncertainty, the belief in the effectiveness of *action, so fundamental for *engineers, the trust in their own capacity to bring about change, were shaken as well, they had to acknowledge "the limitations that facticity and fate impose[d] on the human will" (ibid., 355) and a feeling of *impotence became widespread.

All the phenomena just mentioned are to be found in Lāshīn's *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* as well. Here, too, the *engineers' fundamental convictions and attitudes are at stake: the apparition of the ghost has shaken Dāwūd's worldview, as well as parts of his personality,[51] and through his friend's story the narrator has likewise been forced to give up his former superior rationalism and allow for a possible other *reality that may exist parallel to the reality he knows[52] – the same one and only

50 The motif of the loss of stable ground returns in the then extremely popular 'train' metaphor: man moves around very fast and without direct contact with the ground (cf. ibid. 340; cf. also ch. "Railroads"). It may also be a reason for the preference for shorter literary genres over longer ones, the former single reality "breaking apart into an infinite number of everyday worlds, each of which (had) to be discovered, occupied, and cultivated" (ibid. 344).

51 While telling his story, Dāwūd is described by his friend as one who, "to be frank, at times I had the impression [...] was close to mutating into an *ʿifrīt*, or that the *ʿifrīt* himself was telling a part of his life-story through Dāwūd's mouth" (*bi-ṣarāḥa aqūl: innī kunt fī laḥaẓāt atakhayyal anna Dāwūd awshak an yartadd ʿifrīt*^{an}*, aw anna l-ʿifrīt dhātahū yarwī juzʾ*^{an} *min tārīkh ḥayātih ʿalà lisān Dāwūd*, 160).

52 Interestingly enough, Maḥmūd Taymūr's *al-Ḥājj ʿAlī* (1933; cf. fn. 23 above) parallels Lāshīn's *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* in this respect. As Wielandt has it: "[d]ie in dieser Spukgeschichte errichtete Wirklichkeit wird vom Autor als Teil der objektiven Realität behandelt und durch nichts in Zweifel gezogen" [Reality as constructed in this spook story is treated by the author as part of objective reality and not called into question at all] – Wielandt 1983, 108. The discovery and acceptance of

reality, by the way, which the authors of the nineteenth and early twentieth century were convinced they were able to truly represent in their writings –, and this has thrown him (like obviously Lāshīn himself) into a deep *uncertainty.[53] In including the report of the Christian priest's exorcist ritual and showing these countermeasures to be – in the end, at least – ineffective, the author also clearly makes the *'action vs. impotence' dichotomy a topic of his text. The juxtaposition of *action and *impotence may also be responsible for Lāshīn's choice of civil servants as the protagonists of his ghost story. As civil servants, Dāwūd and his friend can be characterised not only as *engineers, but also as *employees, for whom Gumbrecht observed a general fascination in 1926 in the discourses he analyzed. What he says about *employees in the West may easily apply to the heroes of *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt*, too*:* The

> strong fascination – if not [...] obsession – with the concept of the employee [...] probably results from a number of ambiguities in the employee's role. On the one hand, employees are allowed to occupy a position of agency [...; related of course to *action – S.G.]. On the other hand, employees are denied (or deny themselves) agency [...]
>
> (Gumbrecht 1997, 81)

And is the story – apart from its 'fatalistic' end which is a confession of *impotence – not also a kind of denial of agency, as though the 'engineers' were not really the masters of their own deeds but only re-acting to the *ʿifrīt*'s actions?

In the same way as the *reality/uncertainty and *action/impotence dichotomies observed by Gumbrecht for the West obviously are on Lāshīn's agenda, too, so are some of the reactions to these dichotomies. Arthur Schnitzler's famous *Traumnovelle* (Dream Story), for instance (the story which inspired Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, by the way), which deals with the *reality/uncertainty problem, ends with "a tacit acknowledgment of the multiple nature of everyday reality", and this acknowledgement "has become part of daily life" everywhere "long before professional philosophers get used to an epistemological situation in which the truth-criterion is disintegrating" (ibid., 344). The solution Lāshīn offers for the same epistemological problem is very similar to Schnitzler's: the verifiability of Dāwūd's story notwithstanding, the narrator accepts the individual

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parallel realities, all self-contained and of their own right, was of course also fostered by Freudian psychoanalysis. As a result, the œuvre of many authors, Western and Eastern alike, shows a 'psychological turn'. Wielandt has demonstrated this very convincingly for Maḥmūd Taymūr, with whom the shift took place in 1927, cf. Wielandt 1983, 52sq., 56, 93. [Cf. also above, Chapter 13.1.5, on Maḥmūd Taymūr.]

53 Dāwūd advises his friend to take the story seriously and as something to think about (*mawḍūʿ tafkīr*, p. 165), and so does the narrator with the reader.

reality and truth of his friend's account. Had he still been a typical 'engineer' he would have tried to falsify it or integrate it into his own *one* *reality (he tries to, time and again, during his conversation with Dāwūd,[54] but in the end remains silent... and then retells Dāwūd's story to a larger reading public).

Other voices which Gumbrecht lets speak in his book blame the modern world's *artificiality for the overall deplorable situation during the inter-war period,[55] as for example Fritz Lang in his film *Metropolis*, where chaos and the loss of stable ground appear as a product of modern man's shaping his own world (cf. Gumbrecht 1997: 264–5).[56] As a means to counter this artificiality (for which, by the way, the 'engineers' in particular are responsible), many start looking for 'the *authentic' – and find it, e.g., in the *past (e.g., ancient civilisations), in the mountains (cf. *mountaineering), or in nature in general (e.g. the popular *Wandervogel* movement in Germany). It is true that in Egypt, the 'artificiality/authenticity' problem could look quite different from that in Europe. Especially the experience of colonialism was felt to bring in inauthentic ideas and ways of life the artificiality of which had to be countered by strong effort to preserved or restore one's true identity. But al-Manfalūṭī's lachrymosity or the studied sentimentalism of European-style light fiction were also identified as something artificial, and the Modern School held up against these 'deviations' their 'realistic' fiction with 'authentic Egyptian' characters and themes.[57] I would also not want to exclude the possibility that Lāshīn's ghost story was meant to be 'authentic' not only thanks to the Egyptianness of its characters (the *ʿifrīt* included); it can certainly be read

54 In one instance, he "could not but smile" (*lam atamālak an ibtasamt*, 165); in another he asks him, "in astonishment and anger: 'What's that nonsense, Dāwūd!' (*qult fī dahsha wa-ghaḍab: mā hādhā l-hawas, yā Dāwūd?*, 166), etc.

55 It is of course the age of important technical achievements that changed modern man's relationship with his environment and made life less natural, less authentic, and more artificial, cf. Gumbrecht's entries on Airplanes, Assembly Lines, Automobiles, Elevators, Gramophones, Movie Palaces, Ocean Liners, Railroads, Roof Gardens, Telephones, and Wireless Communication. As a matter of fact, most, if not all, of these achievements formed part of contemporary Egyptian everyday worlds as well.

56 After the major upheaval of World War I, the human subject lost its former central position because it experienced powers that man had created and set free, but that had become uncontrollable and were now striking back at himself – Falk 1984, 33.

57 The animosity between al-Manfalūṭī and the Modern School of course also echoes the *exuberance/*sobriety opposition noticed by Gumbrecht for the Western contexts where much of the art and literature of the late nineteenth / early twentieth century came to be looked upon as "exuberance, proliferation, and eclecticism", and artistic historicism emerged as "the epitome of poor taste" (1997, 332).

likewise as a story about the confrontation of the 'artificial' urban rationalist 'engineer' with the 'authentic', though uncontrollable, powers of the underworld, an encounter which Lāshīn situates – certainly not without purpose – in the non-urban, almost rural, more 'natural' (i.e., more authentic) south of the country (*center vs. periphery). It may also not be chance that he creates in his text a link between the ghost and the civilisation of the Ancient Egyptians, in this way establishing a tension of *present vs. past. And I think it is also no accident that in several places in the text expressions point to the fact that our 'engineer', in spite of his fear, or perhaps also because of it, is fascinated by this earthy power and feels attracted to it, just as Gumbrecht's 1926 Westerners were fascinated by *mummies.

Last but not least, in the same way as the men of action in the West tend to experience their own impotence as something *tragic,[58] so Lāshīn too seems to conceive of his hero's impotence vis-à-vis the ghost as something fatal; this explains very well the sense of irony that prevails in the narrator's comments – the irony of an 'engineer' who has become helpless (cf. collapsed code *"Action = Impotence (Tragedy)").[59] The disintegration of the 'action vs. impotence' code is perhaps not yet complete here, so that this story actually only *borders* on tragedy. But a look at later developments in Lāshīn's writing, where the sense of tragedy has fully broken through, could support a reading of *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* as a first step in this direction. Only five years after the publication of *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* in *Yuḥkà anna...*, we come across another representative of the civil servant / employee / (social) engineer type, the teacher Ḥawwāʾ in Lāshīn's novel "Eve without Adam" (*Ḥawwāʾ bi-lā Ādam*, 1934).[60] It is true that, in contrast to *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt*, the reality of ghosts (in which Ḥawwāʾ's grandmother believes) is denied throughout the whole story and the rationalist attitude towards any kind of superstition maintained till the very end. Nevertheless, the project of modernisation (for which the heroine's emancipation stands) is deplored as having tragically failed (for the moment, at least).[61] The path of education by which the young orphan Ḥawwāʾ

58 Gumbrecht even assesses an 'addiction' to the "concept of Tragedy" at that time (1997, 353).

59 Cf. Hafez's observation that the "fatalism" which Lāshīn often introduces into his stories is a means to underline what the author perceives as the "irony of life" (1993, 224, 225).

60 Cf. fn. 5 above.

61 Lāshīn's novel does of course not stand out as an isolated case here but can be taken exemplary for a whole trend, in Egypt as in other countries of the Middle East, represented also by novels such as Yakup Kadri (Karaosmanoğlu)'s *Yaban* (The Stranger, 1932), Halide Edip (Adıvar)'s *Sinekli Bakkal* (Sinekli Bakkal Alley, 1935), Ṣādeq Hedāyat's *Būf-e kūr* (The Blind Owl, 1936), Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *Yawmiyyāt nāʾib fī l-aryāf* (The Diary of a Deputy Public Prosecutor in

manages to overcome the obstacles of her social background and to become a modern emancipated woman who is even able to live on her own, is not refuted as basically wrong but it is shown to be something *artificial in that it has forced the protagonist to neglect her emotional needs (her true, *authentic self, as the text suggests) until it has become 'too late': when she falls in love with Ramzī, the son of a wealthy pasha, the man does not even notice her burning with love for him, because as a girl of low social descent she has no place among the possible brides. In the end, she commits suicide. If *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* is a *mawḍūʿ tafkīr*, then *Ḥawwāʾ bi-lā Ādam* clearly is a *mawḍūʿ bukāʾ* – we can say, a tragedy. Before the suicide, however, and in addition to it, Ḥawwāʾ's defeat is symbolized by her allowing her grandmother (and her helper, the old vendor of charms, al-Ḥājj Imām), the representatives of a traditional, 'pre-modern' Egypt, to perform an exorcist ritual on her: not a ghost, but the believers in ghosts emerge victorious! It is clear that for this novel, like for *Qissat ʿifrīt*, many of the Gumbrechtian codes are meaningful, such as *action vs. impotence (cf., e.g., Ḥawwāʾ's working against superstition as a teacher vs. her failure to abolish it in her own environment, or the whole project of education, emancipation and social career vs. her impotence in the face of the persistence of the old social order), *authenticity vs. artificiality (see above), *individuality vs. collectivity (one of the central themes of contemporary Arabic literature in general, and represented here of course in Ḥawwāʾ's, the individual's, clash with society's out-dated norms), *present vs. past (the heroine, modernity, progress vs. the grandmother, old traditions, backwardness), *sobriety vs. exuberance (Ḥawwāʾ's rationality vs. her emotions, or the sober project of the society's modernisation vs. the exuberant sentimentalism at the novel's end), *reality vs. uncertainty (the author's and his heroine's former belief in a social reality that could be cured vs. insight into the complexity and manifoldness of this reality, deep uncertainty about which way to follow now, after the defeat). Ḥawwāʾ also participates in the ambiguity, mentioned above, of roles attributed to employees, oscillating between agency and a denial of agency. The escalation that has taken place between *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* and *Ḥawwāʾ bi-lā Ādam* with regard to the engineers'/reformers' disenchantment, or even disillusionment, with their former ideals becomes manifest in Lāshīn's narrative in a change of the gender of his protagonists. As Gumbrecht notes, "[i]n view of the most widespread gender stereotypes [of that time], it is not surprising that the role of

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the Countryside, 1937, transl. into English as *The Maze of Justice*, 1947), or Sabahattin Ali's *Kuyucaklı Yusuf* (Yusuf from Kuyucak, 1937). For details of this trend/period, described from a comparative, 'Arabo-Turkish' perspective, cf. §§ 94, 99–101 (with all sub-§§) of my *Brückenschläge* (Guth 2003b).

the employee carries a strong connotation of femininity" (Gumbrecht 1997, 81), and as we can see here, for Lāshīn the weakness and non-agency of the 'engineers' must obviously have reached such a degree that the choice of a female protagonist suggested itself.[62]

14.5 Conclusion

I think I have given enough examples now of congruences between Lāshīn's *Ghost Story* and what Gumbrecht has found to be worldwide categories of perception and ordering everyday-worlds during the second half of the 1920s. And I hope that it has become clear that in the light of a possible global dimension in the author's thinking – which, in my opinion, is more than probable – a story that looks rather banal and superficial from the point of view of 'national literature' may appear as something rather different: it has acquired an almost philosophical depth now, and it expresses, though in an Egyptian garment, a problem that has absolutely nothing 'exotic' or specifically 'oriental' about it but was an epistemological dilemma dealt with in the West too. Therefore, in this respect, a 'lagging behind', or backwardness, of Egyptian literature should be out of the question.[63] Despite its topic and local colour, the "Ghost Story" can be read as an

62 For another male author who chose a female protagonist as his fictional 'alter ego', cf. my "Male Author, Female Protagonist: Aspects of literary representation in Reşat Nuri Güntekin's *Çalıkuşu*" (Guth 2008 = Chapter 15, below).

63 Another method to prove the story's contemporaneity with European thinking could have been Falk's "componential analysis". The main message of *Qiṣṣat ʿifrīt* can be described as the interaction of three components: 1 – the belief of the 'engineers' in the superiority of human reason and its ability to master nature and defeat chaos; 2 – the elementary forces of nature, the powers of the supernatural and the hereafter; 3 – acknowledgement of the limitedness of the powers of human reason. The story metaphorically re-enacts the clash between (1) and (2) in a number of 'fights' between the *ʿifrīt* and the married couple, resulting in (3), an attitude of modest acceptance of other, 'higher', realities. With this trinary structure Lāshīn's story expresses exactly the same general experience, described by Falk, at the end of *Neuzeit* that was sparked off by World War I: "Im Umbruchereignis selbst [i.e., the War, S.G.] [...] verlor das menschliche Subjekt seine zentrale Position, indem vom Menschen entbundene Kräfte erfahren wurden, die sich der menschlichen Kontrolle entzogen" (Falk 1984, 33; note that the ghost too is a "vom Menschen entbundene" *Kraft*, since the author relates his existence to the building of ancient monuments – a human activity), "das noch tätige schöpferische Ich [erlebte] das Ende der Möglichkeit zu ungebundener Entfaltung", and "die der schöpferischen Tätigkeit des Ich vorausliegende strukturelle Verfassung der Welt [wurde] zur leitenden Grunderfahrung" (Falk 1983, 166). The failure of man (until then conceived of as nature's master, i.e., as 'engineer') is no longer interpreted as an individual shortcoming from now on, but as the result of being subject to universal

absolutely modern text, and the *Madrasa Ḥadītha* can be seen on a level with, e.g., the Bauhaus architects, or a composer like George Enescu, whose third sonata for violin and piano (op. 25, again 1926) is explicitly intended to be played "dans le caractère populaire roumain", i.e., with a lot of local colour – yet nobody will ever doubt its modernity and universality. Breaking down the traditional discourse of 'national literature' and building bridges between cultures will always be worth the effort.

forces, inherent in the structures of the world itself. Gumbrecht observes the very same phenomenon in Theodor Lessing's description, in 1926, of "the efforts of an ostrich to fly" as something 'tragic', since the animal's failure "can certainly not be interpreted as an individual shortcoming" (1997, 353).