

Chapter One

Modern Arabic Literature: A Historical, Political and Cultural Background

This chapter attempts to explore the historical, political and socio-cultural changes that brought about significant developments in Arabic literature. The period (from mid-nineteenth century till the end of the World War I) witnessed profound changes in the very concept of literature. The renaissance (*al-Nahdah*), which was the basis of the spurt in Arabic literature, was in fact a product of fruitful meeting of two forces: the indigenous tradition and the imported Western forms. Moreover, Mohammed Ali's drive for modernisation in Egypt early in the nineteenth century initiated a process of Westernisation which gathered momentum, eventually spreading from Egypt and Syria to the rest of the Arab World, aided by the disintegration of Ottoman Empire. More importantly, the spread of secular education and the birth of printing and journalism were potent factors not only of modern Arabic literature but also of modern Arabic thought, society, and politics. A significant translation movement resulted in the borrowing of Western ideas as well as of literary forms: the drama, the novel, and the short story. Against this background, the traditional concept of literature as a display of verbal skill was replaced by the view that literature should reflect and indeed change the social and political reality.

1.1 Important Historical Events

Geography and history combine to make the Arabic speaking world one of the most fascinating areas of the globe. Generally, it was the influence of Islam that was responsible for the meteoric rise of the Arabs starting in the seventh century. Emerging

from the narrow confines of the peninsula, Arabs spread over the Fertile Crescent¹ and extended their sway over all territories between the Atlantic and the Arabian Gulf,² as Gamal Abd al-Nasser³ remarked, “From the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf we are Arabs” (qtd in Allen 11). Till the middle of the thirteenth century they remained a world power, asserting their political, linguistic and cultural ascendancy. It was not only an empire that the Arabs built, but a culture as well. Heirs of the ancient civilisations that flourished on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, in the land of the Nile and on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, they likewise absorbed and assimilated the main features of the Greco-Roman culture, and consequently acted as a medium for transmitting to medieval Europe many of those intellectual influences which ultimately resulted in the awakening of the Western world and in setting it on the road towards its modern renaissance (Hitti, *History* 4). No people in the Middle Ages contributed to human progress so much as did the Arabs and the Arabic-speaking people (4).

With the passage of time there set in a regression from the forward tempo of the Islamic spirit followed by a series of negative developments. Around the 1200 A.D. this led to a complete domination of scholasticism over radical and scientific enquiry leading to absolute stagnation. In historical terms, Hulagu’s sack of Baghdad in 1258 A.D. marks the beginning of the decline of the Arab power. This was followed by other Mongol invasions. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Turks had occupied all Arab territories. After the destruction of Baghdad at the hands of the Mongols, the power of the

¹ Greater Syria and Iraq.

² “From the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf” is not only a territorial description of the Arab lands but the expression also symbolises their prowess and unity.

³ A former president of Egypt (1956-70) who became a controversial leader of the Arab world. He created the short-lived United Arab Republic (1958-61).

Mamelukes⁴ in Egypt and Syria became the main bastion against the Mongols. It was only then that Cairo as the capital of one of the most powerful states in the Islamic world became the cultural centre of the Arab world. However, the rule of the Mamelukes was to become a heavy burden to Egypt in the following centuries. The Mameluke beys governed the country in a military fashion and in isolation from the population, with whom they had no ties whatsoever. Probably due to this poor government, the late flowering of the literature in Egypt came to an end in the fifteenth century (Brugman, *Introduction 2*).

When in 1517 the Ottoman Turks conquered Egypt, the situation did not improve. The Turks entered into a compromise with the Mamelukes. The compromise resulted in a delicate balance which procured for the Sultans in Istanbul the advantage that any dynastic aspirations would want, i.e. governing the land and its people. To Egypt, however, it represented one of the worst imaginable forms of government. To quote Heyworth-Dunne:

The Turkish pasha representing the central government ... lived in perpetual terror of his own garrison, while the (Mameluke) Amirs, who had formed themselves into parties ... fought and intrigued with one another for power. At the time the anarchy was unbearable, but street fighting seems to have been of such common occurrences that the tradesmen sometimes did not even bother to shut their shops while it was going on. (675)

⁴ Mamelukes are soldiers of slave origin. They appeared in the 9th century A.D. and became a powerful military caste in various Muslim societies particularly Egypt and Syria. They held political and military power and in some cases they attained the rank of sultan, while in others they held regional power as amirs or beys.

Of all the colonial power in history, the Turks had the least to impart to the nations they subjugated. These were not only kept down-trodden but segregated themselves from the currents of the world affairs bypassing them completely. While great upheavals were taking place in Europe and the Americas, the Arabs hibernated in the backwaters (Mahdi 2). Although some of the contacts between the Arabs and the outside world were maintained in the Levant from the sixteenth century onwards in the form of scholarly exchanges with the Church of Rome, it was only a clash of arms that finally broke down the insulation of the Arab world. In 1798 Egypt was conquered by Napoleon Bonaparte.

After defeating Napoleon's army, Mohammed Ali, a young officer in the Turkish army, emerged as the ruler of Egypt. In fact, Mohammed Ali's reign marks the beginning of the Arab awakening. He modernised Egypt's army and navy and extended his rule over the Arabian Peninsula and Sudan, and even endeavoured the annexation of Syria through forces under the command of his son, Ibrahim Pasha. Mohammed Ali's grandson, Isma'il, was a progressive and imaginative ruler. The Suez Canal, which was inaugurated in his reign, re-routed the shipping pattern of the Old World. Egyptian economy boomed out but this was short-lived. Subsequent developments weakened Egypt hold over the Suez Canal and led to political interference by both Britain and France in the region. At the instance of Western pressure, Isma'il was deposed by the Turkish Sultan I in 1879 (2).

The reign of the next ruler Khedive Tawfiq witnessed a reaction against the deteriorating conditions and manifested itself in the first armed revolt of modern Egyptian history. The Orabi movement started as a result of discontent among the soldiers, and against the discrimination meted out to them by the Turks. The intelligentsia

and the peasants joined the movement, fanning it into a social revolt demanding constitutional rights and an end to tyranny. The Orabi revolt (1882) was foiled by many conspiracies and ended with the British occupation of Egypt, which nonetheless remained under the nominal sovereignty of the Ottoman rulers. However, national consciousness, which had already taken root, became a force to reckon with in Egypt (Haykal 51). Political parties appeared also in 1907 and three were formed in Egypt advocating an end to the British rule. They represented two divergent schools of thought: whereas *Hizb al-Islah al-Dasturi* (The Constitutional Reform Party) of Ali Yusuf, and *al-Hizb al-Watani* (The National Party) of Mustafa Kamil, strove for pan-Islamic rule and wanted Egypt to remain in the framework of the Ottoman Empire; *Hizb al-Umma* (The People's Party) of Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid was secular and believed in the total independence of Egypt and the demand of Egypt for the Egyptians. In the course of time the second school was to gain wider appeal.

Ottoman Empire started to decline during World War I and Ottoman suzerainty over Egypt ended and it was made a British protectorate. Anti-British feelings were embittered further by the presence of British troops in large numbers and conscription of peasants to form the Labour Corps for the British armies (Mahdi 3). When the war ended in 1918, Sa'ad Zaghlul led a delegation (*wafd*) of national leaders to the British High Commissioner demanding the independence of Egypt. Underestimating the strength of the nationalists, the British exiled the delegates to Malta. The result was the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution 1919. This was the first in the series of revolutions that were to shake Arab politics for over half a century. Sa'ad Zaghlul was allowed to return and in

1922 Egypt became a constitutional monarchy with the British retaining some rights, including the presence of their troops on the Egyptian soil and the control of the Sudan.

Like Egypt, the Levant was the scene of great instability and unrest in the nineteenth century till the other colonial power, France, finally edged itself into a position of strength. However, the conquest of Syria by Ibrahim Pasha in 1830, and his reign lasting a decade, brought peace and prosperity to the region. In 1833, Ibrahim Pasha proclaimed equality before the law of members of all religious denominations. His new liberal policy and public security attracted Western educational institutions to extend their influence and activity as never before (Hitti, *History* 747). When the Egyptian army was forced to retreat from Greater Syria at the instance of Western pressure, conditions in the Levant deteriorated. Corruption and suspicions culminated in chaos and the riots between the Christians and the Druzes in 1860, in which thousands of people were killed. Consequently, France found an excuse to intervene militarily in Lebanon, which became an autonomous province under the protection of the Six Great European Powers and passed out of direct Ottoman control.

Nevertheless, other Arab countries such as Syria, Palestine, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, remained under the Ottoman Empire. In 1908, Sultan Abdul Hamid of Turkey was forced by the movement of the Young Turks to restore the Ottoman Constitution, which offered the Arabs a share in the working of the government. The Arabs believed that this was a beginning towards the fulfilment of their national aspirations but were soon frustrated as the Young Turks adopted a racial policy. Moreover, 1908 was a significant date for it heralded the beginning of a concerted effort, east of Suez, for Arab unity and independence. For the next fifty years, Arab nationalism was dominated by the

desire of the Arabs to free themselves from the yoke of the Turks as well as Western colonisation.

The initiative to act came from Sharif Husayn of Mecca. Mobilising the tribes of Arabia, he launched a movement to end the Turkish rule and requested Britain to help. British reluctance to intervene was overcome by other exigencies arising from the outbreak of World War I when Britain then seized the opportunity of undermining Turkish influence in the region. The Arab revolt with the British assistance was launched in 1916. However, the Arab unity and independence remained mere dreams because Great Britain had secretly concluded the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 with its ally, France, for the division of Arab territories into British and France spheres of influence. Moreover, when the war ended Sharif Husayn found himself without a country. Arabia was claimed by the powerful Saudis of the province of Najd. Husayn himself was deported to Cyprus, but his sons Abdullah and Faysal were offered the kingdom of the newly carved state – Transjordan, and truncated Syria, respectively (Mahdi 4).

Meanwhile, Iraq was having its experience of British colonisation. In 1914, British troops landed in Basra, and after the siege of Kut, they occupied Baghdad in 1917. Reacting to the occupation, the Iraqis tried to drive the British away and appeals for *jihad* rent the country, leading to the Iraqi revolution of 1920. Nonetheless, the British quelled the revolution and made Iraq their protectorate. They also helped to establish the Hashemite dynasty there. Yet a far greater shock was in store for the Arabs. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 sought to create a home for the Jews in Palestine, disregarding the fate of the Arabs who formed ninety per cent of its population (Mahdi 5). At the end of World War I, with Egypt in the throes of revolution, unrest in other Arab regions and

occupation of some of their territories, the travails of the Arabs were just beginning. In these upheavals politics naturally became their foremost concern and affected all their cultural and social activities.

The fact that the Arab World had been ruled by non-Arabic speaking foreigners since 1250 was a hindrance to the development of Arabic literature. No intellectual work of high order could be expected under the political and concomitant social and economic conditions that prevailed in the Arab states under the Ottoman rule. Even though Arabic language retained an important position as the language of culture, it was chiefly used for academic purposes. It continued to be the language of the theologians and – to a lesser extent – of lawyers but lost its position as a literary language. Neither the Mamelukes nor the Turks were therefore intrinsically patrons of Arabic literature. But not all cultural activities had waned in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Egypt; in their own way, the Mamelukes promoted science and their zeal for building is still visible in the old Cairo (Brugman, *Introduction* 3). However, within such a social structure, the growth of literature was thwarted particularly at a time when it was completely dependent on patronage. The potential literary patrons, not only the sultans but also the lesser dignitaries, were simply unable to appreciate literary Arabic sufficiently.

The writers of the period were by and large commentators, compilers and abridgers. Literary formalism and intellectual rigidity characterised their works. Of the Egyptian chroniclers Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti (d. 1822) is the most important one. He was not a man of letter in the strict sense of the term, but his annals, the *Aga'ib al-Athar fi'l Taragim wa'l Akhbar*,⁵ are among the best writings in Arabic historiography. Particularly because of their simple and direct style they are a refreshing relief amidst the

⁵ It was translated in 2009 by Jane Hathaway as 'History of Egypt.'

affected and ornate rhymed prose characteristic of the time. However, in modern Arabic prose, al-Jabarti is criticised for using words from the vernacular and Taha Husayn condemned his work for its defectiveness (Brugman, *Introduction* 4). Nevertheless, al-Jabarti's annals are remarkable not only because of their style but also of the wealth of data they contain about the works and the lives of the poets from the period prescribed by al-Jabarti.

1.2 *Al-Nahdah* (The Renaissance)

Arabic literature from pre-Islamic times to this day has its high and low periods. It reached its zenith during the Abbasid period (750-1258), touched its low ebb following the takeover of the Arab land by the Turks. The years 1517-1800 denote one of the most bleak periods in Arabic literary history when Arabic literature ceased to be creative and in fact was a mere trickle; however, the foundations of the language remained unshaken. The fact that Arabic language and literature survived the bleak period extending over three to four hundred years is due to the Koran, which occupies a central position both in Islamic religion and Arabic literature. Arab intellectuals devised an elaborate system to preserve the Koran's original form without a single change in syllable or accent. Their whole emphasis was on the correct reading of the Koranic text. For this purpose they devised teaching methods, which while helping in understanding the Holy Book, also assisted in keeping the base of the Classical Arabic alive. Because of this method the Koran is read, understood and quoted by all who speak Arabic inside and outside the Arab world (Mahdi 5).

However, the bleak period was followed by *al-Nahdah* (the renaissance), which was the basis of the spurt in Arabic literature (6). Generally, two major events or

developments paved the way for *al-Nahdah*; European influence, which was represented by the Maronite missions in the Levant, and the French occupation of Egypt in 1798. In the Levant, European influence began to be noticed in the sixteenth century. In 1584, Pope Gregory XIII established a special school in Rome for the Lebanese missionaries called the Maronite School. He also provided students with stipends. Subsequently, the Lebanese prince Fakhr al-Din al-Ma'ari (1590-1635) started sending Lebanese students to study in Italy. Al-Ma'ari also established schools in Lebanon so that the graduates could acquire and promulgate learning in their homeland.

Despite the fact that the Maronite School was theological in character, the students had opportunities to learn secular sciences as well as European languages, literature and philosophy. When the graduates of the Maronite School came back to the Levant, they started a wide range of activities on what they had learned in Rome. For example, Bishop Gabriel al-Sihuyani al-Adhani (1577-1648) translated Sharif Idrisi's work *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Dhikr al-Amsar wal- Afaq* into Latin (Mahdi 6). Ibrahim al-Haqalani was given the title of the Court Translator by Richelieu for rendering important Arabic works into French. Father Butrus al-Mubarak (1660-1747) supervised the printing of Arabic texts in Tuscany and returned to Lebanon to establish *Madrassa Aintura* (Aintura School).

In 1936, the Maronite missions, instructed by the Holy Academy at Rome, began opening schools in the towns and villages of the Levant. They undertook adult education in the monasteries and neighbouring areas and also sent students on scholarship to Rome. Other missions belonging to the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches also began working in the Levant and used education as the medium of missionary work. In 1755 the

Lazarities founded a boys' school in Damascus, and the Capuchines established their centres in Antioch, Beirut and Aleppo (Hitti, *Syria* 226). Before the end of the nineteenth century, Protestant education missions, including a training school for girls, were established by the Germans, Danes and British. The Americans founded the Syrian Protestant College in 1886, now the American University of Beirut (226). The French also established their Université de Ste. Joseph in 1874.

Nonetheless, there was a reaction to the Christian missions, represented in the establishment of the *Madrasat Ain Waraqa* (The School of Ain Waraqa) in 1789. It was the first national school to be followed by a host of others. These institutions adopted methods different from the traditional Arab instruction and followed the European pattern. French and English were included in the syllabus. In 1863, Butrus al-Bustani started the first school for higher studies and, more importantly its main feature was that it was secular and taught sciences following contemporary methods (Mahdi 7).

In this way, the beginning of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a constellation of Arab writers, thinkers, scientists, journalists, poets, printers and translators. Some remained in the Levant; however, others went to live in Egypt and other Arab countries due to political circumstances. Later waves of Syro-Lebanese literati settled as far away as North and South America, mainly to seek livelihood, and also to escape the political curbs imposed on them by the Turks (Hitti, *Syria* 233). Wherever they went they contributed to the renaissance of Arabic, especially in Egypt and the Americas (Mahdi 7).

The French occupation of Egypt in 1798 marks the next important phase of Arabic revival. That is why some of the contemporary writers consider the French

occupation of Egypt (1798-1801) the beginning of a new era in the cultural life of the Arab world. Moreover, they see it as the most significant link between Arabic thought and Western civilisation since the Crusades (Rifa'at 118). This new contact awakened the Arabs in general and the Egyptians in particular to their deplorable backwardness and aroused their national sentiments (Moosa, *The Origins* 3). Napoleon Bonaparte brought with him a team of French experts, scientists and scholars who established modern libraries and laboratories to carry out scientific and literary researches. Above all, he brought with him from the Vatican an Arabic language printing press, the first Arabic printing press to enter Egypt, for the publication of French proclamations in Arabic (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 4).

The responses of some critics and historians to the French campaign varied. Martin Bernal viewed the whole Expedition as a fascinating turning point in European attitudes to the East (Bernal, Vol. I 184). He argues that though there were important political and economic reasons for the Expedition, there is no doubt that the ideas of France to revive the 'cradle of civilisation' which Rome had destroyed and the desire to understand the Egyptian mysteries also provided important motivation (184). The scientific members of the Expedition believed that in Egypt they could learn 'essential facts about the world and their own culture and not just exotica to complete Western knowledge – and domination – of Africa and Asia' (185).

On the other hand, Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, a historian of this period, regarded the year of the invasion as the year of ultimate catastrophe, of the disastrous reversal of the natural order of things (3). He bitterly criticised the behaviour of the French, especially their women, in Egypt. Furthermore, he described the "immoral" French as

inflicting the Egyptians with their corruption. Utterly shocked by the French “misbehaviour,” this conservative Muslim was not slow, however, to observe the good qualities of the French. He greatly admired their efficiency, organisation, and sense of justice, which appeared outstanding when compared with the cruelty of the Turkish rulers. Moreover he admired the slogan of the French revolution, “liberty, equality and fraternity” (qtd in Moosa, *The Origins* 3). Other Egyptians from al-Azhar such as Shaykh Hasan al-Attar (d. 1835), the teacher of Rifa’ a Rafi al-Tahtawi, to be discussed shortly, also appreciated French knowledge and learning.

For Badawi, the French Expedition is generally judged as a military failure for the French, therefore its significance for Egypt and the Arab world cannot be exaggerated (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 11). He also argues that the expedition had indirect and mainly political effect (11). It is true that the occupation lasted only three years, i.e. the Egyptians’ exposure to Western learning, science and representative self-government was too brief to be meaningful, but the campaign brought to an end the isolation of the Arab world from the West (5). It, furthermore, signalled the beginning of a process of Western expansion and colonisation, which in the course of time resulted in practically the entire Arab world falling under the domination of Western powers, notably France and Britain.

Even after the Arab states formally attained their independence, they remained under the spheres of influence of Western powers for a long time, in fact until Gamal Abd al-Nasser appeared in the scene after the Egyptian Army Revolution of 1952, which in its turn helped to push Arabic literature in other directions (5). Generally speaking, the bloody and unequal encounter with the West which varied in ferocity and violence from

one Arab country to another and according to whether the coloniser was France, Britain or Italy, had such a profound and traumatic effect upon the Arab imagination, even though it was sometimes late and slow to reveal itself, that to this day the East/West opposition has remained one of the leading motifs in Arabic literature. In their attempt at self-affirmation and restoration of identity, Arab writers have for many generations often tried to define themselves in relation to the Other, which in most cases was the European.

Generally, modern Arabic literature constitutes in certain important aspects an entirely new departure from its indigenous tradition; nevertheless, it never really and completely severed its links with its past (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 1). In this respect, *al-Nahdah* was a fruitful meeting of two forces: the indigenous tradition and the imported Western forms. That is to say, from the beginning of the nineteenth century two currents flew into the making of *al-Nahdah*: Arab as well as European. The Arabic stream was represented by al-Azhar, which preserved the Islamic and Arabic literary heritage in the darkest days of the decline and was the only source of learning in Egypt and other Arabic countries (Mahdi 9). On the other hand, the European influence expressed itself through Christian missionaries in the Levant and French occupation of Egypt. Thus *al-Nahdah* represents, using Du Bois' concept, 'double consciousness' (Gilroy 30). It is a hybrid phenomenon in which 'two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings' and 'two warring ideals' are reflected together (126).⁶

Some other Western critics, such as Brugman, try to make a parallel between the Arab renaissance and European renaissance. He argues that the Arab renaissance, *al-Nahdah*, which, like the European renaissance of the fifteenth century, is characterised by

⁶ This accounts for the hybridity reflected in Tawfiq al-Hakim's plays, which is explored in chapter four.

a return to classical literature whose masterpieces served as models for new writers. However, Arabic revival is different from European revival; he writes:

The Greek and Romans had in every respect further receded from the European mind than the classical Arabic culture from the minds of the inhabitants of Arabic countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unlike classical Greek in Europe, classical Arabic had remained at least their written language, and Islam was still the religion of the majority of the Arabs. On the other hand, the Greco-Roman civilization has meant more for the flourishing of European culture than classical Arabic culture for the Arabic Renaissance. In retrospect it appears that modern Arabs have only been partly inspired by the ideas that were current in their classical culture. Modern writers may have seen in classical literature a greater expressiveness, a purer Arabic language, a larger possibility to involve reality into their work of art, but it was principally a matter of self-affirmation, of psychological satisfaction, awareness that the Arabs, too, had a great culture. (*Introduction* 9)

In fact, it is difficult to establish when *al-Nahdah* began. The Arabs themselves are not in agreement about its starting point. As far as Egypt is concerned, it is commonly believed that *al-Nahdah* was a result of the invasion of the Bonaparte in 1798. The consequences of the Bonaparte campaign have often been described in striking metaphors. F. Gabriel remarked that “it might be said that the Arab world, until then still wrapped in medieval slumber, was re-awakened by the tread of the French feet around the base of the Pyramids” (Gabrieli 35). P. Cachia also compared the campaign with “a

rock cast into a stagnant pond: the changes that have taken place in the past 150 years are the ripples and the upsurge of silt resulting from the disturbances” (Brugman, “Modern” 282). These views, as well as the concomitant metaphors, are usually adopted by Arabs, at least by Egyptian authors, for example by Abd al-Latif Hamzah, who in his history of the Egyptian press writes that “the Egyptians were awakened from their stupor by the tumult of the French attack” (Hamzah 8). Opinions to the contrary, which minimise the importance of the French expedition, are an exception.⁷

Generally speaking, the emergence of an autonomous state, independent Egyptian state had an effect which turned out to be an important stimulus for its cultural revival. Egypt is not the only Arab country to have known *al-Nahdah*. But even assuming that the Arab world as a whole went through *al-Nahdah*, it must be granted that in the nineteenth century the cultural revival was restricted to Egypt and Lebanon, for the rest of the Arab world “awakened” much later, parts of it in the twentieth century. Whether this Arabic *Nahdah* manifested itself earlier in Lebanon or Egypt is still not determined. The Egyptian scholars who consider Bonaparte’s adventure as the starting point for *al-Nahdah* probably are inclined to favour the Egyptian priority.

On the other hand, equally sound arguments may be given for the Lebanese The Origins of the Arabic *Nahdah*. For example, G. Antonius sees Beirut as the cradle of the Arab national movement, which according to him has a cultural background, according to the famous first sentence of his book *The Arab Awakening*: “the story of the Arab national movement opens in Syria in 1847, with the foundation in Beirut of a modest library society under American patronage” (qtd in Brugman, *Introduction* 12). To this society he immediately links the names of men of letters Nasif al-Yaziji and Butrus al-

⁷ See for example, Badr 8-15.

Bustani. The notion that the Lebanese are the heralds of modern Arabic literature is also found in Western scholars such as Schoonover and Wiet (Brugman, *Introduction* 12).

In fact it seems difficult to make final judgment about the time and the region in which *al-Nahdah* originated. It should be seen as a diffuse phenomenon of cultural revival rather than a well-defined movement, and as a retrospective gloss on events that took place rather than a programme of which contemporaries were aware. Moreover, it remains difficult to ascertain where the movement of literary revival was stronger or where it contributed more to modern Arabic literature. For the time being, it would seem that the Syrian-Lebanese were the most open among the Arabs to literary revival. However, Taha Hussein, an Egyptian writer and critic, argues that “the movement in Egypt was rather academically and practically oriented, while that in Syria (here including Lebanon) was rather oriented towards language and literature” (Hussein 74).

Generally speaking, most writers and critics are vague about the duration of *al-Nahdah*. For example in 1914 Gurgi Zaydan expressed his view that it was still going on and in the last part of his literary history in which he dealt with the modern era, he writes: “*al-Nahdah* starts with the French invasion of Egypt and is still in progress” (qtd in Brugman, *Introduction* 13). Many Arab writers, even today, feel that *al-Nahdah* is not yet over, and hold the view that Arabic literature is going through a preparatory phase of awakening, which ultimately will lead to a new literary culminating point. This is probably related to the peculiar need of stock-taking found in many Egyptian writers, who often explain how far Egyptian literature has progressed, and who now consider poetry and prose as having advanced more. In the past few years, however, the self-

confidence of the Arab writers, particularly the critics, seems to have grown and the notion of *al-Nahdah* seems to be losing its topicality (13).

1.3 The Contribution of Mohammed Ali

After the eviction of the French in 1803, Egypt was left in a state of chaos in which Mohammed Ali, a Turco-Albanian military commander, could seize the opportunity to have himself proclaimed governor (*wali*) of Egypt (1805-1848). He soon manifested his dissatisfaction with the delicate balance between the governor and the Mamelukes as it had existed until 1798. As early as 1811, he had the most prominent Mameluke beys murdered during a ceremony to which he invited them, thereby getting rid of his chief domestic opponents. The new governor generally called the pasha since then ruled Egypt as his private domain and in fact he made himself independent of the central government in Istanbul. The ambitious Mohammed Ali launched a more successful comprehensive programme of military reform along the lines of the superior and well-organised Western armies. He employed all the available sources in Egypt, and in doing so he altered the economic, political and the social structure of the country (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 6).

Mohammed Ali tried to modernise his country with all his might. He may have intended in the first place to strengthen his army, but in effect he made an all-out effort at modernisation and undoubtedly Egypt as a whole benefited from his innovations. His territorial ambitions, it is true, were a heavy burden to the country; however, his modernisation continued to be effective even after his death, a fact which has tended to be obfuscated since the fall of his dynasty in 1952 (Brugman, *Introduction* 5). The fact that the Pasha greatly stimulated contacts with Europe was particularly important for the

modest inception of cultural revival under his reign. He soon employed a large number of Europeans, initially mostly Italians, but later on many Frenchmen and some Englishmen, Australians and Germans. In addition, he established some schools and sent missions to Europe in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. One such example is *Madrasat al-*Alsun** (The School of Languages), one of the most influential schools established by him in 1835 under the leadership and supervision of a pioneer Egyptian intellectual Rifa'a Rafi al-Tahtawi (d.1873). With his students, al-Tahtawi translated many books and scientific treatises, designed to serve Mohammed Ali's purpose in creating a modern strong Egypt. However, they had no immediate effect on Arabic literature (Moosa, *The Origins* 5).

Generally, the setting up of a new secular system of education, different from the traditional theocentric one, a system which produced men who were to occupy important posts in the government, was bound to result eventually in the weakening of the authority of traditional values. Arab Muslim society therefore ceased to be the 'closed' culture it had been for so long (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 7). In the course of time, Western culture and Western languages were to play an ever-increasing role in the cultural makeup of the Arab world. Another important development is that due to the fact that secular education did not grow slowly and gradually out of the indigenous traditional religious system of al-Azhar, but was instead imposed upon it from 'above,' cultural dichotomy or polarity ensued with grave psychological consequences, which had already worried the religious reformer Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905), and which are visible today (8).

There seems to have been no question of literary patronage on the part of Mohammed Ali. Not until a later age did the pasha himself learn to read and write. He probably spoke little Arabic and was in no position to appreciate literary Arabic. It is no wonder that all his modernisation did not produce a sudden literary revival. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, literary traditions of the eighteenth century were continued. Arabic and Egyptian writers of this period were far from “modern.” They took their inspiration mainly from post-classical literature. Baha’ a al-Din Zuhayr was admired more than al-Mutanabbi and to prose writers the *maqamaat*⁸ of al-Hariri continued to be an inspiring example. The traditional genres were still being practiced. The emphasis was on the refinement and virtuosity, which often degenerated into brittle linguistic tricks without a trace of individuality (Brugman, *Introduction* 7).

Nevertheless, during this period there were some writers who produced considerable works. For example, a famous work was written by Shihab al-Din Mohammed B. Isma’il (d. 1857). He became known in particular for his *Safinat al-Mulk wa Nafisat al-Fulk* (printed in Hijra 1273 = 1856-7), a treatise on music and poetry, which also contains a large number of stanzaic poems of the type of the *muwashahat*.⁹ It is an elegant piece of work. In addition to the central part, it contains ten annexes (*migdaf*), in which traditional subjects such as wine (*Adab al-Nadim*) and garden-poetry (*rawdijat*) are discussed. Equally traditional was Ali Hasan al-Darwish (d. 1857) whose book *al-Ish’ar Behamid al-Ash’ar* (printed in Hijra. 1284 = 1867-8) consists of three parts, the *sina’iyat* (literary tricks), the actual *diwan* (personal notes) and *maqama*

⁸ *Maqamaat* is the plural of *maqama*; it is a literary rhymed prose.

⁹ *Muwashahat* is the plural form of *muwashah*. It is a musical form that originated in Al-Andalus (medieval Spain and Portugal). It may use more than one rhythm although the rhythm is single throughout. Rhythms in *muwashah* are poetry in classical Arabic and must neatly fit the rhythm (every syllable must fall on a beat).

(literary prose). Another traditional figure in the modern era was Mahmud Safwat al-Sa'ati (d. 1880) who became particularly famous for a poem in praise of the Prophet. The poem was written in 142 lines in which he used a different figure of speech for each line as well as a word of the same or almost the same stem as the technical term for this figure (8).

1.4 Arabic Printing Press, Birth of Translation Movement and Journalism

One of the most significant contributions of Mohammed Ali is the introduction of Arabic printing press. In fact the very first educational mission member to be sent to Europe went to Italy to study printing (in 1809). This press which was set up in Bulaq in 1822 was not the first to be found in the Arab world. Even before Bonaparte brought with him an Arabic press to publish his proclamations in Egypt. As early as 1706 the Maronite priests had their own press in Aleppo for the purpose of printing Christian texts (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 8). Mohammed Ali's press, later to be known as the Government Press, was to play an important cultural role in the Arab Muslim world. It printed translations of European works, at first scientific and technological, nevertheless, later literary translations as well as Arabic classics such as the work of Ibn Khaldun became more freely available than they used to be as handwritten copies of former days.

Likewise, the press printed the very first periodical, an official newspaper, *al-Waqa'i al-Misriyya* (The Egyptian Fact Sheet, 1828). This marked the birth of journalism which was to become a potent factor in the development not only of modern Arabic literature, but also of modern Arabic thought, society and politics (8). Together with the translations of scientific works, journalism helped to change gradually the style of Arabic prose, ridding it of excessive rhetorical devices, making it a simpler and fitter vehicle for

conveying ideas. In other words, newspapers and, to a lesser degree, magazines required a different Arabic, a language that could be written at a faster rate and therefore had to be less ornate and more succinct, and that could deal with a multitude of subjects that before had not or hardly been fit to be written about. Thus the birth of journalism brought about a major extension of reading public, an extension which had already been promoted by the introduction of printing press (Brugman, *Introduction* 14).

Obviously, one of the most important obstacles to the birth of a modern literature was the pitiful state in which the knowledge of standard Arabic in Egypt and other Arabic countries found itself in the first half of the nineteenth century. Naturally this was due to the fact that upper classes for a long time had known little Arabic, whereas, on the other hand, the spoken Arabic of the lower levels of the society quite strongly deviated from the written language. The latter was cultivated by the religious leaders, particularly by the Azhar scholars, who until Mohammed Ali came into power (M. Shukri 1127), had a mediating influence, but from their quarter no modernisation was to be expected, while their knowledge of classical Arabic literature was often insufficient. Hence the introduction of press as well as the establishment of newspapers and magazines played a significant and vital role in the development of standard Arabic into a usable modern literary instrument.

The Egyptian government gazette, *al-Waqa'i al-Misriyya*, was the first newspaper in the Arab world. The editing of this official gazette was assigned to the distinguished Rifa'a Rafi al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), who is generally regarded as the father of modern Arabic thought. As it was the official organ, it did not reflect the public opinion. Journalism continued to be in the hands of the government in the reign of Isma'il, but

when his politics became unpopular, political newspapers started appearing. *Abu Nazara*, edited by Ya'qub Sannu, was the first political newspaper to be produced in the lighter vein and the first to criticise official policy, in this case the policy of Isma'il (Dayf, *al-Adab* 34). Meanwhile in the Levant, Khalil al-Khuri founded the first Lebanese newspaper *Hadiqat al-Akhbar* in 1852 (Hitti, *Syria* 48). It was the first unofficial newspaper of the Arab countries. However, the political atmosphere of the Levant, which had witnessed the first activity of the press, was not conducive to sustain journalism. In the face of repeated closures, journalists migrated to Egypt, where they found a more liberated milieu for journalistic activity. The famous newspapers founded by the Syro-Lebanese émigrés in Egypt included *al-Ahram* in 1875 by Salim and Bishara Taqla in Alexandria. Later it was moved to Cairo and is today the most famous and respected daily in the Arab world (Mahdi 10).

Along with the printing press and the introduction of journalism publishing houses and libraries were established. *Jam'iyat al-Ma'arif* was founded in 1868 to print great works of Arabic literature. The national library *Dar al-Kutub* was founded by Ali Mubarak in 1870. It contained Arabic as well as European books and its press undertook the printing of rare books and precious manuscripts. Moreover, in the Levant every educational institution had a library; the Jesuit Library, the Library of the American University and *Dar al-Kutub al-Watani*. In Syria *Maktabat al-Zahiriyya* was founded in 1878 in Damascus and *al-Maktaba al-Malkania* in Aleppo. Among the private collections *al-Khalidiyya* in Jerusalem and *al-Taymurria* and *al-Asifiyya* in Egypt were the most famous (11).

More importantly, after Mohammed Ali had founded the Cairo School of Languages (in 1835) which was directed by al-Tahtawi, a Translation Bureau was set up in 1841 and this remarked the beginning of a significant translation movement. The graduates of the School of Languages are said to have translated some two thousand works from European languages (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 9). Though the translation was limited to technological and military books, in the course of time it included literary and historical writings. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, literary works alone formed no less than one third of the total output of the translations (9). It is worth mentioning that the first translations were made from French literature in both Egypt and the Levant because the earliest cultural contacts of the Arabs were with France.

The first attempt was made by al-Tahtawi, the first director of the School of Languages, who translated *Telemaque* of Fenelon. Al-Tahtawi gave an Arabic version to the title referred to as coupling, and called his book *Mawaqa'i al-Aflak fi Waqa'i Tilimak* (The Positions of the Celestial Spheres in Relation to the Adventures of Telemaque): this was the first attempt to acquaint the Arabs in general and the Egyptians in particular with a Western story and is identically the first introduction of Greek mythology to Arabic readers (Mahdi 12). Al-Tahtawi, furthermore, translated Voltaire's Elegy on Louis XIV and *The Marsaillaise*. Inspired by the French national anthem, al-Tahtawi composed many patriotic songs which became popular with the troops. This type of poetry was unknown in Arabic before and is one of the earliest cases of borrowing of European forms (12).

Another translator in Egypt was Mohammed Othman al-Jalal (1829-1898). He was a pupil of al-Tahtawi in the School of Languages. Jalal began his career as a member of the Translation Bureau. From the beginning he was interested in French literature, mainly drama, and translated several plays into colloquial Egyptian Arabic verse based on the *zajal*, a popular Arabic meter in strophic form. His voluminous translations included several comedies by Moliere – *Le Tartuffe* (al-Shaykh Matluf), *Les Femmes Savantes* (al-Nisa al-Alimat), *L'Ecole des maris* (Madrasat al-Azwaj), *L'Ecole des Femmes* (Madrasat al-Nisa), and *Les Facheux* (al-Thuqala) – *Paul et Virginie* by Bernardin de Saint Pierre, La Fontaine's fables, and several of Racine's tragedies. He wrote a play entitled *al-Khaddamin wa al-Mukhaddimin* (Domestic Servants and Employers) in the *zajal* meter.

The translations were first intended to amuse the readers who love stories and adventures and were not particular about the quality. Moreover, some translators started translating without an adequate knowledge of the original language. The most glaring example was the rendering of Hugo's *Les Misérables* by Hafiz Ibrahim, who did not know French (Badr 125). However, the Arab writers tried to overcome this problem by making a distinction between *tarjamah* (literal translation of the foreign text) and *ta'rib* (producing an Arabic version of the original text). Al-Manfaluti, for example, adapted *Pail et Virginie* of Bernadine de St. Pierre and called it *al-Fadila* (Mahdi 13). According to Latifa al-Zayyat, in *The Movement of Literary Translations*, the subject matter included oriental tales, historical fiction, love stories, social novels, picaresque and detective novels (Badr 126). The last were mainly translated from the works of Sir Walter Scott and Alexandre Dumas. The famous translations were: Scott's *Coeur de Lion* by

Ya'qub Saruf; Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* by Farida Atiyya; Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* by Najib Haddad and *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Bashara Shadid. Other individual translations of a higher order include Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* by Mohammed al-Siba'ii and *The Resurrection* of Tolstoy by Rashid Haddad (127-31).

Generally, the early translations were weak since Arabic prose was not fully developed. It was either pompous and extravagant or contained a lot of colloquial idioms. That is why translations appeared artificial when rendered in the old rhetoric fashion. Realising the need for a plain and direct style, writers experimented with a mixture of classical and semi-classical journalistic styles including some colloquialisms. The main style to dominate was the journalistic which tended to be 'busy' and 'easy.' The simplification of Arabic prose was one of the major contributions of the translators' activities. More importantly, translations brought about the birth and development of literary genres that were not prevalent in classical Arabic. The drama, novel and short story grew directly as a result of the translations and have become an integral part of modern Arabic literature (Mahdi 13).

1.5 Isma'il and Westernisation

The process of modernisation was continued by the Khedive Isma'il, Mohammed Ali's grandson, in whose reign (1863-1879) many native and European schools were established. In addition, under his guidance the whole system of education underwent dramatic changes which affected the development of literature (Moosa, *The Origins* 7). Although the Europeanisation of Egypt was built eventually upon the foundation laid by Mohammed Ali, he was less interested in education *per se* than in the aggrandisement of

his political ambition to create an empire. Unlike his grandfather, Isma'il showed remarkable interest in promoting culture and he was genuinely interested in popular education (including education of girls), which was organised by his able minister of education Ali Mubarak (1824-1893), an engineer who was himself a product of the new secular school system (7).

By the 1860s Arabic had replaced the Turkish as the official language of Egypt. Isma'il also allowed a large number of Christian missions to establish schools, where many Egyptian children, girls as well as boys, received their education in European languages, mainly French. In 1872, he established *Dar Al-Ulum* (The Teachers' Training College), which aimed at combining traditional Islamic and Arabic culture with Western learning (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 11). He founded learned societies and a museum and encouraged the liberal arts. In 1870 he set up *Dar al-Kutub* (The National Library). Moreover, he established *Madrasat al-Idarah* (The School of Administration) which produced qualified government personnel and prepared the future political leaders of Egypt.

The educational revival under Isma'il had one important consequence for modern Arabic literature: theatre was introduced in Egypt. He established *Madrasat al-Komedia* (The Theatre of Comedy) in 1868 and *Dar al-Opera* (Khedive Theatre of Opera) in 1869. These were probably intended less to meet a public demand than to show the Khedive's policy of Westernising Egypt. Since native literature could not provide the theatre and the opera with sufficient subject matter, the borrowing of themes from European or ancient Egyptian and Arabic sources became imperative (Moosa, *The Origins* 11). The most prominent works acted during this period were Verdi's *Rigoletto and Aida*, whose plot

was derived by the French archaeologist Mariette Pasha (1821-1882) from papyri sources. While the establishment of the theatre did not create an indigenous drama, it did afford writers (except Ya'qub Sannu, to be discussed later), the opportunity to adapt or arabicise and egyptionise many Western plays. They could also experiment with dramas whose themes were drawn from Arabic history (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 11).

1.6 Islam and Westernisation

Generally, Westernisation was problematic in a Muslim country. Not even Isma'il himself was prepared to shed some of his 'oriental' ways such as, for example, polygamy, an attack on which seems to have been the reason why the dramatist Ya'qub Sannu incurred his displeasure and was ordered to close down his theatre . The key issue that preoccupied the minds of the Arab intellectuals was how to modernise while remaining Muslims. However the problem did not arise in the case of Christian Arabs, some of whom like Farah Antun (1874-1922) and Shibli Shumayyil (1860-1917) believed in the need to separate secular and religious powers, and also like al-Shidyaq who adopted an anti-clerical stance or even advocated secularisation. The need for modernisation, however, was keenly felt by all when the supremacy of the West was a fact that could no longer be ignored (12).

The nineteenth century religious reform movement in Egypt and Syria, the two leading intellectual centres of *al-Nahdah*, was promoted by the desire to catch up with the modern world. The members of what Albert Hourani called the first generation of modern thinkers (up to 1870), that of al-Tahtawi of Egypt and Khayr al-Din of Tunisia (1810-1889), were impressed by what they saw in Europe, which for them stood for material progress and science rather than the political power and aggressive expansion of

which later generation were made painfully aware. Their problem was “how to reconcile reason and the rationalism of the French Enlightenment with *Shari’ah*, the divine law of Islam, and how to reconcile the need of *Ummah*, the Community of Muslims, with those of *watan*, the nation” (12).

Nevertheless, for the subsequent generation the situation had radically changed. It was no longer the question of Islam trying to cope or catch up with the West, but one of survival, of fighting against external danger. For example, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) preached the need to revitalise Islam, to oppose the autocratic government of Muslim despots, to limit absolute rule by constitution, to unite the Muslims so that they could fight against the European intervention. Furthermore, he insisted that Egyptians should endeavour to achieve national unity in order to fight British occupation. Mohammed Abduh was more moderate than al-Afghani; his position was one of eclecticism with a strong nationalist Mu’tazilite component (13). He held that Islam was never opposed to science or rational enquiry, that a distinction must be drawn between the permanent core of Islam, namely its simple doctrines, and its inessential elements, which may be changed according to individual judgment.

The younger generation of writers and litterateurs who had been profoundly influenced by Mohammed Abduh continued this Islamic apologetic tradition, especially as after the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate by Ataturk in 1924 and Western attacks on this religion in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was felt in some quarters that Islam was in grave danger. In Egypt, Taha Hussein (1889-1973), Mohammed Hussein Haykal (1888-1956), Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad (1889-1964), and Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987), tried to defend Islam or to make it more relevant to the problems of

contemporary Egyptian as well as Arabic societies by treating themes from Islamic history from certain angles or by writing a large number of Islamic biographies, including that of the Prophet Mohammed, or else by pointing out that Classical Arabic, the language of Koran, is no obstacle to progress (Mahdi 14). Seen in this context, it is not surprising that the very writers, who were enthusiastic about Western literature and thought and were anxious to introduce these to the modern Arab reader, devoted so much of their energy to write about Islam.

1.7 Pioneers of *al-Nahdah*

Al-Nahdah was an outcome of the contributions of the men of letters of the Levant and Egypt and the leaders of important reform movements. It would be useful to highlight some of their contributions. In the Levant, scholars were either patronised by rulers or nurtured by the Church. The court of the Shihabi Prince Bashir II of the Lebanon was the meeting place of the famous poets Nikula Yusuf al-Turk (1763-1828), Butrus Ibrahim Karama (1774-18610), Amin al-Jundi (1814-1887), and Nasif al-Yaziji (1800-1871). Al-Yaziji was not only a court poet but also a prose writer who played an important role in reviving the classical idiom. Moreover, his book, *Majmaa'a al-Bahrain* (The Conjunction of the Two Seas) written in the traditional *maqama* style of al-Hariri and al-Hamadani, shows his mastery over Arabic language (Heywood 56). He also wrote important books on the Arabic language and grammar.

Ahmed Faris al-Shidyaq (1805-1887), another pioneer of *al-Nahdah*, was known for his studies in lexicography. Al-Shidyaq called for a modern arrangement in Arabic dictionaries, i.e. in alphabetical order, instead of the traditional rhyme order based on final root-letter. In his dictionary, *Sirr al-Layal* (Secret of the Nights), al-Shidyaq began

with the gutturals to support the theory of onomatopoeic origin of language. He also treated two letters anagrammatically, for example b-d with d-b and r-d with d-r. In this way, he was reverting to the theory of bilateral origin of Arabic roots which Khalil Ibn Ahmed had originated in the eighteenth century (Mahdi 14). A versatile scholar, al-Shidyaq assisted in the translation of the Bible, for which he travelled to England.

Other pioneers of *al-Nahdah* were Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883) and Suleiman al-Bustani (1865-1925). Butrus was the founder of the first national school in the Levant and a school for girls. He also compiled a two-volume dictionary arranged in the modern order called *Muhit al-Muhit* (Circumference of the Ocean). Among his writings *The Life of Napoleon* and *Commentary on the Diwan of al-Mutanabbi* are well known. His outstanding contribution is his work on the Arabic encyclopaedia *Da'ira al-Ma'arif*, later volumes of which were completed by other members of al-Bustani family. Similarly Suleiman translated Homer's *Iliad* with a preface noted for its literary value. Factually, the *Iliad* was the first introduction of epic verse into Arabic and the translation was a masterpiece. Moreover, Sulaiman al-Bustani was the first to employ methods of modern literary criticism in Arabic (Hourani 67-83).

In Egypt, al-Tahtawi as a prominent pioneer of *al-Nahdah* was a unique figure in the history of Arabic thought in the nineteenth century. He was the first Egyptian intellectual who immensely understood Western values which he transmitted to his conservative society without prejudices (L. Awad, *al-Mu'aththirat* 7-9). His writings and progressive ideas helped in constructing a new social and cultural foundation of his society. He called for a re-evaluation of the archaic traditions that had impeded the progress of Arabic Egyptian civilisation. Despite his traditional Azharite schooling and

rigid religious upbringing, al-Tahtawi revealed an open mind which assimilated and appreciated European ideas and civilisation. His fellow-religionists, however, considered such foreign notions morally harmful and hostile to their way of life (Moosa, *The Origins* 6).

Apparently, al-Tahtawi played an important role in Egypt's cultural life but he did not rank high as a litterateur in the strict sense of the word. His best known work today is *Takhliṣ al-Ibriz fī Talkhīṣ Barīs* (Extraction of Gold in Summarising Life in Paris, 1834) and *Manahij al-Adab al-Misriyyah* (Approaches of Egyptian Literature, 1869) in which he expressed his respect for the nationality and good organisation of social and political institutions of the West, and the civic virtues such as the love of the motherland (al-watan) – some regard him as the first Egyptian nationalist – and qualities which he advocated as necessary for the betterment of Islamic society in Egypt and the Arab world. In his book, *Takhliṣ al-Ibriz* he records his experiences as a student in Paris. The book is distinguished by its style which for its day was uncommonly simple and easy to read. The rhyming title still has a touch of mannerism, but the work itself is not written in an affected *saj'* (rhymed prose). It is an entertaining description of the French society and of chief French public institutions, written from the point of view of a sympathetic onlooker, not of a bigoted *shaykh* or imam. Even French customs alien to him, such as the treatment of women, are described without prejudices (Brugman, *Introduction* 20).

From a literary point of view, al-Tahtawi was important mainly for the development of modern Arabic prose style. Even if his later works were not written in the same clear and simple style as *Takhliṣ al-Ibriz*, a work which easily lent itself to this style, his later prose also was great improvement in the clarity and efficiency compared to

the ornate style in which many of his younger contemporaries still felt obliged to write. Moreover, al-Tahtawi contributed greatly to the development of translation through his work for the School of Languages and Egyptian journalism, also through his work for *al-Wqa'i al-Misriyyah* (The Egyptian Fact Sheet) and for the magazine *Rawdhat al-Madaris* (Garden of Schools). It is not surprising that he should have been described as the first Egyptian to write an article (*maqal*) in Arabic (Mahdi 15).

Among the great reformers Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1898) played a very significant role. An Afghani by birth as his name suggests, al-Afghani made Egypt his home. As a revolutionist and a radical reformer, he attempted to break the hold of scholasticism which had encased Islam since medieval time. Al-Afghani first called for reform in religion, next for curbing the economic and political deterioration, and identified himself with the movement leading to the Orabi Revolt of 1882 (15). Although he left few writings, al-Afghani's liberal ideas profoundly stirred the sentiments of Muslims. He tried to revolutionise the Islamic world by constantly reminding Muslims that they were intelligent and able to manage their own affairs and live as a respected civilised nation. Al-Afghani believed that Muslims had lost their pride in their heritage and culture, and that they should do something to revitalise it. He may have viewed himself as a kind of "Messiah" ordained to redeem the Islamic world from the oppression of the Western invaders (Kiddie 170).

Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905), another reformer and pioneer, was probably al-Afghani's most devout follower. Apprehensive about coercive and revolutionary methods of achieving political aims, Abduh believed in gradual but constructive reform rather than in forced but short-lived changes. Therefore, he preferred to criticise the unjust rule of

Riyadh Pasha rather than collaborate with the revolutionary element in the army led by Ahmed Orabi (1839-1911). He also believed, with some justification, that the Egyptians were not ready for the revolution. He was particularly astonished at the radical enthusiasm of the middle and poor classes. A revolution erupted in 1881-1882 but was suppressed, and Egypt was occupied by British forces and came under British rule (Moosa, *The Origins* 15).

Even though Mohammed Abduh's various activities were mainly devoted to the revitalisation of the Arabic language, the purification of Islam from superstition, and the reformation of al-Azhar, he also advocated the writings of the novel and encouraged novelists. It is reported that under the inspiration and direction of Mohammed Abduh, Said al-Bustani (d. 1901) wrote his story *Dhat al-Khidr* (The Veiled One, 1884). Abduh, who regarded the novel as a useful instrument of social reform, wrote also an article in *al-Ahram* which reviewed most popular books of his time (May 11th, 1881). He found out that the audience/readers preferred works of history, articles dealing with moral subjects, and novels. However, Abduh considered fiction of secondary importance, and his role in its development never went beyond offering encouragement or complimenting others (Moosa, *The Origins* 16).

1.8 New Conception of Literature

As a result of those socio-cultural, political and historical changes, a new conception of literature emerged. The medieval view which had dominated until the nineteenth century and which regarded writing as either morally or spiritually edifying or else entertaining through mastery of language and verbal skill, gradually gave way to the attitude that literature should reflect and indeed change the social reality (Badawi,

Modern Arabic Literature 15). The patron prince or ruler who encouraged poets to gather in his court in order to sing of his achievements and immortalise his name in memorable *qasidas*, formal sonorous odes, was being replaced by a middle-class reading public, educated in secular and not theocentric schools, and who as a result of the introduction of printing press had access to printed books, newspapers and magazines.

Admittedly, in a society where the degree of illiteracy was extremely high, the size of the reading public initially was very small, but their number grew rapidly with the spread of popular education. Therefore, the poet-craftsman who offered his panegyric verse to the highest bidder was replaced by the 'inspired' poet, the man of feelings who valued sincerity or the campaigner who had strong views about wider issues, such as the illnesses of his society. The traditional prose writer who sought to entertain the privileged learned minority by drawing, but not too heavily, on diverse aspects of knowledge or who embroidered his epistles to fellow writers or his *maqamaat* (narratives of sorts in rhyming prose) with all kinds of figures of speech (*badi'e*), in the most artificial manner imaginable, gave way to the concerned essayist or journalist burning with reforming zeal in matters, intellectual, religious and political, no less than in language and literature. Whatever might be the attitude to the mimetic view of literature nowadays in the era of Post-structuralism and deconstruction, it is the emergence of literature as a mimesis, as imitation of life, which signalled the arrival of modern Arabic literature on the scene (16). Instead of the ideal types provided in traditional medieval literature, presented in the most elaborate language, concrete observable reality became the subject-matter of writers, particularly in the newly imported forms of drama and fiction.

More than novel and short story, drama has become an integral part of modern Arabic literature. It has been an important facet of contemporary Arabic culture particularly since 1950s. It has attracted more attention than any other artistic genre with the possible exception of cinema (Wittingham 13). More importantly, Arabic drama has become integrated into the Arabic national identity and has an important role to play in the socio-political life. More details in this regard are offered in the following chapters.

Works Cited

- Abduh, al-Shaykh Mohammed. "al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah wa Ghayruha" [Scientific Books and Others]. *Al-Ahram. Al-Ahram Weekly Online*. 11 May 1881. Web. 14 Aug. 2008. <<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2001/529/bo1.htm>>.
- Al-Jabarti, Abd al-Rahman. *Aja'ib al-Athar fi al-Tarajim wa al-Khabar*. [History of Egypt]. Ed. Jane Hathaway. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009. Web. 2 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.books.google.com/books?id=OUzaasBv8SIC&pg=PR32&Ipg=PR32&dg=al-Jabarti's+aja'ib+al-athar&source>>.
- Allen, Roger. *The Arabic Literary Heritage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.
- Awad, Louis. *al-Mu'aththirat al-Ajnabiyyah fi al-Adab al-Arabi al-Hadith* [The Foreign Influences on Modern Arabic Literature]. Part I. Cairo: Dar al- Ma'arif, 1962. Print.
- Badawi. M. M. Ed. *Modern Arabic Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Print.
- Badr, Abd al-Muhsin Taha. *Tatawwur al-Riwaya al-Arabiyya al-Haditha fi Misr 1870-1938* [The Development of Modern Arabic Novel in Egypt 1870-1938]. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1963.
- Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Vol. I. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987. Print.
- Brugman, J. "Modern Arabic Literature." *Eight Studies marking its first Decade, Nederlands-Arabische Kring* (1966): 23-24. Web. 17 Oct. 2009. <<http://www.abebooks.fr/1955-1965-Eight-studies-marking-first-decades/1375855457/bd>>.
- Brugman, J. *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*. Netherlands: E. J. Brill & Leiden, 1984. Print.

- Dayf, Shawqi. *Al-Adab al-Arabi al-Mu'asir fi Misr* [Contemporary Arabic Literature in Egypt]. 4th ed. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1971. Print.
- G. Wiet, *Introduction a' la litteratre arabe* [Introduction to Arabic Literature]. Paris: UNESCO, 1966. Print.
- Gabrieli, F. *The Arab Revival*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1961. Print
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993. Print.
- Hamzah, Abd al-Latif. *Adab al-Maqalah al-Sahfiyah fi Misr* [Art of Journalistic Essay in Egypt]. Vol. III. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1966. Print.
- Haykal, Ahmed. *Tatawwur al-Adab al-Hadith fi Misr*. [Development of Modern Literature in Egypt]. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1983. Print.
- Heywood, John. *Modern Arabic Literature*. London: Land Hamsphries, 1971. Print.
- Heyworth-Dunne, J. "Arabic Literature in Egypt in the Eighteenth Century with some Reference to the Poetry and the Poets." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 9 (1938): 676-689. Print.
- Hitti, Philip. K. *Syria: A Short History*. New York: Macmillan, 1959. Print.
- . *History of the Arabs*. 10th ed. London: Macmillan, 1970. Print.
- Hourani, Albert. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970. Print.
- Hussein, Taha. *Hafiz wa Shawqi* [Hafiz and Shawqi]. Cairo: al-Khafaji, 1933. Web.16 Sep. 2009. <http://www.4shared.com/get/46886538/6c1536df/_online.html> .
- John, Robert St. "Gamal Abdel Nasser." *Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. 2011. Web 17 April 2011. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/404045/Gamal-Abdel-Nasser>>.

- Kiddie, Nikki R. "Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani: A Case of Posthumous Charisma?" *Philosophers and Kings: Studies in Leadership*. Ed. Dankwart A. Rustow. New York: G. Braziller, 1970. 683-694. Print.
- Mahdi, Ismat. *Modern Arabic Literature*. Hyderabad: Rabi Publishers, 1983. Print.
- Moosa, Matti. *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*. 2nd ed. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997. Print.
- Rida, Mohammed Rashid. *Tarikh al-Imam al-Shaykh Muhammed Abduh 1* [History of Imam Shaykh Muhammed Abduh 1]. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1931. Print.
- Rifa'at, Mohammed. *Tarikh Misr al-Siyasi 2* [The Political History of Egypt 2]. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1929. Print.
- Shukri, Mohammed Fu'ad. *Misr fi Matla'a al-Qarn al-Tasi'e Ashar* [Egypt in the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century]. Vol. III. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1958. Print.