Arab Representations of the Occident

This book explores Arab responses to Western culture and values as expressed through works of fiction and non-fiction written by Arab authors during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It constitutes an original addition to the perennial East–West debate, and is particularly relevant to the current discussion on Islam and the West.

Arab Representations of the Occident might be seen as the reverse study of Edward Said's famous *Orientalism*. If Orientalism, according to Said, provided the conceptual framework, the intellectual justification for the appropriation of the Orient through colonialism, 'Occidentalism' – if one may use this label to indicate Arab conceptualisations of the West – tells a different story. It is a story, not about the appropriation of the land of the West, but its very soul. And if Orientalism was about the denigration, and the subjugation of the Oriental Other, much of Occidentalism has been about the idealisation of the Western Other, the desire to become the Other, or at least to become like the Other. This book – the first book on the subject in English – explores this process through examining representations of the West, or of the self and other in Arabic fictive and quasi-fictive writing.

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Arab Representations of the Occident

East–West encounters in Arabic fiction

Rasheed El-Enany

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Foreign culture is as necessary to the spirit of a nation as is foreign commerce to its industries.

(Lebanese/American writer, Ameen Rihani, 1876–1940)

We came to Europe
To drink of the springs of civilisation;
We came looking for a northerly window;

We came to breathe in the air;
To know the colours of the sky;
We came running away from the whips of oppression;

We came to Europe
To rejoice in the freedom of expression;
To wash the dust off our bodies;
And to plant trees in the gardens of conscience.

(Syrian poet, Nizār Qabbānī, 1923–98)

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Authors discussed

Below is a list, for quick reference, of primary authors whose texts are studied in this book. The names are given under the relevant chapter headings in the order in which they occur in the chapters.

1 The pre-colonial period: enchanted encounters

1 ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī (1754–1825)
2 Nīqūlā al-Turk (1763–1828)
3 Rifāᶜa Rāfiᶜ al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–73)
4 Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (1804–87)
5 Fransīs Marrāsh (1836–73)
6 ᶜAlī Mubārak (1823–93)
7 Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī (1820?–89)
8 Muḥammad Bayram al-Khāmis al-Tūnisī (1840–89)

2 The colonial period: encounters under duress

9 Muḥammad al-Muwaylihī (1858–1930)
10 Jūrjī Zaydān (1861–1914)
11 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888–1956)
12 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898–1987)
13 Ḥusayn Fawzī (1900–88)
14 Shakīb al-Jābirī (b. 1912)
15 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889–1973)
16 Aḥmad Amīn (1886–1954)
17 ᶜAlī al-Dūᶜājī (1909–49)
18 Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī (1905–92)
19 Louis (Luwīs) ᶜAwaḍ (1915–90)
20 Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb (1908–88)
21 Suhayl Idrīs (b. 1923?)
22 Waguih Ghali (d. 1969)

3 The postcolonial period (1): proud encounters

4 The postcolonial period (2): humbled encounters

5 The encounter with America

6 The encounter through female eyes

Introduction

One way of looking at my endeavour in this book is to see it, at least in part, as a reverse study of Edward Said's (1935–2003) *Orientalism*. I say 'in part' because unlike him I limit myself to the Arab parts of the Orient. If Said's aim was to consider Western perceptions of the Orient, mine is to study Arab representations of the West. Said argues that Europe has largely invented the Orient, that since antiquity the Orient has been for Europe 'a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes'; that the Orient provided Europe with its 'greatest, richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other'. The Orient, he maintains, 'has helped to define Europe as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience'.[1]

Said refers to Henry Kissinger's (b. 1923) classification of developing countries as pre-Newtonian cultures, which cannot deal with empirical reality, that is, cultures to which 'the real world is almost completely internal to the observer . . .'[2] Alfred Lyall (1835–1911), on the other hand, has argued that 'accuracy is abhorrent to the Oriental mind . . .',[3] while Hamilton Gibb (1895–1971) has written about 'the aversion of Muslims from the thought-processes of rationalism', blaming his proposition on what he calls 'the atomism and discreteness of the Arab imagination'.[4] Ernest Renan (1823–92) had earlier dismissed the Semites as 'an inferior combination of human nature', and their languages as 'inorganic', lacking in the capacity to regenerate themselves, unlike the living, organic Indo-European languages.[5] Chateaubriand (1768–1848) saw the Crusades as not only 'about the deliverance of the Holy Sepulchre', but also as a fight against a cult that was 'civilisation's enemy', and whose only God was 'force'.[6] Lamartine (1790–1869), on the other hand, preached the advent of the age of European colonialism. To him the Orient was 'nations without territory, rights, laws or security . . . waiting anxiously for the shelter' of European occupation.[7]

That was a representative sample of Western perceptions of the Orient brought into question by Said. His study has attempted to show that these perceptions were not the product of the objective observation of empirical reality, to use Kissinger's words, nor of the thought-processes of rationalism, to use Gibb's, but of a long political and cultural conflict, reaching back in history to medieval times and culminating in the colonialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

To justify the war against the other and the importance of subjugating him, it was necessary to demonise him, or at least to dismiss him as a sub-human species. Hence the above perception of the Arabs, shared alike by nineteenth-century men of letters and historians, as well as twentieth-century academics and politicians.

Edward Said has however been criticised for ignoring in his study the self-representations of the colonised, and focusing on the imposition of colonial power but not the resistance to it, thereby promoting a static model of colonial relations in which 'colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser' and therefore there is no room for negotiation or change.[8] Irrespective of the legitimacy or lack of it of this criticism, it is exactly this missing aspect in Said's representation of the experience of colonialism that the current study attempts to provide in relation to the Arab world. If the Western coloniser saw the Orient in the above terms as presented by Said's study, how then did Arab intellectuals see the West? Did they perceive it more objectively and fairly? Or was their perception equally coloured by cultural bias and the less than happy, all too recent colonial history? The hypothesis that I started with was an empirical one, based on my life experience as an Egyptian intellectual myself, who was born, grew up, was educated, and worked in Cairo for a number of years before settling in the West, or more particularly, Britain in my late twenties. The culture in which I grew up as an average middle-class Egyptian and the state-sponsored educational system through whose different phases I progressed, up to graduation from Cairo University with a BA in English in 1970 at the end of the Nasser era, meant that when I arrived in London in the autumn of 1977 at the relatively youthful age of 28, with little experience of the West save for a summer spent in London four years earlier, I had no problem with Western culture: the worldview of my culture and both its visible and invisible apparatuses was sufficiently Westernist not to allow a conflict. Apart from minor adjustments here and there, the fact of the matter is that on arrival in England in 1977, I was to all intents and purposes ready to fit in without much fuss and have experienced little to the contrary in the following quarter of a century or so of living in the West.[9] My hypothesis was that a culture that produced me and countless others like me cannot possibly be anti-Western, nor can be its intellectual exponents. Several years of wide textual investigation served to bear out my initial hypothesis. Unlike their Western counterparts of the colonial age, studied by Edward Said, Arab intellectuals have displayed a very rational and appreciative attitude towards Western culture despite the colonialism of modern times and older clashes. To them the European other was simultaneously an object of love and hate, a shelter and a threat, a usurper and a giver, an enemy to be feared and a friend whose help is to be sought.

Ambivalence has indeed characterised Arab perceptions of the West in modern times, and it still does in the new American age the world is living today. This ambivalence should not be difficult to explain. It is as old as the first encounter between Arabs and modern Europe. When Napoleon landed in Egypt in 1798, he was no doubt a foreign invader to be resisted, but Egyptian intellectuals at the time, as witnessed in the annals of al-Jabartī, the chronicler of the day, were able to see that Napoleon was not just another Mamluk, or Ottoman governor seeking

to wield power over them. They saw in him the representative of a different culture, a different world – they saw that he had come to them from a different age that they had yet to travel to. In an unspoken manner, they understood that he had come to them from the modern age, the age of science, invention, advanced weaponry and battle tactics, the age of sophisticated administration and civil rights for the people – theirs was still the medieval age, dominated by Divine law and religious learning, and enjoying a false sense of security from its isolation.

It is in this light that we can explain the paradoxical relationship between the Arabs and the West. Al-Jabartī gave it its first expression when, horrified at the French's violation of al-Azhar mosque, he described them as the very 'soldiers of Satan', but his demonisation of the other does not go much further than that. Elsewhere he can hardly contain his admiration for their science, their organisation, and their judicial system of which he saw a specimen in the trial of Sulaymān al-Ḥalabī, the Syrian assassin of General Kléber, whom Napoleon left in charge after returning to France. From that moment on, the fascination with the European other continued throughout the pre-colonial period. As Palestinian writer Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā (1920–94) puts it, 'they [i.e. the Arabs] wanted to catch up with the modern world. The West appreciated that, but was more interested in colonies, markets, and spheres of influence. Such is the way in which historical forces operate: the give and take between nations, as between cultures, is no simple exchange.'[10]

This ambivalence in attitude demonstrated by al-Jabartī on the first encounter with the West was significantly still in evidence more than a hundred years later, as Naguib Mahfouz shows in his *Cairo Trilogy*. Egypt was now under British rule and the national struggle for independence was at its highest. Kamāl, the protagonist of the novel and a persona for Mahfouz, takes part in an anti-British demonstration, but he is puzzled at his own attitude: 'In the morning my heart is inflamed with rebellion against the English, while at night the common spirit of human fellowship in pain calls for co-operation in the face of the riddle of man's destiny' (Al-Sukkariyya, pp. 44–45). What he is referring to here is his nightly readings in Western thought. In a much later interview, Mahfouz spelt out the feelings expressed earlier through the medium of his character, Kamāl. He tells his interviewer in 1998:

> We were in conflict with the English; we used to demonstrate against them and shout, 'Complete independence or violent death!' But at the same time, we valued highly English literature and English thought… We made the distinction between [Britain's] ugly colonial face and its radiant civilised one…[11]

In this Naguib Mahfouz was unwittingly replicating the much earlier views of Ameen Rihani, the American/Lebanese writer, who in his *Book of Khalid*, denounced in 1911 the Europe which used Christianity as a divine key to colonisation, while enjoining his fellow Arabs to emulate the Europe of reason, wisdom and truth; of philosophy, literature and art.[12]

The dilemma that Arab intellectuals faced from the early days of the encounter with the West was that Europe was at once the malady and the remedy. It had

power over their nations because it commanded the better life model and value system. European power, they have come to realise gradually since the time of al-Jabartī, was not magic. It was the product of secularisation, science and industrialisation, democratic government, human rights, economic modernisation, etc. The paradox for them was that to gain freedom from Western domination, the Western life model had to be adopted. The tension we feel in their writings on the East–West encounter stems from their recognition of the necessity of the very *other*, against whom they are trying to assert the *self*. Thus when Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm writes in the 1930s in his novels, *Return of the Spirit* and *Bird of the East*, denouncing, on the one hand, the materialism of the West, which gave the world nothing but the modern religions of Capitalism, Fascism, and Bolshevism, and glorifying, on the other hand, the spirituality of the East, which gave the world Christianity and Islam, and to which Europe will have eventually to turn for moral guidance after its materialism had led it to self-destruction – when al-Ḥakīm makes this argument, the ambivalence of his attitude begins with the observation of the very literary genre he uses to express his anti-Western views. The novel is a European literary form, which he was among the first to introduce into Arabic letters: so necessary was the other for the assertion of the self. But al-Ḥakīm, of course, never seriously meant what he said in those novels. Later in life, in the postcolonial period, he was to write that the notion of the materialism of the West and the spiritualism of the East was a false one, and that his invective against Western culture in his early works was necessary to raise the morale of the nation during the fight against foreign occupation.[13]

Perhaps not unlike al-Ḥakīm's ironic use of Western moulds to disparage the West was Egyptian doctor, novelist and ardent women's rights activist, Nawāl al-Saᶜdāwī's (b. 1931) adolescent thoughts about her native Arabic and the language of the other. She writes in her autobiography, *Awrāqī . . . Ḥayātī* (My Papers . . . My life, 1995) of her childhood under British occupation:

> In my dreams I used to see myself as a woman of letters like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn; because I loved the Arabic language, its letters, its words, its musical ring in the ear. I used to believe that God alone created the Arabic language, that He chose it over other languages and revealed the Qur'ān in it. I imagined that the English language was made by humans but that Arabic was a Divine language made by God Almighty and that the Arabs were the best nation created by God. I would walk haughtily in the street, looking down on the English, who spoke a mortal language and belonged to an inferior nation not mentioned in the Qur'ān.[14]

But at night, we are told, an inner silent voice would question that certainty: 'If God loved us more than the English, why did He let them conquer and occupy us? Why did He let *them* discover the power of steam and electricity, the radio, the wireless, the aeroplane and the submarine?'[15] What al-Saᶜdāwī was questioning really was not the love of God, but the very notion of the sublimity of the self and the mundanity of the other.

Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm may or may not have been conscious of the irony inherent in the denunciation of the West by means of a literary form of the West's invention, and Nawāl al-Saᶜdāwī's precocious doubts about her native language and its speakers may only be her mature life's reflections, but in the 1980s we still find the great Naguib Mahfouz very much aware of the tensions between traditional and modern, native and Western, self and other. Having mastered the techniques of the modernist Western novel and published some of his best work in its mould, he felt confident to experiment with it through effecting an intermarriage between the European form and traditional narrative forms of Arabic. Here is how he phrases his thoughts:

> When I started writing novels, I used to think that the European form of the novel was sacred. But as you grow older, your outlook changes; you want to free yourself from all that has been imposed on you . . . You find yourself searching for a [certain] tune deep down inside yourself . . . As if you were saying to yourself: 'Those forms which they [the Europeans] wrote in – were they not artistic moulds that they created? Why can't I create a mould of my own?[16]

And that is exactly what he goes on to do in some of his late and most memorable fiction published in the 1970s and 1980s, such as *The Harafish*, and *Arabian Nights and Days*, works which hark back in their form to the episodic structure of medieval Arabic narrative moulds known in both high and popular literature. But does Mahouz really break with Western modernism in favour of indigenous forms of narration? Nothing can be further from the truth:

> There is no doubt in my mind that the originality of the late episodic phase of his work would not have been possible without the novelist's long experience of the arts of Western modernism, traces of whose modes of expression as well as sensibility are no less recognisable in the episodic works than are some of the qualities of the indigenous arts of storytelling.[17]

Once more the paradoxical nature of the issue is demonstrated: to arrive at tradition you have to travel through modernity first, and when you do arrive, you discover that tradition has been modified forever by your journey; you discover that the self's tradition you are reviving is as much steeped in the other's modernity as it is in its own ancient roots.

All these are manifestations of the ambivalence I have been speaking about. And where the ambivalence turns into what seems to be an antagonistic position, as when the nobility of the spirit is monopolised by the self while the baseness of matter is ascribed to the other, this will prove to be only a phoney stand with ulterior motives. Indeed, the most visionary of Arab writers, such as Ameen Rihani, have seen the falsity of this dichotomy from the beginning. As early as 1911, Rihani was making a solid case in his *Book of Khalid*, for the complementarity of spirit and matter, East and West. The spirit–matter opposition was primarily an

invention of the colonial period; it did not form part of the cross-cultural debate before colonialism, and has seldom figured in the self-confident, nationalist discourse of the postcolonial era.

The ambivalence in both its rejectionist and emulative manifestations can perhaps be illustrated in terms of Arnold Toynbee's juxtaposition of 'Zealotism' and 'Herodianism'. He writes:

> The 'Zealot' is the man who takes refuge from the unknown in the familiar and when he joins battle with a stranger who practises superior tactics and employs formidable new-fangled weapons, and finds himself getting the worst of the encounter, he responds by practising his own traditional art of war with abnormally scrupulous exactitude.... The 'Herodian' is the man who acts on the principle that the most effective way to guard against danger of the unknown is to master its secret; and, when he finds himself in the predicament of being confronted by a more highly skilled and better armed opponent, he responds by discarding his traditional art of war and learning to fight his enemy with the enemy's own tactics and own weapons. If 'Zealotism' is a form of archaism evoked by foreign pressure, 'Herodianism' is a form of cosmopolitanism evoked by that selfsame external agency.[18]

The tug-of-war between the two tendencies which has characterised the encounter between East and West from its earliest days will be seen consistently to have leaned in favour of 'Herodianism' in the course of this study. Throughout the pre-colonial and later the colonial period, the dominant voice among Arab thinkers was that 'Zealotism' or 'archaism' was no way to confront the Western challenge; adopting the ways of the opponent was the battle cry. In the postcolonial period a Western-stamped form of 'cosmopolitanism' will be seen to have been accepted as a way of life.

The self-assertion, inspired by the nationalism of the first half of the twentieth century, which continued in the postcolonial period, as we can see, for instance, in the Egyptian Yūsuf Idrīs's representations of the West in his fiction,[19] was soon to give way to a period of undisguised self-denouncement, coupled with the idealisation of Western culture. A striking example of this is the novel by another Egyptian, Sulaymān Fayyāḍ, titled *Voices*, published in 1972, and to be discussed at length below. The postcolonial nationalist tide had then receded with the defeat of Nasser's regime in the 1967 war with Israel. Dreams of pan-Arabism had evaporated, totalitarian rule had not paid, nor had political confrontation with the West. For Arab intellectuals, this was a period of introspection, of trying to understand what went wrong. The defeat meant that a century and a half of trying to build the Western model in the East, to adopt the values and way of life that brought with it power and success had failed, and Arab intellectuals were in no mood to forgive themselves or their culture. To this mood, Fayyāḍ was to give voice in his novel, where he presents an Egyptian expatriate returning for a visit to his home village with his French wife after many years of absence. The French woman, by her

mere presence, her beauty, energy and vitality, shakes the village into a realisation of its ugliness, backwardness, and listlessness. Simone, as she is called, is lusted after by every man in the village, and feared and rejected by every woman. The women of the village, who are shown as custodians of tradition, discover that Simone is uncircumcised, and that as the wife of one of their men, she ought to be made pure and have her lust curbed. In the absence of her husband, they get together with the midwife of the village and operate on her by force: she bleeds to death. When the forensic doctor later issues the death certificate, he wonders whether it is the death certificate of Simone, or 'our own death certificate' that he is writing. The novel is written in terms of presenting an image of the triumph of a culture of death over the culture of life. No harsher condemnation of Eastern values has been written so far in Arabic, and no stronger glorification of Western values, which are made synonymous with life itself in this work.

This trend appears to continue into the present through the work of women expatriate writers in the West, such as Ḥanān al-Shaykh and Ghāda al-Sammān. A short story written in the 1980s by al-Shaykh, entitled 'I sweep the sun off rooftops', is a good example. Here, we shall see a new development in that the perception of the West is made by a woman writer and indeed a female protagonist. Cultural issues will intermingle here with gender issues, presenting us with a more complex situation than in previous male representations. The female protagonist cherishes her life in London, in which she finds shelter from the oppression of the patriarchal society she had left behind. Once more here, the culture of the self loses ground to the culture of the other.

If Orientalism, according to Edward Said, provided the conceptual framework, the intellectual justification for the appropriation of the Orient through colonialism, the representations of the West I have studied in this book would, by contrast, seem to suggest in my view a different story; one not of appropriation but of *emulation*. And if Orientalism was about the denigration, and the subjugation of the other, much of the Occidentalist images explored here will be seen to have been about the idealisation of the other, the quest for the soul of the other, the desire to become the other, or at least to become like the other.[20]

The Arab world's encounter with the West in modern times goes back, as we have seen, two hundred years or so, to1798 to be exact, the year Napoleon's army landed in Egypt, an event generally accepted as the medieval Arab East's first encounter with both modernity and colonialism at the same time. This twofold nature of the first encounter, the fact that modernity introduced itself through the medium of the other, through the overwhelming power of an invading force, is perhaps one reason why its position is still precarious until today, why it is regarded with suspicion in some circles as an importation, a borrowing that threatens the originality, the traditions, the very identity of the self. In Europe itself, modernity evolved from within, as a natural process: intellectual, scientific, social, industrial etc; what opposition it met in the course of its development and until it ousted older modes of existence was an internal one, and therefore also natural, but modernity in the Arab World has been for the most part and from the outset a transplantation, a foreign organ implanted in a body that needed it badly

but could not help but try to reject it. This dual attribute of modernity was felt by and reflected from the outset in the writings of Arab intellectuals who responded to the experience in their writings. Their representations of the West evince a sense of dichotomy, of ambivalence, of simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards their object, and towards modernity in so much as it is a Western thing.

One of the perennial manifestations of this dichotomy which has dogged the debate about the West since the beginning of the encounter and has never been resolved is the question of what to take from the West and what to leave. There has been consensus that Western civilisation is a *sine qua non* for progress, but there has also been fear for identity, for tradition, for the corruption of what the self perceived as a higher morality, a certain spirituality of which the West is bereft. This uncomfortable combination of desire and fear, the desire to emulate and the fear of the consequences, has led to a schizophrenic attitude towards Western civilisation, which divided it falsely into a set of practical values which were permissible and another of intellectual ones which were not. Thus it was fine to take from the West science, technology, industry and material comforts but not the thought systems, not the value systems, not the political and social structures that lay behind them. The Arab imagination in its horror at modernity, at once fascinated by its achievements and frightened by the changes they implied for an age-old way of life, constructed for its own benefit an illusory Europe, whose intellectual life was detachable from its practical life, and thought it could have the products of the second but not those of the first, and achieve the same results. The Arab mind, with few exceptions, as will be shown, has consistently failed to face up to the impossibility of this equation, to the necessity of accepting that the empirical realisations of Western civilisation would not have been possible without the changes in its worldview that were set in motion with the advent of the Renaissance and later the Age of Reason, with their Humanism and secularist outlook that separated the worldly or temporal from the spiritual or eternal.

In his study, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe*, Ibrahim Abu-Luhgod came to the conclusion that:

> the superstructure of the cultural manifestations was transmitted but not the intellectual bent of mind which in the West had led to its establishment. We can speculate, therefore, that the early nineteenth century transmission of knowledge had only a limited effect on the intellectual outlook of the Arab world. It introduced superficial changes but did not shake the foundations of Arab society . . .[21]

Abu-Lughod's conclusion is shored up by Gibb's argument that:

> It is not then the institutions and techniques borrowed from the West, however massive such borrowings may be, nor yet the external evolution shown in the last century, which will be of final significance, but the inward reaction towards the cultural values which are seeking to find their place within Muslim society under cover of these borrowings . . . .[22]

What Abu-Lughod pronounces in relation to the nineteenth century is to a large extent still valid today, the major difference being that more of the 'superstructure of the cultural manifestations' has been transmitted; the invisible embargo on the transmission of the underlying Western 'intellectual bent of the mind' is still firmly in place, and is responsible in a major way for the contradictions observable in Arab societies today, ranging from the minutiae of daily life that oscillate between two cultures to the emergence of religious fundamentalism as a violent attempt to put an end to the oscillation by deciding in favour of the past, in favour of 'archaism', or 'Zealotism', to go back to Arnold Toynbee's phrase quoted above. This uncertainty towards the West that we witness in Arab societies today, and the ambivalence in Arab intellectuals' attitude that will be observed in the course of this book are all manifestations of the ongoing 'inward reaction toward the cultural values' of the West, to which Gibb refers earlier.

The impossibility of separating 'superstructures', or the products of applied science on the one hand and the 'intellectual bent of mind' or 'cultural values' underlying them on the other was perceptively argued by Egyptian scientist and writer, Ḥusayn Fawzī in the course of commenting on a poem by Amīn al-Rīḥānī. The poem entitled '*Anā al-Sharq*' (I am the East) and personifying the East as a peddler, ends on these lines: 'I am the East / I have philosophies and religions / Who would swap them for aeroplanes?'[23] Ḥusayn Fawzī uses the poem to remark that al-Rīḥānī was oblivious of one thing in his unlikely offer of 'exchange of merchandise', namely that 'his philosophy, that all philosophies, are the original owners of the aeroplane, because it was the free operation of thought for its own purely philosophic purposes . . . that eventually reached scientists, inventors, engineers, and workers, and brought about the aeroplane'. Philosophies, he argues, 'cannot be put up for sale because they are worth nothing in their own right . . .'.[24] It is only when they move into the empirical sphere that they become of value, he implies. But Ḥusayn Fawzī was one of a precious few among Arab thinkers of his generation who were conscious of the indivisibility of Western civilisation and argued for its wholesale embracement.

What should perhaps be reassuring are the conclusions emanating from the present study. My attempt at mapping the vast amount of writing on the subject, spanning two centuries, has produced four major chronological divisions: precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial, with the latter phase sub-dividing into two eras: assertive nationalism, followed by disenchantment or self-denunciation. These four rough periods are dictated by perceived changes in the way Arab intellectuals saw themselves and the other, as historical changes took place around them leading from one period to the next. With few exceptions, Arab intellectuals, no matter in which period, have never demonised the European other or regarded him in sub-human terms. All the investigations I have undertaken here in the four categories or periods of my research have vindicated, with very few exceptions, my starting hypothesis, as explained above. This is the case whether we are talking about al-Jabartī, who chronicled the first dramatic encounter

between Europe and the Arab East when Napoleon invaded Egypt, or about a postcolonial author, writing in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

* * *

Now for some matters of organisation. Although well over fifty authors and scores of works are discussed in this study, the fact needs to be stressed that it has not been intended as a comprehensive survey of relevant sources. Considering that I have limited myself to treatments of the theme in fictional and quasi-fictional writing, I have been astounded by the abundance of direct approaches to the question of the East–West encounter in Arabic writing in the novel genre, my main target here. I set out with a few well-known authors and titles in mind that have been traditionally associated in the collective scholarly mind with the subject, but to my amazement and delight I was soon to discover that those were only the tip of the iceberg, and that while celebrated works by early writers (e.g. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *ʿUṣfūr min al-Sharq* or *Bird of the East* (1938), and Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* or *The Saint's Lamp* (1944) may have set the scene and dictated the tone of representations of the West in Arabic fiction, subsequent generations of writers proved to be equally interested in the issue, and had ideas and techniques entirely their own and their age's. I made it my concern to follow the development of the theme since the foundational works and to use the occasion to reassess those very foundational works in the light of trends and movements in society and literature since they were created; they are now part of a much bigger picture and need to be viewed within its framework. This prolificacy meant selectiveness was necessary although I would maintain that I have attempted to include in the study all the significant (and some of the not-so-significant) authors and works to which my investigation has led me. The greatest exclusion has been North African literature, both Francophone and that written in Arabic (with only a handful of exceptions in the latter case). On the one hand, the field is so vast, it warrants a book devoted to itself. On the other hand, the North African, and specifically the Algerian experience, had a particularity of its own that justifies study apart from that of the *mashriq*, or Arab east. Selectiveness was also exercised with regard to nineteenth-century writing, especially travelogue. This is not only because the field is too vast for the purposes of this book, but also because it has been covered fairly well in recent scholarship and because I consider the twentieth century and particularly fiction to be the real territory of my study. My incursion into the nineteenth century was motivated by the natural desire to begin at the beginning, the desire to relive the first moments of the encounter, to find the roots from which shoots grew, and to monitor that growth under the changing climate of history, as it were. To this end, representativeness rather than exhaustiveness was more appropriate.

Nor does the list of exclusions end here. There was also the issue of polemical writing on the subject. The question with all its ramifications has dominated intellectual and political debate since Napoleon set foot in Egypt at the turn of the eighteenth century of how the East should deal with the Western civilisation, with a civilisation that is more advanced, more powerful, more prosperous, but had

a different faith, a different culture, a different set of life values, a civilisation that was totally other, and has totally overwhelmed the Eastern self. What should the East learn from it and what should it avoid? Can it take the science and technology and ignore anything to do with moral life? Is it really possible? Did science and technology not flourish in the West only as a result of secularisation, and the inculcation of liberal values which gradually allowed everything to be questioned and freed society from all medieval fetters including those on scientific research; that process which started with the Renaissance and peaked with the Enlightenment? How can we both respect Western civilisation for its progress and power and despise it for its materialism at one and the same time? How can we fight Western colonialism in our own land and seek to imitate its political, social and cultural structures at the same time? But is that not the only way to achieve progress ourselves and thus be able to offer resistance to the West and achieve parity with it? How can we reconcile Islam to a civilisation based on reason alone? And is Islam not self-sufficient? Did it not advocate a complete system for a thriving existence both in this world and the next? Did not the Muslim civilisation rule the world unopposed for centuries? Surely, if our ancestors did it once, we only have to stick to Islam to do it again. Hold on! Actually, Europe's modern civilisation owes much to Arab civilisation; they had no problem learning from the Muslims in the past and this is how they reached where they are now, so why can we not learn from them today as they did from us then? We will only be collecting our debts. And so on and so forth *ad nauseam*. Nor is the debate over yet! There was no way that this book could address this debate in its manifestations in polemical discourse without it becoming another book. Nor was there a need, as numerous scholars from East and West, historians, political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, to name but a few disciplines, have extensively documented and analysed this debate and continue to bring it up to date ceaselessly in response not only to the noble call of academic research, but also in that grey area where research and the politics of the day have a meeting ground. This is why the names of such reformists and modernisers as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838–97) and Muḥammad ᶜAbduh (1849–1905) do not crop up in this book. I have however found it useful to address the polemics of some nineteenth-century writers who were among the initiators of the debate, and whose contribution to it was based on a direct and extensive experience of encounter with the West, such as al-Ṭahṭāwī and Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī. I have also made another exception to my exclusion of discursive discourse on the East–West debate in the case of imaginative writers, for example, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, who have also addressed the self-same themes of their fictive work in their scholarly work or disputatious writing. It was imperative in my view to contextualise the vision emanating from their artistic creations in the more directly expressed views on the subject that they expound in their other media of writing. This strategy paid off handsomely when in the case of al-Ḥakīm, it revealed serious inconsistencies between what he advocates via the medium of fiction, and what he advocates elsewhere in his output, as shown within the body of this study, while in the case of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn there was reassuring cohesion between his vision, say, in his novel, Adīb (1935) and his seminal,

Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa fī Miṣr, or *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (1938) in which he promulgates his vision for Egypt's cultural rebirth.

If this study is therefore primarily about the examination of representations of the West in Arabic fiction, of self and other, subject and object, viewer and viewed, where the self is Eastern and the other is Western, it will perhaps serve a good purpose to define the parameters of the subject from my vantage point. What I am interested in here is not representations of the West in broad terms, not representation of reflections of the process of modernisation or Westernisation in Arabic narrative discourse. To do so will be an impossibility unless one sets out to study almost every novel and short story written in Arabic since Salīm al-Bustānī in the 1870s to the present day. Arab life and therefore Arab fiction (and much else of the Arabs' expressions of creativity) has been about Westernisation, about the conflict between old and new, traditional and modern, native and foreign, secular and religious, to the end of a long list of binary oppositions that have bedevilled Arab existence and Arab literature, and created endless tension and pain (but perhaps also much pleasure sometimes) in the lives of generations of real people and fictional characters alike. So integral has the West become to Arab life! Thus to address such themes in their broad manifestations in this book would mean for instance addressing the entire voluminous corpus of Naguib Mahfouz, to mention but one example. As it happens, I do not in fact address Mahfouz's work at all here, and that is not because I have done that in another dedicated book anyway, but because Mahfouz has not written a single work that qualifies for the parameters by which this study is limited in its treatment of fictional works; that is, a work in which there is an actual encounter between an Eastern character and a Western character in one or other of their native habitats (mostly it is an Easterner in the West). Thus fellow readers and scholars may be able to think of many a work of fiction by many a writer where the very same issues figure as those of works that fall within the specified parameters of the present study, but they will not find them listed or discussed here. Thankfully, though, they will find them abundantly discussed in many broader-based studies of Arabic fiction.

Recalling Edward Said's remarks on the feminisation of the East in the discourse of nineteenth-century European writers as part of the conceptualisation of colonialism, a subject that he chooses to note and illustrate but declines to interpret,[25] it is interesting to observe that the reverse process happens in Arabic fiction, written in the twentieth century first during the colonial, and then the postcolonial period. What we witness there is a simple 'feminisation of the Occident'. Thus if the act of colonisation was in the imagination of the coloniser a sexual act in which the coloniser was male and the colonised female as Western apologists of colonialism saw it, so the act of resistance to, or pushing back of colonialism was in reverse a sexual act in which the colonised imagination saw itself as male and the coloniser as female. This is not surprising since writers on the theme were at that time all male, and since they particularly chose to render their theme through allegorical, semi-autobiographical cross-cultural narratives of love and

sex. And for authors who, like al-Ḥakīm and Ḥaqqī, to name but two, cast the West in a materialistic mould, it was particularly convenient within the allegorical or symbolic structures they erected to represent the West in the guise of a fickle, libidinous, pleasure-seeking female. When in the fullness of time, as we shall see in the present book, Arab women writers began to write on the theme of the encounter with the West, basing their writing on their own experiences, the process will be reversed at the stroke of a pen, with the Eastern protagonist becoming female and the Western other encountered by her becoming naturally male. But this was a feature of the postcolonial era and the rise of feminist writing. The gender roles here may be less politicised than merely a reflection of the female writing sensibility.

As pointed out, the feminisation of the West begins in the colonial period with an influx of fictional works based on a journey theme, where the protagonist is mostly a male Arab scholar studying in Europe, who enters into an amatory relationship with an European woman, often a fellow student. The two characters are endowed respectively with generic cultural attributes, bringing to the work an allegorical or symbolic quality as the case may be. The Eastern protagonist will normally have ambivalent feelings for the Western woman, feelings of both attraction and caution, fascination and doubt. The female other will normally be characterised as a doer, an initiator of action, a leader and educator in relation to the male Easterner, whose traumatic, sobering encounter with her leads him eventually to self-discovery both on the individual and allegorical levels. Such fiction usually ends with self-reconciliation on the part of the Eastern protagonist, who rejects the other after benefiting from him, that is, he retains his cultural identity and stands fast against being absorbed by the other. This outline first clearly found in Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *Bird of the East* of 1938 remains to date the 'norm', as it were, by which other works identify themselves either by conformity, variation, or downright reversal. What is particularly intriguing about this scheme of things in which the East is male and the West feminised is that the power actually lies with the feminised party, such that the expected power roles in a patriarchal world order are ironically inverted in order to reflect the facts of the reality allegorised, that is, that of a dominant West and a domineered East. Seen against Said's observation of the feminisation of the Orient, it is not difficult to see that that irony is absent from the equation at the other end, since the Orient-feminising authors of Europe actually reflected the correct power relations between coloniser and colonised through their sexual metaphors; there was no irony here.

In my analysis of the works addressed in this study, I have naturally focused on the theme with which I am concerned here, namely the Eastern encounter with the West. In the majority of the works studied, the theme is dominant, though not necessarily the only one preoccupying the author. Where there is a multiplicity of themes in a given work, I have nevertheless concerned myself primarily with the encounter theme, paying little attention to other themes except insofar as they relate to the central theme. My obvious reason for this partial approach is its necessity for the coherence of my study. For the same reason and because the

present book is preoccupied with a central idea, that is, how Arab intellectuals represented Western culture (and through that their own insofar as our view of the other serves also to define the self) in their imaginative creations, I have adopted a methodology with a thematic focus where the drive behind the study is to glean the thought, the intellectual stance, the worldview underlying imaginative structures. This has meant that examination of the aesthetic quality of works, an integral part of literary study, has been confined to consideration of the writers' artistic tools, of their mastery of their craft, insofar as it is brought to bear on their successful or not so successful embodiment of their intellectual position. Considering the substantial scope of this study covering two centuries of writing and the large number of authors from different periods of development and different geographical regions of the Arab world at different stages in their intellectual evolution; considering also that the bulk of the works examined comes from narrative genres, and particularly the novel, which emerged in Arabic letters only half way through the two centuries under study here, it is inevitable that the literary quality of the works studied and the creative talent behind them will vary widely. And while it has not been my concern here to study the aesthetic evolution of the genre of the novel in Arabic, a task amply covered by existing scholarship at any rate, I have nonetheless been acutely aware that a discussion that focuses on the thought content of a work of art may mislead in two ways, both injurious: there is the risk that such a focus could diminish or totally obfuscate the aesthetic quality of supreme imaginative creations, and there is the other risk that it could falsely aggrandise what is in essence a poor work of art where content stands apart from form, or where a crude literary structure is blatantly used as a vehicle for raw ideas. And as I did not set out to execute a study in the sociology of literature, although elements of that are ineluctably there, but rather conceived of this as a literary study with a certain focus, I have consistently endeavoured to maintain and impart an awareness of the literary quality of the works under discussion.

Rasheed El-Enany
Exeter, April 2005

1 The pre-colonial period

Enchanted encounters

In his *Culture & Imperialism*, Edward Said argues that the experience of **ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī** (1754–1825), the well-known Egyptian historian whose chronicles bestrode the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and on whose eye-witness account we rely mainly for the Egyptian perspective on the French invasion of Egypt (1798–1801), 'produced a deep-seated anti-Westernism that is a persistent theme of Egyptian, Arab, Islamic, and Third World history . . .'.[26] This may be true but it is only half the truth. In so far as al-Jabartī was an Egyptian reacting to foreign invaders, he could only have been anti-Western, but then the Mamluks and Ottoman Turks who ruled Egypt in his day were hardly Egyptians. True, they were Muslims like the majority of the Egyptians but this did not seem to endear them to al-Jabartī, as his text amply shows, and as I shall quote below. Al-Jabartī was revolted by the French, but almost in the same pen stroke he was appreciative of what their different culture model had to offer; a fact which should make it possible to rewrite Said's above sentence equally truthfully thus: al-Jabartī's experience of the French invasion of Egypt 'produced a deep-seated pro-Westernism that is a persistent theme in Egyptian, Arab, Islamic, and Third World history . . .'. Much of what follows in this book will show that to be the case. It should be noted however that by pro-Westernism here I do not of course mean a love for Western domination but rather recognition of the many merits of the Western culture model and a desire to appropriate them for the self. In the case of al-Jabartī, his 'anti-Westernism' can be seen in the way he describes the French as "devils" or the very "soldiers of Satan" in his horror at their violation of the Al-Azhar Mosque,[27] but this and other descriptions of their brutality in the suppression of Egyptian resistance to their rule are doubtless outshone by his detailed accounts of their merits in scientific achievement, and in governance and administration, where in certain parts he can barely contain his admiration. He describes, for instance, how they requisitioned the grand house of an escaped notable (he does not forget to tell us in passing how the cost of that grand house had come out of the oppression of the people) and turned it into a public library. He is impressed with the good organisation of the library, which was attended by even 'the lowest ranking soldiers'. He is even more impressed by how the French officials went out of their way to welcome and assist native Egyptians who visited the library, and explains that he himself visited it repeatedly and was shown

a variety of books, including a biography of the Prophet, which showed pictures of him and his companions.[28] The impact of the cultural encounter is perhaps symbolically illustrated by al-Jabartī's charmed description of chemical experiments that French scientists demonstrated in front of some Egyptians including himself. Among other *wonders*, he describes how one of them took a little white powder, placed it on an anvil and slammed it gently with a hammer to cause a great explosive sound. 'We were frightened by it', he writes. 'And they laughed at us'.[29] Fascination and fear may be adequate terms to describe the Egyptians' attitude to the French as expressed by al-Jabartī. After description of a variety of chemical experiments, he readily acknowledges the superiority of the invading other. He writes, 'They have . . . fashions and conditions and strange compositions, which produce results beyond the comprehension of our minds.'[30]

Science and technology apart, there is an account even more revealing of the extent of al-Jabartī's admiration of the French. By this I mean his report of the assassination of General Kléber, Napoleon's deputy in Egypt after the latter's return to France. Kléber was stabbed to death by a Syrian youth, Sulaymān al-Ḥalabī (i.e. of Aleppo), as he came to be known, hired by the Ottomans for this purpose. Al-Jabartī has no words of praise for Sulaymān; he does not see him as a *mujāhid* (a fighter for the faith), but as an 'impetuous rogue'.[31] Rather, he is full of praise for the French, who did not hasten to execute him and the accomplices he informed on, in spite of the compelling evidence, but took their time and arranged for him and all the others to be tried and sentenced only after being interrogated in all manner, singly and together. He is particularly impressed by the fact that one of those implicated was actually acquitted and released for lack of evidence. Al-Jabartī tells us how after having intended not to include in his history a full description of this incident due to the excessive length of the bill the French published on it and the weakness of its style, he changed his mind because of the lessons there were to learn from the French's conduct of the trial and judgement. He describes them as 'people who submit to the rule of reason, while holding no religious faith', and contrasts their measured response to the murder of their chief with 'the actions of the scum of soldiery, who pretend to be Muslims and claim to be *mujāhidīn* [fighters for the faith], but kill [innocent] souls . . . for no reason but their beastly desires . . .'. By the Muslim 'scum of soldiery', he means the Ottomans and the Mamluks of the day.[32]

Al-Jabartī's testimony on the French is reinforced by that of another contemporary chronicler, namely **Nīqūlā al-Turk** (1763–1828), writer and poet at Lebanese Prince Amīr al-Shihābī's (1767–1850) court in Beirut. Al-Turk writes, among other things, of the French's 'just rule', 'good policy', 'their lifting of oppression off the peasantry', 'their control of their soldiers', and 'the modesty of their chiefs'. He also writes of the attention they paid to the administration of the country, and how the attacks of robbers, bandits and the bedouin were eliminated under their rule.[33]

Al-Jabartī and al-Turk were writing their reactions to Western culture as they experienced it through watching the French during their campaign in Egypt and

Syria. Coming from different religious backgrounds and different parts of the Arab lands as they do, al-Jabartī being an Egyptian Muslim, and al-Turk a Christian Syrian, both chroniclers appear to share the recognition that the French brought with them a more efficient and just system of government than anything they had known under the Mamluk/Ottoman rule.[34]

Those, however, were accounts of Arab intellectuals who never travelled to the West, never learnt one of its languages, nor studied its culture in any form. Future accounts of the West were to be different. They were to be based on firsthand encounters with the Western culture, experienced on its own land through the observation of social and political phenomena and the systematic study of one or more of its languages and branches of knowledge. The earliest such account was that given by **Rifāᶜa Rāfiᶜ al-Ṭahṭāwī** (1801–73) in his famous *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīṣ Bārīz* (The Extraction of Gold in the Description of Paris[35]), first published in 1834, in which he describes his experience of Paris and French life and culture during his years of study there, as a member of Muḥammad ᶜAlī's (1769–1849, Viceroy of Egypt, 1805–49) first mission of Egyptian scholars to France in 1826–31.[36]

Like al-Jabartī, al-Ṭahṭāwī received the only education available in Egypt in his day, that is, traditional religious education at al-Azhar. He even started his career as a preacher in Muḥammad ᶜAlī's army; a function he retained in some capacity during the mission years in Paris after being upgraded to a full mission member following laudatory reports of his assiduity to Muḥammad ᶜAlī, who took a personal interest in the missions he sent abroad. His early education nevertheless continued to provide al-Ṭahṭāwī with the perspective in which to view the new world. In the introduction to his book, he divides the world into five hierarchical sections, where each section's place in the hierarchy depends on its relation to Islam.[37] Thus Asia is top, followed by Africa and Europe, whereas the Americas come bottom, as Islam is non-existent there.[38] If his point of reference is Islam, it follows that what he sees in Paris in the way of civilisation, and particularly what he describes as the 'amazing justice and strange fairness [of the system of government]', are 'more worthy of [prevailing in] the abode of Islam (*diyār al-Islām*)…'.[39] On board the ship which carried him to Marseilles, al-Ṭahṭāwī is impressed with a level of cleanliness he clearly has not been used to. 'Among that which is likeable in the ways of the French', he writes, 'is their love of external cleanliness… even at sea.' He gives examples of how the ship and its utilities are regularly cleaned during the voyage, only to wonder in the end how it is all done, 'even though cleanliness is of faith, and of that [the French] do not have as much as the weight of an atom'.[40] This dichotomy of faith and admiration of the 'faithless' is a recurrent theme in the book. Al-Ṭahṭāwī labours under the notion that since Islam is the 'true faith', then all that is good should emanate from it, and appears genuinely surprised at the achievements of 'the faithless'. He admires the law of the land, that is, the *charte constitutionelle*, or *al-sharta*, as he calls it. He tells the reader that he will enlist the articles of the *charte* 'even though most of its contents is neither in the *Qurʾān* nor in the *sunna* of the Prophet'. Why he lists

them in spite of that is for the reader to know how the French, both rulers and subjects, have realised through reason that justice is the foundation of civilisation (*al-ᶜumrān*).[41] In effect al-Ṭahṭāwī has been forced here, through his experience of French culture, to admit implicitly that human reason is capable of organising society and government in a way totally foreign to Muslim societies and their Divine sources of legislation. It is no wonder that he warns his readers that the French 'have some philosophic convictions, which other nations will find preposterous, but which they disguise and strengthen to lend them credibility'. Therefore, those who want to indulge in reading French philosophy should be 'well versed in the *Qurʾān* and the *sunna* . . . otherwise their faith will be lost'. Al-Ṭahṭāwī sums up his dilemma in two lines of verse of his own composition, in which he wonders how the sun of knowledge in Paris never sets, while the night of infidelity (*kufr*) is without day.[42] In spite of that, he notes approvingly the discreteness of the sciences of religion and those of the world; a distinction quite important considering that he came from a culture where the sciences of religion reigned supreme and encompassed all else. He tells his readers that French savants (*ᶜulamāʾ*) are not priests, that 'priests are knowledgeable about religion alone . . . , and that persons referred to as *ᶜulamāʾ* are those who are knowledgeable about the intellectual sciences . . .'.[43]

Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz is not an autobiographical account, nor a book of memoirs. It is not a journal or personal diary either. It is not even anecdotal. It is an external, descriptive account of what the author saw, studied and read in Paris with only sparse explicit comment on what he sees, or comparison with conditions in his own country.[44] The unwritten text, however, is alternately profuse in its bewilderment, as we have seen above, and in its unmistakable approval, notwithstanding, of much of the ways of the other. Nevertheless, al-Ṭahṭāwī remains aloof from French society insofar as the book goes, or to quote the words of ᶜAlī Mubārak, a younger, if equally influential, contemporary of his and mission student in Paris too, who commented on *Takhlīṣ* in his own *ᶜAlam al-Dīn*, discussed below, '. . . He [al-Ṭahṭāwī] did not enter [Paris] through its [proper] doors, nor did She upon his description of her reveal her face unto him . . .'.[45] Did he make any friends (apart from the orientalist Sylvestre de Sacy and the like)? Did he know any women? etc. These and similar questions will remain without answers. The best description of the book and the author's motives in writing it is perhaps that given by a French reader of the text, namely Armand Pierre Caussin de Perceval (1795–1871), a teacher of colloquial Arabic at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris at the time,[46] whose opinion al-Ṭahṭāwī had explicitly sought. Caussin de Perceval found the book (which he read as a manuscript) praiseworthy for being usefully informative to the author's fellow countrymen on France, its arts, the manners and customs of its people and the politics of its state. 'When he saw that his country was inferior to the countries of Europe', writes Caussin de Perceval, 'in the human sciences and the useful arts, he felt sorry because of that, and wanted to awaken Muslims with his book, and to engender in them the desire to . . . learn Western civilisation and advance in matters secular (*ṣanāyiᶜ al-maᶜāsh*)'.[47] In the closing pages of his book, al-Ṭahṭāwī makes a very intriguing

statement, although regrettably he does not elaborate sufficiently on it for any learned conclusions to be possible to be based on it. 'It appeared to me', he writes, 'after contemplation of the manners (*Ādāb*) of the French and their political conditions that they are more akin to the Arabs than the Turks or other races . . . .'[48] Was this an early premonition of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's argument a century later in his *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa fī Miṣr* (The Future of Culture in Egypt), first published in 1938, that Egypt was historically part of the Mediterranean culture? This may be a shot wide of the mark. What is certain, however, is that the first seeds for Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's intellectual position were sown by al-Ṭahṭāwī.[49]

An important contemporary of al-Ṭahṭāwī was **Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq** (1804–87),[50] Lebanese writer, traveller, translator, and journalist. He lived and worked between Lebanon, Egypt, Malta, Britain, France, Tunis, and Istanbul.[51] Born a Maronite Christian, he later fell out with the Church authorities and converted to Protestantism. Later on in life, he yet again converted to Islam. The last three years of al-Shidyāq's stay in Egypt (1825–34) coincided with al-Ṭahṭāwī's first years back home after his return from France in 1931. The two men are certain to have met, and it is thought that al-Shidyāq actually worked under al-Ṭahṭāwī in editing Muḥammad ᶜAlī's governmental paper, *al-Waqāʾiᶜ al-Miṣriyya*.[52] It is evident that al-Shidyāq read al-Ṭahṭāwī's *Takhlīṣ*, to which he refers, if only in passing, in his *Kashf al-Mukhabbā ᶜan Funūn ʾŪrubbā* (Unveiling the Arts of Europe),[53] published in Istanbul in 1881. Al-Shidyāq's stay in Europe (mainly England and France), which began in 1848 and lasted for the best part of ten years, came more than twenty years after al-Ṭahṭāwī's. Al-Shidyāq's earliest account of his European observations was to appear in some of the chapters of his autobiographical (among other things) work, *Al-Sāq ᶜalā al-Sāq fī mā huwa al-Fāriyāq*, first published in Paris in 1855, again some twenty-one years after al-Ṭahṭāwī's *Takhlīṣ*.[54]

Before embarking on the description of Paris and its people in his *Kashf*, al-Shidyāq writes, 'Considering that the learned man of letters, Rifāᶜa al-Ṭahṭāwī, has written before me his invaluable book on the same subject, entitled *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīṣ Bārīz*, it has become incumbent on me here to ask his permission to mention such things as he has ignored completely, or merely referred to in a manner that left me surprised.'[55] What were the omissions by al-Ṭahṭāwī, one wonders, which left al-Shidyāq surprised? Considering the temperamental and career differences between the two men, the former being an Azharite by training and a lifetime educationalist in the service of the Egyptian state, and the latter a self-exiled writer, largely free from institutional inhibitions of all manner and endowed with a great appetite for life,[56] it is not difficult to guess at what al-Shidyāq found lacking in his contemporary's book. Indeed, what he missed in al-Ṭahṭāwī's book may be the very thing that we find refreshingly different about his own. I have suggested above that al-Ṭahṭāwī remains aloof to French society. Its political and social organisation he tells us much about, but he never becomes involved in its 'real' life: the streets, the shops, the weather, the men, the women, the children, the priests, faith and public worship, family life, crime, prostitution,

city life and country life, the class system etc. Did he have thoughts on or experiences of these issues that he did not see fit to record, or did he live in Paris the isolated and sanitised foreign student life his book suggests he did? Whatever the answer, it is attention to these 'vital' issues, to life in the concrete, coupled with the uninhibited panache of his literary style and his playful, unrelenting satire that characterise al-Shidyāq's European accounts and distinguish them from al-Ṭahṭāwī's dryness. In essence, though, their attitudes *vis á vis* European and their own culture will not be seen to be different.

Al-Shidyāq is full of admiration for many of the social and cultural virtues of the Europeans. The children of the English are brought up to standards of 'civility, knowledge and virtue' that a child of twelve 'would talk to you in the manner of one of us who was twelve and twenty, [i.e. thirty two]'.[57] The presence of '*us*' in the previous quotation is of the essence: in al-Shidyāq almost every praise of the other contains implicitly or explicitly a criticism of the self. This then is the context in which we should understand his praise of the English, of whom every man, though 'not necessarily wealthy', would have in his home a library, well stocked with books and newspapers, and 'the majority of whose peasants read and write' and are aware of their civil rights.[58] He gives this congenial picture of the conduct of the head of an English family, thereby implying reproach of a more austere, patriarchal rule in oriental families: 'In the morning when he sits at the breakfast table with his wife and children, he would kiss each of them and ask them how they were. He would give them some advice to guide them in their day, and they would talk mirthfully to him and draw comfort from his company . . . .'[59] Al-Shidyāq enjoins his reader to tell his friends about 'these and similar stories' in the hope that they may be motivated 'to start a school, translate a book, or send their children to a [foreign] country where they may learn good manners and [acquire] noble virtues',[60] having previously rebuked him for developing the wrong interest in what Europe has to offer: 'Why is it that you buy from Europeans clothes and [other] goods, but not learning, wisdom and the arts (*al-ādāb*).'[61] He warns his reader, however, that 'in countries where virtues abound so do vices',[62] and therefore one 'must be wary in emulating Europeans not to mix what is good with what is evil, and what is correct with what is wrong'.[63] The vices he mentions fall almost altogether in the category of social injustice.[64] He laments the prostitution of young girls in the streets of London, the extreme poverty of peasants and workers: 'The world is built on corruption. How can a thousand, nay two thousand men suffer to make one man happy? . . . And how can this be in this country [England], whose name has become a byword for justice?'[65] In his lighter moods, he satirises the English, in his usual sardonic style, for a multitude of lesser sins, ranging from their bad weather and unpalatable cuisine to their habit of 'uncovering their bottoms to warm them before the fire'.[66]

What most of al-Shidyāq's intellectual contemporaries in the Muslim world would have found morally shocking does not seem to perturb him in the least. In *al-Sāq*, chapter 17 of book IV is titled 'Fī Waṣf Bārīs' (On the Description of Paris), when to be accurate, it should have been titled 'on the description of the women of Paris'.[67] The chapter amounts to a celebration of the beauty and sexual

appeal of French women, how they walk, how they talk, how they dress, how they lure etc., with a detailed and explicit account of the practices and services of Parisian prostitutes and the sexual preferences of their customers. What calls for a pause for thought here is the total absence of any sense of moral condemnation in the narrative. Indeed, what is there is not even a neutral objective account of the observations of a traveller. Rather, it is presented with a sense of abandon, a delight in the *joie de vivre*, and, dare one suggest, an implied approval, and perhaps even an implied criticism of the writer's own culture, with its austerity and inhibitions. If in doubt of his moral attitude, we could perhaps turn for further evidence to an article he wrote in *al-Jawā'ib*, the weekly newspaper he published in Istanbul between 1861–84. He writes, 'you may argue that corruption in European countries is worse than elsewhere, as it is evident that there are more prostitutes there than in eastern countries . . . . The answer is that prostitutes there [serve] a natural need like food, drink and [the need for] warmth in cold weather, for instance.' He goes on to argue that there are hundreds of thousands of unmarried men in Paris, who go to prostitutes, 'exactly as they would go to places [that serve]food'. He concedes that this may be sinful, '*ḥarām*', 'but it has become their custom, and they have come to approve of it'.[68] Al-Shidyāq operates here a relative value system. There is no absolute moral code to which all societies must submit, one can infer from the tenor of his argument.[69] He is not prepared to judge the French by the tenets of his own culture. If the French think nothing of this or that vice, that is fine by him, and he is perfectly happy to explain their 'vices' in 'natural' terms. By contrast, he is critical of polygamy and the custom of owning slave women, still then in practice in parts of the Ottoman Empire. If anything, he sees this as a worse vice than prostitution. Rich Europeans are not in the habit of 'building great mansions to fill them with ignorant women, from whom they beget cretinous and fainthearted children'.[70] Why he describes the offspring of Eastern men in these pejorative terms can be attributed to the different styles of raising children between the two cultures. European mothers educate their children at home in all fashion of 'knowledge, manners and virtue before they send them to school'.[71] By contrast, 'mothers in the east raise their children to be superstitious, . . . [to believe] in being watched over by the jinn . . . . Thus children grow up to be fainthearted and easy to scare . . . .' Eastern girls have an even worse deal, as all they hear from their mothers is gossip about marriage, divorce and affairs. Thus a girl would grow up to believe that 'she was created for nothing but marriage and divorce'.[72] The end result of this, al-Shidyāq tells his reader, is that 'the children of Europeans are proud of themselves from a young age, active, nimble and have initiative, unlike the children of eastern countries, . . . who are sluggish, slow, listless and slack . . .'.[73]

Al-Shidyāq could not be more forthcoming in denouncing his own culture in the same breath as he lauds the culture of Europe. The harshness of his indictment, however, does not stem from disdain, or lack of faith in his own culture, but rather from the concern and anger of the reformist. He has no doubt that the Eastern countries, or *al-mamālik al-sharqiyya*, as he calls them, are capable of achieving his European ideals. In an unmistakable secularist tone, he urges his

readers 'not to expect revelation from God on a daily basis as to what He has in destiny for us, but to measure our affairs against those of others [i.e. the Europeans], . . .' and states categorically that, 'for us to think that we could not be like them because we live in a different land or speak a different language would be a grave error'.[74] Indeed, he is keen to assert, again in *al-Jawā'ib*, on the basis of his own experience of living in Europe that 'there is no difference between us and them in reason, understanding, intelligence, sagacity, . . . nor in any other natural faculty . . . . Where Europeans have taken the lead over us in this age is in manufacturing and trade because of their organisation and methodical ways . . .'.[75]

'Measuring our affairs against those of others', as al-Shidyāq puts it, or looking at his own culture in the light of his experience of the other, to give his phrase a contemporary ring, is central to the self-assessment process he undertakes most of the time in the course of his exposition of the manners and customs of Europeans. This is the case whether he is contrasting the polite way an English mistress treats her maids with the more crude style of an Arab lady,[76] or more importantly, comparing the state of learning in Europe with that in the East: 'To them learning does not consist in knowledge of grammar or [skill in] versification, rather in reading Greek and Latin and the study of their literature, knowledge of history, philosophy, geometry and mathematics.'[77] Al-Shidyāq's criticism of the state of learning in Eastern countries is emphasised again in the course of his dazzled comment on the invention of telegraphic communication, following a demonstration of the service that he witnessed at a London office. He laments that while Arab grammarians 'wasted their life' over issues of declension, Europe occupied itself with true science and useful inventions: 'to communicate news from the capital of the Kingdom of Austria to Liverpool in less than a second is more beneficial than finding twenty possibilities for the declension of compound adjectives (*al-ṣifa al-mushabbaha*).'[78]

A younger contemporary of al-Shidyāq who died prematurely aged only 37 years was **Fransīs Marrāsh** (1836–73).[79] Marrāsh was a Christian native of Aleppo, and one of the earliest exponents of the thought of the secularly oriented *nahḍa* (Arab renaissance of the nineteenth century). Best known perhaps for his allegorical protonovel, *Ghābat al-Ḥaqq* (The Forest of Truth, 1865), Marrāsh, who was born in a literary family, studied medicine privately before going to Paris to qualify as a doctor and returning to Aleppo ahead of time due to complete loss of sight having had gradually worsening problems with his eyes since childhood. His book *Riḥlat Bārīs* (A Passage to Paris, 1867) is a record of his impressions of his last visit to France in 1866–67, having previously visited with his father for treatment in 1850.[80] The book is little more than a pamphlet of 70 odd pages, written in a simple prose style that leans toward modernity if generally lacking in elegance, and still prone to a measure of *saj*^{c} and the inevitable interpolation of verse. The book begins with a description of his progress from Aleppo, to Iskenderun, Latakia, Tripoli, Jaffa, Alexandria, Cairo, and then back to Alexandria from which he boards a ship to Marseilles. His brief descriptions of the Arab cities he passes through ranges in tone from utter disgust at the

backward and degenerate state they are in (Iskenderun) to indifference (Jaffa) or mild appreciation (Beirut). It is only when he arrives in Alexandria that a note of excitement can be detected in his prose: 'Alexandria is a city making headway with regeneration, a city well on its way to expansion and grandeur, and can nearly be counted among the cities of Europe, which is why I have called her the crown of the East and gateway of the West… .'[81] He thus makes his aesthetic yardstick clear from the beginning: it is the degree of likeness to Europe.[82] In so doing, he was of course no different from the very ruler of Egypt at the time, Khedive Ismāᶜīl, who during Marrāsh's passage through Cairo and Alexandria had already embarked on his great project of modernisation in all spheres, aimed at 'turning Egypt into a piece of Europe', to cite the catchphrase attributed to him and often quoted by historians of the period.

As soon as Marrāsh sets foot in Europe at Marseilles, travelling through France with a stopover in Lyons before ending up in Paris, the language shifts from the revulsion or indifference of earlier to unadulterated adulation. Thus Marseilles is made of 'the gold of elegance, brocaded with the pearls of beauty, and is the very title of human happiness, and the opening chapter of the book of civilisation' (p. 21). And while Lyons is accorded similar high praise, it is Paris that really leaves the author out of breath with enchantment: 'Paris, the capital of the French, has in the present generation become the bride among all the cities of the earth; the very sun round which the rest of humanity orbits…'[83] (p. 28).

But Paris is not merely a static object of beauty, and its civilisation is by no means presented by Marrāsh as a miracle of heaven; it is very much the creation of ceaseless human effort: 'there, everyone is in a race for progress and success… there, everyone is running forward, moving, hurrying… in the knowledge that… slackness and stillness engender backwardness…' (p. 34). 'Slackness' and 'stillness' and their resultant 'backwardness' are of course implicitly attributed to the homeland, the demeaning description of whose environment the reader will have encountered only a few pages earlier in the book. Nor does Marrāsh let go of a chance to praise the achievements of Western civilisation while berating his own culture, as when he describes the gas-lit lamps that illumine Paris at night, whose burning flames, he writes, 'call upon the cold-spirited to enter into the sphere of civilisation…' (p. 35). Who he means by 'the cold-spirited' is hardly a matter for conjecture in the text.

As to how the French achieved their scientific wonders and high state of civilisation, there is no doubt in Marrāsh's mind: it is through reason. 'The deductive mind in those lands has used the laws of industry to conquer nature by its very weapons… ,' he writes. Nor does he hesitate to attribute to the progress of rational thinking 'all this amazing beauty and incredible perfection that this great city [i.e. Paris] has attained' (pp. 36–37). In his posthumously published, *Kitāb Mashhad al-Aḥwāl* (A Description of the State of Things, 1883), comparing East and West, Marrāsh writes that 'while the East sank deeper into darkness, the West embraced light… until Reason was enthroned…'. He then goes on to enumerate in stilted rhymed prose the many practical achievements of science that resulted from the rational perception of the world, and comes to the passionate conclusion that true

life existed only in the West.[84] Marrāsh seems also to establish a connection between reason and liberty; a connection by which the rule of reason is seen to be conducive to social and political liberty. These are ideas that he merely touches upon and only in vague rhetorical language. Thus he lauds scholars and scientists because thanks to them 'the realm of reason was lit… while that of falsity and lies was overturned; the throne of truth and true guidance was built; slavery was smitten into annihilation, while liberty rose to the summit of existence…' (pp. 46–47). This sonorous vagueness however can be compensated by recourse to his other works, especially *Ghābat al-Ḥaqq* (The Forest of Truth), where a full exposition of his utopian views of civilisation can be found.[85]

Marrāsh's account of Paris, and through it of Western civilisation, is nothing more than a bird's eye view. His state of health and failing eyesight probably did not allow him a chance to live life to the full in France, to get close enough to people, or to observe society in the way that al-Shidyāq did for instance. Nevertheless, he saw enough to impress him immeasurably and ignite in his soul a longing for a way of life and conditions of living unheard of in his own culture, where despotic Ottoman rule was in sway:

> How a man is drawn to those lands of unceasing song, inviolable security, unencumbered freedom, where life knows neither threat nor fear, and where faces never part with their smiles, where joy never leaves the heart, nor singing the mouth, and where good times know not of change, nor pleasures of eclipse!
>
> (p. 35)

Too idyllic a description for any place on earth no doubt, and certainly for a France which at the time of his visit was within three years of a major conflict with Bismarck's Germany followed by the turmoil of defeat in 1870, but this very idealisation of Western space can only be seen as a mark of the horrid reality of his own environment.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about Marrāsh's evocation of Western civilisation is not so much anything that he says, but rather something that he does not. By this I mean the fact that nowhere in his account do we feel that human reliance on reason alone presents him with a problem; the dichotomy of faith and reason that has plagued Arab intellectuals in their encounter with the West since the time of al-Jabartī seems lacking in the writings of non-Muslim exponents of the experience, such as Marrāsh, and before him al-Shidyāq.[86]

ᶜAlī Mubārak (1823–93), Egyptian educationalist, architect, engineer, army officer, town planner, politician and cabinet minister, who served in a multitude of capacities under several Khedives, like his older contemporary, Rifāᶜa al-Ṭahṭāwī, spent several years (1844–52)[87] as a student on one of Muḥammad ᶜAlī's educational missions to France. After elementary religious education in his village, Mubārak's intelligence and dedication to study brought him to the attention of the authorities and obtained him a place in the Military School

(*Madrasat al-Jihādiyya*) in Cairo, whence to the School of Engineering (*Al-Muhandiskhāna*), and then to Paris on graduation.[88] Of the many books authored by Mubārak, the one that concerns us here, is his long didactic, partly autobiographical narrative work[89], *ᶜAlam al-Dīn*, first published in 1882.[90] The novel (and the book can only be attributed to that genre with a stretch of the concept[91]) consists of 125 chapters or *musāmarāt* (conversations), as the author calls them, which take place between the eponymous protagonist, ᶜAlam al-Dīn and other characters, but above all with the Englishman. The influence of the *maqāmāt* genre with their episodic, plotless structure is clear, although, to Mubārak's credit, the style is modern, simple, focused on content and unadorned with figures of speech or the *saj*ᶜ rhyme. The influence of Ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ's (d. 760) *Kalīla wa Dimna* is also evident in the dialogue-based narrative and the occasional use of the technique of internal stories within the framework story to illustrate a point or advance a conversation.

In his introduction to the book, Mubārak states the instructive, encyclopaedic scope of the book with interests ranging from the 'religious sciences and the skills of manufacture, to the mysteries of creation and the wonders of land and sea; the stages of mankind ['s development] in ancient times and what he is like at the present time . . . all this given in the form of a journey made by a learned Egyptian *shaykh* [religious leader] called ᶜAlam al-Dīn and an Englishman . . . engaged in conversation to compare oriental with European conditions' (pp. 320–21). The Englishman (possibly modelled on the character of Mubārak's contemporary, if older, Englishman in Egypt, the Orientalist, Edward Lane (1801–76) who was in the country between 1833–35) is an Arabist in search of a learned native to employ as an assistant in editing and preparing for publication a manuscript of the *Lisān al-ᶜArab* lexicon. ᶜAlam al-Dīn comes forward for this job, and it is agreed that he and his son, Burhān al-Dīn, would accompany the Englishman (who is not given a name in the book) in his travels both in Egypt and abroad until the project is completed. In the event, most of the book, close in length to a thousand pages, is devoted to the description of the group's sojourn in France, particularly Paris. Or so it would seem as what is dedicated to the description of Paris and its people and landmarks is in fact marginal, considering that much of the narrative is used in digressions and interruptions of a historical, anecdotal, scientific, or geographical nature, etc.; an exercise that is an integral part of the amorphous structure of the book. The dichotomy between old and new, conservative and outreaching, is established from the beginning as is the liberal frame of mind of the protagonist, ᶜAlam al-Dīn, who can be safely assumed to be in large part a persona for the author.[92] ᶜAlam al-Dīn is reproached by some of his students for agreeing to work in the service of a 'man not of his faith' and to accompany him to his country, but he rebuffs their argument explaining that he would be helping the Englishman publish a book which would be of certain benefit to Muslims, and that instructing a man of a different faith may either lead him to Islam, or at least lead him to such understanding as would turn him into an apologist for Islam in his own country against its disparagers (pp. 369–72).

From the outset however and while they are still in Egypt, it is the Englishman who appears to be instructing ᶜAlam al-Dīn, and not the other way round; instruction being primarily in matters of modern civilisation, unfamiliar to him and his son.[93] *Musāmara* 7, for instance, which takes place on board the train carrying them from Cairo to Alexandria, is devoted to an explanation to ᶜAlam al-Dīn, who was travelling by train for the first time in his life, of the benefits of the invention of the locomotive, and how steam works as a source of power, while in *Musāmara* 11, we see him for the first time experiencing stay at a modern hotel in Alexandria which he at first mistakes for a great mansion of the powerful Englishman. When he learns the truth, he is impressed by foreigners, 'who know how to do everything well, even in their inns and hotels, unlike us who allow ours to be run down…' (p. 452). This early established pattern will be maintained throughout, with the Englishman consistently introducing to ᶜAlam al-Dīn and his son, aspects of modern civilisation and the scientific explanation of natural phenomena to counter his superstitious outlook on the world. By contrast what ᶜAlam al-Dīn has to offer his co-traveller is traditional philological or jurisprudent knowledge, much of it tinged with superstition. A good example of this occurs in *Musāmara* 18 when the Englishman questions ᶜAlam al-Dīn on the future of his son. ᶜAlam al-Dīn explains that he wishes for his son to master the Arabic language and its literature, and then go on to work in a profession connected with religion, like his father and grandfather before him. He explains to the Englishman that professions such as soldiery, engineering and medicine are 'worldly trades' unbecoming for a family thought to be of Prophetic descent. It falls to the Englishman to explain to ᶜAlam al-Dīn that 'virtue' is not a prerogative of any one group or profession, but is rather based on a human being's personal attainment; that a man 'is not measured by his origin and lineage but by good reason and manners'. It is obvious here that ᶜAlī Mubārak is using the Englishman to make his own case, as it was he who abandoned the traditional occupation of village *imam* that his father wanted for him to adopt a secular career in the service of the state (pp. 493–96). The question of tradition and modernity is pursued further in *Musāmara* 19, where the Englishman attributes the supremacy of Europe over the rest of the world, its welfare and freedom to 'science and the impulse to explore (*al-ᶜilm wa kathrat al-siyāḥa*), for if they had restricted themselves to ancient knowledge, and what their forbears knew in the days of ignorance, they would not have achieved any of that…' (pp. 538–39). More significantly, he tells ᶜAlam al-Dīn that there had been a time when Europeans 'occupied themselves with nothing but books of religion' and priests reigned supreme and persecuted those who disagreed with them, until science triumphed in the end (p. 539). The parallelism that Mubārak draws through the words of the Englishman between Europe's medieval past and Egypt's present in the nineteenth century is obvious despite the gallant defence of Islam's advocacy of knowledge that ᶜAlam al-Dīn makes in reply to the Englishman, who assures him that the thought had not crossed his mind that Islam was responsible for the regression of the Arabs (pp. 539–45).

Following his cautious method of using Westerners as mouthpieces for voicing sensitive criticism of the self, Mubārak employs an old French scholar, who was

in Napoleon's campaign on Egypt, in *Musāmara* 92 to denounce Egyptian scholasticism. The Frenchman lists some of the acts of modernisation, for example, creating the Qaṣr al-ᶜAynī Hospital, that the French introduced during their short stay in Egypt. He argues that if it were not for the French, the Egyptians would not have thought of that because they 'like the rest of orientals, only care for learning the Qur'ān and some religious matters at which they stop and go no further, . . . all of which arrests the mind and pre-empts the furthering of thought, especially as they dwell at the face value of the meanings of the Qur'ān . . . , which promise Heaven and warn of Hell, and call for the renunciation of the world and its pleasures . . . thereby leading to satisfaction with all manner of disaster, and neglect of ways conducive to the betterment of life . . . ,'[94] a cultural criticism already voiced, if in different terms, by an older contemporary of Mubārak, that is, Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq, as we have seen above. It is to be noted that while this sounds like a typical early specimen of an Orientalist view of the East, albeit written by an Oriental, rather than an Orientalist, the Frenchman's words are significantly left without refutation, which Mubārak could easily have done, had he wished, through his protagonist, ᶜAlam al-Dīn.

Despite ᶜAlam al-Dīn's openness, there are areas where he will cling to tradition without explicitly condemning Western ways, for example, the treatment of women. Thus when he sees Western women mixing with men on equal footing, showing learning and confidence and accorded respect in public places, he is impressed but on contemplating their status in relation to the Oriental woman, comes to the conclusion that the Orientals' customs are more commendable because they are more 'conducive to the preservation of honour . . .' (pp. 458–59). The issue, first touched upon in *Musāmara* 11, is revisited in *Musāmara* 27, after a visit by ᶜAlam al-Dīn's son to a theatre in Paris, where he is scandalised by the revealing dress of women and their free mingling with men. His father dismisses the matter as an irrelevancy and instructs him that every nation has its own customs and morals, and that they as passing visitors should not concern themselves with that, but watch out for what might be useful to transfer to their country 'of their conditions, manners, laws, architecture and the like' (pp. 622–23), a view that was to be echoed by many an Arab moderniser in subsequent generations and until the present day: the imperativeness of benefiting from Western civilisation while ensuring the avoidance of what is perceived as its social ills.

The issues which puzzled al-Ṭahṭāwī, al-Shidyāq[95] and Mubārak in the Arab East were reciprocated in the Arab West too, and specifically in Tunisia, which, on a smaller scale and probably inspired by Muḥammad ᶜAlī's experiment in Egypt, went through a short-lived experiment of modernisation after the European model during the reign of Aḥmad Bey (1837–55), and to a lesser extent under increasing foreign debt and European intervention during the reigns of his two successors until the French Protectorate: Muḥammad Bey (1855–59) and Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq Bey (1859–82). A product of, as well as a major contributor to, the process of modernisation was **Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī** (1820?[96]–89), reformer statesman and author, whose book *Aqwam al-Masālik fī Maᶜrifat Aḥwāl al-Mamālik* (The Surest Path to Knowledge concerning the Condition of Countries),

first published in 1867, is now counted among the early landmarks of liberal political thought in the Arab world, a product of openness to the ways of the European other on a par with the work of an older contemporary, the product of Egypt's modernising experiment, Rifāᶜa al-Ṭahṭāwī, to whose famous *Takhlīṣ*, Khayr al-Dīn makes admiring reference in the introduction to his own book.[97] Khayr al-Dīn had an opportunity to put into practice some of his reformist ideas as Prime Minister (1873–77) under Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq Bey and in lesser if still influential capacities earlier under Aḥmad Bey and Muḥammad Bey.[98] He spent the years 1853–57 in France on a state mission, and later intermittently the years 1862–69 in a kind of self-exile.[99] The former period gave him first hand experience of Europe, but it was during the second period that he found the time, now largely free from state duties, to write his substantial descriptive tome of all the major powers of the Continent (20 altogether), including the Ottoman Empire. In all his accounts he maintained a consistent methodology covering the history, geography, political structure, military power, legal system, economy, local government to name but the principal entries. The book is a work of research, a kind of a meticulously amalgamated database on the Europe of the day, rather than a live account based on personal experience, as we have seen in al-Shidyāq's books discussed above for instance. In fact, even the relatively dry *Takhlīṣ* by al-Ṭahṭāwī appears more colourful and personal when compared with *Aqwam al-Masālik*. As such, it will hold little value today, but what is of enormous significance for our understanding of the beginnings of Westernisation in the Arab world, the beginnings of the encounter between the Arab intellectual and the West, is the fact that Khayr al-Dīn thought that the book would serve a purpose, satisfy a need; the fact that he believed that his fellow Arabs or Muslims needed to know all there was to be known about Europe and to learn from it. This belief he expounds and dwells on in his lengthy introduction to the book, which has sometimes been compared to the *Muqaddima* of another great Tunisian with renowned views on history and civilisation: Ibn Khaldūn.[100]

Like all his predecessors and contemporaries, with the exception perhaps of al-Shidyāq and Marrāsh, Khayr al-Dīn's perspective is Islamic. He wants to reach out to the other but is invariably at pains to reconcile his reformative intents to the primarily medieval religious context in which he and his culture lived at the time.[101] By way of justifying the writing of his book, he refers to the importance of understanding the European other in these terms: 'We can properly distinguish what is most suitable for us only by having knowledge of those outside our own group, and especially of those who surround and live close to us' (p. 71). He goes on to remind his reader that 'secular organisation is a firm foundation for supporting the religious system', and is not loath to express displeasure with religious scholars for their failure to observe the 'circumstances of time in the application of Law', and for being ignorant of both domestic and foreign events (p. 72). After reprimanding religious scholars for their being out of step with the times both at home and abroad, he declares that 'the purpose in mentioning how the European kingdoms attained their present strength and worldly power is that we may choose what is suitable to our own circumstances which at the same time

supports and is in accordance with our *Shari*ᶜ*a*' (p. 73). The reference to European power is understandable in the context of the day. Khayr al-Dīn was writing at a time when Tunisia was coming increasingly under threat from European powers, particularly France, meanwhile Algeria had already been colonised, Muḥammad ᶜAlī's Egypt defeated and the whole Ottoman Empire on the wane. Under such circumstances, wanting to know what had gone wrong with the self and how the other had gained supremacy, and how the self can emulate the other in order to 'restore what was taken from our hands' (p. 73) is no unusual pursuit. But it all has to happen 'in accordance with our *Sharī*ᶜ*a*'. And herein lies the great dichotomy with which all reformers and Westernisers have wrestled: how to acquire otherness while maintaining selfhood, how to become Western while remaining Oriental, how to become secular while staying religious. From the beginning they laboured under the illusion that Europe's attainments in civilisation were separable from its secularised worldview, and thought that they could reconcile opposites, modernising while maintain a religious outlook on the world.

Thus Khayr al-Dīn has no problem rebuking his fellow Muslims for 'their persistent opposition to the behaviour of others that is praiseworthy and in conformity with our Holy Law simply because they are possessed with the idea that all behaviour and organisations of non-Muslims must be renounced…'. He is also happy to impress on them that 'there is no reason to reject or ignore something which is correct and demonstrable simply because it comes from others…. Any one devoted to his religion should not be deterred from imitating the commendable actions related to worldly interests of one religiously misguided…' (pp. 74–75). The implication that the Europeans are 'religiously misguided' apart, Khayr al-Dīn's argument fits snugly in the category of rational human common sense. This however does not appear to endow it with sufficient legitimacy in his view to advance it to his suspicious readership; he feels the need to quote an incident from the life of the Prophet Muḥammad when he adopted in 627, on the advice of his follower Salmān the Persian, an Iranian war trick hitherto unknown in Arabia, namely the digging of a trench round Madinah to stall an attack by Quraysh. Similarly, when Khayr al-Dīn wants to stress the importance of implementing political reforms akin to those of Europe, he cannot stress the indispensability of such concepts as 'justice and liberty' to the reform process without simultaneously emphasising that both those concepts 'are sources in our own Holy Law' (p. 79) as if such essential human concepts needed legitimation from holy sources before their worth became recognised! Typically of a religiously based worldview, Khayr al-Dīn is keen to negate that the nations which achieved stability and progress due to 'their legal system which was based on just government' had done so 'because this was due to a divine grace (*baraka*) in the holy laws of the nations mentioned'. Far from it! This is a status that he reserves only for the Islamic nation. As for European nations, their laws were 'derived from reason based on due consideration to worldly authority'. Should these laws however be transferred to the Islamic world, as he would dearly wish, they would he seems to argue become even more effective than in their 'unbelieving' land of origin: 'If laws should also be endowed with divine grace and sanctity, as is the case with

our immaculate *sharīᶜa*, then their being violated would be even more likely to cause decline in this world, not to mention the punishment which would ensue in the next' (pp. 175–76). These are by no means solitary examples in the introduction but are symptomatic, not only of Khayr al-Dīn's writing, but of a religious world-view that characterised his age (and is anything but defunct even today), at worst, as in the case of his opponents, rejecting modernisation altogether as an act of infidelity, and at best, as in his own case and that of fellow reformers, embarking on the often impossible task of reconciling secularist thought systems with an Islamic outlook on the world. This dichotomy was aptly classified by a later Syrian litterateur and apologist for the reform of Islamic societies, the Druze Prince Shakīb Arslān (1869–1946) who classified Muslims responsible, in his view, for the backwardness of Islamic nations into two categories: *jāḥid* and *jāmid*, or the repudiators who see Islam as an impediment to progress and want the complete Westernisation of their societies, and the ultra-traditionalists who even deny the study of the natural sciences as a branch of knowledge belonging to the unbelievers.[102] From the time of Khayr al-Dīn to the present day, Arab reformers do not seem as yet to have hit upon the right middle course between the extremes of *jāḥid* and *jāmid*.

Whether this stance was Khayr al-Dīn's conviction, or his conscious method to promote foreign concepts to a suspicious and unprepared audience, or still a combination of both, one thing was certain: he knew as did all nineteenth-century Arab thinkers who came in contact with Europe that there was no other way for the Muslim nation but to follow the European model if it were to lift itself from the pit of backwardness. He chooses to put this realisation of his in words which he attributes to an unnamed 'leading European' in the latter part of his introduction:

> The torrent of European civilisation is overflowing the world. Nothing can face it without being destroyed by the strength of its unceasing current. Therefore kingdoms neighbouring Europe are in danger from this current unless they imitate it and follow the same course of secular *tanẓīmāt*. This can save them from drowning.
>
> (p. 136)

History was soon to prove that Khayr al-Dīn had been reading the signs right. Tunisia was to drown in his own lifetime in 1881, Egypt in the following year, and the rest of the region gradually thereafter: the 'kingdoms neighbouring Europe' were not quick enough to 'imitate it and follow the same course of secular *tanẓīmāt*'.

Muḥammad Bayram al-Khāmis al-Tūnisī (1840–89) was a Tunisian religious scholar of a family of learning who trained and taught at Al-Zaytūna Mosque in Tunis, and statesman and reformer who, among other capacities, headed the Endowments Department (entrusted to him by Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī[103]) and served as emissary for the Tunisian government before the French occupation in 1881. Al-Tūnisī published his five-volume account of his travels, *Ṣafwat al-Iᶜtibār bi-Mustawdaᶜ al-Amṣār wal-Aqṭār* (The Purest Consideration in the Location of

Countries) in Egypt, where he spent the last years of his life, in 1885–86 (vols 1–4 only; vol. 5 having been posthumously published in 1894).[104] *Ṣafwat al-Iʿtibār* follows in the by then established tradition of travelogue begun by al-Ṭahṭāwī and al-Shidyāq, to both of whom al-Tūnisī makes deferential, if brief, reference in his own book.[105] Much broader in scope, methodical, more-researched and documented in its coverage of the countries visited by its author than either al-Ṭahṭāwī's *Takhlīṣ* or al-Shidyāq's *Kashf al-Mukhabbā*, *Ṣafwat al-Iʿtibār*, remains largely a less penetrable text than his predecessors' including ʿAlī Mubārak's *ʿAlam al-Dīn*, to which he does not appear to make any reference, perhaps because Mubārak's book was published only in 1882, no more than three years before al-Tūnisī's own. By the impenetrability of the text I mean the detached neutrality of the author's descriptions of the European places visited, and the rarity of comparisons between self and other. What we have is a surgical description with a well-researched background of the history, geography, politics, manners and customs of the people, down to what they eat, the kind of houses they live in, what they wear, how they treat their women etc. but seldom does the prose show approval or disapproval, and seldom does it refer to the Arab/Muslim culture for comparison and contrast, or the expression of a preference.[106] His book is more akin in structure, content and methodology to his mentor's Khayr al-Dīn's *Aqwam al-Masālik* than to travellers from the Arab East. Where he differs from Khayr al-Dīn is in including accounts of the manners and customs of the peoples of the nations visited, although this is presented through detached description without any personal involvement. His journeys also are not restricted to Europe but this does not concern us here. It is worth noting that although he was an insider witness of events which led to the occupation of his country in 1881 by France and its declaration a French protectorate in 1883, there is but the thinnest expression of sentiment towards these events, especially where the French are concerned. On the contrary, there is much praise for the French debt commissioners who served in Tunisia in the years leading up to the Protectorate.[107] It is perhaps no wonder that during the last years of his life in Egypt (1884–89) where he published a newspaper by the title, *Al-Aʿlām* (1884–88), which met with little success, he was accused of adopting an editorial line that was little critical of the British occupation, then recently ensconced in 1882.[108]

His four visits to Europe, which occurred in the period 1875–81, were primarily for medical treatment, incorporating on occasion political missions.[109] During his tours he visited Italy, France and Britain among other European and non-European places. The religious vantage point of the author is established from the outset when he devotes the opening pages of his book to demonstrate through reference to *fatwa* sources that travel to 'the land of the non-Muslims' is religiously permissible.[110] This is further emphasised when al-Tūnisī names what he calls the geographers' division of the earth into five parts (Asia, Europe, Africa, America and Australia) and goes on to single Asia out for being 'the oldest in civilisation and the most populated', but most significantly and in a manner much reminiscent of al-Ṭahṭāwī's earlier classification of the world in terms of its proximity to Islam as we have seen, for being 'the noblest in meaning as the source of

Divine religions, the abode of prophets, and the very place from which the light of Muḥammad shone . . . Asia that contains Makkah, Al-Madinah and Jerusalem'.[111]

Elevated may be the status of Asia for otherworldly reasons in al-Tūnisī's view, but it is Europe that he goes to for cure of earthly ailments of the body, and Europe that he describes as the continent 'on which Fortune has smiled at the present time'. He then offers a quick survey of Europe's history from the dark ages through to the Greeks and Romans, the Middle Ages, arriving at the Renaissance which he refers to as a state of 'civilisation (*tamaddun*) unlike what had previously been known which began five hundred years ago and spread gradually until it reached in this age the highest degree of culture and knowledge, such that [Europeans] have attained supremacy over all parts of the earth'. Nor is he unaware of how Europe achieved her status. For he goes on to educate his reader in how it came to pass. He lists freedom from the restrictions of the Church on learning, revival of Greek and Latin learning, influence of Arab civilisation especially through Andalusia and earlier through the Crusades, and finally the invention of the printing press which made knowledge widely available as never before.[112] From freedom from the Church's monopoly on learning, he moves on to advance another reason for the supremacy of Europe: political freedom or democracy although understandably the word, which probably had not entered modern Arabic yet at the time, is not used. He talks of how Europe had moved gradually towards 'restricting the power of kings through consultation . . . and how government was exercised according to known laws . . . where both high and low were equal in personal rights . . .'. He stresses however that these changes took place through much bloodshed among despotic kings and their nations, but he equally points out that there were wise kings who learnt the lesson and granted those rights peacefully to their people. Finally, he makes the point that European nations which adopted the foregone reforms invariably 'began to progress and gain wealth due to the desistance of injustice, the bringer of ruin, and thus their conditions would improve, their population increase, their cities grow, their industries multiply, and learning and invention would spread and become more accurate until such kingdoms extended their power over those who failed to adopt their ways . . .'.[113] This is exactly where Muḥammad Bayram al-Tūnisī's text leaves it. He has described Europe's movement away from a religiously based worldview to a more secular one (without using these words), and her abandonment of despotic rule in favour of the rule of law, equality and the institution of personal freedoms; and he has also established in no equivocal terms the link between the attainment of progress, wealth and power on the one hand, and the installation of such a way life and government. Nowhere in the profuseness of his five tomes does he explicitly, as does al-Shidyāq for instance, put forward the idea that the conditions he attributes to Europe are sorely missing in the Arab/Muslim nations and that that is the reason for their backwardness and Europe's supremacy over them, and that the way to progress and achieve parity with the Europeans would be to adopt those systems that he so aptly describes. We have to read the sub-text, or perhaps assume a subtext of which even the author may not have been altogether aware, for he is anxious at the beginning of the above exposition to reiterate that Europe's glory in the present time is an example of 'earthly good fortune' or *al-bakht al-dunyawī*,[114]

thereby implying, one may be justified in arguing, that Muslim lands still enjoy some kind of a transcendental supremacy over Europe despite their national decadence: a kind of '*bakht ukhrawī*', if one may coin a phrase in the spirit of al-Tūnist's style. Nor does he seem aware of the contradiction he falls in when he argues that Europeans who abandon religion as irrational would follow Islam if its truths were revealed to them 'because of its conformity with reason and the clarity of its arguments'.[115] The dichotomy that bedevilled al-Ṭahṭāwī and Mubārak before him continues to rend apart al-Tūnisī's text if not its author, who throughout maintains a sense of detachment, a kind of clinical aloofness that finds no difficulty in reconciling opposites, in at once upholding tradition and subverting it by powerful, if unstated, arguments, almost unawares; perhaps unawares.

* * *

This then was the train of thought among Arab intellectuals during the nineteenth century. The Arab world was under despotic Ottoman rule, education was scholastic in nature, and at that a rare commodity. The basic tenets of the European Enlightenment, and the advance in science and industry that ensued from it had not reached the Arab world yet. The early Arab intellectuals who became aware of these realities looked up to Europe as the model to be emulated. They began the Arab quest for Europe in modern times. The spirit–matter opposition, which was to crop up in the colonial period, did not figure in their discourse, nor did they dwell on the difference in religion as a possible impediment to cultural emulation, inspite of their having normally taken care to argue the lack of any conflict between the tentets of Islam and the European model.

ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī gave us a record in his annals of the first brief but violent encounter between the West and the Arab East, a record that conveyed both the horror and the fascination, with the latter arguably being the dominant sentiment. By the time Rifāᶜa al-Ṭahṭāwī came to publish his *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz* in 1834 based on his study years in Paris, the horror had gone leaving no trace, and only fascination speaks out of his book, a sentiment still shared by al-Shidyāq in his *al-Sāq ᶜalā al-Sāq* of 1855, where the fascination continues, tempered only by occasional light-hearted social satire of the Europeans. A little over a decade later, Fransīs Marrāsh in his *Riḥlat Bārīs* in 1867 was head over heels in love with Paris and the civilisation that created it. Meanwhile, France had colonised Algeria in 1830 but the event almost passes unnoticed, even by al-Ṭahṭāwī who was still in Paris at the time of the invasion. But by the time Khayr al-Dīn published his *Aqwam al-Masālik*, also in 1867, European, especially French, designs on Tunisia were beginning to become manifest, not least through France's imposing presence in adjacent Algeria. Khayr al-Dīn's reformist ideas and whatever he was able to effect out of them as a statesman were but desperate, and in the event failed, measures to stem the advancing colonial tide at the time. By the time the next encounter book was published, al-Tūnisī's *Ṣafwat al-ᶜItibār* in 1885–86, not only Tunisia had fallen to the French but also Egypt to the British. For a while fascination was to recede giving way to horror and fear. In the words of Hisham Sharabi, 'More and more Europe was being viewed in terms of imperialism and less and less in terms of its cultural attributes.'[116]

2 The colonial period

Encounters under duress

By the end of the First World War, most Arab countries were under the rule of one European power or another, some having been in that condition much earlier, for example, Algeria in 1830, Tunisia in 1881, and Egypt in 1882. Europe, which at one time seemed to offer the paradigm to be emulated on the road from the Middle Ages to modernity, was now a power of oppression and exploitation, a hindrance to freedom and progress, a cause for despair. Europe was the Other, at once dreaded and desired. It was, however, a formidable Other; it could not be defeated by force; it could not be evicted from the land of the Self; its supremacy in science and industry, in government and social order, in production and military power, were all facts not to be denied. Indeed they were facts to be coveted for the Self, and for which the now feared and hated West, was also to be paradoxically admired. The Egyptian writer, Yūsuf Idrīs, was later, in the 1950s, to render this ambivalent sentiment vividly in the words of one his characters:[117]

> It was really a confusing situation, but that is the way it was. By nature, I was fond of every thing European (…). On our visits to Ismailia or Port Said, for instance, we noticed the European character of these cities and of the Canal Zone in general: bungalow-style houses with sloping roofs, stoves and chimneys; and of course the tidiness, calm and order. Order, so distasteful to us, becomes in their hands an art. The art of order: orderly eating, orderly warfare, orderly loving. It made me feel sad to see those things, and deep in my heart I wished that all of us could become like that white, complicated being with its ruddy face. But amazingly enough I never wanted to become European. I dreamt of possessing their wonderful inventiveness, cleanliness and sense of order, but possessing them myself as an Arab, for I was not prepared to have one single hair of my head changed. Sometimes, when taking part in demonstrations against the British occupation, I noticed to my surprise that I shouted our slogan 'Down with the English!' with as much rancour and disgust as I admired what I saw of them in Ismailia, Alexandria and Port Said…
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> * * *

If calls for caution in the emulation of Western civilisation were already being made in the pre-colonial period as we have seen in ᶜAlī Mubārak's views

expressed through his fictitious spokesman, ᶜAlam al-Dīn, they were only bound to grow louder in the colonial period when the 'ills' of the West came closer to home, and the antagonism to all things Western was a natural response to the culture of the coloniser. We can see early manifestations of this trend in Egytian writer and journalist's **Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī**'s (1858–1930) famous prototype novel, *Ḥadīth ᶜĪsā Ibn Hishām*, first serialised in *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq*, 1898–1900, with three additional articles/chapters published in 1902. *Ḥadīth* appeared in book form for the first time in 1907, although the last part of it which extends the scene of action from Cairo to Paris, known as '*al-riḥla al-thāniya*' (The Second Journey), had to wait until the fourth edition of *Ḥadīth*, published in 1927, to be included.[118]

The episodic narrative, written largely in the traditional ornate and rhymed prose style of the *maqāma* genre, if not quite given to linguistic abstruseness as its classical progenitors of al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī[119], amounts to a groundbreaking critique of the turn-of-the-century Egyptian society with a high sense of realistic representation, nonetheless striking with its immediacy and insight into human nature for its over-elaborate garb.[120] Foremost among al-Muwayliḥī's censures of his fellow countrymen is their blind and corrupting imitation of Westerners. In words which evoke al-Shidyāq's quoted above, al-Muwayliḥī rails at his fellow Egyptians through the mouthpiece of his character ᶜĪsā Ibn Hishām for their imitation of Westerners only in trivialities, false appearances and the indulgence of carnal pleasures: 'to put it briefly in this regard', says ᶜĪsā, 'an Egyptian in his adoption of Western civilisation is like a sieve that retains what is paltry and valueless, and lets through what is precious and beneficial'.[121] The Pasha of older more stable pre-colonial times, who has risen from the dead and is being given a tour of a modern increasingly Westernised Cairo that he had not known in his day, is all the time scandalised by what he sees, and on this occasion laments the state of moral limbo that Egyptians have landed themselves in, having 'given up the virtues of their old civilisation without adorning themselves with those of modern civilisation'.[122] A vivid example of Egyptian senseless adulation of Europeans as ridiculed by the author is given in the chapter of the wedding, where a simple uneducated *Ṣaᶜīdī* or Upper Egyptian who does not know a word of a foreign language takes immense pride in inviting to the wedding of his daughter some Western tourists, who are complete strangers to him, and seats them in the place of highest honour showing them exaggerated signs of veneration and servility, and elevating them above all class of local dignitaries and relatives.[123]

The views embodied in *Ḥadīth* are to be found in much of al-Muwayliḥī's journalistic articles published at around the same time in *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq*, the newspaper founded by his father, Ibrāhīm al-Muwayliḥī, and himself. In one article he enjoins Orientals not to imagine that Westerners are 'of such perfection that they should be followed and copied in every manner and custom . . . nor should we imagine ourselves so defective in measure to their perfection . . .'.[124] In another he tries to demystify Orientals from their belief that 'the West is Heaven on earth . . . and that every one of its cities is Plato's very Utopia . . .'.[125] But he argues in a line of thought that heralds Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's later disparaging ideas about

the West's materialism, that the West's only advantage over the East is its industry and mechanical tools.[126]

However much the Europeans may be resented in the text for their scorn of Orientals, as is the Egyptians' sense of inferiority before them, ᶜĪsā Ibn Hishām's own admiration of Westerners is not in short supply in the text even if reluctantly expressed. What matters from the author's point of view is that it is admiration for the right reasons, those being knowledge, strength, science and inventiveness among other qualities. In one chapter, Europeans are described almost grudgingly as the jinn or 'devils' of the human kind, and their scientific achievements are rendered in miraculous terms as if from the viewpoint of a primitive man: '. . . they fly in the sky, walk on water, penetrate mountains, . . . turn hills into plains, deserts into seas, and seas into vapour . . . they make those in the east hear the voices of those in the west, bring down to your vision the remotest planets, and magnify in your eye the tiniest of insects . . . .' But understandably from the viewpoint of a nationalist whose country had relatively recently at the time fallen under British occupation, Europeans were reviled for using their superiority for less than moral ends: 'They use their knowledge and intellect to occupy countries and appropriate lands, to fight people out of the resources of their livelihoods . . . they are bringers of destruction, worse to people in peace time than armies are at times of war.'[127]

Eventually, the resurrected Pasha, so baffled by the manifestations of Western civilisation he witnesses in distorted fashion in Egypt, he expresses a wish to experience it at first hand in its own land, which leads in the structure of the book to the aforementioned '*al-riḥla al-thāniya*' or the Second Journey, the first journey presumably being the Pasha's tour of modern Cairo following his return from death. The journey is to Paris[128] but is largely a disappointing development in the book.[129] What potentially could have been an opportunity for al-Muwaylīḥī to follow in the footsteps of former great visitors and describers of Paris from an Oriental angle, such as al-Ṭahṭāwī, al-Shidyāq, and ᶜAlī Mubārak, is reduced in length to a fraction of the *Ḥadīth* and in content to little more than a description of the 1900 Paris Exhibition[130], written primarily for the benefit of the readers of the Muwayliḥīs' newspaper *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq*, and utilising the characters of *Ḥadīth* as simply carriers for the report.[131] The disappointment with the al-Muwayliḥī's Parisian account is perhaps best recorded by a fellow traveller to the city and better exponent of Western civilisation, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, whose work on the subject will be examined in detail below. Al-Ḥakīm writes:

> Take a writer like al-Muwayliḥī – he goes to Europe like many of the writers of his generation but you will be hard put to spot in his or their work any evidence of knowledge or appreciation of European culture [literally 'arts']. I wonder! Did they walk there with their eyes bandaged, unable to see or hear? What is it that blinded them to the culture '*ādāb*' of those living nations which cried out loud to them from the windows of bookshops . . . .[132]

Even so, the Second Journey ends, and with it the whole book, on a significant note. It is as if conscious of his scathing anti-Western invective in much of the

book, al-Muwayliḥī wanted to make sure he was not misunderstood by his readers. He wanted to end the book on a note which gave Western civilisation what is its due, and anything but turned modern Egyptians away from it. The closing words are given to a French Orientalist wih whom the travellers had become friends and who acted as their guide during their visit of the Paris Exhibition. He is a wise enlightened man well-disposed towards Orientals and their culture, and not intolerant of their criticisms of the negative aspects of European civilisation, but he instructs them that Western civilisation, despite its shortcomings, has many virtues: 'Do not deny it what is its due! Do not belittle it! But take of it, ye Orientals, what is good and suitable for you, and leave what is harmful and contradicts your nature! Benefit from its great industries, and magnificent machinery, and use that as a force to repel . . . the greed of colonialists! Transport the virtues of the West to the East, but hold on to your good morals and customs! . . . .'[133] This of course is no Frenchman's counsel to Egyptians and Orientals in general but al-Muwayliḥī's very own, and that of countless Arab intellectuals to their nation to date. The notion that Western civilisation is an indivisible package, a historical process that produced its virtues together with its ills even for its own peoples, and that it is therefore available to borrowers and emulators only as such, is one that has eluded a majority of Arab thinkers from the earliest days of the encounter with the West, and continues to do so today in large domains of Arab thinking.

Comtemporary of al-Muwaylīḥī, **Jūrjī Zaydān** (1861–1914), Lebanese novelist, historian, journalist and publisher, who settled in Egypt, made a short summer journey to Europe in 1912, an account of which is recorded in his *Riḥla ilā ʾŪrūbbā* (A Journey to Europe). During the tour he visits a number of cities in France, Britain and Switzerland. He declares his intention at the outset of the book to be the contemplation of 'what concerns readers in Arabic about the ways of that [Western] civilisation that we have started to emulate a whole century ago, yet continue to puzzle over what is suitable for us of it. I shall limit myself to what is of interest to the oriental reader in view of his need to challenge the civilisation of those Westerners in the course of the current awakening. I shall also show what is praiseworthy or otherwise of the facets of that civilisation in relation to our nature, customs and morals.'[134] These may have been Zaydān's noble aims but in his slim account based on a short European tour, he achieves very little of them, and ends up with a largely lifeless descriptive inventory of the museums, monuments, libraries, educational institutions and suchlike features of Paris and London in the main. There is some description of the systems of government in France and Britain, but his accounts neither match the detail of al-Ṭahṭāwī, nor the liveliness of his own fellow countryman al-Shidyāq, nor still the perceptiveness of either; much of the book actually appears based on material drawn from printed sources rather than firsthand experience. The comparative element of East and West is rarely present, and some reactionary viewpoints are voiced in the course of the description and commentary which show if anything the residual conservatism even among Arab modernising intellectuals, among whom Zaydān

doubtlessly is to be counted. An example of this occurs in the course of his comment on the 'common classes' (*al-ʿāmma*) in France, whom he places in matters of education and engagement with public affairs far above their counterpart classes in the East. He goes on however to claim that the freedom that the French commonalty had attained while it safeguarded their rights actually harmed them and the nation in other ways. He attributes this to the 'limited intelligence' of the commons, their emotionalism, and addiction to alcohol among other shortcomings, and comes to the conclusion that real influence rested with the ruling classes (*al-khāṣṣa*) because 'they are stronger intellectually', more resourceful, and capable of manipulating the commons.[135]

Jūrjī Zaydān's conservatism shows at its most extreme, as is common among modernisers of his and indeed later generations, when the issue is that of female emancipation and sexual mores. After describing the emancipation of the European woman and the parity she has achieved with men, he goes on to comment wistfully, 'We used to protest at the ignorance and veiling of the oriental woman, and envy the European woman for her education and freedom. Now that we have seen the latter in Paris, one has almost reverted to being content with the ignorance and the veil; they [the Europeans] have harmed that gentle creature with excessive freedom.' The harm he means is nothing but the sexual freedom resulting from women's work and engagement in public life, leading to prostitution. From there he proceeds to extend a bizarre advice to the Egyptian government and parents: not to send Egyptian youth to study in Paris to spare them the temptations of the Latin Quarter where institutions of learning and places of vice co-exist in each other's vicinity.[136] Finally and in a moralistic tone that calls to the mind by contrast al-Shidyāq's neutral and almost jovial description of the sexual mores of the French as we have seen above, Zaydān declares that the prime reason for sexual looseness in Paris is 'the emancipation of the woman, her equality with men, and her going out to work.' To this he adds the French government's legitimisation of prostitution (The British are praised by contrast for criminalising it[137].) and what he calls 'indifference about religion' (*al-futūr al-dīnī*).[138] Zaydān's reservations *vis á vis* the role of women under Western civilisation reach their peak in his comment on the suffragette movement in Britain. This is what he writes on the subject: 'Some women maniacs went so far as to demand the right to vote [in elections for] Parliament. They went to extremes in that and abandoned the role they were created for… But we trust that they will come back to their senses… The English woman was created to look after her home and family: if she turned away from that to the business of men, she would be turning away from her [true] nature.'[139]

While these views have to be considered in the context of their age, and while it would be unreasonable to expect an Arab thinker in the early years of the twentieth century to be more liberal than Europeans who still resisted such developments at the time, these reactions are nevertheless telling about the no-go areas for early Westernisers in the Arab world. As conservatism regarding female emancipation tends to be habitually associated with Islam, we will do well to remember that Jūrjī Zaydān was a Christian.

At the end of his report of his visit to France, Zaydān presents a summary of Dos and Don'ts in cultural borrowing from the West. Here it is:

> In the civilisation of France and that of other European parts, there are many virtues that we should borrow and benefit from, but it has also vices that should be avoided. The virtues that we will do well to borrow are:
>
> 1. recognition of duty; 2. punctuality and not wasting time; 3. refinement of the manners of the commonalty through true education; 4. the education and edification of woman; 5. the promotion of education and expansion of the [study of] letters; 6. hard work.
>
> As for the faults of that civilisation, the most important to remember of those are:
>
> 1. Excess of freedom and using it wrongly; 2. whatever contradicts oriental decency, notwithstanding the adoption of a measure of knowledge and education that is suitable for our customs; 3. indifference to religion . . . for that is the cornerstone of ruin.[140]

This simple list of injunctions and prohibitions, very much in the manner of a teacher's instructions to pupils, is not without significance in its own way, although it does seem like a meagre harvest to bring back home from a tour of Europe by a major figure of letters. The 'dos' are very straightforward; they are essentials for social and economic progress and cannot possibly come in conflict with the givens of religion or sound tradition. As for the 'don'ts', they seem to be designed as curbs for the dos. No.1 is there to put a brake on no.3 since the author is suspicious of too much political freedom for the ordinary people. No.2 on the other hand checks no.4 to control the emancipation of woman, while no.3 is there as an overall curb on both the commons and women of nos 3 and 4. It is a very curtailed and tamed version of Western civilisation that Jūrjī Zaydān wanted for his people.

With the Egyptian **Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal** (1888–1956), politician, journalist, biographer and novelist, we make a qualitative move. I have so far discussed intellectuals either from the pre-colonial period, or ones who straddled both periods. With Haykal's account of his experience of the West, we are beginning to deal with a new generation, who were born and grew up under European occupation, who received for the most part secular education at home, often extended to higher study in Europe. This generation, as we shall see, will be torn between two gravities: that of their intellectual embracement of European values on the one hand, and of their nationalist rejection of Europe as an occupying force, on the other. The ambivalence will be reflected in their creations in a multiplicity of ways and with varying intensity, as will be shown. Just as he has been credited with authoring the first novel of literary merit in Arabic, namely *Zaynab* (1912), Haykal, indubitably one of the founding fathers of twentieth-century modernity in Egypt, may claim also the honours of writing the earliest account by a member of that generation, of the encounter with Europe, namely *Mudhakkirāt*

al-Shabāb (The Diaries of a Young Man) written during the years 1909–12 when he was conducting his doctoral studies in law in France.

The Diaries were published posthumously only in 1996 to coincide with an international conference in Cairo to mark the fortieth anniversary of his death. Haykal's *Mudhakkirāt* are extremely important for the insight they give into an Egyptian intellectual's view of the West. Their importance is enhanced by their immediacy and candidness. They were written by a young man, only 21 years old when he arrived in Paris for the first time in 1909, and as such are the product of a fairly inexperienced and receptive, though questioning, consciousness. On the other hand, the diaries having not been intended for publication meant that no self-censorship was exercised by the author at the time of writing at least.[141]

Some Egyptian concepts of the West, which were to linger for a long time can be found in these diaries of the early twentieth century. The young author's attitude to what he observes, contemplates and experiences, and his report of it, varies in substance; sometimes never more than shallow and reflective of preconceived notions, at others perceptive and original.

Writing some six weeks after arrival in Paris, he is horrified, in a way reminiscent of the later Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm in *ʿUṣfūr min al-Sharq*, at the supremacy of 'material gain' in the moral scales of Westerners. Unlike Orientals, who despise this world and have their eyes on the next, the French are a nation, who only know this world and trust nothing beyond.[142] When you read on however, what you sense is not criticism of this attitude, but rather an admiration for the way it manifests itself in the love of life and the determination to enjoy it fully.

Haykal's early exposure to secularist thought, which questions the sanctity of all religious beliefs, leaves him intellectually dazed and saddened at the loss of innocence, but in no doubt as to the necessity of reform in the East: 'I am inclined to the view . . . that reform is necessary, especially in the face of this European materialist civilisation, sweeping the world . . . . But which way to reform, this I cannot be clear of at present'.[143] Further on in the diaries, however, he sounds a little more certain of what he wants for his nation. In the entry for 19 January 1911, he restates his admiration of Western civilisation in spite of 'what is in it of corruption and evil'.[144] He wishes there was a way to attain its power without its decadence, but has no hesitation in advising every nation unable to achieve that, 'to daub Western civilisation with its own colours and take it unto itself'. This naive dream of having one's cake and eating it, of acquiring the virtues of Western civilisation, while magically avoiding their attendant evils, is one that both predates Haykal and the colonial period, and that continues to haunt the Eastern dream of progress until the present.

After a visit to the Luxembourg Museums, he records in his diary his admiration of the paintings and statues he saw there, in the making of which imagination is used to render both the mental states and the physical beauty of the human being. 'Those representations in their diversity and the freedom with which they are created', he argues, 'show Europeans to be emancipated from many restrictions that the Eastern soul remains fettered with in the name of virtue and modesty'. The freedom which characterises artistic expression, he observes, is the West's model

in all walks of life. He comes to the sweeping conclusion that 'a free spirit is capable of anything, even miracles'.[145] As he sees more of Europe, his infatuation with the manifestations of its civilisation grows deeper and deeper. After visiting London, he writes, 'When shall we have in the East a city like London or Paris?'[146] He is equally appreciative of European men and women. In a line of argument not unlike that of his predecessor, al-Shidyāq, he writes that a European man, whether he is 30, 50, 60 years of age or over, remains full of energy and the *joi de vivre*. He plays sports, partakes of the pleasures of life and finds the time for all its activities. By contrast, the Eastern culture expects its men to be old in their youth and to assume the poise, dignity and solemnity of advanced years when they are 25.[147] The Eastern woman fares no better either in his scale of comparisons. He observes French women studying with him at the Sorbonne, and laments the fate of Egyptian women, who, he argues, 'if they could go out into the living world and mix with men and experience life, would doubtless create a character for themselves . . .'.[148]

In essence, Haykal's European diary reads as a homage to Europe and an elegy of the East. In this it was to prove less self-deluding than the work of some of his contemporaries or near-contemporaries, such as al-Ḥakīm, as we shall soon see.

Like al-Ṭahṭāwī, **Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm** (1898–1987) made the journey to Europe for educational purposes. Having graduated with a mediocre degree in law from the Egyptian University (now Cairo University), he stood no chance of joining the judiciary service. On the other hand, he showed no interest in setting up as a lawyer. It was then that his father decided to send him at his own expense to France to read for a PhD degree in Law in the hope that on his return, he would be offered a post in the University. Al-Ḥakīm travelled to Paris in July 1925, where he stayed for just over three years, returning to Egypt finally in November 1928 without a doctoral degree: the budding artist in him was lured away from the pursuit of his legal studies by the broader encounter with the Western culture.[149] During the 1930s and 1940s al-Ḥakīm occasionally spent his summer holidays in France mainly and sometimes in other parts of Western Europe. In 1959, then in his early sixties, he was appointed by the Egyptian government to the prestigious post of permanent representative at the UNESCO in Paris.[150] Ironically, the young man who pleaded without avail with his father in a letter written from Paris in 1928 to agree to finance his stay there for a little longer,[151] was in his old age willing to relinquish his post at the UNESCO after only one year and return to Cairo.

The three years he spent in Paris in the 1920s as an impressionable young man in his twenties were crucial in forming his consciousness as a young artist and reconciling him to a career in writing for the theatre at a time when society's esteem rested with other professions. The encounter with Europe was to lead to unending probing of the self and the other in his journalistic writings in the 1930s and 1940s, now scattered in numerous collections of essays.

Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *ʿUṣfūr min al-Sharq* (translated *Bird of the East*)[152], first published in 1938,[153] can be said to have, to all intents and purposes, introduced

the theme of the Western encounter in Arabic fiction: to subsequent writers on the subject it was always to represent in one way or another a point of departure.[154] Its protagonist, Muḥsin, like his namesake in al-Ḥakīm's earlier novel, *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ*, is admittedly a persona for the author,[155] while events, characters and relationships appear to be modelled in large part on al-Ḥakīm's own experience in Paris during his stay there in the 1920s. The parallelism between the author's life and the novel should, if anything, lend more conviction to the ideas propagated in it. The axial idea in *ᶜUsfūr* is that the West is materially powerful but spiritually hollow, whereas the East, materially weak and at the mercy of the West, is the true abode of the spirit and the source of light for humanity since time immemorial.

The novel prepares us for its main anti-Western thrust as early as chapter one, when Muḥsin is taken unexpectedly by André, the son of his landlady, to attend a funeral at the church of Saint Germain. After the event, Muḥsin reproaches André for not having given him notice so that he could 'prepare himself' for the church visit. The Frenchman cannot see the point: 'We enter [a church] as we enter a café. What is the difference? Both are public places . . . .' For Muḥsin the issue is more serious than that. The church is where 'heaven' lies, and 'it is not easy for the soul to climb at short notice . . .' (p. 21). The battle lines are thus drawn between what are represented as diametrically opposed attitudes to matters of the spirit. Muḥsin's description of his first visit to the Paris Opera, also a 'church' or temple for the worship of art in al-Ḥakīm's terms, further emphasises the difference in attitude. The young man is stunned by the sheer magnificence surrounding him, and finds in it the 'concrete meaning of the great Western civilisation, which spread its wings over the world'. The opulence and extravagance are reviled by the author and the majority of the opera-goers are dismissed as paraders of wealth, rather than 'seekers of the joy of purification and humility in the presence of art; the joy of finding one's soul and becoming human again through music' (p. 30). Europeans, having been shown as false worshippers in the temples of God and Apollo alike, another moral mainstay of society is soon shown to be in retreat too, namely the family. With the hegemony of industrialisation and both men and women working in factories after the First World War, no one is left at home to look after young children and a new 'age of slavery is ushered', as indicated by a conversation among members of Muḥsin's host family (p. 43). The least familiarity with al-Ḥakīm's social thought will show that what he is doing here is simply transposing his well-known conservative ideas about women's employment, which won him the title of 'the misogynist' in Egypt, to a French context. By implication he is saying let us not travel down this European road if we do not want to reach to this end.

The main exposition of the East–West dichotomy, however, is introduced through Muḥsin's encounter with the Russian worker, Ivan. If we are to believe al-Ḥakīm's account in the epistolary *Zahrat al-ᶜUmr* (The Prime of Life), published in 1943, Ivan is based on a true character by the same name, met by the author in the 1920s Paris. In one of his letters to André he refers to his friend 'Ivan, the rebel Russian'.[156] In another letter he refers to him as the late Ivan, 'that Russian, who bolstered my faith in myself and the East . . .'.[157] Whatever basis

Ivan may have had in reality, it is difficult to imagine that al-Ḥakīm's portrayal of him bore much resemblance to it. This poor, consumptive Russian worker, in exile in Paris, who reads Marx's *Das Kapital* over lunch in a noisy proletarian restaurant, who speaks with authority on the political ideologies of the day, and offers learned insights into the religions of the world and their historical development, and who makes sweeping references, in a deathbed lecture, to authors and works as varied as Adam Smith, Aldous Huxley, and Jean Cocteau, in addition to the Bible and the Qur'ān, is probably as bad an example as one is likely to find of authorial abuse of character as mouthpiece for dogma. This character has no function in the novel but to be used to denounce Western civilisation in heavy-laden conversations with Muḥsin.[158] Writing in the 1930s, al-Ḥakīm may have thought it would lend his argument more power for such a denunciation to come from a renegade Bolshevist, that is, a representative of Western materialism *in extremis* by the criteria of the day.[159]

Ivan classifies religions into two categories, those of Heaven and those of the earth. The East contributed the first, the West the second. The spirit of Christianity as it emanated from the East was 'love and idealism, that of Islam faith and order'. What has the West offered by comparison? Its modern version of Christianity is Marxism, which preaches the founding of the kingdom of one class over the remains of another, while its equivalent of Islam has been fascism, which supplanted faith in God with that in the 'leader' and imposed order through terror (pp. 88–91). Ivan expresses his scorn for Western science and its discoveries and inventions when compared with the 'greatest discovery of the east', that is, heaven (p. 106). Europe's modern science, 'its only boast throughout history', is nothing in practical terms but 'toys of tin and glass, which have given people some comfort in their daily life, but drew humanity backwards, and robbed it of its true nature, its poetry and purity of soul…' (p. 175). Science is of two kinds 'exoteric' (*ẓāhir*) and 'esoteric' (*khafī*). Europe's field is exoteric science alone; the science that uses the senses to discover the characteristics of nature. But this, of course, is science that can only probe the 'superficial phenomena of life'. The true science is esoteric science, with which 'the civilisations of Africa and Asia had truly reached the pinnacles of human knowledge'. As for modern Europe, she is no more than 'a child, still playing at the feet of that science' (pp. 190–91). The Russian who literally uses his last breath to deliver his feverish condemnation of Western civilisation, has one symbolic wish on his deathbed, which is to travel to 'the source, the spring [i.e. the East]…'. His last words to Muḥsin, on which the novel ends, consist of an exhortation to go back himself and carry his memory with him (pp. 192–95).

These are the basic ideas of the book as directly expressed through the conversations between Muḥsin, who is mostly a passive listener, and his Russian friend. But *ʿUṣfūr* is of course a novel with a love story, which is put in the service of the ideas. The story line is very simple. The protagonist, Muḥsin, falls in love with the ticket office girl at the Odeon. The girl appears to reciprocate his feelings, but after two blissful weeks, she dumps him suddenly and cruelly. It transpires that she was in love with her theatre manager and that Muḥsin was

simply used to arouse the jealousy of her real lover. Where this story ties in with the flagrant polemic of the above conversations is in the fact that Muḥsin and the French girl, Suzie Dupont, as she is called, are portrayed in such a way as to be seen as representatives of their respective cultures.

According to al-Ḥakīm, Suzie's character and the basic situation between her and Muḥsin are based on a true relationship he had with a French girl by the name Emma Durand during his study years in Paris. He concedes in interviews that it was genuine love which was consummated physically: 'it was my first experience of the perfect love; that which encompasses both the heart and the body'. He also admits that the ticket office girl portrayed in *ᶜUṣfūr* was the inspiration behind the novel.[160] In *Zahrat al-ᶜUmr*, where many of his Parisian memories are recalled in his letters to André, there are numerous references to Emma Durand and to events and locations in *ᶜUṣfūr*.[161] What we must remember is that although *Zahrat al-ᶜUmr* was published some five years after the novel, the letters, written by al-Ḥakīm in French and later rendered in Arabic, in fact predate the novel, having been written, as the author says in the introduction, partly during his stay in France and partly after his final return to Egypt. It was on a later visit to France in 1936, he tells us, that he collected the letters from his friend André and decided to rewrite them in Arabic and publish them.[162]

Muḥsin is portrayed as a dreamer, not a realist; a watcher, not a doer. In his portrayal of him, al-Ḥakīm gives Muḥsin absent-minded, thought-absorbed, otherworldly airs. In doing so he serves simultaneously two purposes: first, adhering to the presentation of a character that is a persona for himself in a manner subscribing to the romantic perception of the artist as someone not of this world, an image he has nurtured in all his writings; second, endorsing the commonly perceived image in the West of Orientals as passive dreamers, cut off from the world of reality, action and enterprise. Muḥsin does not know how to court the ticket office girl. He simply sits for hours every day at a café watching her and doing nothing about it.[163] His friend André and his wife Germaine describe him as a 'dreamer' (*khayālī*), given to 'too much imagination'. 'A woman', they tell him, 'cannot be won by imagination, but by reality' (p. 48). On being urged to speak to the girl, he sees no point as he is certain she is in love with another man. Asked about the source of his knowledge, he has one word in reply: 'intuition' (p. 62). His French friends, needless to say, are driven to despair at this intuitive approach to palpable, ascertainable reality. Later on in the novel, al-Ḥakīm uses the Russian worker Ivan, in one of the many forced conversations of the book, to dismiss 'reality' in favour of 'imagination' as a worldview. Muḥsin, who appears momentarily to have learnt the European lesson, argues that human misery is due to 'ignorance of reality and its direct methods', and that 'nothing in life is gained by imagination'. The Russian immediately recognises this as a culturally foreign notion to Muḥsin: 'Who taught you that, Oriental?' he asks before breaking into a long speech in praise of imagination and the ability to dream as the only quality distinguishing man from animals, which are confined to the world of reality and matter (p. 104).

When Muḥsin finally musters his courage and takes action, the short-lived relationship that develops is one, as befits their symbolic cultural roles, in which

the girl has absolute power over the youth. Initiative is always with her, and although al-Ḥakīm does not indulge in description of the physical side of the relationship, it is interesting that it is the girl who first kisses Muḥsin[164] after he confesses his love to her through the medium of a poem written by a Greek poet. The moment is described in epiphanic terms, which also serve well on the cultural level: 'Pity those dreamers when they are suddenly confronted with reality, before their imagination has had time to clad it in its adorned attire…' is al-Ḥakīm's authorial comment, describing Muḥsin's elated reaction to the physical consummation of the encounter (p. 124). When Suzie later dumps him humiliatingly and callously once he has served his purpose by restoring to her the attentions of the Frenchman she really loved,[165] his assessment of the experience is not totally negative. His train of thoughts goes like this: 'let it be enough that he had enjoyed a moment of that bliss of which he had been ignorant. Yes, this girl has uncovered for him a facet of paradise, of which his soul had been unaware…. Thanks to her he now knows what he had not known. She had given him the key to *heaven on earth*[166]…' (p. 142). The symbolism of this account, never really developed or made concrete by the author, whose subtlety and artistic skills belong more in the genre of the theatre, points to the woman (Europe) having brought to Muḥsin a new *knowledge*, and given him the key of *heaven on earth*. While on the story level, this may be reference to emotional and physical fulfilment, within the metaphorical framework of the book they will be references to the material pleasures and comforts offered by Western Science.

That al-Ḥakīm intended Suzie Dupont to stand for Europe and its values, and her treatment of Muḥsin for Europe's treatment of the East is not in doubt. Indeed, Europe is personified by Ivan, the Russian worker, as 'a beautiful but selfish blonde, whose only concern is the enslavement of others'. Ironically, this spoilt blonde is the progeny of the marriage of Asia and Africa (the East she later enslaved). But while, according to Ivan, Asia and Africa produced 'complete civilisations', equally at home with the two worlds of religion and applied science, their daughter has lost her soul to the latter at the hands of industrialisation and capitalism[167] (pp. 174–76). 'Today', he argues, 'the East has come to understand that his daughter is no more than a dissolute woman' (p. 180). The parallelism between these physical and moral attributes of personified Europe and those of the manipulative Suzie Dupont are obvious enough. Al-Ḥakīm is simply arguing by implication that Europe has treated the East as immorally and irresponsibly as Suzie has Muḥsin.

So, if Europe is so morally corrupt, is it the East then that holds the key to the salvation of humanity? This would seem to be the natural corollary that al-Ḥakīm might want to advance on the basis of all the above arguments, but according to Muḥsin that hope does not exist any more, as Europe has already imposed its cultural values on the East under its power. Superficial education, parliamentary democracy,[168] modern science and industrialisation are some of the European 'evils', listed by Muḥsin, which have taken root in the East. 'Today, the East no longer exists', argues Muḥsin. 'In its place is a jungle, on whose treetops are rowdy monkeys, aping the West without understanding' (pp. 193–94). This seems

to amount to nothing short of a lamentation of the influence that European culture has had on the East, and a tendency to view it in entirely negative terms.[169]

Although al-Ḥakīm's thoughts on Europe and the East found their major expression in *ᶜUṣfūr*, they can in fact be traced back to an earlier work, that is, his first novel *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ* (translated *The Return of the Spirit*[170]), written in Paris in 1927 though published only in 1933. An examination of *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ* from that angle will be a useful asset for a better understanding of the author's views on the subject. *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ*, one of the earliest accomplished specimens of the novel genre in Arabic, is a multi-layered work with, among others, a strong nationalist theme. Written not long after the 1919 Egyptian popular uprising against the British occupation and partly recreating some of its events, the novel is characterised by a strong nationalist sentiment, steeped in romantic idealism. The protagonist of the novel is the adolescent Muḥsin, whose development at a later stage of his life al-Ḥakīm was to follow in *ᶜUṣfūr*, both novels being largely autobiographical, as pointed out before. It will be sufficient for my purposes here to deal with one famous and much quoted scene in the novel, namely the long conversation between the French archaeologist, Monsieur Fouquet, and the British irrigation inspector, Mr Black, taking place after lunch in the lounge of Muḥsin's parents' house in the country. The conversation is to be found in chapter twenty-five of part two of the book.

In a manner that al-Ḥakīm was later to use again with equal clumsiness in his presentation of the character of the Russian worker in *ᶜUṣfūr*, he uses the character of the French archaeologist in *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ* as a mouthpiece for his romantic nationalist ideas about Egyptians and what distinguishes them from Europeans. Viewed artistically, the whole episode is forced on the novel. Neither the Frenchman nor the Englishman is part of the book. They are simply ushered in to have this conversation and ushered out not to be seen again at its end. Thematically, however, the episode gives al-Ḥakīm a chance to spell out in explicit polemic some of the notions he half utters in the novel. The conversation takes place as the Frenchman and the Englishman look out of the window and watch the peasants go back to work in the fields after the midday siesta. Mr Black has nothing but scorn for Egyptian peasants; they are ignorant and hardly distinguishable from their animals. But Monsieur Fouquet takes a different view of the matter; a view which Ivan of *ᶜUṣfūr* was to reiterate again in his denouncement of Europe's science, as falling short of the true knowledge of the East. The Frenchman rebukes Mr Black and tells him that the people he calls ignorant know many things, although their medium of knowledge is the heart, not the mind. 'This is an ancient people', he maintains. 'If you open the heart of one of these peasants, you will find in it the residue of ten thousand years of experience and knowledge, layer on top of layer, of which he is unaware.' By contrast, Europe only possesses 'acquired science', which ancient peoples regarded as accident, not substance; as only an outward pointer to the treasure within. 'All we Europeans did', argues Monsieur Fouquet, 'was to steal from those ancient peoples the outward pointer without the buried treasure'. (Compare the marriage of Asia and Africa which gave birth to the selfish blonde, Europe, in *ᶜUṣfūr* above!)

'If you open the heart of a European', continues Monsieur Fouquet, 'you will find it empty. The European lives by what he is taught . . . because he has no legacy, no past to fall back on unconsciously . . . . Europe's only strength is in the mind, that limited machine that we fuel ourselves. As for Egypt, its strength is in the heart, which is bottomless.'[171]

If we divert our attention awhile from al-Ḥakīm's fiction and turn to his polemical and recollective writings, mainly journalistic essays, published in the press in the 1930s and 1940s, more or less contemporaneously with the literary works discussed above, we will be in for a surprise. The polemicist's views seem to be in stark conflict with the artist's. Al-Ḥakīm's anti-Western invective expressed through the medium of his fiction, as shown above, gives way to open admiration of Western civilisation, an idealisation of the period he lived in France, and an invitation to his fellow countrymen to emulate that civilisation without reservation. The contradiction is of such magnitude that it throws into question the very seriousness of al-Ḥakīm as a writer. Before we look further into this perplexing issue, we should perhaps survey his views as voiced in his polemical writings.

In *Taḥta Shams al-Fikr* (Under the Sun of Thought) published in 1938, the same year as *ʿUṣfūr min al-Sharq*, he speaks surprisingly more reverently and more covetously of Western civilisation. Here he argues that 'Eastern culture' (*al-thaqāfa al-Sharqiyya*) must 'catch up with Western culture, which has added a great deal to what it has taken from early civilisations'. He holds that Eastern culture cannot close its eyes to the great wealth of European culture: 'Let us put out our hands [to it] unfettered by the chains of traditions, customs or beliefs! Let us take everything and digest everything!' What matters for al-Ḥakīm is that all this borrowing should be imprinted with the Eastern stamp, that is, assimilated and made the East's own, just as Europe did with what it took from other cultures (pp. 107–10). These views are reiterated in another article, titled '*Turāth al-Ḥaḍārāt*' (The Legacy of Civilisations), included in his anthology of essays, *Fann al-Adab* (The Art of Literature), published in 1952. Here he goes so far as to blame on the body of Medieval Muslim scholars what he calls the 'intellectual isolation' of present-day Arabic culture from that of Europe. He argues, with an obvious sense of regret, that had those scholars cared to transfer to Arabic all aspects of the Graeco-Roman culture, as they had done with Greek philosophy for instance, then 'something amazing would have happened: Arab culture today would have been the direct foundation of Western culture, . . . to which it would have added the spirit of the East'. In his article, al-Ḥakīm uses this 'historic mistake' as a warning for fellow countrymen to borrow comprehensively from Western civilisation and not to repeat the mistake of their Medieval forefathers.[172]

In another essay in the book, he goes on to compare the life ethos of the French with that of the Egyptians. His fellow countrymen lose outright in the comparison, which al-Ḥakīm writes in typical Orientalist terms; 'Orientalist' here meant in the sense lent it by Edward Said's *Orientalism*. They are lethargic time-wasters. They know neither real work nor real fun. 'Life in its great and full sense has yet to start in the Nile Valley', he maintains. 'All it knows now is that small life of

eating, drinking and cheap pleasure' (pp. 125–28). This low view of the quality of life in his country is emphasised in his plaintive letters to his French friend, André, after his return to Egypt, which is described as a moral desert to which André's letters carry 'the breeze of great Europe', and the 'fragrance of France'. His letters reflect the enormity of his sense of alienation upon his return to his homeland.[173] He speaks of 'murderous despair, constant longing [for Europe], and days that flow like cold tears…'. He tells André that the intellectual climate in Egypt, if one existed, was no longer fit for someone like him returned from Europe, that 'the friends of the past were no longer good enough for him. Their talk, their jokes, their pastimes turn me away from them'. 'Loneliness in its most perfect and cruellest sense,' he writes, 'is the one word to sum up my condition'. In another letter, he speaks of the shock of his first few months back in Egypt in terms of a spiritual death, and maintains that his intellect was in danger of 'dying out under the influence of the opium of the East'. His extreme sense of alienation at home is thrown in sharper relief by his sense of fellowship with Europeans: 'Just being in a concert hall [in Paris]…created between me and every Frenchman, Russian or German present an affinity akin to that of countryman with countryman.'[174] In yet another chapter of *Taḥta Shams al-Fikr*, al-Ḥakīm turns his anger to the Egyptian woman, who is downgraded in comparison with the European woman for lacking taste, the aesthetic sense, and therefore being also unable to pass on these important qualities to Egyptian children.[175] The art of painting in Egypt will flourish on the day the Egyptian woman cares to adorn the walls of her house with paintings. Likewise, literature will thrive, the day she begins to buy a copy of every new book by her favourite author. Only when the sensibility of the Egyptian woman changes, he contends, will Egypt be able to be ranked with civilised nations (pp. 197–201).

Further condemnations of the East in relation to the West can be found in another collection of short essays, titled *ʿAṣā al-Ḥakīm* (Al-Ḥakīm's Walking-Stick), written and published, according to the author, in 1946–51 before being collected in book form in 1954. In one of his dialogues with his walking-stick, al-Ḥakīm describes the East as a 'beggar', whose hand is always stretched out for the West's moral and material charity, and which will never have the respect of the West until it has some ideas of its own to offer it.[176]

These pro-Western views (in the cultural, not the political, sense) are no doubt more in line with al-Ḥakīm's overall standing in modern Arab thought as a pioneer of intellectual modernisation (practically a more self-respectful synonym for Westernisation in Arab writing), one of the generation of liberal, European-educated, Egyptian intellectuals, who exercised a tremendous modernising effect in Egypt through their writing, or the occupation of educational or governmental, executive office during the inter-war period. After all, this is Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm who fathered Arabic drama (and to a lesser extent Arabic fiction) through the emulation of Western models. This is Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm who felt so at home with Greek mythology and its modern reworkings in European theatre, that he went on to tackle in his own theatre themes attempted by as diverse writers as Jean Cocteau, George Bernard Shaw and Aristophanes.[177]

How then can we explain the ambivalence in his attitude, the apparent oscillation in his writings between acceptance of Western culture as a necessity for progress, and its rejection as a materialistic evil? This is a question that can only be answered in light of European colonisation of the East. Al-Ḥakīm was writing at a time when Egypt was under British rule, in common with most Asian and African nations, then dominated by one or other European power. The strong nationalist sentiment of a country struggling for independence, for the assertion of its own identity against an occupying super power with a different culture found an outlet for itself in the apotheosis of 'the spirit of the East' and the downgrading of the culture of the hostile other. In his *Culture & Imperialism*, Edward Said argues that such attitudes represent a strategy 'at work in what many national poets and men of letters say and write during independence or liberation struggles…'. He goes on to underline 'the mobilising power of the images and traditions brought forth, and their fictional, or at least romantically coloured, fantastic quality'.[178] Elsewhere in the book, Said distinguishes between what he calls 'primary resistance', that is, physically fighting outside intrusion, and 'ideological resistance', which is the second stage in the fight, when efforts are made to reconstitute a 'shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of the colonial system'.[179] It is within the framework of this anti-imperialistic discourse that we should understand how al-Ḥakīm came to cast modern Western culture as an upstart among the ancient civilisations of the East; its scientific discoveries and applied inventions being nothing but superficial adornments in human history, totally lacking in moral foundation, in wisdom. All the West gave humanity was materialism in the form of the warring political ideologies of capitalism, communism, and fascism, and when Western civilisation has destroyed itself through its lust for power and infinite greed, it will then have nothing to turn to but the ancient wisdom of the very East it despised:[180] the East shall inherit the earth. These must have been very comforting thoughts for a young intellectual, at once dazzled by the achievements of Western culture and affronted by its subjugation of his country. Indeed, it is not difficult to notice that whenever al-Ḥakīm is writing about the West in a nationalist context, a note of hostility and self-assertion can be heard, which otherwise would be absent. In one article, for instance, he ridicules the West for fussing over the political rights of the individual, while denying entire nations those rights.[181] In another article he argues, in the context of denouncing foreign schools in Egypt which neglect the teaching of Arabic, that 'independence from military occupation should be accompanied by independence from all forms of spiritual occupation that oppress our thinking and prevent us from realising our identity'.[182]

The nationalist cause apart, it must not be forgotten that at the time al-Ḥakīm was writing, Europe had recently come out of a world war and was preparing for another. He could be excused to think at the time that Western civilisation was living in moral vacuum and bent on self-destruction, and that it was in no position to save itself, let alone others. Indeed, this was the stance of many European thinkers then. In *ᶜUsfūr*, al-Ḥakīm uses the Russian worker to point out an example of European thinkers driven to despair by the moral impasse modern Europe

had reached. He quotes Jean Cocteau describing opium as the antidote of bewilderment and *angst*. Cocteau's condition is seen as a personification of Europe's: 'Jean Cocteau stands for the whole of Europe in its present crisis. Europe is finished, and nothing from inside her can save her.'[183]

However, it may be that my above defence of al-Ḥakīm, or rather attempt at explaining the ambivalence of his attitude towards Western culture, is largely redundant since he has personally rescinded his earlier views in an article which has received so little attention, that the majority of his readers and students of his work have nevertheless continued to believe that he stood fast by his youthful views.[184] The article bears the title '*Tabiᶜātunā naḥwa al-Shabāb*' (Our Responsibility towards Youth), first published in the weekly Cairene newspaper, *Akhbār al-Yawm*, on 28 May 1949, and later included in a collection of articles titled *Yaqẓat al-Fikr*, as late as 1986, only one year before the author's death, which may be why it has passed the notice of scholars.

Al-Ḥakīm's rescindment of his views, which comes only a little over a decade after the publication of *ᶜUṣfūr*, is given in the context of recognising the responsibility that he has as an author towards young people influenced by his writings. He observes that 'young people who travel to Western countries today to study . . . think and feel the way Muḥsin did in *ᶜUṣfūr min al-Sharq* a quarter of century earlier.' He states that like him their thought is dominated by the idea of the spirituality of the East and the materialism of the West, and that like the other Muḥsin of *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ*, they take pride in their cultural legacy, which goes back in history for thousands of years. However, rather than glory in the effect his ideas have had on young readers, he wonders whether he should not be now saying to youth: 'Do not exaggerate in sanctifying your past! Do not let the inferiority complex, which dominated Muḥsin dominate you, and make you over-protective towards your subjugated civilisation against the civilisations that wield the power! Drink courageously from every spring! Partake of every heritage in order to enrich your soul and broaden your horizon!' Al-Ḥakīm goes on to diagnose what he calls 'the harm in my old ideas', as causing young people to use their 'Eastern spirituality and the residue of their Egyptian civilisation as shields to isolate them from world thought . . .'. He admits the influence of the popular revolution of 1919 and the prevailing nationalist mood on those early works when he pleads with young people, 'not to think any longer with the mentality of Muḥsin; that was the mentality of a young man of the Egyptian Revolution and the national resurrection'. Instead, he urges them, 'to confront the world with a "humanistic"[185] mentality unhampered by bias of any form'.[186] In an even later account, he argues that it was incumbent on art and literature in those formative days for Egyptian nationalism to 'raise the morale of Egypt . . . and the Arab East . . . in front of the overpowering European civilisation'.[187]

Al-Ḥakīm has started with some very contentious tenets about East and West, making some very arrogant and complacent claims about his own culture while denigrating that of the West insupportably. His ideas were raising questions about their sincerity and the motives behind them even as they were being written. The author's profound regard for Western civilisation and his realisation of its

indispensability for his own are simultaneously present in his writings to the point of self-contradiction and eventual recantation, as we have seen. This ambivalence of attitude, this tense tug-of-war, this love–hate relationship is not idiosyncratic of al-Ḥakīm. It is perhaps symptomatic of the relationship between East and West since Napoleon landed in Egypt in 1798. And while expressions of this symptom will continue after al-Ḥakīm in the postcolonial period, I do not wish to make the claim that the East's perception of the West has been static. In history nothing is static. Changes in perceptions and attitudes will occur from generation to generation and in response to the changing historical, political and social conditions. We shall take note of these as we review the literature in subsequent parts of this book. For the moment, it will perhaps be appropriate to end this section with one of al-Ḥakīm's most direct and revealing statements on the central beliefs of his two novels discussed here. In an interview given in 1965, he says: 'The notion that the East was and still is spiritual only, and that the West was and still is materialistic only is one that overlooks the truth.'[188]

One of the staunchest denunciations of al-Ḥakīm's notions of the materialism of the West and the spirituality of the East came from a contemporary pro-Western Egyptian, ironically a close friend of al-Ḥakīm during their study years in Paris and later, namely **Ḥusayn Fawzī** (1900–88), ophthalmologist, oceanographer, traveller, educator, essayist and music critic. Fawzī wonders in his collections of essays *Sindbād ilā al-Gharb* (Sinbad in the West, 1967), without direct reference to al-Ḥakīm, whether there was any 'civilisation that did not manifest itself to the eye in a material image'. To his rhetorical question, he replies that 'at the core of the civilisations of east, west, north and south is a spiritual side represented in the thought of philosophers and scientists, and the inspiration of artists and men of letters, but that those civilisations manifest themselves mostly in their materialistic phenomena,'[189] an apology not unlike that proferred by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in his seminal book, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, as will be shown below.

His denial of the materialism of the West notwithstanding, Fawzī laments that it was that aspect, and that aspect alone, that Egypt appeared keen on adopting from Western civilisation. A tireless advocate of European civilisation all his life, Fawzī insists, in his *Sindbād Miṣrī* (An Egyptian Sinbad, 1969), a book in which he presents a personalised nationalist's view of Egyptian history from the earliest periods to his own day, that Western civilisation from the time of Muḥammad ᶜAlī onwards came to Egypt in its material form '*al-ḥaḍāra al-mādiyya*': 'Egypt did not develop intellectually in parallel to the structural upheavals "*inqlābāt ᶜumrāniyya*" brought about by Europe's civilisation since the time of Muḥammad ᶜAlī. These material images of the Western civilisation remained dominant, always striding ahead of the intellectual awareness of the country.'[190] In common with al-Shidyāq, a century earlier, who chided his Arab reader for buying from Europeans [material] goods but not learning, wisdom and the arts,[191] Fawzī maintains that a foreign civilisation can only 'bear its cultural fruit' if its material aspects bring along with them other aspects. He identifies the dilemma of his

generation of modernisers, who 'believed in Western civilisation as an intellectual, imaginative '*fannī*' and scientific whole, inseparable from its materialistic aspects', only to be vilified by 'the reactionaries' who, while content to utilise the West's 'material tools and facilities', did not hesitate to accuse modernisers of '. . . blind imitation and encroachment on tradition and nationalism'. Fawzī has no qualms diagnosing this 'acceptance of the material tools of civilisation . . . without its intellectual, imaginative, and spiritual basis', as an 'amazing condition of schizophrenia'.[192] In his memoirs, titled *Sindbād fī Riḥlat al-Ḥayāt* (Sinbad in Life's Journey, 1968) which covers, among other phases of his life, his study years in Paris (1925–31), Fawzī stresses again that when he arrived in Paris in 1925 (the same year as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm) he was already 'charged with the spirit of European civilisation . . . and convinced that the future of the fatherland was dependent on mastering its true constituents of thought, science, art and literature, and not only transposing its scientific applications and technology . . .'.[193] Steadfast to his views to the end, he declares in an interview given two years before his death that 'Western civilisation is the only source available to underdeveloped countries . . .'.[194] He also blames generations subsequent to his for falling short of that ideal and harking back to the Arab civilisation, which 'cannot be revived'. He looks on the liberal decades following the 1919 national uprising against the British as a period of true progress in Egypt as a result of embracing the values of Western civilisation, and regrets what he sees as a later retreat from that direction.[195] In this, his mournful words echo the last words of his older contemporary, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, quoted elsewhere in this book.[196]

At about the same time as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *Bird of the East* (1938), The Syrian **Shakīb al-Jābirī** (b. 1912) published his *Qadar Yalhū* (Fate at Play, 1939) in Damascus. Within the canon of Syrian fiction, the novel is of historical value, as is generally the work of al-Jābirī, who is regarded by some as representing the beginning of serious fiction in Syria,[197] while others deny him even that status.[198] The novel, influenced by European romanticism,[199] and autobiographical in large part, its protagonist/narrator being a student in Germany as was the author, is plagued by a weakly structured plot, flat characterisation, flowery style, as well as thematic incoherence.[200] Apart from the hyper sensibility of the protagonist, ᶜAlāᵓ, typical of romantic heroes, there are all the hallmarks of a romantic novel of suffering, from a love story between a well-to-do man and a poor girl driven to a life of near vice because of her poverty, to an illegitimate child denied by the father, to chance encounter of the lovers after tragic loss of child and many years of separation, and finally a realisation by the lover of the true worth of the woman but only when it was too late as she dies in his arms of tuberculosis, holding fast to her love to the end. Normally, the two lovers need not be of different cultures, which would have left this novel out of the scope of this book, but al-Jābirī makes his hero a Syrian, his beloved a German, and sets the action partly in Berlin, partly in Beirut. However, location and nationality would not alone have endowed this novel with a cross-cultural interest. Indeed, al-Jābirī's earlier novel, *Naham* (Greed, 1937) is also set in Germany with mostly German characters, and as such

is irrelevant to the theme of the encounter of cultures. Ironically, what makes *Qadar Yalhū* somehow relevant is nothing that is intrinsic to it, nothing that organically springs out of it, but rather the intrusive authorial material imposed on characters, and particularly the German woman, Elsa.

One thing the narrative makes clear is that a combination of the romantic sensibility and Berlin, 'one of the greatest capitals on earth . . . a world bursting with all that the senses or the imagination ever craved',[201] is an explosive one. Wherever ᶜAlāᵓ goes, whether he is on the street, in a park, at university, or a night club, with every step that he takes 'life is redoubled within him, as if the entire city were packed between his two sides' (p. 52). To this vast, enriching world, we are told that he had come from one of 'the closed, parochial towns of my country' (p. 54). It is to that country however that he has to return after he finishes his studies in order to perform his 'sacred duty towards my oppressed country . . . and participate in the great struggle to restore . . . the independence of our torn homeland'[202] (p. 88). Without so much as a thought, he leaves behind an Elsa with child, and returns to lead a profligate life in Beirut where we are not shown any participation whatsoever by him in the national struggle for independence from the French, nor indeed does the national struggle figure in the book at all.

The novel is an amazing, if naive, exercise in compensatory representation of self and other. Here we have ᶜAlāᵓ, the representative of the East, in a position of absolute power over Elsa, the representative of the European Other. He is rich, she is poor. He is highly educated, she is modestly educated. She is homeless, and he is the one who offers her shelter and food and saves her from becoming a prostitute. She is utterly helpless and unemployed, while he, the foreign student in Berlin, is the one who helps her find a decent job. She falls hopelessly in love with him, while for him she was only one more female conquest to be added to his rich repertoire. And finally, when he thoughtlessly abandons her and his expected child to return to Syria, she is the one who writes him a parting letter, in which she extols the great values of his culture and announces her determination to raise their son as an Arab and a Muslim (on her own in Germany!); to raise him in such a way as to 'takes pride in his nation even if living faraway from it' (pp. 95–96). Now, if we recall the fact that the novel is set at a time when Syria was under French rule in common with the rest of the Arab region whose countries were under the rule of one European power or another, the compensatory nature of the reversal of power relations in the portrayal of the two cultural representatives becomes amply clear.

Twelve years after his abandonment of her and return to Beirut, Elsa ends up in Beirut herself as a dancer in a nightclub, their son having died of poverty-inflicted consumption a year earlier. Why she ends up in Beirut out of all places, we are not told, but the obvious exterior reason is for the author to be able to bring his hero and heroine together again. She now works under the disguised name of Elske and, like her son before her, is slowly dying of consumption herself; consumption serving the double purpose here of being a murderous disease and a *sine qua non* of a tragic love story in the nineteenth-century romantic tradition style. Elsa immediately recognises ᶜAlāᵓ, but incredibly the novelist would have

ᶜAlāᵓ fail to recognise her, and begin to fall in love with her gradually all over again as a different woman until she reveals to him in her dying moments her true identity and tells him the story of their son. During their repeated meetings in the night-club, the author uses Elsa as a mouthpiece to voice his criticism of Syro-Lebanese society and the loose life its young men are leading instead of devoting themselves to the national cause. Here is an example of her/al-Jābirī's cultural reprimands:

> Why do you take from us [Westerners] dance and not take true nationalism? Why do you take from us these disfigured commercial buildings and not universities with which to illuminate the minds of your young people, and let shine on the world a national civilisation that you create from the glorious legacy of your past as well as your nascent present? It maybe that by so doing you will render the world an act of pure goodness, unlike this mixture of good and evil presented by the West in the name of modern civilisation.
>
> (p. 149)

In this role, Elsa bears kinship to the role played by al-Ḥakīm's French archaeologist, or for that matter, the Russian worker, Ivan, in *The Return of the Spirit* and *Bird of the East*, respectively, as shown earlier in this chapter. They all are European characters used unconvincingly as mouthpieces to propagate ideas that can only be their authors'. Thus Elsa, the weaker party throughout in the relationship on the personal level, is endowed with the superior moral consciousness. For all her weakness, she plays the role of the educator of ᶜAlāᵓ and his circle of Syrian friends. In the end, and even before Elsa reveals to him her true identity, ᶜAlāᵓ has fallen in love with her and proclaims her his saviour from a material life with no goal but the accumulation of wealth. 'O you sweet, eternal tune', he addresses her in his mind, 'You have breathed life into me after nothingness!' (pp. 212–13). Thus with a bizarre twist, the subliminal compensatory representation of cultures appears to be redressed into a more realistic one where the representative of the Western culture is shown to be the educator and saviour; an obvious reversal of the vision proffered in al-Ḥakīm's *Bird of the East*; and one where all claims of spirituality and materialism are left out of the equation, not to say tipped in favour of the Western character. It may be not irrelevant also to remark here that while his personl European experience was of Germany and therefore it was natural for Shakīb al-Jābirī to set his scene in Berlin, he may additionally have found it easier to have a positively portrayed European heroine from a country other than that occupying his own.

It should be noted that in 1946, al-Jābirī published a sequel to his novel by the title, *Qaws Quzaḥ* (Rainbow), a nickname for Elsa. The novel is a retelling of the same story from the point of view of Elsa, written in the form of a journal kept by her between the years 1926 and around 1940, the supposed year of her death in Beirut. The novel amounts to little more than a tedious recast of the events of *Qadar Yalhū*, bringing no new perspective on the story or theme to justify itself.[203]

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889–1973) was arguably the most original, most radical and most influential figure of the modern Arab renaissance of the twentieth century.

Born in a remote upper Egyptian village, blinded from untreated trachoma at the age of five, recipient of the most conventional education possible at the Qurʾān school of his village and later at an Azhar mosque in Cairo, still steeped in the ways of scholasticism, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn proceeded, as though by a miracle of fortune, to study first at the nascent secular University of Cairo (then al-Jāmiᶜa al-Miṣriyya) in the first decade of the century, and then at Montpellier and the Sorbonne in France. When he returned to Egypt, he was immersed in the nationalist fight against British rule on the one hand and an absolutist monarchy on the other. However, this he did from a thoroughly Europeanised standpoint, unflinching in its secularist, positivist outlook on the world. In other words, he adopted the very 'otherness' of the other, and strove to refashion the self in his image. This he preached untiringly all his life, in his teaching at the University, in his prolific writings, and in the policies he put in force when he occupied high office in the state and its institutions.

More than any other member of his generation, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was prepared to walk Westwards without looking behind: his advocacy of Westernisation was wholehearted and almost unconditional. So convinced was he of his beliefs that it was not sufficient for him, as it was for others, to call for cultural openness towards the Western other in order to learn from him the secrets of progress. His assertion was that the Egyptians and the European other were one and the same, both the product of a pan-Mediterranean culture inspired by the Greeks. By asserting this tenet at the conceptual level, Ḥusayn was telling his fellow Egyptians that they did not have to convert to anything foreign to them in order to become like the Europeans; they only had to recognise themselves for what they truly are, for what the events of history and centuries of obscurantism may have served to hide from them. This is the gist of his call in his famous book, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa fī Miṣr* (*The Future of Culture in Egypt*), published in 1938.[204]

In this seminal book, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn is at pains to dissociate Egypt from the so-called East or Orient and to place it firmly within a European context.[205] Since European civilisation has been the offspring of ancient Greek civilisation, he finds this a convenient gateway to his basic assertion, that is, by proving a strong link between the Ancient Egyptians and the Ancient Greeks, he will be in a logical position to argue a current affinity between the Egyptian worldview and the European one. Thus he asserts that the interaction between the Egyptian and Greek minds in antiquity was something in which the very Greeks took pride and reflected in their verse, drama, historiography and philosophy. After the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great, he argues, it became a 'Greek state' and Alexandria became one of the greatest 'Greek' capital cities on earth. Later, when Egypt came under Roman rule, it continued to be a haven for Greek culture. Egypt therefore has nothing to do with the cultures of the East, with nations like China, Japan and India and the neighbouring regions. And if the Egyptian mind had to be affiliated somewhere, this will be nowhere but with the cultures which evolved around the Mediterranean. Ḥusayn cannot contain his amazement at the way modern Egyptians think of themselves as Orientals, not only geographically

but also in a cultural sense. He has no hesitation in dismissing this belief as without foundation. As for Europeans too thinking of Egyptians as Orientals, he attributes that to political and imperial interests which make it convenient to ignore proven historical facts.[206]

For those who may be tempted to assume that the advent of Islam has introduced a distinctive cultural difference between the two supposedly Greek-based civilisations, Ḥusayn has the answer ready: Islam was as much influenced by Greek philosophy as was Christianity.[207] If therefore it holds that the European mind continued to be Greek in essence in spite of its embracement of Christianity, it also holds that the Greek character of the Egyptian intellect has survived its embracement of Islam.[208] Only historical events, particularly the long Ottoman domination, have created the gap between the two cultures, allowing Europe to develop while Egypt's intellectual growth was arrested. But what matters is that 'the essence' of the European mind and the 'Eastern mind' of Egypt and other countries of the Near East is the same.[209] This conceptual assertion was translated into practical measures when Ḥusayn used his academic influence to introduce the study of Greek and Latin at Cairo University. He later went so far as to argue their introduction at secondary school level, ironically at the time when they were beginning to be cast aside by European educational systems.[210]

Following this robust assertion of the oneness of the self and the other on the conceptual level and in historical and geographical context, Ḥusayn goes on to demonstrate how modern times have come to re-establish the severed connection: Egypt's modern renaissance is entirely based on the European model both materially and morally. 'Our material life has become totally European', he declares. The European model of material prosperity has become that of the Egyptians across the social spectrum. Not only so, but Egypt's moral life in the modern era has also been based on the European model. This applies as much to the system of government as the educational system and the attempts at reforming the Azhar and religious courts. Even the autocratic tendencies of the monarchy of the day he attributes not to the Ottoman model of Sultan Abdulhamid II, but to that of Louis XIV.[211] He had no doubt that the national aim of the day, that is, to shed off European hegemony in the form of the British occupation, could ironically only be achieved through the emulation of the European model. The way to gain independence politically, economically and culturally is 'to see things the way Europeans see them, consider things the way they consider them, judge things the way they judge them…', and the way to achieve this is 'to have the same education as the Europeans'.[212] So obsessed is he with Europeanising education that he sees the mastery of a European language an essential part of the training of even teachers of the Arabic language. This is because he is 'unable to imagine a teacher of any subject of general education, who is ignorant of European life or unable to be in direct communion with it through one of its major tongues'.[213]

Ḥusayn's fascination with Greek civilisation as providing the intellectual basis for both European and Near Eastern cultures predates his outspoken assertion of his ideas in *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa*, which he used to elaborate, organise and restate views previously expressed in a sporadic fashion, scattered in many

sources. His book *Qādat al-Fikr* (Leaders of Thought), published in 1925, was an early expression of this fascination, comprising as it does short accounts of the lives and ideas of mainly such Greek figures as Homer, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander the Great. He also went on to translate into Arabic such works as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, and Aristotle's *The Athenian Constitution*.[214]

In *Qādat al-Fikr*, Ḥusayn sets out to define in comparative terms the distinctive characteristics of the ancient civilisations of the Greeks on the one hand, and other Near Eastern cultures, on the other. The comparison as we shall see is clearly weighted in favour of the Greeks. In a sweeping move he reverses the argument, widely accepted in his day and to this day in the East, that the West is materialistic and the East spiritual. (Compare Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm above for a contemporaneous advocate of this view.) Ḥusayn does this in a subtle way, which nonetheless does extreme violence to the received opinion of his day. He simply proposes that the ancient Greeks, fathers of modern Europe, were more concerned with matters of the spirit than their Near Eastern contemporaries. The obvious conclusion from this premise would be that modern Europeans are in a similar position in relation to modern Orientals. At this stage however he leaves the issue at the level of implication rather than statement. What he argues is that the Eastern influence on the ancient Greeks was limited to the practical, material domain. The Greeks may have learned from their Eastern neighbours some facts and practical skills about measurements, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy among other things, he maintains, but it was they who introduced to humanity the sciences of astronomy and geometry as such. When it comes to metaphysics, however, and the attempt to understand and interpret the universe, they went at it completely alone in the ancient world without influence or aid from their Near-Eastern associates. The Greek intellect alone gave the world the rational philosophies of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and then those of Descartes, Kant, Comte, Hegel and Spencer, whereas the Eastern mind has continued throughout its stages of development to rely on religion in understanding nature and interpreting it. He also points out that it was the Greeks who developed political thought and produced the democratic model of government in contrast with the model of absolute and despotic monarchism to which the East has adhered.[215] At the end of his tract, Ḥusayn does not hesitate to make the value judgement that the Greeks represented the intellectually most fertile model of human life in antiquity. He also calls to attention the fact that of the two ancient models it is the Greek one that has triumphed and asserted itself through modern Europe as the order of the day.[216] This triumph which has resulted in today's intellectual homogeneity of the East and the West, as Ḥusayn sees it, (the only differences between the two cultures according to him are political, social or ethnic but not conceptual), is owed to Alexander the Great, whose conquests brought the two worlds together once and for all by rooting Greek philosophy everywhere in the world of antiquity.[217] It was years later in *Mustaqbal al-Thaqaāfa*, that Ḥusayn expressed in no equivocal terms his utter contempt for the notion of the materialism of the West. He admits that European civilisation is materialistic in many ways, but maintains

that it is absurd to deny that it possesses a great deal of spirituality as well. He asserts:

> The brilliant successes of modern science and the inventions that have changed the face of the earth spring from imaginative and creative minds. European history is replete with men like Descartes and Pasteur, who cheerfully devoted their time and effort to ideas alone. Besides scientists and scholars, there are such men as airplane test pilots who expose themselves to horrible injury and even death in order to extend man's mastery over nature.[218]

He goes on to refer to the 'divine religions' (*diyānāt samāwiyya*) of the Near East, adopted by both Europeans and Easterners – Christians, Muslims and Jews alike, and wonders sarcastically, 'Can these religions be spirit in the East and matter in the West?'[219]

How much Ḥusayn was fascinated with the European model and how much he craved for Egypt to emulate it can be demonstrated in a random kind of manner from browsing in a collection of light impressions and accounts that he wrote for newspapers mainly while spending summer holidays in France with his French wife and children. The collection, published in 1935, carries the title *Min Baʿīd* (From Afar) and contains material written between 1923 and 1930, according to the author's foreword.[220] Giving an account of the voyage to France on board the ship, the Sphinx, he cannot contain his admiration for the French barber of the ship whose services he had to call upon. The barber, a disillusioned socialist according to Ḥusayn, lectures him on French policy towards Germany and England, and pontificates on parliamentary life in his country and the differences between French and British colonialism, stopping at France's policy in Syria and Algeria. The moral is in Ḥusayn's concluding comment: 'I wish everyone in Egypt were like the barber of the Sphinx, but I think a very long time will pass before the majority of us reach a level of education and refinement similar to his.'[221] This sentiment is encountered again when we read his account of the funeral of the great French actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923), which coincided with his arrival in Paris. He is astounded at the status accorded the actress in her death no less than in her life, and the inevitable homebound question arises: 'when will Egypt have a genius like Sarah Bernhardt? Or at least when will the Egyptians achieve a degree of educational and moral progress to enable them to appreciate a genius of the type of Sarah Bernhardt, who excelled not in politics, not in religion, and not in science, but in . . . the art of stage-acting, despised of most Egyptians?'[222] Elsewhere in the book he turns his anger on Egypt's religious scholars who abysmally fail the test of comparison with European priests. During an international conference on history and historiography held in Belgium in 1923 to which he was invited, he comes across many priest scholars, who possess professional expertise in many a science and an art not related to religion, and who speak languages other than their own. He rails at Azharite scholars for their ignorance of anything outside traditional religious learning. He rebukes them for

ignorance of even Islam outside the non-Arabic speaking countries, which he has found European scholars to be knowledgeable about. He wishes the day would come when Muslim scholars would be able to give a talk on the history and architecture of such Cairo mosques as the Azhar, Qalāwūn and Barqūq, as he listened to a Belgian priest lecture on the history and architectural style of an old church in Brussels.[223] But Muslim scholars do not only fall short of Ḥusayn's European yardstick in matters of extra religious knowledge, but indeed in the very performance of their religious duties towards the community, as he makes clear in a dispatch from France, written in 1924. The sight of a priest manning a merry-go-round on a charitable evening, organising children rides and collecting tickets, fascinates him. He assures Azharites and religious scholars particularly, to whom he addresses himself, that the action of the French priest in no way contradicted the codes of propriety and dignity expected of a man of religion. He chides them for falling behind the spirit of the times, for their narrow understanding of their duty towards society as restricted to leading prayers and giving sermons, and invites them to follow the example of European priests and become more involved in the life of their community, or be atrophied as society moves on.[224] Eventually, Ḥusayn equates the European model with life and the Eastern one with death. This occurs at the conclusion of a long article, titled '*Bayna al-ᶜIlm wal-Dīn*' (Between Science and Religion), in which he reviews the history of the tense relationship between the two concepts from the time of Socrates to the twentieth century in the course of defending his controversial book, *Fī al-Shiᶜr al-Jāhilī* (Of Pre-Islamic Verse, 1926) and his right to express his views freely even when they conflicted with received religious opinion. He argues that in order to become the equals of Europeans and gain their respect 'we must live in our country the way they live in their countries, and enjoy freedom the way they do…'. He goes on to say that the only way to do so is through science, 'on condition that it is studied the way Europeans study it, not as our forefathers studied it centuries ago. Woe betide us the day we drop the medicine of Pasteur and Claude Bernard for that of Ibn Sīnā and Dāwūd of Antioch!'[225] He insists however that modern science can only survive and be fruitful in a climate of freedom and tolerance: 'we have two choices: either life, in which case freedom is indispensable, or death, in which case we can stay as we are'.[226] The association between Europe and life on the one hand and Egypt and death on the other was to occur again on a more personal level in his account of his years of study in France in the third volume of *Al-Ayyām*, published in 1967. Describing his feelings on his way to board the ship back to Egypt, all overseas students having been called back by the Egyptian University due to a financial crisis it suffered in 1915, he writes, 'it was as if I was being taken away to my death, and not on my way to the homeland'.[227]

Ḥusayn remained faithful to his seminal ideas expressed in *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa* to the end. In an interview given to the critic Ghālī Shukrī only months before his death in October 1973, he stressed that he had not recanted any of his basic notions about the lasting Greek influence on Egypt and the inevitability of adopting the Western life model as the only way forward. He makes it clear

to his interviewer that he sees the Mediterranean as a connector not a separator between north and south, and emphasises the necessity of modern Egypt building its renaissance on a Greek basis, just as France and Italy had done. He does not undermine the Arab-Islamic connections of Egypt, which sprang in Asia away from the Mediterranean, but stresses that both the Egyptians and the Arabs 'need to interact culturally with Europe as much as they need life itself'. He adds that Egypt as a Mediterranean country is better qualified for this task.[228] As for the conservatives who worry about the European influence on the Arab-Islamic heritage, he reminds them that the Arab-Islamic civilisation at its zenith was beneficially influenced by Greek thought.[229] For those who want to take only science and industry from the West, he has a stark warning: 'Civilisation, like freedom, is an indivisible whole. Just as we are unable to separate political freedom from economic freedom, we cannot take from [European] civilization machines and leave its thought, literature and art.'[230] In his old age, his harshest rebuke of the younger generations of Egyptian intellectuals is for their dwindling interest in Europe as a source of learning and their failure to learn European languages and read their intellectual legacy.[231]

Adīb[232] (A Man of Letters), a novel by Ḥusayn published in 1935, is his only approach to the subject of the East–West encounter in the form of fiction. It is not a particularly engaging narrative and can only be of interest today for what it reveals indirectly about the thought of its author.[233] The story is narrated in the first person, the narrator being an unmistakable persona for the author. The protagonist of the book is the *Adīb* to whom the title refers, who is a close friend of the narrator, and who is not given any other name in the book. They first meet in the lecture theatres of the then nascent Egyptian University, and gradually become close friends who meet often in the evenings and talk endlessly into the small hours of the night. They are united in frustration with the stagnation of intellectual life in Egypt and a desire to leave it behind and 'cross the sea to one of those countries where broad knowledge and lofty learning can be found, and where life is different in every fashion'.[234] Within three years of their companionship, Adīb wins a scholarship to study at the expense of the University in Paris. He is faced however with a dilemma: he is a married man, while a precondition of the scholarship excludes this category of person. Should he lie to the authorities about his status, or should he wrong his wife by divorcing her? To the horror of his friend, the narrator, Adīb opts to divorce his wife. Ironically, however, it is not because he is too squeamish about hiding the truth from the University. It is because he knows that he will not be able 'to resist European life . . . as a man who is faithful to his wife should'. He is sure that he will 'indulge in sin' and is not prepared to lie permanently to his wife, whom he will have to leave behind.[235] Adīb does divorce his wife in accordance with this logic, but not without a great measure of pain, for he had loved her. Unable to face her, he writes her a letter to explain his decision, but even that he does not send to her, despairing of his reasoning being understood. His wife however is not a character in the book in her own right. We only know of her through what he tells us, and are interested in her only in as much as she is the object of his moral agony. The terms in which he

addresses her in that unsent letter are so passionate and contrite, they call for a pause for thought:

> I swear I have never loved you as I do now, . . . nor realised your power over me and my debt to you as I do now. I feel as if I was splitting my very heart into two halves, keeping one in my chest and sending the other to the depths of the country [where his peasant wife lives and his origins are] never to find it again. I swear it was only out of love that I divorced you . . . I was neither able to choose you over Europe and so stay with you, nor could I be certain that I would be faithful to you once I have crossed the sea . . . Why then don't I confront life with courage, enjoying its pleasures and accepting the responsibility?[236]

The letter goes on like this for seven pages. Is there more to it, one wonders, and the whole episode of choosing Europe over a loved wife than meets the eye? Is there some hidden symbolism here? Can the simple, innocent, loyal, though uneducated peasant wife be a symbol of the traditional Egypt Adīb wants to cast aside for the sake of the promise of Europe? Can his insistence on divorce and his unabashed intention to give in to the lure of Europe, knowledge, sin and all, be seen as Ḥusayn's way of hinting at the necessity of a clean cut with the old and a wholehearted embracement of the new, whose benefits could not be gained without its evils? There is certainly enough in the text to justify such a reading, not to mention that it is in complete harmony with the author's thoughts on the issue as expounded above.

Much of what follows, namely, the latter third of the novel, is told in the epistolary method, that is, letters sent by Adīb to the narrator, giving an account of his exploits in France. The first is written from the ship carrying him to Marseilles, where he is still full of contrition about his abandonment of his wife, and trepidation about, not the sea he is crossing, but the other fathomless sea he is travelling to, 'the sea of European life, full of pleasure and pain, good and evil'.[237] Would he 'drown or float in that sea?' is the question that agonises him. Once he has arrived in Marseilles, the phantom of Ḥamīda, his wife, quickly recedes into oblivion; the pleasures of French life and his soul's thirst for them leave her no place in his consciousness. He is attracted by the chambermaid of the hotel he stays in and decides to prolong his stay in Marseilles on account of her, rather than proceed to Paris as he was supposed to do. So intent is he on trying out life to the full, that he stops himself from thinking about things lest he should come to his senses and draw back:

> I do not want to understand what I am about to embark on now. I want to discover evil, if evil it is, after the event. Why? – I don't know. But I am neither able to stop nor turn back. I feel rather like someone thrown by such a great force from the summit of a mountain that all he can do is roll down until he reaches the bottom.[238]

Adīb's lust for life, for everything that the culture the European Other has to offer, is all-encompassing – from chambermaids and whores, who give him VD,[239] to

doing extremely well at the Sorbonne and accomplishing in one year what would take others several. His judgement of his own culture in relation to Europe's is aptly put in the following comparison between life in Egypt and life in France, which he makes in one of his letters to the narrator:

> Go to the Pyramids! . . . Climb inside the Great Pyramid and observe how suffocated you will feel, how you will sweat, how you will feel that the weight of that enormous building is on top of you, is crushing you! Then come out of those depths into the open and let the fresh air greet you! Learn then that life in Egypt is like being in the depths of the Pyramid and that life in Paris is like coming out in the open air![240]

When it is finally the narrator's turn to win a scholarship and join his friend in France, he is sent to Montpellier, as the Egyptian authorities thought Paris was too near the frontline during the First World War. Adīb, who refused to leave Paris even at the height of danger and in defiance of the orders of the Egyptian authorities, uses the occasion to criticise the cultural attitude behind the decision: 'you are a nation who go to extremes in taking precautions and avoiding the merest thought of danger'.[241] Adīb's own lifestyle in Paris was to throw away all manner of caution and moderation to the wind, alternating between bouts of indulgence in physical pleasure and extremely hard work. Thus, whatever progress he makes with his studies is soon wiped off by a period of total neglect. He fails his examinations and ends up in madness.[242]

What are we to make out of this? Is Adīb the victim of his own temperamental weakness, or the shortcomings of his culture? Ḥusayn's portrayal of his character is not conclusive either way. On the one hand, he presents him as an eccentric man, grotesquely ugly in appearance, loud of voice, uncouth of manner and totally oblivious of social decorum, while being a man of wide learning, intelligent, sincere, loyal, straightforward, and honest with himself and others. On the other hand, he is shown as a man given to extremes, as we have seen above. He is shown to be fatalistically aware of his weakness: 'our destiny will catch up with us whatever we do. And I know what God has destined for me', he writes to the narrator. He then goes on to explain his torn state of mind between work and pleasure, and his failure in dividing his time effectively between the two different pursuits.[243] There is then a strong case for blaming Adīb's fall on this fault of his character, but as Ḥusayn has written the novel in cultural terms, he feels obliged to inject a contributory cultural factor in Adīb's unhappy end, which later tended unduly to influence interpretations of the novel.[244] Here are the words he puts in his mouth:

> I feel that it was my Egyptian upbringing that pushed me in that direction, because I grew up without any discipline. My raising and education lacked method and stability . . . Had I stayed in Egypt, I would have spent all my life in this constant confusion, without discipline or purpose. But I crossed the sea to an environment that does not accept confusion . . . I was unprepared for it and could not adapt to its requirements of discipline and sustained effort.[245]

The two cultures are thus juxtaposed: one is positive (the European) and the other is negative (the Egyptian/Eastern). They are incompatible, and the transition from the norms of one to those of the other requires certain malleability on the part of the individual, an ability to adjust and switch codes. Otherwise, your fate is madness,[246] or a state of imponderability in cultural space, outside the gravitational force of any specific culture.[247]

How much of this story is fiction and how much is autobiography is difficult to ascertain, but what is evident is that it has a strong foundation in reality.[248] The identification between the narrator of the story and the author is incontrovertible down to minute detail from Ḥusayn's life and background. It is therefore Ḥusayn here giving an account of a close friend, whom he knew well in Egypt and later as a fellow student in Paris. Evidence that the character of Adīb is strongly based on a true person can be found in Part III of Ḥusayn's autobiography, *Al-Ayyām* (1967), where he makes reference to having to tend a friend in Paris who was afflicted with a serious mental disease following his failure in examinations for the licentiate degree.[249] What matters however is that Ḥusayn saw in the realistic occurrences material fit to record and develop the way he did in his novel. As it happened, the effort gave us his only contribution in imaginative form to the debate on a theme that was very much at the centre of his concern and that of his generation.[250]

For a man with a very traditional upbringing, an Azharite education at the turn of the century, a sizeable part of his career spent either as judge in religious courts or lecturer in the school that trained such judges, with no solid knowledge of a European language, and no direct contact with the West except for short limited visits,[251] **Aḥmad Amīn** (1886–1954), the Egyptian scholar, renowned for his critical study in a series of books of the early centuries of Islam at a time when such studies were rare among Muslim scholars,[252] evinces a mature and balanced approach to the subject of Western modernity, unmarred on the one hand by inward-looking traditionalism, nor unconditionally embracing the West as his contemporary and friend Ṭāhā Ḥusayn did.

In his book *Al-Sharq wal-Gharb*, posthumously published in 1955 (translated as *Orient and Occident*, in 1984), Aḥmad Amīn draws attention to the role of colonial violence in engendering antipathy and resistance among Orientals to 'modern civilisation' by which he means Western civilisation. It is this, in his opinion, which led oriental countries 'to become suspicious of the representatives of modern civilisation'. 'If it had come accompanied by mutual understanding,' he writes, 'and if the occidentals would not have looked at other people with an eye towards aggression and exploitation, the reception of the modern civilisation would have been facilitated… .'[253] He also couples this factor with another equally relevant factor, namely the fact that modernity evolved gradually in the West but was thrown in one lump at the East: 'In contrast to the ingenious Occident, the development in Orient was not a natural process. While in the Occident step one led to step two… and so forth to step ten, the Orient was confronted with step ten without having passed the ten intermediate stages' (p. 19).

This however does not mean that if it were not for colonialism he would endorse the wholehearted adoption of 'modern civilisation'. In fact, his discourse is one which subscribes in some measure to the notion of the materialism of the West and the spirituality of the East, not uncommon in his and later generations, as we have seen for instance in the writings of his contemporary, al-Ḥakīm. 'Oriental cultures', he writes, 'are orientated towards religions and morals . . . while the occidental culture tends towards increasing the material comforts . . .' (p. 17). Elsewhere in the book, he maintains that 'the actions of the occidentals are ordinarily determined by profit . . .' and that 'any consideration as to what is beneficial or harmful to humanity is alien to them' (p. 64). From these premises, he is able to go on to argue that 'scientific and industrial progress alone do not bring glory to the modern civilisation' (p. 19). What is also needed is 'progress . . . in moral behaviour . . .', and here he expresses doubt that the Occident is superior to the Orient (p. 19). From this position emerges the destiny of the Orient as he sees it, (and as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm saw it before him in *Bird of the East*): 'to give the world a spirituality, religion, and a disposition to contemplation which is lacking in the Occident' (p. 17). Ironically however he believes that the Orient will not be able to fulfil this destiny unless it adopts from the Occident 'its system of production and its scientific spirit' (p. 17). But again, like many Arab intellectuals of his and other generations with the notable exception of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, he is under the illusion that modernity is divisible, that it should be possible to adopt from the Western civilisation what is suitable and desirable and shut the door before the rest. He calls on the leaders of the Orient to 'select the positive aspects of the Occidental civilisation and to reject the negative ones, and if possible, to keep also the good parts of the ancient civilisation' (p. 17). How this can be achieved is not an issue he chooses to contemplate. At any rate, this reconciliatory vision is further enhanced by an attempt at even-handedness displayed in his berating of the so-called spirituality of the East, which he labels, 'just as corrupt as the materialism of the Occident, [being] afflicted with superstition and conjectures, imposture and delusion . . .' (p. 65). Thus according to Amīn, the panacea for the world is for 'the spirituality of the Orient [to be] infused with a reasonable amount of materialism in order to utilise science in the service of the convenience of life' and for the materialism of the Occident 'to be infused with a certain amount of the true spirituality . . . to give [it] a pulsating heart and munificent feelings' (p. 66).

If we turn our attention momentarily west of Egypt, we will find that the East–West debate that preoccupied writers of the Arab East was also very much on the mind of their counterparts in the relatively literarily less developed North Africa. In Tunisia, where we have encountered some of the most radical thought on the subject in the pre-colonial period in the person of Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī, discussed in Chapter 1, we now encounter, with the French Protectorate already long established, another traveller in Europe with some very relevant thoughts on the subject; thoughts which deceptively may appear to lack the grandeur and overarching profundity of the great statesman and reformer, but which are in essence in direct descent from his modernising call.

ᶜAlī al-Dūᶜājī (1909–49), Tunisian short story writer, humorist and essayist,[254] published an account of his European journey under the title *Jawla bayna Ḥānāt al-Baḥr al-Mutawassiṭ* (A Tour among Taverns of the Mediterranean), in 1935, the year Ṭāhā Ḥusayn published his novel *Adīb* in Egypt. Duᶜājī begins his account by declaring unceremoniously to the reader that he has no intention to follow the familiar path of travel books in describing the geography and natural features of the places visited, nor the architecture of their cities with their streets, squares and parks. His intention is to describe 'taverns and cafés, with which no one could be bored'.[255] While he largely adheres to his pledge in avoiding a conventional descriptive approach, there is certainly more to his account than his modestly stated aim of describing 'taverns and cafés'. More unwittingly perhaps than by conscious design, he makes a contribution to the East–West debate that is both intellectually interesting and artistically engaging, as I will be showing in what follows.

His is a humorous account intended at amusing rather than educating the reader, taking particular interest in describing the beauty and appeal of European women. However, although he does not seem interested in cultural comparisons in a serious way, his humorous discourse still evinces telling signs of the stereotypical view of self and other. The physical beauty of the women is emphasised, as is their scanty dress and their sexual hunger. Of a young woman he had a brief encounter with at the Acropolis in Athens, he writes: 'in her lips, and bosoms there was that kind of sexual invitation that you would only find in a Westernised woman of the East.'[256] Stereotyping the Western woman here as naturally seductive is underscored by giving the Eastern woman that quality only if she has departed from her assumed 'chaste' nature and become 'Westernised'. On the other hand, wanting to impress the Greek woman, he finds no better way to do that than to play up to her preconceived image about the Arabs: he presents himself as the son of a great tribal chief and spins all kinds of stories about desert battles, captures and ransoms, in which he performed heroically before returning to his awaiting dozen wives.[257]

When his ship passes through the Dardanelle straits, he is fascinated by the idea of east and west being separated by no more than 20 metres of water, and as he sits in the front of the ship with Asia on his right and Europe on his left, he thinks of the two continents in terms of two wives, he being the husband. While he does not dwell on the idea, we must not forget the immediately present notion of conflict or opposition in this polygamous arrangement; a thought not at all out of place in consideration of the opposed cultural attributes of the two wife-continents, as he is going to reveal them. 'In my right-hand wife, Asia,' he writes, 'I saw the Orient with its mystery, secrets and symbols; I saw its great spirit with its religions, beliefs, and creeds; I saw the Orient with its palaces and jewels and pearls… .' In this setting, his Asian wife, a graceful brunette with mysterious wide eyes, lavishly dressed in Damascene brocade, bejewelled with ruby, aquamarine and pearls from the depths of the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, and perfumed with scents from the Sind, sits absorbed in reading ᶜUmar al-Khayyām, while her singing girls played wistful, memory-laden tunes for her, as she smoked

Chinese pipe, only occasionally moving her placid gaze from Khayyām's *Quatrains* to the vividly coloured, intricate design of the Persian carpet on the floor, or the elaborate calligraphy of the Qurʾanic verses on the tile-clad walls of her room.[258] Although the writer is an Arab, he is obviously at pains in his pursuit of wit to outdo the most devoted Orientalist in portraying a stereotyped image of the East: languid, enwrapped in a haze of smoke, enhanced by the abstract artistic patterns on the walls and carpets; even the book Asia is reading is part of the romantically invented image of the East, Khayyām's poetry being an ideal embodiment of nineteenth-century romantic obsession with the themes of the exotic, of transience, and *carpe diem*, or the importance of the pursuit of pleasure during our short spell of life.

Let us now follow Dūᶜājī's gaze towards his 'wife on the left', Europe, in whom he sees, 'the West with its factories, machinery, equipment and chimneys, created by materialism, discipline, the printing press, and cool reason beneath a rainy sky in a land covered with snow for nine months of the year'.[259] With this description the binary opposition is made complete to a perfection: the palaces and riches of Asia are replaced with factories and chimneys; religion and spirituality with materialism and discipline; mystery and secrets with cool reason and the printing press, while the plain, dispassionate concept of European culture is emphasised by the hyperbolic image of the continent being submerged under snow for most of the year. Against this setting he introduces to us his imaginary European wife as a beautiful blue-eyed blonde with 'athletic body', dressed in modern attire, all made of artificial fabrics and leathers, and adorned with chemically produced jewellery. She sits in a chrome-legged chair at a Swiss hotel built with fortified concrete. As she drinks champagne and smokes a Havana cigar, she alternates her gaze between the skiers she can see through her window and a London magazine, in which nothing interests her but the cartoons and the fashion pages.[260] We can see here how Dūᶜājī maintains his opposition of cultural stereotypes with almost geometrical precision. The dreamy langour of the Asian wife gives way to the assumed energy of the athletically bodied Europe; and the listless indoor scene of pensive songs to the hyperactive setting of skiers on a Swiss mountainside. On the other hand, the natural clothing and ornament of the Asian wife, and the luxury of the interior design of her home is demoted to the artificial products of the industrialised West, within the setting of a concrete-walled hotel. The disparaging parallelism continues to the smallest detail with a London fashion magazine replacing the poetry of Khayyām, at once ridiculing European culture and its own romanticised image of the Orient.

Ridicule apart, Dūᶜājī's real sentiment can be found in the next section of his account of his journey, when he lands in Istanbul and walks around its streets observing the new and real Asian woman, not the one whose fantasised European image he had earlier scoffed at. Here we are left in no doubt as to which of the two wives he would choose if compelled to renounce polygamy. He writes:

> Gone is that naïve Turkish girl; the one that used to wear loose trousers embroidered with gold and silver, and a top with giant sleeves; the one who used to watch passers-by from behind her latticed window, . . . that romantic

> girl who used to send her jasmine-perfumed letters, written on a silken handkerchief brocaded with silver, with her black maid with the swollen lips. That girl who was only good for bedding or belly dance to the tunes of the lute and the tambourine has disappeared with the Ottoman Empire, and in her stead is now another girl, refined, educated and dexterous, . . . a girl that has rid herself of the deceitful veil and come out to deal with men as an equal human being . . . The girl of the *harem* now dresses according to the latest Parisian fashion, . . . and can be seen in the suburbs playing tennis, football, or racing with young men, having relegated her Easternness together with her ignorance and her veil to a classified number on a shelf at the Turkish Museum.[261]

It is not difficult to identify here the ousted model of the Turkish woman as the very one of his Asian wife across the Dardanelle, whom he had earlier described, nor is it difficult to identify the new Turkish woman with her agility, sociability, fashionableness and athleticism as a replica of the model of the author's European wife minus the caricaturing exaggeration. Dūᶜājī was writing in 1935, when Tunisia was under French rule. This clearly was no reason for him to reject Europe and its cultural model, as we have seen.

Published only a few years after al-Ḥakīm's *Bird of the East*, **Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī**'s (1905–92) *Qindīl ᵓUmm Ḥāshim* (1944), translated as *The Saint's Lamp*, proffered a vision at once similar and different; similar in that it appeared to subscribe to the essentialism of al-Ḥakīm's view of the East in terms of spirit and the West in terms of matter, and different in that while doing so it did not vilify the West's values, nor did it extol those of the East. In fact, some of the harshest criticism of the novel is reserved for the author's own culture, if made with affection and understanding, rather than from an attitude of rejection. Ḥaqqī's vision, as I will show, was one which from the start recognised the East, in the form of Egypt, as sick, and the West as the doctor who has the curing medicine. The diagnosis and the prescription are matters of principle that the novella does not question; the argument is only about the most effective and foolproof method of applying the treatment.

One could argue that the novella was written at a moment of intense particularity in Egypt's history. Seen in retrospect, it now appears as if it had been intended to crystallise the mental state of a nation at a cultural crossroad. The novella appeared when the Second World War had entered its last phase. On a global level, an old world order was collapsing and a new one was being born. On the local level, the liberal democratic experiment, as yet not fully developed, was fast approaching a dead end, as a result of the tug-of-war between the monarch and minority parties on the one hand, and the popular Wafd Party on the other, all under the oppressive presence of British imperialism. Religious fundamentalism in the shape of the Muslim Brotherhood had now come to the fore as a political force to be reckoned with, and one that was not averse to the idea of violence as a means to attainment of power. At the other extreme, communist thought was rife underground as a third alternative.

This is the background against which Ḥaqqī wrote his classic tale of the encounter of civilisations. It is a simple story with a straightforward structure, written during the as yet nascent years of the genre in Arabic. Despite the simplicity of its plot, and the scarcity of its action, what little events that take place in it are marked by intensity and enriched by fastidious attention to detail, and above all pithy charged prose, all within a high symbolic order.[262] Ismāʿīl, the protagonist, is an Egyptian young man from a family of modest means and peasant origins who moved to Cairo. The time is not precisely given but can be reasonably assumed to be in the early years of the twentieth century. When he finishes his secondary education, his father, a small merchant, decides at a considerable cost to the finances of the family to send him to England to study ophthalmology. Ismāʿīl returns from Europe with his medical qualification, but also with new ideas, an altogether new outlook on life that leaves him unable to co-exist with his old cultural environment, which he now arrogantly rejects. His scorn is reciprocated, and he lives through a spiritual crisis until he is able to make peace with himself and society, and learns how to reconcile the old and the new, East and West, or self and other.

This is a symbolic tale as I have intimated, and almost every detail in it however tiny exists on two levels, the realistic and the symbolic. Thus although Ismāʿīl grows up in Cairo, there is an emphasis on his country roots, where his grandfather had come from in search of a better life. This is because as we shall see later in the story, Ismāʿīl will develop into a symbol of the modern Egyptian who comes into contact with Western civilisation and on whose shoulders falls the burden of salvaging his nation from the past, and putting right her ills, inherited from centuries of lagging behind the march of civilisation. Hence, the insistence of the story on his simple village roots to underline the difficulty of the cultural leap needed. Another factor that cannot be incidental is his very name, Ismāʿīl, the biblical prophet mentioned in the Qur'ān and revered by Muslims who believe him to be the father of the Arabs. A common Egyptian name as it is, it is Ḥaqqī's choice to stress the religious dimension in the constitution of the modern Egyptian. Now, Ismāʿīl has an orphaned girl cousin, who grows up with him in the same household and is pledged to be his wife when they grow up. She too is given a familiar name with clear religious implication: Fāṭima al-Nabawiyya, that is Fāṭima the Prophet's daughter. Nor do we have to travel far into the narrative for Fāṭima to turn into a symbol of Egypt, ignorant and steeped in superstition, afflicted with eye disease and threatened with blindness, with her hopes pinned on a saviour who will bring back her sight to her and lead her on the path of modernity. Ḥaqqī emphasises the seclusion of Egypt's medieval Oriental culture through highlighting the stereotypical notions of the self about the other. Thus Fāṭima (Egypt) is unable to imagine how Ismāʿīl manages 'to speak the tongue of foreigners', and when it is decided that he should travel to England for study, the word 'abroad' had a strange ring in a house 'where reciting the Qur'ān never ceases, and where the word of God is both truth and knowledge'. In Fāṭima's imagination, 'abroad' is a land inhabited by people, who are as clever and full of tricks as the jinn, and whose women are skilled temptresses who walk semi-naked in the streets.[263]

The most important symbolic detail in the story is no doubt its principal setting, the old Cairo quarter of al-Sayyida Zaynab, where stands the mosque that carries the name and houses the shrine of al-Sayyida Zaynab, the granddaughter of the Prophet Muḥammad. The shrine of the holy lady with its lamp and the lamp's oil and light, and the connotations of all that, dominates the ambience of the story and becomes a focus for the clash of cultures at its centre. Ḥaqqī describes the quarter in realistic terms, indeed naturalistic terms, with his insistence on details of poverty, filth and disease. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the quarter are shown to be in a state of 'contentment and complacency',[264] (p. 11) as if insensitive to their condition. To them 'the world was a carefree place, and the future was in the hands of God' (p. 13). In the spirit in which the description of the people and their environment is given (one far from approving or neutral), this sense of contentment is nothing but an illusion engendered by fatalism, passivity, and the numb resignation to what life might bring. This is brought out in Ḥaqqī's portrayal of the quarter and its people, who are shown as if living in a time warp. Most tellingly, he describes them as 'fruits that fell from the tree of life and rotted in its vicinity' (p. 12). Those people, or 'rotten fruits', are shown to 'live' their decomposition around the shrine, the extemporal focal point of the quarter, where history is arrested and the forward motion of life ceased. Or else how can we understand this description of the lamp hanging over the shrine, in terms of a 'drowsy, peaceful' eye that has 'seen, understood, and settled everything', and light emitted by it in terms different from those of any other light: 'Any other light seems to struggle to assert itself against the darkness which seems to swallow it, but the light of this lamp seemed to shine without effort or struggle. Here was neither east nor west, neither day nor night, neither yesterday nor tomorrow.'[265]

This then is the culture that Ismāʿīl leaves behind when he makes his way to the scientific, secular Europe, where time, by contrast, is in a state of constant flux, and the march of history is incessant. Ḥaqqī describes Ismāʿīl as he climbs the gangplank of the ship to carry him to Europe as 'a young man on whom sits the solemnity of the old, slow-moving, naive-looking, pot-bellied, with everything about him saying that he is a peasant feeling ill at ease in the city' (p. 25). We could be forgiven as readers to believe momentarily that those were the personal physical attributes of Ismāʿīl, but we soon come to realise our mistake when we read Ḥaqqī's description of him as he descends the gangplank of the ship that brought him back home from Europe. The time gap is seven years, but the gap in the book between the two descriptions is no more than one page, which makes the contrast so sharp and immediate. Here it is: 'who was that tall handsome, young man, with the radiant face, jumping down the gangway, his head held high? By God, it was none other than Ismāʿīl' (pp. 25–26). It follows therefore in my view that the earlier description was metaphorical of an aged, flaccid, ineffective, confidence-lacking civilisation, while the latter is another metaphorical representation of the same civilisation after intercourse with European civilisation, which brought to it a new energy, a new vitality and self-confidence. In other words, the Ismāʿīl returning from Europe seems an embodiment of a culture re-enrolled in the flux of time, in the onward movement of history.

But how does Ḥaqqi depict this astonishing transformation? He uses once more the metaphor of the sexual encounter, already established by al-Ḥakīm in his *Bird of the East* as shown earlier in this book, where East is the man and West is the woman, whose union is symbolic of the cultural encounter. Ḥaqqī hands over his protagonist, Ismāᶜīl (the East) to Mary (Europe), his English study mate. And might we not linger here a little at the symbolic potential of the name? Just as we have acknowledged the allegorical Islamic dimension in Fāṭima's name, we will not be wide of the mark to read a Christian dimension in Mary's name here. If the name of the Prophet Muḥammad's daughter can evoke the Islamic culture, then the name of the mother of Jesus is no less capable of evoking Western Christianity. Here we have two religiously based civilisations, the one (the Western Christian) remained in the current of time until it transcended the supernatural, while the other (the Eastern Muslim) stepped out of history and remained inward-looking and fixated in the religious phase of human history. From Mary, Ismāᶜīl learns a great deal. It is all best summed up by Ḥaqqī's masterly sexual image, invoking their first sexual intercourse: 'when she gave him herself, it was she who deflowered him'.[266] Making Mary the agent of the Arabic verb 'faḍḍa', 'to deflower' in its sexual meaning, is an obvious reversal of both connotational usage and the anatomical functionality implied in the sexual denotational meaning. This reversal is powerfully suggestive of Ḥaqqī's encoded intellectual statement. Western civilisation is *the* active one, the initiator, the penetrator of the hymen of ignorance, the desecrator of the sanctity of superstition, while Eastern culture is the recipient of action, who submits and learns.

'My dear Ismāᶜīl, life is not a fixed plan', says Mary, 'but an ever-changing series of pros and cons'.[267] In an authorial comment, Ḥaqqī sums up the differences between the personalities of the two characters' cultures: 'What she feared most was fetters, while he was most afraid of freedom.'[268] Put in words to correspond with the present interpretive reading: what she feared most was 'fixity outside time,' while he was afraid of 'being in the flux of time'. This cultural reshaping of Ismāᶜīl at the hands of Mary was no easy matter; his soul, we are told, 'ached at the blows she dealt him' (p. 32). The education of Ismāᶜīl appears complete when he casts aside 'belief in religion', substituting it with 'a yet stronger belief in science. He no longer thought of Heaven and its [promised] bliss, but rather of the beauty of Nature and its mysteries' (p. 33). With this final renunciation of the very essence of his culture, and adoption of that of the culture of the other, the disciple appears to rise to a state of parity with his educator. 'He no longer sat in front of her as a student would before his mentor', Ḥaqqī tells us, 'but rather as a student with a fellow student' (p. 33).

After completing his education, Ismāᶜīl goes back to Egypt with a qualification in ophthalmology, together with a more important medical qualification, if undocumented. By this I mean a qualification in the art of restoring to life defunct civilisations through a complete blood transfusion. Consistent with his allegorical framework, Ḥaqqī would have us think of Egypt in terms of the Sleeping Beauty[269] of the famous fairytale, and of Ismāᶜīl as the saving prince. This is how the transformed Ismāᶜīl thinks of Egypt: 'the Beauty of the Forest, sent into sleep

by a touch from the magic wand of a wicked witch . . . when will she wake up? When?' (p. 34). This being so, it is only natural that he thinks of himself as the saviour able to give the reviving kiss, the one infused with the counter spell, for 'it was not for nothing that he had lived in Europe, and worshipped there in [the temple of] Science . . .' (p. 35).

Upon his return, seven years later, during which he had traversed not only continents but also ages, Ismāʿīl is shocked to find his Sleeping Beauty, his Egypt, (or if we want to stick with the realistic level, Fāṭima al-Nabawiyya, cousin and betrothed) on the verge of blindness because of untreated trachoma. He is appalled to see his mother dripping in the girl's eyes oil brought from the Saint's lamp. At this moment the symbolism of the girl's advancing blindness acquires greater intensity, as a metaphor for an inward-looking, isolated civilisation; a civilisation advancing further and further into darkness, unable to see other ways for life and progress, for extricating itself from an outmoded past legacy. The great irony is that, in its isolation, that civilisation is only able to apply to itself for cure more and more of the very cause of its illness, that is superstition, belief in the power of the supernatural.

Beside himself with anger, Ismāʿīl snatches the oil bottle form his mother's hand, flings it out of the window, and leaves the house in a state of rage. In the street, he is greeted with images of ignorance, poverty and disease. The stream of his angry thoughts amounts to a series of statements of forceful cultural rejection. Egypt was nothing but 'an expanse of muddy land turned putrid in the desert, over which swarms of flies and mosquitoes buzzed . . . . Here was stagnancy that killed all progress. Here was a nothingness where time was without meaning.' The crowds of people around him in the Sayyida Zaynab Square were like 'corpses closing in on him, stifling him . . . . Their apparent contentment was nothing but impotence, their kind-heartedness idiocy, their patience cowardice, and their gaiety degeneracy' (pp. 44–45). Ḥaqqī's choice, here and elsewhere in the book, of vocabulary and imagery evocative of stagnation and death contributes to the typification of Egyptian culture as decayed and existentially closer to death than life. In his feverish state of mind, Ismāʿīl finds himself in front of the Sayyida Zaynab mosque. He enters and stands in front of the shrine. Let us mark in the description of this central symbol in the story the concentration of an idiom of darkness, fixity and death, and that all this is given in an actual ambience of death since the protagonist is standing in front of a tomb:

> There was the lamp hanging above, dust sticking to its glass and soot having turned the chain into a black line. It gave off a stifling smell of burning. It emitted more smoke than light, and even the faint ray of light it did give was only a sign of ignorance and superstition. Near the ceiling hovered a bat which made his skin creep. Around the tomb leaned people like logs of wood propped up against it. They stood there paralysed, clutching at the railing.[270]

Seized by a passion of rejection, Ismāʿīl smashes the lamp into pieces with a stick, and is only saved from lynching by worshippers through the intervention of the

servant of the shrine, who had known him for years. He tells the irate worshippers that Ismāʿīl was seized by an evil spirit; another example of Ḥaqqī's clever manipulation of the realistic in the service of the symbolic. Ismāʿīl is, as we know, motivated in his extreme action by belief in science and rationalism. Hence, the irony in the shrine servant's excuse for him, stemming as it does from a mental attitude steeped in irrational belief.

Ismāʿīl begins to treat Fāṭima according to the latest techniques he had learned in Europe, but he fails in curing her, and one morning she wakes up to find she had lost what little sight she had left before the treatment began. Ismāʿīl is bewildered and depressed. He cuts himself off from his family, and enters into a period of introspection. He begins to question the European worldview and wonders whether despite its achievements, it was based on conflict, and lacked love and pity, but he is eventually unable to deny that worldview:

> no, no, he should not give in to such thoughts, otherwise he would be a renegade to his mind and science. Who could possibly deny the progress and civilisation of Europe, and the ignorance, disease and oppression of the East? History had passed its verdict which was unalterable: there was no means of denying that we were once a great tree that blossomed forth, produced its crop of fruit for some time and then shrank and died out.[271]

His passion for his folks in their cultural predicament begins to stir, nonetheless, and he asks himself, 'why compare[the two cultures] at all? Surely a lover does not draw comparisons'.[272] At the height of his bewilderment, the Night of al-Qadr occurs, that special religious occasion towards the end of the fasting month of Ramaḍān, when the gates of Heaven are thought by Muslims to be open for the prayers of the faithful. As he walks in the Saint's square that night, his old spirituality awakens in him, and in a charged, epiphanic moment, he understands why his treatment of Fāṭima's eyes had failed: 'Now I understand what has been hidden from me. There can be no science without faith. She never believed in me, but in your blessing and magnanimity and power, O Umm Hashim!'[273] Ismāʿīl walks into the shrine. This time he sees the shrine in a different light: it was 'radiating with the assurance of an eye that saw and understood all. He imagined that the lamp winked at him and smiled.'[274] He walks up to the servant of the shrine and asks him for some of the oil of the lamp. When he walks out with the little bottle, he is a man reconciled with himself and his culture. Inwardly, he addresses the Square and the people thronging it like this: 'Come unto me all of you! . . . In my heart there is room for your dirt, your ignorance and your lowliness. You belong to me and I belong to you! (p. 56). He returns to Fāṭima in a new spirit, telling her that he has brought her, 'the blessing of 'Umm Hāshim; she will cure you of the disease and return to you your sight . . . I shall teach you how to eat and drink, how to sit and dress. I shall make a human being of you' (p. 56).

Ismāʿīl's objective has not changed. He still aims to draw out Fāṭima/Egypt from the blindness/darkness of her isolation, from her cocooned state of existence, and to teach her a complete lesson in modern civilisation that would turn

her in the end into a 'human being', as he puts it. The objective has indeed not changed, but the approach to its attainment certainly has. A puzzling question that faces us here is the meaning of Ismāʿīl's return to the shrine to ask for a bottle of the lamp's oil – he the European-educated doctor, the rationalist who believes in science, and who has furiously rejected the old superstitions, as we have seen. What does he mean by telling Fāṭima that he was going to cure her with the 'blessing of Umm Hāshim'? Ḥaqqī does not tell us, nor is he expected to. It is up to us as readers to solve this paradox. It is impossible within the context of the story to imagine that the ophthalmologist will start to treat trachoma-infected eyes with lamp oil. What we can imagine is that he may suggest to the diseased Fāṭima that he was doing something of the sort, or that he was mixing his medicine with her superstitious belief in *baraka*, or the Saint's blessing. In doing so he would not be straying from science in any way; suggestion is indeed a recognised psychological method of treatment. Any interpretation therefore that assumes that Ismāʿīl has reneged on science and modernity in favour of superstitious faith will be preposterous. What Ismāʿīl learns from his initial failure is that shock treatment is not the appropriate one for cultural disease; that crossing from death to life, from blindness to vision, from captivity to freedom, from the cocoon of the self to the ambience of the other, does not happen in one leap, and not through compulsion or the peremptory annulment of the self and subsumption in the other, but rather slowly, through gradual change, persuasion, patience and persistence.[275] Had Ismāʿīl himself not spent seven whole years in the heart of Europe before he made the crossing?

A contemporary of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, with his novella published only six years after the former's *Bird of the East*, Ḥaqqī's vision came as a totally different, more realistic approach to the question that vexed Egypt's intellectuals at the time. While al-Ḥakīm indulged in nationalist-motivated, self-deluding idealisation of Eastern civilisation and denigration of Western civilisation, Ḥaqqī readily diagnosed the ailment of his country, prescribed the medicine and was specific on the apposite method for the application of the treatment.[276] He was able to make a more sober approach to the cultural question; in other words, he was able to distinguish between Europe as a colonial power that ought to be vilified and resisted, and Europe as a system of values that evolved from the totality of human endeavour over many centuries; a system of values that was necessary for his own culture if it were to enlist again in this endeavour.

Louis (Luwīs) ʿAwaḍ (1915–90) represents a younger generation than that of the writers I have been discussing so far, but like most of them, he too was born and grew up in the British-occupied Egypt. ʿAwaḍ was probably Egypt's last polymath, the last survivor of the generation of the great *ruwwād* or intellectual pioneers who presided over the transfer of Egypt from semi-medievalism to the modern age. He was not of course quite a pioneer in the way that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, ʿAbbās al-ʿAqqād (1889–1964) and Salāma Mūsā (1887–1958), for example, were. He was on average younger than any of those by some 25 years, and indeed had much to learn from them in his formative years. But in many ways he can be

seen as an extension of their generation and an upholder and developer of their Western-inspired ideals of secularism, liberalism and democracy.

A Christian Copt, born in a lower middle class family, ᶜAwaḍ grew up and finished his schooling in the town of al-Minyā in Upper Egypt. He studied English literature at King Fuʾād I University in Cairo (now Cairo University) where he graduated in 1937. He was then sent to further his studies at Cambridge University, from which he returned in 1940 with an M.Litt. degree to assume a teaching position at his university. In 1951 he was sent to Princeton to study for the doctoral degree which he obtained in 1953. Shortly after his return to Egypt he was dismissed in 1954 from his university post together with 50 others in a political purge undertaken by Nasser's newly established regime. In 1959 he was imprisoned without trial together with scores of suspected communists. He was released the following year and in 1961 became the literary editor of Egypt's leading newspaper *Al-Ahrām*, a position which he occupied for nearly three decades until his death. From his podium at *Al-Ahrām* he was able to monitor, direct and influence the literary scene in Egypt in considerable measure. By the time of his death, he had become something of a national institution, though understandably not without vociferous disparagers among conservative, anti-secularist circles.[277]

His list of publications includes some 50 titles with a wide range of subjects. These include many literary studies of both Arabic and Western literature, translations from English and Greek classics, Egyptian intellectual history, Arabic philology, as well as a few attempts at creative writing.[278] The work that concerns us here is his autobiographical book, *Mudhakkirāt Ṭālib Baᶜtha* or Memoirs of an Overseas Student (henceforward *Mudhakkirāt*), written in 1942 but published only in 1965. The book is largely an account in nearly 300 pages of the author's period of study for the degree of M.Litt. at King's College in Cambridge between the years 1937 and 1940.[279] As a book of memoirs, there is no growth or development of character in *Mudhakkirāt*; no inner conflict, no change of fortune or self-discovery. In other words, there is no attempt at fictionalising the life experience presented in the book; rather the author sticks to a chronological structure beginning with the preparations for the journey by sea to Europe first in Cairo and then in Alexandria, and ends, three years later, by an account of the voyage back to Egypt, degree obtained and mission, or *baᶜtha* to use the word of the Arabic title, accomplished. We are thus faced with a static character against a moving background of events and an ever changing variety of minor characters. As we go along we learn more about the author, the young ᶜAwaḍ, between the twenty-second and twenty-fifth years of his life. But what we know about his character or thought does not emerge from the situations or experiences that he passes through in the course of the narrative. Rather, his character is fully formed in some kind of a priori existence, antecedent to the narrative. It is only that various aspects and traits of it are revealed to us piecemeal through the unfolding chronology of the text.

I have already idiomatically translated the title of the book as Memoirs of an Overseas Student. But it may pay dividends to look at the literal meaning of the Arabic title. *Ṭālib Baᶜtha* happens to be the standard term used by Egyptian authorities to designate postgraduates sent to study abroad, as much today as at

the time of Louis ᶜAwaḍ. So in naming his book the way he does, ᶜAwaḍ appears to be using a simple, descriptive title. *Ṭālib Baᶜtha* translates literally as 'mission student', but the roots *ṭalaba* and *ba ᶜatha* are fraught with transcendental connotations in Arabic. A *ṭālib* is not only a student in the commonplace sense of the word, but also a 'seeker' of knowledge or truth and the Prophetic tradition which enjoins the faithful 'to seek knowledge if even in China' is one of the most quoted in Arabic in educational contexts. On the other hand, the noun *Ba ᶜtha* as I have already indicated means 'mission' and the root *baᶜatha*, apart from its basic meaning of 'sending out', is also the repository for such semantic variety as 'resurrection; renaissance; rebirth; revival'. Indeed the word *mab ᶜūth*, a derivative of this root, is used in Arabic to refer to the prophet of Islam as the one sent by God, much in the same way as the somewhat more common *rasūl* which is derived from a root with a similar meaning. Now if we recall in retrospect that ᶜAwaḍ has come in the fullness of time to be regarded as a principal agent of regeneration, modernisation and secularisation in Egyptian culture in the second half of this century, and more particularly as a transmitter of the values of Western culture to his own, the title of his memoirs begins to acquire an added significance; the transcendental connotations of the words become animated. ᶜAwaḍ was not merely an 'overseas student'; he was a man on a mission and *with* a mission; he was a seeker of truth, the Prometheus of a culture living in the darkness of ignorance sent on a heroic mission to acquire the divine spark of knowledge and modernity from another. Our heightened awareness of the significance of the title can only be supported by our knowledge from later texts that ᶜAwaḍ himself felt throughout his life driven by a sense of mission and had not been too shy to proclaim it. Indeed in the introduction to his one and only novel, *Al-ᶜAnqāʾ* (The Phoenix), written as early as 1946–47 but not published until 1966, ᶜAwaḍ writes with little attempt at self-negation:

> All my contemporaries . . . knew that I was not a mere university teacher in the common sense, but a 'master' (*mu ᶜallim*) of that type that usually only exists at times of transition when barriers between knowledge and life drop. I was inflamed by a lust to reform the world, if I may borrow Shelley's words which described his own condition in the age of the French Revolution.[280]

Mudhakkirāt Ṭālib Ba ᶜtha was an early fruit of this Promethean lust or quest that motivated ᶜAwaḍ. (It is interesting to note here that he has translated into Arabic Shelley's drama *Prometheus Unbound*,[281] while his PhD dissertation submitted to Princeton University in 1953 was on 'The theme of Prometheus in English and French Literature'.[282]) Seen in this mythical framework, it is most felicitous that what is in essence a life account lends itself readily to structures usually applied only to fictional design. By this I mean the circular voyage pattern of the memoirs, in which the hero proceeds from home to Europe, achieves the knowledge acquisition purpose of his journey, and returns home triumphantly to disseminate this knowledge among his people. This comfortably mirrors Prometheus' incursion into the Olympic Mountains, smuggling the fire of the gods and taking it back to mankind.

As a Promethean text, *Mudhakkirāt* is centrally preoccupied with a dialectic between men and gods, with a burning desire to know why gods are gods and men are just men. In other words, it is concerned with the East–West question, the issues of self and other and what they think of each other, and above all the infinite craving of the self to become like the superior other. It is the manifestations of this central debate in the book that should interest us in the context of the present study.

The dialectic between cultures begins very early on in the first chapter when ᶜAwaḍ is busy finalising his scholarship papers in government departments. On one occasion a minor clerk notices that he has signed his name Luwīs ᶜAwaḍ instead of the full Luwīs Ḥannā Khalīl ᶜAwaḍ and requires him to correct it. ᶜAwaḍ complies. But then the clerk requires him to sign his first name as Luwīz (Louise), not Luwīs. When ‘Awad protests that Luwīz is a girl’s name and that his name was spelt with a *zay* in the birth certificate only because of the clerk’s ignorance, his defence bears no weight with his antagonist and he is forced to sign as Luwīz on pain of losing his scholarship. As he leaves the office he makes the comparison in his mind with correspondence coming from the registrar of Cambridge University in which he is simply referred to as Mr ᶜAwaḍ. Thus attention is drawn in passing to two different cultures; one that is formalistic and trivialistic and another that is pragmatic and goes for the heart of the matter.

At the end of the first chapter, our hero is on board the Kawthar sailing to France. Once more we have to accept the gift of a free symbolic name from reality. For Kawthar was indeed the name of the ship on which ᶜAwaḍ travelled, and a footnote tells us that it was one of the first three ocean liners bought by the Egyptian Marine Company in 1934. But Kawthar is also the name of a river in Paradise according to the Qurʾān – not at all a bad coincidence in the context of a Promethean account of a journey to Mount Olympus. As our protagonist watches from the deck the receding harbour, the last images of home that he takes away with him are those of the porters in their ‘dirty’ *galabiyas*, the stacked cartons and the ‘horrible’ cranes[283] – hardly an idyllic picture. Compare this with the dream picture that he has of England in his mind, and with which he had earlier opened the same chapter and indeed the whole book. He is on the train taking him from his native Minyā in Upper Egypt to Cairo to begin the paper work for the scholarship. He dismisses Minyā as ‘a tin of sardines’, where no one with imagination and dreams can be happy, and goes on like this:

> I want to go to England. I want to see the Thames, Westminster, Soho, the Tower of London, Picadilly, Saint Paul’s, the Lakes. I want to see the postcard turn into reality in front of me. I want to mix with the people who have given us trouble in Egypt since 1882. 1 want to live on Wuthering Heights and in the Yorkshire Dales with Catherine and Heathcliff. The land of the snow, rain and brown fog of Mr Eliot’s poems.
>
> (p. 29)

Here we have a picture that combines elements of the ‘touristy’ with elements of high culture, and in both its aspects, it contrasts sharply with its colour, variety

and promise with the 'sardine-tin' Minyā and the previously quoted drab picture of the Alexandria port. The language and images here and there invoke respectively the reality left behind and the dream journeyed to. But we must not ignore a key sentence in the above passage: 'I want to mix with the people who have given us trouble in Egypt since 1882.' Those people he refers to are, of course, the British, the European gods, whose 'fire' he wants to procure for his own people back home. This parenthetical sentence is the paradoxical element in this opening paragraph of the chapter, and indeed of the whole book. We shall always encounter expressions of fascination with the West and discontent with the conditions of Egypt. But the fascination will often be coupled with a measure of resentment, while the discontent will be seen to be sympathetic underneath and essentially motivated by a desire on the part of the self to match the achievement of the other.

As the ship sails away from the shore, the protagonist's thoughts are centred on the idea that he will not see his country again for years, but try as he may, he is unable to give in to emotion, contrary to his fellow passengers, some of whom are overcome by tears. His mind is shown to be in control over his heart, and as such he is singled out from the culture he represents where traditionally emotions reign supreme. As an emissary to the culture of the intellect, he is thus well equipped. The cutting off of ties with his own culture is underlined when he refers to the past 22 years of his life as having sunk in the sea (p. 44) and later again as having been wasted in vain (*rāḥū balāsh*) (p. 71). Rather than looking backward, his thoughts are riveted on his destination, on the land of the other: 'All my life I have hankered for the other side of the Mediterranean' (p. 45). Once he has settled in his cabin, he changes into golf trousers and a Norfolk jacket for the first time in his life – a symbolic initiation rite into the new culture.

ᶜAwaḍ's fascination with the European other is never presented in the absolute; it is always expressed in the context of the desire to emulate and transfer experience from one culture to another. On their way to England, ᶜAwaḍ and his fellow students stop in Paris for a couple of days. There he makes the acquaintance of another Egyptian student studying at the Sorbonne, one who, like himself, was destined to become one of Egypt's foremost intellectuals in the second half of the century, namely academic and literary critic Muḥammad Mandūr (1907–65). Mandūr shows him around and takes him to the Latin Quarter.

He reports the experience in these terms:

> Just being in the Latin Quarter is enough to unhinge one. I look around me and I see nothing extraordinary – people in hats, streets, buildings. But the idea! The idea that I was in the Latin Quarter, where all Egypt's men of letters had tramped about made me tremble. O God! When would I tramp about in this quarter like Zakī Mubārak, al-Ṣāwī – and Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm . . . and write as they have?
>
> (p. 63)

Thus fascination with the Latin Quarter is coupled with an incantation of the magic names of other Promethean figures from Egypt who had been there before him.

A Promethean stance is necessarily one that is defiant and irreverent towards the gods. Hence the young protagonist's espousal of some of the stock notions about the English and his satirical exposition of them. His first train journey from Dover to London gives rise to some facile meditations on the nature of the English. He is struck by the silence of the passengers and their apparent absorption in their inner worlds. He argues that when one is silent, one must be thinking, and therefore judging by their prolonged silences the English must be the most thinking, most philosophical people on earth. However, in his estimation the Englishman is the only human animal capable of sitting for ten hours without doing anything or thinking about anything. He argues that the English barricade themselves in public behind newspapers, books or closed eyes in order to remain in control. 'England' is an island and every Englishman is an island in himself. They are lacking in self-confidence; that is why they need their silence to maintain their sense of superiority. That is also why when they talk to people they do not know, they only talk about the weather and similarly ineffectual matters that reveal nothing of the personality. He recalls how a train passenger once 'forgot his Englishness' and engaged with him in a political discussion on the day Hitler's armies entered Czechoslovakia, but fell immediately silent when another Englishman joined the compartment (pp. 85–90).

There is nothing original about these superficial impressions of a foreigner about the English. What is interesting however from my analytical point of view is that the only English quality that ᶜAwaḍ singled out for criticism is the one that seems to be in conflict with his Promethean mission. A Promethean quest is by nature an incursive one, seeking to raid the other, probe into his world and unravel his mystery. Hence, the protagonist's frustration at the impregnable English defences. Indeed, despite the book's relative length and the fact that it is an account of three years of the author's life in England, there is not in it one instance of a genuine friendship with an Englishman. The only relationship in the book with a warm human element in it is that with a young woman called Pamela, whom the author got to know during the few months he spent in London before his official enrolment at Cambridge. But then Pamela, we are told, was half Spanish and that surely is enough to take care of the warmth. The girl quickly falls in love with ᶜAwaḍ and while he is initially infatuated with her, he quickly becomes aware of her demand on his time and reminds himself that he had come to England 'on a mission'. He puts an end to the relationship with surgical though gentlemanly control – a Prometheus should never be deflected by temptation from his sacred objective. This episode which occupies ten odd pages in the book (pp. 126–37) will call to the mind al-Ḥakīm's *ᶜUṣfūr*, published in 1938, only four years before ᶜAwaḍ wrote his *Mudhakkirāt*,[284] and of which ᶜAwaḍ would doubtless have been aware. Central to al-Ḥakīm's novel, as we have seen, is the relationship between the protagonist Muḥsin and the French girl Suzie, which is meant to allegorise the relationship between East and West. The girl is shown to be materialistic and manipulative while Muḥsin is innocent and emotional. One wonders whether it would not be legitimate to read a kind of intertextuality here by which the realistic account in ᶜAwaḍ's memoirs, where the Eastern character is

the calculating one, could be seen to betray the spuriousness of the fictionalised account in al-Ḥakīm's novel. Looking from the other end of the perspective, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to say that the cold rationality of ᶜAwaḍ's protagonist anticipates the fateful calculations of one Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd, who was to appear several decades later in al-Ṭayyib Sālih's *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamāl* (*Season of Migration to the North*, 1967).

We have seen how stereotyped ᶜAwaḍ's thoughts about the other were. Now is the time to look at the other side of the coin: his account of the other's thoughts about the self. These, we shall see, are no less stereotyped and indeed downright hilarious. On one occasion ᶜAwaḍ is shown around Cambridge by Joan, a 14-year-old and the daughter of his landlords. Here is his account of the outing:

> Every now and then she would stop and point at one college or another. 'Do you have colleges in Egypt?' she would say.
> 'Yes, Joan'.
> We would walk a little more and come across a park. 'Do you have parks in Egypt?'
> 'Yes, Joan'.
> A bus goes by.
> 'Do you have buses in Egypt?' 'Yes, Joan'.
> My face is turning red with annoyance and embarrassment, but I keep quiet. Who does she think we are? Savages? We come to a lamp post. And, yes; she says it.
> 'Do you have lamp posts in Egypt?'
>
> (pp. 158–59)

On another occasion he meets someone who should be more knowledgeable than a 14-year-old – the son of a university professor and himself a biology student at St John's College. However he asks him 'Do you in Egypt bathe in milk?', and again: 'Do you in Egypt sit under palm trees and let dates drop in your open mouths?' These questions which exasperate our protagonist do not however stop him inwardly from levelling some self-criticism at his own culture if only in socio-political terms. He remarks to himself that in Egypt the aristocratic class do not only bathe in milk, but also 'eat gold and quench their thirst with the tears of the poor', while he sees in the question about dates dropping in open mouths a metaphor for a culture of pre-destination that does not initiate action but waits passively for things to happen. But whatever ᶜAwaḍ thought about the shortcomings of his own culture, the type of English notions about it that he continually came up against would seem to suggest that the English conceived of Egypt as an ahistorical entity with a fixed essence: 'A lot of people in England know nothing about Egypt apart from what they have read in the Bible,' comments ᶜAwaḍ (pp. 159–60).

Ironically however, while resenting the other's fixed notions about his own culture, ᶜAwaḍ's own observations appear sometimes to converge unwittingly with the very notions he rejects. On his first stroll in downtown London, he is

overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of life and the apparent sense of purpose of people going about their business one early morning in Oxford Street. He contrasts this with the laxity and slow rhythm of life in Cairo: 'Here [in London] you can only see men on the move, women on the move, cars on the move, buses on the move. The whole nation is on the move. You feel as if you were carried along the current of a river . . . rather than being in a swamp, in an ancient fixed existence . . .' (p. 114). ᶜAwaḍ may be dismissive of his own culture here in favour of the model presented by the other, but there should be no mistaking the sentiment behind his dismissal: it stems from the desire to spring his culture from its ancient fixity into the kind of new vibrant life he has seen. The same sentiment of sorrow for the self and envy of the other can be felt in another episode. ᶜAwaḍ describes how 'when the crocuses blossomed', as he puts it, he used to go and stand on the so-called Bridge of Sighs in Cambridge and watch students down below punting their boats, while their girls reclined reading a novel or dreaming of what they would be doing when the river cast them out of town where lovers meet. ᶜAwaḍ comments after this description: 'I would look on and feel sorry for the Nile and the tent of mourning struck over it in summer as in winter' (pp. 148–49).

Finally, I should indicate that central to the narrative discourse of *Mudhakkirāt* is a pervading fascination with the intellectual achievements of European culture from the ancient Greeks and their mythology to Shakespeare and Milton, to Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot. The text is vibrant with a myriad literary references, almost from every discipline of knowledge and from every age, displaying astonishing erudition and assimilation of learning. In a Promethean text, this of course is as it should be. It is for the divine spark of knowledge that ᶜAwaḍ is in Europe, and so it is in order that the text should perpetually engage in a dialectic with the texts of the other, with his poets and thinkers and artists and philosophers – are these not the makers of the fire that he wants to bring back home?[285]

The Iraqi novelist and short story writer **Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb** (1908–88), a pioneer of fiction writing in Iraq, comparable perhaps to the status of Shakīb al-Jābirī in Syria, has also made a contribution to the theme of the cultural encounter with the West in some of his works. In 1939, he published his novel, *Al-Duktūr Ibrāhīm: Ḥayātuhu wa Maʾāthiruhu* (Dr Ibrahim: his Life and Deeds), a largely didactic work voicing social and political criticism of the Iraqi society and officialdom of the day. The novel is centred on the character of Ibrāhīm, the epitome of corruption and self-seeking, whose portrayal as an evil man is exaggerated to the point of caricature, perhaps for maximum didactic effect. What concerns us here is that Ibrāhīm receives his higher education in England, where he does not only qualify as an agriculturalist, but also marries an English woman whom he takes back home on the completion of his studies. His sojourn in England occupies only a small portion of the book, and his English wife, Jenny, is flatly portrayed and almost forgotten once he is back in Baghdad where the bulk of the story is set. Like many an Oriental fictive hero before and since him, Ibrāhīm arrives in London full of yearning for 'the world of freedom, emancipation, and pleasure';[286] an invariable key concept of the West in the modern Oriental

imagination. Like many notions and threads in the novel, this is one that is offered but not developed at any stage. What the author is preoccupied with is the continuation of his portrayal of his protagonist as an unprincipled opportunist, no less in his relations with the other as with his own people. He becomes more English than the English in his manners, and is flattered when he is described by English colleagues as a true gentleman, 'as if he had not come from the savage land of the Arabs' (p. 109). Conversely, he is unperturbed by the criticism of his fellow Arab students, who accuse him of blindness to the faults of the English, who 'may not know how to make small lies but are clever at big ones; who are horrified at the killing of a dog but will not disapprove of the killing of thousands of humans; who send to prison transgressors on the liberty of others in their own country, while sentencing to death those who demand freedom for their nations in their colonies . . .'[287] (p. 111). None of this invective of the colonised carries any weight with Ibrāhīm who, in his search for personal advancement, is prepared to renounce his culture completely: 'How I wish I could shed this skin of mine to replace it with white skin, like that of the English and thus become one of them . . .' (p. 112). This is as far as Ayyūb's exploration of the cultural encounter goes in this novel. The theme is incidental rather than central; it is there only as a facet of the protagonist's negative portrayal as an amoral person who would stop at nothing in his self-advancement. It is thus an individualised representation which cannot be seen as indicative of a typical Oriental attitude towards the Western other.[288]

His collection of short stories, *Qiṣaṣ min* Vienna (Stories from Vienna, 1957), written relatively shortly after the end of the Second World War, and based on his experience of life in Vienna where he settled in 1954 until his death, hardly qualify as serious art, or as anything more than shallow observation of a European society, still reeling from the war experience.[289] The observations/sketches/recordings are sometimes detached views of the other with no particular emphasis of his otherness and no involvement of the self in the experience being observed. At other times however, issues of the self are brought in although rarely in a convincing manner; intellectual issues remain at a discursive level, hardly transformed into art matter.

Issues of art and craft apart, there is one sense in which Ayyūb can be seen to have been ahead of his time, at least as far as the development of the theme of the Western encounter is concerned. He appears to be the first to have stressed the notion of the similarity of human beings across cultures, and to have highlighted the possibility, nay the spontaneity of the encounter on the interpersonal level despite superficial cultural differences and existing political conflicts. The story 'Aytām fī ᶜīd al-Mīlād' (Orphans on Christmas Day) is a good example. It is a love story, set in Vienna in common with all the stories of the collection, between an Iranian man and an Austrian woman. The cultural issue is approached partly through a theme of appearance and reality, where the woman, Renata, keeps secret from him the reality of her poverty and her two children from an American soldier who abandoned her, and projects herself as a superior person with a more refined life style. Riḍā, the Iranian man, is often offended by this attitude, which

he interprets in cultural terms: 'You seize every opportunity', he rails at her, 'to demonstrate to me that you are a European of finer taste . . . as if you wanted to tell me that I was a backward Oriental . . .'.[290] As the story develops, it turns out that this cultural interpretation was nothing but a figment of Riḍa's imagination, that Renata's attitude was nothing but a self-defence mechanism to hide her poverty. The reality which she has tried to hide from him with pretence for too long is revealed when on account of his loneliness, she is cornered into inviting him to spend Christmas Day with her family. The irony of the situation is enhanced by the punctilious preparations that Riḍā undertakes for the occasion in his eagerness to look the perfect Austrian gentleman. In order to gain acceptability, he assumes the appearance of and acts as much as possible as the other would on such an occasion, from the style of dress to prompt punctuality, and kissing the hand of his hostess on arrival. All this build up is followed in the narrative by the anticlimax of arriving at a very modest flat where Renata lives with her mother who suffers from a piteous if endearing nervous illness, and two previously unannounced children. Full of trepidation at how Riḍā was going to take the new reality, Renata is apologetic, but if anything the discovery brings the two lovers closer: 'I now feel that you are a woman from the same world as I come from', he tells her (p. 295). The conversation with Renata and her mother is managed by the author to portray Europeans, who had at the time only recently been freed from Nazism, and Orientals as both sufferers from despotism. And as Renata eats in a simple manner, contrary to her affectatious manner at restaurants before, she asks Riḍā if he would now 'stop calling her "the arrogant Europe" '. His answer could not be more reconciliatory, whether taken on the realistic level of the story, or on the allegorical cultural level: 'you in fact are the true Europe, who hides its misery behind the mask of pride. If She would only remove the mask and reveal her true spirit, the Orient would open its heart unto her and the curtain of pretence would be lifted from between them' (pp. 299–300). This romanticisation of the relationship between Europe and the Orient at a time when colonialism was still either current or very recent history is amazing in its visionary reconciliatory message, transcendent as it is of everything except what is essentially human, similar and unifying of the human experience. The last lines of the story deserve to be quoted: 'As Riḍā walked towards Renata, her eyes glowed like the candles on the Christmas tree. She put out her arms to him and the four lips met: East and West met in quintessential love and deep understanding' (p. 300). Ayyūb could not refrain from spelling out the allegorical meaning of his story in its conclusion. If this message may have sounded too romantic in its day, it is undoubtedly more in harmony with contemporary approaches in the postcolonial period to the theme of the cultural encounter, as we shall see in the work of such authors as Bahāʾ Ṭāhir, Ḥanān al-Shaykh, and Ahdaf Soueif.[291]

Al-Ḥayy al-Lātīnī (The Latin Quarter, 1953) by the Lebanese novelist, academic and publisher, **Suhayl Idrīs** (b. 1923?), is today regarded among the classics of Arabic fiction on the theme of the cultural encounter. To what extent it deserves

this status is what I shall try to examine here. As in all cases, more than fifty years after its publication, it is certainly overdue for a reassessment. In his novel, Suhayl Idrīs subscribes to the tradition already established by Egyptian authors in the two previous decades, as we have seen in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Adīb*, al-Ḥakīm's *Bird of the East*, and Ḥaqqī's *The Saint's Lamp*. He too approaches the theme through a sexual encounter between an Arab male student and a European woman, in this instance also a student. The narrator/protagonist arrives in Paris from Beirut to undertake higher studies in literature (in common with the author who obtained his PhD from the Sorbonne in 1952). From the beginning, the narrative creates an equation between Paris and life, vitality, and freedom, while Beirut is associated with the opposite notions. Arab students in Paris feel as if 'they had cast off the burden of poise that weighed them down in their country, and felt invited to lead in Paris a free unrestricted life'.[292] The protagonist calls upon himself to wrench Beirut out of his soul, kill it, and bury it (p. 22). From the beginning too, freedom is equated with sexual freedom: it was 'the vision of the European woman' that lured the protagonist to run away from 'the East', while the Eastern woman is associated with 'fear, deprivation, inhibition, aberrancy, isolation and sickly fancies', where no fulfilment free of guilt is possible (pp. 28–29), and where a great many of the Arab youth are 'prevented from fulfilling their highest potential because their needs for love and sex are unsatisfied' (pp. 132–33).

The entire cultural question in this novel is reduced, through the relationship between the nameless Lebanese protagonist and the French girl, Janine, in the foreground, and the endless sexual escapades of Arab students in Paris in the background, to a conflict between sexual purity on the one hand and sexual liberty or promiscuity on the other.[293] Needless to say, the first is associated with the East and the latter with the West.[294] But it must be noted that sexual purity is not idealised; indeed it is shown to be no less problematic than promiscuity. The narrative is often used on the most tenuous of thematic pretexts for meditations by the author/protagonist on the status of women and sexual relations in Arab society. The full sexual relations with the French Janine are juxtaposed with the excessive but typical shyness of Nāhida's, the protagonist's all-but-declared fiancee in Beirut, who draws back in alarm on merely realising that she was standing too close to him during a brief unchaperoned encounter in his room. This triggers, not untypically in the novel, a short treatise on the psychology of the Arab woman, for example, 'the Arab woman fears man; fears the being in whom she should trust because she fears his body, instead of loving it' (pp. 213–14). But the Arab male protagonist who arrives in Paris is no less steeped in a sensibility that associates sex with impurity and immorality. After a couple of passing encounters with French girls, he wonders whether the satisfaction he now experienced for the first time in his life was anything but 'dust, mire, dirty matter'. He cannot overcome the horror of the notion of 'a girl who gives all from the first encounter'[295], and escapes into the vision of 'the little beautiful face' (pp. 76–77) of his mother, who is later developed in the book into an archetypal preserver of Eastern traditions in the harshest sense. Her letters to him warn him from the beginning of the women of Paris, and in due course it is she who destroys the

relationship between him and Janine when it comes into conflict with her plans for him and her traditional notions of morality and chastity.[296]

The author portrays his protagonist's relationship with Janine as the complete love, where both the needs of body and soul are fulfilled: '[Previously] he had known of love only one or other of its aspects: either spiritual ecstasy alone [i.e. in associations with Lebanese girls], or physical pleasure alone [i.e. in fleeting relationships with French girls]…he never imagined that a man could realise in the closeness of a female both pleasures, as he had with Janine' (p. 151). This complete love is however thrown to the wind under the force of tradition. When the protagonist returns to Beirut for the summer holiday and receives a letter from Janine announcing her pregnancy and asking him what she should do, he yields to the pressure of his mother who forces him to write a cruel letter to Janine denying anything to do with her or the pregnancy. Later he repents and returns to Paris to find Janine, only to discover that she had already had an abortion and disappeared. At this juncture the author allows the novel to descend into high melodrama, as Janine who is abandoned by her family as well, drops her studies and is inexplicably unable to find a job after her discharge from hospital, reduced to penury and has become more or less a woman of the street by the time the protagonist finds her. In true form to the ideals of the romantic novel, he nobly proposes to her, undeterred by the challenges he will have to face as a result back home, but with equal magnanimity she declines to become 'an obstacle in the way of his ambition'. 'I shall be at the foot of the mountain but you will be at the summit', she writes to him, 'Go forward, my love, and do not look behind! As for me, I shall always draw from my painful love for you, light…and sustenance until the end of my days. Go back, my Arab beloved, to your faraway East that awaits you, and needs your youth and your effort!' (pp. 281–82).

An Arabised Lady of the Camellias? Perhaps. But what has this to do with the East–West encounter? There is nothing intrinsically French about Janine, nor is the protagonist in a state of conflict between two cultures. He is a typical Eastern man with a typical sexual morality that was already being questioned by changing social norms in Arab urban society at the time of the authorship of the novel. Janine, on the other hand, could have been a socially and sexually liberated Arab young woman, of the type that peoples the fiction of the Egyptian Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs (1919–90) of about the same period, for instance; the type that the traditional/sexually unliberated man normally fell in love with but eventually abandoned to marry a woman who conformed to conventional notions of chastity. This is really a novel about social morality in the context of gender relations, and not about the clash or encounter of cultures. Janine is far too much individualised and romanticised to support any notions of cultural otherness, and the protagonist's rejection of her is not a cultural rejection but a symptom of an inner conflict between two incompatible moralities at a time of changing social and sexual mores. The fact that the conflict is staged in Paris and that Janine is given a French label is rather tenuous and incidental.[297]

Also of dubious status as a novel of the cultural encounter is the Egyptian **Waguih Ghali**'s (d. 1969) only novel, *Beer in the Snooker Club* (originally

written in English, 1964) which is more of a condemnation of Nasser's Egypt, the persecution of communists under his regime, as well as an irreverent elegy of the demise of the aristocratic class and rise of the army officer class in the post-1952 Egypt than a novel about issues of the encounter of East and West. Ram, the narrator and central consciousness in the novel,[298] is a young and 'poor' aristocrat, turned communist through a liberal education (much of it through his own wide readings), disillusionment with his own class, and a realisation of its moral bankruptcy and social injustice. After graduation, Ram and his friend Font spend a period in London in the mid-1950s, just before the Suez Crisis. The West they leave to is an idealised one: 'We left . . . for London. For the dreamed-of Europe, for "civilization", for "freedom of speech", for "culture", for "life".'[299] Once they were in London, the idealised image is soon modified as they come up against lingering imperialist and racist attitudes, and are treated with scorn by immigration officers. Most telling perhaps is the encounter with Steve, the ex-soldier who served with the British army in Suez. In Egypt, ' 'e never got to the natives', as his mother puts it in her cockney English, 'wot with army rules and all that' (p. 63). When they accept an invitation to have tea at Steve's place so that he may have an opportunity to meet in London the natives he never met in Egypt, they are in for a surprise. He totally and unconsciously depersonalises them; as if their presence in the 'civilised' environment of London has rid them of their native Egyptian identity. Thus he talks to them in all innocence about the natives at Suez, who will 'fleece you if you're not careful', and it being 'not safe after dark. You know what the wogs are like'. These statements, he makes, ironically, while performing the duties of hospitality impeccably, 'pouring us tea and offering us cakes and lighting our cigarettes' (p. 85).

The encounter however is never presented in terms of black and white. The ignorance and insensitivity of the ex-soldier is offset by the politeness and apologies of his mother, his fiancee and her family, but it is among their middle-class acquaintances that Ram and Font come across some early expositions of the post-Second World War, postcolonial 'reformed', British attitudes. Discussing with their hosts the legality of overstaying in Britain after the expiry date of their visa, John, a young member of the family, rails at his country's policy: 'I suppose you call eighty thousand of our soldiers in Suez against Egyptian wishes, not against the law? . . . I'm sure everyone of them has a visa duly stamped and signed for at the Egyptian Consulate . . . We English never break the law, it's so malleable in our capable hands' (pp. 65–66).

The tension between the pre-conceived, idealised image and firsthand experience of reality continues throughout the part of the book that is set in London. Even a visit to the pub has a special significance. Describing his feelings on such an occasion, Ram says, 'I was enjoying myself. Not particularly because of what we were talking about, but because I was there in a pub with the "intellectuals" I had read about in books, and because the girls were attractive . . . It was natural to want to fit this environment to the books I had read, and to tell myself: here you are, Ram . . . life'[300] (p. 69). Ram's attitude towards the English is perhaps best summed up by a reverie that is told in the mock heroic style. Ram imagines

himself in a large pub (again!) giving a speech to hundreds of English people, 'telling them all about the cruelty and the misery the English have inflicted upon the millions…' (p. 75). He scoffs at his imaginary audience in a diatribe that deserves to be quoted at length:

> No Englishman is low enough to have scruples, no Englishman is high enough to be free from their tyranny. But every Englishman is born with a certain power. When he wants a thing, he never tells himself he wants it. He waits until there comes to his mind, no one knows how, a burning conviction that it is his moral and religious duty to conquer those who possess the thing he wants, and then he grabs it. He is never at a loss for an effective moral attitude to take. When he wants a new market for his adulterated goods, he sends a missionary to teach the natives the gospel of peace. The natives kill the missionary, the Englishman flies to arms in defence of Christianity, fights for it, conquers for it, and takes the market as a reward from heaven.
>
> (p. 76)

We should not be deluded by the playful sarcasm of the reverie, or the exaggerated stereotyping in its portrayal of the English; this is as serious a critique of British imperialism as one will find in a work of fiction written by an Egyptian. Certain aspects of it may sound dated today, but we must remember that the novel was published in 1964, and that it is set mostly in the first half of the 1950s.

As argued earlier, this is not a novel where the theme of the cultural encounter occupies centre stage. It is a *bildungsroman* of sorts, which traces the growth of the central character, Ram, and of which his relationships with foreigners in Egypt, and interaction with them during his relatively short period in London, is part. All this is presented in a wider context of social and political upheaval in Egypt during the early years of Nasser's regime and up to the Suez War. Not least among the concerns of the novel is the dilemma of the Egyptian Jewry following the creation of Israel, and the officers' coup of 1952, which is explored through the central love relationship in the book, that is, that between the protagonist Ram and the rich Egyptian Jewess, Edna. This is the only work of fiction by an Egyptian, to my knowledge, which deals with the issue, and it is against the background of this relationship that the East–West encounter theme is explored. The main theme of the book is however outside the scope of this study.

3 The postcolonial period (1)

Proud encounters

The changes that took place in the world order after the Second World War culminating in the creation of the United Nations in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948; the gaining of independence from European powers by ex-colonies in Asia and Africa from the late 1940s through to the 1960s including all Arab countries; the emergence of self-confident nationalist regimes with anti-imperialist ideologies and policies in the Arab world, particulary Nasser's (1918–70; in power, 1952–70) in Egypt; the establishment in 1955 of the Non-Aligned Movement, in which Nasser's Egypt played a leading role, and which brought together recently independent nations of the developing world and advocated policies opposed to Western world hegemony and supportive of independence movements worldwide, while seeking to maintain a neutral stand between the Soviet and Western blocs during the prime of the Cold War; above all perhaps Nasser's success in his confrontation with the two greatest colonial powers of the past, Britain and France, over the Suez crisis – all these new factors heralded a postcolonial age and have naturally affected the way Arab intellectuals, in common with other intellectuals in former colonies, saw the European other. There was born a new spirit of national confidence; the need was no longer felt to create false structures, based on self-righteous assumptions about spirit and matter in order to promote the self and denigrate the other, as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm had done during the colonial period, for instance. Independence boosted the self's morale and there were to follow representations in literature of the self as an equal of the other.

* * *

The sense of national confidence vis à vis the Western other in the postcolonial era has perhaps found its earliest exponent in literary form in **Yūsuf Idrīs** (1927–91) and is well encapsulated in a key passage from one of the writer's novels, which amounts to a direct statement on the issue. The novel concerned is the admittedly autobiographical *Al-Bayḍāʾ* (The White Woman), written in 1955 but unpublished until 1970.[301] The passage is fully quoted in Kurpershoek's study of the author and I shall simply reproduce it here:[302]

> It was really a confusing situation, but that is the way it was. By nature I was fond of every thing European, particularly of European women, why I do not know.

> On our visits to Ismailia or Port Said, for instance, we noticed the European character of these cities and of the Canal Zone in general: bungalow-style houses with sloping roofs, stoves and chimneys; and of course the tidiness, calm and order. Order, so distasteful to us, becomes in their hands an art. The art of order: orderly eating, orderly warfare, orderly loving. It made me feel sad to see those things and deep in my heart I wished that all of us could become like that white, complicated being with its ruddy face. But amazingly enough I never wanted to become European. I dreamt of possessing their wonderful inventiveness, cleanliness and sense of order, but possessing them myself as an Arab, for I was not prepared to have one single hair of my head changed. Sometimes, when taking part in demonstrations against the British occupation, I noticed to my surprise that I shouted our slogan 'Down with the English!' with as much rancour and disgust as I admired what I saw of them in Ismailia, Alexandria and Port Said.[303]

This revealing confession by the protagonist/narrator, who is obviously a persona for the author, is symptomatic of the ambivalent love–hate or fascination–repugnance sentiment that almost every Arab intellectual has experienced towards the West from the time of al-Jabartī down to the present day. Idrīs's admiration here is the unqualified one of a young man still in his twenties. It extends from urban planning and architecture down to such qualities as order, cleanliness and inventiveness. The irony in the situation is that the object of his fascination is a colonial power that he is fighting to eradicate from his country. Another characteristic factor in the relation raised by the passage is that of identity: how to adopt the European way of life and value system, while remaining Arab, or as the author puts it, without having 'one single hair of my head changed'.

In the following pages I shall examine how these sentiments materialised in the author's representations of the West in his writings. Idrīs's interest in the subject of the Eastern encounter with the West found expression in a fair number of his works, spanning the genres of the short story, novella, play and literary essay. The novella 'al-Sayyida Fīyinā' (Madam Vienna), first published in 1959,[304] was his contribution to the then already established theme of the Arab in Europe. It is worth noting that some 20 years later, Idrīs was to retitle his novella as 'Vienna 60', that is 1960, and republish it in one volume with a new novella, titled *Nuyū Yūrk 80* (New York 80), published in 1980.[305] I shall deal in the present chapter with 'Madam Vienna', and delay my consideration of New York 80 until Chapter 5, in which I examine Arab representations of the West as embodied by the United States in particular.

Taking after al-Ḥakīm, Ḥaqqī and Suhayl Idrīs, Yūsuf Idrīs presents the cultural issue in both stories in terms of a sexual encounter between a male Arab (in this case Egyptian) and a female Westerner. Unlike in previous treatments of the theme, the protagonist in 'Madam Vienna', is not a student with a long-stay scholarship in Europe, but a civil servant on a few days' mission. The European woman with whom the encounter takes place has a small secretarial job in some company. The intellectual dimension, therefore, which dominated the works of al-Ḥakīm and Ḥaqqī is diminished here with the introduction of these fairly ordinary representatives of their respective cultures. This fact, while broadening the scope

of any conclusions about the cultural encounter drawn from the story, helps throughout against turning what is a very lively and self-sustaining story into an allegorical situation bedraggled with intellectual juxtapositions, as we have seen happen for instance in al-Ḥakīm's treatment of the theme.

The protagonist, Darsh, a married man, father and great womaniser all his life, is tired of the women of his country. He may have been sent to Europe on an official mission, but he had only one personal motive: 'to try a European woman . . .' (p. 77). The cultural dimension to his sexual curiosity is hinted at in his definition of his personal mission as that of 'conquering Europe, the woman' (p. 79). As he roams the streets of Vienna, he is dazzled by the beauty and variety of Austrian women in whom 'the spirit of Europe is concentrated' (p. 80). But Darsh is not just after any European woman – he is adamant not to have anything to do with street girls. He wants the encounter to be 'with a true European lady of character, who wants him, and not his money, and who would give him herself of her own free will . . .' (p. 86). It is more than sexual knowledge he is after; he is after knowledge of the European other. And when American sailors suddenly flood the streets, he fears no competition because he knows they are after 'the frivolous Europe', whereas he is looking for 'Europe, the lady' (p. 87).[306]

After many failed attempts, Darsh manages in the nick of time on his last night in Vienna to make the contact he had so much feared he would have to go back without. His persistence, daring , humour and past expertise in female conquests pay off when he chats up a beautiful and respectable woman on her way home after a long day's work and an evening at the opera with friends. Like him she is married and has children, though her husband is briefly away on business. Throughout, Darsh maintains a tentative approach towards the woman and is not quite sure how to handle her. As he puts it, 'his brain is nearly exploded with bewilderment on account of her: 'Is she a devil or an angel? Naive or cunning? Is she making fun of him or has she really fallen for him?' (p. 126). Her neutral smile puzzles him and the way she shakes her head could mean 'yes' as much as 'no' (p. 127). All these seemingly innocent details appear to be spontaneously coded with a reflection of the historical suspicion and uncertainty that characterise the attitude of East towards West. On the other hand, when he holds her tightly and kisses her for the first time, she groans, 'You are going to break my back, African!' (p. 127), addressing him generically by the name of the different race he belongs to. Nor is it an oversight on the part of the author that Darsh never learns her name nor she his. Each of them is to the other the representative of a whole opposite culture and not just an individual, and it is perhaps to draw attention to this fact that Idrīs leaves them anonymous to each other. Significantly again he gives his protagonist the name Darsh, which is uniquely Egyptian. The woman, on the other hand, is referred to in the title by the name of the very city whose culture she embodies.

As the situation develops, it transpires that the so-called 'Madam Vienna' was no less curious about the 'otherness' of Darsh than he about hers, nor any less eager either to discover him. She says to him:

> We here in the West hear a lot about the East, its mystery, its men and its charm. I have always dreamt of a brown Eastern prince as a teenager, and

> even as a wife and mother. When I saw you I thought I had found him and that it was a chance in a lifetime . . . .
>
> (p. 141)

Darsh is thus made aware that her expectations of him are no less than his of her, and is determined 'to raise high Africa's head', to use the author's sexually suggestive phrase (p. 146). Idrīs then develops the situation in such a way as to suggest that our unfounded expectations of the other, our misconceptions or fanciful ideas about other cultures can only hamper a genuine encounter.

Through a series of little details and situations the *reality* of the European woman, and by implication her whole culture, gradually displaces her mythologised image in Darsh's head. When he holds her hand, he experiences a feeling of fellowship towards her as he notices 'her thin fingers, made strong through hammering at typewriter keys' (pp. 129–30). Again, when he enters her flat, he is struck by its narrowness and the numerous familiar little objects that he can see all over the place. But when he enters the tiny bathroom and spots there an extended wash line like the one used by his wife in their own flat and with children's underwear hanging from it too, he is genuinely shocked, and he asks himself the seemingly naive but enormously significant question: 'What use is Europe then if her people use the same objects as we do?' (p. 144). What shocks Darsh here is the ordinariness, the familiarity, the ultimate similarity of the other.

On the other hand, when some of his idealised conceptions about the other are proven in reality, he is, ironically, frustrated rather than gratified. When the woman returns his sexual passion with equal panache, he is at first excited: 'This is how a woman should be', he tells himself. 'In the East women are like corpses . . . but here when you kiss a woman, she kisses you back; you hug her, she hugs you; you take her, she takes you. This is how it should be . . .' (p. 129). But soon enough, he shrinks before her activeness and reciprocity: 'Why doesn't she lie submissively and let me do the man's job?' he thinks to himself. 'Why can't she be a little shy? Shyness makes a woman more feminine and a man more masculine . . .' (p. 147). So disturbed is he by the very fulfilment of his previous fantasy, he cannot muster an erection. Ironically, it is only when he closes his eyes and begins to fantasise about his own wife that he can function properly. Likewise, after the lovemaking, his Viennese partner picks up her husband's picture and kisses it admitting to a horrified Darsh that all the time as they made love she had been thinking of him: 'I didn't know that he *is* my African man for whom I've been searching', she says (p. 162).

Idrīs here is obviously at pains to appear even-handed, but he is also underlining his artist's vision. This can perhaps be summed up in the ultimate realisation of the basic sameness of the other. What is ironic is that this realisation seems to draw cultures apart rather than bring them closer, as if the argument became: if we are basically the same, then perhaps each should stick with their own.[307] This confident approach to the theme of the cultural encounter, where self and other are seen in equal terms; where the other is rid of his halo, and shown to be no

different form the self is in my view as I have indicated earlier a manifestation of the newly found national pride and self-assurance in the post-independence period.

I will now proceed to examine another work by Idrīs of immediate relevance here. I have argued earlier that one of the ideas that came across clearly in 'Madam Vienna' is the ultimate similarity of the other and the self; a similarity that was easy to realise once experience and knowledge allowed us to penetrate beyond the crust of stereotypes and misconceptions. Crossing over to a dramatic work by Idrīs will show him to be consistent in his vision. The work in question is his early play, *al-Laḥẓa al-Ḥarija* (The Critical Moment), first published in 1958, that is to say around the same time as 'Madam Vienna'.[308]

The play is set in the Egyptian city of Port Said in the run-up to and during its Anglo-French occupation in the aftermath of Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956. The central character in the play is a young man called Saᶜd, who enrols in the popular resistance movement and receives military training in anticipation of the expected attack. The play is centrally concerned with Saᶜd's inner conflict. On the one hand, he is a devoted nationalist who wants to defend his country, but on the other hand, he is afraid of death, a highly likely outcome of the violent confrontation with the invading other. When the 'critical moment' of the title arrives, however, Saᶜd's father, whose protective instinct towards his son overrides any sense of patriotic duty, locks him up in a room of the house to stop him from going out to join the resistance. Soon after, a British soldier by the name of George forces his way into the house in search of resistance fighters. In the confusion that ensues he shoots dead Saᶜd's father. Saᶜd meanwhile is petrified by fear behind his locked doors and although he had a gun and could have shot his way through the door and confronted the enemy, he quickly changes out of his uniform and hides under the bed. Indeed we later know that the door lock did not work and that the whole household, including Saᶜd, had known that for years. Saᶜd chose to forget this fact because it offered him a way out of the call of duty and the much feared confrontation with the other.

It is not, however, in Saᶜd's predicament that we are interested here, but rather in that of the British soldier, George. Considering the nationalist background of the play and particularly the fact that it was written shortly after what went down in Arab history books as the Tripartite Aggression, referring to the collusion against Egypt between Britain, France and Israel, Idrīs would have been more than excused if he had portrayed the British soldier in a totally unsympathetic light as an evil aggressor. But he does nothing of the sort. In a conversation between him and another soldier before attacking the house in Act Three of the play, George, like Saᶜd, is shown to be prone to fear of death and thoughts of cowardice; he too is afraid of confronting the other. Indeed the conversation between him and the other soldier mirrors geometrically an earlier one in Act Two, which took place between Saᶜd and a friend of his also in the resistance. This parallelism between scenes is no doubt a technical device intended by the playwright to show the essential human sameness of self and other, even when a particular historical circumstance pitches them in mortal opposition to each other.

Idrīs sustains his sympathetic attitude towards the British soldier throughout. Even when he kills Saᶜd's father, it is out of fear and confusion rather than in cold blood. In his apparent concern to show the sameness of self and other, Idris pushes the situation beyond what is realistically acceptable when he makes George, in his disturbed state of mind after the shooting, confuse the wailing young daughter of the dying man with his own Shirley whom he left behind in Southampton and is keen to get back to alive. Although the soldier and the girl do not understand each other's language, the pathos of the situation is shown to transcend language and the soldier ends up asking the girl for forgiveness. The scene is brought to an end when other British soldiers arrive and carry off their distraught comrade.

Saᶜd eventually is released by his younger sister from incarceration to confront, as it were, the consequences of his fear of confrontation with the other. The reality of his failure weighs down heavily on him and he tries to blow his own brains out but again cannot muster enough courage. Meanwhile, George, now totally unhinged, staggers back on stage raving about his daughter, Shirley. This time the confrontation takes place. Saᶜd and George fire at each other. Predictably, George is killed and Saᶜd, now reconciled to himself, joins the larger battle for the homeland. Given that the essential sameness of self and other is made so much of in the play and that the British soldier is portrayed in such humane terms, one may be tempted to think that the ending of the play is somewhat forced for patriotic or didactic reasons. But this is not so to my mind. An essential factor to recollect here is that at no time does communication happen between the British soldier and Saᶜd, or any other member of the family. The barriers of language, fear and animosity are all too solid for that. The emphasis on the ultimate sameness is thus there only by way of dramatic irony for our benefit, the spectators. A further irony built into this situation is that self and other are hopelessly unaware of their essential similarity and that while they remain so, they can only continue to destroy each other. This is an important aspect of the play, which critics, however, have tended not to notice in their eagerness, perhaps, to pursue psychological and other themes.[309]

I will now turn my attention to further treatments of the theme by Idrīs. Idrīs's story 'Akāna lābudda An Tuḍiʾī al-Nūr yā Lī-Lī?' (Did You Have to Turn on the Light, Li-Li?), published in 1971 in the collection *Bayt min Laḥm* (A House of Flesh),[310] falls in the middle between the earlier 'Madam Vienna' and the later *New York 80*. At the centre of the event in 'Did you…' is the seduction of the young *imam* of a small backstreet mosque by a half-Egyptian, half-English cabaret dancer and something of a prostitute, specialising in foreign customers only. This much detail alone is enough to take us some distance on the way of an interpretation of the story in cultural terms: the character of the *Imam* of a mosque lends itself naturally to a role whereby the *Imam* can represent traditional culture, whereas the woman with her alluring beauty, foreign name, sinful ways and, above all, half-Englishness, seems a perfect candidate to stand for Western culture. Idrīs then has stuck here too to the now familiar pattern of male representing East, female representing West, and the theme being explored through a sexual encounter. The main deviation from this pattern is that rather than take us

to Europe or America, the scene is set in the popular, lower-class quarter of al-Bāṭiniyya at the heart of old Cairo; its oldness being an ideal background for the interplay of old and new, fixity and mutability, self and other.

Bāṭiniyya is the 'den of opium, seconal and hashish',[311] as Idrīs defines it in the story, and as it has been known in reality for a long time. Its inhabitants are made up largely of drug traffickers and addicts, and according to the Imam/protagonist their heads are 'foggy with dope' even when they come to the mosque to pray (p. 121). The story opens dramatically with a congregation of worshippers performing the dawn prayer at the mosque. The worshippers are in the final stages of the second prostration, with their bodies arched and their foreheads stuck to the ground between the hands. It only remains for the *Imam* to utter the words 'God is the Greatest!' for them to sit up, recite the 'salutations' and end the prayer. They wait and wait but the words of the imam never come. Their dizzy heads still laden with dope from the previous night, isolated from reality in their uncomfortable prostrate position and unable to raise their heads in order to investigate the matter, as this would annul their prayer, they remain stuck in this position. As for how long this prostration continued, the story is uncertain. Two minutes, half an hour, until the noon prayer of the following day are some of the various reports given, but most telling of all is the account of 'those who insist they are still prostrate to this moment' (p. 122). As the congregation remain in their prostrate position, they each begin to ponder their predicament:

> What exactly should he do now, and what do the laws of religion say with regard to a situation like this? If one of them were to move and raise his head, would that annul his prayer, and possibly that of the entire congregation? And would he alone take the blame?
>
> (p. 123)

But rather than shoulder such an enormous responsibility, they remain fixed in their prostration, resigned to the fact that 'they would probably have to remain in that posture till the following day, or possibly till doomsday . . .' (p. 123).

The situation is absurd, surrealistic and very funny indeed but behind its hilarity is, I believe, a profound hidden indication. Idrīs here is presenting a metaphor for a community living in a kind of time warp, a community fixed in a time that is past, isolated from reality and frightened to face it, a community paralysed under a spell without hope of release. The fact that the community is arrested in a posture of religious worship and that their inability to deal with the situation is entirely due to fastidious considerations of jurisprudence is on a symbolic level an embodiment of a culture so much inward-looking, so much cocooned from external reality, so much enslaved by its own traditions, its self-generated doubts, its own oldness and incompatibility with any situation at variance with itself and its own predictability.

But what actually happened to the *Imam*? If one does not forget the title of the story during the first few breathtaking paragraphs, one might guess that the enigmatic silence of the *Imam* must have something to do with the eponymous Li-Li, and her 'turning on of the light'. The suspicion is then strengthened by the

subsequent use of the words of the title in the manner of a refrain at certain junctures of the narrative. It is not, however, until the denouement of the story that the feverish narrative, suspense-laden and endlessly delayed by flashbacks and soul-searching by the *imam*/narrator, finally yields its secret. The *imam*'s defences, long sustained against many temptations in the sin-immersed quarter, collapse dramatically before the sight of Li-Li's semi-naked flesh, sprawled on her bed in her delibrately (?) well-lit room in the middle of the night. The window of the room is only across the narrow street on a level with the balcony of the mosque's minaret, from which the *imam* calls for prayer. Li-Li had approached him before with the unusual request of giving her private lessons on how to pray. Conscious of her real motive and steadfast in his resistance to seduction, he dismisses her. But then one day he climbs in the small hours of the morning to the minaret's balcony to call the sleeping for the dawn prayer. The sight of her in the manner described drives the chaste *imam* out of his mind. His eyes are nailed to her body and for the first time he understands the extent of his own weakness. The words of the call to prayer turn into a desperate plea to God to come to his help, and in one final act of resistance he descends to the mosque and leads the prayer. He faces the *qibla* and starts the prayer, but before his eyes he could see only Li-Li's naked form, 'throbbing, voluptuous, her silken hair fallen in ripples down her sides' (p. 134). He abandons his congregation, prostrate in the middle of the prayer, and steals to the second floor of the house opposite. He knocks on Li-Li's door and tells her that he has come to teach her to pray. 'Sorry, I bought the English record that teaches prayer. I found I understand it better,' is what she says to him in answer as she 'switches off the light' (p. 134).

The irony of the denouement is powerful. She had led him on only to turn him down the moment he surrendered, and the magnitude of his collapse is only matched by the total indifference of her dismissal of him. Now is the time to go back to my interpretation of the story in cultural terms. If we take the prostrate posture in prayer as a quintessentially representative moment of a traditional, acquiescent, religiously oriented culture, then the *imam*'s abandonment of prayer at this particular moment before its termination can only be more telling in its symbolic quality as an act of surrender to the promise or allure of a different culture; one more worldly, more earthy, more sensual, that is the culture of Western modernity for which Li-Li appears to stand. The author is indeed at pains to stress the 'otherness' of Li-Li in spite of her being the daughter of a poor Egyptian woman, who conceived her after an amorous night with a British soldier, during the Second World War. She is seen by the people of Bāṭiniyya as a *khawāgāya*, that is, a European. Her hair is red and skin milk-white. She drinks alcohol and works as cabaret dancer with visiting foreign troupes. And above all she remains sexually inaccessible though highly desirable to the men of the area, who in the end accept that she only sleeps with foreigners. Her seduction of the *imam* is then more than what meets the eye on the realistic level, which clearly treats the familiar theme of saint enticed by whore. Any fallen woman of Bāṭiniyya would have sufficed here without being a half-English *khawāgāya*, and the story does mention many of them who tried and failed to seduce the *imam*.

The seduction of the *imam* can then be seen as a cultural one in a symbolic reading of the story. And it is in this context that the interplay of darkness and light in the story may best be understood. The *Imam* climbs to the balcony of the minaret in the dead of the night to be 'blinded' by 'a window of shining light' (p. 129). The experience is rendered in epiphanic terms: 'I gazed inside. One look swept me up like a whirlwind from the *pit of somnolence* to the *peak of awareness*. An awareness full of *terror*, as I realised I was facing something *wondrous and overwhelming*' (p. 129, my italics). The darkness here can be that of ignorance of the self's weakness, of isolation from reality and complacency; all of which are terms which simultaneously apply to the *imam* as an individual as well as to the culture he stands for collectively. The epiphanic terms are dictated by the glorious experience of discovering a whole new world. The journey is tellingly described as one from the pit (*qāᶜ*) to the peak (*qimma*), and from somnolence (*ghafwa*) to awareness (*yaqẓa*) – terms which can adequately, though in a rather generalised way, describe the Arab nation's encounter with Western modernity, which shook it out of medieval 'obscurantism'. Such experience, again as the passage shows, is as much one of 'wonder' as it is one of 'terror'.

The *Imam*, however, though totally overpowered by Li-Li's charm, is not unaware of her threat. He sees her as a 'snare' (*sharak*) in which he is caught and the very devil, who contrary to common belief is the very incarnation of beauty (p. 130). He tries hard to ward her off but all he has for a weapon is his voice and the sound of his own plaintive pleas going up to heaven. Face to face with the 'devil' in a fight for survival, as he puts it, he dashes into battle armed only with his voice: 'The voice is my weapon. I am the voice and the voice is all that is left in my soul. The voice is my only hope . . .'[312] His voice in fact plays an important part in the story. It is a voice whose mellowness, when he recites the Qur'ān, or calls to prayer, has become proverbial in the neighbourhood – it is his only power of attraction over a community who otherwise cared little about him. But the voice avails him little at his hour of trial. And no wonder! For he is the personification of a hollow, verbal culture, enamoured of its own vocality and unable to listen beyond its own intonations. Such culture cannot stand the lurid and more fleshy temptation of the Western model any more than the *imam* can shelter from Li-Li's flesh in the sonority of his prayers.

Finally, one must not omit to remark on Li-Li's treatment of the *imam* at the end. Having seduced him, the seduction remains, as it were, tantalisingly unconsummated. She had no genuine interest in him. It was a power game: she only wanted to subjugate and humiliate him. He was interesting while he resisted, but the moment she had him at her feet, there was no point in offering him anything anymore: she switches off the light. And has this not been the story of East–West relations since colonialism and indeed until today, as many in the East will see it? The story ends at this point when the light is switched off and the door is shut in the face of the *imam*. One can imagine his despair, standing there in the *dark*, at once denied the *light* for which he had made an enormous sacrifice and unable to return to his congregation to save them from the darkness of their eternal prostration.[313] In 'Did you have to turn on the light, Li-Li?', Idrīs appears to have

stumbled on the perfect metaphor for the East–West 'thing'; a metaphor so perfect it can almost be mistaken for something else.[314]

I shall now turn to Idrīs's latest and final approach to the theme in art form, namely the story 'al-Sīgār' (The Cigar), which appeared in his late collection *ʾUqtulhā* (Kill her!), published in 1982.[315] The story which hardly has a plot and in which very little happens is written in the first person and has the hallmarks of being based on an incident which happened to the author personally, or is at least narrated in such a way as to create this impression.

On a flight from Beirut to Cairo, the Egyptian narrator has the extremely good fortune of being seated next to a dazzlingly beautiful European woman; a queen from Bavaria, he calls her. Why especially Bavaria is not clear, unless it is a reflection of the common belief in Germanic physical perfection. They start talking and she tells him that she had always dreamt of visiting the East, and that Cairo had always been at the centre of her dreams. She enlists his help in finding a suitable hotel, stressing her repugnance for big, posh places like the Hilton and the Sheraton hotels. She wanted a hotel with character; 'one whose rooms were tents, whose courts were the desert, and where food was cooked on fire in the open; a fire stirred by a youthful brown bedouin, with a black beard and an *ʿiqāl* or headgear hanging down on one side carelessly but elegantly . . . .' And what is more she wanted the bedouin after grilling the meat to devour it with her under the moonlit sky (p. 6).

The author here is obviously caricaturing the West's old, romanticised picture of the East. His hero listens with horror to the details of the Bavarian's stereotyped expectations of the East, as he who has dreams of bedding her knows all too well that neither he nor the Cairo she is going to visit have anything to do with bedouins and deserts. Thus he immediately sets out with 'cruel eloquence', as he puts it, to 'demolish the revolting, primitive picture (i.e. of the East) that apparently had stuck in her mind since childhood' (p. 10). The story, which is artistically of mediocre quality, depends unfortunately on reportage rather than showing. Thus we are told eventually that the narrator succeeded in converting the woman to a more realistic mental picture of the East, though we are not made privy as to how he did that. But as he puts it: 'The tent turned into a room in a luxurious hotel and the brown, bearded bedouin into my very person; prim, eloquent and elegant as I am' (p. 13).

They have dinner together and everything appears to be going just fine and according to plan, until he takes out his cigarette packet and offers her one. She declines politely and instead opens her handbag and takes out of it an enormous cigar (a Churchill – we are told specifically), unwraps it and places it between her lips. She then inclines her head towards the narrator asking him for a light (p. 14). It was as if his Bavarian queen had suddenly grown a phallus. Indeed the ritualistic description of her movements is evocative of an unfolding penis. Our hero immediately loses his desire for her. He comments that although he had succeeded in dispelling her false dreams about the East, that 'accursed cigar' then came and grew a moustache above her lips. And when she says to him that she hoped he believed in sexual equality and did not mind her smoking a cigar, he comments silently that indeed they had become equals: two men (p. 15).

The attitude of the narrator/protagonist here is perhaps not unlike that of Darsh in 'Madam Vienna', written some 20 years earlier. Darsh too was disturbed by the boldness of the Austrian woman in bed, which detracted from her femininity, as he remarked. But 'The Cigar', as I have said earlier, is not a good short story. An added reason for thinking so is its lack of a focal point. It begins and proceeds almost all the way in the direction dictated by the East–West theme, but ends simply on what sounds like an anti-feminist note. It is as if the author wants to denounce female emancipation if in the end it is going to turn women into men. But this development is thrown at us suddenly in the end and apparently at the expense of jettisoning the original theme. On the other hand, we are shown that the European woman had some cultural misconceptions about the East which the hero puts right as we are told. The picture, however, remains unbalanced because we are not quite sure what the Eastern man's misconceptions about the West are, except that his Bavarian queen of beauty metamorphosed into a phallus-endowed monstrosity. But we cannot make much out of this because the story is too superficial and lacking in a sense of purpose to allow an interpretation beyond the immediate realistic level.

It remains now to go back in the chronology of Idrīs's world to what is perhaps his earliest treatment in his fiction of the theme under discussion. By this I mean a long short story of some 70 pages with the title '*Sirrihu al-Bāti*' (The Secret of his Power), which first appeared in the collection *Ḥādithat Sharaf* (An Incident of Honour), published in 1958.[316] I have left this work until so late in my discussion because it stands apart in Idrīs's fiction in that it does not approach the East–West theme through a sexual metaphor.

The story is set mainly in an unnamed Egyptian village of the Nile Delta and the protagonist is a child whom we watch growing to manhood as the plot develops. The time span may thus seem too long for a short story but as it happens the plot is endowed with a strong sense of purpose that sustains interest wihtout abatement throughout the extended narrative and until the denouement. This sense of purpose is imparted by the obsessive nature of the protagonist's quest powerfully rendered by Idrīs's racy narrative and endless delaying techniques.[317] The child is intrigued from early on in his life by the mystery of Sultan Ḥāmid, the village saint, whose shrine stands on the edge of the local cemetery outside the village. The saint is revered by the villagers and his holiness taken for granted, although nobody knows anything about his history or origin. When the child passes his primary school examinations, his grandfather urges him to go and light the six candles previously promised for Sultan Ḥāmid. The child cannot convince himself that the saint could have had anything to do with his success, but still he honours the age-old tradition, albeit after cheating the saint out of three candles to buy sweets with the rest of the money.

From that day on, the saint begins to dominate the boy's thoughts. After his initial sense of awe, the shrine with its dilapidated walls fails to impress him. What is inside those walls, he wonders, to make the villagers cherish him so in their hearts and talk about him as if he were an enormous being living somewhere? (p. 132) He starts going round the old people of the village asking them about the family origins of Sultan Ḥāmid, but they all assure him the saint was not

related to anybody in the village. However, no one but the protagonist seems to wonder how he came to be buried in the village (p. 138). In his bewilderment, the boy seeks the help of the Shaykh of the *Kuttāb*, or Qur'ān School, who tells him the secret of Sultan Ḥāmid may only be reached through *dhikr*, or the ritualistic repetition of God's name. He thus begins to frequent the weekly *dhikr* ring at the Shaykh's house. But having never liked the idea in the first place, he soon realises that *dhikr* cannot solve his problem. He soon makes another logical discovery: that Sultan Ḥāmid cannot be a saint since the epithet usually added to saints' names is that of 'shaykh' and not 'sulṭān' (pp. 140–42).

He soon makes yet another more radical and more bewildering a discovery. One Friday he travels to a neighbouring village to watch a soccer match between its team and that of his own. During the game, one of the opponent team's players kicks the ball so high, it lands on the roof of an elevated stone structure beyond the fields. That turns out to be the shrine of Sultan Ḥāmid, to the amazement of our protagonist who, on further enquiries, establishes that many other villages in the province had their own shrines of Sultan Ḥāmid (pp. 147–48). The boy's obsession with the mystery wears him out. His health deteriorates and he is obliged to draw back from the brink and forget about Sultan Ḥāmid. Years pass and he grows up, leaves the village and settles in Cairo. But one summer, while on a visit to the village, he returns home one evening to find a stranger sitting there busy tucking in a huge meal. Hosting strangers passing through the village and listening to their stories was a hobby of the protagonist's grandfather. On this occasion, the stranger had the appearance of a dervish, but on being asked to what *ṣūfī* order he belonged, he proclaims: 'We are not an order. We are the Children of Sultan Ḥāmid . . .' (p. 155).

With these words, our protagonist's quest is revived with renewed vigour after years of dormancy. After initial reluctance the stranger is drawn to speak about the so-called saint. He explains that his hallowed status was gained on account of 'his scattering of the enemies, his defeat of the infidels . . .' without specifying who those were or when that happened (p. 157). In fact he tells a long story steeped in legend and acts of the miraculous about how Sultan Ḥāmid confronted the enemy when they arrived in Egypt like a colossus, his feet dug in the earth and his head high up in heaven. Scores of men were unable to make him budge, and swords broke on him leaving him unscathed. Finally an old soldier realises that the secret of his invincibility is the purity of his body and that the way to defeat him was to first defile him.[318] Thus the old soldier begins to urinate on different parts of Sultan Ḥāmid's body, which immediately became vulnerable to sword strokes. Sultan Ḥāmid was thus cut up into millions of pieces, but each piece turned into a man who rose to fight the enemy until the land was cleared of them (pp. 157–58). The protagonist does not simply dismiss this account as the ravings of a dervish. He realises that behind the legend some reality must lie. But his extensive research at the National Library in Cairo leads him nowhere: he finds no sultan by the name Ḥāmid to have ever ruled Egypt.

The breakthrough happens however by sheer accident. The protagonist makes the acquaintance of an eccentric European woman, known as Madam

International from her extensive travels world-wide. On one occasion, he tells her the story of Sultan Ḥāmid and his obsession with him, which fascinates her. Eventually she leaves to Europe and he forgets all about her. But many months later he receives a letter from her and it transpires that she too had become obsessed with Sultan Ḥāmid and that together with a group of friends she spent months investigating the matter. Eventually she came across a book containing the letters of a certain Roget Clément sent from Egypt to his friend in Paris, Monsieur Guy de Rouen. Clément, we are told, was one of the archaeologists who accompanied Napoleon's campaign in Egypt, thought to have donned the national habit and settled in Egypt. In her letter Madam International includes the last few pages of the book containing Clément's last letter from Egypt.

The letter is dated 20 June 1801. It continues the writer's impressions of Egypt and the Egyptians and an account which solves once and for all the mystery of Sultan Ḥāmid, bringing the story to its denouement. The letter is rather long, occupying the last 23 pages of the story. Here is a summary of it. M. Clément describes how on arrival in Egypt he first thought he had come to bring the flame of civilisation to a dark African land, but that soon he was to be touched by its magic and miraculous powers (p. 170). He sets out to correct some of his Parisian friends' misconceptions about the Egyptians: 'The Egyptians . . . are not as you say. They do not dance around fire at night, and their women are nothing like the harem of the *Thousand and One Nights* . . .' (p. 171). In words obviously put in his mouth by Idrīs he argues that it was easy to conquer Egypt for a start but that problems came later. He is held in awe in particular of the Egyptian peasants, whose mystique he cannot penetrate.

To illustrate to his friend what he means he begins to tell him the story of Ḥāmid, one of those peasants who had been the talk of the French army in Egypt for many months. He was an ordinary *fallāḥ* from the Delta village of Shaṭānūf, where the French built a garrison. Now, although the garrison's policy was to avoid harassing the *Fallāḥīn*, a soldier loses his nerve one day under the hostile gaze of a *fallāḥ*, and shoots him dead. The villagers go to the captain and demand the life of the murderer. When their demand is rejected, a member of the garrison is found dead the following day. The captain arrests the chief of the village and threatens to have him killed unless the assassin delivers himself. A *fallāḥ* by the name of Ḥāmid gives himself up before the end of the day and the chief is released. The captain decides to hang Ḥāmid after a mock trial, but at the eleventh hour the men of the village attack the garrison and free the man. When the French regain control, the captain executes the chief. A rumour goes round that the escaped Ḥāmid had sworn to kill the captain. Soon enough the captain's horse brings its master's body back to the camp. By this time the news had reached Napoleon himself, who orders no lesser an officer than his second-in-command Kléber to capture that Ḥāmid person. At this point the entire Delta becomes a safe haven for Ḥāmid. Peasants everywhere have their little fingers amputated and their cheeks tattooed to give themselves two of the most distinguishing physical characteristics of Ḥāmid, and further confuse the French. Gangs form up and down the country who call themselves the Children of Ḥāmid and engage in

waylaying the French. Gradually Ḥāmid's name acquires the epithet 'the Sultan' among the people as a token of respect. M. Clément comments breathlessly that the Egyptians 'were not a people, but a mass (*kutla*) which merged into Ḥāmid and made even the General (i.e. Napoleon) look a dwarf beside him' (p. 184).

The French succeed however in the end in finding and killing Ḥāmid. M. Clément speaks of the rage which shook the country and attributes to the incident the second uprising of Cairo during the French occupation. Ḥāmid's body is not moved from the spot where he was killed, and in no time a shrine with a big dome is built over him and crowds without number start coming to visit every day. Kléber realises that in his death Ḥāmid has become more dangerous than in his life. Again breathless with admiraion, M. Clément is made a mouthpiece for Idrīs's almost mystical belief in his people[319]:

> We have conquered these people with our superiority, our guns, our brass music, our printing press and our chemical science, but where can we get their supernatural power to stick together like a solid mass, to love one another and survive? Where can we have faith like this?
>
> (p. 187)

Kléber destroys the shrine, exhumes the body and has it thrown in the Nile. But before he has known, the body is picked up from the water and a new shrine bigger than the first is built over it, again attracting crowds of pilgrims in their thousands. Almost driven to madness, Kléber decides after consultation with his staff to exhume the body again, cut it up in small pieces and scatter them all over the country. (Idrīs here is obviously utilising the Isis/Osiris ancient Egyptian myth of death and resurrection to give depth to his theme.) Little did Kléber know what he was letting himself in for. The news soon started to arrive that in every spot where part of the body was found, a shrine was built over it. Thus instead of just one, hundreds of shrines were erected up and down the country.

At this point in the letter, the mystery of Sultan Ḥāmid which has baffled the protagonist all his life can be said to have been solved. The saint turned out to have been a patriotic hero, who fell in the fight against foreign aggressors a century and a half earlier and around whom popular imagination had woven stories elevating him to a saintly, supernatural status; not an uncommon practice in all cultures. That of Joan of Arc is an example that French history itself has to offer. The story could have ended here, the protagonist's quest having reached its culmination and the Egyptians' ability to hold their own and assert their identity and unity before the European other in spite of his superior power and technology, proven. But Idrīs keeps the story going for a bit more giving it a significant, though unconvincing, twist.

The focus of attention is now turned to M. Clément, who becomes obsessed with the phenomenon of Sultan Ḥāmid in his own time as much as the protagonist was to become obsessed with it a hundred-and-fifty years later. He disguises himself in the Egyptian national dress and gets subsumed in the crowd at one of the many shrines built for Ḥāmid. In his letter he describes the experience in

highly romanticised, almost mystical terms, strongly reminiscent of the words of the French archaeologist, Monsieur Fouquet, in al-Ḥakīm's *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ*, discussed earlier:

> It was as if those rough bodies, sticky and dusty, exuded a substance superior to life, the essence of life, the totality of all that is powerful and triumphant in it; all that is invincible, the supreme miraculous power, the very secret of life . . . Ḥāmid's shrine was the focus at which individual wills converged; a focus that concentrated the will to eternity and turned it into a magical elixir able to achieve it . . . .
>
> (p. 190)

M. Clément is humbled by the experience to the point of wanting to 'prostrate himself before the crowds and ask their forgiveness', and for the first time in his life he feels 'the greatness of life and the splendour of being a human possessed of that miraculous power, the power to come together with other humans in order to produce something greater than the life of each of us' (p. 191).

It is amazing that as Idrīs put these words in the mouth of M. Clément, he was able to be totally oblivious of the fact that his character was a Frenchman, serving in one of the armies of the French Revolution, a great popular movement which changed human history once and for all through 'the convergence of individuals in order to produce something greater than their separate selves'. Someone in M. Clément's position should have had little to learn from the Egyptians in this particular connection and at that particular time, but Idrīs allows verisimilitude to be swept aside by the tide of his patriotic passion.

M. Clément's letter, and with it the whole story, ends on a note of total cultural surrender, total abnegation of the self and subsumption into the other. Here is how he describes his agony to his friend:

> I am afraid Rouen. I feel an overwhelming power drawing me to those people and calling upon me to know their secret . . . . I am resisting violently. My education, my cultural heritage, my intellect – should all hold me back from their mass when they come together, but I am no longer myself . . . I fear that today or tomorrow I may sneak off to one of the many shrines of Sultan Ḥāmid . . . and light a candle for him, as I used to do for the Virgin Mary at church . . . . I can feel myself walking powerless towards that fate. I can feel my resistance diminishing and coming to an end. Help, Rouen!
>
> (pp. 191–92)

This vision is unique in Idrīs's renderings of this recurrent theme of his. The cultural attraction here is completely one-sided with the French archaeologist seen to be drawn towards the East to the point of extinction of identity. A comparison with a short story by Albert Camus, 'Le Renégat' from the collection, *L'Exil et le royaume* (1957), is too tempting to resist. Edward Said gives the gist of the situation in Camus's story: 'a missionary is captured by an outcast

southern Algerian tribe, has his tongue torn out…, and becomes a super zealous partisan of the tribe, joining in an ambush of French forces'. Said's interpretation is that 'going native can only be the result of mutilation, which produces a diseased, ultimately unacceptable loss of identity'.[320] Loss of identity is what happens to M. Clément too (another Frenchman in the land of the Orient) in Idrīs's story, but while Camus's protagonist is a 'renegade' and his loss of identity is an act of 'mutilation' if we adopt Said's interpretation, Idrīs's Frenchman is a man who has seen the light, whose loss of identity is a small sacrifice for acceptance into a nobler one. The vision in either story is undoubtedly determined by the cultural perspective of the author, and it is perhaps no coincidence that Camus's story was written at the time of the beginning of the ebb of French control of Algeria (*c*.1957), while Idrīs's was written at the time of a high tide of nationalism in Egypt (1958).

To go back to Idrīs's story, one must note that it is also unabashedly romantic in its idealisation of the Egyptians, and intellectually naive in using a Frenchman as a vehicle for the expression of this idealistic view. The influence of al-Ḥakīm's equally romantic view of Egypt in *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ* is undeniable here on the much younger Yūsuf Idrīs. It may be also that Idrīs had at the back of his mind the model of Nasser. For in the late 1950s when this story was written, a period of national euphoria when the newly independent Egypt seemed to be making headway in every direction, Nasser seemed indeed a focal point which brought together the mass of Egyptian people as an 'unstoppable force' in their confrontation with the West. Whatever the case may be, what is evident here is the influence of nationalism on an the Arab intellectuals' view of the other; an influence which extends across generations and different political circumstances. In both *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ* and *ᶜUṣfūr min al-Sharq*, al-Ḥakīm's view of Western civilisation was heavily coloured by the rising tide of nationalist feeling against British rule in Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s, as I have argued elsewhere in this book. Some 25 years later, in the postcolonial period, the same argument was still true, as we have seen in the case of Yūsuf Idrīs.

At about the same time that Yūsuf Idrīs was writing his 'Madam Vienna' and 'The Secret of his Power'; stories inspired, as we have seen, by strong nationalist feelings in the heyday of Nasser's postcolonial, anti-Western rule, it is interesting to note a work by a major novelist of the same generation as Idrīs's, and with the same leftist inclinations, approach the theme of the encounter with the West from a completely different vantage point. **Fatḥī Ghānim** (1924–99) published his novel, *Al-Sākhin wal-Bārid* (The Hot and the Cold) in 1960, a romantic love story between an Egyptian man and a Swedish woman, where the conflict is not only between contradictory cultural values but between the absolute values of love and duty. This very romantic story was ironically written by an author who was to establish his name as a master of realism. What is even more bemusing is that the main theme did not really require inter-cultural representatives for its treatment; it could have been treated through agents from within the same culture.

Yūsuf Manṣūr, an Egyptian businessman, 30 years old, is on a business trip to Sweden to buy printing paper. He is a playboy with three girlfriends back in Cairo,

one to sleep with, a second to go out with, and a third to chat with over the telephone, as we are told. He arrives in Stockholm looking for sexual adventure and armed with the Eastern stereotypical idea about Western women being easy prey: 'he expected that if he looked at a Swedish girl, she would look back at him, if he smiled to her, she would smile back, if he talked to her, she would talk back, and a new adventure to tell his friends back in Cairo would be added to his old ones'.[321] Or again, 'You are in Sweden where everything is allowed, where it is sufficient for a woman to think you are nice for her to surrender herself to you, even if she is married . . .' (p. 51). In the event, the playboy falls in love with, Julia Johnard, the young wife of a much older husband, an orchestra conductor. It is almost love at first sight. Julia, whose old husband is the epitome of poise, reason, respectability and remoteness of manner, is taken in by the exotic charm of the dashing youthful Egyptian, who courts her in verse within minutes of their encounter.[322] Within an hour of a chance meeting at the theatre where her husband conducts, they are off together for a tour of Stockholm, to a dance club where she teaches him to ask her to dance in the traditional manner of young Swedish lovers, to a funfair, where they kiss for the first time on a Ferris wheel, to a nightclub, and finally to his hotel room where she spends the night in his arms, having already decided to tell her husband in the morning that she was leaving him. Meanwhile, Yūsuf has forgotten the business he was in Sweden for, and the two lovers elope together to Denmark to visit Hamlet's castle, and from their to Norway and the North Pole to see the midnight sun, in what looked like their honeymoon together. The romantic pace and intensity of the story almost defies credibility. Here is an example of the prose in which Yūsuf addresses Julia within two days of their encounter:

> Everything I say or do means that I love you. When we get into a taxi and I tell the driver to take us to the hotel, what I am really saying to him is that I love you. If I order a bottle of aquavit from the barman, it means I love you. If I ask someone what time it is, it means I love you. Everything in existence means I love you. I love you in my sleep. I love you while awake. I love you as I negotiate the printing paper deal. I love you as I breathe and as I smoke. The music I listen to says I love you. The aeroplane engines this morning were saying that I love you. If I move a step away from you, I love you. When I argue with you, I love you. If I stay alive, it is because I love you. If I die, it is because I love you.
>
> (pp. 127–28)

What the narrative stresses throughout is a love story between a man and a woman overwhelmed by an idealised romantic passion. Cultural differences do not crop up, nor are the man and woman impregnated with cultural allegorical values of the type familiar at the time in treatments of the theme. The thrust of the plot is to show two lovers so driven by their passion, which transcends culture and religion and all the things that traditionally separate people, that they become oblivious to reality and its dictates. Reality eventually hits them when Julia's husband follows them to Denmark and pleads with his wife to return home with him. Yūsuf, who

is present at the scene, feels for the first time an intruder as he listens to them speak in the Swedish language which he does not understand, but a voice inside him shouts in protest that love is above everything, including barriers of nationality, religion, and the life she formerly shared with her husband: 'I am not any more an Arab than she is Swedish; no more a Moslem than she is a Christian, no more a bachelor than she is a married woman – we are two lovers to whose love the whole world bears witness…' (pp. 228–29).

This *cri de coeur* by Yūsuf is one that is at the heart of what Fatḥī Ghānim's novel purports to convey. But the novel purports to convey something else too, as Julia's decision to stay with her husband and sacrifice her love after that sobering meeting suggests. Her choice of duty and responsibility over love was not easy for her but she made it eventually to the dismay of Yūsuf who wanted her to divorce her husband and marry him in Egypt. Throughout the novel there is a juxtaposition of the passionate, dashing (the *sākhin* or 'hot' of the title) nature of Yūsuf, and the cold composure (the *bārid* or 'cold' of the title, again) of Julia's aged husband. It is with the charm of the *sākhin* that Julia falls in love, but the experience is not presented in the book as a mere adventure or passing attraction. It is presented as genuine love that is sacrificed at the altar of responsibility and the honouring of commitment. It is interesting to note that this moral stand was adopted in the novel by one of those Swedish women, about whom the protagonist entertained on arrival in Stockholm the stereotypical idea that they were ready to jump into bed with the first man they fancied.

Little remembered today, Ghānim's novel remains a specimen of a view of the other unmarred by any kind of prejudice, nationalist, religious or cultural. In so being, it anticipates the work of a notable Egyptian novelist of a later generation: Bahāʾ Ṭāhir, who will be discussed further on in this study.

Not so however a novel published at around the same time, *Jisr al-Shayṭān* (Satan's Bridge, 1962?) by the Egyptian publisher, novelist, and Islamic biographer **ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Jūda al-Saḥḥār** (1913–74). Little remembered today as a novelist, al-Saḥḥār, who has never been taken too seriously by critics or literary scholarship, has nevertheless left behind a sizeable legacy of fictional works, produced over a period extending from the 1940s to the 1960s. His novels, not entirely unpopular in their day, are characterised by a strong moralistic drive if little artistic accomplishment.[323]

Coming from an author who has shown a strong religious streak in his writing, *Jisr al-Shayṭān* does not surprise with its simplistic view of human nature in terms of black and white, and its inclination to moral preaching that transcends individuals to the cultures they stand for. As such the novel is a candidate to occupy an uncontested seat as a direct contribution to the famous equation of East equals spirituality, West equals materialism; therefore the fallen West needs the morally superior East to save it from perdition. And while such a position could be dressed up, rightly or wrongly, in higher intellectual contemplations of the histories and supposed natures of the two cultures as we have seen in al-Ḥakīm's seminal novel *ʿUṣfūr min al-Sharq* for instance, here we have the equation in black and white, unmitigated by any cerebral polemic.

The action of *Jisr al-Shayṭān* is set in the German city of Hamburg a decade or so after the end of the the Second World War, the narrative dwelling occasionally on the miracle of reconstruction after the great devastation of the war, with memories of its not-too-distant horrific experiences figuring in the dialogue.[324] The novel, a conventional omniscient-author narrative, is a simple love story between ᶜAlī, an Egyptian engineer come to take delivery of a ship being built for his employers in Cairo by German shipbuilders and Annie, a German strip dancer and prostitute. ᶜAlī meets Annie during her show in a nightclub and a bizarre relationship develops between them, in which ᶜAlī, who has a wife and children back in Cairo, but is nevertheless strongly attracted to Annie, rather than succumb to his powerful feelings, sets himself the arduous task of reforming the 'fallen woman'. Annie, who on the other hand sees ᶜAlī at the beginning as another customer with the added advantage of his attractive Oriental looks, is first bemused by his respectful approach to her but is soon keen to live up to his construct of her. As they both fast fall in love with each other and are driven by a maddening desire to consummate that love, they each become a theatre of operations for a raging war between good (abstinence, the triumph of spirituality) and evil (surrender to desire, the triumph of materialism). Their face to face dialogues about spirit (Egypt; the East) and matter (Germany; the West) are enhanced by inner dialogues with their resident devils; all augmented by the crude symbolism of 'Satan's Bridge' of the title, which ᶜAlī has to cross physically every time he visits Annie's home but which morally he never crosses!

The theme is introduced and developed cumulatively rather than linearlly through naive, artificial dialogues of this nature. On his first visit, ᶜAlī takes as gift to her a traditional tray with the inscription 'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate'. On translating the words to her, Annie, the author's spokeswoman for European materialism, comments that those were 'ancient words out of place in our world. We no longer believe except in what our hands touch, our eyes see, our ears hear, our noses smell, or our tongues taste . . .'. ᶜAlī, the spokesman for the spirituality of the East, is unruffled by this assault and argues calmly that 'God is with us wherever we go . . . . We ask His help before we undertake any action . . . and He answers our prayers'.[325] Inconsistent with her occupation, Annie seems well aware of and quite prepared to use in her anti-faith invective, the views of Darwin, 'who revealed the secrets of life to us', those of Freud, who 'unravelled the mysteries of our souls', and Einstein, who 'cast light on the universe dispersing the darkness previously enveloping it . . .' (p. 45). But the tireless preacher, ᶜAlī's, next gift to her was nothing short of the Bible, because 'reading in holy books restores assurance to anxious souls . . .', he tells the incredulous Annie. ᶜAlī's next triumph is to convince Annie to go to church on Sunday; something she had not done for countless years. She needs to disperse the darkness that has descended on her soul, he tells her, and takes no notice of her materialistic (Read: Western!) protestation: 'But how do I know I have a soul? I am only a body that feels pleasure and pain, that loves and hates, as a result of chemical interactions' (p. 113). But to church she goes notwithstanding, and together they read in the Bible when ᶜAlī visits her. By the time ᶜAlī is due to leave to Egypt, Annie's conversion is complete; he has restored her to faith. So powerful

is her newfound belief in God and chastity that she runs away from her own home when he comes to bid her farewell because she is too worried she might succumb to temptation at that final moment. The author, never having been particularly subtle in the course of the narrative, spells it out even more flagrantly in the words of the message she leaves him: 'It only remains to thank you for the most beautiful days of my life . . . for the spark of faith which you brought from the enchanting East, which will remain in my heart for as long as I live . . .' (p. 227).

Thus al-Saḥḥār's heroine is lifted from a life of carnality and prostitution to one of faith and piety, and through her poor allegorical figure a torch is carried before the eyes of Europe to guide her back from the slime of materialism to the firm ground of faith. On the individual level the torch bearer is the saintly figure of ᶜAlī; on the allegorical level it is the spirituality of the East. Rather than as a statement on the cultural encounter, *Jisr al-Shayṭān* should perhaps be read as a distorted adaptation of Anatole France's (1844–1924) novel, *Thais* (1890), which tells of the story of a courtesan enamoured of a monk who while succeeding in converting her, ends up falling in love with her. Given the proselytising ethos of the novel, it is perhaps to al-Saḥḥār's credit that he does not go as far as have ᶜAlī convert Annie to Islam; he only magnanimously restores her to her Christianity!

Appearing at the time it did, al-Saḥḥār's novel seems to hark back to the kind of stereotyping in terms of spirit and matter characteristic of the colonial period. We do not find here the case for the utltimate similarity of self and other that we encountered in Yūsuf Idrīs, and much less so the almost culturally unconscious encounter of Ghānim's *al-Sākhin wal-Bārid*. This should not in fact present a problem, as dated attitudes can linger across broad period divisions, assisted by individual authorial inclinations of nature. Just as we saw denunciations of the contention of the materialism of the West by contemporaries of al-Ḥakīm at the height of the colonial period, it is not surprising that we should see the occasional resurfacing of that contention in later periods.

Al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ's (b. 1929) *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamāl* (1967), or *Season of Migration to the North*, as it is known in its English-language version, is undoubtedly one of the most original approaches to the theme of the East–West encounter in Arabic fiction. Written in the 1960s in the early days of the postcolonial period, when memories of colonialism were still fresh in the national consciousness of the newly independent Arab countries, it remains without parallel in its violent rendering of the theme. Continuing with the tradition begun by earlier masters such as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, and Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, already discussed in this book, Ṣāliḥ presents us with a vision of the *clash*, not the encounter, of cultures; a vision that is bloody and from which the prospect of reconciliation is absent.[326] There is no doubt that Ṣāliḥ was consciously trying to reflect that aspect of the encounter that he thought his predecessors had romanticised in their urbane approaches to the subject.[327] Ṣāliḥ has this to say on the issue: '. . . I have redefined the so-called East/West relationship as essentially one of conflict, while it had previously been treated in romantic terms. We know better now.'[328]

Ṣāliḥ does not in fact digress significantly from the pattern established by his predecessors, that of presenting the cultural encounter through a sexual relationship where, as we have seen in earlier works, the East is a man (often a student) and the West is a woman he encounters during his sojourn in Europe (usually for study).[329] The man will invariably be emotional, imbued with moral and spiritual values founded in religious faith. The encounter will shock him by introducing him to a worldview based on rationalism, science, pragmatism, and sexual freedom, upon which there will be a rejection of the West (e.g. Muḥsin in al-Ḥakīm's *Bird of the East*, or adoption after adjustment, e.g. Ḥaqqī's *The Saint's Lamp*). Endowed with firsthand experience of the West through long residence, a career with the BBC in London and marriage to a British woman, Ṣāliḥ was no doubt well-placed to put his creative talent to this already well-trodden ground and hope to come up with a fresh approach. There is every evidence in the book that Ṣāliḥ did not want his protagonist, Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd, to subscribe to the stereotype already established by his predecessors as described earlier. Rather, he desired for him individuality and unpredictability, independently of the existing body of writing on the theme. Ṣāliḥ achieves this but, in my view, at a high price. Let me explain.

Ṣāliḥ portrays his protagonist from the very outset as an accomplished model of rationalism, of emotional coldness, of alienation from all kinds of values, whether spiritual, moral or social. From his childhood, Saᶜīd is shown to be rootless, without a father, lacking a strong bond with his mother, and with no friends: 'My mind was like a sharp knife, cutting with cold effectiveness . . . I was cold as a field of ice, nothing in the world could shake me . . . My brain continued on, biting and cutting like the teeth of a plough.'[330] This is how Saᶜīd is introduced to us as a child and ingenious pupil of the primary and secondary schools in his native Sudan. For those who helped him at every stage along the way, he had no feeling of gratitude; 'I used to take their help as though it were some duty they were performing for me.'[331] When it was time to leave the Sudan to Cairo at the age of 12 to continue his studies, he sheds 'no tears at parting from anyone'.[332] And again, when it was time to leave Cairo to London at the age of 15, he arrives at his destination armed only with one weapon: 'that sharp knife inside my skull, while within my breast was a hard, cold feeling – as if it had been cast in rock'.[333]

If Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd arrives in Europe in such a state, what is left in him, one must ask, for Europe to change? How can Europe shock him when he arrives in it already more European than the pre-conceived image of the Europeans? That pure rationalism of his, that pragmatism, that spiritual death – is it not Europe's act of corrupting the Oriental, any Oriental, already achieved without any need for further contribution from her? It is this readymade 'Europeanism' of Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd that deprives him of any of the stereotypical traits of the Oriental, thereby making a genuine conflict of opposed value systems impossible. Thus the novel's attempt at casting itself as a new approach to the theme of the clash of civilisations, which has misled most critics, is in fact a non-starter. Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd's penchant for female conquests, his indulgence in ritualistic sex, his predilection for relationships that followed a pattern of seduction, subjugation and discarding; that pattern which eventually led to the suicide of two women and his murder of

a third after marrying her – none of this can be seen as the revenge of a subjugated culture over its conqueror, nor can it be seen in terms of a 'physical' invasion by a young civilisation full of vitality of an old 'intellectual' civilisation that has grown degenerate and ready to die. None of these interpretations is possible although the author appears to want to lead us in that direction. This is so because he portrays Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd in entirely individualistic terms without any Oriental communal or typical traits; instead he bestows on him the stereotypical qualities of the civilisation with which he is at conflict. The problem would not have arisen, had the author allowed his protagonist to adopt consciously Western values, as a means of beating the 'devil' at his own game, so to speak, but what he presents us with instead is an uprooted hero, shorn of emotion, with an inborn Western psyche, fully formed before he has set foot in Europe. Thus the argument does not hold of Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd's counsel for the defence, which the author would have us adopt, namely that 'Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd . . . is a noble person whose mind was able to absorb Western civilisation but it broke his heart', nor does his assertion that the girls he had led to perdition, 'were not killed by Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd but by the germ of a deadly disease that assailed them a thousand years ago'.[334] The manner of his portrayal delivers him to Europe with a heart already dead, as we have seen, and for this matter, his tragedy, or something like it, could have occurred in Khartoum, Cairo, or any other city, Western or Eastern. This is so because his tragedy is that of an individual, and not that of the representative of a particular civilisation, and his sexual conquests are assertions of the self against the other only in a personal sense, not a cultural one. Such individual conflicts have indeed been the very stuff of life and art in all cultures since time immemorial.

It is perhaps ironic that al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ in his comments on his own novel ascribes the quality of romanticism to earlier treatments in Arabic fiction of the theme of the Western encounter, while it is *Season of Migration to the North*, which in his view avoids that romanticisation and depicts the encounter in its brutal and bloody reality.[335] Ṣāliḥ may think so, but I would like to argue that *Season of Migration to the North* is a romantic novel *par excellence*, no less so than, say, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, which it parallels in succinctness, poetic density, and a worldview which sees life as a riddle, and human passions as inscrutable forces inexplicable in terms of social or personal circumstances. At the centre of the novel's romanticism is that overwhelming sense of fatality; the feeling that some blind power was pushing events in a pre-determined, inevitable direction.[336] Wherefrom does this power emanate? Is it a supernatural power? Is it something in the very nature of things? Or does it originate from a darkness that lies at the depth of the human heart? All these are questions posited by the narrative, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, but never answered. Thus Saᶜīd's evil motives and actions remain a mystery without explanation, whether in political, social, economic, or cultural terms. Now if Ṣāliḥ was writing in realistic terms, this would have not been acceptable, but within the romantic worldview he adopts (never mind his denial!) there should be no problem. This mystical, transcendental view of evil is summarised beautifully in Saᶜīd's thoughts as he lays

the snare for Isabella Seymour, one of his victims:

> Until the meek inherit the earth, until the armies are disbanded, the lamb grazes in peace beside the wolf and the child plays water-polo in the river with the crocodile, until that time of happiness and love comes along, I for one shall continue to express myself in this twisted manner. And when, puffing, I reach the mountain peak and implant the banner, collect my breath and rest – that, my lady, is an ecstasy greater to me than happiness. Thus I mean you no harm, except to the extent that the sea is harmful when ships are wrecked against its rocks, and to the extent that lightning is harmful when it rends a tree in two.[337]

This is the real preoccupation of this powerful novel. It is not a novel about the tragic clash of civilisations; it is not a novel with a political or cultural pronouncement,[338] but one that transcends that as a minor detail in its grand romantic conception, in its mystical fascination with the fallibility of mankind and the way things are. The novelist may indeed have set out to write a work of fiction about the East–West, or North–South thing, but other grander notions were bothering him; he lost control and the result was this powerful and beautiful, if flawed, novel.[339]

If Ṣāliḥ's *Season of Migration to the North* embodies in its own complex way the most violent representation in Arabic literature of the encounter with the West, it will not perhaps be inappropriate to end this chapter with the discussion of a work of the imagination that could be seen as its antithesis in its vision, another work of 'migration to the north', where love and harmony reign unopposed in what amounts to a prelapsarian vision of the encounter. I am referring to the childhood memoirs of Moroccan writer, **ᶜAbd al-Majīd bin Jallūn** (1919[340]–81) *Fī al-Ṭūfūla* (In my Childhood), published in 1957, shortly after the end of the French Protectorate in Morocco in 1956. It is the only approach that I know of to the theme of the cultural encounter presented through the sensibility a child.[341] Bin Jallūn was born in Casablanca, travelled to Manchester with his family when he was only a few months old,[342] where he stayed until the age of 9 when the family returned to Fez after the collapse of his father's merchant business. Bin Jallūn studied at the Qarawiyyīn Mosque in Fez and then Cairo University in Egypt, before becoming a career diplomat until his death in 1981. His literary output is scant consisting mainly of one collection of verse and two of short stories. It is thanks to the present recollective work, reminiscent of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Al-Ayyām* (Part I, 1929; Part II, 1939; Part III, 1967) which may have influenced it, that his name survives as the author of a true classic of Arab autobiography. Vividly written in a roubust but evocative prose style, the book captures masterfully the essentials of the human condition through character portrayals and the contemplation of the meaning of events beyond their ephemerality.

One of the earliest memories recorded in the book is that of the death of the author's mother, and the episode serves to point out from the beginning some cultural differences. The child is shielded from the reality of death and is not allowed

to see his dead mother before burial. The family however had become close friends with their English neighbours, and Millie, one of their older daughters, sees in this an act of cruelty. She tells the boy who had been in her care that his mother is dead and leads him into her room to say goodbye to her in the face of protests from family and friends. Those protesters may have viewed Millie's behaviour as *the* 'act of cruelty' from their cultural perspective, but the text of the adult recollecting the child does nothing of the sort. He remembers Millie with affection and refers to her as she took his hand up the stairs to his mother's room as 'that noble English girl.'[343] Does the text here typify Arabic culture as one that does not confront reality and English culture as the opposite of that? The suggestion is certainly there but is not dwelt on. Later on in life and in the book, when the child had returned to Morocco, more deaths will occur in the family, notably that of his sister. In each instance, the family will try its best to protect the child from the occasion, and in each instance, he will do his best to penetrate their shield of silence and subterfuge to discover the truth and confront it; only without the help of Millie on those occasions.

Millie indeed appears to play an important role in the child's development: 'through this girl I began to know life and extend the horizon of my existence', writes the narrator. In fact, Millie's entire family, the family Paternos, of Greek stock, seems to provide the boy with his point of reference, his model of social and behavioural normality, while his own people, at least at that stage of his life, seem to strike his childish consciousness as the digression from the norm; as the other, bewildering and incomprehensible. The juxtaposition in the book in two successive chapters of the manners and customs of the two families is telling in the cultural pronouncements it makes through the child's eyes.[344] The narrator, who only spoke English at the time, writes of frequent Moroccan visitors, whom he found 'completely strange'. The deep sounds in which the men spoke, their loud voices and boisterous laughter, all astounded him: 'everything about them was exaggerated: their shouting, their laughing, their eating, their clothing, their anger, their merry-making . . . all this amidst a nation (England) which knew not of exaggeration . . .' (p. 33). With the benefit of hindsight, the child, turned into the writing adult, wonders whether it was perhaps the controlled manners of the English that had contributed to his sense of the loudness of his own people. His juvenile mind was also particularly puzzled by the segregation of visiting men and women, 'as if they were mortal enemies'. After some amusing incidents which he recounts to show the lengths women went to in order to hide from the view of males, the author who employs a narrative strategy allowing him to use his adult understanding and knowledge to interpret his childish mysteries and miscomprehensions, comments: 'it never occurred to me that what I witnessed was the hide and seek game which the two sexes played continuously . . . . My mind was too small to imagine that a whole nation played an eternal game without end . . .' (p. 31). He recognises that the women were as beautiful as Angie Paternos, Millie's youngest sister who charmed him with her statuesque beauty, but they lacked elegance and grace because their figures hid behind their grotesque attire 'hanging over their bodies curtain-like', while their hair was

covered in a 'pile of silk and jewellery' and their complexion 'stained with dyes.' All these derogatory comparisons are tellingly put right when he recalls his sense of wonder on once seeing one of the Moroccan young women dress up in a playful moment in the manner on Angie Paterson. And lo and behold! 'She appeared no less elegant or attractive' (p. 32). Nor was his criticism limited to female dress customs. Later, when he was to return to Morocco, he resented having to wear the traditional 'loose' male garment like other children; garments which he describes as 'cumbersome for movement and conducive to laziness' (p. 117). When years later he is sent to study in Cairo, he is delighted to be able 'to shed off those loose garments in which I had been imprisoned since my return from Manchester . . . . They had brought middle age to my childhood . . .' (p. 138).

As the text is written with the benefit of hindsight, there is often in it a secret tug-of-war between the immediacy of the childish experience rendered and the fuller knowledge of later developments that the writing self of the adult has. In a chapter where he reminisces on his family's summer escapades in northern England with the Paternos family, he writes, 'I shall never forget those wonderful days that we spent in the beautiful summer resorts of England. It was there that I woke up to the joy of life and the beauty of nature.' He goes on to describe his childlike awe before the magnitude and mystery of the sea and limitless horizon beyond. And it is at this suitable juncture in an otherwise idyllic chapter, that the adult injects a reminder of the ephemerality of the child's experience, of its less than complete harmony, of a future that was going to modify the present moment unbeknown to the child: 'I have heard', continues the child, 'that beyond those waters lay another world, and that I was once again to cross the sea to return to a country from which they claimed I had come' (p. 45). Nor should we fail to stop at the words 'they claimed', which treat with justifiable suspicion from the child's viewpoint adult claims about another identity, another culture and indeed another geography lined up for him, and of which he was totally oblivious.

His first experience of his own country occurs when his father takes him on one occasion on a six-week visit to Morocco. The experience was daunting for the child, who tells us that up until that time the mention of Morocco used to trigger in his mind mythical images from hearsay. 'In my mind', he writes, 'Morocco was confused with the countries of the negroes, those lands inhabited by creatures about whom everything was unusual: their size, their colour, and the things they did' (p. 77). What we see here is a consciousness shaped by the other, viewing the self with the same unfounded fears and misconceptions. When the child and his father disembark at Casablanca, his uncle in their reception is quick to recognise the child's dilemma. 'Come', he says to him teasingly, 'I am going to teach you that those Europeans know nothing about life at its most brilliant and enjoyable. Let us go to Fez, the land of your fathers and forefathers, where I will introduce to you the kind of life that I know the Europeans must have taught you the wrong thing about' (p. 82). Nor does it seem that the uncle was wrong in his calculation, for life in Fez charms the boy with its pleasures, warmth and colour, so that at the end of six weeks, the land he had feared so much in anticipation left him dismissing his more familiar city as 'the coal-black Manchester' (p. 86). This was

the beginning of the change of sensibility; the beginning of the questioning of the consciousness formed by the other. On his return to Manchester, the boy holds two sessions in which he recounts to his English playmates his amazing experiences in Morocco. What he tells them are tales of the exotic *in extremis* as one may have encountered in a European traveller's account short of the added sense of childish wonder, but in it we find the sense of empathy that may be lacking from that account: 'Morocco is a strange country', he tells his young friends, 'but I wouldn't want you to think that its people are weird in their appearance; they are exactly like us, and if they were all to be brought to Manchester and made to live here, we wouldn't be able to tell the difference between them and us . . .' (p. 95).

Later on, when the father's business hits financial difficulty and permanent return to Morocco is decided, the child's newfound love after the earlier visit proves less solid. 'I did not want to go back to live there for life . . . . I thought I would only go back as a tourist', he tells us. At this point in the narrative, the adult interrupts to explain to us (and to himself) why he did not want to return to Morocco. It is because there, he tells us, 'your senses will be free, sharpened, and open to pleasure, but your soul will be fettered';[345] (p. 103) an argument that flies in the face of the school of thought, dealt with elsewhere in this book, which attributes matters of the soul to the East and those of the senses to the West.

4 The postcolonial period (2)

Humbled encounters

The heady years of national self-confidence in the early post-independence period were, however, not to endure. The turning point was the humiliating Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel. Arab intellectuals did not see the defeat in only military terms, but were to see it in the fullness of time as a symptom of the collapse of the national dream in the post-independence era. Colonial rule was gone, but in its place what emerged was not democracy, liberalism, and the welfare statae, but rather autocratic governments that repressed individuals and groups, often more fiercely than under colonialism, and disastrous policies that led to military defeats and economic decline. There was a sense of pervasive national disillusionment.

This new sombre mood was inevitably to lead to a reassessment of both self and other; a reassessment in which on this occasion and for the first time the other was to be shown as ethically superior to the self: Arab intellectuals had come a long way since the days of the materialistic, morally corrupt West versus the spiritual East.

* * *

The novella *Aṣwāt* (*Voices*, 1972) by the Egyptian fiction writer **Sulaymān Fayyāḍ** (b. 1929) is without doubt a turning point in representations in Arabic literature of the theme of the encounter with the West. No other work before or since, has created so powerful and concise a metaphor of the encounter in which there was to be such a complete abnegation of the self and glorification of the other, and in which for the first time in Arabic literature, the West is shown to be a victim of the East. As such, the novel rewrites the history of the treatment of the subject and throws into question the validity and relevance of all treatments prior to itself.

Unlike previous novels, the setting here is in the land of the self: an Egyptian village in the Nile Delta. It is the other that makes the journey of the encounter: Simone, the French woman, wife of Ḥāmid, the Egyptian businessman in Paris who fled as a child from the village 30 years before the start of the action, now comes back for a visit with his wife, whom he wants to introduce to his family and culture. The encounter thus is between the West represented by the visiting Simone and the entire village community representing the East, rather than between two individuals as had been the norm in earlier works. This fact may be

behind the novelist's choice of a polyphonic narrative, where a number of the villagers, but not Simone, tell the story from their respective viewpoints, each adding a new bit to the emerging picture leading finally to the tragic end of Simone. The choice by Fayyāḍ of a quasi-primitive rural setting for the encounter, rather than the more sophisticated urban environment of Cairo for instance, contributes to the radicalisation of the encounter, as one between the values of civilisation on the one hand, and those of primordial forces of destruction on the other.

The arrival of Simone in the village of Darāwīsh acts as an unprecedented catalyst in its life. There is the feeling in the village that it is unworthy of this great visitor from a different and evidently superior world, that it needs to brush up its image before her arrival, 'in order to raise high Ḥāmid's head in front of his wife, and the head of Darāwīsh and its surroundings and the whole of Egypt in front of all Westerners represented in the person of Simone', as the *ᶜumda* or village chief puts it.[346] Thus feelings of inferiority towards the other come up to the surface even before the encounter begins. Ḥāmid sends money in advance to his brother Aḥmad, to be used to refurbish the family home where Simone is going to stay, and equip it with such modern comforts as a shower, a toilet seat, and a small fridge: luxuries by the village's standards. Not only is the house refurbished but the entire village: the irrigation canals and their bridges are fixed (in case Simone decided to take an afternoon stroll there), the marshes and potholes are filled, the streets are lit, paved and covered with sand etc. not to mention a new code of behaviour imposed on the villagers to be observed during the stay of the visitor, for example, children to be prevented from urinating in the streets, and animal dung to be promptly cleared therefrom.

On arrival Simone and Ḥāmid are given a reception worthy of royals or heads of state, with the narrative verging on the mock-heroic in its detailed evocation of the event down to the motorcade surrounding their red car. The scene described from the viewpoint of Maḥmūd al-Mansī, the student who later befriends Simone and acts as interpreter between her and villagers, captures the dichotomy of East and West from the first moment: 'As the people crowded and jostled, two worlds suddenly emerged before my eyes: there were the faces of the crowd, and there was the face of Simone…'. Even Ḥāmid, who is Egyptian, his appearance has been transformed by contact with the West, 'so that we can no longer claim that he is a descendant of Darāwīsh, even though he was once one of its barefoot children wearing patched up clothes… and could have remained so had he lived in Darāwīsh until today' (p. 29).

Simone is portrayed as the epitome of simplicity, ease of manner, spontaneity, and spiritedness. A journalist by profession, she has more than the natural curiosity of a foreigner finding herself in a totally different culture to which she is now connected by dint of marriage. As she watches and takes notes for a future article ever so amazed by what she sees, she is not detached, but rather full of sympathy for what she sees in the way of ignorance, disease and squalor. On one occasion, she spends a whole morning applying eyedrops to the infected eyes of the children of the village, a scene that evokes the archetypal Gospel description of Jesus

feeding the multitude. Nor is the implicit association with Christ an irrelevant one. For like him she is innocent and like him she suffers and dies for no guilt of hers.

With her beauty, which the narrative emphasises is more of the spirit and manner than physical (pp. 30–31), she captures the imagination of every male villager and becomes the object of their desire, just as she becomes the object of every woman's envy; all by dint of her otherness, by just being her natural spontaneous different self, not because she does anything consciously to arouse desire or envy. She makes the men of the village feel that their women are no more than 'cows', while becoming for those women, with her elegance, education, self-confidence, opulence and independence, the epitome of everything they do not and cannot have. Unwittingly she becomes the agent by which the villagers gain self-consciousness and wake up to a realisation of the drabness of their life. It is her superior otherness that finally kills her.

Like many stories of the encounter before it, *Voices* presents the cultural encounter through a sexual metaphor.[347] But the encounter here is not between two individuals: an Oriental male and a Western female. Rather it is a clash between fulfilled sexuality (Simone) and repressed sexuality (of the village women), between the capacity for pleasure and the celebration of life represented by the uncircumcised Simone, and the denial of pleasure and life represented by the circumcised women of the village, whose link with death is emphasised by the narrative's highlighting of their perennial black dress.

In the end, the women seize Simone and forcibly remove her clitoris, an 'impurity' and a gateway to lust and marital infidelity, as they see it; she bleeds to death. Thus the dark, life-denying forces of the Orient destroy the innocent, life-loving West. The image of a culture afraid to face up to its moral corruption, to the emptiness of its soul, is emphasised by the officials' cover-up at the end to protect their positions. As the doctor hands the chief of police a falsified burial permit testifying to a natural death, he wonders whose death certificate he was issuing: 'hers or ours?' (p. 120). Thus the narrative's last words proclaim the bankruptcy of a culture, its very spiritual death; a proclamation accentuated by an ironic instance of intertextuality when the chief of the police recalls sarcastically Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *Bird of the East* and Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's *The Saint's Lamp*. While the reference is intrusive within the narrative, one can understand why Fayyāḍ must have found it difficult to resist inviting a laugh at those earlier texts which in their own ways spoke of the spirituality of the East and moral decadence of the materialistic West. Be this as it may, what is of more interest here is the more subtle literary irony that arises from the spontaneous intertextuality of the entire text with its predecessors; the irony discernible in the changing perspective between two different historical phases: the defiant nationalism of the colonial period and the disillusioned nationalism of the postcolonial times. In al-Ḥakīm's *Bird of the East*, we see a French woman cruelly manipulating the affections of her Egyptian admirer in order to win back the waning attention of her French lover. Both characters were allegorical representations of their respective cultures, as al-Ḥakīm saw the relationship. By contrast, in Fayyāḍ's *Voices*, written an odd 30 years later,

we see a French woman murdered by Egyptian village women, envious of her beauty and vitality. Again, both parties have their unambiguous symbolic values in cultural terms. The two texts, read together, speak volumes of the changing perceptions of self and other.

Nor is this the only instance of intertextuality attempted by the narrative. The use of archaic, or obsolete historical terms in the narrative to refer to Simone as the one coming from the land of the '*faransīs, wa al-firinja, wa al-Aᶜājim*' (p. 22), words to refer to the French, Europeans and foreigners in general, which belong to medieval and certainly no later than nineteenth-century sources, immediately gives the encounter a historical depth, a sense of being a continuation, of being one of a chain predating itself. The village also remembers through the recollections of the aged, and the learning of the educated among its sons, past violent clashes between itself and the French during Napoleon's invasion at the end of the eighteenth century, and indeed much earlier during the Crusade of Louis IX in the thirteenth century. In a telling detail, Simone visits the Ibn Luqmān House, where Louis IX was imprisoned after capture, and she enquires about the truthfulness of the story that the French king was castrated by his jailer before being ransomed. This passing curiosity about supposed sexual violence in the distant past appears in retrospect within the narrative a premonition of the fate awaiting Simone herself in the present. And although mention is made in the text of the 17,000 Egyptians massacred during that crusade, there is no suggestion that the villagers bore Simone a grudge for that or held her responsible for atrocities by her ancestors of more than seven hundred years ago. What the text implicitly suggests however through the parallelism between the supposed castration of Louis IX and the fatal circumcision of Simone is a survival of the barbarous mentality of the medieval times into the present, but only on the part of the Orient.

Written by an Egyptian novelist, *Voices* amounts to an act of self-flagellation. It is a stark condemnation of his own culture and an elevation of the culture with which his has historically been at loggerheads until recent times. Considering that the novel was published in 1972,[348] shortly after the Arab defeat in the war with Israel in 1967, it is not difficult to understand the psyche of self-rejection that underlies it. The glorification of the other and mortification of the self, as seen in this powerful novella, was a reflection of the sombreness of the mood of the Arab intellectual in the aftermath of the collapse of the national dream of the postcolonial period.[349]

Fayyāḍ's outcry in *Voices*, rendered in sweepingly broad terms that vilified the self's culture as repressive and ultimately life-denying, was by no means a singularity without echoes. Only two years later, his compatriot novelist, **Ṣunᶜallāh Ibrāhīm** (b. 1937), was to publish an equally pained work of fiction where a more specific kind of repression, namely the political repression of totalitarian rule, is entwined with the representation of the theme of the encounter of cultures, as we shall see presently.

Among Egyptian novelists, Ṣunᶜallāh Ibrāhīm is unique in having written a novel where the other is represented not by Western Europe but by the Soviet

Union. *Najmat Aghusṭus* (The Star of August) was first published in 1974, although according to Ibrāhīm, its authorship was begun in 1966 and the bulk of it not completed until 1972–73.[350] The novel is set in Aswan in the far south of Egypt during the years of the construction of the Aswan High Dam. In the propaganda machine of the state at the time, the building of the High Dam was labelled as the 'miracle of the modern Egyptian man' and compared to the building of the pyramids by his ancient ancestors. Politically, it was an act of defiance to the West following an American-led decision by the International Bank not to finance Egypt's construction of the Aswan High Dam, as a punishment for its growing closer relations at the time with countries of the Soviet bloc. *Najmat Aghusṭus* is in part a documentary novel recording at considerable descriptive length, and mostly in a prose style of apparent detached reportage,[351] the construction of the Dam during its middle phase after the diversion of the course of the Nile. The novel is based on an eye-witness account gained by the author during a visit to the site in the summer of 1965.[352] Nevertheless, this is anything but a celebratory or triumphalist novel. It is in fact a novel about political repression, where the great act of the construction of the dam is constantly alternated in the narrative, through a system of studied flashbacks, with scenes from the protagonist/narrator's political imprisonment and torture. The journalist/protagonist is an obvious persona for the author, who was imprisoned under Nasser during a Marxist purge in the late 1950s. The theme of political repression is further strengthened by a concealed parallelism that the narrative creates between an old tyrant (Ramses II) (the rescue of whose monuments from being flooded forever was part of the effort around the building of the High Dam), and the modern tyrant, Nasser, in whose name the new monument of the Dam was being built. Just as armies of artists and builders were enslaved in the creation of monuments to immortalise the old tyrant, so was the building of the High Dam an act of deification for the new one, in the course of which thousands of modern Egyptians were more or less also enslaved, and by extension the entire nation in its submission to authoritarian rule. Thus the novel presents us with two equally powerful, if ironic, themes: that of the construction of the great monument and utility of the Dam on the one hand, and that of the destruction through repression of the soul of the very builder of that monument, the Egyptian individual, on the other.[353]

Alongside the theme of political repression comes that of sexual deprivation. It is no exaggeration to say that the narrative throbs, almost on every page, with the pain of unfulfilled sexual desire, where the Egyptian protagonist and all the males he comes across in the course of his visit to Aswan and Abu Simbel are reduced to sexual predators in search of female prey. The objects of their desires were the few European women tourists passing through the city, and more particularly the resident Russian women who work on the project which was being carried out with massive Soviet expertise. And this is where the novel can claim a modest contribution to the tradition of writing on the theme of the East/West encounter. The encounter here takes place between the unnamed male journalist/protagonist, gathering material for some magazine reports, and a female clerical assistant from Russia, called Tanya. The encounter is of a purely sexual nature and is

surrounded by fear and anxiety; it has to take place in secrecy as discovery of the liaison would jeopardise the woman's career and precipitate a premature return to Russia, with possible repercussions for the Egyptian protagonist as well. This is where the themes of political repression and sexual repression converge, and where the two political cultures, Egyptian and Soviet, self and other, also appear to unite in their restriction of the freedom of the individual. The furtive encounter happens only once, as the woman's fear of discovery later appears to outweigh her desire. What is unique about Ṣunᶜallāh Ibrāhīm's portrayal of the lovemaking scene is its complete synchronisation in the narrative with acts of digging, poring, and the inoculation of substances into holes and tunnels (vaginal symbols) performed in the mountain by heavy machinery (phallic symbols) as part of the process of the construction of the Dam.[354]

This, to my mind, has a mechanising, dehumanising effect on the sexual encounter; it incorporates the love act into the totalitarian superstructure to which both the Soviet Union and Nasser's regime belong, as if the mechanical union between the couple were another facet of the engineering cooperation between the two regimes. Unlike in representations of the cultural encounter in works previously considered, that is, those between the Arab Self and Western Europe, the exponents of the two cultures here are not at odds; they do not stand for different values, there is no conflict between them – each in his/her own way is a victim of repression, and in this peculiar kind of way they are united. It is as if in their clash with their own regimes as repressed individuals, they can only see their human similarity across cultures. There is a sense in which this representation can perhaps be seen as a precursor of more developed and reconciliatory representations of the theme in the work of another Egyptian writer, Bahāʾ Ṭāhir, as we shall see later.[355]

As if by tacit coordination among writers, representations of the European other in fiction written in the period of national disillusionment in the post-1967 years were beginning to be systematically linked to a theme of political repression, where the individual is crushed under dictatorial rule, where freedom of expression does not exist, and human rights are a little known luxury. In such representations, the European other will stand for liberty and the dignity of the individual, the very values denied the self under repressive rule. This new association will now replace the old representatation of the Western other as oppressor; in the post-independence era oppression is now home made. Readers of Arabic fiction written in the 1970s and 1980s, and indeed of the products of other literary genres such as poetry and drama, will recognise without difficulty that political repression was a widely spread theme among Arab writers at the time in the context of the process of soul-searching that gripped the Arab literary endeavour following the debacle of 1967. It was only natural that writers who tackled the theme of the Western encounter would have the same preoccupation, and that that would be brought to bear on their view of both the self and the other.

This is the context in which to understand the continuing concern with the issue of political repression across writers and works, as we can see in the work

of **ᶜAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim** (1935–90), a fellow Egyptian and contemporary of Ṣunᶜallāh Ibrāhīm. Qāsim published his novel, *Muḥāwala lil-Khurūj* (An Attempt to Get Out) in 1980. The novel specifies 16 July 1966 as the start date of its action,[356] which lasts for a few days, although no specific immediate significance is recognisable from specifying the date, apart from placing the action during the years of Nasser's rule, thereby dissociating it from the time of publication, which was during Sadat's rule (1970–81). The protagonist of the novel is a clear persona for the novelist. Indeed, he is not only a novelist like him, but also carries the same name of ᶜAbd al-Ḥakīm, which is often shortened in dialogue to Ḥakīm. The novel is centred on a love story that quickly evolves between Ḥakīm and a young Swiss woman, by the name Elspeth, on a visit to Cairo as part of a tourist group. Ḥakīm undertakes to show her around Cairo and to take her on a visit to his native village and his family, who lives there. The tour turns into a survey of the misery, squalor, and oppression in which modern Egyptians live, whether in Cairo, or in rural Egypt. The narrative does not make do with the near-naturalistic evocation of the contemporary scene of privation, but systematically resorts to flashbacks from the author/narrator's childhood in the village, and unspoken contemplations of Egypt's history, triggered by free association, to extend the misery of the moment far back into individual and national history. It is against this dismal backdrop, that feelings of empathy and love evolve between the Swiss woman and the Egyptian man. By contrast to Ḥakīm, Elspeth is happy and carefree; she does not carry the burden of the past and the present as he does, and while like him, she too belongs to a farming family (p. 38), the Swiss countryside from which she comes is not burdened with a legacy of poverty and disease, like his. She cannot understand what she sees in Cairo, nor can she understand why he does not 'get out' and escape to a different life and a different world. She offers him, through the medium of her love, the opportunity of '*al-khurūj*' or escape, that the title of the novel invokes, but he declines personal happiness because he 'has to stay' (p. 163) and, as the narrative implies, share in the common lot of his countrymen.

Ḥakīm sees her as his 'salvation'; she fills him with 'unadulterated joy . . .' (p. 84), and in her he finds a cure 'from the continuous anxiety, lonesomeness and sorrow of the days . . .' (p. 81). He is determined however to impregnate her with his woes, 'so that she would depart weighed down with the bitter reality' (p. 134). Amidst the ugliness which surrounds him, he recognises her as 'beautiful, as a different reality' (p. 90) from the repressive, crushing harshness of Cairo, which the narrative emphasises almost on every page of the book. The taxi scene epitomises it all. On one occasion, Ḥakīm and Elspeth take a taxi. They snuggle together on the back seat, with her arm round his waist and his round her shoulders, as lovers would sit. The narrative idealises the moment: 'How beautiful life is! How beautiful it would be to live for a thousand years and to be good!' (p. 91). But the taxi driver, who sees in this closeness nothing but licentiousness, pulls up and orders them to dismount. He even extends a 'heavy hand like a hammer' to physically separate their bodies. The driver is demonised by the narrative: 'his eyes are narrow, and cold like two chisels . . . [He] is broad-shouldered and drives smugly and aggressively . . . .' Ḥakīm is shown to be entirely helpless before the

hostility of the driver; he is utterly humiliated: he cowers in the backseat 'like a wet rag', and again, 'like a mouse in a hole…' (pp. 91–92). As for Elspeth, she 'had never been so afraid in her life' (p. 94), and is left utterly uncomprehending and disconsolate by the experience. The episode acquires symbolic power and the narrator's culture emerges as repressive to the individual, unaccommodating to love, a destroyer of dreams:

> How often I had dreamt of having a beautiful, elegant girl like Elspeth, and being able to stroll with her, talking on a calm street! And how often I had imagined that as I lay in my bed before sleep! But always a frightful thought shattered my fancy in the middle… Defeatism ran in my blood and spoiled everything for me like a patient infected with malaria…
>
> (p. 93)

On another occasion, as they make their way to Burg al-Qāhira (Cairo Tower) in the evening, they stand kissing in the shadow of a huge leafy tree. The lyricism of the moment is ruined as much by the sound of the footsteps of an approaching figure as by the tense anticipation and fear that now prowls in their souls: 'We could hear footsteps ringing in the dark, advancing with certainty, like the footsteps of an executioner. As the figure became level with us, he looked at us, afraid but determined. We walked away in the opposite direction…'. What is ironic here is the fact that in this tense atmosphere where spontaneity of action is constantly arrested under countless watchful eyes, both the intruder and the intruded upon are in a state of fear, as if the narrative wanted to show us that repression devoured its perpetrators no less than its victims. Elspeth is almost driven to madness by the situation that keeps repeating itself: 'This is terrible. I have never seen a city like this… Prying eyes in every corner. Always looking at you, never leaving you alone' (p. 150). Their next frustration was only round the corner, when an attendant clumsily deprives them of a private moment at the top of the tower (pp. 152–53). Their Kafkaesque nightmare continues as they leave the tower to sit by the Nile. The atmosphere of fear and repression is further intensified by the sight of two secret policemen swiftly and silently arresting two suspected prostitutes and hurling them into a waiting police car. For a tense moment, Ḥakīm had no doubt that it was going to be their turn next (p. 156).

The narrative had earlier conjured up in a surrealistic image death-pale faces floating on the surface of the Nile, dead faces with dead yearnings of those who had died. Ḥakīm surmises that 'perhaps in a thousand years two lovers would be able to embrace here without fear' (p. 95). As the scene changes, the narrative maintains its relentless build of Egyptian reality as repressive and hostile in the manner of a police state. When Ḥakīm visits a friend of his, living in an apartment block, the flats are described as 'filled with inimical people', ever so probing into the affairs of others. Europe by contrast is 'a different thing', a place of freedom, where one is as free as 'a bird…' (p. 104).

The experience of the Egyptian culture of repression takes its toll on Elspeth, and Ḥakīm is regretful that he 'has soiled her beauty, and rolled her splendour in

the mud…' (p. 146–47). Eventually, she goes back to her world, and leaves him to his pre-destined one. For the committed artist/human being, ᶜAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, would have us believe that culture is fate, from which there is no escape.[357] The protagonist is indeed shown to be resigned to his fate, but far from reconciled to it. As he bids Elspeth farewell, he screams mentally, 'I shall not forgive! I shall never forgive!' (p. 164). We are not told what it is that these very last words of the novel hold forgiveness back from, but they do appear to be a cry against the amalgam of conditions that victimise him and condemn to failure his *Muḥāwala lil-Khurūj*, or attempt to escape. Even love could not stand up to a culture of repression that nips in the bud the individual's soul, and lets him go disfigured through life, as Qāsim's portrayal of his protagonist shows in this very bleak novel.[358]

Qāsim's next novel, *Qadar al-Ghuraf al-Muqbiḍa* (Fate of the Oppressive Rooms, 1982)[359] finds him still interested in the encounter with the other, although unlike in *Muḥāwala lil-Khurūj*, this theme does not represent the principal concern in the novel. The novel which, in common with much of his work, is autobiographical in large part[360] is concerned with the fate of the trapped individual who cannot escape from poverty and privation however much he is conscious of his predicament and however much his soul aspires to escape into the beauty of the world, which it knows exists out of its reach. For this entrapment, Qāsim uses the powerful metaphor of narrow, confined, ugly, makeshift living space (the oppressive rooms of the title), which he maintains with unabated force throughout the novel.

It is only in the last few pages of the novel that the writer/protagonist, ᶜAbd al-ᶜAziz, gets an opportunity to break away from 'the fate of oppressive rooms', or so it seems at first, when he receives an invitation from a German religious foundation to visit West Berlin to give a lecture and spend a few days there.[361] In Berlin, the 'oppressiveness' of Egyptian rooms and buildings seems initially to give way to the freshness of houses which were 'testimonies to beautiful architecture and the splendour of colours, surrounded by exquisite gardens…'.[362] The protagonist surmises that he is in 'paradise' and that people there ought to be 'angels', but concludes without hesitation that 'They are not', and goes on to comment that, 'he sees them in their posh cars, or walking in the street, their eyes not making contact with him despite his staring, as if he were an invisible transparent being, which intensifies his deep sense of reserve and his consciousness of the fact that he is an undesirable foreigner' (p. 129). Even people with whom he came in personal contact 'were very polite and generous towards him, but a barrier of fear, like barbed wire, separated him from them' (p. 131). ᶜAbd al- ᶜAzīz wonders whether it is 'the fear of those who came from the East, where there is poverty and people are crammed in grotty holes'. He wonders too whether the 'wounds on his soul' effected by a life spent 'incarcerated in oppressive rooms' has indelibly left a mark on him without hope of cure (p. 132). In Berlin he meets other third-world 'foreigners' like himself, and feels a kind of oneness with them: 'They have crossed the seas fleeing from the horrendous fate of the South… driven by the tragedy of the frightful holes [in which they live]…' (pp. 137 and 142).

As his stay in Germany is extended and he begins to take menial jobs to support himself, he discovers that 'oppressive rooms' exist in Berlin too (pp. 137–40), and that workers, both German and foreign, 'worked persistently like ants, hounded by mysterious inscrutable fear' (p. 137).

ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz is charmed by the beauty of Berlin: '…its lakes and forests, its wide, tree-lined streets, its green flowery spring, and the wild apricot blossoms when they fall from their trees and cover the calm streets with a silken carpet…' (p. 143). But he is distraught by the gap between this open beauty and the ugliness of the individual living space of the under-privileged: 'Tens of thousands of the people inhabiting this city go back from this beauty to their grave-like homes…This beauty is like a poisoned tree, whose roots extend into the remains of the human beings huddled in the oppressive rooms; a poisoned beauty that lives side by side with the ugliness and feeds on it in an accursed world…' (pp. 143–44). This conflict between the beauty of the world and its ugliness, and the fact that its beauty is largely closed to the disadvantaged of the world, whether in Cairo or Berlin, is at the heart of ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz's suffering and the vision of his creator, ᶜAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, who has addressed the issue time and again in his Egyptian-set work, and appears to bring to it here a universal dimension that stretches beyond particular cultures and socio-political systems. The protagonist appears unable to comprehend the tenacity of his fate: 'He has worked tirelessly every day of his life. He has never been slack or lazy. This fate is just too horrendous to be a matter of personal failing, blunder or stupidity; it is a dreadful flaw wreaking havoc on the entirety of life, and turning it into a fable of ugliness and disfigurement' (p. 144).

When ᶜAbd al- ᶜAzīz is finally diagnosed as diabetic, he tries to figure out how he might have contracted the disease, that is going to be his death, in the knowledge that it could not be genetic since there was no one on the side of either of his parents' families that had diabetes. He goes in his mind through a number of traumatic, if banal, moments in his life when he might have been affected. Most of them had occurred in Cairo, but Berlin is not excepted as the possible venue for the fatal strike: 'Or was it in Berlin, in one of those nights, laden with the melancholy of exile and fear under a faded ceiling and oppressive walls?' In *Qadar*…, there is no salvation to be hoped for in the land of the other nor in what his culture has to offer: all cultures seem to unite in their denial of the downtrodden. Or, to put it differently, the fate of the downtrodden seems to be at their heels wherever they seek to run away from it. This austere vision seems no different from that offered in *Muḥāwala lil-Khurūj*, where the protagonist lets Elspeth return alone to Switzerland, while he stays in Cairo in acceptance of his fate.

The repression of the police state that haunts the protagonist of Qāsim's *Muḥāwala* and stands in the way of the fulfilment of love, and the promise of salvation in the form of a European beloved with the different value system that comes with her, is paralleled in an earlier novel by Moroccan writer **Muḥammad Zifzāf** (1946–2001), writing too in the postcolonial era. Morocco had gained its independence from France in 1956, having been a protectorate since 1912.

The novel in question is *Al-Marʾa wal-Warda*[363] (The Woman and the Rose), published by Zifzāf in 1971, and largely counted among his best works despite its

relatively early place in his writing career. The novel is set in a coastal touristy Spanish town, called Ṭūrī.[364] Muḥammad, the protagonist and narrator of the story, is a man of some 30 years, of humble background. He is unemployed and seems unperturbed by it. He moves in seedy circles of criminals, and drug traffickers, and is obsessed with sex. He is a man trying to choose a path for himself in life; a man at the crossroads, and the novel is a prolonged exploration of that decisive moment in his life. Significantly, the book begins with the account of someone who had immigrated to Europe, and who passes on to the protagonist the gist of his experience by way of advice. A fellow Moroccan, he tells him that Europe had always held for him a mysterious promise; that when he first stood on the shore in Tangiers, he felt intuitively that 'those lands which appeared to him close by across the blue waters of the sea represent a wondrous enchanted world'. He tells him that he would not care to live in Casablanca whatever the temptation. This is because 'here I lose my humanity, but there [in Europe] you can become what you want . . . . There, you can want or not want; no one will want for you on your behalf, as they do here'. He declares that he does not want to speak about the civilisation of Europe or hold comparisons, but only to state that 'I love Europe; (. . .) that I discovered myself in Europe'. He denounces his homeland as a place of repression, where 'they look down on you as if they were gods', and rebukes his young acolyte for 'spending your youth in a tomb surrounded by water', by which he means Morocco. The polarisation of the homeland as a focus for repression and Europe as a focus for freedom is summed up in this bizarre statement: 'Here you can't even steal a hen, while *there* you can easily pose as an EU expert and roam the continent carrying what you will of smuggled jewellery or drugs . . .'.[365] This is of course Europe seen from the viewpoint of a lawbreaker, but the implication will not be lost on us that in Europe honest men might even enjoy greater freedom than criminals.

The protagonist's chance encounter with this outspoken figure, who is duly banished from the novel after the introductory first five pages, transforms him. It orients him towards Europe, and much of the novel is about that. It is probably under his mentor's advice that Muḥammad makes his way to Spain as a gateway to Europe. There he meets a Danish girl by the name Sūz, and what starts as a sexual encounter develops into something deeper. Muḥammad is a man in crisis; a man disorientated and under threat of drifting into a world of crime, a man at the brink and hesitating to take the final step forward. And although this is not an allegorical novel about the cultural encounter, where individual characteristics point at cultural values, it would still appear that much of the protagonist's predicament is engendered by a sense of cultural malaise. A recurrent theme in the novel is that of state repression. Muḥammad is always in fear of the Spanish police despite the legality of his status. They are represented as brutal rapists, and images of their attack on him and a previous girlfriend keep haunting him. The theme of repression is underscored by a recurrent motif in the protagonist's consciousness, where human beings are viewed in sub-human terms, and their actions, particularly the sex act, are paralleled by insect activity in what amounts to a surrealistic representation of the world. This of course can be seen as the ultimate result of lifelong repression, where human identity is lost altogether.

The repression he fears and experiences in Spain appears an extension of his life in Morocco; Spain is not the promised Europe for the protagonist, nor obviously in the mind of the author who created him. This is perhaps due to the fact that the novel was written when Spain was still living under General Franco's (1892–1975; in power, 1939–75) repressive rule. What is certain is that Europe as a symbol of freedom for the protagonist was somewhere further north. The European girl whom he loves and who holds for him the promise of cultural escape is understandably not Spanish but Danish.

In a reverie fraught with meaning, Sūz appears to Muḥammad in the form of a corpulent all-powerful woman. The vocabulary and imagery used invoke a mortal–deity relationship. He speaks to her from 'the depths of my pain, as Moses spoke to the Lord'. He introduces himself as a man who wants to become a god, and would it be possible? She, on the other hand, introduces herself as Sūz, 'a woman from Denmark (. . .) and I have come to save you'. She informs him that divinity was a status beyond the likes of him, but that she could turn him into a flower or marry him. He is thrown into confusion by the offer, and his thoughts run like this:

> The hour of decision is upon me. Such opportunities occur only once in a lifetime. And I? What race do I come from? An Arab. Not every Arab will have a chance like this. Why don't I become a flower? Why don't I marry the corpulent woman who might help me become a god? (. . .) I remembered my dismal past living as one of the millions inhabiting the dirty villages scattered on the Atlas Mountains, on the Rif Range, in the Shāwiya plains, or the endless Tan-Tan desert.[366]

The binary opposition in this daydream is so clearly laid out: the European woman is a goddess, her corpulence a sign of wealth and plenty, and she has the ability to elevate her followers into echelons of power (god) or at least beauty (flower). By contrast, the Arab is a mere mortal with ambition but no means. His is the poverty and the dirty villages, from which his only hope of escape is her. The reverie establishes 'flowers', with their aesthetic value, as a concept foreign to Arab culture, and 'God' as a force of repression. Muḥammad explains his desire to become a god in the following terms: 'we are a people who do not like flowers; we like God and whipping'.[367] At the end of the novel, Muḥammad is in a state of limbo trying to pull himself out, as he hesitates before taking part in a drug trafficking operation across the sea. He considers returning to Casablanca as a way out, but instead he buys a postcard and sends it to Sūz. On the back of the card he writes: 'Sūz, I love you and I love Denmark. I am always waiting for you to save me. I love you. I love you.'[368] An indecisive ending perhaps, but not without indubitable elements of certainty: the Arab protagonist needs to be saved, and his potential saviour is his European love with all she stands for.

The disillusionment felt by Egyptian writers was no less felt by their contemporary Syrians in the 1970s and the 1980s and indeed into the 1990s: Syria suffered the same defeat as Egypt in the 1967 war with Israel and part of its

territory, the Golan Heights, has remained occupied; she was also living under a fierce totalitarian regime. A good example of this disillusionment can be found in the work of the little known novelist, **Walīd Ḥajjār** (b. 1931), who was to try an approach of sorts to the issues of the theme of the Western encounter in a trilogy of lengthy, privately published novels (his only published fiction), which he tellingly calls 'The Trilogy of the Search for the Self'. The three novels are: *Al-Suqūṭ ilā Aʿlā* (Falling Upwards, 1973), *Musāfir bilā Ḥaqā'ib* (A Traveller Without Luggage,[369] 1979), and *Riḥlat al-Naylūfar* (The Journey of the Water Lily, 1984). For some reason, that is neither justified by the narrative nor externally explained by the author, parts two and three of the trilogy in the chronology of publication are actually later in the chronology of events in the narrataive than part one. The novels should really be read in this order: Two, three, then one; a privilege that today's reader may enjoy, but which would not have been available to readers who read the novels as they were being published! Ḥajjār, who studied musical composition and political science in Paris and the United States, respectively, in the 1950s has produced an amorphous work of over 2,000 pages with a large number of characters (some fictitious, some historical), an inordinate number of themes, plots and sub-plots, and a much varied cross-country, inter-continental scene. The only sense of unity, if it can be called that, comes from the French narrator and his friend, the Syrian protagonist, Firās, or Maxime (his adopted French name.) The action is spread over the 1950s and 1960s and shifts freely from Syria, to France, to Germany, to Spain, Algeria, Italy, Switzerland, and Saudi Arabia (though the latter is identifiable from detail rather than by name), and other places. Characters range from penniless students of the Latin Quarter in Paris, to Algerian resistance fighters during the French colonisation, to exiled Russian royalty in Paris and their consorts of the former French aristocracy. Firās arrives in Paris in 1950 with nothing but scorn for his backward Arab culture, though we are never shown how he arrived at that position. He adopts a new identity of an exiled and impoverished Russian aristocrat and emabarks on the study of classical music and art (note the similarity with the author's own mission in Paris). He mixes with every imaginable Western nationality in Paris's high and low society, and endless pages are filled with tortuous philosophic discussions of every known ideology of the day, interspersed with hedonistic indulgence in every imaginable sexual pleasure of such calibre as would make Suhayl Idrīs's *Al-Ḥayy al-Lātīnī* protagonist's exploits in another Latin Quarter based novel seem rather modest. Firās, who cannot be described as a realistic character nor can the situations the author places him in, is so totally absorbed by his new identity and the life that came with it, to the point that he decides to join the French Foreign Legion (*le légion étrangére*) to fight for France against the Algerian resistance. As he makes his way south through Spain *en route* to Algeria, he stops at Al Hambra in Granada. There he breaks down and experiences an epiphanic moment. As he stands amidst the abandoned wonders of art and architecture, the place comes to life in front of his eyes and a realisation of the grandeur of the *Arab* civilisation which left behind those relics hits him.[370] And although he never loses sight of the fact that Arab culture today 'has nothing to do with this world, with this palace . . .',[371] the reconciliation appears to

have taken place; the splendrous past restores Firās to the identity he had jettisoned on account of the petty present of his native culture. Thus on arrival in Algeria, he only joins the Foreign Legion in order to work as a spy for the natives before quitting and returning to Paris. He finally rejects Europe and returns to Damascus but that is no salvation, as his return only confirms the low opinion in which he has always held his culture: he becomes drawn into a network of debased connections with corrupting oil-rich Arab princes and princesses, which is perhaps what the title of the novel implies by alluding to 'falling upwards' or '*al-suqūṭ ilā aᶜlā*'.[372] Finally, a word of warning for future readers of this trilogy: if a sense of order is at all discernible in this short exposition, it has only been arrived at with extreme difficulty due to the formlessness of the work, and the sprawling nature of the narrative. This trilogy warrants study not so much for artistic accomplishment; a quality it lacks sorely, but for a sense of intellectual honesty and earnestness of thought occasionally lifted by the prose. It is another trilogy by another Syrian author that succeeds in presenting us with a coherent vision emanating from an admirably accomplished work of fiction: that by Khayrī al-Dhahabī, of which more later.

Fellow Syrian writer, **Yāsīn Rifāᶜiyya** (b. 1934) in his novella, *Maṣraᶜ al-Mās* (The Murder of Almās, 1981) is unique in making a romanticised approach to the encounter theme, considering that he was writing in the 1980s, well past the age of the romantic novel in Arabic. Like the trilogy of his fellow countryman, Khayrī al-Dhahabī, discussed below, Rifāᶜiyya's novella is set in Damascus during the French Mandate. It revolves round the character of the larger-than-life eponymous hero of the title, who is portrayed as a kind of noble thug, as much loved as feared by the inhabitants of his quarter, where he appears to rule unopposed over the lives of the people, and who operates against the French with apparent impunity. The struggle against the French occupiers dominates the action and dictates Almās's and the quarter's moral code: collaborators are killed without mercy, and those injured and incapacitated in the fight against the French are supported for life by the rest of the community under the watchful eye of Almās.

It is against this harsh background of conflict and bloodshed that Rifāᶜiyya introduces a short-lived romantic episode of a love story between a French officer and a simple, uneducated but beautiful Syrian girl, Imtithāl. The officer, much older than the girl, is utterly infatuated by her youth and beauty, by 'the shyness and innocence of the East',[373] embodied in her. The infatuation turns into love and rather than seduce her, as would have been the normal practice in the situation, he converts to Islam and they consummate their love in a secret marriage. Meanwhile, her brother suspects her goings and comings, and slaughters her for her presumed sullying of the honour of the family. All this happens while the girl had been using her influence with the French Colonel to secure the release from prison of her father, who had previously been sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering a collaborator with the French. The influence of love on the Colonel leads to complete denial of his identity: not only does he convert to Islam as we have seen, but the author also manages to make him adopt the natives' viewpoint of collaboration

and thus convince the French authorities that the man in prison was not a murderer but a fighter for the cause of his nation as he saw it. So complete is his loss of identity to the other camp, the East, that even after the savage murder of his beloved, ordered by the released father and executed by her brother, he still holds on to Islam, retires from the army, and returns to France to rue her loss for the rest of his days, and from there he sends a letter of penance to her father to clear her name.

Parallel to the Colonel's story with the Syrian girl, runs the story of his wife Josephine's infatuation and elopement with an uncouth, native milkman, 'with his muscular body and strong arms like two branches of an olive tree . . . [if] ignorant, inarticulate and unwashed . . .'.[374] The milkman in turn is no less charmed by the French woman's 'elegant figure with pure milk-white skin, smooth blond hair, and blue eyes . . .'.[375] While this relationship is portrayed in purely carnal terms, and is dropped from the book unaccountably, the relationship between the Colonel and Imtithāl is given more depth both in the case of the Colonel and the girl, who finds her liaison with him both uplifting and fulfilling: 'The Colonel has given me a radiant joy, I never knew I was so great, so sacred, so beautiful . . .'.[376]

Confused and rendered a disservice by the inadequacy of the author's artistic tools, the novella seems on the one hand to play up to stereotypical representations of East and West in sexual terms, while attempting to offer the alternative of the possibility of the human encounter through love on the individual level despite the strife between coloniser and colonised. Aesthetics apart, the quality of what is meant to be a tolerant vision is undermined by the implied necessity of the sacrifice of identity by one party in order for the encounter to happen; in this case, the Colonel's conversion to Islam.[377]

Ḥannā Mīnah (b. 1924), Syria's most illustrious novelist, with his long period as a political exile in China and Hungary, was bound to give expression to his experience of the other in his fiction. His novel *Al-Rabīᶜ wal-Kharīf* (Spring and Autumn, 1984) has achieved the status of a classic as a novel of the cultural encounter. It is nevertheless a multi-thematic novel, which while showing a considerable interest in issues of the cultural encounter with Europe, is also a work about exile and political commitment, love and artistic creativity, and cross-generational love to name some of its more salient preoccupations. Through the techniques of realism and an omniscient author's viewpoint, Mīnah fuses together all these themes to present us with a reconciliatory vision where self and other are at harmony rather than in conflict. As his protagonist puts it, 'in my relationship with the other, I am not after victory . . .'.[378]

What sets *Al-Rabīᶜ Wal-kharīf* apart from most other works discussed in this book is the fact that it is set in Budapest, the capital of communist Hungary, where for the first time the other is a European not from the West but from the Eastern Bloc of the Cold War days. Why this should be particularly interesting is obvious: the other here has had no imperial history in the Middle East, on the contrary he is doctrinally committed to helping the ex-colonised, opposing imperialism and capitalism, and propagating egalitarian social and world orders. Since

colonialism has played a major part in colouring portrayals of the other in literary works, the portrayal of the non-colonial other is bound to offer an interesting comparison.[379] Mīnah of course was not the first to do that as such, Ṣunᶜallāh Ibrāhīm of Egypt having preceded him to the representation of the European other through a Soviet female in his novel, *Najmat Aghusṭus*, as we have seen; a principal difference however is that Ibrāhīm's novel is set in Egypt, while Mīnah's is set in Budapest.

The protagonist, Karam al-Mujāhidī, is a Syrian novelist in exile for political reasons. This is in common with his creator, Ḥannā Mīnah, who escaped from Syria in 1959 during the communist purge by Nasser's newly established regime in Damascus following political unity with Egypt in 1958. Mīnah was not to return to Syria until 1967 following the Arab defeat in the war with Israel.[380] Nevertheless the exact reasons behind Karam's exile are not made clear but one may safely assume that his crime was being an idealist leftist in opposition to the ruling regime, which remains unnamed in the novel. His exile takes him first to China where he teaches Arabic for five years before ending up in Budapest, again to teach Arabic at university. This and much detail in the novel again tallies with events from the author's life during his own exiled years in China and Hungary among other places, which suggests, despite the author's denial,[381] a strong autobiographical element in the work.[382] While the action is all set in Budapest, a contrast is established between the city's culture and that of Beijing: 'Everything in Hungary seems different from what I have come to know in Beijing. Society here is open, and there is no dogmatic fanaticism . . .' (p. 35). While both countries are ruled by communist regimes, references in the book to Beijing are normally negative in contrast with the author's warmth towards Hungary. Politics apart, to Mīnah and his protagonist Hungary is West and China is East, and there is no mistaking where their sympathy lies.[383]

Karam is an antiques collector, who during his travels especially in China amasses a sumptuous collection constituting in effect a small museum, which he exhibits artistically in his Budapest apartment.[384] The collection has a breathtaking influence on his visitors, particularly women, and as references to it abound in the narrative, its function as a symbol of the ensnaring allure of the Orient becomes evident. The influence of al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ, whose hero in *Season of Migration to the North* decorated his bedroom in the *Arabian Nights* style and used it as a snare for his fascinated women victims, cannot be overlooked here. But there is a significant difference: unlike *Season's* Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd, Karam has no vendetta against the West as embodied in Hungary, and he is adamant that his 'museum will not turn into a trap, and that his conduct will never degenerate into ensnaring girls' (p. 82). The book however is dominated by two simultaneous relationships he has with two Hungarian women, Piroska and Erika; the first a 20-year-old university student (who stands for the 'Spring' of the title, while he at 40 stands for the 'Autumn'), while the second is a well-known singer. Both women fall in love with him, and together they seem to embody (realistically rather than allegorically) the spirit of Hungary, but Karam is unable to fall in love; all he can afford is endearment, or *maᶜazzah*, as he honestly tells them. His love

is saved for what seems an unattainable dream or ideal: 'for the moon fairy (*jinniyyat al-qamar*); she who lives somewhere distant and unknown; she calls me and *she* is my love, my yearning, and the final stop in this life's journey for me . . .'.[385] He goes through many a painful moment, and indeed causes much pain too to the women who love him, in order to preserve his ultimate loyalty to that 'moon fairy', who transpires to be a symbol for the homeland to which he must return, because as an artist, his mission can only be fulfilled there. The novel ends with his abandonment of the women who love him and a comfortable life in Budapest to return to Damascus, where he is arrested on landing. But as he is transported from the airport in a security vehicle, he gazes on the shining moon to recognise gradually in it what 'looks like a smiling face. He smiles back and thinks to himself, "The moon fairy has travelled with me", and he shuts his eyes over a kind of happiness he has never experienced before' (p. 328).

Thus Mīnah would have us believe that for the exile, and particularly the exiled writer, the homeland is the greatest love, for which even freedom is a price to pay willingly, and that all the lures of the land of the other are meaningless, mere obstacles to the artist's creativity which can only bear fruit in his homeland. Hence the recurrent invocation in the book of another great exile of modern times, the Marxist Turkish poet, Nazim Hikmet (1902–63), who like the protagonist and his creator also suffered prison and exile for his political beliefs.[386] And as great Marxist figures and principles are idealised, so is Hungary: 'The implementation of socialism is doing well here. What a beautiful country this Hungary; it can indeed serve as a model for socialist countries. Here a person feels his humanity . . . .'[387] The irony of this idealisation appears completely lost on both the author and his protagonist, who is in exile because of political repression in his country but appears oblivious of the fact that in Hungary too political dissidence is not tolerated; indeed the action is set in 1967 only a little over a decade following the repression of the anti-Soviet 1956 Revolution. A further irony that can only be perceived in the context of events that took place after the publication of the novel is also unavoidable, as present-day readers cannot help but bring to their experience of the book their knowledge that communism in Hungary was to be popularly rejected in favour of Western democracy (as in the rest of Eastern Europe) only within seven years or so after the publication of this idealising work.

There is no systematic juxtaposition of East and West in Ḥannā Mīnah's novel, no allegorisation of the kind we have seen in al-Ḥakīm's *Bird of the East* or Ḥaqqī's *The Saint's Lamp*; what we have are real, not pre-conceived characters, and what thoughts we have about the differences or similarities between East and West are incidental and stem from the main thematic concerns of the novel.[388] Examples of this are passing thoughts on Europe's openness towards sex, and traditions of personal freedom which are seen by the protagonist as more healthy attitudes than those of the East (pp. 166, 210–11, 250), and the alienation of second generation Eastern expatriates from their exiled parents' native countries (pp. 169–72). Because of this no special significance can be attached to Karam's relationships with and final abandonment of both Piroska and Erika. There are no undertones of cultural incompatibility here, it is only Karam's experience of

anagnorisis following the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel, that brings home to him the realisation that his place as a writer can only be in his own homeland,[389] where his true love 'the moon fairy' awaits him. Significantly, it is also at this moment that he smashes, in his frustration at the news of the humiliating military defeat, the contents of his antiques museum. The symbolism of the act must be understood in the context of the already established symbolism of the museum. If the latter stands for the ostentatious lure of the old Orient, its destruction at this moment is an act of a leaving behind of the old for the new, of the past for the reality of the present.[390]

Staying with Syrian writers' representations of the Western other, we move on to a novelist of a younger generation than Ḥannā Mīnah's: **Khayrī al-Dhahabī** (b. 1946) who offers one of the most recent approaches to the theme of the encounter with the West in his trilogy of *Al-Taḥawwulāt* (Metamorphoses). The novel is a *roman fleuve*, on the scale of Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*, telling the story of three generations of the Damascene family of al-Jawqadār at a time of change. The three parts published over an eleven-year period, each carrying the name of the character at its centre, are *Ḥasība* (1987), *Fayyāḍ* (1990), and *Hishām ʾAw al-Dawarān fī al-Makān* (Hishām or Turning Round in Space, 1998). In its attempt to document in fiction social and political change in Damascus in modern times, the novel starts in *Ḥasība* as far back as the early days of the French Mandate in Syria in the 1920s, showing the interaction of the public and private, and reaches more or less the present day in *Hishām*, the third part.

It is in the second novel of the trilogy, *Fayyāḍ*, that the encounter with the West achieves thematic prominence, which is further developed in *Hishām*. Fayyāḍ, who marries into the second generation of the Jawqadār family, had spent several years in Paris as a student. Upon return he becomes involved in the nationalist struggle against the French occupation, but he is nevertheless able to assert that he does not hate the French in their country, but hates them in Syria.[391] The dichotomy of the French as liberal and egalitarian in their own country and arrogant oppressors as colonisers baffles Fayyāḍ: 'It is a strange business . . . A box office girl at the theatre, a kind, gentle girl from whose company over a cup of tea [in Paris] untold happiness can be experienced, that very same girl if she came to what they call the colonies, something in her would change . . . She would regard [the natives] as backward barbarians, and herself as the very person entrusted with the task of civilising them, through no other means but the commanding voice and the whip.'[392] The omniscient author emphasises Fayyāḍ's sense of bafflement: '. . . he was unable to explain fully his relationship with France, that complex relationship in which the majority of the educated of that generation were caught up. They loved liberty in France, they loved the democracy, and the respect for culture and science, but they were shocked upon return to the colonies, where they saw another France, that of the *Légion Etrangère*; of mercenaries, and murderers . . . .'[393] The authorial comment here is replicated in an interview with al-Dhahabī in which he uses almost the same words: 'I was one of that generation, which thought that it was the Other or the West which would deliver us: socialism,

liberalism and culture had all come from there.' The disappointment with the colonial France that Fayyāḍ expresses is paralleled in the postcolonial period with the presumed responsibility of the West for the creation of Israel and ultimately the 1967 defeat, and is expressed by the author in the same interview when he goes on to say: 'I had to wait until the disaster of 1967 . . . It was then that I opened my eyes to see the falsehood of the West to which we gave all, only to be treated by it as if we were servants in its huge kitchen . . .'[394]

The presentation of the East/West conflict through the character of Fayyāḍ is made complicated by dint of the fact that he grows up in Damascus as the adopted son of two French parents, the father being actually a member of the military. Thus the relationship between coloniser and colonised is endowed with a degree of both intimacy and intricacy that makes the disengagement when the time for it inevitably comes all the more difficult and traumatic for both parties. Ironically, it is Fayyāḍ's period of study in Paris made possible by his French parents that witnesses the beginning of his realisation of his otherness as French girls fall for his Eastern charm, and the first stirrings of his nationalist feelings as he freely mixes with his compatriots away from the protective influence of his French parents back in Syria, who had brought him up to think of nationalists as common bandits, and of France's occupation of Syria as fulfilment of an international obligation to bring civilisation to a backward people.[395]

When Roger and Mathilde Le Blain adopted Fayyāḍ, he was an orphaned shepherd boy from a village near the ancient relic of the Castle of Shayzar in northern Syria. Having massacred the inhabitants of the village in an army raid, the infertile couple take pity on the boy they capture, take him back to Damascus, and adopt him. They give him the best education to be had and he virtually grows up like a Frenchman in his native Syria. This may be the author's embodiment of the French style of colonisation which imposed metropolitan culture on colonies to the point of obfuscating native identity. The failure of the experience on the individual level can be taken to be symbolic of its historic failure (e.g. most poignantly in Algeria). Parallelisms between structures in the novel and ones from the author's own intellectual history are not difficult to establish either. The relationship can be seen between the change of fate from the poor shepherd's life to that of the 'sophisticated student' who studies 'Corneille, Racine, Hugo and Lamartine',[396] on the one hand, and the author's own dichotomy, on the other, as a young man, between the traditional Arabic home library of his father, and the different kind of learning offered him by what he calls the 'library of the West'. His education had started in his father's library, he tells us, 'until I learnt English. Then something changed in me and I felt that I had entered a new world'. And just as Fayyāḍ's French appropriation, so to speak, was not to last beyond a certain point in his maturity, so was the author's eventual disillusionment with the West after 1967, which caused him to revisit his 'father's library': '. . . I felt orphaned: I had discarded my father's turban only to be rejected by the West's hat. I had to look for a new way. Thus I returned to my father's library to extract from it whatever suited [the spirit of] the age. Ever since, I have been trying to effect an intermarriage between my father's library and the West's library in the hope of

finding my own model, my own epistemological experience.'[397] Nor is the author's inconclusive search in the twenty-first century different from his hero's in the first half of the twentieth century, as Fayyāḍ's renouncement of his French identity during the struggle for independence does not resolve the conflict or produce the peace of self-reconciliation. Nor indeed does the achievement of independence itself, which leaves Fayyāḍ at odds with his former comrades in the struggle, who seem now all too keen on reaping the fruit of independence in terms of power and privilege, happily forgetting past revolutionary ideals.

Khayrī al-Dhahabī, who has consistently shown a preoccupation with history in his fiction, does not depart from this proclivity in *Al-Taḥawwulāt* trilogy. Parallel to the present-day plot in *Fayyāḍ* runs a subsidiary historical one, set in the twelfth century, also situated in the Castle of Shayzar, where ruled the famous Arab poet prince ᵓUsāma b. Munqidh (1095–1188), who fought with Saladin against the crusaders and told the story in his autobiography, *Kitāb al-Iᶜtibār* (The Book of Reflection.) Fayyāḍ, who grew up in Shayzar too, before being adopted by his French parents, is meant to be seen as the modern day reincarnation of the medieval poet warrior (substitute poet for the inflammatory columnist that he becomes!) while the French Mandate is of course the latter day crusaders. The whole experience is recorded in Fayyāḍ's journal, which later his son, Hishām, finds and publishes, thereby providing a fictive parallel to ᵓUsāma b. Munqidh's historical autobiography in this complex and carefully structured narrative. It should be clear from the double plot of the book, which merges history with the present that al-Dhahabī sees the East/West relationship today as a link in a chain, another chapter in an unfinished saga. It is also clear that, unlike many of his fellow Arab writers of recent decades that he sees the relationship in terms of an ongoing conflict, and that he has not yet absolved the West from its bloody colonial past, or so it seems until we reach *Hishām*, the third part of the Trilogy. A key phrase used by both the coloniser and colonised in the book is tellingly about the task of 'paying back debts'. It is the question that Roger Le Blain cries to the valleys below the Shayzar Castle where his ancestors have once been defeated: 'Have we paid back the debt?' shouts the modern coloniser.[398] Later on, when Fayyāḍ renounces his adoptive parents, this too becomes his catchphrase.[399] This vision which emerges freely from *Fayyāḍ* is borne witness by al-Dhahabī's statement that 'Fayyāḍ's is the destiny that we all live, the ongoing clash between East and West'. While conceding that the elements of similarity between the Arabs and the West outweigh those of difference, he adds, as if to withdraw the conciliatory suggestion, that 'the worst conflicts are those which take place among brothers and close relatives . . .'.[400]

Hishām, the third part of the Trilogy, tells the story of its eponymous protagonist, the son of Fayyāḍ, and the representative of the third generation of the al-Jawqadār family, which brings the Trilogy more or less up to the present day. Hishām grows up in the post-independence era, a neglected child in a fatherless house, and with a mother who had lost her mental balance after the disappearance of the father. (Fayyāḍ had gone off to fight in Palestine in 1948 and comes back a disillusioned nationalist to lead a reclusive life.) Now, if Fayyāḍ's story was that

of denying the other to assert the self's identity during the period of struggle against colonialism, Hishām's is the story of total disillusionment with the self in the post-independence period, the story of the denial of the self and the adoption of the other's identity, and in so being his story is in unison with the trend in fictive writing that began with Sulaymān Fayyāḍ's *Voices* in Egypt, as shown earlier. Hishām makes the reverse journey of his father's, and is shown to have been led in that direction through the failure of the nationalist project after the independence and the emergence of opportunist totalitarian regimes, keen on retaining power at any cost, and at whose hands he and similar idealists suffered the worst repression. Hishām ends up a student in Europe, where he settles with a German wife, becomes an acclaimed novelist, intent on severing relations with his Arab past:

> When Hishām arrived in those distant lands, . . . the first thing he did was to tear up his passport, his former identity. He said to them that he wanted to be born anew, to be stripped of his past, . . . his sorrows, and memories. They [i.e. the Europeans/the Germans] nodded understandingly, for this was no new case for them . . . Many had come before him to the other shore of the sea, desperate, broken and deformed . . . .[401]

Olga, the German fellow student, he meets and marries, and later fathers with her their daughter, Nadje, is the representative of Europe in this encounter, and is so outwardly portrayed that she can only be viewed allegorically. To her love she brings the added advantage of being a student of psychology, and puts both in the service of the task of healing Hishām of the pains of his Arab past, the past which saw his imprisonment and torture on account of his political views:

> The encounter of Olga and Hishām was a turning point in Olga's life. Having lived carefree before knowing Hishām, she now found herself sailing farther and farther, and day by day, into his life, laden with the sins of an old world, and pussy wounds.[402]

Here we can see that al-Dhahabī has adopted a view of Europe not dissimilar to that of other writers of his generation who addressed the East/West relationship; one that is starkly in contrast with the view he advanced in *Fayyāḍ*, set in the colonial period. Here in the third part of the Trilogy, set in the postcolonial period, Europe is no longer an oppressor but a saviour, who suffers in the process of trying to help the East shed off the burdensome legacy, not only of its past but above all of its present, as we can see in the relationship between Olga and Hishām.

Hishām spends many years in total denial of his cultural identity, of his native origin. He immerses himself wholeheartedly and unreservedly in his adopted identity. He makes his name as the writer, who 'brought together East and West through novels which search in the folds of history to say that the links had always existed, and that *the East had always been indebted to the West* . . .'.[403] He

leads a comfortable life in the limelight, declining invitations from Arab countries, and interview requests from Arab journalists: 'He was confident that he had truly melted into the other shore, and that his relationship had been severed with the side of the sea that once ravished him with a stick in the backside . . .'.[404] However, the greatest irony of the novel is that the new elaborate life structure that Hishām builds over two decades in his adoptive culture is shown to collapse in no time at all when he is confronted with the spectres of his old self. And it all happens in the most banal of ways: he surprises his teenage daughter naked in bed with a boyfriend in the family home. In the row that ensues he slaps her, 'a slap that came from a distant past, as if wanting to remove an unbearable stain on his new world'.[405] The girl falls down the staircase and somehow dies instantly. Hishām goes to prison, and the inconsolable Olga takes her own life, but not before an act of European magnanimity towards a fallen East, as her final letter to Hishām shows: 'I have tried to hate you, Hishām, but was unable to: you are the victim, even though you appear to be the executioner. You are the victim of all those people who had shaped you before I met you and you claimed boastfully to me that you had torn up your passport, your past, and your identity, and that you had become as white as a blank sheet . . .'.[406] Upon eventual release from prison, Hishām returns to Damascus to confront once and for all the spectres of the past on their own ground.[407]

It is something of an anticlimax that the al-Dhahabī has chosen to fail the experiment of identity transplant, if one may call it so, on the banal pretext of the so-called 'crime of honour'. It renders flat what is a very complex issue. What is clear is that the author's vision is that you cannot escape your identity, you cannot obliterate your past by a deliberate act of denial, and the embracement of a loan culture; sooner or later you will be put to the test and what you have suppressed will erupt and wreak havoc with your illusory secure present. Whether al-Dhahabī actually succeeds in finding the best concrete terms to render this vision in *Hishām* is debatable. The one argument, to my mind, that could be said in favour of this flat and hurried end to Hishām's experience of the encounter with the West is that its very banality illustrates the brittleness of the foundation on which he built his new identity. It may help here to refer to some statements by the author. In the course of commenting on his Trilogy, he expresses what appears to be a critical view of Arab-Islamic culture in the last millennium: 'I am of the view that the Arabo-Islamic civilisation has done nothing in the last odd thousand years but replicate itself, and retain what ancestors had done. Since the fifth century AH, we have known nothing new, in political, jurisprudent, or cultural thought . . .'.[408] It is this process of cultural self-replication that the author intended to evoke by the title of the Trilogy, that is, *Al-Taḥuwwulāt*, by which he appears to conceive of Arabic culture in terms of endless transmigrations, or *Tanāsukhāt*, to use his word, which re-produce the culture across the centuries without change: 'From this departure point I attempted to interpret the replication of Arabo-Islamic society, and the way our civilisation has been manufactured such that we have been led to the ignominious position we are now in in every respect. It was thus that I wrote my novel, *Al-Taḥuwwulāt*.'[409] Al-Dhahabī

manages to render this notion of a past relentlessly reproducing itself in the novel sequence through the clever use of magical realism, whereby the ghosts of the ancestors, who appear to reside in the fountain (or *baḥra*) in the inner court of the house of the al-Jawqadār family, constantly influence the lives of their descendants, who often seem entirely at their mercy. It is in these terms that the author explains the failure of his hero, Hishām: '…Hishām escapes to the West from corruption, sabotage, and the destruction of beauty…He succeeds there and reaches the top, but suddenly he is blasted by the winds of the ancestors who besiege him and cause his tragic downfall.'[410] When Hishām returns to Damascus after his release from his German prison, it is to have a final showdown with the spectres of the ancestors, to exorcise them once and for all from the present. Significantly, the outcome of the confrontation is left undecided.

Writing in the 1980s and 1990s, Egyptian novelist and short story writer **Bahāʾ Ṭāhir** (b. 1935), has brought time and again the qualities of his densely terse, clinically precise, deceptively aloof prose style, as well as his personal experience of exile in Europe to the theme of the cultural encounter in Arabic fiction. He brings to it also, as we shall see, a vision of tolerance and human fraternity hitherto unencountered in Arab representations of the West, a vision that transcends both the violent clashes of the past and the political differences of the present in order to concentrate on the ultimate concord of human beings on the individual level, their utltimate unity in suffering, in fragility before the cruelty of the human condition, be they from East or West.

In 1984, Bahāʾ Ṭāhir published his collection of short stories, *Bilʾamsi Ḥalumtu biki* (Yesterday I Dreamt of You). In the title story, written in the first person, the protagonist and narrator is an Egyptian, who defines the setting for us as 'a foreign city in the north'.[411] The protagonist is a disillusioned idealistic intellectual who ended up in this foreign land by way of escape from the collapse of his ideals in his homeland.[412] (In this he is no different from the author, Bahāʾ Ṭāhir, who ended up working for the United Nations in Geneva from 1981 to 1995, following the marginalisation of leftwing intellectuals in the post-Nasser era.) Egyptians living in the city are anything but happy: they feel alienated, ill-adjusted in a society whose inhospitability is underscored by the action of the story being set in severe wintry climate, with freezing temperatures, gloomy overcast skies and desolate snow-covered streets, on whose description the author dwells suggestively throughout the story. Ṭāhir uses the by now well-worn technique of presenting the parties of the encounter through a male figure standing for the East and a female for the West: in this case the Egyptian narrator and a local white girl called Anne Marie. But things are not as straightforward as that; nothing here of the simplicity of such representations as we have encountered in the seminal works of al-Ḥakīm, and Ḥaqqī, where the cultural values loaded onto the characters are easily identifiable. The encounter here is given through a rich symbolic texture that would defy any simple interpretation.

The protagonist is an individual and not a cultural type; he is a middle-aged disenchanted idealist who once had 'impossible dreams', and wanted 'the world

to be other than what it is, and people other than what they are . . .' (p. 113). He sees his friends in exile drifting into religious escapism under the strain of their estrangement in a host society that neither accepts them nor can they adjust to it. A secularist at heart, he refuses calls to withdraw from the world into sufi beliefs. He rejects too a simplistic denunciation of Western culture as '. . . cardboard toys'. In words reminiscent of Muḥsin's in al-Ḥakīm's *Bird of the East*, the protagonist's friend argues that 'The high-rise buildings, the gigantic factories, the super fast planes, and the cemeteries adorned with statues and flowers are all cardboard toys that can deceive only children. Look inside [i.e. into their souls] and you will see nothing but ruin . . .'. In answer to this stereotypical attack, the protagonist is keen to stress the anomalous fact that Europeans are 'intelligent in the management of their affairs, successful in their jobs, wealthy and in good health . . .' (pp. 115–16).

Anne Marie, likewise, does not seem to embody any of the familiar typical notions about Europe that we have encountered in earlier works on the theme; she too seems to be individualised. She too is a frustrated idealist, 'sad that kindness and compassion in the world should be defeated and evil triumph . . . that there should be in the world the hungry who can find no food, and the sick who can find no medicine, or that death should still snatch them without reason if they found the medicine. Death in particular saddens me' (p. 112). Despite this idealism which identifies her with the protagonist, Anne Marie is portrayed as a mentally unstable person, who approaches the Egyptian protagonist for help and does not know whether she loves or hates him. He is unable to help her being himself in need of help and she ends up committing suicide. The author however is anxious to place her idealism in a religious context, unlike the secular idealism of the protagonist: 'My father was a protestant priest. He taught us to love Christ and to love all people in Him . . . .' She also admits to the protagonist that at one time she, 'wished to convert to Catholicism and become a nun . . .'. The full existential dimensions of her predicament and indeed that of the protagonist become apparent when she goes on to say, 'This world sickens me. There's no use. Many have tried but there's no use. The same stupidity in every age. The same hatred, the same lying, the same misery . . .' (pp. 106–07).

A number of interesting observations arise from the consideration of this story in the context of earlier treatments of the theme. The two characters here are individuals rather than embodiments of their respective cultures. They are also equals in their sense of bewilderment before the world; neither of them has the answers to the essential questions in the story about evil and death – they are both defeated by a greater force. And ironically here, the European is the spiritualist and the Egyptian is the secularist. Indeed, within the framework of the story, Anne Marie with her religious bent is in a league with the protagonist's friends who escape into sufism, and her opting out by suicide is not dissimilar to theirs by withdrawing into mysticism. In this story Bahāʾ Ṭāhir appears to break new visionary ground by presenting East and West as allies/victims before the dilemma of existence.[413]

Even more difficult to comprehend and more eerie in its setting and atmosphere is Ṭāhir's slightly later story, 'Anā al-Malik jiʾtu' (I, the King, have come), written

in 1985 and first published in the eponymous collection of 1989. This is a story where the encounter of East and West is rendered not only romantically but mystically, incomprehensibly, in the realm of the timeless. It is a love story, set in the 1920s, between Farīd, an Egyptian ophthalmic doctor, and Martine, a French woman, whom he met when they were both studying at the University of Grenoble in France. The unearthly quality of their love is rendered in tense, suggestive prose: 'Without you I am incomplete', says Martine, 'My hand would not know how to hold things, my eyes would see things imperfect. Only with your love am I complete. I have known no man but you, and there shall be no one but you' (p. 164). Not only is their love unworldly, but Martine herself is portrayed as a woman too gentle, too innocent, entirely not of this world, so much so that the insanity that strikes her before she and Farīd were able to marry, does not seem an unreasonable development when it occurs. A few months before going mad, she had visited Egypt and was enraptured by the relics: 'I never felt so close to the truth of life, to its joy, to its awe . . .' she says to Farīd. 'I don't know how I will bear the next months in France before I come back to you here for us to be baptised in the Nile and the temple, and become complete' (p. 166). But of course she never comes back and he lives on in profound sorrow, immersing himself in work for several years, until he is mysteriously 'called'. He then embarks on a journey through the Western Desert of Egypt to an assumed oasis beyond any known tracks. He proceeds like a driven man answering a preordained calling: 'in the desert Martine's face was everywhere; in the blaze of distant mirages, upon the hills and in the twinkle of the stars. And in the desert, Farīd would pray often at sunset, and he would weep alone at night' (p. 164). In the end he reaches his destination: an unknown temple of Akhenaton[414] standing alone deep into the Western Desert of Egypt.

What follows is too immersed in evocative symbolic narration to allow a clear-cut understanding of what is happening or the meaning of it. But this should not stop us from trying. After prolonged struggle, Farīd is able to read enough of the hieroglyphics to establish that the King had come to this temple having abandoned his wife and the world in order to unite with the worshipped god of the sun: 'You are the light and I am the echo [sic] of the light. I look upon myself and I see you, and I look upon you and I see me . . . I have come for you and me to become one . . . I gaze upon your luminous disc that watches everything from the sky and I cut into the rock my secret: I am sad' (p. 175). At this point one inevitably recalls Martine's last letter to Farīd, sent from the frontiers of insanity:

> Tell me why I have grown to fear the light? Tell me why I draw the thick curtains during the day and love the night? Why does light hurt my eyes? . . . Tell me, distant light of mine, the only light of which I am not afraid, (but why are you distant?) tell me why I had to go! Please do not be angry! I beseech you, I kiss your noble hand. You who know, tell me why I have grown to fear the light . . . .
>
> (p. 172)

With this juxtaposition of parts of the text everything falls in place, including the epiphanic moment when Farīd rails at the picture of the King on the wall, 'You Liar! You Liar!' after deciphering his hymn to the god. He deliberately seeks a poisonous snake bite, which reunites him with Martine in death.

This then is a story of reincarnation: Martine is the abandoned queen (Nefertiti?) come back to life still disconsolate from ancient times, and Farīd is the resurrected guilty King, who deserted a loving woman for a metaphysical illusion, now repentant and ready to die wilfully in order to reunite with his wronged and beloved wife. One pressing question remains, why did the author choose to render this story across two cultures? Why is the abandoned Egyptian queen reincarnated as a French woman? And can we ignore the fact that the author may be trying to reach out through this mystical manipulation to an essential truth about the unity of humanity, the unity of all cultures before the fallacy, the 'lie' of the metaphysical, as the delirious Farīd calls it in his last outburst; that we become 'complete' by union with each other wherever we are, not by union with the sun god or any other? This reading can only be strengthened by the observation of a parallelism with the previous story, 'Yesterday I dreamt of You', where there is a clear rejection of the notion of sufism, or the metaphysical escape from the realities of life, and where there is a unity, albeit one in despair, between the outlooks of the Egyptian man and the European woman. Once more, Ṭāhir has individualised his cultural exponents and presented his readers with a broader vision devoid of the dichotomy familiar in earlier treatments of the subject.

Al-Ḥubb fī al-Manfā, 1995 (translated *Love in Exile*, 2001) remains Ṭāhir's only treatment of the encounter theme in a full-length novel. In one sense at least it seems an elaboration of the short story discussed earlier, 'Yesterday I dreamt of You'. The protagonist is again a disillusioned self-exiled Egyptian in an unnamed northern European city. A middle-aged journalist, divorced with two teenage children, he is a remnant of the optimism of Nasser's Egypt, and the decade of the 1960s worldwide, when leftist political idealism was globally in ascendancy. Set in the early 1980s[415] after the demise of Nasserism in Egypt and the Arab world,[416] and the retreat of leftwing revolutionary idealism in the postcolonial world generally, a new picture of the European other emerges in the novel; one that emphasises the humanistic face of Europe; the Europe that is driven by the individual conscience and non-governmental organisations, rather than by politicians; the Europe whose doctors, nurses, lawyers journalists, and other voluntary workers are in the forefront in defending human rights and in helping in the hospitals and refugee camps in the war-torn Beirut in spite of the risks (pp. 37–38). The report of the Norwegian nurse, Marian, for example, is a most telling instance. Horrified at her account of what she saw in Palestinian refugee camps during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the narrator is keen to know what political affiliations drove her to subject herself to what she had suffered there. She angrily denies any affiliation: 'I am not a communist, nor a leftist, nor a member of the Baader-Meinhoff Gang, nor am I in the Red Brigades . . . I am not a member of any party or organisation of any kind . . . I went [there] because I could not believe what I saw; I could not believe that an entire people could be

made a legitimate target for murder, that their blood could be so cheap…' (pp. 127–28). This individual involvement is contrasted in the novel with an apparent institutional reticence to stand by what is morally right, newspapers are reluctant to publish accounts that may implicate their assumed neutrality, governments are indifferent or have political considerations of their own that have nothing to do with rights and wrongs. Any hope of understanding, of a real encounter in the work of Ṭāhir seems to be reserved for the individual conscience.

Against this background, a love story emerges in defiance of the barriers of both culture and age between a young Austrian woman and the middle-aged Egyptian journalist. Brought together by their horror at political atrocities against humanity revealed in a meeting of a human rights' group, Brigitte, the Austrian tourist guide, takes the Egyptian stranger into her confidence and tells him the story of her unhappy childhood, the failure in life of her idealistic father, his betrayal by her mother and his best friend, the tragedy of her marriage to an African exile doomed to failure in a prejudiced racist environment. He also is able to tell her of all the frustrations and disillusions of his life: the scars of his poor degrading childhood, his marginalisation by a political regime (Sadat's) he could not support, the breakdown of his marriage and his estrangement from his children, etc. 'Why was her story, removed from my world and everything I know, able to penetrate to the depth of my heart?' wonders the protagonist/narrator. He comes to the conclusion that suffering engraves a 'scar' on the soul, by which sufferers are able 'to recognise one another' (p. 63). Here again we see what can by now be identified as a recurrent notion in the work of Ṭāhir, that is, human unity in suffering, the cross-cultural reach of the human condition, the sheer ease of the encounter on the individual level, often so intractable on state or any other collective level.

The relationship develops into a great love, in which the self becomes 'complete', to hark back to 'I, the King, have come', through union with the female other, again a real union of individuals, not an allegorical one of cultural representatives. But in its very realistic individuality, it is fraught with meaning in its elucidation of the possibility of the cultural encounter.[417] Let us look at the terms in which the narrator describes his feelings:

> As I leave your place after a night of loving in which we became one…I do not want to go back home. I do not want to be confined to a place. I wish I could soar with you high above this solid thick wall-like world to another world smooth and transparent, a world without walls, appointments, newspapers, wars, hunger, or death, without the cares of yesterday and the surprises of tomorrow – a world that we make together…one that puts right the past…, one that puts right the present and leaves nothing in place but joy.
>
> (p. 144)

Such transcendental view of love as a regenerative corrective power that knows not the boundaries of time, space or age, has nothing intrinsic to it that requires it to be cross-cultural. But one parable after another, Ṭāhir seems to be

demonstrating that the cultural encounter is no different from any other; it is an encounter between individuals, a meeting of minds and bodies, not between abstract sets of values, masses of land or entire peoples, and by implication that any attempt at allegorising it in such terms as his predecessors had done is bound to be misrepresentative and defective.

As in both the preceding stories, the present encounter takes place against a religious or metaphysical theme in the background. The sufism motif in 'Yesterday I dreamt of You' and the abandonment of the loving wife for the sake of the worshipped sun god in 'I, the King, have come' are paralleled here by the conversion of Khālid, the narrator's son, to fundamentalist Islam, as part of a wider trend in the 1980s' Egypt, a fact which adds to the disillusionment of the liberal father. The bigoted, opinionated fundamentalism of the son that fails to see complexity in life and human action, and judges all by a simplistic and narrowly interpreted right-versus-wrong religious code is set poignantly but unobtrusively against the transcendental, liberating, barrier-crossing, and unifying power of love, seen in the relationship between the narrator and Brigitte. It is also set inconspicuously but eloquently against the rising humanistic trend among European individuals and non-governmental organisations as argued earlier. There is however no attempt at idealising Europe as a bastion of love and tolerance; the undercurrents of conservatism, racism and xenophobia are shown in the book as in the story of Brigitte who had lost the child she was carrying from her erstwhile African husband following a racist attack by drunken youths, and the ironic story of the son of the progressive journalist, Bernard, who grows up to become an arms dealer selling weapons to warring African factions to amass wealth.

Love in Exile is not a story of love triumphant either. It is in fact a story with a dark vision, a story of despair, where evil triumphs over love, and negative forces reign supreme in a tormented world whose only resistance is to cry out in agony. The novel ends with a convergence of the public and the private. Against a vividly recreated description of the massacres of Ṣabrā and Shatīlā in Beirut following the Israeli invasion of 1982, the love story is brought to a tragic end too. Not because the lovers ceased to love each other. Not because of any of the narrator's fears, that the much younger Brigitte would tire of him, that his health would fail him, or that love would wither by familiarity and habit. Nothing of this happens; it is 'the world' that ends their love, it is 'that sword from the unknown that severs them' (p. 238). The 'world' and its 'sword' take the form of a powerful Arab prince who had tried unsuccessfully to recruit the pen and expertise of the Egyptian journalist in the service of his shadowy political agenda. He takes his revenge on him by using his immense influence and wealth to make it impossible for the Austrian woman to continue to earn a living in the country, and by getting the Cairo paper for which the Egyptian works to terminate his posting as foreign correspondent. Thus the lovers are pushed into a corner from which there is no escape. The narrator wonders to himself whether they could start again in another city, but he knows that his fragile, previously hurt-by-life Brigitte 'has grown tired of escaping', and that she would tell him that '*they* were everywhere' (p. 239). Thus the relationship is placed in a wider context in which it is doomed by

a power of evil in the world which stands as much behind the massacres of the Ṣabrā and Shatīlā camps in Beirut, the overthrow of Allende and the Stadium killings in Santiago, and the ebb of political idealism before the rising tide of the far right globally as behind the destruction of the union of two lovers. The narrative uses famous lines from Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' soliloquy in Shakespeare's tragic play to contextualise the personal tragedy in the wider, universal scheme of human suffering.[418] Hamlet's yearning for the peace that comes with death (To die, to sleep . . .) as the only remedy for the ills of the world is shared by Brigitte, who quotes the line as she tries to crash the car in which the narrator is driving her to the airport. He thwarts her attempt only to die of a heart attack in his favourite park in the city, hours after dropping her at the airport. This may be as bleak an ending as can be of a novel with a sombre vision, what is essential to remember however is that the lovers are sundered apart not by cultural differences, on the contrary, it was the common human in them that brought them together totally oblivious of cultural differences. What tore them apart was the anti-human forces in the world that, like love, work across cultures too.[419] Bahāʾ Ṭāhir's view of his own fiction appears to bear out my analysis of the works discussed earlier. It will not be inappropriate to quote him here:

> I have not [in my work] looked at the other from a vantage point of difference but rather of similarity, in the sense that I was concerned to search for what is common among humans, any human and any other . . . The human predicament is one predicament. And this is what *Love in Exile* says clearly . . . What I think I am trying to communicate through writing is that individual salvation is an impossible notion; we shall always need human solidarity, no matter how different our nationalities and inclinations, to deliver our civilisation from its dilemma.[420]

Aḥmad Ibrāhīm Al-Faqīh (b. 1942), Libyan short story writer, novelist, and playwright, approaches the theme of the Western encoutnter from a new angle: that of the dilemma of the Arab intellectual who experiences the freedom of life in the West and then is forced to return to living under the austere inhibiting traditions of his Arab homeland. Al-Faqīh published all three parts of his most celebrated work, and the one that concerns this study, the Trilogy in 1991. These are: *Saʾahabukī Madinatan ʾUkhrā* (I Shall Offer You Another City), *Hādhihī Tukhūm Mamlakatī* (These are the Borders of my Kingdom), and *Nafaq Tuḍīʾuhu Imraʾa Wāḥida* (A Tunnel Lit by One Woman). An English language version in one volume, titled *Gardens of the Night*, appeared in 1995. The novel is set partly in Edinburgh (volume 1), and partly in Tripoli, Libya (volumes 2 and 3). In *Sʾahabukī* . . . the Libyan protagonist/narrator, Khalīl al-Imām, is a doctoral student at the University of Edinburgh, not unlike the author, who also studied for his doctorate in modern Arabic literature at the same university in the 1970s. Al-Faqīh admits to an element of autobiography in the novel: 'The Trilogy is a work concerned with the exploration of the inner world; it is a novel about

self-liberation, and it is autobiographical insofar as a writer is prone to utilise his personal experience.'[421] *I Shall Offer You Another City* is a story of a *ménage á trois*, where the protagonist falls in love with Linda, his landlady, and has a passionate relationship with her with the consent of Donald, her husband, an otherworldly man so steeped in the philosophy of the Far East (especially Buddhism), and who thinks that Linda has in her enough love for both of them to share. Or so it seems until the strain of the situation and the rumours going round town take their toll on him. He falls ill, abandons work and home, and takes to drinking. The marriage eventually breaks down and with it the relationship, which does not survive the pangs of conscience on both the parts of Linda and Khalīl. She returns to live with her parents in a nearby village and he moves house and enters into a new relationship with a promiscuous young student called Sandra.

In this novel of the 1990s, al-Faqīh adheres to the classical pattern of this tradition of Arabic fiction, that is, the Arab student in Europe, and the sexual encounter as metaphor for the cultural one, as we have seen in the work of many predecessors from the 1930s onwards. Sex occupies place of pride in this novel, which goes farther than any text of the tradition in Arabic in exploring the protagonist's sexuality and that of the women around him, often in such detail and with such absorption as would be sufficient to earn the novel the status of a work of eroticism. As the subject of Khalīl's doctoral thesis is 'Sex and violence in the *Arabian Nights*', his life appears to be at times an enactment of the subject of his study, with unmistakable overtones from al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ's classic treatment of this subject in *Season of Migration to the North*. The sex and violence of the *Arabian Nights*, is reciprocated by references from the European context to such historical figures as Henry VIII and his slaughter of his wives, and literary texts as Shakespeare's *Othello*, and the eponymous hero's erotic slaughter of his wife, Desdemona, whose parts are played in an amateur production by Khalīl and Sandra, respectively. In the final scene, Khalīl gets carried away with the performance and nearly strangles Sandra, who in real life is openly unfaithful to him in her experimental, promiscuous lifestyle (which Desdemona was not to Othello), including a lesbian affair just for the sake of the experience. Real violence however eventually catches up with the abundance of sex in the novel, thereby solidifying the link it tries to establish between the modern Western scene and the fantasy world of the *Arabian Nights*, usually associated by Westerners with the Orient. Significantly, the violence is not perpetrated at the hands of Khalīl, but a gang of Western youths, who kidnap Sandra to a wood and for three days subject her to repeated rape and torture. Although Sandra survives the ordeal, something in her soul is damaged beyond repair, and her relationship with Khalīl ends. Meanwhile, it turns out that Linda is carrying his child, after whose birth he proposes to marry her but she rejects the proposal telling him that the Linda he once loved no longer existed. Khalīl finishes his thesis and is awarded the degree, thereby feeling freed from the influence of Scheherazade and the *Arabian Nights* on his life. The enactment of the fantasy world of sex and violence then comes to an end with his purchase of the flight ticket back to his 'desert country'.

What the novel has achieved in one sense is to show the Western city of Edinburgh of the late twentieth century actually living its daily life according to the phantasmagorical norms of unbridled passion, violence and narcotic stupor of the *Arabian Nights*, norms of life that the West has for centuries ascribed to an imaginary Orient. In fact, for an Oriental, like Khalīl, to live such a fantasy as a reality of everyday life, he had to come to the West. What al-Faqīh seems to have done is to reverse the argument, so to speak. The Orient's medieval fantasy of itself is the West's modern reality. If Westerners have found time and again in the Orient they invented a scope for release from the sexual inhibitions of their own society, class and culture, as Orientalist creations in art and text have persistently shown,[422] al-Faqīh seems to turn around the argument almost with geometric precision, and with the added force that the picture he is presenting his reader with is a realistically convincing representation of the life of a present-day Western city.

What is unique about Faqīh's work is that his protagonist falls in love with this re-enacted world of the *Arabian Nights*, this invented Edinburgh, hedonistic, self-indulgent, and without a care in the world but the gratification of its wildest whims, a true paradise for a sexually starved Arab coming from the dearth and austerity of desert life and unrelenting inhibitions.[423] He integrates fully into the life of the city and the student community, and partakes liberally of the pleasures they have to offer, without a whiff of criticism. His innocence may be initially shocked at this or that (as when Sandra seduces a freshman girl into a lesbian liaison to prove a point), but he soon understands, accepts and often happily joins in. Khalīl loves Edinburgh and Edinburgh loves him back, and when he takes the aeroplane back to his 'desert country', it is as if he were leaving his soul behind. In fact, the novel is all an act of nostalgia for a fondly remembered Edinburgh. It opens up with the sentence: 'A time has passed and another has yet to begin',[424] which sets in trail the agony of Khalīl, at the present moment, an academic in his home country, unhappily married to a woman he never loved, and unable to readjust to his society since his return. One sleepless night, he looks out onto the sea and indulges in recollection, with the novel turning full circle to bring him to the moment when his time in Edinburgh 'had passed'. His return however seems to bring his life to a standstill, as the opening sentence suggests.

So tenuously connected with the first part, the second part of the Trilogy can almost be treated as an independent novel. It opens up with the same sentence as the first part: 'A time has passed and another has yet to begin', thereby taking us back to the inception moment in the present, having brought to an end the nostalgic recollection of life in Edinburgh that constituted almost the entirety of the first part. Khalīl here suffers from the aridity of life in his Arab country and from a complete sense of alienation from his environment to the point of mental illness, seeing visions and attempted suicide. In a telling passage he misses the world of *The Thousand and One Nights*, which life in the West had turned into a reality:

> How can *The Thousand and One Nights* realise for me a world resembling its own in this age-old environment that preserved its chastity, taken refuge into her misery and barrenness, surrendering itself eternally to the winds of the desert?

> In my exile, the myth had taken hold of me and overwhelmed me with its magic in an environment that had rid itself of the wisdom of Bedouin societies hostile to the pleasures of this world, and indulged in the adventure of self-celebration, singing and dancing and rejoicing in the delights of the heart.[425]

The juxtaposition of two worlds here, one of misery and austerity and another of joyful embracement of life, is clear, the first being the product of the protagonist's culture, and the other of Western culture as he experienced it in Edinburgh. Clear too is the protagonist's view of Europe as the true embodiment of the life-celebrating ethos of *The Thousand and One Nights*. Cut off from that world and any chance of its realisation now, he decides to restudy the book and write a new paper on it, but this time he is determined that he would not recall any of the features of play and adventure in the book, but rather to look for the 'most horrific' aspects of the book, for stories of 'disfigurement, death and suicide' in the hope that they would 'throw some light on my predicament'.[426] This thread however is not pursued in the book. Instead the protagonist, and with him the reader, in a flight of the imagination, or perhaps in a feverish hallucination of his illness, is transported to a medieval utopia of a town, and the bulk of the second part of the Trilogy is devoted to the description of his loves and adventures there. The depiction of this magical town and its people invokes the atmosphere of *The Thousand and One Nights*, and shows clearly the influence of two works by Naguib Mahfouz: first, his own re-rendering of the medieval tales in his celebrated *Layālī Alf Layla* (Nights of the Thousand Nights, 1982),[427] and particularly the last tale of the novel, 'Al-Bakkāʾūn' or The Grievers, and second, the utopian quest in his *Riḥlat Ibn Faṭṭūma* (The Journey of Ibn Faṭṭūma, 1983).[428] The fantasy ends cruelly with the protagonist being catapulted back into his own age and harsh reality of the present and losing, Budūr, the woman with whom he fell desperately in love in the time-warped town of *ʿIqd al-Murjān*, or Coral Necklace.

The third part of the Trilogy, *A Tunnel lit by One Woman*, is also only feebly connected with the previous two, except inasmuch as it is a continuation with the history of the protagonist. It too opens with the same sentence as its antecedents: 'A time has passed and another has yet to begin', restating Khalīl's interminably limbo state of existence in his society since his return from Edinburgh. His life with his unloved wife, a good woman by every local traditional criterion but rejected by him together with the rest of the culture, becomes intolerable, and he divorces her. His existential malaise as a man fallen between two cultures is epitomised in a telling description of the 'joyless' city of Tripoli, as he sees it:

> It has stopped being a village without becoming a city. It is neither Eastern nor Western. It does not belong to the past nor does it belong to the present: suspended between the sea and the desert, between a time that that has passed, and another that has yet to begin. It has lived in a historical predicament since it gave up its village nature and failed to adopt a new one . . . . Its Bedouin heart is terrified at the mention of clubs, theatres, nightspots, bars, libraries, dance halls, funfairs, swings, flower shops, child welfare societies, trees, birds, and hospitals for cats and dogs, as a substitute for its Bedouin austerity.[429]

His recollection of Edinburgh, on the other hand, offers a stark contrast:

> With all the thirst, sun glare, and desert hoarded in my heart, I went to that city [i.e. Edinburgh]. There I drank my fill, stayed up the night and indulged in a way of life made possible by an open society that consecrated personal freedom. I lived according to their laws, loved in their fashion, danced to their tunes . . . as if I were one of them. But in some part of my mind I knew that I was like a drop of oil in a water jug: always bound to be floating on the surface, unable to integrate . . . .[430]

Nor should we be misled by the cautious 'But' of the last sentence. The first part of the Trilogy shows amply a protagonist at home with his Western host culture, and shows his life there as a time of happiness and fulfilment. By contrast, the second and third parts which show him back in Tripoli reveal to us a wretched man irreconcilably cut off from his culture, and markedly contemptuous of it. Even after his abandonment of his wife, and apparently falling in love with the woman of his dreams, Sanāʾ, a fellow academic, also at odds with the traditional and hypocritical mores of society, who is portrayed in quasi-mythical terms and linked in Khalīl's consciousness with Budūr, his medieval enchantress from the fantasy of the second part – even then, he is nowhere near happiness or fulfilment, because the culture is portrayed as inhospitable to love:

> The lack of opportunity for contact between the women and men of society . . . turns our love into something of a strange plant growing in the middle of the desert . . . in a harsh environment . . . where because it represents a challenge to its givens, . . . it seeks in return to isolate and strangle it with all that a desert possesses of dearth and violence . . . .[431]

Thus the relationship ends in failure (although the novelist does not succeed in presenting this in a convincing way),[432] and Khalīl decides in his despair to surrender to his environment and everything he has always despised in his culture. Every hope of salvation is tossed aside and the limbo state is transcended, not by moving forward but by turning back. Appropriately, the opening statement of each of the three parts of the novel, 'A time has passed and another has yet to begin', turns on the last page of the third into: 'A time has passed, and another will *not* begin'.[433] This bleak vision of the self and affectionate view of the European other was not out of step at the beginning of the 1990s with contemporary writings on the subject in other parts of the Arab world, as we have seen.[434]

Muḥammad Abī Samrā (b. 1953), Lebanese teacher, journalist and novelist, lived in Lebanon until forced by the Lebanese Civil War to move to Lyons in France in 1985. Of the three novels[435] he has published to date, we shall concern ourselves here with his second. Together with Sulaymān Fayyāḍ's *Voices*, discussed earlier in this chapter, **Abī Samrā**'s *Al-Rajul Al-Sābiq* (The Former Man, 1995) represents a peak in the literature of self-flagellation, characteristic of the post-1967 period of national disillusionment, when self-criticism to the point of

rejection and self-condemnation can be found in much that was written after the defeat in the Six Day War, including approaches to the theme of the encounter with the West. In the Egyptian Fayyāḍ's *Voices*, we saw self-flagellation coupled with the apotheosis of the other. More than 20 years later, we find in the Lebanese Abī Samrā's *The Former Man*, an even harsher attitude towards the self, if without the idealisation of the other in the manner observed in Fayyāḍ's work.

The protagonist/narrator is a middle-aged Lebanese émigré in France, who has lived and worked in Lyons for 17 years, having married a French woman, Monique, and fathered three children with her. The action of the novella focuses on the protagonist's visit to his native Beirut after all those years, which becomes an occasion for recollection and review of his past and present, of the years of growing up in Beirut and the later times of life as an emigrant in France. The narrative amounts to little more than a lament of a life whose past overshadows without hope of redemption the present and the future. The novella opens with these words:

> During my last visit to Lebanon, I discovered, I who have lived in France for seventeen years, how I still resemble, in my appearance, movements, tone of voice, and dress, my childhood mates in the quarter of Salīm Musᶜad, in one of whose shacks I and my brothers, and our father before us, were born. And when, while in Beirut, I recalled some of the scenes of my domestic life in Lyons, it seemed to me as if my French wife, Monique, and three children were also born in the same shack.[436]

The narrative comes full circle with the closing paragraph of the novella, which sees the protagonist flying back to France, with these words:

> When the plane rose above the sea, I realised that Beirut, like the quarter of Salīm Musᶜad . . . was now behind me. It was as if I had only left it at that moment and not seventeen years earlier. I was neither pleased nor saddened by this realisation. Rather, it made me more certain that I was leaving behind me what had passed of my life, just as I was heading towards what was to come in the future, rather late for both.
>
> (p. 106)

What we are faced with here is the story of a man who has lost both the past and the future, who has rejected the homeland without finding a substitute in the land of the other. *The Former Man* is the story of a lost generation of emigrants (Hence, apparently the title of the book denoting a lost status!) who carry the legacy of the homeland in their land of exile, and in their inability to integrate appear to have been doomed for life to a sense of incurable malaise.

Growing up in an impoverished slum of Beirut, ironically named 'Salīm Musᶜad', epithets which denote 'soundness' and 'happiness', which is memorably evoked in the narrative through relentless naturalistic description, the protagonist is never able to escape the grip of his origin, down to the putrid smell of the place

which he seems to carry with him to every apartment or house in which he lives in France; not only that but he seems to have passed on the smell to his French wife and his children from her (p. 13). But the coarseness, vulgarity and severity of poverty is most poignantly recreated through the protagonist's harsh depiction of his mother. Such is the repugnance of her character and such is the hate and persistence with which she is so portrayed that only a symbolic interpretation of her figure makes it palatable. The harshness of the protagonist's voice is attributed to that of his mother's, whose pitch is described as 'dirty, and came out of her mouth like spew'. Taken together, her voice and the content of her speech were two facets of 'a soul disfigured into poisonous thorns' (p. 15). This 'poisonous' voice of the mother forms part of the all-encompassing clamour of the slum of Salīm Musᶜad, the clamour which greeted him the moment he left his mother's womb, as he puts it, and in which:

> I Continued to wade until l left Lebanon. I carried it like a mild fever that my body never cast aside. It was a clamour made not only of sounds, but sounds mixed with smells, liquids, vapours and colours, as they all rose from the pores of my skin, and from the objects, bodies, and the air around me.
>
> (p. 17)

The mother is shown as an austere, life-denying figure, obsessed with empty manifestations of purity:

> I do not remember a single occasion of you laughing, Mother, as if laughter were forbidden to you, like the impure utensils and garments, whose dirt never disgusted me but rather your very notion about purity and impurity. It was your mutterings in the course of your exercise of purification rituals and the whoosh of the resulting filthy water that I imagined to bring impurity to the very metal of utensils and fabric of garments.
>
> (p. 18)

That the mother stands for more than the individual she is can be seen from some elements of her characterisation. Consider for instance how her son ascribes her malicious nature as well as the coarseness of her voice to a legacy that 'has come down to you over generations and centuries…'. 'I began to see you as old', he addresses her in his thoughts, 'not the oldness produced by the advancement of years and the ageing of the body, but a pure abstract kind of oldness, the oldness that lives in the nature of persons, and in their movements and voices; persons as old as fashions and objects being used at a time and a world not their own…' (p. 23).

The mother thus becomes a symbol of what is old and hackneyed about Arab culture, of those aspects of an aging, impoverished, superstitious, inward-looking culture, obsessed with false notions of its own purity, and the protagonist's rejection of his mother, very rare in Arabic fiction, is a rejection of the culture she embodies. Against this hated 'old' rejected image of a mother, there was another coveted one that the protagonist harboured in his imagination from

his childish years, one of a young 'modern' mother: 'one with short hair not covered by a white kerchief'. The image of the imaginary 'young', 'modern', Westernised mother is equally symbolic: it characterises the 'modernity', the different cultural image, the protagonist yearned for. He goes on with his description of her thus:

> I used to imagine myself in the front seat of a car driven by that woman, my mother, on the mountain road, or us sitting together, one old summer afternoon, at a city café. She would sip her coffee absent-mindedly, as I watched her Kent cigarette, as long as her fingers, with the tip of its filter, as bright and white as her teeth, moistened by her rose-red lipstick.
>
> (p. 22)

All his life the protagonist's most cherished wish has been to sever himself from his mother, the slum he grew up in and all they stand for: 'My life was almost a constant yearning to break away from what I was made to be in the quarter of Salīm Musᶜad' (p. 42). But as we have seen, 17 years of life in France including a French wife and French-born children only served to underline the connection with his mother and the quarter. You cannot escape your culture; you carry it with you wherever you go, seems to be the message of the book:

> As soon as I got married and got children, I began to feel that we all had carried our belongings and clothes, and come together from the quarter of Salīm Musᶜad to live in this country. I do not know why it was my lot to marry a woman that was so much like me that I was confounded by time and space and ceased to know in which country I lived....
>
> (p. 70)

The desperateness of the situation is perhaps best summed up by the words of the protagonist's brother, who also immigrated to France: 'whatever we do, and wherever we go, the quarter of Salīm Musᶜad will follow us' (p. 105).

The narrative ceaselessly impresses on us the bewilderment of the emigrant self in the land of the hosting other, where a feeling of subordination, of inferiority, of the inability to integrate or cope is always there. As a fellow emigrant of the protagonist puts the question: 'Why can't we keep in step with the quick pace of life in this country?' (p. 75). On the other hand, the emigrant seems so overwhelmed by the sheer bulk of the accomplishment of the other, compared with the backwardness of their own culture, that they are prepared to view that accomplishment in ahistorical terms:

> I wonder however whether the people of this country take the same view as we do that their civilisation was an accomplished act before their arrival into existence, and that their life is nothing more than the little bubbles on the still surface of a river that underneath continues to flow raucously. Are they really as I believe them to be: beings much smaller and less important than what

> their hands and intellects have made? It is as if it were not they but a secret power that they possess that created for them this country and its systems, and bestowed on it what greatness and capability it has . . . .
>
> (p. 75)

Set against this glorifying image of the other is the inevitable disparaging comparison with the self:

> Or is it that we, the sons of those countries, where people know no other way to enjoy life but that of the rampant voracity of hungry dogs set on what times and places, bodies and objects that come their way – is it we who see them thus – small, harmless and reassured in the dejection of their individual solitary worlds?
>
> (p. 75)

Put in stark terms, the bewilderment of the speaker here may be reduced to the question: 'Is it that they are so great or we are so low?' The self-denigration in the above passage is unmistakable, but so also is the doubting of the other, who lives in 'dejected solitariness', and who may give physical refuge to emigrants but only to surround them with silence and confine them too to the same 'dejected solitariness'. Here is how the protagonist describes chance encounters with co-residents of the same apartment block:

> In the long corridor or in front of the door of one of the rooms, I would sometimes bump into one of the fellow residents, and exchange with him a greeting for which I would change the tone of my voice. But the greeting would bestow on our chance encounter nothing but mutual suspicion, which we only transcended through deep silence . . . a silence that continued to grow until one of us reached his room and closed the door behind him, at which point a more intense, abstract silence enveloped one, a silence that was equally distributed among all rooms and houses, a silence that mingled so intimately with their furniture and other objects that only those used to it could endure it.
>
> (p. 69)

Thus between the expellant 'clamour' of the Salīm Musᶜad slum in Beirut and the inhospitable 'silence' of the host society of France, the Arab émigré is forever oscillating: an identity is willingly shed off but would not go away, nor is there a real alternative on offer in the land of the other. All things considered, the most lingering effect of this unusual novella remains to be the relentless quality of its rejection of the culture of the self.

Published in the same year as *Al-Rajul al-Sābiq* was a lesser novel with some similar concerns, namely the contemporary Syrian writer's, **Fuʾād Yāzijī's** (b. ?) *Asnān al-Rajul al-Mayyit* (Teeth of the Dead Man, 1995). Set mainly in Amsterdam, the

novel is concerned with the Arab youth as emigrant. The book is peopled with Arab young men from Syria, Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco, to name but a few. Of those many are illegal emigrants, working without permit in the most menial jobs, or indeed involved in petty crime as a means of earning a living. They thus exploit the liberal systems of European society but are also exploited by unscrupulous employers who know their weak position. They are all educated men, most with university qualifications, but come from very poor, repressed backgrounds in their countries of origin to seek opportunity, and freedom in Europe. The protagonist is a Syrian youth of that latter category, and it is through his eyes as he moves about Amsterdam looking for a job that we meet many other Arab young men there and come to know their stories. There is therefore no central plot as such, but a number of parallel stories that may or may not have their own little plots; what holds the book together as a novel of sorts is the thematic unity of all the stories, and the intermingling of the characters with each other and with the protagonist/narrator.

At the very beginning, the protagonist tells us a story from a different time of Syrian emigration, a story he had heard from his grandmother about how one day, when she was a newly married woman, she had sent her husband to buy a chicken from a nearby store, when he came on his way across some comrades of his emigrating to Brazil. He joined them there and then, and 40 years later he came back, and on his way he stopped at the local store, bought a chicken and took it home.[437] The modern protagonist wonders how his grandfather could ever do a thing like that: 'Did they tell you that in Brazil gold was in such abundance, you only needed a broom to sweep it with?' he asks him in his imagination (p. 16). In one sense, this symbolic anecdote from a different time includes all the elements relevant to the understanding of the actions of the young men of today that the narrative is concerned with: there is the neediness, the lure of the land of the other, the rash decision to leave the homeland, and the eventual return home with little achievement. The anecdote told at the beginning thus points the way to the tribulations and fates of the catalogue of characters the book contains, including that of the protagonist.

For all of them Europe was in the beginning a dream, a paradise to be sought at any expense. Stītū, the Algerian, who arrives in Amsterdam a stowaway on a ship, ends up living there from shoplifting, and eventually, on the run from the police, needs to be smuggled out of the country again, this time to return to Algeria. On first being thrown on a European shore, he is weeping with joy, and in a weird kind of way pities the European, because 'he cannot go to some place in the world and suddenly feel that he has come out of darkness to light, and that a radiant world has opened up to him, as happens to us who come from the third world . . .' (pp. 148–49). The dialogue is full of heart-searching, if somewhat cumbersome, thoughts on this and related issues, of which a recurrent one is a feeling of inferiority *vis á vis* the other, reminiscent of Abī Samrā's *Al-Rajul*, as we have seen, and Ḥanān al-Shaykh's protagonist in 'I Sweep the Sun off Rooftops', to be discussed later in this book. Here is an example:

> We are not different from them [i.e. the Europeans] in the way equals are different . . . We are at the bottom, forgotten. What makes you feel really

> miserable is knowing that they are actually better than you, and that their civilisation is so vast, you will never be able to catch up unless you are born anew. You feel like a rat in a restaurant: all you can do is eat the crumbs to stay alive, and the only excuse you have is to deny responsibility for having been born in the third world.
>
> (p. 60)

The other however is not entirely without blame for these feelings of inferiority: his indifference and reluctance to integrate immigrants is shown to be partly behind their problems and deviant actions: '[We have always been] kept outside the fabric of society, like stray dogs. If we were loved or cared for as if this were our homeland, we would watch our actions, and make an effort to improve our image . . .' (p. 151).[438]

The great European dream thus ends for Stītū with him injured and on the run from the Dutch police after a mangled robbery. He now looks forward to return to Algeria and to restore his humanity: 'My days will cease to pass so mechanically leaving behind a feeling of bitterness that life was slipping away uselessly. I shall become human, not a machine, a table or toy stuffed with straw' (p. 159). The author just stops short here of accusing the West through his character of being materialistic, soulless. It may have neglected the emigrants to such a degree that they lost their souls in trying to adapt and survive, but this remains largely their own responsibility in the narrative: latter-day Arab authors have indeed become more realistic and objective in their projections of the West than their predecessors.[439]

The short story, 'Layla Yahūdiyya' (A Jewish Night), included in the collection *ᶜAsal al-Shams* (Honey of the Sun, 1990) by contemporary Egyptian novelist, **Fuʾād Qindīl** (1944), normally more concerned in his fiction with the changing social scene of the Egyptian countryside in recent decades than in exotic scenes or themes, is a latter day-attempt at the classic journey mould in approaches to the theme of the cultural encounter. It adheres to all the constant elements of the mould as laid down by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, except for a minor, if significant detail: the female other is not Western but Israeli. In so doing, if for nothing else, it breaks new ground in approaches to the theme. It has however attracted little attention, being a short story tucked away in a little known collection by a little studied novelist.[440] The tabooness of the subject may be another reason, although Qindīl ends the story on the politically correct note of the failure of the encounter, keeping faith with the classical 'norms' of the Western journey/encounter fictional tradition, if nothing else.

The encounter takes place in Rome between an Egyptian protagonist/narrator and an Israeli woman, neither of whose backgrounds is given. The narrator is struck by the beauty of the woman: 'I am seized by a secret mad desire to know this Jewess. Perhaps it is my curiosity that propels me like a bull to the arena . . . . If I were to pull out of the experience, I would regret it for the rest of my life.' His attraction to her is however tempered by a sense of caution and fear: 'Zionists are infinitely resourceful; I should not walk with my own feet to the laid trap . . .'.[441] When they end up in bed, he is surprised at the sweet scent of her body: 'I thought

her body would have a repulsive smell',[442] was his pre-conceived stereotypical idea. Nevertheless, it is fear and distrust that triumphs in the end. After their night together he feels as if she wanted to possess him, and is alarmed when she discovers his Egyptian identity which he had tried to hide from her, and asks him if she would be allowed to live in Egypt. So disquieted is he by her persistence that he flees Rome altogether before the end of his intended stay period.

Thus in like manner to many works of fiction written in this tradition decades earlier in Egypt, as we have seen in this book, the protagonist here maintains towards the Israeli other, the same ambivalent stance of his fictional predecessors *vis à vis* the Western other. And while this stance has changed in favour of more acceptance of the European other and more openness, even idealisation towards him in the latter decades of the twentieth century, as we have witnessed from the 1970s onwards in the work of the multiplicity of authors treated in this chapter, it is interesting to see that when the other assumes an Israeli garb, the old stance readily comes back. It is also interesting to see that although the story was published in 1990, more than a decade after Egyptian recognition of Israel and the signing of the Camp David Accords, a European city is chosen as scene for the encounter at a time when it would have been possible to set the scene in Cairo or Tel Aviv. It would seem that the political 'unimaginability', or the insurmountable psychological barrier here has dictated this particular deviation from the norm of the genre, which would usually have the encounter take place on the territory of the other.

5 The encounter with America

Up till the present moment my study of the representations of the West in Arabic literature has dealt with the West as a moral entity, as a more or less cohesive set of ideas and values perceived by the Arab self as different from those govering its own life, and reacted to in a variety of changing responses dictated by complex and intersecting historical, political and social conditions. All representations of the West examined so far have however been of Europe, as the emobodiment of that moral entity and the geographic home of the colonial powers which dominated the Arab world for so long and challenged it with their different worldview. But the West includes of course the United States of America too, with which there have also been Arab encounters, which in turn have confronted Arab intellectuals with a different worldview and stirred them into literary and polemical responses, seeking to describe and understand the nature of the encounter. I have chosen to scrutinise representations of the United States in Arabic writing separately from those of Europe for a number of noticeable reasons. Unlike European powers, the United States has had no colonial history in the Arab World, and up till around the end of the second half of the twentieth century appeared a remote power about which they could be indifferent. Indeed, come the end of the First World War, and President Woodrow Wilson's famous Fourteen Points of 1918, the United States seemed a benign power from which colonised nations with national ambitions could aspire for moral support. For some Arabs, particularly the immigrants from Lebanon's Christian community, America was a hospitable destination in the early years of the twentieth century, offering the promise of a better and freer life away from repressive Ottoman rule and economic hardship. From among those some of modern Arabic's best poets and freethinkers were to arise, and in their writing there was to be expressions of their interaction with their host culture with its different values and way of life.

At the beginning, representations of America were little distinguishable from those of Europe, as we shall see, with much of the debate centring on the so-called spirit–matter duality. But as the United States emerged as a superpower at the end of the Second World War with growing interests in the Middle East, and as the State of Israel was established with the active support of the United States in 1948, and as it continued to have that support in its repeated wars with Arab states, notably in 1967 and 1973, the image of the United States in the Arab World

on the whole and consequently in its representations in literary creations began to change radically towards the negative. Before long, the United States came to be characterised as a reactionary, repressive world power, hostile to the legitimate aspirations of small nations in the world at large and not only in the Arab world, and mindful only of its capitalist interests. By a strange change of fortune, it has rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century come to be seen in the Arab world as a neo-colonial power polarising the resentment that used to be set aside for European colonial powers in the pre-independence days. The hardening of American policies in the region and globally since the events of the 11 September 2001, and the subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003 will have done nothing to change the declining image of the United States in the Arab consciousness, and its literary representations.

* * *

Amīn al-Rīḥānī (often spelt in English as **Ameen Rihani**, 1876–1940), Lebanese/American prose writer, journalist, poet and writer of travelogue, arrived as an emigrant with his family in New York in 1888 at the age of 12, and lived there on and off for most of his adult life until he settled back in his native village of Freike in Lebanon in the latter years of his life in the 1930s. Rihani wrote both in English and Arabic, effectively starting what later became the great tradition of the Arab/American writers of *mahjar* or exile.[443] Until today, Rihani remains one of the most visionary and conciliatory of Arab writers in his examination of the East/West question. In his day, he was well ahead of the prevailing terms of the debate; and today he has yet to be outstripped.

In 1911 he published his fictional work, *The Book of Khalid*, in which he tells the story of two adolescent Lebanese boys, who emigrate illegally to America. The book is ostensibly autobiographical in large part, and the protagonist, Khalid, is an unmistakable persona for Rihani. The journey is described in terms of one from the City of Baal (Baalbek) to 'the City of the Demiurgic Dollar',[444] that is, New York. 'The New World paradise', as the writer calls America, is judged as well worth the appalling conditions, compared to the transportation of cattle, in which the journey through the Mediterranean and across the Atlantic was made: 'On and on, to the gold-swept shores of distant lands, to the generous cities, and the bounteous fields of the West, to the Paradise of the World – to America', writes Rihani.[445] But as he experiences more of American life after arrival and settling in, the relationship becomes more complex, more paradoxical: 'O my greatest enemy and benefactor in the whole world is this dumb-hearted mother, this America, in whose iron loins I have been spiritually conceived…'.[446] The paradox worth noting here is that the protagonist's 'spiritual conception' takes place in the materialistic, industrial 'iron loins' of the 'dumb-hearted' America. Unlike other Syro-American and Arab writers,[447] Rihani has never subscribed to the matter–spirit simplification of the East–West dichotomy. In his more despondent, angry moments at what he sees as America's worship of money, the protagonist can appear nostalgic for his native land and its less voracious values,

and can rail at his host country:

> O America, equally beloved and hated of Khalid, O Mother of prosperity and spiritual misery, the time will come when you shall see that your gold is but pinchbeck, your gilt-edge bonds but death decrees, and your god of wealth but a carcase enthroned upon a dunghill. But you cannot see this now; for you are yet in the false dawn, floundering tumultuously, worshipping your mammoth carcase on a dunghill – and devouring your spiritual children. Yes, America is now in the false dawn, and sure as America lives, the true dawn must follow.[448]

This attitude however is never sustained for long, and is counterbalanced elsewhere in the book, with an insistence on the necessity of matter and spirit for human progress. Here is how he argues the case:

> The dawn of a new life, of a better, purer, healthier, higher spiritual kingdom. I would have its temples and those of the vast empire of wealth and material well-being, stand side by side. Ay, I would even rear an altar to the Soul in the temple of Materialism, and an altar to Materialism in the temple of the Soul. Each shall have its due; each shall glory in the sacred purity and strength of life; each shall develop and expand, but never at the expense of the other. I will have neither the renunciation which ends in a kind of idiocy dignified with a philosophic or a theologic name, nor the worldliness which ends in bestiality. I am a citizen of two worlds – a citizen of the Universe; I owe allegiance to two kingdoms . . . .[449]

This declaration, rare among Arab writers, of double allegiance to the values of spirituality and materialism, or East and West, is reinforced by a powerful concrete image, affirming his rejection of any notion of opposed polarity:

> The dervish who whirls himself into a foaming ecstasy of devotion and the strenuous American who works himself up to a sweating ecstasy of pain, are the two poles of the same absurdity, the two ends of one evil . . . .[450]

The 'absurdity', or 'evil', to which he refers, being of course the notion that a wholly spiritual or wholly materialistic outlook on life was maintainable. Elsewhere, Rihani declares the principal aim of his protagonist, Khalid (not to be distinguished from the author, for that matter) to be 'to graft the strenuosity of Europe and America upon the ease of the Orient, the materialism of the West upon the spirituality of the East . . .'.[451] The cultural differences are now and again typified in different terms: 'the West for me means ambition, the East, contentment',[452] but what is invariable in Rihani's discourse is the absolute necessity of both sides of human nature: 'the spiritual ought not and cannot be free from the sensuous, even the sensual. The true life, the full life, the life, pure, robust,

sublime, is that in which all the nobler and higher aspirations of the soul AND THE BODY[453] are given free and unlimited scope…'[454] and 'the most highly developed being is neither European nor Oriental; but rather he who partakes of the finer qualities of both the European genius and the Asiatic prophet'.[455]

In spite of Rihani's intellectual generosity, if one may say so, and his pragmatism shown in his insistence on the complementary nature of what he sees as the central qualities of East and West, the irony must not be lost on us that he in the last analysis does subscribe to the notion of cultural duality; to the basic argument which typifies the West as materialistic, while reserving spirituality for the East. The only difference is that he advances the view that materialism and its attendant attributes are not an altogether bad thing, and that spirituality which negates the material needs of mankind is perhaps not an altogether good thing. This demarcation line is clear in what Khalid, an Oriental in Western exile, asks of each of the two cultures that have a claim on his mind:

> Give me, ye mighty nations of the West, the material comforts of life; and thou, my East, let me partake of thy spiritual heritage. Give me, America, thy hand; and thou, too, Asia. Thou land of origination, where Light and Spirit first arose, disdain not the gifts which the nations of the West bring thee; and thou land of organisation and power, where Science and Freedom reign supreme, disdain not the bounties of the sunrise.[456]

Rihani, however, is anything but blind to the flaws of the West, or oblivious of its evils in his desire for the East to partake of its materialism. This, Khalid makes clear in an address to a congregation of worshippers at the Ummayad mosque in Damascus:

> Not to Christian Europe as represented by the State, therefore, or by the industrial powers of wealth, or by the alluring charms of decadence in art and literature, or by missionary and educational institutions, would I have you turn for light and guidance. No: from these plagues of civilisation, protect us, Allah! No: let us have nothing to do with that practical Christianity which is become a sort of divine key to Colonisation; a mint, as it were, which continually replenishes the treasuries of Christendom… No, no… To another Europe indeed, would I direct you – a Europe, high, noble, healthy, pure, and withal progressive. To the deep and inexhaustible sources of genius there, of reason and wisdom and truth, would I have you avert the mind. The divine idealism of German philosophy, the lofty purity of true French art, the strength and sterling worth of English freedom – these we should try to emulate; these we should introduce into the gorgeous besottedness of Oriental life, and literature, and religion.[457]

Elsewhere in his work, Rihani demonstrates his insistence on preserving his identity in the face of the process of Americanisation to which, he tells us, many

of his fellow Syrian emigrants gave in. He writes in his typically humorous style that one day he woke up thinking himself 'bigger than America':

> I, the Lebanese Arab was the only thinking being among one hundred and twenty million non-thinking people . . . all so proud of their Americanism . . . and concerned about nothing else in the world: America *was* the world.[458]

He typifies the ego-centrism and arrogance of the American nation, as the selfsame which characterised the Roman Empire in antiquity and brought about its destruction.[459] At times however, his invective against American culture appears nothing but mainstream nineteenth-century romanticism in its attack on urbanisation and alienation from nature. Some of what he writes would be seen in today's language as an expression of environmentalist or ecological concerns, and will be shown below to have been a concern not unique to Rihani, but also present in the writings of his fellow Lebanese, Mikhāʾīl Nuʿayma. Here is an illustrative passage from an article in praise of the Brooklyn Bridge in New York:

> How beautiful is the rain on the Bridge and the river below it! And how ugly the crackle of vehicles and trains, crammed with people like cattle! How miserable such people! How precious their time and cheap their life! (. . .) They run away from fresh air and the expanse of God's sky because trade so requires. They hate walking because it delays business. Confound profit! And welcome, O loss![460]

Elsewhere, he takes pity on 'the people crowding in urban forests among mountains of skyscrapers and ignorance'.[461]

These criticisms, however, are no hindrance to unmitigated admiration for the 'energy of the American people, and the freedom [they enjoy] in thought, speech and deed'.[462] And it is this aspect of American culture that he unreservedly covets for his own and, indeed, the rest of the world. In his article, 'Min ʿAlā Jisr Brūklīn' (On the Brooklyn Bridge), he addresses the Statue of Liberty with a lyricism born from the yearnings of his soul:

> When will you turn your face towards the East, O Liberty? When will your light combine with that of this radiant Moon and revolve with it round the Earth shining on the darkness of every wronged nation? Will the day come in the future when a statue for liberty is erected alongside the Pyramids? Will a peer of you rise in the Mediterranean Sea?[463] Can it be that sisters for you shall be born, O Liberty, in the Dardanelle, the Indian Sea, and the Gulf of Tongking?[464]

Unlike other Arab disparagers of the materialism of the West, including his fellow Arab/American, Mikhāʾīl Nuʿayma, as we shall presently see, Rihani maintained a more eclectic attitude towards both his culture and that of the other. For him not all that was Oriental was good, nor all that was Western was evil. In the same

article quoted earlier, he turns his supplications to the ships carrying American merchandise from New York to the East in the manner he addressed his prayers to the Statue of Liberty:

> Carry to the East some of the energy of the West and bring it back some of the indolence of the East! Carry to India a bundle of America's practical wisdom and bring back a few bagfuls of the seeds of Indian philosophy! Unload in Egypt and Syria the fruits of engineering science and come back to these lands with an abundance of Arab virtues![465]

No place here for the lopsided vision of Rihani's younger compatriot, Nuᶜayma, nor that of the later Egyptian writer, al-Ḥakīm, but a reconciliatory view, which recognises the possible mutual benefits of cultural exchange; an implied suggestion that in either culture there are elements in excess and others in shortage, and that redress is needed both in the East and the West. He spells it all out in a lecture titled, 'al-Akhlāq' (Ethics), delivered in Beirut in 1912:

> If only Orientals and Westerners would learn from each other what is beautiful in their religions, proper in their customs, noble in their arts, just in their laws, correct in their manners! There is no doubt that the essence of what is sound and proper in the cultures of the East and the West, mixed together and united, is the only cure for the ills of our era, religious, social and political. We shall then see Westerners come back to God, and Orientals relieve Him of some of his burdens.[466]

No one could have been more different in his attitude to America and Western civilisation to Ameen Rihani than his younger contemporary and fellow Lebanese/American **Mikhāʾīl Nuᶜayma** (also spelt in English as **Mikhail Naimy**, 1889–1988). No less a visionary than Rihani, he saw things differently and preached accordingly in his writings, which were no less prophetic in tone than Rihani's, if lacking the latter's redeeming sense of humour.

Nuᶜayma, poet, critic, essayist, biographer, fiction writer and dramatist, is an undisputed major figure of modern Arabic literature, and particularly within what came to be known as the *Mahjar* School, referring to the literary movement which evolved in the United States among emigrant Syro-Lebanese poets and writers, who operated through a literary gathering in New York by the name *al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya* (the Pen Association) during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, and until the death in 1931 of Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān (spelt in English Jibran Khalil Jibran, 1883–1931), its guiding spirit. Nuᶜayma began his education at the elementary Russian school in his native village in Lebanon, Baskintā, before going on to the Russian teacher training school in Nazareth, whence to the Diocesan Seminary at Poltava in the Ukraine (1906–11).

In 1911 he joined his two elder brothers, already settled in the United States, and enrolled at the University of Washington in Seattle, graduating in 1916 with two bachelor's degrees in the Arts and Law. Soon after, he moved to New York,

and in 1918 was drafted in the US army and sent to the frontline in France. On his return he continued to pursue his literary interests while earning a meagre living from working for a commercial business. In 1932 he returned to his native Baskintā, where he led a quasi-hermetic life, devoting himself to literature until his death. During his study years in Seattle, he first learned of the belief in the transmigration of souls through a Scottish roommate and member of the Theosophical Society; a belief that he was to embrace with unwavering conviction all his life, and which was to have a profound effect on his life and writing, eventually turning the man into a near ascetic, and injecting into his writing a strong element of Emersonian Transcendentalism, and a kind of pantheistic mysticism.

Mikhāʾīl Nuʿayma's arrival in America in 1911 was a deviation from the original plan to continue with his studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. He had been persuaded by one of his elder brothers, mentioned earlier, to join them in the United States for financial reasons.[467] This he accepted only reluctantly, as he did not want to go to the United States. He explains how he felt in his autobiography, *Sabʿūn: Ḥikāyat ʿUmr* (Seventy: the Story of a Life, 1959):

> Whenever I thought of the [New] World, I felt that a wide gulf existed between me and it . . . . For the dollar, which attracted millions of people form all corners of the earth, did not attract me because I was looking for things that the dollar could not buy . . . .[468]

It appears that he arrives in New York, already predisposed against modern civilisation. This attitude had already formed in Poltava, which he describes as a mere village, compared to New York. Civilisation had led man astray onto paths of greed, devoid of compassion, justice and love, he tells us. Thus rather than being dazzled by New York on first sight, the city's 'huge buildings and feverish movement' oppress him, and leave him nostalgic for the Lebanese mountains where he grew up.[469]

As Nuʿayma's account of those early impressions was written in 1959,[470] nearly half a century after their occurrence, it would be difficult to accept that it was not coloured by the author's subsequent experiences, readings and adopted stance in life. To my mind, it is in fact difficult to separate Nuʿayma's attitude towards America from his well-known romantic stance which characterised his poetry and general outlook on life, as it has many of his contemporary compatriots in the Americas, the so-called poets of the *mahjar* or emigrant poets.[471] On visiting the plains of Walla Walla, he witnesses for the first time in his life the practice of mechanised agriculture: 'machines to sow wheat, and other machines to harvest, winnow, and collect it in bags . . .'. This puts him in mind of his farmer father's plough, shovel and scythe in the plains of his native Shakhrūb. He laments the loss of communion with nature in the modern world and man's surrender of his life to the rule of the dollar and the machine.[472] What we have here is nothing particularly anti-American or anti-Western; only the romantic stock-in-trade argument against urbanisation, industrialisation, mechanisation and the movement away from nature.[473]

Nuᶜayma's decision to return to Lebanon in 1932 after 20 odd years of living in the United States is presented in a highfalutin language, steeped in romanticism, and a mystical sense of vision or calling that was the hallmark of the author's notion of himself expressed, sometimes directly sometimes indirectly, in his autobiographical writing. The idea of the poet or artist as visionary or prophet is of course one that has been central to romanticism in general, and that has found expression elsewhere in Nuᶜayma's critical writing, notably in his famous *Al-Ghirbāl* (The Sieve, 1923), where he proclaims, 'a poet is a prophet . . . because he sees with the eye of his spirit what not all humans see . . .'.[474] What he theorises about in *Al-Ghirbāl*, he embodies in his perception of himself as visionary, as a writer with a prophetic voice, with a duty to proselytise; an unmistakable note in his oeuvre generally, but particularly in the one work in which he poured in cryptic allegorical form and high poetic language his vision of life and eternity, namely *The Book of Mirdad*,[475] at once reminiscent of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and Gibran's *The Prophet*. It is in this light that we need to understand his attribution of the decision to leave New York and return to Lebanon to 'reaching a state of satiety with civilisation', and the way he depicts the period leading up to his departure from America as one 'rich in signs and intimations that I was approaching a turning point in my life'. He recounts how during that period he had asked a friend to open the Bible and place her finger at random on a verse that would serve as a pointer for the future. Conveniently, the verse she picks is 'Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you' (Luke 8:39). The same friend had also seen him in a dream 'digging a [solitary] road for myself in the mountain'. Nor was he without his own pictorial epiphanic dreams invoking spectacular visions of angelic choruses singing in peaceful unadulterated woods, complete with sparrows chanting the name of God in Spanish, a language Nuᶜayma did not know, to add to the sense of mystery.[476]

A more cynical reading however of other 'signs' with which Nuᶜayma's text is replete may suggest that his life in America appeared to have reached a stalemate that demanded radical choices to be made. Sixteen years after graduation from university, he did not seem to be getting anywhere. No permanent, self-fulfilling job or source of income, and although he had established his literary fame in exile, the *Rābiṭa Qalamiyya* or Pen Association, whose guiding soul was Gibran Khalīl Gibran and in which Nuᶜayma was an active member, appeared to have spent its force. Literary activity and publication in Arabic was becoming increasingly difficult, as was much else in the United States during the years of the Great Depression. Then came the death of Gibran in 1931 which must have signalled the end of an era. All this is fully detailed in the author's autobiography, but none of it is given the faintest credit as a force behind the decision to return to Lebanon. It is far too practical and banal to fit the bill. What is needed is a profound explanation that reaches beyond appearances and practicalities; an interpretation in terms of the rejection of a false civilisation to embrace again the innocence and simplicity of a culture still closer to Nature. And that is what we are given.

During his life in the United States, Nuᶜayma had fallen in love with two married women at different periods, and entered into extended, consummated relationships with them, the stories of which and the burden they placed on his conscience and puritanical ideals he relates at some length in his autobiography.[477] In each case, he ends the relationship to regain his peace of mind. The second severance coincides with his decision to depart from the United States. At the age of only 43 in 1932, this relationship, we are told, marked the end of his carnal knowledge of woman. His return to Lebanon was to open a new chapter in his life, where 'lust had no power over my body; only the spirit that sought to unify man and woman into the complete human being, whole and stronger than all desire'.[478] The gratuitous symbolism available in the coincidence of his departure from America marking the beginning of the renunciatory phase of his life (i.e. the following 56 years, as he lived to be 99) where the spirit reigned supreme is perhaps more telling than any metaphor that Nuᶜayma may have created by design.

The one work by Nuᶜayma that best characterises his attitude to the West, and particularly America, is probably his short story 'Sāᶜat al-Kūkū' (The Cuckoo Clock), written in 1925 according to the author, and first published in his short story collection *Kān Mā Kān* (Once upon a Time) in 1927. The story is a simple allegory based on the binary opposition of East and West in terms of spirituality and materialism. In adopting this duality and giving it literary expression, Nuᶜayma was more than ten years ahead of al-Ḥakīm's better known novel *Bird of the East*, which propagated a similar conceptualisation of the two cultures, if in a more complex context.[479] The story is set in a small Lebanese village in the early 1920s. Its protagonist is a villager by the name Khaṭṭār, who worked in tilling the land. Khaṭṭār was in love with Zumurrud, the girl next door, and she with him. They had been promised for each other by their families since childhood, and at the start of the story, the wedding day was approaching. However, it is at that time that a native of the village who had immigrated to America returns for a visit. Villagers, including the young betrothed and their families, go to bid welcome to the returnee. In his house, they see on display some of the gadgets he brought back from 'those foreign lands', including a cuckoo clock. The villagers, who had never imagined, let alone seen, such a thing were utterly fascinated by this mechanical, talking bird, especially Zumurrud, who, a few days later, was to be found nowhere on her wedding night. Such was the lure of the cuckoo clock that she eloped with the man who owned it upon his return to America. The shock leads Khaṭṭār to a reassessment of his life. For the first time 'he sees everything around him ugly and shameful: his oxen and plough, his trees and vines . . .'.[480] He is unable to blame Zumurrud in his heart and decides to take up the challenge and seek happiness in the land of the cuckoo clock.

After initial hardship in America, Khaṭṭār, realises that he is in 'a country whose key is the dollar'. He fights hard to possess that key, and with the aid of the Great War, he becomes a millionaire and owner of extensive stores within a few years. However, 20 years of life in the land of the cuckoo clock come and pass leaving him an unhappy man. Coincidence brings him into a chance encounter with his erstwhile great love, now the wreck of a woman, working in a restaurant,

having been dumped a long time ago by the man who lured her away with his cuckoo clock from simple but happy life at her native village in Lebanon. After some melodramatic developments and twists, Khaṭṭār returns home to his village where he spends the rest of his life, preaching to his fellow villagers the beauty of their simple life and the horror of Western life.

It will be interesting to note the extent to which the views expressed in the story were those of the author, and the way in which Khaṭṭār's final act seemed to point the way to his creator: Nuᶜayma was to leave the United States after some twenty years of living there to return for good to his native village in Lebanon only a few years after writing the story, not to mention that he had originally written it to dissuade from immigration a younger brother of his, who at the time was still living in Lebanon. The story is indeed entwined with the author's life in more ways than that. For its central symbol, the cuckoo clock, was borrowed from his childhood. He recounts how his mother accompanied him on one occasion to visit a cousin of hers recently returned from the United States. It was there that he and other equally astounded youngsters and adults, completely unaware of the gadgets of modern civilisation at the turn of the century, made their first encounter with the cuckoo clock. In retrospect, Nuᶜayma was to employ in the story under discussion this 'magical' gadget as a symbol of his, and by extension, his culture's encounter with the material achievements of Western civilisation. Of his first intention in writing the story, he says: 'I shall write a story revolving round the cuckoo clock, and I shall use that clock as a symbol of the complexity of modern civilisation, and the happiness that people look for at its heart without avail.'[481]

By every account in the story, this encounter was a disastrous one. Khaṭṭār preaches tirelessly to his fellow villagers in Nuᶜayma's best poetic language that their life is one of 'nature', which is 'pure truthfulness', while 'civilisation' consists in nothing but 'ornate pretence'[482] (p. 11). In a series of parables, reminiscent of, if not directly modelled on, those of Jesus in the Gospels, he advocates attachment to the land, and to mother Nature as the ultimate and unfailing provider:

> From soil is what you wear. From soil is what you eat. From soil is your shelter. How ignorant you are to try to deceive life to obtain your clothing, your food, and your shelter without touching soil . . . Blessed are those who take the soil as partner in their toil for livelihood for they shall sleep soundly . . . Trade is but a ruse to attract money, and money a ploy to swindle partners of the soil of the fruit of their toil, but it is a ploy that rebounds on the perpetrator.
>
> (p. 13)

Happiness is within the soul and nowhere else; it is not to be sought through the change of continents or cultures: 'The happy man is he who rejoices in his place, and unhappy is he who seeks contentment in other places' (p. 14). Let each man (and each culture?) be content with what they are: 'How beautiful is the crow speaking with the tongue of a crow, and not envying the nightingale its voice!

And how beautiful is the nightingale speaking with the tongue of a nightingale, and not envying the crow its strength!' (p. 17). To Nuʿayma and his protagonist the West is the civilisation of cuckoo clocks, of mechanical cuckoos, while his own is that of natural cuckoos and crows and nightingales; his own is a culture of affinity with earth, with survival that is the fruit of human toil in nature, not by trade in the stock exchange.

Through the mouthpiece of his character, Nuʿayma typifies East and West in terms of a metaphor where they are travellers in the pilgrimage of life, the East riding in the chariot of the 'heart', driven by horses of 'emotion', reigned in by timeless 'faith and traditions'. Conversely, the West rides in a chariot of 'steel', driven by 'steam or electricity', and powered by 'conceit and arrogance'. The speed and glamour of the West's chariot dazzle the Eastern rider, who begs the West to let him hang on to the wheels. The meaning of the image is spelt out: 'Thus speaks the East to the West when they meet. It casts aside its own chariot, and sells its soul in order to obtain a chariot like its co-traveller's' (pp. 26–27). *That* was Khaṭṭār's error, when he 'turned his back on his oxen and field and made his way [westwards] to the sea' (p. 27). He wanted to conquer 'the cuckoo clock', but instead it possessed him and turned him into one of its screws (p. 29). For Nuʿayma the cuckoo clock (the material progress of Western civilisation) can only be had at the price of one's soul. It was too dear a price, in his view. On the personal level, he rejected the deal. On the public level, he devoted his writing to bring his personal conviction across to his Arab readers.

A narrower interpretation of the materialism of the West can be found in a negligible short story by the title '*ʿUlbat Kabrīt*' (A Matchbox), in Nuʿayma's collection *Akābir*, first published in 1956. Not unlike 'The Cuckoo Clock', the story is based on the binary opposition of two allegorical situations. The protagonist recounts to his friend, the narrator, two separate events from his life in order to illustrate 'which is more greedy for matter, East or West?'[483] The first event tells how on one occasion his car became stuck in the mud as he was driving at night on a mountainous country road during a heavy storm. The people of the nearby village to whom he was a total stranger rush to his help at extreme difficulty for themselves, and offer him hospitality for the night. In the morning, they free his car for him and refuse, despite their poverty, any recompense. The second event takes place in Paris, at the time when the protagonist was studying at the Sorbonne. He had stayed for years at a small hotel, with whose proprietor, his family and staff he had become on the friendliest of terms, buying them presents and giving tips on every occasion. He had even lent the proprietor at one time some money to pay back a debt and refused to accept interest. After emotional goodbyes on the day of his departure, having completed his studies, the proprietor runs after the protagonist's taxi, and stops it to ask for the price of a matchbox that he had forgotten to add to the final bill.[484] The story ends on this, with the protagonist leaving it to his friend (and to us) 'to conclude what you want from these two episodes'.[485] The emerging opposite images of the two cultures is clear: one is generous and gallant (the East), the other greedy and ungrateful (the West).

Nuᶜayma's literary representations of his ideas on East and West are underpinned by some clearly argued polemic in his essays. One of the earliest such essays goes back to 1922, prior to writing 'Sāᶜat al-Kūkū'. The essay carries the title 'The Rise of the Arab East and its Attitude towards Western Civilisation', and was written in response to a questionnaire on the subject among notable Arab intellectuals of the day conducted by Cairo's respectable literary magazine, *Al-Hilāl*.[486] Nuᶜayma works out a grand structure in which he fits minor questions as to the differences between the two cultures. This structure seems to attribute a static view of the world to the East, as opposed to a dynamic one to the West: 'the East finds the world perfect because it was made by a perfect God, while the West finds in it many imperfections, which it seeks to "make better" '. For him the West's attempt at improving the world is a form of doomed 'arrogance', akin to 'a fish in the sea trying to "improve" it and comprehend its secrets'.[487] He argues that the East has given the West immutable 'revealed truths,'[488] while the West's contribution consisted only in 'scientific truths', which changed everyday. If the West was compelled to discard all its books and keep only one, he argues, it would probably choose to keep The Holy Book which came to it from the East. By contrast, what would the East want from the West? His answer is: 'Aeroplanes, trains, machines . . . and many ailments and problems, which would not bring it any closer to the secret of life, nor give it the spiritual reassurance it obtained from faith.'[489] Nuᶜayma however seems well aware of the lure of Western civilisation, and is certain that its day will not be spent 'until it has swept the whole world over' including the Arab countries. Nevertheless, this awareness does not serve to abate his contempt for Western civilisation. He is willing to live with the accusation of being 'a reactionary who wants to take us back to the ignorance of religion and superstition', rather than relinquish his belief that 'the East with its faith is closer to the Truth than the West with its thought and scientific evidence'. It is the West, he concludes, that needs to be a disciple in the school of the East.[490] One should perhaps mention that some 40 years later, Nuᶜayma added a little gloss on his position. In his autobiography, *Sabᶜūn* (Seventy), he refers to the circumstances in which he wrote his reply to the questionnaire in a chapter entitled '*Thawra wa Hudna*' (Revolution and Truce), and points out that the 'faith' which he 'called on the East to hold on to did not mean submission, fear, and acquiescence in humility and poverty, but rather the ability to comprehend the limitations of the mind and transcend them to . . . a spiritual wealth that outshines all material wealth . . . '.[491]

In a much later essay titled 'al-Tawᵓamān: al-Sharq wal-Gharb' (The Twins: East and West), included in his collection, *al-Bayādir* (The Threshing Floors), published in 1945, Nuᶜayma sustains his polemic against Western civilisation. After waxing lyrical about the morphological genius of Arabic that produces from the same root such nouns as *baṣar* and *baṣīra*, 'sight' and 'insight' or 'inner sight', respectively, he goes on to label the West as the world's *baṣar* and the East as its *baṣīra*. These are terms not much different from their more familiar correspondents: 'matter' and 'spirit'. Thus in vocabulary similar to what Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm had used a few years earlier in *Bird of the East*, Nuᶜayma argues that while the East gave the world prophets, the West gave it scientists. He diagnoses

the illness of the modern world in terms of the 'the supremacy of sight over insight', a supremacy that did not spare the East itself, which is 'dazzled' by Western civilisation that addresses itself to the senses and is therefore more accessible and pleasurable, according to him. The East, he argues, has sought from time immemorial the 'eternal truth'. This quest however has been helped by the modern science of the West, which has made life easier with its inventions, nature less mysterious with its discoveries, the world smaller, and which has brought people closer together the better to concentrate on the great quest. Nuᶜayma is clearly at pains to do justice to the role played by Western civilisation in humanity's quest for the truth. However, the great prize is reserved for the East. For he predicts that when 'the materialistic sciences of the West have reached their farthest . . . [the West] will have completed its role in this cycle of mankind's life, and the East will take over anew'. It is the East that will be able to build on the West's achievements that rid humanity of ignorance and superstition, and lead it again with unwavering determination towards its ultimate goal.[492]

In the concluding chapter of his voluminous autobiography, Nuᶜayma reaffirms his central pantheistic belief, and his unwavering faith, as death approached with advanced years, in the eternal cycle of nature which belied the idea of extinction.[493] He laments however the failure of modern humanity to learn from the past, 'to look for the essence in the froth'. He asserts his belief that the evils of modern civilisation will not be dispelled save by a 'voice to wake the human conscience and instil in it the awareness of the goal of existence . . .'. That voice, he assures his readers, 'shall come from the East'.[494] This idea of a fallen West, lost beyond redemption in its materialism, being saved by moral guidance from the East it despised is one that Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm had propagated earlier in the century, as we have already seen.

Unlike Rihani and Nuᶜayma, **Maḥmūd Taymūr** (1894–1973), Egyptian pioneer writer of fiction and drama, knew the United States only as a passing visitor. He recorded his impressions of the visit in his travelogue, *Abū al-Hawl Yaṭīr* (The Sphinx Flies, 1946?). The dichotomy of East and West, the first associated with tradition and the latter with modernity, is epitomised from the outset in the writer's metaphorical representation of the aeroplane in which he makes the trip to New York with his wife as a modern 'Abū al-Hawl' or Sphinx that flies: 'As we stepped out into the airport ground, there was the Sphinx lying down in front of us, wings outspread in readiness to fly . . . . It was the symbol of two great civilisations: the ancient civilisation of Egypt and the youthful, vigorous civilisation of America.'[495]

On the way to New York, a stopover is made in Paris for a few days. Taymūr's tour of the city and passing conversations with the French lead to some thoughts on an issue that has bothered his generation much: the division between high European cultural ideals and European unprincipled practice in their colonies:

> when a Frenchman converses with you in Paris, he astounds you with the lofty nature of his speech: he speaks well about liberty, equality and fraternity, those noble and correct principles of the immortal French Revolution. It makes me wonder what kind of Frenchman then is the one that we meet in

> Tunisia, Algeria, or Morocco . . . that Frenchman who always greets you in his military uniform, hard-faced and coarse-voiced, tyrannical and oppressive, and persuasive solely through the logic of steel and fire?[496]
>
> (p. 47)

Like many a visitor before and after him, Taymūr is struck by the skyscrapers of New York:

> A man feels that he has been rendered insignificant in front of these intimidating constructions. In one instant the power and greatness of America becomes manifest. In their magnificence, these tall skyscrapers expose the obvious (and not so obvious) truths about America: its civilisation, wealth, genius, dynamism, and ambition . . . .[497]

Taymūr is nonetheless not content to remain descriptive of American architectural achievement; he goes on to draw from that his own conclusions about the psychology of America:

> Here the towering edifices climb toward the sky and never cease to climb. They are eloquent in expressing the inherent inferiority complex in the American psyche, which prompts this young rising nation that has been blessed with resources, knowledge, and an undisputed position among nations, to cry out to the world: 'Look at me, I am the greatest one of all!'[498]

His experience of New York's skyscraper reminds him of other enormous constructions: the pyramids of his native Egypt. And in like manner, he uses them as occasion for musings on the spirit of Egypt:

> These skyscrapers are like the pyramids of Egypt. The sight of which captures the essence of a grand culture; they immediately conjure up the minute details of a civilisation and its secrets. For example, you know at once that the grave was paramount in ancient Egypt: a repository of knowledge, art, and the system of government: the living worked hard to prepare it as a permanent abode, while the dead enjoyed it as a resting place until resurrection came.[499]

If we are to apply Taymūr's own psychological 'insight' here, would we not find it striking that the juxtaposition of the meaning of the edifices of the two cultures and the respective conclusions he bases on them seem to suggest that one culture, that is, the American is life-oriented, while the other, the Egyptian, is death-oriented?

Having established that America suffers from an 'inferiority complex', as we have seen above, Taymūr proceeds to subscribe *en passant* to the then fashion of the day: assigning the label of materialism to the West. He does that without giving the matter any thought while describing his progress through a crowded New York street:

> As I went through the mechanics of walking, I observed the people and objects around me. It was as if people and the inanimate had so mixed that

> there was no way to tell one category from the other. There were blocks that moved about in the street with neither spirit nor sensation, and there were other blocks stacked one on the top of the other; bricks that moved and others heaped in high-rise buildings… Woe betide humanity if a civilisation is founded on the hard and barren base of matter.
>
> (pp. 81–82)

So commonplace and taken for granted was the argument for the materialism of the West at the time, Taymūr did not feel the need to make a case for it. Confronted in his wanderings with billboards advertising Mother's Day, he laments the commercialisation of such a noble sentiment as filial affection for the mother, and consistently with the premise of materialism comes to the conclusion that, 'Mother's Day in my view is nothing but a loud cry announcing the emptiness of the American heart of filial tenderness…' (pp. 116–17).

One would have thought such condemnation was sufficient to write off America as sub-human and unworthy of celebration, let alone emulation, but one has only to read on a few pages more of Taymūr's account to find him paradoxically singing the praises of American progress and lamenting the backwardness of the Orient. He credits America with 'having laid down for the world the method of progress', which consists in:

> man working always with an energised, relentless and unwavering spirit, aiming for new horizons and exploring unknown worlds without fear or reticence. This spirit constitutes what is most noble about modern American life, and is the highest ideal to be sought for our old world, shrunken behind confines and barriers, behind the fetters of doubts and traditions. As an Oriental, I contemplate the spirit which characterises American life and feel the strength of our need, us Orientals, for a spark of that light to illuminate the road ahead for us.
>
> (p. 134)

He then turns on the East and rebukes it for following in the footsteps of the march to progress with the speed of a 'tortoise' (p. 135). The self-contradiction in the writer's attitude is twice striking, once in its own right, and another by dint of the fact that Taymūr appears entirely unaware of it. In his *Bird of the East*, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm had at least taken the trouble to build an argument, albeit a false one which he later renounced, for the superiority of the East's spirituality over the West's materialism. But nothing of this here, only a major writer who is happy to condemn and praise in the same breath without the slightest endeavour to reconcile opposites. Intellectual rigour certainly is undermined by the casual recording of the impressions of a traveller.

Sayyid Quṭb (1906–66), better known as a fundamentalist Islamic thinker, is also the author of a small amount of Western travelogue, sufficient to earn him a place in this study. While originating in the familiar dichotomy of spirituality and

materialism to which many Arab writers of different generations have subscribed in different ways and for different reasons, including a notable Lebanese/American such as Mikhāʾīl Nuʿayma, it is the harsh, scathing and dehumanising tone of Quṭb's discsourse that singles him out from the rest. In the summer of 1948, he was sent by the Egyptian Ministry of Education, his employer, to study pedagogic methods and educational syllabi in the United States, where he stayed for two years returning to Egypt in 1950. The mission (his only journey outside Egypt) was not, it seems, tied to a particular programme of study or specific institution. Thus during the two years, Quṭb came to spend various lengths of time in New York, Washington, Greeley, Denver, San Diego and San Francisco.[500] His impressions of America were recorded in some correspondence and articles in literary magazines, posthumously collected and published with an introduction under the title *Amrīkā min al-Dākhil: bi-Minẓār Sayyid Quṭb* (America from Inside: from the perspective of Sayyid Quṭb). The most important among these is a series of three articles, titled 'The America I saw: in the scale of moral values'. The articles were published in the Egyptian literary magazine *al-Risāla* between the months of November and December in 1951, a little over a year after his return from the United States.[501]

The account consists in an impressionistic analysis of the American psyche, utilising to a large extent widespread popular conceptions/misconceptions of America, while enlarging on the subject from his personal observations and hearsay during his stay in the United States. To Sayyid Quṭb, America presented a strange dichotomy, not different in essence from that it offered Rihani, and Nuʿayma a generation earlier. It is the basic dichotomy of spirit and matter, regardless of the terminology used to describe it. To Quṭb America is simultaneously 'the peak of progress and the nadir of primitiveness'. The progress is in the field of 'work and production', in other words, in the field of applied science, whose birth coincided with America's own birth. However, this progress was at the expense of turning man into a machine, leaving Americans seriously underdeveloped in the area of human values.[502]

Thus to him, Americans have a primitive admiration of muscular strength, matched only by their contempt of ideals and moral principles. According to him, American crowds delight in watching violence, for which he gives examples from such popular sports as American football, boxing and wrestling. America has been a war-loving nation from the time of its war of extermination against the Red Indians, through its war of independence, to its involvement in two the world wars, and the then current Korean War. Even the Civil War was not about freedom for the slaves, but a conflict of economic interests between north and south.[503]

Americans are hard-hearted; their emotional life is 'dry' and 'devoid of compassion' for each other. Rather, it is based on 'materialistic equations and physical relations'. So much so, that they take death in their stride and are unaffected by the sight of pain and suffering in others. He goes on to cite macabre, caricatured examples of American patients at a hospital laughing at the sight of a man in the throes of death after serious injury in an accident; of indulging in jokes around the coffin of a dead friend; of a wife going to a pre-arranged dinner party,

while her husband lay dead at home, and so on. Respect for death, he concludes, is something that creatures much baser than mankind, such as crows and chickens, whose examples he quotes from personal observation, know, but not Americans.[504]

Irreverent or indifferent as Americans are towards death, their attitude towards religion is no less uncivilised. Nobody builds more churches than they do, Quṭb admits, but goes on to say that no one is more removed than the Americans from 'feeling the spirituality of religion and according it respect and sanctity'. He typifies American churches as places for 'entertainment and fun', not worship, 'as they are in the rest of the Christian world'. This attitude towards religion and churches is one shared by churchgoers and pastors alike, he tells us. Under the sensational heading of 'A Red Night in the Church', he describes in orgiastic terms a ball for young people that took place after the service at a church in Greeley, Colorado, which he witnessed. He takes particular exception to the pastor's assistance with the dimming of the lights for the dance, and his playing a record of the hit song at the time 'Baby, it's cold outside!'[505]

Quṭb goes on to make some sweeping value judgements about the sexual mores of the Americans: 'they are primitive in their sexual life'. Humanity's great effort over the ages to 'civilise' sex has been cast aside in American life. American men and women seek in each other the attractions of the body alone. Quṭb's prose here appears to descend into titillation in his description of what men look for in women's bodies and vice versa. Here is a specimen:

> The American girl knows very well where her physical charms lie: in the face, in the eyes that call, and the lips that thirst . . . ; in protruding breasts and full buttocks; in rounded thighs and smooth legs . . . . To all this she adds the enticing laugh, the explicit look, and bold movements.[506]

Interestingly, Quṭb adds, in a parenthetical sentence, that the American female has a body as striking as a thunderbolt, to use his words, and she makes things worse by wearing clothes that betray its charms. To be sure, Quṭb did not need to go into this kind of detail to make his point. Rather than ridicule the object of his criticism, that is, American culture, the discourse actually detracts from the solemnity of his argument, and the position of high moral ground that he maintains. One may, however, wish to view his attitude in more sympathetic terms, as another scholar has done, arguing that Quṭb's critique of American sexual mores 'reflects the consternation of a man beset with encounters and temptations which challenged the ethic of public morality upon which his own sense of personal worth and integrity depended'.[507]

Later, in his radical commentary on the Qurʾān, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān* (In the Shade of the Qurʾān, 1952–57) he was to continue to demonise America, in religious terms, as a godless society, the society of *jāhiliyya* (spiritual ignorance) *par excellence* in modern times.[508] The view has been put across that he may have been influenced also by experiences of a racist nature that he underwent in America. His dark skin and distinctive southern Egyptian features reportedly singled him out for racist indignities (at least in San Francisco) about which he

complained bitterly in letters to friends back in Egypt.[509] This view is borne out by Quṭb's criticism of racial discrimination in the 'American *Jāhiliyya*', as he calls it, in his *In the Shade of the Qurʾān*.[510] There is also a case for arguing that Quṭb's negative views of America were fully formed long before his American visit, which did nothing to modify them.[511] They were also views of Western culture in general, which America served to corroborate through the opportunity of firsthand experience of the West that his visit afforded him. In an article published in 1946, two years before his American journey, he writes of Westerners:

> They all share the same vantage point, which is that materialistic civilisation without heart or conscience; that civilisation which can only hear the drone of machines, speak only with the tongue of commerce, and look only with the eye of the usurer.... How I hate those Westerners and despise them all without exception! The English, the French, the Dutch, and lastly the Americans, whom many had trusted.[512]

The context in which this wholesale denunciation of the West occurs may go someway to explain the fierceness of its rhetoric. Written only two years before the creation of Israel, the article was a critique of American policy towards the Palestinian question, titled 'the American conscience and the Palestinian issue'.[513] This issue was of course to colour Arab perceptions of the West, and especially the United States for several generations and until the present day. The similar attitude to America, two generations later, of Yūsuf Idrīs, a thorough secularist and as such at odds in every respect with Sayyid Quṭb, is a good example, as will be shown later. Both vilify America and reject her; the main difference being that the religious dimension in Sayyid Quṭb's discourse on materialism and spirituality is absent from Idrīs's.[514]

Perhaps the hostility towards the West as characterised by the United States in particular and in relation to its Middle East policies and the Arab–Israeli conflict in particular can be better appreciated if we go back in time a little and pause for a moment at another early Arab intellectual's view of America and the Americans at a time prior to the creation of Israel.

In all Arab accounts of America, few can match, in their unbridled admiration of its culture and human ethos, that made by **Philip Hitti** (1886–1978), Lebanese historian and academic, who studied in the United States and taught at the American University in Beirut before moving to Princeton and settling in the United States. Hitti wrote a series of seven articles in the years 1922–23 (at about the same time Mikhāʾīl Nuʿayma was to write his rejectionist story, 'The cuckoo Clock') for the Cairene monthly literary magazine *Al-Hilāl* in which he gave an account based on his personal experience of the country.[515]

In those articles, written shortly after the end of the First World War at a time when the United States with her lack of colonial history or pronounced interests in the region and when the idealism of President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points with their implicit promise for the aspirations of colonised peoples still

rang in the ears, Hitti's idealisation of the Americans should perhaps not surprise us. He extols the 'vitality' of Americans and describes them as 'giants among the human species' and 'heroes among the vagrants of humanity' (p. 132). Their love of work is praised while his fellow countrymen are ridiculed when he points out that 'By the sweat of your brow you will eat your bread',[516] is a verse revealed in the East to be practised in the West (p. 144). Nor would he subscribe to the argument that the American's love of work was motivated by the desire for material gain or worship of the dollar; an argument that Ameen Rihani, as we have seen, was not averse to propagating. Such an argument was for him 'unconvincing for the honest and fair-minded'. For him the American's love of work was 'a law of life; the very secret of his being. He worked for the sake of working, to be productive, creative and for the delight of conquering difficulties' (pp. 151–52). Then the Americans' efficiency in their work, their drive for efficiency, their cooperativeness and sense of discipline are exalted at length with plenty of examples of their achievements over two whole articles of the series. From there onward to eulogising American democracy as without parallel in Europe, the American sense of fairness, freedom of worship and infinite opportunity for all (pp. 185–95). In his unrestrained embracement of everything American, Hitti's scholarship appears to exercise no braking force in his playing up to popular myths and anecdotal evidence of American excellence, as when he quotes by way of illustrating American democracy a joke about a tourist in New York who asks his coachman who the governors of the country were, only for the latter to answer proudly that the tourist was speaking to one of them (p. 187).

Such extolment of the United States was not to be possible again after 1948. Contemporaries of Hitti with firsthand substantial experience of American society such as Mikhāʾīl Nuʿayma and even Ameen Rihani may have been critical in various measure of America on the grounds of the age-old premise of materialism, but those were philosophic denunciations on matters of principle. With the fundamentalist Sayyid Quṭb, and later writers of a secular creed such as Yūsuf Idrīs and Raḍwā ʿĀshūr alike, as we shall see, rejection of America was to be on a political not philosophic basis. For them and for millions in the Arab world and elsewhere in the world, the America of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points no longer existed; it was no longer a force of liberation and moral principle in the world but one of repression and was to be regarded with the suspicion, animosity and fear previously accorded to the old colonial powers of Europe.

Ḥalīm Barakāt (b. 1933), Syro-American Academic and novelist, leads us into the thick of the present-day relationship between the United States and the Arabs. There is nothing here of the philosophical debate about matter and spirit that Rihani and Nuʿayma indulged in, and which Quṭb perpetuated in the context of his own fundamentalist agenda; and nothing either of the naive fascination of Philip Hitti. There is simply the horror at the neo-colonial imperial power that stands blindly behind Israel and against the perceived justice of the Arab cause.

Barakāt published his novel *ʿAwdat al-Ṭāʾir ilā al-Baḥr*[517](The Return of the Bird to the Sea) in 1969; translated into English as *Days of Dust*.[518] The novel is

an attempt at capturing the Arab mood during the different phases of the Arab–Israeli Six Day War in 1967: the euphoria of the build-up period and early hours of the war before the man-in-the-street began to comprehend the extent of the defeat inflicted on Arab nations, and the subsequent humiliation and despair. The theme is explored mainly through the consciousness of a Western-educated Palestinian academic, Ramzī Ṣafadī, who, not unlike the author at the time of the war, lives and teaches at university in Beirut;[519] the action is set mainly in Beirut and Jordan, including the cities of the West Bank during the days of the war. The novel employs a bizarre, if not necessarily mutually repellent, mixture of realism and symbolism: the awful happenings of the war are graphically portrayed but simultaneously enveloped in an enlarging mythic structure that makes recourse to the Bible, the poetry of T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden, the legend of 'the Flying Dutchman' as portrayed in Wagner's eponymous opera, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Handel's *Messiah*, *The Iliad*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and Palestinian folklore, among other works. Naturally, some of these referential points of the novel blend better than others with the events but the overall effect is one of an artificial construction where the author's erudition is allowed to run unbridled, raising questions about the dictates of high aesthetics and those of the representation of reality.

The novel, is partly a documentary work, in that the accounts of ways in which the war destroyed the lives of many thousands of Palestinians either through death, injury, destruction of property, or forced displacement, are based on interviews which Ḥalīm Barakāt, like his protagonist, conducted personally in Amman in his academic capacity after the end of the war.[520] These disparate accounts are held together on the one hand by the mythologisation process, and by a central love story between the protagonist and an American woman, Pamela Anderson, who is a poor but highly cultured hippie painter, in love with the region and its people. The love story between the American woman and the Palestinian professor runs, in a deliberate irony, parallel to the ongoing Arab–Israeli war, in which the American government is shown to be totally behind Israeli brutality. Against the scenes of death and destruction of the war, Pamela is presented through metaphors of life and beauty: 'Her long hair is a tent in the desert of his life; threads of golden radiance connecting him to the sky, and her eyes are two islands in a world submerged in water and darkness.'[521] And again 'The wind caressed her long hair which hung down like ears of wheat awaiting harvest under a scorching sun' (p. 12). Nor is the reference to 'the scorching sun' incidental since the scene is one of napalm-burned victims being treated.

As an individual, Pamela's sympathy for and understanding of the Arab cause is in stark contrast to that of the American government, which is probably the reason that Barakāt makes her a poor ordinary American and a hippie at that, that is, a rebel against the mores of established capitalist society: 'The American government has become a tool in the hands of the industrialists and the military', she tells Ramzī, 'it stands against the American people as much as it does against the Vietnamese and the Arabs . . .' (p. 59). Pamela may be something of a spokesperson for the author here, but what she says is not out of line with the hippie

philosophy of the day. Her cultural refinement is another distinguishing factor on the individual level in contrast with the violent scene shored up by the other as government, so to speak: 'Her eyes light up when they talk of intellectual matters, especially painting, poetry, and fiction' (p. 68); the refinement and pathos of the arts appear to facilitate and enhance the cultural encounter beyond the harshness and narrow vision of government policies.

What Barakāt advocates through the love between an American woman and a Palestinian man during a time of adversity between the Arabs and American policy is not unlike the message that comes across from the work of his Egyptian contemporary Bahāʾ Ṭāhir, evident especially in his novel, *Love in Exile*, as can be seen elsewhere in this book: the cultural divide between East and West is easily bridged on the individual level through love and understanding, and in spite of state policies and political differences. In his presentation of this love story against a narrative whose texture is so densely interwoven with a wide variety of high-culture Western texts with a universal, humanist message, Barakāt further underlines the essential unity of human wisdom: the fraternity established between his Arabic text and a multiplicity of Western texts and works of Art from many ages is perhaps the strongest statement the narrative makes on the possibility of the cultural encounter.[522]

This entire vision is nevertheless thrown into question in a later work by Ḥalīm Barakāt, an autobiographical book about an Arab-American university professor, trying to bring the pieces of his life together in a narrative of recollection. The autobiography, thinly disguised as a 'novel', is titled *Ṭāʾir al-Ḥawm* (The Crane, 1988). The book is condemnatory of American culture, in a manner to which readers familiar with Barakāt's non-literary writings in recent years, especially in the media, will be well-accustomed. Set in the time of the ultra-right Ronald Reagan Administration (1981–89), the narrator/protagonist addresses a (hypothetical?) American neighbour by the name Mike Anderson, who obviously stands for an American majority:

> I ask you, Neighbour Mike Anderson, [in connection with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, condoned by the Reagan Administration] which one is the defender and which the aggressor, which one the murderer and which the victim, which is the civilised party and which the barbarian? Your government wants to wipe out from the face of the earth Cuba, Nicaragua, Iran, Lebanon, and Syria, and you take pride in having killed a large number of the Japanese, whom you call the 'Japs', during the Second World War. Why do you harbour so much hate? What is it that makes you get up every morning and raise the American flag in front of your house?[523]

The narrator is careful notwithstanding not to personalise or dehumanise the situation. He goes on to apologise to his imaginary interlocutor, Mr Anderson, about his stark candidness, and beg him not to conclude that he hated him: 'I sympathise with you actually and am delighted that the recent surgery your wife underwent at hospital was successful . . .'.[524]

One inevitably stops at the name 'Mike Anderson'. As one recalls the name of the young hippie woman, 'Pamela Anderson', in *ʿAwdat al-Ṭāʾir*, the question arises whether there is any authorial intention in using the name again in this much later work. Could the Hippie Pamela, who rejects America's imperial policies and practices in Vietnam, the Middle East and elsewhere in the world be the 'daughter' of Mike Anderson, that is, a new generation of Americans with a different vision? This is a question that will have to remain hypothetical, but what is certain is that the visions of the two books will appear in conflict unless we call to mind the values of love and understanding which Pamela stands for and set them against those of domination and mindless patriotism which her 'father' represents. But whatever interpretation we adopt of either text and whatever connection we find between them, what continues to ring in the reader's ears at the end of *The Crane* is the angry words of the narrator/protagonist at the close of the novel; words which amount to an unmitigated indictment of American culture:

> I reject you, you false, petty, petty civilisation! I proclaim you petty and contemptible. You call liberating heroes 'terrorists'. And I proclaim you 'terrorist'. You sort the world into civilised and barbarian. And I proclaim you 'barbarian' – maybe you can understand your own language which I detest . . . Your elegance is a mask; your beautiful guise a sham. You do not know as I do the relationship between your people's obsession with dieting and African famine. As for your democracy, it is nothing but a rotten act of rapacity performed politely.[525]

In Chapter 3 of this book, I have discussed some works by the Egyptian author **Yūsuf Idrīs** (1927–91) within the context of examining early representations of the West in the postcolonial era, including a novella by the title, 'Madam Vienna'. I have however reserved for discussion in the present chapter a relevant work by Idrīs, namely *New York 80*, as it fits better here in the context of my consideration of other authors whose works deal with the Arab encounter with the United States in particular. Of Idrīs's European-based representations, so to speak, it is important to keep in mind 'Madam Vienna' while examining *New York 80*, as a distinct variance will be recognised in the writer's outlook on the West as represented by Europe on the one hand, and as embodied in America, on the other.

That Idrīs means the two stories to be viewed together is evident from including 'Madam Vienna' in the same volume as *New York 80* and retitling it 'Vienna 60',[526] an obvious attempt to parallel the title of the newer story and to indicate the time gap between the two stories through the titles. As a work of art, *New York 80* is inferior in quality to 'Madam Vienna'. It reads very much like an extended essay juxtaposing the different value systems of the two cultures through, again, a sexual encounter. But unlike in the earlier story, the situation has no life of its own and serves only as a thin fictitious apparel to clad the author's thoughts on the subject, which are given through lengthy tracts of dialogue. In fact the story consists largely of dialogue interspersed with short pieces of narrative. The fact that the story was written in the middle of the last 20 odd years of the author's life,

during which he had mainly expressed himself through the journalistic essay rather than any creative art form, should go perhaps some way towards explaining the poor quality of the story, totally uncharacteristic of the work of this great artist.

New York 80 is different in many ways from 'Madam Vienna'. One obvious difference is that it is set in America rather than Europe. America of course is the farthest western part of the West, geographically as well as culturally, in the sense that the harshest and least acceptable values of the West are more poignantly represented by it than by Europe, which is physically nearer to the East, and like it is part of the Old World. This fact is only tacitly attested to in Idrīs's treatment of the subject, as he displays in *New York 80* a tone of cultural repulsion and harsh indictment totally absent in 'Madam Vienna'. Again in 'Madam Vienna' there is an attempt at evoking a sense of place describing with empathy some of the features of the old city and its streets. No such attempt is made in *New York 80*, where the story is set between a public bar and a hotel room which could have been anywhere. This total defacement of the city is itself an unspoken statement reducing it to the set of repugnant values that the story unfolds.

The most important difference between the two stories lies perhaps in the nature of the protagonists in *New York 80*. In 'Madam Vienna' the encounter as we have seen was between a decent working woman with a family, who represents 'the spirit of Europe' and a typical Egyptian, who represents the spirit of the East. In the present work, however, the West is represented by the narrator/protagonist, who is a professional writer and is evidently a persona for Yūsuf Idrīs himself.[527] As if to ensure intellectual parity between the two characters in the endless arguments they have, Idrīs qualifies the woman above what is normal for a prostitute giving her a PhD and making her a psychologist and sex therapist, who willfully chooses prostitution for a profession simply because it pays better. One wonders again whether Idrīs's representation of Europe as a decent ordinary woman and of America as a sophisticated whore is yet another manifestation of the fact that his Eastern man's view of Europe is not identical with that of America.

Another essential difference between the two stories is the reversal of sexual-cum-cultural roles. In 'Madam Vienna' the initiator of the situation was the Eastern male, though he was soon to meet with a more than enthusiastic response. In *New York 80*, by contrast, it is the call girl who persistently chases the protagonist to the point of offering to pay him for sex instead of being paid by him. In 'Madam Vienna' we have seen how Darsh was adamant not to know Europe through a whore. In *New York 80*, the protagonist is equally revolted by the idea of tradable sexual pleasure. His rejection of it, in spite of his evident physical attraction to the woman, is symbolic of a rejection of a materialistic, dehumanised culture, where everything can be valued in terms of dollars (e.g. pp. 32, 55). (Consider how Rihani's notion about the 'Demiurgic dollar' has continued to metmorphose in Arabic writing for the best part of a century!) Her judgement of him, and by implication of the culture he stands for, is no less dismissive; she labels him an underdeveloped 'child, emotionally and psychologically' (p. 25). She explains to him that a purely physical relationship is evidence of a maturity that he has yet to reach and offers to help him out of what she sees as emotional

underdevelopment (pp. 32–33). Their polemical exchange ends abruptly when the woman appears to break down under the force of the protagonist's rejection of her and leaves the café after making a scene.

The end is forced on the story and entirely unconvincing. Throughout both sides have appeared equally dogmatic about their beliefs and outlook on life and shown themselves to be intellectual peers, able to give as much as they take in terms of polemical support for their cultural stances. Thus although Idrīs can only have meant us to interpret her eventual collapse as a triumph for the Eastern argument, it does not work. The admirable, even-handed vision, which he had shown in 'Madam Vienna', is lost here together with artistic accomplishment.[528] The vision here has no shades of gray at all: the West is all black and the East is all white and the encounter, unlike in 'Madam Vienna', is never sexually consummated. 'Madam Vienna' seemed to stress the sameness of self and other, with the physical consummation of the encounter serving in an ironic kind of fashion to underline this conclusion. The present story by contrast rejects the other as unacceptably different.[529]

The question remains: why has the writer's vision been so radicalised in the course of 20 years? Is his rejection of the West total? Or is this harshness of tone reserved for the 'new West' (America) as opposed to the 'old West' (Europe)? During those 20 years the United States has been politically at loggerheads with progressive regimes in the Arab World, particularly Nasser's Egypt – could this offer some background explanation, even though *New York 80* deals with a cultural clash and not a political one?

In order to answer this question, or at least to examine the extent to which the artist's vision agrees with his explicitly stated views, we need to turn to his vast output of journalism, which comprises no less than 11 collections of essays, not to mention uncollected ones, spread over a period of four decades.[530] It is in his journalistic essays that we will find his views of America undisguised toghether with occasional comparisons with Europe.

In *Iktishāf Qārra* (Discovering a Continent), a book of intellectual travelogue, written after a tour of some Asian countries and published in 1972, Idrīs makes a scathing attack on America. Written at the height of America's involvement in Vietnam and against a background of its continuing anti-Arab policies concerning the Palestinian question, or to put it in more general terms, at the height of the Cold War years, when to most Third-World countries America was the symbol of capitalist reaction and neo-colonialism working against progressive forces the world over, it is not difficult to understand Idrīs's anti-American rhetoric. After arguing that the role of European civilisation has receded since the Second World War to allow American civilisation to come to the fore, he goes on to define the mission and means of that civilisation. The mission is to block the progressive current of history, and the means to do that is the technology which America developed from the European science she inherited (pp. 18–27).

In another anthology of articles titled *Al-Irāda* (Will-Power), published in 1977, several articles are devoted to America. In one of them with the title 'The Decision', he talks of conflict and power being the foundation of American

society, 'the power of money, influence or guns . . .' and contrasts this with what he describes as the 'gentle, easy-going life' of the Egyptians (p. 39). He describes the preparations for heart surgery that he underwent there, and while expressing admiration for American medicine, he laments the industrialisation of the treatment process in such a way that dehumanised it and made it comparable to the production line in a car factory. At the end he wonders whether he should not have gone to England instead: 'Is England not closer to us and to our nature than those enormous human treatment factories?' (p. 40). This last rhetorical question should perhaps serve to justify my earlier proposition that Idrīs's attitude towards Europe is mellower than his to America.

In another article entitled 'America 1976', he describes the difficulty he encountered in obtaining a visa to visit the United States. The Consul tells him he is blacklisted on account of his anti-American writings, and he uses the occasion to rail at America for being 'very democratic with its own citizens but suspicious and dictatorial towards others, . . . regarding every revolutionary in the world as of necessity a threat to American security . . .' (pp. 82–83).

In yet another article, which he titles 'America, the mystery of modern times', he again holds a comparison with Europe in which the latter emerges the favourite: 'In European countries you do not see capitalism in its reality. Rather you see it trimmed with state intervention . . . but here [in America] you are at the heart of a purely capitalist world . . .' (p. 93).

In *ᶜAn ᶜAmd Ismaᶜ Tasmaᶜ* (Listen Intently and You Will Hear) he includes an article dated 1974, in which he reviews America's relations with Nasserite and post-Nasserite Egypt and holds her responsible for the 1967 Arab–Israeli war, which he describes as 'a war to assassinate ᶜAbd al-Nāṣir personally . . .' as a punishment for his nationalist policies (p. 51).

An article written in the 1960s and included in *Jabartī al-Sittīnāt* (A Jabarti of the Sixties) shows the extent to which Idrīs could get carried away in his politically motivated polemic. The article entitled 'An American asks: do we have freedom [of expression]?' denies the existence of press censorship in Egypt and argues that the absence of any criticisms of Nasser and his policies does not indicate repression but simply that the whole nation is totally behind him! Indeed he goes further by arguing that if anything, Egypt was more democratic than America because for all America's claims of democracy, the massive popular opposition to the Vietnam War was not succeeding in stopping it[531] (pp. 126–29).

In articles written in the 1980s Idrīs appears to be trying to strike a more balanced attitude towards America, but his sentiment remains basically the same.[532] For once he makes the distinction between state policies and society at large. 'What deserves to be fought against in American society', he writes, 'is not society itself, but rather the aggressive way in which it is administered so that its enormous progress is directed towards the repression of the peoples of Latin America and the Middle East, and the support of dictators . . .'.[533] In another article he argues that America with her wealth and technology is in an ideal position to become a great humanitarian power with a major civilising role to play in the world. He wonders in a tone of wishful thinking whether America could ever

assume that role.[534] Meanwhile, however, Idrīs has no illusions about relations with the West: 'We are in a state of confrontation, which is in the very least a cultural one.' Did he have any counsel for his nation *vis à vis* holding their own in this confrontation? Yes, and that consists in 'adopting and assimilating American and European technology, while retaining and strengthening our own spiritual, national and cultural wealth'.[535] The question of identity is obviously uppermost in his thinking here, as it was in the extract from *Al-Bayḍāʾ*, written almost 30 years earlier, and quoted elsewhere in this book. The counsel he gives is the stock-in-trade response among Arab intellectuals since the nineteenth century, with few exceptions such as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Louis ʿAwaḍ, namely to take science and technology and reject everything else, failing to see that science and technology were the product of a comprehensive worldview without which they would not have been possible. In his writings in the 1980s, one can indeed detect a sense of weariness of the West. 'We Arabs', he writes, 'have looked up to the West for much longer than we should have . . . our fascination with it approaches the point of sanctification. We still look on what happens in Paris, London or New York, as if they were our emotional and intellectual capitals. The West, on the other hand, has nothing for us except scorn and never thinks of us except to exploit or subjugate us, or to plunder us of the last dirhem in our wallets . . .'.[536]

This quick review of Idrīs's attitude towards the West in his journalism will, if anything, serve to underline the ambivalence of his vision as expressed in his artistic works. The West appears simultaneously attractive and repellent. The fascination with its achievements is counterbalanced by the resentment of its political opposition to Arab nationalist ambitions, while the desire to borrow and learn from it is tempered by an almost paranoid fear for identity. Another factor which becomes clear from the writer's articles is that he keeps his harshest thoughts and words for the United States; he has an empathy with Europe which he never shows in his comments on America.

The above review of the author's journalism will have served to place Idrīs's artistic vision in perspective, and will also have gone some way, I hope, to explain the difference in tone between 'Madam Vienna' and *New York 80*. Its connotations should not however be confined to understanding the work of Idrīs, as his anti-Americanism was by no means rare or eccentric; rather it is symptomatic of a popular as well as intellectual culture that has persisted since the 1960s to the present day, and in many ways has indeed worsened in more recent years. The position Idrīs took is very useful for understanding Ḥalīm Barakāt, discussed earlier, and not totally unrelated to the extreme position of Sayyid Quṭb. What we have here is a progressive, secularist Egyptian writer, a Syro-American sociologist and novelist, who lives in America and teaches in one of its reputable academic institutions, and a fundamentalist Islamic thinker writing some 30–40 years before them, but all three, with their significant differences, are united in their anti-Americanism.

The Egyptian **Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm** (b. 1937), whose novel *Najmat Aghusṭus* (1974), discussed in Chapter 4, showed uniquely a unity in suffering under political

repression between cultural representatives from Egypt and the Soviet Union, came back to the issue of the cultural encounter in a recent work, this time turning his attention to the encounter with the United States. His novel *Amrīcānlī* (The American Way, 2003), presents us with a view as negative as that of Yusūf Idrīs and Ḥalīm Barakāt in their works considered earlier. Set in San Francisco, the novel, or perhaps the anti-novel, considering its documentary, plotless form, has an Egyptian protagonist/narrator (Ibrāhīm's favourite narrative technique), who is an obvious persona for the novelist, spending a semester as visiting professor of history at one of the city's universities.[537] The professor runs a series of seminars in which he attempts to review the socio-political history of contemporary Egypt through the review of his own education, career and personal life. Through discussions and student presentations on chosen topics, as well as minor events outside the seminar room, a parallel picture emerges of the history and present reality of America in the 1990s. The intricate nature of the contemporary world scene in the age of globalisation, corporate power and American hegemony becomes stiflingly apparent, leaving no space for the individual, whether American, Egyptian or of any other nationality: this is allout totalitarianism, much more sophisticated, far-reaching and all-pervasive than anything seen in history before. This is perhaps the meaning of the pun of the subtitle of the novel, *Amrī kāna lī*, literally, 'my affair used to be in my hand', or 'I used to have control over my own affairs'; a thinly disguised jibe, when taken together with the main title, at American control of the Middle East and indeed the whole world, as the author sees it. Different as this novel is from Ibrāhīm's *Najmat Aghusṭus*, and separated from it by nearly 30 years, it is interesting to note repression of the individual continues to be his concern, and that in the post-Soviet era when 'Freedom' is assumed to have triumphed worldwide, he only maintains that a new kind of more pervasive totalitarianism has replaced it under global American domination.

* * *

Women writers and the United States

Gender was no barrier to anger with the United States and negative representations of her in literature, as proved in the work of **Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr** (b. 1946), contemporary Egyptian academic and novelist. In her autobiographical account of her study years (1973–75) at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in the United States, *Al-Riḥla: Ayyām Ṭāliba Miṣriyya fī Amrīkā* (The Journey: the Days of an Egyptian Student in America, 1983) Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr, is keen from the start to place herself in the long tradition of Egyptian encounters with the West. For one thing, the very presence of the word '*ayyām*' (days) in the title of her autobiography, links her immediately in a fortuitous act of intertextuality with the autobiography of another great Egyptian student in the West: Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and his renowned *Al-Ayyām*, which tells in its third part the story of his study years in France. But more directly, ᶜĀshūr links herself with the godfather, so to speak, of all Egyptian

students in the West, al-Ṭahṭāwī, discussed earlier in this book. 'Like Rifāᶜa [i.e. al-Ṭahṭāwī] I was on my way to distant lands in order to obtain knowledge', she writes in the opening paragraphs of her book. She is keen however to emphasise that the long time gap between her and her predecessor has made a difference: 'Unlike him, I was not travelling with the neutrality of one who knew nothing about what he was heading towards. Nor was l like the many generations of students who followed in his footsteps, only to return enamoured of the "Light" of imperialism.'[538] Thus ᶜĀshūr uses this early and brief moment of intertextuality to establish both a link and a departure point, and to prepare us through the final note of sarcasm for a perspective of America, which is not 'neutral', and which is politically motivated. The account takes place against a backdrop of the 1973 Arab–Israeli war which happens within weeks of the author's arrival in the United States. Her feelings of 'otherness' are augmented by attempts at intimidation by 'Zionist' sympathisers on the campus of Massachusetts University. ᶜĀshūr is there to study Afro-American literature,[539] nor is the link lost between her study of a historically suppressed section of American society and the story of the suppressed people of Palestine, which is always in the background in one way or another. (It will not be irrelevant to remember that the author is married to the Palestinian poet, Murīd al-Barghūthī, who comes to visit her at some point during her stay, although no intimation is intended that this has anything to do with her political position.)

Often the text betrays the cross-cultural tension. This can be through humorous anecdote, as when we are told the story of how an American woman asks a German student whether they had telephones in Germany.[540] The implications of the anecdote as to the utter ignorance of the Americans about the rest of the world, and the implied horror at what Americans might think of Egypt or Arab countries if that was what they thought of Germany are too obvious to need dwelling on. There is also the narrator's horror at the abundance of food on offer at the university refectory and even more so at the amounts wasted of that food.[541] This is obviously a third-world sensibility affronted at waste by the rich in a needy world. However, the text can be more telling of cultural stereotyping in a more subtle way, as in the juxtaposition of the descriptions of the English and Afro-American Departments at the University, where the first is associated with death and the second with life:

> In the Department of English Literature, I move amidst a pallor of colours. There, white faces prevail, and the long corridors are faintly painted. In the evening as we make for the exit, they are desolate and cold under their dim lights, pallid like death. By contrast, the building housing Afro-American Studies was unusually warm . . . and the walls are painted in bright colours: green, blue and orange; even black had a certain lustre.[542]

The text's antipathy towards the United States is undisguised; with every opportunity, relevant or irrelevant, used as an occasion to disparage American culture. On the author's first visit to Boston, she goes in the company of some friends on a tour of sites commemorating the events of the American Revolution. Here, the text is

interrupted for the author to tell us how the American Revolution, unlike the French Revolution, never fired her adolescent imagination when she was at secondary school. It was a revolution which 'taught her nothing'; a revolution about 'a number of tea chests thrown in the sea'.[543] The site of the Boston Massacre of 1770, where 5 citizens where killed in a mob confrontation with British soldiers, brings to her mind the then recent events of General Pinochet's American-backed overthrow of Allende's elected government in Chile in 1973, where 5000 where crammed in a stadium before being massacred. She then goes on to reminisce on the many massacres of the Middle East perpetrated or caused by Israel, and although she does not blame the United States for this, the implication is indubitable.[544] The announcement of the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese during a pop concert that she was attending in 1975 is greeted with jubilation as the herald that 'a phase of history was ending in our favour'; 'our' being here a collective reference to the downtrodden of the earth, among whom she clearly counts herself and her culture. In the same breath, the 'American Dream' is referred to as a 'nightmare' and an 'illusion'. A sense of triumphant solidarity is felt among students from developing countries, 'the sons and daughters of the world living under the imperialistic whip', as the writer refers to them. For them the liberation of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War with American defeat meant that their cause was right no matter how long it took to achieve victory; it meant that 'the flag of imperialism has fallen and we have seen how'.[545]

There is another aspect, less accentuated but nevertheless present, to Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr's student memoirs; a gender-based aspect, which will be seen in Chapter 6 of this book to be a consistent factor in representations of the West by female authors. The book begins with a recollection of the conflict her father had gone through in allowing her 'to go forth in the world', rather than succumb to his instinctive conservatism as a 'Muslim of rural roots'.[546] This is recaptured at the end of the book after her successful defence of her doctoral dissertation. Thus, the memoirs are made to be seen as telling the story of female emancipation. Nor is this a theme far removed from the more central one of the book, which is about political liberation; namely, that of dominated third world cultures from American imperialism.

The author's bitterness towards America, which can by no means be dismissed as an individual attitude, is best summed up in her own words close to the conclusion of the memoirs: 'I sometimes wonder whether I am able to look at America objectively. How can someone stung speak with clinical calmness about the attributes of the scorpion? How can I rid myself of this feeling of oppression, particular of the Third World human being?…'. She then goes on to explain how her admiration of the great achievements of American civilisation is always marred by her realisation of its bloody foundations; the 'sinful colonialist violence', the extermination of the indigenous population.[547]

Many years later, Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr was to write a documentary novel by the title, *Qiṭᶜa min ᵓUrūbbā* (A Piece of Europe, 2003), in which she laments the failure of Khedive Ismail's dream to turn Cairo into a piece of Europe architecturally and culturally. The novel is an attempt at tracing the loss of the dream through the phases of history during the latter part of the nineteenth century through to the

Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003, preparations for which are recorded by the novel. Internal politics and burgeoning foreign intervention share the blame, with the latter paradoxically, but not uncharacteristically among Arab writers, being also celebrated for introducing some of the best architectural achievements of modern Cairo and of commercial enterprises that enhanced the quality of life, and whose destruction by later generations in the post-independence era is lamented.[548] Like so much of seemingly anti-Western writing, this lament emphasises the distinction in the consciousness of the Arab intellectual between the Western civilisation and Western colonialism or equally anti-Arab, postcolonial attitudes and policies.

Another less hostile female Egyptian account of student years in the United States is that by **Laila Abou Saif** (b. 1941), academic, theatre director and feminist activist. Her *A Bridge Through Time: A Memoir*, originally written in English, was published in 1985, only two years before Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr's *Al-Riḥla* (The Journey). It is primarily a full autobiography rather than a concentrated account of the scholarship years in the United States; the latter occupying only a modest part of the memoir. Abou Saif studied at the University of Illinois, Urbana, in the mid-1960s during the prime of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. These however are accorded in the book the most fleeting attention: Abou Saif seemed to have concentrated on her studies with little involvement in the public scene and its political ramifications, and the text does not bear witness to such statements of *engagement* as are sometimes encountered:

> The realities of my country loomed large in this clean, tree-shaded, idyllic community [of Urbana]. I began to dread that moment when I would have to come face-to-face with reality again, especially as I would be seeing it with new eyes made more susceptible with this double image. I began to feel that my life in America was unreal, a Disneyland, a joyride that would soon come to a screeching halt.[549]

These are more the revised sentiments of the autobiographer than the sentiments of the experience of 20 years earlier. For Abou Saif, the journey to America was one of personal emancipation, in which America offered freedom from an arranged marriage, from the common lot of most of her women compatriots, and from the stifling political atmosphere of Nasser's Egypt. When she returns to the United States for a second visit to complete her doctoral studies in 1968 shortly after Egypt's defeat by Israel in the 1967 war, she describes the customs' officer's search of her luggage at New York airport in these terms: 'He was searching my luggage, but he should have been searching my heart, for it was there that I concealed my hostility for America.'[550] This hostility, the author would have us believe, was the result of America's support for Israel in the war. But again, the text does not substantiate in any way this statement. America remains for the author a symbol of freedom. And many years later after her return to Egypt and involvement in the country's academic and artistic life throughout the 1970s and

up to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the assassination of Sadat in the early 1980s, she ends her memoir at a juncture in her life when things had reached a stalemate in her personal life, her career, and the life of the country as a whole. She decides to leave Egypt, and the last paragraph of the book shows the memoirist waiting in her flat for the taxi that will take her to the airport to catch her flight once more to New York. 'And now freedom beckons again, like an enchanting rainbow',[551] is the last sentence of the book.

Both ᶜĀshūr's and Abou Saif's books are life stories with a strong theme of female emancipation. Both are stories where the ambition of study in America was achieved against great social and family odds. However, in ᶜĀshūr's book, America is incidental, is merely a tool in the story of emancipation and the role it plays does not win her a place in the author's good books, when it comes to her nationalist sentiments which are in conflict with American policies. On the contrary, this conflict overshadows any positive values that may otherwise have been noticed in American life. By contrast, in Abou Saif's book the basic value of America as a symbol of freedom, on the individual as well as the political level, is never questioned despite the perceived conflict between its governmental policies and Egypt's national interests. The sequel to her book, *Middle East Journal: a Woman's Journey into the Heart of the Arab World*, published in 1990, sees her returning to Egypt on a number of visits to conduct interviews with some political and cultural personalities in an attempt to understand the Arab–Israeli conflict and the socio-political changes taking place in Egypt in the Mubarak years. If anything the second book sees the complete alienation of the author from her mother culture; the sensibility lying behind its journal entries is almost a Western sensibility. In both the original book and its mundane sequel, Abou Saif seems to have been able to isolate almost clinically the one American value that mattered most to herself, and from her point of view to her culture, from any irrelevant entanglements: freedom. Abou Saif's existence on the sidelines of politics and ideology, unlike the more involved, left-leaning ᶜĀshūr, may have helped.

Another female view of America, influenced by politics too but more critical of the self than the other, is by the Syrian **Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī** (b. 1922), better known for her biography of Mayy Ziyāda and the publication of her collected works, and also wrote a short novel by the title *Al-Burtuqāl al-Murr* (Bitter Oranges, 1975). The novel is set in Cleveland in the United States (of which the author, unlike ᶜĀshūr and Abou Saif discussed above, is not known to have had firsthand experience) and centred on a love story between a Syrian young man sent there to study medicine and a Swedish nurse. The novel is written partly in the form of a journal kept by the Syrian youth and partly in the epistolary method as the protagonist writes to his family and friends in Damascus and receives letters from them which are produced or quoted at length in the novel. The work is of no mentionable aesthetic value, based on reportage rather than showing, and with no attempt at characterisation, and no recognisable plot either. The love story ends in the sacrifice of love for the sake of the homeland, as the protagonist rejects a lucrative job offer in the United States to return to his country which needs his

expertise. The nationalist theme is strengthened with him enrolling in the Syrian army as a doctor during the Yom Kippur War in 1973, shortly after his return from Cleveland. Despite this the novel is replete with criticisms of repressive traditions of Arab society and politics in letters received by the protagonist, juxtaposed with high praise of features of Western life recorded in his journal and in letters he sends home. These range from liberalism and the dignity of the individual,[552] respect and equality for women (p. 76), both of which are lacking in Arab society as the correspondence shows, to an exoneration of Westerners of the stereotypical Oriental accusation of coldness or impoverished emotions; Westerners are as emotional as Easterners, we are told; only more realistic and better at controlling their feelings and showing dignity at emotionally charged situations, such as death (pp. 59–60). The novel being about an Arab in America, there is also the inevitable criticism of the influence of the Jewish lobby in the country and the pro-Israeli policies of the United States.

6 The encounter through female eyes

The theme of the encounter with the West has been well establilshed in Arabic fictive writing since at least the 1930s as we have seen, and has over generations assumed many forms and expressed many visions, which in their own way record, or reflect, the changing view of the self and Western other as Arab intellectuals responded to the challenge/lure of Western civilisation in pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial days. All the representations of the West that have been considered so far have been creations of male writers, with the exception of the three female representations of the United States discussed at the end of Chapter 5. This is a natural reflection of the comparatively late arrival of women writers on the scene of fiction in Arabic: whereas the beginnings of the genre can be traced back in Arabic letters to the 1870s, significant female contributions to the genre were not to materialise until the second half of the twentieth century, notwithstanding earlier attempts.[553] On the other hand, representations of the West based on the theme of the encounter were not to figure in female fictional output until the 1960s, reaching a staggering degree of artistic maturity and originality of vision by the 1990s.

Hitherto approaches to the subject have relied on the male sensibility of their authors, on a male viewpoint of self and other, on a male worldview in general. That is why in representations of sexual encounters, the Eastern self has always been male, while the Western other is female. In the work of Ḥanān al-Shaykh, which in my view has revolutionised representations of the West in Arabic fictive writing, we shall see this reversed, with the central sensibility being female, while the Western other is embodied in a male character. This reversal of the gender of subject and object was inevitably to lead to other changes in the very nature of representations of the West. In women's approaches, we shall always find issues of the cultural encounter mixed with issues of gender: to their contemplations of the Western other, women writers have brought with them some of their intimate concerns about female emancipation, the status of woman in society, and also male–female relations on the individual level. And it being the fact that Western societies have stridden ahead of the East in women's liberation, the image of the West as a space of freedom for the Arab female will emerge and establish itself as a given. Another important factor to bear in mind while considering representations of the West in the work of Arab women writers is the fact that they

arrived on the scene in the post-independence era, and effectively only in the second phase of that era, characterised in Chapter 4 as the era of 'Humbled Encounters', so to speak. The historical and political circumstances expounded in that chapter which dictated the change of attitude towards the West in the imaginative creations of male writers have naturally influenced women writers in like manner.

I have shown already how Sulaymān Fayyāḍ's *Voices* was quick to capture the dark mood of the Arab psyche in the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War. Developments in the Arab world since that catastrophe have not been seen to be for the better. Several other major wars have taken place in the region: the Iran–Iraq war (1980–88), the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait leading to the Persian Gulf War in 1990–91, the American–British invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its continued occupation. There has also been the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90), the Algerian Civil War (1992– Present), and the Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005). Democratic government and respect for human rights have continued to be elusive dreams with totalitarian regimes entrenched in almost every seat of power in Arab countries, often with devastating consequences for religious and ethnic minorities and political opponents in general, while economic prosperity and a decent standard of living have remained evasive pursuits for the average Arab citizen. Meanwhile, against this background, and perhaps largely in social response to it, there has been the steady rise of Islamic fundamentalism across Arab lands, reaching unspeakable levels of violence in some parts, and making life intolerable for ethnic and religious minorities, for liberals, for secularists and non-conformists in general, and above all for women. It should come as no surprise, all things considered, that the mood of disillusionment with the self, the desire for self-flagellation in front of the other, continues to be the prevailing mood in representations of the West in Arabic literature today.

In recent decades, and in response to the political and social upheavals described earlier, a new factor has evolved in manifestations of the Arab quest for Europe in the form of migration to the West, to the very land of the other. Significant numbers of Arabs now live in European diaspora. Some came by choice, perhaps in search of a better life, others to flee the ravages of war, while others still came in search of human rights that their societies, or ruling regimes, have denied them for political, religious, ethnic or whatnot reasons. Whatever the case may be, this has introduced a new element in literary reperesentations of the cultural encounter, namely that the West for the Arab individual is no longer an oppressor but a saviour, a place of refuge from repression at home, a space of freedom with the promise of prosperity. It is only natural that Arab intellectuals, who live themselves in exile or diaspora should be in the forefront of the process of exploring these new grounds. In tandem with male writers who lived in the West for extended periods of time in recent decades, such as Bahāʾ Ṭāhir, discussed in Chapter 4, Arab women writers of the diaspora have also been deeply affected by the experience and with them too the outcome has been a reconciliatory view of the other, indeed often a view of the other that idealised

him and raised his values above those of the self's culture, as we shall see next in some instances.

* * *

Syrian novelist's **Kūlīt (Collette) Khūrī's** (b. 1936) second novel of her career, *Layla Wāḥida* (A Single Night, 1961) may have initiated what was to become a near convention among Arab women writers addressing the theme of the cultural encounter, by which I mean the inclination to mix gender with cultural issues; a trend that will later be fully developed at the hands of Ghāda al-Sammān and Hanān al-Shaykh, as we shall see.

A romantic novel *par excellence*, it is nevertheless one of the earliest to form a hard nucleus of women's liberation fiction, and women writers with a more realistic bent of mind were later to come back to the same concerns if from a different, more realistic view angle. *Layla Wāḥida* tells the story of a young Syrian wife, Rashā, married off too young (at 15) to Salīm, a successful businessman, more than twice her age. The marriage, forced by her family, puts an abrupt end to her education and adolescent dreams. The novel is set in Paris, ten years into the marriage, and as the title suggests covers no more than twenty-four hours, with the first-person narrative resorting to simple flashbacks to retrieve relevant facts and sentiments form the past.

Rashā travels to France for treatment from suspected infertility (which later on transpires to have been her husband's problem, deliberately hidden from her by him). She leaves her husband in Marseilles and takes the train alone to Paris for her medical appointment the following day. On the train she meets Camille, a Frenchman. And true to romantic form, it is love at first sight. Camille turns out to be an unhappily married man: he was a pilot in the Second World War who received a serious injury from which he was cured only thanks to the loving care of a devoted nurse, whom he then married out of gratitude, rather than love. Rashā's stereotypically oriental looks attract him to her: 'you are a lady come out of *The Thousand and One Nights* . . . . Many mysteries hide in your eyes', he tells her.[554] By a strange coincidence, Camille turns out to be half Syrian himself, having been born 40 years earlier to a Syrian father who married his French mother against the wishes of his family while studying in Paris, only to die shortly after his son's birth. Camille grows up a Frenchman through and through but with a yearning for his oriental origins that never had a chance to be fulfilled until he set eyes on Rashā on the train. On the other hand, Rashā, whose own life has been one of frustration and emotional aridity with a husband who saw her as no more than a beautiful ornament, finds in Camille the youthfulness, the recognition of her femininity, the warmth and love that she had heretofore never experienced. She ends up spending the night in his arms, and is awakened for the first time in her life to her sensuality.

All this happens in the course of one day, and is relayed to us through a long confessional letter that Rashā writes to her husband in the hours following the encounter. It all defies belief, even within the accepted framework of romantic

fiction, as the narrative depends on telling rather than showing, using a simple prose if overindulgently sentimental. The ending of the novel lives up to its sloppy romanticism, when the heroine, in an agitated state of mind on her way to the train station, is fatally hit by a car. As she lies between life and death in the ambulance, the paramedic asks her if she knows anyone in Paris. To which question, her dying words in response are: 'Here . . . I got to know . . . life.'[555]

The significance of her final words is not too far-fetched: the repressed Oriental woman found fulfilment only in the West, in the arms of a Frenchman. But why did Camille have to have Syrian blood in him? Is there an insinuation of the benefit of cultural hybridity? And why did his father have to marry a French woman against the objections of his family? That was an act of rebellion that perhaps the author thought mirrored her heroine's own rebellion in being unfaithful to her husband. It was also an act of cultural encounter which produced Camille, who embodied Rashā's dreams of manhood and love. These are signals that the author certainly meant to impregnate with some meaning, but at the beginning of her writing career she lacked both the craft and intellectual depth to follow them through. The novel's main preoccupation is with female emancipation, just as it was in Khūrī's first novel, *Ayyām maʿahu* (Days with him, 1959), and not with the encounter of cultures. Khūrī's transfer of scene from Damascus to Paris is primarily decorative.[556] Nevertheless, Khūrī's novel was groundbreaking in its day with its rebellious stance, its moral daring in confronting a conservative society with a situation where female marital infidelity is treated with sympathy, not only without the least moralisation but with an implied condemnation of social tradition which placed the heroine in the circumstances that led to her tragic end.

Nearly 15 years after *Layla Wāḥida*, Khūrī wrote another novel set in the West, this time in London: *Wa Marra Ṣayf* (And a Summer Passed, 1975). It is a somewhat complex, multi-triangled love story, where an Italian man falls in love with an Egyptian woman, who is in love with a married Egyptian man being treated in a London hospital, and with whom his young English nurse falls in love. This cobweb of relationships is overtly manipulated by an author who is ever present in the narrative, thinking loudly about her characters' actions and wondering to what consequences she should let those actions lead them. Here again the emphasis is not on cultural differences or the encounter as such, but rather on the intricacies of the relationships themselves, brought into focus by being taken out of the normal environment of Cairo and isolated, as if for observation, in the foreign milieu of a London hospital and a London hotel. Europeans and Egyptians alike seem to take each other for granted as human beings, and conflicts arising seem to arise from the complexity of the relationships and the nature of the agents as human beings per se, and not as agents of this or that culture. This in itself may be the author's unspoken statement on the East–West debate.

Syrian novelist, short-story writer, essayist and journalist, **Ghāda al-Sammān** was born in 1942 in a village near Damascus into a well-to-do professional family. She studied English literature at the University of Damascus and then at the American University in Beirut, where she later took up a career in journalism.

She travelled in Europe during the years 1967–69 before returning to Beirut again. A prolific writer, she has published nearly 30 books in a multiplicity of genres since *ᶜAynāka Qadarī* (Your Eyes are my Destiny), the collection of short stories with which she started her writing career in 1962. Writing during the heyday of existentialism in Arabic literature, Al-Sammān courted controversy from the start by being outspoken and confrontational in her advocacy of women's liberaton issues, and her willingness to explore, in the context of conservative society, the psychology of the rebellious adolescent female and relations between the sexes. In common with many Arab writers, the defeat in the 1967 war with Israel was a turning point in her career. Now she turned her attention to wider social and political issues, though without losing sight of her earlier women's emancipation concerns. The eruption of the Lebanese Civil War in the mid-1970s saw her join the Arab diaspora in Europe, where she has since lived mostly in Paris.

Al-Sammān's interest in the question of the cultural encounter with the West can be traced back to her early writings, particularly to some of the stories of her collection, *Layl al-Ghurabāʾ* (The Night of Strangers, 1966.) The collection, or at least those stories in it that address the theme, was written following a one-week visit by the author to her brother in London, her first at the time.[557] Written when the author was in her early twenties, and preoccupied with issues of female emancipation coupled with a desire to shock her Arab readers, the collection's sensationalism and dreary view of the other can perhaps be understood.

Let us stop at the story 'al-Miwāʾ' (The Meow), where the female protagonist is on a visit to her brother who studies in London. While he is out on female escapades, she is confined to the flat, where she is constantly haunted by the animal sounds of the unceasing lovemaking of the couple next door, subjected to another neighbour's sermons of a new sexual morality whereby a boyfriend is dropped one day and a new one picked up the following without further ado, while a third neighbour still, who is lesbian, has taken a fancy to her and is sparing no effort to seduce her. In short, London is portrayed as a cesspool of sex, and nothing else; all of which symbolically heightened by the constant meowing of a cat in heat coming from the street below. In what seems to be a fleeting endorsement of the dichotomy of the spiritual East and materialistic West, the animality of love in London is contrasted with the romanticism of love in Damascus through periodic flashbacks to a past relationship of the protagonist. What protects this story from being entirely a specimen of cultural labelling in terms of black and white is the way al-Sammān portrays her heroine as not immune to the degradations she describes. The meowing of carnality is shown to almost engulf her on occasion, to be rising from a suppressed psyche inside her as much as invading her from all quarters outside herself. Within the framework of a story that is essentially concerned with gender despite the facade of cultural comparison, al-Sammān is portraying an Eastern young woman who is dazzled by the very sexual freedom to which she professes her contempt.

Al-Sammān's next story in the collection, 'Buqᶜat Ḍawʾ ᶜalā Masraḥ' (A Spot of Light on a Stage) carries out a process of complete dehumanisation of the

other, where a landlady's only concern on seeing the protagonist cut her hand is to wipe the spots from the floor with apparent disgust, and a neighbour doctor gruffly tells her he could not tend her wound because he was on holiday.[558] Melodramatic portrayal dominates the story, as when the doctor is seen getting drunk with his she-dog at the local pub and ends up, in his desperate loneliness, burying his face in her neck and crying. The protagonist books the first flight to her home country in disgust. The irony in the protagonist's attitude, of which her creator appears unaware, is that the country to which she is running back from the horrors of the West is the one where her erstwhile beloved was imprisoned and tortured for political reasons. He, by contrast, has just arrived in the London she is leaving, the wreck of the idealist young man he once was.

Another story, 'Yā Dimashq' (O! Damascus) continues with the relentless dehumanisation of the other, with a male protagonist this time. The technique of juxtaposing the present event in London with moments from the past in Damascus through flashbacks is maintained as in the already discussed stories and used in like manner to contrast filth with purity, humanity with animality, cold with warmth, materialistically based relationships with ones based on love and loyalty. The main situation in the story is that of a poor English woman who takes the Syrian protagonist to her dirty dark room for sex in return for a meal. When the light is lit, it turns out that the woman's paralysed husband and two young children have been in the room throughout. Rather than show any sympathy for the plight of the family that reduced the woman to that practice and the husband to accepting it, the narrative evinces nothing but condemnation, disgust, and a sense of moral superiority.

Written when the author was in her early twenties, it is difficult to take these stories too seriously or treat them as anything but juvenilia; they are rather flat in their view of human experience, rather self-absorbed when it came to viewing one's own culture in relation to that of the other. Their reduction of London (and by extension modern Western culture) to a city of seedy sex and nothing else subscribes to one of the crudest Arab stereotypes of the West as an obscene libidinous entity with no control whatsoever over its sexual behaviour.

A story by the title 'al-Ḥayāt badaʾat lil-taww', (Life has just begun) comes from a later collection. The story is included in the collection *Zaman al-Ḥubb al-Ākhar*, first published in 1978 although the author backdates the writing of the story inside the book to 1967, that is, around the same time as the stories of the much earlier collection of 1966, discussed earlier. This may explain why the story represents no change in the stereotypical representation of the other. The female protagonist of the story, like most of al-Sammān's heroines of that phase, is in search of emancipation from a male chauvinist culture; a process in whose pursuit she is frustrated at everyturn, not least by the man she loves, who is a true representative of all that is negative in society's view of woman. The captivity of women in a male-dominated culture is embodied by that of a captured she-wolf in a cage, whose woeful howling is reminiscent of the meowing of the cat in the 'The Meow', discussed earlier. Within this framework, she meets a Frenchman at a party around a function she was covering in Tunis. The Frenchman proves no better than Eastern men when it came to perceptions of woman. He hates, we are

told, the fact that his wife is a 'thinking working woman', and prefers 'the female to stay a female'. Thus his view of our heroine as a 'an Oriental enchantress coming out of the tents of the Thousand and One Nights . . . and who was created for love . . . '[559] does not only befit his stereotypical portrayal as a Westerner but also al-Sammān's stereotypical view of all men as male chauvinists. His otherness is in fact totally incidental to the story; the concern of the writer is not with the self–other but with that of the male–female. Here, we perhaps have the rudimentary beginnings of what was in more mature works to become a familiar pattern where al-Sammān's examination of self in relation to other was always to mix issues of culture with those of gender; a tendency that is not unique to her among women writers who dealt with the theme of the Western encounter in their fiction, as I have stated in the opening section of this chapter.

Al-Sammān's novel, *Laylat al-Milyār* (Night of the Milliard) (1986), is separated from the discussed works by nearly 20 years, and is set almost entirely in Geneva, marking a number of works where the author was increasingly to preoccupy herself with problems of the Lebanese diaspora in Europe in the aftermath of the Civil War of 1975–90. This is an amorphous novel with a huge number of characters and rather entangled storylines, rendered all the more confusing by the abundance of detail and internal monologues, readily brought in by an omniscient author, as if on tap. The novel is primarily conceived as a condemnation of the self-interested Lebanese plutocracy which fomented and profited from the Civil War. Nevertheless, although the action takes place in Geneva, and despite few and far between wistful comparisons of the state of affairs in Switzerland where life is safe and the individual respected, and the opposite in war-torn Lebanon, the European location is predominantly irrelevant; what al-Sammān seems to have done is transport Lebanese society to Switzerland without allowing her characters to come into genuine contact with the European other, or the new milieu to influence their thinking or action in any noticeable way.

Ghurba taḥta al-Ṣifr (Exile under Degree Zero), a collection of newspaper articles written between 1980 and 1985 and published in a compilation under that title in 1986, the same year as *Laylat al-Milyār*, consists mostly of an account of the personal experiences of the author during life in self-imposed exile in Europe (mainly in Geneva and Paris) and reflections on Western *vis à vis* Arab life. The dominant theme is the lamentation of the absence of the values of freedom, democracy, liberalism and secularism from Arab societies by contrast with Europe, and is often coupled with a strong sense of yearning for a time when those values would prevail in Arab society too.

It is in her collection of short stories, *Al-Qamar al-Murabbaᶜ* (1994), translated as *The Square Moon*, 1998, that Ghāda al-Sammān, brings to bear for the first time in her fiction in a serious and meaningful way, her experience of life in exile. The ten stories are devoted in varying measure to an exploration of the predicament of the Arab woman; the very issue at the heart of al-Sammān's work since the beginning of her career, but this time the probing is heightened through the juxtaposition of two sets of values, one that gives woman her freedom and one that does not, that is, Western values against Arab values.

I shall deal here with two stories to illustrate my point. The first is titled 'Qaṭᶜ Raᵓs al-Qiṭṭ', or 'Beheading the Cat', where the author places side by side traditional and modern values, aggravating the contrast through its placement in a European milieu. ᶜAbd al-Razzāq, or Abdul as his name is pronounced by the French, and Nadine are the two main characters of the story, who both end up in Paris as a result of the Lebanese Civil War. Abdul is an academic in his thirties, while Nadine is a student in her twenties, who grew up in Paris, to which she had fled the war with her family aged only ten, becoming 'a brilliant mixture of the magic of East and West'.[560] As for Abdul, he had already been a fully grown young man when he came to Paris, and thus laden with a fair amount of the traditional legacy of his Arab culture, unlike Nadine who arrived young enough to be shaped largely by the values of a different culture. Unlike what she might have grown up to be in Lebanon, she is emancipated in thought and action; she believes in equality between man and woman on every level including sexual experience. To her the fact that Abdul is a man does not grant him any 'inherited gains' (p. 11), nor does she accept her Lebanese identity unconditionally: 'I am a woman who is modern, realistic, free, independent, in love, and Lebanese. If I have the right to combine all these qualities with my Lebanese identity, then I am Lebanese' (p. 8). Abdul, on the other hand, boasts that he is 'a rationalist, one who accepted logic, a Cartesian as they would say here in Paris . . . ' (p. 3). His rationalism and logicality fail to come to his aid, nevertheless, when put to the test by his relationship with Nadine; practice in personal life proves more difficult than academic persuasion. Thus we find him uncomfortable towards Nadine's bold, venturesome spirit, her free liaison with men and her sexual experience. Nor is he less uncomfortable about the fact that she is a student of business administration and financial planning rather than languages and home economics, and that she intends to work after graduation rather than become a housewife (p. 4).

Al-Sammān uses techniques of magical realism (the collection is subtitled '*qiṣaṣ ghrāᵓibiyya*, or Supernatural Tales) to underline the conflict of values that simmers inside Abdul as the time approaches for him to decide whether to propose to Nadine or not. This is the technical framework in which to understand the character of the mysterious woman from Beirut, clad in black, who visits Abdul in his Parisian flat, enquiring about his mother and offering to act as matchmaker on his behalf. She proposes to find him, '. . . a rare bride-to-be, my son, quiet and obedient. No one but her mother has ever kissed her mouth. She'll never leave home without asking your permission – unless it is to her grave. She'll give birth only to boys. A maid by day, a slave girl by night, she'll be a ring on your finger which you can turn around as you wish and take off when you wish. And if you rub it, it will say, "At your service, your slave is at your command" ' (p. 1). This lady has no real existence, as the details of the narrative poignantly suggest, with phenomena such as her image not being reflected in mirrors, her shoes leaving no mark on dust-covered floors, and her body no dent in soft chairs, in addition to the fact that no one other than Abdul is able to see or hear her. The lady proves to be none but his aunt who died in his boyhood a frustrated spinster, the victim of a patriarchal society where matchmakers had no time for women

bereft of white complexion and attractive features (p. 14). The mysterious lady therefore is none but an embodiment of Abdul's perplexity before the opposed values of his original and host cultures, the latter being represented by Nadine, the woman he wants to marry, and who is the complete opposite of his deceased aunt.

The other story I want to stop at, one which shares the concerns of 'Beheading the Cat' as we shall see, is 'Jinniyyat al-Baja^{c}' or 'The Swan Genie'. The scene is again Paris where a wealthy Lebanese family has taken refuge from the civil war. At the beginning wealth solves all problems, but when European bank accounts are depleted and the sale of land and property in Lebanon and transfer of money become impossible because of the war, it is the wife who saves the family from hunger and humiliation by going out to work in a Parisian fashion house; previously she had been nothing but a beautiful ornament for her rich and doting husband to flaunt. That husband, by contrast, gives in to depression and inaction when they are faced with the crisis, and for the first time in their life lets his wife take the lead. Years pass and the war ends, and with it the need to live in exile working hard for a meagre income. It was now time to return to Beirut, and as the wife puts it, to hang 'my diplomas in my husband's kitchen and perform the duties of director of spousal receptions and public relations when the war had liberated me!' (p. 103). One might note here that if war 'liberates' through its reshaping of society and its rewriting of its dominant values, exile too contributes to the liberation experience by dint of its offering of an alternative cultural model, a substitute set of values. Thus the protagonist of the story finds herself unable to relinquish her gains from war and exile in terms of freedom, economic independence and the attendant self-esteem. She sums up her newfound identity powerfully:

> I am tired and no longer able to adjust again to a society [Lebanon] that daily humiliates and insults me.... Here [in Paris] I have rested from all the small details which used to offend me in my homeland and which I did not know how to respond to, because they appeared to be part of the prevailing customs at which no one paused to protest. I no longer feel it is normal or acceptable to be insulted merely because I am a woman and to have no right to travel unless a male permits me, when I have been the one who, like a cat carrying her kittens with its teeth, carried all the males of my family in our misery away from our homeland. I am no longer willing to hear stories or read them in newspapers about a man who killed his sister because her behaviour did not please him, or about another who required his wife to return to the home out of obedience to a court order...and took one more wife in order to spite her.... Now, I own my house;...I have a job that keeps me from the humiliation of begging, I am the citizen of a state that will take care of me in my old age and pay my health expenses and my pension. I can say I am a free woman....
>
> (pp. 110–11)

Whether Abdul marries Nadine or not in the first story, and whether the wife returns to Beirut or not and on what conditions if she does in the second story, is

not of the essence. What matters in the two stories, and the rest of the collection for that matter, is the juxtaposition of two value systems of two different cultures with authorial sympathy being firmly in favour of the cultural values of the other. From the naive rejection and dehumanisation of her early stories, al-Sammān has come a long way in identifying the cultural values of the other as offering the way to redemption for the Arab woman, and by implication Arab society at large.[561]

Lebanese author **Ḥanān al-Shaykh** (b. 1945) with half a dozen novels, a couple of collections of short stories, and two plays to her name, since she started her writing career in the late 1960s making her mark in 1980 with the publication of her famed Lebanese Civil War novel, *The Story of Zahra*, is without doubt one of the most accompolished fiction writers in Arabic today. She has risen from a traditional, Shiᶜī Muslim lower middle-class background to become one of the most liberal, taboo-breaking women writers of her generation. In her work, she is particularly concerned with the baring of social and political hypocrisy and the exploration of female sexuality, and has done so with a persistence and an explicitness that at one time gained her notoriety that only the seriousness and artistic quality of her work were able eventually to dispel. The originality of thought and freshness of outlook that characterise her work in general, she brought to her representations of the West in her fiction, a subject inspired by her long firsthand experience Western culture, having lived in London since the early 1980s. Two relevant works by al-Shaykh will be examined here: a short story by the title '*Aknus al-Shams ᶜan al-Suṭūḥ*' ('I Sweep the Sun off Rooftops'), included in the eponymous collection, published in Arabic in1994, and translated into English under the same title in 1998; the other work is the novel *Innahā London yā ᶜAzīzī* (2001), published in English in the same year under the title, *Only in London*.

Ḥanān al-Shaykh presents her female protagonist's perception of the self and the other within a framework that can be seen as characteristic of the way the Arab émigré in the West generally sees himself/herself in relation to the other, indeed in a way not unlike the collective Arab perception of the self in relation to the Western other at this moment in history, if one may generalise. This perception is characterised by a feeling of inferiority towards the other. It is a perception which typifies the other as the model to be emulated and the yardstick by which to judge both the achievements and failures of the self; a perception in which there is a latent desire to please the other, to win his approval of what the self does and to convince him that the self is doing what it can to rise to his level and to adopt both his intellectual principles and way of life.[562] This feeling of inferiority may be a vestige of the colonial days, but there is no doubting that it has survived on conscious as well as subliminal levels for more than half a century now into the postcolonial era.[563] Fanon may have defined colonised people as those, 'in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality'. But long after the end of the colonisation of Arab nations, the 'inferiority complex' seems conversely to stem from the inability to bury some aspects of the local original culture that are no longer viable in the modern age. And as the modern age is synonymous with the West, the perceived inviability with it is bound to generate

this sense of inferiority, which can be transcended here and there by excellence on the individual level, and can be denied here and there through further withdrawal into inviability through fanaticism and the organised embracement of fundamentalism. But these acts of denial and hollow defiance serve only to confirm the inviability and the concomitant feeling of inferiority.

On the story level, this is what Ḥanān al-Shaykh's emigrant protagonist in London means when she says about her English boyfriend, 'I wanted his approval because he was English. I wanted everyone's approval from the bus conductor to the Indian shopkeeper because he owned a shop and spoke English.'[564] Having paid for an overcoat she bought at Marks and Spencer, she feels contented because the cashier girl had smiled at her and commended her choice, which means that she 'approves of my taste and the manner in which I conducted myself while paying'.[565] Again, when she enters a pub for the first time in her life with her English boyfriend and his mates, she is unable to say a word because of the loud din, and drinks only water as she does not drink alcohol, but 'standing there like the English in the crowd and the smoke made me feel proud, overjoyed, and filled me with self-confidence'.[566] In the beginning it had not crossed her mind that street beggars existed in London. Eventually, she would give them charity 'and feel proud because I have more money than someone English even if a beggar'.[567] But above all, when she surrenders her dear and long-protected virginity to her boyfriend, who is appalled rather than flattered at the discovery, she does it because 'he is English, someone from this great country which rules half the world [*sic*]',[568] and she wonders, 'Is it because he is English that he does not take pride in having deflowered me?'[569]

Where does this feeling of inferiority spring from? It will not be fair to expect the story or its author to address this question; essentially, the story shows a state of being or becoming at a certain moment in time. However, the wider implications of the individual consciousness portrayed in the story to the question of how the Arab self sees the Western other cannot be lost on us when seen in the generic context of the treatment of the theme in Arabic literature. Ḥanān al-Shaykh here is making a fresh approach to the theme in which the other is not seen as an oppressor but a saviour, an approach which links her vision to that of Sulayman Fayyāḍ's *Voices*, discussed in Chapter 4. The question still persists: where does this feeling of inferiority spring from? The irony is that it is not shown as engendered by an arrogant or disdainful attitude on the part of the Western other, whether on the individual or institutional level. The protagonist experiences nothing of the sort. On the contrary, her host society offers her opportunity. She, the uneducated Arab emigrant who barely speaks English, finds employment, shelter and a decent life. The inferiority is in fact a 'carry-over' feeling from her own culture, the story seems to point out. It is a reflection of the original marginal state of existence that the emigrant suffered in her homeland, of the repression of the political authority or social conventions left behind, but not quite forgotten, not quite cleansed of the subverted soul.

Our protagonist escapes to the land of the Western other from: 'the monotony of days in my country. The poverty and the nothingness. The men of the family

and their threatening looks. The men of the neighbourhood and their watchful eyes. My mother and her harsh words . . . . I am happy in London. I am free and mistress of myself and my pocket. How can I not be happy, when I, who am regarded as ugly in my country, can hear him [i.e. her boyfriend] praise my dark skin and frizzy hair? . . . '.[570] Our female protagonist here runs away from a double repression: she may share with males in her country 'the monotony, the poverty and the nothingness', but as a female she suffers the added repression of the men of the family and the neighbourhood, and of her mother, who despite her femaleness is appointed by dint of her age and family position custodian of the patriarchal mores of society. It is no wonder then that the warm climate and shining sun of her country mean nothing to her. When her boyfriend wonders how she could leave the sunshine and come to live under the clouds and misery of England, her answer is very telling in its simplicity: 'What do I do with the sun? Sweep it off the rooftop?'[571]

The story begins with a tense dramatic moment, after which the narrative takes us back to the beginning leading up to it before the situation is picked up again and redeveloped to the point of illumination. It begins with the moment when the protagonist discovers her English boyfriend with another man in her bed. Momentarily unhinged at the sight of the two men, she screams and pours cold water over them before she dashes out to roam the streets of London and its underground stations at night in a distraught state. The two men only laugh at her shock and fury, when she had expected them to be dumbfounded, to wish out of their shame that 'the earth would split open and swallow them'.[572] And when she rings her boyfriend's sister in an attempt to share the shocking news with someone, the former has nothing to say but to rebuke her for calling her so late at night over a matter that was not the business of either of them. As she wanders aimlessly in the streets of London, images of her native Arab village come back to her. In her bewilderment she wonders: 'Why am I here? Why don't I go back to my country?' Again, freedom seems to be the answer: 'Is it because here I am at a safe distance from the eyes of the people of my village and the questions of the men of my family about my goings and comings, and those of my mother's as to why I was lying on my tummy or staying too long in the bathroom?'[573]

The story however harbours a great irony which gives it its total significance and explains the protagonist's final acceptance of the other's morality, shocking as it is to her own Eastern sensibility. The irony stems from the different attitudes of the two cultures regarding homosexuality. I will now explain what I mean by that. When the protagonist surprises the two men in bed, a tragic image from her past life in her native village flickers in her consciousness by association: the image of 'Sa^{c}d laid out on the floor motionless . . . '.[574] Who was Sa^{c}d? Why did he become a body laid out on the ground? Why does the free association of ideas produce in our protagonist's consciousness this particular image at this particular moment? The answer to these questions, which arise at the beginning of the story, is something we do not know until we are very close to the end, when the woman returns home feeling clearer in the mind after her feverish walk in the streets of London. Sa^{c}d was an ordinary family man from her village, who was rumoured

to have been seen lying in a compromising way with a passing shepherd outside the village. Unable to live with the disgrace, he takes his own life on the same night, leaving behind a note protesting his innocence. The whole village is thrown in turmoil as Saᶜd's family rises in quest of vengeance for his death. Herein lies the cultural irony I have referred to earlier. A proven homosexual act in London has no legal or social implications whatsoever; on the contrary, interference with which is considered an impingement on personal freedom, while a suspected, merely suspected, comparable act in an Arab village, where the grip of the social moral code on the individual is so relentless, leads to tragedy and bloodshed.

When our protagonist returns home, she is confronted by a different vision of herself as she walks through the door; herself as a tall blonde with coloured eyes. In a playful transvestite act, her boyfriend's friend had put on her clothes, earrings and make-up, and was swaying to the tunes of an Arab song. 'I stood in front of my blonde self. The mist has now lifted and the pictures become clear',[575] is how she describes her reaction. This transformation is of course symbolic of the complete embracement of the values of the other. It is her 'blonde self' that now thinks clearly, her shock and anger gone. The difference of the other is accepted. Indeed, it is implicitly seen as superior to the values of the old Arab self, so to speak. The transformed 'blonde self' now realises in a vague sort of way that the values of the other which allow a much wider margin of individual freedom within society would have kept Saᶜd alive if they had prevailed in her own culture.

Back in her village, our protagonist used to throw stones, in common with her folk, at flying pigeons. When a pigeon was hit and dropped to the ground, it was killed and eaten. Now in London, she leaves food for the pigeons on the window ledge: 'I feed you instead of eating you',[576] she would say to the pigeons. The symbolism of this change should not be lost on us either. This is another aspect of the adopted 'blonde self', no doubt; one that respects the freedom and right to existence of the bird, and sees in it for the first time a beautiful creature of nature and not an article of food. Nothing sums up the story's expression of the total acceptance by the self of the other better than the woman's words to a pigeon, on which the story ends: 'I know that you are not beautiful. You are neither white nor brown, but dark grey like a rat. But I like you all the same because you are English and you wait for me.'[577]

In 2001 Ḥanān al-Shaykh was to return to the subject once more, this time in her full-length novel, *Innahā London Yā ᶜAzīzī*, or *Only in London*. As the title suggests, the novel is set primarily in London. Its characters are partly Arab, partly English, with a majority of the first, who come from different national backgrounds, for example, Iraqi, Moroccan, Lebanese and from the Arabian Peninsula. Varied too are their inclinations, their social backgrounds, their reasons for being in London, and above all the way they relate to the English other. Al-Shaykh handles this diversity of characters through a traditional narrative, adopting the viewpoint of an omniscient author, who moves freely through a multiplicity of parallel plots and the consciousnesses of the characters that populate them. The characters know each other and occasionally meet across their respective plots, but their liaisons are not of an organic nature, in the sense

that each of the main protagonists has his or her own story independently of the others. The event that brings them together in the first place is being passengers on the same flight from Dubai to London, after which they go their separate ways. This of course is not to say that al-Shaykh has congregated them and chose to tell us their corresponding London stories between the covers of one novel for no good reason. The greatest single unifying factor in the novel is in fact the setting: London. By this I do not mean London as a geographical location, but as a value; a value absent from their own lives, and from the Arab geographical locations from which they came: a value called freedom. In the picture that al-Shaykh paints, London gives each of them, different as they are, the freedom to do what they want, to fulfil themselves, to be emancipated from censorship, be it social, religious, political or sexual; those endless censorships that restrict their every move and thought in their native environments. London liberates them from all that. And it is from the tug-of-war between internal, home-grown inhibitions and the sense of release they experience in London that the dramas and comedies of the novel arise. That London should have that value for her characters is hardly surprising since admittedly it has held the same value for Ḥanān al-Shaykh herself, who argues that it was London that made it possible for her to write her fiction, and that she might have not been able to write the way she did in Beirut:

> London eggs you on, it makes you feel you are living in a healthy atmosphere, free of repression . . . Because I live in London I have come to know myself as I really am. In Beirut you exercise 'camouflage' like a chameleon, but in London you come to know who you are; you shed off your outer shell and see yourself as if in front of a mirror.[578]

I shall concentrate here on what is without doubt intended as the main plot of the novel, the story of the Iraqi woman, Lamīs. In addition to being allotted relatively more space in the book than the two other plots (of Amīra, the Moroccan prostitute, and Samīr, the Lebanese homosexual), it is the only story that addresses seriously the issue of the cultural encounter. Lamīs belongs to the Iraqi diaspora in London. When the novel begins, Lamīs had already obtained divorce from her wealthy Iraqi businessman husband, who was considerably older than her and whom she had originally married under pressure from her mother. Despite having a young son from the marriage, her husband's keenness to keep her, and her mother's opposition to the divorce, Lamīs insisted on freeing herself from a union that was emotionally arid. In the beginning Lamīs does not know what to do with her newly acquired freedom; hitherto she had lived in a closed Arab circle in London and was hardly conversant with English. She is desperate to make the acquaintance of an Englishman as an introduction to her host society of which she was so ignorant: 'it would only take one invitation from an English person for her to have a way in . . . '. She particularly laments that Arab women knew English men only in the form of their GPs: 'a special relationship grew up between Arab women and their doctors, the only British who came in contact with their bodies'.[579]

In one aspect of her portrayal, Lamīs unavoidably is a divorcee in search of a new relationship, but Al-Shaykh has also another agenda. She wants to continue here what she had begun in her story 'I Sweep the Sun off Rooftops', discussed earlier, namely to explore the relationship between East and West through a sexual encounter where, contrary to the pattern established by earlier male authors, the East is represented by a woman and the West by a man. Here Lamīs, the female protagonist, is anything but well disposed towards her native Arab culture which had imposed on her the unhappiness of an unequal marriage. She appears to have lost faith in that culture and desirous of embracing that of the other. For that end she lays down a practical programme: to acknowledge that Britain has become her country; to learn English properly; and to make friends with some English people. She even decides to stop eating Arab food by way of more radically severing herself from her native roots.[580]

Lamīs falls in love with Nicholas, the English Arabist and antiques expert who works for Sotheby's, the art auctioneers, is well connected with wealthy Arabs, and lives between London and Oman. The novelist's exposition of Lamīs's consciousness shifts between the present and the past, thereby allowing us to witness the sense of freedom and security, the emotional and sexual fulfilment she experiences with the English other against the lack of these very essentials from her former life in the shadow of an oriental husband. One of the remarkable ironies of the book is the fact that it is Nicholas, that loving, understanding other, who restores to her her confidence in her own culture, the Arab culture she had denied in her eagerness to free herself from repression. On one occasion, when he shows her a rare Arabic manuscript, she is surprised to be able to make out the calligraphy easily, and feels proud of the old traditions of the Arabic language that have barely changed in hundreds of years, and of the civilisation behind it: she '. . . felt a sharp pang of regret that . . . she'd thought that being an Arab was an obstacle in her life'.[581]

I said earlier that for the three protagonists of the novel's disparate stories, what London means is freedom, as each understands it. In the case of Samīr, the Lebanese homosexual, London turns him from the reviled 'queer', temporarily incarcerated in a mental hospital to cure him of his 'disease', into a normal human being whose different sexuality is accepted by society and whose right to be different is protected by the law. Samīr's story here reinforces the moral of al-Shaykh's earlier story, 'I sweep the sun off rooftops' discussed earlier, where an Arab villager is driven to suicide when suspected of a homosexual liaison, while a similar relationship in London is seen to attract no attention, as a matter of personal freedom. Hence Samīr's delight at discovering the true meaning of London to which he had come with pre-conceived ideas:

> Back home people thought that London was walking in the mist wrapped in a heavy coat and a furry pair of boots . . . and that London was Piccadilly Circus, Oxford Street, Big Ben and Buckingham Palace. London was freedom. It was your right to do anything, any time . . . and when you did do what you wanted, you didn't have to feel guilty or embarrassed, and start leading a double life and ultimately end up frustrated.[582]

That leaves us with Amīra the prostitute, protagonist of the third story. She had come to London from a life of poverty and abuse in a Moroccan village. An adventuress who aims high in her liaisons, she thrives on ensnaring oil-rich Arabs in London's most opulent hotels by pretending to be a libidinous Arabian princess. There is delightful comedy here and not entirely without social and political connotations, but the reader is left puzzled at what London means to her in the wider context of this London-idealising work. Is it just an open space for escapade and class revenge through every available means, legitimate or illegitimate? Is she just a type of the variety of human specimens that London attracted from the Arab world that the novelist wanted to represent in her little Arab panorama of London? Once more a comparison with the author's earlier London short story, 'I sweep the sun off rooftops', forces itself. That story's heroine is also a Moroccan emigrant to whom London gave refuge, opportunity, independence and freedom; all of which she had been deprived of as a poor and uneducated Arab female in a repressive patriarchal society. But she gains access to all that through legitimate toil in London, which the writer portrays as a city capable of giving the Arab other what his/her own culture cannot give them. How then did this simple villager of the short story of 1994 turn into Amīra the prostitute in the novel of 2001? The common setting and thematic closeness of the two works are too compelling for the question to be deemed irrelevant on the basis that the two works are separate entities. The protagonist of the short story would have sat more comfortably in this novel with the story of Lamīs and Nicholas, whereas the story of Amīra, interesting in its own right, looks out of place and without clear purpose.[583]

Ḥanān al-Shaykh brings freshness to this long-established tradition of Arabic fiction, especially in the story of Nicholas and Lamīs. Her characters are real flesh and blood people that can be bumped into among the burgeoning Arab community in London, unlike the allegorical figures we have seen in the work of older generation authors such as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm and Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī. Al-Shaykh tries to portray a genuine European character from inside; a portrait that attempts to see the other not as such, but as ultimately similar, as ultimately not unlike the self, as a companion not an antagonist. As she herself put it, 'it pleases me to think that I [am contributing] to the removal of misunderstanding between East and West if only by as much as an iota'.[584] In so doing, al-Shaykh belongs to her age as her predecessors belonged to theirs. They wrote under or in the aftermath of colonialism when the European other was the opponent of the self in its struggle for independence. By contrast, al-Shaykh writes in the age of Arab defeatism when Arab societies and their ruling regimes have failed in achieving liberty and dignity for their citizens in the post-independence era. She writes in the age of the Arab diaspora in the West in search of opportunity and freedom. Europe had become a refuge place and a protector, rather than a coercive colonial power, and it is no wonder that we encounter in her work this reconciliatory approach to the theme.

Egyptian-born, British author **Ahdaf Soueif** (b. 1950) is in her person and not only her work an advertisement for the cultural encounter of East and West. Born

into a Western-educated academic family, she spent part of her early childhood in London while her parents read for their higher degrees. Back in Cairo, she did her schooling at an English language school, and went on to study English at Cairo University, and thence to Lancaster University for her doctoral degree in the same field. Her immersion in Western culture was crowned by marrying British poet, critic and biographer, Ian Hamilton (1938–2001). Soueif, who has lived in the United Kingdom since the mid-1970s with some periods of interruption, writes in English despite being a native speaker of Arabic and theoretically capable of writing in her mother tongue. Although her work should probably be regarded for the purpose of classification as English literature, the sensibility behind it is unmistakably Egyptian, as are often the setting and the characters in large part. However, to speak of an 'Egyptian sensibility' with the multi-cultural background outlined above is a tricky thing, and it is in that 'tricky' area that Soueif's work belongs, hovering, as it does, between two cultures, two sensibilities, two languages and two worlds that it tries to bridge; and by so doing attesting, as does the author's life, to the reality of the encounter. Soueif made her debut as a novelist in 1983, and has since published two further novels, one collection of short stories, and another of essays. I shall stop here at her two major novels: *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and *The Map of Love* (1999).

In the Eye of the Sun is a largely autobiographical novel, which traces the growth and development of the Egyptian heroine, Asya, from adolescence to maturity through a mishmash of characters and relations, and against the socio-political backdrop of Egypt during the 1960s and early 1970s, with a long pause at the 1967 war with Israel and its aftermath, the scene shifting then to Britain where the heroine undertakes her higher studies, pursuing also the journey of self-discovery. In what is essentially a *kunstellerroman*, Ahdaf Soueif makes what may pass for a fleeting attempt at tackling the theme of the cultural encounter through the introduction of a sexual relationship between Asya and an English university colleague by the name Gerald Stone. The sensual encounter with the Englishman is juxtaposed with a frustrating and unfulfilled sexual relationship with her otherwise loving and loved, suave and successful Egyptian husband. The Englishman is able to give her straightaway the gratification that years of married life had not, a situation not unlike the one that Ḥanān al-Shaykh was years later to introduce through the encounter of Lamīs and Nicholas in *Only in London*, where again the Englishman gives the Arab woman the sexual fulfilment she had not known during many years of marriage, as we have seen earlier. We will also recall that such was the case too in Collette Khūrī's *Layla Wāḥida* (A Single Night), where hitherto matrimonially unattainable emotional and sexual fulfilment is achieved through the brief encounter between the heroine and the Frenchman, Camille. It is a matter for debate as to what conclusions should be drawn from this fortuitous consensus among three women writers regarding sexual/emotional fulfilment seemingly being only attainable with the other. But what is certain is that the cultural setup to which those individually different heroines belong is a contributory factor to the frustrations from which they are only cured by the liberating encounter with the other.

Nevertheless, despite his ability to bring sexual fulfilment to the heroine of *In the Eye of the Sun*, Gerald Stone, unlike the other Western protagonists of *Layla Wāḥida* and *Only in London*, is portrayed in distinctly non-endearing terms. He has that animal attractiveness about him, but is vulgar of manners, and is happy to exploit Asya financially when the opportunity arises. His subject of study at university is the pragmatic one of 'business administration', whereas by contrast the cultured, sophisticated Asya is a student of English poetry. This is as far as the episode goes in the novel. It does not actually occupy much space in what is an 800-page novel primarily preoccupied with the exploration of the psychology and sexuality of its female protagonist. The role of Gerald Stone, nevertheless, is pivotal in that he serves as the catalyst that forces Asya to confront the *impasse* in her marriage and puts her on the path to emancipation. The cultural symbolism of the relationship is nonetheless not dwelt upon by the author; it is not developed or integrated with the central relationship in the novel in a such way as to allow us to make any reliable conclusions based on it. Gerald Stone offers Asya sexual fulfilment, but there is no suggestion in the novel that Sayf, the Egyptian husband, is impotent for us to be able to read intimations in the text of an active living culture juxtaposed with a stagnant lifeless one. In fact, it is Asya's irrational fear of the pain of defloration that prevents Sayf throughout from having intercourse with her; a fear that inexplicably disappears when she finally gives herself to Stone. On the other hand, when Sayf knows about the affair, he rapes his wife in an angry violent scene which constitutes his first and only intercourse with his wife of several years. In a novel where there is a clear intention of using symbolism to interpret reality, we are left with too many loose ends, too many unpicked clues. One of those is an aborted, half-baked attempt at addressing the theme of the cultural encounter.[585]

Soueif's next novel, *The Map of Love*, a mixture of fact and fiction against a historical backdrop, is one in which the theme of the cultural encounter is at the very heart of the book. A *roman fleuve* of complex structure, with two parallel stories: a contemporary one framing an older one set in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the scene of action shifts primarily between London, Cairo and (to a lesser extent in the contemporary story) New York. Each of the two stories tells a love story against the background of major political events, against unfolding history, as it were. In each love story, the protagonists are from different cultures, with those of the contemporary story being descendants of their ancestors of the older one, and the time gap being roughly a century. The old story consists of a love story (leading to marriage) between an English aristocrat, Lady Anna Winterbourne and an Egyptian nationalist (of the landowning class), Sharif Barudi Pasha. This unlikely union happens in a British-occupied Egypt, firmly ruled by Lord Cromer. The protagonists of the contemporary story, on the other hand, are the American journalist, Isabel, a descendant of Lady Anna and Sharif Pasha, and Omar Ghamrawi, who lives in America and is a great grandchild of Layla, Barudi's sister. It is the agents of the contemporary story who try to reconstruct the lives of their forbears through the piecing together of letters and journals found in an old trunk. As the two narratives unfold side by side, the

almost complete parallelism between both their private and public levels becomes increasingly apparent.

Lady Anna's character is Soueif's fictional answer to the cruelty of history. She represents the other voice in the grand narrative of the British Empire, the voice that was hardly heard during the heyday of the Empire because it was too quiet and too rare, the voice of tolerance and openness towards the subjugated other; the voice of the occupier who knows he has no right to be where he is, who realises the humanity of the other, and his ultimate parity with his conquerer. It is as if Soueif wanted to emphasise in fiction the omissions of history, which tends to concentrate on the 'glories' of conquests and the viewpoints and actions of political leaders and generals to the neglect of less boisterous, less mainstream voices. In a sense, the novel can be seen as an embodiment in fiction of Edward Said's portrayal of imperialist attitudes in both *Orientalism* and *Culture & Imperialism*. In her idealised depiction of nascent Egyptian nationalism, of poeticised Egyptian family life, and of the chivalry of Egyptian manners, Soueif provides the answer to the racist arrogance and the hypocrisy of the British ruling class in Cairo at the time. This she does at the same time as she digs deep for the roots of human tolerance and conciliation at a particularly bad moment in history when the notions of dehumanising and subjugating the other reigned supreme. How many Anna Winterbournes were there when the soldiers of empire, its administrators, merchants and travellers strutted the corners of the globe, secure in their belief in their superiority to subject races? Probably not very many, but Soueif seems intent on willing them into fictional being and celebrating what they stand for in the moral evolution of humanity. The philosophy of the novel is best summed up by its title, which advances the notion of a 'map of love', which recognises no boundaries cultural or political, as opposed to geographical and political maps based on divisions, greed and conflict.

Not all experiences of diaspora however seem to produce such visions of tolerance, of openness to, and acceptance of the difference of the other, as *The Map of Love* teaches us, nor do they all lead to a reassessment of the self and a realisation of the shortcomings of its culture and what it can learn from the other, as the work of Ḥanān al-Shaykh teaches us. It would seem that some experiences of the diaspora lead to further entrenchment within the self, to an enhanced realisation of the difference of the other, and an insistence that the encounter can only be on the terms of the self. This is what comes out of reading *The Translator*, a novel written in English published in Edinburgh in 1999, the same year as Soueif's *The Map of Love*. It is a fortuitous irony that two such novels, written by two expatriate Arab women writers with concerns about the encounter of East and West, should appear in the same year with intellectual stances that are worlds apart.

Leila Aboulela (b. 1964), Sudanese by birth, educated in Khartoum and London, has lived and worked with her husband and children in Scotland since around 1990. An economist by training, she started writing short stories in English before publishing her first novel, *The Translator* in 1999. The heroine, Samar, is a young Sudanese woman, widowed after the accidental death of her

Sudanese husband, who was on a research scholarship in Scotland. She sends their son back home to Khartoum, and continues to live in Scotland working as as an Arabic language translator. The encounter theme is presented through a love story between Samar and Rae, a Scottish academic, who is a specialist in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, sympathetic to the subject of his study, as the title of one his books indicates: *The Illusion of an Islamic Threat*.[586] The love story that unfolds, through a third-person narrative with a viewpoint restricted to the heroine, is uncanny in its presentation of a love apparently motivated by Rae's understanding of Arabs and Islam and his advocacy of their just causes in his academic research and media appearances, more than by his personal traits as a man and a human being. Thus while he loves her unconditionally as the woman she is from the culture she is from, she seems to love him only in measure to the degree of his closeness to her own culture and its attendant beliefs. Thus the moment comes when his academic sympathy for Arabs and Muslims and his intellectual espousal of their causes were no longer sufficient. In order to gain her full love and their union in marriage, there were other requirements, there were more serious conditions to be met. He had to renounce both his inherited Christianity and adopted secularism, to jeopardise his personal integrity and credibility as a Western specialist on Islam: he had to convert to the beloved's faith. When Rae hesitates, he is rejected and Samar returns to the Sudan. It is only when he follows her to Khartoum, declaring his Islam, repudiating his otherness, submitting to her will, and allowing himself to be subsumed into her self, that he is accepted and loved. When he professes his Islam and begins to talk about it as 'our religion', we are told that 'His words made her feel close to him, pulled in, closer than any time before because it was "ours" now, not hers alone…'.[587] Her conditions met, Samar agrees to leave Khartoum with Rae to Scotland to begin their life together.

Contrary to appearances, this is not a story of love, not a story of encounter; but a story of conquest, of appropriation, of the self triumphant and the other vanquished. As such, it has a link with self-righteousness both in the personal and cultural senses. As such, it also has an essential link, however disguised, however subliminal, with religious fundamentalism. And as such, it is also a step back, a step out of line, in the more open, forward-looking and inclusive trend that has generally characterised representations of the encounter with the West in Arabic literature in recent decades.[588] Aboulela's second novel, *Minaret*, while set in London, is largely peopled by Sudanese characters in exile. While not much concerned with the cultural encounter theme of *The Translator*, it is a 'born-again' Muslim narrative that escapes from political and personal frustrations, enhanced by exile, into religion. As such, it confirms the author's basic intellectual stance as propounded in *The Translator*.

Concluding remarks

In its outline and to a large extent also in its detail, the picture emerging from this book must be one of a pro-Western Arab world; an Arab world whose writers, intellectuals and by extension the educated classes generally, regardless of their political inclinations and their predominantly Islamic faith, are adherents, consciously or unconsciously, of Westernism, by which I mean the broad set of life values assumed when we refer to the moral entity called the West. I say 'consciously or unconsciously' because the majority of people in the normal course of living do not go through life classifying themselves as pro-Western or anti-Western, traditional or modern, to the end of these reductionist pairings. It is the way they think, live, dress, act, express themselves, educate their children, entertain themselves, to the end of the myriad activities and attitudes that make up both individual and collective life, that classify them as this or that. I also say 'consciously or unconsciously' because Westernism has taken root in the Arab world, roots that have been growing deeper and deeper in the collective psyche for over 200 years, so much so that Westernism is no longer a mode of otherness; it has so mingled with the self, been adopted, adapted and reproduced by the self to such an extent that the self has over generations lost trace of its otherly origins. It is ironic that 'Westernisation' can still be an accusatory term in some conservative circles but we must not let emotive rhetoric delude us into thinking that such a charge today in the majority of the Arab world is anything but self-accusation, rather than a criticism of the other; it is simply an expression of discontent with the way people live now, which is common to all human cultures, the West not excepted, perennially exhibiting a tendency to ascribe better mores to previous generations and lament latter-day degeneracy.

Having said that, the fact must not be overlooked that the 'Arab world' is a loose, unscientific term. The Arab world is made up of Arabic-speaking communities that indeed share a common enough culture to justify the use of such a term, but significant distinctions exist, particularly in terms of socio-political and intellectual development (i.e. modernisation, i.e. Westernisation!). It would be unrealistic to speak of some countries of the Arabian Peninsula, for instance, where social evolution had been largely arrested since the Middle Ages and until the 1960s in the same terms as one speaks of Egypt or the Levant, where modernity has taken root over more than two centuries. But the fact cannot be denied either that even

in the less developed parts of the Arab world, Westernism is fast taking root under the combined influence of both the West directly and those parts of the region whose historical circumstances had brought them sooner to the gates of modernity.

Such a submission may sound bizarre considering the wave of anti-Western feeling that is rife in the Arab world today, and particularly since the events of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath. But anti-West or anti-Western is something completely different from anti-Westernism. 'Anti-West' is a term operative in the political arena alone, and is applied from an intellectual position that is paradoxically Westernist. Antagonism to American policy in the Middle East is just that; it is not antagonism to what the West stands for as a civilisation. In many respects, it can be seen as antagonism to an idealised West that seems to the Eastern eyes to be betraying its own humanist values through self-interested policies. The so-called anti-Western sentiment that is often sensationalised in sections of the Western media should be understood in the same terms in which this study has endeavoured to interpret the paradox of the love–hate relationship between Arab intellectuals and Europe during the colonial period. At that time, the consensual view was that Westernism was not only necessary for survival and progress in the modern world but also that it was the only way to combat the colonising West itself and expel it from the homeland. There may have been some quibbles and natural anxiety here and there about the degree and pace of the process of Westernisation and the possible threat it posed to identity and social mores, but the inevitability of 'modernisation' (*taḥdīth* or *ḥadātha*), effectively the Arabic term for 'Westernisation' since the exact equivalents, *taghrīb* or *gharbana*, both of which are rarely used neologisms, has never been seriously questioned, except in the demagogical rhetoric of marginal religious conservatives.[589]

Thus the term 'clash of civilisations'[590] that has gained undeserved currency in recent years, and which may have some legitimacy when looked at in a historical perspective, is bound to appear hollow when considered in the context of Arab-Islamic attitudes to the West as shown in this study, a miserable misnomer at best. What clash exists is a clash of interests, of policies, of attempts at dominance and resistance to dominance: it is not a clash of worldviews, not a clash of cultures, certainly *not* a 'clash of civilisations'. When Western powers clashed up to the end of the Second World War, those were clashes of interests and political ideology, all home-grown within the borders of Western civilisation. And when we observe today the rising rivalry between the European Union and the United States, and the increasing anti-Americanism on the popular and governmental levels in European countries, which are in turn dismissed by American politicians as the dated attitudes of 'old Europe',[591] in the build up to and in the aftermath of the American–British invasion of Iraq in 2003, this is not interpreted as a 'clash of civilisations' but again a conflict of interests and policies among advocates of the same culture and the same worldview.

Now, these are exactly the terms in which the present writer suggests, on the force of the conclusions emerging from this study, that the conflict between the Arabs and the West should be viewed. It is not a conflict between opposing

worldviews but between interests. The implications of which definition we adopt are enormous: worldviews are permanent and fixed, interests are changeable and reconcilable.[592] The realities of social and intellectual change as they unfolded in the Arab world over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries indicate that Westernism has become ingrained in the fabric of Arab society and in its worldview; the accounts in this study are a testimony to that proposition. The narratives discussed here spanning a period from the closing years of the eighteenth century to the opening years of the twenty-first century are the expressions of a consciousness not only their authors' but of the mass of people who produced those authors and their texts; a consciousness that has remained in ardent untiring pursuit of the West since the time of al-Jabartī and until today.

Now, pursuing an ideal that is several hundred years ahead of you is not the easiest of missions. And when the object of your pursuit is unappreciative, nay, hostile and disdainful, as the West has been towards the Arabs throughout the colonial period and in many ways since, then the pursuer is bound to suffer frustration and to lash out on occasion. Bin Laden, al-Qaida (al-Qāᶜida), Islamic fundamentalism, both on the conceptual and violent levels, are manifestations of this frustration, of the impetus to lash out at those who reject and scorn your devotion. Rather than being seen as a manifestation of the collapse of the drive for Westernism in Arab societies, these phenomena should be viewed as the very opposite; as a symptom of impatience at the slowness of the process, at the fact that after so long it has not yet borne full fruit, that it has not produced liberal societies of economic plenty, human dignity and international respectability.[593] More than an anti-Westernist backlash, religious extremism sprang into being as a reaction to the failure of the secular, undemocratic, nationalist ruling regimes, of the post-independence era. Their disastrous failure, peaking with the collective military defeat in the 1967 war with Israel, was elevated by ultra-conservatives to a failure of the entire Westernist state and society paradigm, and a call to the return to faith, to roots, to a substitute ahistorical paradigm as the only salvation, began to have a following, with national and international frustrations; every new defeat; every social or economic malaise, serving to strengthen the appeal of the call and increase its following.

It is not within the remit of this book to pursue in any detail this proposition, nor is it at all under-studied by contemporary historians and social and political scientists. Nor is it unique to Arabs: traumatic national experiences have time and again in history produced reactions of a similar nature, where a process of introspection, isolationism, recourse to better times in the national past etc. come to the rescue of the collective psyche. Today in Arab countries, anti-Westernists are a force without a real alternative to Westernism. Their ideology paradoxically asserts their Westernism because if offers no alternative to what they deny, save a transcendental notion of a return to a golden time of adherence to a self-righteous, narrowly interpreted, disciplinarian Islam, which would then as if by magic produce the greatness that Westernism has failed to do. This idealistic notion has never been translated into a viable political programme in an Arab country, and little doubt should be entertained that if it ever did, Islamism would in practice turn into window-dressed Westernism.

Apart from bad Western policies, especially with regard to the Arab–Israeli conflict, Arab misgovernment in the postcolonial era up to the present day has been responsible for the emptying of the Westernist model of much of its genuine content. Readers will remember from earlier parts in this book that many Arab intellectuals lamented the importation from the West of only material goods, technology and its products, but not the spirit of science, not the moral values, not the entire cultural ethos that made modern Europe what it is. This dilemma observed on the theoretical plane by modern Arab thinkers as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, as we have seen in al-Shidyāq, for instance, has never been seriously addressed by Arab ruling elites, who either did not have the vision in the first place, or tried to have their cake and eat it by modernising (Westernising) on the procedural level, while allowing a traditional, antiquated, religion-based ethos that goes against the grain of modernisation to continue to thrive unopposed. This is evident in the educational system, the media and the entire state apparatus, thereby unwittingly creating what amounts to a schism in the national psyche, whereby people are brought up to use mobile telephones and computers, and all the latest technologies of the West without being impregnated with the cultural ethos, dating back to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, that made such Western products possible and without which they are bound to remain parasitical consumers of those products, who can never make their own contribution to the welfare of themselves, let alone the rest of humanity.[594] Entwined with this dilemma is another: the failure to liberalise and democratise; another essential element in the package of Westernism that was deliberately dropped by ruling elites, as a pre-condition of their self-perpetuation. Thus under totalitarian government where the ruler cannot be questioned came a whole gamut of incontestable authorities: holy books, religious leaders, teachers, fathers, husbands etc. The corollary is a society using imported mobile telephones and computers and watching satellite television with a pre-Renaissance cultural ethos and little realisation of the contradiction.

What I am trying to argue here is that it is this eclectic, or to put it more brutally, haphazard adoption of Westernism that was bound to create problems in the resulting motley, schizophrenic culture that turns its face in one direction and its feet in another: fanaticism and fundamentalism and other forms of radicalism are always a possible offshoot of such schism in a national psyche. Since theocracy is no longer an option in the management of human society, there was only Westernism left which, as many Arab intellectuals saw it, is only a European or Western product in so far as it was in modern Europe that millennia of human endeavour across civilisations of both East and West materalised.[595] As such, they thought, it belonged to everyone, and it was no abandonment of one's own culture to adopt it. Of that elusive Western ideal, the East is still in pursuit.

Notes

Introduction

1 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, pp. 1–2.
2 Quoted in ibid., pp. 46–47.
3 Quoted in ibid., p. 38.
4 Quoted in ibid., pp. 105–06.
5 Quoted in ibid., pp. 142–45.
6 Quoted in ibid., p. 172.
7 Quoted in ibid., p. 179.
8 H.K. Bhabha, 'Difference, discrimination, and the discourse of colonialism', in F. Barker, P. Hulme, M. Eversen and D. Loxley, eds, *The Politics of Theory*, University of Essex Press, Colchester, 1983, pp. 194–211; quoted in Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 49.
9 The story of my apparently seamless integration and that of thousands like me may not always readily be in accord with the conclusions of social and political scientists who study the status of Arab, Muslim and other ethnic minorities in Europe today in broader terms and with statistical endorsement. If my account reads too idealistic, a sobering view may be gleaned from referring to Jorgen Nielsen's *Muslims in Western Europe*; see in particular chapter 10, 'Muslims in a new Europe?', pp. 153–74, where issues of multi-culturalism and the integration of ethnic minorities are discussed.
10 See Jabrā I. Jabrā, 'Modern Arabic literature and the West', in *A Celebration of Life: Essays on Literature and Art*, pp. 89–90.
11 See Rajāʾ al-Naqqāsh, *Naguib Mahfouz: Ṣafaḥāt min Mudhakkirātihi wa Aḍwāʾ Jadīda ʿAlā Adabihi wa Ḥayātihi*, p. 64.
12 See my discussion of Rihani in Chapter 5 of the present study.
13 See Chapter 2 of this book for my detailed examination of the views of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm.
14 Nawāl al-Saʿdāwī, *Awrāqī… Ḥayātī*, Dār al-Hitāl, Cairo, 1995, p. 188.
15 Ibid.
16 See Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī, *Najīb Maḥfūẓ Yatadhakkar*, Beirut, 1987?, pp. 108–9, quoted in Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: the Pursuit of Meaning*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 130.
17 Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz*, pp. 130–31.
18 Arnold Toynbee, 'Islam, the West, and the future', *Civilisation on Trial* (New York, 1948), pp. 188, 193; quoted in Charles Issawi, *Cross-Cultural Encounters and Conflicts*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 9.
19 See my full discussion of Yūsuf Idrīs in Chapter 3 of the present book.
20 Cf. Contemporary Egyptian philosopher Ḥasan Ḥanafī who maintains that Occidentalist studies, unlike their Orientalist counterparts, were 'more honest, objective and neutral' in their approaches to the West than Orientalism in its approach

to the East; see his *Muqaddima fī ᶜIlm al-Istighrāb*, al-Dār, al-Fanniya, Cairo, 1991, p. 32.

21 Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe*, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, 1963, p. 59.

22 Hamilton A.R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilisation of Islam*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1962, pp. 323–24.

23 For the full text of the poem, originally published in 1922, see Amīn al-Rīḥānī, *Al-Aᶜmāl al-ᶜArabiyya al-Kāmila*, vol. 9, al-Muᵓassasa al-ᶜArabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wal-Nashr, Beirut, 1980–86, pp. 96–105.

24 Ḥusayn Fawzī, *Sindbād ilā al-Gharb*, Dār al-Maᶜārif, n.d., pp. 289–90.

25 See Said's discussion of Flaubert in *Orientalism*, p. 188.

1 The pre-colonial period: enchanted encounters

26 Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1993, p. 39.

27 ᶜĀbd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *Tārīkh ᶜAjāᵓib al-Āthār fī al-Tarājim wa al-Akhbār*, vol.ii, Dar Al-Fāris, Beirut, n.d., p. 220.

28 Ibid., pp. 233–34. Al-Jabartī gives a long list of the books and pictures they showed him. Interestingly, he expresses no horror at seeing pictures of the Prophet.

29 Ibid., pp. 235–36.

30 Ibid., p. 236.

31 Ibid., p. 359. For a completely different view of Sulaymān of Aleppo and his action, see the eponymous play by the contemporary Egyptian dramatist Alfred Faraj (b.1929), published in 1965. Faraj sees Sulaymān al-Ḥalabī as a national hero, and his assassination of Kléber as a legitimate act of resistance against foreign occupation. See also Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, *Dhikrayāt Maṭwiyya*, Dār Suᶜ ād al-Ṣabāah, pp. 161–62. Here, Ḥaqqī ā narrates how during his work as an Egyptian diplomat in Paris, he visited 'the museum of man', where he saw the skeleton of Sulaymān on display as a human murderer. Ḥaqqī is outraged since he sees Sulaymān as a political and not a natural criminal. In his introduction to his own play, Faraj also refers to having seen the head of Sulaymān on display at a Parisian museum, labelled as 'the head of a murderer'. Earlier than both writers and much closer to the time of the event, another Egyptian intellectual had had an encounter with the remains of Sulaymān al-Ḥalabī, namely Rifāᶜa Rāfiᶜ al-Ṭahṭāwī, who mentions coming across 'part of the body of the late Shaykh Sulaymān Al-Ḥalabī' in the *Salle d'anatomie* of the *Jardin des plantes* in Paris. Unlike al-Jabartī, his tone is sympathetic. He refers to Sulaymān as having been martyred *(ᵓustushhida)* following his killing of General Kléber. See Maḥmūd Fahmī Ḥijāzī, *ᵓŪṣūl al-Fikr al-ᶜArabī al-Ḥadīth ᶜanda al-Ṭahṭāwī maᶜa al-Naṣṣ al-Kāmil likitābihi Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz*, p. 302. The text incorporated in Ḥijāzī's study is that of the second edition of al-Ṭahṭāwī's book, published in 1849.

32 Al-Jabartī, *Tārīkh*, pp. 359–60. Al-Jabartī's *Tārīkh* is amply condemnatory of the Turco- Mamluk practices in Egypt. For a perceptive reading of *Tārīkh ᶜAjāᶜib al-Āthār* as a text manifesting the incipience of modernity in Egyptian thought, see Louis ᶜAwaḍ, *Tārīkh al-Fikr al-Miṣrī al-Ḥadīth: al-Fikr al-Siyāsī wal-Ijtimāᶜī*, Dār al-Hilal, Cairo, 1969, pp. 8–88.

33 See al-Muᶜallim Nīqūlā al-Turk, *Dhikr Tamalluk Jumhūr al-Faransāwiyya ᶜalā al-Aqṭār al-Miṣriyya wa al-Bilād al-Shāmiyya*, ed. Yāsīn Suwayd, al-Fārābī, Beirut, 1990, p. 63. For a French translation of this work, see Desgranges, *Histoire de l'expedition des Francais en Egypte*, Paris, 1839. Another contemporary source on the French Campaign is that of Prince Ḥaydar al-Shihābī in his *al-Ghurar al-Ḥisān fī Akhbār Abnāᵓ al-Zamān,* although his chronicles in this respect are mainly based on those of al-Jabartī and al-Turk. For a modern edition of his work, see Asad Rustum and Fuᵓād al-Bustānī, who edited it in three volumes under the title *Lubnān fī ᶜAhd al-ᵓŪmarāᵓ al-Shihābiyyīn,* Manshūrāt al-Jūmiᶜa al-Lubnāniyya*,* Beirut, 1969.

34 For a brief literary biography of Nīqūlā al-Turk, see Marūn ᶜAbbūd, *Ruwwād al-Nahḍa al-Ḥadītha* in *Muᶜallāfāt Mārūn ᶜAbbūd*, vol. 2, Dār Mārūn ᶜAbbūd, Beirut, n.d., pp. 65–70.
35 For an English translation with introduction, see Daniel L. Newman, *An Imam in Paris*, Saqi, London, 2004.
36 On Muḥammad ᶜAlī's missions policy in general and al-Ṭahṭāwī in particular, see Lisa Pollard, 'The habits and customs of modernity: Egyptians in Europe and the geography of nineteenth-century nationalism', *Arab Studies Journal*, vol. 7, no. 2–vol. 8, no. 1, Fall 1999–Spring 2000, pp. 52–74.
37 For a similar argument, see Ḥasan Ḥanafī, 'Jadal al-Anā wal-Ākhar: Dirāsa fī *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz* by al-Ṭahṭāwī', in al-Ṭāhir Labīb, ed., *Ṣūrat al-Ākhar*, Markaz Dirāsāt al-waḥda al-ᶜArabiyya, Beirut, 1999, p. 287.
38 See Ḥijāzī, ᵓ*Uṣūl al-Fikr*, p. 160.
39 Ibid., p. 165.
40 Ibid., p. 175. See also, Khalīl al-Shaykh, *Bārīs fī al-Adab al-ᶜArabī al-Ḥadīth* (Paris in Modern Arabic Literature), p. 34.
41 Ḥijāzī, ᵓ*Uṣūl al-Fikr*, p. 229.
42 Ibid., pp. 296–97.
43 Ibid., p. 299. Some of al-Ṭahṭāwī's seminal ideas on these issues are further developed in his later book, *Manāhij al-Albāb al-Miṣriyya fī Mabāhij al-Ādāb al-ᶜAṣriyya* (The Ways of Egyptian Minds in the Pleasures of Contemporary Learning). For an exposition of this work and a discussion of al-Ṭahṭāwī's significance in general, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1970, pp. 67–84; see also Louis ᶜAwaḍ, *Tārīkh al-Fikr al-Miṣrī al-Ḥadīth: al-Fikr al-Siyāsī wal-Ijtimāᶜī*, pp. 90–201, for a discussion of both *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz* and *Manāhij al-Albāb*.
44 For an interesting comparative study examining al-Ṭahṭāwī's *Takhlīṣ* and Edward Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) as contemporaneous works, respectively, of exploration of the culture of the other, see Nājī Najīb, *Al-Riḥla ilā al-Sharq wal-Riḥla ilā al-Gharb*, *passim*; on the same subject, see also Sandra Naddaf, 'Mirror images: Rifāᶜah al-Ṭahṭāwī and the West', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 6, Spring 1986, pp. 73–83.
45 See Muḥammad ᶜImāra, ed., *Alī Mubārak: Al-ᶜAmāl al-Kāmila* (in three volumes), al-Muᵓassasa al-ᶜArabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wal-Nashr, Beirut, 1979, 1980, 1981, vol. 2, p. 434.
46 Ibid., p. 483.
47 Ibid., pp. 328–29.
48 Ibid., pp. 402–03.
49 In his *Tārīkh al-Fikr al-Miṣrī al-Ḥadīth: al-Fikr al-Siyāsī wal-Ijtimāᶜī*, Louis ᶜAwaḍ views this 'explicit' statement by al-Ṭahṭāwī as an 'early challenge of the notion of Islamic unity under the Ottoman caliphate . . . an assertion of Egyptian nationalism and Arab nationalism . . . ' (p. 150).
50 There is some controversy over the year Shidyāq was born. See the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edn, E.J. Brill, Leiden.
51 For a comprehensive study of al-Shidyāq's life and works by a fellow Lebanese, see Mārūn ᶜAbbūd, *Saqr Lubnān* (The Eagle of Lebanon) in *Muᶜallāfāt Mārūn ᶜAbbūd*, vol. 9, 2nd edn, Dār Mārūn ᶜAbbud, Beirut, 1975, pp. 7–263.
52 The circumstances of al-Shidyāq's employment at *al-Waqāᵓiᶜ al-Miṣriyya* are somewhat controversial. See Sulaymān Jubrān, *kitāb al-Fāryāq: Mabnāhu wa Uslūbuhu wa sukhriyatuhu*, Literary Studies and Texts, No. 6, Tel Aviv University, 1991, p. 18.
53 Al-Shidyāq, *al-Wāsiṭa fī Maᶜrifat Aḥwāl Māliṭa wa Kashf al-Mukhabba ᶜan Funūn ᵓŪrubba*, 2nd edn, Maṭbaᶜat al-Jawāᵓib, Istanbul, 1881. The first edition (1836) consisted of *al-Wāsiṭa* only.
54 For a disussion of the autobiographical element in al-Shidyāq's *Al-Sāq ᶜAlā al-Sāq*, see Paul Starkey, 'Fact and fiction in *Al-Sāq ᶜalā al-Sāq*', in Robin Ostle *et al*., eds, *Writing the Self*, Saqi Books, London, 1998, pp. 30–38.

55 Paul Starkey, 'Fact and fiction in *Al-Sāq ᶜalā al-Sāq*', in Robin Ostle *et al*., eds, *Writing the Self*, Saqi Books, London, 1998, p. 222.
56 Compare Louis ᶜAwaḍ's distinction between the two figures. He sees al-Ṭahṭāwī as 'the model of the profound thinker preoccupied with the intellectual overview, particularly of political and social thought', as opposed to al-Shidyāq, 'who is a model of the hyper-sensitive artist, who gives us a picture of life from his partial impressions'. See Louis ᶜAwaḍ, *Tārīkh al-Fikr al-Miṣrī al-Ḥadīth: al-Fikr al-Siyāsī wal-Ijtimāᶜī*, p. 238.
57 Al-Shidyāq, *al-Sāq ᶜalā al-Sāq fī mā huwa al-Fāriyāq*, Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, Beirut, 1966, p. 527.
58 Ibid. Within a few chapters in the same book, al-Shidyāq appears to contradict himself. He writes of English peasants that in addition to their poverty, they are extremely ignorant, and that, contrary to what he had thought, they could not speak their own language well enough, let alone read it and write it (p. 596).
59 Ibid., p. 527.
60 Ibid., pp. 527–28.
61 Ibid., p. 524.
62 Ibid., p. 528.
63 Ibid., p. 522.
64 For an attempt at presenting al-Shidyāq as an early Arab socialist, see Fawwāz Ṭarābulsī and ᶜAzīz al-ᶜaẓmah, eds, *Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq*, Unknown Works Series, Riad El-Rayyes Books, London, 1995, pp. 40–41; for a broad exposition of al-Shidyāq's views of European culture see also Mohammed Bakir Alwan, 'Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq and the West', unpublished PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1970, pp. 74–115 and *passim*; and Aḥmad ᶜArafāt al-Ḍāwī, *Dirāsa fī Adab Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq wa Ṣurat al-Gharb fīhi*, Manshūrāt Wazārat al-Thaqāfa, Amman, 1994, *passim.*
65 Al-Shidyāq, *al-Sāq*, p. 595–96.
66 Ibid., p. 587.
67 Ibid., pp. 623–32.
68 Quoted in Fawwāz Ṭarābulsī and ᶜAzīz al-ᶜAẓmah, *Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq*, p. 250. The editors do not give the date of the issue from which the extract comes.
69 Three quarters of a century later, an Egyptian scholar studying in Paris was to wonder, confronted by the different sexual morality of the French whether 'morality was a relative matter…'. See Zakī Mubārak, *Dhikrayāt Bāris* (Memoirs of Paris), p. 220.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., p. 250.
72 Ibid., p. 247. Elsewhere al-Shidyāq upbraids his readers on the matter of neglecting the education of women, and points out that Europeans have books specialised in women and children, written by respectable men. 'Whatever extremes you go to in veiling your wife from seeing the world', he admonishes his (male) reader, 'You will not be able to hide it from her heart', see *al-Sāq*, p. 524.
73 See Fawwāz Ṭarābulsī and ᶜAzīz al-ᶜAẓmah, op. cit., pp. 250–51.
74 Ibid., pp. 249–50.
75 Ibid., pp. 311–12.
76 Al-Shidyāq, *al-Wāsiṭa fī Maᶜrifat Aḥwāl Māliṭa wa Kashf al-Mukhabba ᶜan Funūn ᵓŪrubbā*, pp. 160–61. Also quoted in Fawwāz Ṭarābulsī and ᶜAzīz al-ᶜAẓmah, op. cit., pp. 137–38.
77 Ibid., p. 170. Also quoted in Fawwāz Ṭarābulsī and ᶜAzīz al-ᶜAẓmah, op. cit., p. 150.
78 Ibid., p. 208. Also quoted in Fawwāz Ṭarābulsī and ᶜAzīz al-ᶜAẓmah, op. cit., pp. 167–68.
79 There is a slight difference over the birth and death years of Marrāsh: see his entry in the *Encyclopeadia of Islam*.
80 See Ḥaydar Hājj Ismāᶜīl, *Fransīs al-Marrāsh*, Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-kutub wal-Nashr, London, 1989, p. 21; see also *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.
81 Fransīs Marrāsh, *Kitāb Riḥlat Bārīs*, Al-Maṭbaᶜa al-Sharqiyya, Beirut, 1867, p. 17. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

82 Cf. Yūsuf al-Shuwayrī, *Al-Riḥla al-ᶜArabiyya al-Ḥadītha*, al-Muᵓassasa al-ᶜArabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, Beirut, 1998, pp. 51–61; see also Khalīl al-Shaykh, *Bārīs fī al-Adab al-ᶜArabī al-Ḥadīth*, al-Muᶜassara al-ᶜArabiyya lil-Dirāsat wal-Nashr, Beirut, 1998, pp. 50–57.

83 Fascination with Paris was quite common in accounts by Arab travellers' of the period; compare for example the later description in 1893 of Paris by Marrāsh's Lebanese contemporary, Khalīl Sarkīs (1842–1915) as 'the wonder of the times', in his *Riḥlat Mudīr al-Lisān* (The Journey of *Al-Lisān*'s Editor), vol. 2, p. 18; cf. also the Egyptian's Aḥmad Zakī's (1866–1934) rapturous description: 'Paris: the paradise of paradises; the city of cities; the capital of capitals; the spring of splendour and beauty . . . However much I exaggerate in describing it, I shall remain immeasurably distant from reality . . . ', in his *Al-Safar ilā al-Muᵓtamar* (Travelling to the Conference), p. 86.

84 Fransīs Marrāsh, *Kitāb Mashhad al-Aḥwāl*, al-Maṭbaᶜa al-kulliyya, Beirut, 1883, pp. 23–24.

85 For a discussion of *Ghābat al-Ḥaqq* and other works by Marrāsh, see Matti Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, Three Continents Press, Washington, DC, 1983, pp. 147–53; see also Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939*, pp. 247–48; and Marūn ᶜAbbūd, *Ruwwād al-Nahḍa al-Ḥadītha* in *Muᵓallafāt Mārūn ᶜAbbūd*, vol. 2, pp. 121–36.

86 For a brief discussion of the differences between Arab Muslim and Christian intellectuals in the nineteenth century, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, pp. 95–97.

87 Muḥammad ᶜImāra, ed., *Alī Mubārak: Al-Aᶜmāl al-Kāmila*, vol. 1, p. 34. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

88 For an account of ᶜAlī Mubārak's life, career and reforms in education in Egypt, see Aḥmad Amīn, *Zuᶜamāᵓ al-Iṣlāḥ fī al-ᶜAṣr al-Ḥadīth*, Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1948, pp. 184–201; see also J. Brugman, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1984, pp. 65–68.

89 For more on this, seeᶜAbd al-Muḥsin Ṭāhā Badr, *Taṭawwur al-Riwāyā al-ᶜArabiyya al-Ḥadītha fī Miṣr (1870–1938)* (The Development of the Modern Arabic Novel in Egypt), Dāral-Maᶜārif, Cairo, 1977(?), pp. 67–72.

90 For the details of Mubārak's publications, see Muḥammad ᶜImāra, ed., *Alī Mubārak: Al-Aᶜmāl al-Kāmila*, vol. 1, pp. 82–94.

91 Some literary historians do classify *ᶜAlam al-Dīn*, as well as al-Ṭahṭāwī's *Takhlīṣ al-Ibrīz*, as didactic prototypes of the genre in Egypt. See Badr, *Taṭuwwur al-Riwāya al-ᶜArabiyya*, pp. 57–72.

92 See also, al-Shuwayrī, *Al-Riḥla al-ᶜArabiyya al-Ḥadītha*, pp. 71–79.

93 For more on this, see Widād al-Qāḍī, 'Al-Sharq wal-Gharb fī Kitāb *ᶜAlam al-Dīn li-ᶜAlī Mubārak*', in *Al-Ḥayāt al-Fikriyya fī al-Mashriq al-ᶜArabī: 1890–1939*, pp. 35–51.

94 Muḥammad ᶜImāra, ed., *Alī Mubārak: Al-Aᶜmāl al-Kāmila*, vol. 2, p. 298.

95 It is evident that Khayr al-Dīn will have read al-Shidyāq's *Kashf al-Mukhabbā ᶜan Funūn ᵓŪrūbā*, printed in Tunis in 1863 at the State Press founded by Khayr al-Dīn himself and still under his supervision at the time. It is also likely that he will have read the earlier *Al-Sāq ᶜalā al-Sāq*, published in Paris in 1856. As to why he mentions neither work in his own *Aqwam al-Masālik*, one scholar attributes that to possible animosity between the two men as al-Shidyāq was a protégé of Muṣṭafā Khaznat-Dār, Prime Minister of Tunisia and political enemy of Khayr al-Dīn: see al-Shannūfī's introduction to Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī, *Aqwam al-Masālik*, pp. 211–13.

96 There is uncertainty surrounding Khayr al-Dīn's year of birth with estimates ranging from 1810 to 1830. For details of the controversy, see Leon Carl Brown, *The Surest Path*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1967, pp. 29–30.

97 Ibid., pp. 155–56. All my references to and quotations from Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī's introduction to his book *Aqwam al-Masālik* are to Brown's translation. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

98 For an account of Khayr al-Dīn's life and reforms, see Aḥmad Amīn, *Zuʿamāʾ al-Iṣlāḥ fī al-ʿAṣr al-Ḥadīth*, pp. 146–83.
99 See Leon Carl Brown, *The Surest Path*, p. 44.
100 See for instance, Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, p. 88. For a general discussion of Khayr al-Dīn's career and political thought, see ibid., pp. 84–94; see also Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe*, p. 79 and *passim*.
101 On the need felt by Muslim reformists, including Khayr al-Dīn and al-Ṭahṭāwī, to justify their call for the emulation of Europe, see Hishām Sharābī, *Arab Intellectuals and the West*, The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, MD and London, 1970, pp. 44–45.
102 See Shakīb Arslān, *Limādhā Taʾkhkhar al-Muslimūn . . . ?*, Dār al-Bashīr, Cario, 1985, pp. 88–112.
103 See Aḥmad Amīn, *Zuʿamāʾ al-Iṣlāḥ*, p. 169.
104 See al-Tūnisī's biography at the end of vol.5 of *Ṣafwat al-Iʿtibār*, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, n.d. *passim*.
105 See for instance, Muḥammad Bayram al-Tūnisī, *Ṣafwat al-Iʿtibār*, vol. 3, pp. 141 and 150; vol. 4, pp. 56 and 66.
106 For a different view, see Youssef al-Shuwayrī, *al-Riḥla al-ʿArabiyya al-Ḥadītha*, pp. 81–90.
107 Muḥammad Bayram al-Tūnisī, *Ṣafwat al-Iʿtibār*, vol. 3, pp. 140–41.
108 See author's biography in vol. 5 of *Ṣafwat al-Iʿtibār*, pp. nh–nw.
109 Muḥammad Bayram al-Tūnisī, *Ṣafwat al-Iʿtibār*, vol. 1, p. 94.
110 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 15 of the author's introduction.
111 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 2–3.
112 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 41–42.
113 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 42–43.
114 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 41.
115 Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 45–46.
116 Hishām Sharābī, *Arab Intellectuals and the West*, p. 46.

2 The colonial period: encounters under duress

117 P.M. Kurpershoek, *The Short Stories of Yūsuf Idrīs*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1981, pp. 66–67. For the Arabic original, see *Al-Bayḍāʾ*, pp. 181–82.
118 For the complex bibliographical details of *Ḥadīth*, see Roger Allen's edition and study of the text, *A Period of Time*, 2nd edn, Sycaracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, 1995, *passim*. See also Al-Muwayliḥī *Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Muwayliḥī: al-ʿAmāl al-Kāmila*, vol. 1, ed. with intro. Roger Allen, Al-Majlis al-'Alā lil-Thaqāfa, 2002.
119 Younger Egyptian writer, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, later had a scathing comment to make on the style of *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā Ibn Hishām*; he writes, 'It is strange to find a writer, like al-Muwayliḥī, in this day and age, refraining, when he wanted to portray the Egyptian people (a good thing in itself) from using the language of al-Jāḥiẓ or even that of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ [*sic*] but utilising the language of al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī. How do we explain that? The only explanation possible is that it was the natural choice for an age of decline!' See Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Zahrat al-ʿUmr*, pp. 192–93. What is interesting here is that what is now seen in histories of modern Arabic literature as an age of revival was seen by one of the makers of modern Arabic literature, closer to the day, as a symptom of decline.
120 For a similar view, see Badr, *Taṭuwwur al-Riwāya al-ʿArabiyya*, pp. 72–82.
121 Compare what Hishām Sharābī has to say on the changing attitude towards European civilisation with the onset of colonialism:

> A fundamental tenet of reformist ideology evolved from the growing awareness of Europe's imperialistic ambitions. In this light, Europe could have nothing to offer Islam that was not tainted by it rapacious intentions toward the Islamic countries. Islam could not wish to borrow from it anything except those elements which directly led to acquiring the means of defending itself, to the possession

of power. On the highest plane, these means were again presented in terms of '*ilm*; more directly, they consisted of new weapons and military organisation and technique. Europe was now seen not so much as the seat of civilisation, but a civilisation that possessed the secret of power and domination. See Hishām Sharābī, *Arab Intellectuals and the West*, pp. 46–47.

122 Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī, *Ḥadīth ᶜĪsā Ibn Hishām*, Dār al-Shaᶜb, n.d., p. 139. These views are reiterated in the book time and again, for example, pp. 207–08 in the conversation between the Friend and the Pasha. All references are to this edition and all translations from the text are my own.
123 Ibid., pp. 128–29.
124 *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq*, 21 July 1898, quoted in Al-Hawārī, *Naqd al-Mujtamaᶜ*, 2nd edn, Dār al-Maᶜārif, Cairo, 1986, pp. 20–21.
125 *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq*, 23 November 1898, quoted in Ibid., p. 21.
126 *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq*, 7 July 1898, quoted in Ibid. See also al-Muwayliḥī's articles, 'al-Madaniyya fī Aᶜlā Marātibihā' (Civilisation at its highest levels) and 'Ḥadhar al-ᶜĀqiba' (Fear of consequences), *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq*, 12 July 1902 and 27 September 1901, respectively, both fully quoted in Al-Hawārī, *Naqd al-Mujtamaᶜ*, pp. 208–19.
127 Ibid., pp. 155–56.
128 It is to be noted that Muḥammad al-Muwaylīḥī stayed in Europe for three years between 1883 and 1886, moving between France, Britain and Italy. See Khalīl al-Shaykh, *Bārīs fī al-Adab al-ᶜArabī al-Ḥadīth*, p. 58.
129 For a similar view, see Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Hawārī, *Naqd al-Mujtamaᶜ fī Ḥadīth ᶜĪsā Ibn Hishām*, p. 134.
130 By the time of al-Muwayliḥī, descriptions of the World Exhibition in Paris had already been established in the writings of Syrian and Egyptian travellers, for example, Fransīs Marrāsh's description of the 1867 Exhibition in his *Riḥlat Bārīs*, discussed earlier. For contemporaneous and earlier descriptions of the Paris World Exhibition, with al-Muwayliḥī's, see Nāzik Sābā Yārid, *Al-Raḥḥālūn al-ᶜArab, passim*; see also Richard van Leeuwen, 'Two Egyptian at the World Exhibition in Paris', in Robin Ostle *et al*., *Writing the Self*, pp. 39–50, for a discussion of the accounts of Muḥammad Amīn Fikrī (1856–1900) and Aḥmad Zakī (1866–1934) of the exhibitions of 1889 and 1900 in their *Irshād al-Alibbāʾ ilā Maḥāsin Ūrūbbā* (The Intelligent Man's Guide to the Beauties of Europe, Cairo, 1892), and *Al-Dunyā fī Bārīs* (Cairo, 1900?), respectively. For the American scene, see a description of the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition by the Syrian writer/journalist, Khalīl Sarkīs (1842–1915) in his *Riḥlat Mudīr al-Lisān ilā al-Āsitāna, wa Ūrubbā wa Amrikā* (The Journey of the Editor of the *Lisān* to Constantinople, Europe and America), vol. 2, pp. 116–40.
131 One Egyptian scholar who knew Paris well, Zakī Mubārak (1891–1952), attributes the 'weakness' of the 'Second Journey' to al-Muwayliḥī's poor knowledge of Paris. See his review of the book in *Zakī Mubārak Nāqidan* (Zakī Mubārak as Critic), Karīma Zakī Mubārak, Dār al-Shaᶜb, Cairo, 1978, pp. 152–70; first published in *Al-Risāla*, no. 486, 1942.
132 See Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Zahrat al-ᶜUmr*, p. 228.
133 Ibid., p. 257.
134 Jūrjī Zaydān, *Riḥla ilā ʾŪrūbbā*, al-Muʾassasa al-ᶜArabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, Beirut, 2002, p. 21.
135 Ibid., pp. 44–45.
136 Ibid., pp. 46–48.
137 Ibid., p. 93.
138 Ibid., p. 49.
139 Ibid., p. 102.
140 Ibid., p. 51.
141 A substantial part of the Mudhakkirāt was serialised in the Egyptian weekly al-Siyāsa al-ʾUsbūᶜiyya, edited by Haykal himself, during the years 1926–27. One critic argues

that those parts may have been censored by the author at the time; See Jābir ᶜUṣfūr, 'al-Anā fī faḍāʾ al-ākhar', Al Ḥayāt, 13 October 1997. However, the openness of the present text in traditionally sensitive areas of Arab writing, such as religion and women, does not support this view.

142 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, *Mudhakkirāt al-shabāb*, al-Majilis al-Aᶜlā lil-Thaqāfa, Cairo, 1996, p. 55.
143 Ibid., pp. 65–70.
144 Ibid., p. 201.
145 Ibid., p. 75.
146 Ibid., p. 175.
147 Ibid., p. 195.
148 Ibid., pp. 106–07.
149 See Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Ṣafaḥāt min al-Tārīkh al-Adabī lī-Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm min Wāqiᶜ Rasāʾil wa wathāʾiq*, Dār al-Maᶜārif, Cario, 1975, pp. 11–19.
150 See Ghālī Shukrī, *Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm: al-Jīl wa al-Ṭabaqa wa al-Ruʾya*, Dār al-Fārābī, Beirut, 1993, p. 50.
151 For the texts of the correspondence between al-Ḥakīm and his father, see his *Ṣafaḥāt* . . . , pp. 11–19.
152 al-Ḥakīm, *Bird of the East*, trans. with intro., R. Baily Winder, Khayats, Beirut, 1966.
153 The edition used in this study is that of Kitāb al-Hilāl, no. 77, Dār al-Hilāl, Cairo, 1957, to which all page references are made.
154 An example of the direct early influence of *ᶜUṣfūr* on younger writers can be found in two stories set in Paris by the Syrian Fuʾād al-Shāyib (1911–70), namely 'Al-Sharq Sharq' (East is East) and 'Aḥlām Yūlānd' (The Dreams of Yolande) from the collection *Tārīkh Jurḥ* (History of a Wound), 1944.
155 See Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Malāmiḥ Dākhiliyya*, Maktabat al-Ādāb, 1982, p. 156; see also Shukrī, *Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm: al-Jīl wal-Ṭabaqa wal-Ruʾya*, pp. 38–39.
156 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Zahrat al-ᶜUmr*, Maktabat al-Ādāb, n.d., p. 83.
157 Ibid., p. 90.
158 In his short comment on *ᶜUṣfūr*, von Grunebaum argues, not without good reason, that the novel, 'can hardly be considered a work of art, but merely provides the author with occasions for unrestrained speechmaking . . . '. See his *Modern Islam*, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1962, pp. 277–80.
159 For a pro-Marxist treatment of *ᶜUṣfūr*, which labels al-Ḥakīm as a reactionary for denouncing Marxist thought through Ivan and extolling the spiritualism of the East, see Maḥmūd Amīn al-ᶜĀlim, *Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm Mufakkiran Fannānan*, pp. 53–73. For a similar view, see also Ghālī Shukrī, *Thawrat al-Muᶜtazil*, Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, Beirut, 1982, where the author labels the novel as 'a naive, reactionary story', and dismisses the character of the Russian worker as 'a mask behind which al-Ḥakīm hid his views of scientific socialism', pp. 148–49, 151.
160 See Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Malāmiḥ Dākhiliyya*, pp. 300–01 and 37–38. See also Shukrī, *Al-Jīl* . . . , pp. 48–51.
161 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Zahrat al-ᶜUmr*, see pp. 23, 52, 109, 110, 123, 163 and 250.
162 Ibid., pp. 9–15.
163 Al-Ḥakīm refers to a one-act play of his, written originally in French, entitled '*Devant son guichet*', which he presented to the real-life Suzie, that is, Emma Durand, at the beginning of their relationship. See Shukrī, *Al-Jīl* . . . , pp. 49–50. The play, written in 1926, was translated into Arabic in 1935 by Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī Muḥammad. For the text of the play, see Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, '*Amām Shubbāk al-Tadhākir*' in *al-Masraḥ al-Munawwaᶜ*, Maktabat al-Ādāb, n.d., pp. 803–12.
164 Sexual initiative as the prerogative of the representative of the more powerful culture is a symbol that Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī was to emphasise more clearly in his novella, *Qindīl ʾUmm Hāshim*, as will be shown later.

165 In a further source of the realistic origin of the novel, al-Ḥakīm says that he was so angered by the discovery of Emma Durand's lover that he tried to hire a bully to give him a good beating, but was unsuccessful. See Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Miṣr bayna ᶜAhdayn* (Egypt between Two Ages), Maktabat al-Ādāb, 1983, pp. 49–52.
166 Al-Ḥakīm's emphasis.
167 This view is reiterated in a newspaper article written in 1947, nearly ten years after *ᶜUṣfūr*, where al-Ḥakīm argues that both Christianity and Islam were based on socialist principles, that it was extreme capitalism, not socialism, that 'destroyed the essence of religion'. See Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Yaqẓat al-Fikr*, Maktabat al-Ādāb, 1986, p. 27.
168 Parliamentary democracy in Egypt from the 1920s to 1952, heavily manipulated by the British, the King and party partisanship, was despised by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, who favoured an absolute ruler who embodied the spirit of the nation, as he preached in ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ.
169 Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, like Maḥmūd Amīn al-ᶜĀlim (see note 156), approaches *ᶜUṣfūr min al-Sharq* from a pro-Marxist perspective. He offers a gallant defence of Europe and its modern values against the denunciations of Ivan and Muḥsin, and by implication al-Ḥakīm, whom he sees, like al-ᶜĀlim, as a reactionary thinker. Ṭarābīshī also brings to his treatment of the novel a new dimension, namely that of examining the acculturation issue in terms of gender relations in the East. See his book, *Sharq wa Gharb: Rujūla wa ᵓUnūtha*, pp. 18–47. Interestingly, in an earlier study of his, Ṭarābīshī approaches *ᶜUṣfūr min al-Sharq* from a completely different angle, i.e. in terms of the conflict between the attractions of art and life for the artist. For comparison, see his *Luᶜbat al-Ḥulm wal-Wāqiᶜ: Dirāsa fī adab Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm*, pp. 38–49. Ṭarābīshī maintains the same latter approach in his study of *Zahrat al-ᶜUmr* – see note 173.
170 Tawfīiq al-Ḥakīm, *The Return of the Spirit*, trans. with intro., William Hutchins, Three Continents Press, Washington, DC, 1990.
171 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ*, Part II, pp. 46–49. For an approach to the theme of East and West in both *ᶜAwdat al-Rūḥ* and *ᶜUṣfūr min al-Sharq*, based on al-Ḥakīm's famous dichotomy of the heart and the mind, see Paul Starkey, *From the Ivory Tower*, Ithaca Press, London, 1987, pp. 108–29.
172 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Fann al-Adab*, pp. 122–24.
173 For a consideration of a different theme in *Zahrat al-ᶜUmr*, i.e. the conflict between the attractions of art and life for the artist, see Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Luᶜbat al-Ḥulm wal-Wāqiᶜ: Dirāsa fī adab Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm*, Dār al-Ṭalīᶜa, Beirut, 1972, pp. 29–37.
174 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Zahrat al-ᶜUmr*, pp. 69, 72, 74–75, 91, 171.
175 Compare al-Shidyāq's praise of the way Europeans bring up their children as opposed to Easterner's, discussed earlier.
176 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *ᶜAṣā al-Ḥakīm*, Maktabat al-Ādāb, n.d., pp. 52–53.
177 Compare al-Ḥakīm's *al-Malik ᵓUdīb* (King Oedipus) with Cocteau's *The Infernal Machine*; *Bigmālyūn* with Shaw's *Pygmalion*; and *Braksā aw Mushkilat al-Ḥukm* (Praxagora or the Problem of Government) with Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*.
178 Edward Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, p. 17.
179 Basil Davidson, *Africa in Modern History: The Search for a New Society*, Allen Lane, London, 1978, quoted in Ibid., pp. 252–53.
180 See for instance al-Ḥakīm's article '*Shams al-Sharq*' (The Sun of the East) in *Fann al-Adab*, Maktabat al Ādāb, n.d., pp. 125–26.
181 See his article '*al-Ḥaḍāra wa al-Sharq*' (Civilisation and the East), ibid., pp. 119–21.
182 From an article in the weekly magazine *Ākhir Sāᶜa* (26 June 1946), collected in Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Yaqẓat al-Fikr*, pp. 69–72.
183 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *ᶜUṣfūr min al-Sharq*, pp. 180–82.
184 For a relatively recent example of scholars still perpetuating this mistaken understanding of al-Ḥakīm's view of the West, see ᶜIṣām Bahiyy, *Al-Riḥla ilā al-Gharb*, pp. 117–62.

185 Al- Ḥakīm's quotation marks.
186 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Yaqẓat al-Fikr*, pp. 107–13.
187 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Taḥiddiyāt Sanat Alfayn*, Maktabat Miṣr, 1988?, p. 61.
188 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Malāmiḥ Dākhiliyya*, p. 174.
189 Ḥusayn Fawzī, *Sindbād ilā al-Gharb*, p. 289.
190 Compare Louis ᶜAwaḍ, another moderniser, who argues that the study of the history of civilisations has proven that 'it has always been easier for people to adopt what leads to their material welfare…than what leads to their intellectual and moral advancement…' See Louis ᶜAwaḍ, *Tārikh al-Fikr al-Miṣrī al-Ḥadīth:al-Fikr al-Siyāsī wal-Ijtimāᶜī*, p. 31.
191 See my discussion of al-Shidyāq earlier in the text.
192 Ḥusayn Fawzī, *Sindbād Miṣrī*, 2nd edn, Dār al-Maᶜārif, Cairo, 1969, pp. 104–05.
193 Ḥusayn Fawzī, *Sindbād fī Riḥlat al-Ḥayāt*, Iqraᶜ series, no. 306, Dār al-Maᶜārif, Cairo, pp. 141–42.
194 See Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Qabas*, 23 March 1986.
195 Ibid.
196 See my discussion of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn later in the text.
197 See M.M. Badawi, *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 210.
198 Jūrj Ṭarābīshī refers to al-Jābirī's novels *Qadar Yalhū* and *Qaws Quzaḥ* as belonging to 'the pre-natal stage of the Arabic novel'. See his *Sharq wa Gharb: Rujūla wa ʾUnūtha*, p. 71.
199 M.M. Badawi, *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 210.
200 For an analysis of the novel, see Ibrāhīm al-Saᶜāfīn, *Taṭawwur al-Riwāya al-ᶜArabiyya fī Bilād al-Shām* (*1870–1967*), Dār al-Rashīd, Baghdad, 1980, pp. 226–31.
201 Shakīb al-Jābirī, *Qadar Yalhū*, Dār al-Yaqaẓa al-ᶜArabiyya, Damascus, n.d., p. 51. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.
202 At the time, Syria was under the French mandate.
203 For an overview of the fiction of al-Jābirī as a romantic novelist, see Sayyid Ḥāmid al-Nassāj, *Bānūrāmā al-Riwāya al-ᶜArabiyya al-Ḥadītha*, pp. 210–13.
204 For an English translation, see Taha Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, Octagon Books, New York, 1975.
205 Many of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's ideas on Egypt and Europe expounded in *Mustaqbal* can be traced back to the influence of Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid on him. For an exposition of the latter's notions on the subject, see Mahmoudi, *The Education of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn*, pp. 44–45.
206 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa fī Miṣr*, pp. 21–25.
207 Pierre Cachia attributes Ḥusayn's theory to Valéry's 'analysis of the European mind into three components: the Greek element apparent in literature, philosophy and art; the Roman element, in politics and law; and Christianity'. See Pierre Cachia, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: his place in the Egyptian Literary Renaissance*, Luzac, London, 1956, pp. 89–90.
208 For a refutation of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's views on the 'Greekness' of the Egyptian mind by a contemporary Egyptian scholar, see Zakī Mubārak's review of *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa* in Karīma Zakī Mubārak, ed., *Al-Maᶜārik al-Adabiyya bayna Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wa Zakī Mubārak*, al-Zahrāʾ lil-Ṭibāᶜa wal-Nashr, Cairo, 1995, pp. 165–81.
209 Ibid., pp. 26–30.
210 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn devotes two chapters in *Mustaqbal al-Thāqafa* to argue the necessity of Greek and Latin for sound education. See pp. 161–75.
211 Ibid., pp. 31–35.
212 Ibid., pp. 40–41.
213 Ibid., pp. 180–81.
214 For a review of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's ideas on Greek thought and literature, see Abdelrashid Mahmoudi, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's Education: From the Azhar to the Sorbonne*, Curzon Press,

Richmond, 1998, pp. 202–09. See also Aḥmad ᶜItmān, 'Tafāᶜul al-Ādāb al-ᶜĀlamiyya fī Tūrāth Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: al-Adab al-Yūnānī wal-Adab al-Lātīnī', in *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: Māᵓat ᶜĀm min al-Nuhūḍ al-ᶜArabī*, ed., A. Tallīma, Dār al-Fikr, Cairo, 1989(?), pp. 225–76.

215 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's views on this issue are not unlike those of Herodotus, who saw the Persian Wars of the fifth century BC 'as a conflict between freedom and slavery, between Oriental and arbitrary despots on the one hand, and on the other hand free Greek communities in which men were required to persuade their fellow citizens and to be responsible for their actions. In Herodotus the Persians are portrayed as driven by the whip, while the Greeks fight for themselves . . . .' See Herodotus, *The Histories*, Penguin Books, London, 1996, p. xvi.

216 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Qādat al-Fikr*, Maṭbaᶜat Dār al-Maᶜārif n.d., pp. 46–52. For a critical assessment of Ḥusayn's views in *Qādat al-Fikr*, see Yūsuf Nūr ᶜAwaḍ, *al-Ruᵓya al-Ḥaḍāriyya wal-Naqdiyya fī Adab Ṭāhā Ḥusayn*, Dār al-Qalam, Beirut, n.d., pp. 29–52.

217 Ibid., pp. 217–18.

218 Ṭāhā Ḥussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, trans. Sidney Glazer, pp. 21–22. For the Arabic original, see pp. 51–53.

219 Ibid.

220 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Min Baᶜīd*, al-Maṭbaᶜa al-Raḥmāniyya, Cairo, 1935, p. 3.

221 Ibid., pp. 18–20.

222 Ibid., p. 25. It would be fair to remark now that the attitude of 'most Egyptians' towards the art of acting has changed since the 1920s when Ḥusayn wrote this report.

223 Ibid., pp. 114–26.

224 Ibid., pp. 164–72.

225 As early as 1923 he had argued that 'science has become totally Western' and that therefore 'our adoption of Western scientific ways should not be limited except by our ability [to absorb it]', 'Nahḍat al-Sharq al-ᶜArabī wa Mawqifuhu bi-ᵓizāᵓ al-Madaniyya al-Gharbiyya', *Al-Hilāl*, January 1923, p. 31. (This was a questionnaire conducted by the magazine on the 'Rise of the Arab East and its attitude toward Western civilization'.) Quoted in Aḥmad ᶜUlbī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: Rajul wa Fikr wa ᶜAṣr*, Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1985, p. 442.

226 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Min Baᶜīd*, pp. 245–46. For the entire text of the article, see pp. 204–46.

227 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Al-Ayyām III*, Dār al-Maᶜārif, Cairo, 1972, p. 91.

228 Ghālī Shukrī, *Mādhā Yabqā min Ṭāhā Ḥusayn?*, Dār al-Mutawassiṭ, Beirut, 1974, pp. 38–40.

229 Ibid., pp. 51–52.

230 Ibid., p. 65.

231 Ibid., pp. 75–76.

232 The novel has been translated into French by Amina and Moënis Taha Hussein under the title *Adib ou l'aventure occidentale* (Paris 1988).

233 On the technical shortcomings of *Adīb*, see Badawi, *A Short History*, p. 126.

234 Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Adīb*, kutub lil-Jamīᶜ, no. 6, Sharikat al-Tawzīᶜ al-Miṣriyya, 1953, p. 32.

235 Ibid., pp. 59–64.

236 Ibid., pp. 87–88.

237 Ibid., p. 101.

238 Ibid., pp. 109–10.

239 For a discussion of *Adīb* in a sexual context, see Derek Hopwood, *Sexual Encounters*, pp. 253–55.

240 Ibid., pp. 116–17.

241 Ibid., p. 127.

242 The symptoms described by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn agree with a diagnosis of manic-depressive psychosis.

243 Ibid., pp. 129–30.

244 See for instance, H. Kilpatrick, *The Modern Egyptian Novel*, Ithaca Press, London, 1974, pp. 36–38.
245 Ibid., p. 132.
246 Bahāʾ Ṭāhir, himself an Egyptian writer who contributed to the body of literature on the East–West theme as will be discussed later in this book, holds that *Adīb* with its illustration of the irreconcilable contradictions between the two cultures, shows 'Ṭāhā Ḥusayn at his most pessimistic'. For a discussion of the novel within the context of Ḥusayn's views of the West, see Bahāʾ Ṭāhir, *Abnāʾ Rifāʿa: al-Thaqāfa wal-Ḥurriyya* (The Children of Rifāʿa: Culture and Freedom), kitāb al-Hilāl, no.514, Dār al-Hilāl, 1993, pp. 86–149.
247 Pierre Cachia is aware of the difficulty of interpreting the novel: 'one is tempted to see in the unfortunate hero a personification of an entire generation which, by its eager adoption of Western ways, subjected itself to great strains in domestic life and moral outlook; but of course such interpretation would militate against Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's own call for Westernisation. The novel is best regarded as a psychological study of intrinsic interest…'. See Pierre Cachia, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn*, p. 193.
248 According to an interview given by the author to Pierre Cachia, the story of Adīb is 'strictly factual'. Ibid., p. 193. M.M. Badawi, by comparison, sees the novel as indicative of 'the fatal attraction of European civilisation for the young intellectual from the East who loses all his traditional values'. See Badawi, *A Short History*, p. 126.
249 *Al-Ayyām* III, pp. 125, 144–45.
250 In her memoirs published after Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's death, his wife gives further evidence that the protagonist of *Adīb* is based on a real person, whom she had actually met. See *Maʿaka*, p. 294. Another Egyptian scholar, who was a contemporary of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in Paris, actually gives the name of the real Adīb as a certain 'Jalāl Shuʿayb', who 'wasted his youth in Paris and precipitated his own death before he obtained any degree'. See Wadīʿ Falasṭīn, 'Sīrat Muḥammad Ṣabrī al-Sūrbūnī', *Al-Ḥayat*, 21 September 1999.
251 For details of his life, see Aḥmad Amīn's autobiography, *Ḥayātī*, Dār al-kitāb al-ʿArabi, Beirut, 1971, *passim*.
252 The studies are those of *Fajr al-Islām, Ḍuḥā al-Islām, and Ẓuhr al-Islām*, published 1929–55.
253 Aḥmad Amīn, *Al-Sharq Wal-Gharb*, Maktabat al-Nabḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1955; trans. Wolfgang H. Behn, *Orient and Occident: An Egyptian's Quest for National Identity*, Adiyok, Berlin, 1984, p. 15. Further references are given in the text.
254 For a collection of his stories in English translation, see Alī al-Duʿājī, *Sleepless Nights*, trans. with intro. William Granara, Beit al-Hikma, Carthage, 1991.
255 *Al-Mabāḥith*, no. 4, July, 1944.
256 *Al-Mabāḥith*, no. 8, November, 1944.
257 Ibid.
258 Ibid.
259 Ibid.
260 Ibid.
261 *Al-Mabāḥith*, no. 9, December, 1944.
262 For a number of different critical approaches to *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*, see the following articles: M.M. Badawi, 'The lamp of ʾUmm Hāshim: the Egyptian intellectual between East and West', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 1, 1970, pp. 145–61 (republished in M.M. Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature and the West*, pp. 83–97); Susan Gohlman, 'Women as cultural symbols in Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's *Saint's Lamp*,' *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 10, 1979, pp. 117–27; Katrina McLean, 'Poetic themes in Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's *Qindīl ʾUmm Hāshim*', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 11, 1980, pp. 80–87; and Muhammed Siddiq, ' "Deconstructing" *The Saint's Lamp*', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 17, pp. 126–45.

263 Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, *Qindīl ʾUmm Hāshim*, p. 20. Subsequent page numbers are given in the text. For an autobiographical article, 'Ṣawāmiᶜ al-ᶜIlm', which tries to dispel the popular Egyptian image of Europe (and especially Paris) as a place of pleasure-seeking and dissolute life. See Ḥusayn Fawzī, *Sindbād ilā al-Gharb*, pp. 168–78.
264 All translations are my own from the Arabic text, unless otherwise indicated.
265 See M.M. Badawi, trans., *The Saint's Lamp*, p. 10.
266 The Arabic says literally, '. . . it was she who deflowered his virgin innocence', translated by Badawi as, 'In giving herself to him, she put an end to his chastity'. Ibid., p. 18.
267 Ibid., p. 19.
268 Ibid.
269 Ḥaqqī calls the 'Sleeping Beauty', 'the beauty (lit. bride) of the forest'; 'ᶜarūs al-ghāba'; see p. 34 of the Arabic text.
270 See M.M. Badawi, trans., *The Saint's Lamp*, p. 29.
271 Ibid., pp. 33–34.
272 Ibid., p. 35.
273 Ibid., pp. 35–36.
274 My own translation. See Ḥaqqī, *Qindīl*, p. 55.
275 Ḥaqqī who spent four years in Rome in the years leading up to the Second World War comments in his memoirs that he had never felt 'in danger of being swallowed' by Western civilisation: 'my first task is to seek enlightenment . . . and to learn the meaning of civilisation . . . without giving up my Egyptian identity'. See Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, *Dhikrayāt Maṭwiyya*, p. 126.
276 I have partly relied in my analysis of Ḥaqqī's *Qindīl* . . . on my treatment of the subject in an article I have previously published in Arabic. See Rashīd al-ᶜInānī, *al-Maᶜnā al-Murāwigh*, Kitābāt Naqdiyya, no. 22, al-Hayʾa al-ᶜĀmma li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfa, Cairo, 1993, pp. 9–23.
277 For more details see Sabry Hafez's obituary of Louis ᶜAwaḍ in *The Independent*, 14 September 1990.
278 For a complete listing of ᶜAwaḍ's publications see the list at the end of his autobiographical work, *Awrāq al-ᶜUmr*: *Sanawāt al-Takwīn*, Maktabat Madbūlī, 1989.
279 The subject of his thesis was 'The theory and practice of poetic diction in English and French literature'; See ᶜAwaḍ, *Awrāq al-ᶜUmr*, p. 567.
280 Luwīs ᶜAwaḍ, *al-ᶜAnqāʾ aw Tārīkh Ḥasan Miftāḥ*, pp. 8–9.
281 The Arabic title of the translation is *Brūmithyūs Ṭalīqan lil-Shāᶜir Shilī*, Maktabat al-Nahda al-Miṣriyya, Cairo, 1946; republished by the General Book Organisation in 1987; and by al-Majlis al-ᶜAlā lil-Thaqāfa, Cairo (among other translations by ᶜAwaḍ in the same volume) in 2001.
282 This was published in English with the same title under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture (Isis House, Cairo, 1963; an Arabic translation in two volumes was published by al-Majlis al-ᶜAlā lil-Thaqāfa, Cairo in 2001).
283 Luwīs ᶜAwaḍ, *Mudhakkirāt Ṭālib Baᶜtha*, al-kitāb al-Dhahabī, Rūzalyūsuf, November, 1965, p. 40. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.
284 See earlier in the text my discussion of *ᶜUṣfūr* and al-Ḥakīm in general.
285 For a revealing interview with Lewis ᶜAwaḍ in his late years, where he remains steadfast in his wholehearted adoption of Western civilisation and blames continuing Egyptian/Arab backwardness on the right-wing conservative forces in society and the ruling elites for obstructing what he sees as the only way forward, see Aḥmad al-Shaykh, *Al-Muthaqqafūn al-ᶜArab wal-Gharb* (Arab Intellectuals and the West) al Markaz al-ᶜArabī lil-Dirāsāt al-Gharbiyya, 2000, pp. 95–111.
286 Dhūl-Nūn Ayyūb, *Al-Duktūr Ibrāhīm: Ḥayātuh wa Maʾāthiruh*, Ministry of Education, Baghdad, 1960, p. 100. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

287 It is worth remembering here that Iraq, created as a political entity by Britain at the end of the First World War, has formally been an independent state since 1932, though effectively Britain wielded power there through an alliance treaty and military presence.

288 For an insight into *Al-Duktūr Ibrāhīm* in the wider context of a discussion of the novel of education or upbringing in Arabic, see Nedal M. Al-Mousa, 'The Arabic *Bildungsroman*: a generic appraisal', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1993, pp. 223–40.

289 This is also true, though to a lesser extent, of his later collection *Qarn al-Lājiʾīn* (The Century of Refugees), where some of the stories are set in the Vienna of the 1970s. For both collections, see Dhūl-Nūn Ayyūb, *Al-Āthār al-Kāmila li-Adab Dhīl-Nūn Ayyūb*, vol. 2, Manshūrat wizārat al-Iᶜlām, Silsilat al-Qiṣṣa wal-Masraḥiyya, Baghdad, 1977.

290 Dhūl al-Nūn Ayyūb, *Al-Āthār al-Kāmila li-Adab Dhīl-Nūn Ayyūb*, vol. 2, p. 290. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

291 Ayyūb's novella, *Wa ᶜalā al-Dunyā al-Salām* (Say Goodbye to the World!, 1972), is another work of modest literary worth set in Vienna among Arab expatriates and their European friends. The time is the 1960s, characterised by permissiveness in Europe and revolution in Arab countries. The protagonist is a pro-Arab German journalist who leads a hedonist existence, sustained by rich Arab exiles. Against the backdrop of love scenes verging on the erotic and endless discussions of politics against a background of tragic events in the unnamed but easily identifiable Iraq of ᶜAbd al-Karīm Qāsim's short dictatorship (1958–63), two juxtaposed pictures emerge: a hippie Europe and a blood-soaked Middle East. In an epilogue, the author tries to maintain a neutral position between the two cultures: 'this is a story that shows one side of the West: freedom that has reached its maximum, and another of the East where events have befuddled intents and laid waste advantage. I neither defend the West, nor criticise the East; these are merely the thoughts of a man of letters, who cannot keep quiet . . . and who denounces censorship . . . ' (pp. 118–19). Postural neutrality aside, there is no doubt as to the preferences of the author, who lived for many years in Vienna, and those of his characters.

292 Suhayl Idrīs, *Al-Ḥayy al-Lātīnī*, Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1989, p. 19. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

293 In a short story by the title 'Milūshkā' from Suhayl Idrīs's collection *Al-Damᶜ al-Murr* (1956), almost contemporaneous with the novel, the issue of the spirituality of the East and the materialism of the West is superficially illustrated through the transformation from a hedonist life style to a spiritual one by the Parisian girl, Milūshkā, after discovering Gandhi and visiting India. See Suhayl Idrīs, *Qiṣaṣ Suhayl Idrīs: Aqāṣīs Thāniya*, Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1977, pp. 14–17.

294 For an insightful analysis of the novel on the basis of the contrasting sexual moralities of East and West, see Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Sharq wa Gharb* . . . , pp. 71–112; another analysis from the same vantage point is that by Ghālī Shukrī in his *Azmat al-Jins fī al-Qiṣṣa al-ᶜArabiyya*, 3rd edn, Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, Beirut, 1978, pp. 165–82. For a discussion of the novel within the context of other encounter novels, see also Issa Boullata, 'Encounter between East and West: a theme in contemporary Arabic novels', in Issa Boullata, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arabic Literature*, Three Continents Press, Washington DC, 1980, pp. 47–60.

295 The tension between the notions of the purity of Arab women and the lasciviousness of French women is again illustrated in a short story of the same period by the author, namely, 'Ṣūrat Nādyā' from the above-mentioned collection, where the image of the pure Nādyā is juxtaposed in the protagonist's consciousness with Gilberte, a French look-alike who loves him but who puts him off by what he sees as her forward manner; see Suhayl Idrīs, *Aqāṣīṣ Thāniya*, pp. 39–45.

296 In a recent interview, the author has no hesitation in judging his protagonist, as having surrendered in his treatment of Janine to the power of traditional morality. See 'Ḥiwār

maᶜa Riwāʾiyyīn Lubnāniyyīn: Suhayl Idrīs', in *Al-Ādāb*, vols 9–10, 2000, pp. 4–18. For further recent re-evaluations of the novel, see the articles in the same source by Kirsten Shāyid (Scheid) and Sāmī Suwaydān, ibid., pp. 19–30 and 31–48, respectively.

297 For an analysis of the novel that views it as seriously marred in its characterisation, theme and plot by an individualistic approach, closely mirroring the author's own life, see Ibrāhīm al-Saᶜāfīn, *Taṭawwur al-Riwāya al-ᶜArabiyya al-Ḥadītha fī Bilād al-Shām*, pp. 441–69. For a comprehensive study of the author's work, see Abubakar Balarabe, *Suhayl Idrīs: Lebanon's Major Literary Figure, passim*.

298 The novel is in large part autobiographical, with the character of Ram being a persona for the author. For an account of the author's life in Europe and death by suicide in 1969 in London, see Diana Athill, *After a Funeral*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1986. For a consideration of both Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club* and Athill's *After a Funeral*, see Ahdaf Soueif, *Mezzaterra: Fragments from the Common Ground*, Bloomsbury, London, 2004, pp. 194–203.

299 Waguih Ghali, *Beer in the Snooker Club*, Serpent's Tail, London, 1987, p. 60. The inverted commas in this quotation are the author's own. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

300 Compare elsewhere in this book the feelings, on experiencing visiting a pub, of the Moroccan female protagonist of Ḥanān al-Shaykh's story, written more than 20 years later, 'Sweeping the Sun off Rooftops'.

3 The postcolonial period (1): proud encounters

301 According to the author, the novel was written in the summer of 1955 and serialised in part in the Cairene daily *Al-Jumhūriyya* in 1960. See his short preface to the novel.

302 P.M. Kurpershoek, *The Short Stories of Yūsuf Idrīs*, pp. 66–67. For the Arabic original, see *Al-Bayḍāʾ*, pp. 181–82.

303 Compare a very similar sentiment expressed by Kamāl ᶜAbd al-Jawwād, Naguib Mahfouz's protagonist and persona for the author in the *Cairo Trilogy*, quoted in the Introduction to the present book.

304 The story was first serialised in weekly instalments in the Cairene daily *al-Masāʾ* between 17.7.1959 and 7.8.1959; later included in the collection *al-ᶜAskarī al-Aswad wa Qiṣaṣ ʾUkhrā*, Cairo, 1962.

305 Yūsuf Idrīs, *Nuyū Yūrk 80*, Maktabat Miṣr, Cairo, 1980? The book also includes 'al-Sayyida Fīyinnā', retitled 'Vienna 60'. It is this edition of both stories that I use here and all page references in the text are made to it.

306 This contemptuous view of the Americo-European encounter is somewhat anticipatory of the author's harsh dismissal of American culture in New York 80, as will be shown in Chapter 5 of this book.

307 For a somewhat similar view of the ending of 'Madam Vienna', see ᶜAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Qiṭṭ, *Yūsuf Idrīs wa al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī*, Dār al-Maᶜārif, Cairo, 1980, pp. 200–01. Al-Qiṭṭ holds that the ending is forced in order to point out the impossibility of separating oneself from one's own cultural environment. The fact that the rejection is mutual rather than one-sided forces the point even more in his view.

308 Reference here is made to Idrīs's collected plays, *Naḥwa Masraḥ ᶜArabī*, 1974.

309 For a detailed study of this play, see Dorota Rudnick-Kassem, 'Egyptian drama and social change: a study of thematic and artistic development in Yūsuf Idrīs's plays', PhD thesis, 1992, pp. 77–92.

310 For an English translation, see Yusuf Idrīs, *The Cheapest Nights and Other Stories*, trans. Wadida Wassef, Peter Owen, London, 1978.

311 All quotations here are from Wadida Wassef's translation, *The Cheapest Nights*, as in note 310. All page references in the text are to that translation.

312 This part is my own translation from the Arabic text (*The Cheapest Nights*, p. 30). For some reason, Wadida Wassef (*The Cheapest Nights*, p. 131) omits it from her

translation. Roger Allen, however, retains it in his own translation of the story, for which see Yūsuf Idrīs, *In the Eye of the Beholder*, ed. Roger Allen, Bibliotheca Islamica, Minneapolis and Chicago, 1978, pp. 149–67.

313 Apparently Idrīs himself had a most bizarre interpretation of his own short story. In an interview given to Kurpershoek in June 1978 he reveals that he was prompted to write the story by Nasser's acceptance in 1970 of the American peace initiative which came to be known as the Rogers Plan after the name of the then US Secretary of State. Kurpershoek reports that Idrīs was indignant at Nasser's readiness to compromise, and quotes him as saying: 'For twenty years Nasser preached hatred of the United States and kept the people prostrated [in this position]. Then he jumped through the window in order to meet Rogers. So why did he inveigh against America? That is the reason why I put all the blame on the preacher.' Kurpershoek rightly comments that such an implication can only elude the reader without the author's additional comment. I must add here that while possibly useful in some respects, the author's own comment should not be taken as a prescription for a uniform interpretation of the story pre-empting different readings. Authors sometimes know least about their work! See Kurpershoek, *The Short Stories of Yūsuf Idrīs*, pp. 160–61.

314 For a view of the story from a feminist angle, see Renata clara Wise, 'The concept of sexuality in the short stories of Yūsuf Idrīs', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1992. Wise sees the story as a description of 'the prototype of male seduction by female exposure . . . ', pp. 180–84. Wise also discusses briefly 'Madam Vienna', *New York 80* and 'al-Sīgār' (another short story to be discussed below), all from a purely feminist point of view, pp. 110–18.

315 'Al-Sīgār' was first published in the Qatar magazine, *Al-Dūḥa*, 5, 1981.

316 Reference here is made to *Al-Muʾallafāt al-Kāmila li Yūsuf Idrīs* (The Complete Works of Yusuf Idrīs), ᶜĀlam al-kutub, Cairo, 1971, pp. 124–92.

317 This view of mine is in sharp contrast with that of ᶜAlī al-Rāᶜī, who holds that the excessive length of the story deprives it of artistic and intellectual concentration. He writes: 'The experience of the peasant child with Sultan Ḥāmid turns with deadly slowness into a national lyric in praise of the inner qualities of the Egyptian people and their insuppressible ability to conquer their enemies.' See *Yūsuf Idrīs bi-Qalam Hāʾulāʾ*, Maktabat Miṣr, Cairo, 1986?, pp. 92–93.

318 Compare Lancelot in the Arthurian legend.

319 In a different context, Kurpershoek comments, 'Idrīs's articles exhibit an almost mystical faith in the simmering potential of the Egyptian people . . . ', op. cit., p. 57.

320 Edward Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, p. 215.

321 Fatḥī Ghānim, *Al-Sākhin wal-Bārid*, al kitāb al-Dhahabī, no. 79, Muʾassasat Rūz al-Yūsuf, 1960, p. 7. Subsequent page references are given in the text.

322 Ibid., p. 25.

323 For a consideration of al-Saḥḥār's fiction, see Ghālī Shukrī, *Azmat al-Jins fī al-Qiṣṣa al-ᶜArabiyya*, pp. 215–38.

324 I have not been able to establish whether the description of Hamburg was based on the personal experience of the author, but the detail is specific enough to suggest a possible personal familiarity with the locale if at least of a fleeting nature.

325 ᶜAbd al-Ḥamīd Jūda al-Saḥḥār, *Jisr al-Shayṭān*, Maktabat Miṣr, n.d. (1962?), pp. 43–44. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

326 It may be this element of violence which motivated Edward Said to discuss the novel in terms of its being a rendering in reverse of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. See Edward Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, p. 255.

327 See Aḥmad Saᶜīd Muḥmmadiyya, *Al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ*, Dār al-ᶜAwda, Beirut, 1976, pp. 129–31.

328 See M.T. Amyuni, ed., *Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North: a Casebook*, American University of Beirut, 1985, p. 16.

329 Compare the works of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, and Suhayl Idrīs, discussed earlier in this book.
330 Tayeb Salih, *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamāl*, Dār al-ᶜAwda, Beirut, 1969; trans. Denys Johnson-Davies, *Season of Migration to the North*, Heinemann, London, 1969. p. 22.
331 Ibid., p. 23.
332 Ibid., p. 24.
333 Ibid., p. 26.
334 Ibid., p. 33.
335 See A.S. Muḥammadiyya, *Al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ*, pp. 129–31; also M.T. Amyuni, ed., *Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North: a Casebook*, p. 16.
336 For a prototype of Muṣṭafā Saᶜīd and the encounter with a culture through a woman representative (but without tragic consequences on this occasion) see, Ṣāliḥ's short story, 'Hākadhā yā Sādatī' (1961?) in his collection *Dūmat Wad Ḥāmid*. Ṣāliḥ describes the story as a draft for Season…. See Ṭulḥa Jibrīl, *ᶜAlā al-Darb maᶜa al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ: Mālāmiḥ min Sīra Dhātiyya*, Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Sūdāniyya, 1997, p. 69. The same collection contains a number of very short stories, or rather sketches, grouped together under the title 'Muqaddimāt', which together with the earlier story represent Ṣāliḥ's approaches to the East/West encounter before writing *Season*….
337 Tayeb Salih, *Season*…, trans. D. Johnson-Davies, p. 41.
338 For an analysis of *Season*…, which views the novel in similar terms, see Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, Sharq wa Gharb *Rujūla wa ʾunūtha: Dirāsa fī Azmat al-Jins Wal-Ḥaḍāra fī al-Riwāya al-ᶜArabiyya*, Dār al-Ṭalīᶜa, Beirut, 1977, pp. 142–85.
339 For an analysis of the novel in terms of Yungian psychology, see Muhammed Siddiq, 'The process of individuation of Al-Tayyeb Salih's novel *Season of Migration to the North*', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 9, 1978, pp. 67–104.
340 There is some disagreement surrounding the date of the author's birth, to which he himself admits in the first chapter of the memoirs, see Bin Jallūn, *Fī al-Ṭufūla*, Dār Nashr al-Maᶜrifa, Rabat, 1993, p. 7.
341 Although I refer to Bin Jallūn's text as memoirs, it is worth noting that a large number of Moroccan critics and literary historians tend to classify it as an autobiographical novel, and as such the first Moroccan novel written in Arabic. See Būshūsha bin Jumᶜa, *Ittijāhāt al-Riwāya fī al-Maghrib al-ᶜArabī*, Al-Maghāribiyya lil-Ṭibāᶜa wa al-Nashr, 1999, pp. 140–41.
342 It is worth noting that the short biography on the back cover of the book gives the age of five as the travel age, while the author himself mentions in the first chapter that he had been told he was only a few months old when he boarded the sea to England, see ibid., p. 8. Needless to say, it is the internal evidence of the text that we should believe, especially as the earliest childhood recollections given are all from Manchester.
343 Ibid., pp. 15–16.
344 Ibid., see chapters 4 and 5, pp. 25–35. Subsequent page numbers will be given in the text.
345 Moroccan academic, Saᶜīd ᶜAlūsh, dismisses the narrator's view of Moroccan society as 'superficial', and only confirming that society's view of itself 'at its moments of despair'. See his *Al-Riwāya wal-Idyūlūjyā fī al-Maghrib al-ᶜArabī*, Dār al al-Kalima lil-Nashr, Beirut, 1981, p. 107.

4 The postcolonial period (2): humbled encounters

346 Sulaymān Fayyāḍ, *Aṣwāt*, kutub ᶜArabiyya, Cairo, 1977; trans. *Voices*, with intro. By Hosam Aboul-Ela, Marion Boyars, New York and London, 1993, p. 21. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

347 For an analysis of the novella from the point of view of gender, see Nadje Al-Ali, *Gender Writing*, pp. 97–111.

348 It would appear that the actual writing of the novel was completed two years before its publication since the published text is dated August 1970 by the author.

349 In his analysis of the novel, Jābir ᶜUṣfūr, calls *Aṣwāt* 'the fiercest criticism in a work of art that could be levelled at the backwardness of society that led to the disaster of the defeat'. See Jābir ᶜUṣfūr, '*Aṣwāt* Sulaymān Fayyāḍ,' in *Al-Ḥayāt*, 28 March 2001. ᶜUṣfūr's analysis of *Aṣwāt* continued in the next three issues of *Al-Ḥatāt*, on 4, 11 and 18 April 2001. For another analysis of the novel, see Muḥammad Badawī, 'Ishkāliyyat al-ᵓAnā wal-Ākhar:Qirāᵓa Dalāliyya fī Riwāyat *Aṣwāt*', *Ibdāᶜ*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1985, pp. 122–29; see also Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, 'Ṣūrat "al-Ukhrā fī al-Riwāya al-ᶜArabiyya: min Naqd al-Ākhar ilā Naqd al-Dhāt fī *Aṣwāt* Sulaymān Fayyāḍ', in al-Ṭāhir Labīb, ed., *Ṣūrat al-Ākhar*, pp. 797–810.

350 Ṣunᶜallāh Ibrāhīm, *Najmat Aghusṭus*, Maktabat Madbūli, 1987, p. 242.

351 For a detailed discussion of style and other aspects of *Najmat Aghusṭus*, see Buṭrus al-Ḥallāq, 'Al-Dāᵓira wa Takhalkhuluhā fī *Najmat Aghusṭus*,' in *Al-Bāḥith*, vol. 1, no. 4, January–Februrary 1979, pp. 100–43.

352 Ibid., p. 242. The visit was also recorded in an earlier non-fictional work co-authored by the novelist together with Kamāl al-Qalsh, and Raᵓūf Musᶜad, namely *Insān al-Sadd al-ᶜĀlī* (The Human Being of the High Dam), published in Cairo in 1967.

353 For an extended analysis of Najmat Aghusṭus, see Maḥmūd Amīn al-ᶜĀlim, *Thulāthiyyat al-Rafḍ wal-Hazīma*: Dirāsa Naqdiyya li-Thalāth Riwāyāt li-Ṣunᶜallāh Ibrāhīm, Dār al-Mustaqbal al-ᶜArabi, 1985, pp. 57–141.

354 See section two of the novel, Ibid., pp. 141–49. It is also interesting to note that throughout the narrative, acts of digging, poring and inoculation of rock are described in erotic terms, as if the machines were performing a sexual act with the mountain. This is also linked to a third theme in the book, namely that of artistic creativity, where through a motif of references in the narrative to Michael Angelo's sculptures, the process of constructing the Dam from the mountain is shown as an act of creativity comparable to the ancient Egyptians' creation of the Abu Simbel temple and the Ramses II statues into the mountain; in both cases the relation between artist and rock is portrayed in erotic terms.

355 Compare for instance Bahāᵓ Ṭāhir's *Love in Exile*, The American University in Cairo Press, 2001, where the male Egyptian protagonist and the Austrian woman he loves both fall victim to the oppression of international political and corporate forces of the Right; see *infra* in this book my discussion of Bahāᵓ Ṭāhir. For discussion of another work of fiction by Ṣunᶜallāh Ibrāhīm, see Chapter 5 of this book.

356 ᶜAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, *Muḥāwala lil-Khurūj*, Dār al Shuᵓūn al-Thaqāfiyya al-ᶜĀmma, Baghdad, 1989, p. 6. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

357 For an insight into the fictional world of ᶜAdb al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, though not with particular reference to the novel under discussion, see Hilary Kilpatrick, 'ᶜAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim and the Search for Liberation', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. xxvi, nos. 1–2, 1995, pp. 50–66; for a sociological analysis of *Muḥāwala lil-Khurūj*, see Fatḥī Abū al-ᶜAynayn, 'Ṣūrat al-Dhāt wa Ṣūrat al-Ākhar fī al-Khaṭāb al-Riwāᵓī al-ᶜArabī: Taḥlīl Sūsyūlūjī li-Riwāyat *Muḥāwala lil-Khurūj*', in al-Ṭāhir Labīb, ed., *Ṣūrat al-Ākhar*, pp. 811–33.

358 The incompatibility of love and repression in a love story between an Arab and a European has previously been touched upon by novelist ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf in a one-chapter episode showing the impossibility of union between an Arab student in Paris, Manṣūr, and a fellow Belgian student, Catherine, because of the repressive culture to which he has to return alone. See ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf, *Al-Ashjār wa Ightiyāl Marzūq* (Trees and the Assassination of Marzūq), al-Muᵓassasa al-ᶜArabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, Beirut, 1983, pp. 241–59. For a comment on Munīf's episode

in the context of the cultural encounter between East and West, see Jūrj Ṭarābīshī, *Sharq wa Gharb*, pp. 186–92.

359 The novel is signed by the author on the last page as having been completed on 13 July 1980 in West Berlin.

360 see Hilary Kilpatrick, '[c]Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim and the Search for Liberation,' *Journal of Arabic Literature*, xxvi, nos 1–2, 1995, p. 50.

361 The corresponding occurrence in Qāsim's life was his invitation in 1974 by the Evangelical Academy and the Institute of Islamic Studies of the Free University of Berlin to take part in a seminar on Egyptian literature. In the event he stayed for some six years until 1982. See Ibid., p. 51.

362 [c]Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, *Qadar al-Ghuraf al-Muqbiḍa*, p. 128. Subsequent page references are given in the text.

363 The novel was first published in Beirut by Gallery Wāḥid in 1971 before it was published in Rabat in 1981 by al-Sharika al-Maghribiyya lil-Nāshirīn al-Muttaḥidīn.

364 This may be the Arabisation for Torre de Gracia on the Atlantic coast of Spain.

365 Muḥammad Zifzāf, *Al-Mar'a wal-Warda*, al-Sharika al-Maghribiyya lil-Nāshirīn al-Muttaḥidīn, Rabāṭ, 1987, pp. 19–21.

366 Ibid., pp. 62–63.

367 Ibid., p. 64.

368 Ibid., p. 110.

369 The title of this novel is clearly inspired by that of the eponymous poem by the Iraqi poet, [c]Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī (1926–99) from his collection, *Abārīq Muhashshama* (Broken Jugs, 1954).

370 Modern Arabic literary discourse abounds in elegiac narratives of the fall of Granada, most notably Egyptian novelist's Raḍwā [c]Āshūr's *Thulāthiyyat Ghirnāṭa* (The Granada Trilogy, Dār al-Hilāl, Cairo, 1994–95). For an English translation, see Radwa Ashour, *Granada*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, 2003.

371 Walīd Ḥajjār, *Musāfir bilā Ḥaqā'ib*, Damascus, 1979, p. 289.

372 For a brief discussion of Walīd Ḥajjār's trilogy of novels and synopses of the three parts, see Mohammed Ali Shawabkeh, *Arabs and the West: a study in the Modern Arabic Novel (1935–1985)*, Mu'tah University, Jordan, 1992, pp. 195–98, and *passim*.

373 Yāsīn Rifā[c]iyya, *Maṣra[c] Almās*, al-Hay[c]a al-Miṣriyya al-[c]Āmma lil-kitāb, 1994, p. 64.

374 Ibid., p. 62.

375 Ibid., p. 64.

376 Ibid., p. 69.

377 Compare the loss of identity by Monsieur Clément in Yusūf Idrīs's earlier story, 'Sirruhu al-Bāti[c]', discussed elsewhere in this book; compare also a much more recent work: Leila Aboulela's novel, *The Translator*, Polygon, Edinburgh, 1999, where the love between an Englishman and a Sudanese woman can only be consummated in marriage by the conversion of the secularist Ray to Islam, as will be shown in Chapter 6.

378 Ḥannā Mīnah, *Al-Rabī[c] wal-Kharīf*, Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1991, p. 43. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

379 It is worth noting that Ḥannā Mīnah was to publish four years later in 1988 a novel by the title *Ḥamāma Zarqā' fī al-Suḥub* (A Blue Pigeon in the Clouds) set in London but showing no interest at all in the cultural encounter theme. Apart from facile remarks about freedom of speech at the Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, the novel is set mainly within a hospital and is preoccupied with sentimentalised thoughts about terminal illness and death: it could have easily been set in Damascus rather than London.

380 See Ḥannā Mīnah, *Hawājis fī al-Tajriba al-Riwā'iyya*, Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1982, pp. 6–7. See also, Muḥammad al-Bāridī, *Ḥannā Mīnah: kātib al-kifāḥ wal-Faraḥ*, Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1993, pp. 27–28.

381 Mīnah claims in an interview that *Al-Rabī[c] wal-Kharīf* 'has nothing to do with my life events. It is the story of an Arab living in exile, and being immersed in the morals of

exile, until he nearly loses his soul…' See Ḥannā Mīnah, *Ḥiwārāt wa Aḥādīth*, p. 216; see also pp. 220–21.

382 See Ḥannā Mīnah, *Hawājis fī al-Tajriba al-Riwāʾiyya* pp. 127–29. Mīnāh devotes a whole chapter (pp. 127–35) to memories of his experience in Hungary and upon return from it to Damascus. Written in 1982, two years before the novel, it contains in outline events and ideas that he was to develop later in the novel. See also, Muḥammad al-Bāridī, *Ḥannā Mīnah*, pp. 42–47.

383 It was much later in life that Mīnah was to give an account of his Chinese experience in a trilogy of novels, namely, *Ḥadatha fī Bītākhū* (1995), *ʿArūs al-Mawja al-Sawdāʾ* (1996), and *Al-Mughāmara al-Akhīra* (1997). For an analysis of this trilogy, see Firyāl Kāmil Samāḥa, *Rasm al-Shakhṣiyya fī Riwāyāt Ḥannā Mīnah*, al-Muʾassara al-ʿArabiyya lil-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr, Beirut, 1999, pp. 201–20.

384 Ḥannā Mīnā, *Al-Rabīʿ wal-Kharīf*, pp. 63, 77, and *passim*.

385 Ibid., p. 96; see also pp. 201–02.

386 The extent of Ḥannā Mīnah's admiration for Nazim Hikmet is demonstrated by three books that he authored about the Turkish poet, namely, *Nāẓim Ḥikmat wa Qaḍāyā Fikriyya* (1970); *Nāẓim Ḥikmat: al-Sijn, al-Marʾa, al-Ḥayā* (1978); and *Nāẓim Ḥikmat Thāʾiran* (1980).

387 Ḥannā Mīnā, *Al-Rabīʿ wal-Kharīf*, p. 109; see also pp. 221–22 for an account of the Hungarian regime's 'tolerant' treatment of political opponents who took part in the anti-communist revolution of 1956.

388 Interestingly, Mīnah was to publish in 1991 another novel, *Fawqa al-Jabal wa taḥta al-Thalj* (Snowed under on the Mountain, 1991), set in another Eastern European country, Bulgaria, which tells of a love story between an older Lebanese writer and a Bulgarian woman, partly replicating the situation in *Al-Rabīʿ wal-Kharīf*, but this time without any cultural dimension: the focus is entirely on the meaning of love, and the complexity brought in by the age gap.

389 *Al-Thalj Yaʾtī min al-Nāfidha* (1969) is an earlier novel by Mīnah against escapism: see Badawi, ed., *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Modern Arabic Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 213.

390 For a discussion of the novel as purely a vehicle for political ideology, see Shawabkeh, *Arabs and the West*, pp. 69–71 and *passim*.

391 Khayrī al-Dhahabī, *Ḥasība*, Dār Mashriq-Maghrib, Damascus, 1996, p. 148.

392 Ibid., p. 147. Compare the following statement: 'White working classes could display as much racism as their masters. In the colonies… 'white workers were delighted on arrival… to find themselves in a position of an aristocracy of colour'. See T. Ranger, 'The invention of tradition in Colonial Africa', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger eds, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 211–62; quoted in Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, p. 23.

393 Ibid., p. 148.

394 See interview with Khayrī al-Dhababī in *Al Ḥayāt*, 20 February 2002.

395 Khayrī al-Dhahabī, *Fayyāḍ*, Manshūrāt ittiḥād al-Kuttāb al-ʿArab, Damascus, 1990, p. 85.

396 Ibid., p. 24.

397 See interview with Khayrī al-Dhahabī in *Al Ḥayāt*, 20 February 2002.

398 Khayrī al-Dhahabī, *Fayyāḍ*, p. 24 and *passim*.

399 Ibid., p. 206.

400 See interview with Khayrī al-Dhahabī in *Al Ḥayāt*, 20 February 2002.

401 Khayrī al-Dhahabī, *Hishām, or al Dawarān fī al-Makān*, Dār Mashriq-Maghrib, Damascus, 1998, p. 81.

402 Ibid., p. 80.

403 Ibid., p. 212. My italics.

404 Ibid., p. 213. This is an allusion to his torture as a political prisoner in his country.

405 Ibid., p. 228.

406 Ibid., p. 229.
407 For a short discussion of *Fayyāḍ* and *Hishām* as sexual metaphors of the cultural encounter, see Mufīd Najm, 'al-Riwāya al-ᶜArabiyya wal-Ākhar: Dhukūra wa Unūtha, Riwāyatā *Fayyāḍ* wa *Hishām* anmūdhajan', in *ᶜAmmān*, no. 40, October 1998, pp. 70–72; see also, for what amounts to a comprehensive critique of his trilogy of novels, an interview with Khayrī al-Dhahabī in *Al-Ḥayāt*, 20 April 1999.
408 See interview with Khayrī al-Dhahabī in the Saudi newspaper, *Al-Waṭan*, 22 February 2003.
409 Ibid.
410 Ibid.
411 Bahāᵓ Ṭāhir, *Majmūᶜat Aᶜmāl*, Dār al-Hilāl, 1992?, p. 99. Subsequent references will be given in the text.
412 Compare the protagonist of his later novel, *Love in Exile*, discussed later.
413 For a sensitive analysis of this story, see Guvnor Mejdell, 'The image of Europe in Egyptian literature: two recent short stories by Baha Tahir on a recurrent theme', in Marianne Laanatza *et al*., *Egypt Under Pressure: a contribution to the Understanding of Economic, Social and cultural Aspects of Egypt Today*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, uppsala, 1986, pp. 94–116.
414 Akhenaton is not actually named but the description of the King's pictures and the wording of the hieroglyphics of the hymns on the temple walls leave no doubt as to the identity of the pharaoh.
415 See Bahāᵓ Ṭāhir, *Al-Ḥubb fī al-Manfā*, p. 29, where the year 1982 is mentioned by one of the characters as the current year of the action, later corroborated by historical events, i.e. the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.
416 For a work in which Ṭāhir treats the subject of the mythologizing of Nasser after his death, see his short story 'Wa-Lākin' (But . . .) in his collection *Dhahabtu ilā Shallāl* (I went to a Waterfall); see also the present writer's analysis of this story and others in 'al-Ṭanāquḍ al-Mutajāwir fī Qiṣṣatayn lil-Miṣrī Bahāᵓ Ṭāhir' (Proximal Contrast in Two Stories by Bahāᵓ Ṭāhir), *Al-Ḥayāt*, 16 May 2001.
417 In the introduction to Bahāᵓ Ṭāhir's *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery*, Barbara Romanie, the translator, stresses that Ṭāhir's writing is about 'reconciling human differences across boundaries of culture, nationality and ideology'. See p. 5.
418 The following lines (*Hamlet*, Act 3, 1:70–74) are loosely incorporated in the dialogue between the narrator and Brigitte: 'For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,/ Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, / The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay, / The insolence of office, and the spurns / That patient merit of th' unworthy takes, . . . '. See Bahāᵓ Ṭāhir, *Al-Ḥubb fī al-Manfā*, pp. 242–43.
419 For a detailed review of *Love in Exile*, see Jābir ᶜUṣfūr's three articles, '*Al-Ḥubb fī al-Manfā*', 'Naqḍ al-Thunāᵓiyya al-Qadīma' and 'Al-Ḥubb fī hādhā al-Zamān', in *Al-Ḥayāt*, 28 August, 18 September and 25 September 1995, respectively.
420 See interview with Bahāᵓ Ṭāhir in *Al-Ḥayāt*, 12 July 1999.
421 From an interview with the author in the magazine, *Bayān al-Thaqāfa*, no. 43, 5 November 2000.
422 See Derek Hopwood, *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East, passim*.
423 For more representations of the uninhibited sexual conduct of the Oriental in a Western environment, see al-Faqīh's short stories, 'Mawᶜid taḥta Burj al-Sāᶜa' (Rendezvous under the Clock Tower), and 'Laylat al-Aqniᶜa' (Night of the Masks), both in his collection, *Marāyā Vīnīsyā* (The Mirrors of Venice). For an English translation of 'Night of the Masks', see Ahmad Fagih, *Who is Afraid of Agatha Christie*? See also, his short story 'Fasten Your Seatbelts' in *Charles, Diana And Me And Other Stories*. More dwelling on the theme of the hankering for Western city life can be found in the conversations between the Bedouin Jaber and the English woman Helena in al-Fagih's play, *Gazelles, passim*.

424 Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, *Saʾahabuki Madinatan ʾUkhrā*, Riad El-Rayyes Books, London, 1991, p. 7.
425 Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, *Hādhihi Tukhūm Mamlakatī*, Riad El-Rayyes Books, London, 1991, p. 13.
426 Ibid., p. 14.
427 Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies as *Arabian Nights and Days*, Anchor Books, New York, 1995.
428 Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies as *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, Anchor Books, New York, 1993.
429 Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, *Nafaq Tuḍḥʾuhu Imraʾa Wāḥida*, Riad El-Rayyes Books, London, 1991, pp. 235–36.
430 Ibid., p. 146.
431 Ibid., p. 224.
432 Khalīl, a suave man, who throughout idolises Sanāʾ, now his fiancée, suddenly turns into a monster who tries to rape her unaccountably before marriage. This is presented as the waking of the rough Bedouin, who has been dormant in him all the time, despite his travels, study, and experience of the West.
433 Ibid., p. 258. My italics.
434 For a wide-ranging interview with the author about his trilogy of novels and other work, see *Al-Ḥayāt*, 20 March 1999.
435 The three novels are: *Būlīn wa Aṭyāfuhā* (Pauline and her Spectres, 1990); *Al-Rajul al-Sābiq* (The Former Man, 1995); and *Sukkān al-Ṣuwar* (The Dwellers in Images, 2003).
436 Muḥammad Abī Samrā, *Al-Rajul al-Sābiq*, Dār al-Jadīd, Beirut, 1995, p. 9. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.
437 Fuʾād Yāzijī, *Asnān al-Rajul al-Mayyit*, Al-Ahālī, Damascus, 1995, p. 9. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.
438 For a study of the marginalised state of Muslim emigrants in Europe, see W.A.R. Shedid and P.S. Van Koningsveld, eds, *Muslims in the Margin: Political Responses to the Presence of Islam in Western Europe*, Pharos, Kampen, the Netherlands, 1996, *passim*.
439 In 1996, Yāzijī's published another novel, *Al-Volga al-Azraq* (The Blue Volga), set in Moscow during the Gorbachev years. Again it is the story of Arab students in a foreign country, but there is no genuine engagement with the theme of the encounter with the Other here; only facile illustrations of the 'easy' sexual mores of Russian women.
440 For an overview of the work of Fuʾād Qindīl, see Rashīd al-ᶜInānī (the present writer), 'Nāfidha ᶜalā al-ᶜĀlam al-Riwāʾī li-Fuʾād Qindīl', *Al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda*, no. 46, Cairo, 1992, pp. 30–34.
441 Fuʾād Qindīl, *ᶜAsal al-Shams*, al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ᶜAmmā lil-kitāb, 1990, pp. 116–18.
442 Ibid., p. 123.

5 The encounter with America

443 For more on this, see my discussion below of Mikhāʾīl Nuᶜayma.
444 Ameen Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*, Librairie du Liban, Beirut, 2000, p. 25; for more on American worship of money, see also, p. 112.
445 Ibid., pp. 25–26.
446 Ibid., p. 127.
447 Compare for instance Faraḥ Anṭūn (1874–1922) who spent three years in New York (1906–09). Anṭūn addresses America thus on first arrival: 'O storehouse of electricity, coal and iron for the whole world! O land where practical gain is put before all else! Where the struggle for existence is fiercer than in any other land!' See Faraḥ Anṭūn, 'Awwal Taḥiyya li-Arḍ al-Ḥuriyya' (First Greeting to the Land of Liberty), in

Al-Jāmiᶜa, vol. 5, no. 1, July 1906, pp. 3–6; quoted in Mishāl Jiḥā, *Farāḥ Anṭūn*, Riad El-Rayyes Books, London, 1998, pp. 189–90. For a discussion of Anṭūn's disillusionment with the materialism of American civilisation, see Donald M. Reid, *The Odyssey of Faraḥ Anṭūn: A Syrian Christian's Quest for Secularism*, Bibliotheca Islamica, Minneapolis and Chicago, 1975, pp. 122–26.

448 Ameen Rihani, *The Book of Khalid*, p. 128.
449 Ibid., pp. 236–37.
450 Ibid., pp. 237–38.
451 Ibid., p. 239.
452 Ibid., p. 241.
453 Rihani's capitalisation.
454 Ibid., p. 242.
455 Ibid., p. 246.
456 Ibid., p. 246.
457 Ibid., pp. 317–8. For a discussion of Rihani's *Book of Khalid* and other works written by him in English, see Geoffrey Nash, *The Arab Writer in English: Arab Themes in a Metropolitan Language, 1908–1958*, Sussex Academic Press, Brighton, 1998, pp. 25–31 and *passim*.
458 Amīn al-Rīḥānī, *Al-ᶜAmāl al-ᶜArabiyya al-Kāmila*, vol. 2, *al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā*, p. 8.
459 Ibid. See also his newspaper articles, 'al-Shaᶜb al-Amrīkī al-Muhadhdhab' (the Polite American People), written in 1898, ibid., vol. 6, pp. 257–60; and 'al-Shaᶜb al-Amrīkī: Ādābuhu' (The American People: their Manners', ibid., vol. 6, pp. 299–301).
460 Ibid., vol. 7, p. 117.
461 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 8.
462 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 5. See also his article on 'al-Tasāhul al-Dīnī' (Religious Tolerance), where he extols the values of liberty in America, Ibid., vol. 7, p. 47.
463 Al-Riḥānī was not alone among Syrian emigrants to be impressed by the symbolic power of the Statue of Liberty: Faraḥ Anṭūn (1874–1922) who lived for three years in New York (1906–09) greeted the Statue, as his ship went past it, by taking off his hat: 'out of respect for the principle the Statue represents; nay, I took off my hat in answer to its greeting. For I imagined that that regal woman erect on that massive base was extending her arm toward us to light our way – it was the spirit of New York, nay of the whole New World, stood there on the way of arriving ships to salute them and remind them that they have entered from the darkness of the ocean to the harbour of peace, and from lands where ignorance and the ignorant, where darkness and injustice, prevail to the paradise of knowledge, equity, and civilisation…'. See Faraḥ Anṭūn, 'Awwal Taḥiyya li-Arḍ al-Ḥuriyya' (First Greeting to the Land of Liberty), in *Al-Jāmiᶜa*, vol. 5, no. 1, July 1906, pp. 3–6; quoted in Mishāl Jiḥā, *Farāḥ Anṭūn*, pp. 81–82.
464 Ibid., vol. 7, p. 118.
465 Ibid., vol. 7, p. 119. Compare the end couplet in Rihani's prose poem, 'Anā al-Sharq' (I am the East, written in 1922): 'I am the East – I have philosophies; I have religions/And I would barter them for planes.' Ibid., vol. 9, pp. 96–105.
466 Ibid., vol. 7, p. 292. Rihani had expressed similar views in an earlier speech, titled 'Qīmat al-Ḥayāt' (The Value of Life), given in Sidon in 1910. See Ibid., vol. 7, pp. 208–21. For a somewhat loose biography and appreciation of Rihani by his friend Mārūn ᶜAbbūd, see his *Amīn al-Riḥānī* in *Al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 9, pp. 575–697.
467 Mikhāᶜīl Nuᶜayma, *Sabᶜūn,* in *al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila (1889–1959)*, Dār al-ᶜIlm lil-Malāyin, Beirut, 1970, vol. 1, p. 284.
468 Ibid., pp. 284–85.
469 Ibid., pp. 290–91.
470 The date he first published his autobiography, *Sabᶜūn: Ḥikāyat ᶜUmr* (Seventy: the Story of a Life).
471 For an introduction to this group of poets, see chapter Five of M.M. Badawi, *Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975.

472 Nuᶜayma, *al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 1, pp. 294–95, 309.
473 We have already encountered a similar attitude in my discussion of Rihani above, and it makes sense to suggest that part of the two men's reaction in this respect must have something to do with the fact that they came to America from rural, naturally beautiful and semi-primitive environments in Lebanon.
474 Nuᶜayma, *al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 1, pp. 294–95.
475 The *Book of Mirdad* was first published in English in Beirut in 1948; later Nuᶜayma published the Arabic version in 1952. See Nuᶜayma, *al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 6.
476 Mikhāᵓīl Nuᶜayma, *Al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 1, pp. 584–86.
477 During his earlier study years in Russia (1906–11), he first came to know woman carnally through also a relationship with a married woman. For the author's account of the relationship, see ibid., pp. 258–74.
478 Ibid., p. 603.
479 See my discussion of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm elsewhere in this book.
480 Mikhāᵓīl Nuᶜayma, *Kān Mā Kān*, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, 1966, p. 24. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.
481 Mikhāᵓīl Nuᶜayma, *Sabᶜūn,* in *al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 1, p. 75. For a detailed account of how he came to write the story in the mid-1920s, see the chapter with the eponymous title, which he devotes for that purpose, ibid., pp. 515–22.
482 In his autobiography, *Sabᶜūn*, Nuᶜayma tells the story of how his father, who spent six years in California, working as a peddler, with little material gain before returning to his wife and children in Biskinta, their native mountain village in Lebanon. When he came to know America at first hand, Nuᶜayma wondered how a man with an honest, upright nature like his father's managed to survive for six years as an emigrant in a country where success was difficult without a measure of 'cunning, ambition, and contempt for truthfulness and honesty for the sake of gain.' See his, *al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 1, *Sabᶜūn: Ḥikāyat ᶜUmr (1889–1959)*, pp. 62–70.
483 Nuᶜayma, 'ᶜUlbat al-Kabrīt,' *Akābir*, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, 1967, p. 107.
484 Ibid., see the story, pp. 107–13.
485 Ibid., p. 113.
486 The Arabic title of the essay is 'Nahḍat al-Sharq al-ᶜArabī wa Mawqifuhu biᵓizāᵓ al-Ḥaḍāra al-Gharbiyya'. Nuᶜayma included it in his book of essays, *Al-Marāhil*, first published in 1932. See Nuᶜayma, *al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 5, pp. 45–50.
487 Ibid., p. 47.
488 We will do well to remember that when Nuᶜayma speaks of the East in terms of spirituality, he does not have in mind only the Semite religions of the Middle East, but also the Buddhism and Taoism of the Far East. See his article 'Thalāthat Wujūh' (Three Faces), where he talks about the Buddha, Lao-tzu, and Jesus, Ibid., pp. 7–44.
489 Ibid., p. 49.
490 Ibid., p. 50.
491 Nuᶜayma, *al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 1, p. 482.
492 Nuᶜayma, *al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 4, pp. 560–85.
493 For a view which dismisses Nuᶜayma's thought as befitting only for the years of 'adolescence and its mystical dreams', see Hishām Sharābī, *al-Jamr wal-Ramād: Dhikrayāt Muthaqqafᶜ Arabī*, Dār al-Ṭalīᶜa, Beirut, 1988, p. 69.
494 Mikhāᵓīl Nuᶜayma, *Al-Majmūᶜa al-Kāmila*, vol. 1, pp. 835–41. Compare Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's similar ideas elsewhere in this book.
495 Maḥmūd Taymūr, *Abū al-Hawl Yaṭīr*, Maktabat al-Ādāb in Jamāmīz, Cairo, 1955, p. 18. Subsequent page references are given in the text.
496 Compare the very similar thoughts of the character of Fayyāḍ about the charming box office girl in Paris who is transformed into a supercilious mistress once she has stepped into a colony in Khayrī al-Dhahabī's eponymous novel discussed in Chapter 4.
497 Maḥmūd Taymūr, *Abū al-Hawl Yaṭīr*, pp. 65–67. For the translation of this passage and the next one, see K. Abdel-Malek, ed., *America in an Arab Mirror: Images of*

America in Arabic Travel Literature, an Anthology, 1895–1995, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2000, pp. 61–62.

498 Ibid.

499 Ibid., I have restored here an omission from the abovementioned translation.

500 Ṣalāḥ al-Khālidī, *Amrīkā min al-Dākhil*, pp. 19–21.

501 For a translation of lengthy excerpts from Quṭb's writings on America, see Kamal Abdel-Malek, ed., *America in An Arab Mirror*, pp. 9–27.

502 Ṣalāḥ.al-Khāldī, *Amrīkā min al-Dākhil: bi-Minẓār Sayyid Quṭb*, 4th edn, Dār al-Manāra, Jeddah, 1987, pp. 97–102.

503 Ibid., pp. 104–05.

504 Ibid., pp. 105–08.

505 Ibid., pp. 108–11.

506 Ibid., pp. 112–13. The same ideas are voiced in an earlier article, titled 'Ḥamāʾim fī New York' (Doves in New York), written in 1949, when he was half way through his American sojourn. For the text of the article, see ibid., pp. 141–44. The full text of the article is also quoted in ᶜAlī Shalash, *Al-Tamarrud ᶜAlā al-Adab: Dirāsa fī Tajribat Sayyid Quṭb*, Dār al-Shurūq, 1994, pp. 191–96.

507 See John Calvert, "The World is an Undutiful Boy!": Sayyid Quṭb's American Experience', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2000, p. 98; for a discussion of some of Quṭb's anti-Western views within the context of Egyptian rising nationalism in the first half of the 20th century, see also John calvert, 'The Individual and the Nation: Sayyid Quṭb's *Ṭifl min al-Qarya* (Child from the Village)', in *The Muslim World*, vol. 90, Spring 2000, pp. 108–32. Quṭb's autobiography of childhood and early youth, *Ṭifl min al-Qarya*, has been translated by John Calvert and William Shepard (Syracuse University Press, New York, 2004; for a discussion of the autobiography among similar works, see Thomas Philipp, 'The Autobiography in Modern Arab Literature and Culture', in *Poetics Today*, vol. 14, no. 3, Fall 1993, pp. 573–604.

508 For selections from Quṭb's *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*, which revile America, see Ṣalāḥ al-Khālidī, *Amrīkā min al-Dākhil*, pp. 161–75.

509 See Wadīᶜ Falasṭīn, 'Sayyid Quṭb al-Nāqid', *Al-Ḥayāt*, 11 January 2000.

510 Quoted in al-Khālidī, *Amrīkā min al-Dākhil*, pp. 164–65.

511 See ᶜAlī Shalash, *al-Tamarrud ᶜalā al-Adab*, pp. 130–32.

512 See Ṣalāḥ al-Khālidī, *Amrīkā min al-Dākhil*, p. 125.

513 Al-Khalidī includes in his book all articles on and references to the United States made by Quṭb in his writings before and after his journey. See pp. 124–203.

514 For a thorough examination of Quṭb's American experience, see John Calvert, ' "The World is an Undutiful Boy!": Sayyid Quṭb's American Experience', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2000, *passim*.

515 The articles were collected with introduction in an appendix by Yūsuf al-Shuwayrī in his *Al-Riḥla al-ᶜArabiyya al-Ḥadītha*, pp. 119–202. All text references are to that collection.

516 Genesis 3:19.

517 For the significance of the title and what the 'bird' stands for, see Ḥalīm Barakāt, *ᶜAwdat al-Ṭāʾir ilā al-*Baḥr, p. 129. Commentators on the text writing in English have often translated the title unjustifiably as 'The return of the flying Dutchman to the sea', perhaps under the influence of the frequent reference in the novel to that legend.

518 Ḥalīm Barakāt, *Days of Dust*, trans. Trevor Le Gassick, Three Continents Press, Washington, DC, 1983.

519 On the overlap between the life of Barakāt and his protagonist during the period of the novel, see the translator's introduction, Ḥalīm Barakāt, *Days of Dust*, pp. xxxv–xxxviii. See also M.M. Badawi, ed., *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, where Barakāt is quoted as saying of Ramzī, 'he is the symbol of me', p. 201.

520 Ibid., p. xxxvii. Ḥalīm Barakāt's findings were published in his *River without Bridges: A Study of the Exodus of the 1967 Arab Refugees*, Beirut, 1969 (co-authored

with Peter Dodd). Of the experience of writing the novel after writing the study, Barakāt has this to say: 'I wrote it after conducting field research about the circumstances of the Palestinians' displacement from the West Bank .... After the research was published .... I discovered that I had not been able to represent the humanitarian side, so I wrote the novel to address what scientific study could not.' See interview with Ḥalīm Barakāt in *Al-Ādāb*, vol. 48, nos 5–6, 2000, pp. 29–40.

521 Ḥalīm Barakāt, *ᶜAwdat al-Ṭāʾir ilā al-Baḥr*, p. 10. This passage (and many more) in the Arabic original were omitted from the English translation. All translations here are my own. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

522 For a general discussion of Barakāt's *ᶜAwdat* ..., see Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel*, pp. 153–59.

523 Ḥalīm Barakāt, *Ṭāʾir al-Ḥawm*, Al-Ahālī, Damascus, 1997, p. 134.

524 Ibid., p. 137.

525 Ibid., p. 153.

526 Yūsuf Idrīs, *Nuyū Yūrk 80*, Maktabat Miṣr, Cairo, 1980? The book also includes 'al-Sayyida Fīyinnā', retitled 'Vienna 60'. It is this edition of both stories that I use here and all page references in the text are made to it.

527 Details abound in the story which tally with known facts about Yūsuf Idrīs's career and character. See, for example, pp. 28, 38–40, 56–57. Even the colour of the protagonist's eyes is given as green, though this is very unusual among Egyptians, of whose cultural identity he is supposed to be a typical representative: Idrīs had green eyes! See p. 42.

528 My first published views on 'Madam Vienna' and *New York 80* go back to my article, 'al-Ṭarīq ilā al-Dhāt Yaᶜbur bi-al-Ākhar', in *Al-Ḥayāt*, 29 August, 1993.

529 For a somewhat amorphous discussion of *New York 80*, see Najī Najīb, 'al-Buᶜd al-Khāmis lil-Insān wal-Ittiṣāl bil-Mawjūdāt' in *Yūsuf Idrīs: 1927–1991*, ed., Iᶜtidāl ᶜUthmān, pp. 101–185. Najīb also discusses briefly the story 'Did you have to turn on the light Li-Li?', addressed in Chapter 3 of the present study.

530 For a bibliography of Idrīs's oeuvre, see *Yūsuf Idrīs: 1927–1991*, ed., Iᶜtidāl ᶜUthmān.

531 For further comment on this article and the background to its authorship, see Kurpershoek, *The Short Stories of Yūsuf Idrīs*, pp. 67–69.

532 This is in contradiction with Kurpershoek's claim that in 1976 Idrīs 'buried the hatchet (i.e. in his war with America) ... thus bidding farewell to the three decades of his anti-imperialist struggle', *Yūsuf Idrīs*, pp. 70–71. As I have shown here *New York 80* and many of the articles written during the 1980s were to prove the writer's basic antagonism towards American culture and policies still in place.

533 Yūsuf Idrīs, *Inṭibāᶜāt Mustafizza* (Provocative Impressions), *Al-Ahram*, 1986, p. 10.

534 Ibid., p. 22.

535 Ibid., p. 23.

536 Yūsuf Idrīs, *Faqr al-Fikr wa Fikr al-Faqr* (The Poverty of Thought and the Thought of Poverty), Dār al-Mustaqbal al-ᶜArabī, 1985, p. 45.

537 The parallelism is obvious with the experience of Ṣunᶜallāh Ibrāhīm, who spent a six-month period as visiting professor/resident writer at Berkely University in California in 2001, where he taught a course on 'modern prose in relation to the cultural tradition' and ran a seminar on 'the Arabic novel' with special reference to his own work.

538 Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr, *Al-Riḥla*, p. 6.

239 Ibid., pp. 25–26.

540 Ibid., pp. 37–38.

541 Ibid., p. 66.

542 Ibid., p. 43.

543 Ibid., pp. 81–82.

544 Ibid., pp. 82–83.

545 Ibid., pp. 114–16.

546 Ibid., p. 5.
547 Ibid., p. 168.
548 For a review of the novel by Fayṣal Darrāj, see *Al-Ḥayāt*, 18 June 2003.
549 Laila Abou Saif, *A Bridge Through Time: A Memoir*, Quartet Books, London, 1985, pp. 28–29.
550 Ibid., p. 61.
551 Ibid., p. 282.
552 Salmā al-Ḥaffār al-Kuzbarī, *Al-Burtuqāl al-Murr*, p. 9. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.

6 The encounter through female eyes

553 For an introduction to the emergence of women's writing in Arabic, see Miriam Cooke, 'Arab Women Writers', in M.M. Badawi, ed., *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Modern Arabic Literature*, pp. 443–62; see also Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists, passim*.
554 Kūlīt Khūrī, *Layla Wāḥida*, p. 67.
555 Ibid., p. 234.
556 For a discussion of both novels, see Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*, pp. 104–11.
557 From a personal communication with the author. In the second half of the 1960s after gaining an MA in English from the American University of Beirut, she was to spend a three-year period based in London and travelling widely in Europe; see Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: the Formative Years and Beyond*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1995, pp. 191–92.
558 See Ghāda al-Sammān, *Layl al-Ghurabāʾ*, Manshūrāt, Ghāda al-Sammān, Beirut, 1995, pp. 54–56. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.
559 Ghāda al-Sammān, *Zaman al-Ḥubb al-Ākhar*, Manshūrāt, Ghāda al-Sammān, Beirut, 1988, pp. 14–15.
560 Ghāda Sammān, *The Square Moon*, trans. Issa j. Boullata, p. 4. Subsequent page references are given in the text.
561 This new balanced vision is borne out also by a short episode in the author's gigantic autobiographical *bildungsroman, Al-Riwāya al-Mustaḥīla*, where a French woman is shown to support the Syrian man she loves against the French authorities during the struggle against the French Mandate in Syria. See Ghāda al-Sammān, *Al-Riwāya al-Mustaḥīla: Fusayfasāʾ Dimashqiyya*, Manshūrat, Ghāda al-Sammān, Beirut, 1997, pp. 341–45.
562 See F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. C.L. Markmann, Grove Press, New York,1967; quoted in Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, pp. 23–24. The irony here, as the story will show, is that the 'local cultural originality' is rejected by the 'local' heroine in favour of the 'alien' cultural values of the other.
563 Compare Hishām Sharābī, who maintains that although the Arab world has gained independence from Western imperialism, it continues nevertheless to be dominated by the West 'on the psychological and cultural levels', that Arabs suffer from an inferiority complex in their relationship with the West, that all their modes of thinking and behaviour in their daily life are drawn wholesale from the West, and that the Arab psyche, consciously or unconsciously, desires nothing more than the approval of the West; See Hishām Sharābī, *Muqaddimāt li-Dirāsat al-Mujtamaᶜ al-ᶜArabī*, Dār al-Ṭalīᶜa, Beirut, 1991, pp. 93, 95.
564 Ḥanān al-Shaykh, *Aknus al-Shams ᶜAn al-Suṭuḥ*, Dār al-Ādāb, Beirut, 1994; trans. *I Sweep the Sun off Rooftops*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, Australia, 1994, p. 112.
565 Ibid., p. 114.
566 Ibid., p. 125.
567 Ibid., p. 119.

568 This is what the Arabic says. As the story takes place in the 1990s, it should perhaps read 'which once ruled half the world', which is how Catherine Cobham renders it in her translation.
569 Ibid., p. 113.
570 Ibid., p. 124.
571 Ibid.
572 Ibid., p. 117.
573 Ibid., p. 126.
574 Ibid., p. 111.
575 Ibid., p. 127.
576 Ibid., p. 129.
577 Ibid.
578 See interview with Ḥanān al-Shaykh in *Al-Ādāb*, vol. 48, nos. 7–8, July–August, 2000, p. 86.
579 Ḥanān al-Shaykh, *Only in London*, trans. Catherine Cobham, Bloomsbury, London, 2001, pp. 16–17.
580 Ibid., p. 19.
581 Ibid., p. 125.
582 Ibid., p. 149.
583 For a study of *Only in London* in the context of postcolonial migrant urban writing, see Christiane Schlote, 'From *Bleak House* to Leighton House: Reading Ḥanān al-Shaykh's *Only in London* as New Urban Fiction', in Christoph Bode, Sebastian Domsche and Hans Sauer, eds, *Anglistentag 2003 München:Proceedings*, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, München, 2003, pp. 235–47.
584 See interview with Ḥanān al-Shaykh in *Al-Ādāb*, vol. 48, nos. 7–8, July–August, 2000, p. 89.
585 See my review of the novel in *The Independent*, 8 August 1992. For a more detailed discussion of the novel in Arabic, see my article 'Al-Khurūj limulāqāt al-Shams', *Al-Kātiba*', vol. 1, no. 3, 1994, pp. 20–24.
586 Leila Aboulela, *The Translator*, p. 12.
587 Ibid., pp. 179–80.
588 The novel shares the same vision with the short story 'Sirruhu al-Bāti^{c}' (The Secret of his Power), written by Yūsuf Idrīs in 1959 during the rise of nationalism in the early postcolonial years. In that story, discussed in Chapter 3, we see a Frenchman's identity melting into Egypt's, just as the Scotsman is made to shed his faith here to adopt the other's. The affinity between the two stories' intellectual positions is a mark in its own right of the datedness of *The Translator*'s outlook.

Concluding remarks

589 See Ḥasan Ḥanafī, *Muqāddima fī ^{c}Ilm al-Istighrāb* (Introduction to the Study of Occidentalism), pp. 15–16.
590 S.P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilisations' *Foreign Affairs*, no. 3, Summer 1993; see also by the same author, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1997.
591 The epithet was applied to France and Germany, in the context of criticising their opposition to war on Iraq without UN Security Council endorsement, by American Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, in a press conference given on 22 January 2003.
592 For a scholarly warning against the pitfalls of 'simplistic claims of immutable cultural clashes', see Jeremy Black, 'The Western Encounter with Islam', *Orbis*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2004, pp. 19–28.
593 Compare Hala Mustafa's argument that 'Militancy, in its Islamic garb, is but a form of social protest against the absence of genuine political participation . . . a symptom

of social crisis that has less to do with religion, per se, than with the failure of development models to produce social equity'. See Hala Mustafa, 'Islam and the West in an era of globalisation', in N. AlSayyed and M. Castells, eds, *Muslim Europe or Euro Islam*, Lexington Books, Lanham, MD, 2002, p. 92.

594 Consider for instance how as recently as 1995, the Shaykh ᶜAbd al-ᶜAzīz b. ᶜAbdullāh b. Bāz (1912–99), then Mufti General of Saudi Arabia and Chair of the Council of Grand Scholars, issued a warning to Muslims in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere not to spend their holidays in Europe and America, 'the countries of the infidels', as he calls them in his through and through medieval discourse, as this would lead to their corruption and will 'inculcate in them admiration for the civilisation of the infidels . . . '. See report in *Al Ḥayāt* newspaper, 'Bin Bāz Yuḥadhdhir al-Suᶜūdiyyīn', 22 July 1995, p. 6.

595 Cf. Ḥusayn Fawzī who argues, along lines reminiscent of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, that the Egyptians, as originators of human civilisation, have a legitimate claim to Western civilisation, which is described as Western, 'not because it belongs to the West alone . . . , but because it flourished in Western Europe as the last link in a chain of human civilisations, having assimilated the civilisations of Thebes, Memphis, Tyre, Sidon, Athens, Alexandria, Rome, Byzantium, Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo'; see Ḥusayn Fawzī, *Sindbād ilā al-Gharb*, pp. 292–93.

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- The date of the edition used is given, followed by that of first publication between brackets.
- Where no date is given between brackets, the implication is that the first edition is the one used.
- A question mark after a date of publication indicates uncertainty.
- Where available, English translations are cited next to relevant entries.
- Journal articles are fully cited in the Endnotes, but not in the Bibliography.
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