Bildungsroman and the Arab Novel

Through a close reading of a corpus of novels featuring young protagonists in their path toward adulthood, the book shows how *Bildungsroman* impacted the formation of the Egyptian narrative. On a larger scale, the book helps the reader to understand the key role played by the coming of age novel in the definition and perception of modern Arab subjectivity.

Exploring the role of *Bildungsroman* in shaping the canonical Egyptian novel, the book discusses the case of *Zaynab* by Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1913) as an example of early Arab *Bildungsnarrative*. It focuses on Latifa Zayyat's masterpiece *The Open Door* and the novels of the Nineties Generation, offering a gender-based analysis of the Egyptian *Bildungsroman*. It provides insightful readings about the function of the novel in women's re-negotiation of social boundaries. The study shows how the stories of youth present universal themes such as the thwarted quest for love, the struggle for personal fulfilment and the desire to achieve a cultural modernity often felt as "other than self".

The book is a journey in the 20th-century Egyptian novel, seen through the lens of the transnational form of *Bildungsroman*. It is a key resource to students and academics interested in Arabic literature, comparative literature and cultural studies.

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Egyptian Intersections

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for my daughters Maddalena and Teresa

Contents

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Introduction

The 20th-century Egyptian novel attached great importance to stories of young people. Until the 1940s it was secondary school students in particular who conveyed the narrative material and took on the sometimes allegorical traits of a nation on the verge of developing its own political independence plan.

In the early decades of the 20th century, the educated, young people called in Arabic *shabāb* emerged strongly in the collective imaginary and in the political appeals of reformers and nationalists as a new social identity. The modern, urbanised youths who dominated the public discourse stood out by way of their dress code and their preference for certain urban spaces, as well as for specific activities and entertainment. Erlich explains that the term *shabāb* takes on highly symbolic meanings in one context – that of Egypt on the threshold of the Revolution of 1919, in which a generational change in Egyptian political leadership was taking place.[1] Around the 1930s and at the same time as a new "generational" change, urbanised youth, increasingly present in political life and in street protests, was once again at the centre of public debate and celebrated as "hope of the nation" by some, while feared as a potentially violent force by others.[2]

The first chapter of this book, the only one not based on the analysis of literary texts but, rather, on various excerpts from printed articles, focuses precisely on the discursive construction of "youth" in Egypt as a new social identity and, afterward, on the relationship between this new social presence on the one hand and the emergence of the novel form on the other. Numerous scholars[3] have affirmed and reiterated that the novel form, in Egypt as in other places in the Arab world, was nourished by the social changes and by the dialectical relationship with the Arab press – in which situations and themes emerged that would be channelled in fiction, as surmised ever since Muwayliḥī's *neo-maqāma Fatra min al-zamān* (1898).[4] The first chapter focuses in particular on the "narrative" translation of this type of westernised youth, which overlaps the category of "*effendiyya*". The term, which originally referred to "a social rank within the Ottoman administration"[5] (which included a series of figures such as the royals, pashas and beys), ended up referring to a new category of Egyptian society defined by Lucie Ryzova as "the first self-consciously modern generation in Egyptian history".[6] Ryzova emphasises how the various social groups that aspired to the rank of *effendī* (that is, a member of the *effendiyya*) for their sons would undertake a series of social practices and

strategies: from favouring a modern education (often resorting to loans so as to invest in the education of the son chosen for the effendification process), to changing social circles, to creating a family "story" in keeping with the process.[7]

This figure, the *effendī*, would not only be "embraced" by the fledgling Arab novel as a "national hero" but would serve as "structuring" character of the novel itself, guaranteeing its dissemination and full acceptance by a new readership.

The analysis put forward in the first chapter springs from the lines of the youthful diary of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal – future author of *Zaynab*, published posthumously in 1996. The author reflects in these writings on the difference between the situation of young people in Europe and in Egypt, examining spaces, possibilities, entertainment, ambiences that seem "naturally" accessible in Europe and that, on the contrary, appear absent in Egypt. Thus, Haykal discloses in his youthful diary a thematic core very much present in the Arab novel of the first half of the 20th century, that of the journey to Europe and the search for the self – a modern, westernised and urbanised "self" that is free in its movements and in its decisions about the future. This notion of "self", as expressed in the novels published at the start of the century, springs from a male imaginary and is meant for a male audience: in the Arabic literary tradition, as well in others, the discourse on "becoming an adult" is masculine in its early phases.[8]

In her pioneering study on the English female coming-of-age novel, Susan Fraiman suggests that the *Bildungsroman* began as an expression of male identity, precisely because it was founded on a consistent, shared self-image which, according to Fraiman, is specifically male – regardless of the cultural framework. Still according to Fraiman, the subject of female development branches off, on the other hand, into two contrasting narratives: self-affirmation and de-formation.[9] As we will see, female self-narration branched off similarly in the Egyptian 20th century and, once again, the mere fact of interpreting the novel *tout court* through the lens of the *Bildungsroman* involves a great risk in the Arabic novel as well: that of passing over the female identity quest, expressed in forms other than the coming-of-age novel.

We must, therefore, underscore our study's awareness of this risk: stating – as above – that the early 20th-century Egyptian novel focuses on all-male growth does not mean that women were not, in the same years, demanding attention and public visibility. Indeed, quite the opposite: starting from the first women's magazine, *Anīs al-jālis* (1892), women began publishing reviews of novels[10] and printed articles (like the one published in 1910 by Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif and endorsed by Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid) under their own names, as well as speeches in public forums, poems and short stories.[11] To a lesser degree, women also published novels, some of which were interspersed, as previously mentioned, with young protagonists. However, these early 20th-century women's writings, which still call for extensive critical work, were more interested in capturing situations where the younger generation interacts with the rest of society than in pinpointing the "coming-of-age narrative" in its broader perspective of biological and psychological process. One of the first women authors to do so would be Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt in her *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*, which will be analysed in Chapter 4.

Despite an awareness that the coming-of-age narrative has long been constructed as a male discourse, and that the *Bildungsroman* itself has long been considered in exclusively male terms, this book – in the wake of Summerfield and Downward's work – has chosen not to deal separately with the category of female *Bildungsroman* but, rather, to analyse the literary genre in its most inclusive form, with no gender-based distinctions. Each time, we will highlight the techniques that can be seen as specific narrative models of "becoming a woman" (like the awakening plot, the developmental plot, etc.).[12]

The discourse on (invariably masculine) youth – which in Haykal moves from clear deterministic thinking inspired, among others, by Hippolyte Taine – implies a broader discourse on European civilisation and culture, destined, the author believes, to lead countries in search of progress and modernisation. Haykal's thought, like that of Luṭfī al-Sayyid, is analysed in the first chapter of this book also in light of the campaign in support of an *Adab Qawmī* (national literature) that these and other intellectuals loudly promoted in Egypt. The chapter considers excerpts in which these nationalist authors encourage their colleagues to address themes felt to be genuinely "Egyptian" and that conveyed a national identity in narrative form on a territorial basis. In this planning, the figure of the youth and the narrative of development that concerns him or her ended up becoming a singularly effective trope due to the emergence of a "modern" narrative with a high fictional content, a captivating narrative and a communicative potential like the novel.

The coming-of-age youth as narrative trope

Just like adolescence, youth is a social construction at the intersection between the psychological, medical and cultural spheres: without these multiple connotations – to paraphrase Bourdieu – it remains "just a word", a linguistic sign, lacking a true referent.[13] Thus, youth understood as a "cultural" element, and not just as an element of age – emerged in Egypt as early as the 1910s as a "symbol" of citizenry in progress.[14] Publicly perceived as "soul", or at times as promise of the nation, youth inevitably assumed a series of metaphorical meanings that took hold, or at times resurfaced, in a narrative rich in youthful paths.

In their turn – by virtue of the dialectical relationship between literature and public debate mentioned earlier – the stories of young people help shape the collective imaginary, which is thus enriched by explorations, choices and opportunities. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal was one of the first authors to take full advantage of the narrative potential of a young protagonist, although, both in the Middle-Eastern area and in Egypt, the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the publication of a few novels centred on stories of youths with their corollaries of love stories, marriages, professional successes and misfortunes.[15] According to the predominant critical reading, Haykal launched the 20th-century Arab novel with *Zaynab* in 1913 (*Zeinab*, 2016). This story, with a rural setting, narrates the sentimental affairs of Ḥāmid, son of a landowner and secondary school student in Cairo. Ḥāmid returns from Cairo to the country every now and then for

summer holidays, and *Zaynab* begins precisely on the eve of one of these visits. If *Zaynab*'s status as the "first" Egyptian novel has been widely debated by scholars, "the long shadow" that this 16-year-old cast on the Egyptian narrative of the years to come appears, instead, as an objective fact, inspiring many other characters who, in their turn, return to the countryside every year and take advantage of the summer holidays to experience the world, and to experience their youth.

After Ḥāmid, another protagonist of a story about youth is Muḥsin, who likewise leaves the country to attend secondary school in Cairo. He finds an adoptive family in the capital within which to nourish an impossible love, and which imbues him with vague patriotic ideals. These characters are followed by Ismāʿīl, who goes to Scotland to obtain a university degree, and Laylā, a student and later volunteer in Port Said, by way of Maḥjūb and Ḥasanayn, 20-year-old aspiring *effendī* fallen into disgrace. Structured around these characters we find stories which, following a long process of evaluation by critics and national cultural institutions, and in light of readers' opinions, are consecrated "canonical novels", joining the circle of the 20th-century Egyptian "cultural capital". In this way they help formulate, in a selection process based on criteria that are not only aesthetic – as shall be seen in the first two chapters of the book – but also political, the new national "literary canon".[16]

After the 1960s, the young figures in the Egyptian novel become less frequent, disappear or, when they do appear, seem "derailed", immersed in a world of emotional stasis, unable to undertake a path of intellectual, at times even physical, growth. The late production of the writing of the avant-garde of the 1960s showcases characters like Sharaf, child of the urban underclass, in prison for murder when he is still a teenager, and Nadā, daughter of a mixed Egyptian-French couple, involved in the student revolts of the "Seventies Generation" and immersed in a process of recovery of individual and generational memory. Finally, the end-of-the-century characters programmatically disregard every promise of transformation. Indeed, even when they find themselves in situations very similar to those typical of the early 20th-century Egyptian novel, like the journey to Europe to pursue an education, these end-of-the-century characters represent themselves as "puppets", or characters without agency.[17]

In general, though introducing many young characters and many themes traditionally related to youth, such as friendship, the distancing from one's family of origin and the search for one's own position in the world, the Egyptian novels of the 20th century have rarely been analysed as *Bildungsroman*. Why? This study attempts to fill a gap in the context of contemporary criticism of the Egyptian novel and it sets out to interpret, through the spectrum of a diachronically extended selection of novels, the Egyptian literary 20th century precisely through the lens of the *Bildungsroman*, the German word indicating a novel "that focuses on the spiritual and intellectual maturation of its protagonist".[18]

Before delving into the more contemporary meanings and uses of the word, it is worthwhile to enter the heart of the concept designated by the German word *Bildung*. As Kontje recalls, this word refers both to an individual's "form" (*gestalt*) and to the process of "giving form" to someone or something. Herder,

in particular, played a key role in disseminating the meaning linked to an idea of "organic imagery of natural growth [that] replaces a model of divine intervention".[19] Kontje underlines the fundamental role of the concept of the *Bildung* in the formation of European thought in the last part of the 18th century, and how the Humboldtian vision of man and of knowledge owe much to this concept. Another foundational work for the idea of *Bildung* is Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*,[20] in which a homology is established between evolution of poetic forms and evolution of humanity. As Redfield explains: "Aesthetic, individual, and species formation all occur as an interdependent system of homologies, and as a progress in the form of a spiral or transumptive return, which is *the only form of progress possible* for a system of exemplarity".[21] Simplifying, one would say that the concept of *Bildung*, central in Weimar Classicism – in Herder, Goethe and Schiller in particular – indicates the formation of the individual through art and predicts his or her complete social integration. In doing so, the *Bildung* makes any form of social revolution an unnecessary event.[22]

Hence the classical theories on the *Bildung* tend to reconcile individual issues (freedom, personal success) and social ones by providing a sort of "alternative" to the revolution and, on the other hand, developing the idea of a unique, harmonious and aesthetic organicity between the self and the world. The European *Bildungsroman*, which emerged between the 18th and 19th centuries and which will be defined as the "classic" form of the genre in this study, is nothing but the narration of this human, aesthetic and social apprenticeship in extended form. With its predictable narrative arc spanning the hero's childhood and maturity, the genre constitutes one of the most widespread, emblematic and recognisable narrative conformations of modernity.[23] However, as emphasised by many scholars of this literary genre, these characteristics also give it a particularly normative nature, destined to break down in the impact with the experimentalism and formal innovations of the 20th century.[24] The "classic formula" of the youth apprenticeship would be disregarded, parodied and rewritten, and, from Flaubert on, many critics would talk about "modernist *Bildungsroman*". Castle identifies, in the work of Esty and Boes, two diverging theoretical lines on the adaptation (or not) of the classic form of the coming-of-age novel to literary modernism. According to Esty, the *Bildungsroman* is an inherently allegorical genre tied to the formative phase of the nation. As a result, it experiences an impasse due to the change in the world political balances in the age of the colonial empires of the European powers between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.[25]

Boes takes a different stance: he is more inclined to read a transformative impulse and an "individuating rhythm"[26] within the genre. In his key study on the intersections between the *Bildungsroman* and modernist "cosmopolitanism", Boes highlights the emergence of a series of counterpoint narratives to the classic "formula", showing how the presumed "German particularism" of many modernist novels runs in parallel to a transnational and cosmopolitan modernism.[27]

The theoretical perspective through which the selected texts in this book will be analysed adopts an open perspective on the *Bildungsroman* from Boes. It will be interpreted here as a genre born as a specifically "national" form within a

European framework, but that will later develop and take on the most diverse configurations. My interpretation of the genre as a "porous" form enables a dialogue with the studies currently being developed on the non-European, postcolonial,[28] on the *Bildungsroman* as a genre[29] or on the *Bildungsroman* understood as a form of identification and expression of the self in diasporic and migration contexts[30] or as minor literature.[31] To Franco Moretti and his *The Way of the World* I owe the interpretation of the Egyptian coming-of-age novel as literary "translation" not so much of real youth as of "symbolic youth"; in other words, of the new social identity that summarises in its being the "promise of future", the emblem of a modernity that is as yearned for as it is problematic within the Arab framework. Esty and Boes' analyses offer the tools to investigate the presence and "directionality" of the homology which will be defined, in Esty's words, "Soul-Nation allegory", or to recognise its implications even *in absentia*. Felsky and Showalter's work provides suggestions on the modernist and feminist rewrites. Finally, analyses by Castle and Kern offer tools to interpret the "modernist" vein of the Egyptian 20th-century canon, which in my analysis appears in Egypt as early as the 1930s and 1940s. In building the analysis developed over the next seven chapters, I have referenced – among others – the studies of Fayṣal Darrāj on the typology of the "young" protagonist in the 20th century novel, of 'Abd al-Muḥsin Badr on the Mahfouzian novel, of Halim Barakat (Ḥalīm Barakāt) on the modernist Arab novel and on the reading of Arab modernity from a sociological point of view.

For a phantasmagorical (non-categorical) use of the term "*Bildungsroman*"

But what, specifically, characterises the *Bildungsroman* at the formal level? One of the central elements of this form is the *telos*, a Greek word meaning "objective, purpose", and that critics use in general to indicate the "movement" of the youth in the plot. According to Whitmarsh, the *telos* is associated with three concepts: "a sense of resolution at the end of a narrative, with all the loose ends tied up nicely; a limitation of interpretative possibilities, as opposed to more open pluralist texts; the prescriptive enforcement of an ideological worldview".[32] In other words, the *telos* of the protagonist of a coming-of-age story is a bit like the path of the character's movement in the plot, which is assumed to be linear. The *telos* provides information on the youth as well as on the world that he or she encounters and moves through. Following and analysing the plots of novels is usually not considered a sophisticated investigative practice in literary criticism. In this study, however, it was consciously decided to give emphasis to the plots so as to highlight the *telos* pursued by the protagonist.

The analysis of the parallelism between the individual *telos* of the protagonist's story and the path of the national story will be analysed in the following chapters. Where it is not possible to find this parallelism, the relationship between individual and national story will be addressed. The *telos* can be pursued and "tied up nicely" – to use Whitmarsh's expression – as occurs in the classic European form. However, as mentioned earlier, in the 20th-century Egyptian novel, as in the

colonial and postcolonial novel in other European and non-European areas, the idea itself of *telos* as "linear path" would be undermined or parodied and replaced with other types of design. In this case, it is necessary to understand whether we wish to choose (as is the case with this study) a free, non-categorising interpretation of the genre, and consider these neglected *teloi* also as coming-of-age stories.

Given the definition provided earlier, it seems superfluous to say that another prerogative of the *Bildungsroman* is the young age of the protagonist. Yet, if the "classic" European novel represents modernity in the guise of coming-of-age youth (Moretti's definition of youth as a "symbolic form of modernity" summarises this concept), the European and non-European modernist novel resists this homology. Enter the *teloi* then, whose protagonists would *not* be young: depriving the narrated characters of the "chronological age of youth", the modernist novel creates problems for an entire network of literary and narrative ingredients linked to this age – that is, the "promise" of a future, of modernity and, for some, of middle class stabilisation. Some Egyptian novels that develop the trope of the "search for the self in Europe" present this "anachronism" between the chronological age of the protagonists and type of experience they undertake.

The analysis of *Adīb* (1935, *A Man of Letters* 1994) by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (1945, *The Lamp of the Saint* 2004) by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī in the fifth chapter of this book tends to bring out how the Egyptian novel portrays the "modernist" paradox of coming-of-age stories with non-young protagonists in a completely parallel way to the European novel. For these modernist novels it was decided to use the more encompassing category of *Bildungsnarrative* to indicate how many of the prescriptive characteristics of the coming-of-age novel are conjured up, but at the same time overcome or forced by these narrations.

Therefore, this study does not aim to provide a "taxonomy" related to the corpus of novels analysed. On the contrary, we propose – adopting the term from Redfield's study, *Phantom Formations* – a "phantasmagorical" use of the term; in other words, a use that takes on, making it its own, the fleeting and ever-changing nature of the *Bildungsroman*, more inclined to be "followed" than blindly reproduced in writing.

Bildung and canon

The basic assumption of this book is that youth, with its characteristics of spatial and social mobility, with its personifying a being in the making, with its being promise of cultural modernity and self-determination, has offered a valuable device for plotting precise aesthetic and ideological guidelines that the novel, at the time of its canonisation, undertook to disseminate and ramify.

It is no coincidence that Jerome Bruner equated the *Bildungsroman* to a sort of "accomplice" to the narrative canon, as it is the structuring principle of the narration, both when it comes to establishing the rules for a construction of acceptable meaning and when it comes to breaking them. It is interesting to note, in this regard, how many contemporary Egyptian novels, clearly marked by a literary modernism refractory to realist-mimetic codes, have been nonetheless

defined as *Bildungsroman*. This is the case with Ṣunʿallāh (Sonallah) Ibrāhīm's antiphrasis-novel *Sharaf* (*Sharaf*, 1996)[33] or with *Fī ghurfat al-ʿankabūt* (*In the Spider's Room*), recently defined as *Bildungsroman* in a review on the website *mad-amasr.com*.[34] The fact that contemporary and experimental narratives have been defined as *Bildungsroman* is an indicator of how, even in the obvious breaking of the limitations of form and meaning that the contemporary novel implements with regard to the realist tradition, the basic narrative implicit in this form "functions" as a powerful genre identifier, even when the "canonical" form is disregarded or openly overturned. From this perspective, rereading texts of the Egyptian national canon through the lens of the *Bildungsroman* can help underline the non-linearity of the progress of the novel in Egypt, build an attempt to trace a non-organical genre history – that is, based on an idea of slow, linear development – and promote, quite the opposite, an idea of porosity and translatability of the form.

The intertextual dimension is an indispensable analysis tool in the approach chosen and in the vision adopted: the *teloi* of the characters will be continuously placed side by side in order to discover the constant intertextual cross reference from one story of youth to another, to highlight how the narrative has marked historically connoted meanings of "youth" and how, at the same time, it has prophetically grasped the "creative" force of being young in certain historical phases.

As we shall see, within the 20th-century Egyptian framework, both the authors considered "canonical" in terms of the national canon, like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Maḥfūẓ, and the end-of-the-century avant-gardists rewrote and tested the limits of the classic European *Bildungsroman*, undermining or rejecting the individual-nation homology on the one hand, and obliterating even the possibility of growth for the protagonist on the other. We could thus ask ourselves: is it even possible to look for a *Bildungsnarrative* only to ascertain its residual aspect, in a narrative tradition in which the coming-of-age novel appears in an already epigonal form?

This methodological question was considered here. Nevertheless, the interpretation that Jerome Bruner offers of the *Bildungsroman* – an interpretation that is not only inclusive but also operationally fascinating – encouraged me to continue my research on the intersections between the genre of the coming-of-age novel and the Arab novel. Bruner maintains that the *Bildungsroman* is not just a narrative genre, but it is also a "narrative" in its own right; in other words, a principle that operates both in the narration and in readers' understanding, directing their hermeneutic efforts and providing them with a virtual reading grid on which to insert the elements narrated in the specific novel.[35] The main characteristic of the *Bildungsnarrative* is the fact that the subjects do not remain static but develop, transforming themselves as they grow up, until a balance is established between the inner dimension of the protagonists and the social dimension they inhabit.[36] Therefore, this narrative operates not only in the text but also in those who read it; it does not stop operating in the event of avant-garde or anti-realistic writings in which – as occurs with the Egyptian avant-garde movement of the 1990s – every reference to the "principle of transformation" – social, personal and ideological – of the individual is programmatically denied. Bruner's interpretation offers the example of a non-"categorising" yet generative and seminal use

of the term *Bildung* and it is an invitation to consider the *Bildungsroman* form not so much as a "genre" defined and relegated to the historical-geographical context in which it developed, but a universal heuristic tool. In the specific case of the 20th-century Egyptian context, this form is capable of revealing a plurality of paths and a non-linear growth. This form, which was described by Bakhtin as the path of a human being who "emerges along with the world",[37] appears in Egypt as a sub-genre, wherein the *telos* of the youthful trajectory generally shows an intimate connection to the novel's predominant narrative language. For example, in a novel dominated by a realistic type of narrative language, the "linear plot" usually prevails. However, as this study will show, the surfacing of literary experimentalism led the coming-of-age *teloi* to follow other models which, one way or another, create problems for the linear model – by fracturing it or showing its stitches, in a writing process that proves more and more aware of the mechanisms creating it.

The very structure of this book aims to reflect the progressive way the "linear" model is problematized in the *Bildung* and how it is replaced by new, alternate possibilities. Every chapter analyses a growing number of models: the second, third and fourth chapters each analyse one novel, the fifth and sixth chapters each analyse two while the seventh analyses three.

The state of the art in the critical studies on the Arab *Bildungsroman* in English and Arabic

To return to the question posed at the beginning – why haven't the Egyptian novels containing stories of coming-of-age youths been studied as *Bildungsroman*, except for rare exceptions?[38] One hypothesis is that Arab criticism has avoided dealing with a "categorising" term such as that of the *Bildungsroman*, aware of the fact that, although many Egyptian novels contain coming-of-age stories, some of the formal prerequisites of the genre are not met.

Another hypothesis is that the category of the *Bildung* has rarely been applied due to a reticence on the part of literary scholars and critics to use – in a non-European setting – a category which, as shown by the vast literature on the genre, is still considered a "national" genre, strongly linked with European culture, and German in particular. Though plausible, this response appears to underscore a peculiar "resistance" on the part of the scholarship on the Arab novel to the *Bildungsroman* category adopted by now, in its most inclusive sense, in many non-European settings.

An overview of the use of the *Bildung* category in critical literature in English highlights how, first and foremost, this category is not used unequivocally by the various critics and scholars but, instead, rather fluidly. The criticism in English shows three different approaches to the *Bildungsroman* category:

- Some articles showcase the occurrence of the term as a "definition" of the literary genre to which it is possible to ascribe the text being analysed.[39] In this case, the critic refers back to an international category, foreshadowing the presence of some themes typical of the genre: education, path of detachment

from the family of origin, journey, encounter, search for the "true" self through art, the school path, etc.

- A limited number of studies centres on the genre of the coming-of-age novel in Egypt, taking into consideration a specific "segment" of the Egyptian narrative canon or a specific text type: see, for example, Dinah Manisty's study on the Egyptian female coming-of-age narrative from the 1960s to the 1980s. In these studies, the decision to dwell on a chronologically limited corpus is due to the awareness of being in the presence of a genre that is as "porous" as it is still little studied in the Arab context.[40]

- Some studies in English use the term *Bildungsroman* as almost synonymous with Egyptian "fictional canon". According to Samah Selim, in the Egyptian context the *Bildungsroman* is the form through which the genre of the "novel" *tout-court* builds its character, similarly to what occurred in the 20th century with the European bourgeois novel. In the specific Egyptian case, this character is that of an *estranged* national subject; in other words, one not integrated into society.[41] Selim's consideration appears to evoke an analogy in the function of the *Bildungsroman* genre between the two contexts, European and Egyptian. At the same time, it underlines a peculiarity of the coming-of-age trope in the Egyptian context: that of highlighting the subject's non-integration or, at times, estrangement.

In their turn, Muhsin al-Musawi and Elliott Colla[42] also use the term to indicate the core of novels united by the experience of European youth, foundational core of the modern Arab novel.[43] Al-Musawi, in particular, identifies the development novel of the 20th-century Arab *Nahḍa* as the result of a more extensive "educational process" invariably borrowed from the European epistemological paradigm.[44] The term *Nahḍa* refers to a vast reformist and intellectual movement, promoted by intellectuals and institutions alike, that developed between the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century in the southern Mediterranean Basin, especially in Cairo, Beirut and Alexandria. It is within this movement, linked to the broader Ottoman reformist project, that the novel-form became widespread.

Referring to a corpus that includes *al-Ayyām* (*The Days*, 1926–1967) and *Adīb* by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, *ʿUṣfūr min al-sharq* (1938, *A Sparrow from the East*) by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Ibrāhīm al-Kātib* (*Ibrāhīm the Writer*, 1931) by al-Māzinī and *Duktūr Ibrāhīm* (*Doctor Ibrāhīm*, 1939) by the Iraqi Dhū-'Nūn Ayyūb, al-Musawi identifies in this form the main channel through which the *nahḍawī* elite plot an education that is itself the announcement of a process of acculturation, either underway or hoped for.[45] Al-Musawi also includes autobiographical works in the corpus such as *Tarbiyat Salāma Mūsā* (*The Education of Salāma Mūsa*, 1947) by Salāma Mūsa and the much later *Mudhakkirāt ṭabība miṣriyya* (*Memoirs of an Egyptian Woman Doctor*, 1958) by Nawāl al-Saʿdāwī. According to the scholar, the apprenticeship novel that became popular in the Arab literary field in the first half of the 20th century is the expression of three main phenomena: the need to confirm, on the part of the authors who

inherited a largely Western or orientalist epistemology, a narrative that recognises in Europe the role of "guide" in the modernisation process, the awareness of the "status" intrinsic to this form, a sort of benchmark for anyone, among the Arab intellectuals, who wished to play an active role in the process of education and modernisation of the country and, finally, the awareness of this form as the only way to "bid farewell to the past".[46]

To sum up, the use of the term in the first point responds to a taxonomic rather than analytical will, while its uses in the second and third points offer some interpretative hypotheses of the impact of the *Bildungsroman* genre or, to use a more open category, of the *Bildungsnarrative* within the Egyptian framework. Alongside authors who tend to show the existence of a *Bildungsroman* tradition in the Arab setting (Dinah Manisty, Nedal Mousa), other studies are highlighted (Samah Selim, Elliot Colla) that use the term *Bildungsroman* to demonstrate the normative and disciplinary value of the realistic-mimetic canon on the genre of the Arab novel, especially in its earliest phase. Finally, a third core of studies (Muhsin al-Musawi) tends to consider the *Bildungsroman* as a European form, foreign to the Arab-Islamic tradition and, therefore, destined to be expelled from the Arab literary scene at the end of the colonial phase.

The interpretation from a postcolonial perspective of the entire corpus of coming-of-age narrative proposed by al-Musawi presents a dual problem of putting into perspective: on the one hand, all agency is denied to the form itself, which is not perceived in its "transformativity", but ascribed to a series of socio-cultural functions, highlighting only its normative power.[47] The authorial choice and the possibility of manipulating the genre are not considered, subordinating every use of the form of the coming-of-age novel in order to convey a nationalistic and ideologically oriented discourse. At the same time, al-Musawi denies the presence of any legacy of this narrative type after the 1960s, a historical period that for him marks a requiem for the genre, dismissed as "something worth acknowledging only as a matter of history, worthy, before a final farewell, of comparison with a rejection of the recent past and its replications of modernity projects".[48] Is this really the case? The following chapters will attempt to answer this question, even though the very existence of this book and the chronological extension of the corpus of novels being analysed already predicts that the answer will perforce be negative.

For Arab-speaking critics, what stands out is the variety of translations with which the term has been rendered – *riwāyat al-taʿallum* (novel of self-development),[49] *riwāya takwīniyya*[50], or *riwāyat takwīn al-dhāt* (both can be translated as novel of formation), *riwāyat takwīn al-shakhṣiyya* (novel of personal growth),[51] or *riwāyat al-tajrūba al-dhātiyya* (novel of personal experience)[52] – and the coexistence of several translations even within the same reference-source.[53] In a study focused on the various types of protagonist of the Arab novel, Fayṣal Darrāj coins the expression *riwāyat al-taqaddum* (progression novel), while the Syrian sociologist, critic and novelist Ḥalīm Barakāt uses the expression *riwāya tawfīqiyya* (novel of accomplishment), mainly in reference to Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm. Both of these prolific critics and scholars confirm the tendency on the part of

much of Arab criticism to freely interpret the concept expressed by the European categories and to prefer a personalisation of the definition.[54]

Also noteworthy is the fact that many reference sources do not mention the genre at all, though this element should still be recorded, given the prevalence – as we shall see better later on – of critical studies aimed at refreshing and redefining the *Bildung*-form in the non-European contemporary context.[55]

At times, the term *Bildungsroman* is indicated in German in the Arab text, almost as if to incorporate – even graphically – the "untranslatability" of this critical category.[56] In the majority of cases, "*riwāya takwīniyya*" ("novel of apprenticeship") prevails over other terms. In critical literature studies in Arabic focused on the subgenre of the generational novel,[57] the *Bildung* category is not mentioned, although it is often considered a similar genre; likewise, in studies that analyse the types of protagonists (both male and female) it is rare to come across the treatment of the coming-of-age novel as an actual genre. In a recent translation of an article by Jerome Bruner which appeared in Arabic in the literary journal *Fuṣūl*, the coming-of-age novel is translated as *riwāya taʿlīmiyya*:[58] the attempt to continuously reformulate, within the framework of literary criticism in Arabic, the relationship between *Bildungsroman* and Arab genre appears clear once again.

The lack of uniformity in the use of the literary terms relating to the coming-of-age novel appears to indicate, on the part of Arab-speaking criticism, the conviction that, among all the fictional subgenres, the *Bildungsroman* is the one that is most European. If so, it would be plausible to think that this form – due to its scope of "otherness" compared to the others – is also the most appropriate to translate the more "Europeanised" phase of the novel, that is, that of the first half of the 20th century. This would confirm the hypothesis formulated in the first section of this introduction, in other words, the persistence of a reticence, on the part of scholars and literary critics who express themselves in Arabic, to use a "European" category the use of which, in a non-European context, could legitimise an interpretation of the texts as derivative, or "rough drafts" of an exclusively European genre.

Research questions

Regardless of the various uses of the term *Bildung* or of the Arabic terms variously used to translate it, scholars seem to tacitly agree on the fact that the coming-of-age stories published in the early decades of the 1900s paved the way for the novel form, and were in turn widely considered as part of the 20th-century Egyptian "canon" while also part of the general Arab literary heritage, seeing how they circulated even beyond national borders. Is there a specifically Egyptian *Bildungsroman*, or perhaps even more than one? And if so, what does it look like?

A study of the coming-of-age narratives inevitably intersects the dimensions of gender and of the different forms that the female coming-of-age novels have taken on. Indeed, given the fact that women had less access to public spaces and their limited conditions as to spatial and social mobility, the female coming-of-age novel has no choice but to also take on the aspiration of a quest for freedom and

emancipation. Nevertheless, as explained by Manisty, among others, this quest almost always arises from a renegotiation of boundaries, not from their radical erasure.[59]

This study centres on Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt's "plot of awakening", Raḍwā 'Āshūr's novel reconstructing the generational memory, al-Ṭaḥāwī's disturbing experimentalism as three examples of female "formation". Not devoting its own section to the female coming-of-age novel was a specific choice: that of not highlighting the genre-based dichotomy (though it existed until the 1960s) of coming-of-age fiction. This has allowed us to speak in terms of a constant renewal of the canon from within: with the forms of the story set on the page, women question the "male" Egyptian and international canon, they reveal its "limits" starting from their own (*ḥudūd*), they reveal its hegemonic nature starting from the rediscovery of the collective dimension and, finally, they break up its symbology, offering – as an alternative to the hegemonic narrative of a "national subject" (i.e., a young man) – a young woman who occupies the furthest edge of the nation.

The content of the volume

As previously mentioned, the **first chapter** centres on the discursive construction of the social presence of the *shābb*, attempting on the one hand to follow its path in the early decades of the 1900s and, on the other, to interpret how this social presence intersected the emerging literary form of the novel. Haykal himself, with his *Zaynab* (1913), would take on the role of "pioneer" of an "authentically" Egyptian novel, developing what is here described as "a well-organised narrative about social, economic and personal networks among young people".[60]

Indeed, the **second chapter** develops an analysis of the novel's reception and publishing history, characterised by a denial of authorship that would be forcefully claimed later, in 1929 – following the novel's great success and in the wake of the Revolution of 1919.

The character of Ḥāmid embodies the figure of the adolescent undergoing the effendification process. As showcased in the second part of the chapter, the contrast between city and country is a key aspect of the novel, recalling an "original" and highly symbolic Egyptian imaginary. In this novel, the love trope, which echoes throughout Ḥāmid's too-rich emotional dimension, conveys Ḥāmid's twofold love for Zaynab (a peasant girl working on his father's lands) and for 'Azīza (his cousin and social peer who is well-educated but hidden away in accordance with the behavioural codes reserved for girls from good families). The protagonists' interactions, movements, plans, silences and even their sudden disappearances are plotted like a map narrating the imaginary of the "young *effendī*" – embodied here by Ḥāmid, and indirectly linked to the author's point of view – on Egyptian society.

In the last analysis, this chapter shows how *Zaynab* owes its "supremacy" not so much to a chronological factor as to the phenomenal reception granted to a clearly autobiographical love story by a nationalist elite and a new audience eager to sanction it as a "realistic", believable and well-organised portrayal of the national situation.

The **third chapter** analyses a novel that has become a model for the national allegory in the Arab novel (the "soul-nation allegory", to use the words of Jed Esty): the popular and successful '*Awdat al-rūḥ* (1933, *Return of the Spirit* 1990) by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, where the young protagonist's trajectory is presented as a complete arc, though the story unfolds over a narration time that does not exceed a solar year. Fifteen-year-old Muḥsin's emotional and physical development coincides with the nation's becoming, and these two trajectories converge at the end – actually only hinted at in al-Ḥakīm's novel – of the Revolution of 1919.

The chapter focuses mainly on two core plots: the relationship between Muḥsin and his chosen family, who hosts him in Cairo (a small community of relatives and friends that he calls *al-Shaʿb* – "the folk" – and that epitomises the Egyptian people) and the youth's being in love with his neighbour Saniyya who, educated and westernised, epitomises the "new woman"; she, however, ignores him to marry an *effendī*. Centring less on the psychological dimension of the adolescent protagonist and more prone to dialogism and theatricality, the novel builds its symbolic force thanks to an assortment of scenes that draw on rural and scholastic life alike. Notably, the analysis develops these final scenes of scholastic life by referencing the European model of the *Künstlerroman*, a form traditionally linked to the youth's process of aesthetic and political coming of age. This aspect is especially interesting in light of a reflection on the use of the *Bildungsroman* form made by the renowned Egyptian playwright: by ascribing the symbolic value of "beauty" to Saniyya and making both Muḥsin and the entire *shaʿb* (folk) fall in love with this female figure, the author, to all intents and purposes, recovers the Weimarian – and in particular Schillerian – tradition of the *Bildungsroman*: the romantic, elitist, "chosen" hero educates his passions through art and dreams of becoming a poet, of exercising the art of words. This makes the revolution an "aesthetic" rather than realistic moment, as it truly forms the protagonist's path.

The **fourth chapter** centres on *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* (1960, *The Open Door* 2000) by Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt, a novel that greatly influenced the Egyptian narrative scene and a driving force behind the Egyptian female narrative. The chapter analyses the *telos* pursued by the protagonist, Laylā, to achieve emancipation and financial and emotional independence. Laylā's body, voice and domestic space are the themes through which her "twofold" growth is analysed.

In addition to being readable as a "classic" *Bildungsroman*, with clear reference to the nation's becoming, al-Zayyāt's novel intersects the international feminist novel as it takes shape as a novel of awakening – that is, a narration that plots the protagonists' (multiple) crises preceding the "awakening" of the real Laylā. This awakening takes place, meaningfully, during the Port Said bombings of 1956, in an ending fittingly described as "epic" by Marilyn Booth.[61]

The **fifth chapter**, focusing on *Adīb* (1935, *A Man of Letters* 1994) by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and on *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (1945, *The Lamp of the Saint* 2004) by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, analyses themes linked to the discovery and exploration of modernity via the narrative trope of migration to Europe for study purposes. Here, the aforementioned novels, traditionally seen as the tale of the "encounter-clash" between East and West, are interpreted as a "crisis plot"; that is, the narration of their

protagonists' inner torment, which a stay in Europe – or a subsequent return to Egypt – "detonates" into a severe crisis expressed in the madness of Adīb, the protagonist of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's novel of the same name, and in Ismāʿīl's radical change in views and perspectives.

This analysis highlights the occasionally anti-realist and expressionist language corresponding to these crisis narratives, which strives to recreate in readers the same feeling of disorientation the two protagonists experience in foreign lands and – especially in Ismāʿīl's case – upon returning to Egypt. Complicated, "piercing" narrative techniques (such as the anachronism of the "interior time" of the protagonist and the time of the narration) emerge to offer the text a new dimension that complicates the bidimensionality of mimetic realism.

These trends, difficult to recognise in the writings of the 1930s, surface in the analysis of the founding tropes transversal to these two novels: departure, *maskh* ("transformation", but in a pejorative meaning, "alteration"), madness. Both these novels of crisis – albeit in different directions – disclose the trope of the "splitting" of the self (*krìsis* means "choice" in Greek), which will be at the heart of the avant-garde writings.

The **sixth chapter** analyses two novels where the protagonists' interior crisis is contained within an ironic structure, here defined "disillusionment plot". This structure prevails in the 1940s novels by the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature Najīb Maḥfūẓ, but it can also be found in the first "avant-garde" novel examined in this volume, that is, *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* (1969, *The Seven Days of Man* 1989) by ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim. In Maḥfūẓ, the *telos* of the young protagonist of *al-Qāhira al-jadīda* (1945, *Cairo Modern* 2008) strives towards achieving outward middle-class comfort. In this novel, like in the subsequent *Bidāya wa-nihāya* (*The Beginning and the End* 1949) the protagonist is a young man undergoing the process defined as "efendification" by Ryzova,[62] when a sudden family tragedy forces him to count only on himself, forcing his way into social and human circles that ensure a swift social ascent. Like in Balzac's *Illusions perdues*, however, the (anti)hero enjoys a taste of social ascent only to experience, in the end, the abyss and social exclusion. The novel is also analysed in terms of its critical reception: indeed, the teleological interpretation imposed on Maḥfūẓ's body of work – which identifies the Cairo Trilogy as the "realistic masterpiece" of Egyptian and, more in general, Arab literature – caused hasty judgements on this novel, seen from time to time as a sort of preparatory exercise for the subsequent Trilogy. On the contrary, *al-Qāhira al-jadīda* is a powerful novel about the loss of youthful illusions as a metaphor for the loss of the national illusion: the nation does not ensure identity values, social transformation or even ethical integrity in the determinism guiding the *teloi* of these stories.

Twenty years after the publication of *al-Qāhira al-jadīda*, ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim portrays, in *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* (1969), a coming-of-age story identified in this chapter as a *Meta-Bildungsroman*. The main character is an adolescent fated to radically change his perspective of reality, this time not as a result of a trip to Europe, but of the process of growth and urbanisation that will take him far from the Sufi community he grew up in, under the guidance of a father-leader

equally fascinating and cumbersome. Thus, in this novel, the loss of illusions takes shape as the loss of a rural and pre-modern *kosmos* within which the Sufi community guarantees a collective identity that feeds on rituals and a strict gender role division. The seven days that make up the protagonist's "journey" towards adulthood stand for seven chronologically separate moments of rebellion, isolation and emancipation from the paternal/community dimension. The novel is described as a *Meta-Bildungsroman* precisely because the narrative focus is not on 'Abd al-'Azīz's *telos* but, rather, on the tensions roused in the youth by his own growing up and changing. The context of the post-*Naksa* historical disillusion is the objective correlative of the loss of any prospect, on the boy's part, of identification with something that is not the same nostalgic dimension of the past. 'Abd al-'Azīz grows up, but he does not "become". The end of the novel showcases the protagonist's great isolation, man's social and political non-integration in his environment (even the rural one, to which the protagonist returns in the final chapter) and in his language.

Centring on avant-garde novels, the **seventh chapter** analyses how the narrations of the avant-garde period explicitly boycott the "principle of transformation" underlying any plot intending to narrate a coming of age. In its own way, each of the three novels examined represents one of the three moments of literary avant-garde that surfaced in Egypt in the 1960s, 1970s and 1990s.

While the "Sixties Generation" introduced the figure of the "motionless" character, incapable of acting within the social framework, Manisty[63] highlights how the women authors of the 1970s reclaimed certain pattens of the *Bildungsroman* in a vivid and many-voiced narration wherein there is no Laylā to stand out as the story's – and the national history's – protagonist but, instead, a plurality of characters who emerge, often like so many visions of the story itself.

In turn, the "Nineties Generation" offers an intimist writing where the boycott of the narrative of development is unfailingly portrayed alongside the (almost literal) dismantling both of the function of the character (the authors, both male and female, of the 1990s dismiss any claim to "uniqueness", "consistency" and verisimilitude on the character's part) and, inevitably, of the very concept of *telos*. *Sharaf* (*Sharaf*, 1996), a novel from the "second narrative phase" of a pioneer author of the historical avant-garde like Sun'allah Ibrāhīm, portrays an anti-*Bildung* set in a prison, where the (anti)hero's emotional draining is the only transformation to occur. *Al-Khibā'* (1996, *The Tent* 1998) by Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī portrays the painful growing up of young Fāṭima, raised without emotional care in a family of sedentary Bedouins. Nadā is the protagonist of *Faraj* (2008, *Blue Lorries*, 2014) by **Raḍwā 'Āshūr**. In this generational novel, the experiences of the 1970s militancy and protest marches in Egypt are portrayed in the wavering movement of the protagonist and narrator's memory, which recalls the years of her development, interspersing her stories with authentic documents and writings by some of the female leaders of these movements.

For the three protagonists of the avant-garde novels, neither their family of origin, the nation-state or the social element in its most inclusive meaning are in any way "incubators" of a stable identity. Sharaf's de-formation, Fāṭima's (literal)

crippling and Nadā's ceaseless recovery and negotiation of memory are, instead, actual alternatives to the *telos*, to the prospect of an organic growth and a "whole" and intra-national becoming. The use of the bitterest irony (Ibrāhīm), the reclaiming of the collective memory ('Āshūr) and, finally, the bareness of the tale of disintegration (al-Ṭaḥāwī) are some of the possible ways to interpret the pattern of the *Bildungsroman* in the late 20th-century Egyptian novel. A pattern which, though twisted and kept at a distance, has never truly disappeared, like a Chimaera turned towards the horizon.

Notes

1 Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Revolution in the Changing Middle East, 1908–2014*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder and London 2015, p. 70.
2 Elshakry, Omnia, "Youth as Peril and Promise: The Emergence of Adolescent Psychology in Postwar Egypt", *Journal of Middle East Studies*, 43 (2011), pp. 591–610.
3 See, for example, Selim, Samah, *Popular Fiction, Translation and the Nahda in Egypt*, Springer International Publishing AG, Cham, Switzerland 2019, pp. 71–86; Holt, Elizabeth, *Fictitious Capital: Silk, Cotton, and the Rise of the Arabic Novel*, Fordham University Press, New York 2017.
4 Muwailiḥī's *neo-maqāma* is seen as a precursor of the Egyptian and Arab novelistic tradition. First serialised in the magazine *Miṣbāḥ al-sharq*, it was published as a book in 1902. For the English translation, see Allen, Roger, *A Period of Time: A Study and Translation of Hadith 'Isa Ibn Hisham by Muhammad al-Muwaylihi*, Ithaca Press, Reading, UK 1992.
5 Jacob, Wilson, *Working Out Egypt. Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity*, Duke University Press, Durham 2011, p. 45.
6 Ryzova, Lucie, *The Age of the Efendiyya. Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, p. 4.
7 Ibid., p. 90.
8 Summerfield, Giovanna and Downward, Lisa, *New Perspectives on the European Bildungsroman*, Continuum, New York 2010, pp. 5–6.
9 Fraiman, Susan, *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development*, Columbia University Press, New York 1993, p. xi.
10 Booth, Marilyn, "Women and the Emergence of the Arabic Novel", in Waïl Hassan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, pp. 137–138.
11 Elsadda, Hoda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel. Egypt, 1882–2008*, Edinburgh University Press and Syracuse University Press, Syracuse and New York 2012, pp. 25–33.
12 Summerfield, Giovanna and Downward, Lisa, *New Perspectives*, p. 3.
13 Bourdieu, Pierre, *Sociology in Question*, Sage Publication, London 1993, pp. 94–102.
14 See Chapter 1 of this volume.
15 See for instance Booth, Marilyn, "Women and the Emergence of the Arabic Novel", p. 147.
16 The expression "cultural capital" is drawn from John Guillory's interpretation (based on Bourdieu's) of the issue of the formation of the literary canon in Guillory, John, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1993.
17 This is the case of Micky, the protagonist of *Hiliūbūlis* by Mayy Tilmisānī (May Telmissany) (Dār Sharqiyyāt, al-Qāhira 2000), whose feeling of being a puppet is the first emotion expressed in the novel.

18 Karl Morgenstern, quoted in Boes, Tobias, *Formative Fictions. Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism and the Bildungsroman*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 2012, p. 1.

19 Kontje, Todd, *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre*, Camden House, Columbia (SC) 1993, p. 2.

20 Schiller, Friedrich, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Ungar, New York 1965.

21 Redfield, Marc, *Phantom Formations: Aesthethic Ideology and the Bildungsroman*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1996, p. 21. Cursive by the Author.

22 According to Redfield, the "aesthetic" narrative of the *Bildung* represented "an alternative to violent revolution" (Redfield, Marc, *Phantom Formations,* p. 29). On the *Bildungsroman* as a "normative" and preventive form compared to political-social revolution, see Kontje, Todd, *The German Bildungsroman*, p. 5; both the aforementioned authors quote Schiller, referenced in Chapter 5 of this volume. On the anti-revolutionary sentiment of the *Bildungsroman* see also Moretti, Franco, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture,* Verso, London and New York 2000, pp. 15–21.

23 On the classic form, see: Boes, Tobias, *Formative Fictions*, pp. 13–69; Redfield, Marc, *Phantom Formations*, pp. 1–125; Moretti, Franco, *The Way of the World*.

24 Castle, Gregory, *Reading the Modernist Bildungsroman*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville 2006 p. 143.

25 Esty, Jed, *Unseasonable Youth. Modernism, Colonialism and the Fiction of Development*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012.

26 Boes, Tobias, *Formative Fictions*, p. 134.

27 Ibid., pp. 128–154.

28 See Hoagland, Ericka A., "The Postcolonial Bildungsroman", in Sarah Graham (ed.) *A History of the Bildungsroman*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, 2019 as well as Slaughter, Joseph R., *Human Rights Inc.*, Fordham University Press, New York 2007.

29 Among the pioneering studies on the female *Bildungsroman*, see Fraiman, Susan, *Unbecoming Women*.

30 See: Nyman, Jopi, *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Diasporic Fiction*, Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York, 2009.

31 Latinez, Alejandro, *Developments: Encounters of Formation in the Latin American and Hispanic/Latino Bildungsroman*, Peter Lang, New York 2014.

32 Whitmarsh, Tim, *Narrative and Identity in the Ancient Greek Novel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK 2011, p. 178.

33 Massad, Joseph A., *Desiring Arabs*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2007, p. 377.

34 Shafei, Ahmed, "In the Spider's Room: A Counter-oppression Novel", see link: www.madamasr.com/en/2016/06/15/feature/culture/in-the-spiders-room-a-counter-oppression-novel/, consulted on 7 August 2020.

35 Bruner, Jerome, "The Narrative Construction of Reality", in Massimo Ammaniti and Daniel Stern (eds.), *Psychoanalysis and Development*, New York University Press, New York and London 1994, p. 27.

36 Moretti, Franco, *The Way of the World*, p. 15.

37 Mikhail Bakhtin, quoted in Boes, Tobias, *Formative Fictions*, p. 29.

38 Among the novels examined in this volume, it appears that only *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī and *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* by Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt have been analysed as *Bildungsroman*. Other novels in this corpus, like *Sharaf* by Sonallah Ibrahim (see Chapter 7 of this volume) or *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* by ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim (see Chapter 6 of this volume), have been only tangentially defined as more or less experimental forms of *Bildungsroman*.

39 For example, the *Bildungsroman* is used by Magda al-Nowaihi to define *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* in al-Nowaihi, Magda, "Construction of Masculinity in Two Egyptian Novels", in Suad Joseph (ed.), *Intimate Selving in Arab Families. Gender, Self, and Identity*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY 1999, p. 237. The term is also

used to describe the novel *al-Talaṣṣuṣ* (2007, Stealth 2010) by Sonallah Ibrahim, in Starkey, Paul, *Sonallah Ibrahim. Rebel with a Pen*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2016, p. 176.

40 Al-Mousa, Nedal, "The Arabic Bildungsroman: A Generic Appraisal", *Middle East Studies*, 25, 2 (1993), pp. 223–240; Manisty, Dinah, *Changing Limitations: A Study of the Woman's Novel in Egypt (1960–1991)*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, SOAS, London 1993.

41 Selim, Samah, *Popular Fiction,* pp. 32–33.

42 Colla, Elliott, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity*, Duke University Press, Durham 2007, p. 155.

43 Al-Musawi, Muhsin, *Islam on the Street: Religion in Modern Arabic Literature*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Plymouth 2009.

44 Ibid., p. 42.

45 Ibid., p. xxiii.

46 Ibid., p. 42.

47 Ibid., pp. 41–42.

48 Ibid., p. 37.

49 al-Qāḍī, Muḥammad, *Muʿjam al-sardiyyāt*, Dār Muḥammad ʿAlī li-ʾl-Nashr, Tūnis 2010, p. 215.

50 ʿAllūsh, Saʿīd, *Muʿjam al-muṣṭalaḥāt al-adabiyya al-muʿāṣira: ʿarḍ wa-taqdīm wa-tarjama*, Maktaba al-Jamiʿyya, al-Dār al-Bayḍāʾ 1984, p. 61.

51 Wahba, Majdī and al-Muhandis, Kāmil, *Muʿjam al-muṣṭalaḥāt al-ʿarabiyya fī ʾl-lugha wa-ʾl-adab*, Maktabat Lubnān, Bayrūt 1979, p. 103, and Yaʿqūb, Imīl, *Qāmūs al-muṣṭalaḥāt al-lughawiyya wa-ʾl-adabiyya: ʿArabī, Inkilīzī, Faransī*, Dār al-ʿIlm li-ʾl-Malāyīn, Bayrūt 1987, p. 218.

52 Shāhīn, Muḥammad, *Afāq al-riwāya. Al-bunya wa-ʾl-muʾaththarāt*, Maktabat Madbūlī, al-Qāhira 2001, p. 134.

53 al-Qāḍī, Muḥammad, *Muʿjam al-sardiyyāt*, p. 215.

54 Darrāj, Fayṣal, *Al-dhākira al-qawmiyya fī ʾl-riwāya al-ʿarabiyya*, Markaz al-Dirasāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, Bayrūt 2008, pp. 81–86. See also, by the same author, *Riwāyat al-taqaddum wa-ightirāb al-mustaqbal: taḥawwulāt al-ruʾya fī ʾl-riwāya al-ʿarabiyya*, Dār al-Ādāb li-ʾl-Nashr wa-ʾl-Tawzīʿ, Bayrūt 2010.

55 See for example Jādd, ʿIzzat, *Naẓariyya al-muṣṭalaḥ al-naqdī*, Dār al-Kitāb al-Ḥadīth, al-Qāhira 2014; Ruwaylī, Mījān, *Dalīl al-nāqid al-adabī: iḍāʾa li-akthar min khamsīn tayyār wa-muṣṭalaḥ naqdī muʿāṣir,* al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, al-Dār al-Bayḍāʾ 1995.

56 This is how Jābir ʿUṣfūr uses the term in one of the essays collected in the volume *Al-qaṣṣ fī hadhā al-zaman* on the novel *Bayt al-nār* by Maḥmūd al-Wardānī, described with the term "*Bildungsroman*" in Latin characters. The term is later explained as an expression denoting "the journey taken by the hero from childhood to adulthood, or from immaturity to maturity" (Darrāj, Fayṣal, *Al-qaṣṣ fī hadhā al-zaman*, Dār al-Miṣriyya al-Lubnāniyya, al-Qāhira 2014, p. 361).

57 ʿUbaydāt, Zuhayr Maḥmūd, *Riwāyat al-ajyāl fī ʾl-sard al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth*, Azmina li-ʾl-Nashr wa-ʾl-Tawzīʿ, ʿAmmān 2010.

58 See for example Samia Mehrez's article "Kitābat al-qarya fī ʾl-adab al-miṣrī al-muʿāṣir", in Ḥalīm Barakāt (ed.), *Naḥū ruʾya shāmila li-ʾl-riwāya al-ʿarabiyya*, Bidāyāt li-ʾl-Ṭibāʿ wa-ʾl-Nashr, Dimashq 2010, p. 255, where the term *Bildungsroman* appears in Latin characters in the Arabic text.

59 Manisty, Dina, *Changing Limitations*, pp. 7–14.

60 See Chapter 2, pp. 44.

61 Booth, Marilyn, "About *The Open Door*", in *The Open Door* by Latifa al-Zayyat translated by Marilyn Booth, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 2017 [2000], p. 373.

62 Ryzova, Lucie, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, pp. 102–104.

63 Manisty, Dinah, *Changing Limitations*.

1 Building the nation, imagining the youth in early 20th-century Egypt

During the 19th century, the reforms carried out by Muḥammad 'Alī led to an increase in the number of technical and scientific schools in the country: the engineering school, established in 1816, and the medical school, founded in 1827, were the first to open, with a largely foreign faculty. Muḥammad 'Alī's successor, 'Abbās Pāsha, founded a military academy in 1849, and around two decades later, in 1868, the *khedivé* Ismā'īl inaugurated the well-known Khedivial school, which would become one of the three key institutes in the early national narratives in the Middle East,[1] as well as nursery of future Egyptian party leaders and politicians.[2]

Ismā'īl Pāsha implemented the scholastic system in a more harmonious way than had his predecessors, attempting to make improvements at all levels of instruction while at the same time seeing to the introduction of general disciplines and the humanities in the curricula, without stopping at the technical-scientific disciplines. Three types of schools flanked the traditional *kuttāb*, or guaranteed a progression in studies to those who had attended the local *kuttāb*: government schools, those run by the *Awqāf* (Islamic foundations) and those managed by missionaries or by other foreign communities. The characters in the novels analysed in the following chapters are enrolled, or plan to enrol, in these schools founded in the second half of the 19th century. For example, Muḥsin, the adolescent protagonist of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's novel which will be discussed in the third chapter, is registered at the Khedivial secondary school, while Ḥasanayn, in *Bidāya wa-nihāya* (*The Beginning and the End*) – a novel by Najīb Maḥfūẓ published in 1949 – is depicted as he considers signing up for the military school (*madrasa ḥarbiyya*) or the police academy (*madrasat al-būlīs*):[3] these works describe how, in the period between the foundation of these institutes and the '30s of the 20th century, choosing one's secondary school was a crucial moment in a young person's education. The secondary schools mentioned thus far are boys' schools. The first Egyptian girls' school, with the exception of religious schools such as the Good Shepherd Sisters' School founded in 1844 and the Italian Franciscan Sisters' School founded in 1859, was the Siyūfiyya School, which opened in 1873 thanks to the efforts of Ceshmet 'Iffet, third wife of khedivé Ismā'īl. These schools prepared girls for housekeeping more than for public jobs, teaching the basics of hygiene, medicine and domestic science.[4] In the following decades, several other secondary girls' schools opened with enriched courses on offer. Among

them is the Saniyya School, which appears in the memoirs of the feminist (and headmistress of the school) Nabawiyya Mūsā and of one of her most renowned students – activist, doctor and novelist Nawāl al-Saʿdāwī.[5] Mūsā and al-Saʿdāwī's writings are just two examples of how references to the first secondary schools for girls represent the foundation of the 20th-century female autobiographical discourse. Greater attention to women's memoirs and autobiographies on the part of historians, translators and scholars of Arabic literature would help reconstruct a collective history of the early phases of female education, in Egypt and in other basins of the southern Mediterranean.

Going back to the male dimension, predominant in the public sphere as well as in autobiographical discourse, entry into secondary school, at that time, becomes a true "rite of passage" in the autobiographical, masculine narrative of the early *effendī* generations – in other words, of the new modernised and urban middle class.[6] For example, this literary trope appears in Aḥmad Amīn's autobiography *Ḥayātī* (*My Life*, 1950). Amīn, an eminent figure in Egyptian letters and pedagogy, Dean of the Faculty of Letters at Cairo University until 1946, described the passage from the world of the Azhar to the Secondary School for Teachers as an epistemological jump between two worlds: on one side traditional and Islamic science, on the other a system of modernised and global knowledge.[7] Like all literary tropes, that of the passage from the Azhar to the "modern" world of reformed schools also presents a poetic *and* a literary function – in this case, that of subsuming in a linear story precisely the new social status of the Egyptian *effendī*, a figure of passage from an obsolete world to a system considered part of the future. In truth, even the elementary and middle schools affiliated with al-Azhar had introduced mathematics, history, geography and natural sciences in their curricula as early as 1911. Additional laws in 1925 and then again in 1930 and 1936 introduced chemistry, biology and other disciplines common to the reformed schools.[8] These data lead us to think that in *My Life*, as in other autobiographies, there is a rather emphasised polarisation between the descriptions of the two systems. Indeed, autobiography (in that it is a literary genre) should be read not only as an "objective" account of the country's economic and social situation, but as "narration" – a construction of autonomous sense compared to objective reality and, therefore, necessarily selective and oriented towards conveying an impression in readers through literary constructs and specific narrative devices.

Another institute essential for the Egyptian cultural ambience of the early 20th century, whose design was opposed during the period of the British rule (1882–1914), was the Egyptian University. Lord Cromer in particular,[9] aware that a new class of young graduates would reconfigure Egyptian society as a whole in terms of dynamism and aspirations, opposed the idea of the establishment of a university and limited his intervention to reforming the *kuttāb* system. Generally speaking, Cromer's reform was inspired by a disciplinary idea of education and by the firm will to organise a primary education that was as "practical" as possible and that would not allow young Egyptians to even glimpse the possibility of a full education.[10]

The university project was not accomplished until 1908, owing to the interest of the Amīr Fuʾād, who became sultan in 1917 and later King of Egypt (1922–1936).

As shall be inferred from the autobiographically inspired narratives under discussion here, in particular from Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Adīb* (1935, *A Man of Letters* 1994) and later on by Maḥfūẓ's novel *al-Qāhira al-Jadīda* (1945, *Cairo Modern* 2008), Cairo University represented a privileged space of intellectual growth and debate for the learned Egyptian youth. Erlich notes that the university "was not a university in the comprehensive sense but, rather an institution that offered courses in the humanities and social sciences alone", and it "lacked a methodical system of teaching, including final exams".[11] Nevertheless, this university was an essential arena for the exchange and meeting of people from various backgrounds: young professionals, reformed secondary school students as well as "government bureaucrats, wives of the foreign community, Pashas in their traditional dress and youngsters in search of knowledge".[12]

1.1 The Concept of "historical generation" and the emerging *shabāb* ("educated youth") in the early 20th century

These reforms introduced in Egypt in the 19th century by Muḥammad ʿAlī, ʿAbbās Pāsha and the khedivé Ismāʿīl, coupled with the institution of the Egyptian University (later Cairo University), had two dramatic effects on society. The first was that a wider segment of the population had access to education,[13] and both the rural elite and urban groups of modest incomes could access what Ryzova defines as the "efendification" (here: effendification) process: namely the process of entering the new category of urban "modern men", or *effendiyya*. As highlighted by Ryzova, this process was often the result of the desire, on the part of newly formed middle classes often unconnected to the elite, to modernise themselves, investing in the future of the family's most promising youth. This youth therefore received the symbolic "investiture" of becoming the family's first *effendī*, and was encouraged to attend a government school. The most fortunate were sent to Europe to complete their education.[14] Of course, these rites of passage were accompanied by the youths' compliance with a series of social and cultural codes that made the *effendī* a complex icon – of modernisation, but of Egyptianness and cultural authenticity at the same time.[15] In its simple trajectory, the novel *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (1945, *The Lamp of the Saint* 2004) by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, analysed in the fifth chapter, narrates the dual passage of a recently urbanised youth of modest origins to the world of science, on one hand, and to the dimension of the new westernised *effendiyya*, on the other. This time, the story focuses on the Egypt-Europe axis – the terms of another "classic" trope in 20th-century Egyptian literature. This axis depicts a complex – and completely internal to Egyptian society – debate between a xenophilous and modernising trend on one hand and, on the other, an Islamic and conservative trend.[16]

   It may be of interest to note that the emerging protagonists of this kind of effendification process were often the sons of the rural middle class called *ʿumda*, a social group which is of particular interest, considering the social affiliation of

most of the protagonists in chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this book. According to Baer's detailed study of the distribution of land in Egypt in the 18th and 20th centuries, this traditional rural elite of *'umda*, after having benefitted from the agrarian reforms instituted by Muḥammad 'Alī and the *khedivé* Ismā'īl, and after having played an important role in the assessments of taxes, sales and sequestration of land, began to lose prestige after the start of the British mandate.[17] Other scholars, such as Charles Smith in his biography on Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, emphasise how even under the British occupation this social class had been able to seize upon the opportunities that the occupiers could offer, thereby guaranteeing their children an education in the capital and in Europe, equipping them for important positions in jurisprudence and other emerging professions. The members of this rural elite "were ready to accept Western influence both at the intellectual and at the political level, using it to their best advantage, an advantage which often coincided, as they saw it, with the good of the entire country".[18] The novel *Zaynab* (1913, *Zeinab* 2016) by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, under discussion in the next chapter, shows in semantic architecture the point of view of a typical son of a rural landowner and a student in Cairo, perceiving himself as an agent of the modernisation process – participating in it, but maintaining a distance from radical discourse on democratisation and disempowerment of the traditional rural elite. Seen from this local, historical perspective, the novel shows Haykal's significant insight into Egyptian society.

The second effect of more widespread access to the reformed school system was the emerging of the *shabāb*, a word which, in the media and in the public sphere, took on the meaning of "male and educated youth" as a self-conscious group, eager for social recognition and political agency. Like the word *effendiyya* discussed in the Introduction, the word *shabāb* is also inevitably gendered and defined in masculine terms. Indeed, it refers to the "becoming Egyptian citizens", meant as a plural and masculine subject. As pointed out by Jacob, one of the public figures who would give the most prominence to this category, and use it in typically masculine terms in his speeches, was Muṣṭafā Kāmil,[19] leader of *al-ḥizb al-waṭanī* (the National Party) and supporter of a reform of Egyptian masculinity. According to his project, schools, sports clubs and youth associations were to be involved in the ongoing formation of a "masculine youth as a political subjectivity".[20] According to Wilson Jacob:

> It is not an exaggeration to say that Kamil instituted and later represented the figure of the heroic masculine youth as a political subjectivity within the emergent Egyptian nationalist discourse. This figure was not only a rhetoric device. It was to be made real through a process one might call the institutionalization of youthful energy.[21]

Also scholars such as Erlich,[22] Elshakry,[23] Pollard[24] and Elsadda[25] highlighted the relevance of Egyptian youths as a prominent social phenomenon in parliamentary Egypt, and their being represented as both actors and interlocutors of public nationalistic discourse. According to Erlich, the very word *shabāb*

was re-signified between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, and started since then to mean a phase of life dedicated to the education and personal growth of an individual. This accepted meaning of youth did not exist in the traditional Islamic world, where no age range beyond childhood was recognised as allocated to scholastic or professional training. This absence had repercussions on the Egyptian language, as well: for example, the word *futuwwa* (a collective term deriving from *fatā*, "youth") usually had a negative meaning. It was used in reference to the young people from poor neighbourhoods who would join "gangs" with the aim of self-defence.[26] The word *shabāb*, instead, takes on the meaning of "educated youth", broadly intersecting the concept of "*effendiyya*" and the image of students enrolled in a reformed school. However, the *shabāb* were transformed into a collective political subject, with specific aspirations and shared cultural and social codes, by a new mobility and a self-perception of themselves as "youths". Though admitted to a course of study that could lead to social mobility in the event of scholastic merit and success,[27] the students of the traditional *madrasa* or the other institutes belonging to the traditional Islamic school system, were not aware of themselves as "youths", nor did society identify them as a socially and culturally distinct group.

In his *Youth and Revolution in the Changing Middle East 1908–2014*, Haggai Erlich applies the concept of "historical generation" (in Karl Mannheim's definition) to modern Egyptian youth, identifying several "historical generations" of youth in the *continuum* between 1908 and 2014. In Mannheim's definition, a "political generation" is the social cohort that has been influenced in its formative years (between the ages of 17 and 25) by a specific set of socio-historical elements, and that in its turn has influenced events and collective history.[28] Erlich identifies several generations of Egyptian youth, determined by shared formative experiences, which in turn were the result of radical transformations in the socio-political profile of one reality. Among them, he outlines a first one, which experienced its young age at the early stage of educational reforms, in the late 1860s, a second political generation which reached visibility in the 1920s, and a third that would appear during the 1970s.[29]

From a chronological perspective, the authors studied in chapters 2, 3 and 5 rank halfway between the first two historical generations identified by Erlich. Arab critics refer to them, still in generational terms, as "*Jīl al-udabā*'" ("the generation of men of letters"):[30] we are speaking, among others, about Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889), Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888), Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Qādir al-Māzinī (1889) and Salāma Mūsā (born in 1887). The slightly younger Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (born in 1898) is also usually included in this "generation".

In this case as well, the definition of "generation" springs both from these authors' ages (basically identical, with the exception of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm) and from the historical framework within which they spent their formative years. Recent graduates of reformed schools (see Haykal) or rebellious Azharites (see Ḥusayn), these authors witnessed, while still at secondary school, the foundation of the first nationalist parties in 1907: *Ḥizb al-Umma*, led by Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid, and

al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī, led by Muṣṭafā Kāmil. In the wake of Erlich's study and of the definition in use by Egyptian critics, this "generation of men of letters" would be seen as the "historical generation" of the late Nahḍa. The following chapters will showcase how, even within the sphere of *Bildungsnarrative*, autobiographies and personal writings, this generation always joined political aspirations linked to the quest for a national identity with the intellectual activity performed in their role of historians, reformers, playwrights, translators and novelists.

Thus, the authors of Haykal's "generation", more or less in their 20s in 1908, the year of the premature death of the patriotic leader Muṣṭafā Kāmil, witnessed what (according to Erlich) would be the "first modern civilian mass demonstration in Egypt".[31] In other words, the *shabāb* began surfacing as a new political subject in the early 20th century, when the reformed Egyptian school system produced a fair number of graduates and future professionals (lawyers, clerical workers, journalists, businessmen and politicians). It reached its peak, however, in the period between the two world wars, when "youths were thought to best embody the political subjectivity of nationalism".[32] The very term *shabāb*, from the 1910s onwards, would be broadly used, undergoing variations depending on the political-identitarian affiliations and claims that it would gradually come to be associated with.

Shabāb: *places, discourses and cultural models*

What were the cultural characteristics of youths? How did the *shabāb* differ from other political subjects in the public and political sphere, from a visual, behavioural and cultural perspective? First, Egyptian youth became visible for its preference for specific urban areas rather than others. Young people frequented modern Cairo, especially the Azbakiyya gardens, the cafés on the boulevards of Khedivial Cairo and the lanes in the Rawda gardens, preferring the urban area that was transformed at the end of the 19th century by the *khedivé* Ismā'īl's wish to modernise and "clean up" the urban landscape.[33] The area around the Azbakiyya gardens is an important shopping and cultural district in the capital, decorated by European-style buildings and department stores often managed by foreign businessmen – for example, the famous Cicurel stores.

Second, young people could gather together, join youth organisations and groups close to national political movements, as well as take part in sports and recreational activities, without necessarily being involved in family or professional business activities. Meeting and uniting among themselves, young people contributed significantly to the process of social modernisation and to the redefinition of sociability in ways that were no longer clannish and family-based. Several clubs and centres where young people could meet had already appeared at the beginning of the century: in 1905 the *Nādī al-madāris al-'Ulyā*, founded for students of the newborn state schools, was established.[34] In the period between the two wars, a wide variety of youth organisations became widespread, from the Boy Scout movement to the *Jam'iyyat al-shubbān al-muslimīn* (the Organisation for Muslim Youth), to *Ittiḥād al-Jāmi'ī* (the University Association). These organisations

offered a platform where youths could express themselves and were, according to Jankowski, the first laboratories of political activism:

> On the university level, the Egyptian University had a Student Union (*ittiḥād al-jāmiʿa*) by the late 1920s. Thus, on both the national and the school levels, outlets for self-expression and leadership by youths, as well as potential centres for political activism, were in existence in Egypt by the interwar period.
>
> The broader setting of Egyptian society and politics in which the youths of this period found themselves also contributed to involving them in politics. To a degree unknown in Egypt previously, the political system itself, with its various political parties, enthusiastic press, periodic elections and appeals of politicians to the electorate, encouraged public participation in politics, youth participations included. At least three of the political parties of the parliamentary period – the Nationalists, the Wafd and the Liberal constitutionalists (*ḥizb al-aḥrār al-dusturiyīn*) – had somewhat organized youth groups affiliated to them in the 1920s and 1930s. . . . Nor was it merely the political parties which encouraged youth participations in politics. In addition, the general cultural environment of Egypt during the parliamentary period provided an atmosphere conducive to the same end. In many ways the 1920s were the heyday of westernization in Egypt. From the now-impressive group of Egyptian *literati* and their multiplying journals came incessant discussion of the benefits of western ideas, western social and economic arrangements and western political forms – including the concept of popular participation in politics.[35]

In this mushrooming of juvenile organisations, the word *shabāb* ("youth") began to take on a new set of meanings from the cultural point of view, and started to appear on a daily basis in the press and in periodicals – and this is the third element, after physical meeting points and associationism, which contributed to this portrait of the cultural identity of the *shabāb*. Indeed, the public discourse on youth, whether to promote or discourage it, spread in the late Nahḍa – namely since the first decade of the 20th century – through the press and numerous caricatures. For instance, the expression *al-shābb al-mutafarnij* ("westernised"), which is the active present participle of the verb *tafarnaja* (meaning "to pretend to be European"),[36] came to describe the dress and Europeanised manners of Egyptian youths. The press also played a fundamental role in providing young people with excerpts from, and a discussion on, modern literary forms: *neo-maqāmāt*, long and short novellas, serialised novels, translations of foreign texts, poetry and portraits of individuals, essays and treatises all found ample space in the Egyptian press of the early 1900s. Newspapers and magazines, at one and the same time, functioned as a meeting forum for the younger generations, thus favouring the cementing of ties between equals and promoting open exchanges in a non-hierarchical environment.

In particular, *al-Jarīda*, the magazine founded in 1906 by Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid, offered poetry and fiction in Arabic as well as translations of literary works from French and English, as well as providing space for literary criticism

and intellectual debate.[37] Indeed, in the second decade of the 1900s, works by "traditionalists" and "modernists" represented by the young Haykal and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn appeared in the periodical's columns.[38] Al-Sayyid himself penned several articles of social portraiture in his periodical. These portraits identified various types of figures that were emerging in a changing society like Egypt: the corrupt and menial official; the fat, old-fashioned housewife; the hardy peasant so fond of his village, always described in romantic terms; and the young man caught between two cultures and thus severely stressed at a psychological level, creating a gallery of a collective identity.[39]

In some of his articles, al-Sayyid focused on Egyptian youths, interpreting them as a metaphor for social change. In an article published in *al-Jarīda* in 1908, titled *Banātunā wa-awlādunā* (*Our Sons and Daughters*), he proposes a comparison between Egyptian families past and present. Unlike the traditional man, he says, modern youths consider marriage an institution based on love, and consequently aspire to modern, educated brides:

> This young man who appreciates art and beauty finds himself trapped with an ignorant wife who believes that it is beautiful to be white and fat, and who wears layers and layers of clothes, overburdening her body and then leaving her arms without gloves.[40]

It may be worth noting here how, despite the inclusiveness of the article's title, the central message conveys a male gaze, and a definition of the "modern woman" based on male judgment, and on the contraposition with "the traditional woman". The core of al-Sayyid's description is what Hoda Elsadda calls the "new man", intending with this label the new cultural model of manhood which developed in the late-Egyptian *nahḍa*. In her seminal study, Elsadda shows how the educated and urbanised youth was actually a true subtext complementary to and underlying the construction of the noted and fully analysed figure of the "new woman" (*al-mar'a al-jadīda*).[41] While Beth Baron and others have amply proven how the identity debate objectified the concept of "nation", depicting it as a woman, Elsadda and Pollard also point out the implied counterpart of this feminisation: that is, the inevitable "masculinisation" of he who was supposed to "liberate" or – in another common metaphor – "marry" the nation-woman. In other words, the young *effendī*. Notably, Elsadda wrote enlightened pages on the debate on the different models of "manhood" of the liberal elite and its youthful component.[42] Pollard shows how the modern, "westernised youth" took centre stage in the satirical press of the '20s, where he was often portrayed as the "suitor" of a nation – Egypt – depicted in the guise of a young woman.[43] In one of these pictures, the young man is portrayed as "shackled" by heavy ankle chains. The caption below the image chosen by Pollard says: "this caricature shows . . . the restrictions placed on the Egyptian youth who cannot progress to fulfill their aspiration unless their fetters are cut. Who can cut them except a strong government?"[44]

The cartoon is a graphic illustration of the development of the public discourse on the Egyptian *shābb*, seen with ambivalence as both a resource and a vulnerable

element of society. In his image of fashionable and modern youth, the *shābb* differs from the working class on one hand, and from other marginalised – though young in age – components on the other.

The *shābb* is actually an intersectional category where the image of the *effendī*, the gender construction (his being male and bridegroom) and a worldview imbued with liberal principles come together. As shown by Elshakry and Pollard, these aspects were historically "linked" in the period between the world wars. It is no coincidence that in this very period, Haykal would "claim" authorship of a novel written back in 1908, *Zaynab*. This novel would become the first story of the "shackled" youth immersed in a process of social change and, at the same time, incapable of fully realising his wish to change his private life.

Youth, nation, narration of national youth in a personal memoir by Haykal

In a page of a diary written in Paris roughly at the same time as al-Sayyid's article, Haykal tried to tackle the issue of the identity of the new, modern young man, basing his argument on the paradigm of a comparison between East and West:

> Here in Paris, a young man feels youth running through his veins, and knows that his studies are his only responsibility. In the East, on the other hand, when a young man is twenty he is mature, he walks with the composure and solemnity of an adult, as though he were a *shaykh*. At twenty-five, his step begins to falter, grey hair awaits him and he begins to shake his head when spoken to.[45]

This diary entry was written in 1909 but not published until 1996 in *Mudhakkirāt al-shabāb* (*Memories of Youth*), a volume edited posthumously by Haykal's son. In the quoted passage, Haykal resorts to a depiction of two contrasting realities, the Egyptian and the French. In the "Orient" one is considered mature at age of 20 and old at 25. These are razor-sharp words that seem to suggest that throughout this trip and his stay in Europe, Haykal was able not only to discover France and its culture, but also to discover a season in a man's life – youth – which he says is non-existent in Egypt. Indeed, compared to their European contemporaries, Egyptians have nothing "young" about them. Their movements, dress, mentality, looks and narrow horizons – in fact, everything about them – suggests obsolescence. Actually, Haykal is employing a rhetorical and compositional strategy to submit a crucial question to readers for their scrutiny. Where is Egypt's youth? Why does childhood, in Egypt, end in adulthood without any intermediate stage? It appears that Haykal's idea of *shabāb* resides within a conflict between the naturalistic concept of youth, where it is seen as a biological characteristic that runs in the veins like sap in a tree trunk, and a "cultural" concept. In the latter vision, youth is expressed through a determined series of behaviours, dress and affiliations. While writing these words, Haykal bears in mind the young European bourgeois student who can afford the luxury of a long, professional and social apprenticeship before

beginning to participate in his own society. Youth is, in Haykal's narration, an apprenticeship for the leaders to come. At the core of this concept and polarised description of youth lies not so much a comparison of two different "cultures", as a comparison of two different systems of social recognition and political power. On the one hand, we find the modern *bourgeoisie*, and on the other the traditional, pre-modern system which denies its young people any form of participation in the political arena.

Seventy-five years after Haykal wrote these words, Pierre Bourdieu – in a well-known interview included in the volume *Questions de Sociologie* – underlined the relative value, historically connoted and therefore negotiable, of the boundary line between age groups and, consequently, of the concept of youth itself. "Simply speaking of youth as a social group, or of a group that is constituted by common interest and the establishment of a link between these interests and a defined age group is in itself no more than mere manipulation".[46] Fence-sitting midway between a "cultural" and a "natural" idea of youth, Haykal manages to include a wide range of meanings and ideas in his political discussions. Youth in its naturalistic concept provides him with a discursive model moulded on a scientific linearity, which endows youth with several "objective" characteristics. The cultural concept of youth, on the other hand, is based on the simple idea that youth as a "state of mind" is only available in a society which actively nurtures such an expansion.

In support of the preceding, the following is a passage from *Mudhakkirāt al-shabāb*:

> It should come as no surprise that these countries are fertile ground for writers and poets. . . . Today we walked through the Parc Monceau. How can any man who lives amid these marvellous gardens fail to become a poet, artist, or writer of multiple talents?" . . .
>
> If you walk the streets of Paris, you find obvious, clear evidence of literature. You find recital halls, novels in bookstore windows, and literary criticism in the pages of newspapers . . . in all nations, literature is the spirit [or] of the nation. It is the ideal and eternal longing [*nafs*] that forges human morality with its inclinations and passions and shows us traits generally shared by nations or characteristics peculiar to a single nation.[47]

In his well-documented biography, Smith underscores how Haykal was provided with a first-rate education, starting from primary school through to his postdoctoral specialisation. Indeed, the years of his youth were dedicated to his studies, and he was free of all other responsibilities.[48] Therefore, Haykal's bitter reflection on the differences between European and Eastern youth was absolutely not a judgement on, nor a reference to, the conditions of youth as personally experienced by the author. The polarisation of "East" versus "West" is instrumental and should be placed within the philosophical references which, at the time the passage cited earlier was written, informed the author's thought – namely, the determinism that Haykal takes from reading Hippolyte Taine.[49] He sees Europe as

a desirable model for civilisation and – according to this deterministic view – it is possible for non-European countries to attain the *status* of modernity simply by following the European model of development in a mimetic and derivative way. This very process of mimesis is called a "natural development" by the author.

The influence of Taine, according to whom literature is the product of race, environment and historical moment, is also evident in Haykal's ideas about literature.[50] Indeed, Haykal also emphasises the central role literature plays in forging a civic conscience, and finds in that capillary diffusion by which France rejoices in literature, literary criticism and fiction the first sign of a widespread national conscience.[51] Furthermore, Haykal mentions the idea of literature as the spirit of a nation, an idea which he also borrows from Taine's *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (1864), a work that essentialises the relationship between nation and literature, attributing to it no less than a spiritual dimension. According to these premises, in his early writings, Haykal advocated the recreation, in Egypt, of the cultural *humus* present in Europe. Just as the great literary figures of Europe had shaped the people's knowledge, so it would be in Egypt as well. This goal was not only highly desirable, but was in fact meant to be for all people, even if they would each accomplish it following their own path and in their own time. Like the writers and poets, youth was also conceived by Haykal as a natural product of a specific social, cultural and human environment, which, on its own, could make youth blossom or wither. According to this formula, youth would seem to be the "natural" state of things which, however, is produced only within a specific cultural context. And it was thanks to this concept of youth as a perfect synthesis between nature and culture that discussions on Egyptianness and on other identifying cultural paradigms were entangled with references, appeals or reflections on youth.

Therefore, coming back to Haykal's comparison between the 25-year-old Egyptian and his European counterpart – chronologically the same age but culturally much younger – we see how this set of ideas about ages, literature and nation is bound by the seminal deterministic glance, and how all these ideas sprang from a specific point of view, that of a young man who *belongs* to the rural elite and who is in the middle of an "effendification" process.[52] The son of the *'umda* class considered himself worthy of being actively involved in the political leadership, because he was both local and rooted in Egyptian territory – unlike the Turco-Circassian aristocratic class – and at the same time open to Western influences. Seen through this perspective, Haykal's discourse on youth and its contrastive aspect in the East and West seems like part of a larger portrait, that of the search for modernity and social change, as Europe was the only route which seemed possible for the young *effendi* to take to reach both.

1.2   The split narrations of Egyptian youth (1907–1936)

The concept of the "exportability" of modernity, or of being "as modern as" Europe in political and cultural programs, is also evident in the explicit campaign directly aimed at *ila-shubbāninā* ("our young people") launched in *al-Jarīda*

between 1907 and 1908 by 'Abd al-Ḥāmid al-Zahrāwī.[53] These editorials deal with a variety of issues, from the need to cultivate independent thought, to the reform of educational methods in the *kuttāb*, to the need for reform in the teaching of the Arabic language.

Analogously, the author did the same as Haykal in his diary, "constructing" an idea of youth by contrasting two images – in this case, "the age when one longs for justice" (*shahwat al-ḥukm*) as opposed to the age of innocence, of childhood.[54]

Al-Zahrāwī's editorials focus on the question of political leadership, among other issues, and once more the paradigm to be followed comes from the opposite shore of the Mediterranean:

> History, the most truthful witness, teaches us that in the past Egypt enjoyed a discreet well-being and a certain wealth in all fields, from science to business, from artisan production to agriculture. . . .
>
> Thus it cannot be asserted that the overcoming by foreign powers is the cause of our nation's weakness. However, it can be said that the cause of our delay is ignorance, and the only remedy is knowledge. But I say – and I don't believe I am mistaken – that the greatest cause of riots and corruption in our society is the weakening of the leaders of society itself, their myopia and lack of leadership. In fact, the ideological leaders and the chiefs of the parties are indispensable elements for keeping the community alive. . . .
>
> France would never have been free of the bonds of oppression if not for political leaders and their books, men of the revolution who, for love of their country, exposed their chests without fear of the arrows of fate. . . . And, in the thick of such chaos, nothing is more similar to our own youth than a con-scientious and high-spirited young man condemned to live in a corrupt world.
>
> Therefore, our youths must realize what their situation is and quickly find a way to remedy the situation. May they therefore adopt a far-sighted and precocious position to guide them down a safe road.[55]

As it was for Haykal and for al-Zahrāwī, France was also the paradigm of patriotic spirit, offering the clear example of an expository literature that was a vehicle for the nation's ideals and was led by the nation's youth. Even in its exuberance and vivacity, the nation's youth as a category is described as "at risk" – easily cor-ruptible, easily influenced and not yet endowed with independent judgement. The figurative crasis between the "two youths" begins to take shape: a young man who is mature from a biological standpoint, and a political young man, the citizen – still not in possession of his civil rights, although ready to gain them.

What Koselleck wrote on the concept of emancipation, on the variations of lin-guistic implications that accompany this changing concept (starting from the time of the Roman Republic to the 19th century),[56] can shine a light on the dynamics that have led to the semantic crasis between "youth" and "citizen in the mak-ing". In the chapter on conceptual history that Koselleck devotes to the idea of emancipation, the Enlightenment is the true point of differentiation in the history of the term. Initially, *emancipatio* in Roman law indicated the act by which the

pater familias freed himself of parental authority, consequently freeing his son of any responsibility towards the family. The verb "to emancipate", which is transitive in Latin, did not begin to take on a reflexive conjugation until the 14th century, when the verb became part of the neo-Latin languages of Western Europe. Finally, with Kant, the idea of "emancipation" left the juridical sphere to become associated with its biological meaning. "Maturity, which in nature is achieved continuously, little by little as one generation takes another's place, becomes the historical perspective on the future of a humanity that governs itself politically".[57] Starting from this moment in the history of thought, the political subject can truly emancipate *itself*, where previously it could only be "emancipated" by voluntary paternal action.

The biological metaphor allows the authors of these appeals addressed to young Egyptians to place the citizen-in-the-making within an "organic" perspective, optimistically open to the future of the modern political subject. As youths tend naturally toward adulthood, so are citizens naturally drawn toward the attainment of civil rights, political rights, independent judgement and social equality. However, the same metaphor allows these authors to adopt the paternalistic tone that belonged to those who, due to *status* or through an institutional role, wished to have a leading voice in the control and orientation of political subjects in this stage of historical change.

Young people were described as the "nation's strength", and at the same time were the first victims of political disorder (*fitna*) and of the deviant attraction exerted by the modern state of corruption. In light of these documents, we could say that youth carried a double image – that is, dynamism and strength on the one hand, but weakness and vulnerability on the other. Therefore, in public discourse, young people were the privileged targets of the reformers' appeals, while also being the recipients of admonitions as they were considered the most vulnerable segment of society. Another element through which a double perception of youth spread was the following: while *al-Jarīda* contributed to forming the new identity of modern, urbanised youth, another sort of press – a kind of legacy of 'Abdallah Nadīm's *al-Tankīt wa-tabkīt* – attacked and derided the nation's youths, describing them as lazy, hedonistic, and too eager to socialise with foreigners and consume alcoholic drinks in public.

These negative representations of young men were often associated with the criticism of depraved sexual practices or of excessive feminisation.[58] These conflicting images of youth closely resemble the double images applied to other segments of the population on which public attention focused in the modern age. The peasant class, for example, was described on the one hand as a kind of burdensome legacy of tradition and on the other, as described in this study, sublimated as holders and custodians of ancient knowledge linked to toiling on the land.[59] An analogous double image was the representation of the feminine. On the one hand, the "modern woman" was a dominant model; she was described as "cultured, making good use of her time, not lazy, and having no superstitions or irrational ideas. She was also an excellent wife [who could] create the ideal environment

for her husband and children".[60] As Hoda Elsadda, among others, pointed out, the issue of the "modern woman" often described as the "new woman" was frequently used as an argument to bolster the level of urbanisation and civilisation attained by Egypt. On the other hand, the image of the Egyptian woman as a sort of "opposite" to the European woman persisted. She was depicted as clumsy, ignorant, without taste and inexperienced. The Egyptian woman was still described in many contexts as a sort of dead weight that could slow down the march to modernity: on these bases, we see how many actors of social modernity in Egypt have been the object of a "split narrative": women, youths and peasants have been narrated as both the agents/metaphors for social change and as a kind of ballast that prevents social change from occurring.

The studies by Erlich, Elshakry and Skovgaard-Petersen identify a shift in the public discourse on youth, a youth that in 1935 took centre stage in the violently repressed protests against British rule and against the cooperation policies implemented by the Wafd Party and the Royal House. New youth organisations such as *Miṣr al-Fatā* ("The Young Egypt Party"), founded by Aḥmad Ḥusayn and Fatḥī Raḍwān, began to channel the frustrations of a category of middle-class youths affected by the crisis and incensed against the foreign communities that ran a vast percentage of the country's trade and business. Maḥfūẓ's novels, written in the 1940s and set within this timeframe, offer an eloquent portrayal of the new political scenario, with its turbulent and polarised nature. We must not forget that the 1930s in Egypt featured youth formations (such as the "Green Shirts", the youth section of the "Young Egypt" Party and the "Blue Shirts", the youth section of the Wafd) involved in frequent and violent clashes.[61]

As Erlich mentions in his history of the youth movements in Egypt, "at the expense of 1920 liberal pluralism, Young Egypt adopted a concept of nationalism that emphasised the Arab and Islamic aspects of Egyptian identity":[62] this attitude would lead to an increased focus on the public discourse for Arab and Islamic values, in addition to accompanying, as regards "The Young Egypt Party", the organisation's proudly anti-British, anti-parliamentary and pro-fascist calling.

As a result, in the 1930s, youths represented themselves as political subjects committed to claiming a "revolutionary" role more proactive than that of their predecessors – those who "suffered" the events of 1919.[63] At the same time, 1930s youths – a politically polarised category – became the object of a less optimistic imaginary, characterised by incessant warnings and public calls to order and to a checking of youthful energy. As pointed out by Elshakry, youth is now depicted as a "social danger" rather than as the "future".[64]

Setting aside their literary aspect and the universal trope (that of the "loss of illusions"), Maḥfūẓ's works, especially *al-Qāhira al-Jadīda*, analysed in Chapter 6, must also be read in light of the events of 1935–1936. This two-year period saw the rise of a new "historical generation",[65] yet the excessive westernisation, the cosmopolitism and a worldview shaped on the basis of the European positivist thought would be challenged in favour of a more proactive struggle for a redefinition of society and for national independence.

The national "ideal subject" meets the Bildungsnarrative

As seen previously, authors such as al-Sayyid and Haykal thought that intellectuals, and writers in particular, had to contribute to spreading the concept of Egyptian *Umma* as widely as possible,[66] by working to build common narratives in society. In a 1908 editorial, al-Sayyid bitterly condemned his contemporary writers, calling them "formalists" and urging them to abandon traditional models in favour of the development of an Egyptian literature separate from the Arab matrix:

> The writers like Ismāʿīl Ṣabrī Pāshā, al-Muwaylīḥī, Shawqī, Ḥāfiẓ and al-Muṭrān, and others who have been blessed with vivid imaginations and have all the requisite abilities for storytelling, still show no desire to produce stories that would cleanse the moral character of the Nation of the stains left on it by the stamp of absolutist rule, by casting them in the form of romances, that would make people want to read them. . . . They still hold the same pattern, content to get together to criticize literary styles, and the form and content of poetry, without taking a step in the direction of the work they are quite capable of doing for the benefit of the nation and the service of humanity.[67]

Literature is, in al-Sayyid's view, an important element of aggregation for the development of a national identity. By virtue of their educational potential, literature and especially fiction were presented as purely political instruments:

> We declare and repeat this, since literature is not, as superficial thinkers imagine, merely an instrument to amuse *littérateurs*. Nor are its tales merely a beautiful way of killing precious time. The fact is that a literature and a literary History are among the strongest identifying marks of an *Umma*; serving to link its past generations with the present one, defining its particular character and rendering it distinct from all others. And so its personality is perpetuated through time, the area of similarities among its individual members becomes broader, and the bond of solidarity among them grows stronger.[68]

Although none of the authors mentioned by al-Sayyid embraced this heartfelt invitation, the appeal launched directly by *al-Jarīda* did not go unheeded. The public's literary tastes on the one hand, and the writers on the other, were influenced by al-Sayyid's concern about "a literature and a literary History" through which the *Umma* could identify itself. The novel, with its ability to describe an individual self's morale and psychological dimension, was the necessary narrative form that al-Sayyid was calling upon.

No other literary form would obey the task of representing the particular and the universal, social change and its restrictions, society and the self as a distinctive product of society, and yet as an agent in it. As noted by Samah Selim, the novel's "ideological efficacy rests on its pretensions to represent a very particular and yet very universal 'reality' – the reality of the individual's consciousness as it attempts to negotiate the world in which it finds itself".[69]

According to Selim, the modern Arabic novel reflects the taste of the new emerging *effendiyya*, of the cosmopolitan and westernised new leadership, as well as fulfilling the function of educating people, without exhibiting a didactic tone, as was the case of the "educational" novel by Zaynab Fawwāz, or of Jurjī Zaydān's historical novel. Authors such as Haykal would put al-Sayyid's advice into practice, generating a *specific type* of novel (the "artistic novel" as opposed to the historical or educational novel), which would provide a realistic representation of national space-time and which would elect the *shābb* in his becoming as an ideal fictional subject. A sort of embodiment of a modern political agency, gendered and engendered by the modern debate on manhood, friendship and love, the modern *shābb* is a social metaphor for the social change that would perfectly fit the national narrative advocated by al-Sayyid. Appeals for a national literature became even more imperative in 1919 and throughout the 1920s, as witnessed by these statements made by the critic Aḥmad Ḍaʿīf in the year of the revolution:

> We wish to have an Egyptian literature which will reflect our social state, our intellectual movements, and the region in which we live; reflect the cultivator in his field, the merchant in his stall, the ruler in his palace, the teacher among his students and his books, the shaykh among his people, the worshipper in his mosque or his monk's cell, and the youth in his amorous play. In sum, we want to have a personality in our literature.[70]

After the Revolution of 1919, the figure of the "young man" received its ultimate consecration as the "new man" of the nation. This symbolic consecration was especially visible in the characterisations of young protagonists in the early canonical novels, particularly in *Zaynab*. The history of this novel, from its denied paternity to being emphatically acknowledged after the Revolution of 1919, provides a particularly interesting case for the study of the late affirmation of the novel form, and for this reason we will examine it in the next chapter. The new form of narration – attractive and non-didactic, yet realistic and documented – would be, from the publication of *Zaynab* onwards, based on the concept of "apprenticeship" and "self-determination", implicitly tracing a parallel narrative with the concept of self-government by the people. The idea of youth as a period of apprenticeship, as an age dedicated to the formative experiences of individuals built, shaped and debated by public discourse – to their education and also to their gradual coming into manhood – will be the raw material for shaping the fictional young hero in search of a modern dimension.

Just as the "young" *shābb* is an intersectional category, which combines elements of gender identity, class and a specific worldview, in the same way the trope of the coming-of-age youth designates a relational identity, which is not achieved (and often does not mature either physically or emotionally) when certain specific elements are missing. The following chapters explore the forms taken by the narrative trope of youths in search of their own identities: in addition to having a descriptive function with respect to reality, these works are "narratives" in the meaning ascribed to the word by Gergen and Gergen.[71] In their outlining of

progressive, suspended or regressive trajectories of youth, the Egyptian *Bildungs-snarratives* organise models of relationship between the individual and society, between the self and one's time, tracing routes of potential personal development determined by gender, social position and historical conditions. As we shall see in detail in the coming chapters, the novels of the Egyptian realist and postrealist canon restore the modern imaginary in all of its tensions to the reader, as well as the events of a self in the making within a society that is still strongly traditional and communitarian.

Notes

1 Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Revolution*, p. 35.
2 Both Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid, the founder of the political party *al-Umma* (the Nation) and Muṣṭafā Kāmil, founder of *al-Ḥizb al-Waṭanī* (the Nationalist Party) graduated from this school. See Erlich, Haggai, "Youth and Arab Politics: The Political Generation of 1935–36", in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Alienation or Integration of Arab Youth between Family, State and Street,* Curzon Press, Richmond, UK 2000, p. 50.
3 Maḥfūẓ, Najīb, *Bidāya wa-nihāya*, Dār al-shurūq, al-Qāhira 2013 [1949], p. 249.
4 Gorman, Anthony, *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt: Contesting the Nation*, Routledge, London and New York 2003, p. 36.
5 See: Mūsā, Nabawiyya, *Tarīkhī bi-qalamī*, Multaqā al-Mar'a wa-'l-dhākira, al-Qāhira 1999; El Saadawi, Nawal, *A Daughter of Isis. The Early Life of Nawal El Saadawi*, Zed Books, London and New York 2009.
6 Ryzova, Lucie, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, p. 112.
7 See Aḥmad, Amīn's autobiography: *My Life. The Autobiography of an Egyptian Scholar*, *Writer and Cultural Leader*, translated by Issa J. Boullata, Brill, Leiden 1978, p. 107.
8 Jankowski, James, *Egypt's Young Rebels. "Young Egypt", 1933–1952*. Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, CA 1975, p. 2.
9 Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Revolution*, p. 42. See also: Radwan, Abu al-Futuh Ahmad, *Old and New Forces in Egyptian Education*, Bureau of Publications, Columbia University, New York 1951, pp. 94–102. According to Aḥmad Ismāʿīl Ḥajjī, under British occupation Egyptians faced a "splitting of the educational system" (*izdiwāj al-taʿlīmī*): the Egyptian population and that of Turkish origins usually took different education paths, *Al-tārīkh al-thaqāfī li-'l-taʿlīm fī-Miṣr*, Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, al-Qāhira 2002, p. 93. Also according to Aḥmad Ismāʿīl Ḥajjī, under British occupation "the pyramid of education appeared to be overturned, for the institutions were focusing all their attention on secondary education while primary education was almost ignored" (translated by the Author), pp. 146–147.
10 On the reform of the *kuttāb* system and on Cromer's opinion about primary education, see Skovgaard-Petersen, Jakob, "The Discovery of Adolescence in the Middle East", in Jørgen Bæk Simonsen (ed.), *Youth and Youth Culture in Contemporary Middle East*, Aarhus University Press, Aarhus 2005, pp. 29–32.
11 Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Revolution*, p. 46.
12 Ibid., pp. 46–47.
13 The number of students increased dramatically in Egypt from 700 (in 1897) to 7500 (in 1935). See Skovgaard-Petersen, Jakob, "The Discovery of Adolescence in the Middle East", p. 25.
14 Ryzova, Lucie, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, p. 215.
15 Ibid., p. 86.
16 See Chapter 5 of this volume, pp. 133–140.

17 See Gabriel Baer, *A History of Landownership in Modern Egypt, 1800–1950*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 1962, pp. 52–56.

18 See Smith, Charles D., *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haykal*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1983, p. 35.

19 Muṣṭafā Kāmil was the founder of territorial Egyptian nationalism and, particularly after the events in Dinshaway (1906), the promoter of an anti-British campaign. Several researchers underscore Kāmil's role as catalyst of the nationalist speech among Egyptian youths, owing to his rhetorical brilliance. Relying on memoirs, autobiographies (such as Salāma Mūsā's) and biographies, Skovgaard-Peterson reconstructs Kāmil's figure, dwelling on his thought on the age of man. Kāmil saw youth as a useful ground for the exercise of independence and individual freedom, and he believed that it was necessary for Egyptian youths to conquer the future on their own. This youthful aspect of the nationalist discourse made Kāmil an undisputed leader of the student masses and later on, following his premature death in 1908 at the young age of 34, an icon of Egyptian nationalism. See Skovgaard-Petersen, "The Discovery of Adolescence in the Middle East", pp. 26–27.

20 Jacob, Wilson, *Working Out Egypt*, pp. 84–91.

21 Ibid., p. 85.

22 Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Revolution*, pp. 1–102.

23 Elshakry, Omnia, "Youth as Peril and Promise", pp. 591–610.

24 Pollard, Lisa, *Nurturing the Nation. The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing, and Liberating Egypt, 1805–1923*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 2005, pp. 186–189.

25 Elsadda, Hoda, "Imaging the New Man. Gender and Nation in Arab Literary Narratives in the Early Twentieth Century", *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 3, 2 (2007), pp. 31–55.

26 Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Revolution*, pp. 4–5.

27 Ibid., p. 12.

28 Mannheim, Karl, "Das Problem der Generationen", *Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Soziologie*, 7 (1928), pp. 157–185.

29 Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Revolution*, pp. 16–19.

30 Pepe, Teresa, "Critics, Moralists and Intellectuals: The Transformation of the *Udabāʾ* in the *Arab Nahḍah*: A Historical-Conceptual Approach", in Jolanda Guardi and Maria Elena Paniconi (eds.), *Nahḍa Narratives*, *Oriente Moderno*, 99 (2019), pp. 179–202.

31 Erlich, Haggai, "Youth and Arab Politics", p. 43.

32 Elshakry, Omnia, "Youth as Peril and Promise", p. 593.

33 On the construction of modern Cairo (or Khedivial Cairo), see the chapter "The Dream of Westernization (1863–1936)" in Raymond, André, *Cairo, a City of History*, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 2001, pp. 309–338. For more details on the new neighbourhoods, the modern boulevards and the Azbakiyya Gardens, see Volait, Mercedes, "Making Cairo Modern (1870–1950): Multiple Models for a 'European Style' Urbanism", in Joseph Nasr and Mercedes Volait (eds.), *Urbanism. Imported or Exported?* Wiley-Academy, London 2003, pp. 18–50.

34 Jankowski, James, *Egypt's Young Rebels*, p. 3.

35 Ibid., pp. 4–5.

36 This verb is built on the word *ifrānj*, meaning "foreigner", as all Europeans without distinction were called in a vernacular expression derived from "Frank".

37 See Kendall, Elisabeth, *Literature, Journalism and the Avant-Garde. Intersection in Egypt*, Routledge, London and New York 2006, p. 29.

38 Ibid.

39 Wendell, Charles, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1972, p. 285, n. 271.

40 Elsadda, Hoda, "Imaging the New Man", p. 39.

41 Ibid., pp. 31–55. See also Elsadda, Hoda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel in Egypt, 1892–2008*, Syracuse University Press and Edinburgh University Press, New York and Edinburgh 2012, pp. 38–58. On the representation of the nation as a woman see also Baron, Beth, *Egypt as a Woman, Nationalism, Gender and Politics*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2005.

42 Elsadda, Hoda, "Imaging the New Man", pp. 31–55.

43 Pollard, Lisa, *Nurturing the Nation*, pp. 186–187.

44 Ibid., p. 187.

45 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Mudhakkirāt al-shabāb*, Al-Majlis al-Aʻlā li-ʼl-Thaqāfa, al-Qāhira 1996, p. 195. The translation from the Arabic is by the Author and the Translator.

46 Bourdieu, Pierre, "*Youth* Is Just a Word", in *Sociology in Question*, Sage Publication, Thousand Oaks and London 1993, p. 95.

47 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Mudhakkirāt al-shabāb*, p. 48.

48 Smith, Charles D., *Islam and the Search for Social Order,* pp. 33–46.

49 See Paniconi, Maria Elena, "Scrivere di sé. Esperienze di modernità culturale in *Mudhakkirāt al-shabāb* (Memorie di gioventù) di Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal", *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, 9 (2014), pp. 295–313.

50 Semah, David, *Four Egyptian Literary Critics*, Brill, Leiden 1974, pp. 70–71.

51 See Ibid., pp. 69–95; see also Darrāj, Fayṣal, *al-Dhākira al-qawmiyya fī ʼl-riwāya al-ʻarabiyya*, Markaz Dirasāt al-Waḥda al-ʻArabiyya, Bayrūt 2008, pp. 61–62.

52 Smith, Charles, *Islam and the Search for Social Order*, pp. 33–34.

53 On al-Zahrāwī, the nationalist leader who was born in Homs, see the chapter by Tarabein, Ahmed, "'Abd al-Hamid al-Zahrawi. The Career and Thought of an Arab Nationalist", in Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Mushin and Reeva S. Simon (eds.), *The Origin of Arab Nationalism*, Columbia University Press, New York 1991, pp. 97–119.

54 Al-Zahrāwī, Abd al-Ḥāmid, "*Ilā shubbāninā-3. Al-istiqlāl al-fikrī*" (To our youth-3. The Independence of Thought), *al-Jarīda*, 78 (1907), p. 1.

55 'Ilā al-shubbān-2' (To the youth-2), *al-Jarīda*, 40 (1907), p. 2. The author signs the article under the sobriquet "Nashī" ("A youth"), but he can be assumed to be 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Zahrāwī, who signed other articles, on the same topic and in the same periodical, with his name.

56 See Koselleck, Reinhart, *Il vocabolario della modernità. Progresso, crisi, utopia e altre storie di concetti*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2009, pp. 73–94. English translation by the Author and Daniela Cristina Innocenti.

57 Ibid., p. 80.

58 Gasper, Michael Ezekiel, *The Power of Representation. Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2009, pp. 195–196.

59 For a more in-depth analysis of the pivotal figure of the *fallāḥ* ("farmer") in Egypt between the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the context of the rise of the national discourse throughout an Egyptian literary canon, see Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880–1985*, Routledge-Curzon, New York and London 2004.

60 Elsadda, Hoda, "Imaging the New Man", p. 32.

61 Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Arab Politics*, p. 106.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., p. 101.

64 Elshakry, Omnia, "Youth as Peril and Promise", pp. 593–599.

65 Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Arab Politics*, pp. 103–104.

66 Wendell cleverly sums up the critical position of Luṭfī al-Sayyid towards society, which in al-Sayyid's words was much more used to the traditional idea of Islamic *Umma* rather than to the secular and national idea that he himself was promulgating.

67 Al-Sayyid quoted in Wendell, Charles, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*, p. 302.

68 Ibid., p. 275.

69 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt*, p. 72.

70 Quoted in Gershoni, Israel and Jankowski, James, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood*, Oxford University Press, New York 1986, p. 192.

71 Gergen, Kenneth J. and Gergen, Mary M., "Narratives of the Self", in Lewis Hinchman and Sandra Hinchman (eds.), *Memory, Identity and Community. The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*, State University of New York Press, New York 1997, pp. 161–166.

2 The way of the Egyptian novel

Zaynab by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal

Many histories of Arabic literature date the birth of the modern Arabic novel back to Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's *Zaynab*, published in 1913.[1] As an introduction to what follows, it is important to emphasise that Haykal was an author, a reformer, a man of law of absolute influence over Egyptian political and cultural history, becoming Minister of Education in 1937 and President of the Egyptian Senate from 1945 to 1950.[2] Born in the village of Kafr Ghannām in Lower Egypt to a family of landowners, he had studied law at the Khedivial School of Law and moved to France from 1909 to 1912 to get his PhD. Upon returning to Cairo, he began his career as a lawyer while collaborating with the newspaper *al-Jarīda*, started in 1907 and directed by Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid, dealing with literary criticism, the history of literature and reformist thought, working as much for the diffusion of European authors as for the review of Egyptian authors who were his contemporaries.[3]

Al-Sayyid was a former student of Muḥammad 'Abduh's and, in his turn, a key figure in liberal Egyptian political milieus, so much so that he was significantly called "the teacher of a generation" or "the father of Egyptian nationalism", names aimed at emphasising the great influence that this intellectual had on the generation of youths of the 1910s and 1920s.[4] *al-Jarīda* was an organ of the *al-Umma* nationalist party and, while it followed a moderate line, it dealt with requests for social reform, such as education, as well as many cultural aspects. Al-Sayyid started his campaign for a modern interpretation of the traditional concept of *Umma* (Islamic community) with this newspaper, promoting political and social battles in favour of liberalism, a constitutional government and the political rights of citizens. The newspaper also had a literary supplement that Haykal collaborated on, together with many young people who would later distinguish themselves as the greatest national authors, like the writers Ibrāhīm al-Māzinī and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, the intellectuals Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād and Salāma Mūsā.[5] The young Haykal frequented this ambience and participated in what could be called the most important laboratory of reworking and spreading of European positivist philosophy in early 20th-century Egypt. In that youthful period, Haykal also had relations with Sa'd Zaghlūl, leader of the nationalist Wafd Party, which enjoyed vast popular consent but from which the author would later distance himself, founding the Liberal Constitutional Party.[6]

Hippolyte Taine's influence, spread by al-Sayyid in *al-Jarīda* circles, would long remain a key feature of his thinking. In an article written in 1925 titled *Al-adab al-qawmī* (*The National Literature*), Haykal again made reference to deterministic thinking clearly inspired by Hippolyte Taine, who believed in a deep connection between the literary expression of a specific people and its political conscience. Haykal built his fervent appeal to the Egyptian *literati* on this connection, calling on them to promote a national literature in Egypt. The analysis of this article, which draws on the author's youthful memories, can be a useful starting point for the analysis of a seminal novel like *Zaynab*, which was one of the first to convert a political and identity project into the loves, behaviours and private history of a young Egyptian man.

2.1 A chat on a Parisian terrace

We are in Paris, around 1910. The young Haykal meets a young Canadian tourist in the dining room of a hotel and confides his aspirations of becoming a writer to her. The girl encourages him with these words:

> I so wish that you would one day write the history of Egypt in narrative form, like Sir Walter Scott did with Anglo-Scottish history. Although I know nothing of Egypt, I feel sure it must be a beautiful country, and that its history and vestiges deserve to be shown and made familiar to people. If you should decide to do this, perhaps one day you shall dedicate one of these historical novels to me.[7]

The three bearing axes of what was, for Haykal, an experience of youthful storytelling intersect in these lines – followed, however, by an important activity of promotion of the nationalist political project: youth, nation and narration. "Youth", given that of the speakers; "nation", because this is the modern concept contained in both the content of the dialog and in the title of the editorial ("The National Literature"); and, finally, "narration", because the two young people talk about a form of modern narration, that of the novel.

Just like youth, as Moretti emphasizes in his seminal study on *Bildungsroman*, modernity is the promise of future.[8] This meeting is none other than a celebration, readable at several levels and according to different perspectives, of the "not yet": a yearned-for future as a writer for the young man, a future for the Egyptian nation as glimpsed in the young woman's expectations and, finally, the two speakers, who embody in their being students, readers and travellers the prospect of a modern time, of a path yet to be decided and built. But the irresistible aura of modernity that emanates from this meeting stems above all from the paradoxical relationships established between these elements, relationships that are revealed upon an analytical rereading of the passage. It is interesting first and foremost to note that the novel-form, and in particular the figure of Sir Walter Scott, "father" of the European historical novel, is what allows the two of them to converse on equal footing. Paradoxically, the two find in Scott, father of a genre destined to

become transnational, a point on which to exchange ideas on the issue of "national literature": the young Canadian had read Scott in Québec, either in the French translation or in the original, while Haykal most likely knew Walter Scott through Najīb Ḥaddād, who had Arabised *Tales of the Crusaders* under the title *Ṣalāḥ alDīn* (1929).[9]

At the time of this conversation, the novel – a still emergent form – was a literary form at the first stage of diffusion. Rather, the production of novels written by local authors for the "general public" – an expression to be understood relative to the still-limited levels of literacy – was already lively, as was the market of Arabisations of foreign novels, which included a large number of texts readapted, at times completely rewritten, starting from a European original.[10] The Egyptian reformist intellectuals that the young Haykal felt connected to frowned upon this low-level literary production, which was found cheap in public areas, on the sidewalks and near the mosques, and they wrote it off as vulgar junk – that is, as entertainment for an unsophisticated, poorly educated audience. The Egyptian reformist elite maintained an ambiguous relationship with the novel in translation. On the one hand, its members could no doubt be counted among its readers – the cited passage shows how the genre of the novel in translation had taken hold of educated youths, and how it was an object of witticisms and exchanges, even among young people from different geo-cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, however, public discourse was by now emphasising the importance of an "authentically Egyptian" novel, which would therefore distance itself from the practice of Arabisation and from Western models.

Getting back to our anecdote, the young woman's words seem to hope for the rise of an "original" and indigenous Egyptian novel precisely in this sense: her invitation to write historical novels "like Sir Walter Scott did" for Scotland, historical novels centred on Egyptian antiquity – the Egyptomania phenomenon was already underway, though it would only explode later on, with the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922 – should be read as an attempt to encourage the young Haykal to try his hand at the challenge of conceiving a national novel.

The numerous references to the idea of nation and national spirit conveyed by the anecdote also recall what Benedict Anderson revealed in his seminal Introduction to *Imagined Communities*, when he outlined the discursive constructions and the logical strategies characterising nationalisms.[11] As has been said, the author uses autobiographical memory here to indirectly introduce the issue of the dissemination and persuasive scope of novelistic narration. With this aim clearly in mind, Haykal narrates (and perhaps reformulates?) his personal past to corroborate one of the ideas that were at the basis of the thought of Egyptian territorial nationalism: to create the Egyptian nation it is first necessary to create a "national" literature – that is, developed on a local basis, with a setting, story and characters that express the "spirit" of the place.[12]

Benedict Anderson, analysing the national imaginary in its more generic and universal meaning, maintained that the idea of nation – whatever its geographical

location – is usually the result of representations structured according to mutually contrasting trends: the universalism of nationalism in its basic principles (all nations aspire to their own self-government but each in its own way) opposes widespread attention to particularism, the continuous reference to the recovery of its immemorial past opposes a nation's tending toward the "future", a conversation that often refers to the most private sentiments opposes the public dimension.[13]

The brief autobiographical anecdote offered by Haykal has the precise function of reconciling – placing them in a narrative context and thus making a personal recollection compelling – the polarisations simultaneously present in the national discourse, in which *particular* and universal, future and past, public and private must coexist. In the cited passage, the figure of the young Canadian woman seems to metaphorically become the mouthpiece of an ideal national imaginary, which she appears to hope for and almost offer to the not-yet Egyptian nation, represented in its turn by the aspiring writer. By implying the modern category of "nation", the young woman can put Scotland and the land of the pharaohs on the same level, simply by putting the two realities, geographically far from each other, in a continuum.

The "communion" thus established between the two lands is sufficient to legitimise, in turn, the observation that the young traveller, well in advance of the theorists of literature and cultural studies, formulates about the universality of a national narration: for Egypt as for Scotland, a fictional work would truly reveal to the Egyptians and to foreigners much more than an entire team of archaeologists and historians would be able to. The passage seems to wonderfully show us what Anderson made clear – that is, that the idea of nation performs a balancing act between localism (whence the determined search for the most particular identity) and universalism (realities even very far from each other can have completely similar aspirations).

Note also how, in the passage on Haykal's memories, the Egyptian state being formed – formal autonomy wouldn't take place until 1922 – is connected to the vestiges of pharaonic Egypt, true simulacrum of a future to strive for and of an immemorial past from which to be reborn. Not only do we imagine the as-yet-unborn nation as ancient; but the same vestiges of the ancient civilisation the nation dates its origins back to appear animated by a driving, almost autonomous force as they shine with a new light and resurface from the indifference in which the Egyptian population relegated them for centuries, treading unaware on once glorious ground.

Even the last paradox clarified by Anderson, that of a public dimension that runs through the most private sentiments, appears to us to be present in the words of the Canadian traveller; according to her, the literary form of the novel, it would be the most suitable one for spreading knowledge of the country's noble past. The novel is precisely the literary form able to lower the public and collective domain into the sphere of the private life of each reader.[14]

The issue of the representability of Egypt and of "Egyptianness" in novel form was, therefore, central to the cultural environments frequented by Haykal and the search for these elements shaped the author's work. As we shall see, *Zaynab* represents the epitome of "Egyptianness": although the author's choice may have disappointed the young Canadian's expectations by not falling into the genre of the historical novel, the search for the setting, the characterisation of the characters and the story was, however, conveyed by the need to fabricate a narrative of Egyptian modern nation. Indeed, *Zaynab* can be read as an articulate well-organised narrative about social, economic and personal networks among young people, inside the bound shape of the nation and within a historical time characterised by modernisation and extensive agriculture. The movement of the hero toward his adulthood, a contrasted movement destined to stop and disappear from the plot, maybe to take place elsewhere, can be in turn read as a *telos* of an ideal Egyptian – male – *effendī* subject, someone who is at the core of the network described in the novel and who is aware of the role of each character in the whole story.

2.2 Morphology of a literary success

Zaynab was a leap in the dark for the young Haykal, who began writing it in Paris in 1910. Indeed, at the time it was still considered unbecoming for a young Egyptian who aspired to the legal profession to write love stories.[15] This is why the author, on the occasion of the first publication, hid his identity behind the nom de plume *Miṣrī Fallāḥ* – literally: an Egyptian peasant, an Egyptian of rural origins – to protect himself from those who, among the most reactionary lawyers and *effendī*, could have discredited his personal and professional figure alike.

As explained by Haykal himself, the nom de plume was meant to recall both the idea of nation (with the noun *Miṣrī*) and the rural dimension (*Fallāḥ*), which is central to the novel and which, through this pseudonym, was also chosen as the essential trait of the author's. Interestingly, in 1814 – that is, a century before *Zaynab* was published – Sir Walter Scott published *Waverly* anonymously as well, for fear of meeting with public failure, thus giving rise to the tradition of the historical novel. This coincidence prompts us to examine the relationship of authorship that binds every author to their literary texts as a process of recognition, instead of as an irrefutable fact: *Zaynab's* story, for instance, shows how a relationship of artistic authorship can first be denied and then restored depending on the intervening historical-political changes.

In the foreword to the third edition of *Zaynab*, printed in 1929, hence after the beginning of World War I and after the Egyptian Revolution of 1919, Haykal explains how his decision to use a nom de plume had been, in its time, also motivated by reasons of an ideological nature:

> A peculiar feeling, which is typical of youth, led me to choose those two words [*Miṣrī fallāḥ*]. It was that feeling that made me premise the word "Egyptian". If I had reversed the order, "Egyptian" would have become the

adjective of "farmer". And I did not want it to be so because before the First World War I felt, like other Egyptians, especially farmers, that the children of a good family and other supporters of an independent Egyptian state, looked at *us*, Egyptian and peasant society, without due respect.[16]

Also in the foreword, the author explains how the time had come to emerge from hiding and lay claim to the novel's authorship:

> The first edition of *Zaynab* was published before the war. . . . When the war ended, the nationalist movement strengthened and the idea of "Egyptianness" made its way and became respected. . . . Later, when I left the lawyer career for journalism, and I became an editor and a writer, a group of friends asked me to reprint *Zaynab* so that this new generation could draw inspiration from it and read an Egyptian story that described an aspect of the life of their country.[17]

Interestingly, a novel that was embraced and admired at the time of its first publication as "daring experimentation" was reread 15 years later as an exemplary Egyptian story, useful for teaching and educating the new generations. The troubled authorship of *Zaynab*, initially denied, then openly reaffirmed in a 1929 foreword in which the author claims to have written the novel in a foreign land, driven by nostalgia (*ḥanīn*) for his homeland, are elements that help us reconstruct a founding moment for the canonisation of the novel form in Egypt. The idea of youth undeniably plays a key role in this process. Indeed, the foreword refers openly to a kind of "generational" transition, from an eccentric yet still fearful youth, which struggles to recognise itself as author of the collective imaginary, to a youth that claims for itself the freedom of literary creation and fruition and that finds in the novel an effective means to shape a new and modern shared imaginary. Hence, the publishing vicissitudes of this novel are per se a visible sign of the progressive founding of the national canon: this love story, anonymous at first, would be recognised as exemplary by the young novelists who would follow its course and by the young generation of readers who would be shaped by the ideas and images expressed in the novel.

   Even directing our attention from the publishing vicissitudes to the content of the novel, it is possible to assert that the progressive recognition of *Zaynab* should be ascribed to a specific narrative choice, that of giving unusual emphasis to the anguished inner world of an adolescent, Ḥāmid. Indeed, the author relies on this character to activate the most typical function of the modern novel: translating a collective and objective reality into an "inner" and subjective dimension. Indeed, out of all the characters, Ḥāmid is the one who would best interpret the vision of the world, the ideas and perspective shared by the community of readers of *Zaynab*. With this character, Egyptian readers of the time could, indeed, establish a kind of relationship based on identification and liking.[18] Ḥāmid's subjectivity looms over that of all the other characters, so much so as to appear devised to the detriment of the general balance of the narration, and to lead, as shall be seen, to

an interruption of the *telos*. It is precisely owing to this awkward character, with his mood so reflective of that of the youth of the *effendiyya* – who were often, like Ḥāmid, urbanised sons and daughters of the rural elite – that *Zaynab* was successful way beyond the author's expectations.

Authorship of the text and of a literary genre

In his *Fajr al-qiṣṣa al-miṣriyya* (*The dawn of Egyptian fiction*, 1960), Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī introduces *Zaynab* as a novel already universally recognised for some time as the "first Egyptian novel". Interestingly, he presents it as the result "of a good fortune, that bestowed on him all the elements that guarantee its beauty. It was written by a young man steeped in love for his country, whose destiny he helped forge".[19] Ḥaqqī appears to welcome and rightly absorb, in his critical judgement, the assessments and positions expressed by Haykal in the 1929 foreword, where the author recalls having written the novel following a surge of nostalgia and patriotic feeling.

Ten years after Ḥaqqī's writing, Ḥamdī Sakkūt shows how the judgement of the critics on this novel remains fundamentally unchanged, describing *Zaynab* as "the first text that can be considered a true novel, in the sense that it possesses a real plot and a characterisation, and that it also manages to realistically portray Egyptian life, instead of adapting certain modern themes".[20] Similarly, in her *The Modern Egyptian Novel*, Hilary Kilpatrick assigns the novel the "position, within Arabic literature, of first *true* novel".[21]

In the analysis offered in the fundamental *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt* Samah Selim recalls how, before the appearance of *Zaynab*, the vast literary production circulating comprised Arabised novels, love stories, popular print adaptations of *The Thousand and One Nights* for the masses, historical and pedagogical novels:[22] can it be affirmed with certainty that there were none of "qualitative value" among these novels? In the last decades, several studies have questioned the narration of Zaynab's primogeniture over the Egyptian novel,[23] attempting to analyse the *Zaynab* "literary phenomenon" from the viewpoint of the *genre* history, and highlighting how the primacy of this text is mainly its having interpreted and made its own the formal and content criteria that society, in part owing to the work of political and intellectual spokespersons of the time, had established as being essential to create quality fictional reading matter. Indeed, historians of literature such as Muḥsin Ṭāhā Badr date the typology of the "artistic novel", destined to force itself on the attention of the critics, back to this novel, rather than to the typologies of the historical or pedagogical novel. According to Selim again, the reason for the canonicity of this novel – a canonicity interwoven, as underlined by Colla,[24] with the rigid differentiation between genres created by literary critics during the 'Abd al-Nāṣir (Nasser) regime – "lies in its being particularly situated at the confluence of two powerful and intersecting historical narratives: the narrative of Egyptian nationhood and the European narrative of the history of the novel".[25] In other words, *Zaynab* was not the first novel in Egyptian in the absolute sense, but the first to become a symbol of an *Adab Qawmī* (national literature).

The confluence of the two "historical narratives" mentioned by Selim came about, in the case of Haykal, thanks also to the mediation of French Romanticism and its greatest exponents in literature, recalled among other things by the author himself in the 1929 foreword to *Zaynab*.[26] The critical history that makes *Zaynab* the initial point of the canon of the authentic Egyptian novel, not derivative from the European novel, shows its greatest paradox here: the text is, in point of fact, interwoven with foreign influences, first among them Rousseau, who emerges both in the conception of the subject who educates himself in the freedom of feelings and morality and in the panoramic and natural imaginary inspired by the *Nouvelle Héloïse*.[27] Nevertheless, as shown by Colla, the status attributed to the novel of forefather of the *riwāya fanniyya* (a status that has sometimes extended to "first Arabic novel" tout-court) was built over time, and its primogeniture over the Egyptian novel has itself played a symbolic role in the consecration of a particular narrative trend to the detriment of others.[28] *Zaynab*'s "authentic" and Egyptian plot, legitimated by literary critics, should thus be considered not so much as an innate quality but, rather, as a legacy of the popularisation that the text saw over the decades, following the patriotic recontextualisation wrought by the author and by other intellectuals of the nationalist milieu.

From a narrative viewpoint, the element that differentiates *Zaynab* from its predecessors is the constant search for narrative realism, the scene-by-scene construction of the narration, the dimension of daily life and of the cyclic nature of the life of simple people, as well as the introduction, through a varied and plural linguistic register, of a consistency – even linguistic – of the characters, who express themselves in the dialogues in a form that adheres as closely as possible to the language actually spoken in the contexts described. As regards the spatial dimensions, the co-existence of urbanised characters and characters deeply rooted in the Egyptian countryside allows the author to explore the space of the Egyptian Nation in the elements that make it up. But one element over all the others guarantees narrative cohesion to these elements, giving the reader a unique *perspective* through which to contemplate the beauty of the countryside, peasant life and Zaynab herself: the young Ḥāmid.

Youth becomes plot. Ḥāmid's point of view: the voice of a generation

As revealed earlier, the pivot on which the narration in *Zaynab* hinges is Ḥāmid, a 16-year-old protagonist autobiographical in inspiration, torn between personal aspirations and "outside" environment, between reality and imagination, between the feeling of belonging to his family of origin, and that which ties him to the student and city environment instead, with its aura of modernity and its opening to westernised aesthetics. Ḥāmid's gaze on his condition is lucid and analytical: engaged in the continuous search for expressive spaces and in the incessant claim to the demands of modern Egyptian youth, the character makes his condition of young man in full social exploration and in contrast with the social environment that constrains his freedom explicit by means of repeated externalisations. Some scholars have spoken, and rightly so, of *Zaynab*, of the novel of Egyptian youth,

not only because of the age of the protagonists, but also because of the explicit reference to youth as a "discovery" and social conquest:

> Youth means living days off and having no responsibility. If those who enjoy it disperse it, because they find themselves overwhelmed by the stories of the old and do not fully rejoice in it, they spoil their existence. . . . But in Egypt . . . where could the young man find his satisfaction? Where could he find happiness?[29]

The story, set to a large extent in a country village, presumably in Lower Egypt, depicts circumstantial events and human and sentimental relationships between four young people – Ḥāmid, Zaynab, ʿAzīza and Ibrāhīm – of different social extraction but all hailing from the same country village. Scenes of rural life and customs sketched out in a romantic-like tone provide a backdrop to the narration, reclaiming the novel's subtitle, "*manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*" (life scenes and customs of the countryside).

The four characters give life to a story that is divided into three sections. As a whole, the narration is punctuated by the periodic return of Ḥāmid, a student in Cairo and son of landowner Sayyid Maḥmūd, for whom Ibrāhīm and Zaynab work, to his village and birthplace to spend his summer holidays. Ḥāmid returns to the village three times with the arrival of summer, which leads us to deduce that the narrated event spreads over about three years, a period that historically stands in the first part of the 20th century. The technique of the omniscient narrator, predominant throughout the novel, allows the reader to follow the young man's movements from the city to the country, where the majority of the narrated events take place. Ḥāmid's perspective alternates periodically with that of the omniscient narrator, who recounts – even after Ḥāmid's sudden exit from the scene – the troubled incident of Zaynab's illegitimate love for Ibrāhīm (Zaynab was forced to marry a labourer of her same age, Ḥasan, against her will) and the young woman's tragic end.

Unlike the rural environment, the city ambience is barely recalled through the brief mentions of the colossal size of the Egyptian capital against the simple student room where Ḥāmid spends the days dedicated to preparing classes and exams. Ḥāmid belongs to the city environment for almost all of the calendar year, and his point of view is trained on the city horizon, so much so as to make any further description of this environment unnecessary – indeed, it is a given. It is no coincidence that Ḥāmid is introduced precisely while on the verge of departing and leaving the known environment (the city) behind him, headed for that evocative, promise-laden environment that is the country:

> While the summer brought work for the *fellaheen*, to others its arrival meant days of rest and recreation. Hardly had spring turned to summer than Hamid and his brothers returned to the village after months spent between papers and books within the walls of the city where they rarely caught a glimpse of the horizon or enjoyed the sight of a sunrise or sunset.

Their studies presented them with many problems and they would count the last few days on their fingers, looking forward eagerly to their return from the great and illustrious capital to their own small village. When the examinations where over and their bags packed, the joy of the occasion brought smiles to their faces. You would think they were migrating to the most exalted parts of the earth where they would find happiness and permanent well-being awaiting them. Arriving in the village they would bring out the sport balls and other items which they felt they could not be without during the first few days of the holiday and these articles would then be passed on to younger relatives who either disposed of them within a day or two or, on finding themselves in possession of something, guarded them covetously.[30]

Hence, unlike the city, the country is a place of pleasure and amusement, to which the urbanised student returns joyfully, finding himself in a situation of novelty and full possibility. Throughout the novel, Ḥāmid's gaze will be similar to that of an observer external to the country, who periodically, on his homecoming trips, returns to an existential dimension of extraordinary intensity. The gaze of this young urbanised student focuses the reader's gaze on the labourers, on the cotton harvesting and processing operations, on the daily actions of the life of the labourers and on their festive moments.

Ḥāmid, poised between city and country, is able not only to read the given landscape in detail, but at the same time also to characterise it according to a sensitivity completely foreign to the other characters in the novel. Hence, his is the perspective from which the reader is introduced to the rural environment, to its traditions and to its protagonists. On the other hand, the country is the place in which the protagonist's inner dimension comes to light, while the city, by contrast, seems almost to divest the young man of his innate depth. Moonlit walks, contact with the crisp open air, especially in the evening, crops and the nocturnal stillness of the countryside are the scenes of the most intense passions, and it is precisely this perspective that justifies his feverish wait for his return to the country. Nevertheless, ever since this early introspection into Ḥāmid's personality, it appears clear that the young man harbours, alongside feelings of expectation and fascination for the countryside, a veiled disdain for his too-simple and ignorant people:

[Ḥāmid] remembered his room in the village with its empty wardrobe and bare desk with no papers upon it. He imagined the evenings he would spend with the villagers, reading the papers which never came up with anything new but simply repeated what had been said before. Even so, the *fellaheen* would still applaud the excellent writers who knew how to rearrange the words day by day, even if their aim was merely to cram the minds of their readers with giant headlines supplemented by inflated accounts of trivial events. No doubt, with sufficient exaggeration, they hoped to make everyone aware of what they considered in their duty to report.[31]

The young man usually spends the evening in the company of the peasants to then go back to his room, regaining that position of singular autonomy that characterises him and his judgement. Judging from the ironic detachment with which Ḥāmid returns to his room, one would say that the student nourishes an ambivalent attitude towards the country environment. His being learned and shrewd, accustomed to a city life in which everything changes, leads him to hate the dullness and misery – both material and intellectual – of the village peasants.

This attitude is at odds with the idyllic image and the nostalgia and love for the countryside, which Ḥāmid himself interprets. The attention and descriptive care that the author reserves for the country and for its peasants is to be set within a broader cultural and intellectual context that began to shape its national characters. Salāma Mūsā and Ibrāhīm al-Miṣrī, for example – together with other intellectuals who advocated an "authentically" Egyptian literature – appealed repeatedly to draw attention to the figure of the peasant, to his character and lifestyle, in order to "produce an authentic Egyptian literature which describes Egyptian life and which is intimately connected to the Egyptian soil".[32] In this ideological context, the peasant is the custodian of the knowledge of the land, handed down from generation to generation, while answering for the ethnic and cultural continuity on Egyptian soil. He ensures and at the same time attests to a direct link between the Egyptians who are his contemporaries and the original inhabitants of the Nile Valley. Haykal also identifies in the peasant the link between the mythical past and the future of the Egyptian nation. The decision to set the novel mainly in the country should therefore be traced back to this ideological and symbolic horizon: the country is a backdrop laden with meanings and symbolic references against which to place the new character, the modern and urbanised Egyptian citizen.

Such a concept of the country, useful for the construction of an image of territorial unity and of *aṣāla* (authenticity), reflects an anti-historical attitude, aimed at abstracting from the national and transnational historical processes the object of much heart-rending contemplation – the countryside and precisely those who work it and look after it – and to freeze it in its ethnic and cultural "authenticity". More than empathy with the country environment, the preceding passage suggests the substantial unfamiliarity of the subject Ḥāmid with the rural environment in general. This double meaning of the rural theme, which is an enveloping scenario for the setting of an Egyptian love story, as well as a human environment from which to keep one's distance, is the result of a conservative political vision. Shalan underlines, for example, how Haykal's text, in spite of its critical nature with respect to the customs, the too-hard work conditions of the peasants and the female condition, does not, however, hope for a radical change in the relationships between peasants and landowners, limiting himself rather to invoking more a humane treatment of labourers and conditions more respectful of workers' rights.[33] Indeed, according to Shalan, radical measures of change such as land reform or the redistribution of agricultural income would lead to instability in the relationships between landowners and peasants, and would consequently lead to the break-up of a national territorial imaginary based precisely on this type of

relationship. The gaze of the adolescent Ḥāmid, son of a "purely Egyptian" rural elite and student-in-training in the capital, thus embodies this particular authorial perspective.

The twofold love for Zaynab and ʿAzīza

Ḥāmid is a character who wavers perpetually between different senses of belonging, as partially revealed by his ambiguous placement halfway between city and country. This trait also characterises his emotional and sentimental life, which from the beginning to the end of the novel will be spanned by conflicting feelings and aspirations. The first tension involves the contrast between "elective" sense of belonging, that is, the one the student Ḥāmid enters into with his schoolmates, and a natural sense of belonging, the one that master Ḥāmid, son of the landowner Maḥmūd, maintains with his family. Ḥāmid is also the product of a new model of education, which takes him far away from his family and introduces him to an egalitarian environment, where the traditional bond with the members of his family and his clan are replaced by the bond of friendship. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the idea of friendship, as well as that of love, were widely debated in the Egypt of the beginning of the century, and were often the object of editorial analyses, open letters and lifestyle articles.

Ḥāmid, however, experiences his progressive detachment from his family as a sin, and this feeling makes him feel guilty and ungenerous ("Have you become so neglectful that you remember the wonders of the night and the music of the fellaheen, but forget your own parents? Have you become so selfish that those whispering sounds in the darkness are more important to you than the voice of your mother calling out to greet you?").[34] Moreover, the act of seeking refuge in his beloved nature, a special place to which he flees from the paternal abode, arouses in him feelings of remorse that tend to find expression in a discourse recalling religious repentance.

Thus the young man, nerve centre of the "artistic novel", reveals himself, ever since his first appearance as a tormented character, in search of an autonomous dimension and in a difficult relation with his paternal home. At the same time, the creation of a new, empathetic and equal bond with his peers is experienced with a feeling of guilt. The amorous theme is therefore inserted within an already tormented inner dimension. Ḥāmid is greatly attracted to Zaynab, a country beauty in the bloom of her youth, authentically Egyptian and radiating sensuality and charming impulsiveness. Zaynab does not reject the young man's initiative and, rather, welcomes it with a warmth that could be seen as the fruit of passive emotionality. Her work in the fields allows Zaynab a mobility denied to many girls of her age, especially if urbanised. She must go to the cotton plantation every day on a vehicle similar to a small country locomotive, which picks up labourers, men and women together, distributing them along the plots of land. Zaynab often returns home travelling long distances by foot.

Irresistibly attracted to the girl, Ḥāmid courts her during the work in the fields, which he sometimes watches during his daytime wandering, or during holiday

evenings in the village. The two have a fleeting contact and, after their first meeting, Ḥāmid will return to Zaynab again and again, feeding his attraction with the very idea of the cyclic return. With his return to the country, Ḥāmid also returns without fail to Zaynab, who ends up embodying the memory of the "good old days", of the caresses exchanged under the sun of past summers.

At the same time, the young man loves – with a platonic love – his cousin ʿAzīza, slightly younger and of bourgeois extraction, who was his childhood playmate. Once she reaches the age of marriage, ʿAzīza is hidden away according to the custom of the middle-upper classes of Egyptian society. Like her cousin, ʿAzīza also spends the summer holidays in the village, but the girl is closely supervised by her family even during these periods. Ḥāmid goes to visit his aunt and uncle almost every day in an attempt to see her:

> Sometimes he saw ʿAzīza but he never had the courage to speak to her other than with a passing greeting. He was content, however, in the belief that she was not indifferent to him – for how could she not be occupied with similar thoughts, being at the splendid age of youth and vitality when we lose ourselves in romantic dreams and loving sentiments? An age in which feelings soften, when the heart opens out to encompass the beauty in the world and the soul feels the need for a partner so strongly that the prospect of a life alone is almost unbearable, so tedious and oppressive that we would wish to put an end to it!
>
> Yet ʿAzīza's heart was always imprisoned. She never saw the sky except from the windows of the house and the only bird-song she heard was the cooing of doves on the roof. Her whole being was aware of the beauty of nature but she only experienced it from within, unable to explore it for herself or to enjoy the experience of solitude in its midst. Her soul was split between the reality of her life and what she felt inside, her heart straying in a wilderness where there was neither pleasure nor pain.[35]

Youth is the condition shared by all the characters, just like love, which seems to be the inevitable outcome – unpredictable and at times fatal – of youth. Youth and love, as the preceding lines reveal, are closely intertwined. Young people, by their nature, love; they love even if society does nothing but hinder them in their search for gratification. In Ḥāmid's experience, love has the two faces of Zaynab and ʿAzīza, two figures with diametrically opposed characters – the former hot-blooded and impulsive, the latter ethereal and reflective.

The two succeed one another in the young man's thoughts ("carrying on his way, thinking about the workers . . ., his memories of Zaynab where reawakened and her image appeared before him with sleepy eyes, her shapely body concealed beneath simple working clothes)",[36] while other times it blends with the images of the nature that harboured the early rendezvous between the two young people. And this vital image contrasts with the memory of his beloved but secluded cousin. Ḥāmid's behaviour varies along with the economic and social environment that these two figures represent: possessive and paternalistic towards the

peasant, over whose person he implicitly exercises a sense of ownership (after all, she is a mere labourer on a plot of the plantation belonging to Ḥāmid's father), and discreet and respectful of the conditions imposed by the seclusion where his cousin is concerned. In her freedom of movement and in her instinctive and primordial nature, Zaynab finally manages to free herself – morally and psychologically at least – from the imprisonment imposed on her by her loveless marriage,[37] even though this path to freedom will be accomplished through death.

Throughout the text, the young woman's uncorrupted beauty is associated several times with the land ("Zainab was at an age when nature smiled on her like a lover and she would lower her gaze accordingly, out of deference, raising her eyelids cautiously to see to what extent she could flirt with this mysterious love".[38]). Conversely, ʿAzīza "was very thin . . . and however lacking in beauty she may really have been, to Ḥāmid she was as beautiful as a flower".[39] Zaynab is always described as a child of the land, as a creature possessing a headstrong will, so much so that by letting herself die, she will manage to live her ill-fated amorous passion for Ibrāhīm, the head of the labourers and right-hand man of the landowner, Ḥāmid's father. The young peasant woman, however, remains a potentially silent character, who does not express her feelings – so much so that we used the expression "passive emotionalism" to emphasise her defenceless nature and impotence. It is interesting to read the silent figure of Zaynab in opposition to Ḥāmid's hypertrophic subjectivity. The young man does nothing but describe and thus objectify Zaynab, comparing her to a magnificent animal, as spirited as she is taciturn. On the contrary, for ʿAzīza he reserves the images and expressions of a creature in prison, or of a soul forced into confinement, thus establishing a level of empathy with his peer.

As highlighted by Smith, love in Haykal's juvenile writing is a literary trope linked with legitimation in society:

> Love for Haykal served as a metaphor for his vision of his gaining personal happiness and a position of intellectual and political leadership. His self-image was both personal and social within a Positivistic vision of history. He believed he was of an elite destined to lead Egypt to independence by introducing progress on a Western scientific basis. His assumption was based on two factors which would reappear in various guises in his fiction: his view of himself as a true Egyptian, a *fallah*, of rural peasant stock uncorrupted by foreign influences, particularly Turkish; his image of himself as an intellectual by virtue of his exposure to Western ideas and education which were the keys both to Egypt's national development and his own personal freedom to act within Egypt.[40]

The twofold love for Zaynab and ʿAzīza is then directly linked to the twofold self-representation that Haykal constructs of himself: a "fallāḥ" *and* a political, liberal leader. While the first affiliation is expressed by his love (*hawāʾ*) for Zaynab, the second is embodied by his ideal love for his cousin ʿAzīza. The two figures around which the young man's imagination and sentiment are expressed refer

to a disassociated imaginary of the feminine, being modelled on the binomial modernity *versus* tradition, of which Hoda Elsadda, among others, spoke in a study on cultural construction, dominant in the public discourse of the Egypt of the beginning of the century, of the "new man", the man who was supposed to correspond to an ideal of sophisticated and westernised modernity, ideal counterpart for the "new woman" already theorised by Qāsim Amīn in the renowned *Taḥrīr al-mar'a*.[41] Zaynab speaks only in the final, tragic moments of her life, those narrated in the last pages of the novel where, literally consumed by illness and by her ill-fated love for Ibrāhīm, she begs her mother not to treat her younger sisters the same way she treated her – in other words not to force them to marry against their will. The onslaught of social condemnation conveyed by the author in this last part of the novel is strong, and the fact that he finally makes Zaynab herself speak represents, in and of itself, a stylistic expedient that leans towards a nonconventional representation of the feminine.

By contrast, 'Azīza – though she is not as central a figure – shares with Ḥāmid the ability to analyse and express her inner reality: the cloistered young woman is fully involved in the amorous game with her cousin and intensely devoted to dreaming about, conversely, that very matrimonial institution her peer so disparages. However, these dreams end up fading in the shadow of the seclusion, dismissed once and for all by the young woman herself, by now resigned to a marriage arranged by her family. The end of the love story between the two is announced in a letter full of contrition, at the end of which the beloved and loving 'Azīza will become for Ḥāmid simply "your sister 'Azīza":

> Yours is the beauty of the world: the sky, the field, the water, the night and the moon. Enjoy those things and leave me in my cell. I am content with my life or at least I am forced to be, old son leave me please, leave me. I am not cut out for love nor has love anything to do with me and I implore God to forgive me. He is the supporter of the weak and today I am in need of His sustenance. May my heart filled with His love alone. The voices I heard were none other than the whisper of Satan as he tries to take possession of girls' souls. They can only find protection from him in men. That is the temptation of devil! In God alone will I seek my refuge.
>
> Leave me Hamid to weep for my youth, maybe that will purify me. We make such great mistakes when we are young! God alone is able to forgive them.
>
> Forget me Hamid . . . Forget me.
>
> Your sister, Aziza[42]

According to the regulations in force in a society that required segregation for women of the middle and upper classes, young women were even prohibited from just dreaming about marriage, as this institution was traditionally the prerogative of their fathers. These lines written by 'Azīza in her own hand to her cousin are somehow symptomatic of an inner ambivalence. 'Azīza expresses herself in

eloquent and polished Arabic and is from a good family: her condition places her side by side with her cousin and peer Ḥāmid. Even her wavering between the attraction for the amorous feeling and constraint seems to reflect the tension harboured in Ḥāmid's spirit. What's more, a true oscillation between two modes of discourse, by this term meaning both the linguistic sphere and that of the imaginary recalled by the young woman, occurs in ʿAzīza as well. On the one hand, we find a traditional formulary and the comforting sequence of invocations, on the other a discourse imbued with secular and reformist reasoning, characterised by a slightly polemical tone echoing Ḥāmid's thoughts on marriage. From yearned-for union, object of secret dreams, this institution becomes the tie of tradition, the legacy of a binding society suffered by the youngest: the young subject, especially if female, cannot oppose the prerogative of family and tradition without becoming completely alienated from the world.[43]

In conclusion, if Zaynab somehow manages to free herself from the constraint of marriage and tradition through her own wild nature, tied to the land and thus naturally sensual, ʿAzīza represents instead the social restrictions of the class Ḥāmid belongs to and holds a position of true double narrative with regard to the student's character. Her inner reality is particularly developed, and the young woman is fully aware of her situation. Despite the fact that the author read Qāsim Amīn and that he declared himself several times to be a follower of his reformist ideas regarding the issue of women, according to Selim the outcome and evolution of both characters reveal a considerably wavering attitude with regard to the issue of women in Egypt. In ʿAzīza's case, the subject expresses herself but does not free herself, giving in to the pressure of tradition. Conversely, as to the silent young country woman, Zaynab, she is able to break free from the destiny imposed by tradition only at the cost of her own life, in a tragic ending that is all too revealing of the absence of other narrative possibilities for the character in question.[44]

2.3 Ḥāmid's suspended trajectory

The love of "others"

The continuous wavering between two passions and the inability to see a future for either of them ensures the progressive intensification of a deep feeling of frustration in Ḥāmid, which the young man gives vent to by announcing his disdain for the institution of marriage and preparing to refute it with the means offered by a new "scientific" literature on the topic:

> he absorbed himself in his academic pursuits so they dominated his mind and heart. Among the books he read were some concerning women and marriage which opened his mind to concepts quite different from his original beliefs and he began to see married life as something dull and monotonous, convinced it was only man's inherent foolishness that had led him to believe there was any joy or happiness to be found there.[45]

To Ḥāmid's question on "why we have to marry", it is his friend Ḥasanayn, in one of the rare scenes of the novel that takes place in town, who offers readers an idea of marriage reformed and modernised like they yearn for. Therefore, these pages of Haykal's can be read as a cross section of cultural history and history of ideas in narrative form:

> Maybe I would agree that our system of marriage does not produce the bliss we dream of. . . . Nevertheless, I don't entirely agree with your opinion. I believe that marriage supplies a framework for happiness and that it is the best system we could devise to maintain our species in the greatest security and well-being we could hope for.
>
> Imagine the situation which you envisage. Helpless children who do not know their fathers, and women with no one to support them in their times of weakness, in the minds of this urban life with all its pressure and demands. Consider the exhausted man returning from his job, looking for comfort in the words of a loved one but finding only others like himself while our women work to earn their livelihoods in order to look after themselves and their children: surely you would agree that there is no happiness for a woman without a devoted man to care for her.[46]

These words of Ḥasanayn's channel the vision of philosopher and theoretician of naturalism, Hippolyte Taine, an author who, by Haykal's own admission, was very important for him in the period between 1909 and 1912.[47] Central is the idea that the world is moved by a natural progress, and to this "moving forward" (*ilā al-amām*) even social institutions like marriage, which regulate living and coexistence among men, contribute. The progressive movement of the world is also promoted by every individual and by the innate mobility that drives everyone to go towards the unknown, which is not part of the baggage of their early experience of family life (*Yanzaʿu ilā ghayri mā yarāhu qawmuhu*).

Ḥasan and Ibrāhīm, the other two male characters in this story, belong to a more modest class than the landowner's young son and are thus obviously excluded from this type of reflections. Indeed, they do not possess the political, class or category awareness shown by two modern students like Ḥāmid and Ḥasanayn. Ḥasan and Ibrāhīm represent "other" subjectivities compared to that of the young man belonging to the rural elite, and therefore educated and urbanised, expressed in the novel. The two do not question their future, but both obey, albeit in different spheres and ways, the destiny arranged for them by someone else. Ibrāhīm, who despite his humble origins is supervisor of the work in the fields for Sayyid Maḥmūd and who loves Zaynab (and is loved by her in return), will depart for Sudan, while Ḥasan will consent to the wishes of his parents and marry Zaynab. Ḥāmid's reaction to the news of his friend's imminent departure reveals ambivalence towards Ibrāhīm and, more in general, an authorial position which, after an initial hesitation, ends up assuming the point of view of the nation, with its needs and its "natural" territorial extensions like, for example, Sudan.

The union between Egypt and Sudan – explain Gershoni and Jankowski – was a fully accepted and perfectly functional idea within Egyptian nationalism. On the one hand, perceiving Egypt as a great nation whose territory included the entire Nile Valley meant maintaining an important unity of meaning for the symbolic dimension continuously referenced by the nationalist discourse. On the other hand, economic control of Sudan ensured prosperity and economic stability to Egypt.[48] The peasant Ibrāhīm, already depicted his role of soldier, is at first presented as a victim of the nation's plan, which sends him into the scorching periphery of the national domain without him being able to oppose this decision, given that "he was in no position to buy his freedom as those with the money to do so would have done".[49] The author repeats this expression three times in the chapter, as if to underline the seriousness of the injustice suffered by Ibrāhīm and his desire to denounce such blatant social injustice. Immediately afterwards, however, Ibrāhīm is brought back to his status of "ordinary peasant" incapable of looking beyond his narrow horizon and of realising how his past is nothing more than a brief segment in the grand scheme of the nation's fate.

> At the same time the thought occurred to Ḥāmid that Ibrahim's view was rather short-sighted. True, he was only going to perform insignificant tasks at present but at least he would be representing his country and her army. Even if there were no honour today in being a soldier, history would remember him as the link between former greatness and future glories. But Ibrahim, a simple labourer, understood nothing of this nor was it in his capacity to understand.[50]

Sudan is depicted as the most remote and inhospitable place to be reached and conquered so as to promote the territorial extension of the Egyptian *Umma*.[51] Here, as elsewhere, we note the emphasis put on the continuity between "a former military glory and the hoped-for future national glory": the reference should undoubtedly be placed among the mythical and symbolic references of the current of "Pharaonism", which recreates a link between the Egyptian people, the modern national territory and the ancient pharaonic civilisation.

Here also, as earlier, we note how the peasant class supporting the national imaginary of which Haykal becomes interpreter is subject to dual contrasting representations: described on the same page as an innocent victim and, at the same time, as a link between the mythical past and the future of the nation, Ibrāhīm is narratively deprived of all subjectivity to become the object of the reflections of his peer. Love for Ibrāhīm is impossible and is thwarted twice: first by the arranged marriage between his beloved Zaynab and his dear friend Ḥasan, and later by his enforced departure for Sudan. Even after his departure for Sudan, Ibrāhīm continues to crowd Zaynab's fantasies and to feed her misery ("she forced herself to break off, once and for all, all ties with Ibrāhīm, but she seemed to hear an inner voice asking her: -Would you be capable of it? And she pictured her loved one at her side, smiling at her with a good heart, circling her narrow waist with his arm and telling her: I love you").[52] And the inscrutability of the sentiments of the by

now far away Ibrāhīm will end up accelerating the young woman's physical and emotional decline.

As for Ḥasan, Zaynab's husband, he – among the male characters – is the one who best embodies the traditional peasant world. Ḥasan reveals a steadfast nature in accepting the wishes of his relatives; he marries Zaynab readily and shows her affection and understanding, despite the unexplainable (for him) behaviour of the young woman who, right after Ibrāhīm's departure, withdraws into herself without ever sharing her tragic decline into illness. If Ibrāhīm cannot love because the nation bends the fate of the individual to its own needs, Ḥasan's love for the woman designated to be his wife, ironically, will not be reciprocated and the young man will find himself prematurely widowed. In conclusion, the trope of love and attraction between two youths transforms into a true social and political identifier in *Zaynab*; here as elsewhere in that typology of novel destined to become the national canon (that is, *riwāya fanniyya)*, love is the narrative trope that not only determines the inner life of the characters, but redesigns their social position and the legitimacy of their aspirations. Ḥāmid's love for the two women, as thwarted as it is, is legitimate and can be told. Zaynab's love for Ibrāhīm, on the contrary, remains in the background and will be disrupted by Ibrāhīm's sudden transfer, to end finally with Zaynab's death.

Ḥāmid slips from the author's hands

The protagonist's crisis intensifies until appearing to be an impasse with no way out. As seen before, in *Yawmiyyāt al-shabāb*, Haykal's juvenile diary, Egypt is described as a country which does not offer the young men a future in which to live. The echo of this diary resounds in *Zaynab*, in its monologues and dialogues. The novel shows how the protagonist, forced into a situation that prevents him from experiencing the feeling that is most natural to him – love – has no way out other than to depart.

As has been said, the crisis is initially outlined as sentimental confusion, in terms of a dual passion for two women who are denied him for different reasons, but both ascribable to a social nature. In the following passage, Ḥāmid describes himself in the grip of the torment of love, or the incurable disease (*maraḍ ʿāliq*), which turns into a true ethical and cognitive crisis:

> An incurable disease had taken root in his soul, and his behaviour was one of its symptoms. It was the feeling of love that stirred the hearts of the young men and women, the feeling that does not forego disturbing them and driving them towards the search for their soulmate – for their soul sister in eternity, from which earthly life had separated them. This is why they searched for it incessantly. . . . It was an intense torment, and love was the most intense torment of all, capable of rousing souls, of inflaming hearts and making them throb. Indeed, it is the only torment in young people's lives, inspiring them with joy and happiness which the loved ones will hold in the smooth palms of their hands, painting a smile on their lips and in their pure, passionate gazes.

> If, however, the search for their loved ones should prove vain, the very exist-
> ence [of these youths] would turn into agony. . . .
>
> In truth, Ḥāmid nourished grand dreams and hopes for the future and,
> though he was sincere in saying that the best thing to do was to "take advan-
> tage of the present", he was troubled by the problem of the future. It was as if
> he were following the theory of his teacher Qāsim Amīn: "the joy that gives
> value to life lies in the fact that man is a working force capable of leaving an
> indelible mark on the world".
>
> . . .
>
> Today, he was not questioning the causes of his anguish. Instead, he wished
> to know how to atone for the past. Should he pray and beg God to forgive
> him? But why, and what sin had he committed? Was it his fault that the Crea-
> tor had infused his soul – just like that of any other youth – with the feeling
> of love? If Nature alone was guilty of such a sin to the detriment of young
> people, then she was the only one to be held responsible. Nature had to atone
> for her sin. If, on the other hand, it was God's will, then God would not ask
> him to explain.
>
> Yet he felt like his sin was growing by the hour, and he felt the full weight
> of his past actions on his shoulders. And at that moment he felt immensely
> weak and in need of asking the Lord for help. He gazed skywards sad, tear-
> filled eyes. He prostrated himself before the celestial dome, magnificent in
> its purity, and then could not help praying as he knelt and humbly asked the
> Lord to forgive his sins. He spread open his palms as he finished praying, then
> brought them to his face as if to bring himself divine mercy and protection.[53]

The internal tension reveals two initiations, two different paths, or ways, that can
be travelled over in just one direction and in mutual contrast, that Ḥāmid tries in
vain to reconcile. On the one hand, there is the way of tradition, which does not
encompass love and which, on the contrary, encourages living the amorous senti-
ment as a rebellion against paternal authority, and hence as a cause for guilt. This
path leads to a state of quiescence, or non-life, of the young subject. On the other
hand, there is the affirmation of love and of its naturalness, of its being one with
youth, a concept that Haykal borrows directly from Rousseau. The short circuit
triggered between the naturalness of the amorous sentiment and the social rules
of community living, or between the natural state of human beings and their hav-
ing to relate to society, translates into a monologue resembling a kind of dialogue
within the subject.

Part of this monologue is inspired by philosophical discourse, with echoes
of the Platonic theory of corresponding souls, and part by religious discourse.
Images of the iconography of martyrdom and expiation are recalled, in a very
similar way to what takes place in 'Azīza's monologue (cited earlier). Ḥāmid is,
therefore, in the throes of an ethical crisis and in need of a guide, which at the
moment not even master Qāsim Amīn, whose name recurs throughout the text,
can guarantee. The brief and rather clumsy attempt, described just a few pages
later, of approaching popular faith (portrayed in the figure of the swindler shaykh

Maṣ'ūd, "the person who had spent ten years between the walls of El-Azhar"[54] and who, in order to earn a living, wandered around the countryside promising a sort of spiritual protection to all the gullible people who are said to have invited him to their table) will prove vain. This character is one of the most successful outcomes of a humorous vein that occasionally runs through the novel, especially in the points recounting rural customs.[55]

In the third and final section of the book, dedicated almost entirely to the narration of Zaynab's final days of consumption followed by her death throes, an extremely effective narrative expedient frees Ḥāmid from the impasse gripping him. Ḥāmid disappears a month after his departure for Cairo, leaving a letter for his brothers, who notify their father right away, a letter in which he summarises all the events of his last years, between false hopes and dreams. In the letter, the young man retraces with candour all the periods of his crisis, his infatuation for Zaynab and his love for his cousin, his grief and more recent desperation. At the end, he implies that he has decided to "retreat into solitude" to devote himself to the search for his loved one.

The narrative voice explains how the first letter was followed by a second one, in which Ḥāmid relates that he is happy, that he earns his living by the sweat of his brow and that he is much more peaceful. Interestingly, no mention is made of the place from which the letter was supposed to have been mailed. It is a rather unusual omission, since both letters are delivered by what could be seen as a modern postal service. The omission is most likely intentional, and we believe there are sufficient elements to imagine a European destination for Ḥāmid. Egypt does not offer the young man a future in which to live, he wrote: from this moment on, many Arab youths would travel to Europe not only to get a modern education, but also to experience their youth in Europe. We might even identify in Ḥāmid's letter an actual point of departure for a period of youth migration to Europe, pole of attraction and at the same time point of reference in the processes of identity construction of modern Arab society.

We have noted in this chapter how the characters' fates reveal much as to the ideological context and the imaginary within which they were shaped. Ibrāhīm sets off for Sudan, to humbly serve a nation of whose plans he is basically in the dark. Zaynab heads towards death, 'Azīza will return to the segregation imposed on her by society, Ḥasan will most likely be the first – and the youngest – widower in the history of the Egyptian novel. The only character to not undergo "stabilisation" in the novel is Ḥāmid, whose deep inner crisis reveals an awareness of the various opportunities that youth has to offer. With a precise act of will, the country gentleman will leave the family environment and the dialectics that for years have repressed his temperament; he will leave the circumstances, the reflections and human interrelations developed during his summers in the village to emancipate himself from his family ties and from the language of tradition.

In the previous chapter, we said that Haykal is inspired, in his autobiographical writings and in the passages in which he refers to Egyptian youth, by a precise model of youth: one that is educated, bourgeois and European. This model is the one that the character of Ḥāmid also aspires to. Specifically, Ḥāmid also

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embodies a social class, the rural and educated elite, to which Haykal himself belonged and for whose candidacy to the government of the nation he acted. The narrative solution adopted by the author with regard to his complicated subject should be ascribed to this ideological context: the son of the ‘*umda* is, in fact, left free to seek for himself a future better suited to the experience and expression of his youth.

At the same time, this solution implicitly excludes all the "others", the Ibrāhīms, the Ḥasans, the Zaynabs and the ‘Azīzas, who will not be given any opportunity to travel in order to live their youth fully. Indeed, theirs will remain a "biological" youth, which will not see the formation of any independent subjectivity, nor the taking place of any apprenticeship to adulthood. These experiences will only be possible for the son of the landowner Maḥmūd (Ḥāmid), whose trip is, first and foremost, an affirmation of the desire to experience a modern invention, available in its Egyptian version and not granted to everyone – that is, this state of youth understood as cultural construct. The female figures remain in opposition until the end of the novel, and the ending of their stories is worlds apart: Zaynab, a free creature, is fated to die, while ‘Azīza, who resigns herself to social normativity by accepting the traditional practice of segregation, is saved.[56] The chiasmus that is drawn between the two young women can be read, like Ḥāmid's disappearance, as the reification of an impossibility, on the part of the young Egyptian woman, to live her condition freely.

Nevertheless, even in the final stage it appears obvious that the gaze expressing the entire story is masculine: the two female fates will remain – after the final heartfelt plea made by Zaynab to her parents before dying, to save her younger sisters from the fate of an arranged marriage – shrouded in silence, while the letter left by Ḥāmid to his parents represents a final affirmation of his ideals and of his own self.

Notes

1 Pierre Cachia defines *Zaynab* as "the forerunner of the realistic and the social novel" in *Arabic Literature, An Overview*, Routledge, London and New York 2003, p. 136. According to Roger Allen, *Zaynab* was "the task of the would-be Arab Novelist at that time, along with the need to overcome societal attitudes to the genre and to those who would write in it". See: Allen, Roger, *The Arabic Novel. An Historical and Critical Introduction*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY 1982, p. 31.

2 On Haykal's formative years see Smith, Charles D., *Islam and the Search for Social Order*, pp. 33–60. On Haykal's political memoires see: Romano, Marina, "*Mudhakkirāt fī 'l-siyāsa al-miṣriyya*: Nationalism and the Politics of Memory in 20th-Century Egypt", in Jolanda Guardi and Maria Elena Paniconi (eds.), *Nahḍa Narratives*, Oriente Moderno 99 (2019), pp. 94–115. On Haykal's nationalist juvenile writings see Casini, Lorenzo, "Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's Anti-Enlightenment Modernity (1916–1925)", in Jolanda Guardi and Maria Elena Paniconi (eds.), *Nahḍa Narratives*, Oriente Moderno, 99, 1–2 (2019), pp. 30–47.

3 On Haykal as translator of Jean Jacques Rousseau see: Kesrouany, Maya I., *Prophetic Translation. The Making of Modern Egyptian Literature*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2019, pp. 163–168.

4 Smith, Charles D., *Islam and the Search for Social Order*, p. 30.

5 On the role of these intellectuals in the making of Egyptian social and literary modernity see Semah, David, *Four Egyptian Literary Critics*.

6 Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order*, p. 68.

7 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Thawrat al-adab,* Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, al-Qāhira 1965, p. 105. Translation by the Author and Daniela Cristina Innocenti.

8 Moretti, Franco, *The Way of the World*, p. 5.

9 Sakkūt, Ḥamdī, *Al-riwāya al-ʿarabiyya. Bibliūghrāfīa wa-madkhal naqdī, 1995–1865,* Qism al-Nashr bi-ʾl-Jāmiʿa al-Amrīkiyya al-Qāhira 2000, p. 2043. The 1929 edition is the first I have found, but it is obvious that Haykal has read an earlier one.

10 See Selim, Samah, *Popular Fiction*, pp. 65–69.

11 Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London 1991, pp. 1–7.

12 For a deeper comprehension of Haykal's understanding of national identity in the mid-1920s, see Casini, Lorenzo, "Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's Anti-Enlightenment Modernity (1916–1925)", pp. 30–47. According to Casini, "Haykal's vision of modernity does not conform consistently to the categories of pro-Westernism, rationalism and secularism with which Pharaonism has traditionally been associated. Instead, it responds to a coherent project of anti-Enlightenment. From 1916 to 1925, a period when secularism reached its apogee in Egypt, Haykal articulated a modern form of transcendentalism based on an organicist conception of the nation and a cyclical view of history, where religion and irrational beliefs were individuated as the fundamental means of socializing the masses into the new political community" (pp. 45–46).

13 Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities*, p. 5.

14 According to Watt, "the formal realism of the novel allows a more immediate imitation of individual experience set in its temporal and spatial environment than to other literary forms"; see Watt, Ian, *The Rise of the Novel, Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Filelding*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1985 [1957], p. 36.

15 Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī is among those who maintain that what worried the author the most was not so much the fact of writing a work of fiction but, more specifically, the writing of a love story. See Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, *Fajr al-qiṣṣa al-miṣriyya*, Nahḍat-Miṣr li-ʾl-Ṭibāʿa wa-ʾl-Nashr wa-ʾl-Tawzīʿ, al-Qāhira 2008, p. 45.

16 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab. Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, Dār al-Maʿārif, al-Qāhira 1992 [1913], pp. 7–8. Translation by the Author and Daniela Cristina Innocenti.

17 Ibid., p. 7. Translation by the Author and Daniela Cristina Innocenti.

18 On the particularising function of the novel see Watt, Ian, *The Rise of the Novel*, pp. 35–36.

19 Ḥaqqī, Yaḥyā, *Fajr al-qiṣṣa al-miṣriyya*, p. 41.

20 Sakkūt, Ḥamdī, *The Egyptian Novel and its main trends. From 1913 to 1952*, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 1971, p. 11.

21 Kilpatrick, Hilary, *The Modern Egyptian Novel*, Ithaca Press, London, 1974, p. 20.

22 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, pp. 62–70.

23 Selim, Samah, *Popular Fiction*, p. 30.

24 Colla, Elliott, "How *Zaynab* became the First Arabic Novel", *History Compass*, 7 (2009), p. 3.

25 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, p. 103.

26 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, pp. 9–10.

27 The influence of French literature in Haykal does not lie only in Rousseau, but also in certain minor authors like Bordeaux and Bourget. See for example Brugman, Jan, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*, Brill, Leiden 1984, p. 241.

28 Colla, Elliott, "How Zaynab became the First Arabic Novel".

29 Ibid., p. 188.

30 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zainab by Mohammed Hussein Haikal*, translated by John Mohammed Grinsted, Darf Publishers, London 2016, p. 58. For the Arabic see: Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, pp. 86–87.

31 Ibid., pp. 87–88.

32 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, pp. 85–86.

33 See Shalan, Jeff, "Writing the Nation", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 33, 3 (2002), p. 224.

34 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zainab by Mohammed Hussein Haikal*, p. 60. For the Arabic see: Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, pp. 86–87.

35 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zainab by Mohammed Hussein Haikal*, p. 70. For the Arabic see: Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, p. 104.

36 Ibid., p. 92.

37 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, p. 107.

38 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zainab by Mohammed Hussein Haikal*, p. 8. For the Arabic see: Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, p. 21.

39 Ibid., p. 14. For the Arabic see: Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, p. 32.

40 Smith, Charles D., "Love, Passion and Class in the Fiction of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal", *The American Oriental Society*, 99, 2 (1979), p. 250.

41 According to Elsadda, the prototype of the new, young, modern, westernised man is the subtext against whose backdrop the typology of the "new woman" (*al-marʾa al-jadīda*) should be read, spread, initially, by the publications of Qāsim Amīn and in the years that followed the subject of numerous reflections. See Elsadda, Hoda, "Imaging the New Man", pp. 32–33.

42 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zainab by Mohammed Hussein Haikal*, p. 143. For the Arabic see: Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, p. 200.

43 Smith, Charles D., "Love, Passion and Class in the Fiction of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal", pp. 249–261.

44 On the nature of the ambiguous attitude towards women's emancipation in Haykal's way of thinking, see Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, pp. 106–112.

45 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zainab by Mohammed Hussein Haikal*, p. 90. For the Arabic see: Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, p. 125.

46 Ibid., p. 93. For the Arabic see: Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, p. 129.

47 See Semah, David, *Four Egyptian Literary Critics*, p. 70.

48 Gershoni, Israel and Jankowski, James, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs,* p. 53.

49 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zainab by Mohammed Hussein Haikal*, pp. 155–156. For the Arabic see Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, p. 220.

50 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zainab by Mohammed Hussein Haikal*, p. 156. For the Arabic see Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, p. 221.

51 The concept of *Umma* is understood here as nation in the territorial sense, according to the use of the word found in Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid. See: Wendell, Charles, *The Evolution of the Egyptian National Image*, pp. 201–293.

52 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zainab by Mohammed Hussein Haikal*, p. 172. For the Arabic see Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, p. 246.

53 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, pp. 237–239 (Translation by the Author and Daniela Cristina Innocenti). A vast section (from page 236 to page 240), including the passage quoted here, was not translated into English in the English translation by Mohammed Grinsted. The emphasis on the protagonist's inner world probably seemed excessively long and not relevant from the narrative point of view to the translator, who decided to cut it.

54 Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zainab by Mohammed Hussein Haikal*, p. 169. For the Arabic see Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, p. 242.

55 This occurs, for example, on the occasion of the negotiations for the engagement between Ḥasan and Zaynab or, though in a more tragic context, in the encounter between the doctor and the ʻ*umda* during the last stage of Zaynab's illness (Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Zaynab*, *Manāẓir wa-akhlāq rīfiyya*, pp. 297–298).

56 Habib, Maha, *Muslim Identities and Modernity. The Transformation of Egyptian Culture*, *Thought and Literature*, I.B. Tauris, London 2016, p. 131.

3 National allegory and *Bildungsnarrative* in *'Awdat al-rūḥ* (*Return of the Spirit*) by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm

Written around 1927 during the author's Paris stay – just like with *Zaynab* – *'Awdat al-rūḥ* (1933, *Return of the Spirit* 1990) was not published until 1933. The 1930s represented one of the most tortuous and unstable periods in the national history of Egypt: Parliament was dissolved by the monarchy in 1928, and Ismā'īl Ṣidqī's dictatorship subsequently led the country – between 1930 and 1933 – to an authoritarian and anti-democratic interval which saw the abrogation of the 1923 Constitution.[1] The effects of the great worldwide economic recession were manifest even in Egypt, where discontent grew between the lower middle class and the popularity of the populist movements such as *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* (the Muslim Brothers), founded in 1928, and *Miṣr al-Fatā* (Young Egypt), founded in 1929 by a young Aḥmad Ḥusayn. Both of these movements "contributed to the shift of Egyptian politics from the palace and parliament to the streets and alleys, the coffee houses, shops, mosques, factories and even homes of Egypt".[2]

The story is set in the period immediately prior to the Revolution of 1919: thus the novel looks to the recent past of the national history to depict a sense of social cohesion and an *esprit de corps* by then lost in the country's new political climate. The main character is Muḥsin, 15-year-old son of landowners and a student in Cairo, whose personal story is used by the author as a ploy to interweave a collective history. As we will see, this merging of personal life and national history is one of the main features of al-Ḥakīm's writing. Compared to *Zaynab*, *'Awdat al-rūḥ* features a lively, highly overdramatised narration of everyday domestic life – a trait indubitably linked to the author's familiarity with theatrical writing techniques. The crux of the novel, in Yaseen Noorani's interpretation, is "the reversion to primordial desire, which constitutes the self, the relation between private and public, and the nature of Egyptian Identity and collective agency".[3] In developing these dimensions, the author – with respect to Haykal – presents a narration wherein the individual and collective dimensions are in constant dialogue with one another. And the natural mediator between these two planes is beauty. Thus, the interpretation of the novel that unfolds over the next few paragraphs highlights the connection between the main character and the extrinsic forms of beauty, as these connections lead to an ultimate goal, contributing to map out the protagonist's *telos*.

Beauty takes on two forms in the novel. It is portrayed by the character of Saniyya, a radiant 17-year-old Egyptian girl. Highly sophisticated and from a bourgeois background, she embodies a modern femininity responding to the imaginary of the "new woman" who – as pointed out by Hoda Elsadda, among others – had already been accepted in public discourse as "central concern in the imagining of the new nation".[4] Furthermore, beauty can also be found in nature and in the Egyptian rural landscape which here – unlike in *Zaynab* – does not represent the main setting of the narration, though it is at the heart of a few isolated scenes pregnant with symbolic meaning.

Al-Ḥakīm does not explore the inner life of his characters through monologues or forays into introspection; instead, he translates the feelings and emotions of his characters into their dialogues and interactions. A massive use of *'āmmiyya* in dialogues is linked to a minutely detailed construction of the fictional "scene": al-Ḥakīm resorts to polyphony to translate his characters' social and material conditions, and language becomes one of the main identification factors for the figures on stage. Al-Ḥakīm limits the use of the narrative voice even in his introduction of the characters, letting the scene speak for itself: readers discover the identity of Muḥsin's mother through the words of Saniyya's mother, just as they learn the story of Zannūba, Muḥsin's spinster aunt, thanks to a long dialogue between aunt and nephew. These formal qualities contributed to the novel's establishing itself as the first Egyptian "realistic novel".[5] This "primacy" – accorded to *'Awdat al-rūḥ* by Noorani, but previously voiced by Hutchins[6] – can be interpreted in light of the aforementioned reflections on *Zaynab*, widely viewed as the "first novel" in Egyptian – or Arabic – literature *tout court*.

Like *Zaynab*, al-Ḥakīm's novel has been seen by critics as the initiator of a specific type of novel: some critics refer to the classic form of the *Bildungsroman*[7] and some reference works of literary terminology mention this novel as an epitome of the Arab *Bildungsroman*.[8] Others, like Noorani, to the "realistic novel". On closer inspection, within the Egyptian context, *'Awdat al-rūḥ* embodies an example of *Bildungsroman* as it is conceived by Redfield, who defines the *Bildungsnarrative* as a form that "asserts its own legitimacy", thus creating its own self-regeneration.[9]

In other words, there is a relationship between the genre (in this instance, the *Bildungsroman*, the basic intelligible form in the text discussed here) and its reception as a "national" novel – therefore, by definition realistic,[10] canonical and highly recommended to coming-of-age youths. The "primacy" accorded by the critics should not be understood as one of the *causes* of the recognisability and success of the novel but, rather, as a consequence of its full adherence to a genre, to a recognisable and – in this case – archetypical form.[11] In addition to showcasing all the recognisable features of a coming-of-age story and, like all novels, recounting a young man's *telos* towards his adult identity, *'Awdat al-rūḥ* was, in turn, greeted as an educational reading. This led to great acclaim, as the novel was adopted in schools and became mandatory "reading".

The novel is divided into two parts, both opening with a quote from the Book of the Dead. The first part is set entirely in Cairo, while the second opens with the

young protagonist visiting his paternal relatives in Damanhūr, later returning to Cairo. Muḥsin is the son of a landowner and a mother belonging to the Turkish landed aristocracy. Despite being a future property owner, the young man lives in Cairo with his paternal aunt and uncle – siblings, not a married couple – and other parental figures who lead a modest life and do not share his social status. In this environment, featuring simple living and the easy-going atmosphere typical of the popular classes and urbanised peasants, 15-year-old Muḥsin meets the neighbours' daughter, Saniyya, two years older than himself and from a bourgeois background. He manages to meet her regularly thanks to the pretext of giving her singing lessons in exchange for piano lessons. Little by little, all the male members of Muḥsin's chosen "family" fall for the girl, finding themselves at the heart of a series of bizarre situations, including domestic disputes, love letters copied word for word from the novels of popular writer al-Manfalūṭī, postcards read as codes for romantic messages. As for Saniyya, she is in love with Muṣṭafā bey, a character who truly loves her and who will propose marriage to her. This romantic disappointment will help Muḥsin grow as he prepares to welcome strong identity values. And at the end of the novel – set just before the Revolution of 1919 – he is ready to embrace the nationalist experience.

The decision to deal with the topic of the need for renewal in the national spirit by means of this commonplace story centring on an adolescent should be seen as a strategic choice, which in fact ensured the great impact of this novel on Egyptian readers. To give an idea of the popularity of the text and of its influence even on generations that came long after its publication, Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir himself claimed to have been greatly impressed by it in his student years. *ʿAwdat al-rūḥ* has been compared to the founding texts of the European canon, from Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.[12]

Specifically, Hutchins recalls how ʿAbd al-Nāṣir claimed to have been as roused by this novel as a young man as Napoleon was inspired and influenced by reading *The Sorrows of the Young Werther*.[13] The title of the novel became the "icon" of a certain revolutionary spirit – if it's true that a likeness of al-Ḥakīm and the words "Return of the Spirit" were depicted as graffiti on a wall in Downtown Cairo shortly after the Revolution of 2011.

Though manifestly autobiographical in origin[14] – like Ḥāmid in *Zaynab* – Muḥsin is an all-around character capable of evolving and of expressing his own, albeit not yet fully formed, personality. On closer inspection, the novel doesn't centre completely on him, because the narrative instance shifts, in chapters 14 and 17 of the second half of the book, to the characters of Muṣṭafā and Saniyya, whose love affair forms a sort of secondary plot with respect to the main one – that is, Muḥsin's adolescent love affair. In general, though romantic love "drives" the plot, for Muḥsin – a young man and artist in the making – his love for Saniyya is unrequited (and whenever he imagines that she returns his feeling, it is nothing but an illusion) and serves as a means to express love his country. Conversely, for Muṣṭafā bey – son of the up-and-coming entrepreneurial class and owner of a company in Maḥalla al-Kubrā – his love for Saniyya is a life plan. Thus, the

author devotes a large part of the second half of the book to Muṣṭafā and Saniyya, allowing the two characters to embody, alternating them, the points of view of two of the nation's "legitimate children".

Young Muḥsin, who starts off as an ardent admirer of Saniyya's and ends up an unwilling witness to this legitimate love, has no choice but to abandon this passion and its disastrous – for him – outcome, thus channelling his ingrained love for beauty into another object. But if the betrothed couple are explicitly described in the novel as two of the nation's "legitimate children", who, then, is Muḥsin? And why does the author feel the need to offer a detailed description of the painful illusion of a youthful love affair?

3.1 The national allegory in *'Awdat al-rūḥ*

Al-shaʻb *(the folk): Muḥsin's chosen family*

'Awdat al-rūḥ marks the bursting of the narration of everyday domestic life – in all its most ordinary, and at times commonplace, aspects – into the Arabic novel. We find an example in the first scene of the "Prologue": a domestic scene which serves to introduce, *in medias res*, the extended family that Muḥsin lives with and affectionately calls *al-shaʻb* (the Folk). The narrative point of view is that of the family doctor, who visits Muḥsin's aunt and uncle's home after the outbreak of flu that has hit the entire household:

> They all came down with influenza at the same time. The doctor called on them. His first glance brought him the amazing information that they were in a single room, their five beds, with flimsy mattresses, lined up one beside the other. There was a single armoire like one used by public scribes. One of its two doors was off. There were clothes of every color and size in it, including some police uniforms with brass buttons. An old musical instrument with bellows – an accordion – was leaning against the wall.
>
> "Is this a barracks for a military base?" The doctor was certain he had entered a house. He still remembered the street and the address. When he finally reached the fifth bed, he could not keep from smiling. This was not a bed but a wooden dining table converted into a bunk for one of them. . . .
>
> He examined them, one after the other. He finished his work and started to depart, but he came back to look with wonder at them, jammed together in the room. . . . Why did they put up with this crowding when there was room elsewhere in the apartment – the sitting room at least? He asked them. A voice which rose from the depths of a bed replied, "We are happy like this!". . . .
>
> The doctor's visit was over. He was ready to depart. He reached the threshold, but he stood there thoughtfully. He turned to the invalids stretched out there and said: You must be from the country! . . . Only a dirt farmer could live like this, no one else. No matter how spacious his house, he will sleep with his wife, children, calf and donkey colt in a single room.[15]

The doctor's point of view, which is an *urban* point of view, shows readers how, far from rural origins being disowned, peasant life is actually deliberately recreated within the crowded Cairo communal life, and defended before the doctor's scornful gaze. Bearing in mind Samah Selim's study on the centrality of the rural imaginary in the formation of a national Egyptian canon,[16] it is possible to understand how, from the "Prologue" onwards, the author tends to build the architecture of textual meanings on the cornerstone of the "genuine nature" of the peasant class and of the inherent goodness of the rural environment. However, like a sort of *ekphrasis* of the whole novel, the "Prologue" reveals how the narrative perspective is urban through and through – and thus objectifying with respect to the rural "essence" recounted, described and "reconstructed" in the crowded communal life of the Cairo household. Firmly tied to their rural origins, Muḥsin's "people" – just like the Egyptian people on a larger scale (who, in the 1930s, would experience a massive urbanisation on the part of the peasants) – adjust easily to city life. Thus, the allegorical dimension of the novel can be inferred from the "Prologue" onwards. This dimension, as Casini pointed out, also made it emblematic of thematic ties and cultural discourses circulating in 1920s and 1930s Egypt, whose "interconnection does not appear as productive and consistent with a specific vision of the nation in any other text".[17] Within this allegorical vision, Muḥsin is a coming-of-age citizen as well as a coming-of-age youth, and the "community" he grows up in is that of the Egyptian people.

The allegorical interpretation of the novel, put forward by Mondal,[18] Casini and Noorani, is based first of all on the construct of the microcosm of the *sha'b*, the group Muḥsin joins enthusiastically and that forms a synecdoche of the Egyptian people as a whole. The good-natured Hanāfī, often depicted while dozing, represents the "white collar" category. Of humble origins, he manages to satisfy the needs of the members of the group, and is the foundation of the household economy. His sister Zannūba, who followed him from the countryside and manages the household, is a 40ish spinster, ignorant and gullible and still hoping to make a good match – which is why she consults the cards and visits a wizard. Despite her extended stay in Cairo, the woman still clings to magical beliefs and rural behaviours, and her city airs make her even more ridiculous ("she adopted the standards of her Cairo girls friends and her modern neighbours without understanding what they stood for. Muḥsin said he once heard her greet her neighbours before noon with "Bonsoir, Ladies").[19] Zannūba incurs the wrath of another family member, 'Abduh, an engineering student slightly older than Muḥsin who cherishes vague aspirations of social justice and represents the enlightened elite.

Finally, we find the man-of-all-work Mabrūk, a sort of "manservant" as well as childhood friend of Zannūba's, who followed her brother Hanāfī from the village, and Uncle Salīm, cousin to Hanāfī and a police officer who was suspended from duty for misuse of authority. He also is another spokesperson for the state sector, who represents the people's baser instincts, yet undergoes a process of refinement throughout the story.

Mondal highlights how Hanāfī represents the new *effendiyya*, as opposed to the Turkish aristocracy embodied by Muḥsin's mother, whose excesses towards

servants and peasants irritate the young man. Conversely, the simple life he leads with his aunt and uncle allows Muḥsin to disguise the fact that he is the son of an heiress, like when he would pretend not to notice the private carriage waiting for him in front of school as a child, so as to appear no different than his class-mates.[20] As pointed out by Richard Van Leeuwen in a work devoted to the relation-ships between the young protagonists of Arabic fiction and their birth families, a key feature of the 20th-century novel is this very election, on the part of young people, of a chosen "family".[21] Muḥsin *chooses*, as his family, not his parents in Damanhūr but, instead, this group made up of his aunt, uncle, and relatives, where relationships are less hierarchical and where Muḥsin, who is portrayed as a good-hearted youth with peasant sympathies, is not forced to witness the abuse against them. While the house in Cairo, with the *shaʿb*, is a symbol of unity and solidarity, the family house in Damanhur is a "symbol of the father's foolish-ness":[22] although Rooke wrote these words in reference to the parental house in al-Ḥakīm's autobiography *The Prison of Life*, we might extend Rooke's affirma-tion also to the parental house in *'Awdat al-rūḥ*, where Muḥsin feels uncomfort-able and constantly out of tune with the system of social relations that he finds reflected in his family:

> His father passed by in a different suit from yesterday. In his hand was an expensive, heavy walking stick with extraordinary gold designs on it. The youth remembered at once what his father had said the day before: "Peasant . . . what can you say to him!". He was a little ashamed of himself. He found it odd that he was the son of parents like these whom he did not resemble.[23]

Love and social legitimacy

As a member of the *shaʿb*, Muḥsin can actually only gain access to his neighbours' home and the beauty held within – segregated, according to the custom of the well-to-do classes – by virtue of his still being a liminal subject, poised between childhood and youth. The author introduces us to him in his newly-tailored suit, on his way home from school with his compasses and books under his arm, as he is joking with his Aunt Zannūba, whom he catches intent on consulting the cards and daydreaming about the marriage plans that came to nothing many years before. The conversation between young man and aunt shows how Muḥsin is already capable of mischievousness and subtle flirtatiousness, as well as of great passions and ambitions for the future. Conversely, Saniyya accompanies him on the piano rather absent-mindedly, absorbed as she is in her secret infatuation for Muṣṭafā bey, a patron of the café opposite and, in turn, a tenant in the building where Saniyya and the *shaʿb*'s families reside.[24] During one of these sessions, Muḥsin confesses that he has one of the girl's handkerchiefs, which fell from her balcony. Saniyya, who regards Muḥsin with the tenderness she would feel for a child, allows him to keep it. Thus Muḥsin embarks on a long, youthful "illusion" that acts as a "background" for a tale of a quest for identity, a repudiation of one's

family, the choosing of one's own path. The illusory love story and its sad epilogue are seen as a *necessary* stage in the youth's development; indeed, it is the personal processing of the feeling of love that allows Muḥsin to develop his first self-narrative, a perception of the self with respect to the world and events.

Casini's invitation to understand the novel as an allegory of the nation is corroborated by al-Ra'ī's interpretation, which extends the allegorical meanings to the character of Saniyya, who implicitly symbolises Isis, a mythological figure much depicted both in figurative arts and in poetry in the very years when the novel was seeing the light – the years when the aesthetics of Pharaonism reached their climax.[25] In Egyptian mythology, Isis was the sister of Osiris, the just king who put an end to the suffering of the Egyptian people. Killed and dismembered by his brother Set, his body was searched for and reassembled by his wife and sister on a journey throughout Egypt. Though not explicit in the text, this pharaonic symbology was inferred by al-Ra'ī starting from Saniyya's role in the novel: not only does she serve as a catalyst for the interest of all the members of the "people", she also triggers Muḥsin's "awakening" – and thus his embracing of the nationalist cause.[26]

Pharaonic symbology was widely used in projects geared towards territorial nationalism – a nationalism deterministically defined by and centred on the authentic character of the Nile Valley and its age-old history, portrayed as unchanging over the centuries. With his natural bent for the adoration of beauty, Muḥsin is sensitive and devoted to Saniyya's beauty, as well as to the beauty of the rural landscapes he has the opportunity to admire when he returns to the country:

> The next day Muḥsin opened his eyes to the chirping of little birds. He saw the first signs of morning and of the rising sun. Everything around him was quietly coming back to life. His soul was radiant, and he felt at peace . . . the green field, the blue sky, the birds, the light, everything was smiling in the stillness. Deep within him, for the first time, he felt the beauty of life. He perceived for the first time that spirit pervading the creatures of Nature and its tranquil inhabitants. A vague, hidden feeling welled up inside him that eternity was just an extension of a moment like this.[27]

In light of this reflection, the Saniyya – Isis – "unifying" and "eternalising" Egyptian nature allegory is recomposed, proving to be the pivot around which Muḥsin's *Bildung* rotates: a natural adoration of beauty which, drawing on Redfield's words, is also inherently "moral" and legitimate. We shall come back to the self-legitimising form and "disciplining" role of the *Bildung* below. To complete the allegorical reading of the novel, we must underscore how it can also be extended to its "secondary plot" – Muṣṭafā and Saniyya's love story, which runs parallel to Muḥsin's disappointed love.

Saniyya and Muṣṭafā, a "new woman" and a young *effendī*, respectively, are destined to have their fates converge in a specific social role – owners of a business in Maḥalla al-Kubrā. Following in the wake of Wen-chin Ouyang's ideas, it is important for us to dwell on the love trope as a trope of "social legitimacy" within

the tradition of the Arabic novel, where a character's love, in romantic terms, represents a quest for love as well as for self-identification and social legitimacy.[28] In a novel dating back to 1904, Labība Hāshim had already incorporated this double meaning of love to the plot of her *Qalb al-rajul* (A Man's Heart), where 'Azīz, an aspiring businessman, attempts to marry the daughter of his mentor and sponsor.[29] However, having betrayed her (he embezzled funds with the aim of starting his own business), he loses it all – love and his social position. Though the plot adds further twists and a scene featuring a final recognition, the homology between quest for love and recognition of social legitimacy remains intact until the end. About ten years later, in 1913, even 24-year-old Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wrote a serial novel, called *Khiṭbat al-shaykh* (*The Shaykh's Engagement*), which wouldn't be published until 2016. In this posthumous and incomplete work, the theme of marriage is at the heart of a complex exchange of letters between the various characters.[30] Labība Hāshim and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's early texts are just an example of how the romantic plot was developed long before *'Awdat al-rūḥ*. As a result, it would be wrong to claim that, prior to this work, the subject of marriage for love had never been touched on by the Egyptian novel. Furthermore, we must bear in mind the dozens of novels (many of them by now forgotten) published, or Arabised, between the 1910s and the 1930s, thereby expanding the Egyptian publishing market.

However, we can credit al-Ḥakīm with a subtle, realistic psychological treatment of his character, and with a credible developmental plot. The novel presents also an objective originality in tackling the love motif by resorting to dramatised writing (the final part, with Saniyya and Muṣṭafā speaking from the balconies of their respective windows and Zannūba eavesdropping in the middle, is one of the most comical) and to the merging of two plots that unfold in parallel.

Love for the countryside: fictional settings and ideology in Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm

As previously stated, *'Awdat al-rūḥ* isolates the scenes where Muḥsin immerses himself in nature at the beginning of the second part of the novel. Muḥsin experiences nature as an immersion in the "meaning" of existence. All creatures great and small arouse in him a sense of "life" and its beauty. A scene of great inspiration, for instance, takes place in a peasant home, where Muḥsin finds a cow nursing its calf. Nearby, the peasant's son is also suckling one of her teats: "the calf and the child both seemed to be her children. What a beautiful picture! What a striking concept!"[31]

The pastoral scene is striking both in its implicit reference to another Egyptian god (Horus) and in its oblique reference to the national discourse – woven, as stated by Samah Selim and Lorenzo Casini in speaking of this novel, into the rural chapters of *'Awdat al-rūḥ*. The idea of an "Egyptian spirit" that has remained intact over the centuries and that would ensure an unchanged national character, from the pharaonic era to modern times, is clearly conjured up: "was it not an angelic Egypt with a pure heart which survived in Egypt? She had inherited, over the passing generations, a feeling of union, even *without knowing it*".[32]

As maintained by Casini, it is essential to underscore the influence of Hippolyte Taine's environmental determinism in this concept of nationalism,[33] wherein peasants are the custodians of an ancient spirit. Their songs capture Muḥsin's attention, as the atavistic sound of the past echoes within him: "was this a song or a hymn? Were they chanting a hymn for the morning, to celebrate the birth of the sun the way their ancestors did within the temples?"[34] These references to Muḥsin's feeling of wonder before the peasants, their songs and the rustic life highlight a deep connection between the young man and the life surrounding him: like the peasants' animals and like their children, his growth also appears to be guided by instinct and nature. These scenes appear to be inspired by the primordial and literal meaning of the German term *Bildung* understood as pedagogical ideal of self-development, according to a principle of development that is within every living being and, at the same time, enrolled in the harmonious order of life as a whole.[35]

In another scene, Muḥsin is taken up with thoughts of his beloved, as he wonders whether she shares the same blood as the peasants. These thoughts follow, and create a marked contrast with, the questions Muḥsin asks himself as to the identity and character of his parents, who use the word "peasants" disparagingly and never miss an opportunity to mistreat their servants:

> Wasn't he a peasant too, first and foremost? Wasn't he a peasant, a man of the earth? Wasn't he still? How had he changed? Did his clothes, his expensive walking stick, his shoes and socks, and his diamond rings alter him?
>
> Wasn't it just a set of conventions? Wasn't it his mother of Turkish heritage who had influenced his father in the name of the civilization? Yes, what right did he have now to look down on the peasant? Because the peasant farmer was poor? Was poverty a fault?[36]

When it is a matter of rural representations, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's narrative realism becomes a language expressing the author's political ideology. As explained by Casini, peasants are not subjects in this work: they are observed, listened to, occasionally venerated by Muḥsin. Guardians of the earth, they are a sort of single organism devoid of agency and point of view. They serve as a

> mirror reflecting the degree of patriotism of the various characters that come into contact with them. The different level of empathy that each character feels for the peasants reflects the specific placement of his or her social group within the national community outlined by the novel.[37]

The character that proves most hostile towards the peasants is Muḥsin's mother, representing the old Turkish aristocracy, while Muḥsin himself is closest to them. The peasants are also described – and praised – by a guest of Muḥsin's parents, a French archaeologist who converses with an English inspector on the very nature of the Egyptian people. In the archaeologist's words, as pointed out by Casini, "the tendency towards work and suffering makes the Egyptians a magnificent

industrial people for the future, distinguishing them from the European peoples, who think only of pursuing their specific personal interests".[38] The reference to Europe as "otherness" is a prevailing technique in this "pastoral" section of the novel: the Egyptian peasants are one with the land, while the European labourers tend, just as naturally, towards selfishness, towards pursuing their own aims.

Lorenzo Casini calls this technique "strategic Occidentalism", underscoring its essentialising role, useful to describe the Egyptian peasants as a unified whole, an "organic" whole – as organic as the concept of nation and of the youth's spontaneous affiliation (the emphasis on intuition and feelings is no coincidence) to the nation. At the same time, as we already saw in the "Prologue" (in a scene highlighting the unity of the *sha'b* from the doctor's perspective), the first scene of the "section" of *'Awdat al-rūḥ* set in the country also clearly shows Muḥsin's point of view and whence he looks upon the peasant life he finds so inspiring: the origin is Muḥsin's private "chamber", tastefully appointed with fine furniture. An ideal communion – with the Egyptian countryside – that remains functional to the youth's political and identity positioning without, however, "shifting" the perspective, which remains focused on the young landowner.

Bearing in mind the ideological background in the pastoral settings in *'Awdat al-rūḥ*, as well as the territorial determinism and the "objectifying" thought with regard to peasants, we can embark on an analogy with the author's second novel, *'Uṣfūr min al-sharq* (*A Sparrow from the East*). Published in 1938 and set in Paris, this novel also features a protagonist named Muḥsin. In all likelihood, it is a story about the same fictional character – although certain elements lead us to think of a narrative mask worn by the author, to represent himself in two different periods of his life – that Nedal Mousa read as a *Bildungsroman*.[39]

A comparison of the two works is fruitful from several perspectives: first of all, it helps shed light on the different nature of the two works by al-Ḥakīm, also in relation to the discourse on the *Bildungsnarrative*; second, it helps shed light on the reception of two novels often read in continuity, where they differ from each other in their ideological and formal points of view. The character of *A Sparrow from the East* is a theatre lover with a sentimental attachment to Susy, a young Frenchwoman who will leave him, and he does not evolve over the story. He tends to take on the role of catalyst of the various conversations on identity held by the characters (Ivan, the Russian exile, first among them). These conversations represent the true subject matter of the story, for which the love affair is simply a backdrop.[40]

The Parisian setting is a functional "backdrop" for these exchanges between the various characters. In the modern Arabic imaginary, Paris is the city of inspiration, of the development of critical spirit and of freedom of thought – as recalled, with didactic intent, in Haykal's autobiographical writings.[41] But while, for instance, in Haykal's diaries readers find the map of a veritable "coming-of-age itinerary" to which every young Egyptian visiting or studying in Paris was subjected,[42] in al-Ḥakīm, the same city is a sort of theatrical scenery, necessary for Muḥsin's narrative mask to stand out by contrast with the other agents – especially with the figure of André, always portrayed as radically "Other" compared to the young "Oriental".

Just like the Parisian background is not described realistically, so too the Muhsin of *A Sparrow from the East*, unlike the "first" Muhsin of *'Awdat al-rūḥ*, takes on the features of a symbolic figure. The author uses this figure to stage a debate on Egyptian identity. This debate sees the West, seen as a materialist entity, face off against the visionary ideal of a Great and spiritual East – an ideology that greatly influenced Egyptian milieus in the '30s. Al-Ḥakīm quotes and draws inspiration from Henri Bergson, from Osvald Spengler, author of the well-known *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*, 1918) – a sort of teleology of Western history centred on the idea of the definitive crisis of Western civilisation – and from Duhamel, quoted verbatim.[43]

The shift in ideological "leanings" – i.e., the dismissal of territorial Egyptian nationalism in favour of an identity inspired, to an even greater extent, by the myth of an extremely "ideal" Orient – that occurred between the drafting of *'Awdat al-rūḥ* and of *'Uṣfūr min al-sharq* (*A Sparrow from the East*, 1938) is reflected in the reference to the Egyptian revolution of the 1919. Divested of the idealism that enveloped *'Awdat al-rūḥ*, the revolution shows itself in *'Uṣfūr min al-sharq* for what it really is – and, probably, always was – in al-Ḥakīm's conservative view: an act of barbarism and an illegitimate political action:

> He could not stand the sight of blood. He had not forgotten the days of the Revolution of 1919.
>
> He was not yet twenty years old at the time. His father, a magistrate, would have liked him to become a lawyer. But he felt drawn to art and the humanities. During the revolution, he had committed himself to writing patriotic songs, which he also set to music. His friends, other young men from Cairo, sang them fervently from behind prison bars. As for him, he bore no weapons aside from his own youthful enthusiasm.
>
> He once witnessed a scene that would leave an indelible mark on his life. He saw a British soldier standing alone and surrounded by the revolutionaries, who split his head open with an iron bar. The soldier fell to the ground, his face covered in blood, his brains spattering all around. . . .
>
> That scene still haunted him: the soldier covered in his own blood. He had forgotten that the man was an enemy, an enemy of the Nation. All he remembered was that terrible scene, that gruesome death.
>
> That's when Muhsin stopped daydreaming, and was roused by André's laughing voice . . .[44]

To conclude this section of comparison between *'Awdat al-rūḥ* and *'Uṣfūr min al-sharq*, it is possible to note how, reduced to spokespersons for ideological and identity visions, the characters in *'Uṣfūr min al-sharq* do not have a narrative autonomy of their own and, therefore, it would be misleading to read this "second" Muḥsin as a *Bildungsroman* hero.[45] Quite the opposite, in its romantic treatment of love and of the revolution, as we shall see in the next sections, *'Awdat al-rūḥ* creates the telos typical of the classic *Bildungsroman*, in which the growth of the young man coincides with the idea – both romantic and conservative – of

a natural "awakening" of the protagonist in the bosom of his community and of his nation.

3.2 '*Awdat al-rūḥ* as *Künstlerroman*

A portrait of the artist as a young man? Autobiography and Bildungsnarrative *come together*

Muḥsin writes and recites verses and he prepares to pursue the humanities even in his choice of university. Faced with a sceptical student, who asks him "And what, exactly, is the future of classical studies?", Muḥsin replies with youthful hyperbole: "You mean in terms of money and wealth? . . . I don't care about money and wealth . . . I don't care about money and wealth. . . . Tomorrow we're going to be the eloquent tongue of the Nation!"[46] As suggested in the previous section, the figure of Muḥsin calls to mind the archetypical (according to Moretti) one of the young artist in the culture of the novel. Of Wilhelm Meister – who in addition to being the hero of the first and paradigmatic *Bildungsroman*, is also described by several authors, such as Varsamopoulou,[47] as the hero of a *Künstlerroman* (that is, a novel that recounts the artist's development). Thus, Muḥsin is a narrative mask for the real author, and his "journey" towards a social role of his own traverses – albeit with the addition of fictional elements – is a narration that is also autobiographical.

Reading al-Ḥakīm's biography *Zahrat al-'Umr* (*The Flower of Life*, 1943) allows us to compare Muḥsin's profile with that of the author, discovering that the two share a passion for music, poetry and reading. They also share the experience of choosing to follow their calling against the wishes of their families. In other words, reading this novel as a *Künstlerroman* (that is, a "portrait of the artist as a young man") allows us to interweave the discussion on the "translation" and adaptation of the *Bildung* form within the Arabic context, with the issue of the autobiographical aspect of the novel.[48] As shown by Hallaq[49] and Rooke,[50] phenomena such as polyphony and narrativisation in non-canonical 20th-century Arabic autobiographies on one hand, and the simulation of the autobiographical effect by means of narrative techniques (dedications, paratextual materials) on the other, are elements attesting to how modern Arabic prose and the autobiographical discourse are interwoven and communicating. In al-Ḥakīm's narration, for example, all of Chapter 9 is devoted to the figure of "Maestra Shakla", an artist and singer and the leader of a musical troupe that Muḥsin performed in as a child. The pages centring on this figure can be seen as a possible autobiographical reference and, at the same time, as a *topos* typical of the *Künstlerroman* – that is, the blossoming of the youth's talent in the wake of his encounter with his teacher.[51]

One of the most emblematic moments in the coming-of-age process of the youth's "self-narrative" is an oral classroom exam that serves as a device for a lengthy digression on the youth's dreams and expectations. Invited by his teacher

to choose a subject for an Arabic composition exercise, Muḥsin chooses love, arousing disconcertment and trepidation in his classmates:

> Perhaps his powerful feelings at that time convinced him he could not speak then at length or with pleasure on any other topic. He took the chalk at once and wrote with one burst of effort: "The topic heading is: Love".
>
> As soon as this word appeared on the blackboard, the class was in uproar and turmoil. The teacher was astonished at the insurrection of the class in front of him. He did not know the cause, yet he rapped his pen against the table for silence. He was shouting: "What's up!"
>
> He saw they were looking at the blackboard. He turned towards it himself and he saw the word "love". He could not restrain himself from screaming out in disbelief, "God, God! God's will be done. Go back to your seat. We can't allow shameless wisecracks".
>
> Muhsin was taken aback. He was not used to treatment like this from his teachers. He stood there in anxious confusion, but he had not lost that confidence and strength which impelled him to write that daring word in front of poor students who were accustomed to hearing words like "knowledge", "study", "learning" and "perseverance", but not like "love", "emotions" or "heart".[52]

In this section of the novel, Muḥsin acts as a mediator between his teacher's disciplining presence and the group's impetuousness. The way he handles and articulates the subject matter of love, his description of the functions of this feeling and the discovery of a connection between that unmentionable feeling (tormentor of youthful spirits) and the other levels of love, instantly becomes a heated subject for the class, who urge him to continue, legitimising his narration with their support:

> the class as a whole summoned the courage to say with great enthusiasm, "We want this topic! We want this topic! Speak Muhsin, speak . . .".
>
> Muhsin looked at the class. He recognized that this word had aroused a great curiosity among these young ignorant fellows . . . but he saw from the Hanbali Shaykh's appearance that there was no way to get around him.
>
> Muḥsin had an idea that revealed a certain brilliance. He took the chalk and wrote under the word "love" these lines: "Love divides into three sections: (1) love of God the High and Exalted, which is humble submission and acknowledgement of grace, (2) love of parents which is based on kinship, and (3) love of beauty which is love of the heart. . . .
>
> The shaykh turned towards the blackboard once again after putting on his spectacles. He began reading the first division, then the second. His voice had a ring of acceptance and agreement in it. But when he reached the third division, he became distressed and he hesitated again. He looked at Muhsin and said: "Erase number three!"

> . . . Finally Muhsin saw no alternative to erasing the third division, although he resolved secretly to address it during his discussion of the first two sections, as though he were comparing the causes and reasons.
>
> Thus, Shaykh Ali consented to let the word love remain on the blackboard. So Muḥsin burst into speech. The boys listened to him more attentively than in any class throughout the whole year. . . . The class fixed their eyes on Muhsin and soaked in through their eyes and ears what he said with unusual delight and joy, as though they were really benefiting somehow. Indeed it was more than that . . . much more. It seemed that they were hearing something they had all sensed for a long time but had not dared express or realized they felt . . . being for a long time but had not dared express or realized they felt . . . being ignorant of the existence of beauty in the world. They were ignorant of the heart's role in their lives. . . . They did not know the sublime meaning of life.[53]

This excerpt acts as a powerful "self-narrative" by means of which Muḥsin also produces his own self-legitimation: in his monologue, the youth pinpoints his future role in the national project – that is, his role as eloquent "tongue" of the nation.

Viewed from this perspective, his classroom speech takes on the features of a trial apprenticeship, like a civil speech on a smaller scale, in front of a group of future Egyptian citizens. However, it is also a trial aesthetic apprenticeship, and indeed – going back to Redfield's idea of the *Bildung* as aesthetic narration *par excellence*[54] – it is a speech that tends towards and speaks of beauty, setting itself up as a bearer of an "increased" value compared to itself. The composition improvised in the classroom is neither a duty nor a request, but pure inspiration. Muḥsin is the essence of the artist, the man capable of reading, with certain insight, the general meaning hidden in the individual's life. Sharing it, acting as guide to a society that is no longer content with finding well-being in its own narrow social or family circles, but that yearns for global changes.

Love, for the young man, is not so much *acted* experience as it is *cognitive* experience: the nature of Muḥsin's feeling – which, at this point in the story, he believes to be reciprocated, but in actual fact is unrequited – has the power to expand his cognitive skills.

When this feeling disappears, replaced by the harshness of reality, Muḥsin finds himself facing a new crisis, cognitive as well as sentimental in nature. In other words, Muḥsin is the romantic hero who "guides" his peers with a power conferred on him by his very feelings, thus "releasing" his peers from their condition, imbuing them with "values" learned with the heart. These features (feeling as a source of knowledge, aesthetic judgement meant, in a Kantian sense, as a bridge between cognitive and aesthetic values) lead to a Goethian concept of the aesthetic experience, which we find – in an even more explicit form – in Muḥsin's rural experiences, in the country estate he returns to for his summer holidays.

Muḥsin's "awakening"

The shift in Muḥsin's love – from his passion for Saniyya to a love of the nation's highest and most noble cause – takes place in the second part of the novel. This section includes a description of the young man's stay at his father's house in Damanhūr, followed by his return to Cairo, which will bring about the shattering of his hopes and a personal "crisis". Once in Damanhūr, Muḥsin whiles away his days waiting for a letter from Saniyya. When he finally receives a trivial message from his aunt, he convinces himself – based on nothing whatsoever – that the message was actually written by Saniyya, who hid a coded declaration of love in her kind act towards the illiterate Zannūba. This is one of the most successful and funniest parts of the novel, where we see a theatrical-type device such as the misunderstanding shed light on the unrealistic and dreamy nature of the young man's passion.

The return from Damanhūr represents a shock for Muḥsin, because he finds out that the message was written on behalf of Zannūba by a public scribe; even worse, he learns that Saniyya never thought of him, not even during the musical interludes of which he remembers every single detail. Eventually, reality wrenches the youth from his reverie: this is Muḥsin's awakening.

However, as previously mentioned, within the structure of the story this sentimental disappointment is functional to the birth of Muḥsin's civic conscience and to the development of his personal and relational maturity. In this regard, we might say that the protagonist's young age is functional to a narrative consistency that ensures the unity and progression of what is narrated. Jeff Shalan speaks of a veritable "narrative effect" of a progressive awakening, guided and accompanied by the physiological growth of becoming an adult:

> The narrative effect . . . is one of a spontaneous, almost unconscious, awakening of nationalist fervour that seems to erupt exclusively in response to Zaghlūl's forced exile. But far from a mere appendage to the main story, the depiction of this event marks, both aesthetically and ideologically, the climactic moment of the novel. And while its particular representation here might in part be accounted for in terms of narrative perspective of the youthful protagonist, who may well have experienced it in this spontaneous light, its textual significance . . . can better be explained by first attending to the story itself. For it is *there* that al-Hakim lays the figurative ground for, and from which he forges, this renewed image of the Egyptian nation and its eternal spirit miraculously reborn in the collective expression of a single moment.[55]

Clearly, then, at this point Muḥsin's youth no longer appears as a mere attribute relating to the main character but, rather, as a dynamic element capable of steering him towards a complete "merging" with the national cause. According to Moretti, it is more than just youth – it is a "symbolic shape" of the Egyptian nation. A nation in the making, ready to open up in the most natural way, like adolescence turns into youth and youth into maturity. The naturalness of the "becoming" in this type

of narration represents the true symbolic force of the novel, produced not by the mere choice in subject matter, nor by the decision to set the story during such a meaningful historical time for the nation (the nationalist demonstrations, as we will see further on, are mentioned only marginally and at the end), as much as by the fact that the experience of these demonstrations places itself at the apex of the parabola of an individual growth, thus producing a connection between individual path and national parabola.

In the Egyptian literary scene, Muḥsin is the first character to embody the "ethics of self-sacrifice"[56] by virtue of which the individual gives up his own benefit in favour of a common ideal from which, in the end, he will find himself benefitting. As elucidated by Noorani,[57] this ethics is inherently "aesthetic", because a fundamental condition of eligibility to attain it is that of having cultivated one's spirit to the sense of beauty (an aspiration expressed by several *nahḍawī* intellectuals, from Haykal[58] all the way down to Aḥmad Amīn[59]). A process ensuring the individual the ability to make moral choices that may be personally detrimental, yet beneficial to the community at large. On the strength of this, Noorani reads *'Awdat al-rūḥ* as a novel leaning towards an aesthetic citizenship, and young Muḥsin expresses the model of a boy working on the education of his emotions, embodying that very aesthetics/ethics of self-sacrifice that makes up one of the central cores of the novel:

> The central element in *'Awdat al-rūḥ* is the reversion of the primordial desire, which constitutes the self, the relation between private and public, and the nature of Egyptian identity and collective agency. Love of beauty, which is always natural beauty, effects an automatic immersion in and unity with nature.[60]

In light of the preceding, it is worthwhile to reflect on Muḥsin's "revolutionary" transition; immediately following his romantic disappointment, he begins devoting himself to clandestine activities, in favour of the popular liberation movement led by Saʿd Zaghlūl:

> No one knew for sure whether the three, Abduh, Muhsin and Salim, had joined a secret society, or what. The room on the roof had become a depository for awesome heaps of bundles of revolutionary broadsides. Every evening a cart drawn by a donkey stopped at the door of number 35 Salama Street.[61]

The revolutionary activities carried out by Muḥsin and 'Abduh are not described in detail: indeed, the scene immediately following this reference to the clandestine activities is the one centring on the "reunion" of the "people" in prison. Going back to al-Hakīm's second novel – *'Uṣfūr min al-sharq*, set in Paris – we have noticed how the author deals with the same historical moment in a completely different fashion.[62]

While in *'Awdat al-rūḥ* the romantic disappointment is a necessary growth experience, in *'Uṣfūr min al-sharq*, the dyscrasia between dream and reality

seems to be the permanent condition within which the young protagonist lives, with no development prospects. And again, while in the first novel the individual "good" is replaced by the greater value of "doing good" for the community, in the second novel there is no longer an actual community like that of the *sha'b* to refer to. The only micro-community comprises André and Germaine, a couple of French proletarians who host Muḥsin and who, in the early pages of the novel, are portrayed in their domestic dimension, busy speaking of their working life, of the condition of the working class in France, and reading the daily newspaper *L'Humanité*.[63] Though fond of this couple, "the second" Muḥsin does not share their ideological horizon, and the relationship established between the two French characters (especially André, inspired by a real friend of the author's) and the young Egyptian is permeated by the filter of "otherness".

Ultimately, while the "first" Muḥsin represents the symbolic character of the young nation, the second Muḥsin is a fluctuating character – uncertain and, to the very end, wavering between two visions of the world which hide behind the labels of "East" and "West" (limiting themselves with these terms to concealing semblances of ideologies in mutual contrast).

In both novels, however, despite being a "moment" in the protagonist's development, the revolution is not the cornerstone that deteriorates his point of view, which remains the one examined previously with regard to Muḥsin's interactions and intuitions in the country – an elitist and, for all intents and purposes, anti-democratic point of view. In other words, the paradox of a "revolutionary" and nationalist novel – wherein no narrative space is allocated to the revolution as such, and wherein nationalism is an exclusive prerogative of certain social classes – took shape with *Return of the Spirit*.

Finally, the cyclic structure of the story also helps seal the idea of a "revolution" in an astronomical rather than political sense. That is, the subject's achievement of a completed path (such as an orbit) around a fulcrum. In this case, the "fulcrum" around which the events rotate is the very spirit of Egypt – around which the members of Muḥsin's "community" will end up gravitating. Indeed, the novel ends with the characters of the "*sha'b*" (that is, Muḥsin's chosen family), with the sole exception of Zannūba, reunited once more – in the State prisons. Hailing the renewed "spirit of the nation", however, the novel does not envisage a possibility of action for all but, rather, recounts an aesthetic and political education that is the prerogative of just a few.

Künstlerroman *as a normative* genre

The *Künstlerroman* is merely the representation, to the highest degree, of a growth process organised within the tension between two poles: subject and society. The construction and autonomy of the former element – the effect is even more apparent when the subject is an artist – materialise to the detriment of the latter, and vice versa: the tension of the changing subject makes the most of and at the same time contains the two principles of inwardness and mobility – two characters that make youth a "specific, material sign" of the new era.[64] They can only be depicted

as they are subject to the disciplining action of society, which allows them to take a definitive *shape*. At the end of the coming-of-age novel, the youth fits "naturally" into the social context, thus reconciling his main aspirations as a modern individual: to be free, but not alone.

Therefore, *'Awdat-al rūḥ* works like a *Bildungsroman* precisely because it features the creation of a symbolic continuity between the subject's secret aspirations (the desire to become an artist, to be the tongue of the people) and the social dimension within which the subject ends up being received. In other words, that of the "people" in the double dimension the term holds in the novel – from small group to which one belongs to *sha'b miṣrī*, the Egyptian people. In Muḥsin's case, the "disciplining" action – which gives *shape* to the magma of passion and energy enclosed in his adolescent nature – is wielded by a specific type of nationalism, the same territorial nationalism that enjoyed great favour in the 1920s and that we spoke of in the previous chapter, as well as the search for an identity within the national system.[65]

The novel can also be defined as a *Künstlerroman*, because in the excerpts relating to his student experience, Muḥsin is clearly revealed as an individual who "resists" society-imposed productivity, conversely declaring his devotion to art. In other words, Muḥsin self-legitimises his choice – becoming an artist of the word, enrolling (against his own self-interest) in the humanities at university and becoming the tongue of the nation – as a choice at once ethical and aesthetic. Through the progressive narration of Muḥsin's "awakening", which ideally anticipates that of the nation, the author creates a homology between two paths seen as organically – a personal awakening and a national one.

We should highlight the peculiar philosophical base of this homology: as previously stated, in the hero Muḥsin we find the ideal – romantic, elitist, Schillerian[66] – according to which the masses need to be led by an inspired man, educated to beauty and capable of educating his passions precisely with the aim of avoiding a popular revolution and seizure of power by the masses. On bases close to German idealism and to Schillerian theorising, al-Ḥakīm's *Bildung* seems to be expressed through art, and to take on the shape of the "gradual", organic, aesthetic and ethical education (where his feelings for the nation naturally reveal themselves to the hero after he has encountered beauty) that is organised like a sort of alternative to a violent, mass revolution. The process and double *telos* (the one marked by the becoming of the hero-nation) are led by a principle of organic growth and natural "awakening", miming the organicist idea of people and nation, which became widespread thanks to Herder.[67]

Thus, it would be a mistake to label al-Ḥakīm as an author close to the democratic aspirations of the masses, only by virtue of his reference to the Revolution of 1919 in *'Awdat al-rūḥ* or of his publishing a much later book like *Thawrat al-shabāb* (*The Revolt of the Young*).[68] Reversing the perspective according to which the novel "reflects reality", the interpretation of *'Awdat al-rūḥ* as *Bildungsnarrative* and *Künstlerroman* places the agency of this form of fiction, as well as its independence in the impact on its readership and critics, front and centre stage.

The alignment between the expansion of the young man's life and the "becoming" of the Egyptian nation shows how the critical orientation defined by Boes as more "universalist" with regard to the *Bildungsroman*[69] as a "mobile" genre (capable of migrating and contextualising itself differently) in conflict with a too "essentialist" and "Germano-centric" vision of the genre proves successful when it comes to the Egyptian novel. In the following chapters, we will find further theoretical references to this approach as the field of investigation gradually broadens to encompass less linear, no-longer allegorical growth paths, or open "counter-narrations" of the national apprenticeship.

However, "universalist" criticism has also shown that, despite the many readaptations of the *Bildung* form – in extra-European, colonial and postcolonial context – the aspect historically linked to German idealism and to the Schillerian aesthetic of research, on behalf of each and every individual, of an "ideal" man and of the ensuing "struggle of the individual" so as to reconcile an ideal and an empirical self, remains a fundamental aspect of some of the texts that are perceived as more influent in this literary tradition.[70]

The concept that most effectively conveys this aesthetic and ethical dimension in Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's novel aimed, as we have said, at expressing the birth of a national feeling (in the romantic sense), is the "aesthetic citizenship" used by Yaseen Noorani in his *Culture and Hegemony in the Colonial Middle East*.

> What I am calling the aesthetic dimension of citizenship is the necessity in the ideal of nationality that there be some process by which subjective feelings and impulses come to be constituted in such a way that the expression of individuality will be at the same time participation in a *moral order*.[71]

In compliance with the participation in this "moral order", the *telos* underlying the novel is both an ideal coming-of-age story and a story of the self, in an overlapping of discourses (fictional and autobiographical) which, according to Linda Hutcheon, are inherent in the *Künstlerroman*.[72] In its normative role, in its clarifying the "growing to adulthood" of Muḥsin, who spans the revolution without being swept away by it, in its telling of Muḥsin's "becoming the prophet" of the language of the nation, *'Awdat al-rūḥ* – upon closer inspection – takes on the anti-revolutionary role held, according to Moretti, by the German *Bildungsroman* at the time of its appearance, in 18th-century Germany.[73] Not only does al-Ḥakīm's text appear ideologically close to Schillerian idealism; it also appears functional to a narration of the "people" as a mass to be disciplined and guided. The main character's personal growth, intellectual and emotional alike, emerges as an "awakening" of the individual conscience, which in turn leads to a fleeting revolutionary "moment", instantly overcome by the narration via the "recomposition" of the *sha'b* in the penal institution. Muḥsin's character goes through the revolutionary experience just as he had gone through his painful love experience – as a compulsory passage in his ethical and aesthetic apprenticeship.

84   'Awdat al-rūḥ (Return of the Spirit)

Notes

1 See Mondal, Anshuman, *Nationalism and Post-colonial Identity. Culture and Ideology in India and Egypt*, Routledge-Curzon, New York and London 2003, p. 170.
2 Ibid., p. 170.
3 Noorani, Yaseen, *Culture and Hegemony in the Colonial Middle East*, Palgrave, New York 2010, p. 163.
4 Elsadda, Hoda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel in Egypt*, p. 36.
5 Noorani, Yaseen, *Culture and Hegemony*, p. 163.
6 Hutchins, William, *Tawfiq al-Hakim: A Reader's Guide*, Rienner Boulder Publishers, London 2003, p. 11.
7 Ibid. See also Colla, Elliott, *Conflicted Antiquities*, p. 155.
8 Ya'qūb, Imīl, *Qāmūs al-mustalaḥāt al-lughawiyya wa-'l-adabiyya. 'Arabī, Inkilīzī, Faransī*, Dār al-'Ilm li-'l-Malāyīn, Bayrūt 1987, p. 218.
9 Redfield, Marc, *Phantom Formations*, p. 10.
10 See the "Introduction" to this Volume, pp. 7–9.
11 Bruner, Jerome, "The Narrative Construction of Reality", p. 27.
12 For the comparison with these two European novels, see Hutchins, William, *Tawfiq al-Hakim*, pp. 11–12.
13 Ibid., p. 11.
14 Ibid., p. 34.
15 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, translated by William M. Hutchins, Three Continents Press, Washington 1990, p. 27. For the Arabic see: *'Awdat al-rūḥ*, Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, Bayrūt 1984, pp. 3–4.
16 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, pp. 1–24.
17 Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità Arabe. Nazione, narrazione e nuovi soggetti nel romanzo egiziano*, Mesogea, Messina 2013, p. 182.
18 Mondal, Anshuman, *Nationalism and Postcolonial Identity*, pp. 179–185.
19 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, p. 31. For the Arab text see *'Awdat al-rūḥ*, p. 11.
20 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, p. 159.
21 Van Leeuven, Richard, "The Lost Heritage: Generation Conflicts in Four Arab Novels", in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Alienation or Integration of Arab Youth between Family, State and Street*, Curzon, Richmond 2000, pp. 189–206.
22 Rooke, Tetz, "Escape from the Family: A Theme in Arab Autobiography", in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Alienation or Integration of Arab Youth. Between Family, State and Street*, Curzon, Richmond 2000, p. 214.
23 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, p. 161.
24 The scene with the two youths speaking to one another across balconies in a multi-level home returns in *Uṣfūr min al-sharq*, where the older Muḥsin speaks from his window to the French girl with whom he will have an affair – a conversation that will remind her of the one between Saniyya and Uncle Salim. This intertextual reference corroborates the fact that we are speaking of two stages in the life of the same autobiographically inspired character.
25 At the time the novel was being written, sculptor Maḥmūd Mukhṭār (who inaugurated his most famous work, *Nahḍat Miṣr*, in 1928) was tackling subjects such as *Isis* and *The Bride of the Nile*, portraying the essence of the nation (the "spirit" of the nation that he had learned to extol during the years of his Parisian studies, when he associated with exponents of the Wafd Party exiled in France) in the guise of very young girls.
26 Al-Ra'ī, 'Alī, *Dirasāt fī 'l-riwāya al-miṣriyya*, Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-'l-Nashr, al-Qāhira 1964, p. 107.
27 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, p. 171.

28 Ouyang, Wen-chin, *Poetics of Love in the Arabic Novel. Nation-State, Modernity and Tradition*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2012, pp. 149–158.

29 See Booth, Marilyn, "Women and the Emergence of the Arabic Novel", p. 142–153; Paniconi, Maria Elena, "Women's Fictional Writing and Social Morality: A Reading of *Qalb al-rajul* (Man's Heart, 1904) by Labībah Hāshim", in Jolanda Guardi and Maria Elena Paniconi (eds.), *Nahḍa Narratives, Oriente Moderno*, 99 (2019), pp. 136–156.

30 See: Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *Khiṭbat al-shaykh*, Dār al-Kutub wa-'l-Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya, al-Qāhira 2017.

31 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, p. 169.

32 Ibid., p. 170.

33 Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità Arabe,* pp. 185–199.

34 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, p. 172.

35 Hartung, Heike, *Ageing, Gender, and Illness in Anglophone Literature. Narrating Age in the Bildungsroman*, Routledge, London and New York and London, 2016, p. 2.

36 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, p. 162.

37 Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità Arabe*, p. 192. Translation by Daniela Cristina Innocenti.

38 Ibid., p. 195.

39 Mousa, Nedal, "The Arabic Bildungsroman: A Generic Appraisal", pp. 223–240.

40 Paniconi, Maria Elena, "'*Uṣfūr min al-sharq* by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm and the Impossible Homecoming to the Imaginary East", in Fréderic Bauden (ed.), *Tropics of travel, 4*, Peeters, Louvain 2015, pp. 109–123.

41 See Paniconi, Maria Elena, "Scrivere di sé. Esperienze di Modernità Culturale", pp. 295–313.

42 Ibid.

43 Paniconi, Maria Elena, "'*Uṣfūr min al-sharq* by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm", pp. 114–118.

44 Al-Ḥakīm, Tawfīq, *'Uṣfūr min al-sharq*, al-Sharika al-ʿĀlamiyya li-'l-kitāb, Bayrūt 2008, pp. 10–11. Translation by the Author and Daniela Innocenti.

45 Paniconi, Maria Elena, "'*Uṣfūr min al-sharq* by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm", pp. 121–122.

46 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, p. 79.

47 Varsamopoulou, Evy, *The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman and the Aesthetic of the Sublime*, Ashgate, Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT 2002, pp. xi–xiii.

48 On *Künstlerroman* see Buckley, Jerome H., *Seasons of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1974, p. 13; Kern, Stephen, *The Modernist Novel: A Critical Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, pp. 40–45.

49 Hallaq, Boutros, "Autobiography and Polyphony", in Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor and Stefan Wild (eds.), *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, Saqi Books, London 1998, pp. 192–206.

50 Rooke, Tetz, "Autobiography, Modernity and Translation", in Said Faiq (ed.), *Cultural encounters in translation from Arabic*, Clevedon, Buffalo 2004, pp. 40–50.

51 Buckley, Jerome Hamilton, *Seasons of Youth*, p. 13.

52 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, p. 80.

53 Ibid., p. 81. For the Arabic see *'Awdat al-rūḥ*, pp. 128–130.

54 Redfield, Marc, *Phantom Formations*, p. 10.

55 Shalan, Jeff, "Writing the Nation", p. 233.

56 On the centrality of the notion in the *Bildungsnarrative* in the idea of a fully "aesthetic" literary *genre* see Redfield, Marc, *Phantom Formations*, pp. 4–12.

57 Noorani, Yaseen, *Culture and Hegemony*, p. 156.

58 See Haykal, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Thawrat al-adab, Maktaba li-'l-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya*, al-Qāhira 1965, pp. 105–120.

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59 See Amīn, Aḥmad, *Ḥayātī*, Dār al-Maʿārif li-ʻl-Ṭibāʿ wa-ʻl-Nashr, Tūnis 2006, p. 111–114.
60 Noorani, Yaseen, *Culture and Hegemony*, p. 163.
61 al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *Return of the Spirit*, p. 276.
62 Paniconi, Maria Elena, "'*Uṣfūr min al-Sharq* by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm and the Impossible Homecoming to the Imaginary East", pp. 111–114.
63 Ibid., pp. 25–26.
64 Moretti, Franco, *The Way of the World*, p. 5.
65 Ibid., p. 6.
66 Noorani, like Boes, quotes Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* to underscore how art and beauty, since the shaping of a romantic discourse on the education of man, have had a role that is not merely decorative but, conversely, proactive in the shaping of the individual's moral autonomy. See Noorani, Yaseen, *Culture and Hegemony*, pp. 156–163.
67 Boes, Tobias, *Formative Fiction*, pp. 51–52. On Herder's influence on the spread of the organic development of individual potential through interrelations with the environment, see Kontje, Todd, *The German Bildungsroman*, pp. 2–3.
68 Al-Hakim, Tawfiq, *The Revolt of the Young: Essays by Tawfiq al-Hakim*, translated by Mona Radwan, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse and New York, 2015. For the Arabic see: *Thawrat al-shabāb*, Maṭābiʿ al-Ahrām al-Tijāriyya, al-Qāhira, 1962, pp. 105–120.
69 See the "Introduction" to this volume, pp.
70 See Esty, Jed, *Unseasonable Youth*, pp. 5–7.
71 Noorani, Yaseen, *Culture and Hegemony*, p. 156.
72 Hutcheon, Linda, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Canada 1980, pp. 11–13.
73 In the first chapter of *The Way of the World*, Franco Moretti describes as follows the normative function of the *Bildungsroman*: "[the *Bildungsroman* is] one of the most harmonious solutions ever offered to a dilemma conterminous with modern bourgeois civilization: the conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization". (Moretti, Franco, *The Way of the World*, pp. 15–16).

4 A personal, feminist, anti-colonial awakening

Al-Bāb al-maftūḥ (*The Open Door*) by Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt

Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt (1923–1996), novelist, academic, political activist and author of short stories and essays, is an undisputed point of reference for the literature of independent Egypt. After graduating in English literature from Cairo University, she obtained her PhD from ʿAyn Shams University, where she was subsequently appointed professor of English literature. She was jailed for the first time in 1949, for supporting the Marxist groups at Cairo University, and again in 1981 alongside thousands of other citizens for protesting peace between Egypt and Israel. Twice married and twice divorced, even after her incarcerations she remained a socialist and nationalist intellectual, an academic, an author who left us, among other writings, an autobiographical work like *Ḥamlat taftīsh. Awrāq shakhṣiyya* (*The Search: Personal Papers*), of significant documentary value.[1]

Her first novel, *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* (*The Open Door*) was published in 1960. Like al-Ḥakīm's ʿ*Awdat al-rūḥ* (1933, *Return of the Spirit* 1990), the novel intertwines the individual and national dimensions: while Muḥsin's trajectory led the reader to the Revolution of 1919, Laylā's (that is, the main character in this novel by al-Zayyāt) leads us to Port Said during the 1956 bombings. The protagonist's story follows the twists and turns of the national history: from the popular protest marches against British colonial rule in 1946, to the 1952 Coup d'état by the Free Officers Movement, to the Tripartite Aggression, namely the invasion of Egypt in 1956 by Israel, followed by the United Kingdom and France. In particular, this last event is told from the perspective of the military actions on the Port Said front.

The narrative voice, external like in al-Ḥakīm's ʿ*Awdat al-rūḥ*, generally focuses on the character of Laylā, with the exception of the three central chapters of the novel (Chapter 10 through Chapter 12), where it shifts to the allegorical character of Ḥusayn, to whom Laylā ends up forming a sentimental attachment. These chapters provide readers with the necessary information to understand the cultural and personal background of the character who will manage to "compose" Laylā's contradictions and waverings, accompanying her on the final stretch of her *telos* of psychological and moral growth. Many critics, including Dinah Manisty, Dalia Abudi and Lindsey Moore, have greeted this text as a female *Bildungsroman*,[2] while Ferial Ghazoul emphasises the historical context within which this journey takes shape, describing the novel as a "great anti-colonialist work".[3] Drawing on the Jamesonian definition of the postcolonial novel as a national allegory, Moore

describes it as an "allegory of national liberation, though masquerading as a *Bildungsroman*".[4] As we will see from what follows, the interpretation of the novel as a national allegory is completely justified by the text itself, finding a foothold in the aforementioned character of Ḥusayn, the last of the three male figures the girl meets and who act as "mediators" in her shift from the private, family space (more and more narrow and unfair to her) to the public and political one.

4.1 Opening the canon: the first Arab female *Bildung*

The fact that Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt's first novel shares the definition of *Bildungsroman* with al-Ḥakīm's novel, whose anti-revolutionary ideological foundation we have previously discussed, does not imply a similarity between the works from the points of view of content and structure. As stated in the introduction, the main prerequisites for talking about *Bildung* are the character's young age, the fact that certain things happen in his or her life and, last but not least, a *teleology* – that is, the presence of an ultimate purpose in the story told. The teleology of this female storytelling is geared, as pointed out by Moore, "towards a bottom-up, comprehensive and, if necessary, violent, revolution".[5] In Laylā's experience, the revolution embodies the subversion of a pre-established order, in the private and family sphere as well as in the public and political one: the whole story can be read as a slow preparation towards the great final tableau, wherein the scenes of civil resistance in Port Said and the sacrifice of young lives for the nation that takes place within that context represent the backdrop to the crucial act of Laylā's personal liberation. By breaking an engagement entered into without true love, Laylā becomes independent both of paternal authority and that of her betrothed, Ramzī – and she does so by leaving behind the domestic sphere and entering a collective framework. Thus, from a narrative point of view, Laylā's story marks the exit of women from the cult of domesticity – the dimension investigated, among others, by Beth Baron, Hoda Elsadda and Lucia Sorbera, for whom the domestic space becomes, in many speeches by the nationalist intellectuals and leaders of the *Nahḍa*, a metaphor for the nation itself. Baron analyses the "domestic" figures and the distribution of roles within this modern idea of domesticity, where founding fathers, sibling bonds and mothers as domestic angels all take on symbolic meaning. Baron highlights how the middle-class couple becomes a sort of recasting of the old model of domestic segregation, a model that brings a new and socially more acceptable form to the logic of separation.[6] Elsadda shows how opposition to the recognition of women's rights, sought after by women, had already been put in place towards the end of the 19th century on the basis of evolutionist and deterministic theories – among which Herbert Spencer's beliefs played a key role – by the *nahḍawī* intellectuals. Elsadda further points out how this opposition was inscribed in the model of "new domesticity" advocated by Egyptian nationalists like Qāsim Amīn.[7] Finally, Sorbera puts these studies into perspective by speaking of a "myth of domesticity" as a concept of modernity: in this reformed "domestic space", though women would have been assigned the task of capable managers, the internal roles (redefined based on a fundamentally patriarchal separation logic) still would not have brought about

equal rights.[8] Thus, while the revolution is nothing but a passage in the young man's aesthetic and political apprenticeship in al-Ḥakīm's *Return of the Spirit*, in Laylā's story, written 30 years later, the revolution makes up the backbone of the tale. What's more, the story itself *is* the revolution, because it has a strong desire to unfold within the rejection of a series of myths inherited from Arabic cultural modernisation, within which the patriarchy had used certain theories of Western evolutionist and deterministic thought as well as the local reformist pushes to renegotiate and renew its power.

The novel had a significant impact on the general public, thanks in part to the contribution of the female perspective (a definitely innovative – albeit not wholly unprecedented – element on the Egyptian literary scene) and to the fact that the author narrates a generational political experience. The fact that the novel traces a parallel between the reawakening of the protagonist and the reawakening of the nation is also likely to have contributed to its popularity.[9] However, in spite of a favourable reception, the novel's appearance also sparked much negative criticism, revealing a certain resistance on the part of Egyptian critics – largely male – to accept a work signed by a woman who showed herself to be "immoderate in [her] use of the colloquial", as the critic 'Abbās al-'Aqqād described the author.[10]

In *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*, we find a painstaking reconstruction of student activism in the 1950s, an activism which, as pointed out by Abdallah[11] and underscored by Booth in the afterword to the English translation,[12] was closely linked to the war activity in the Suez Canal region.[13]

Most critics saw the novel as the first, canonical "female *Bildungsroman*" written by a female Arab writer, though this definition requires its own critical debate. As noted by Felski, in recent decades the category of "female *Bildungsroman*" itself has been debated by feminist scholarship. While Fraiman clearly expressed the contradiction in terms inherent to the very notion of this category,[14] other critics have shown how, in the feminist and proto-feminist novel, even the plots traditionally dedicated to women – mainly love stories – have always served as a starting point for materials which (despite their deceiving appearances) went well beyond matters of the heart. As Jane Austen teaches us, the financial motive and quest for social ascent were at the foundation of the marriage institution, in 19th-century England as in early 20th-century Egypt. As a result, the plots centring on marriages – even before the novel at hand was published – also tell of female ambition, self-promotion and the quest for emancipation.[15]

The debate surrounding the possibility of speaking of "female *Bildungsroman*" or not can be traced back to Adrienne Rich's controversial interpretation of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, where the novel is described as a "fairy tale" rather than as a *Bildungsroman*,[16] as well as to the issues raised by Joanna Russ in a 1972 article questioning the very notion of "plot" – a notion which, in her opinion, had been modelled over time on male ("Our literary myths are for heroes, not heroines") parameters (possibility, mobility, autonomy).[17] Twelve years before Russ asked "What Can a Heroine Do?", *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* showed how in the late-1940s and 1950s Egypt a character like Laylā – an Egyptian teenage girl – could fall in love, join street protests and be punished for this by her father, get

engaged, go out with her *shilla* (small group, social circle) of girlfriends and talk about everything (from international politics to the ongoing changes in the social life of the country) without the plot deviating from general criteria of plausibility. Contextualised within these reflections offered by international feminist scholars, Laylā's story cannot but appear like a bold challenge to the generic and formal "boundaries" imposed on women's writing – international as well as Arabic.

Though undoubtedly already present in Egypt at the time this novel was published, literature written by women was, as Booth reminds us, "marginalised" also by leading male figures in the field of Egyptian literature. The emblematic case is that of the forward-thinking intellectual and writer Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, who viewed the works by his student Suḥayr Qalamāwī, a writer and intellectual in her own right, as "genuinely female" – thus relegating them to the margins of the literary field.[18] Al-Zayyāt's text has contributed to oppose these dynamics of more or less direct marginalisation, becoming an invaluable legacy for women writers such as Sakīna Fuʾād, Raḍwā ʿĀshūr, Salwā Bakr and Nawāl al-Saʿdāwī. Indeed, each of these Egyptian authors pitted herself against the trope of the "coming-of-age young woman" – sometimes illustrating its "permanent" metamorphosis, like in Raḍwā ʿĀshūr's novel *Faraj* (2008);[19] sometimes exploring storytelling as a possible means to change the female condition, like in Salwā (Salwa) Bakr's *Al-ʿaraba al-dhahabiyya la taṣʿad ilā al-samāʾ* (*The Golden Chariot*, 1995);[20] and, last but not least, sometimes telling – in a provocative fashion and in the guise of a parody – the formative years of a subject traditionally left out of the canon such as that of the prostitute,[21] like Saʿdāwī did in *Imrāʾa ʿinda nuqṭat al-ṣifr* (*A Woman at Point Zero*, 1973).[22] Al-Zayyāt could only avail herself of "male" models of coming-of-age youths, like the protagonists of the novels by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, Yaḥyā Haqqī or Ṭāhā Ḥusayn – characters called on to *innervate* the Egyptian quest for modernity in their tension towards European otherness. The narrations of their crises upon returning to their country represent, as we shall see more in depth in the next chapter, an enactment of the tensions – whether internal or external to the subject – generated by the search for a modernity that proves difficult to attain, if not downright out of reach.

It is acknowledged that al-Zayyāt "founded" a model of the female coming-of-age: Manisty describes *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* as a "landmark in women's writing in Egypt";[23] Abd al-Razzāq ʿĪd names it as foundational of the Egyptian female novel ("taʾsīs li-ʾl-riwāya al-nisāʾiyya al-miṣriyya"), underscoring how the title's metaphor of the "open door" is ascribable, on one hand, to Laylā's "entrance" into the area of political activism and anti-colonial resistance, while on the other it can be traced back to the entrance of female writers into the canon of the Egyptian literary novel.[24]

The author chooses to tell her story moving from the marginal point of view of a female student who, 11 years old at the start of the novel, is a daughter of Cairo's lower middle class. Readers follow Laylā in her daily life, at school, seeing her closed in her sanctuary-room or in the company of a gaggle of girlfriends busy speaking a language full of youthful jargon and expressions typical of the student ambience in the 1950s. According to Booth, the vivid, realistic nature of the

language, alongside the female – and thus marginal – perspective in the novel triggered a change in a canon dominated by male presence and the male perspective:

> Referring to a body of literature and other art that is recognized as emblematic of the dominant ideology, values, and organization of social forces in a given society, a canon is thus inseparable from struggles over political power and economic and social processes and structures. . . . A canon cannot be a fixed entity but rather is a process, a site of struggle over the power to name what is central to cultural and political definition. The canon of Arabic Literature in the Twentieth century, like that of any literature, is always subject to pressure and always in re-formation. . . . Women writers have had to fight their marginality – their marginalization – but they have also used marginality as a privileged position, one that widens their gaze as a privileged position.[25]

In the novel, we find a self-conscious reference to the double value underlying the insularity of the female position, which is marginal yet privileged due to its autonomy compared to other dynamics prevailing in cultural production. This dimension is summed up by the metaphor of Laylā's room – both a reification of the seclusion enforced on her by her family and the ultimate sanctuary, a suitable place to collect the girl's thoughts, imagination and first sentimental and sexual desires. Laylā's story unfolds through this marginal perspective which is, however, an advocate of potential empowerment.

Laylā does not have access to the "mobility" and freedom of movement typical of the growth – indeed, its *conditio sine qua non* – of the male protagonist. Her growth – as often happens in the female coming-of-age story – is more inward facing[26] and characterised by sudden departures from the ultimate purpose of self-determination. False steps and temporary self-deceptions follow one another before reaching maturation and moral independence, here undeniably fashioned on the progressive narration and optimism typical of the *Bildungsroman* in its classic form. In truth, the end of the novel has actually been regarded as far too optimistic and celebratory, if not downright "disturbing",[27] because 'Abd al-Nāṣir's repressive policies were already apparent in 1960, and the triumphalist tone with which the story ends has been seen as disregarding the true conditions of Egyptian politics at that moment in time. However, the symbolic force of the novel lies perhaps in the too-literal interpretation of the model of the "successful" *Bildung*, wherein Laylā's path merges with that of the "crowds pushing in front of them, too. A huge, victorious wave sweeping all before it"[28]. Thus, the final image of the book is that of a collective self, unprecedented and liberating, within which Laylā's sense of self and her new awareness of her own strength and will converge.

The filter of the autobiographical tendency in the (re)writing of the nation

Al-Bāb al-maftūḥ must also be seen within a transnational Arabic context – that is, the framework of the 1960s which, as pointed out by Sabri Hafez, conveys an

image of the nation that increasingly finds its embodiment in the "middle-class urban woman", a subject that became a symbol of empowerment and modernisation at that very moment in time.[29] However, Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt – in a more radical fashion compared to the authors mentioned by Hafez, like Fu'ād al-Takarlī and Ḥaydar – translated the agency of this new female subject into the narrative focus and language in which the characters express themselves (a highly gendered and generationally determined language).

The author's code of choice is undoubtedly that of social realism, and the typecasting of the characters by means of colloquial language represents a literary quality required by this code.[30] Thus, from a linguistic point of view, *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* boasts an all-new guise, voicing the way of speaking of the young activists and students engaged in the anti-colonial movements of the 1940s and 1950s – earning the novel another definition, that of *riwāyat jīl* ("generational novel"). Conversely, from a structural point of view, the novel seems to look to the past, to the (also European) tradition of the "classic" coming-of-age novel and to a narrative consistency for which the 1960s language of experimentalism would soon create difficulties. We must also bear in mind that the Egyptian literary landscape had already seen the first wave of experimentalism. In 1959, just a year before *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* was published, Maḥfūẓ's "controversial" novel, *Awlād ḥarātinā* (*Children of our alley*), had adopted – for the first time ever – an anti-realistic and completely allegorical language, dismissing the traditional setting of the great realistic portrayal in favour of a complex, non-historical allegory encompassing references both to the religious environment and to that of temporal power, with its foundational myths and its transmission dynamics.[31] Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm's book *Tilka al-rā'iḥa* (*That Smell*, 1966) was published a few years after *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*. This book, which represented a break with the dominant literary style, would launch a new season of experimentalism, rising – in the critical narration of modern Egyptian fiction – to the ranks of manifesto of a new literary sensibility.[32] The novel gained great popularity with readers, a success only strengthened by the 1963 film version directed by Henry Barakat. Over the years, *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* has continued to establish itself as a bold writing model, capable of tackling taboo topics like the female body's growing changes during adolescence or that of female desire and its central role in a marriage. Hala Badri thus recalls the relationship between this text and the women of her generation:

> The women around me were quite thankful to this woman who had been able to express an experience that they could not articulate out loud though it was common among them. Thus, *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* did not simply broach a simple signification; it sparked heated debate in many homes, among them mine – just an ordinary home in Cairo.[33]

Unlike Muḥsin's male upbringing, modelled on a young student and aspiring *effendī* in the first two decades of the 1900s, already independent and "mobile" on the spatial and social plane, Laylā's upbringing passes through knowledge of

the female body and of the limits (*ḥudūd*) it imposes on women. It is undeniable that the paths of these two youths are partly modelled on autobiographical experience; indeed, Hutchins numbers both of them among the "autobiographical fiction" foundational to the panorama of the 20th-century Egyptian novel.[34] Al-Ḥakīm and al-Zayyāt take different approaches to their autobiographical material. While Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm transposes certain autobiographical traits onto a very young Muḥsin, born virtually a few years after the author himself,[35] al-Zayyāt plays around more noticeably with her protagonist's age, so as to ensure a youthful life span that takes place between the two significant dates of 1946 and 1956. In an interview with two editors of the magazine *Alif*, the author explained how the scenario of the 1946 protest set at the beginning of the story is drawn from personal experience.[36] Hannah Davis Taïeb traces the aspiration to reconnect with a broader social body – often expressed in al-Zayyāt's autobiographical writings – back to an impetus with a double political value:

> The desire to take shelter inside (the house) and the contradictory desire to drown oneself in the people outside are emotions emerging from the plight of the *bourgeoisie* or, in this case, the *petite bourgeoisie* . . . as well as out of the feminine predicament. The leap into the arms of a larger community is a childhood emotion but also a conscious political stance.[37]

Following first-hand experience of this need to overcome boundaries linked to both class and gender, the author recreates the same need in her fictional character, 11-year-old Laylā. This fact is indicative of the author's explicit desire to map out Laylā's education as a more meaningful arc, chronologically speaking, compared to the one she herself experienced first-hand – an arc that took place between the 1946 protests and the Port Said bombings by the Anglo-French forces ten years later. The complex making of the novel, which was initially meant to be called *Four Years* and tell of a single segment of Laylā's youthful history,[38] is per se a demonstration of how writing was – for al-Zayyāt and for other Egyptian female authors who followed her (Raḍwā ʿĀshūr, Sumayya Ramaḍān, Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī and Mayy Tilmisānī, just to name a few) – an opportunity to (re)write segments of the national history. Indeed, in the interstitial area between autobiography and novel, the author manipulates her own personal history, constructing another, more consistent one that develops in parallel – as much as possible – to the national history. The space she obtains is a reconstruction of the self and of the national image at the same time:

> As I wrote *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* I was – without realising that I had killed her – breathing life into the girl so deeply involved in student political activities against the British, breathing life into the woman so deeply involved into the clandestine activities, after she graduated in 1946, which took her and her first husband in prison. I was making a public statement, although I was not completely aware of it, that I preferred the path she had trodden to the path I had chosen the day I had accepted my second marriage in 1952. Man in this

> novel does not really find himself in a whole, a totality greater than this narrow, individual self. *Al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* to the true peace within the self is the door that opens on to belonging to the sum, the whole, in thought.[39]

In other words, the *Bildung*-form does not offer the author a label of "Western" literary canon to conform to so much as, conversely, a working principle within the plot capable of stimulating a person – Laylā – who would have otherwise, perhaps, remained too flattened on the memoir plane.[40] As we saw previously with al-Ḥakīm, the intersection between autobiography and fiction is a constant of the modern Egyptian novel and, more specifically, of the coming-of-age novel, as highlighted by 'Abdel Nasser[41] and Moore. Within this framework, *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* represents an unprecedented synthesis between a journey of female and personal growth set against the backdrop of a historic path depicted as a "natural scenario" for the girl's development. Laylā moves within the city – and then, on a vaster scale, within the national – space, in response to the real attraction history has for her.

This movement, from the first to the last pages of the novel, will always entail new *ḥudūd* (limits, boundaries), whether imposed by her family, society or the specific social class Laylā belongs to – the *petite bourgeoisie* that sees women's seclusion, for example, as a status symbol.

As Laylā's ideological orientation – still being formed at the beginning of the novel – gradually conforms to the political aspirations and requirements of the nation, the girl's personal struggle will take on an increasingly anti-colonial undertone, leaving the anti-patriarchal one, as suggested by Moore, "suspended".[42] However, a detailed analysis of the strategies employed by Laylā to escape from patriarchal control might allow us to speak of a dissolution – and thus an entry into a less visible and underground phase – of her personal struggle, rather than a *tout court* "suspension".

When Laylā's father, prior to his daughter's departure for Port Said, orders her to not associate with the local residents and to not form relationships with anyone outside of the work environment, Laylā replies with an obedient: "As you wish, sir".[43] This answer is an example of how the fight for independence often hides behind an ostensible and convenient obedience and conformism.

In reading *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*, we cannot disregard the idea that the "door" referenced in the title potentially implies both the end of a segregation (and thus the opening of a door onto a previously forbidden outside world) and the possibility of carving out an insular, marginalised "space" for herself – a "room of her own" useful to the counter-narrative. Thus, seen from this perspective, the *ḥudūd* are not only limits to be overcome, but props to be leveraged. Seen in its entirety, the novel does not provide an enthusiastic manifesto for the emancipation of women but, rather, it offers a personal coming-of-age story that encompasses the awareness that even within conversations on the national liberation and anti-colonial fight, female empowerment and self-promotion still need to be defended, as the spaces of female agency still need to be renegotiated.[44]

4.2 Body, voice, domestic space and public space in Laylā's development

Ḥudūd

The story begins with Laylā's father literally redrawing the map of his daughter's "daily mobility" the day after her first menstrual cycle appears, and ends with a threshold crossed or with a door left open in the Port Said apartment where Laylā is carrying out her service at the front. The story of a constant repositioning, negotiation and overcoming of boundaries unfolds between these two extremes. Laylā's development implies contrastive urges – on one hand, growth imbued with the values of the lower middle class, under her mother's vigilant gaze ("you will have to learn how to lie and dissimulate");[45] on the other, a progressive moral and political growth that often expresses itself in the urgent desire to take part in the street protests and to join the crowd of people on "the outside". Unlike Muḥsin, Laylā does not have a family that stands in as an alternative to her birth family. Her father and mother are united in the safeguarding of bourgeois and patriarchal morals. Her brother Maḥmūd, whom Laylā loves dearly, receives preferential treatment at the hands of their parents, in line with the tradition of the prevailing educational system. In the metaphor of the "prisoner-warden" relationship that sums up Laylā's relationship with her paternal home, her brother lies somewhere in between. At times he is a model to emulate – already a heroic figure in student circles for his active participation in the anti-colonial struggle, where he was injured. At times, instead, he also takes on the role of his sister's "warden".

Truth be told, Maḥmūd is fighting his own battle against traditional values where affections are concerned, a battle that costs him his father's benevolence when he decides to marry Ṣanʿāʾ, the woman he loves. When it comes to his sister's freedom, however, Maḥmūd – who seems to be trapped between a rock and a hard place – is unable to show his full support. Then again, Laylā's freedom of movement is far more restricted than her brother's. Laylā always moves within the constraints of the institutions she mixes with (family, school, university) and her movements are greatly limited by her father when she experiences menarche. Only towards the end of the novel will she see a chance for mobility thanks to the opportunity – meanwhile won by women – to teach, and thus move around the national territory for work requirements. Only then can the novel's prevailing theme – that is, Laylā's "awakening" – actually develop.

The novel opens with the mention of a significant date among the many that characterise the protests of the time: 21 February 1946, when the National Committee of Workers and Students proclaimed a general strike against British occupation, referencing the very idea of "national awakening" in the hope of building together, from below, "a day that shall be a universal *awakening* of the Egyptian People, which will thus make it plain that it will accept no deviation, no relinquishment of its right to independence and freedom".[46] The author's decision to start her story on this date draws an instant parallel between the destiny of

"eleven-year-old Laylā, a robust girl with skin darker than her mother's",[47] and that of the people on strike. Similarly, the *chiaroscuro* contrast between Laylā and her mother is evident from the very first lines. As noted by Abudi, in female-penned Arabic novels, the relationship between the main character and her mother always implies the subject's relationship with society in a broader sense, because the mother often plays a key role in maintaining the patriarchal order, both in rural environments and in more urban contexts.[48]

During one of the protest marches that follow one another, Maḥmūd is hit by a bullet and becomes a young "hero" at the school attended by Laylā:

> Layla found herself – a mere first-year student at the secondary school – the center of attention and admiration. Older girls swarmed around her and teachers stopped her in the corridor to ask questions. The intensity of their interest intoxicated her, and she let her imagination go. His name? Mahmud Sulayman. His age? Seventeen. Layla, why didn't he go to the hospital? How could he go to the hospital, they would have arrested him there![49]

Laylā sees the school world as a door – one of the few, perhaps the only one, she is allowed – onto the world, a horizon for the development of her personality. Within this dimension, her brother was already "legendary" for having been injured during a protest march. The domestic dimension, however, proves less prone to gratifying developing youthful personalities. Whether about her or her brother, anyone crossing the threshold of the Sulayman home in those days would have felt "tension in the air. Maḥmūd was lying on his side, facing the wall. His eyes wide and unmoving as if he had not budged since yesterday. Isam, her aunt's son, sat on the edge of the bed rubbing his chin".[50]

Laylā's family, especially her father, is aware of how family balances and gender roles had changed in the wake of modernisation, social reforms and popular demonstrations: in order to avoid an emptying of the family institution (seen as a socioeconomic centre), and its partial replacement with competitive institutions (education, employment, welfare services),[51] he chooses to impose drastic restrictions on Laylā's freedom. The young girl experiences these restrictions first-hand, especially when the traumatic arrival of her menstrual cycle marks the end of childhood and of the freedom enjoyed in that period:

> She grew to the realization that to reach womanhood was to enter a prison where the confines of one's life were clearly and decisively fixed. At its door stood her father, her brother, her mother. Prison life, she discovered, was painful for both the warden and the woman he imprisons. The warden cannot sleep at night, fearful that the prisoner will fly, anxious lest that prisoner escape the confines.
>
> Those prison limits are marked by trenches, deeply dredged by ordinary folk, by all of them; by people who heed the limits and have made themselves sentries. . . . Layla's father had outlined those confines as the family

sat around the table, eating lunch. His voice showed no uncertainty or hesitation. Layla, you must realize that you have grown up. From now on you are absolutely not to go out by yourself. No visits. Straight home from school".[52]

In addition to these restrictions, we find the bitter observation of the double standard reserved for Maḥmūd. Her brother's first facial hair is welcomed cheerfully by their father,[53] while Laylā's first period results in a drastic reduction of her freedom. Maḥmūd's studies are a source of pride for their father, while Laylā's decision to go on to university is questioned.[54] Six years elapse between the first and second chapters: Laylā has become a fairly tall 17-year-old, with bronzed skin and a forceful nature, able to fully live her social life at school and in youth clubs, with the Scouts and in sports. Returning home at the end of the day, however, proves mortifying. Laylā's participation, along with some other girls from school, in the anti-Imperialist demonstration marks a point of no return in her feelings towards her family, especially towards her father, who sees her at the march ("a pair of eyes was drawing her, to stifle the wells of strength in her body and spirit"),[55] and later, at home, punishes her violently for having brought scandal upon the family in front of the neighbours:

> Layla's father was still chewing on his lip as he opened the door. He opened it silently, impassively. He was equally cool as he closed it. Only then did he bring out the slipper concealed behind his back. He tried to throw her to the floor but her mother slipped between them. He pushed his wife away and she stood motionless to one side, her lips quivering. He yanked off Layla's shoes and against her feet sounded the slap of the hard slipper. As it hit against her legs and her back, Layla could hear that slap mingling with the sound of a woman's laugh on the stairs outside, the screaming of a new-born, and her mother's choked sobbing.
>
> She heard her father's voice, shouting at the mother – shut up! – and again the crack of the slipper, one blow after another, a momentary silence between each, a pause, suppressed breathing, then the slap ringing out again. Then there was the rustle of her book bag as she dragged it across the tiles, the squeak of tears on leather as she clenched the bag in her mouth, her father's steps receding, the sharp sound of his door slamming, her mother's steps coming nearer, the sensation of her hands punctured by the iciness of the floor tiles as she crawled on hands and feet to her room.[56]

The narrative voice records and lists the sounds of the aggression Laylā suffers at the hands of her father as they are perceived by the girl, in an intentional semi-depersonalisation. Her body is mortified, bent to the blows of the slipper, while the protagonist's inner space and the family space are pervaded by tensions ("Shut up!", the father yells at his wife who, in this forced silence, also finds herself subject to male authority).[57]

Throughout the text, silence is a privileged weapon used by the violent educational system: after the shouted slogans, at home Laylā is met by punishing silence. As explained by Manisty:

> There is a direct corollary between the restriction imposed on Layla by her female body and the suppression of her voice. At this stage she is aware of her oppression but is unable to express her resistance effectively; hence her expressions through muted discourse – metaphors of confine and bodily pain. As her journey progresses, it becomes clear how she is only able to find her voice once she transcends the internalized social perceptions of female sexuality and the female body.[58]

By bending Laylā's body as she is forced to crawl on the floor, and by suppressing her voice, the paternal punishment is, to all intents and purposes, attempting to re-establish the *ḥudūd* overcome by that body, to bring it back to a regressive phase of infancy enforced too late. This is the only way for paternal authority to regain control over Laylā's body, which is evidently on the point of following its own nature and thus escaping from that control.

Her father's punishment does not just affect her body, but her world as well, made up of dreams and high ideals and of a thrilling experience that has just ended – that is, having expressed her feelings, and having belonged to the collective body wherein her person and her voice had found their space. But freely expressing herself – concludes Laylā as she mulls over the punishment inflicted on her by her father, suffering from the lack of support from her mother and brother – is something girls are not allowed to do. She voices her disheartenment most bitterly with her brother:

> "I was wrong. I showed what I felt as if I were a real human being. I forgot. I forgot that I am not a person, I am only a girl. A woman. Yes, I forgot." She laughed, though it sounded more like a wail, and looked squarely at Mahmud. "Isn't that what you wanted to say, Mahmud? . . . [the woman] has all the rights and bears all the responsibilities. . . . They are such lovely words, when you see them written down. But when we get serious, when your sister shows what she feels, when she expresses herself like a human being, then all of a sudden she is wrong!"[59]

Here, Laylā explains the "silence", the passiveness that was supposed to characterise "modern femininity" of the time – that is, in the Egyptian society of the early 1950s – the dominant idea of femininity, as it was conceived by the patriarchal system. The female icon produced by the "modern" middle class to which Laylā's brother Maḥmūd, a student of medicine, aspires to belong finds its *raison d'être* within the paradigm of a masculinist/patriarchal society. Thus, Laylā's words will be a small lesson for her brother, whom the author describes as "confused, as bewildered as she was".[60]

'Iṣām, Ramzī: "mediators" of Laylā's desire for growth

The journey Laylā embarks on in pursuit of her independence, and described in the novel, can be divided into three stages, each one featuring a meeting with a male figure: thus, a first stage corresponding to her love for 'Iṣām, a second corresponding to her romance with Ramzī and a third connected with Ḥusayn, whom Laylā meets at the end of the first section, though the two will only come together at a later date, after Ḥusayn's return from Germany. This journey is made up of thrilling discoveries for Laylā, but also of distress caused by her perception of her body as a "limitation" or embarrassment ("she never knew where to put her hands"),[61] and by the attacks on her physical person – first by her father and later by her cousin 'Iṣām, who expresses his attraction and affection for his cousin as a form of ownership.

Laylā feels like her body, which has developed into that of a woman, no longer completely belongs to her but, rather, is constantly being assessed and the object of heteroimposed restrictions and regulatory injunctions.

Within her family's discursive horizon, especially in the words of her mother and of her aunt Dawlat Hanem, the female body is reduced to a commodity. When her aunt compliments her looks, Laylā's voice explodes – albeit internally – in a furious statement: "Nothing but a *jariya*! A *jariya* in the slave market. Dressing and adorning herself to raise her price".[62] The young woman's scorn is also triggered by the traumatic memory of the tragic story of her cousin Ṣāfiyya, Dawlat Hanem's daughter, driven to commit suicide because of a marriage arranged by her family against her will.[63] Ironically, however, it is not Dawlat who brings scandal on the family, but Laylā's participation in the protest march: "You have scandalized us!"[64] shouts her mother. The Arabic term for "scandal", *faḍīḥa*, appears frequently in female coming-of-age stories, and it is a spectre constantly waved in the educational process in the Sulayman home. *Faḍīḥa* is the social anathema, the negative judgement that could befall the family; it is the fate of non-acceptance, and thus ostracism, that the family could be subjected to by society.[65]

After this episode, Laylā seeks refuge in her room – a perimeter, as we have already mentioned, within which she can devote herself to self-discovery and, at the same time, to the reification of her state of imprisonment. Within this liminal space, Laylā processes her suffering, taking refuge in a feeling of love for a family figure – that is, her cousin 'Iṣām. The two read the same books as well as share a word view that seems, at a first glance, similar and complementary: their chat on Salāma Mūsā (1887–1958), an Egyptian intellectual and an exponent of the more secular thought who adhered to the Fabian society still read by 1950s youth, also highlights a precocious interest in social issues. The contacts between the cousins occur more and more often, enriched by coded messages. 'Iṣām is as attracted to his cousin as she is to him; he sees her as if it were the very first time. The author also partially expresses 'Iṣām's point of view as, after much hesitating, he declares his feelings for Laylā by writing her a note.[66]

For Laylā, her cousin represents a sort of "mediation" with the world outside her room, but this mediation will turn out not to work, because it will not lead to

an alternative concept of the man-woman relationship compared to the dominant one. Indeed, ʿIṣām – despite the sincerity of his feelings for Laylā – immediately reveals a patriarchal idea of women. He is ashamed of his physical attraction for Laylā, and divides women into two categories: the ones it is admissible to be attracted to (servants or prostitutes) and the ones who must remain "free" from these attentions – that is, wives and sisters.[67] According to Moore, the romance with ʿIṣām "temporarily obstructs our protagonist's *Bildung*": this is only partially true, because the bitter realisation of the double "standard" according to which ʿIṣām judges woman will prove to be a key element in Laylā's understanding of the mechanisms regulating the thought and policies of the patriarchy.

Another element – more powerful than disappointment – will, however, show how Laylā's relationship with ʿIṣām was merely a sentiment clung to in the need to feel loved and to explore her femininity. Laylā learns from Maḥmūd that both he and their cousin have decided to enlist,[68] but while her brother bravely triggers a family crisis by asserting his wish to go to the front alongside other youths of his generation, ʿIṣām is perpetually held "hostage" by his mother, and finally gives up the idea of leaving. At this point, Laylā begins losing interest in him: her reaction shows how one's relationship with one's homeland is also, within the semantic architecture of the novel, a criterion to build a sort of "noble-mindedness" in the characters and their being "grown up". Ironically, at the end of the novel, ʿIṣām himself will be the only one to fall victim to the Port Said bombings, tragically showing a change of pace and the maturity he has achieved.

Starting from this first love affair between Laylā and ʿIṣām, it is evident that love, in al-Zayyāt's writing, is always linked to a broader dimension, to a love of a "whole" that is the homeland. This youthful striving towards totality that emerges in *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* in the scenes describing the protest march and in the great final depiction of the battle at Port Said is the same that radiates from the autobiographical writing *The Search: Personal Papers*:

> a sea of youth ripples over Abbas Bridge in 1946 and the young woman who found refuge in the whole is a drop in the sea, wild joy is she and powerful, active strength, and the ego – the ego has meaning, because it has become one with the others.[69]

As previously mentioned, however, there is a difference in the way love of one's homeland is expressed, depending on whether the subject is a woman or a man. This love initially rouses a feeling of inadequacy in Laylā ("even if she had been a man she would not be able to go, for she was weak, and the honor of struggling for the sake of Egypt was not the destiny of the weak!"),[70] which the young woman seems to relish, at least at first. This feeling later turns into a desire to take part in the national cause, which edges out adolescent love, seen as a useless distraction ("Love for Egypt does not demand that").[71] And, finally, into an obsession that Laylā tries to follow by means of a copious correspondence with her brother at the front.

Conversely, when it comes to male characters, love of one's homeland is, on one hand, a ground to affirm one's masculinity and, on the other, a place where a generational clash occurs, leading to an affirmation of one's own agency compared to one's father's.[72] Thus, in the network of relationships built within the novel, we see the constant surfacing of the tension that can arise between subjects of the same age (but of opposite gender) and who are both involved in the anti-colonial cause. Laylā's relationship with her brother Maḥmūd is a perfect example, recalling the metaphorical dimension of family relations referenced by Baron in her exploration of the "modern family" as the space of a nation. A similar tension runs through the relationship between Laylā and Ḥusayn who, though involved in a romantic relationship, mature their respective positions in the national cause at different times and in different ways. Perhaps this is why, when the two meet around the middle of the novel – Ḥusayn is a friend of Maḥmūd's and his cellmate in the interlude that takes place in the 'Ajānib Prison – Laylā decides to spurn Ḥusayn's love ("She was not going to sacrifice herself for anyone, lose herself for anyone, abase herself for anyone")[73]. At this point in the novel, Laylā's priority is rebuilding the world of values shattered by her father and by 'Iṣām's behaviour, seeking refuge in a sort of voluntary isolation. As others – for example Abudi[74] – have said, Laylā is certainly afraid of suffering again, but there is also an undercurrent of fear of delegating her quest for independence to yet another man. Ḥusayn will return in the third part of the story, spurring Laylā to break free of her oppressive relationship with Ramzī (her philosophy professor at Cairo University and ultimate "mentor" in the world of prevailing social values) in the central section of the novel.

Described as cold and aloof, Ramzī is an authoritarian figure who arouses both fear and attraction in Laylā, so much so that the young woman begins changing her behaviour to adapt to her teacher's precepts in order to earn his approval. Ramzī represents a second mediation between family life and the outside world – a mediation that will, this time, lead her comfortably back within the *ḥudūd* (boundaries) envisaged by society and the academic world ("he knew the boundaries, and so did she, moreover, so did Adila, her mother, everyone").[75] Laylā's relationship with Ramzī is actually a repetition, outside the domestic walls, of the patriarchy and power play she experiences at home: the *ḥudūd* mapped out by her father within the domestic space have not been cancelled, but are simply redrawn by the professor's authority within the university and public space.

When Ramzi asks Laylā's family for her hand in marriage, their betrothal is taken for granted; one does not hesitate before a man of Ramzī's calibre, therefore "no one consulted her".[76] "Ramzī" soon reveals his symbolic value (the character's name even comes from *ramz*, "symbol") as "transversal" patriarchal authority. By entering the girl's family circle, he will be able not only to back her father up, but also to emerge as a higher authority. In this asymmetrical relationship, Ramzī's policies inform his position of power: he is the arbiter of the conversation, he directs and ends it and maps out its trajectories, excluding everything that does not fall within the scope of his interest. He is constantly judging others; even

his relationship with Laylā is an ongoing exam. His opinions are judgements, his vision of the world the only acceptable one.

Ramzī sees love as imprisoned in the dichotomy "lust" *versus* "marital love", a polarised vision of love belied by Maḥmūd and Ṣanʿāʾ – a couple formed both outside the "protection" of the family and in open opposition to it, providing a true counter-narrative to the one implemented by Ramzī and by Laylā's father. While Laylā's growth – physical, personal and political – revolves around the parallel of traditional/liberal polarity, as claimed by Manisty,[77] the figure of Ramzī is set squarely on the axis of tradition. From a scientific point of view, he sees philosophy as "principles, firm principles, and rules, strict and fundamental rules";[78] from a political point of view he is a conservative ("Nationalizing the canal has rallied all the forces of imperialism against Egypt",[79] he claims in a conversation on nationalising the Suez Canal). Last but not least, on subjects like marriage, he actually seems to go against Islamic tradition, according to which the bride must consent of her own free will. When Laylā learns that the professor and her father have read the *Fātiḥa* in her absence, her first thought is – inevitably – that it did not occur to either of them to consult her.[80] Laylā banishes this thought, however, acting *as if* she does not know that her fundamental rights have been overridden. This, perhaps, is the part where the girl's behaviour appears to almost overstep the boundaries of plausibility, in a narrative construct seen as "realistic" (as is *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*) and given the girl's temperament. The narrative voice restricts itself to pointing out how "she forgot this observation in the flood of self-pride that submerged her"[81] in search, on the contrary, of approval and – both in the home and outside of it – of her own "position" in other people's opinions. In an attempt to carve out the position she feels she does not have within the home.

A fragment of a conversation Ramzī will have with Maḥmūd in the hope of dissuading him – urged by Laylā's father – from marrying Ṣanʿāʾ reveals the sexist and small-minded nature of Laylā's future husband. Laylā eavesdrops on the conversation from behind the door, in a skilfully constructed scene. Ramzī tells a horrid personal anecdote relating to a girl – guilty of returning his interest – he seduced in his youth. The story reaches Maḥmūd, sitting with Ramzī in the living room, and Laylā, hidden behind the closed door in a setting that is certainly not accidental, at the same time.

The siblings' reaction draws readers back into the heart of the gender dynamics "naturalised" in much of the fiction contemporary to *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* but which the novel dissects in a way that had never been done before in the history of the Arabic novel:[82]

> A single thought resounded through Laylā's head, a single question that bore into her skull like a nail. The girl? What about the girl? What had happened to the girl? Mahmud's voice was cold: "I do not understand why you have told me this story". Layla covered her face in her hands. Mahmud's words bore no echo of the questioning in her head. The girl's fate was not on anyone's mind, not even in Mahmud's.[83]

While the conversation between her brother and her future husband continues, Laylā's thoughts interpolate the third-person narrative and are shown in cursive, illustrating – even graphically, without any mediation whatsoever – the jumbled flow of thoughts running through her mind: "*On fear; I will live in fear of Ramzi. Day after day, my blood will go dry with fear. The fear gone by and the fear to come*".[84] On one hand, Laylā is shocked by what she has overheard, and at last appears terrified by the prospect of marrying Ramzī. On the other, social and family pressure ("*Scandals! We don't want scandals. My mother does not want scandals*")[85] is too strong to break off the ongoing betrothal and, when she tries to talk with her father, his "murderous look"[86] stops her in her tracks.

Laylā finds herself in a paradoxical position: after having ensured the conditions for a betrothal to take place, glimpsing in Ramzī a prospect of stability and prestige, she realises that she is caught in a trap of her own making. Laylā's "awakening" is announced in one of the letters Ḥusayn sends her from Germany ("One morning you will wake up and discover that you love me")[87] and, in the end, is made possible thanks to a subterfuge to which she resorts. After her graduation, Ramzī – purely for financial convenience – consents to Laylā's wish to find a position as a teacher right away. When Laylā is called on to choose her preferred location for her first assignment as a teacher in the office of the General Inspector for Social Studies, she chooses Port Said and, with the sudden and invaluable connivance of an inspectress (who seems to have guessed everything), manages to keep Ramzī in the dark as to her choice, later passing it off as a bureaucratic mistake.

Feminine counter-narrative(s)

Contrary to Ramzī's expectations, Laylā's move from Cairo to Port Said proves a longer process than foreseen, so the girl stays in Port Said, living with her brother and his wife Ṣanʿāʾ – already a friend of hers. When the Suez Canal Crisis breaks out in 1956, all three of them serve as volunteers on the battlefield, and Laylā herself is injured in an explosion as she nurses the wounded. Her relationship with Ḥusayn, who has returned from Germany and is now involved in designing the Aswan Dam, is renewed against the backdrop of these acts of war. The protagonist's move from the centre (Cairo) towards the outskirts (Port Said) of the country is antithetical compared to Ḥāmid and Muḥsin's: while the two young men move from the outskirts to the centre to complete their higher education (in line with European coming-of-age fiction), Laylā moves, instead, from the capital to the war zone to take part in history – literally going forward to meet it. Her character moves towards an awakening at once personal, anti-colonial and feminist, and the Port Said battlefield where she is injured – but miraculously not killed – in an explosion ("I have never been better, Maḥmūd"[88] she says to her brother when he visits her in the infirmary) represents the field on which *her* battle is fought, in a perfect synthesis of what Esty calls the "Soul-Nation allegory".[89] Thanks to the subterfuge employed, and perhaps also to the cover offered by the traditional betrothal that enables Laylā to pass from her father's guardianship to

the equally restrictive one of Ramzī, the young woman manages to achieve the mobility necessary to conquer *that* symbolical battlefield. As the aforementioned Sabri Hafez points out, this mobility is made possible by the modernisation processes that occurred in Egyptian history. Laylā, however, interacts with traditional Egyptian institutions (family, school and later university), carving out spaces of autonomy, also by means of choices which, on the face of it, are not very functional to her development. Laylā's growth includes the stages of "camouflage" and "depersonalisation" because it was carved out of a constant renegotiation of the self within a social and domestic environment that has placed strict rules on the limitation of that self.

Within this perspective at the "margins" of the political and administrative centre of the nation, but in the heart of the battlefield – bearing in mind that the only character involved in war actions so far has been Ibrāhīm in *Zaynab*, another marginal character – Laylā's story offers a counter-narrative to the late-*nahḍawī* Egyptian youth who aspired to become an *effendī*. In her marginality, according to Sorbera, al-Zayyāt re-wrote a segment of the national history, breaking down the barriers between autobiography, novel, coming-of-age story and historiography.[90] More than that, Laylā's story takes shape as a macro-frame containing several other counter-narratives that are often expressed by secondary female characters.

As we have seen, in the first part of the novel Laylā's meeting with and attraction to her cousin are functional to her emotional growth and to a focusing on the hypocrisy rampant in Egyptian society, where women who do not fit within the socially established "boundaries" are subject to censure. Discovering that her beloved cousin 'Iṣām's beliefs and sexual practices are guided by the principle of feminine "duality" ("domestic angel" versus "perverted woman") leads Laylā not only to end their relationship, but also to look for a "reassuring" figure – where, perhaps, this duality was made explicit – like Ramzī.

A powerful counter-narrative of this feminine duality, previously analysed by Gilbert and Gubar in their seminal essay on the Victorian novel,[91] is contained in Jamīla's monologue. Laylā's cousin, a married woman who is deeply dissatisfied with her marriage, Jamīla is repeatedly unfaithful to her husband with a family friend, and Laylā catches her *in flagrante* at a betrothal party. In front of Laylā, the woman bursts forth into a long monologue which, aside from being one of the most successful points in the novel, aesthetically speaking, offers a bold self-narrative of the matrimonial dimension seen from the female point of view. Jamīla does not accept the patriarchal division between "angel of the hearth" and "streetwalker", linking female desire to physical beauty, in a reappropriation of the feminine sphere that will have a profound impact on Laylā.

> What do you know about the world? What? What do you know about what a woman suffers when she lives with a man she despises? Did they teach you anything about this in the books you've read? Did they explain this to you? . . . Do you know how a woman feels when she realizes that she's become like an old rag? She's all dried out, her body has dried out, and her heart, too, because no one looks at her with a glow in his eyes, no one says to her "I love you". . . .

> What can I do? . . . Divorce, right? So simple? . . . That bed, there, in front of you. I slept there for three days between life and death. I'd swallowed a bottle of Aspirin. My mother said, I don't want any scandals. And she knew perfectly well what it meant for me to stay with a man who doesn't love me. . . . "I don't want any scandals", my mother said.[92]

Thus, in the novel, the discovery of the true implications of marriage in girls' lives, of what family and social pressure often implies, pushing girls to place themselves on the "marriage market", which will one day swallow them up (Jamīla's monologue is significant due to the clarity with which the point of view of an unloved woman is told) are inescapable "aspects" of Laylā's education. Sympathising with her cousin, Laylā comes to realise that extramarital affairs are often sparks of happiness in lives completely subjected to and imprisoned by someone else's will.

While Jamīla's monologue is a tragic interlude, Laylā's conversations with her two friends, Ṣanʿāʾ and ʿAdīla, also revolve around the subject of marriage,[93] albeit from an ironic, youthful and occasionally presumptuous perspective. The banter between the friends weaves a counter-narrative of the same "double moral" preached by ʿIṣām, in an ironic reappropriation of women's discourse and will, also by means of an ironic fabrication of nostalgia for the *ḥarīm* and seclusion between the sexes:

> "At the very least our mothers knew exactly what their circumstances were. But we're lost. We don't understand – are we the harem or not? We don't know whether love is *haram*, prohibited by our religion, or permitted, or *halal*. Our family says it's *haram* while the state radio day and night sing love love love, and books tell a girl, 'Go on, you are free and independent' and if a girl believes *that* she's got a disaster on her hands and her reputation will go to hell – now honestly, is that any kind of situation to be in? Really and truly, now, aren't you pathetic souls?"[94]

This skit staged by Ṣanʿāʾ – the girl Maḥmūd marries for love at the end of the novel – hides a lucid analysis of the condition in which an entire generation of young Egyptian women finds itself. After being the first to enjoy public education, they were able to develop a certain degree of self-awareness that was highly unsuited to the country's political and social situation. The youthful terms and colloquial language form used can be viewed as an integral part of this ironic "counter-narrative" of the feminist discourse in the early 20th century – another legacy taken up by the author and repositioned within a new perspective in this novel that aims to break with a historical practice of negotiation and internalisation of socio-patriarchal "boundaries". As recalled by Booth, the novel was nominated for a national prize right after its publication, and Egyptian man of letters Maḥmūd ʿAbbās al-ʿAqqād, as a standing member of the Higher Council of Arts and Letters, threatened to resign if the prize were not revoked, because the author had been "immoderate in [her] use of colloquial".[95] According to Booth, this element shows the level of innovation of the language used in *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*,

which not only aimed to tell a coming-of-age story from the female perspective, but also to do so by means of an "articulation of marginality"[96] useful – again according to Booth – for shedding light on a gender and class dimension until then left out of the variety of national, artistic (*riwāya fanniyya*) and realistic novel that was developing into canon.[97]

Al-'Aqqād's reaction shows how the author's intent – that is, to create a counter-hegemonic narrative – had not gone unnoticed. Within the group made up of Laylā and her friends, we find a free discussion, at times modulated on the polarisation between more traditional behaviour ('Adīla) and a liberal approach (Ṣan'ā') that truly enables us to reconfigure a gender and generational perspective in a series of scenes drawn from young people's everyday life.

4.3 *Al-bāb al-maftūḥ* as "narrative of awakening"

Ḥusayn

Laylā's constant state of change is persistently made explicit throughout the text, with expressions such as "Laylā had changed" or "Laylā wasn't like this before",[98] from the outside perspectives of characters like Ḥusayn, Maḥmūd and Ṣan'ā'. As underscored by Manisty, Laylā goes through phases of mimesis of other people's speech or behaviour, following the oscillation between two poles: on one hand, a traditional patriarchal model, embodied by her father first and foremost and then by 'Iṣām and Ramzī and, on the other, Ḥusayn.[99]

We often infer the placement of the various characters on this or that axis from their reactions to the historical events that run through the novel: the day after the 1952 Coup d'état by the Free Officers Movement, Laylā's father is unbelieving and sceptical ("he simply could not accept that men like him – Egyptians just like him – had successfully challenged the authorities – all of them! – and had overturned the government").[100] This scene is juxtaposed with the one where, like in a long shot, Laylā finds herself in Qaṣr-al-'Ayn Street, always crowded with passers-by: a man on a bicycle announces the king's removal to everyone, and spontaneous displays of joy break out all over the city:

> Laylā could not move: she stood among them, enjoying her sense of oneness with the crowd, the companionable sensation that they had all contributed in one way or another to expelling the king. A mood of sympathy, of ease and belonging, swept over her, a sense of confidence in herself and the other; how she wished she could stay among them, stay on and on![101]

The *esprit de corps* that Laylā had already experienced during the protest marches that took place shortly before this event now returns at the news of the revolution (while she is in the street with strangers who, however, are more familiar to her than her own family), as an extraordinary feeling in contrast with the emotional detachment with which the girl tries to react to her sentimental disappointment. In the next scene, readers find themselves sharing a cell in the Ajānib Prison with

Maḥmūd and Ḥusayn, his cellmate and close friend, at one time in love with Laylā. The two are suddenly set free after 23 July 1952, and cries of "Long live Egypt!" and "Long live the Revolution!" ring throughout the prison. The two companions get ready to return to their life projects, and readers learn from their conversation that, as a result of marrying off his sister, Ḥusayn is broke despite having worked for two years after obtaining his degree in engineering. In the next chapter, Ḥusayn sees his own mother in the features of Maḥmūd's mother – he sees her at the stove in their country house, on the Nile Delta, while she's holding his little sister, he sees the palm tree in front of their house. Ḥusayn is on the point of leaving for Germany to specialise in civil engineering, and one of the *topoi* of modern Egyptian literature – as we will see later on with the novel written by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn almost 30 years before this one – is the young man's visit to his own village and his farewell (virtual and intimate in Ḥusayn's case) to his country home before departing for Europe.[102] The scene of the encounter between Ḥusayn and the university clerk, who certifies that he won the scholarship, is followed by Ḥusayn's rush towards Laylā's house to tell her that he had obtained a three-year scholarship for Germany. Laylā, however, draws back from his declaration of love, showing how her disappointment caused by 'Iṣām is still too strong.

In the next chapter, Ḥusayn visits (physically, this time) the rural world he grew up in – the fields and water buffalo-powered *saqiyya* for irrigating them. It is the same countryside described in *Adīb*, and the perspective – despite the different natures of the two characters – is also that of someone who has to cross the sea towards a foreign land in order to reach a turning point in their lives:

> He would go thousands of miles far from these fields, far from the homeland. In foreign lands he would live by himself; he would work alone, would eat alone, would sleep alone. His day would be filled with a lonely aching, and his night, an ache for the homeland. If she had been going with him . . . if she were to be with him . . .[103]

This leads to the Laylā-Homeland metaphor that will also be made explicit in the letters Ḥusayn writes to Laylā from Germany later on. The sight of the Damietta palm trees, which Ḥusayn compares to young soldiers on the attack like a sort of premonition of youth's sacrifice (on which the last chapter centres), touches on another *topos* of modern Egyptian literature – that is, the "farewell" to the palm trees dotting the rural landscape.[104] These elements are all functional to describe a character whose value is clearly allegorical – a "builder of the nation", a leader of independent Egypt. Indeed, Ḥusayn is a civil engineer involved in the design of the Aswan Dam, a professional forced (like the protagonists of the novels by al-Ḥakīm, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī) to spend long years specialising in Europe before returning to build the nation. His presence, which becomes intertwined once more with Laylā's life after the interlude of her betrothal to Ramzī, truly acts as a "return of the Spirit" in Laylā's heart, or perhaps as a boost of a nationalist, unifying transport that will help Laylā solve her personal crisis (her betrothal to Ramzī) and her decision to join the war scene.

A "historical awakening"

As highlighted previously, the protagonist's "awakening" is the turning point in the architecture of the novel. The awakening metaphor had already been widely used in the international feminist tradition – for example, the "solitary" book (as defined by Elaine Showalter)[105] *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, foundational to the feminist and modernist American story. Published in 1899, *The Awakening* centres on a middle-class New Orleans woman caught in the difficult struggle between a desire for independence as she tries to find herself outside of marriage and motherhood, and the values prevailing in the American South in the late 19th century. Though Chopin's protagonist embarks on a completely personal journey, it can also be read (as suggested by Koloski) as the result of historical forces that come into play and end up affecting and disrupting Edna's life, albeit operating not only on her emotional level as an individual, but on the network of social and moral values that women like her were forced to accept *in toto*.[106]

In al-Zayyāt's novel, the term "awakening" is used explicitly, both in the missives sent by Ḥusayn to Laylā (and which almost act as a "prophecy" of the young woman's realisations) and as an image to describe "history's becoming collective". Broaching the subject of family relationships as a central trope in Arabic fiction, Suad Joseph[107] speaks of "patriarchal connectivity" to show how the "we" supported by patriarchal rules is always preferred over the "I". The main character in this novel (which, among several fitting definitions, emerges as a many-voiced novel due to the breadth of the plot and the centrality of the history of the nation) resorts to the ancient trope of the awakening as a "return to the self", a finding of the self, so as to affirm a quest for a self at once personal and collective – and, in any case, an alternative to the "we" supported by the patriarchal rules mentioned by Joseph. The protagonist's awakening from a state of numbness cannot but denote her awakening from that mental state of repression that makes the acceptance – if not the assimilation – of patriarchal rules and their *ḥudūd* possible. Perhaps the *topos* of the "awakening" also refers ironically to the old *nahḍawī* theme of "women's awakening", usually put forward by men calling for the reform of the Arab woman's status, rhetorically compared to a dangerous and offending slumber.[108]

The awakening scene almost literally repeats Ḥusayn's prophetic words ("one morning you will wake up and discover that you love me"):

> Everything was so clear now. Clear, sharp, rough, and now it was not all the same to her. Her love for Husayn was sharp and rough, and so was her loathing for Ramzī. And her disgust with her own inabilities and weakness was even sharper and rougher.[109]

In the previously explored alternation between private and public dimensions, Laylā (in the chapter following her awakening) listens to Jamāl 'Abd-al Nāṣir's speech after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal. In a letter to her brother, she will write: "I am not alone any more".[110]

In its portrayal of the battle at Port Said, the final chapter visually represents this plurality, the new subject to which Laylā feels she belongs. This scene leads to a new vision of the national history, an alternative vision – as mentioned at the start of the chapter – to the official history. Here, history is seen as the outcome of a collective action rather than as a result of the action of a "Great Man" – according to a vision of history popular with the very nationalists who coined the aforementioned concepts of "modern domesticity" or "modern family". Once again, with her writing, Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt challenges and contradicts the intellectual legacy of the nationalist *nahḍawī*, whose vision of history (as recalled by Wien) is greatly indebted to the modern myth of the Great Man:

> The *topos* of the Great Man was initially a European concept of the Enlightenment. Instead of religious saints whose lives bore witness to direct divine intercession in the world and thus pointed to the hereafter, nationalism discovered earthly, secular human beings whose unique contribution to the glory and benefit of the nation was due to superior individual skills and authority. . . . The Great Man entered the secular discourse of the Arab cultural revival movement . . . in the late nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries through intellectual journals. Publicists such as Jurji Zaydan and Farah Antun were looking for the Great Man of the Arabs who had propelled Arab civilizations to unprecedented heights.[111]

In Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt's novel, the "awakening effect" created by the double climax – a story of personal emancipation told in parallel with the independence of the nation – contributes to the reconstruction of "another" meaning of history, as well as to the retrieval of the dimension of self-promotion and empowerment, female and collective alike, within it. In this vision, history is not that made by "Great Men" but it is history from below, a force that has transformed people's living conditions, given them awareness, contributed to shaping a new idea of the future. Perhaps this is why Laylā "shrinks from" the too-rigid and direct allegory that Ḥusayn himself (literally, as previously mentioned, a "builder of the nation") sets out in his letters. Laylā realises the collective dimension of the nation, and only thus can her "path" cross those of other women and men, not satisfied with a "subterfuge" to escape patriarchal – or political – control, but rewriting the rules of the private and political spheres.

Laylā is exposed to an initial renegotiation of the female role in the war during the scene at the beginning of the novel when, in order to keep the female students from participating in the student protest against the abolition of the Treaty of 1936, the school headmistress says: "Woman's job was motherhood. Woman's place was in the home. Weapons and fighting were for men".[112] These positions are echoed by her brother Maḥmūd, who angers Laylā when he does not show his support after their father punishes her. Maḥmūd's resistance resurfaces when, faced with Laylā's request to remain in Port Said with Ṣanʿāʾ to join the resistance, his answer merely reasserts his masculinity: "I am a man!"[113]

Laylā is thus forced to renegotiate her stances even on a terrain (that of the anti-colonial struggle) which to her does not mean "empowerment" in and of itself, because that same terrain sees other identities pitting themselves against the others, maintaining a protective (if not downright regulatory) attitude towards her. Additionally, both within and outside the Arabic world, the national liberation has reinforced gender relations rather than destabilising them.[114] And so Maḥmūd, with all the meanings hidden behind this sibling relationship in the text, does not give up the logic of separation that is normally in force during war time and on the battlefield. But the "door" is open by now, and as soon as Laylā realises that she is not counted among the dead, but has instead survived the bombing, she will not let herself be held back by the umpteenth *ḥadd* (boundary) laid down by her brother.

Notes

1 Al-Zayyat, Laṭifa, *The Search: Personal Papers*, Quartet Books, London 1996.
2 For a reading of *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* as a *Bildungsroman* see Manisty, Dinah, *Changing Limitations*, pp. 85–108; Moore, Lindsey, *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations. Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, Palestine*, Routledge, London and New York 2018, pp. 43–50; Abudi, Dalya, *Mothers and Daughters in Arab Women's Literature: The Family Frontier*, Brill, Boston 2011, pp. 144–159.
3 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, translated by Marilyn Booth, Hoopoe, Cairo and New York 2017.
4 Moore, Lindsey, *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations*, p. 48.
5 Ibid., p. 45.
6 Baron, Beth, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt. Culture, Society and the Press*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2005, pp. 4–6.
7 Elsadda, Hoda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel*, p. 22.
8 See Lucia Sorbera's discussion about the myth of domesticity in Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità arabe*, pp. 287–294.
9 Elsadda, Hoda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel*, pp. 101–102.
10 Booth, Marilyn, "About *The Open Door*", p. 380.
11 Abdalla, Ahmed, *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt*, Saqi Books, London 1985, p. 78.
12 Booth, Marilyn, "About *The Open Door*", p. 373.
13 Abdalla, Ahmed, *The Student Movement*, p. 78.
14 Felski, Rita, *Literature after Feminism*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2003, p. 100.
15 Ibid., pp. 100–107.
16 Summerfield, Giovanna and Downward, Lisa, *New Perspectives*, pp. 138–139.
17 Joanna Russ quoted in Felski, Rita, *Literature after Feminism*, p. 99.
18 Booth, Marilyn, "About *The Open Door*", pp. 369. In the afterword to her English translation of the novel, Marilyn Booth notes that even though writings by women began in the same period as writings by men – Booth cites as an example the authors Labība Hāshim (1882–1952), Suḥayr Qalamāwī (1911–1997) and Mayy Ziyāda (1886–1941) – they remained on the sidelines of the canon itself due to a critical reception that tended to diminish its artistic range (Booth, Marilyn, "About the Open Door", pp. 369–370).
19 See Chapter 6 of this volume, pp. 196–202.

20 On *The Golden Chariot* by Salwa Bakr see Faqir, Fadia "Introduction" in Bakr, Salwa, *The Golden Chariot*, translated by Dina Manisty, Garnet Publishing, Reading, UK 1995, pp. 1–2.
21 Moore, Lindsey, *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations*, p. 39.
22 For an interpretation of the *Bildungsnarrative* in the novels by Nawāl al-Saʿdāwī, see Manisty, Dinah, *Changing Limitations*, pp. 44–82. In this work, Manisty does not deal specifically with *Woman at Point Zero* which, according to her analysis, is not completely ascribable to the genre due to the little autonomy the author grants the protagonist, the prostitute Firdaus.
23 Manisty, Dinah, *Changing Limitations*, p. 8.
24 ʿAbdalrazzāq, ʿĪd, *Al-adabiyya al-sardiyya ka-faʿāliyya tanwīriyya. Muqārābāt sūsiū-dalāliyya fī ʾl-riwāya al-ʿarabiyya*, Jadawil, Bayrūt 2011, p. 297.
25 Booth, Marilyn, "About *The Open Door*", p. 363.
26 Bono, Paola e Fortini, Laura, "Introduzione", in Paola Bono e Laura Fortini (eds.), *Il Romanzo del divenire. Per un Bildungsroman delle donne?* Iacobelli Editore, Roma 2007, p. 11.
27 Moore, Lindsey, *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations*, p. 48.
28 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 360.
29 Hafez, Sabri, "The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel Aesthetic Response", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 57, 1 (1984), pp. 93–112.
30 Booth, Marilyn, "About *The Open Door*", p. 380.
31 Van Leeuwen, Richard, "Creation and Revelation in Najib Mahfuz's Novel Children of Gebelawi", in Caroline Vander Stichele and Alastair Hunter (eds.), *Creation and Creativity. From Genesis to Genetics and Back*, Sheffield Phoenix Press, Sheffield 2006, p. 51.
32 Starkey, Paul, *Sonallah Ibrahim. Rebel with a Pen*, pp. 43–47.
33 Hala Badri quoted in Booth, Marilyin, "About *The Open Door*", p. 362.
34 William Hutchins, *Tawfiq al-Hakim: A Reader's Guide*, p. 17.
35 Because he is about 16 years old in 1919, Muḥsin was born in 1903 (circa), while the author was born in 1898.
36 al-Zayyat, Latifa, "On Political Commitment and Feminist Writing", in Ferial Ghazoul and Barbara Harlow (eds.), *The View from the Within. Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arabic Literature*, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 1994, pp. 250–251.
37 Taïeb, Hannah Davis, "The Girl Who Found Refuge in the People: The Autobiography of Latifa Zayyat", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 29, 1 (1998), p. 208.
38 al-Zayyat, Latifa, "On Political Commitment and Feminist Writing", pp. 250–251.
39 Al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Search*, p. 100.
40 On the transforming power of *Bildungsroman see* Levine, Caroline, *Forms. Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network,* Princeton University Press, Princeton 2015.
41 Abdel Nasser, Tahia, *Literary Autobiography and Arab National Struggles*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2018, pp. 52–54.
42 Moore, Lindsey, *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations*, p. 48.
43 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 320.
44 Moore, Lindsey, *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations*, p. 48.
45 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 34.
46 Abdalla, Ahmad, *The Student Movement*, p. 66, Author's italics.
47 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 3.
48 Abudi, Dalya, *Mothers and Daughters*, p. 69.
49 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 7.
50 Ibid., p. 9.
51 Abudi, Dalya, *Mothers and Daughters*, p. 45.

52 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 21.
53 Ibid., pp. 20–21.
54 Ibid., p. 27.
55 Ibid., p. 49.
56 Ibid., pp. 49–50.
57 Ibid., p. 49.
58 Manisty, Dinah, *Changing Limitations*, p. 93.
59 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 54.
60 Ibid., p. 55.
61 Ibid., p. 25.
62 Ibid., p. 39.
63 Ibid., p. 41.
64 Ibid., p. 52.
65 For example, Liana Badr, narrating the story of 'Aisha, a girl of humble birth from the Palestinian refugee camp of Tel al-Zaatar in her novel *'Ayn al-mir'ā* (*The Eye of the Mirror*, 1994, translated by Samira Kawar), describes a "scandalous" action ('Aisha cuts her hair before her wedding, arranged against her will) as the climax of a process excluding the girl from her own society. See Saliba, Therese, "A Country Beyond Reach", in S. Majaj (ed.), *Intersections. Gender, Nation and Community in Arabic Novel*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY 2002, pp. 133–161.
66 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 86.
67 Ibid., p. 68.
68 Ibid., p. 91.
69 Al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Search*, p. 43.
70 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 62.
71 Ibid., p. 92.
72 Ibid., p. 99.
73 Ibid., p. 195.
74 Abudi, Dalia, *Mothers and Daughters*, p. 153.
75 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 242.
76 Ibid., p. 250.
77 Manisty, Dinah, *Changing Limitations*, p. 88.
78 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 228.
79 Ibid., p. 314.
80 Ibid., p. 250.
81 Ibid., p. 250.
82 Moore, Lindsey, *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations*, p. 46.
83 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 284.
84 Ibid., p. 285. Is worth to mention that this same narrative technique will appear in Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm's in *Tilka al-Rā'iḥa*, (*That Smell*, 1966).
85 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 286.
86 Ibid., p. 289.
87 Ibid., p. 310.
88 Ibid., p. 349.
89 Esty, Jed, *Unseasonable Youth*, pp. 24–25.
90 See Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità Arabe*, p. 253.
91 Gilbert, Sandra M. and Gubar, Susan, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1979.
92 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, pp. 274–275.
93 Manisty, Dinah, *Changing Limitations*, p. 90.
94 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 71.

95 Booth, Marilyn, "About *The Open Door*", p. 308.

96 Ibid., p. 381. Parallel to Booth's reflections on how this linguistic guise allowed the novel to strive for a new positioning of female writing and from a female perspective within a literary sphere almost exclusively dominated by men, it is useful to point out how Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's novel *'Awdat al-rūḥ* has never undergone a similar attack by exponents of Egyptian culture for its – albeit substantial – use of dialogue in *'āmmiyya*.

97 See Chapter 2 of this volume, pp. 46–47.

98 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 173.

99 Manisty, Dinah, *Changing Limitations*, pp. 88–89.

100 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 157.

101 Ibid., p. 158.

102 See Hussein, Taha, *A Man of Letters*, translated by Mona el-Zayyat, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 1994 (1935), pp. 46–47.

103 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 182.

104 Ibid., p. 183.

105 Showalter, Elaine, "Tradition and the Female Talent: The Awakening as a Solitary Book", in Wendy Martin (ed.), *New Essays on The Awakening*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, pp. 33–58.

106 In *The Historian's Awakening* the author reads the personal awakening of the protagonist Edna Pontellier as the result of a series of historical changes in term of class, gender, ethnicity, modernity. See Kolovski, Bernard (ed.), *The Historian's Awakening. Reading Kate Chopin's classical novella s social and cultural History*, Praeger, St. Barbara, CA 2019.

107 Joseph, Suad, "Introduction", in Suad Joseph (ed.), *Intimate Selving in Arab Families. Gender, Self, and Identity*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY 1999, p. 12.

108 Pollard, Lisa, *Nurturing the Nation*, p. 7.

109 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 310.

110 Ibid., p. 313. A recurring figure in the modern Egyptian novel, 'Abd al-Nāṣir is a genuine narrative trope, channelling a series of discourses and social imaginaries. On this point, see Khalifeh, Omar, *Nasser in the Egyptian Imaginary*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2017, pp. 3–5.

111 Wien, Peter, *Arab Nationalism. The politics of History and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK and New York 2017, p. 35.

112 al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Open Door*, p. 46.

113 Ibid., p. 333.

114 Moore, Lindsey, *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations*, p. 50.

5   The crisis-plot

Adīb by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī

Adīb (1935, *A Man of Letters* 1994) by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (1945, *The Lamp of Umm Hashim*, 2004) by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī present the *telos* of the protagonist in search of the self not within the paradigm of the "coming-of-age youth", so much as within another great foundational theme for Egyptian fiction of the 20th century: in other words, the journey to Europe for study purposes. As pointed out, among others, by Abu Lughod,[1] Hourani,[2] Fieni,[3] Casini[4] and Shaden Tageldin,[5] the 19th-century and early 20th-century Arab Renaissance known as *Nahḍa* was also configured through the renewed interest of the Arab cultural elite towards Europe, and through constant comparison with European institutions and cultural expressions by means of student delegations, personal contacts between intellectuals, politicians, businessmen and translation movements concerning literary and scientific works. Following the 1836 publication of al-Ṭahṭāwī's famous *riḥla*[6] *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī-talkhīṣ Barīz* (translated in English as *An Imam in Paris*),[7] the travelogue whose protagonist is a young man on a study trip to Europe was widely circulated in the Arab world, so much so as to be recognised as the symbol-genre of *nahḍawī* literature. The novels discussed in this chapter represent early evidence of how the theme of the study trip to the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, more than a century after publication of the *riḥla* of the young Imām Ṭahṭāwī, would remain a theme of great topicality, actually destined to have extraordinarily long-lived success in this genre. The pages of the two novels contain a succession of scenes from urban life in Cairo, pastoral scenes – where one of the protagonists returns to his village to bid farewell to his loved ones before leaving[8] – and a series of conversations between equals, bitter confrontations with relatives and inner monologues from which emerge the tensions of the search for modernisation and cultural renewal that animated Egyptian youth of the time. The trope of the journey to Europe to complete one's studies, with all the accompanying secondary themes tied to it, does nothing but give a socially plausible form to this tension.[9]

5.1 The trope of the journey to Europe in the modern(ist) Egyptian novel

The journey to Europe, whether configured as a study mission or – as in more recent texts – as economic migration, implies the activation of a series of

processes in the individual who makes it. Here, the term "individual" is meant, at least as regards the publication period of the two novels analysed in this chapter (the 1930s and 1940s) as a synonym of "young man", because the theme of the coming-of-age journey to Europe is a phenomenon that mainly involved men. As a result, the predominant narration of this type of journey is inevitably gendered – that is, a specifically male experience. In this experience, as Claudio Magris writes:

> [the travelers] discover, like in an archaeological dig, other layers of reality, the concrete possibilities that have not materialised but that existed and survive in fragments forgotten by the rush of time, in still open gaps, in still fluctuating states. To travel means to deal with reality but also with its alternatives, with its voids; with History and with another story or with other stories hindered by it and removed, but not entirely cancelled.[10]

Travel opens a different temporality in those who undertake it; it makes new ideas reverberate in them; it triggers changes and involves encounters that would be impossible in their homeland. In the late *Nahḍa* novel the journey to Europe is a key theme to describe the identity and political disorientation of the young, educated Egyptian (man), also translating in this sentiment the disorientation of those who, though they have not crossed the borders of a foreign land, have aspired to the modernisation of their curriculum of studies and social context, having to deal with parts of society that appear to them as "foreign" because they are structurally or ideologically contrary to the effendification process underway. Ryzova maintains that this process was indeed one of the most obvious aspects in the modernisation of colonial Egypt, triggering resistance among those who became spokespersons for an authenticity of identity by now perceived to be in danger.[11] Homecoming is in and of itself a journey and it is represented in many 20th-century Arab narratives as a harbinger of "alienation" and inner trauma. This dimension of homecoming is first explored in *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*, a novel that has been considered "seminal" because it develops a narrative of alienation within a major narrative, that of the quest for social modernity.

The same growing economy that was entering the world economy becomes part of the novel's plot, as we have already seen with *Zaynab* and, as Holt rightly reminds us in his study on the relationship between the content of serialised Arabic fiction and the economy of the Middle Eastern countries, characterised by ever more dynamic entrepreneurial activity, under French and English mandate.[12] The descriptions of the ships departing from and arriving in the port of Alexandria, directed to or coming from Europe, are the plastic representation of this world in the making. These novels also establish a narrative pact with their audience that is completely different from the story of an "informative" journey that was typical of Ṭahṭāwī, Marrāsh and other intellectuals of the *Nahḍa*, not only Egyptian but also Arab; they guaranteed that "individualising function" of the novel[13] and thus the possibility, for readers, to identify with the protagonist and find footholds in the narrative arc of the novel to reflect on their *own* experience.

In these thematisations, the journey to Europe activates a metamorphosis (*maskh*) in the individual who makes it and the narrative focus is centred precisely on this transformation rather than on the description of the foreign country. In other words, through the theme of the journey, the Arab novel of the early 20th century explores the "archaeology of being" modern, recalling in part the words of Magris, in a context like the Egyptian one before World War I and in the period between the two wars. The themes of these novels are largely shared with the language of the *Bildungsroman*: the physical change, the emotional and character crisis of the individual, the change of perspective that the protagonist experiences following the "journey" to a foreign land. This can be compared to the change of outlook of the person who "moves through the ages", passing from childhood to adolescence. In other words, the fictionalised travelogue of the late *Nahḍa* has something in common with the *Bildungsroman* and, as a matter of fact, has been linked by some scholars with this model.[14]

In the history of the Arab novel and in the critique proposed by Arab scholars and European scholars alike, the theme of the journey to Europe is frequently traced back to the label "East-West encounter", which is both a meeting and a confrontation. However, as Casini suggests, the European theme can and must be read as a literary trope, or a kind of compositional strategy that expresses – through the *outlook*[15] of the various characters involved in the story and in the various settings predisposed to narration, whether they are situated on the South or North shore of the Mediterranean Sea – the personal experience of departure from one's origins, uprooting, crisis and possible restoration of the crisis of those who followed an idea of modernity in the Egypt of the time. With this concept clear, the operation reiterated by many critics – that is, the interpretation of the various declarations of the fictitious characters of novels like al-Ḥakīm's *A Sparrow from the East* or Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Adīb* as a mirror of authorial opinions on Europeans and Europe – will, without a doubt, emerge as a misleading operation. Reading travel narratives as an "archaeological dig" into the self-discovery process, and into the modern world that the young Egyptian man is looking for, is more fruitful than reading these texts as a realistic portrait of a cultural encounter between Egypt and Europe.[16]

The motif of the maskh *("metamorphosis") at the intersection between journey and* Bildung

The travelogue of the modern *Nahḍa* and the *Bildungsnarrative* share the central element of the protagonist's "metamorphosis", an element which, as Hartung recalls, underlies the principle of the Goethian *Bildung*:

> Goethe describes his own contribution to the idea of *Bildung* as linked to the notion of "metamorphosis". . . . Following Buffon, who defined a prototype for which all animals are formed as either superior or inferior variants, Goethe reformulates his consideration that formation includes variables as well as constants into the notion of "metamorphosis" and "type". These poles of variety versus immutability interact with each other, and on these two principles

the diversity of species is built. This also implies that for Goethe *Bildung* encompasses the interaction of the variable with the constant, of difference and identity, and of the static and the dynamic.[17]

The passage taken from Hartung's study ends with a reflection by Goethe on the ambiguous use of the term itself. *Bildung* is used both as "process" and as "product" – a use due, according to the German philosopher, precisely to the combinatorial nature of the *Bildung*, a phenomenon always poised between "stasis" and "change".[18] According to many scholars, this meaning of the term "*Bildung*" – which alludes to the "process" and to the "outcome of the process" alike – is difficult to render in translation. In her study on the transposition of the *Bildung* in Russian literature, Lina Steiner translated *Bildung* with the Russian word *obrazovanje* (literally: education) and with the English word "culture".[19]

The narrative arc of *Adīb* by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* evolves around the metamorphosis of the protagonist, on the one hand, and around his spiralling into a deep personal crisis on the other hand. Thus, crisis-plots are certainly not "traditional" coming-of-age novels (in both novels the protagonists are around 30 years old!) but they take from the *Bildung* themes like the passage between phases of life, a person's interior and exterior change, his or her metamorphosis and the impact this has on the self and on others.

In this chapter, the "modernist novel" category is used to analyse these stories, thus choosing the perspective of the narrative grammar through which the authors shape the personal crisis. In its unravelling page after page, the crisis of Adīb, eponymous protagonist of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's novel, like Ismā'īl's, appears as if filmed from within, from an intimately subjective perspective. Moreover, in both texts the "other" world frequented by the two travellers is barely described, though some features of it are recognised, always linked to the protagonist's inner world. It is thus a work based on the mimetic-realist model, but is also spanned by the language of the "modernist novel"; in other words, of that form of experimental, 20th-century novel perceived as "subsequent" and "differential" compared to the realistic and normative model that was discussed in the second chapter.

Bringing the conversation back to the narrative arc mapped out by the protagonist's story: what changes with respect to *'Awdat al-rūḥ* and, more in general, to the realistic novel? Certainly the perspective of a *possibility* of an aesthetic education, as codified by Schiller in *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* in 1795, is missing in both of these novels. Schiller writes:

> Every individual human being . . . carries with him potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of a human being, and it is his life's task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in *harmony* with the unchanging unity of his ideal.[20]

While admitting, with Redfield, the fleeting and almost illusory nature of the ideal Schillerian model of the "classic *Bildungsroman*",[21] in the bewildering and dysfunctional metamorphoses of these novels we read a moving away from this model

and its replacement with a traumatic and fragmentary *maskh* (metamorphosis). It is difficult not to read in this twisting of the central element of the *Bildung* an *in absentia* reference to the unreachable, "phantom" literary formation, as Redfield calls it, of organic growth.

Once again comparing these modernist novels with Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *'Awdat al-rūḥ*, we see a lost opportunity on the protagonist's part to grow *with* the nation. This loss is already foretold by the element of the journey: familiar geography is challenged rather than explored, by the coming-of-age youth. The "universalist" critical tradition of the *Bildungsroman*,[22] from which this study draws inspiration and that goes from Moretti through Esty and Boes, has highlighted how the concept of "building the self" based on German idealism translates into the "soul-nation allegory", for "nationhood gives a finished form to modern society in the same way that adulthood gives a finished form to modern subject".[23] The expression soul-nation allegory, worded by Esty, will be used in this study precisely to intend the homology between the process of individual growth and that of national formation.

According to this concept of the *Bildung*, the balance between stasis and change in the individual foretells a political "balance" on another scale – in this case, on a political-national scale. In these modernist novels – which, on the contrary, show tormented individuals incapable of achieving harmony in crisis – this balance is missing. Moreover, what is missing is youth as *structuring principle* of the story: the two stories, as we shall see in detail, lose the characteristic primeval nature of the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* – in other words, youth. What occurs is a kind of replacement of the story's structuring principle, which in the classic *Bildungsroman* Wilhelm Meister by Goethe is youth from the viewpoint of age, with its promise of organic growth, understood as development of the essence of the self – thereby every person would become what he or she already is *in nuce*[24] – while the trope of the journey implies a "leap" of identity. As we shall see, in *Qindīl* there is a true age *leap* highlighting the breaking of the "organic" perspective in the modulation of the main character.

Thus the two novels, introducing a diegetic grammar based, as we shall see, on the spatial and temporal discontinuity more than on harmony and continuity, represent a "new", alternative form to Muḥsin's organic *Bildung* in *'Awdat al-rūḥ*.

The following sections will show how this early 20th-century travel novel is fully comparable to that 20th-century transnational form that Gregory Castle calls "modernist *Bildung*",[25] a type of *Bildungsnarrative* in which the allegorical strength of the Goethian *Bildung* is missing and in which the impossibility of a balance between transformation and stasis, on the one hand, and between individual and society, on the other, is revealed. A novel in which, however, fascination for the theme of youth growing up is not completely cancelled. On the contrary, the theme of personal growth is recalled repeatedly by the plots and, at the same time, is contradicted by the fragmentary nature of the *teloi*.

In the modernist and early 20th-century Egyptian novel under discussion here, the transformation of the individual becomes synonymous with crisis, from the Greek *krìsis* ("choice"), thus not falling on nature, but on intellect and on the

individual's capacity for discernment. This choice brings to light the individual's fallibility, the oscillations, the parts in conflict with each other which, as we shall see in the two *teloi* outlined in *Adīb* and *Qindīl*, may not be reconciled (in the former case) or may be reconciled (the latter case) owing to the intervention of a *force majeure* independent of the protagonist's will. Therefore, there are many differences with '*Awdat al-rūḥ*'s *telos* of continuity. In Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's novel, the character's growth takes place within a national "spirit" that exists prior to him and that, at a certain point of his story, infuses him with an aesthetic and ethical-cognitive certainty. On the contrary, the protagonist who travels to Europe will change his gaze on the nation or, as in the case of *Adīb*, will never return to it. In other words, we witness here the breaking of the "soul-nation allegory" that had been the subject of study in the third chapter. The individual's desire is not directed towards the national "spirit" but, rather, it becomes the vessel of a desire for Europeanness which, as Lorenzo Casini expresses in detail, is embodied by a "new" figure – at least, "new" in this particular trajectory of the *Bildungsnarrative* – that of the European woman.[26]

European women in Adīb *and* Qindīl Umm Hāshim

According to Casini, René Girard's theory of mimetic desire[27] provides a fruitful interpretation of European female characters – of which we also find examples in *Adīb* and *Qindīl*:

> The relationship between fictional subject and mediator outlined by René Girard in his study [cit.] is very effective to describe that between the protagonists of the Egyptian novels . . . of the first half of the 20th century and European female characters; this is also because there is no shortage of analogies between the gaze of the characters of *Madame Bovary* and *Le Rouge et le Noir* towards the French urban aristocracy and that of the characters of the Egyptian novels set in Europe. . . . In both cases, the relationship with the mediator is conditioned by the protagonist's conviction that the sociocultural universe he comes from is inadequate compared to that of the mediator taken *as a model*.
>
> While the mediators are European female characters, the object of desire is the modernity achieved by European societies and personified in the very bodies of the mediators.[28]

In the preceding passage by Casini, which employs Girard's theory in a less deterministic context more inclined to recognise the characters' narrative autonomy, the "mediator" is defined as a key figure in understanding the outcome of the will, desires and claim of "mimesis" that the Arab-Egyptian subject brings with him in the European context. In his study, Casini shows how women fulfil the role of "mediators" by directing the behaviours and convictions of the protagonists. The trajectories of these youths are far from representative of an authorial vision of Europe and of the relationships that the real authors had, from the

autobiographical viewpoint, with European women. On the contrary, the trope of the European woman (as that of her homologous, the "Egyptian woman", whom the *naḥḍāwi* reformists often refer to as an embodiment of the nation) has to be read as a narrative tool to characterise symbolic spaces: "nationhood" and "foreignness".[29] Sometimes, as in *Adīb*, the same woman (Aline) covers both spaces in the protagonist's eyes, in accordance with his interior crisis/transformation.

The trope of the European woman and that of the Egyptian wife, as we will see in the next section titled "Crisis and Metamorphosis", are therefore functional to the articulation of a critical narrative about the desire of being modern, and about the risk of losing self-identity in the attempt to reach cultural modernity. In particular, in Casini's words, *Adīb* "can be interpreted as the tragic allegory of an intellectual journey founded on "mimetic" desire and mystified image of European civilization".[30] In order to fulfil his mimetic desire Adīb will divorce his beloved Egyptian wife, despite the advice of his friend, the young Ṭāhā. Soon after the divorce, the European woman, as we will see in detail, embodies Adīb's mimetic desire and acts as an agent of his crisis/transformation. When his radical transformation will lead him to delirium, his perception of Aline will change immediately, and he will denounce her as a spy, a traitor. His last wish will be to return to Egypt and to his ex-wife, as to return to the symbolic space she was embodying (Egypt).[31]

Another literary trope that put in evidence the protagonist's crisis/transformation is the dichotomy between light and darkness. The protagonists' movement towards Europe is a movement that goes from the dark to the light. This metaphor is made explicit: in *Adīb*, for example, the protagonist writes a letter inviting his young friend to leave the dark and suffocating air of the Pyramid and reach Paris, which "come out" of the depths of the antiquity. A description of Paris, this, that refers solely to the freshness of the air outside the closed room, which seems aniconic.

In *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*, the protagonist leaves behind his betrothed, who is suffering from trachoma, and returns from Europe with a degree in ophthalmology, armed with which he will attempt to cure her. Light and dark are like two poles around which the tensions of the "no longer young" in the making are structured, with the outcomes we will mention later on.

According to Castle, another obvious feature of the transnational modernist novel is the opening of the time dimension, which is why the narration does not follow a unique and chronological order but opens a gap between the time of the narration and the interior time of the protagonist and the overcoming of the single narrative voice. Another phenomenon that characterises modernism in literature is the mingling of the novel with other genres,[32] together with the constant deviation of the writing from the "pact" defined by Giovanna Rosa as the "Narrative pact of realism"[33] characterised by a conforming of dialogues and characters to "plausible" standards. In other words, to standards that mirror accepted and socially normative codes. If anything, the modernist novel exhibits the non-normativity of the writing and thought that create it, revealing the artifice behind representation and annoyance faced with an establishment of trust between author and reader

that causes the "suspension of disbelief".[34] In this sense, the "modernist coming-of-age novel", in the most diverse geographical contexts, can be read as a kind of parodying, disenchanted, fragmentary rewriting of the modern tradition in its form and content, a kind of dissection of the form, or *a contrario* re-enactment of the allegorical organicity of the *Bildungsroman*.

"Unseasonable youth", crisis and disorganic paths

The loss of "organicity" of the modernist story and the fact that youth from the viewpoint of age loses its structuring role in the stories are factors common to the two works. Nevertheless, they "react" differently to the breaking forth of modernist sensibility and to the formal rifts partially presented earlier: a formal organicity is maintained in *Qindīl* but the personal crisis that assails the protagonist Ismāʿīl ends up being resolved with a sort of "flash" that hits the protagonist, who welcomes back faith after having rejected it, armed with his studies in ophthalmology in Europe. This flash of inspiration, which is followed by Ismāʿīl's actual success in treating Fāṭima's eye condition, remains within the sphere of mystical yearning and in fact, as Muhammad Siddiq iconoclastically notes, "collapses under any rigorous interrogation".[35] The criterion of "plausibility" so acclaimed in the formative years of the genre of the Egyptian novel is missing, therefore, in these writings. Readers of *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* find themselves holding a kind of "parable" permeated with allusions to popular faith, skilfully tied to elements of mystic tradition. In the case of *Adīb*, on the other hand, the novel appears discontinuous, fragmentary and polymorphous, as it breathes of different writings and styles – from autobiography to epistolary novel, from sapiential dialogue to *adab* prose.

As mentioned beforehand, a loss of the traditional "form" – according to the use that Levine makes of the word – of the hero of the *Bildung* (in other words, his youth) acts as a corollary, in both cases, to this loss of organicity.[36] The question that critics like Kern, Castle and Esty have asked themselves with regard to the European context is: what remains of the *Bildung* when the novel form "disintegrates", and when what is mentioned earlier occurs – in other words, when *becoming* is no longer perceived as a prerogative of youth, but as an intrinsic trait of humans? Kern observes that the first consequence of modernist sensibility in the tradition of the European novel is the loss of an organic, fluid and continuous narration[37] which found its epitome in foundational texts of the European *Bildungsroman* like Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795) or Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1850). The feeling of the natural "awakening" of the spirit, recalled in the third chapter and reclaimed by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm in his *ʿAwdat al-rūḥ*, runs parallel to that of *Meister*: Muḥsin's youth is a metaphor for "aesthetic citizenship", and this metaphor cannot be reproduced in the modernist novel: "in place of a continuous organic unfolding in life [they] saw discontinuity, wrong turns and dead ends".[38]

In Kern's view, an unprecedented "value" of failure also emerges in modernist sensibility: the illusory world of "fiction", its being artifice, is denounced by modernist language, in an explicit breaking of the "mimetic-realist" trust agreement. Here, then, the protagonist's failure is foretold as a confirmation of the same

impossibility of "organically" narrating the experience of becoming a subject, and the loss of self, crisis and false steps end up replacing, in the grammar of the narration of modernist education, the goals and experiences of progressive growth. In other words, the teleology underlying the form of the "classic" *Bildung* is no longer possible in the modernist novel, as well as the Humboldtian concept of the *Bildung*, which envisages the attainment of a balance between individual and community and the identification of the individual with a positive "model", triggering the development of the inherent potential of youth.[39] This concept is literally "torn apart" by literary modernism. As we shall see, the new declensions of the *Bildung*, alternative to the linear and organical ones, will thus often take on the role of anti-*Bildung*, or of a dysfunctional transformation that leads to the loss of self and to the individual's alienation from his or her society.

With the writings analysed here, a shifting of the emphasis on a self in crisis, tormented, alienated, is already taking place, presaging the experimental and late-modern writings of the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, even other elements of the novel (character, event, space, time and function of the narrator) change with regard to their more traditional and realistic structure: the principle of causality, or the idea of a unique character who is consistent from the ethical and behavioural point of view, are the first pillars to fall under the blows of modernist sensibility, impatient with the normativity of mimetic realism, curious to explore the contradictions within the individual, ready to narratively translate the protagonist's mental and inner life.[40]

5.2 Anachronistic youth and "out-of-season" *Bildung*: *Adīb* by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889–1973 – scholar, historian, writer, translator, politician and Minister of Education in the last Wafdist government (1950–1952) – was one of the most important figures of the *Nahḍa*, seen as a political and cultural project. Even the story of the educational path of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, a native of the village of 'Izbat-Kilū in the governorship of al-Minya who was left blind by an infectious disease at the age of 3, was taken by biographers and literary critics as an example of a typically *Nahḍawī* literary, academic and political "career".[41] After attending the local *kuttāb*, in 1902 he followed his brother to al-Azhar, where he soon showed his intolerance towards conservative teachers and traditional *curricula*.[42] During his years of study at al-Azhar, alongside the study of Islamic subjects, the young man also attended seminars held at Cairo University by orientalists like Carlo Nallino, Louis Massignon and David Santillana. During this same period, he got in touch with Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid and with the circle of the newspaper *al-Jarīda*, where he signed his first articles in 1908 and where he became familiar with the thought of Ernest Renan, Auguste Comte and Hippolyte Taine. In 1915, he moved to France and obtained a doctorate at the Sorbonne under the guidance of Émile Durkheim. The autobiographical history of his formative years is contained in his third-person autobiography *al-Ayyām* (*The Days*, published between

1926 and 1927 and translated into English as *An Egyptian Childhood*),[43] which had an explosive impact on the Egyptian panorama of the 1930s, encouraging autobiographical writing which, shortly afterwards, would take on new breath.[44]

Published in 1935, *Adīb* takes up certain autobiographical elements already present in *al-Ayyām*, which nonetheless do not allow us to define the book as an "autobiography". Owing to a series of textual (like the letters that make up a significant part of the text) and peritextual (like the dedication to the character of the book, recalled as a real person, put in epigraph) elements, there is a simulation of the autobiographical discourse.[45] The majority of critics and translators has, with reason, spoken of *Adīb* as of a novel, despite there being "islands" of autobiography. The main character, inspired by a person who really existed,[46] is an unpredictable, arrogant and histrionic "man of letters", who critics and readers call "Adīb" solely for the sake of convention. Indeed, the name "Adīb" (which in Arabic is a common noun meaning "man of letters" as well as a proper name) appears on the cover, but is never used within the novel.

Thus, *Adīb* is a pseudo-autobiographical novel[47] centred on the friendship between the narrator-character who, for the sake of convention, we shall call "the young Ṭāhā", and Adīb. The correspondence and conversations between the two form a large part of the story. It is precisely through the friendship between the two and the interweaving of their two very different points of view – though they have similar aspirations – that the novel builds its network of meanings. The theme of the double runs through the entire story: on the one hand the Azharite student, faithful to the preparation of his lessons, on the other Adīb, a destabilising character, a man of letters of great culture who, however, lives his love as an *'illa* – an "illness", an obsession. In the seminal reading of the text offered by Lorenzo Casini, *Adīb* is a "parodic allegory of an exemplary intellectual path, shared by numerous Egyptian modernist intellectuals";[48] an allegory deeply rooted in the autobiographical past of the author himself, but that equips itself with the necessary distancing of fiction to recompose itself in a story of "crisis" and loss of self.

Adīb is described as "victim" of his passion for books, poetry, science and letters, and he poses as a romantic who aspires to live his life as if it were a work of literature.

> They claim that the most prominent characteristic of a man of letters is his keenness to create a bond between himself and the people. He feels nothing which he does not divulge and experiences no emotions which he does not advertise. . . . If all this is true, then my friend must be a man of letters.[49]

It is a passion that devours him physically as well:

> despite his short height, his back was bowed when he stood, bent when he sat. Perhaps his addiction to writing and reading and his extravagance in bending down to the book or the paper were the cause of this deformity of his posture.[50]

Adīb's romantic disposition is rendered in contrast with the routine and not very exciting nature of the clerical work that the character performs with total indifference, being completely absorbed by his passion for letters. The "romantic-hero" versus "Philistine" contrast is obvious from the first encounters between the two, which take place in the corridors and classrooms of the newborn Cairo University, where both Adīb and Ṭāhā attend public classes. Adīb goes to escape the boredom of a clerical job, to attend more stimulating and up-to-date courses compared to the Azharite curricula, where subjects like history or geography are not yet offered.[51]

While at first Adīb seems scornful of those coming from al-Azhar ("You come from al-Azhar! Everything seems significant to you and everything seems a novelty to you!"[52]), he soon expresses the desire to study more in depth the Islamic disciplines taught there, in his own way rising as a sort of heir to traditional Islamic culture and, at the same time, a careful appraiser of modern literature, including Western literature. In this way, with the pretext of an "exchange" for study purposes, the character prepares to "build", and later cement, a modern friendship with an Azharite half his age.

Friendship as a metaphor for modernity

Adīb is, perhaps, the first 20th-century Egyptian novel to narrate the friendship between two individuals in such vivid terms. To find an example of literary friendship as convincing, it is perhaps necessary to wait for the novel *al-Qāhira al-Jadīda* (*Cairo Modern*, 1945), on which the next chapter will focus, by the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature Najīb Maḥfūẓ. This novel opens recording the repartee between four students, close friends living in the same university residence hall, of different social extraction and political affiliation.[53] In *Adīb*, for the first time, we find a focus on a feeling of camaraderie and friendship (*ṣadāqa*) also understood as a modern form of social cohesion, independent of the old forms of social organisation like the family or the clan. This new form of bond between "equals" is strengthened by the various forms of youth organisations and becomes a characteristic trait of the young people belonging to that new social category of the *effendiyya* (urban middle class)[54] that Adīb conforms to in his interests and attire. After a series of repeated encounters between the Azharite and his older friend, who is passionate about literature but works as a civil servant, the narrating voice offers a chiasmic image of the couple: "that day there sat beside me, listening to the professor of principles of law, a man who donned not a turban, but a tarbūsh".[55] The turban sitting on the benches of the public university (the young Ṭāhā) and the tarbūsh of the civil servant among the colonnades of the Azhar are the plastic image of a peculiar friendship that was likely not that rare at that time. Indeed, in the public imaginary, the Azharite is the non-*effendī*. If Western-style garb accompanied by tarbūsh are the sign of the modernisation of the *effendiyya*, then the Azharite's turban is the clear sign of *not* belonging to that group. In other words, clothes are the external sign of that which Ryzova calls "educational capital" – a central element, though not the only one, for effendification: families who

wished for their sons to become *effendī* would send them to secularised public schools. Nevertheless, as Ryzova is wont to point out, the destiny of the young Azharite represented here in novelised form also tells us that the educational path is merely one of the ways to achieve effendification: indeed, in light of the biography of the real author, we could surmise that behind the turban of the anonymous 15-year-old narrator of *Adīb* lies an exception that confirms the rule, as he became, from the Azharite that he was, the undisputed symbol of the Egyptian westernised *intelligentia*.[56]

The young Ṭāhā is still very attached to his older brother's care, and perhaps made even more dependent by his blindness, to which the text refers only obliquely, via the textual references to the "young Nubian reader" who, in faltering Arabic, reads textbooks aloud to the young Ṭāhā,[57] or to the two companions who usually lead him around the city. If anything, the character of Adīb is the bearer of a sentiment of the new times, and he will finally succeed in his intent to emancipate – at least partially – the young Azharite from his brother's protection. As mentioned earlier, the friendship between the two does not begin right away; quite the opposite, Adīb's know-it-all attitude and his boisterousness at Cairo University irritates the young Ṭāhā and his smaller group of friends. However, he will finally give in to the insistence of Adīb, who explicitly asks to see him outside of the family circle:

> I do not wish to visit you in your home. For I do not wish to stand on ceremony and to be embarrassed. I do not wish to feel confined to the constraints that fetter people, especially youths and boys, when they visit each other in their homes, where there are also fathers and elder brothers present. I would like to meet you free and unconstrained, having to take account of nothing and of no one.[58]

Thus the two begin to see each other; Adīb manages to invite his friend to his home, on the top of the Citadel of Cairo, from where he can enjoy the sight of the city from above, like in a sort of "ivory tower". Even Adīb's home is representative of his place in society. To strengthen his friendship with this blind Azharite, who still has an adoring attitude in the face of notions and content handed out by the chairs of the "lay" university that he takes for granted, Adīb recalls their common rural origin in a virtual stroll that winds through the clay streets, canals and shops of a rural geography familiar to both of them. It is interesting to see how, through a rhetorical artifice (the virtual stroll recounted by Adīb), the past of the two young men is perceived as shared not so much because it was lived together but because it was *recounted* as such. Here the man of letters is depicted in all his narrating power; the young Ṭāhā, in his turn, feels subjugated by his friend's words.

> "Suppose I were now in my village and you were in your city. Suppose I wished to visit you and spend part of the day with you. Where could I meet you? . . . Throw off this turban and reject this *gilbab* and quftan and return to

the loose gown you donned before coming to Cairo. . . . Go back to that gown and put that thin white skullcap on your head. It is called a *takiyya*. . . . Return to that costume and I will take off this European one and return to the clothes I used to wear in the countryside when I was not attending school. I wore an open-breasted wool costume and put a tarbush on my head, as the affluent sons of '*umdas* [village mayors]. . . . Return to your old attire, and I shall return to mine, and await my visit. Where shall I meet you?"

Moved by his words, voice, and tone, and by memories they invoked, memories which carried me back to myself before leaving the town to come to Cairo, which put me back in those clothes he described, those I return to whenever I visit the provinces, I said, "Then meet me on the roadside. I will be sitting in front of the Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Wahid's shop on one of those crates flanking it to the right and left".[59]

In the invitation to "cast off the clothes of the *shaykh*" and in redressing Ṭāhā in the clothes of his youth spent in the Egyptian countryside, Adīb wants to get rid of all distances, implicitly overcoming that polarisation between social *effendī* of the *shaykh* – which, as we shall see, is a title that "weighs" on the shoulders of this Azharite as much as on those of another protagonist, i.e. Ismā'īl, protagonist of *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* – and to embrace a feeling of youth, of possibility and freedom. These conditions are irreconcilable with the traditional "title" of *shaykh* and with the social role normally connected with this title.

The invitation is reiterated by Adīb, and his words can count as an explanation of what we have written in the first chapter on the cultural dimension of "youth". This dimension can only be attained by participating in the aggregate life among young people, occupying specific urban spaces, organising one's existence in accordance with a certain concept of work and free time and, finally, recognising oneself in a common horizon of readings, cultural and discursive references. With his proposal of breaking out of the roles of the *shaykh* to embrace a "modern" friendship of total sharing (sharing of dreams, of plans, but also, as we shall, of the crisis), Adīb refers to himself as bearer of modernity in his friend's life.

His young friend's resistance finally crumbles, and a sharing outside the family will be established between the two, mainly based on mutual plans:

He had planned to go through life as an employee, introducing himself to a new form of culture every day, seeking pleasure in reading, writing, and discussions. He came to detest his office violently and grew totally indifferent to his work. *He yearned to abandon Egypt and cross the sea to one of those countries where he could seek widespread knowledge and refined literature, where all aspects of life would change.* I wanted to become a sheikh at al-Azhar. I aspired to renovate thought and life in the manner of those influenced by Muḥammad Abdu. . . . *I yearned to abandon Egypt and cross the sea to one of those countries where abundant knowledge and refined literature is sought, where all aspects of life would change.*[60]

As can be inferred from that twice repeated sentence used by the author to describe the plans of both (although these two characters are very different from each other), the paths of the two friends shift from opposite to parallel precisely because of this modern friendship, which has the power to match up even the most diverse personalities by placing them within the same horizon. Later on, with the outbreak of Adīb's crisis, the end of this feeling of friendship will bring a new distance between them ("I feel that a coldness has descended between us", Adīb writes to his young friend[61]) and their plans will once again be described in oppositional terms. The modern friendship between the blind 15-year-old Azharite and Adīb, a civil servant passionate about literature and with youthful aspirations, is fuelled by the desire to reach elsewhere:

> thus did our first year at the University pass, and our second, and our third. He did not progress in his study of logic and I did not progress in my study of French. But we did progress in the art of organizing these lengthy, diversified debates which touched on everything but rarely concluded anything.[62]

Thus, the two appear engaged in a relationship of mutual definition – a definition which, the more it appears alike in the happy moments of intertwining friendship, the more it splits into two opposites at the time of crisis.

Crisis and metamorphosis

However liberal, the environs of Cairo University are not open enough for a restless, curious, iconoclastic intellectual like Adīb, who has long yearned to travel to Europe to complete his education as so many Egyptian youths did before him (al-Ṭahṭāwī's *riḥla* and the tradition that followed in its wake come to mind). About a quarter into the novel, readers learn that Adīb has finally managed to obtain a scholarship to study in France thanks to the university, which funds student trips abroad. The scholarship, however, is reserved for unmarried students, while Adīb – greatly astonishing young Ṭāhā, who knows nothing of this part of his friend's private life – reveals that he is married to Ḥamīda, a woman from his village of origin.[63]

After several troubled reflections, in which Adīb involves his friend and confidant on more than one occasion, the man of letters decides not to lie to the university by hiding his marriage, and so he divorces from his wife, though she has always proven to be a generous, loving woman, and was willing to marry him after he was refused by his own cousin.[64] Oddly enough, Adīb's reasons underlying this radical decision include the fact that he cannot promise marital fidelity – to Ḥamīda or to himself – during his study period in Europe.[65] This infuriates young Ṭāhā, involved by his friend in this choice and to whom Adīb confides his "moral" dilemma – and who, instead, throws back in Adīb's face his immoral intention of freeing himself of the conjugal shackles in order to lead a dissolute lifestyle in Europe. The young Azharite student goes so far as to hope his friend is

denied the scholarship. Conversely, his *shaykh* words provoke his friend's hysterical laughter:

> [young Ṭāhā] – "My love for you forces me to wish with all my heart that you should be irrevocably denied this journey of yours and that you should be forcefully compelled to stay in Egypt. You know that you shall sin in Europe. Then you proceed, nonetheless, to travel to it and you insist on traveling, you therefore seek sin and premeditate vice and insist on disobedience to God". As soon as the words "disobedience to God" reached his ears he went mad. He broke out into a wide, loud, incessant laughter.[66]

As recalled, *krìsis* is the Greek word for "choice", although here the choice faced by the man of letters takes on the dimensions of Adīb's moral "enigma" (to divorce or not to divorce? To lie to the institute that will fund the trip or to greatly wrong a faithful, virtuous wife?), ending with a loss of certainties for both friends. Neither Adīb nor, as a consequence, young Ṭāhā know who they are anymore. The divorce issue – like, more in general, the relationship with all things female in this novel – clearly takes on a metaphorical version.[67] The letter sent by Adīb to young Ṭāhā, who stayed behind in Cairo, contains a detailed description of the bitter "separation" from his young wife, who is sent back to her home in the countryside with her maid. Adīb then describes at length the oppression he feels in being hounded by the demon (*shayṭān*) of guilt ("Her image has not left me, my dear friend, yet days and days have gone by since the train carried her to her village in the countryside. Many things have taken place since then and many conditions have changed".).[68] Several elements of the narrative recall a metaphorical discussion: Ḥamīda embodies both Adīb's ties to his land of origin (they come from the same village), and a family tie that "accepted" him, in contrast to other family members that had rejected him in the past.

Despite the crushing guilt that tortured him on the journey, despite the demon of remorse lying in ambush, once Adīb arrives in Marseille, he confesses in a letter that he no longer suffers from remorse. The trope of transformation (*maskh*)[69] is expressed through the transition from his relationship with Ḥamīda to his relationship with a Frenchwoman who takes on the role of "mediator" of Adīb's desire to completely integrate with and belong to France. Meeting this woman will persuade him to extend his stay before setting off again for Paris. We later learn that Adīb has embarked on a brilliant career of studies, albeit spanned by deep crises foretelling his mental imbalance. Upon the outbreak of the war, Adīb decides to stay in France rather than desert the country like the other Egyptian students, sparking a process of total identification with his host nation, and his mental imbalance becomes more and more apparent, hinting at an impending and final victory of insanity over reason ("I have resolved not to leave Paris whatever the circumstances. You will learn that I shall respect this resolve whatever the consequences, even if I should die. What is death if it is for Paris?!").[70]

The character will fall prey to insanity, identifying with Germany in the last of his delirious manifestations as he sees himself reflected in everything that is said

or written about this country – for example claiming, in his epistolary delirium, to have been exiled by the Allies to the "Extreme West" (*al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā*).[71] According to the man, it was his lover, a Frenchwoman he formed an attachment to after arriving in Paris, who reported and delivered him to the Allies.

It is interesting to note how the tension between the character's past and his conscience's "present" is conveyed, in several points of the novel, by means of the epistolary style which, in actual fact, is the prevailing style in *Adīb* – so much so as to inspire the critic al-Musawi to define *Adīb* as a "pseudo-epistolary" novel.[72] The epistolary novel does not have an acknowledged position in the history of the Arab novel, and the role played by this genre in the development of the individual experience representation techniques is indubitably underestimated. In the Egyptian novel's formative period (that is to say, the 1910s and 1920s), we find *Khiṭbat al-shaykh (1915, The shaykh's engagement)* a youthful and incomplete epistolary novel by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (never published except in serialised form in the newspaper *al-Sufūr*),[73] in addition to epistolary segments in Labība Hāshim's novel *Qalb al-rajul* (*A Man's Heart*, 1904). This means that the epistolary novel, though it remained a minor genre, did circulate in the early 1900s. According to Watt's statements with regard to writers like Richardson (author of *Pamela*, one of the first epistolary novels), in Europe this genre played a prominent role in perfecting the effect of "imitation of individual experience".[74] We can speculate that the pseudo-epistle played a similar role also in Arab fiction in its earliest period of expression: indeed, this ploy is the means by which Adīb presents himself exactly how he is, in his constant, feverish wavering, in the coming and going of guilt. In its modernist guise, the epistolary novel only expands the emphasis placed on the contradictory nature and plurality of any subjectivity.

Adīb's *maskh*, metamorphosis, follows this crisis. On the very first day of his sojourn in Marseille, Adīb is already won over by the softness of his bed, the brightness of his room and the charm of the maid, the first Frenchwoman he meets when – the day after his arrival – she wakes him with a breakfast tray. This entrance into Adīb's room marks the beginning of the *maskh*, a "metamorphosis" clearly expressed by the character in a letter to his friend. Initially, this metamorphosis takes on the tangible, Ovidian traits of the change of form: Adīb writes his Egyptian friend: "I was a donkey before crossing the sea. But when I entered this hotel and went up to this room I beheld that I was no longer a donkey. I had been *metamorphosed* (masakhtu) to a human being".[75] Adīb finds himself transformed from a "donkey" into a "man" as a consequence of his love for Fernande, in whom he recognises an ideal of beauty and femininity previously unknown to him. As a man, then, Adīb argues (recalling the poet al-Akhṭal's claims as to water, seen as a drink fit for donkeys), he becomes initiated into the consumption of wine and beer. A few lines later, this metamorphosis results in love madness, yet this very feeling leads Adīb to despise himself, as if the metamorphosis also triggered a feeling of guilt:

> Yes, I am neither mad nor intoxicated. But I am a man who has total disdain for himself, who utterly despises himself. How would you expect me not to disdain

myself when hardly do I see a commonplace maid carrying food to me, smiling to me and speaking to me as she carries food to tens of my likes . . . hardly do I see her when I go mad and my heart becomes infatuated with her. . . . I am neither mad nor intoxicated. But I do not know who I am and what I am. A while ago I claimed I was a donkey before crossing the sea and that this girl restored me to human form.[76]

The role of Fernande, the first maid Adīb meets by chance in Marseille, is clearly expressed, in the mediation towards the *maskh*, in this and other passages – where the shadow of insanity first appears in Adīb. As Casini states, the character's madness is a final, ironic and Dantean expression of this *maskh* which, transforms Adīb into the opposite of what he aspired to be when he made his choice, thus going through the crisis and crossing the Mediterranean Sea. More than a mere theme, insanity in *Adīb* is actually a principle of ironic subversion of the literary tropes which are included in the novel and contribute to build its meaning. At first, Adīb shows signs of a behavioural imbalance and of a complete lack of order (*niẓām*) that lead him to live from one extreme to the next. In his letters, he also mentions the frenzy (*iḍṭirāb*) and, last but not least, the corruption (*fasād*) that are slowly taking possession of his life. The man of letters ascribes these conditions to his "Egyptian education"[77] in his letters to Ṭāhā – an education that allegedly had a negative influence on him, keeping him from adapting to a society where, on the contrary, disorder and chaos are not tolerated.[78] Later on, in a description that seems to linger on self-Orientalism, the traits initially ascribed to a cultural heritage become the distinguishing traits of a personality that has become unbalanced. In chapters 18 and 19, both of which consist of letters exchanged between Adīb and Ṭāhā, the man of letters explicitly references his nervous disorder, and several episodes of his life – both personal and academic – are mentioned as signs of the progressive worsening of his condition. The man's Egyptian education and heritage are therefore schematically described as a terrible legacy that eventually jeopardises his Paris sojourn. Urged by his friend, who is curious to learn something of his new life in Paris, Adīb is not able to offer a traditional description of it but, rather, resorts to a metaphor to express himself:

"October 19 . . .

life in Paris is not roughly described in letters and correspondences. You can only know it by living it. But I would roughly, imprecisely, describe my feelings in Paris to you. This description will not be accomplished by words which I write to you! For words, as I said, are useless in Paris. But go to the pyramids – for I don't think you have ever been there – and enter the great Pyramid. There you will grow impatient with life, and life will grow impatient with you. You will experience suffocation and your body will drown in sweat. You will imagine that you are carrying the weight of this tremendous building and that it is about to crush you. Then, come out of the depths of this Pyramid and meet the light, open air. Learn that life in Paris is life after you escape from these depths. Strive to complete . . . the remaining examinations

which you must take, strive also to maintain the satisfaction of those who love you and encourage you and wish you to complete your studies in Paris. And hurry to Paris when you can, I am waiting for you here.[79]

After describing life in Paris as the air outside the Pyramid, sanctioning – visually as well – a sabotage of the Pharaonic symbols popular with the novelists of the time to celebrate and corroborate an ideal of national authenticity,[80] Adīb practically humanises Paris, enacting a delirious process of self-identification with this city. Adīb literally "marries" the city as if it were a lover.[81]

As Michael Allan points out, Adīb's insanity hides something very different than the alienation of an intellectual in relation to his own community and his own "audience" (or auditorium, since Adīb did not publish his works but, rather, would hold long conversations with his friends).[82] His character shifts from the atmosphere of affinity and cosmopolitan aspirations shared with his young Egyptian friend and intellectual in the making to social isolation and disappearance into a cloud of madness in Paris. The strange European transformation, the outcome of which proves fatal to the protagonist, cannot but be read as an allegory of the Manichaean vision embraced by the protagonist during his crisis as a solution to it . . . but which, instead, is nothing but the dissolution of the self.

Adīb as an allegory of the man of letters fascinated by Europe

As we infer from the preceding analysis, the *topoi* characteristic of Adīb are placed at the intersection between coming-of-age story and "European-themed" novel. In Adīb's story, however, these *topoi* undergo a special twist: the protagonist is not young and, additionally, what awaits him is not integration into French society but, conversely, the loss of self by way of crisis and insanity. In the twist of a *telos* that replicates elements from the coming-of-age path while drawing an opposite arc, Adīb appears to readers as a modernist anti-hero, as well as a narrator of his own unstable self and a "translator" – especially in the epistolary sections – of his own interior world. As the cultural and intellectual modernity Adīb aspires to does not circulate among the colonnades of al-Azhar or the corridors of Cairo University, he sets off on a spasmodic quest to find it, to the point of blurring completely with the "model" he set out to attain: his divorce equals the severing of all ties with his native land. Fatally attracted by his own end, this destabilising character begins his descent into madness by denying his Egyptian intimate family "life", creating his own "pass" to Europe, and ultimately losing himself in the French capital, by means of severing family ties.[83] In Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's novel, the breaking of the allegory occurs via a mechanism of emphasis and ironic subversion. Ultimately, in his delirium, Adīb is convinced he is "married" to France – thus reconstructing, on one hand, the marriage he severed and, on the other, feeling "joined", like in marriage, to the nation he has chosen in a sort of delirious reappropriation and recodification of the national allegory.

By means of the impetuous and irreverent character of Adīb, the author destabilises and overturns social roles taken for granted ("Throw off this turban!"),

contradicts the trajectories and complicates the narrations of Egyptian intellectual modernity. Adīb's own trajectory is a contradiction of the self: Adīb loses himself in madness – once an intellectual, he now becomes a man at the margins of society.

Critics and translators of the novel have asked themselves the following question: why tell the story of the *fashal*, the failure, of Adīb's European mission and of his personal and intellectual project? Why did the author not simply tell his acquaintance's story by keeping to the traditional genre of the *sīra*, the biography? What interest, on the contrary, did the author find in the subjectivity of this man, a victim of mental imbalance, so much so as to highlight his inner dimension with a massive use of the epistolary technique? Who, then, is Adīb?

Adīb, as Casini explains, is an allegorical character in whose tragic story the author presents a polarised vision of modernity that was quite common in Egypt between the world wars. Adīb's *choice* is a reference to the binarism between a modernity perceived as an opportunity and a desire of mimesis with Europe, and a modernity perceived, instead, as a danger, a place of perdition. The character of Adīb, just like the author in real life, draws a virtual arc between the two poles. In contrast to the author's experience, however, it will prove impossible for Adīb to "go on", to carry out his mission with a positive transformation and a triumphant return home. Like many novels set on the eve of World War I, *Adīb* resorts to this parable of disintegration to also speak of the war,[84] and it does so through a character with a deranged teleology, who identifies with his model to the point where he is no longer able to find his own self. For this teleological twist, Lorenzo Casini used the Dantean metaphor of *contrappasso* ("suffer the opposite") – that is, the mechanism by which the damned find themselves serving a sentence that is contrary or analogous to their offence.[85] Adīb represents something similar to what Hans Castorp, protagonist of *The Magic Mountain* (1924), represents for the European novel: the character's "escape" from himself, a parody of the 19th-century coming-of-age novel that draws on – while also demolishing – the language of the realist coming-of-age novel. In Casini's innovative interpretation of *Adīb* as an allegorical text,[86] Adīb ultimately represents a vast category of intellectuals close to the author – other authors who have lost their identity in the acritical pursuit of an idea of modernity that consists exclusively of an imitation of the European model, of knowledge and of European cities, severing all ties with the self. Like Adīb in the Pyramid, these intellectuals experience suffocation in their homeland and thus leave it behind, literally driven by cultural and social narrowmindedness, by the same inability to live their youth, and prepare to fill their lungs with fresh air. However, some of them, perhaps even among the intellectuals personally known by the author, became one with this long-desired otherness, eventually suffocating as they breathe in the air "outside the Pyramid". This interpretation opens up the possibility of including Ṭāhā Ḥusayn himself in the circle of the *Udabā'* lost in the illusion of mimesis with the other, as he ultimately and unquestionably innervates both voices. Thus, the pseudo-autobiography would appear as a sort of confession, a reconstruction of the hidden part of the authorial *telos* – the less disclosable, most secret and, still today, most mysterious part.

Who was that smart, tall, upstanding young man? Qindīl Umm Hāshim *and the journey to Europe*

An Egyptian author and novelist of middle-class origin, Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī attended Cairo School of Law, graduating in 1925. Right after obtaining his degree, he began participating in the circle of the *madrasa ḥadītha* (the "Modern School"), a group of authors (including Muḥammad and Maḥmūd Taymūr and Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshin) who resorted mainly to the *Qiṣṣa qaṣīra*, the short story, to enliven the debate on human and political rights and themes of social justice. Ḥaqqī contributed to the group's magazine, *al-Fajr*, from 1925 to 1926.[87] In 1929, he worked as an archivist in Jeddah, and performed diplomatic assignments in Istanbul and Rome in the 1930s.[88] Recalled to Egypt in 1939, he carried out his writing activity side by side with his work as a public servant, also working for the National Library of Egypt, but later returned as a diplomat to Paris (1949), Ankara (1951) and Libya (1953). He was subsequently editor of the magazine *Al-Majalla* from 1961 to 1971; the magazine reserved a lot of space for – and a few devastating critiques of – the younger authors who would later establish themselves on the Egyptian scene in the 1960s.

Ḥaqqī left us four collections of short stories and just one "novel", *Saḥḥ al-Nawm* (*Good Morning!*, 1955), if we consider the "hybrid" nature of *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* – regarded by some critics as a novella, by others as a short novel.[89] This work tells the story of Ismāʿīl and is structured, like *Adīb*, around the theme of an Egyptian youth who travels to Europe for study purposes. Ḥaqqī's novel, analysed in depth by many scholars of modern Arab literature[90] and regarded as a classic of Egyptian modernity both because of the topics dealt with and because of its form, defined as "realistic" by the majority of critics, indubitably represents one of the most successful outcomes of the narrative of "European education". Widely studied and anthologised in the Arab world, *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* is also the only Arab text to appear in a specialised work on the "coming-of-age novel" as an international form,[91] and it has often been described as a story inspired by the model of the Arab *Bildungsroman* in dedicated studies.[92] Furthermore, the novel's publication proved so influential on the Egyptian cultural scene that its author lamented the excessive – from his perspective – attention lavished on this text compared to the others he wrote.[93] Indeed, *Qindīl* remains by far the author's most quoted, anthologised and best-known work.

Traditionally, this short novel (or novella) by Ḥaqqī has been defined as the narration symbolising the "cultural encounter between East and West".[94] In continuity with Lorenzo Casini's interpretation in a work that sheds light on the nature of the "European" setting of novels like *Qindīl* and *Adīb*, which *strategically* express the theme of the journey to Europe to represent a political and identity debate within the nation of the 1920s and 1930s (years characterised by a reaction to Occidentalism and intense inner conflicts), here we offer an interpretation of the work as a novel of the "crisis" caused by the search for and discovery of the self.

Ḥaqqī's work – though it remains within the realistic trend – presents several allegorical traits: as Muhsin al-Musawi highlighted, the travelogue is the first form

to be associated with the story, and in particular, the period after the hero's return (Ismā'īl) from his journey abroad will be the time of change and crisis for the protagonist. Additionally, the flashbacks and unspoken interludes that characterise the narration of the European experience in *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* can be seen as gaps in a narrative discourse which, as we shall see, is linear only on the surface.

In *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*, just like in the aforementioned *Adīb* and in the previous writings of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, several aspects of the society of the time converge in the figure of the young protagonist, Ismā'īl. These aspects include the surfacing of a new social mobility that allows the sons of urbanised peasants access to the urban middle class; the search, on the part of these new members of the urban *petite bourgeoisie*, for a complicated balance between their rural origin and a symbiotic relationship with tradition, with its heritage of popular worship; the advent of a new world vision, which finds its medium in the new literary dignity of a young man travelling to Europe to complete his studies. In this novel, the main character's "education", his becoming the man he will be at the end of the story, is basically divided into two moments, which take on two very different narrative forms compared to the factor of the temporality of the narrative: Ismā'īl's education before Europe, and his goings-on after returning to Egypt. This two-stage structure includes at least five narrative units (Egyptian education – journey – return – crisis – solution of the crisis), and the thematic heart of the story is, as underscored by Cooke, the sense of Egyptianness[95] and the self-awareness – mainly on the part of the Arab and Muslim intellectual – of his own identity and role in society.

After seven years spent studying in the United Kingdom, Ismā'īl returns to Egypt as a doctor with a degree in ophthalmology. He looks on the world that he finds from a completely different perspective compared to before his departure. The story is told in the third person, but the narrator introduces Ismā'īl as a relative (namely, his uncle) at the beginning of the story. This narrative device allows Ḥaqqī to create a peculiar involvement of the narrative voice which actually has its own point of view about the facts. Narrated in linear fashion, Ismā'īl's education in Egypt passes through the various scholastic institutes that a family of rural origin, urbanised a generation previously in the neighbourhood of Sayyida Zaynab, would have had access to. Conversely, the European interlude is narrated in a *flashback* lasting just a few pages, where the author summarises Ismā'īl's experience in Europe.

The main figure in this section is Mary who takes on the role of mediator between Ismā'īl and the social model in which he finds himself living (the British one), the culture, language and society of which he strives to acquire *in toto*:

> His nerves were unable to cope with this morass in which he found himself drowned and alone. He fell ill and broke off his studies. . . . It was Mary who came to his rescue, she took him on a trip to the Scottish countryside. During the day they wandered around on foot or by bicycle; or they would go fishing; at night she would let him taste the pleasure of love in all its forms. He

was fortunate to be able to pass through that crisis which afflicts many of his young compatriots when they are in Europe. He came through it with a new self, one that was stable and confident; if this new self had cast aside religious belief, it had substituted for it a stronger faith in science. He no longer thought of the blissful beauty of paradise but of the splendour of nature and its mysteries.

   Perhaps the best evidence of his cure was that he had begun to free himself from the hold Mary had over him. No longer did he sit before her like a disciple before his master, but as a colleague.[96]

While Ismāʿīl serenely gets over this initial crisis caused by his coming into contact with Europe and the end of his affair with Mary, he is faced with a much more serious one – the crisis around which the story revolves – upon his return to Egypt, when his family barely recognises him and when he himself barely recognises (after having introjected his mediator's point of view through whom – like Adīb – he underwent a *maskh*, metamorphosis)[97] his surroundings.

   The course of Ismāʿīl's *telos*, especially in the narrative segments of his early education and, later on, of the crisis, takes place within the Cairo district of Sayyida Zaynab (known as "Umm Hāshim" in popular worship). This popular district sprang up around the mosque of the same name and, as Muhammad Siddiq points out in his work on the novel, serves as a space-time fulcrum for the community and – as we shall see – for the protagonist.[98]

   Ismāʿīl's father – and thus the narrator's grandfather – the shaykh Rajab ʿAbdallāh used to make this pilgrimage when he was a child. He and his parents would journey to the holy place from the countryside and kiss its threshold under the austere gazes of the men of religion, little inclined to accept these forms of popular devotion. These references to the pilgrimage and to the popular ritual of kissing the threshold of the mosque are the spatial parameters of a sacred, community dimension which, however, Ismāʿīl ("for whom the fate, and the improvement in his father's fortunes, made it possible to provide a brighter future")[99] will be called upon – by his family – to abandon. Like Adīb's young *shaykh* friend, so too does Ismāʿīl feel the weight of his family's control, planning and expectations on his shoulders. Everything surrounding him – from his environment to his parents to the cousin to whom he agrees to become betrothed – reminds him of the *sacrifice* of the generations that came before him:[100]

   While still a lad he came to be called Mr. Ismail or Ismail Effendī and was treated like a grown man, being given the best of food and fruits. When he sat down to study, the father, while reciting his prayers, would lower his voice to a whisper that was almost a melting of tremulous devotion, while his mother walked about on tiptoe, and even his orphan cousin Fatima al-Nabawiyya learned how to stop her chattering and to sit silently in front of him like a slave-girl in front of her master. . . . When he retired to bed, and only then,

> did the family feel that the day had ended. . . . A generation was annihilating itself so that a single member of its progeny might come into being: it was a love whose strength had attained the force of an animal instinct. . . . The family clung to this boy with the ardour of those deprived of all liberty and free will. Where in God's name was the beauty in it?[101]

This reference to a generation annihilating itself, pursuing the "natural", almost animal logic of sacrifice to give its most promising individual the chance to realise his potential, allows readers to more easily perceive the "rebirth" undergone by Ismāʿīl during and after his European experience.

As an aside, we must highlight how the question – "Where in God's name was the beauty in it?" – asked by the narrative voice (who, in this story, takes on the role of a sort of ethical, *super partes* judge) refers to the impossibility, for Ismāʿīl, of an "aesthetic", organic and Schillerian growth. Ismāʿīl is constrained by the expectations of his own family, who makes sacrifices, allowing him to study, yet also predefine his development, robbing him of his youth – as we sense from the title, *effendī*, foisted on him by friends and relatives when he was still a child. Once he has obtained his diploma, however, Ismāʿīl is not accepted into the Egyptian university's medical school and so, on an acquaintance's recommendation, his family sends him to study in England. As he is preparing to embark, the youth seems weighed down with, in addition to his luggage, the symbolic weight of his father's plans and of all the hopes his family has placed in him. He recites the *Fātiḥa*, standing next to Fāṭima and before his parents, in the traditional ceremony that would bind him forevermore to his cousin to seal their betrothal. Ismāʿīl is dressed, moves and acts like an old man when he boards the ship that will take him to England:

> How bitter were his farewells with his family! First of all in the house amid wailing and sobbing, then at the station and on the train, then at the port with the bustle, with the unknown ship and its hooting. I can imagine him going up the gangway as a young man but with the gravity of a sheykh, slow moving, staid, a little naïve, everything about him giving the impression of a lonesome villager in the city. My uncle Ismail later swore to me that he carried a pair of wooden slippers in his luggage, for Shaykh Rajab had heard that making one's ablutions before prayers in Europe was rendered difficult by the fact that people had the habit of wearing their shoes indoors.[102] . . . And the ship sailed away.[103]

The "old-young" Ismāʿīl's departure for England brings an end to the "linear" part of his education. His seven years abroad are summed up in just a few words: "Seven years passed before the boat returned".[104] Thus, the narration leaps forward and, with the exception of the brief flashback where the author mentions his affair with Mary, we might say that Ismāʿīl's education abroad is narrated by means of this reticence. However, the narrative pause also signals the protagonist's different inner time – an absolute time, unbound to the narrative sequence.

Indeed, seven years later, we find – contrary to our expectations – a young Ismāʿīl disembarking:

> Seven years passed before the boat returned. Who was that smart, tall, upstanding young man with radiant face held high who came down the gang-way in leaps and bounds? By God, it was none other than Ismail, or rather, beg your pardon, Dr. Ismail, the eye specialist to whose singular distinction and rare brilliance the University of England had testified. His professor used to joke with him and say, "I bet the spirit of some pharaonic doctor priest has materialized in you, Mr. Ismail. Your country is in need of you, for it is the land of the Blind".[105]

The metamorphosis undergone by Ismāʿīl in Europe is so great that it defies the laws of time and space. The Ismāʿīl who returns home after seven years is a light-hearted, dynamic youth, at ease in his modern garb. Even Ismāʿīl's personality seems to have been transformed: his self-confidence and discernment are qualities not ascribable to the *shaykh* who had set sail seven years earlier with his wooden slippers. Thus, from the moment he departs for Europe, Ismāʿīl enters a sort of anachronism. Upon his return, his relatives no longer recognise him, and even his age seems to have changed. Europe brings about more than just a *maskh*, meta-morphosis, in him – it gives rise to a true rebirth.

Although *Qindīl* is an icon novel of the "encounter between the Arab world and the West", and a novel regarded as an "icon" of the realistic trend, on closer inspection the text offers other – and little explored – possibilities of interpreta-tion. Ismāʿīl's *Bildung* suffers a twist reminiscent of 20th-century European nov-els, manifesting itself – after seven years abroad – as "unseasonable youth" (in the words of Jed Esty).[106]

For Ismāʿīl, living an unseasonable youth entails gazing at the world with new eyes. Upon his return to Egypt, the prevailing gaze is that of Mary, the "mediator", in Casini's terms, followed by that of the professor, who calls Egypt "the land of the Blind", clearly expressing – from his viewpoint – what will be the Egyptian student's mission when he returns to his homeland. Ismāʿīl's return and the scenes characterising it are a *mise en forme* of this mission: curing the diseased eyes of his cousin, and betrothed, Fāṭima, who is nearly blind by now. The mission, however, reveals itself to be more complicated than expected. First of all, the homeland to be cured proves not at all fascinating:

> He looked out of the window and saw a moving landscape, that appeared to have been coated by a sandstorm, a landscape dilapidated, begrimed and devastated, the vendors at the station were in tattered clothes, pouring with sweat and panting like hunted animals.
>
> When the horse-carriage he took from the station entered narrow Khalig Street . . . the sight that met his eyes was uglier than anything he had imag-ined: dirt and flies, poverty, and buildings in the state of ruin. . . . When [Fāṭima] came, he saw a young woman in the prime of her youth, her two

> plaits of hair, her cheap glass bracelets, her movements, and everything about her proclaimed that she was a peasant-girl from the depths of the countryside. Was this the girl he was going to marry? From that instant he knew that he would betray his promise and break his vow.[107]

The youth's unfamiliarity with once-familiar things and people hurts others ("How callous is youth", Ismā'īl's mother comments before such callousness)[108] while also affecting Ismā'īl himself, who takes back the promises he made to his loved ones before leaving ("From that instant he knew that he would betray his promise and break his vow"). Here, we see clearly how imitative realism has left room, in these descriptions, for a markedly impressionist vein that restores the protagonist's dilated, almost deformed perceptions. Ismā'īl's own mother, *Sitt* (Lady) 'Adīla, is described by her son as "a mass of passive goodness".[109] Ismā'īl's extremely personal point of view therefore contrasts with the gazes, at once worried and sympathetic, of his relatives and of the narrative voice, which underscores his intrusion upon the narration with brusque passages between pronouns, from third to first person singular, presenting himself as the repository of the story told by his uncle, Ismā'īl, as an adult.

Like in *Adīb*, the protagonists' journey is not portrayed "objectively" but, rather, expressed in its relationality. Herein lies the modernist deviation imposed by these two stories on their readership which, as of today, has not yet been sufficiently studied. Though Ismā'īl's initial reaction in the face of Europeanness is one of rejection and crisis (from which he is saved by Mary), he is seized by an even more tremendous reaction upon his return. This relationality replaces the "objectivity" of the *telos* of the classic *Bildung*, somehow already written in the destiny of the hero and of the nation itself. Here, the nation – embodied in the character of Fāṭima (whose full name is "Fāṭima al-Nabawiyya", or Fāṭima of the Prophet) – waits blindly and imperturbably. And when Ismā'īl, relying on the scientific tools he has learned, decides to attempt to restore his cousin's sight, her reaction may seem "unfair" or irrational in scientific terms, but appears, on the contrary, to fit perfectly within that chronotope of the sacred that is Sayyida Zaynab.[110]

(Ana)chronism: the time of the self in crisis

The very evening of his return, Ismā'īl witnesses a scene that further stirs up the malaise he had already felt upon catching sight of his old neighbourhood, his house and his relatives greeting him with a mixture of joy and dread. At the end of the day, Ismā'īl catches his mother pouring a few drops of holy oil from the lamp of Umm Hāshim (Sayyida Zaynab) into Fāṭima's diseased eyes. Filled with rage and disbelief before such a display of ignorance, Ismā'īl removes the young woman's bandage only to discover that her condition has worsened considerably; if the disease is not properly treated, she will surely go blind.

Horrified, Ismā'īl berates his mother for what he describes as a stupid superstition, but the woman replies: "God Protect you, my son Ismail. May the Lord keep

you in your right mind".[111] Incapable of restraining himself, the youth throws the oil lamp out the window. A clash is by now inevitable: the young man accuses his relatives of being foolish, while they accuse him of impiety, invoking divine protection over him. The final act of this conflict takes place inside the Sayyida Zaynab Mosque, where Ismāʿīl goes in a confused state – fighting the crowds, he bumps into people and nearly tramples the passers-by on the pavement crowded with "beggars, exposing their deformities from which they derived an honest living".[112] The tomb of the saint inside the mosque gives off "barbaric" fragrances, and people suffering from paralysis and all sorts of illnesses crowd around it. Among them a *shaykh* offers some oil to a man with a bandaged head. Inside the mosque, Ismāʿīl witnesses a scene similar to the one at home, and at this point he loses his head. Raising his cane, he brings it crashing down on the lamp that holds the oil. As shards of glass scatter everywhere, Ismāʿīl cries out: "I! . . . I! . . . I!" (*anā! . . . anā! . . . anā!*). At this point, the young man risks being lynched by the crowd. He owes his safety to the Imām who, recognising him, commands the crowd to "Leave him! I know the man. It's Ismail, the son of *shaykh* Rajab. He is one of us. Let him be. Don't you see he's possessed?"[113]

Ismāʿīl's repetition, three times in a row, of the personal pronoun "I" shows us how the solution to the inner crisis can, perhaps, start from a renewed knowledge of the self – a self that has not yet been found but that is, at least, physically whole.[114] The Imām's words draw Ismāʿīl back into his community ("He is one of us"), paradoxically saving him from the wrath of the crowd.

In *Adīb*, madness appears on the scene after the protagonist's departure for Europe; here, instead, it is the result of the protagonist's impact with his native land, which looks "new" to a subject who has undergone a profound change – which almost results in Ismāʿīl's death by lynching. Once his inner crisis has come to light, the protagonist will search in vain for a possible coming together of his new self, also the product of his European experience, and the ancient faith that accompanied him until he set sail for Europe. From a narrative point of view, this crisis takes the shape of the subject's escape from himself (the change in point of view is one of the clearest signs of this symbolic shift). Ismāʿīl faints after having shattered the lamp, and is carried home where, in a state of shock, he is welcomed back into his family. For him, the long way back to the self is strewn with references to the spiritual dimension, which he had abandoned during his European sojourn. As many critics have pointed out, Ḥaqqī's narration is greatly influenced by the idea of a reformed Islam, an Islam which does not stand in the way of modernity but, rather, lays the foundations for a modern renaissance. This quest for reconciliation will lead to the surfacing of another "self", the returning self, where faith in science and religious faith are able to coexist.[115]

Once he has regained his strength, the young man sets about trying to cure Fāṭima's blindness by relying on scientific means, but to no avail. Thus, all knowledge gained in Europe seems useless when put to the test in Egypt. Though Ismāʿīl is an ophthalmologist, theoretically capable of curing the population "blinded" by ignorance and superstition, not only does the girl's condition not improve, she loses her sight completely. Clearly, science without the support of faith is unable

to yield results: Ismāʿīl learns this lesson through empirical experience as well as through transcendental intuition, during the Night of Destiny (*Laylat al-qadar*) when divine revelation can truly intercede in – and change – the destiny of men.[116] In other words, Ismāʿīl hardly even plays a role in the resolution of his own crisis, which only comes together by means of a transcendent force.

While the "*Bildung*" is a concept linking the idea of the surfacing of an independent individual with that of individual *life*, meant as an inner and organic form of movement,[117] the category of "modernist *Bildung*" (for the reasons explored at the start of the chapter) is inwardly contradictory, as it denies itself the principle of progression to something which, by definition, goes forward. The anachronism, in the interpretation put forward by Mary Russo,[118] should be intended as one of the most frequent "symptoms" of the modernist *Bildungsnarrative*, in itself displaying the impossibility of organic progression in these writings. Ironically, within the Egyptian framework, *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (regarded as a "classic" of the realistic story in the Arab panorama for the linearity of its evangelical parable) offers, with Ismāʿīl leaving as an "old man" and returning seven years later as a "young man", one of the most meaningful examples of narrative anachronism and dyscrasia between the time of the self and the time of narration. Subjective time – or *(ana)chronism*, as we might call it, highlighting the pronoun "Anā" contained in Ismāʿīl's cry – is a dimension that heralds a crisis (and therefore a choice), as it endows Ismāʿīl with a gaze in contrast with the plan prearranged for him by family and society alike. However, when this dimension intersects the chronotope of the character's roots, faith, family and nation – that is, the Sayyida Zaynab Square on the Night of Destiny, the night when all sins are forgiven – the time of the self goes back to narrative time, and Ismāʿīl's actions, after he recovers his faith, will lead to positive results for Fāṭima's sight.

Notes

1 Abu Loghod, Ibrahim, *Arab Rediscovery of Europe. A study in Cultural Encounters*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1963.

2 Hourani, Albert, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York 1983, pp. 80–81.

3 Fieni, David, "French Decadence, Arab Awakenings: Figures of Decay in the Arab Nahda", *Boundary 2*, 39, 2 (2012) pp. 143–160.

4 Casini, Lorenzo "Il tema Europeo", in Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità Arabe. Nazione, narrazione e nuovi soggetti nel romanzo egiziano*, Mesogea, Messina 2013, pp. 181–241.

5 Tageldin, Shaden, *Disarming Words. Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2011.

6 After concluding his studies at al-Azhar, Rifāʿ al-Ṭahṭāwī was appointed by the then governor of Egypt, Muḥammad ʿAlī, *imām* of a student trip to Europe. He later taught at the Language School (*Madrasat-al-alsun*) in Cairo until 1849. Having fallen into disgrace with Muḥammad ʿAlī's descendants, al-Ṭahṭāwī was removed to Sudan with a view to what he himself defined as a "second exile", with the task of establishing an educational institution in Khartoum. For a review of the biographies available in Arabic on al-Ṭahṭāwī, see Euben, Roxanne, *Journeys to the Other Shore. Muslim and*

Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 234, fn. 1.

7 al-Ṭahṭāwī, Rifāʿ, *An Imam in Paris. Al-Tahtawi's visit to France*, introduced and translated by D.L. Newman, Saqi Books, London 2004, pp. 29–68.

8 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters,* The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 1994, pp. 31–50. For the Arab text see Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *Adīb*, Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, Bayrūt 1981 [1935].

9 For a focused study on the European theme and on the perspective of Occidentalism, that is of the functional use of the European trope that intellectuals undertook to position themselves within the identity debate underway in Egypt in the early 20th century, see Casini's contribution in Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità Arabe*, pp. 149–241.

10 Magris, Claudio, *L'infinito viaggiare*, Mondadori, Milano 2005, p. xv.

11 See Ryzova, Lucie, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, pp. 40–68.

12 Holt, Elizabeth, *Fictitious Capital*.

13 Rosa, Giovanna, *Il patto narrativo*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2008, p. 31.

14 Mousa, Nedal, "The Arabic *Bildungsroman*: A Generic Appraisal", p. 227.

15 In the novel, seeing, eyes and outlook have symbolic meaning: the novel is a story about "faith" and about the challenge of continuing to see with the eyes of faith even after having accepted knowledge and the scientific method. The opposition between science and faith are polarised in the plotting – which, we repeat, should be interpreted as such, thus as a functional narrative device – of the Egypt *versus* West tension.

16 Muhammad Badawi in his "Perennial Themes in Modern Arabic Literature" (*British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 20, 1 (1993), p. 13) offers an example of how the trope of the journey to Europe has been interpreted to the letter and out of any figurative meaning, as it should instead be read. Dealing with Ḥaqqī's novel *Qindīl*, Badawī proposes a "first-level" reading of that which is, as we shall see on the basis of what Casini calls "strategic occidentalism", a narrative trope that tends to convey other dimensions in the representation of Europe, first of all a modern – normative and scientific dimension that had appeared in Egypt (See Casini, Lorenzo, "Il tema europeo", pp. 213–218). Representing these trends as European, the narrators "objectify" the identity debate and create a Manichean vision aimed at staging dialectics on the diegetic point of view. However, these representations should not be taken "literally". An exemplary case of this "literal" and essentially misleading interpretation of the European theme is contained in Badawī when he reads Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's '*Uṣfūr min al-sharq* (*A Sparrow from the East*), discussed in the third chapter of this book, when he describes the story as "presumably designed to show the contrast between the infinite devotion of the Man from the East and the calculated utilitarianism of the woman from the West" (p. 13), taking for granted a derivative and mimetic approach of the Manichean representation offered by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm. In particular, Badawī writes: "in *The Saint's Lamp* the East/West antithesis takes on a spiritual and cultural dimension", taking the antithesis between East and West as a given, acquired and realistically represented (and only secondly spiritually connoted) by the author. On the contrary, the trope of the journey to Europe is adopted to represent an internal identity debate inherent to the historical time of the *Nahḍa* and to the Egyptian context.

17 Hartung, Heike, *Ageing, Gender and Illness*, p. 60.

18 *Ibidem*. On the double meaning of *Bildung*, a word used to indicate both a dynamic process and the static outcome of this process and on the resulting difficulty in translating the word, see Boes, Tobias, *Formative Fictions*, p. 46.

19 Lina Steiner, *For Humanity's Sake. The Bildungsroman in Russian Culture*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2011.

20 Schiller, Friedrich, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, quoted in Boes, Tobias, *Formative Fictions*, p. 16.
21 Redfield, Marc, *Phantom Formations,* pp. 17–21. Redfield analyses the *Bildung* form from the philosophical point of view, always referring to Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. According to Redfield, it is the main codifier of the "narration of man in his canonical forms" (p. 21). The perfect synthesis between the unfolding of human nature as cultural destiny is resolved in a homology between individual aesthetic formation and formation of the human species).
22 See the Introduction to this volume, pp. 5–6.
23 Esty, Jed, *Unseasonable Youth*, p. 4.
24 In *Meister*, the concept of *Bildung* was innervated by a harmonious and organicist transformation, closely linked to the theory of epigenesis according to which each cell contains in itself, which is the reason why the transformation of the individual into adult individual was a "pulling out" of an essence already contained within the small individual (on this point, see Hartung, Heike, *Ageing, Gender and Illness*, p. 51).
25 See Castle, Gregory, "Destinies of *Bildung*. Belatedness and the Modernist Novel", in Gregory Castle (ed.), *A History of the Modernist Novel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK 2015, pp. 483–488. Castle describes the dynamic of the "failure of Bildung" that characterises many modernist writings, starting from the backdrop of the Humboldtian concept of *Bildung*. According to Castle, the modernist novel builds its "ironic consciousness" on this backdrop, which leads to the clarification of narrative outcomes like the stasis of the self, or the loss of self, or the self-exile of the protagonist.
26 Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità arabe*, pp. 201–204.
27 The work Casini refers to is Girard, René, *Mensonge romantique, vérité romanesque*, Grasset, Paris 1961. Girard proposes an interpretation that is not linear but, rather, "triangulated", between desiring individual and object of this desire. There is a third element at the vertex of this triangle, the "mediator of desire", who is also essentialised as "Other". The Other is, in turn, desiring and object of desire (not as himself so much as the possessor of the desired object): this scheme explains ambivalent behaviours of the individual with regard to the Other. Casini explains the peculiar use of Genette's theory in Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena, Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità arabe*, pp. 201–203.
28 Ibid., pp. 202–203. Translation by Daniela Cristina Innocenti.
29 Casini, Lorenzo, "New Perspectives on the European Woman Trope in the Arabic Novel. A concise Study of the Egyptian Case", *Le forme e la storia*, 11, 2 (2018), pp. 228–229.
30 Ibid., p. 233.
31 Ibid.
32 Castle talks about *hybrid style*. See Castle, Gregory, "Introduction", in Gregory Castle (ed.), *A History of the Modernist Novel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK 2015, p. 6.
33 Rosa, Giovanna, *Il patto narrativo*, pp. 41–48.
34 Kern, Stephen, *The Modernist Novel*, p. 8.
35 Siddiq, Muhammad, *Arab Culture and the Novel. Genre, Identity and Agency in Egyptian Fiction*, Routledge, London and New York 2007, p. 111.
36 Levine, Caroline, *Forms*, pp. 4–5.
37 Kern, Stephen, *The Modernist Novel*, p. 40.
38 Ibid., p. 41.
39 Castle, Gregory, "Destinies of Bildung", p. 486.
40 Kern, Stephen, *The Modernist Novel*, p. 41.

41 Mahmoudi, Abdelrachid (Maḥmūdī, ʿAbd al-Rashīd al-Ṣādiq), *Ṭāhā Ḥusain's Education: From the Azhar to the Sorbonne*, Curzon Press, Richmond, UK 1998, pp. 52–62.

42 Cachia, Pierre, *Ṭāhā Husayn: His Place in the Egyptian Literary Renaissance*, Luzac & Co, London 1956, p. 45.

43 Except for Tahia Abdel Nasser, who stresses the aspect of "fictionalization of the autobiography" (Abdel Nasser, Tahia, *Literary Autobiography*, p. 19), Arab and Western critics have generally spoken about a foundational autobiographical work, in an Arab, modern and sometimes third world key, even though the author uses a third person spacing (see Malti-Douglas, Fedwa, *Blindness and Autobiography. Al-ayyām of Taha Husayn*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1988, pp. 13–14).

44 On the autobiographical fiction published after *al-Ayyām* see Reynolds, Dwight F. (ed.), *Interpreting the Self. Autobiography in the Arab Literary Tradition*, University of California Press, Berkely, Los Angeles and London 2001, p. 14, fn. 27.

45 On the simulation of the autobiographical discourse in *Adīb* see Paniconi, Maria Elena, "Introduzione", in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (ed.), *Adib. Storia di un Letterato*, translated by Maria Elena Paniconi, Edizioni Ca' Foscari, Venezia 2017, pp. 23–27.

46 Moosa identifies in Jalāl Shuwayb, a friend of the author's, the inspiration behind the character of Adīb. See Moosa, Matti, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder and London 1993, p. 299. We find traces of this character and of the mental imbalance that struck him in France in the third volume of *An Egyptian Childhood*, in which the author deals briefly with a friend who fell victim to a severe nervous crisis and whom he had to take care of for a few months. See *Mudhakkirāt Ṭāhā Ḥusayn*, Dār al-Adab, Bayrūt 1967, pp. 215–216.

47 Paniconi, Maria Elena, "Introduzione", pp. 23–27.

48 Casini, Lorenzo, in Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità arabe*, p. 237. See also Casini, Lorenzo, "Adīb di Ṭāhā Ḥusayn e la Grande Guerra: i limiti del modernismo letterario egiziano attraverso la lente del Conflitto", *Le forme e la storia*, 10, 2 (2017), pp. 189–206.

49 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, pp. 3–4.

50 Ibid., p. 6.

51 On the history of the establishment of Cairo University, inserted in the background of the history of the main universities of the Arab world, see Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Revolution*, pp. 194–203.

52 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, p. 8.

53 Mahfouz, Najib, *Cairo Modern*, translated by William M. Hutchins. The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 2008. See in particular the conversation between the four characters Ma'mūn Raḍwān, ʿĀlī Ṭāhā, Maḥjūb ʿAbd al-Dā'im and Aḥmad Budayr in Chapter 6.

54 Ryzova explains how one of the cultural elements of the *effendiyya*, i.e., of the new urban middle class, was a certain concept of "free time" and entertainment: "The attention given to extra-curricular activities, sports, clubs and society in Egyptian autobiographies, the spontaneous descriptions of awesome schools, the feeling of exclusion by those who did not attend modern schools . . . create the impression that there was no fun before the arrival of modern schooling". See Ryzova, Lucie, *The Age of the Efendiyya,* p. 194.

55 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, p. 28.

56 Ryzova, Lucie, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, p. 40.

57 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, p. 30. The English translation says "my young helper", while the Arabic has *Khādimī al-aswad al-ṣaghīr* ("my young black servant").

58 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, pp. 15–16.

59 Ibid., pp. 16–17.

60 Ibid., pp. 29–30, Author's italics.
61 Ibid., pp. 29–30.
62 Ibid., p. 29.
63 Ibid., p. 57.
64 This detail is the subject of a lengthy segment where Adīb writes a letter telling the story of how Ḥamīda accepted him after he was refused by a cousin, who didn't want to marry him because of his unattractiveness.
65 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, p. 60.
66 Ibid., pp. 62–63.
67 Casini, Lorenzo, in Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità arabe*, pp. 232–234.
68 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, p. 88.
69 The use of this term to denote, in textual analysis, the type of change undergone by the protagonists *Adīb* and *Ismāʿīl* in the two novels is drawn from Adīb himself, who uses it repeatedly. Notably, in a letter to his friend, he describes the "metamorphosis" he experienced upon his arrival in France. See: Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, p. 105. For the Arabic see: Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *Adīb*, p. 181.
70 Ibid., p. 118.
71 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *Adīb*, p. 231. In the English translation the term is changed completely in "Far East", see Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, p. 138.
72 al-Musawi, Muhsin, "Narrative", in Dwight F. Reynolds (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arab Culture*, Cambridge, UK 2015, pp. 112–134.
73 The juvenile and epistolary novel by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn *Khiṭbat al-Shaykh* (*The Shaykh's Engagement*) has been recently published by Dār al-Kutub, 2017 with a foreword by Jābir ʿUṣfūr.
74 Watt quoted in Bray, Joe, *The Epistolary Novel. Representation of Consciousness*, Routledge, London and New York 2003, p. 6.
75 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, p. 105. For the Arabic see: Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *Adīb*, p. 181.
76 Ibid., p. 110.
77 See Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *Adīb*, p. 218.
78 Ibid.
79 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, pp. 115–116.
80 Colla, Elliott, *Conflicted Antiquities*, pp. 159–164.
81 Ḥusayn, Ṭāhā, *A Man of Letters*, p. 213.
82 Allan, Michael, *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt*. Princeton University Press, Princeton 2016, p. 130.
83 See Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità arabe*, pp. 230–232.
84 Kern, Stephen, *The Modernist Novel*, p. 12.
85 Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità arabe*, pp. 234–237.
86 Ibid.
87 Cooke, Miriam, *The Anatomy of an Egyptian Intellectual. Yahya Haqqi*, Three Continents Press, Washington, DC 1984, p. 5.
88 Ibid., p. 6.
89 According to Brugman, Hassan, and Gohlman *Qindīl Umm Hashim* is a novella. See Brugman, Jan, *An Introduction*, p. 264; al-Musawi, Muhsin, "The Medieval Turn in Modern Arabic Narrative", in Waïl Hassan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017, p. 79; Gohlman, Susan Ashley, *Starting Over. The Task of the Protagonist in the Contemporary Bildungsroman*, Garland Publisher, New York 1990, p. 41.

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90 Among the critical studies dealing with *Qindīl Umm Hashim* we mention: Badawi, Muhammad, "Perennial Themes in Modern Arabic Literature", pp. 3–19; Siddiq, Muhammad, *Arab Culture and the Novel,* pp. 42–45. The novel is also analysed as a *Bildungsroman* in Gohlman, Susan Ashley, *Starting Over,* pp. 41–67.

91 Susan Ashley, *Starting Over*.

92 Pagani, Samuela, "Sufismo, «neo-sufismo» e confraternite musulmane: il confronto con il mondo moderno", in Roberto Tottoli (ed.), *Islam*, Einaudi, Torino 2009, pp. 30–68.

93 Cooke, Miriam, *The Anatomy*, p. 7.

94 See for instance El-Enany, Racheed, *Arab Representation of the Occident, East. West Encounters in Arabic Fiction*, Routledge 2006, London and New York, p. 68.

95 Cooke, Miriam, *The Anatomy*, p. 44.

96 Ḥaqqī, Yaḥyā, *The Lamp of Umm Hashim and Other Stories*, translated by Denys Johnson-Davies, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo and New York 2004, p. 67.

97 Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità arabe*, p. 219.

98 Siddiq, Muhammad, *Arab Culture*, pp. 42–45.

99 Ḥaqqī, Yaḥyā, *The Lamp of Umm Hashim*, p. 46.

100 On the "efendification" process, see Ryzova, Lucie, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, pp. 102–104.

101 Ḥaqqī, Yaḥyā, *The Lamp of Umm Hashim*, pp. 47–48.

102 Ibid., p. 61.

103 Ibid., p. 46.

104 Ibid., p. 62.

105 Ibid.

106 Esty, Jed, *Unseasonable Youth*, p. 2.

107 Ḥaqqī, Yaḥyā, *The Lamp of Umm Hashim*, pp. 70–72.

108 Ibid., p. 71.

109 Ibid., p. 73.

110 Siddiq, Muhammad, *Arab Culture*, pp. 42–45.

111 Ḥaqqī, Yaḥyā, *The Lamp of Umm Hashim*, p. 74.

112 Ibid., p. 77.

113 Ibid., p. 78.

114 On p. 104 of the most recent edition of this text, by Maktabat al-Usra (2000), we find an interesting explanation by the author on this exclamation of Ismā'īl's: "I spent more than a week searching for the words that Ismā'īl should have said at this juncture . . ., and when I was still hesitantly searching, I remembered a biography I had read of the German philosopher Nietzsche who, when he was seized by insanity, left his home, situated on top of a hill, shouting «I! I! I!» . . . That's when I understood that those were the very words I was searching for". Translation by the Author and Daniela Innocenti.

115 Cooke, Miriam, *The Anatomy*, p. 48.

116 On the religious symbology in *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* see Siddiq, Muhammad, *Arab Culture,* pp. 101–111.

117 Hartung, Heike, *Ageing, Gender and Illness*, p. 60.

118 See Russo, Mary, "Aging and the Scandal of Anachronism", in Kathleen Woodward (ed.), *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies Generations*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1999, p. 21.

6   The "disillusionment plot" in Najīb Maḥfūẓ and 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim

In the classic *Bildungsroman* (Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* is the most shining example), the hero ends up conforming to society's expectations of him. Initially driven by a desire to develop his own skills in contrast with his father's bourgeois life, Wilhelm Meister devotes himself to theatre, forming himself, both artistically and socially, *outside* of work. Moretti underscores this aspect in his analysis of the Goethian classic:

"The most classical *Bildungsroman* conspicuously places the process of formation-socialization outside the world of work"[1]. Only after this personal and artistic formation does Wilhelm enter the world of trade, where he will build himself a social position functional both to the preservation of order within society itself and to the new national vocation that society must follow.

The third chapter, centred on the soul-nation allegory contained in '*Awdat al-rūḥ*, discussed the "conservative" vocation of the classic form of *Bildung*, while the fifth chapter discussed how literary modernism leads to a sort of *maskh* ("alteration") of the character, who does not change according to the classical model but, rather, transforms in an unpredictable and radical fashion. In literary modernism, this change is no longer the result of reconciliation between individual drive and social destiny; instead, it represents a distortion of the self that leads to the alienation of the individual rather than to social inclusion.

Between the two narrative languages at the heart of this chapter (that is, the Mahfouzian modernism of the late 1930s and of the 1940s and the experimentalism of the "Sixties Generation"), there is a further deviation from the model of the soul-nation allegory and its reconciliation between national and individual dimensions. The first new development, compared to the characters in the novels examined previously, is that in this chapter the characters remain "static"; their actions rarely astonish readers, and they are often forced by the surrounding circumstances, not free "players".[2] Another new development is the fact that the individual's aspirations (which were legitimate, albeit experienced within an inner crisis, in the previous chapter) kindle a sort of de-legitimisation in the reader, guided by the architecture of the novel. The protagonists actually seem to be pinning their faith on "illusions" destined to prove themselves as such by the end of the novel. Thus, the protagonist's development does not consist of a

"coming-of-age" process meant as a process of physical, relational and cultural growth but, rather, of a bitter awakening to reality.

al-Qāhira al-jadīda (1945, *Cairo Modern* 2008)[3] by Najīb Maḥfūẓ was published in 1946, but it was written in the late 1930s, before *Khān al-Khalīlī* (1945).[4] According to El-Enany, this novel presents a central theme that would be further developed by the author in his later "Cairo novels". In particular, the protagonist, Maḥjūb ʿAbd al-Dāʾim, is a prototype of the "self-seeker" that will return in *Bidāya wa-nihāya* (*The Beginning and the End*, 1949), also centred on the rise and fall of a youth full of aspirations.[5] The 1930s society described in *al-Qāhira al-jadīda* is profoundly unjust and, despite the widespread modernisation of the education system and the rise of a seemingly dynamic *effendiyya*, does not guarantee everyone the same opportunities. Thus, the aspirations of anyone not from a wealthy family or with no important family contacts prove to be mere illusions. Even attempts to bend society's prevailing cynicism to one's advantage prove futile, as society itself does not allow everyone to be equally cynical.

As we will see, ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's novel *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* (1969) reorganises the theme of shattered illusions present in Maḥfūẓ by revisiting the *Bildungsroman* more closely, thus tracing a wider narrative arc around the protagonist. The novel came out on the heels of a traumatic event like the Military Defeat of 1967, recorded by historians and analysts of the Middle East as a moment of epic collective disillusionment. In his *Self-Criticism After the Defeat*, Sadik al-Azm recalls how the defeat of 1967 struck Arab troops and governments with the force of a natural disaster and how, with the same violence, it put an end to the prevailing ideologies, leading economic and political analysts to speak of "the exit of the Arabs from history".[6] Despite dwelling on different settings and historical periods, both novels exploit the figure (already established in the modern Arabic literary tradition) of the youth in search of the future to forge an "understandable" narration of historical phases distinguished by widespread disappointment and – in ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* – by the critical review of the "performative nationalism" that had permeated the early national novels.

Although the two texts have been traditionally interpreted by critics as "distant" expressions of the trajectory of the Egyptian novel (with *al-Qāhira al-jadīda* still linked to classic realism and *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* already immersed in the literary experimentalism of the avant-garde movement), these analogies allow us to read them side by side with regard to the trajectory of the Egyptian *Bildungsnarrative*.

6.1 The historical disillusion and the change of narrative paradigm

Both *al-Qāhira al-jadīda* and *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* portray Egyptian society, at two different historical moments, as a society undergoing a crisis, impoverished as to perspectives and economic possibilities. The early 1930s, when *al-Qāhira*

al-jadīda is set, were characterised by political instability and by the repercussions of the global economic crisis, while the content of *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* includes the most momentous "loss of illusions" in modern Arab history – the one caused by the *Naksa* – and predicts the ensuing financial destabilisation.

Moral crisis is another element found in both novels. In Maḥfūẓ's work, it emerges via a comparison between the "forward-thinking" ideologies (socialist and Islamist, respectively) that energise Maḥjūb's two fellow students and the nihilism of the protagonist himself. A similar moral crisis appears in the estrangement experienced by Maḥjūb, the main character of *Ayyām al-insān*, whose rejection of the rural and spiritual dimension of a childhood felt to be obsolete comes to nothing, leaving him with a nostalgic memory of the past and of a scattered rural community.

ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's stance predicts the withdrawal of the Arab intellectual reported by Ḥalīm Barakāt in a 1974 article where he complains of the decline in *engagée* literature (*adab multazim*) and in the relevant narrative codes, as well as of the withdrawal of novelesque literature into the individual dimension.[7]

In point of fact, what was called into question after the defeat of 1967 was the very concept of *Iltizām*, meant as the opportunity writers had to leave an actual mark on reality: the first to discard this perspective, along with the codes of mimetic realism, was Maḥfūẓ himself. In his case as well, the 1960s – *Al-liṣṣ wa-ʾl-kilāb* (1961, *The Thief and the Dogs* 1984) and *Miramār* (1967, *Miramar* 1978) are two examples – ushered in a new literary season characterised by polyphony, multiple narrative, fragmented plots and the recovery of traditional models, such as *The Thousand and One Nights* or *adab* prose.[8]

Soon after Maḥfūẓ, the "Sixties Generation", described by critics as the "consecrated avant-garde"[9] of the Egyptian 20th century, took on the task of portraying the existential crisis caused by the Military Defeat of 1967 by means of novels and short stories that are often concentrated on the individual dimension. In a seminal essay, Mehrez describes them as "underground historians", pointing out how the works of these authors offer a counter-hegemonic narration of Arab society on the eve and in the wake of the *naksa* ("catastrophe") of the 1967. From a formal point of view, this generation of authors breaks free from linear fiction, introducing experimental narrative techniques, multi-focus frameworks, a fragmented diegesis and a narrative language often built along the lines of cinematographic writing.

The experimentalism of the 1960s led to a progressive blurring of the typical features of the various literary genres: novels lose breadth and take on the form of the short story, the dialogue prevails over the narration, taking on the form of one-act plays. In this period, literary experimentalism also shifted towards allegorical language – a shift spearheaded by Maḥfūẓ himself, with his controversial *Awlād Ḥarātinā* (1959). According to Tomiche, "the irrevocable surrender of the individual, who feels like he lives on the edge of modernity, takes shape" following the naksa.[10] Late-1960s and 1970s fiction claimed the moral duty to portray history as it came unglued, staging characters who are often alienated, frozen in their human relationships and personal growth, almost as if to offer a plastic portrayal

of the impossibility, for the individual, of taking part in the course of history, and of having a bearing on it – even slightly – by means of his existence.

Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa is traditionally – and rightfully – included in this historical and cultural framework. The novel draws on the foundational tropes of the realistic novel (the debate between city and countryside, the tortured growth of the rural-born youth in the process of effendification) while, however, giving up the linear narrative typical of Maḥfūẓ and, before him, of the authors analysed in the previous chapters.[11]

In ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's novel, the historical disillusionment turns into a dual narrative arc which, following the protagonist's growth axis from childhood to adulthood, becomes the gradual disappearance of a magical-rural cosmos on one hand and, on the other hand, the youth's arrival in an urbanised and politically disillusioned world, overcome by alienation – wherein, however, the nostalgic dimension of the village and of the community environment he grew up in remains.

To conclude this section, both *al-Qāhira al-jadīda* (*New Cairo*) by Maḥfūẓ and *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* (*The Seven Days of Man*) by ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim identify youthful disillusionment as a theme and synecdoche of a vaster social disillusion: trapped in a society where the forces of self-preservation prevail, these youths are described not so much in a long-term "maturing" and growth process, but photographed in brief moments where their circumstances force them to reflect on their individual destiny, irreparably "excluded" from any prospect of social integration, in full contradiction of the classic *Bildungsroman* model recalled earlier.

6.2 *Al-Qāhira al-jadīda* (*New Cairo*) in the context of the canonisation of Maḥfūẓ

Before analysing the novel in depth, we must mention its critical reception in the context of the author's vast production. Awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature 1988, Maḥfūẓ dominated the Egyptian literary scene from the 1930s onwards.[12] Traditionally, international critics have divided the vast Mahfouzian novel production into three key phases: first and foremost, a phase of preparation (usually made to correspond to the Pharaonic historical novel); followed by his "full artistic maturity" (corresponding to the social realism of the Trilogy); and, last but not least, a phase of modernist experimentalism, where realism is transcended.[13] On the face of it, this teleological interpretation aims to replicate, within the Mahfouzian production, artistic phases seen as representative of Egyptian fiction *tout court*. In other words, despite the Nobel Prize having contributed to Maḥfūẓ's entry into the world of international literature,[14] the critical and teleological interpretation of his work has pigeonholed him in the role of national icon-author.

Indubitably a forerunner of narrative experimentalism and metaphors, Maḥfūẓ towered over the Egyptian and Arab literary field for decades,[15] and Arab and Egyptian authors still refer to him as a pioneer of the modern experimentalism of the 1960s and 1970s.[16] Nevertheless, the aforementioned critical interpretation

of Maḥfūẓ's work means that some of his novels were seen as "solely" realistic, while others were seen as solely experimental, or symbolist. For example, his 1940s works published before the Trilogy: though it was filed as "mature" literature by critics like Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlim,[17] the interpretation of these texts has always been conditioned by the idea that the author only reached the phase of "full maturity" with the Trilogy.

In an article aimed at a critical rereading of the canonisation of the novel-form in Egypt, Samah Selim questions the reception of *Rajab Effendī* (1928) and *Salwā fī maḥabb al-rīḥ* (*Salwa, Tossed by the wind* 1947), two novels by Maḥmūd Taymūr. The two works incorporate and blend – albeit differently – forms of traditional narration. The former novel employs some elements borrowed from popular narrative,[18] while the latter focuses on the building of the main character – by means of a more detailed characterisation and of a psychological excavation, both missing from the first novel. In a critical context such as the Egyptian one, where the realistic canon of the *riwāya fanniyya* ("artistic novel", so called by Muḥsin Ṭāhā Badr) was accepted as the form of the national ideology, and where literary criticism took shape in the firm belief that realism – descriptive, mimetic and national in scope – was the only aesthetics to promote and pursue, Taymūr's fiction was qualified as *not yet* mature, or "preparatory".[19] In other words, as pointed out by Selim, Taymūr's fiction was not measured in relation to a scale of aesthetic, linguistic, objective criteria but, rather, was judged in relation to the realist canon said to have reached its acme with Maḥfūẓ. Thus, again according to Selim, canonisation occurred based on a "discursive opposition between truth and falsehood, reality and illusion, realism and deception",[20] creating a polarisation between a meagre corpus of "good" literature (so called for its ability to meet the criteria of verisimilitude required by realist aesthetics) and a vast mass of "dismissed" literature, also known as *paralittérature*.[21]

Maḥfūẓ's work was interpreted through a similar teleology, taking as a scale of value the ensemble of features defined – in the years when the "modern artistic novel" was being developed – as fundamental criteria for a realistic, coherent, plausible narration. International critics have tended to consider the Trilogy as the undisputed "height of Egyptian realism",[22] identifying the Egyptian Nobel Laureate's contribution with the Trilogy and reducing the novels published previously to "preparatory works". *Al-Qāhira al-jadīda* (*Cairo Modern*) can be seen as a case study for this perspective. The novel, which will be studied in this chapter, is described as the beginning of the "realist period" that earned the author international visibility[23] but also, as we shall see, as an inventory of technical mistakes and building "flaws" caused by an as yet incomplete mastery of realism's narrative tools.

In his socio-literary analysis of the postrevolutionary Egyptian novel, Richard Jacquemond recalls how Maḥfūẓ always turned the ambiguous role of civil servant-turned-writer to his own advantage to defend his own freedom of expression, within a complicated relationship with the powers that be and censorship offices. Balancing between an eloquent debate with the powers that be, a compromise and, at times, an open clash of opinions with authority, Maḥfūẓ always enjoyed an adequate freedom of expression.[24]

He communicated his freedom also in the "coexistence" of several languages within a single text: realism on one hand, a modernist calling on the other. Compartmentalising an author's production in different "phases" does not help us understand the transversality of themes and languages typical of the transnational 20th-century modernism voiced by Maḥfūẓ. In his case, though his novels vary as to style and language, the narrative focus remains centred on the dynamics of succession, legitimation and struggle for power of certain classes to the detriment of others. Thus, pinpointing the intersection between the *Bildung*-form and the Mahfouzian novelesque universe is useful to reread his pre-Trilogy fiction without necessarily having to conceive it as "preparatory" to this masterpiece of Egyptian literature.

6.3 The paradigm of *the loss of illusion* in Maḥfūẓ

While some critics view this type of plot as a sub-genre of the *Bildung* form, others – like Bulson – view it as a "particularly productive *genre* for exploring . . . moments of discovery, solitude, isolation, and collapse",[25] – thus, as a sort of independent genre accompanying the individualisation process in many 20th century novels. Critics have identified this type of plot starting from Balzac's body of work, notably his *Illusions perdues* (1837–1843).[26] Maḥfūẓ has been repeatedly associated with Balzac[27] and Zola[28] due to his ability to understand the society, customs and dynamics that drive the cultural market; indeed, several sources speak of Maḥfūẓ as a connoisseur of these French novelists and an avid reader of novels in general.[29] In his dialogue with the narrative tradition of French naturalism, Maḥfūẓ played a part in broadening and complicating the international *topos* of urban disillusion in the Egyptian area, singling out the financial crisis of the 1930s and the framework of political destabilisation which affected the most precarious part of the middle class first and foremost. Thus, Maḥfūẓ's novels present aspects of polyphony, time manipulation, overdramatisation, stream of consciousness and other techniques belonging to international 19th-century modernism from the 1940s onwards, well in advance of the so-called postrealist phase.[30]

al-Qāhira al-jadīda was considered a "minor" novel by Arab and non-Arab critics, who highlighted its formal defects,[31] logical inconsistencies and non-functional descriptions. Some critics, for example, criticised the dialogues for not being written in spoken Egyptian,[32] though in interviews the author never hid his preference for classical Arabic over *ʿāmmiyya*, even in dialogues. This choice on the author's part can undoubtedly be ascribed to his personal redefinition of the codes of late-*Nahḍa* "realism" that pervades his entire production.[33] Among the novels preceding the Trilogy, *al-Qāhira al-jadīda* is the one most clearly focused on a single character, the key player in a swift rise followed by a vertical fall. Arab critics describe the protagonist of this novel as a "*shakhṣiyya sāqiṭa fī 'l-intiḥār*" ("a character who falls into suicide")[34] to convey, in short, the heart of the novel: the *telos* of a young man whose fall comes as fast as his rise. The loss of youthful illusions is one of the most universal and popular themes of the modern novel,[35] though some critics have identified it as a sort of "French variation" of the

Bildungsroman form. Alison Finch, for example,[36] equates the entire Balzachian project to an "ironised *Bildungsroman*"[37] – that is, to a sort of self-aware rewriting of the coming-of-age novel. Notably, Finch identifies social exploration, mobility and the centrality of the meeting and youthful experience as elements shared by the disillusionment plot and the traditional *Bildungsroman*. There is, however, a big difference between the two forms: the novel of disillusion shows a decrease in the striving towards moral progression on the part of the protagonist. Usually, in the *Bildung*-form, this progression is caused by the attempt to translate an ideal model of integration between the individual and society into narration. An integration meant to be gradual and nonviolent, with the aim of building an example of social reconciliation between the social tensions that surfaced in the wake of the great political upheavals caused by the French Revolution.[38] Conversely, the disillusionment plot envisages rejection of the protagonist on the part of a middle-class society that refuses to accept him, thus erasing his illusion of social repositioning.

In view of the innate bourgeois tendency to overcome one's condition, starting from the first literary transposition of the bourgeois – i.e., Robinson Crusoe – we can define the disillusionment plot as a sort of *mise en forme* of the "castration" of bourgeois aspirations.[39] The tale of an illusory "apprenticeship" and the shock of disillusion replace the tale of an organic growth. The theme at the heart of the *Bildungsroman* – the hero's journey in the world – marks another difference between the two forms. In Goethe's *Meister*, for example, the journey is divided into consecutive stages organised in a specific design, as willed by the Tower Society. In Moretti's words, this society "safeguards" the young man, allowing him to realise himself as an individual – provided he accept the "plot" set out for him by the institution.[40] The Balzachian disillusionment plot shows no trace of the providential design operated by people who serve as mediators between the young protagonist and society; instead, it is replaced by the resourcefulness of the young man himself, who cherishes the illusion – among several others – of being able to orchestrate his own future. As we shall see, however, individual resourcefulness is not enough to set the good luck machine in motion, and the young man is fated to give up any aspiration of mobility once and for all. Attempting to analyse the young protagonist in Bakhtinian terms, we can say that this character is not at all the "man who emerges along with the world", as Bakhtin defined the protagonist of the "novel of education" (*Erziehungsroman*).[41] In the disillusionment plot, the hero does not *emerge* but, rather, tends to remain unchanged in his essential traits. Not only that: as it will be clear from Maḥfūẓ's novel under discussion here, even when education raises his awareness, society imposes substantial immobility on him.[42]

In the first part of *al-Qāhira al-jadīda*, the young protagonist, Maḥjūb 'Abd al-Dā'im, suffers a family misfortune that undermines his path towards social ascent and inclusion – that is, the secondary studies he is completing successfully. The central part of the novel focuses on his attempts to achieve a pretence of middle-class existence through a series of encounters and stratagems, until the final denouement, which reveals the artificiality of this existence. The following

analysis will demonstrate how this novel, like others of its time, shows a twist in the "classic" coming-of-age plot that recalls – all the while boycotting – more traditional and linear forms, in a rewriting process typical of the modernist-colonial novel.[43] Instead of interpreting Maḥjūb's story within the framework of a narrative striving to "prepare the way" for the social depiction we find in the Trilogy, we will see how it actually offers a reflection on the ups and downs of Egyptian modernity and on the individual's impossibility of influencing society and his own destiny.[44]

What sets this novel – which also narrates the life of a student – apart from the several studied previously? First and foremost, here we notice the breakdown of the homology between "growth of the nation" and "personal and intellectual growth" of the hero. On the Mahfouzian horizon, as well as on the horizon on which 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's novel – analysed in the second section of this chapter – is set, the nation no longer ensures unity, identity or stability for the growing individual. Quite the opposite, the novel shows the intersection between two social groups in search of legitimation: the ruling *effendiyya*, closed and far from typically Egyptian as to education and identity affiliation, and the impoverished lower middle class whence Maḥjūb hails.

In novels of disillusion, the nation does not exist as the abstract idea, the "driving force" behind an individual desire which we find in al-Ḥakīm's iconic *'Awdat-al-rūḥ*. Both Maḥjūb and 'Abd al-'Azīz (the protagonist of the novel by 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim analysed in the second section of this chapter) are driven by the desire to conform to the dimension of the urban *effendiyya*, without worrying too much about the category's "Egyptian identity". And perhaps the nation, viewed as a united and historically definable project, is the greatest "illusion" of all, fated to make way for alienation and a desperate individual struggle for being.[45]

6.4 *al-Qāhira al-jadīda*: modernity as a *simulacrum*

As stated previously, *al-Qāhira al-jadīda* is unanimously described as the novel ushering in Maḥfūẓ's "realist period". The plot features the paradoxes of Egyptian colonial modernity, first and foremost the desire for stabilisation of the vanguard (*ṭalī'a*) of the less wealthy middle class, only recently urbanised and deep in the process of effendization[46] – in addition to being exposed, more than any other class, to the financial crisis that also swept through Egypt following the great crisis of 1929. The process of "becoming" defined by Bakhtin as the essence of the coming-of-age novel is not dwelt on in this novel which, instead, attempts to "capture" the striving of the youth from an impoverished family towards the *effendiyya* – that is, towards social mobility and visibility.

For Maḥjūb 'Abd al-Dā'im, the protagonist of *al-Qāhira al-jadīda*, Maḥfūẓ maps out what Mary and Kenneth Gergen defined as a "tragic narrative" – that is, "the story of the rapid downfall of one who had achieved high position".[47] This type of narrative became a key feature of the novels written by Maḥfūẓ in the 1940s and prior to the Trilogy; indeed, in her essay on the formation of the *effendiyya* in Egypt, Lucie Ryzova highlights how the figure of the young man

engaged in the process of "effendification" is fated for tragedy, farce or downfall in the national narrative imaginary.[48] This stylistic feature – so characterising as to become the actual paradigm of an entire social category – reopens the reflection on the "realism" of the Mahfouzian narrations. How "realistic" *are* characters like Maḥjūb or Ḥasanayn in *Bidāya wa-nihāya* (*The Beginning and the End*), who appear inevitably doomed to their own downfall? Actually, in these stories of failed effendification, Maḥfūẓ reshapes tropes typical of late-nahḍa realism, with the aim of showcasing the modern/colonial imaginary of the 1930s. More than describing society as it is by reproducing its logics and dynamics, Maḥfūẓ aims to recapture – to later sabotage – a certain imaginary of "modernity" seen exclusively as a display of westernised behaviours and of a social status consistent with the standards dictated by the new economic elite. Thus, we can interpret Maḥfūẓ's novels as expressions of a counter-narrative of the forms of economic modernisation and social organisation that developed in Egypt from the early 20th century onwards, often establishing themselves in a socio-political climate still pervaded by the dream of progress and urbanisation.

Maḥjūb moves within a perimeter drawn by a wish for redemption and interspersed with the frustrations caused by thwarted desire. The main aspect to be underscored here is the exclusively Egyptian nature of this perimeter, though it does absorb certain European environments and languages. Foreigners – or, as 'Abd al-Muḥsin Badr calls them, "the new Hyksos"[49] – are, indeed, an integral part of the urban landscape; they live in the middle-class neighbourhoods of Zamalek and speak French or Turkish, "occupying" and characterising an area of the Egyptian capital in its cultural and informative centres.

The "golden world" of internal foreigners is an alien, separate world compared to the one Maḥjūb comes from – that is, the island of Qanāṭir, a rural, backwards area the young man leaves behind upon arriving in Cairo to further his studies. In this novel, as in *The Beginning and the End* (written just a few years later), the dialectic harmonisation between world and protagonist is impossible. In order to join the effendized world, a "leap" (both in a physical and figurative sense) from the shores of Qanāṭir to the shores of another island, Zamalek, is necessary. The novel relates how this "leap" cannot be performed by remaining ourselves. In the disillusionment plot, the desire for social repositioning requires not so much a transformation as a *tanakkur*, a concealment of the young man's identity. This idea is also indirectly hinted at in the name Maḥjūb, which literally means "veiled".[50]

Narrated in the third person, the novel opens with a gallery of portraits of some Cairo University students. The lively debate between 'Alī Ṭāhā, a fervent supporter of social reformism and of Comte's thoughts, and Ma'mūn Raḍwān, an illuminated Islamist, offers readers a glimpse of a cross-section of student life at a time when the university was still called "Re Farūq" and was a significant forum for the shaping of political thought in Egypt[51] and for the exchange of ideas and perspectives on "hot topics" such as politics, public education, the institution of marriage and the relationship between the sexes within it. Neither the protagonist, the morally contemptible Maḥjūb 'Abd al-Dā'im, nor his fellow students are ever openly judged by the narrator. The student foyer and, in

particular, Ma'mūn's room where the group meets, allow the narrator to introduce the protagonist within a generational and relational framework: "this room is an incubator",[52] explains 'Alī Ṭāhā, underscoring how the foyer is a synecdoche of the Egyptian student world and, therefore, of the future ruling class. We find the main ideological stances of 1930s Egypt represented within the microcosm of the student residence: conservatives, Islamists, liberals and socialists all share the same social horizon, and gather for lively debates. One of the early chapters in the novel is dedicated to each of these characters, as well as to Aḥmad Budayr, a liberal-minded journalist. As an appendix to this gallery of youthful portraits, we find the love story between 'Alī Ṭāhā and Iḥsān "Shehata" (Shaḥāṭa), daughter of a humble tobacconist with a questionable past, which occupies the fourth chapter. In its own way, the dialogue between the two youths also offers a glimpse of a cross-section of the gender relationship at the time the novel is set: the young man is a reformer, yet "paternalistic" towards the girl who, instead, is poor, extraordinarily beautiful and disillusioned, yet educated.[53]

Unlike his friends, who appear frozen in their ideological – at times idealistic – stances, Maḥjūb is presented as a staunch nihilist who wishes "liberation from everything: from values, ideals, belief system and principles, from social culture as a whole".[54] A true embodiment of individualism, Maḥjūb usually dismisses the philosophical arguments of his fellow students with a word that sums up his nihilism: *tuẓẓ* (literally "crap", used here as an interjection meaning "I don't give a crap"). Four months before being admitted to the degree exam, Maḥjūb receives the news that his father has become paralysed and therefore is no longer able to support him. Though the young man goes to visit his parents, he seems more worried about finding a way to support himself, in the few months before his final exams, than about his father's state of health. In the end, Maḥjūb obtains permission to continue his studies by promising his elderly father to relieve him of the burden of supporting him as soon as possible.

The first part of the novel is a detailed description of the survival strategies adopted by the young man, and of his daily struggle to overcome financial straits and hunger. Indeed, hunger is a recurring theme; Maḥjūb is literally starving, as well as metaphorically hungry for a social position. His hours are punctuated by the thought of meal rationing, financial straits and a growing envy for his fellow students, who are free to be full-time students, while he is eventually forced to leave the foyer for cheaper lodgings. By virtue of the symbolic value of the environment referred to earlier, the protagonist's departure from the student residence foretells a deviation compared to what we might call the "normal" education path of a young *effendī*.

The young man attempts to resume relations with a wealthy maternal uncle, Aḥmad Bey Ḥamdīs, who had previously moved from Qanāṭir to Zamalek, the neighbourhood that became a symbol of the "status climbing", after being hired as a government employee. The tram is the preferred means of transport via which Maḥfūẓ's protagonists – both in this novel and in *Bidāyā wa-nihāya* – cross the various urban areas (each one the exclusive domain of a different social group) in search of the patronage of a wealthy person or of an association that can sponsor

them in their social ascent. Despite the cold welcome reserved to him by Aḥmad Bey, Mahjūb manages to contact his daughter – that is, his own cousin – in whom he immediately glimpses a useful tool to curry favour with his uncle and obtain – perhaps by means of a betrothal? – a job in government administration. This eventuality appears concrete when, owing to a series of coincidences, he manages to arrange a date with the girl to visit the excavations of Egyptian tombs carried out by the university. The motif of the modern young Egyptian fascinated by the vestiges of the Egyptian past recurs in many autobiographical or pseudo-autobiographical writings of the 1920s and 1930s: from Aḥmad Ḥusayn who describes his trip to Luxor and his "inspiration" before the Pharaonic past in *Imānī*[55] to Salāma Mūsā,[56] all the way down to the Pharaonic setting of a few scenes in *Ibrāhīm al-Kātib*, a 1933 novel by Ibrāhīm al-Māzinī.[57]

While Aḥmad Ḥusayn's and Salāma Mūsā's autobiographies narrate the picturesque potential of the Pharaonic setting, and the character of al-Māzinī is able to benefit from the backdrop of the Pharaonic remains at Luxor, Mahjūb is unable to take advantage of that space pregnant with history and meaning. At first, faced with his lovely cousin's rather bored reactions, he tries to make her appreciate some of the pictures:

> "Let's look at the pictures. See how brilliant the colors are". They began near the entrance with the wall where the beneficiary of the tomb was portrayed with his wife on his left and his children between them. . . . Tahiyya spent hardly any time at all on this image and moved on to the third panel. Mahgub realized that the pictures of naked people embarrassed her. As he examined the images with bulging eyes, a malicious smile spread across his lips. His heart beat faster, and he sensed even more strongly their isolation. He did not leave the picture of the field and did not turn his eyes from the representation of naked people.[58]

The strategy engineered by Mahjūb to create empathy with his cousin soon fails miserably: in addition to not interesting the girl whatsoever, the sight of those paintings arouses in him the unrestrained "impulses" of youth – another recurring motif in Maḥfūẓ's fiction. Divested of any sentimentalism, Mahjūb's sexual impulses erupt in an ill-timed fashion, turning into actual molestation on his part. As his outraged cousin leaves the excavations, Mahjūb sees his first opportunity for social ascent vanish but, in his heart of hearts, the student feels no regrets: "He thought for a moment. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he murmured contemptuously: *Ṭuẓẓ*".[59]

Later on, the young man seeks the protection of a fellow villager from the island of Qanāṭir – al- Ikhshidī, now the cabinet secretary for a senior public administration official, who will recommend him to collaborate as a translator with the magazine *al-Nijma* (*The Star*). For Mahjūb, al- Ikhshidī's guidance is almost a sign of fate: "If Hamdis and al-Ikhshidi could rise from poverty to power, he thinks, why should he not do the same?"[60]

Maḥjūb sees the corrupt world of sensational journalism as the way to rapid success. At the same time, however, he feels like an outsider in the westernised upper-class society surrounding him – as this scene about the charity event organised by the founder of the "Society of Blind Women" showcases:

> Mahgub's field of vision wandered as his protruding eyes hesitated between pretty faces, radiant throats, high backs, and swelling breasts. His blood rushed through his veins with renewed vitality and anxiety shot through his nervous system. He marveled at this dazzling world. Where had it been hiding? . . . Most were speaking French fluently – These fallen Muslims (*al-muslimāt al-sāqitāt*)! It almost seemed that French was the house's official language. How did they communicate with the blind women? Sarcasm (blended with spite) washed over him, but not because he felt chauvinistic about his country's language. He was merely trying to marshal reasons for an instinctive hatred.[61]

Like in *L'éducation sentimentale* by Flaubert, the journalistic ambience takes shape in Maḥfūẓ – in the words of Bourdieu – as a sub-field of the vaster "cultural field", a sub-field with its own dynamics, its own set of circles and reference institutions, its own symbolic values.[62]

Within the ambience, each individual's way of operating depends on his or her degree of involvement and investment: Maḥjūb, watching the scene that unfolds all around him from the threshold of the room, is still considering his degree of investment. However, a few pages later, we find him busy taking notes on the celebratory article he promised Mme. Nayruz in the hope of ingratiating himself with her. Chapter 22 opens with the young man's two columns of notes for the article: the first column is captioned "The Truth", while the second is "What I should write"[63]. The truth is that Mme. Nayruz comes from a family that profited by the British occupation of Egypt, but the article will praise "the family's long and patriotic history",[64] and so on. Unlike the poet – a model figure for Muḥsin in *'Awdat al-rūḥ* – here the journalist appears to have to follow the simple rule of writing the opposite of the truth. Once Maḥjūb comes to realise this, al-Ikhshidī advises him to forget the article: a far more substantial opportunity has arisen. Al-Ikhshidī suggests that Maḥjūb enter a "blind" marriage with an unknown girl who has been seduced by Qāsim bey. To protect his good name, Qāsim bey – a government minister and married man – wishes to hide his adulterous affair by having his young lover marry another man as a front. Tempted by the promise of financial aid from the Bey, Maḥjūb makes himself instantly available, though the reasons and conditions behind this marriage are only partially clear to him.

It is worthwhile here to dwell on the character of al- Ikhshidī: this key figure, a fellow villager of Maḥjūb's, can carve out for himself the role of "mediator" due to his having managed to permanently join the nation's administrative and political elite. Maḥfūẓ describes the new *effendiyya* – embodied by al- Ikhshidī – in profoundly ambiguous terms. On one hand, it is seen as an open system,

because several young former small-towners from families with limited means have had access to it. On the other, effendization (that is, the process of becoming an *effendī*),[65] represents an admission ticket to a social arena governed by merciless laws, where injustices and the abuse of power reign supreme.

The identity of Maḥjūb's "intended" bride will only be revealed as the wedding is about to take place: Iḥsān, the former fiancée of ʿAlī Ṭāhā, once loved by Maḥjūb himself and now his "ally" in a chase analogous to social stability and visibility. And so this farce of a marriage comes to pass.

A new "harmony of intents" prevails between the bride and groom, who discover that they are cut from the same cloth. Like worldly *pícaros*, the two young people begin their life together in an apartment equipped with all modern conveniences – a true *simulacrum* of middle-class luxury. In the last section of the novel, the protagonist's inner tensions, his injured pride, his jealousy mixed with a fear that his secret will be discovered all reach fever pitch. His hateful "mentor" al-Ikhshidī will set Maḥjūb's elderly father – by now recovered from his illness – on his son's trail. In the final scene, Maḥjūb's father, the Bey's wife and the Bey himself (who had been visiting Iḥsān) all find themselves in the boudoir-apartment, in a plot twist that seems to veer towards vaudeville. All the characters are at once actors in and victims of the farce devised by al-Ikhshidī to ruin Maḥjūb, guilty of having ascended the administrative hierarchy too rapidly, and of having surpassed his level. Speaking of the end of the novel, we must not forget that its title was originally meant to be *Faḍīḥa fī 'l-Qāhira*, "A Scandal in Cairo". Maḥjūb and his wife are transferred to Aswān. This is especially ironic as the protagonist, once so ashamed of his rural origins, is exiled to the border of the nation, becoming a *Faḍīḥa* himself – that is, one of the outrages that are fodder for the gossip columnists. In the last chapter, the author reintroduces the fellow students with whom Maḥjūb once shared the foyer: the reader finds them busy commenting "the major scandal that was on everyone's lips".[66] These friends are gathered in the headquarters of the new newspaper directed by ʿAlī Ṭāhā, the title of which – *New Light Journal* – seems to ironically recall Maḥjūb's "veiled" nature. Far from being not functional to the development of the plot, the characters of Maḥjūb's friends reappear, at the end, to show how the various social roles – after Maḥjūb's nine days' wonder – are invariably held by legitimate actors. Thus ʿAlī Ṭāhā, the son of a wealthy Cairo family, becomes the owner of a small newspaper; Maʾmūn Raḍwān gets ready for an upcoming journey (perhaps to Europe?); and journalist Aḥmad Budayr, who – for the record – bitterly recalls their mutual friend's motto "Tuẓẓ", reflects on the events, wondering who Maḥjūb ʿAbd al-Dāʾim really was. The last word belongs to ʿAlī Ṭāhā, who represented the reformist type of student:

> "Our wretched friend is at one and the same time predator and prey, don't forget society's role in his offense. The happiness of hundreds of believers assumes the sufferings of millions of others. They are no less at fault than our miserable friend. Our society encourages crime, even though it defends the

clique of powerful criminals and defends the weaker ones". . . . . "The society we dream of, however, erases evils we currently consider predestined and inevitable".[67]

'Alī Ṭāhā became an enlightened intellectual, who seizes upon his friend's fall to speak of a "collective illusion", a suffering of the times, using Maḥfūẓ's Trilogy as a source of inspiration for a way to offer the community his ideas on the reformed society.

A map of illusions: names and urban areas in the allegory of the nation divided

As often happens in the Mahfouzian fiction of this period, the protagonist's name reveals in advance the *charakter* – that is, a hallmark, an inner coherence – that will survive throughout the story.[68] In Maḥjūb's case, he will retain the characteristic of "veiled" (literal meaning of his name) character, whose "inner" life is inaccessible to the eyes of others. The root of the word, *ḥjb* – the same as *ḥijāb*, veil – allows for another interpretation: not only is Maḥjūb a young man with "invisible" aspirations and impulses; he is also a young man who "doesn't see", incapable of glimpsing his end. Also a telling name, "Iḥsān" (*maṣdar* of the verb *aḥsana*, "to do good") ironically hints at the sudden improvement in material conditions gained by the couple thanks to their unseemly agreement with the Bey. The girl's surname, "Shehata" (Shaḥāta), is probably an Egyptianisation of the Arabic *shaḥḥādh*, "beggar", with reference to the wretched nature of Iḥsān's family of origin and to the young woman's moral behaviour.[69]

The semantic "map" contained in the characters' names is joined by the map of places where the upscale *effendiyya* – to which the protagonist wishes to belong – meet and entertain. On one hand, we find the protagonist's place of origin, Qanāṭir, a rural area 20 km from Cairo that hosts the first artificial Nile barrages that create a series of islets; on the other, the island of Zamalek and the neighbourhoods of the Cairo *effendiyya* the protagonist aspires to reach. If we follow the protagonist's movements throughout the novel on a map of Cairo and its neighbouring areas, we see how an initial need to save money drives him to the outskirts of Giza; he later ends up in Zamalek to ask Aḥmad Bey for help and then in the Khedivial Cairo salons during his brief interlude as a journalist. His final stop is Iḥsān's boudoir-apartment located on "Nagi Street", which Maḥjūb describes as an "expatriate neighbourhood" devoid of "busybodies" and therefore suitable for the Bey's clandestine visits. The protagonist's movements follow a trajectory that shifts from the outskirts to the modern, westernised centre of the city. This trajectory, as mentioned previously, will be thwarted by the exile imposed on the couple, who must move to Aswān, the outer limit of the national space.

Paradoxically, Qanāṭir is the destination of the only journey the newlyweds treat themselves to – a brief yacht cruise on the Nile in the company of friends.

This outing will prove crucial in the "unmasking" of the anti-nationalist positions of Maḥjūb's fellow colleagues and new acquaintances:

> Iffat laughed and asked, "Why does Egypt need to be independent? Its leaders fight each other for power, and the people are unfit to govern themselves". Mahgub thought this was a fitting opportunity to offer a moralizing comment in order to help shape a positive reputation for himself. . . . With a smile, he said. "Aren't you ashamed to say something like this about your nation?" Iffat laughed again and replied in a loud voice: "I don't have a drop of Egyptian blood in my veins".[70]

Shaken and almost disgusted by his acquaintance's words, Maḥjūb swallows his initial retort in order to blend in with the group. This exchange showcases the soundness of 'Abd al-Muḥsin Badr's[71] critical reading, which raises the issue of the vast distance between Maḥjūb and the high-ranking urban *effendiyya* also in "ethnic" terms. In fact, the unfamiliarity of this society for Egyptian inhabitants is recalled both in the scene describing the charity party for blind women (in linguistic terms) and in the completely westernised aspect of the boudoir-apartment where Maḥjūb and Iḥsān lead a seemingly middle-class existence ("Nagi Street, Shleicher Building, 4").[72] Just like the ancient settlers of pre-modern Egypt, "the new Hyksos", as Badr describes them, have a predatory attitude towards the country and its people. Notably, Iffat's words conceal his scorn for Egypt's innermost and – as we saw in the previous chapters – symbolic soul. According to this character, the peasants extolled by the authors of the *Nahḍa* must be defended in the official parliamentary seat, but whipped in private.

In these terms of ethnic, linguistic, geographical and census differentiation between the "Egyptian" protagonist and the *simulacrum* of an *effendī* that he finds himself playing in the end, we can detect a subversion of the national allegory underlining the narrative mechanism of *'Awdat al-rūḥ* by al-Ḥakīm. If there is an allegory to be detected in *al-Qāhira al-jadīda*, as well as in the next novel that we will examine, *Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a* by 'Ab al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, it is that of a nation divided in its most representative part – the city symbolising it. Here, the desire of "otherness" (previously set out in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Adīb*) is remodulated within a mixed Cairo, a city inhabited and shaped by a mass of foreign settlers ready to plunder the human, linguistic and symbolic capital of the national project. As we saw in Chapter 3, the homology between the individual's emotional and moral "progress" and the building of the nation (a key feature of the *Bildungsroman*) is overturned by Maḥjūb's desire to become "the other", "the Hyksos within" the national territory.

However, despite the protagonist's alleged nihilism, in addition to not coming true, this desire causes a struggle within the protagonist – a struggle between the cynical indifference to his cronies' profound anti-Egyptianness and certain deep-rooted, almost archaic resistances that seem to be part of his nature: "Let al-Ikhshidi be my role model. That resourceful fellow obtained his position through treachery and has risen through the ranks because he's a pimp. So forward, ever

forward".[73] Similar resistances also surface when, driven by hunger, the protagonist finds himself incapable of begging: "What prevented him? A sense of honor? Pride Damn it!".[74]

In the end, the very middle-class environment inhabited and ruled by the "new Hyksos" pushes the pair of "*parvenus*" out of the urban gathering by sending them to the very edge of the nation (Aswān), much like a living organism expelling a foreign element.

Likewise, in *The Beginning and the End*, we can view Ḥusayn's departure from Cairo and his arrival in Tanta as the metaphor for an interrupted and retrogressed educational path. Especially notable is how the young man's movement from the centre to the outskirts of the city marks the "end" of his youth and, thus, the character's sudden and premature aging.[75] Therefore, in *Bidāya wa-nihāya* as in *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*, the character's youth is not so much a question of age as it is a cultural and incidental condition, linked to the environment and path within which he finds himself.

Based on these considerations, we can state that, in his particular version of the disillusionment plot and despite the fact that his novels cannot be said to fully belong to the *Bildungsroman* category, Maḥfūẓ sketches the "non-integrated national subject" mentioned by Samah Selim in her study on popular Egyptian literature.[76] The parable of an individual's ascent towards a specific class, not to mention the swift shock of his expulsion therefrom, illustrates in a nutshell the social rifts of a composite Cairo, of a modernity that has become a divisive factor within the city itself.

To sum up, the narrative layout of the novel examined here is based not only on derivative realism, but also on a specific and – at times – parodic twisting of the archetypical model of the *Bildung* and of its translation into farce. The disillusionment plot, as we have seen, can be read as a disillusioned and ironic "rewriting" of the *Bildung*, a genre with which it shares several themes. In similarly conceived plots, the protagonist eventually loses not only his youthful illusions, but himself as well, obstinately and fatally, thus offering a model of failure (*fashal*) and inner exile (*manfā*) that will prove useful to the protagonists of the antiphrastic novels of the decades to come.

6.5 'Abd al-'Azīz's pilgrimage towards himself in *Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a* (*The Seven Days of Man*) by 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim

Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a (*The Seven Days of Man*, 1969) is one of the most significant novels of the "Egyptian counter-narrative" which, in the 1960s and beyond, overturned the rules of mimetic realism, contributing to the shift towards modernist experimentalism.[77] Set in the countryside in the province of Tanta, the novel tells the story of a young man through the filter of a rural community and of the *ṭarīqa*, or *ṣūfī* brotherhood, within which he grows up. From the very first chapters, the gap between "linear" and conventional narrative is achieved by alternating a narrative voice that closely follows 'Abd al-'Azīz's compressed and poetic

stream-of-consciousness",[78] excerpts of dialogue in colloquial Egyptian and an impersonal voice described by Samah Selim as the "Sufi voice"[79] – that is, a sort of collective voice capable of offering an internal perspective to community and daily life, thus also allowing the magical dimension to be inserted within the story:

> Abdel-Aziz had always loved the evening prayer. It came at the time when the day was growing faint, the sun was setting, and the lights were soft, perhaps even a little sad. His father, Hajj Karim, would say in his solemn, resonant voice: "Sunset is a jewel. Seize it".
>
> You had to pray right away, or the thin, delicate trace of light would vanish from the horizon and darkness would fall.[80]

Right from the opening words alluded to earlier, the "Sufi voice" serves as a connection between the narrative voice and the point of view of the character of the author as a child, expressing the rules he interiorised ("You had to pray right away") and introducing them into a framework of common acceptance. Despite the predominance of the third person, this architecture of voices ensures that the descriptions of characters and situations are built around 'Abd al-'Azīz's point of view. The protagonist's growth – which occurs initially in the bosom of his community and in admiration of his father, and is later structured as a painful separation from this paternal figure and brotherhood – is the real plot of the novel. Each chapter chronicles the protagonist during a phase of his growth: indeed, the author's intention seems to be to recall the stages of a journey. The early childhood stage, narrated in the first chapter, is called "al-ḥaḍra" ("The Evening Gathering"); puberty is captured in the second chapter, titled "al-khabīz" ("The Baking"); adolescence in the third chapter, "al-riḥla" ("The Journey"); the age of the high-school student in the fourth chapter, "al-khidma" ("The Service")[81] . . . all the way down to the university student in his 20s in the fifth chapter, "al-laylā al-kabīra" ("The Big Night"), and the adult in the following chapters: "al-widā'" ("The Farewell") and "al-ṭarīqa" ("The Path").

These seven chapters, written in the shape of "days" spaced in time and narrated as separate scenes, share the common thread of the great event around which the community life of the village and of the *ṭarīqa* revolve – that is, the annual pilgrimage to the mausoleum of Saint Aḥmad Badawī in Tanta.

The protagonist's existential journey recounts another journey – that of a rural world where ploughs are still drawn by oxen and water wheels by cow buffaloes. A world that is slowly disappearing. Within this dimension, the male and female worlds belong to inexorably distant spaces and functions, where rhythms and activities are governed by the charismatic figure of Ḥajj Karīm – leader of the *ṭarīqa* and father to the young man.

Several critical interpretations define *Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a* as a *Bildungsroman*,[82] though Nowaihi points out how the narration "split" into seven different "moments" of the youth's growth (the seven "days" of the title, where the term "day" is a metaphor for "age") makes the novel experimental within its genre.[83] However, as it traces the parallel shift of the inner world of the character

and the outer world, the novel internalises the key feature of the coming-of-age novel – that is, describing the individual "becoming" with the world.[84] The world described in *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* is "made to measure" for the child ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz in the early chapters and reveals its flaws with the advent of the protagonist's adolescence, finally crumbling and falling to pieces during the protagonist's adulthood. The section that follows showcases how, just like *Cairo Modern*, this novel can also be read as a story of disillusionment, because the young man breaks away from the *kosmos* of the city of his childhood without, however, finding – in adulthood – an inner balance or a society or any place that could be considered "alternative" to what he has left behind.

The village public and domestic life as kosmos

As mentioned just now, the novel's opening lines kick off the description of a *kosmos* (the word means "order" in Greek), that is, of a society wherein everyone has their own place – as shown by the detail of the bench reserved for Ḥajj Karīm, where no one else dares to sit. Ḥajj Karīm, father to little ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, is the centre around which the life of the community revolves ("Hajj Karīm lit his lamp every night for the brothers, and he illuminated their gatherings with his enchanting words").[85] Time is circular. The rhythm of the succession of light and darkness governs the course of prayers and fieldwork alike:

> His father finished the prayer and went over to take his place on the bench on the guesthouse porch. His forehead was still dusty from prostration and his lips were still praising God. He was a good, lovable man with a special dignity about him, his father, Hagg Karim. No one ever sat in his place even when he was away. If anyone were to do such a thing, he would surely sit there tense and nervous, leaning forward and cupping his hands on his knees . . . it was Hagg Karim's guesthouse. He had inherited it from his father. It stood at the head of the lane where everyone belonged either to his family or clan. He was his leader, and they were his proud, loving and obedient followers.[86]

Seasons and harvest, social practices, collective rites of passage, community celebrations: everything is circular. Everything arrives, leaves and returns. The most important event by far is the pilgrimage to Tanta, though several tributes are paid to other Sufi tombs and mausoleums. Ḥajj Karīm – who, according to Selim, takes on the ambivalent role of king/father[87] – is an irreplaceable point of reference for the community. He organises the annual pilgrimage, leads the *dhikr* ceremony and routine individual prayers (*wird*). The mosque's *shaykh*, for his part, represents another face of faith in the novel – more regulatory and uncompromising, and certainly less present in daily life.

The brotherhood is a warm, welcoming environment that also admits followers whose public behaviour is morally questionable due to their sexual appetite or the drugs and hashish they consume habitually. Sins, as the impersonal "Sufi voice"

seems to remind us, are practically made void by the collective prayer led by the charismatic Ḥajj Karīm:

> They worked all day long on the land until their hands cracked. They yelled and screamed at their children and their wives and they beat their animals. They would become blind with rage. But in the evening, they put on freshly laundered galabias and performed the night prayer together in the main mosque, saying amen from the hearts as they prayed behind the imam. Then they came to the guesthouse. Now they were kind and wise. They looked at the toil and pains of the day with composure, and smiled. They regretted the storms of anger at their wives, their children, and their animals. But such was the hardship of life and the harshness of the day. It was the great and unfathomable secret hidden in the fertile earth on which they moved about in perplexity, worry and anger during the heat of the day.[88]

The child's perspective reveals admiration for and complete trust in his leader-father, as well as a fondness for the "collective body"[89] that is the brotherhood, whose members are described one by one ("There were many of them, but each one was a world of his own").[90] Just as the collective euphoria is a magical moment for little ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, so too is the communal reading steeped in magic and mystery, almost endowed with a life of its own – it is the "wondrous chest" filled with stories of the origins of the *ṭarīqa*:

> Abdel-Aziz kept his eyes on the chest as one of the dervishes bore it in on his shoulder and set it down on the matting at the head of the two rows of men. That wondrous chest! When the older people had gone out to the fields, or the toil of the day and the streets were quiet with few passers-by, Abdel-Aziz, oppressed by the stillness, would sneak into the inner room where that big chest was kept. When he tugged on the lid it would come sliding off and reveal piles of yellow paged books filled with tiny lines of print. The sight of those books always struck fear in his heart, but summoning all his courage he would pull one out of the chest and open it in front of him. . . . It disclosed to him only meaningless letters and words. How was it, then, that these yellow pages could be transformed into the magic that spread through the gatherings of the brothers, while Hagg Karim sat cross-legged in his place on the bench, slapping the bottom of his left foot with the palms of his hand.[91]

This passage recalls a community life where reading, as well as sleeping, are collective acts. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz lies between the mattresses of the brethren and devotes himself to the communal reading of the fundamental texts of the *ṭarīqa*, thus participating in the ritual transmission of collective memory. It is no coincidence that the first signs of the youth's parting from this *kosmos* will be the search for a solitary bed, far from the many brothers, and the chance to read his first "personal" books in solitude. Selim comments: "This expansive, communal Sufi reading of

time and history is contrasted to 'Abd al-'Azīz's school primers, and later to the novels he reads in jealous solitude".[92]

Centring on the bread-making moment before the pilgrimage, the second chapter presents the domestic and female world with its conversations, rituals and the game of early sexual attraction that the baking ritual sparks between 'Abd al-'Azīz and Sabāḥ, who is the same age as he is. Thus, the binary nature of male and female spaces and environments, of "becoming a man" and "becoming a woman" slowly takes shape. Within the village *kosmos*, this difference between the sexes achieves primary importance, representing a solid foundation for all the intersubjective relationships involving the members of the community. Young girls are tasked with baking bread under the severe, watchful eyes of their mother, also called *kahīna* ("Seer"), who watches over the yeast and keeps the secrets of baking and knowledge linked to household management and childcare, from infant massages to domestic economy.

Thus, by the end of the second chapter, the two figures of Ḥajj Karīm and 'Abd al-'Azīz's mother appear to us as two cardinal figures belonging to separate worlds – the external, communal one led by the father and the private-domestic one led by the mother. These two spaces are also markedly gendered.[93] It is the women's responsibility to prepare for a pilgrimage that most of them will not make, while the men enjoy the privilege of setting off on the journey and, as a result, of reaching and immersing themselves in city life. 'Abd al-'Azīz's body is the terrain where the public (paternal) and private (maternal) dimensions meet, as do the dimension of the village and that of the city, basically experienced within the extraordinary, chaotic and destabilising context of *Mawlid*, the Saint's feast day. In particular, the *Mawlid* at Tanta – destination of the pilgrimage embarked on by the brothers – represents a heterotopic place – subversive and, for this very reason, functional to the novel's economy of meanings.[94]

In the first two chapters, especially in the hypnotic rituality of the male "circle" of the *ṭarīqa* and in the feverish circle of the women busy baking bread, the physical dimension emerges overwhelmingly: this very physicality arouses embarrassment and even repulsion in the young man in the following chapters.[95] In particular, 'Abd al-'Azīz's maturation is heralded by the disgust he feels upon seeing his father's naked body at the start of the third chapter.[96] In the fourth chapter, "al-khidma" ("The Service"), 'Abd al-'Azīz – by now a secondary school student in Tanta – restricts himself to greeting his fellow villagers who arrive at the station for the pilgrimage and to celebrate the *Mawlid* together. This detail translates – visually as well – the shift in perspective undergone meanwhile by the protagonist: he is no longer travelling with them but awaiting them at the station. The youth has now adopted urban manners and a more rational model of behaviour, in which there is no room for popular faith a magic thinking. City life requires different social reference models compared to the ones he used in the country. His extended family, with the numerous female figures who once gave him warmth and a place of refuge, have been replaced by the idea of a mononuclear family; the circular rituality of the country by a linear concept of time. Along with his course of higher studies 'Abd al-'Azīz has embarked on a journey towards his own self,

towards the individual, by now deprived of the collective body that once protected him. However, in this renewed closeness to his people, the youth develops a feeling of physical repulsion. His father's body, like the collective body of the *ṭarīqa*, now rouses anger, rather than affection, in him:

> Abdel-Aziz was seized with a violent rage and his whole body quivered with resentment. He turned his face away. His body had lost all sense of unison with the group of men and he moved tensely on his own. The men looked at him as they were straightening their galabiyas and adjusting their caps. They were perplexed and obviously a little ashamed.[97]

'Abd al-'Azīz and his pilgrimage towards the self

In 'Abd al-'Azīz's journey, the individualisation process, that is, the process defined by Jung as "formation and characterisation of the single individual",[98] takes place precisely through the physical reactions of disgust and intolerance towards once-loved bodies, sought by the child. For 'Abd al-'Azīz, becoming an adult individual occurs by contrast with the *kosmos* of village life and by contrast with his father's body which, as al-Musawi points out, represents both a moral reference and a figure of control over his son's life, representing for him not only a guide, but also the "constraints and limits with which he has been living"[99]. In the first stretch of this journey of individualisation, which begins with adolescence, the youth is swept by contradictory impulses: domestic life and the walls of the home have become a prison for him,[100] and he expresses the desire to escape from his father's house and go wandering "from province to province".[101]

At the same time, however, 'Abd al-'Azīz the young man still appears to be within his father's sphere of influence and even the "journey" is undertaken only within the familial – and sacred – dimension of "pilgrimage" ("but how could a man journey without a cane, without baring his feet, without performing his ablutions? He was ritually impure"[102] the young man asked himself). As mentioned previously, the annual pilgrimage has strong symbolic value in the novel: on the one hand it is a metaphor for a rural and pre-modern *kosmos*, in which men tethered to the land for the entire year go annually and collectively to the dome of the Sultan Badawi, to strengthen their bond with the patron saint of the confraternity. On the other hand, it is also the structuring principle of the *telos* of the young man, who also formally observes the trend – measured "in stretches" – of the pilgrimage. In search of himself, the character accomplishes a true inner pilgrimage. The relationship between the pilgrimage arc and the *Bildung* form is highlighted by Phillips and Eiselein, who draw a parallel between the narrations of the travellers in Chaucer and the coming-of-age story: the movement of the plot is directed towards a goal in both. In the former, the goal is the cult object, while in the latter it is the age of maturity.[103] The homology between pilgrimage and journey of self-discovery becomes obvious in *Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a*, to the point that 'Abd al-'Azīz's journey appears, in the eyes of the reader, as a journey within the

journey, in which each stretch represents both the scope of the progression and the cyclical dimension of the return of the same circumstance over time. Thus, the "inner" pilgrimage is both a shift in space and a return – which does not, however, mean an identical repetition of events. In its self-aware architecture, *Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a* reminds us of a *Meta-Bildungsroman* – that is, of a novel whose content is not so much organised around the *telos* of the young man growing up, as it is around the observation of the emotional tensions and relational changes caused by this growth.[104]

The realist illusion of a nature gradually forged and shaped as he encounters life's difficulties is recalled and, at the same time, broken by the structure in thematically "independent" chapters. From a formal perspective, the novel appears to be in line with the new "Egyptian awareness", in other words with the new antirealistic tendency in which the idea itself of "character" understood as consistent and ongoing presence in the story (as it was in realistic literature) is called into question. As Seelinger Trites points out, "the postmodern awareness of the subject's inevitable construction as a product of language renders the construct of self-determination virtually obsolete";[105] thus, the coming-of-age novel in the Arab-speaking area, traditionally tied to a type of realistic-derivative language, could not actually exist after the 1967 Defeat and the explosion of the traditional narrative languages, unless in meta-narrative or parodic form.

The break that 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim makes with the *Bildungsnarrative* written earlier is not observed solely from a formal point of view. As mentioned previously, *Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a* breaks the homology that had characterised al-Ḥakīm's *'Awdat al-rūḥ* and that had spanned – albeit with different tones – al-Zayyāt's *Al-bāb al-Maftūḥ*: the parallel between individual growth and growth of the nation. No nation is ready to welcome the individual "fleeing" the *ṭarīqa* and the family, tribal and pre-modern environment. Conversely, the protagonist's journey of escape and arrival in the world of the city does not crystallise into a definitive position of rejection of the *ṭarīqa*. Instead of tracing a linear route, the young man traces a circle, returning – though he is no longer who he was in the past – to the places of his childhood.

The fourth chapter, "*Al-khidma*",[106] bears the mark of a definitive change of perspective in the protagonist. In fact, *Al-khidma* is the "service" offered by the Sufi to the community hosting them during the pilgrimage, with special reference to the preparation of meals for the poor. This chapter centres on the relationship between Sufi *fallāḥīn* and the city world, their "unrequited love" for a city that welcomes them with shouting and taunts and the inner tensions of a rural world which, chapter after chapter, changes its relationship with urban modernity. If the village appears to be clearly separated from the urban dimension, in the early chapters, starting from the fourth chapter the encounter between the collective body of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* and that which Selim calls "disciplining modernity", which has its legitimate setting in the city, comes to be thematised.[107] Now a secondary school student residing in Tanta, 'Abd al-'Azīz walks by himself to the station, heading for the platform where his father and the other dervishes will alight for their annual pilgrimage. Here as in Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's novel *Saḥḥ al-nawm* (1955), the

train is the symbol of a modernisation which, by now, has reached even the rural areas. In Ḥaqqī, the train is always described with negative images ("thread passing through a huge patchwork", or "snake passing through the green diked fields of Upper Egypt"[108]); the railway that traverses the countryside in *Ayyām al-insān* is described instead as a means that reduces the distances with the city and, replacing donkeys, helps establish more frequent contacts between *fallaḥīn* and urban *effendiyya*, fuelling the allure that the city holds for the peasants. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's gaze when he sees his relatives and fellow villagers alighting from the train recalls Ismāʿīl's in *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* upon returning from his stay in Europe:

> These men, with their cheap clothes, their rust-colored wool caps and their thin faces tanned with the sun and spotted by malnutrition, these poor frightened creatures, were Abdel-Aziz's parents and his kin, his heart and his eyes. They stood around him and looked at him. He wished they were cleaner, and bolder, not like this – poor, ignorant, and frightened.[109]

For their part, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's fellow villagers appear unaware of the young man's feelings. Aḥmad Badawī, one of his father's old friends and a longtime member of the Sufi confraternity, is the one who lays bare the young man's painful contradictions:

> At school he boasted of being a peasant to the city boys. He boasted of it. But inside he was angry and resentful. If only they weren't like this. They looked at him suspiciously, as if they sensed the struggle going on inside him. Ahmed Bedawi spoke: "Suppose one of your schoolmates saw you with peasant folk like us. Just in case, why don't you stay off to one side, we won't lose sight of one another on the way".
>   They had stripped him naked with their sharp eyes. A moment of shame came over him like a sudden chill. "What are you saying? I don't care about that". But he quickly realized what he had said. His answer was an admission of how he really felt about them.[110]

The marked dualism between city-country that characterised the entire literary production of the early Egyptian 20th century is toned down and remains uncertain in this novel. Once in town, Ḥajj Karīm reveals a complex personality, not entirely foreign to the world of city life, which he shows he is familiar with and recaptures every time he returns to Tanta; entirely at ease in the urban space and parlance, the Sufi leader receives the compliments and flirtatious looks of Umm Talʿat, owner of the house where the dervishes live during the week of *Mawlid*.[111] In the fourth chapter, readers discover, to their surprise, how the custom of the annual pilgrimage slowly brought the dervishes to appreciate the little "vices" and the "pagan rites" that this immersion involves, from the evening at the cinema all the way down to – for some of them – the visit to some women of the night. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz observes this "transformation" of the villagers while keeping his distance, confused by his own duplicity and by the absence of a clear direction ("he

wished to lose himself in the city").[112] The arrival of his fellow villagers in town causes conflicting feelings in him – discomfort and at the same time fondness for the rediscovered dervishes, friends of his father's, his childhood companions, who love the city unrequitedly.[113]

In the fifth chapter, "Al-Laylā al-kabīra" ("The Big Night"), the journey "to the centre of the world" has lost all meaning for the by now 20-year-old 'Abd al-'Azīz.[114] The popular adages that once made him feel safe irritate him, his father's very presence makes him feel restless ("if only he could take his father by the arms, stop him for a moment, and ask him: what does all this mean?"[115]). Still set in the city, this chapter opens with the promiscuous coexistence of the dervishes inside the house reserved for them during the pilgrimage period, among smells of food and hashish, and insects that serve as objective correlative of 'Abd al-'Azīz's growing *malaise*. "Outside", the *Mawlid* moves about with his "dancing girls, cheats and swindlers, the three card players" and the panoply of pagan entertainment, even the hashish sellers join the destabilising "carnival" of this celebration.

The "social body" of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* moves in the city as a foreign, subversive body, and 'Abd al-'Azīz feels thrown off centre and disoriented:

> The sounds were high-pitched, cutting through the hoarse, crazed barking rising from the dancer's breasts. Two lines of peasants, dancing widely and sweating profusely. The sheikh, a wily-faced man, was riding a frail, emaciated mare and was surrounded by colored banners held high by his men. The wild beating reverberated in Abdel-Aziz's head and almost made him vomit. The dregs of his consciousness clung to that sheikh towering on his poor, frail mare. . . . Abdel-Aziz felt his head about to explode. But his senses were numbed, and he was drawn on by this tempestuous din as it moved through the city.[116]

A very similar crisis to the one that caught Ismā'īl inside the sanctuary of Umm Hāshim arrives like an eruption, marking the point of no return in the young man's inner world. 'Abd al-'Azīz is in the lodging crowded by the dervishes, overflowing with the smell of food and bodily fluids, when his accumulated rage explodes:

> "Nations with no mind! Nations that don't think. They move just like animals. They don't have any idea where they are going or where they are coming from". His whole being was shouting, and the echo of his voice carried from one end of the lodgings to the other. The others responded with baffled faces and silent tongues and stared at him with mouths agape". . . . "Is there anything you know? Where you are coming from? Where you are going? Idol worshippers!"[117]

Though the Arabic *Umam*, plural of *Umma*, was translated as "Nations" in the English version (p. 157), the word refers to the Islamic value of *Umma*, community of believers. 'Abd al-'Azīz's feeling of disorientation is clear here: he no

longer finds the *kosmos*, the community of his childhood, and he appeals to that memory to loudly question – after having been silent for so long, in the previous chapters – the legitimacy of the *Ṭarīqa*. The story of growth and disillusionment in *Ayyām al-insān al sab'a* is, therefore, the story of a progressive inner exile compared to the sacred order within which the child was raised. The loss of this order translates into loss of the primeval sense of an ideal dimension experienced in the evening meetings of the dervishes during his childhood.

Among the disconcerted reactions of those present, there are those who invoke the opening *sura*, the Fātiḥa, to set 'Abd al-'Azīz back on the right "path": precisely because from son of the *Ṭarīqa*, 'Abd al-Azīz has turned into someone who has abandoned the *tarīqa* (the "path" or, in the view of the old dervishes, the "path of righteousness"). 'Abd al-'Azīz now prefers self-determination to obedience to the *ṭarīqa* and coexistence with the dervishes. Scornful of communal life, he begins instead to speak the language of the political opposition.[118]

It is notable that this progressive inner exile and the final crisis that seals its outcome are generated, not by chance, at the time of the *Mawlid* which, in the words of Maha Habib, "manifests the transformation of religion and religious discourse. The concern in the *Mawlid* is focused on material transactions, and practices that are worldly as opposed to other-worldly".[119] The *Mawlid* hypnotically attracts the believers while at the same time offering a space of transformation of spirituality and popular practices into "degenerate space":[120] this aspect echoes in the words of the *j'accuse* against the dervishes and against their "degenerate" behaviour.

In the figure of 'Abd al-'Azīz, Muhsin Jasim al-Musawi identifies "the long-lived *nahḍa* legacy . . .: a division between an awareness of science and responsiveness to urban allurements, enchantments and desires on the one hand, and a communal spirit of faith".[121] Maha Habib resumes this binary reading of the character, identifying the young man's lay education as the element of collision with the world of the Sufi congregation:

> As ['Abd-al-'Aziz] develops a distance from the diffidence towards the sacred order . . . trained in the art of rationality, not spirituality, he is a model of disenchanted youth. 'Abd al-'Azīz develops an awareness of the sciences, of rational thought, and the allure of the city. As such, he is no longer able to sustain an understanding of the city.[122]

However, by interpreting the young 'Abd al-'Azīz as a "replica" of the *nahḍawī* character in crisis, in particular as a replica of Ismā'īl in *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*, split between a spiritual and community legacy and a scientific education, we risk losing sight of the novel's strongly meta-literary aspect. Unlike the *nahḍawī* hero, 'Abd al-'Azīz is in constant movement, he is on a pilgrimage towards himself: after his rejection of the *ṭarīqa*, the "return" – although disillusioned – to the village finally takes place. Transforming from a beloved son of the *ṭarīqa* into an educated, modernised secondary-school student who flees his origins, into a disillusioned man, 'Abd al-'Azīz does not, however, lose his sensitivity and love for his father entirely – as is made clear in the last part of the novel.[123]

The village of his early youth remains an "uncontaminated" memory which, in spite of himself, inhabits and directs the adult individual on which the last chapters focus. If the "fall" of the Mahfouzian hero leads to his definitive exit from the scene, 'Abd al-'Azīz's rebellion and detachment lead to the growth without achievements of the urbanised student, anticipating a trend – that of the "paralysed youth" or of the character reduced to *mushāhid mashlūl* – typical of the 1970s and 1980s.[124]

Having by now said his final farewell to his deceased father, in the last chapter 'Abd al-'Azīz ascertains the fall of the *kosmos* in the aged or deceased figures of his childhood, in the by now shuttered social gathering places and in the once desired female figures, by now wives and mothers. 'Abd al-'Azīz's feet know the road from the station to his home in the village by heart, and they automatically turn towards the café: it is no longer Ḥajj Karīm's voice that lightens the darkness but that of the radio:

> Abdel-Aziz found himself speaking, quietly at first, but then excitedly at the top of his voice. As the broadcast continued its struggle with the boisterous voices of the men, his excitement increased. Everyone was talking. . . . he lost himself among them.[125]

Thus, paradoxically, 'Abd al-'Azīz's individualisation process leads to a reconfiguration of his individuality, which slips back not into the Sufi community, but into a room ruled not by a *kosmos* but, rather, by a chaos of voices that do not communicate with each other. On the basis of Samah Selim's analysis of the text, it is possible to interpret the figure of the protagonist and the alienation surrounding him, expressed by his "talking, talking" – without anyone listening to or interrupting him – as the incarnation of an "historical exile" after the situation of 1967: the protagonist's voice echoes solitary in the midst of many other voices that overlap but go unheard. This situation is the "background chatter" of the Egyptian condition, while the solitary shout of the adolescent 'Abd al-'Azīz in the pilgrims' lodging continues to echo like the shout of an individual who discovers – in spite of himself – the end of a world, the end of a world that had been his. And he judges the survivors of that world, who don't see that it is ending, to be idiots.

We have seen how the novel incorporates, even formally, the characteristics usually acknowledged in the narrative of the Generation of the Sixties. Given the distinctly meta-textual nature of this novel, we spoke of *Meta-Bildungsroman*: i.e. a form characterised by the fragmentation of the story into chapters that progressively photograph the ages of the protagonist and the hybridisation of the forms, surmised here by the intersection between travel story and coming-of-age story. The news broadcast over the radio – here, as in Maḥfūẓ's *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*, in which the neighbourhood storyteller is banished in favour of a new radio apparatus – conveys the entry of the new history within the novel, a history which, as Selim points out, now belongs to both dimensions: village and city.[126] This history permeates a society swept by new concerns, new discourses, in which, however, cohesiveness and mutual understanding are more and more sporadic.

Thus, the end of the novel should be read within the framework of the national disillusionment and of the resulting triumph over the derivative, mimetic realism that arose as the discourse-symbol of the nation during the period from the late *Nahḍa* to the 1950s. Although the text makes no explicit reference to the military defeat known as the *Naksa*, the moral disorientation of the by now adult 'Abd al-'Azīz, raised in a "sacred order" and now mingled with unknown fellow villagers in a bar, intent on speaking alone, becomes an allegory of the national disintegration.

Notes

1 Moretti, Franco, *The Way of the World*, p. 25.
2 Somekh, Sasson, *The Changing Rhythm. A Study of Najīb Maḥfūẓ's Novels*, Brill, Leiden 1973, p. 75.
3 Maḥfūẓ, Najīb, *al-Qāhira al-jadīda*, Dār al-shurūq, Al-Qāhira 2006.
4 See Brugman, Jan, *An Introduction*, p. 298.
5 El-Enany, Rasheed, *Naguib Mahfouz. The Pursuit of Meaning*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, pp. 51–52.
6 Darraj, Faisal, "Introduction", in Sadik Al-Azm (ed.), *Self Criticism after the Defeat*, translated from the Arabic by George Stergios, Saqi, London 2011, p. 21.
7 Barakat, Halim, "Arabic Novel and Social Transformation", in R.C. Ostle (ed.), *Studies in Modern Arabic Literature*, Aris and Phillips LTD, Warminster, UK 1975, pp. 126–137.
8 On Maḥfūẓ's later works and literary experimentalism, see for example Le Gassick, Trevor, (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Naguib Mahfouz*, Three Continents Press, Washington 1991, pp. 115–164; Greenberg, Nathaniel, *The Aesthetic of Revolution in the Film and Literature of Naguib Mahfouz (1952–1967)*, The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Lanham, MD 2014, pp. 21–54. For the crisis of the *adab multazim* see also: DiMeo, David, *Committed to Disillusion. Activist Writers in Egypt in the 1960–1980s*, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo and New York 2016, p. 81.
9 Jacquemond, Richard, *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt*, Translated by David Tresilian, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 2008, p. 172.
10 Tomiche, Nada, *Histoire de la littérature romanesque de l'Égypte moderne*. Maisonneuve et Larose, Paris 1981, p. 197. Translation from the French by the Author and Daniela Innocenti.
11 See al-Musawi, Muhsin J., *Islam on the Street*, pp. 110–125; Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt*, pp. 188–205; Elmarsafy, Ziad, *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2012, pp. 18–22.
12 Tageldine, Shaden, "Mahfouz's Posts", in Waïl Hassan and Susan Muaddi Darraj (eds.), *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Naguib Mahfouz*, The Modern LangShadenuage Association of America, New York 2012, p. 85.
13 For the latter definition, see Hassan, Waïl, "Seminar on Mahfouz", in Waïl Hassan and Susan Muaddi Darraj (eds.), *Approaches to teaching the Works of Naguib Mahfouz*, The Modern LangShadenuage Association of America, New York 2012, p. 26. For example, *Kifāḥ Ṭiba* (*Thebes at War*, 1944) belongs to the historical phase, generally inspired by Pharaonic subjects; the realist-social phase includes urban, modern novels such as the ones studied in this chapter and the renowned Trilogy; last but not least, from *Awlād Ḥarātinā* (*Children of Gebelawi*, 1959) onwards, we have a phase generally described as postrealist. For an example of the traditional periodisation of the Mahfouzian works, see Somekh, Sasson, *The Changing Rhythm*; El-Enany, Rasheed, *Naguib Mahfouz*.

14 See Beard, Michael and Haydar, Adnan, *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional fame to global Recognition,* Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY 1993.
15 Jacquemond, Richard, *Conscience of the Nation*, p. 5.
16 Tageldine, Shaden, "Mahfouz's Posts", p. 85.
17 See for instance al-ʿĀlim, Maḥmūd Amīn, *Taʾammulāt fī ʿālam Najīb Maḥfūẓ*, al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-ʿl-taʾlīf wa-ʿl-nashr, al-Qāhira 1970, pp. 46–48.
18 Selim, Samah, "The Narrative Craft of Fiction", *Edebiyyat*, 14, 1–2 (2003), p. 125.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Selim, Samah, *Popular Fiction,* pp. 10–11.
22 Brugman, Jan, *An Introduction*, p. 293.
23 Hassan, Waïl, "Teaching a Seminar on Mahfouz", in Waïl Hassan and Susan Muaddi Darraj (eds.), *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Naguib Mahfouz*, Modern Language Association of America, New York 2012, p. 25.
24 Jacquemond, Richard, *Conscience of the Nation*, p. 4.
25 Bulson, Eric, "Introduction", in Eric Bulson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to The Novel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK 2018, p. 4.
26 Lewis, Pericles, *Modernism, Nationalism and the Novel*, p. 19.
27 Said, Edward W., *Reflection from the Exile*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2000, p. 273.
28 DiMeo, David, *Committed to Disillusion*, p. 69.
29 In his book Fuʾād Dawāra looks at the formative readings done by Maḥfūẓ: he mentions the French naturalists and, among others, Flaubert, Proust, Huxley, Dickens, Lawrence, Melville, Tolstoj, Dostoevskij. See *ʿAshara Udabāʾ y ataḥaddathūna*, Kitāb al-Hilāl, Al-Qāhira 1965, pp. 270–271.
30 On realism in Maḥfūẓ and on his use of classical Arabic in dialogue see Ḥassan Abdallāh, Muḥammad *Al-wāqiʿiyya fī ʿl-riwāya al-ʿarabiyya*, Haʾya al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-ʿl-kitāb, al-Qāhira n.d., pp. 89–134.
31 Badr, Abd al-Muḥsin, *Najīb Maḥfūẓ, al-ruʾya wa-ʿl-adāt*, Dār al-Thaqāfa, al-Qāhira 1978, p. 291.
32 Abū Aḥmad, Ḥāmid, *Najīb Maḥfūẓ wa-ʿl-riwāya al-ʿālamiyya*, al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmmah li-ʿl-taʾlīf wa-ʿl-Nashr, al-Qāhira 2009, p. 43.
33 Jacquemond, Richard, "Langues etrangères et traduction dans le champ littéraire Egyptien", *Alif,* 20 (2000), p. 27.
34 Abū Aḥmad, Ḥāmid, *Najīb Maḥfūẓ wa ʿl-riwāya al-ʿālamiyya*, p. 287.
35 Bulson, Eric (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, p. 4.
36 Alison Finch quoted in Graham, Sarah (ed.), *A History of the Bildungsroman*, p. 20.
37 Ibid., pp. 46–47.
38 Boes, Tobias, *Formative Fictions*, pp. 16–24.
39 Moretti, Franco, *Il Borghese. Tra storia e Letteratura*, Einaudi, Torino 2017, p. 8.
40 Moretti, Franco, *The Way of the World,* p. 22.
41 Monique Rinere explains how the German novel of development includes the "*Entwicklungsroman*", which "indicates that the hero of the work displays marked internal psychological and/or spiritual development" and *Erziehungroman* which "narrates a rather more external process of education and upbringing. Rinere, Monique, *Transformation of the German Novel. Simplicissimus in Eighteenth Century Adaptations*, Peter Lang, Bern 2009, p. 202. Bachtin translates *Erziehungroman* as *stanovlenie* (formation).
42 Bulson, Eric (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, p. 4.
43 Esty, Jed, *Unseasonable Youth*.
44 See Scott, Bede, "A Raging Sirocco: Structures of Dysphoric Feeling in *Midaq Alley*", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 42, 1 (2011), p. 44.
45 Habib, Maha, *Muslim Identities and Modernity*, p. 200.
46 Badr, ʿAbd al-Muḥsin, *Najīb Maḥfūẓ,* pp. 279–280.
47 Gergen, Kenneth J. and Gergen, Mary M., "Narratives of the Self", p. 167.

48 Lucie Ryzova analyses *Cairo Modern*, *Beginning and End*, and *Midaq Alley* as narratives which explore dynamics of the social struggle for mobility. See Ryzova, Lucie, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, p. 130.

49 The critic refers to *Qifāḥ Ṭība* (*Thebes at War*), which is focused on the battle between the ancient Egyptians and the foreign population of the Hyksos, seen as a metaphor of the colonial presence in Egypt. See Badr, Abd al-Muḥsin, *Najīb Maḥfūẓ*, p. 283.

50 'Abd al-Muḥsin Badr, *Najīb Maḥfūẓ*, pp. 283–284.

51 Erlich, Haggai, *Youth and Revolution*, p. 40.

52 Mahfouz, Najib, *Cairo Modern*, p. 49.

53 Ibid., pp. 13–22.

54 Ibid., p. 24.

55 In his *Imānī*, Aḥmad Ḥusayn describes his travels to the South in 1928 to re-discover and re-appropriate the glorious Egyptian past. He evokes the connections he made between the modern Egyptian peasantry and the Pharaonic past (which is a typical theme of the "Pharaonist ideology"). He condemns the Egyptians that ignore and deny this connection, considering them traitors of the nation, obstacles to its progress. Husayn's "conversion" to Pharaonism happened during his trip South, where he felt deeply changed, reborn in front of the Pharaonic monuments. He concludes his account of his visit to Luxor Temple by saying: "I was reborn . . . a new creature . . . I had been resurrected. I had been created anew, just like every man in Egypt ought to be created. I saw the columns of Karnak and its monuments not as ruins, but as they were a living thing that spoke". (Ḥusayn, Aḥmad, *Imānī*, Aḥmad al-Shīmī, al-Qāhira 1936, pp. 33–35).

56 Colla, Elliott, *Conflicted Antiquities*, pp. 155–156.

57 See Paniconi, Maria Elena, "Reframing the Politics of Aesthetic Appropriation in the late-*Nahḍah* Novel: The Case of Plagiarism in Ibrāhīm al-Māzinī's *Ibrāhīm al-kātib*", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 1, (2019), pp. 56–80.

58 Mahfouz, Najib, *Cairo Modern*, p. 81.

59 Ibid., p. 83.

60 Ibid., p. 61.

61 Ibid., p. 100.

62 Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structures of the Literary Field*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA 1995 (1992), pp. 3–43.

63 Mahfouz, Najib, *Cairo Modern*, p. 109.

64 Ibid.

65 Ryzova, Lucie, *The Age of Efendiyya*, pp. 93–99.

66 Mahfouz, Najib, *Cairo Modern*, p. 235.

67 Ibid., p. 235.

68 Al-Kurdī, Amīn, "Sīmīutiqā al-asmā' fī riwāyāt Najīb Maḥfūẓ", in *Ta'ddud fī 'alam Najīb Maḥfūẓ*, al-Majlis al-A'lā li-'l-Thaqāfa, al-Qāhira 2013, pp. 172–180.

69 Ibid., pp. 174–176.

70 Mahfouz, Najib, *Cairo Modern*, p. 210.

71 Badr, Abd al-Muḥsin, *Najīb Maḥfūẓ*, pp. 283–284.

72 Mahfouz, Najib, *Cairo Modern*, p. 148.

73 Ibid., p. 119.

74 Ibid., p. 55.

75 The wisest of the four brothers who are the novel's main characters, Ḥusayn accepts his adverse fate and locks away his youthful illusions to support his family. Ḥasanayn, like Maḥjūb, attempts a rapid social ascent that will drag him – along with his sister Nafīsa – towards a tragic end. Ḥusayn's departure for Aswān opens up a temporal and "private" dimension of the character in contrast with what his brother experiences back in Cairo; in actual fact, a narrative example of the modernist anachronism discussed in Chapter 5.

76 Selim, Samah, *Popular Fiction,* p. 32.

77 On the Sixties Generation, see Chapter 7. For a reading of *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿa* in the context of the literary avant-garde and as a reformulation of the late-*nahḍa* dualistic imaginary split between the rural and the city, see Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, pp. 186–188.

78 Ibid., p. 192.

79 Ibid.

80 Qāsim, Abd al-Ḥakīm, *The Seven Days of Man*, translated by Joseph Norment Bell, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1996, p. 1.

81 Translated as "The Lodgings" in the English version.

82 See for instance Elmarsafy, Ziad, *Sufism in the Contemporary Arab Novel*, p. 19.

83 al-Nowaihi, Magda, "Construction of Masculinity", p. 237.

84 Bachtin, Michail, "The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism", in Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (eds.), *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX 1986, p. 24.

85 Qāsim, Abd al-Ḥakīm, *The Seven Days of Man*, p. 7.

86 Ibid., p. 1.

87 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, p. 190.

88 Qāsim, Abd al-Ḥakīm, *The Seven Days of Man*, p. 4.

89 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, p. 195.

90 Qāsim, Abd al-Ḥakīm, *The Seven Days of Man*, p. 6.

91 Ibid., p. 15.

92 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, p. 196.

93 Al-Nowaihi, Magda, "Construction of Masculinity", p. 240.

94 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, p. 195.

95 Ibid., p. 198.

96 Qāsim, Abd al-Ḥakīm, *The Seven Days of Man*, p. 72.

97 Ibid., p. 116.

98 Jung, Carl Gustav, *Dream Symbols of the Individuation Process: Notes of C.G. Jung's Seminars on Wolfgang Pauli's dreams*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2019, pp. 35–37.

99 Al-Musawi, Muhsin J., "Beyond the Modernity Complex: 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's Re-Writing of the *Nahḍah* Self-Narrative", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 41 (2010), p. 33.

100 Qāsim, Abd al-Ḥakīm, *The Seven Days of Man*, p. 79.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., p. 81.

103 Anne K. Phillips and Greg Eiselein, "The Varieties of Adolescent Experiences: Coming of Age in Alcott's *Little Women*", in Kent Baxter (ed.), *Critical Insights. Coming of Age*, Salem Press, Ipswich, MA 2013, p. 159.

104 Baxter, Kent, "On Coming of Age", in Kent Baxter (ed.), *Critical Insights. Coming of Age*, Salem Press, Ipswich, MA 2012, p. 7.

105 Selinger Trites quotes in Baxter, Kent, "On Coming of Age", p. 7.

106 Literally, "the service". The meaning is lost in the chapter title provided by the English translation (The Lodgings).

107 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, p. 196.

108 Ḥaqqī, Yaḥyā, *Good Morning! And Other Stories*, Three Continents Press, Washington, DC 1987, pp. 10–15.

109 Qāsim, Abd al-Ḥakīm, *The Seven Days of Man*, p. 114.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid., p. 124.

112 Ibid., p. 132.

113 Ibid., p. 131.

114 Ibid., p. 140.
115 Ibid.
116 Qāsim, Abd al-Ḥakīm, *The Seven Days of Man*, pp. 150–151.
117 Ibid., pp. 157–158.
118 Elmarsafy, Ziad, *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel*, p. 119.
119 Habib, Maha, *Muslim Identities and Modernity*, p. 204.
120 Ibid., p. 201.
121 Al-Musawi, Muhsin J., "Beyond the Modernity Complex", p. 26.
122 Habib, Maha, *Muslim Identities and Modernity*, p. 205.
123 Elmarsafy, Ziad, *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel*, p. 21.
124 See Chapter 7, p. 181.
125 Qāsim, Abd al-Ḥakīm, *The Seven Days of Man*, pp. 217–218.
126 Selim, Samah, *The Novel and Rural Imaginary*, p. 205.

7   Antiphrastic *Bildung* and multiple selves in the avant-garde literary movement

The avant-garde novel created problems for the novelesque character – to whom traditional realism accorded the freedom to build the plot and whose life, in the specific instance of the *Bildungsroman*, unfolded "spontaneously" over the course of the story.[1] Thus, the literary experimentalism introduced by Maḥfūẓ and developed by the Sixties Generation inevitably marks a break with one of the basic features of the *Bildungsroman* understood as a literary form capable of transforming a static story (for example, one generated by a series of events concerning the adventures of a student in the throes of his first infatuation) into a narrative arc.[2]

Later on, the generation of "children" of the Nasserist Revolution gave rise to a series of experimental writings influenced by the European *Nouveau Roman*, by cinematic language, by figurative lyricism, by nonfiction or the postmodern *pastiche*. We also witness the recovery of a local Egyptian identity, taken from the spheres of folklore and popular genres.[3] Some of the authors belonging to this generation, such as Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm, served time in prison for opposing the Nasserist regime.[4] Others, like Bahāʾ Ṭāhir, preferred to go into exile rather than suffer a similar fate. These authors' works are infused with a sense of estrangement (*ghurba* or *ightirāb*) which, far from restricting itself to the migrant experience or exile, invests the individual's existential dimension. The plot empties out, while the story creates expectations only to deliberately disregard them. The "Sixties Generation" didn't represent a literary "school" or an organised group of authors recognisable for homogeneity of languages. Indeed, if we consider the formal aspect in the novels produced by this generation in later years (in the 1970s and 1980s), we find Muḥammad al-Busāṭī's rural, suspended settings, Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm (Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm)'s intentionally flat style in his manifesto-novel *Tilka al-rāʾiḥa* (1966, *The Smell of It*, 1971 and *That Smell* 2013), the Kafkaesque dialogue in Bahāʾ Ṭāhir's short story "Al-khuṭūba" (*The Engagement* 1984), the recovery of traditional forms in Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī's historical novels, the breakdown of the plot into cinematic scenes, such as in *Mālik al-Ḥazīn* (1981, *The Heron* 2005) by Ibrāhīm Aṣlān. In a seminal study on this generation of avant-garde authors, as diverse as they were influential on later experiences, Sīza Qāsim Draz (Céza Kassem Draz) claims that the Sixties Generation was "not engaged in negating traditional forms of literal expression but, rather, in negating the traditional concept of truth expressed in traditional language":[5] hence the recovery – in

an ironic vein – of well-established forms (such as the historical novel) in the semantic reconfiguring of national counter-narratives, or of the underground historiographic reconstructions embodied by the novels of Maḥfūẓ or Jamāl al-Ghiṭānī's later periods.[6]

In Egypt, the 1980s and 1990s saw the return of a more readable, perhaps "less" experimental novel featuring a broader plot, as if in an attempt to assert the plot's return to the urgency of breaking with conventional models. Drawing on Draz's words, the need to "negate the traditional concept of truth" would not disappear; indeed, the lengthy narrations of the 1980s would differ from the concise style of the 1960s thanks to a return of the plot and a combinatorial, playful approach often defined as postmodern with regard to both language and subject matter. This recovery also owes much to the female authors of the so-called Seventies Generation, who measured themselves against autobiographical novels, historical novels or family sagas,[7] reclaiming an interest in the evolution of the narrative character,[8] in part to the same authors of the 1960s avant-garde movement, who reclaimed traditional narrative forms at the close of the century.[9] After having given voice to the sensation of being exiles in their own country without ever leaving it, as well as to the historical disenchantment and the burning moral defeat on the heels of the Defeat of 1967, the historical avant-garde movement began to explore the possibilities of the novel once more.

What, then, did these postexperimental writings recover of the *Bildung*-form? And if we can truly speak of a recovery, with what aim did the novel combine elements of a traditional "form" with the new narrative aspirations? A question that the seventh and final chapter of this book attempts to answer by examining three novels published in the 1990s. Though not deploying a linear coming-of-age story, these novels regain possession of narrative devices typical of the coming-of-age novel: the protagonists' young age, their evolution, the link between their growth and the vicissitudes of the nation. All these elements are revisited and debated, but still present in the novels we will discuss, where the protagonist's transformation is seen neither as linear development, nor as growth. There is no sign of the disciplined transformation contained within the age limits of youth that we find in the traditional *Bildungsroman*. Raḍwā ʿĀshūr and Mīrāl al-Ṭahāwī's female characters strive towards continuous evolution unrestricted by their age, while Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm's character, introduced from the start as an anti-hero whose fate is sealed, follows a tragic path aimed at progressive depersonalisation and marginality.

7.1　The Egyptian avant-garde movements and the *Bildungsnarrative*: beyond the national identity

The avant-garde movement of the 1960s ate away at the languages of the legitimised narrative canon, setting in motion a quest for expressive independence from the Western novelesque tradition, as well as from the late-*nahḍawī* normative tradition. Concepts prevailing in the 1950s, such as *Iltizām* (intellectual and political commitment) and social realism,[10] were challenged. Though not professing

to "voice" a truth meant in the absolutist sense, the authors of the 1960s claimed the right to express their own reality, following three courses of action effectively underscored by Kendall:

> The Sixties Generation might be read as offering an amalgamation of three models of resistance in their quest to establish their own literary identity. First, a national Egyptian culture and pre-colonial literary tradition were asserted through the incorporation of myth, legend and historical material from the distant Egyptian and Arab past (anti-colonial discourse); second, the hybrid nature of their literature contested the very basis of imperialist pretensions of cultural superiority (counter-discursive practices); and third, the rejection of the literary practices of the immediate Arab past and the emergence of a new realism challenged the social, political and literary status quo, while the creation of their own independent journal gave them a certain autonomy from the greater field of power (anti-establishment).[11]

In other words, albeit recovering the trope of the coming-of-age youth, the 1990s novels under discussion here relinquish the metaphorical sense of an allegory that traces the collective and national growth within the individual *telos*. Furthermore, the very idea of narrative progression would undergo a crisis, openly challenged by the authors of the historical avant-garde, as well as by the authors of the later avant-garde movements. Thus, even the *Bildungsroman* – the *summa* of national and realistic literature – was rewritten and reformulated from within.

As mentioned earlier, the first section of the "traditional" coming-of-age novel to be removed was the correspondence between "spirit of the coming-of-age youth" and national becoming. It was replaced by the trope of national decline, expressed in different ways by the narrators, who marked their protagonists' stories with a deformation or – in some cases – a renegotiation of identity, as if in an attempt to deprive the progressive national narration of its authority, or even to openly boycott it.[12] According to Bourdieu, in its European and late 19th-century guise, the modernist novel tended to discard any material definable as traditionally "novelesque"[13] – that is, the content that had made up the novel's living matter in the 19th century. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the Egyptian avant-garde novel would likewise tend to discard the *teloi* aimed at discovery of the self or the other; the analogies between individual dimension and national history were no longer perceived as artistically viable methods.

One of the most notable consequences of the avant-garde novel's programmatic relinquishment of the traditional mediators of meaning is the transformation of the theme of the journey, or migration, to Europe.

As we have seen in Chapter 5, centred on Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Adīb* and Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī's *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*, the *telos* of the young Egyptian man who goes to Europe to complete his studies becomes the main textual "mediator" to recount the boundaries, the possibilities and even the crises inherent to "national" subjects. Likewise, this *telos* offers a narrative guise to the quest for modernity and to the destabilisations born by this quest. As Casini explains, the journey to Europe

recounts the modern Arab individual's aspiration to a social, cultural and political modernity often perceived as unviable – or at least problematic – in the homeland. In the late-century avant-garde novel, despite the re-emergence of the theme of migration, it is difficult to find a story where the protagonist's movement is linked to an allegorical (national) metaphorical sense like in *Adīb* or in *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*.[14]

Towards the end of the 20th century, migration stories became fertile ground for expressing the "need to go beyond the national frame, as well as its enframed modern and traditional tropes, for enquiry into communal and individual identity and, more importantly, the formation of subject and its role in the literary expression".[15] While the trope of the young student, or postgraduate student, in Europe had played a key role, ever since the 1940s, in the coming-of-age story of a subject widely influenced by the nation's structure, adapting to the formal characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* (linearity, presence of key-tropes such as the meeting with a "go-between" with the foreign culture and the separation from one's family of origin), in "postnational" literature, though the theme of migration was touched on, the migratory *telos* no longer coincided with that of the hero's formation. And if the journey or migration – even if forced, like in *Mudun bi lā-nakhīl* (1992, *City Without Palms*, 2006) by Ṭāriq al-Ṭayyib (Tarek al-Tayyeb) – should coincide with the protagonist's "becoming an adult", the narration still does not lay emphasis on the "national" dimension of the youth's identity as much as on his marginality, and on the disastrous permanence of this condition of marginality in the countries of arrival, as well.

This reflection on the evolution of the migration trope, foundational in the early decades of the 20th century and, ironically, subverted in the 1960s, highlights what happened more in general for an entire series of literary tropes viewed as foundational to the realist canon and later challenged by the avant-garde literature of the 1960s, which anticipated – and later channelled – the ideological disillusion characterising the period following the Defeat of 1967. The experimental avant-garde novel deconstructs and examines its *own* history of pursuing modernity, and it does so (as underscored by Ouyang) by "sabotaging" the genres – the *Bildungsroman* first and foremost – that traditionally appear as repositories of the hegemony of the nation-state. The following textual analyses pertain to three works which, each in its own way, showcase the desire – and the attempt – to go beyond this aesthetic and cultural hegemony: for example, in Raḍwā ʿĀshūr's feminist and generational novel, Nadā's coming-of-age story is a narrative device that allows us to discover the role of women in the student and labour movements of the 1970s, to discover its inner rifts and to rediscuss its legacy. Conversely, in *Al-Khibāʾ* (1996, *The Tent* 1998), the novel penned by Mīrāl al-Ṭahāwī in the mid-1990s, the plot is once more guided by a focus on the individual self. We are not, however, referring to a coherent, unified individual development; instead, the narration stages an identity at once broken and split in two, plural or constantly renegotiated. Late-20th century *Bildungsnarrative* was therefore, and necessarily, non-linear and non-progressive, giving voice to the modernist tendency to escape the too-strict dictates of the novel form as it was meant traditionally. When the protagonist's

coming-of-age occurs amidst a national discourse – like in ʿĀshūr's *Faraj* – the soul-nation allegory we spoke of for *ʿAwdat al-rūḥ* and for *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* does not take place. The national tradition and the national project's identity no longer ensure a stable "identity" for the protagonist; instead, they become the symbolic void *despite* which the characters manage to evolve. The detachment from progressive literature appears clearly in Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm's *Sharaf*, which stages an actual anti-*Bildung* where the protagonist (guilty of involuntary manslaughter) will end up engulfed by the Egyptian prison system, a dystopian microcosm of the remains of the national project. In these 1990s novels, the disjointedness of the self – constantly reinventing itself, deforming or shattering – is the most original expression of a new grammar of the individual's writing, of the quest for the self and of the individual's relationship with the world.

The boycott of the narrative of transformation in the 1980s and 1990s

Thus, the protagonist viewed as defined, coherent and "active" subject, with his or her own project and independence, is programmatically sabotaged through the very denial of any possibility of transformation and organic growth. The protagonist's inability to change is foretold, in the novels written by the "historical avant-garde movement" of the 1960s, by a series of portraits of young men who appear "motionless", doomed to non-transformation. The character of Yūsuf al-Najjār in *Mālik al-Ḥazīn* (1981, *The Heron* 2004) by Ibrāhīm Aṣlān, described by his acquaintances (fellow residents of the Cairo neighbourhood of Imbābā) as "a stranger" in the neighbourhood;[16] the student in crisis in *Sharq al-nakhīl* (1985, *East of Palms*)[17] by Bahāʾ Ṭāhir or the layabout Shajara Muḥammad ʿAlī, protagonist of *Bayt al-Yāsāmīn* (1981, *The House of Jasmin* 2012):[18] all these characters are inactive, frozen in a unidimensional present time. In their in-active and unproductive natures,[19] as well as in their inability to evolve from a narrative standpoint, these protagonists are often emblematic of an intellectual class in great difficulty, and can be defined as "frozen youth", to use the expression coined by Jed Esty to describe the European modernist novel.[20]

At times, these young men appear involved in popular marches or even demonstrations like the 1977 "Bread Intifada", in the case of Aṣlān's character, or like the student riots of 1972, in the case of Ṭāhir's character.[21] However, no matter what cause urges them to take to the streets (the main character of *Bayt al-Yāsāmīn* is actually an organiser of claques paid to welcome foreign politicians to Egypt), these young men are *mushāhid mashlūl* (frozen witnesses) of the reality surrounding them[22] – so much so as to feel alien to the crowds in the demonstrations in which they themselves participate, or to the words of the slogans they chant.

Similar protagonists are not only "alien" to the classic *Bildung*-form; they also seem to take shape specifically to plot the impossibility of action, of transformation of the self and of the surrounding world, of becoming. Narrative reserve and the protagonist's "frozen" condition do not reveal a distancing from the *adab multazim* ("committed literature") so much as a break with a "direct" construction

of meaning. Indeed, narrative irony is the "new dominant", as defined by Draz:[23] in other words, the new common thread shared by this generation's multiplicity of voices.

The 1970s saw the appearance of a large number of female authors born between the late 1940s and the 1950s and conventionally grouped under the term "Seventies Generation":[24] among them, Salwā Bakr, Niʿmāt al-Buḥayrī, Iʿtidāl ʿUthmān and Ibtihāl Sālim. These authors regain possession of a political and even more communicative narration. As highlighted by Dinah Manisty in a critical study centred on the female transformation novel between 1960 and 1991, this generation would fully reclaim the pattern of the coming-of-age novel, albeit transforming it into a "relational" coming-of-age by introducing themes traditionally absent from the genre, such as the mother-daughter relationship, or by interweaving the theme of exile or travel with that of personal transformation.[25] The novels analysed in this chapter are written by exponents of three different avant-garde movements: the first is a 1996 novel by an author of the Sixties Generation, Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm; the second, also written in 1996, is the debut novel of Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī, an exponent of the Nineties Generation; the third is a 2008 novel (published in English in 2014) by Raḍwā ʿĀshūr, an academician and novelist belonging to the Seventies Generation.

The 1990s were marked by two juxtaposed phenomena. On one hand, the revival of a narrative inspiration – in other words, longer and more consistent, linear plots – on the part of the historical avant-garde. See, for example, the lengthy plots of *Dhāt* (1992, *Zaat* 2001)[26] and, coincidentally, *Sharaf* (1996)[27] by Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm. On the other hand, we see the rise of a new "historical generation" (to use the phrase coined by Mannheim):[28] the "Nineties Generation" that was born during the period of economic liberalisation and matured in the political period following the Camp David Accords, within a framework characterised by the policies of Ḥusnī Mubārak's government, by Egypt's growing dependence on American financial aid and, on the internal front, by the threat of Jihadist activism. The failure of the economic reform, the growing social inequality and the increased power accorded to security and police forces aroused a feeling of powerlessness in civilised society, and especially in educated youth.[29]

The Nineties Generation features a large female presence: Summaya Ramaḍān, Mayy Tilmisānī, Mona Prince and Nūra Amīn are just a few of the female authors to enliven this generation; their writing stands out for its professedly intimist nature, as well as for its unrelatedness to a militant vision of literature. These authors' novels are organised around constructs of meaning that avoid the allegorical metaphorical sense and, in particular, abandon the homology between individual growth and national becoming.[30]

A key feature of this writing is the destructuring renewal of the journey to Europe, which becomes an inner journey towards schizophrenia in *Awrāq al-Narjis* (2001, *Leaves of Narcissus* 2002) by Summaya Ramaḍān, or else turns into an unfulfilled prospect in *Thalātha ḥaqāʾib li-ʾl-safar* (1998, *Three Suitcases for Departure*) by Mona Prince, where the main character busies herself with packing

"three suitcases" for a trip she will never take. The non-transformation of the subject – meant as an intentional subversion of the principle of formation ("*takwīn*") and transformation – appears also in these avant-garde works of the 1990s. What's more, not only is the perspective of a narrative development able to lead to the attainment of a goal or to self-realisation denied; it is explicitly sabotaged by the authors – male and female alike – of this generation, committed to dismissing any "illusion" of personal development, by means of a playful and combinatorial writing, made up of scenes rather than plots.

An exemplary novel of this boycott, interpreted by several critics and occasionally explained by the authors themselves as a form of artistic resistance in the face of political disappointment, is *Hilyūbulis* (2000, *Heliopolis*) by May al-Tilmissānī. The author revisits her childhood in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the neighbourhood where she was born – Heliopolis – a residential suburb built in northeastern Cairo at the dawn of the last century.[31] Micky, the author's alter ego, is an Egyptian woman about 30 years old. The narrative voice, external in the opening lines, describes her as intent on gazing at herself in the mirror as she asks: "Who are you?" Over the course of the novel, neither the protagonist nor any other character will answer this question, a version of which echoes, instead, throughout the series of stories that make up the novel. Micky, the protagonist, maintains the impression of being a puppet in the hands of a non-identifiable puppeteer, and the narrative voice tells us of her desire to revisit her childhood in search of the moment when the "metamorphosis" occurred. Not to understand it but, rather, to go back in time so as to avoid it:

> she thus decided that she had to find that opaque instant in her childhood when she had been transformed into a puppet, a shadow or a mask, or again, into that something that was so hard for her to consciously define. She realised that it wasn't easy for her to tell the story accurately, to avoid its snares or to accept the logic of the metamorphosis.[32]

Thus, on the threshold of the new millennium, the metamorphosis (that is, the principle of "transformation" which had already reached a paroxysm in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Adīb*) is dismissed as a "logic from which to escape", as the sign of a narrative of the past that cannot be adopted in the time of disillusion. Likewise, the paradigm of "organic growth" is sabotaged by Kimi, the fragile protagonist of *Awrāq al-Narjis* (2001, *Leaves of Narcissus* 2002), who "boycotts" the premise of a study trip to Dublin from within, or by the narrator of the novel *Thalātha ḥaqā'ib li-'l-safar* (*Three Suitcases for Departure*, 1998), intent on packing – as stated by the title – three suitcases for a trip she will never take. In other words, as underscored by Manisty, while the tropes of the journey, migration or exile prove fertile ground for transformation in works by the female authors of the 1970s, in the female narrations of the 1990s, these very tropes are recalled only to be sabotaged by a subversive endeavour[33] bent on laying claim to an identity that is neither linear nor homogeneous but, rather, composed of many selves, each one taken up with its own growth process. Taking the plural self as a new identity

paradigm, individual "growth" as a "harmonious" process cannot but sound obsolete. Thus, the theme of growth will be associated with that of the rift (inner or within society), almost in the hope of marking the "plurality" and splitting of the self, which no longer finds an equivalent in the standardising role of classically understood novelesque subject. Another formal sign of the non-conformity to national traditional narrative is the substantial adhesion to a collective identity or, as we shall see with the two novels penned by women authors, to a female inter-subject. In each of the three novels analysed, the rift (at times in the guise of a splitting of the self) and the self-inclusion in an inter-subject will truly signal the end of a unifying and hegemonising "vocation" of novelesque fiction. End-of-the-century fiction is not required to showcase a unifying vocation but, rather, an interrogation (*Istinṭāq*) of the self in its multiple components. On the plane of the trajectory of the Egyptian *Bildungsnarrative*, a consequence of these turn-of-the-century developments of fictional writing will be the questioning of a traditional model of the coming-of-age novel and the appearance, in its place, of a variety of new narrative possibilities, also produced by the parodic and intertextual rewriting of previous forms.

7.2 The anti-*Bildung*: *Sharaf* by Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm

In his debut novel *Tilka al-rā'iḥa* (1966, *The Smell of It*, 1971), Ṣunʿallāh Ibrāhīm plotted a course later widely followed by other authors of the Sixties Generation. The novel explores the daily life of a social outcast – a man recently released after five years in prison – who, upon his release, finds himself alone in a changed world. Ibrāhīm forgoes the means of psychological realism, preferring to borrow the languages of film editing and the media, the alternation between narrative voices, so as to establish an uninterrupted dialogue between fiction and diary writing. If *Tilka al-rā'iḥa* was interpolating excerpts from a diary the protagonist wrote in prison in the fictional narration, *Sharaf*, published in 1996,[34] brings the prison theme to the forefront.[35] Sharaf, short for "Ashraf" (a name that means "The most honourable"), is a recurring term in the Egyptian language to denote the general concept of "honour" (seen as an individual or group trait). Fifteen-year-old Sharaf is the embodiment of the anti-hero: marginalised, poor and ignorant (he is a secondary-school dropout), his narrative figure can be read right from the start as an icon of the Egyptian youth oppressed by an unfair economic system, of the individual marginalised by a society that has become ruthless with its weaker members.[36] The novel kicks off with the incident that sends Sharaf to prison: his accidental killing of an Australian tourist who had been sexually assaulting him. The entire plot is based, according to ʿAṣfūr, on the "*ramziyyat al-iltihāk*" (that is, on the symbology of violation),[37] because the power dynamics endured by the young man directly affect his physical integrity and his "honour" (*sharaf*). In the environment Sharaf lives in and in his experience, what is or is not "honourable" is defined by the codes of the prevailing heteronormative and patriarchal sexuality. The symbolic architecture of the novel is entirely based on the homology between the world "outside" of prison and the prison universe, as well as on the submissiveness that Sharaf invariably impersonates in both dimensions.

As the author himself summarises effectively, "Sharaf is the Everyman of the global world order. He is the modern national anti-hero, impotent, effeminate, and violated".[38]

The following analysis showcases how the transformation of Sharaf's sexual performativity is one of the axes sustaining an "upended", antiphrastic, narrative arc. It is no coincidence that Sharaf's story starts in one of Downtown Cairo's most iconic squares and ends in a prison cell: the arc stretched between these places cannot but give shape to the downward spiral, the fall, of a shamelessly metaphorical "subject", in whom the author objectifies the national subject of the late-*naḥḍawī* tradition, showcasing its cultural assumptions and the "progressive" logic underlying it. Ibrāhīm replaces this progressive logic with the trope of the "national decline", previously embodied by the female character of Dhāt, formerly a girl in the 1960s and now disillusioned and covered in a *hijāb* and *ʿabayā* as a woman in the late 1980s. Here, this trope is made more caustic by Sharaf's "inner" perspective, which appears in the chapters where Sharaf's character is also the narrating voice, and by the – albeit ironical – resumption of the coming-of-age narrative module.

A national antihero, an antiphrasis of adāb al-sujūn (prison literature)

The story opens against the backdrop of one of the busiest streets of Downtown Cairo: Sharaf gazes in rapture at the glittering clothing-shop windows, his nose pressed against them as he looks at the items on sale and his backside turned eloquently towards the statue of Ṭalʿat Ḥarb dominating the square of the same name. Ṭalʿat Ḥarb was a leader of Egyptian nationalism and founder of the Bank of Egypt in 1920; his effigy, placed in the late-19th century area of Downtown Cairo, symbolises national modernisation. The fact that Sharaf is turning his back on it to focus on imported goods that he cannot afford to buy is our first inkling of the young man's social origin, as well as of the vacuum of values that estranges him from the surrounding urban fabric.[39] Described from time to time as the "threshold" to a Europeanised, global modernity (or the illusion of it, like in Maḥfūẓ's tale of lost illusions), as the terrain of social protests, as a "nostalgic" place or as a neo-Bohemian neighbourhood in 1990s literature, Downtown Cairo – the subject of several literary rewritings – represents a narrative trope that has undergone a complex evolution.[40] Concentrated on the goods displayed in the window, Sharaf places himself at the centre of a space that was an iconic space of a national progressive narrative, of which the youth is blissfully unaware. Sharaf has no access to past national conquests. All he can do is admire products of Western brands, look furtively at girls on the street and follow them with his gaze, stand outside equally inaccessible shops and restaurants, weighing the options (*ubshūnz*, English transliteration in the text) available to him and choosing the least expensive:

> The options available to him were the following: to go to the movies and watch a bloody film, since the other films with "scenes" were unavailable, thanks to the censor, a respected and disciplined woman; to buy a pack of

Marlboros, to buy a sandwich, a Coke, and two Cleopatra cigarettes that he despised; to go home. The last option was actually two in one: downstairs and upstairs. Downstairs meant on the street around the corner by the cigarette kiosk where he owed a huge debt, or at the mechanic's shop with the rest of the gang and two joints that would give him a headache and nausea on an empty stomach. Then tea at the Corniche coffee shop that was strategically located on the border of an old dry canal that had become a garbage dump (and if the mechanic had a car that was working, the group could go to nearby Maadi and join the gang of students and smoke more joints). Upstairs meant the apartment (small, where there was no place to sit or sleep) and confrontation (with the self and others) and the attempt to resolve the impossible dilemma.[41]

The desolation of the microcosm in which Sharaf lives and the limited nature of his opportunities contrast sharply with the aforementioned urban context with its wealth of shops and shoppers. Sharaf gets out of this predicament thanks to an encounter with John, an "American" – actually Australian – tourist who treats him to a film and later invites him to spend the rest of the evening at his house. Not realising the young foreigner's true intentions, Sharaf follows him and accepts his kindness, though a bit forceful ("like all blond foreigners in Egypt, our friend was not used to taking no for an answer");[42] his broken English does not allow him to express anything but a generic acquiescence to John's proposals. The struggle between the two is described in just a few lines. When John attempts to rape him, Sharaf hits him with a bottle, accidentally killing him.[43] Thus, Sharaf is taken to prison, where he is soon forced – by means of torture – to confess to an intentional crime. Once he is taken into custody by the prison authority, the bureaucratic procedure begins: the shaving, identification photo and distribution between the two wings, the *anbar mīrī* (military wing) and the *anbar malakī* (literally the "regal" wing, here it means "civilian"):

Those who want to go into the military wing, to the left; those who want the civilian wing, to the right. He stopped for a short moment then deigned to explain what he meant by the two terms: the "civilian" means that you can eat and wear what you like, the "military" means wearing prison clothes, eating bread and cheese, and working every day for people in the civilian wing.[44]

The prison world is described forcefully, down to the grisliest detail: right from the start, the prison proves to be a self-governing system, which closes in on the protagonist as soon as he enters it, rendering all hope of ever leaving vain. With the exception of the first chapter, which describes the encounter and then the struggle between Sharaf and John, the novel is set entirely inside a prison, and follows the arc of Sharaf's experiences as he moves between wings and between encounters and "stages" of adaptation to prison, with its set rhythms and rituals, the arena of power dynamics constantly redefined by means of negotiations that range from corruption to violence to the practice of sexual intercourse between prisoners.

The entrance to the institution is dominated by the motto "*al-Taʾdīb wa al-iṣlāḥ*" (Education and Reform), but Sharaf encounters neither education nor even a glimmer of reform during his imprisonment but, rather, a "descent to the underworld" that leads him to a progressive depersonalisation.[45] After an initial stay in the "military" wing (*anbar mīrī*), where the inmates lack even the vital space to breathe, Sharaf moves (thanks to his mother's efforts) to the "civilian" wing, where he finds the same condition of marginality that he had experienced in the first wing and, more in general, in his "outside" – albeit free – life:

> There was no doubt that he had made great progress up the social ladder. Sure, he was still on the ground floor, and the stench of the new cell was no less nauseating than that of the old one, and his place was still near the puddle of urine.
> But the furnishings were different, and the crowds of inmates overseeing the passage were wearing multi-coloured clothes, rather than the usual white uniform.[46]

In his new cell, which houses over 20 murderers, Sharaf discovers a universe of boundless wealth, all shades of crimes.[47] Among the thieves and murderers introduced, one by one, to the reader, Sharaf shares in the prison rituals for the first time: meals, shared cigarettes, the nightly struggle against the cold, the way the inmates alternate between telling stories and silence. As is typical in the *adāb al-sujūn* story, the strict routine of daily life acts as a backdrop for encounters with and descriptions of the various inmates, accompanied by a description of the crimes committed by them.[48] However, as underscored by Elisabetta Benigni, *Sharaf* also marks a break with the celebratory attitude of the testimonial or narrative *adāb al-sujūn*, just as it differs from the 1980s feminist literature set in prison, where detention often had its own – albeit at times highly imaginative – long-term perspective.[49] According to Benigni, *Sharaf* can be interpreted as an antiphrasis to the tradition of the modern *adāb al-sujūn*, which often relates the educational value and the aspect of personal growth, made possible thanks to encounters between the different social classes and individuals from the most diverse backgrounds.[50] Interpreting the novel as an antiphrasis of the prison genre is essential to the reconstruction of its structures of meaning: the bareness of values, ethics and politics, as well as the absence of any future prospects, ensure that the character's movements are relegated to the present dimension and directly impact his ability to act and to evolve. Thus, Sharaf presents himself, right from the start, as a non-subject – that is, an *acted upon* individual rather than an actor. His presence is an antiphrasis of the national and revolutionary hero who experiences prison and comes out with a "symbolic capital" that can be traced directly back to the prison experience.

Furthermore, Sharaf has no prospects of changing his material living conditions, nor even of gaining a critical awareness of them. The character's only margin of action is the search for an adaptation to the conditions imposed by prison. These qualities also make *Sharaf* an anti-*Bildung*, in Slaughter's use of the term

to describe the functioning of the postcolonial novel, and its tendency to lay bare the emptiness of the promises of development contained in colonial narratives:

> Contemporary first-personal Postcolonial *Bildungsnarratives* tend to be novels of disillusionment, in which the promises of developmentalism and self-determination are revealed to be empty, or at least exaggerated; *Bildung* thus becomes the process of recognising the limits of personal development and the socio-historically contingent condition of the idea and project of the *Bildung* itself.[51]

Slaughter's description of the postcolonial novel is well suited to *Sharaf*, a novel that uses the protagonist's downward spiral as a means to showcase the post-Nasserist disillusion and, as previously mentioned, the estrangement from national fiction. In other words, by means of the prison trope (the distorting mirror of a militarising and emasculating society and nation-state model), Sharaf manages to highlight a postnational narrative, in the sense described earlier. While Slaughter's discourse regarding a *Bildung* by now seen as "disillusion from the developmental discourse" lends itself well to describing the functioning of the novel *Sharaf*, it does not, however, apply to the protagonist of the same name, too naïve to reflect on his condition. This metacritical function will actually be performed by one of the young Sharaf's co-protagonists: that is, Dr Ramzī, a Coptic pharmacologist unwittingly involved in a case of inside corruption at a pharmaceutical multinational. At a certain point in the novel, Dr Ramzī ends up sharing a cell with Sharaf. The second of the three parts into which the novel is divided centres around this character, who is Sharaf's exact opposite (he is wealthy, educated, informed, a son of the Nasserist Generation and thus a witness of the pan-Arab dream, a mindful traveller and consumer).

   In their turn, the chapters included in the second part are the result of a collage of extra-narrative materials. Just like some of the chapters in *Dhāt* (1992, *Zaat* 2001) the 13th chapter is made up exclusively of juxtaposed newspaper clippings without any commentary to assemble a collage of news (presumably taken from authentic materials) on the trade in damaged goods, water pollution, inefficient health care, the exploitation of third world land and human resources by Western industrial powers, pharmaceutical scandals.[52] Basically, Dr Ramzī's "archives", these clippings act as a sort of narrative counterpoint both to Sharaf's experience told in the first and third parts of the novel, and to the personal experiences of Ramzī – an enigmatic figure who only speaks of himself in the next chapter, the 14th. Narrated in the first person by Dr Ramzī himself, this chapter contains a story (which is also a coming-of-age story) within the story: the memories of the Coptic pharmacologist, who clearly reminisces about his biography from his university years to his stays in Beirut and Latin America, all the way down to the pharmaceutical scandal he unwittingly became involved in.[53]

   Ramzī recalls his youth as a pharmacology student, his friendships and love affairs, showing an awareness of his entire life, which he puts into perspective with a critical evaluation of Nāṣir's actions ("the idol of my youth")[54] also from

the standpoint of his own membership in the Coptic community ("Nāṣir had a golden opportunity to put an end to the discriminations between Copts and Muslims. He didn't do so").).[55] The character recalls his friendships, his early infatuation with Sārā, his passion for theatre and classical music and, last but not least, the evolutions of pharmacology from an artisanal art to a market increasingly subject to the large American corporations.

The 15th chapter, which closes the second part, consists of a lengthy script for a puppet show staged by Ramzī. Though nominally a "tribute" to the military victory of October 1973, in point of fact this show is a parody of Egyptian history from 1919 to the period in which the show is set; indeed, it appears to be based on the corruption and overturning of the principles that had inspired the first nationalist Revolution. As we will later discover, the show ends with a prison-wide riot, while Dr Ramzī is placed in a security cell, where his tirades against corruption and the damage done by imperialist capitalism fall on deaf ears.

As pointed out by Benigni, the absence of a teacher-student relationship between the two, as well as Sharaf's complete deafness to the remarks of Dr Ramzī (who tries to harangue the inmates in vain, until he is finally placed in isolation), represent the evolution of a system of power relationships turned upside down. The radical criticism of the capitalist system and, subsequently, of Ramzī's prison system, fall on deaf ears, while the system of aggression and its symbology prove so popular with Sharaf that he passively accepts and internalises it, as we shall see later on.

Furthermore, the fact that the young, ignorant, acritical Sharaf and the educated, mature witness of the national dream of the 1950s both end up on the fringes demonstrates how, in addition to no longer being able to convey a person's growth and social inclusion, the nation-system actually crushes their existence. As highlighted by Mehrez, both are emanations of the same national "self".[56] It is no coincidence that the novel actually relates two formations: Ramzī's is condensed in a single chapter, like a sort of "cameo" of the traditional coming-of-age story within the prevailing deformation. Sharaf's, on the other hand, is a downward spiral towards (further) marginality and isolation, both within the social system and in its prison reproduction.

*Anti-***Bildung** *and the feminisation of Sharaf*

In the novel's final, well-known and much discussed scene, Sharaf makes clear his complete internalisation and full acceptance of the "symbology of violation" as, on the advice of another inmate, he shaves his legs (despite having been willing to go to prison so as to avoid dishonour!) and gets ready for sexual intercourse with one of his cellmates.[57] This feminisation of Sharaf is a metaphor for his "surrender" to the prison system, which assaults Sharaf precisely as the Australian "John" had tried to do. And just as John's aggression is a metaphor for the "first" world's assault on the third, of the capitalist world on that of the underprivileged and lower classes, so too are the aggressions of the prison system and of its hierarchies a metaphor for what was happening in Egyptian society

outside the prison.[58] As noted by Massad, the novel, far from straining the sphere of heteronormative sexuality, actually roots its entire symbology in the "civilisation" versus "barbarism" dichotomy, repeated in the vulgar and outdated colonial jokes that spread quickly throughout the prison walls.[59] The grotesque reproduction of the patriarchal, colonial and homophobic discourse in the inmates' jokes might be seen as a debatable authorial and stylistic choice that clings to an idea of novelesque polyphony that appears anachronistic in a technically adventurous novel like *Sharaf*. However, we must consider the near-homophobic expressions, objectively present in the novel, as a specific conversational *strategy*, set within the more general framework of *Sharaf*'s antiphrastic dimension compared to the 20th-century *Adāb al-Sujūn* on one hand, and to the tradition of the late-*nahḍawī Bildungsroman* on the other.

The dichotomous approach – marked by the colonial discourse – of the "symbology of violation" has been viewed by Massad as a structural limit of the novel. However, in light of *Sharaf*'s antiphrastic nature, it is possible to consider the final scene, of the character's "feminisation", as a sign of the *genre* upheaval underway. In his role as anti-*Bildungsheld*, Sharaf overturns the classical *telos* of the apprenticeship of the late-*nahḍawī* hero (aspiring *effendī* and heterosexual, student, romantically involved in a love affair still within the heterosexual sphere) to become the exact opposite: depersonalised, arid, non-independent and feminised. Likewise, this reversal represents an upheaval of the self-praising narration of the *Adab al-sujūn*, wherein the realistic aspect of the homosocial practice in prison is generally silenced in favour of the creation of a resistant, active "hero".

On one hand, Sharaf's change, his adaptation and passivation, bring to light the limitations and historical contingency of the coming-of-age novel as a normative, national discourse. On the other, they reference the many levels of aggression which, in the manner of Chinese boxes, gradually close all around the youth. By accepting the sexual assault in force in prison, Sharaf "expresses", in conversationally "realistic" terms and in the codes specific to his ambience, the ultimate objectification of his being an acted-upon individual rather than an actor. He had already done so by becoming a passive recipient of the appeal of mass consumerism, or of the advances of the Australian, John. Last but not least, when facing the prison system (whose classism replicates global and national society), the character's passivation/feminisation can be seen as a sign of the breakdown of the concept of "individual" in contexts of subordination, and as the laying bare of the cultural-historical contingency of the invention of an individual coming of age.

7.3 Growth and splitting in two in *Al-Khibā'* by Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwi

Al-khibā' (*The Tent*, 1996)[60] is the debut novel by Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwi, a highly regarded female author whose first appearance on the Egyptian panorama is linked to the appearance of the "Nineties Generation".[61] The plot centres on a little girl, Fāṭima, who is also the narrator. The daughter of sedentary Bedouins, the novel tells the story of her childhood, girlhood and early adulthood. It is a formative

and deformative journey alike, because on one hand the novel tells the story of Fāṭima's physiological growth, while on the other it narrates a breakdown that is both physical (the protagonist loses a leg in an accident) and mental. The story seems to be set in the first half of the 20th century, while the places described are the desert areas east of the Nile Delta. Fāṭima's mainly female family of sedentary Bedouins, where Bedouin and peasant customs intermingle, is made up of Fāṭima's father, the son of a landowner and himself the owner of extensive lands, and her mother, a Bedouin woman named Samawāt, who suffers from a severe form of depression. The domestic economy is managed by the family matriarch, Fāṭima's grandmother, who supervises the activities of her son, her daughters-in-law, her granddaughters and many maids, and verbally abuses her female relatives – especially Fāṭima's mother, who she calls "the deranged woman", and Fāṭima herself. The grandmother takes on the traits of the most brutal patriarchy, obsessively checking every nook and cranny of the house, managing family relationships, arranging marriages, persuading the members of the family to marginalise Samawāt. Fāṭima is a bright, lively child, whose intelligence and restlessness upset her grandmother because she does not submit to her control. The little girl is viewed with suspicion, and the grandmother accuses her of bringing the evil eye on the family, as the inevitably degenerate daughter of a mother stigmatised for not having born a son.[62]

The character of Fāṭima's father is both present and absent: nearly always out on reconnaissance or hunting on his lands and thus perpetually awaited, recalled, longed for by his daughters ("The main gate was opened and the mare trotted up the path. He was back. I thought: should I run toward him?"),[63] upon his return from his trips, he yields tamely to his mother's verbal interference and abuse.

Though affectionate with his daughter, whom he calls "little gazelle" or "Princess Fatim", and for whom he boasts noble beduin origins ("pure Adnanian"),[64] Fāṭima's father does not object to the domestic atmosphere created by the grandmother, nor does he intervene when his daughter lingers in her outdoor excursions or in her favourite pastime, climbing trees in an attempt to escape the domestic atmosphere. Her father's absence sharpens Fāṭima's longing, as she loves him unconditionally ("I loved him and loved him . . . I loved his silence, when he was lost in deep thought"),[65] receiving affection and terms of endearment and rare gifts in exchange, like a gazelle hunted by him that lets itself die by refusing to eat.[66] In this novel, the classical poetry imaginary interspersed with palm trees, gazelles, oases and the oral Bedouin culture coexist with the stories, myths and popular songs handed down by the storytellers and by old Sardūb, to whose care and words Fāṭima loves to abandon herself.

The ethnographic dimension, present and active in the text,[67] can be found both in this interest for the oral Bedouin tradition and in the character of Anne, a researcher of Bedouin culture (more on her later on). However, an exclusively ethnographic interpretation of *Al-Khibā'* would entail the risk of losing sight of the novel's central trope: that is, the breakdown of the character of Fāṭima, and the theme of trauma and the marks it leaves on the physical and emotional planes.

Trauma and splitting of the self

Fāṭima spends her formative years in an oppressive home, where her liveliness and intelligence are viewed with suspicion, and a few years in the home of a foreign woman, as the subject of the ethnographic studies of a European researcher. The novel is the perturbing story of a paradoxical path because, despite her unyielding desire to escape from both environments, Fāṭima will end up losing herself (as Adīb did in France) in both. Her only certainty is maternal suffering, that she will come to take over.[68] The final reunion between the two figures – mother and daughter, Samawāt and Fāṭima – contributes to the novel's circular pattern.

The novel is divided into 12 chapters, like the months of the year, each one centred on an event in the protagonist's life. Fāṭima's childhood is marked by the presence of the large group of women mentioned previously, which includes her grandmother Ḥakīma, the maternal Sardūb (Bedouin maid and storyteller), Fāṭima's sisters and her mother Samawāt, consigned to a closed room which is not, however, enough to isolate her constant sobs and wails. Fāṭima establishes an ambiguous relationship with her mother: searching for her on the one hand, only to be repelled. Fāṭima may be too young to feel solidarity or compassion: her reaction to her mother's sobs is a sharp pain ("Her pale, emaciated figure, the thin veins on her eyelids, and her nose swollen from floods of tears, choked my heart with sadness")[69] that drives her away from the house and makes her dart around outdoors in search of a place where she can breathe freely. As previously mentioned, Fāṭima finds refuge in Sardūb's stories and in climbing trees – an activity that offers her a new point of view on the world and on the life of her father who, though an integral member of the family, was accustomed to sleeping in a tent next to the house, almost as if to legitimise a "separation" from the female members of the family, as well as on the recently settled family environment and on the peasant world it had mingled with:

> I climbed the trees whenever my father was away or had gone out to hunt. Through the branches I could see the front of the house, the buildings across the road, the camels resting, and the guest house with its mud walls which were blackened by smoke like the bottom of a kettle that sits on the fire. . . . My father's goat-hair tent was pitched next to [the guest house] whenever he was home, and around the tent were spread red Persian carpets. . . . The peasants were there. Sometimes I heard them singing and saw them strolling gracefully in their brightly colored clothes.[70]

These escapes from domestic reality carry the memory of a not-yet sedentary life; climbing trees is also the first sign of Fāṭima's attraction for heights ("I came down from the treetop into Sardūb's folded lap, where I laid my head for a while and dozed off. I felt I was falling deeper and deeper into a bottomless well"),[71] as well as a creative solution to escape a home where a little girl like her cannot act freely.[72]

Yet one of these liberating treetop experiences will result in an accident that has fatal consequences, and marks the end of Fāṭima's growth and the beginning of her downward spiral into madness:[73] "I reached out for the next branch, but my hand missed. The earth spun around me. When I came to, Sardoub was bent over my swollen leg".[74] The accident, narrated in the second chapter, consists in a fall that causes painful wounds to Fāṭima's leg, which is rubbed and bandaged by the maid. Life goes on normally, on the face of it: two of Fāṭima's sisters, brutally called "goods" by the grandmother, are married off, and Fāṭima starts climbing trees again, though her leg still aches.

After her sisters' weddings, Fāṭima is lonelier than ever. She is left with a few maids, her younger sisters and her sick mother, as well as her father's new wife. Like Ḥakīma, Fāṭima's stepmother is afraid of the little girl's evil nature, and complains to her husband that she fears for her unborn child. Fāṭima, whom her grandmother disparagingly calls "the Cripple", strikes up an imaginary friendship with Zahwa, with whom she has long conversations and exchanges stories woven around the mythical legacy of the desert and rural life, and who will remain by her side throughout the years. Zahwa, especially in the final part of the novel, becomes a highly imaginative presence, a true alter ego that might make us think of the first splitting of the subject – that is, Fāṭima's projection of another version of herself, free in the oasis and far from the constant definitions, the truly violent verbal limits foisted on her by her grandmother and her father's wife ("your daughter is mentally unhinged").[75] In the wake of these complaints, Fāṭima's father decides to take her to Anne, the foreigner (*al-khawajiyya*), carrying out a perhaps long-standing plan for his favourite child (the *khawajiyya* is going to teach her to be like a Turkish Princess. Fatim is pure Adnanian filly").[76]

The fourth chapter marks the passage from Fāṭima's father's house to Anne's, a passage that will lead to the start of an ambivalent process: of growth and education on one hand, and of crisis and the breakdown of personality on the other. Indeed, at Anne's house, Fāṭima receives a solid education ("Do you want to learn? And everything began to have an appointed time");[77] she learns three foreign languages, but at the same time clearly realises that Anne's interest in her is tied to her interest in Bedouin culture ("I felt that my existence was like that of the birds in their cage and Khaira in her stall"),[78] and that Anne boasts to guests about educating her ("Tell us a story, ya Fatim. What can Fatim the Cripple tell you? I sighed and the tattoo on my chin shone as they opened their mouths").[79]

During her stay at Anne's house, Fāṭima comes to realise the emotional detachment her father has developed for her. He still seeks her out, but less frequently and with a resigned look in his eyes since the doctor informed him that gangrene has set in and the wounded leg must be amputated. For Fāṭima, the traumatic event (amputation) dramatically symbolises the loss of a part of herself, both from a physical and emotional standpoint, because she loses her childhood self, the fond relationship with her father and her past, where she was free to climb trees – with all that meant in terms of acquiring a new gaze, a new perspective on the world.

We must now consider the traumatic event caused by Fāṭima's fall from the tree; more specifically, a tree on her father's property, given to him years earlier by Anne. This event, pregnant with symbolic meaning, can be dissected into its various implications: the fall refers to Fāṭima's slippery position as the daughter of the mingling of two incompatible races.[80] In her inability to live in someone else's place (as will later happen in the metaphor of Anne's house), or to find a more stable foothold that allows her a strong hold, she loses her balance.

At Anne's house, once this "trauma" has taken away Fāṭima's stability forever (it is no coincidence that she loses a limb, a prop of reality), she clearly perceives that she has split in two. Indeed, the girl who knows how to read, write and speak several languages and the Bedouin girl intent on weaving popular tales for Anne and her guests remain two separate people. When she later returns to her father's house, this dual nature will be expressed clearly by Fāṭima herself, who claims she can no longer write, or relate, to Anne: "What could I write to her? That Fatim has split in two, one half jabbering away in foreign languages and the other singing traditional Bedouin folk songs?"[81] Through her ethnographic, objectifying gaze, Anne, the foreigner (*khawajiyya*) who has settled in the Bedouin community to research Bedouin "traditions, arts, women", sparks in young Fāṭima a process of crisis similar to that experienced by Ismāʿīl in *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*. While not crossing national borders and staying within the liminality of the desert and the plurality of its social elements, at Anne's house, Fāṭima immerses herself in a foreign language and education. However, unlike the other characters educated – or "lost" – in Europe, Fāṭima appears to "resist" Anne's interventions, and is unable to become "other than herself". Anne herself, and the context through which Fāṭima – the object of an altering gaze – finds herself, do not allow it: Fāṭima's tattoo is the "sign" of her radical otherness, and the constant and imaginative self-comparisons to the wild animal world (the gazelle, the raven) foretell the inflexibility of her "otherness" compared to Anne, but also to the other women in her own family. In particular, the story of the wild gazelle which – a paternal gift to his favourite child – appears at the beginning of the novel, refusing food in captivity and letting itself die, can be seen as a prediction of Fāṭima's future impatience at staying at Anne's house, cultivating a foreign language and "otherness".

The novel's final chapters are set in Fāṭima's father's house, where she decides to return, no longer able to stand Anne's lack of human empathy. According to Fāṭima, "There was only one expression [on Anne's face], and it was similar to that of a spider crouching silently in wait of its prey".[82] Her aged father by now leans on the arm of Fāṭima's younger sister, the daughter of his second wife. The final glimpse of narration is told by a Fāṭima surrounded by ghosts – imaginary presences where Sardūb, the fond and maternal maid of her childhood, reappears in the guise of a persecuting demon. Fāṭima has spiralled into madness. Persecuted by the past, she crawls rather than walks. She no longer undoes her braids, nor does she allow anyone to brush her hair, in the ritual that had accompanied her childhood, recurring over and over again in her stories.[83] She lets her hair grow out, while living in terror of being tied by her braids to the pole of the tent erected in front of her father's house – his refuge whenever he is at home (a recurring nightmare that gives the novel its title).

In the 12th and final chapter, Fāṭima takes her mother's place, both symbolically and physically, filling it with the same sobs. She withdraws into isolation and into an obstinate silence, although her story tells us that she seeks refuge in letters and printed words: "What is Fatim doing with letters, with words, when the loneliness is excruciating?",[84] she asks herself. What use are words, when one is broken in body and in spirit? A request for meaning destined to remain unanswered, as Fāṭima constantly answers the critical and scolding – and probably inner – voices that chase her in her folly: "Why don't you open the door of your room, ya Fatim"?[85]

Far from being a realistic portrait of the life and customs of the Bedouin community, the novel explores the growth, following a traumatic event, of a free-spirited child in a family and society where there is no care available. It describes the circularity of this type of trauma for a family, especially when it befalls women and their bodies (Fāṭima's mother's miscarriages, her own amputation). In her return to a sort of starting point, in her taking her mother's place (isolated within the family, where she is called "deranged woman"), Fāṭima *becomes* the vivid story of this trauma. Her voice consciously denies the idea of progressive growth and "becoming a woman" within the pre-established channel of the female roles imposed by the patriarchy, while at the same time claiming the impossibility of growth triggered by a personal awakening (as was the case for Laylā in *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*).

Indeed, in the feminist-realist novel, the trope of the "awakening" (both personal and political) helps women lay bare a false identity, to then free themselves and affirm their "true" nature, usually felt as something unique and one of a kind. Manisty describes the directionality and functions of the awakening thus:

> the direction of awakening follows what is becoming a pattern in literature by and about women: movement is inwards, towards greater self-knowledge that leads in turn to a revelation of the disparity between that self-knowledge and the nature of the world.[86]

The undeniable intellectual, cultural and personal growth that Fāṭima experiences at Anne's house, and that is expressed clearly in the questions the woman asks herself at the end, is not enough to maturate the "awakening" of a unique, coherent "subjectivity". In the words of Abir:

> In *The Tent* female physical illness and disability begins to be articulated via the mother and daughter's shared experience of sickness. It is this sense of solidarity that finally collapses the subject/object dualism of mother-daughter illness narratives and permits a genuine intersubjective female suffering body to be produced.[87]

The transformation can only occur in the perturbing shape of the illness, and of the "return" to suffering which, for Fāṭima, also represents a return to her mother (whom she has always identified with suffering) in a sort of predestined reincarnation, foretold in the thrill of heights sought by the child Fāṭima ("I felt like I was falling deeper and deeper into a bottomless well"[88]).

Fāṭima's "return" to her mother's suffering exposes the illusion of an identity at once defined, subjective and harmonious, while it draws the subject back into an "inter-subject" (to use Abir's definition) branded onto Fāṭima's physical memory. Any attempt to escape this return proves vain. The same fate, though expressed differently, awaits Fāṭima's sister, Ṣafiyya, the only one who dared to rebel against their cruel grandmother Ḥakīma. Returning periodically to her father's house as a married woman, *khawajiyya* Ṣafiyya thrusts her cane (as their grandmother Ḥakīma did before her) into every jar, every crevice, imposing her presence because "the caravan can't move without a camel driver".[89] Giving shape to the story and to the return, Fāṭima's voice can ultimately be read as the last possible redemption, and an act of affirmation on the loss of the self, or of part of it – of which her mother's frequent miscarriages are the expression – as well as on the atavistic lack of nourishment of individuality.

7.4 The feminist "development novel": *Faraj* by Raḍwā ʿĀshūr

The pseudo-memoir *Faraj* by Raḍwā ʿĀshūr *Faraj* (1992, *Blue Lorries* 2008)[90] is a narration written with the aim of celebrating both the ordinary and the extraordinary aspects of a generational experience told by means of the Nadā's return to her own biographical path.[91] The novel can be read as a sort of collective *Bildung* of the female component of the 1970s political generation. Indeed, it reconstructs the actions, the way of conceiving family relationships, the cultural points of reference and the political activism of this generation. Antithetical to the "frozen" male characters of the 1980s, Nadā ʿAbd al-Qādir presents a constant transformation that escapes the age barriers imposed by the classic *Bildung*-form, extending beyond childhood to adulthood.

For the protagonist of *Faraj*, as in Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt's *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*, political activism represents the main form of social exploration and discovery of her own personality. While Laylā's first encounter with activism and demonstrations occurred in 1946 at the age of 11 (see Chapter 4), Nadā discovers political activism at the age of 14, in 1968 in Paris, during the May protests, and will start practicing it first-hand in the 1970s in Cairo.[92] Nadā's discovery of a political conscience, consistent with that of *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*'s protagonist, will be an activism marked by the ubiquitous presence of and her contradictory feeling towards ʿAbd al-Nāṣir (Nasser) who – like in other novels written by authors who grew up in the 1960s – becomes an actual character in the book.[93] However, the two novels differ greatly as far as the perspective imposed on the narration goes: while Zayyāt uses mimetic realism to relate Laylā's coming of age "in real time", *Faraj*, on the other hand, overcomes the barriers of psychological realism to cunningly recreate the memoir effect, clearly expressing the adult Nadā's reconstruction of her memories.

Nadā, a 5-year-old, is introduced in the novel's first scene, set on a train: the little girl is travelling to visit her father in prison, where he was sentenced for political reasons. Nadā's mother is an educated Frenchwoman who speaks to her

daughter in French; later on, we learn that Nadā's father is a communist intellec-
tual imprisoned for being a political dissident of the Nasserist regime. The child
clearly perceives the paradox created by the absence of her father, who can only
be reached via a long train journey, as opposed to Nāṣir, omnipresent in the public
space and discourse. And the adult Nadā remembers it just as clearly:

> My father wasn't there, though, while Nasser's name, his voice and his pic-
> ture cropped everywhere on a daily, even hourly, basis. He was celebrated
> in songs that I loved. . . . He was a topic of conversation in every household
> and on every street and in every school – quite simply he pervaded the very
> space in which we grew and took shape as if he were water or air or earth or
> sunbeams that we absorbed as a matter of course, becoming what we became.
> It was Nasser who brought us up, proud though I was of my kinship to my
> father.[94]

During her father's absence, travelling through vast regions of the Egyptian ter-
ritory on a train headed towards the prison where he is confined, Nadā discovers
Egypt through the "translation" and mediation of her mother, who shows her the
map of Egypt in a children's atlas:

> "Upper Egypt? . . . But you moved your finger down!
>   Where are the trees? I don't see any trees or animals!"
>   "They don't appear on the map, but you'll see them for yourself: date
> palms, sycamores, willows, eucalyptus, and fields of cotton and maize and
> clover – and you will see cows and water buffalo too, as sheep and goats.
> Camels and donkeys, and cattle egrets . . . you'll see them all from the train
> window, settled there beside me in your seat as if you were at a film".[95]

The two paradoxes of childhood (a biological father absent from daily life against
the omnipresence of the country's father-leader, and a foreign mother who acts
as a "guide" as they cross the national territory) are the early axes on which the
author builds a plot of constant transformation, made up of slow negotiations,
painful sacrifices, formative relationships fated to deteriorate, leaving doubts and
furrows in the characters' past experiences.

Translation

Nadā's role as a translator, which she takes on as a very young child (for example,
having to constantly translate her paternal grandmother's language to her own
mother, or vice versa),[96] becomes a theme spanning the entire novel. Not just
because, as an adult, Nadā works as a translator and interpreter, but also because
the translation from one language to another, from one *grammar* – including emo-
tive grammar – to another becomes the subject of an on-and-off metanarrative
reflection. Indeed, the story is interspersed with progressively numbered chap-
ters called "Translation Problems", where the author offers glimpses of a family

life that unfolds among mediations, misunderstandings and the constant losts and founds of translation.[97]

"Translation requires choices",[98] Nadā writes in one of these passages, as she reconstructs her own personal memory and that of the generation that played a historic role in the student protests of the 1970s. Nadā reflects on the excessive responsibility she was burdened with as a child by her family, and on the playful nature of this responsibility ("I was a translation gofer").[99] Thus, out of necessity as well as habit, translation becomes a practice of managing her relationships with her loved ones, which in the novel are never given as stable (that is, as the result of blood or marriage ties) but, instead, are built through the tireless work of identity negotiation. This aspect transpires clearly in Nadā's relationship with her family. Her mother represents a life model "in translation": married to an Egyptian man who does not speak her language, she decides to leave him and go back to France when she can no longer understand his behaviour, his "inner language". On the contrary, Nadā's father offers her an influential Egyptian surname and a solid identity reference: a university professor and well-respected political leader, Professor 'Abd al-Qādir's past experiences include the narrative of a political commitment pursued daringly, even in the face of a four-year imprisonment. For Nadā, her father's movements from one prison to another – from Abu Zab'al to Waḥāt, to 'Azab al-Fayūm, to Ṭura and Maḥāriq[100] – acts as a pillar on which to build her own identity. We infer this from the childish skirmishes Nadā has been involved in since primary school, and in which she practices laying claim to a political identity that establishes itself, so to speak, through heredity. In the focus on her relationship with her father, and in the subsequent – albeit brief – account of the imprisonment Nadā herself underwent[101] following a roundup of the organisers of the 1972 student protests, the novel relates to the 20th-century Egyptian *Adāb al-sujūn* ("prison literature"),[102] where the "formative" dimension of prison is described alongside its atrocities.[103] Thus, everything that pertains to her father, from his name to his personal history, is the bearer of a national identity to which Nadā *chooses* to belong when her parents separate.

On the other hand, the novel also follows Nadā's long-distance relationship with her mother, through the account of the young girl's first Parisian summer and, later on, Nadā's visits to the maternal places in the company of her half-brothers (her father's sons by his second wife), Nadim and Nadir, whom Nadā adopts as her own after their father's death. The permanent alienation of her mother's nature contrasts sharply with her father's solidity: "My alienation was total, whether in Yvoire, in Paris or in Cairo",[104] the woman writes in an unsent letter to her daughter, that Nadā will find among the papers in the Parisian apartment after her mother's death.

Thus, Nadā builds her own personality in the dialectics between these two extremes. Likewise, the renegotiation of relationships with loved ones is a constant feature of the plot. At first, Nadā is not at all fond of Ḥamdiyya, her father's second wife, but they later establish a strong bond when Ḥamdiyya announces that she is expecting a baby and, supported by Nadā, decides to continue the pregnancy against her husband's will. Nadā will go on to adopt the two little ones

("It's as if they were my own children"), thus renegotiating the family boundaries while becoming – in the wake of her father's premature death, just before the twins' birth – the point of reference for the two new lives from the standpoint of identity and politics. Last but not least, Nadā will also, on a night of confidences and confessions with the twins, reveal their mutual father's identity (taking on the role of "translator" of Egyptian history).[105] Though the twins' biological mother, Ḥamdiyya, will try to keep them away from politics (increasingly present in the city streets and squares) for fear of losing them, the two youths will be irresistibly attracted by the embodiment of the public sphere represented by Maydān Taḥrīr. Indeed, the final part of the novel details the twins' participation in the 1991 demonstrations in the wake of the American invasion of Iraq.

This constant negotiation of relationships and identities gives rise to a "developmental plot" – that is, a constantly transforming plot. Adopting a phrase coined by Barbara Frey Waxman, *Faraj* can be read as a *Reinfungsroman* ("novel of ripening"), an offshoot of the *Bildungsnarrative* identified by Waxman in reference to late 20th-century feminist literature. According to Waxman, this form "exhibits jumbling of time, space and conventional meaning of words; challenges the properties of the *Bildungsroman*, and undermines binary opposition between youth and age, logic and fantasy, senility and sanity".[106] Similarly to the other female authors examined by Waxman, 'Āshūr creates an alternative plot to the anagraphically "disciplined" plot typical of the male tradition of *Bildung*, and has a constant intersectionality between personal affairs and national life converge in this developmental narrative. As previously mentioned, the convergence points between the two planes are often identified in the encounters with historical figures, such as Nadā's friend and cellmate Sihām Sa'd al-Dīn Ṣabrī and the activist 'Arwā Ṣāliḥ,[107] women who actually existed and are fictionalised here to offer, in addition to Nadā's personal trajectory, more fragments of a collective counter-narration compared to that of "becoming a woman" and becoming a political subject. In this novel, as in the two analysed previously, the trajectories of Nadā and of the women activists of the 1970s (especially that of Sihām, whose biography represents a story within the story) refute the idea of "formation" as an organic process, aimed at generating a unique personality that is consistent, dominant and unchangeable in history.

A developmental plot, a generational plot

After Nadā's father is released, her family home is once again bustling, night and day, with relatives and friends celebrating the return of Professor 'Abd al-Qādir. However, once the elation of the first months has faded, Nadā's parents seem to have lost their harmony. Their troubles and divorce are narrated concisely and with no claim to psychological realism; the same goes for Nadā's mother's choice to go back to France, leaving her daughter and husband behind in Egypt. Nadā chooses to stay with her father ("For five years my father had been an unattainable dream; when he came back, I wanted him to be the dream in whose sanctuary I might live".),[108] thus seeking to make up for the years spent without him.

Ideally, this choice can be traced back to the translation practice characterising Nadā's approach to life. As the translator moves between two languages seeking the best way to render the original text, so too must Nadā rebuild the meaning of her life after her mother's departure, rebuild an idea of family with just her father who, in turn, embodies the protagonist's "Egyptianness". The (failed) translation of her father's thoughts and feelings is also responsible for the couple's difficulties, which explode into one of the junctures of the public and private spheres typical of 'Āshūr's writing. Immediately after the Defeat of 1967, the family listens to Nāṣir's famous speech to the nation on TV, in which the president announces his resignation:

> The speech ends. My father weeps, wailing like a child. My mother all at once becomes hysterical, shouting, "I don't understand! I absolutely do not understand! Why are you crying over him? Isn't he the fascist officer, the brutal dictator who put the lot of you in prison for five years without the slightest grounds?" Her words tumbled out in a rush, her voice pitched higher and higher. Suddenly my father said: "You must be blind!" Then he walked out – left the house.[109]

Thus, the crisis of the nation shines a spotlight on that of the family and the couple. When the same scene is told from the maternal point of view at the end of the novel,[110] readers come to realise how, like the great national certainties swept away by the Defeat of 1967, Nadā's father's "incomprehensible" language destabilised her mother to the point that she decided to leave Egypt.[111]

It is interesting to point out how in *Faraj*, unlike what happens in novels structured in the soul-nation allegory, where the character's becoming an adult develops in parallel to the becoming of the nation, the allegorical dimension is restricted to the concurrence of a public and a private crisis. With the female subject who undergoes (and, in her own way, overcomes) this crisis, inventing an alternative family and once again critically analysing her generation's activism, the novel records the tendency typical, according to Kohli, of the feminist novel of the 1980s – that is, the projection of the character's "growth" throughout her life as if to claim the lawfulness of perpetually pursuing (in terms of the formulation of the plot) individual freedom and the right to change.[112]

The "translation" skills honed by Nadā shift outside the family circle after her parents' divorce: she becomes a militant member of the student movements and so, in the hopes of avoiding problems with the police, her father – in agreement with his ex-wife – decides to send her to Paris. During her first Parisian stay, the narrator reconstructs in great detail the stories of Gérard, a friend who guides Nadā through the world of student protests. The text offers an intense timeline of the student movements, from the Nanterre riots to the heated Paris springtime, alternating between fiction and non-fiction.[113] During the months spent in France (where she resumes her relationship with her mother, also involved in the protests), Nadā begins to interweave the "public" and "private" dimensions, building her own political construction path – which

will result in the generational experience of the 1970s, recalled in the second half of the novel.

In a context such as the Egyptian one, where Nasser's modernising agenda had required women to enter schools and factories, the reference from the perspective of a woman's private life remains a sort of "traditional" family,[114] which will never be portrayed in *Faraj* (as we can guess ever since Nadā's parents' divorce). Quite the opposite, we see a maternal relationship made up of absence and of a sudden emotional discovery, in non-everyday life and in the bitterness of the clash, in the non-expression of affection ("I turned my back and walked away").[115] Also notable is how Nadā's mother's choice to leave her husband and only child behind in Egypt paves the way for Nadā's equally free choice to raise her little brothers "like a mother", carving out a maternal role for herself beyond the biological role. Nadā's bond with her mother sets two important aspects in motion: first of all, her participation in civil and student protests, and then her love of the international novelesque tradition that she will bring back to Cairo, crisscrossing the discoveries made during her educational experience in Europe with Egyptian literary tradition:

> By the time I was sixteen, my accumulated knowledge was a startling mixture, in which Balzac's peasant mixed with al-Sharqawi's, the back streets of Cairo crisscrossed with the alleyways of London, to get from Mme Bovary to Amina . . . required no more than a slight turn of the head.[116]

Upon her return to Cairo, Nadā joins the 1970s labour and student movements, where she meets the aforementioned 'Arwā Ṣāliḥ, author of an important generational memoir, and Sihām Ṣabrī, who's a great friend of Nadā's in the novel and shares a brief imprisonment with her. Both Sihām and 'Arwā play key roles in the generational consciousness of the time, as well as in Nadā's personal development. However, while the relationship between Nadā and Sihām is one of total empathy, and her funeral is described as a moment of collective mourning for the former students of the Seventies Generation, 'Arwā Ṣāliḥ's text, quoted by 'Āshūr, is radically criticised by Nadā, who does not recognise its ideological layout.[117]

A feature accompanying the narration, notwithstanding the unexpected events and upheavals that occur in the protagonists' lives, is the emphasis on Nadā's non-emotional character which, as mentioned previously, appears intent on sabotaging the traditional depiction of individual formation (especially male) as the emergence of a coherent, organic self, above all confined – from a temporal perspective – to "the formative years".

While Fāṭima's growth in *al-Khibā'* is fractured by trauma and ends with a circular convergence with the figure of her mother, Nadā's transformation is uninterrupted, and appears to be a narration in harmony with the transnational feminist novel of the 1980s. As underscored by Felski,[118] the recovery of an affiliation with the maternal figure suggests that a woman's development does not need to build its own path in opposition to that of her mother. In 'Āshūr's novel, both women

(mother and daughter) live their family ties freely, reconfiguring the meaning of the word "family" at every season of their lives, and they build their identity by participating in political life. Likewise, the novel follows the testimonial vocation, as it tells the collective story of the female contribution to the student and labour protests of the 1970s by means of the emblematic figure of Sihām – by means of the fragility, silences, illness and, in the end, suicide of this historical, yet fictionalised, character.[119] Sihām's and Nadā's rough paths act as heuristic tools for the reader, pointing out the hardships characterising their individual lives. In this sense, the novel keeps its distance equally from the traditional *Bildung* and from the narrative of awakening, not highlighting an isolated moment of personal "awakening" or an organic flow of the self into history but, rather, telling a story of ongoing transformation, self-discovery and a critical return to the collective experience.

Notes

1 Hartung, Heike, *Ageing, Gender and Illness*, p. 2.
2 Levine, Caroline, *Forms*, p. 15.
3 On the Sixties Generation, see DiMeo, David, *Committed to Disillusion*, pp. 158–187; Caiani, Fabio, *Contemporary Arab Fiction: Innovation from Rama To Yalu*, Routledge, London and New York 2007, pp. 67–95; Mehrez, Samia, *Egyptian Writers Between History and Fiction*, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 1994. On the literary heritage of the Sixties Generation, see also Kendall, Elisabeth, *Literature, Journalism and the Avant-Garde*, pp. 154–163.
4 Starkey, Paul, *Sonallah Ibrahim: Rebel with a Pen*, pp. 20–21.
5 Kassem Draz, Céza, "In Quest of New Narrative Forms: Irony in the Works of Four Egyptian Writers: Jamāl al-Ghiṭānī, Yaḥyā al-Ṭāhir ʻAbdallāh, Majīd Tūbyā, Ṣunʻallāh Ibrāhīm (1967–1979)", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 12 (1981), p. 137.
6 See Mehrez, Samia, *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction*, pp. 1–16.
7 See Seymour-Jorn, "Introduction", in *Cultural Criticism in Egyptian Women's Writing*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 2011, pp. xvii–xxxi.
8 Ibid., pp. 109–122.
9 Jacquemond, Richard, *Conscience of the Nation*, pp. 216–218.
10 On the debate surrounding committed literature, see DiMeo, David, *Committed to Disillusion*, pp. 191–206; Jacquemond, Richard, *Conscience of the Nation,* p. 309.
11 Kendall, Elizabeth, *Literature, Journalism and the Literary Avant-Garde*, p. 146.
12 Massad, Joseph A., *Desiring Arabs*, pp. 310–314.
13 Bourdieu, Pierre, *Ragioni pratiche*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2009, pp. 65–67 [or. ed. *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1994].
14 Casini, Lorenzo, Paniconi, Maria Elena and Sorbera, Lucia, *Modernità arabe*, pp. 155–242.
15 Ouyang, Wen-chin, *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel: Nation-State, Modernity and Tradition*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2013, p. 226.
16 Aṣlān, Ibrāhīm, *Mālik al-Ḥazīn*, Maṭbuʻāt al-Qāhira, al-Qāhira 1992, p. 61.
17 Ṭāhir, Bāhā, *Sharq al-nakhīl*, Dār al-Mustaqbal, al-Qāhira 1985.
18 Abd al-Majīd, Ibrāhīm, *Bayt al-Yāsāmīn*, Dār al-Fikr li-ʻl-Dirāsāt wa-ʻl-Nashr wa-ʻl-Tawzīʻ, Bāris 1986.
19 The inactivity is biological, as well: The protagonist of *Bayt al-Yāsāmīn* is the only one whose future fatherhood will be announced.

20 Esty, Jed, *Unseasonable Youth*, pp. 101–131.
21 See Selim, Samah, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary*, pp. 206–207.
22 The definition was given to me by Ibrāhīm Aṣlān himself during an interview which took place on 13 April 2005.
23 Kassem Draz, Céza, "In Quest of New Narrative Forms", p. 137.
24 See Seymour-Jorn, Caroline, *Cultural Criticism in Egyptian Women's Writing*, pp. xvii–xxiv.
25 Manisty, Dinah, *Changing Limitations*, pp. 128–156.
26 Ibrāhīm, Ṣunʿallāh, *Dhāt*, Dār al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabī, Al-Qāhira 1992.
27 Ibrāhīm, Ṣunʿallāh, *Sharaf*, Dār al-Hilāl, Al-Qāhira 1997.
28 See Chapter 1, pp. 22–25.
29 See Kienle, Eberhard, *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt*, I.B. Tauris, London and New York 2001, pp. 49–72.
30 See Jacquemond, Richard, *Conscience of the Nation*, pp. 76–80, and Paniconi, Maria Elena, "Il romanzo sperimentale egiziano degli anni Novanta: gli esempi di Muṣṭāfā Dhikrī, Muntaṣir al-Qaffāsh and May Tilmisānī", *Annali di Ca' Foscari*, 45 (2006), pp. 65–91.
31 On 1990s writings as writing "on the margins of History" and on the artistic choice of a "marginal" writing as the ultimate form of resistance, see Tilmisānī, M., "al-Kitāba ʿalā hāmish al-tārīkh", in Sayyid al-Baḥrāwī (ed.), *Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt, al-marʾa wa-ʾl-waṭan*, *Nūr*, Dār al-Marʿa al-ʿArabiyya li-ʾl-Nashr, al-Qāhira 1996, pp. 97–106.
32 al-Tilmisānī, Mayy, *Hilyūbūlīs*, Dār Sharqiyyāt li-ʾl-Nashr, al-Qāhira 2003, pp. 15–16.
33 Elsadda, Hoda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel,* p. 170.
34 Several researchers have analysed this novel, see for example Starkey, Paul, *Sonallah Ibrahim, Rebel with a Pen*, pp. 123–135. For an analysis from the perspective of the gender dimension, see Elsadda, Hoda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel*. From the perspective of the similarities and differences with the *Adab-al-sujūn*, see Benigni, Elisabetta, *Il Carcere come spazio letterario*, pp. 174–187. On the aspect of sexuality in *Sharaf*, see Massad, Joseph, *Desiring Arabs*, pp. 310–314.
35 Starkey, Paul, *Sonallah Ibrahim*, pp. 43–47.
36 Massad, Joseph, *Desiring Arabs*, p. 377.
37 ʿUṣfūr, Jābir, *al-Muqāwama bi-ʾl-kitāba. Qirāʾ fī ʾl-riwāya al-muʿāṣira*, al-Dār al-Miṣriyya al-Lubnāniyya, al-Qāhira 2016.
38 Elsadda, Hoda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel*, p. 134.
39 Mehrez, Samia, *Egypt's Culture Wars*, pp. 37–40.
40 Naaman, Mara, *Urban Space in Contemporary Egyptian Literature. Portraits of Cairo*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2011, pp. 170–176.
41 *Sharaf*, Dār al-Hilāl, al-Qāhira 1996, p. 8, Translated by Samia Mehrez, in Mehrez, Samia (ed.), *The Literary Atlas of Cairo,* The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 2010, p. 81.
42 Ibid., p. 12.
43 Ibid., p. 19.
44 Ibid., p. 57, translated in Starkey, Paul, *Sonallah Ibrahim*, p. 129.
45 Benigni, Elisabetta, *Il carcere come spazio letterario*, pp. 178–187.
46 Ibrāhīm, Ṣunʿallāh, *Sharaf*, p. 112.
47 Ibid., pp. 114–134.
48 Benigni, Elisabetta, *Il carcere come spazio letterario*, p. 184.
49 For an example of the testimonial genre, Al-Zayyat, Latifa, *The Search: Personal Papers*. For fiction, see the many-voiced novel *Al-ʿaraba al-dhahabiyya lā taṣʿad ilā al-samāʾ*, by Salwā Bakr published in 1991, translated by Dina Manisty as *The Golden Chariot* Garnet Publishing, London 1995.

50 Benigni, especially, contrasts *Sharaf* with Sharīf Ḥetata's novel *al-'Ayn dhāt al-jafn al-ma'danī*, Bayrūt Dār al-Ṭāli', Bayrūt 1974. See Benigni, Elisabetta, *Il carcere come spazio letterario*, p. 183.

51 Slaughter, Joseph R., *Human Rights Inc.*, p. 216.

52 Ibrāhīm, Ṣun'allāh, *Sharaf*, pp. 208–232.

53 Ibid., pp. 233–292.

54 Ibid., p. 234.

55 Ibid., p. 240.

56 Mehrez, Samia, *Egypt's Culture Wars*, pp. 37–40.

57 Ibrāhīm, Ṣun'allāh, *Sharaf*, pp. 469–470.

58 Massad, Joseph, *Desiring Arabs*, pp. 380–386.

59 Ibid., pp. 378–386.

60 al-Taḥāwi, Mirāl, *Al-khibā'*, Dār al-Sharqiyyāt li-'l-Nashr wa-'l-Tawzī', al-Qāhira 1996 (al-Tahawi, Miral, *The Tent*, translated by Anthony Calderbank, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo 1998). The novel has been included in several critical essays on contemporary Arab literature, including Youssef, Mary, *Minorities in the Contemporary Egyptian Novel*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2018, pp. 221–248; Hamdar, Abir, *The Female Suffering Body. Illness and Disability in Modern Arabic Literature*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse and New York 2014, pp. 86–96; Abudi, Dalya, *Mothers and Daughters*, pp. 231–248.

61 Jacquemond, Richard, *Conscience of the Nation*, p. 76.

62 Fāṭima's family includes members of the sedentary peasant society, represented by the figures of Fāṭima's father and his interfering, violent mother on one hand, and on the other by elements of the nomadic Bedouin population traditionally present in the region northeast of the Nile Valley. The Bedouin world, represented in the novel by Fāṭima's mother and through the character of Fāṭima, comes to symbolically contrast the patriarchal system that dominates peasant society. See Youssef, Mary, *Minorities in the Contemporary Egyptian Novel*, pp. 141–143.

63 al-Tahawi, Miral, *The Tent*, p. 5.

64 Ibid., p. 45.

65 Ibid., p. 38.

66 Ibid., pp. 51–52.

67 See al-Ṭaḥāwī, Mīrāl, "Al-bu'd al-ithnūghrāfī li-'l-'amal al-riwā'i: shahāda", *Alif. Journal of Comparative Poetics, Literature and Anthropology in Africa*, 17 (1997), p. 146.

68 See Hamdar, Abir, *The Female Suffering Body*, p. 88.

69 al-Tahawi, Miral, *The Tent*, p. 3.

70 Ibid., p. 15.

71 Ibid.

72 Abudi, Dalya, *Mothers and Daughters*, p. 237.

73 Ibid., p. 232.

74 al-Tahawi, Miral, *The Tent*, p. 26.

75 Ibid., p. 83.

76 Ibid., p. 49.

77 Ibid., p. 94.

78 Ibid., p. 99.

79 Ibid.

80 Youssef, Mary, *Minorities in the Contemporary Egyptian Novel*, p. 151.

81 al-Tahawi, Miral, *The Tent*, p. 117.

82 Ibid., p. 46.

83 Ibid., p. 129.

84 Ibid., pp. 115–116.

85 Ibid., p. 129.

86 Manisty, Dinah, "Negotiating the Space between the Private and Public: Women's Autobiographical Writing in Egypt", in Robin Ostle and Stefan Wild (eds.), *Writing the Self. Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, Saqi Books, London 1998, p. 273.

87 Hamdar, Abir, *The Female Suffering Body*, p. 95.

88 al-Tahawi, Miral, *The Tent*, p. 15.

89 Ibid., p. 116.

90 'Āshūr, Raḍwā, *Faraj*, Dār al-Shurūq, al-Qāhira 2008 (Ashur, Radwa, *Blue Lorries*, translated by Barbara Romaine, Bloomsbury, Qatar Foundation Publishing, Doha 2014). The novel's Arabic title means "relief, release", and is the name of a turtledove squab raised by some of the inmates of the Moroccan prison in Tazmart, whose story is told in the epilogue. Fed and cared for by the prisoners, the squab manages to take flight and escape; the novel ends with this anecdote. The English title, *Blue Lorries*, refers to the blue police vans used to transport demonstrators from the city streets to police stations. It is also the title of the 23rd chapter, centred on the student protests that took place in Cairo in 1991, in the wake of the American invasion of Baghdad.

91 Quṭb, Sayyid Muḥammad, "Riwāya al-taʿallum wa-masāḥa li-ʾl-murājʿa ʿinda Raḍwā 'Āshūr fī *Faraj*", *Fuṣūl*, 25 (2009), p. 59.

92 Ashur, Radwa, *Blue Lorries*, pp. 51–60.

93 Khalifeh, Omar, *Nasser in the Egyptian Imaginary*, pp. 125–129.

94 Ashur, Radwa, *Blue Lorries*, pp. 14–15.

95 Ibid., p. 3.

96 Ibid., p. 20.

97 Ibid., pp. 20–24 and pp. 34–50.

98 Ibid., p. 22.

99 Ibid., p. 20.

100 Ibid., p. 30.

101 Ibid., pp. 82–93.

102 The *topos* of prison as an educational place appears in Ashur, Radwa, *Blue Lorries*, p. 169.

103 See, for example, the poem by Fu'ād Ḥaddād, quoted in *Faraj*, recalling torturer 'Abd al-Laṭīf Rushdī, who really existed and was responsible for the death of Shuhdī 'Aṭiyya (an Egyptian activist in the Communist Party who died under torture). See Ashur, Radwa, *Blue Lorries*, p. 28.

104 Ibid., p. 156.

105 Ibid., p. 171.

106 Waxman, Barbara Frey, *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature*, Greenwood Texts, New York 1990, p. 186.

107 Ashur, Radwa, *Blue Lorries*, pp. 87–93. For a study on the historical figures of 'Arwā Ṣāliḥ and Sihām Ṣabrī, who both appear in *Blue Lorries* as fictionalised characters, see Ṣāliḥ, 'Arwā "The Premature': Gendering the Issue of the Egyptian Left", *The Arab Studies Journal*, 24, 1 (2016), pp. 118–142. 'Arwā Ṣāliḥ's memoirs, quoted in 'Āshūr's novel, were published as *al-Mubtaṣarūn*: *dafātir wāḥida min jīl al-ḥarakah al-ṭullābiyya* (Dār al-Nahr, al-Qāhira 1996) and were translated by Samah Selim as *The Stillborn*, Seagull Books, London, New York and Calcutta 2017.

108 Ashur, Radwa, *Blue Lorries*, p. 39.

109 Ibid., p. 50.

110 Ibid., pp. 153–154.

111 Ibid., pp. 151–157.

112 Kohli quoted in Hartung, Heike, *Ageing, Gender and Illness*, p. 293.

113 Seymour-Jorn, Caroline, *Cultural Criticism*, pp. 111–113.

114 On 'Arwā Ṣāliḥ's memoir *al-Mubtaṣarūn*, see Mothman, Selma, *Engendering Citizenship in Egypt*, Columbia University Press, New York 1999, p. 87.

115 Ashur, Radwa, *Blue Lorries*, p. 160.
116 Ibid., p. 68.
117 Nadā's criticism of Ṣāliḥ's book is detailed during a heated discussion with Hazem who, conversely, defends the activist's point of view: [Nadā] – There are some intelligent insights in the book, but taken as a whole it's poor from a theoretical standpoint, marred by its own facile approach: "The bourgeoisie is the problem, and the behaviour of the bourgeoisie is responsible for every false step, every perversion, every failure", Ashur, Radwa, *Blue Lorries*, pp. 97–99.
118 Felski, Rita, *Literature after Feminism*, p. 118.
119 Ashur, Radwa, *Blue Lorries*, pp. 219–225.

Epilogue

Bildungsroman and the Arab Novel: Egyptian Intersections examines the role of the *Bildungsroman*, interpreted as a transnational form shared by several fictional cultures, in the trends and transformations of the 20th-century Egyptian literary canon. This type of novel emerged, within the Egyptian framework, in the formative period of novel as a *genre* and can be effectively analysed, in its forms and peculiarities, with the aim of exploring the interrelationships between the modern literary genre *par excellence* and the collective identity. As underscored several times throughout the volume, in addition to being "representations" of the Egyptian socio-political situation, youth narratives greatly impacted the definition and perception of modern subjectivity, contributing to help shape a community.

In this study, the *Bildungsroman* was not interpreted as a "Western genre" ready to embrace "local content".[1] Quite the opposite, it can be stated that, notwithstanding the nationalist and identity thrust that gave the go-ahead to the novel form in Egypt, the stories of youth that pervade the Egyptian novel present universal themes such as a thwarted quest for love, a struggle for personal fulfilment and a desire to achieve a cultural modernity often felt as "other than the self". The tradition of the coming-of-age novel, already renewed internally by the thrusts of literary modernism, has provided these instances with a teleology and a compelling narrative structure, helping transform these stories into as many icons of the Arab narrative modernity, as well as into the heritage of the community of readers and an unavoidable model for the writers of the next generations.

The prevailing models: soul-nation allegory and crisis-plot

The textual analyses presented here all gain momentum from the study of the *teloi* designed by each of the characters of these fictional stories. Indeed, the *telos* literally shapes the discovery made by the modern Arab individual regarding his or her own self, and regarding the world within which the individual attempts to fit. It represents both the goal towards which the protagonists strive and the composite ensemble of ideals, values and worldviews that they convey. In an attempt to identify features transversal to all the novels analysed, it can be stated that at least until the appearance on the scene of the avant-garde writings of the 1960s, the individual *teloi* can be read as metaphors for a collective fate.

Two main models of *teloi* were encountered: on one hand, the youth joining his or her path with that of the nation (the "soul-nation allegory", to use Esty's definition), which can be found in *'Awdat al-rūḥ* by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm and in *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* by Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt. In both cases, the *telos* of the protagonist runs parallel to the path of the nation's history and develops progressively, like an ascending arc. The other emerging model is that of the "crisis plot" – that is, a story centred on the individual crisis of the protagonist, whose growth appears thwarted, side-tracked or stalled, and whose search for the self does not adhere to the national project. The latter model can correspond to a *telos* that appears suspended (see Ḥāmid in *Zaynab* by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal), regressive (for example, the anti-*Bildung* detected in *Adīb* by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn) or fragmented and inconclusive (for example, *Ayyām al-insān al-sab'a* by 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim).

Both models recount the *transformation* of an identity within a social framework where the "I" – especially the youthful "I" – had long been viewed as a danger for the "we" embodied by the family, community, class or gender.[2] The "normativity" of the *Bildungsroman* genre acts as a structuring principle in the plots of the first type (which highlight a parallel growth between individual and nation) and can also be detected, albeit *in absentia*, in crisis or disillusionment plots. In the Mahfouzian disillusionment plot, especially, the young protagonists rush to accumulate experiences under the delusion of being able to build a non-authentic identity which, indeed, denies the true self, in search of a place in a society as modern as it is out of reach. In other words, there is a personal effort to fit a social order: the character tends desperately to social recognition.

Instead, the model of completed *telos* showcases how the transformation of the youth in this narrative more marked by the classic *Bildungsroman* stimulates a striving towards the attainment of a dual aim: that of a "cultural modernity" expressed in the emotional dimension of modern love, as well as in the political dimension of an independent citizenship. To quote Noorani, we could say that the *telos* of novels like *'Awdat al-rūḥ* and *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ* summarise the youth's striving towards an "aesthetic citizenship", that is, a condition of civil awareness where personal aims and private emotions are disciplined by a higher "body" – a social, political, cultural body – in the firm belief that they belong to a vaster "moral order".[3]

However, while conforming to the same model, the two novels are very different. Al-Ḥakīm draws on and takes full advantage of the normative force inherent in the *Bildungsroman* form and, though not supporting the revolution from a political perspective, he introduces the *topos* of the Revolution of 1919 into the protagonist's story by virtue of this event's "aesthetic" value. Indeed, in al-Ḥakīm's novel, the theme of the revolution must be traced back to the prevailing "narrative code" – that is, the coming-of-age story of an artist (*Künstlerroman*). The normative structure of the *Bildungsroman* becomes a foothold for emancipation in al-Zayyāt's *al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*: the progressive alignment of Laylā's personal interests with those of the nation – at a time like the anticolonial struggle, described during the crucial moment of the Tripartite attack against Port Said and of the

organisation of the besieged city's resistance – lead to the simultaneous "awakening" of the protagonist and the nation alike.

Transversal themes

The aforementioned prevailing models share many recurring and transversal themes and motifs. In general, the protagonists embark on an often painful separation from their family of origin to follow a love of beauty and freedom, cultivating the gift of words and their potential. While the arc described in Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *'Awdat al-rūḥ* thematises the aspect of the search for the self through education and the aspiration to possess the art of words ("Tomorrow we're going to be the eloquent tongue of the Nation!" she confides to a classmate), the end-of-the-century experimental novels show youths and children intent on contending with words from a completely different viewpoint. The national project no longer informs individual identity, and so the subject's words are no longer talent to be cultivated and placed at the service of the nation but, rather, to be constantly searched for and negotiated in the incessant translation activity in *Faraj* by Raḍwā 'Āshūr, or in the foreign language in *Al-khibā'* by Mirāl al-Taḥāwi. These translations internal to the female protagonists express a process of constant negotiation of the self: within the postrealism codes, the novel no longer lays claim to its subject's consistency, nor does it dare voice the prospect of a future attainment of completeness.

Other characters in the avant-garde writings find themselves contending with silence (for example, the anti-*Bildungsheld* Sharaf) or with the impossibility of asserting their word and conveying their gained maturity. This can be inferred from the final scene in the meta-*Bildung Ayyām al-Insān al-sab'a* by 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, where the protagonist, by now a grown man, remains symbolically unheeded while talking in a crowded café in his native village. 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's meta-*Bildung*, or self-aware coming-of-age story, shows 'Abd al-'Azīz as a boy who is eager to escape the rural dimension and popular religiousness he grew up in – environments towards which he feels a great aversion. Yet 'Abd al-'Azīz himself will become an adult who looks back nostalgically on the "paradise lost" represented by popular faith – the very faith opposed by the *nahḍawī* intellectuals and, for example, ridiculed in *Zaynab* – and by a rural, premodern dimension.[4]

Also common to all the novels analysed, the theme of the "search" takes shape as the search for freedom and for the expression of one's feelings in *Zaynab*; of knowledge in *Adīb*; of education in *Qindīl Umm Hāshim*. In the "crisis of the self" novels analysed in the fifth chapter, and written between the mid-1930s and mid-1940s, the protagonists go too far, objectifying in the trope of the crossing of national boundaries (and, thus, in the trope of the journey to Europe) their quest for a modernity too often identified as "acculturation" and "transformation of the self into something other than the self". The theme of insanity, explicit in *Adīb* and hidden in *Qindīl*, is actually an outward sign of the subject's implosion when

faced with the quest for a modernity that can only "alter" the subject – that is, make him or her someone else.

Gendered *teloi*

This study on the *Bildungsnarrative* allows us to focus on how a "canonical" coming-of-age journey has always, and inevitably, been gendered, and on how female and feminist narratives have had to struggle against the exclusively male legacy of the form to establish their own particular tradition. In order to grow, al-Zayyāt's heroine Laylā goes "against" the destiny that her family and betrothed designated for her. Though she initially accepts her professor's marriage proposal to conform to family expectations, the young woman later resorts to various strategies (depersonalisation, mimesis, deceit) to finally assert her own personality. Her path, as stated in the fourth chapter, leans on the limits (*ḥudūd*) forced on her by her family and, on a more general scale, by a patriarchal social system, transforming them into as many starting points.

Raḍwā 'Āshūr's Nadā, the protagonist of *Faraj*, searches for her own space of action in yet another manner, differing both from Laylā's strong personality and from the plethora of "frozen" students and not-young youths who enliven many of the narratives of the 1970s. As explained in the seventh chapter, 'Āshūr chooses the way of a "development novel" written from a clearly testimonial and feminist point of view to rediscover a plural narrative of the student protests of the 1970s. More specifically, the author's interest lies in recreating the attention-seeking behaviour of the female students and leadership of those protests. The constant changes in the protagonist, which go ostentatiously beyond the boundaries of her young age, aspire to narrate the life of a woman free from the concept of traditional "family", and thus involved in an ongoing overcoming of the "normative" function of the classic *Bildungsroman*.

Within the sphere of female authorship analysed in this volume, the novels by the aforementioned authors provide the opportunity to discuss the connections between *Bildung* and narrative codes: 'Āshūr's *Faraj* stays clear of the "total fiction" formula evident in *al-Bāb al-maftūh*, in favour of a formula interweaving fiction and non-fiction, funnelling the real experiences of the female protagonists of the student battles of the 1970s into the plot, quoting their autobiographical writings and thus interweaving a plot at once public and private. The writings of the women authors of the 1990s examined in the seventh chapter emphasize a blend of fictional and autobiographical tendencies, in an often explicit rejection of the very idea of narrative "protagonist" meant as an organic, coherent subject.

Two examples of *Bildungsnarrative* in contemporary fiction

Ḥikayāt Yūsuf Tadrus (2015, *Tales of Yusuf Tadrus*, 2018)[5] by 'Ādil 'Iṣmat and *Fī ghurfat al-'ankabūt* (2016, *In the Spider's Room* 2018)[6] by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Nabī are two examples of how the contemporary novel occasionally resorts to

the structure of the *Bildungsroman*. The character who lends his name to the first novel, Yūsuf Tadrus, is a Coptic painter living in a town in the Delta region who organises his confessions (narrated in the first person) into a series of "stories" that make up the chapters of the novel. Each chapter opens with the expression *qāla Yūsuf Tadrus* (And Yūsuf Tadrus said), imitating the tradition of classic genres like both the *maqāma* and the *ḥadīth*. Thus, the protagonist is also the story's narrator, and it is he who, throughout the tale, observes his own change, his own transformation. This (trans)formation follows circular movements, modulating itself on constant returns and second thoughts. The protagonist is affiliated with various social institutions from which he later grows apart: he enrols in secondary school in Alexandria, but is unable to complete his studies because "I discovered that Alexandria was vaster than I'd imagined".[7] In a clear about-turn compared to the canonical course of the *Bildung*, the protagonist returns to the countryside, giving up higher education and city life. Similarly, the protagonist marries the woman he loves – a marriage he often and repeatedly tries to escape from.

By the same token, the novel can be said to intentionally reference the many elements typical of the *Künstlerroman*, such as the young man's encounter with a teacher, the "revelation" of his talent, his ambition. At the same time, these themes are thwarted – they are merely "tales" that span the protagonist's life without, however, being organised into a coherent subject. And despite the protagonist's confidence in his own talent, art will long remain a forgotten interlude in Yūsuf's story; indeed, only at the end will he return to portrait-painting and, more specifically, to his obsession with self-portraiture. "Who is Yūsuf Tadrus?" the protagonist asks himself obsessively with every self-portrait he paints, in a constant expression of the existential question underlying this narrative.

The relinquishment of superiority on the part of a protagonist fated to become a unitary and coherent "self" could not be expressed more clearly: the novel iconically restores the subject's plurality, "stealing" a few moments and passages from him, but replacing the *telos* of his search for a place in the world with a tale of non-integration, of a search for the margin, of a success that arrives too late.

Another contemporary novel to adopt the *Bildungsroman* trend, in a more straightforward fashion compared to the aforementioned novel, is *Fī ghurfat al-ʿankabūt* by ʿAbd al-Nabī. The protagonist, Hānī, is gender non-conforming, and therefore shows some female traits. Friendly and lively, Hānī has a feminine figure, loves to dance and is the life of the party. Raised in an exclusively feminine environment, Hānī has always desired men and, rather than being "ashamed" of this sexuality, "comes of age" in the familiar world – "parallel" to the legitimate one – of homoerotic relations.

Aware that his ambiguity is not accepted by a society whose masculinity is based on homophobia, Hānī experiences this homophobia thanks to the Queen Boat raid,[8] an event described by Nicola Pratt as "official punishment of homosexuality in order to reproduce heteronormativity".[9] The novel simply narrates the trauma suffered by the protagonist due to this event, and his subsequent attempt to re-enter society in the wake of this inner fracture.

Following the Queen Boat raid, Hānī ends up in prison along with his partner and dozens of other patrons. After his release, and suffering a loss of speech (here, too, the protagonist's voice symbolises his identity), Hānī does his best to build a socially "acceptable" life, with a marriage of convenience to temporarily mask his true nature.

Fī ghurfat al-'ankabūt marks an important break from the perspective of the portrayal of homosexuality: the story restores voice and body to one of the bodies which, in the aforementioned raid, are tortured by the state. As noted by Pratt, it is significant that the violence of the state in the Queen Boat affair did not create a scandal, because homosexual bodies were not considered inviolable.[10] The national dimension in this novel takes the form of the prison, which is almost the only institution to appear in Hani's story. The plot follows the interweaving of a few "characters" that end up – in an exemplary fashion – alone, and underscores the differences between these characters without searching for a parallel with the national context.

This novel gains its strength from the classic form of the *Bildungsroman* to attempt to build up a finally legitimate – and authentic – tale of a young homosexual in Egypt. Compared to 'Iṣmat's neo-*künstlerroman*, 'Abd al-Nabī commits a politically unsettling narrative act, placing a figure that for decades had been portrayed as deviated and deviant at the heart of the story.[11]

The Egyptian *Bildungsnarrative*: a *genre* in progress

This study showed how the terms *shabāb*, "youth", and *shābb*, "young man", took on a socio-cultural rather than an age-related meaning within the social and political framework of the 1910s and the early 1920s. The term *shābb* ended up referring to educated youth, the *effendī* undergoing cultural modernisation, giving rise to an intersectional category wherein age-related, behavioural, social and economic elements intersect. As a result, the paths embarked on by youths become something more than merely a "theme" in the novel form; they themselves become the "novel", as a driving force behind the development of the genre.

In the study proposed by Moretti, the European coming-of-age novel dies a "natural death" with World War I and with the "modernist" writing that precedes it: modernism and *Bildungsroman* are, in the Italian critic's seminal study, mutually exclusive languages.[12] Conversely, the studies by Esty and Boes place the 20th-century experimental novels and the "crises" of their youthful protagonists within a longer journey, which accompanies modern readers even beyond the normative horizon of the "national" novel. The work presented here takes up the legacy of these previous studies, showcasing how the history of Egyptian literary modernity is spanned by *Bildungsnarratives* that are *also* modernist: indeed, in the coexistence of its forms, the Egyptian coming-of-age novel expresses a literary reflection on the nature of modern Arab subjectivity, on the intellectual's role in shaping it and on the inescapable limits of Arab societies.

While the *nahḍawī* intellectuals defined, in their literary production, the role of the Arab intellectual – who was meant to be the nation's "voice, vision and

conscience",[13] the "canonical" Arab novel emerged to illustrate the *becoming* of the modern individual according to the late-*naḥḍawī* intellectual elite's idea of the "individual".

The early 20th-century novels, generally describable as "realist" works, develop a shared and accessible communication code with the reader, by means of which the individual/national collective becoming is organised into allegorical meaning and the subject's gradual approach to history emerges. Literary modernism – recognised here since the 1930s writings by late-*naḥḍawī* authors – is set on a different track compared to mimetic realism, and establishes an "alternate" communication code in a deliberate distancing from realism and from the promise of a subject that lives in and for history. A code open to metatextual interplay, to parodic rewriting, to "low-fiction" narratives (that is, open to the intrusion of non-fictional elements and autobiographical or biographical content). In Egypt, this code marked the second half of the 20th century, a time when every unifying and normalising project seemed obsolete, and when writing created the space for a plural, intersubjective or fragmented self. However, as stated in the seventh chapter and underscored earlier in this Epilogue, these modernist rewritings do not signal the end of the *Bildungsnarrative*; in fact, they belong to the genre. Moreover, the form of the *Bildungsroman*, in its "phantasmagorical" magnetism, resurfaces in Yūsuf Tadrus' stories – the use of the plural is deliberate – or in Hānī's "clandestine" (compared to the heteronormative coming-of-age) journey. In a constant dialogue between "local" forms and transregional canon, between modern or late/postmodern narrative codes, between individual and national story, the Egyptian *Bildungsnarrative* offers a wealth of research material and holds the promise of future developments.

Notes

1 I am referring here to the categories of "local authors" and "local contents" as they are discussed in Moretti, Franco, *Distant Reading*, Verso, London 2013, p. 104. Here, Moretti argues that "in the case of less powerful literatures, then – which means: almost all literatures, inside and outside Europe – the import of foreign novels doesn't just mean that people read a lot of Foreign books; it also means that local writers become uncertain of how to write their own novels. Market forces shape consumption and production too: they exert a pressure on the very form of the novel, giving rise to a genuine morphology of underdevelopment".

2 On the topic of the "self" as a peculiar theme in modern Arabic Narrative see Rooke, Tetz, "Escape from the Family: A Theme in Arab Autobiography", p. 214.

3 Noorani, Yaseen, *Culture and Hegemony in the Colonial Middle East*, p. 156.

4 See Pagani, Samuela, "Sufismo, «neo-sufismo» e confraternite musulmane", p. 65.

5 ʿĀdil ʿIṣmat, *Ḥikayāt Yūsuf Tadrus*, al-Kutub Khān, al-Qāhira 2015 (*The Tales of Yusuf Tadrus*, translated by Mandy Mc Clure, Hoopoe, Cairo and New York 2018).

6 Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Nabī, *Fī ghurfat al-ʿankabūt*, Dār al-ʿAyn li-ʾl-Nashr, al-Qāhira 2016 (*In the Spider's Room*, translated by Jonathan Wright, Hoopoe, Cairo and New York 2018).

7 Ibid., p. 48.

8 On the Queen Boat case see: "The Queen Boat Case in Egypt: Sexuality, National Security and State Sovereignty", *Review of International Studies*, 33, 1 (2007), pp. 129–144.

9 Ibid., p. 130.

10 Ibid., pp. 131–134.

11 Massad, Joseph, *Desiring Arabs*, pp. 269–334.

12 Boes, Tobias, *Formative Fictions*, p. 131.

13 Halabi, Zeina, *Unmaking the Arab Intellectual*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2017.

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