Modern Arabic Literary Biography:

A study of character portrayal in the works of Egyptian biographers of the first half of the Twentieth Century, with special reference to literary biography

BY

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Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds
The Department of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies

June 1999

I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where references have been made to the work of others
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the period of this study I have received support and assistance from a number of people. First I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor Dr. A. Shivtiel, who guided me throughout this study with encouragement, patience and support. His generous help was always there whenever needed and he undoubtedly eased my task.

I also acknowledge my indebtedness to the Faculty of Dar al-\ulum, Cairo University, and in particular to Profs. Rajā Jabr and al-Ṭāhir Aḥmed Makki and Abd al-Ṣabūr Shahin for inspiring me in my study of Arabic Literature.

Next I would like to thank the Egyptian Education Bureau and in particular the Cultural Counsellors for their support.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Atiyya Amir of Stockholm University, Prof. Muḥammad Abd al-Ḥalīm of S. O. A. S., London University, Prof. Ibrāhim Abd al-Raḥman of Ain Shams University, Dr. Muḥammad Sālim Makki and Mr. W. Azīz for their unlimited assistance.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr. A. al-Rais for designing the cover of the thesis, Mr. R. Lahgazi, Mr. H.A.A. Rāziq and Mr. S.A. Gazrawi for typing the thesis patiently.
Abstract

In Chapter one, I presented a comparative definition of the meaning of صلا (Pl. سيرة, Tarjama (Pl. ترجمة), Manaqib, تابعات and مغازي as they were understood in antiquity. I also showed how the meaning of صرا in modern times has only narrowly developed. Although the method of biographical writing continuously developed in Europe, it hardly progressed in Modern Arabic Literature. The only exception was seen in the writings by the pioneers of enlightenment in Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth century. This change of direction relied on borrowing European methodology in biographical writing.

In chapter two, I reviewed the early attempts at writing biographies in the nineteenth century by Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti and Ali Mubarak. Although both were the first pioneers in this respect, yet they followed the footpath of classical approach above all that of al-Maqrizi, from whom Ali Mubarak derived inspiration in his book Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyah.

In chapter three, I studied the twentieth century, starting with traditional biography writers who could not employ European methodologies and whose writings oscillated between biographical notes and biographical sketches; or whose texts were more of a literary study than a biography proper.

In chapters four to nine, I selected the most renowned, productive writers who best represented methodologies of biography writing. Perhaps certain writers have not been mentioned in this period of study. This is not out of negligence but simply because their texts were totally out of reach, or their writings did not exhibit the required literary criteria.
All methodologies representing the theory of biography writing in Egypt have been analysed in these chapters. All, in fact, form a digestion or assimilation of French, English and German schools. In Egypt, Taha Husayn is considered the chairman of the French school, al-Mazzini and al-Aqqad of the English/German schools, al-Nuwaihi of the psychoanalytical/anatomical school and Sidiq who employed both. By contrast, al-Iryan was the trailblazer of the distinguished biographical novel.

In these chapters, I tried to lay out the general outlines these writers have produced in the production of biographical texts, and how these attempts were a successful step on the road of presenting literary biographies characterized by high world standards.

Chapter ten may well seem traditional, but it is important to give a comparative outlook on the views of biography writers themselves when they study and analyse the same character.

Among the characters studied, I selected Bashshar, Abu Nuwas, Ibn al-Rumi, al-Mutanabbi and al-Maarriri. These are outstanding landmarks in the history of Arab verse and the subject of a multitude of studies as well. Modern biographers took these figures as a test field for the deployment and employment of biographical methodologies. I selected these examples to provide comparisons and explain how far these biographies were successful in producing a biography or a profile of those classical poets.

The conclusion and the bibliographical list arrived at the end of research.

I wish, however, to clarify one important point here. It seems that I could not fix the year 1950 as the temporal parameter of my research but took some texts which were published shortly beyond that point. The reason for this obvious extension was either
to give additional useful details or simply because chapters of such texts had already been published prior to that year and were known to the readership.

At times I would satisfy myself with analysing the part rather than the whole. This again was meant to eschew repetition or was due to the fact that the book in question was not available.
CONTENTS

Chapter I  Introduction
  a. Definitions of Terms:  11
     Sirah  13
     Tarjamah  15
     Maghāzī  17
     Tabaqāt  18
     Ansāb  20
     Manāqib  22

  b. Comparative Analysis  23
  c. Characteristic of Medieval Arabic Biography  24
  d. Previous Critical Works on Arabic Biography  31
  e. Biographical Works in Egypt  33

Chapter II  The Development of Biography Writing in Egypt
  in the Nineteenth Century  43
  Introduction  44
  a. Al-Jabarti  45
  b. Ṣalih Majdi  47
  c. ʿAlī Mubarak  47

Chapter III  Traditional Literary Biography of the First Half
  of the Twentieth Century  54
  Introduction  55
  a. Jurjī Zaydān  55
  b. Hasan al-Sandūbī  59
c. Aḥmad Taymūr 60

d. Mayy Ziyāda 60

e. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal 65

f. Aḥmad Aṁīn 66

g. Ibrāhīm Naḍī 69

h. Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Zayyāt 71

i. Zākī Muḥammad Mujahīd 72

j. Aḥmad Zākī Abū Shayāḥ 73

Chapter IV  New Paths in Literary Biography: Ṭaha Ḥusayn 81

Introduction 82

a. A Portrait of al-Maṭarrī 84

b. A Portrait of Abū Nuwas 86

c. A Portrait of Bashshār b. Burd 87

d. A Portrait of Hafiz ibn Rūmī 88

e. A Portrait of Ahmad Shawqī 88

f. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī 89

g. A Portrait of al-Mutanabbi 91

h. His short biographies 93

His characteristics as a biographer 94

Chapter V  Abbas Maḥmūd al-Āqqād 101

Introduction 102

a. A Portrait of al-Maṭarrī 107

b. A Portrait of al-Mutanabbi 108

c. A Portrait of Bashshār b. Burd 109

d. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī 110
e. A Portrait of Shu 'arā' Miṣr  
112
f. A Portrait of Umar b. Abī Rabī'ā  
113
g. A Portrait of Jamīl Buthayna  
114
h. A Portrait of Abū Nuwās  
115
i. A Portrait of Goethe  
116
j. A Portrait of Bernard Shaw  
117
k. A Portrait of Shakespeare  
118
l. A Portrait of Jimenez  
118
m. His short biographies  
119

His characteristics as a biographer  
121

Chapter VI Ibrāhīm Abd al-Qādir al-Mazini  
131
Introduction  
132
a. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī  
133
b. A Portrait of al-Mutanabbi  
135
c. A Portrait of Bashshār b. Burd  
137

His characteristics as a biographer  
139

Chapter VII Zakī Mubārak  
145
Introduction  
146
a. A Portrait of Umar b. Abī Rabī'ā  
149
b. A Portrait of Jamīl Buthayna  
153
c. A Portrait of Kuthayyir  
154
d. A Portrait of Abbās b. al-Aḥnaf  
155
e. A Portrait of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī  
156

His characteristics as a biographer  
161
Chapter VIII
A. Muhammad Sa'id al-Iryān

Introduction

A Portrait of al-Rafi'ī

His characteristics as a biographer

B. 'Abd al-Rahmān Śidqi

Introduction

a. A Portrait of Baudelaire

b. A Portrait of Abū Nuwās

His characteristics as a biographer

Chapter IX
Muḥammad al-Nuwaḥī

Introduction

a. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī

b. A Portrait of Bashshār b. Burd

c. A Portrait of Abū Nuwās

His characteristics as a biographer

Chapter X
A comparative analysis of five literary personalities as reflected by leading Egyptian biographers

Introduction

a. Bashshār b. Burd

b. Abū Nuwās

c. Ibn al-Rūmī

d. Al-Mutanabbi

e. Al-Ma'arrī
Conclusion 234

Selected Bibliography 238
a. Primary sources 239
b. Critical works in Arabic 244
c. Critical works in English 250
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

a. Definitions of Terms
   *Sirah*
   *Tarjamah*
   *Maghazi*
   *Tabaqat*
   *Ansab*
   *Manaqib*

b. Comparative Analysis

c. Characteristic of Medieval Arabic Biography

d. Previous Critical Works on Arabic Biography

e. Biographical Works in Egypt
Modern Arabic biography writing has its roots in two different sources. The first is the developed European biography which Arab writers had come across during their encounter with Western civilization in the twentieth century. The second source is the classical, embryonic, raw forms of Arabic biography. This dual origin contributed to the development of a mode of biography writing. This chapter explains the classical lineage of the blend.

In its earliest prototypes, biography emerged at certain points in the development of civilizations. It stemmed out of spiritual (religious) or mundane needs, or out of both. In its simplest form, it was a record of the deeds of sublime figures, the two major classes of the time, statesmen and warriors. Obviously, it was a method of venerating or worshipping the past and instructing the living. By the same token, the deeds and sayings of sacred figures, prophets or saints, were also the subject matter of the first early forms of biography writings in the Arab-Muslim civilization. This feature was also observable in the early English biography writings in the medieval era.

We shall trace the classical forms, terms and functions of biography in the Arab-Muslim civilization. A comparative outlook shall follow taking the Western models as points of reference. This preliminary introduction would help us see how both the classical and modern, mainly Western developed, forms meanings and methods of biography writing were combined in the minds of modern Arab-Egyptian writers.
a. Definition of Terms

Sirah

Sirah [biography] is one of the oldest terms in Arabic literature. In several classical dictionaries we read:

"Sirah: the prophet's traditions [sunna], method [tariqa] or appearance [ha'ad]." in Al-Qamus al-Muhit. (1)

"Sirah is the prophet's tradition or manner" in Lisān al-'Arab. (2)

"Sirah is the method "in Mukhtār al-Sīḥāh. (3)

"Sirah is the appearance, prophet's traditions, approach and doctrine [madhhab]. A man's sīrah is the record of his deeds and the mode of his behaviour towards others." in Al-Munjid. (4)

"Sirah: the prophet's tradition, way, or man's behaviour." in Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ. (5)

"Sirah is the prophet's traditions, method or appearance." in Taj al-Ćrūs. (6)

"Sirah is the Prophet's tradition [sunna], form. Man's sīrah is his live history," in Al-Mujām al-Wasīṭ. (7)

"Sirah is a manner of living " in Encyclopaedia of Islam (8)

As far as this genre is concerned, sīrah was the widest term in circulation. The term tarjamah came also into usage to denote the same meaning as sīrah. "The two words [i.e sīrah and tarjamah] revolve around one and the same connotation: life history."(9)

Perhaps sīrah signifies a detailed annals of an individual's life, tarjamah, by contrast, may indicate a more concise, abbreviated record.(10)

Tarjamah, according to M. Young, "tends to be restricted to shorter biographical notices, while Sirah usually refers to biographies of substantial length."(11)
This differentiation, in point of fact, is more of a personal preference or subjective whim of certain students of this area in literature. There is, however, an objective criterion: "Usage and custom are the final determinant of the sense of each term."(12)

Sirah emerged long before Tarjamah. Its application had religious beginnings.

"The term sirah was first used in literature for the biography of the prophet Muhammad"(13) and for "his Maghāzi"(14). This strictly defined sacred-literary tradition continued for almost four centuries when, "the application of the term, sirah, was expanded to cover the general life of an individual. A case in point, Kashf al-Zunūn argues, is the advent of a multitude of siyar (pl. of sirah) with the rise of the fourth century of Hijra, such as the Sirah of Aḥmad Ibn Ṭūlūn by Ibn al-Dāya, [Aḥmad b. Yūsif (d.334 A.H.) or the Sirah of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn by Ibn Shaddād (d.622 A.H.)." (15)

This indicates a shift from sacred to mundane purposes of the sirah. Apart from this change, neither the method of research nor of presentation was affected. The sirah remained a collection of events related to an individual's life. The method of biographers hardly differed from the method employed by Ḥadīth [prophet's sayings] collectors, or that applied by Ṭabaqāt writers. The basic principle was the so-called isnād, i.e the chain of reliable, oral informants who link the biographer to the time of his subject. Without this chain no detail could ever be reliably ascertained by the biographers or be acceptable to the readership. This was a literate imperative to present the almost oral culture of early Islam when, apart from the Qurʾān, no written record was produced to register the deeds and sayings of the leaders of the Muslim community.
That is why early *sirah* writers began their careers as transmitters and/or tellers of old *Akhbār* (events). Only when they matured, they became collectors/classifiers of biographical information.

Even when *sirah* was expanded, it remained caged within the rigid fetters of *isnad* because "Muslim historians conceived of *sirah* as being a constituent part of history itself."(16)

This conception retained its forceful presence until the beginning of modern times, much to the backwardness (17) of literary *sirah* writing "which had been neglected by every pen."(18)

**Tarjamah**

The term *tarjamah*, on the other hand, had not been presented by classical dictionaries in the sense of *tarikh hayat*. This is quite clear in dictionaries such as *Lisān al-ʿArab* by Ibn Manẓūr, *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* by Majd al-Dīn b. Yaḥyā b. al-Faṭrūzābādī, or *Mukhṭar al-Ṣīḥāh* by Muhammad b. Abī Bakr b. Abī Qādir al-Rāzī. In *Al-Aghānī* by Abī al-Faraj al-ʿAsfahānī, the term *tarjamah* makes no appearance. *Al-Aghānī's* author speaks of *Akhbār* (literally news) and lineages of this or that poet.

The origin of the word proves to be controversial. Modern writers maintain that "the word *tarjamah* is alien; it derived from Aramaic tongue and never has it been in current usage before the beginning of the seventh century of Hijra when Yaḥyā b. ʿAmmār mentioned it in his dictionary as meaning a person's life." (19) Aramaic is a Semitic language. By the end of the 7th Century (A.D.), Syria and Mesopotamia had become thoroughly Aramaized. (20) So why then had the Arabic speaking people spent almost seven centuries before they could adopt an Aramaic word, *tarjamah*? It is not clear on what grounds the idea that the term *tarjamah* was derived from
Aramaic tongue, is founded. Modern dictionaries, however, present the term tarjama, with similar shades of connotations:

In Al-Mu•jam al-Wasit "tarjama of a person is his sirah, his life story. its plural is tarajim."(21)

Al-Munjid hardly differs: "Tarjama is the singular of tarajim: it means: a record of one's sirah, character and lineage."(22)

Muhit al-Muhit refers to the word tarjama as "record of one's sirah, character and lineage."(23) Al-Ra'id dictionary is more concise: "somebody's tarjama is his sirah and life."(24).

Both sirah and tarjama may be conceived as one and the same concept, hence it is relevant to see them both used as synonyms. In its early form, sirah was a historical record which first emerged and developed at the hands of traditional reporters (Rijal al-Hadith) and later at the hands of historians.

Traditional reporters held firm to the aforementioned principle of isnad, chain of informants or transmitters as a condition sine qua non of the authenticity of the Hadith, sayings of the prophet. This isnad is the classical equivalent of the sources of information in modern research techniques. If the sirah came into existence as a method of recording the history of early Islam, it soon went beyond these confines to cover history at large, then to the realm of literature. In the words of Makki, sirah "is a historical work in which historians present the sayings, opinions, companions, masters, verse, prose and role of an individual without much of criticism or analysis. Examples are the Al-Aghani, Mu•jam al-Udabâ', Wafayat al- Ayân and others."(25)
Maghāzī

The term Maghāzī simply means "the expeditions and raids organized by the prophet Muhammad in the Medinan period." (26)

Classical and modern dictionaries gave almost identical meanings for the same word. In Lisān al-ʿArab, we read, "Maghāzī: outstanding actions. instances of conquest." (27) While there is no mention of the word in Mukhtar al-Sīḥāḥ, other dictionaries like Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ, Tāj al-ʿArūs and Al-Munjid, give the same explanation: "outstanding deeds of conquerors [manāqib al-Ghuzat]." (28)

As was the case with sīrah, the term Maghāzī, i.e. military expeditions or conquest, was related to the prophet's first military battles "such as those of Uhud, al-Khandaq, al-Hudaybiyyah, Khaybar, Mecca, Hunayn and Tabīk; Badr is elsewhere styled a ghazwa but not by al-Waqidi." (29)

According to C. Brockelmann, "The first who attempted at recording and classifying the military expeditions of the prophet was the leader of the maghāzī Mūsā b. ʿUqba b. Abī al-ʿAbbās al-Asadi, the protectee of Banī al-Zubair b. al-Awām in Medina (d.141 A.H.)." (30)

The editor of Kitāb al-Maghāzī M.B. Abū Malik challenges Brockelmann's view that the Maghāzī, as a historical-religious genre of writing, were initiated earlier by Urwah b. al-Zubair in his work, Maghāzī Rasūl Allah, (The Military Expeditions of the Messenger of God) (23-94 A.H.), and by Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq (d.152 A.H.) in his work, Al-Sīrah. Both anticipated Mūsā b. ʿUqba. (31)

G. Levi Della Vida also differs with Brockelmann. He maintains that "The oldest author of a book on the biography of Muhammad, Urwa b. al-Zubair (23-94 A.H.)."
is well known as a juristic as a historian, the son of the famous companion of the prophet " (32)

The aim of Maghāzi was to chronicle the formative period of the Muslim polity, in particular the revered symbol of this polity, the messenger of God. And irrespective of who initiated and recorded this genre, the concept is essentially religious and in the service of Islamic doctrine, " It was probably al-Waqidi (d.207/823) who was the first to view Maghāzi and Sirah as fields of study, which were related but could somehow be differentiated - a view in which he was evidently followed by Ibn Sa'd (d.230/845)." (33) Interest in Maghāzi kept its momentum among the second and third generations of Muslim historians for the sake of defending the religious creed.

Tabaqat

Al-Tabaqat is one of the oldest terms in classical Islamic thought. Literally, the term means a " layer, but developed a technical meaning of (generation) or (class) to denote a group of persons who had played some role in history of significance from a religious, scientific, military, artistic or other point of view."(34)

The notion of class or layer was the basis upon which a multitude of works was produced to classify and scrutinize difference of traditional reporters, poets, doctors of religion or any other elitist groups of individuals. In fact, these works on Tabaqat "extended a great service to the collection and study of Hadith (prophet's sayings) since these writings meticulously scrutinized the status, weight, and reliability of Hadith transmitters."(35)

The concept of layers, tabaqat, "originated with the concept of classifying the companions of the prophet. It developed at an early stage of the second Hijra
century when the Ḥadīth codifiers criticized the application of isnād. i.e relating a certain Ḥadīth to the prophet through a chain of informants."(36)

According to this concept, "the prominent figures who criticized the sunna (traditions of the prophet) were classified. The same method of classification was expanded to another type of leaders of the community, such as doctors of religion. Lastly the concept was utilized to arrange historical events themselves as was the case in the history of Islam by al-Dhahabi."(37)

The concept itself allowed for this multi-purpose usage because it had a double meaning. On the one hand, it conveyed a social status, rank or type. On the other, it had a temporal dimension. According to Arabic dictionaries, ṭabaqa means "rank, status or quality" (Marāṭib wa- Aṣnāf), but it also means "a span of time of a century - a community preceding another, or twenty years."(39) This dual meaning would best help the examination of the reliability and value of the reporters of the prophet's traditions according to their rank or their prominence in the prophet's era, or their generational cycles.

Kitab al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr of Ibn Sa'd (d.230/845) is considered the earliest extensive Arabic biographical dictionary, in which its author followed the footsteps of his master and tutor al-Waqidi who had produced his book, Al-Ṭabaqāt, or [al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra] which had a decisive influence on later generations, and had a great impact on Baladhuri's Ansāb al-Ashrīf. (Noble Lineages).

With the passage of time, a host of Tabaqat authors multiplied, such as :

Abū Abd allāh Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d.256/870), the author of Al-Jāmi' al-Sahīḥ.
Abū Muḥammad `Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938), the author of *Kitāb al-Jarh wa-al-Ta’dīl*.

Muḥammad b. Yusuf al-Kindī (d. 350/961), the author of *Wulāt Miṣr wa-Quḍātuha*.

Muhammad b. al-Ḥarīth al-Khushānī (d. 371/981) author of *Qudc7t Qurtubah*. In a later period, there appeared:

*Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā’ al-Shāfi‘īyyah; Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila; Ṭabaqāt al-Atibba’ wa-al-Ḥukama’*, which contained biographies and ranking of different doctors of religion and jurists from different sunni schools of law.

As for poets, *Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Sha‘rār* by Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī (d. 232-847) "was the first of its kind in the realm of literature."(40) Other volumes on this topic, *Al-Shīr wa-al-Shu‘arā’* by Ibn Qutaiba (d. 276/889), *Yatīmat al-Dahr fi Maḥāsin ahl al-‘Aṣr* by Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad al-Tha‘alībī (d. 429/1038), *Al-Aghānī* by Abī al-Faraj al-Asfahānī (d. 356/967), followed.

It was obvious that as from "the second century of Hijra, ṭabaqāt volumes of general nature were going hand in hand with ṭabaqāt books on poets and their verse."(41) Relevant methods applied by the Greeks were introduced to the Arab intellectual life at a later period when Translation were already known.

**Ansāb**

Unlike the previous terms, Ansāb is almost unanimously and uniformly defined whether in antiquity or at present. It simply means descent or better still blood kinship.(42) This concept has, as a matter of course, a tremendous value among Arabs before and after the advent of Islam. Tribes and clans were the natural social organization of the time. As Arabs built their empire under the banner of Islam, they acquired the status of a warrior-nobility. *Quraish*, the larger clan from which the
prophet Muhammad descended, ranked supreme among different Islamic schools and groups. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that volumes upon volumes were produced to keep records of lineages and descent, above all of noble tribes. Abd al-Rahman Utba noted how numerous these lineage-centred writings are and singled out the most prominent among them: Jamharat Ansab al-Arab of al-Kalbi, Nasab Quraish of al-Zubairi, Jamharat Nasab Quraish of al-Zubair b. Bakkar, Ansab al-Ashraf of al-Baladhuri, Al-Ansab of al-Samani, Al-Lubab fi Tahdib al-Ansab of Ibn al-Athir, Nihayat al-Arab fi Ma’arifat Ansab al-Arab of al-Qalqashandi, and a host of others. (43)

Under Islam noble descent became a source of political legitimacy and religious veneration. It was the line through which sublime attributes of knowledge, wisdom, leadership and divine mediation powers would be transmitted to male offspring. In a word: "The political importance of Quraish", "the communal veneration of Ali" (The third Caliph and Muhammad's paternal cousin and son in law) " and the age-old importance of Arab tribes together with the pride the rulers and nobility (Hukkam wa-Ashraf) took in their ancestry, all this contributed to the constant study of lineages and the appearance of numerous volumes on the topic." (44)

Religious, political and social aspects combined to enhance this tendency. The right to rule was restricted by Muslim jurists to Quraish. Political legitimacy was thus based on noble breeding. With it came the right of the ruler to collect religious taxes (zakat) on behalf of the community; whereas the noble descendants from Quraish had the right to another religious tax, the Khums, (fifth).

Apart from this, lineage writings were also linked with the study of Hadith for purely jurisprudential ends. At one point, Ansab records overlapped with the tarajim.
Hence biographical sketches of tarajim were reinforced by Ansāb: "The lineage theory overwhelmed the conception of human relations. It was considered the prime mover of history. Thus lineage aspects penetrated the writings on tarajim." (45)

Manāqib

Like maghāzi and sīrah, Manāqib is a term specifying a genre of writings on the virtues of the prophet and, later on, the saints and other religious figures. The interpretation of the word in various, classical and modern dictionaries, is not dissimilar.

Al-Qāmūs al-Muhūt indicates that "Manqaba (s. of manāqib) is a proud deed (Mafkharā)."(46) Lisān al-ʿArab gives a more personified equivalent: "Manāqib: ethics (Akhlāq)" but ethics here is not neutral but a positive attribute in the sense of sublime ethics.(47) Muhīt al-Muhīt stresses the previous connotation in clear terms: "Man's manāqib is his fine qualities and ethics."(48) Al-Munjid retains only one meaning "manqaba is the outstanding deed (Mafkharā)."(49) Taj al-ʿArūs combines the two aspects; "Manqaba is the outstanding deed and fine ethics"(50) [of a person]. Only Mukhtar al-Sihāḥ drops the word altogether.

According to this definition by classical Arabic lexicons, it can be safely inferred that the concept was applicable to certain biographical writings. In fact Manāqib is, in the words of M. Young, "a word which frequently appears in the title of biographies which are intended to present a portrait of a morally admirable person, together with a recital of his outstanding actions and achievements."(51)

The term Manāqib ranges from personal moral virtues, such as excellence (Faḍāl) or fine ethics (Akhlāq), to remarkable achievements (Mafākhir) or outstanding
accomplishments (Ma'athir) which are a source of pride, dignity and honour. The Manaqib writings were linked to the prophet but their arena was broadened to such an extent that the Manaqib appeared, during the early centuries of Islam "in the titles of individual biographies or of biographical compilations."(52), such as:

* Fad'il ashab al-Nabi* by al-Bukhari (d.256/870)
* Manaqib Baghdadi* by Ibn al-Jawzi (d.597/1200)
* Al-Najm al-Thaqib fi ashraf al-Manaqib* by Ibn 'Arabi (d.638/1240). (53)
* Rawdat al-Tarif fi Mafakhir Mawlana Ismail b. al-Sharif* by Ifrani (d.1156 or 1157/1743-5)
* Kitab Akhlaq al-Nabi* by Ibn Manzur (d. 711/1312).

The principal aim of Manaqib "is to offer the reader a moral portrait and information on the noble actions of the individuals who constitutes their subject or on the superior merits of a certain group."(54) This view is reminiscent of what M. Young maintained.(55)

**b. Comparative Analysis**

The presence of six terms all relating to biography, portraits and biographical sketches find its explanation in the methodological need to classify events on the basis of their nature, Maghazi for military actions, conquest and battles, Manaqib for moral of the companions of the prophet (notably Hadith reporters) or later Saints and doctors of religion, Tabaqat for generational sequence or rank and status, Ansab to establish noble lineages; Siyar and Tarajim for wider biographical contexts.

These conceptual terms are complementary to each other. As part of a historical-religious genre of writing, they all sprang from religious needs to preserve doctrinal, orally transmitted texts and glorify the religious symbol (the person of the prophet).
The glorious exaltation was a common feature to these writings from ‘Urwa b. al-Zubair, to Ibn Ishaq, Musa b. ‘Uqba, al-Waqidi, Ibn Hisam and Ibn Sa‘d and others. The interconnection between these forms was established by the fact that they revolved around the life events of the prophet, whose expeditions were told apart from other actions or aspects of his activity.

The sirah achieves the same ends by recording the distinguished accomplishments of prominent figures in Muslim society. The shift in the usage of these biographical categories reflects a socio-political and cultural change, namely from the Arabian based early polity of Islam in Mecca and Medina, to a larger Islamic empire beyond the confines of Arabia. The old Quraish setting had its own social and tribal hierarchies, the new setting had a different stratification although in theory all Muslims were equal before divinity.

c. Characteristics of Medieval Arabic Biography

The historical sense among the Arabs was deepened by the Qur'an which related and relayed accounts of earlier nations.(56) Perhaps this is the main source of the Arabs’ focus on history and recording of past events down to the tiniest detail. The massive number of chronicles, annals and journals accumulated by Arabs testifies that "books of biography and personal portraits reached a level never attained by the Greek or the Roman."(57)

The prophet’s sirah was "The first written historical work by Arabs."(58), and it represented one method of "collecting Muhammad's traditions [sayings and deeds], and having them codified at the hands of transmitters of Hadith."(59) Urwa b. al-Zubair, (23-94 A.H.), was "the first author of a book on the biography of Muhammad".(60) In his record, al-Zubair relied upon oral transmission. He was
followed by a host of other biographers of the prophet, such as 'Ibban b. 'Uthmān (22-105 A.H.), Shurāhbil b. Sa'd (d. 122 or 123 A.H.), 'Āsim b. Umar b. Qatīda (d. between 119-129 A.H.), Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri (51-129 A.H.), Musa b. Uqba (d. 141 A.H.) "who had a very marked influence on all later Tradition." (61), Muhammad b. Ishāq (d. 152 A.H.), al-Waqīdī (d. 207 A.H.), Muhammad b. Sa'd (d. 230 A.H.) and Ibn Hishām (d. 218 A.H.).

We received the best form of the prophet's biography in *Al- Sirah Al-Nabawiyya* by Abd al-Malik b. Hishām who had relied on a previous *sirah* written by Ibn Ishāq. (62) Credit was Ibn Ishāq's indeed. He was a keen observer and tradition collector and codifier. For the sake of brevity, he dropped the long chains of transmitters (*Asānīd*), but he did not scrutinize any verse related to Muhammad's biography. His rivals severely criticized the latter flaw. Ibn Ishāq "found himself forced to give up teaching in Medina and to settle in Iraq." (63)

Ibn Hishām, by contrast, was more cautious and scrupulous than his master, Ibn Ishāq. Hence he scrutinized available records, omitting what seemed flawed, abbreviating loose presentations, and the like. The personality of prophet Muhammad was thus one major theme of biography and biographers from that time down to modern times.

Biography writing and methods underwent two developments. The first development took place in the third Hijra century, when the concept of the *Sirah* shifted from the particular to the general, that is from revolving exclusively around the life and deeds of prophet Muhammad, to covering generally the lives of other great men and leaders, such as *Sirat Ahmad b. Tulun* written by Ahmad b. Yusuf b. al-Daya. (64) This trend continued in the centuries that followed.
The second development came in the seventh and eighth centuries. The sirah written on the leaders of the past was replaced by the sirah of living monarchs and rulers. A sirah of this new type was written by Baha' al-Din Yusuf b. Rafi' b. Shaddad (d.632/1234) under the title: Al-Nawadir al-Sultaniyyah wa-al-Mahasin al-Yusufiyah, on the achievements of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (d.589/1193) (65). This was followed by similar biographies, for example the biography of Taimur lane, the mongol monarch, which was written by Ibn 'Arab Shah (d.845), titled: Ajab al-Maqdur fi Akhbar Taimur. This type was confined, then, to the biographies of rulers and monarchs, but on the whole, they "did not go beyond the traditional recording of events, virtues and achievements of the person in question." (66) If history is "the biographies of great men" (67), then perhaps it is relevant to categorize this type as historical biography.

At the very beginning, sirah was developed by tradition collectors and transmitters and came to form a part of history. There are certain scholars who still consider that sirah was part of history writing. Others, however, think that sirah had gained independence, although it could not go deep into the life of the individual in question. In its classical stage, sirah took many forms. In addition to individual biographies, there were the biographical dictionaries which "developed simultaneously in close association with historical composition." (68); and as M. Young put it, "it (was) developed in close association with the study of Hadith, because it was important to Muslims to know who the transmitters of Hadith were, and the study of the details of their lives would provide evidence of their degrees of trustworthiness." (69)

This type of biography, which emerged two centuries after the death of prophet Muhammad, surpassed its match in other cultures.
Biographical dictionaries had different forms and varying volumes and covered the lives of Muslims, Christians and Jews, such as:

a. General biographical dictionaries; arranged on the basis of the year of death. This general type would "cover a group of individuals who are different in terms of occupation, class, status and the like, but are considered equals in terms of worthiness which merits recording." (70) Examples of this type are ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Muḥammad b. al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181) in his *Nuzhat al-ʿAbbāsī fi Tabaqāt al-Udaba‘* [Recreation of the intelligent regarding the Classes of Authors], Yaqūt b. ʿAbd Allah al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) in his *Irshād al-Ārīb ila Maʿrifat al-ʿAdīb* (A Guide to the intelligent towards the Knowledge of the Men of Letters) and Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. Khallikān (d. 681/1282) in his *Wafayāt al-ʿAyn wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-Zamān* (Obituaries of Eminent Men and Notices on the Sons of the Epoch), which was arranged alphabetically and included 800 entries. (71)

b. There are other biographical dictionaries which are confined to a certain period, usually a century, or even centuries, recording the lives of prominent pen-men in specific era. Among them were ‘Abd al-Malik b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿalibī the first to include in his *Yatīmat al-Dahr fī Maḥāsin ahl al-ʿasr* [The Unique Pearl of the Age on the Beauties of the People of the time], an anthology of the poets of the 4th century of Hijra, (72), and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAṣqalānī (d. 852 A.H.) in his *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fī Aṣyān al-Maʿālīt al-Thāmina* [The Hidden Jewels of the Notables of the Eighth Hundred].
c. A third type was the biographical dictionary classified on an annual basis. Celebrities were mentioned year by year. The difficulty in this form of classification lies in the fact that the specific year of death should be given in advance. (73) Ibn Shākir al-Kutubi (d. 764 A.H.) in his *Uyun al-Tawārikh* [Springs of Histories] put such a record which covered a long period ending in the year 760 A.H.

There are also biographical dictionaries of cities and countries such as *Tarikh Baghdad* (The History of Baghdad) by Abū Bakr Aḥmad b.ʿAlī (d. 463/1071), known as al-Khaṭib al-Baghdādi. "This multi-volume work consists of topographical, cultural introduction to the city of Baghdad, followed by biographies of scholars who grew up in the city or settled there from elsewhere." (74). Another example is Abū al-Qāsim ʿAlī b. al-Hasan b.ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176) in his *Tarikh Dimashq* (The History of Damascus). This type also included books which covered the biographies of monuments and edifices, that is "short or long biographies of the men who had built these monuments and edifices." (75), such as, *Al-Mawāriz wa-al-ʾibār bi-Dhikr al-Khitat wa-al-athār*, [Lessons and Admonition through the Remembrance of Monuments and Edifices] by Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441). Through his schematic description of the buildings and constructions he would present "biographies of those who initiated these structures." (76)

ʿAlī Mubarak in his *Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyah* described Cairo with its streets, neighbourhoods, mosques, schools and districts, and gave reference to the city's notables, jurists, scientists and pen-men. (77)
e. Among biographical dictionaries we find the so-called *Tabaqāt* [layers].

f. On the other hand, there were volumes confined to poets we may call it literary biographical dictionaries. This type appeared in the second century of Hijra. Their authors were clearly influenced by transmitters of *Hadīth*, and they focused on illustrious Arab poets, their tribal lineage, the best pieces they had created, evaluating and arranging them in a hierarchical order.

An example of this sort is *Tabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shuʿārā* [The Classes of Mature Poets] by Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Sallām b. ʿUbayd Allāh b. Sallām al-Gumahī (139/756-232/847). The author collected entries of 114 poets, arranging them in a vertical order according to their value and rank in comparative and superlative poetical terms. As a rule, the author begins with lineage, then moves on to the opinions expressed by different critics of their poetry supported by examples or evidence.

Another example is *Al-Shīr wa-al-Shuʿārā* by Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh b. Muslim, known as Ibn Qutaybah (213/828-276/889), which, in the words of its author, is a book "on poets, their times, fate, circumstances, verse, tribal affiliation, their fathers' names, their epithets, titles, their records and best verse." The book concentrates only on the celebrities among the poets "with, apparently, no consistent method of selection or presentation, for it begins with pre-Islam poets, then Muslim poets. The so-called veterans is included in both these categories."

*Al-Aghānī* [Songs] by Abū al-Faraj ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad, known as Abū al-Faraj al-ʿAsfahānī (284/897-356/967), was meant to present one hundred songs
which the Caliph, Harun al-Rashid, had asked his entertainer, Ibrahim al-Mawsili, to select for him. This volume "attributed each song mentioned to its original author and composer, specifying the method of playing the notes and the rhythms employed." (83) The author relied on oral information, and the melodies were subjectively appreciated in order to please every taste. (84) The approach applied in these biographical dictionaries differs little from the methodology employed by predecessors or successors. These dictionaries were more of a traditional literary biography with whose norms and forms modern writers were, so to speak, relatively influenced.

Apart from the general and literary types, a third mode of biography writing emerged, which may be termed as folkloric biography. This mode, "goes beyond the historical narratives into an imaginative creation of dramatic situations and events. It resembles a historical novel, on the one hand, and the epic or heroic, on the other." (85) This type was, relatively speaking, a latecomer. It consisted of "a host of fiction stories and adventures of a single persona, such as the adventures of Antara. This may have led to the development of the so-called fictional biography. (86)

These are the main forms or types of biographies which appeared, matured and lived on in the period under consideration. The needs to create these types were almost similar: the desire to record and preserve the achievements made by all men and women who contributed to the Islamic history. Diverse as the topics of these texts are, the biographers engaged in only one fixed method. The main feature they had in common is their emphasis "on the outer events rather than the mental development of the person's life." (87)
Individual biographies and biographical dictionaries were different but, "not in the sense of a development in the structure of (the) method, or an improved technique of analysis or characterization."(88)

In short, the majority of the medieval Arabic biographies are part of history and, "there is no evidence of any attempt to create a literary organization of these materials."(89) Thus literary biography has, literally, remained practically untouched by biographers.(90)

d. Previous Critical Works on Arabic Biography

Modern Arabic biography is a literary genre which has received little attention from either Arab critics or orientalist scholars. There are few exceptions, various scattered essays and a few books, which fall short of covering the whole range of such a vast literary genre such as biography. Orientalists focused, in a limited number of essays, on medieval Arabic biography. This has been reviewed in the third section of this part.(91)

As for Arab critics, their studies in this field are insufficient in number compared to works on drama, poetry or the novel. These studies may be classified into two types, theoretical and practical (case-study). Theoretical works, either books or chapters in volumes, are very scarce. The books are fewer than the fingers of one hand; the essays are only little more than that. Books that took on case-studies, however, focused, with some reservation, on al-'Aqqād and Tāhā Husayn.

In these writings, however, there was a great deal of recycling of materials and views, recurrent quotations from the Encyclopaedia Britanaica or Encyclopaedia of Islam and repeated excerpts from English literature. No concise, or standard
definition (or definitions) of the meaning of ʿṣīrah was offered let alone the
differentiation of ʿṣīrah from tarjamah. Both terms were, in the majority of cases,
used as synonyms; only a few writers marked off the two terms on a quantitative
basis, the tarjamah was short, the ʿṣīrah was long. (92)
The definition of ʿṣīrah, when offered, was specified as being part of historical
writing (93), or as first and foremost a literary text relying, only partly, on
history. (94) Or, ʿṣīrah is a literary genre of a historical character. (95) Or ʿṣīrah is the
study of the life of an individual in order to depict an accurate image of his
personality. (96)

The most confusing concept is the insistence of some writers that the term tarjamah
was not used in Arabic literature before the seventh century of Hijra, that the word
was borrowed from Aramean. This view was time and again recycled without any
historical evidence. (97)

Perhaps Mahir Hasan Fahmi's Al-Ṣīrah Tarikh wa-Fann, [Al-Ṣīrah as History and
Art] is the most important source which anatomized the art of ʿṣīrah as a literary
genre. Perhaps Fahmi is the only critic who specified the basic fundamentals of this
genre on which biographers may have to rely for a long period to come. He
conceives of ʿṣīrah not as a literary genre in itself, but attributes its literary nature to
its dramatic context rather than its subject. (98)

I premised my remarks on the concept defined by Leon Edel who inferred that a
biography would be considered a literary one if and when it portrays the life of a
writer, or in his words, "it is my intention to focus in particular on a specialized
branch of biography- the writing of lives of men and women who were themselves
writers." (99)
e. Biographical Works In Egypt

The biographies that appeared during the first half of the 20th century in Egypt might well be summed up in three major long biographies and six short ones.

Firstly, the majority of the works could not differentiate between the literary study and the traditional biography (presenting a simple synopsis of the life passage of a certain individual). This confusion surfaced in most of the writings by those who took Arabic literature and its history as their topic, from Jurji Zaydan down to Abū Shādi. This type, however, is a mere continuation of the Arabic traditional biographies, the books of classes (Tabaqāt) and of lauding virtues (Manāqib).

The second type thrived on the new social and political developments in the Egyptian society, the beginning of which is exemplified by the foundation of the Al-Jāmi' at al-Maṣriyyah (Egyptian University), 1908, later called Cairo University, and the new styles of literary research this university introduced (it should be mentioned that the Dar Al-50i7m had already achieved this precedence by sending one of its students, Hasan Tawfīq al-Adl, (1862-1904)(100) to study in Germany under the auspices of the senior German Orientalist Carl Brockelmann).

This kind of study endeavoured to introduce Western critical methods into modern Arabic literature. This has led to the appearance of certain writings that might well be considered the first blossom of the literary critical biography, although the authors lacked the very materials necessary for any literary biographer: letters, diaries, habits, tastes, etc. They had to rely solely on what had been jotted down in traditional biographical dictionaries such as Al-Aghānī (songs) by Abī al-Faraj al-Asfahānī and al-Lqd Al-Fard (the lexicon of writers) by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbihi.
Weighed in literary terms, this type is nearer to the literary critical biography. Ţaha Ḥusayn, al-Aqqād, al-Māzinī, Zakī Mubārak, Abd al- Raḥmān Ṣidqī and al-Nuwalḥī are among the first precursor in this field who have different methods ranging from the historical to the psychological or social approach.

The third type resembled the novel. It is called the "rounded biography"(101), revolving around an individual and depicting his human emotions and passions. What helps the biographer is that he had cohabited the individual in question, had closely known him, had watched and studied his character, his likes and dislikes, his piths and marrows, his esoteric and exoteric features, and discussed details such as whether or not he suffered from schizophrenia, or if he still harboured the agony of the first failed love. Example of this latter type may well be represented by Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Iṣrāyān in his Biography on al-Rāfiʾ i, and Abd al- Raḥmān Ṣidqī in his two biographies of Abū Nuwās and Baudelaire.

The other six short biographies are:

1. Profile (Sūrah Ḥānibiyah), a brief article to introduce a unique character, with a description of his intellectual and moral qualities and a list of his works.(102)

2. Sketch (Rasm Takhtīṭi), a brief summary of a specific subject,(103) and it could be a short piece of prose and usually of a descriptive kind.(104)

3. Monograph (Maqalah Uhadiyyat al-Maudūʾ), an essay or treatise on a particular subject.(105)

4. Commemorative Biography (Sūrah Tīzkāriyāh), an article to preserve the memory of some person.

5. Miniature (Rasm Munāmīn), a miniscript illumination which gives a minute description.
Portrait (Ṣūrah), an article which gives a vivid description in words of a famous man.

These were the literary genres which developed in Egypt. At times there was a plethora of such productions. At other times, they were scarce indeed.

The reason why this art, literary biography, did not well develop may be attributable to the fact that the intellectual atmosphere in the first half of this century was still unfavourable yet for engagement in biography writing. Perhaps circumstances encouraged the translations of more inviting literary genres: poetry, dramas and novels. Speaking of literary biographies was to indulge in the mysteriously untold.

The writings by Ṭāḥa Ḥusayn, al-ʾAqqād, al- Māzīnī or al- Nuwāňi, Mubārak and Șīd𝑞ī in this field were mere preliminary experimentations. They employed the modern European methodology of critical studies, relying, as they were, on the examination of the verse of the poet under consideration. This, as a matter of course, is an insufficient analytical tool for a biographical study, because poetry in itself represents a particular emotional vision of its author at a specific moment. Poetry can not be representational of reality as it is. It typifies, reconstructs this reality through definite, demonstrative sentiments. There would always be a missing part or parts, say the phase of childhood which is of paramount importance since it would explain the innermost, hidden determinant sensibilities and experiences which mould the poet's psyche.

The traditional aim of the literary biographer is to discover, define and depict the mind as well as the life of the artist (106) but the ideal biographer "must be endowed with industry, sympathy, judgement, and some literary capacity, qualities diverse
and seldom united in one person. On the other hand, his creative imagination must be held in severe check." (107)

Biography is a study aimed at portraying or analysing the life of a human persona distinguished by depth of thought or great achievements. It tries to bring the emotional temperaments and ethical qualities of the personality under consideration. To grasp these features, biographies tend to examine facts and circumstances relevant to the life of the person and how they influenced his behaviour and work. This examination may reach out for the general social milieu and the historical atmosphere under which the figure under consideration developed and from which were drawn many of his or her ideals, tendencies and tastes. The latter part would be a necessary complement to any biographical work. (108)

Unlike the classical mode, modern biographies do not focus on the hero or the ideal in the figure portrayed but probe the human himself. Instead of apology in the classical biography, there is in the modern form a deep dissection of the material and intellectual reality, a profound analysis of the various human aspects irrespective of their bad or good, simple or complex, deep or superficial, nature. "If the old biographer was a critic or an ethical judge, in modern times he should be a psychological novelist." (109)

The biographer should command extensive knowledge of the relevant facts and documents, to examine the circumstances and background of the individual under consideration. In addition, the biographer should enjoy a highly developed organizational efficiency, keen powers of observation and minute analytical capacity which would allow him or her to build into one integrated whole the development of
events, psychological transformation. material and intellectual traits of the character under study.(110)
Notes


15. Ibid., p. 30.
22. L. Ma’luf, Al-Munjîd, p. 60.
33. M. Hinds, op. cit., p. 1161.
   Ābd al-Ghani Ḩasan, op. cit., p. 55.
40. Ābd al-Ghani Ḩasan, op. cit., p. 64.
41A. Ibid., p. 153.
44. F. Rosenthal, op. cit., 140.
45. Ibid., p. 141.
46. Al-Fāruzābādī, op. cit., Vol 1, p. 139.
49. L. Maʿluf, op. cit., p. 829.
53. Ibid., pp. 349-351 [q.v.].
54. Ibid., p. 357.
56. I. Ābbās, op. cit., p. 12.
58. Ibid., p. 31.
59. Ābd al-Ghani Ḩasan, op. cit., p. 31.
60. G. Levi Della Vida, op. cit., p. 441.
61. Ibid., p. 442.
64. "Abd al-Ghani Ḥasan, op. cit., p. 28.
65. Ibid., p. 30.
66. Ibid., p. 31.
67. H. F. Al-Najjar, op. cit., p. 31 [quoted from Plutarch].
71. M. J. L. Young, op. cit., 175 and "Abd al-Ghani Ḥasan, op. cit., p. 44.
73. Ibid., pp. 50-51.
76. Ibid., p. 53.
77. Ibid., p. 53.
78. See Term *Tabaqāt* in this chapter, pp. 18-20.
80. Ibid., p. 165.
81. Ibid., p. 241.
82. Ibid., p. 246.
83. Ibid., p. 261.
84. Ibid., p. 265.
86. I. Ṣabbās, op. cit., p. 28.


97. See Term *Tarjamaḥ*, pp. 15-16.


109. Ibid., p. 523.

110. Ibid., p. 524.
CHAPTER II

The Development of Biography writing in the Nineteenth Century

Introduction

a. Al-Jabarti

b. Şalih Majdi

c. Alî Mubarak
Introduction

The expedition of Napoleon to Egypt (1798-1801) was the turning point in the modern intellectual history of the country. It led to the discovery by Egyptians of European literature (1) and the reforms of Egyptian education which were undertaken by Muḥammad ʿAlī.(2) The development of the translation (3) movement went hand in hand with the developments which took place in the Egyptian educational system.

Muḥammad ʿAlī's main motive behind his reform activity was the creation of a strong state.(4) To do this lessons had to be learned from the Europeans, and hence the missions to Europe were "as varied as Muḥammed ʿAlī's ambitious schemes."(5) A prime aim of educational activity was the translation into Arabic of those works in European languages (mainly French, Italian and English) which were seen as embodying the technical and scientific progress in which Europe had outstripped the lands of Islam,(6) but this did not exclude the translation of literary, including historical works from Western languages.

Rifāʿah al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), who had spent five years in France as a member of the mission of 1826, and had made good use of that time in studying and observing, was made director of the school of translation.(7) This institution was founded in 1835 in Cairo.(8)

Among the few works of belles-lettres translated were Fênélon's Télémâque (translated by al-Ṭahṭawi, and published in two editions in 1777 and 1867), Molière's Tartuffe (translated by ʿUthmān Jalāl under the title, Riwāyat al-Shaykh Matlūf, published in 1850) and La Fontaine's Fables (also translated by ʿUthmān Jalāl in 1850 under the title, al-ʿUyun al-yawaqqī fī al-amthāl wa-al-Mawāṣīz).(9)

Biography played a little part in the early translation movement, but it did find a place to some extent in the historical works which were translated, such as Taʾrikh Mulūk Faransa, Taʾrikh Itāliya (10) and others.
All of these contained some biographical writing, but "Biographical dictionaries published at that time bear witness, implicitly or explicitly, to broadly the same conservative taste."(11) Of indirect importance to the composition of modern biographies was the enrichment of Arabic stylistic possibilities by a new form of Arabic prose.(12)


The earliest Arabic work of the Nineteenth Century which contains a significant amount of biographical writing is al-Jabarti's history of Egypt ʿAjāʾib al-Athār fī al-Tarājim wa-al-akhbār.(14) ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. Hasan al-jabarti was born in Cairo.(15) His family came originally from the village of al-Jabart, near the Red Sea port of Zayla' - an area that was a dependency of the Abyssinian Negus and noted for the extreme piety of its inhabitants. Around the turn of the sixteenth century, ʿAbd al-Rahmān, seventh grandfather of our historian, emigrated to Egypt and became Shaykh of the jabarti riwāq in Al-Azhar, an office which then passed from father to son.(16)

Shaykh Hasan the father of our historian was one of the most learned men of his time, both in theology and in mathematics. Apart from this, he had a good command of Persian and Turkish.(17) So, al-Jabarti was brought up in an academic atmosphere, and had inherited enough wealth from his father to allow him to devote all his efforts to learning.(18)

Al-jabarti wrote three, historical works: (1) ʿAjāʾib al-Athār fī al-Tarājim wa-al-akhbār; (2) Mazhar al-Taqdis bi-Dhihāb al-Faransīs; (3) Taʿrīkh Muddat al-Faransīs bi-Misr.(19)
Al-Jabarti started to prepare the drafts of his book *Ajā'īb before the arrival of the French expedition. In the introduction he states that he has not only dealt with historical events in Egypt in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries of the Hijra, but has also included short biographies of notable persons (ašrān). "I have written drafts of the events of the closing year of the Twelfth Century (A.H) and the first quarter of the Thirteenth. I have collected part of the material in a general way, while the rest I have put down in great detail. Most of these events took place in my time and I had a chance of witnessing them. To these I added more which I got by hearsay or learned from old people. Besides this I have added the biographies of men of distinction; Ulama' or rulers. I have also included some of their news and affairs and some dates of their births and deaths. I have put all this material, after arranging it chronologically, on cards and in an orderly manner."(20)

*Ajā'īb covers the period from (1106-1236 A.H.), giving details and precise dates "In dealing with authors, he quotes from their works, sometimes at length."(21) These biographical notices are composed in the traditional style of the Abbasid period, and resemble notices to be found in works of Tabaqāt and Manāqib. Al-jabarti's style was in fact generally poor, reflecting the decline in literary standards that had started in Mamluk Times.(22) He includes biographies such as *Faṣl fi Tarājim al-Shuyukh (23), *Faṣl fi Tarājim al-Umarā' (24), and those who died during these years. Al-jabarti on the other hand has been considered, according to David Ayalon as "one of the greatest historians of the Muslim world of all times, and by far the greatest historian of the Arab world in modern time."(25)

b. Ṣalih Majdī (1827-1881) (26)

His grandfather was from Mecca (27) but Ṣalih Majdī was born in the village of Abū Radjwān in the province of Giza in 1242 A.H (1827 A.D.) he joined the Ḥelwān
School from which he was chosen. In the same way as his colleague Abū al-Su'ūd, he became a student at the Alsun School in 1252A.H. (1836A.D.),(28) so Ṣalih was one of the members of the Qalam al-Tarjamah, a school which was headed by al-Ṭahṭawi. He spent many years as a student and friend of al-Ṭahṭawi and this enabled him to write his biography, *Hilyat al-Zaman bi- Manāqib Khādim al-Wātan* (29) which appears to be the first full length Arabic biography of the nineteenth century. His debt to Rifā'ah is not to be underestimated. It was the French and Arabic education which he received at the Alsun School that made him eligible for work in the higher school of engineering during the reigns of Muḥammad ʻAlī and ʻAbbas 1, while his legal education in the same school qualified him to be entrusted with the translation of laws and to be appointed as a judge at the time of ʻIsmā'īl.(30) This explains Majdi's devotion to his professor. Among all Rifā'ah's pupils Majdi was the only one to write a biography of him after his death.(31)

c. ʻAlī Mubārak (1824-1893)(32)

ʻAlī Mubārak was born in 1823 in the small Delta village of Birnibāl al-jadīdah (Daqahliyyah province).(33) His family was not wealthy and like most Egyptian boys, he received his primary schooling in the village *kuttāb.* (34) His excellence in this early stage led to his selection for a place at the Cairo Secondary School *al-Qaṣr al-ʻAynī.* (35)

In 1844 Mubārak had the good fortune to be chosen to accompany Muḥammad ʻAlī's sons on an educational mission to Paris. He spent about five years in France studying mainly military science in Paris and Metz. In 1850, following the death of Muḥammad ʻAlī, the entire mission was called back to Egypt.(36) His knowledge of European affairs was almost as broad as al-Ṭahṭawi's after his five year stay in France.(37) ʻAlī Mubārak was an outstanding government official who passed
through the schools of Muhammad Ali, studied in France and thereafter served Egypt as an administrator and engineer, and also as a teacher and organiser of schools. (38)

He had an inquiring and practical mind and was distinguished by the warm interest he took in his work and his students. He was appointed wakil (Secretary) of the Schools Department on 12 October 1867, and several times thereafter became director of the department. Under his chairmanship a committee including Ulama and notables from outside the government service, elaborated the primary school law of 1868, which was superior to that proposed by the Chamber of Deputies. (39)

In 1871 he was instrumental in founding the Dar al-Ulum in Cairo, and in 1881 the Dar al-Kutub.

Although 'Ali Mubarak's culture was that of a military engineer, and although he wrote a good deal on engineering and other subjects, he had a great inclination for the study of history and it was on an historical subject that he wrote a book of lasting value and indeed the best of his books. It is Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyah al-jadida li-Misr al-Qahirah wa-Muduniha wa-Biladiha al-Qadima wa-al-Shahira (20 volumes, 1888-1889). (40)

Al-Khitat was his most important published work. This is a topographical history of Egypt with emphasis on Cairo, and contains a mass of detail on the streets, Mosques and public buildings of the capital. In addition it abounds with biographical notices of prominent Egyptians and local worthies, including scholars, poets, authors, sufis, faqīhs and political figures. (41) Altogether the work contains 1,108 such biographical notices and also has several notices of non-Muslim figures. 'Ali Mubarak also includes his own autobiography in Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyah.

Mubarak took al-Maqrizi's book (42) as a basis and starting point for his Khitat. (43) and as Brugman put it "This work, obviously set up as a Second Maqrizi, is an
elaborate Topography of Egypt in twenty volumes, with many digressions on her history as well as numerous biographical notes."(44) He had consulted the old Arabic references and his good knowledge of the French language enabled him to read the writings of modern European authors and orientalists who deal with Egyptian history.(45)

In his introduction of al-Khitat he says, "I collected and consulted the writings of Arabs and Europeans who have toured these places and their drawings in which they showed the boundaries of this country."(46)

Al-Khitat will remain one of the most important references ever on the history of Egypt, and the main source for the biographies of the men who made the history of Modern Egypt.(47) "Ali Mubarak was the first biographer in modern Egypt who wrote all these biographies, but still in traditional Arabic style similar to al-Dhahabi, al-Suyuti and, in particular, al-Maqrizi.

He often does not give the source of his information, making it difficult to check its accuracy. This common failing dated back to the Medieval Muslim historians.(48) In these respects, al-Khitat was very traditional.

Among the biographical notices of literary figures in al-Khitat are the father of the historian, Hasan al-Jabarti,(49) Salih Majdi,(50) and Plutarch,(51) who are all presented in the same manner.

"Ali Mubarak apart from al-jabarti, "was the only person in nineteenth century Egypt who wrote a monumental historical (or to be more exact, biographical-Topographical) work, al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyah."(52)

Although there was a not inconsiderable amount of biographical writing in Arabic in Egypt in the nineteenth century, it was mainly a continuation of traditional collective
biography. It was still characterised by a close association with historical writing, and there is little indication in it of European influence.

Biographies during the nineteenth century, in the main, were simple, others rhetorical, but as time went on, biographers tended to concentrate more on matter than manner. (53)
NOTES

3. Abū Lughod, op. cit., p. 46.
5. Abū Lughod, op. cit., p. 35.
6. For the growing Muslim awareness of the danger posed by the scientific progress of Europe, see, eg, B. Lewis, The Muslim Discovery of Europe, p. 168.
10. Abū Lughod, op. cit., p. 50.
29. I have been unable to trace a copy of this little-known work.
31. El-Shayyāl, op. cit., p. 46.
42. Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqīzī author of *Al-Mawāṣa wa-al-ḥiṣāb bi-dhikr al-khīṭat wa-al-athār*
44. J. Brugman, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*, p. 67

45. El-Shayyal, op. cit., p. 50.


47. El-Shayyal, p. 51.


50. ‘Ali Mubarak, op. cit., p. 64.


CHAPTER III

Traditional Literary Biography of the First half of the Twentieth Century

Introduction

a. ɊuɊi Zaydān
b. Ḥasan al-Sandūbī
c. Ʉḥmād Taymūr
d. ɏayy Ziyāda
e. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal
f. Ʉḥmād Ɂamin
g. İbrahīm Nājī
h. Ʉḥmād Ḥasan al-Zayyāt
i. Zākī Muḥammad Mujāhid
j. Ʉḥmād Zākī Abū Shādi

* The works of each author were arranged in Chronological order according to the Time of Publishing.
Introduction

In this chapter I shall give a critical analysis of some, rather than all, of the biographers, because it was too difficult to lay my hands on all the writings of certain authors.

We shall see that some of the biographers published their biographies under different titles: *The History of Arabic Literature*, *The Great Literary Figures*, *Contemporary Poets*, *Pioneers of Poetry* and the like.

a. Jurji Zaydan (1861-1914) (1)

Born in Beirut in 1861, his family belonged to the Greek Orthodox Community(2). He received his primary education in Beirut, but he left school because of economic conditions. Later he passed the entrance examination for the Syrian Protestant College and enrolled as a student of medicine (3). He was successful during his first year of studies, and was the best in his class. He completed his studies by receiving an award for distinction as a student of chemistry and Latin (4). Later he left Lebanon for Egypt to complete his medical studies in al-Qaṣr al-ʿAynī. However he did not complete his medical studies and interested himself in literature and journalism (5). Eventually he was sufficiently able to become the editor at al-Zamān newspaper.

In 1844 he went to Sudan with an expedition as a translator. He returned after that to Beirut where he studied the Hebrew and Syriac languages. Later he travelled to London where he spent most of his time in the reading rooms of the British Library becoming familiar with the works of the European orientalists (6).

He returned to Egypt to become the editor at al-Muqtataf magazine, but he left to publish his own magazine *al-Hilal* in 1892. Jurji Zaydān was self-taught and gained mastery of the English, French and German languages, which enabled him to
become conversant with the works of orientalists, particularly Brockelmann's *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*.

In his introduction to the biography of a compatriot of his, Salim Sidnawi (7), he explained the purpose of writing this and similar biographies: "There are biographies of people like Disraeli, Rothschild and other men of action and hard work who were born poor and achieved wealth or knowledge or a profession through their efforts and activity. The purpose of such biographies is not so much the immortalisation of their memory but rather the emulation of their deeds. The closer their vitae are to the needs of the reader, the greater the benefit in publishing their biographies. The biographies of politicians, administrators and soldiers are of no use in our hope for success in our own work. As far as scholars, merchants or professionals who achieved their wealth or greatness through their own efforts and faith are concerned, their biographies set a good example for the young generation - an ounce of example is better than a pound of instruction. Our writers have this habit of restricting themselves to biographies of scholars, soldiers, or politicians, yet we are in greater need of biographies of merchants who are self-made men and who became rich by lawful means befitting the conditions of success. Trade is the most important source of income in our country yet it is part of the popular fantasies that wealth is not (to be) attained in a legitimate, *Halal*, manner; that the true believer lives in poverty and dies a needy man; so that only liars, cunning people and sly men get rich ... is the excuse of those who fail in their efforts." (8) Zaydān aimed, however, to map out a main road, in his biographical conception.

Jurjī Zaydān was one of the greatest historians in Egypt towards the close of the 19th century (9). He wrote many books about Arabic literature, Islamic civilisation, English and Roman history, a history of the Arabs before Islam etc. Zaydān's chief
contribution to literary history is in his two important books: *Tarājim Mashāḥīr al-Sharq fī al-Qarn al-Taṣḥīḥi Ashar*, (Cairo, 1907), and *Tārīkh ādāb al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyyah*, which appeared in 1911-1914 (10).

His first book *Tarājim* was published in two volumes. The first part of the book was devoted to Muhammad ʿAlī's family, Kings, leaders, reformers and politicians. The second part concentrates upon founders of the Nahdah - publishers and journalists, men of science and ādāb, and poets (11).

Most of the people who are the subjects of the biography are Arabs but there are some non-Arabs. In about ninety short biographies, Zaydān cites biographical accounts which do not form a notable contribution to literary biography, but it is a useful collection of biographical data, and remains until today a valuable source for biographical information, especially for Egypt and Syria in the 19th century (12).

Zaydaan's second book, *Tārīkh ādāb al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyyah*, which appeared in four volumes, gives brief lives of the poets, consisting of not more than two or three pages (except in the case of the Muḥallāqāt poets, where the treatment is longer). He uses European criteria, dividing poets according to their occupations, family names, and also according to whether they are from Bedouin or settled communities. The book does not present poets from the point of view of literary biography, and in fact offers little more than sketches. The organisation of Zaydaan's *Tārīkh* follows the periodisation of Brockelmann (13).

Zaydaan “made great use of Nicholson’s and Brockelmann’s works. Probably very much of the bibliographical information and some of the biographic information were
taken more or less directly from Brockelmann's *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*" (14).

Zaydān divides his book according to political events, into a pre-Islamic (jāhiliyya). Islamic, Umayyad, Abbasid, Mogul, an Ottoman and a modern period (al-Nahḍah al-Akhirah).

In his first chapter he classifies poets primarily according to their subject matter, *Mu'allaqat* poets, court poets, chivalrous poets, gnomic poets, love poets, vagabond poets, Jewish poets, poetesses and so on.

In the second chapter he divides the poets according to their tribal *nisbah* and contrasts the large number of *jāhili* poets with those in the Umayyad period. He then divides the early Islamic poets into followers of *Ālī* and followers of Mu'awiya. Then he uses the categories of leading poets *fuḥūl*, political poets, love poets, licentious poets and poets who were singers.

In chapter three he brings together the rest of the Umayyad poets. In the Abbasid age he divides poets into four different sections: first for Urban and Bedouin poets and the same in the second and third sections (232-334 A.H., 334-447 A.H.), famous poets and literary figures. In the fourth section he divides poets' lives into seven different classes: Egyptian poets, Syrian poets, Iraqi poets, Persian poets, Andalusian poets, Moroccan poets, and poets of the Arabian peninsula.

Thus the author aims at presenting, in chronological order, the bare facts of the lives of the poets as he understands them, quite impartially and without ulterior intentions in the sense of representing any particular critical viewpoint. Even in his last chapter al-Nahḍah al-Akhirah, he continues this arrangement for the modern period.

Altogether Zaydān brings together more than five hundred biographical sketches using the historical approach described. Although Zaydān was known for having
imitated Brockelmann (15), still his book, *Tārīkh ādāb al-lughah al-ʿArabiyyah*. "is one of the first attempts of an Arab at a periodization of his own Literary History." Zaydān "was one of the most prominent" (16) of "intermediate figures." (17)

b. Ḥasan al-Sandūbī

In his first book *Aṣyān al-Bayān min subḥ al-Qarn al-Thālith ʿAshar ʿila al-yawm*, al-Sandūbī presented the celebrities of Arab literature and history who "rose to prominence under the reigns of Muḥammad ʿAlī, Ismāʿīl down to the reign of ʿAbbās [Hilmi]." (18) The aim of the book is to "immortalize the memory of the ingenious literary figures of that period and revive their works." (19)

The work is divided into two volumes, of which only the first is available. It covers prestigious personalities who were born at the beginning of the 13th century of Hijra. In his presentation, the author applied the traditional *Tarjamah* method of providing a meagre sketch of the person in question, his qualities, prosaic or poetic works and finally his status.

Al-Sandūbī, we presume, had no object other than honouring those who upheld literature in a book which differs little from the traditional, classical authors. His approach is consistent with his period, characterized, as it was, with reviving the classical spirit and trumpeting our past as being one productive of great men. It is more like a history of literature than a biography record. This may well apply to his second book, *Al-Shuʿarāʿ al-Thalātha, Shawqī, Muṭrān and Ḥāfiz*, where he reviews and presents the verse of those three poets, Shawqī, Muṭrān and Ḥāfiz, providing their comments on each other together with his own commentary on them. (20)
c. **Ahmad Taymūr (1871-1930)**

In his first book *Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī*, Taymūr strives to record every detail that has been preserved regarding al-Ma‘arrī's kinship, friendships, travels, studies, his wealth, his ascetic way of life, and his books. He depends for his facts on published research into the life of al-Ma‘arrī, and does not develop a critical approach to al-Ma‘arrī's work through a close study of what is known about his career.

His second book, *Tarājim aṣyān al-Qarn al-Thālith ‘Ashar wa-a‘awā’il al-‘Rābi‘ Ashar*, is a collection of biographical sketches. It includes twenty three different characters who were famous in Taymūr's day. Some of them were personal friends. He devotes a few pages to each, including dates of birth and death and details of their hobbies and personal affairs. In general these notices are in the tradition of *Tabaqāt* literature.

d. **Mayy Ziyāda (1886-1941)**

Mayy Ziyāda was born in Nazareth in Palestine. Her father Ilyās Zakhūr Ziyāda was a Lebanese from Saḥṭūl village, Keswān province; her mother Nuzha Mu‘ammar from al-Jalīl. Mayy attended elementary school at her home town, and continued her learning at ‘Ayn Tūrā school in the Lebanon. She studied the French language and had a good command of it.

In 1907, her parents migrated to Egypt where they settled. The young lady, Mayy gave private tuition in French to the daughters of the upper class. In 1911 she published her first poetry collection in French, titled *Fleurs de rêve*. She started to contribute to *al-Mahrūsa* magazine, edited by her father. During the First World War she was admitted to the Egyptian University, and graduated in 1918.
Mayy Ziyāda produced two biographies, the first on Malak Ḥifni Nāṣif, a reformist and pro-women writer; the second Alisha Taymūr, the poetess.

In 1913 Mayy Ziyāda came to know Malak Ḥifni Nāṣif through the latter's essays and commentaries run by Al-Jarīda and Al-Mu‘ayyid journals. Malak Nāṣif published her pieces under the pen-name: Bāḥithat al-Bādiyya, literally: [The Bedouin Researcher]. In her columns she advocated the education of women, recognizing their rights, delivering them from the shackles of ignorance and serfdom. Mayy Ziyāda admired these dashing columns, and the two women got acquainted in person. Their liaison developed into a strong intellectual bond of friendship, admiration and respect.

In 1918, however, Bāḥithat al-Bādiyya died. In her grief for the loss of a friend and a reformist writer, Mayy Ziyāda serialized essays on Malak Nāṣif's life and work in al-Muqtatf review. These were collected in one volume and published under the title: Bāḥithat al-Bādiyya: A Critical Study, in 1920. This was "The first book written in Arabic by an Arab woman on an Arab woman."(22)

Ziyāda traces Malak Nāṣif's family descent saying she was born in Cairo in 1886, attended a Cairene high school, and got a diploma as a lecturer in royal schools for girls. In 1907 she got married and died in Cairo on 17 October 1918.(23)

Ziyāda described her first encounter with Malak Nāṣif, and observed that what attracted her attention most was Malak Nāṣif's unlimited tenderness and generous hospitality. Malak Nāṣif "was a typical Egyptian both in her sweet humour and her staunch patriotism."(24) In fact "her playful witty spirit beamed from between the lines she wrote."(25) If Malak Nāṣif, on the one hand, was merry, joyful,
humorous, joke-teller, she was, on the other "succumbed, like all ill-tempered, bilious people, to depression, a sense of grief which was sharpened by her readings."(26)

Although both her father Ḣifnī Nāṣif Bey, and her spouse Abd al-Sattār Bey al-Bāṣil, were sons of the upper aristocracy in the Egyptian society, Malak Nāṣif befriended middle and lower classes, above all the bedouin and peasant women with whom she liaised and conversed, and to whom she listened and gave advice.

Mayy Ziyāda reviews Malak Nāṣif's Islamic beliefs, her position on polygamy, equality and education for women and concludes that "she was a devout Muslim who jealously guarded Islam in the manner a lover would jealously guard his own beloved."(27) Ziyāda even justifies Malak Nāṣif's religious fanaticism: "Her religious feeling was blended in her mind with nationalist and social symbols, as is the case with most human beings."(28)

Ziyāda postulates that Nāṣif's character was made from different elements, but these "are inseparably linked together, with none working unless assisted by the others."(29) In a special part of the volume, the letters they exchanged, are printed together with an obituary and a piece on her achievements. Ziyāda even draws a contrast between the advocate of women's emancipation, Qāsim Amin, and her friend Malak Nāṣif, in their endeavours to defend women's rights.

What Ziyāda has presented in this volume is considered "a literary, social, historical and critical study of the life and works of Malak Ḣifnī Nāṣif, more known as Bahīthat al-Bādiyya, particularly her book Niṣāʾyīyat [Women's Affairs]."(30), which included her previous essays on the topic. And it was Yaʿqūb Ṣarrūf, al-
Muqtatafs editor, who asked Miss Mayy to write "on the cause the deceased lady advocated." (31 I came across views which consider this work of Ziyäda as "a new model in writing a scientifically disciplined biography, because it contains an all-encompassing analysis of the life and works of Bahîthat al-Bâdiyya." (32)

In point of fact what Mayy Ziyäda presented was more of a portrait, emphasizing few features in Malak Nâsif, such as modesty, religious belief, humour, melancholy, or her calls for removing the veil. Her study lacks the depth required to follow up the development of the character in question. We encounter Malak Nâsif as a ready-made mature woman. The various aspects of her personality are disconnected by the very organization of the book into different chapters. Ziyäda produced the text in an atmosphere of immense grief for the loss of her friend, and she could only jot down those observed qualities in Malak Nâsif's behaviour and character without much deeper analysis even of the so-called "ill-tempered, bilious "nature. It is a posthumous eulogy, stressing the positive side of Malak Nâsif in an attempt to support the latter's crusade. But this does not mean to say that Ziyäda's study was void of any rational analysis or vivid portrayal of her friend's sensibilities, on the contrary, "Mayy [Ziyäda] could empathize with the person of Malak Nâsif in her various life-stages." (33)

In her second book 'A'isha Taymûr Shârat al-Tali'î, 1925, Mayy Ziyäda strives to record every detail that has been preserved regarding 'A'isha Taymûr's life. She portrayed the social and intellectual life of Taymûr's period. In her words, 'A'isha Taymûr appeared at a time when women were in a dark night of ignorance, and she came out as a glimmer of hope to Egyptian woman and their future. Intellectual and social life was in constant development, but women had not yet reached that stage of self-education. On the contrary, they were content in their insulation and ignorance.
Taymūr's father was the source of her support. It was he who brought her tutors to teach her Persian, Turkish and Arabic grammar, rhetoric and style, until she gained literary maturity.

As for her social milieu, Ziyāda says "Aīsha was the daughter of a prominent notable and senior official who assumed several high positions under 'Abbās I, Sa'id and Isma'il, and came to hold the post of the head of the Royal Court under the Khedive of Egypt. She married Muhammad Bey Tawfiq, son of Muhammad Bey al-Islambullī, the governor of the Sudan, and had various connections with the daughters of the Egyptian upper class." On the reason why this study was written, Mayy Ziyāda says: "I read all what I could find of her writings and gathered all available personal details and I wanted to write a research about Aīsha. The reason is that she was the vanguard of the wakening of women in this country, also because the public knew her as a poetess without having read her verse."(34)

Ziyāda based her biography of Aīsha Taymūr on the noble lineage, assisting and inspiring environment and the challenging era. In her words, Aīsha Taymūr was "irrespective of her frailties and shortcomings, the first experience in the current of innovation, the pioneer of the new approach".(35) Taymūr had the credit, in her opinion, of breathing the first sighs at a moment when the voice of the woman was in itself considered as shameful. Ziyāda portrayed the 19th century Cairene life quoting "the French academy member Xaviet Morniet's, From Constantinople to Cairo, a diaries of its author's journey in the Orient between 1845-6."(36)

On the upper class private life she relied upon "the vivid narratives by Niya Salima, the pseudo name used by premier[sic] Ḥusayn Rushdi's French wife." (37)
In her dissection of Taymuṣr's life, Ziyaḏa followed the traditional ʿirāh and the analytical methods (psychological and historical) combined in one. On the other hand, there is a traditional narrative of Taymuṣr's life passage, but there is the emotional, psychological struggle within herself after her daughter's death and her relations with her social milieu.

This book constitutes a stride forward in literary biographing in Egypt. Compared to the previous volume on Bāḥithat al-Ḥādiyya, it reveals a better grasp of biography, a deeper analysis and powerful expression, yet the part dedicated to the study of Taymuṣr's verse is weak.

Mayy Ziyaḏa is a real pioneer, for she was "the first in modern times who devoted her efforts to study two modern Arab poetesses, Bāḥithat al-Ḥādiyya and ʿAīsha Taymuṣr. Her study of their lives and works was more of a defence of herself and her womenfolk rather than a narrow portrayal or a mere defence of two women." (38)

e. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888-1956)

*Taḥrajim Mīṣrīyyah wa-Ghārbiyyah* (1929) (republished as *Shakhsiyyāt Mīṣrīyyah wa- Gharbiyyah*)

This book is a collection of articles published in a weekly newspaper, *al-Siyāsah al-Usbuʿiyyah*. In the first part the author tells us he intends to present for the reader "a portrait of the life of political Egypt in the latest period." (36) He deals in this part with Cleopatra (B.C. 69-30), Ismāʿīl Bāsha (1830-1895), Tawfīq Bāsha (1852-1892), Muḥammad Qadīr Bāsha (1821-1886), Buṭrus Ghālī Bāsha (1846-1910), Mustafā Kāmil Bāsha (1874-1908), Qāsim Amīn Bey (1863-1908), Ismāʿīl Sābīr
Basha (1854-1923), Mahmud Sulaiman Basha (d.1922) and Abd al-Khaliq Thawat Basha (1873-1928).

Ismail Sabri Basha was the only poet among all these prominent figures. Haykal covers the life of Ismail Sabri Basha in twelve pages from birth to death, and includes specimens of his poetry. "He (Ismail Sabri Basha) really was an Egyptian poet. He was never inclined towards Bedouinism, but he was imbued with the delicacy of the Nile valley and its clear sky which is reflected strongly in Ismail Sabri's soul and which is rarely found in other poets." (40) Sabri left a collection of poems. The author draws attention to the impact of Western life on Sabri's mentality, which in his opinion added a new dimension of beauty and taste to his poetry. This appears clearly in his love poetry.

In the second part of his book he writes about Beethoven, Taine, Shakespeare and Shelley, "I wrote about them on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Beethoven's death and hundredth birthday of Taine..." (41)

The book is, in fact, as the author says, "biographical sketches" and does not really deserve the description of "literary biography", because it does not record the actions and re-create the personality of an individual life, but seeks to introduce each personality to the general reader, and is therefore similar to a collection of biographical articles.(42)

f. Ahmad Amin (1886-1954)

An Islamic Historian, who was born, lived and died in Cairo. He was educated at al-Azhar college-mosque and graduated from the school of law. He was appointed as judge and lecturer at the faculty of Arts in Cairo university whose deanship he assumed later on. He was a member of the Damascus-based Arab Science Academy.
the Cairo-based Arabic Language Academy and the Baghdad-based Iraq Science Academy. He authored and published several works on Islamic history and was the editor of *al-Thaqāfa* magazine. He studied the English language and acquired a good command of it. With the exception of Tāhā Ḥusayn and Zakī Mubarak, he had no quarrels or clashes against his contemporary pen-men.(43)

**A Portrait of Ḥāfīz Ibrāhīm**

In his introduction to *Ḥāfīz Ibrāhīm’s poetry*, Aḥmad Amin provided personal notice, more of a curriculum vitae of the poet relying on the latter’s file kept by the Pensions Administration.

The poet’s father, Aḥmad Amin says, is Ibrāhīm, hence an Egyptian, but his mother, Ḥānim Aḥmad al-Bauslit-li, is of Turkish origin. Ḥāfīz Ibrāhīm was born in Dairūt, lower Egypt, in 1872. When his father died he was brought up by his maternal uncle. Ḥāfīz Ibrāhīm had a limited tolerance of modern schooling or civil service. Detesting both, he spent much of his early career in dire need. At sixteen, he was attracted to becoming a lawyer but could not continue this career for long. Then he applied for the military school and graduated as an officer at the age of twenty. Three years on, he mandited his service to the department of the interior and was shortly thereafter despatched to the Sudan. Upon his request, he was relieved from service and retired in 1899. Between 1911-1932, he was appointed head of the literary department at *Dar al-Kutub Al-Miṣriyyah*. He died in 1932.

Aḥmad Amin studied four aspects of Ḥāfīz’s life, his character, culture, verse collections and literary status, in a very brief manner, reminding one of biographical dictionaries. Apart from amassing few details on the poet, there was nothing novel. On Ḥāfīz’s character, Amin says Ḥāfīz was dissatisfied, unhappy, failed, frustrated
with his life and community. He lamented his era, complained of his people, felt forlorn and miserable. He revealed deep paranoia of death, perhaps by way of conveying his bitterness and wrath. Ḥafīẓ ʿIbrāhīm, Amin explains, cared little for money yet he was liberal in spending, tolerant of his critics. Unlike Aḥmad Shawqī the aristocrat, Ḥafīẓ’s Turkish blood was more democratic, more inclined to live with ordinary people. But his literary culture was rather limited although he did his best to expand on it by reading or attending intellectual lectures delivered by prominent thinkers of his time, such as sheikh Muḥammad ʿAbdu, Sādī Zaghlūl, Qāsim Amin and Mustafa Kāmil. He also studied the French language.

The most outstanding feature of his poetry was that "it crystallized the expectations of the Egyptian nation first, and of the Arab people second. He was the mouthpiece of patriotism, the poet of the people, of politics and of community. Never was he surpassed in this propensity by any other poet of his age."(44) At the end, Aḥmad Amin reviews Ḥafīẓ’s verse, classifies it under different rubrics according to the purpose of the poem, signifies his best pieces and defines his place on the map of contemporary poetry.

Aḥmad Amin, in our view, had no intention of producing a biography of Ḥafīẓ ʿIbrāhīm but would rather give preliminary notes by way of acquainting the reader with the poet. In fact, Amin was well aware of the literary prerequisites of biography writing, and in his words, literary biography, "should be based on a thorough knowledge of the social environment in which the poet lived, of his daily liaisons with his mates, of the crucial factors defining his history, of his expectations, endeavours, above all his failures, interconnections between his works, on the one hand, and the external and internal circumstances under which these works were created, on the other."(45)
Applying Ahmad Amīn's own criteria on his introduction of Ḥāfiz reveals that his brief notice is far from any form of biography proper.

**g. Ibrahim Najī (1898-1953)**

He was born on 31 December 1898, in al-Manṣūra province. At the age of eleven he memorized the verse of the classical Arab poet al-Šarīf al-Radī. At the age of thirteen he wrote some poems and pieces of prose. In the academic year 1916-17 he was admitted to the Medicine College to graduate in 1923. During his study, he did not give up poetry. With Ṣalih Jawdat, Al-Hamshari and ʿAlī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā, Najī established the nuclei of the Apollo School "which still retains its strong roots to this very day in modern poetry."(46) In Cairo he married Samiya and they had three daughters. His first collection of poetry appeared in 1934 under the title: *Warāʿa al-Ghamām* [Beyond the Clouds]. At the time he was the leader of Apollo group.

Najī "was focusing his reading on the Science of Psychology to deepen his knowledge of the various schools. Freud's school had the strongest influence on him."(47) Najī "was the master of lover-poets in modern time who no one could match in their sublime arena."(48) At the age of fifty-five, Najī was suspended from his work as a physician due to some vague intrigues by rivals.(49) Najī died on 25 March 1953.

**A Portrait of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm**

In a chapter titled *Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm Hayātuhi al-Nafsiyyah Min Kutubihi* (Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm his psychological life through his books), Ibrahim Najī tried, in a book on Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm which he co-authored with ʿĪsā il-ʿAdham (1911-1940) to analyse al-Ḥakīm's psychological fabric. He said al-Ḥakīm's mother was a Turk but his father was an Egyptian peasant. The mother had a formidable, dominating character.
and she was keen on segregating her son from mixing with the peasants so as to keep him from being contaminated by what she considered unacceptable behaviour, lifestyle and traditional values. Being subordinate, the father bowed to her wishes. "The parents could not develop into him [Tawfiq] outward orientation (outside his self); he was thus more and more inward oriented to the point where he became so self-insulated that he created for himself an inner, private realm made from his dreams and fantasies, a realm where his will to power would materialize."(50)

In his adolescence, his artistic talents began to develop. Viewed from a behavioural point of view, this youthfulness was bereft of any violence, misconduct or vanity, and constituted a continuation of his legitimate childhood. He began to write verse and showed early interest in music. A premature failed love affair plunged him deeper into his inner, magical realm (51) and disturbed his approach to the other sex. He developed a traumatic phobia towards women, this was "perhaps partly produced by the mother complex."(52) Like Turk women, his mother "was renowned for her strong, dominant and feared character who harboured a tender and caring soul underneath this facade of decisiveness and sway."(53)

Applying a psychological methodology, Ibrahim Najj examined al-Hakim’s personality relying heavily on the latter’s creative works. He also studied al-Hakim’s life, parentage and the influence of the Turkish environment on his inner mood and temper during early formative years, above all the said self-insulation which "apart from few moments of rare waking, left no room for society."(54)

This image was fragmentary. No accounts were given by the author on al-Hakim’s behaviour during childhood, at school, at home, or even in France where he studied. We know nothing about his various relations with those whom he liaised with during
those years. Only sporadic aspects of these relationships are depicted but they fall short of producing sufficient evidence to properly evaluate, let alone draw an accurate image of his personality. Naji confined his analysis to the texts written by al-Hakim. Thus the voice of al-Hakim the child, the school boy or the young student was missing. Frequent mention of Turkish background was almost a tautology. In fact the nature of the Turkish environment in the Egyptian society was remained totally obscure, al-Hakim lived in the Cairene milieu which he reflected in his 'Awdat al-Ruh, but artistic presentation is different from actual reality lived by the author.

Naji could have examined al-Hakim's private diaries, interviewed his closet contemporaries and friends to unearth what is unknown by the public of his real life, his struggle with the self and the others. Naji failed to be an interpreter and explorer of al-Hakim's real life experiences. What he has written about al-Hakim may well be considered a mere analytical study of certain literary works of al-Hakim to discover his character.

h. Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat (1885-1968)

Al-Zayyat was born on April 2, 1885, in the village of Kafr Dumayrah in the Daqahliyyah province, as the son of a peasant (55). He was sent to al-Azhar when he was twelve, where he met Taha Husayn. In 1907, he became a teacher of Arabic at a French School. In 1908 he registered with the Law School, to obtain a licence in 1912. Later, in 1922, he went to France for further studies (56). In 1929 he left for Iraq where he taught for three years at the Teacher's Training College in Baghdad. In 1933 he established his own magazine, al-Risalah, which was in circulation until 1953. Al-Zayyat was a prolific writer himself as appears from his collected articles which were published under the title of Wahy al-Risalah in four volumes. He died on June 12, 1968 in Cairo. (57)
In his *Tārīkh al-Adab al-ʿArabi*, al-Zayyāt includes the major Arab literary figures from the *Jahiliyyah* up to modern times, giving brief biographical notes for each figure.

In his first chapter *al-Asr al-Jahili*, he introduces orators (public speakers) and poets in a few lines each, concerning their education, life, and poetry.


The third chapter deals with the Abbasid Age: including prose writers and post-classical Syrian, Andalusian and Egyptian poets.

The fourth chapter deals with poets of the *Mamlūk* Age and the fifth with writers and poets.

This book in effect follows the tradition of the biographical sketches; in each entry little more than a curriculum vitae is given.

**I. Zākī Muḥammad Mujāhid**

In his book, *Al-ʿAīm al-Sharqiyyah fī al-Miṣrīt al-Rabi′ate ʿAsharata al-Hijriyyah* (*1301/1883-1365/1946*), Mujāhid provided, *Tarajim*, of "the fourteenth century of Hijra oriental celebrities across different nations and countries irrespective of their creed, religion, culture, tradition, rank and orientation."(58) In his own words, this type of study was the favourite topic for a host of jurists, historian, exegesis experts and transmitters of traditions. This, he emphatically pronounces, is "a book of *tabaqāt* [layers] like any other of its kind."(59)

He divided the text into sixteen chapters, each covering a specific group: monarchs, princess, ministers and ambassadors, leaders of the national movement; high military and naval commanders, Muslim doctors of religion, judges and lawyers, *ṣūfī* orders, celebrities of non-Muslim denominations, pen-men (writers and poets), historians
and travellers, journalists, physicians, financiers and businessmen, artists, miscellaneous professionals, and women. According to his original intentions, the chapters were to be divided into five volumes, of which only the first three books came into circulation covering some 775 figures in eight chapters.

We could not find a trace of the fourth and fifth volumes which are of importance to our topic, particularly the fourth which contains the chapter on pen-men. From reading the first three volumes, we observe that he selected the celebrities on the fourteenth century of the Hijra who died before (1366 A.H.) His approach is meagre and schematic, confined to the mentioning of personal details, such as dates of birth and death, place of birth, education or destination of travel, rank, customs, post, the events they witnessed and their works.

It is a traditional book of tarāfīm which may suit the needs of literature historians rather than biography records. The author pays no attention to the celebrities’ characters, their development, their responding actions to their environment, in fact they appear void of any will or individuality.

J. ʿĀhmad Zakī Abū Shādī (1892-1955)

Abū Shādī was born in Cairo in 1892. His father was an eminent lawyer and a lettered man. His mother was a poetess. He had his education in Cairo and joined the Medical School, but he broke off his study, and left for Istanbul and London after an unsuccessful love affair. In England he studied English Literature in detail. He stayed for ten years, and married an English woman. In 1922 he returned to Egypt with his wife, and he resumed his scientific activities, especially his profession as a bacteriologist. He edited various literary periodicals; Apollo was the most important and famous magazine for its distinguished contributors, especially young poets from all over the Arab world.
He published a number of literary studies. His prolific output includes more than 15 volumes of verse and a number of operas and plays. He left for the U.S.A. after his wife's death in 1946 and resumed his literary activities. He worked in New York for the "Voice of America", then in Washington until his death. (60)

His book, *Shu'āra al-'Arab al-Muṣāfirūn*, was published posthumously in Cairo in 1958 - that is, three years after the death of its author. The publisher presented the book with the following words: "A thorough study of the literary production of the *Shu'āra al-'Arab al-Muṣāfirūn*, in the light of the modern critical schools, and a scientific, impartial history of the renewal movement." (61)

Abū Shadi's book was edited for publication by Raḍwān Ibrāhīm, who gave a concise note of each poet, including that of the author Abū Shadi. In his introduction as an editor, Ibrāhīm says: "This is a critical study classified into harmonious groups not for the sake of drawing regional limits, but to bring into bold relief the common, local concerns and the responses to environmental factors which were all reflected in the verse of each category of poets whom this survey studies." (62)

Ibrāhīm introduces each poet in brief terms. The publisher call this a thorough biography, "based on the meagre, insufficient information I have got." (63) He adds: "Among the most demanding obligations, we should concern ourselves with studying talented poets, their achievements, and do them justice." (64)

In his study on Khalīl Muṭrān, the author says: "Khalīl Muṭrān's star shone too brilliantly for a young lad like him, during the last quarter of the 19th century." (65)

Leaving the poet's illumination, the author goes on to say: "In his poetic sensibilities the poet is indebted, genetically speaking, to his maternal grandmother. From his mother, Malakah al-Ṣabbāgh, he inherited sapience and sagacity, from his father, Abdu Muṭrān and the Muṭrān family as a whole, his indignation over injustice and his
will to defy the mighty." (66) The way Abu Shadī depicts Mutran is more of a simplified portrait, in fact mere biographical notes.

Another example of his presentation of Abd al-Rahman Shukri: "Born in 1886. One of the pillars of renewing modern poetry. He has Western education, and is influenced by English poetry. He published seven verse collections and a book titled Confessions, in 1916. He led an isolated, melancholic life, and died alone in Alexandria due to paralysis. His liberal spirit was clearly mature even in his first collection. He focused on intellectual contemplation and the classical poets like al-Ma'arri, Ibn al-Rūmī, and Milton, through the marriage of philosophical contemplation, emotional feelings, mystical impressions, and natural emotions." (67)

In this second sample, Abu Shadi presents a brief account on Shukri that borders on the nature of a simplified essay written for a weekly. We know nothing of the poet's melancholy, why he was so distant from politics and journalism, what drove him to take this or that position against al-Mazini and al-Aqqād. Why he kept himself locked in that solitary confinement, although he was among the pioneers of the Diwan school in Arabic poetry?

Abu Shadi gave very brief, even poor accounts of those whom he studied, although his literary comments on their pieces were, in certain cases, somewhat detailed. This may well apply to his remarks on the Apollo School, or the author's school itself, or on those who may have enjoyed richness in vocabulary, vivid passions, graphic ideas and musical charm.

He analyses the elements of poetic creativity whether they are original or simply an echo of one's own readings of European literary sources. Each poet is introduced through his basic feature. Nizar Qabbani, for example, is a poet of prodigious lust. Zaki Mubarak's poetry is renowned for its vitality, strength and classical music. His
is an independently unique verse. When he pleased, he would analyse this or that poet, irrespective of its subject, be it a patriotic piece, or one of love and revolution. Some prosaic pieces are also reviewed and criticised.

Abū Shādi was well acquainted with Western literary methods; English, American, and he tried hard to draw the attention of his fellow writers and disciples, including the Apollo Group, to the masterpieces of English poetry, above all the English Romantic poets. But when he wrote his book, he did not apply any methods from these methods. His study came out poor in content, looking more like journalistic essays or even reminiscent of the purely traditional studies which require no knowledge of Western methodology.

The book is grouped into five geographical sections, as follows: the poets of Egypt, the poets of al-Shām (Greater Syria), the poets of Iraq, the poets of the Arabian peninsula and the poets of the North Mahjar (i.e. the migrant poets of North America). Traditional as the study is, it retains a degree of importance, if for no other reason than for its study of this great number of poets from the second generation of the modern Nahḍa (renaissance) in the Arab world.
Notes

1. See Ahmad Ḥusayn al-Ṭamāwi, Jurji Zaydān. (Cairo, 1992); Thomas Philipp, Jurji Zaydān His Life and Thought, (Beirut, 1979), and J. Brugman, pp. 218-224.

2. Thomas Philipp, op. cit., p. 11.

3. Ibid., p. 11.

4. Ibid., p. 17.


10. The four volumes had been published by Zaydān in al-Hilāl during 1894-95.


24. Ibid., p. 64.
25. Ibid., p. 66.
26. Ibid., p. 45.
27. Ibid., p. 46.
28. Ibid., p. 62.
29. Ibid., p. 88.
32. Al-Kazbarī, op. cit., p. 200 [quoted from Ya'qub Șarrūf's introduction of Bāḥithat al-Bāḍiyya].
34. Mayy Ziyāda, ʻAṭīṣa Tāy mùr Sha'irat al-Tafrīzah, (Beirut, 1975), p. 16.
35. Ibid., pp. 207-208.
37. Ibid., p. 143.
38. Ibid., p. 156.
40. Muhammad Ḥusayn Haykal, op. cit., p. 171.
41. Ibid., p. 8.
42. Ṭāhā Wādī, Al-Dukūṭ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal wa-Turāthhu wa-Adabi, (Cairo, 1969), p. 141.
47. Ibid., p. 155.
50. Ibid., p. 204.
51. Ibid., p. 205.
52. Ibid., p. 212.
53. Ibid., p. 206.
54. Ibid., p. 206.
55. See J. Brugman, p. 382 [quoted from Niʿmat Aḥmad Fuʿād Qimam adabīyyah, p. 195].
59. Ibid., p. 1.
63. Ibid., p. 15.
64. Ibid., p. 18.
65. Ibid., p. 32.
66. Ibid., p. 33.
67. Ibid., pp. 44-45.
CHAPTER IV

New Paths in Literary Biography: Taha Husayn (1889-1973)

Introduction

a. A Portrait of al-Ma’arri
b. A Portrait of Abu Nuwas
c. A Portrait of Bashshar b. Burd
d. A Portrait of Hafiz Ibrahim

e. A Portrait of Ahmad Shawqi
f. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rumi
g. A Portrait of al-Mutanabbi

h. His short biographies

His characteristics as a biographer
Introduction

Taha Husayn was born on November 14, 1889, in a village in Upper Egypt, 'Izbat al-Kilu', near the town of Maghaghah, which is situated on the side of the Nile. Taha was the seventh of his father's thirteen children, and the fifth of his mother's eleven. His father, Husayn Ali, was a low income worker, but the family belonged to the lower middle class, by local standards was neither rich nor poor. He went blind when he was three years old, because of ill-treated eye disease, but this did not prevent his family from sending him to the kuttab (village school) to learn Qur'an. By the age of nine Taha had satisfied his teacher.

In 1902 he was sent to Cairo, to continue his studies at al-Azhar, in his brother's care. Among the Azharist teachers, Taha Husayn was impressed by Shaykh Sayyid al-Marsafi. It was through him that Taha Husayn discovered literature and began to discover himself. He remained at al-Azhar until the year 1912.

Taha Husayn was not satisfied with the education level of al-Azhar. He was already learning French at evening school and had taken to attending the evening lectures of the Egyptian University, given by great Orientalists such as Littmann, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Santillana - which opened a new perspective on his own inherited culture.

Taha Husayn left al-Azhar after he failed at the final examination, Al-Alamiyyah, but at the new university, he was, very successful; in 1914 he was the first to obtain his doctorate, with a dissertation on Abi al-'Ala' al-Maarr. He went to France in November 1914, he read Anatole France, attended the lectures of Durkheim, Lanson, Casanova, Pierre Janet, and wrote a thesis on Ibn Khaldun. Taha Husayn received the university's doctorate from the Sorbonne with distinction "Très Honorable" on 21 January 1918 and was given the doctorat d'Etat the
following year. (12) In 1917 he had married a French woman who was a great support to him during the rest of his studies. (13)

In 1919 he returned to Egypt and was appointed professor of Ancient History in the old Egyptian University. Afterwards he was appointed professor of Arabic literature at the state university. (14) During the next thirty years, Taha Husayn was at the very centre of literary and academic life in Egypt, as teacher and administrator in the Universities of Cairo and Alexandria, and an official in the Ministry of Education. From 1950 to 1952, he was the Minister of Education in the last Wafdist government. (15)

Taha Husayn "had attained considerable personal prestige in Egypt, in the Arab world, and even in Europe." (16) Taha Husayn died on 28 October 1973. Taha Husayn was known as the Za'im al-Mugaddidin (Leader of the Modern School), (17) and his autobiography al-Ayyam (the days) is one of the most celebrated books in Modern Arabic literature. (18)

Taha Husayn found great delight in reading Plato, Aristotle, al-Taftazani, Descartes, Comte, Spencer, Bergson, Goethe, Schiller and Heine; but Kant and Hegel he did not find so palatable and he admits that he had to refer to French works to understand them. (19) The first source that impressed Taha Husayn was his Egyptian environment, classical Arabic literature and the subjects he studied at al-Azhar, (20) the Quran was the main source through all his life. His second source was European thought, particularly French. "Europe for him means three things: human culture, the civic virtues, democracy." (21)

Taha Husayn underwent the influence of Nallino, to whom he owed a great debt, and "he had been struck by the Orientalists, especially by their methods: they did not primarily occupy themselves with aesthetic judgements, but studied both what was good and what was bad." (22) Although Taha Husayn wrote his biography of
al-Ma’arrī before his studying in France, but "it seems more likely that Nallino and Wiet led him into this direction, the more so as, certainly at the beginning of the twentieth century, most Orientalists had an objectivist approach towards literature." (23)

Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn had noted that the study of literature should be a mixture of the two methods; the traditional, which has been served by Sayyid al-Marsafī in al-Azhar, emphasising the language and critical approach of ancient writers, and the second method introduced by Nallino and other Orientalists, which was the analytical approach. (24)

Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn was impressed by French culture, French literature, Greek and Roman literature and French philosophy. He had an appetite for reading both Arabic and European literature. He wrote most of his biographical articles for periodicals or journals, which were later collected in collections such as Ḥadīth al-‘Arbi’ (3 vols., appeared in 1925, 1926, 1945), Min Ḥadīth al-Shī‘r wa-al-Nathr (1926), Lāḥāzāt (2 vols., 1942), Fuṣūl fi al-adab wa-al-Naqd (1945), Alwān (1952), Min hunāk (1955), Khiṣām wa-Naqd (1955), etc.

Most of his contributions appeared in literary journals such as al- Siyāsah, al-Ḥadīth, al-Wādi, al-Jiḥād, al-Risālah, al-Jumhūriyyah.

a. A Portrait of al-Ma’arrī

In his Tajdid Dhikra Abī al- ’Alā‘ (1915) [Towards the Renewal of Abū al-‘Alā’s Remembrance], Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn describes the ramified aspects of Abū al-‘Alā’s era in its political, economic, social, religious moral and practical facets together with the direct milieu he liaised with "Political turmoil at the time was so acute that it weakened Muslims and gave rise to treacherous figures whose hearts were suffused with greed, miserliness and meanness." (25)
The distribution of wealth was "so unbalanced that it split the nation into two separated, diametrically opposed social classes with no rank in between, namely the class of the very rich and that of the very poor."(26) The degeneration of social and moral life was so deep that "it left its deep marks on his sensitive soul and drove him to embrace distinct social and ethical views and ideas."(27) Paradoxical as it may seem, this social and ethical degeneration corresponded to a general progress "in the Muslim's intellectual and scholarly life. In no other epoch had thought and culture flourished so magnificently."(28)

The poet's life in the eye of 婷婷旨 is divided into three phases; phase one covers the period prior to his journey to Baghdad, the second depicts his residence in the capital city, the third extends over the rest of his life in the town of مَارِر al-Nu'man, where he was accused of apostasy. His permanent, self-imposed home-confinement, his disposition and temper, his old age and death, are closely followed by婷廷旨. When al-Ma'arî, 倾廷旨 tells us, went blind, his loss of sight developed in him a strong sense of timidity and shyness. A host of qualities ranging from "inherited modesty, timidity, self-esteem, dignity, truthfulness, to compassion towards the weak, have combined together to free him from the desire to make his living by selling his poetry at such an early stage of his life."(29)

Al-Ma'arî, according to婷廷旨, was naturally disposed to introversion but this withdrawal was reinforced by the calamities which befell him, the loss of his father and mother, his dire poverty, mistreatment by other people and lastly his failure to achieve the fame he deserved for his sharp intelligence and refined sensitivity. Al-Ma'arî was an austere, ascetic puritan, who vowed chastity and lived in full priestly celibacy. Despite his sensitive gentleness and compassion, he was distrustful of others, suspicious of their intentions and inclined to conceal his inner
thoughts from them. He was more of a rationalist who had belief in the power of human reason rather than a mere sceptic. His rational thinking led him to deny revelation and prophecy, the Qur'an included, but he believed in the existence of a God. In his daily life he never approached strong beverages or animal products. To the very end, he remained a vegetarian.

In his second book entitled Ma' ta Abī al-'Alā'ī Fī Sijnihi (1939) [With Abī al-'Alā'ī in His Prison], Tāhā Husayn leads a philosophical dialogue with the classical poet, revealing thereby how the latter was driven by excessive pride and loftiness to extreme, unbearable limits. He set for himself lofty ends which were far beyond human reach. Abū al-'Alā'ī was so excessively rationalistic that he rejected everything else. In the end, Tāhā Husayn casts a comparative glance at Abī al-'Alā'ī, al-Mutanabbi and Bashshār to bring forth their differences and similarities.

The third book by Tāhā Husayn, Sawt Abī al-'Alā'ī (1944), [The Voice of Abī al-'Alā'ī], is totally dedicated to the interpretation of the Al-Luzūmiyyāt, the well known poetry collection of the classical, blind poet-philosopher.

b. A Portrait of Abū Nuwās

Abū Nuwās reflected in his poetry the spirit of his own age as Umar b. Abī Rabī' had been the true representative of the Omayyad Period (30).

Abū Nuwās personality, Tāhā Husayn says, was that of "a sarcastically humorous, jesting, dissolute and uninhibited poet who would liberally indulge in all sorts of lusts and boast of these worldly pleasures. He was impudent, worldly, moody, frivolously audacious and reckless indeed." (31) He was "neither melancholy nor disposed to sadness but jubilant and joyful by nature." (32) He went to the extremes. His bacchanalian poetry was as ingenious and refined as his verse on
asceticism or on his sensuality or passion towards his young gay lovers. As for his satirical poems, the images were extremely obscene and foul. Abū Nuwās abhorred life in its entirety and his indulgence in sensational lust and fun was for him a means of distraction. "He was a true incarnation of his epoch, an era renowned for scepticism, insolence and sensuality." (33) Abū Nuwās had "a passionate affection for intoxicating beverages, verging on worship." (34) His wine-poems were excellent, warm and subtle, and they flowed so eloquently and spontaneously from his pen as they were the product of "an epoch which instituted such inclinations and ways of seeing and living one's life." (35).

c. A Portrait of Bashshār b. Burd

Tāhā Husayn depicted Bashshār's physical appearance and character in precise and concise manner: Bashshār was perhaps the ugliest person in his surrounding. His face was unsightly and hard-featured and his figure was bulky and clumsy. Although he was a bad companion, he was bestowed with powerful artistic talent and poetic prowess. He was sightless but could not reconcile himself to this nature-imposed imperfection and concealed his discontent by taking pride in being blind. Undoubtedly, he was shrewd and intelligent, but he was sincere to nobody. He was also a coward, deceptive, extremely hypocritical, an atheist, sensual and blasphemous. He was a thinker who believes that a second return of man to life is possible, a man who excommunicates the whole nation of Muslims. His affection and passions towards females were warm and lavish indeed.

To the doctors of religion and Muslim jurisprudents his satirical pieces were a source of horror. His was not the best verse of his age nor was he the most powerful poetic talent, yet his poetry represents a relentless indulgence in sexual and other worldly
pleasures combined with a strong desire to parade his liberal, immoral conduct. His satirical verse ridiculing the Caliph, al-Mahdi, and his Vizier cost him his life. (36)

In this portrait, it is clear that Taha Husayn is mainly concerned with Bashshar's character and he uses this analysis of personality as a means to explain Bashshar's poetry and epoch combined together. He specifically says: "Bashshar's imagination reveals to us that his contemporaries were far from being delicate, prudent or polite towards him. Obviously, they cruelly mocked at him to the point that would drive him out of his senses. More often than not he would lose control over himself. " (37)

d. A Portrait of Haфиз Ibrahim

In his portrayal of Haфиз, Taha Husayn provides the reader with a simplified psychological image: "His psyche has no enigmas, perplexity or anomaly. It is rather plain and lucid." (38) Haфиз was unsteady, unstable, wasteful, extravagant, joyful contrary to his mostly melancholic poems. In social life he had no privileged patronage at the court of the Sultan. In addition, Haфиз was characterized by his keen sensibilities, his sharp observation of people, their disposition and qualities, and his sympathetic concern for others.

Haфиз excelled in lamentation [Ritah] poetry, that verse dedicated to mourn the dead, perhaps because he was miserable and unhappy. He would only compose his poems when he was grieved.

e. A Portrait of Ahmad Shawqi

Shawqi's persona, according to Taha Husayn, combined Arab, Ottoman Turkish, Greek and Circassian cultural influences. These elements interacted in such a way as to create a labyrinthine, complex but rich persona. (39) Shawqi was raised in the same period as Haфиз, but unlike the latter Shawqi was a member of the aristocratic
class. His privileged social status enabled him to acquire wide learning and knowledge of foreign languages, like Turkish and French. Tāḥā Ḥusayn maintains that Shawqi was of dual character, an ascetic person on the one hand, and a liberal cynic who cared for pleasures, on the other. This duality may have been a deliberate construction envisaged out of caution to "secure safety and success." (40)

f. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī

Ibn al-Rūmī was, Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn writes, an Arab poet of Greek origin who was so agonised by his alien descent. No other genealogy influenced him more than his Greek ancestry. Ibn al-Rūmī was so poisoned with hatred that he ended being poisoned at the hands of foes "He was extremely unfortunate in his life, disliked by people even abhorred and detested. Perhaps this was why he was so badly tempered, disturbed, apprehensive, neurotic, aggressive. This in turn would tarnish his reputation and make him looks like a nuisance and generate more hatred and animosity against him." (41)

He was so superstitious and apprehensive that he would stay in his house for several days lest a horrendous calamity should befall him. Should he hear the voice of an owl or recognize an unpleasant name of a visitor knocking at his door, he would interpret this incident as a portent of evil, because, mentioning the name of the guest had connotations indicative of calamity. His pessimism would thus peak. Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn says that it is necessary not to attribute Ibn al-Rūmī's qualities to his Greek parentage or to his inherited culture, because "we do not know whether or not Ibn al-Rūmī had a good command of Greek tongue. There are no visible, textual evidences showing he was versed in Greek language to an extent that would enable him to communicate with Greek literature."(42) The fact that Ibn al-Rūmī was influenced by the Greek and Persian cultural traditions while living in a Muslim environment
implies that "he was neither induced by pure Persian nature nor by pure Greek nature but was guided by a combination of foreign, Arab and Islamic traditions which moulded his thought and poetic talents."(43) Ṭāḥa Ḥusayn adds: "I attribute his intellectual disposition to the Islamic/ Greek culture rather than to a Greek blood descent. It is most certain that the unanimous reference to his Greek parentage as the factor determining his culture was generated by the unique visions we find in his poetry." (44)

Ṭāḥa Ḥusayn comes nearer to the views of al- Ṣāzīnī and al- ʿAqqād in their evaluation of Ibn al-Rūmī. He says: "Ibn al-Rūmī's conception of things, his concepts on nature, his thought were totally unfamiliar. In this he was quite different from his contemporaries or predecessors. The only exception we may find is the verse of Abū Tammām, as I have indicated earlier." (45)

Ibn al-Rūmī is an imaginative, creative, intuitive and passionate poet who personifies meanings and senses, depicts life as an arena or a theatre where people come to play their roles. "This kind of deep contemplation and this staging of dialogue between things as if they were conscious beings reveal their Greek origin and show to what extent Ibn al-Rūmī was instigated by the Greek nature and Greek culture." (46)

Ṭāḥa Ḥusayn criticises what al- Ṣāzīnī and al- ʿAqqād had written about Ibn al-Rūmī. "Al- ʿAqqād was more interested in the poet than in his poetry."(47) Al- Ṣāzīnī, on the other hand "brings forth more quotations from Ibn al-Rūmī's verse, but, in line with al- ʿAqqād, he revolves around the character of Ibn al-Rūmī, giving more weight to the personality and leaving aside the literary analysis of the poetical creations. It seems that both, al- Ṣāzīnī and al- ʿAqqād, were passionately loving admirers of the characters of poets."(48)
g. A Portrait of al-Mutanabbi

In his biography of al-Mutanabbi, Taha Husayn studied the latter’s poetry and life, investigating al-Mutanabbi’s early, adult existence, the psychical formative period. Taha Husayn discovered how painful that period was for the poet. In a tribal society so keen on and sensitive about noble lineages, al-Mutanabbi could not clearly establish his paternal or maternal ancestries. His agony over the ambiguity of his descent, his poverty and lastly his embracing of *Qarmatism*, were crucial factors in al-Mutanabbi’s life: "He could not establish a pure Arab parentage neither on the side of his mother nor on the side of his father."(49)

Taha Husayn depicted al-Mutanabbi as a person antipathetical to the corrupt social order, scornful of the others, having appetite for wealth, social rank and power. To achieve all these ambitions, Taha Husayn contends, al-Mutanabbi saw one way: the *Qarmati* movement. Subscribing to this radical, egalitarian movement, he soon became one of its agitators, calling for rebellion against despotic rulers and for more blood letting. This rebellious career soon led to his incarceration. In the gaol he quickly surrendered and turned sheepish, remorseful and eulogistic. That was the first phase in his life.

In the second, he reverted to the princes of Syria, praising them in his poetry and concealing his audacious, dashing ambitions as well as his *Qarmati* convictions. At that time, he approached Saif al-Dawla al-Hamdani who helped him recover his self confidence and dignity. Soon, al-Mutanabbi became the favourite poet in the royal court of al-Hamdani. Taha Husayn says the new milieu provided al-Mutanabbi with two traits, an intellectual sophistication which soon crept into his poetry, and a climate fraught with jealousy and envy by rivals which destroyed his special relation with Saif al-Dawla and forced the poet to take flight.
The third phase in the poet's life took place in Egypt. Taha Husayn considered the different impacts the Egyptian environment had on al-Mutanabbi's verse. Of course Aleppo had no similarity to Egypt. But the change in the poet's mood and disposition was caused by a double injury: he had lost his heart and mind to Aleppo where his previous patron was, but had not yet achieved his goals in the new court. He was so displeased with himself that he left Egypt after having satirized its Prince Kafur beyond any repair.

He then rode to Kufa city to visit the notable celebrity Ibn al-Amid, and praise him. Later he appealed to Adud al-Dawla in Shiraz. But his thoughts were focused on mending fences with Saif al-Dawla in Aleppo. On his way to Baghdad, Fatik al-Asadi, a mutinous brigand, intercepted him and took his life.

Taha Husayn was very deeply interested in al-Mutanabbi's character, though he confirmed that the poet was neither his favourite nor the best. In his eyes, al-Mutanabbi was self-conceited, arrogant, pompous, restlessly unstable with limitless, self-destructive ambitions. He yearned for change but sought protection by a centre of power or a powerful patron. Taha Husayn took the poet's psychological traits and features and dissected them as being facets of al-Mutanabbi's inner nature. Even the selection and interpretation of al-Mutanabbi's poems were examined as psychological evidences rather than artistic structures. For him, "al-Mutanabbi was a poet like other poets, a man like other men, but he imagined himself to have been above the others; he pretended to have values and morals which he simply lacked; he languished for rank and power well beyond his reach. He fancied himself a free individual but he was a slave to money; and he had the illusion that he was dignified but in actual reality he was but a humble vassal of the Sultan." (50)
h. Ṭāḥa Ḥusayn and his Short Biographies

Writing obituaries, commemorations or on celebrations, Ṭāḥa Ḥusayn produced a multitude of short biographies of many classical Arab poets or French literary celebrities. Most of these miniatures were published in periodicals like *Al-Ilād,* *Al-Hadīth,* or *Al-Siyāsah.* That is perhaps why they were lacking in depth and sketchy in style. They were collected and reprinted in separate books.

His first biographical essay was the piece he wrote on Abū al-! Al in 1909, the last was on Ahmād Shawqqī in 1968. The number of such pieces was approximately 70, standing between the portrait (as on Paul Valery) and the monograph (as the articles on Voltaire, Sartre and Camus). His study on André Gide was a biography in the literary sense of the word. It was the longest and deepest study he created. His admiration of Gide was so compelling that when Ṭāḥa Ḥusayn described the French nihilistic, novelist, "he [Ṭāḥa Ḥusayn] was in point of fact as if describing himself and his own character but in different social and cultural circumstances." (51)

The bulk of short biographies was dedicated to classical Arab poets from the pre-Islamic, Umayyad or Abbasid epochs. The pre-Islamic poets were the subject -matter of his *Fi al-Shīr al-Jāhilī* [On the Pre-Islamic Verse], where he deployed the Cartesian sceptical method (52) to study these figures. In this book he questioned the existence of some poets or the reality of the poems of others. As far as biographical aspects are concerned, the book presented portraits, profiles of some of those under consideration. His method in short biography was that of the literary-scientific approach to which he was adhered.
His characteristics as a Biographer

In his book on Abî al-šAlâ‘î al-Mâ‘arrî, Tâhâ Ḥusayn "adhered to the principles the French critic Taine had established. "(53) In fact Tâhâ Ḥusayn was a great admirer of Taine, and more often than not, he kept reminding his readership "ask Taine and he will inform you that the character, mood, emotions and whatever constitutes the psyche of the poet or the author do not in the least mean anything beyond the fact that they are an outcome produced by the epoch and the environment under whose impact the poet came and by the nation from which he descended."(54) Bearing this in mind, we may clearly understand why Tâhâ Ḥusayn said that Abû al-šAlâ‘î "was the product of his period, a product which was conditioned by its time and space, by political, social and economic circumstances."(55) which then prevailed played a decisive part in the formation of his personality. (56)

Tâhâ Ḥusayn also approached the poet's nature "from an expanded psycho-analytical angle, specifying his mental features describing the worst agonies he had had in his struggle with life and the self, and revealing the hidden aspects of the life of the blind, self-isolated poet."(57) He was driven by the irresistible force of Compulsion. Blindness, Tâhâ Ḥusayn believed, was the cause of al-Mâ‘arrî's depression and the sense of deprivation and powerlessness. Self-imposed seclusion or solitude was another fact Tâhâ Ḥusayn focused on. His sarcastic view of life was triggered by his injured pride. Al-Mâ‘arrî was shrinkingly timid and suspicious of people. His soul, Tâhâ Ḥusayn asserts, was the battle ground of a fierce war between his humanistic nature and animal instincts.(58)

His above mentioned admiration of Taine was coupled with his appreciation of Saint-Beuve. Tâhâ Ḥusayn's Hadîth al-Arbi‘î [Conversation on Wednesday] was an echo of Beuve's Aḥadîth al-Ithnayn, [Conversation on Monday].(59) In his work, Tâhâ Ḥusayn analysed "the characters of many literary figures on the basis of
a rational study of the creations and works attributed to them."(60) Tāḥā Ḥusayn. I believe, applied different methodologies, the historical method (61), on the one hand, and the Cartesian method, on the other. These two were supplemented by the impressionist method. (62) Tāḥā Ḥusayn in his studies on Abbasid poets, "was more concerned with the artistry of each poet than with his life and character." (63)

By contrast, the cases of Ḥafīẓ and Ṣhawqī were psychologically approached. Tāḥā Ḥusayn "penetrated their nature and temper, establishing links between their souls and their poetry. From psychological features he inferred motives for success or failure in this or that art." (64)

In his Maṣa' al-Mutanabbi [With al-Mutanabbi], his analysis hinges exclusively on the texts of poetry. This source, however, was inadequate, since "the poetry-based picture of al-Mutanabbi is not the real image of the man who faced life and people of his period in bone and flesh." (65) Tāḥā Ḥusayn, however, conceded that al-Mutanabbi's Diwan reflected no more, but no less, than moments in the life of its creator. In line with the historical approach, Tāḥā Ḥusayn hinted at the fact that al-Mutanabbi was "the product of that political turmoil, economic and social corruption of his days. His mind and art were also the fruit of that rational, intellectual progress which characterized the Muslim world in general and the Iraqi context in particular at the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century of Hijra." (66)

The sense of being descended from debased lineage or parentage, Tāḥā Husayn believes, was "the prime factor which influenced al-Mutanabbi's character, shaped his social antipathy and imprinted in his young soul the idea that his existence was contrary to his mates and comrades, bizarre, shrouded in thick mystery and abnormality." (67)
Taha Husayn locates al-Mutanabbi in his specific space "in the system of things prevailing at his time, then analysis his psychological peculiarities and closely relates these to his poetry. He even associates certain rhymes and rhythms in the verse of al-Mutanabbi with certain psychological frames of mind."(68)

Taha Husayn's method in constructing the portrait may be summarized in the following points:

* Probing the poet's character, his psychology, his feelings, perceptions, how he describes these feelings and perceptions, Taha Husayn uses his findings in this respect, above all the emotions, passions and propensities from which the character is composed, as an instrument to understand the poet's epoch, environment and the ethnic origins and the influence these may have had upon him .(69)

* Analysing the artistic structure of the poetry produced and the impressions it imparts to him, Taha Husayn casts a critical look at the aesthetic feature which may ignite his admiration and acknowledgment. This assessment runs in line with the criteria set by Jules Lemaitre's school.

In analysing sentiments, such as shyness or misgiving which were deepened by circumstances in Abū al-ʿAlā, or pride which was so apparent in Bashshār, al-Mutanabbi or Abū al-ʿAlā, in different comparative degrees, and the consequences arising therefrom, Taha Husayn applied the psychological method.(70)

In his Dhikra Abī al-ʿAlā, Taha Husayn says "Any scholar exploring the history of literature should have by all means studied individual and collective psychology if he desired to perfectly understand the works left by an author or a poet."(71)

* Taha Husayn also adopted the social approach, because the individual, in his opinion, is a social phenomenon.
Taha Husayn employed these different methods combined, but he leaned on each method to a greater or lesser extent in different cases. Explaining the background of this variety of methods, Jabir 'Usfur says: "This is due to the enlightening nature of the civilizational project Taha Husayn advanced. Enlightenment is essentially encyclopaedic. It stimulates its bearer, the encyclopaedist, to get involved in every direction and urges him to provide his backward society with every intellectual product assisting its progress."(72)

Taha Husayn laboured to have the civilizational, intellectual critical project in which he had been schooled in France transplanted in the Egyptian soil so as to enrich what had so far been achieved by this nation. He "tries to cumulate the main principles of Sainte-Beuve, Taine and Jules Lemaitre by bringing out first the poet's personality, then his environment and finally the artistic pleasure that is to be found in his Poetry."(73) The views of Taine, Beuve or Lemaitre were not uncritically taken by Taha Husayn, because "literary criticism cannot become science." (74), and because each of the above European figures stressed different aspects.

What should be credited to Taha Husayn is the introduction of these methods into the study of Arab literature. The service this introduction extended to the Arab enlightened elites had an enduring effect. And his Dhikra Abi al-`Ala' was indeed the first attempt at literary biography proper, and it was somehow "the first study in Arabic to apply the rules and techniques adopted by European Scholars."(75)
NOTES


4. Taha Husayn, op. cit., p. 27.


10. Albert Hourani, op. cit., p. 326.


14. Tahir Khemiri and G. Kampffmeyer, op. cit., p. 34.


17. Tahir Khemiri and G. Kampffmeyer, op. cit., p. 34.


Kamal Quita, op. cit., p. 30.

Albert Hourani, op. cit., p. 328.

J. Brugman, op. cit., p. 366.

J. Brugman, op. cit., P. 367.


Taha Husayn, *Ta'jid Dhiqra Abi al-'Ala*, (Cairo, 1937), Third edition, p. 64.

Taha Husayn, op. cit., p. 71.

Taha Husayn, op. cit., p. 79.

Taha Husayn, op. cit., p. 79.

Taha Husayn, op. cit., p. 135.


Taha Husayn, op. cit., p. 133.

Taha Husayn, op. cit., p. 44.

Taha Husayn, op. cit., p. 86.


Taha Husayn, op. cit., p. 188.

Taha Husayn, op. cit., p. 190.


50 ʿAtāʾ Kafāfī, op. cit., p. 140.

51 Kamāl Quṭa, op. cit., p. 69.


56 David Semah, op. cit., p. 129.

57 ʿAtāʾ Kafāfī, op. cit., p. 142.

58 ʿAtāʾ Kafāfī, op. cit., p. 142.

59 Ibrahīm Salamah, Taʾyīrāt ad-Dāhibiyah, (Cairo, 1951), First edition, p. 84.

60 Ḥamdī al-Sakkūt and Marsden Jones, op. cit., p. 32.


63 P. Cachia, Tāhā Ḥusayn, op. cit., p. 172.

64 Muḥammad Khalf Allah, Min al-Wujhat al-Nafsiyyah fī Dirāsāt al-Adab wa-Naqqādihi (Cairo, 1947), p. 131.


68 Muḥammad Khalf Allah, op. cit., p. 133.


70 Muhammad Khalf Allah, op. cit., p. 133.

71 Tāhā Ḥusayn, Tajdid Dhikra Abī al-ʿAlāʾ, p. 7.


73 P. Cachia, Tāhā Ḥusayn, op. cit., p. 167.

74 Jabīr ʿUṣfūr, op. cit., p. 49.

75 David Semah, op. cit., p. 124.
CHAPTER V

Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad (1889-1964)

Introduction
a. A Portrait of al-Ma'arri
b. A Portrait of al-Mutanabbi
c. A Portrait of Bashshar b. Burd
d. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rumi
e. A Portrait of Shu'ara' Misr
f. A Portrait of Umar b. Abi Rabia
g. A Portrait of Jamil Buthayna
h. A Portrait of Abu Nuwas
i. A Portrait of Goethe
j. A Portrait of Bernard Shaw
k. A Portrait of Shakespeare
l. A Portrait of Jimenez
m. His short biographies

His characteristics as a biographer
Introduction

`Abbás Mahmúd al-Äqqäd was born in Aswán of an Egyptian father and Kurdish descent (1). He was largely self-taught. At the age of fourteen, when he was halfway through his secondary school, he left his native town of Aswán and went to Qena and later to Zaqāzīq, capital of the Sharqiyyah province. Cairo was his last stop. Having spent some time in a junior post in the Civil Service, he took up journalism. He also did some school teaching, which gave him the opportunity of meeting his future friend al-Mázíní (2).

He learned English mainly through his own efforts; and in spite of his sometimes painful understanding of the texts he was reading, he was keen on reading whatever he could lay his hands on. His reading was, however, unsystematic and somewhat confused (3), "Carlyle was probably the first English author he read, for it is generally assumed that this writer inspired al-Äqqäd’s series about the great men in Islam al-Äbqariyyat."(4) In 1912 he published his first book, Khulāṣat al-Yawmiyyah wa-al-Shudhūr, which includes a short biography of Ibn Ḥamdis al-Šiqillī (the famous poet Abū Muḥammad Abd al-Jabbār b. Abī Bakr b. Ḥamdis al-Azdī al-Šiqillī).

After the First World War, both he and al-Mázíní gave up school teaching to devote their time to journalism. He wrote many political articles for Al-Bálāgh and later wrote much of his literary criticism for its weekly literary supplement. In May 1925, he became a member of the Egyptian Senate, and in 1929 he was elected to the House of Representatives.(5) He was prosecuted for his attack on King Fūād (1869-1936) and was sentenced to nine months imprisonment, and in his World of Prisons and Chains, he left us an account of his incarceration.(6) For his writings he received honours; membership of the Academy of the Arabic language (Ma'ajmú' a
al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah) in 1940, chairman of the Poetry Committee of the High Council for Arts, Literature and Social Sciences. On March 12, 1964 he died at his home in Heliopolis.(7)

Al-Dīwān consisted of critical essays written by al-'Aqqād and his friend al-Mazīnī in which they attacked the popular writers of the period, al-Manfalūṭī and Shawqī. Al-'Aqqād's favourite poets were Ibn al-Rūmī, Bashshārī, Abu Nuwas, al-Ma‘arī and al-Mutanabbi. Among non-Arab writers he read books by authors such as David Hume, Tagore, Marie Corelli, Anatole France, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Carlyle, Browning, Tennyson, Hardy, Poe, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Heine, Hugo, Darwin, Petrarch, Pluto, Plutarch, Rousseau, Rilke, and Renan.(8)

Al-'Aqqād led a full, active life, and his works, which run into more than ninety volumes, deal with politics and society, literature and philosophy, both in East and West.(9) Most of this material was first published as articles in the magazines Al-Dustūr (daily) and Al-Balagh. He wrote one novel, Sarāh(1938) and a number of biographies.(10)

Al-'Aqqād is one of the leading twentieth-century writers not only in Egypt, but in the whole of the Arabic literary world. Al-'Aqqād was much impressed by Plutarch (46 - 120) (11) and read his works widely and gave him much serious consideration. This influenced him and this is apparent in his biographies, so"it is close to his heart, as it is close to his hand."(12) Al-'Aqqād shared Plutarch's attitude towards the portrait of the ideal hero, more particularly he was attracted by the same idea in Thomas Carlyle (1795 - 1881)(13) with his On Heroes and Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History which was an important source for him. The more one reads Carlyle's Heroes and
Hero-Worship the more one is convinced that his concept of the great man, or the divinely inspired unpredictable hero, is the key to al-Aqqād's thinking. (14)

Al-Aqqād had particularly high regard for his presentation of the prophet of Islam, which satisfied him as being a true portrait. Al-Aqqād was greatly affected by the "spiritual tendency in explaining history which appears in his [Al-Aqqād's] biography, the main element in his writing." (15)

Sainte-Beuve Charles Augustin (1804 - 1869) (16) owes his high standing as a critic to his exceptionally successful handling of a method that is in itself obvious enough: it consists in penetrating a writer's personality thoroughly and expressing it in human no less than in aesthetic terms. It is thus mainly a process of psychological and intuitive perception. But it is nevertheless based on a preliminary process of exploration, which takes full note of all surviving biographical data, letters, memoirs, as well as his published works. Sainte-Beuve was able to effect an assimilation of his subject's moral and physical characteristics and his art has many similarities to the physician's art of diagnosis. (17) So Sainte-Beuve's method consists in a psychological and literary portrait, but also in searching for the roots and the milieu of his subject. Al-Aqqād was particularly influenced by Sainte-Beuve in writing about Ibn-al-Rūmī. He clearly used the methods which had been set by the French critic. (18)

To know the character you must know his personality, his milieu and his written works. This is what was said by Sainte-Beuve. So al-Aqqād chose the title of his first literary biography, *Hayātuh min Shīrīhi*, (his life out of his poetry). Al-Aqqād was also influenced by Nietzsche (1844-1900), whose Superman impressed him. (19)
Emil Ludwig (1881-1948) (20) was one of the leaders of a new biographical school. He relied very much on soliloquies and descriptions of psychological movements but this was not based on a wide acquaintanceship with documentary sources.(21) His writing in literary biography was appropriate literary using a narrative approach. He was the first to reverse this, using the methods of psychology in most of his writing to psychoanalyze substance,"never be interested in political movements or battle, but all his concern was in the character of Napoleon and his psychology."(22) Ludwig was one of the understandable biographers "who adored exaltedness which is rare in reality." (23) Al-Aqqād met Ludwig when the latter visited Egypt in 1923 and some of the comments made in their discussions were later published. Al-Aqqād was stimulated by Ludwig's technique of inner monologue and his narrative style in his biographies.

Freud wrote critical biographies using psychoanalysis such as his long chapter on Leonardo da Vinci, (24) and this book was constantly consulted by al-Aqqād.

Al-Aqqād read European literature and European philosophy assimilating what suited his individual temperament and spiritual tendency. He had an appetite for reading, and European culture was the fountain and source of what he searched for. Between 1908 and 1931, the date he published his first portrait of the life of Ibn al- Rūmī, al-Aqqād wrote many of his biographical articles - in effect, portraits in miniature - for journals, which were later collected in books. For example, Khulāṣat al-Yawmiyyah wa-al-Shudhūr, his first book, published in 1912, contained four short biographies; Nietzsche in two pages, Ḥafīẓ Ibrāhīm's poetry in one page. The third, Ibn Ḥamdīs Abd-al-Jabār b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Ḥamdīs al-Ṣiqīlī al-Sarqūsī (25) who died when he was about eighty (447A.H.), he became a poet when he was twenty
years of age.(26), he had good relations with al-Muʿtamid b. Abbād. His father was a poet, he went to Africa, his tomb is in Maurka (or Bijaya)(27) and the last thing he says "his poetry was sentimental not artificial."(28) Al-ʾAqqād infers from Ibn Hamdis' poetry portrait, which was clear. Ibn Hamdis was Al-ʾAqqād's first appropriate short biography. The fourth, Qāsim Amin.

Al-ʾAqqād has a pre-eminent place in this study not only because of the size of his literary production over a period of sixty years but also for his contributions in the field of literary biography.

In both his longer independent works, and his contributions in journals, al-ʾAqqād was without doubt a pioneer. His works written between 1908 and his death in 1964 include more than one hundred books and nearly five thousands contributions in journals. He wrote twelve full-length books on literary figures, four of them on non-Arab authors: Al-Mutanabbi (1924), Ibn al-Rūmī (1931), Tidhkār Goethe (1932), Shuʿarāʾ Misr wa-Biʿatuhum fī al-Jil al-Madī (1937), Rajʿat Abī al-Ālāʾ (1939), Shāʿir al-Ghazal: ʿUmar b. Abī Rabāʿī (1943), Jamīl Buthayna (1944), Bernard Shaw (1950), Abū Nuwās (1953), Al-Taʿārif bi-Shakespeare (1958), Shāʿir Andalusi wa-jāʿizat ʿĀlamiyyah (Juan Ramon Jimenez) (1960), Rijāl ʿAraftuhum (1963).

Al-ʾAqqād's contributions to journals appeared in literary periodicals such as Al-Balāgh and Al-Dustūr, or in daily newspapers. Most of these articles were written to mark important literary anniversaries such as those of the birth or death of celebrated authors. These contributions may conveniently be called "portraits in miniature" cf. the volume by Lytton Strachey, Portrait in Miniature, (1931) and some of them have been re-published under new titles in al-ʾAqqād's lifetime and also after his death.(29)
a. A Portrait of Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Māʾarī

Al-ʿAqqād did not write an independent biography of al-Māʾarī but studied different aspects of his life and poetry in separate essays. The first series appeared in 1916 in the al-Muqtaṭaf, a monthly literary review. The topic was Al-Māʾarī’s disposition. In 1923, five new essays were published by al-ʿAqqād in Al-Balāgh weekly. This time he studied al-Māʾarī’s pessimism, cynical sarcasm, fantasy and views on women. In 1939 he published a full book titled: Rajāʿat Abī al-ʿAlāʾ. In fact al-ʿAqqād never stopped writing about the classical, blind poet-philosopher in subsequent years, notably in response to Tāhā Ḥusayn’s critical observations. Taken in their entirety, the essays, pieces and books penned by al-ʿAqqād constitute a psychological portrait of al-Māʾarī. Taken singularly, each would look more like a sketchy profile. Al-Māʾarī, says al-ʿAqqād, came into existence orphaned, poor, pessimist, melancholic and excessively sensitive. Among the symptoms revealing this disposition are "his deep sadness, gloominess, perplexing depression, focus on death in daily conversations, misgiving and, last but not least, loss of confidence in people as in himself."(30)

He adds:"Had it not been for his blindness and early good upbringing, the misfortunes which befell him in his boyhood, the chaos and upheavals which plagued society, his weak body enervated by smallpox, the cynical mood he had would have distanced him from asceticism and self imposed isolation."(31) True his pessimistic temperament was deeply rooted in him, but his life events intensified it. He had no rational choice in his intentions and deeds. Thus, al-Māʾarī arrived at the conclusion that the will of man is suspended, his mind or reason is harnessed and passions are uninhibited."He was inclined to self-torture like mentally deranged masochists."(32)
The key to al-Maṣarri’s philosophy, al-ʿAqqād asserts, is "to study his disposition and mood and attribute his thoughts and contemplations to the peculiarities of this disposition which the environment conditioned."(33)

Al-ʿAqqād views al-Maṣarri’s pessimism and sarcasm towards life in its totality as being conducive to "a disdainful attitude and rejection of worldly, material benefits."(34) Thus al-ʿAqqād depicts the psychological features of al-Maṣarri and the conditions prevailing in his era, focusing on the poet’s cynicism which resembles that of the German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860).

b. A Portrait of al-Mutanabbi
Al-ʿAqqād takes al-Mutanabbi’s early life in Kūfa city as his starting point. Kūfa at that point was the nest of the anti-Abbasid Shiʿa and the birthplace of all sorts of oppositional groups, from the descendants of ʿAlī to various religious sects, to power mongers, who were hostile to the Abbasid Caliphate seat in Baghdad. When the Qarāniṭa captured Kūfa in one of their forays and took the military commander of the Caliphate army into captivity (during the reign of al-Muqtadir), al-Mutanabbi was a twelve-year-old boy. Under those circumstances, when the state of rebellion was held high and that of religion was held low, claimants of prophecy would multiply. Al-Mutanabbi was a natural born aspirant to such lofty ranks. He observed no prayer or fasting and disdained prophets, never recited the text of the Qur’an, the holy book of Islam. Absorbing Greek philosophy and the teachings of apostatical and atheistic groups, he was, al-ʿAqqād asserts, well prepared for such pretences. His self-magnifying, his sense of grandeur led him to inflate, magnify, exalt and exaggerate on the one hand, and to underrate, decry and belittle, on the other. Al-Mutanabbi developed vehemence of character, pride, grandeur, and perhaps these qualities prompted him to strive for power and supremacy.
His failure, however "left him indignant at and contemptuous of his folks, his time and his life. The more failure bit, the more he magnified his ego in his poetry."(35)

He yearned for wealth, because money was the instrument and machine for achieving a majestic glory. He craved for knowledge and philosophical wisdom because they were instrumental in achieving supremacy, triumph and eminence. For al-Mutanabbi "sovereignty was the purpose of his life, and the will to power was the source of moral virtues and the pivot on which good and praised conduct hinged."(36)

In his social relations, al-Mutanabbi was known to have been truthful, frank and loyal to friends, but he tended also to conceal his inner thoughts and real ambitions. Among his interesting qualities was his love of Bedouin females who were in his eyes so pure and truthful that they did not need to chatter incessantly to hide their desires nor to use cosmetics to artificially beautify their eyebrows and eyelids.

c. A Portrait of Bashshār

The key to the portrayal of Bashshār's persona lay, for al-ʿAqqād, in his physical composition: "He was of bulky body, very tall, with heavy scapula. He had that kind of animality which is disposed to all sorts of debauchery, dissolution, entertainment and pleasures."(37) Being born to "Persian parents from the Mawāli [non-Arab clients]"(38), he received no religious upbringing and was far removed from any sort of piety. The early Abbasid epoch during which he grew up to maturity witnessed the development and currency of various philosophical and irreligious views and schools. Bashshār was well acquainted with the different contending and rival intellectual schools and groups whose meetings he would attend, such as the gatherings of the Muṭāzila, the advocates of Fatalism or the Shiʿa, i.e. the followers
of 'Alī, prophet Muḥammad's cousin and son in law, and his household, namely his offspring from Fatima.

Al-Āqqād points out that Bashshār's poetry was suffused with a ridiculing spirit. His intelligence "his pleasure seeking fervour, or his insincerity were attractive and repulsive. People liked and feared him."(39) As for his poetry "it was bereft of inspiration, longing, yearning, nostalgia or even imagination, but it was rich with breathing experiences. In his poems he merely registered his life encounters in the manner any other person might well have done using rhyme and rhythm. The only difference was that he had better eloquence and sharper expressive capabilities. This is clearly reflected in his poems of wisdom, vivid description, erotica, love episodes and of course satirical attacks."(40)

Bashshār's love and erotic poems "presented either a sincere narrative of sensual and real experiences or an expression of desire. His amorous lust was focused on the female, which for him, was one in every actual woman he may have liaised with irrespective of name or shape."(41) Al-Āqqād's approach was three dimensional. First, the physical composition of Bashshār is considered in its own right as a pivotal aspect in the analysis. The second aspect is the poet's sensual, fleshly demeanour. Lastly, there is the impact of epoch in which he lived, the age of contradictions. These factors combined to leave their mark on his poetic nature and strengthened his inclination to satirical assaults to intimidate people and achieve fame and eminence.

d. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī

Applying a psychological approach, Al-Āqqād reviews Ibn al-Rūmī's life and epoch, analysing in depth his human character. "In his collections of poetry, there is an esoteric translation of his psyche in which he conceals places, spaces and time but reveals the emotions, sentiments and inner thoughts from which human life is made."(42)
In his portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī, al-ʿAqqād counted on the poet's collection first and on historical chronicles second. To have a graphic image, al-Aqqad reviews the third century of Hijra, the period in which Ibn al-Rūmī lived, saying it was the age of political paradoxes and contradictions, the era in which feudalism, corruption, bribery, chaos, upheavals, rebellions and mutiny against the Sultan prevailed. But it was also the days of luxury, entertainment and joyful gaiety as well as the times of alienation, loss and destitution. The list of paradoxes never ends. This era was also "the best of all times for the flourishing advance of sciences, civilization and culture."(43) It is in the third century of Hijra that all kind of literary genres and scientific callings and productions blossomed, poetry and poetry scholars included."(44) During that period "different schools, sects and dogmatic/scholastic antagonisms emerged and led to violent inter-struggles."(45)

This age was the least favourable for Ibn al-Rūmī who, by dint of his poverty and frailty, lacked the instruments of success in his capacity as a man. In his function as a poet who enjoys talent and delicate artistic sense, it was the most convenient epoch. Al-ʿAqqād says that his over-reliance on Ibn al-Rūmī's poetry for analytical purposes stems from the fact that "unlike other poets, Ibn al-Rūmī was unique in his keen observation of his own psyche as in his detailed recording of the events of his life in verse."(46)

Al-ʿAqqād takes his reader to review Ibn al-Rūmī's lineage; he is Greek on the side of his father; Persian on the side of his mother. Details of his family life, his wife, children, education, his command of Arabic language, his character and disposition are given. Al-ʿAqqād even depicts his physical features: "He had a rounded, small head and white complexion."(47) He was hypersensitive, neurotic, tense, anxious, excessively apprehensive (perhaps due to a mental disorder). He was also renowned
for his sarcastic humour. Far from being envious or hateful, his satirical poems were "a natural outcome, a truthful expression of his real inner suffering from his own self and society."(48) He would conjure up spectres of phobia, imagine horror and manufacture panic. In his last years, he was possessed by dreadful delusions to the point of hypochondriasis. Evil misgivings overwhelmed his words and deeds. He even developed a hydro-phobia.(49) Ibn al-Rūmī was totally unlucky "Calamities overshadowed him. Achieving no success in literary life, he lost his wife and children, his property was gone, his farms were burnt."(50)

Al-Aqqād also studied Ibn al-Rūmī's satirical poetry, his relations with other contemporary poets, the men whom he praised in his verse, and lastly his poisonous death. Seeing him as a genius, al-Aqqād contended that this faculty stemmed from the Greek knowledge and creativity which was characterized by a deep love of life, love of nature and the faculty of personification and the power to envision.

e. A Portrait of Shu'ara Miṣr

In his studies of the lives of the Egyptian poets who preceded his generation, al-Aqqād focused "on the environment, because studying it is very important in any critic of poetry in any nation or generation."(51) Ḥāfiz Ibrāhīm, he says, lived in circumstances which were different from those under which Shawqī existed; and the environment which embraced Ismā'īl Ṣabī was dissimilar to that which enveloped Muḥammad Abd al-Muttalib. Ṣabī lived in Cairo and was educated in Paris where he came in contact with French poetry and admired Lamartine, hence his Cairene gentleness and Parisian sincerity. By contrast, Abd al-Muttalib lived in a religious atmosphere which was clearly reflected in his verse.

What al-Aqqād wrote about Aḥmad Shawqī was, perhaps, the deepest of his studies. Shawqī lived "among the Egyptianised (ruling) Turks who were only skin-
113

Deep Westernized." (52) That is why, al-Aqqād thinks, Shawqi's sensibilities were alienated from the mood of the nation. He was a man of the royal court and his rhyme was "monarchical." (53) Al-Aqqād's concept of environment was dual, it is a macro setting, here the Egyptian, and a micro frame, here the family, city or neighbourhood.

1. A Portrait of Umar b. Abī Rabī' a

Umar b. Abī Rabī' a represents an unprecedented psychological phenomenon in Arabic literature. He was born in the year (23A.H.) (on the very day the second Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb passed away) and presumably died in (93 A.H.). Al-Aqqād relies heavily on the Dīwān [poetry collection] of Ibn Abī Rabī' a to provide biographical details. The poet descends from the wealthiest families of Quraish, the tribe from which prophet Muhammad comes. He leads a luxurious life "surrounded by female-slaves and male slaves who serve and provide pleasures for the young and rich man so delivered from the agony of winning his bread." (54) With his good looking countenance, graceful, tall figure, wealth and leisure time, "he had the means to paying court to and keeping company with charming young females. He was the best representative of the Yemen and Ḥijāz civilized urban life during the first century of the Hijra calendar." (55)

It seems that his was the age of love episodes in its width and breadth, for there was "no doctor of religion, jurisprudent or even commander who had not written love poems and had had a wide, receptive audience." (56)

Love and love-poems, it seems, were more than a necessity in that epoch. Umar was the poet of that luxurious, rich and idle class in those days. All the women he courted were rich and charming. The females of this upper class "were not only gracefully attractive but took pride in parading their beauty, and were keen on seeing
the effects of their attraction and hearing what was to be said about it.” (57) It was only natural for love-poetry "to thrive under such circumstances where women are invited to approve of it and lured to heed to it." (58) Umar excelled in this kind of rhyme and al-Aqqad attributes his success to two factors: the legacy he inherited from his Yemen mother, and the feminine trait in his nature.

The latter attribute, al-Aqqad says, is discernible in the fact that the poet betrayed his fondness of the vocabulary used by women and the pleasure he found in uttering these words. The poet was also in the habit of mimicking feminine attitudes, like flirting, or playing heart-break or hard-to-get. The fact that Umar assumed many nicknames for himself was another evidence of his flirting. Umar was neither inclined to poor women nor content to have only one, no matter how far any woman may have been attracted by his elegance, glamour or eloquence. Al-Aqqad tried to analyse Umar’s character by means of the latter’s verse, but he also studied the Hijaz setting in those times and the impact it had on determining the course Umar took. In the eyes of al-Aqqad, "Umar reflected that environment in the best possible of all ways." (59)

g. A Portrait of Jamil

Jamil b. Abd Allah Ibn Mar, the poet of love, lived in Hijaz, the mercantile, developed part of Arabia at the time. And al-Aqqad would take as his starting point this setting where desert and civilization meet. Speaking of Hijaz, al-Aqqad says: "It is an environment from which emerges the likes of Jamil, the poets of the bedouin desert which neighbours the Hijaz civilization and has contacts with the remote Islamic centres of civilization in Egypt and Syria." (60) Hijaz was then "resuming its customary life which developed prior to the rise of Islam, but in a new way." (61) In
this setting, Jamil appeared and matured as a poet of love. Certainly, he was extremely self-conceited, strutting like a peacock.

True, he was tall and handsome, but was coddled since childhood. His character had already prepared him for that fate, to be bewitched by Buthayna, that bedouin, slim, charming and tall young woman. When the time came and the encounter occurred, he could not escape his destiny. Unlike him, Buthayna was of a moderate temperament. "Both Jamil and Buthayna had the same ancestry, their common grandfather Han Ibn Rabia." (62) To add insult to injury, his beloved Buthayna was married to another man. The husband "was weak, unlovable, unworthy of esteem and one-eyed. She could never sense she was being supported or protected by her husband." (63) Among the paradoxes of Jamil's life is that "his own love poetry destroyed his very endeavours to accomplish his objective." (64) These passionate poems simply alienated Buthayna.

Yet Jamil's love for Buthayna never waned. Although the Sultan had issued restrictive order, Jamil would, nevertheless, stalk to the forbidden place: Buthayna's neighbourhood.

h. A Portrait of Abu Nuwas

In al-Aqqad's words, Abu Nuwas was a typical character (Shakhshiya Numuzajiya) in many senses. His persona was composed from the combination and interaction of various influences, starting with the family breeding. Under the excessive care of his loving mother, he was completely spoiled. The Basrah society was the scene of many social, political and moral paradoxes. There were rival religious-political movements, military raids launched by dissidents or bandits, inter-struggles between Persian and Arabs, and among Arabs between the Qahtanī nobility and the Adnānī
lineage. It was the age of political, racial and religious conspiracies and antagonism. In the social realm, drunkenness, gambling and prostitution flourished.

Abū Nuwās was a narcissist, and narcissism, according to al-'Aqqād, caused his deviation. But other factors stemming from family upbringing, the social environment in Baṣrah and the nature of his epoch, assisted and enhanced this moral divergence. The influences which moulded him were unique indeed. In his motives and sexuality he was homosexual. To overcome the complex of inferiority caused by his humble lineage "he intoxicated his senses with wine because wine was the beverage of the kings or the lordly liquor of his Persian ancestors and Caesars." His heart was the place in which atheism, asceticism, love for the females and the males found a common habitat.

i. A Portrait of Goethe

"He is the offspring of the Church which rebelled against nature, and the castle which rebelled against the Church, and the city which rebelled against the castle and the individual who rebelled against the city."(68)

In this manner al-'Aqqād starts his account of Goethe's life. He goes on to outline the features of this epoch: a period of flourishing science and knowledge. Presenting the history of artistic freedom in Germany, al-'Aqqād asserts that the German spirit was characterized by its esoteric propensities.

In this context, he describes Goethe's life stages (1749-1832) from cradle to grave. Being the descendent of the wealthy classes he studied Latin, Italian and French from his early boyhood. More often than not, his father was his tutor. At such an early age, his talent began gradually to blossom. He completed his university degree at the age of twenty two. He had close relations with Karl August, prince of Weimar, and had the chance to make acquaintance with Napoleon Bonaparte. Herder and Schiller were among his literary comrades. Goethe's attraction to women never
waned throughout his entire life, that is because "his instinct was that of a passionate woman-loving poet ready for romance."(69) Goethe begot five sons who all prematurely died in their childhood, except his elder son, August, who lived on to the age of forty. He passed away in Italy. Al-Aqqād praised Goethe as a genius: "His is an artistic genius which finds a home in sensing the beauty of the present and transforms this beauty into a balanced, spiritual devotion and aesthetic creation."(70) Al-Aqqād analysed Goethe's external and internal persona, following him in his intertwined psychological and spiritual transformations.

Goethe observed the leading principle of classical Athens, in fact of Aristotle: No excesses on either extreme. In his practical philosophy, "Goethe was humbly satisfied to get whatever part from the world."(71) He was a believer in God and submissive to divine will.

j. A Portrait of Bernard Shaw

Bernard Shaw emerged in the age of science and social, emancipatory systems calling for the breaking of the fetters inhibiting human liberty. It was the age of Sigmund Freud and Lombroso "Shaw was not placed far from these callings or propensities in both his thought and literature."(72)

Being Irish is another factor. The Irish are "diligent, hard working people, bent on achieving liberty and enjoy a great sense of humour."(73) This was the ideal soil to produce the insurgent, sarcastic Shaw. In fact Europe as a whole "was productive of systems, theories and pleas to rebel and demolish traditions whether in art, literature, science, philosophy or society."(74) From this atmosphere Shaw derived many of his rebellious ways of thinking which hardened his will to defy the power of
traditions. In a sense, Shaw was the offspring of his age in as much as he was the true heir of his mother's satirical temper.

He was neither a nihilist nor a sensualist but a humble, ascetic vegetarian who never went near spirits. Women occupied an important place in his works rather than his emotional life. For him, reason was the only means to arrive at truth.

k. A Portrait of Shakespeare

In his account of Shakespeare's life, al-Aqqād depicted the Age of Renaissance and the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the epoch of the new outlook to man and knowledge. Shakespeare's was a rural family of middling rank. At an early age, he was taught to read and write at home. At the age of twelve he left school to stand by his father in his work, dealings and cattle herding. It is reported of him that he travelled or ran away to the city either out of indiscretion or simply to study the art of dramatics. In short, Shakespeare, in al-Aqqād's words, was "the son of a rural family which, in that age, was keen on upholding the values of honour, dignity and hard work."(75) At the age of forty five he stopped writing altogether. His was an epoch of "political intrigues, accusations, trials, defamation and slander."(76) Solemnity, hard-work, self-confidence and probity were among his personal qualities. His disposition was that of a humble, contemplating philosopher, a man of dignity, tranquillity, humour, resourcefulness and originality. His was a message of artistic creativity which was mainly concerned with human nature.

l. A Portrait of Jimenez

Al-Aqqād presented a simple, concise profile of Juan Ramon Jimenez, in which he detailed where and when Jimenez was born, lived and died, what was his literary status and the intellectual features of his period and his love of nature.
m. Al-Aqqād and his Short Biographies

Al-Aqqād produced a multitude of short biographies during his career as a writer. Some of these narratives ranked high in terms of modern, artistic biographical writings, others were simply traditional. During more than half a century, al-Aqqād jotted down more than one hundred short biographies relating to Arab and foreign writers and poets. This huge production was first published in current dailies, weeklies and monthlies. The materials were collected later on in separate works like: Al-Fuṣūl, Murāja‘at fī al-Adāb wa-al-Funūn, bayn al-Kutub wa-al-Nās, Sā‘āt Bayn al-Kutub. These contained biographies of modern and classical figures.

In general, biographies by al-Aqqād are classifiable into five categories: the miniature, the portrait, the monograph, the commemorative biography and the profile. He was very eloquent and clear about the delicate differences between these types.

In selecting the characters, al-Aqqād applied a method of his own: they were all celebrities with whose persona his own character had things in common such as integrity, self-reliance, will to power, individualism. In all cases, he sought to disclose the key features of the personality and its ingenuity. Being aware of the individual texture of each, he did his best to show the singularity and selfhood of the writer and study the impact of the social environment. The psychological approach, which he deemed the pillar of modern literary research, was at the centre of his methodology.

Al-Aqqād, in fact, came under the influence of European biographers with whose works he was acquainted. This applies in particular to short biography writers, in whatever sense of the above mentioned we may understand the term "short biography". It is interesting to note that al-Aqqād uses the term "portrait in miniature" without giving credit to its original author, Lytton Strachey. Al-Aqqād had borrowed many terms from Strachey, even some of the titles he chose for his essays.
To sum up, al-Aqqād composed different profiles, miniatures or short biographies of more than 60 Arab and around 40 European poets and writers. The size, method and motives for writing these pieces were different and varied. Some were mere quotations and repetitions, lacking artistic creativity. Many essays were simply translation of texts on this or that poet, the more so if the latter was a European; other essays were a reproduction of biographical details covering life passage, from birth to death. For example, what al-Aqqād inscribed about Ibn Ḥamdīs was mostly a repetition of what had been mentioned in this respect in historical annals. Critics, however, consider al-Aqqād's text on Ibn Ḥamdīs (77) as the first biographical work he had done. Almost all Egyptian critics are unanimous in the opinion that al-Aqqād masterfully applied the psychological method on the great literary figure. Each new critic would reiterate the same above without supporting his claim with any evidence. A chain of assertions has become, thus, available.

It seems that al-Aqqād chose only those whom he considered to have genius, to be eccentric and to have callings. On the other hand, his choice was intended to "uncover a hidden truth or restore a lost right."(78) for the celebrity in question.

His short biographies were mainly concerned with bringing into bold relief the psychological nature of the person. He applied different methods ranging from historical determinism, to psychological method to impressionism as Taha Husayn

We may safely conclude that al-Aqqād was a productive biography writer, perhaps the most prolific. Perhaps the journalistic character of his work might well be held responsible for such shortcomings. Yet he was a pioneer in this field who introduced this literary type and acquainted the readership and literary milieux with many new ideas which he derived from European authors. By this al-Aqqād also introduced French, German and English methods of research.
His characteristics as a Biographer

Al-‘Aqqād’s book on Ibn al-Rūmī, applied a technique on which critics had seemingly divergent views. In the eyes of one critic, this technique constituted "biography and portrait at one and the same time. It is a biography because in it al-‘Aqqād covers the epoch, circumstances and life accounts of Ibn al-Rūmī. And it is a portrait because it constitutes a study of Ibn al-Rūmī’s psychology, faculties, genius and philosophy."(79) In the opinion of another "It was a good example on the application of the psychological approach."(80) Or, according to another view, it is "a study in which al-‘Aqqād presented Ibn al-Rūmī on the basis of a mild, understated, psychological method."(81) A fourth judgment saw it as a psychological biography because in it "Al-‘Aqqād exhibited a picture of Ibn al-Rūmī’s life, leaning on the latter's poetry to depict his psychological demeanour and the features of his human image."(82) All these comments revolve around essentially one idea dressed in different wording.

This applies to the observations on al-‘Aqqād’s biographical methodology: "He [Al-‘Aqqād] neither pertains to the method of the Arabic Sīrah nor to that of the European biographies, although he was versed in the latter and made extensive use of it. What he gives us is a portrait constructed from quick, but lively outlines. From these outlines the image of an individual emerges."(83)

In his book on Ibn al-Rūmī, al-‘Aqqād built upon "two pillars, the first he borrowed from Saint-Beuve, namely that the literary work is but the incarnation of the man who created it, it is the incarnation of his life, thought and soul. To comprehend the work we need to fathom the talent of the artist by means of studying his intellectual culture and private life. The second pillar on which al-‘Aqqād built was taken from the regularities Taine formulated. These principles state that the artist is the product of his
epoch, environment and race, and the art is the product of the artist."(84) Hence al-
Aqqād researched these elements relevant to Ibn al-Rūmān and used them as an
instrument to dissect the artistic creations of the poet as being the result of these
different influences which formed the genius of Ibn al-Rūmān."(85)

This was an orientalist, scientific method relevant to the study of the lives of poets.
Taha Husayn derived it from his tutor Carlo Alfonso Nallino and applied it to the
history of Arabic literature.(86) But al-Aqqād also adopted the psychological and
other methods. In fact "he combined most of the methods of literary criticism."(87)
from that of Plutarch to that of Freud and his disciples. But, al-Aqqād, we may
presumably conclude, applied these combinations in different ways and to varying
extents on the authors whom he selected and who "represented cases exemplifying
his literary philosophy embedded, as it were, in his philosophy of life."(88)

One is strongly inclined to believe that al-Aqqād's interest in Ibn al-Rūmān increased
remarkably when he found in him support for Nordau's theory (or rather for the
theory of Lombroso with which he had acquainted himself through Nordau's
Degeneration).(89)

Al-Aqqād stressed the significance of the environment as a context whose changing
nature would produce different effects. Hence āl Umar b. Abi Rabīʿā lived in a setting
which encouraged romance poetry. The environment of al-Mutanabbi influenced the
process of moulding his character and strengthened in him the propensities of greed,
money-grabbing and search for high rank. By contrast, Bashshār's circumstances as
one of the Mawālī, i.e non-Arab proteges, played a significant role in shaping his
personality.
Among the symbols used by al-ŠAqqād was the so called "key to personality" which he used to depict the desired image. But this symbol was stretched beyond the limits. On the whole, al-ŠAqqād was inclined to write biographies "of great men; he had a conscious grasp of the meaning of biography."(90) and kept asserting that we should "look at the sayer not the saying."(91) His critical remarks against what he termed as Emil Ludwig's incoherent representation of the characters in his biographies (92) was another example of his conception of what biographies should look like. Abstract perception notwithstanding, al-ŠAqqād burdened his biographical method with a heavy critical tone which went beyond the limits of scientific analysis. His characters were depicted in such a way that they appeared to "have been stabilized or fixed in steady maturity. They were constant, sustaining no change or development through different life stages from childhood to manhood and death no matter how traumatized or agonized they had been during this passage."(93)

Biographers "must learn to understand man's way of dreaming, thinking and using his fancy, not to fall in love with their subjects."(94) Attention should not be fixed on specifying one key to personality.

Al-ŠAqqād did not create modern literary biographies in the strict sense of the term, but he did create psychological images, fluctuating between portrait and profile, of those literary figures whom he considered as unique individuals in their lives and artistic creativity.

Al-ŠAqqād's Ibn al-Rūmī Hayatu Min Sharīhi, was the second, serious attempt to create a literary biography in Egypt based, to a certain extent, on the critical scientific method. In his many profile-like essays on al-Mutanabbi, al-ŠAqqād stressed "megalomania" as the key element in understanding the poet's character, although he
conceived this "key" as being the outcome of different, interacting, internal and external factors.

Some literary critics considered al-Asqad’s essays on al-Mutanabbi as masterpieces in biographical attempts (95), but, in my opinion, they fell short of this category in its capacity as a life-story. What al-Asqad achieved was an attempt at character analysis rather than anything else. The same judgement may well apply to his portrait of al-Marri. The latter’s mocking sarcasm was, in his view, the "key" to his persona, and Bashshar’s "key" was his bulky, ugly form. The influences of Lombroso, Nietzsche and Freud on al-Asqad appear very clearly.

His examination of Abu Nuwas was anchored in psychoanalysis. This is quite obvious from the terminology applied, such as self-centred libido, self-idolating, neurotic regression and the like. Only the sections on Abu Nuwas’ disposition mention environment and inherited qualities. Again, in the case of Jamil Buthayna, al-Asqad attributes the latter’s love, in fact burning passion, towards Buthayna, to his paralysed will and Masochism. Again this masochism is seen as the product of superficiality, spoiled childhood, weakness of personality in addition to soft, idle living. His artistic and poetic disposition amplified these propensities. The "key" to his character is weakness of the will. But al-Asqad employed this concept in the context of the environment and epoch. This exhibits to what extent he relied on the critical scientific method in his work.

In his study of Shuara’ Misr, he divided them into two categories according to their micro and macro environments. Accordingly, he classified poets into different types. "He took up the views of Taine and Saint-Beuve, combined them together in his
analysis of the environment, epoch and ethnicity of each poet, and then had the poets
categorized in different clusters."(96) Here we have a profile.

"Umar b. Abī Rabi'a was another model taken by al-'Aqqād in the "selfsame".
previous style. Has al-'Aqqād introduced a consistent method for biography writing?

True he combined many approaches, but the application was amateurish and
superficial in many cases. His piece on Goethe was perhaps a copying of what Emil
Ludwig had written about the great German figure through a translated text, since al-
'Aqqād had no knowledge of German language. Many inaccurate generalizations
stemming from national vanity surface in al-'Aqqād's accounts, such as his
assertions, which need to be verified, that Goethe's genius was due to the influences
the Oriental, Islamic and Arabic texts had on his mind, for Goethe "read the
biography of Prophet Muḥammad, the holy Qur'ān, hence the Qur'ānic aura in his
religious writings."(97)

Al-'Aqqād's were attempts at biography writing rather than biographies proper. It
was out of sheer desire to be complimentary that some critics described his book
Tidhkār Goethe, [Remembrance of Goethe] as "another ticket to pioneering the
world of modern literary biography."(98)

His weakness is most pronounced in his book on Bernard Shaw. A few,
miscellaneous bits, as quoted or copied from other authors, are assembled together.
lacking, as it were, any logical coherence. Even the customary psychoanalysis is
wanting here. The same conclusion can be said of his book on Shakespeare, where
there is hardly a life story. His brief portrayal of Shakespeare's period or his family
background was the only exception. Apart from this, al-'Aqqād preoccupied himself
with reviewing and criticising negative opinions on Shakespeare. Another example is his text on Jimenez. It can hardly be anything but a sketch relying on sources available in English. In fact al-Aqqa-d had not read one book by Jimenez, the only exception was the latter’s volume on Platero."(99)
NOTES

7. Shawqi Daif, Ma'aa al-Ąqqād, lqra', 259, Cairo, 1964, p. 51.
10. M. M. Badawi, op cit., p. 86.
13. Al-Sadānī, op cit., p. 73.
22. Iḥsān Ġabbās, op cit., p. 51.
25. Ġabbās Maḥmūd al-Ąqqād, Khulāṣat al-Yaumiyyah wa-al-Shudhūr, (Cairo, 1968), first published in 1912 was Khulāṣat al-Yaumiyyah, p. 150.
26. al-Ąqqād, op. cit., p. 149.
27. al-Aqqād, op cit., p. 148.
28. al-Aqqād, op cit., p. 150.
35. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 144.
36. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 156.
38. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 68.
40. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 72.
41. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 75.
43. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 36.
44. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 41.
47. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 88.
50. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 149.
52. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 157.
53. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 159.
54. 'Abbas Maḥmūd al-Aqqād, Shār ir al-Ghazal 'Umar b. Abī Rabī‘a. Dār al-
55. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 173.
56. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 177.
57. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 190.
58. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 191.
59. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 208.
60. 'Abbas Maḥmūd al-Aqqād, Jamīl Buthayna, (Cairo, 1991), Silsilat Iqrā’: 13.
61. al-Aqqād, Jamīl, p. 10.
62. al-Aqqād, Jamīl, p. 23.
63. al-Aqqād, Jamīl, p. 32.
64. al-Aqqād, Jamīl, p. 22.
65. 'Abbas Maḥmūd al-Aqqād, Abū Nuwās al-Ḥasan b. Ḥā ni‘ Maktabit Nahdīt
66. al-Aqqād, Abū Nuwās, p. 106.
69. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 49.
70. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 140.
71. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 169.
72. 'Abbas Maḥmūd al-Aqqād, Bernard Shaw, Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnāni, (Beirut,
73. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 444.
74. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 448.
75. 'Abbas Maḥmūd al-Aqqād, al-Ta‘ārif bi-Shakespeare, Dār al-Kitāb al-
76. al-Aqqād, op. cit., p. 167.
77. See Jābir Qumaiha, Manhāj al-Aqqād fi al-Tarājim al-Adabiyyah, (Cairo
78. 'Abbas Maḥmūd al-Aqqād, Anā‘, (Cairo, 1964), p. 87.
79. Shawqi Daīf, Ma‘ṣ al-Aqqād, (Cairo, 1964), Silsilat ‘Iqrā’, 259, p. 121
80. Ati‘ Kafāfī, al-Naṣī’ al-Nafsiyyah fi Manhāj al-Aqqād al-Naqdī, (Cairo,
82. Jābir Qumaiha, op. cit., p. 337.
83. Sayyid Quṭb, Kutub wa-Shakhsiyāt, (Cairo, 1946), p. 315. The previous
quotation comes in two different books without any mention of its source.
We can find it in *Abbas al-Aqqad Naqidan* [Abbas al-Aqqad as a Critic] by Abd al-Hayy Diyab, p.299, and in *Fann al-Sirah* [The Art of biography] by Ilhsan Abbas, p.65.


86. It was a private conversation in Ain Shams University, Cairo.


96. Ibrahim Abd al-Rahman Muhammad, op. cit., p. 204.


98. Jabir Qumaiha, op. cit., p. 188.

CHAPTER VI

Ibrāhīm Abd al- Qādir al- Mazīnī (1890 - 1949) (1)

Introduction

a. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī

b. A Portrait of al-Mutanabbi

c. A Portrait of Bashshār b. Burd

His characteristics as a biographer
Introduction

Ibārīm ʿAbd al- Qādir al-Māzīnī was born in a middle class Egyptian family, his father being a lawyer. (2) Al- Māzīnī’s childhood was spent in a religious home, but his adult world seems to have been secular. His father and grandfather were Islamic scholars. After his father's death, the family moved into a communal residence which included a prayer hall for Ṣūfī meeting. (3)

Al-Māzīnī graduated from Madrasat al-Mu ʿallīmīn al-Ulya, [a teachers training College] in 1909 (4), and worked for a short period as a teacher for translation (English-Arabic) in a secondary school in Cairo, then as a teacher of English. In 1917 he gave up teaching to become a freelance journalist, devoting his energies to politics and literature. (5)

He had profound knowledge of the English language, and was at home with the works of Shakespeare, Byron, Thomas Hardy and Heine who were his favourite authors. (6) Al-Māzīnī translated into Arabic poems by Shakespeare, Milton, Waller, Shelly, Hood, Morris, Edward Fitzgerald and James Russell Lowell, attributing some of them to himself. (7)

He thus became notorious for plagiarism. Apart from Arabic Literature he loved European literature and his favourite writers were Dumas, Maupassant, Shaw, Max Nordau, Anatole France, Freud, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Charles Kingsley, and Homer, among others.

He began by writing poetry and literary criticism. The two volumes of his Diwān appeared in 1914 and in 1917 respectively, and he published an essay of literary criticism on the poetry of Ḥāfīẓ Ibārīm in 1915.

In 1921 he collaborated with ʿAbbās al-ʿAqqād in producing the famous work of criticism Al-Dīwān (8), which was the manifesto of the modernist movement.

In addition al-Māzīnī composed some literary biographies in the form of biographical essays or complete biographies.

a. Biographical essays: This category is again reducible into two sub-forms, they are:

1. Lengthy biographical essays which were collected in a subsequent period in one book, under the title *Hasād al-Hashīm* (The Harvest of Chaff): Example, the portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī.

2. Short biographical articles, a profile or a sketch of a literary figure, published in *Al-Balāgh* newspaper, *Al-Siyāsah*, *Al-Ḥadīth*, *Al-Asās*, *Al-Wādi`. A sample of this is the sketch of al-Mutanabbi (included in the collection: *Hasād al-Hashīm*).

b. Complete biographies: an example here is the critical biography of the Abbasid poet Bashshār b. Burd.

In this section of our research, we shall focus on three samples of al-Māzīnī's writings in this area which, hopefully, would illuminate the author as a biographer.

a. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī *

In his introductory remarks, al-Māzīnī explains why he had chosen Ibn al-Rūmī as a study case so we come to understand that al-Māzīnī conceives of the task of producing a biography of "great figures, whether attempted by a man of letters or a scientist, or whatever, should start with exploring the events of this great figure in
order to trace back the features of his life, his intellectual maturity, his psychological markers. In all this, the study should be based on a thorough analysis of the psychological, moral and ethical side of his character. The psyche of the great figure must be dissected in such a way as to bring into bold relief the various specifics, instinctive and other traits of the personality in their totality."

To achieve such a standardised task, al-Māzīnī relied on Ibn al-Rūmī's own poetry to derive and deduce an image of his life. It is the same method which had already been applied by al-Māzīnī's colleague, al-ʿAqqād, to the case of Ibn al-Rūmī, in his book: *Ibn al-Rūmī Hayātuḥu Min Shīrīhi* [His Life out of His Poetry]. That is because "Ibn al-Rūmī and al-Mutanabbi are two poets who fulfil the basic precondition adopted by the *Diwān* Group [*Jamāʿat al-Dīwān*] to ascertain the greatness of the poet, this basic precondition is the reflection of his life in his own verse." (11)

Al- Māzīnī was totally fascinated by Ibn al-Rūmī. To him the latter was the nearest to the heart, the best and most cherished poet among classical Arab poets. He preferred and supported Ibn al-Rūmī because the latter lived in dire poverty, fighting for his life or defending himself against the onslaughts of staunch opponents or humorous challengers. (11A) Al-Māzīnī gave a detailed description of Ibn al-Rūmī's physical appearance and psychological characteristics, his birth, death, his culture, his behavioural imbalance, his being prone to pessimism, his indignation, sarcastic irony, and lastly his philosophical contemplations.

Ibn al-Rūmī was eccentric. First, he was an alien, he was not of Arab, but of a Greek origin in an era when the lineage was held in high esteem. "He adhered to his ethnicity, the race from which he descended; he clung to his Greek origin with such a passion that he kept announcing who he was without the slightest inclination towards
concealment, or pretensions of Persianism and this is the key to comprehending his poetry." (12) He was "sensitive, refined in soul, of keen intellect where views and creeds clash with various aspects of life and actual reality."(13) Ibn al-Rūmī. according to al-Mājni, digested the culture and thought of his time. sciences, knowledge and literature, for "he wanted to lead an artistic life: that is a life verging on the lofty ideal he cherished and more in harmony with what he thought the sublime function of the poet and with the literary status the poet should hold. He had great desire to achieve this ideal but in vain."(14)

He who suffers such frustration would inevitably be plunged into self-centred indignation, unhappy with his misfortune, leading a self-insulated life, sad and angry towards society at large, hostile to social regimes and conditions, and lastly burning with the unrealistic ambition of fame and glory.

Nothing was known of his parentage, al-Mājni says, but we definitely know that the poet lost his children at their early years and he shed tears over their tragic fate in many of his pieces. His nervous system was in disorder [neuropathy], his reproductive system was also disturbed. As for his pessimism it was easily aroused and continuously fed. A paranoid view dominated his outlook towards people and nature: his sense of being oppressed by them never departed from him. Perhaps it is these factors that made him so hot-tempered, easily angered, rebellious and obscenely satirical.

b. A Portrait of al-Mutanabbi **

In the articles on al-Mutanabbi, al-Mājni considers the high quality of his verse is due to its imminent power. This power is attributable to the power of al-Mutanabbi himself. This, in turn, is the key to personality. "He was of that type of strong
personality that was created for struggle and the challenge not for submission and servile obedience."(15)

His poetry is but a record conveying this high self-esteem, his awareness of his value, destiny, ambition and magnified glory. One example, among many, of this magnified self is seen in what he wrote about his mother:

Had you not been the daughter/ of the noblest of fathers
Your great merit would have been/ That you were my mother (16)

"It is the character of the al-Mutanabbi that created that sound and fury among people in his time, and made them divide into only two camps, one fanatical, advocates of al- Mutanabbi, the other bitter rivals and enemies. Such a sharp division can only be produced by a strong personality. It comes like a tempest. None can afford to ignore it or dismiss it."(17)

His piece on Kafur, the prince of Egypt, vividly illustrates the depths of his strength, his rebellious drive, his thirst, in fact greed, for assuming political power, because "he was a great and a strong man with deep sense of manhood and its conditions. We can detect this sense of manhood in him when we consider how he declines to accept lenience and softness."(18) Perhaps that is why we see that he "deliberately lauds and extols, even magnifies himself in advance before uttering a good word in praise or compliment of a prince or a person."(19)

As for the alleged miserliness of al-Mutanabbi, al-Mazini mentions certain opinions critical of al-Mutanabbi, for his avarice, greed and tight fistedness, but he counters these views by suggesting that miserliness and bravery never come under one roof let alone in one heart. He says " al-Mutanabbi was far from being a miser but was in
point of fact a man who knew and appreciated the value of money and the great
effects it has on our lives."(20)
Glory can not be achieved without good finances, al-Mutanabbi believed, and in
support of this idea he said in one of his poems:
No glory in the world for the penniless
And no penny for those bereft of glory.(21)
The elements of power and strength are the key to al-Mutanabbi's character. But
what are the qualities of this personality?
They are self-esteem, non-lenience, dashing bravery, the will to gain power, the
awareness of destiny and ambition.
It would have been more apt and more fruitful if al-Mázini had presented a deep
analysis of al-Mutanabbi's character, how this personality had developed, what
parents he had, what had been the true story of his controversial sacred lineage,
allegedly extending to the family and the prophet Muḥammad(s). What sort of strain,
pressures and tensions overtook him? What fatal ambitions fraught his heart? What
traumatic experience had he during his imprisonment?

c. A Portrait of Bashšár b. Burd
The method applied in the case of Ibn al-Rūmī was the same one employed in the
analysis of the life and poetry of Bashšár b. Burd.

Bashšár b. Burd, al-Mázini says, was born in Başrah, the port city in what is now
the south of Iraq, around the year 95 of the Hijra to a Persian family of the Mawālī,
i.e. an alien, here a non-Arab, 'client' usually of a weak tribe, patronised by a strong
Arab tribe, a widespread practice at the time of the Islamic conquests.
As a child, he was taken to the desert to experience primitive conditions of the life by living among the Bedouins. Again this was a tradition among many to bring their sons to the hard life of chivalry, to give them the opportunity to learn the 'pure' Arab language, free of any alien accent in the desert where contact with the outside world was limited. Among the Persians, his community was as prominent as Quraish was among the Arabs. It was only mishaps and misfortune that brought them down the ladder of power, prestige and status.

Bashshar was born blind and ended his life being accused of heresy. In his loyalties and allegiance he was capricious. At an early age, in fact at ten, he began to produce verse. He took satire for a start. Of his mother he knew absolutely nothing, including her name. His father was said to have been naive and ignorant; he died while Bashshar was still an adolescent.

His blindness was a main source of creative tension. Because of this physical disability he tried to prove to others that he was talented and gifted with a sharp intellect and that blindness would not in the least affect such faculties of mind and heart as his. The era in which he was destined to live was one of precarious instability, of Arab-tribal solidarity, which meant harsh prejudice against non-Arabs, of chaos, revolts and general disruption and upheavals.

His character was rebellious. Being blind, of low parentage, debased lineage, utterly ugly countenance, bulky body and lastly a Mawla, i.e. a client of low status, all these were factors that strengthened his revolt against the Arabs' religious and other traditions. He was indignant and embittered. His bitterness took various forms, including that of obscene satire, vulgar cursing and insult without any regard to the constraints of good conduct, virtue or ethical standards.
What is true of his attitude towards society is also true of his attitude towards women. To him she was only a female, a tempting body, and object of satisfying masculine lust, an instrument to quench his instinctive thirst. He preferred her soft and tender-skinned, and he drove his female companions to reveal their admiration for his overwhelming power, domination and masculine roughness. He dedicated most of his verse to love and satire. At the end of his life, he was accused of heresy, a serious, in fact, fatal offence at the time. Consequently, he was whipped to death, and he died at the age of seventy.

His characteristics as a biographer

Al-Māzīnī in his portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī relying on a varied and rich intellectual education, al-Māzīnī could make use of modern, critical schools, applying them to his study of Ibn al-Rumi's portrait.

1. Al-Māzīnī used the "key to the character" concept as an introduction to study the personality of Ibn al-Rūmī. The key here is the poet's ethnicity, the fact of being a Greek (Rūmī). This trait sharpened his keen sensibilities and rendered them more delicately receptive than others. In other words "He had an all encompassing feeling of life, he would reach out for it with all his organs, touching it deeply with his bare nerves to absorb as much as possible of it, to have it shrouded into his own soul."(22) He is a poet gifted with a very specific power to sense nature. To him, nature "is a living creature, a vital organism, like him, an entity having sensibilities, soul, memory and even a will of its own."(23)

Such qualities, al-Māzīnī thinks, made him, unlike the Arabs, a unique poet. Al-Māzīnī contends that "the Arabs are not the most poetical people, for they are naive simpletons like all Bedouins and tent dwellers. Hence it is not surprising that they would elevate to the status of guardian and protector those individuals among them
who show any degree of eloquence, and has any amount of witty imagination. Any sort of heavy shoulders and strong muscles. Those individuals would be turned by their tribe into a protective shield and a weapon to challenge the rivals with."

Genetics plays a decisive role in breeding the structure of the physical, the readiness of the intellect. It is only in the nature of things that Ibn al-Rûmi, the man of Arian origin (Persian-Greek), should bequeath a multitude of the features distinguishing his people, and that his verse would be nearer to the Greek poetry than to the Arab."(25)

The "key to personality" was a concept developed by Saint-Beuve who looked into the literary texts and productions for traits leading to the author himself. It is worth mentioning that al- Aqqâd applied the same methodological principle in his study of the biography of Ibn al-Rûmi.

2. To analyse the verse and character of Ibn al-Rûmi, al-Mâzînî applied both psychological methodology and the principles of the science of physiology.

Ibn al-Rûmi's pessimism, for instance, is attributed to his neuropathy. His "satirical pieces were fraught with obscenity and vulgarity explainable by his fragile masculinity, a weakness that drove the poet to be found of liberal allusions to sexual organs. He made contused, liberal mention of women, likening them with nature."(26)

As a biographer, al- Mâzînî focused on Ibn al-Rûmi's psychological motives, analysing his character and showing warm sympathy towards him. In short, the psychological features were explored.

Al-Mâzînî was under the strong influence of the Orientalist writers who held the Arian race superior to the Semitic race, and this is a racial essentialist approach, and an exaggeration to say the least. To a great extent, al-Mâzînî merely reproduced al- Aqqâd's views and ideas on the same topic.(27)
Al-Māzīnī explained Ibn al-Rūmī's mental disorder and neuropathy by the untimely death of his offspring. No concrete, scientific evidence was ever given to support such linkage.

One of the outstanding features which al-Māzīnī attributes to Ibn al-Rūmī is that the poet had strong, keen and highly sensitive feelings of nature and man, but this keen perception of nature "was not only achieved through the faculty of hearing and seeing but also through other senses, notably the sense of smelling and of feeling. These greatly enhanced his potential to capture the beauty of nature." (28)

On the whole, al-Māzīnī's analysis of Ibn al-Rūmī's character and personality may well be considered a "free formation" (Al-Tashkil al-Ḥurr). (29) It comes under the heading of critical biography.

Al-Māzīnī in his portrait of Bashshār moved along various pivotal trajectories. These are:

a. The key to Bashshār's character is his rebellion, or better still his aggressive disobedience and insubordination. Focusing on this aspect, al-Māzīnī revealed the causes of such mutinous behaviour and the consequences it produced.

b. Al-Māzīnī applied the scientific, critical French method which demands that biographical research should be anchored in a three dimensional study of race, surroundings and epoch. Taking this into consideration, al-Māzīnī applied the same method as al-ʾĀqqād.

He also made use of psychological analysis and the science of physiology. This is best seen in the conclusion that Bashshār's blindness motivated his sharp satire, and the idea that his ugly and bulky body drove him to indulge in all sorts of bodily lusts. Lastly, his race, i.e. being of Persian origin, was a catalyst of his insulting attitude towards the Arabs and glorifying attitude towards the Persians. His inferiority
complex produced in him that kind of rebellious behaviour which tempted him to oppose all schools of theology and all colours of faith.

Al-Māzini justifies Bashshār's positions and behaviour on the grounds that his psychological nature, his time, and his surroundings have worked together to pull him down that path. (30)

The idea that the character of the poet is to be found in his poetry is a literary, critical method adopted and applied by al-ʕAqqād and al-Māzini on the case of Ibn al-Rūmī and Bashshār b. Burd.

It is postulated by al-Māzini that Bashshār's blindness at birth might have been caused by his father's illness. His assumption might prove unfounded. The reason why al-Māzini chose for his study the same figures which had been analysed by al-ʕAqqād, asserts the fact he was inclined to further enhance the method of study he had adopted in his earlier work, that is the Diwan.
NOTES


2. M.M. Badawi, op. cit., p.84.


4. M.M. Badawi, op.cit., p.84 and William Hutchins, op. cit., p.3.


7. M.M. Badawi, op. cit, p106.


* The essays on Ibn al-Rumi appeared monthly in *Al-Bayan* between (February-July) 1913 and in *Al-Akhbar* between 9.8-27.9 (1924) on a weekly basis. All the essays were reprinted in the first print of *Hasid al-Hashim* which came into circulation in January 1925.


12. Ibid., p. 264.

13. Ibid., p. 265.


** A collection of articles first published by *Al-Akhbar* newspaper between 16.4.1923-14.5.1923 every week. Later they were reproduced in *Hasid al-Hashim* in January 1925, first edition.
22. Ibid., p. 298.
24. Ibid., p. 238.
27. He even acknowledged that he made use of every single opinion of al-\textsuperscript{4}Aqqad that was mentioned in the latter's preface to a book by Kamil al-Kilani.
CHAPTER VII

Zaki Mubarak (1891-1952)

Introduction

a. A Portrait of ʿUmar b. ʿAbī Rabīʿa
b. A Portrait of Jamīl Buthayna
c. A Portrait of Kuthayyir b. ʿAbd al- ʿRahmān
d. A Portrait of Al-ʿAbbās b. al-ʿAḥnaf
e. A Portrait of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī

His characteristics as a biographer
Introduction

Muḥammad Zaḵ, son of Abd al-Salām Mubārak, better known as Zaḵ Mubārak, was born on the 5th August, 1891, in the village of Sintrīs, Munofiya Province. He was descended from an Arab Ḥijāzī tribe which had emigrated to Egypt and settled in that village. His mother’s father was Lebanese, a fact which Zaḵ has himself placed on record.

Zaḵ Mubārak had great affection for the village of Sintrīs where he was born and brought up, and often praised it in his articles. In many articles he described himself as a physically fit and handsome man, and thanked God for having given him regular features without defect. Mubārak was a narcissist and therefore considered himself among the brightest and strongest of men. He was extremely fond of academic recognition, and admitted this in an interview with the weekly Al-Ṣabaḥ when he was preparing for his third doctoral examination. Asked whether the quest for knowledge should be limited to preparation for a doctor’s degree, Mubārak denied this, but said that the examination for such a degree had a very strong appeal for him because it lasted three whole hours in the presence of the public.

Once he had memorised the Holy Qur’ān, his family sent him to al-Azhar, but he did not stay in al-Azhar long enough to obtain the Al-ʿAlamiyyah. Instead, he transferred to the Egyptian University. This was the most important stage in his life. He entered the University in 1916 and passed the initial test with distinction. He was awarded a doctorate in 1924 for a thesis entitled Al-akhlāq ʿind al-Ghazālī [Ethics as viewed by al-Ghazālī], by the Egyptian University. His second doctorate was from the Sorbonne (1931) for a thesis on Al-Nathr al-Fannī fī al-Qarn al-Rābī al-Hijrī [Artistic prose in the Fourth Century of Hijra]. He was not, however, satisfied with this, and took a third Ph.D (thesis on al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī) at the Fūād I
University (1935). As a result he was dubbed al-Dakātirah (possessing three doctorates).(1) He died in 1952.

In considering the work of Zaki Mubaarak one must distinguish between works of literary criticism and literary biography. Zaki Mubaarak left a large number of articles scattered in different literary magazines. Some of these have been collected and published by research students or members of his family. Most of this material was published during his lifetime; some was published after his death, and some has still not been published up to the present. Philosophy and literature were the subjects he loved most and in them he obtained his three Ph.Ds.(2)

The majority of his books are concerned with the history of Arabic literature and literary criticism, e.g. Al-Bada7 (Cairo, 1923), in which he discusses various ideas related to literary criticism, as well as certain social issues, Al-Muwāzanah bayn al-Shu′arā (Cairo 1926); Madam i′ al-USHQ (Cairo 1928); Al-Nathr al-Fanni (Cairo 1934), etc.

Zaki Mubaarak composed two different forms of biography, namely short biographies which appear in three of his books, some of them being in fifty words only, such as Al-Muwāzanah bayn al-Shu′arā and Naqd al-Shir and Al-Madāʾih al-Nabawiyyah. In his book Al-Muwāzanah he suggests new criteria for judging between poets. Moreover, he offers much instruction to the reader to enable him to enjoy poetry.(3) To compare between Al-Buṣīrī and Ahmed Shawqi, he says: "he (Al-Buṣīrī) is Muḥammad b. Saʿid b. Hmād b. Ābd allah b. Ṣanḥaj. One of his parents came from Abū Ṣyr and the other came from dlās, so his name was formulated from these two different names to be dlāṣyri, but his famous name was al-Buṣīrī."(4) In his second book Al-Madāʾih al-Nabawiyyah he studies the careers of all the poets who praised the prophet Muḥammad. This book commences with Ḥassān b. Thābit and includes poets up to al-Buṣīrī.(5)
Zaki Mubarak shows himself to be fully aware of the great significance of comparisons as a tool in the hand of the critic, and this was a direct result of his reading in both Arabic and French literature. He strongly recommends that the critic should analyse and study the social life and mentality of the poet. In his view, "literature is a portrait of the writer." In point of fact Zaki Mubarak looks upon the critic as one whose basic function is not just to analyse art, but also to draw the attention of men of letters to the aesthetic values inherent in the work, values which they can later bear in mind, when they undertake literary composition.

The second type of literary biography authored by Zaki Mubarak is represented by his three books

1. *Hubb b. Abi Rabita wa-Shi'ruh*, [The Love Affairs of b. Abi Rabita and His Verse], where a portrait of the poet and his poetry is given.

2. *Al-'Ushshaq al-Thalatha* [The Three Lovers], where the portraits of three love-poets, Kuthayyir, Jamil and al-'Abbas, are presented.

3. *Abgariyyat al-Sharif al-Radi*, [The Genius of al-Sharif al-Radi], which is a literary biography and a literary critical research combined.

These three examples shall be examined below in the same sequence with certain quotations and reproductions so as to reveal the focus of Zaki Mubarak's attention and his method, coupled with some critical remarks showing not only the significance of what has been said but also of what has not been mentioned or questioned.

This review would presumably show that these works stand on the dividing line between traditional anecdotes and the modern literary forms. These life stories are, in a sense, biographies in embryonic form, since this literary genre was novel and its
methodology was not yet fully absorbed and digested. Yet as in the last example of al-Sharīf al-Rādī, the scientific method is applied with varying degree of success.

a. A Portrait of Umar b. Abī Ṣa'īd Baṣīr

In his book *Hubb b. Abī Ṣa'īd Buṣār wa- Shī Ṣuḥ* (1928), Zaki Mubarak analysis the youth, love and love-verse of Ibn Abī Ṣa'īd Buṣār. The only marks left of Ibn Abī Ṣa'īd Buṣār's youth and handsome looks, Zaki Mubarak contends, are embodied in his poetry, above all in his love-verse. Poetry is the self-portrait of the poet himself. The question about him remains: Was he a true lover, solid in his affection, or was he a conceited young man, fond of his own fair appearance, a man who does not care for love? If he could neither love nor have deep emotions, how could he then produce such perfect love poems and recreate in his reader that thrilling emotion? What is it in his poetry which surpasses the high poetic level his friends and colleagues achieved?(10)

Zaki Mubarak sets off to study the ideas of The Prime Young Man of Quraish (his nickname), and says: As for love, I would accuse him of it and deny it at one and the same time.

This duality, Zaki Mubarak elaborates, would soon be clear as soon as we come to see the difference between the love of a Bedouin and that of the urban dweller. In his passion, the urban dweller behaves more like an addict, wrestling every day with his uncontrolled desire for the drug or the cup. With his second dose he would only quench the thirst created by the first one.(11) And the chain may thus go on uninterruptedly.

During the sacred ceremonies and rituals of pilgrimage to Mecca, Umar would be looking for glamour and beauty. He would tour the places where the scent of
females could be sensed and their physical existence could usually be seen and touched. It is in this garden of women that he would bend to pluck a charming rose of which there is no equal; or it is at a night gathering that he is present in the hope of seeing if any new fair maidens have arrived in the city. He might come across a young woman ready to give him her heart but he would stand aloof. Or he would offer a glamorous maiden his heart and she would only reward him with negligence. (12)

Zaki Mubarak's idea of urban love is that it is not sincere. It is a play, deceit, it has self enjoyment as its main aim. Umar was so pompous, he was so conceited with his youth, so fond of his own handsomeness, so self-trumpeting about how women quickly and irresistibly fell in love with him. In a word he is a typical narcissist. Such a 'loved' person seldom loves, such a strongly desired man seldom strongly desires the partner. In his poetry, Zaki Mubarak says, I found the self-glorifying satisfaction of the loved not the agony and submission, disarray and feebleness of the lover. (13) True in some of his poems he would swear he longed for a single true love, one endless affection, yet we find out that he is ever changing partners, ever in want of another relation and a new affair. His flirting mood is well depicted in the following two pieces.

His concubine Layla has grasped his mentality. He admits saying:

In a secret letter, Layla blamed me/
saying I am easily bored, moody and changing mistresses.

Rabab, another mistress of his, comes to the same judgement. He writes about her:

Rabab sent gentle reproach, said/
She heard what praise [for other women] I chanted.
Yet the longing for one eternal love is also expressed.

In a poem dedicated to his *Abda he says:

Oh *Abda, your affection shall not be forgotten by my beating heart/

For better or worse, It will not be pleased [without you]

In another piece on Zainab, he depicts himself as having no other thought or dedication but to his love:

In my soliloquy, and inner dialogue is rich,

The focus of my self and my soliloquy is Zainab

Asmā' receives even more praise. He says about her:

Never has [my] heart experienced a love like yours

Never have I set eyes on such a charming beauty

It is obvious that these over-statements cannot all be taken at their face value, and when one is proved false the authenticity of other statements are consequently questioned. *Umar is a cunning, deceitful man, he gives a solemn oath to every single pretty girl that he is hers, and the innocent hearts tend to believe what appears to them a sincere pledge.(14)

*Umar b. Abī Rabi'a seems, in Zāki Mubārak's presentation, untrue in his love relations. He seems to use his good looks, youth, wealth and fame to subdue females. But, Zāki Mubārak goes on, it is not right to judge the verse of a poet or the prose of a writer before a thorough study of his inner feelings and the secrets buried deeply in his chest. That is why we should diagnose his psychological features and personal mentality.(15) To dig into the poet's psyche, to weigh the facts, to scrutinise the allegations that Ibn Abī Rabi'a's love claims were false and that he was
moody and changeable in love, to see how all these possible interpretations left their impact on his poetry, Zaki Mubarak did nothing but repeat the opinions of the classical writers and historiographers, saying they did not grasp the true essence of the poet. This applies to the author of Al-Aghani, who wrote 70 pages on ‘Umar "which told us nothing of the truth about him, and gave us no clue to his personality. The details were jotted down without systematisation, they were even groundless."(16)

Zaki Mubarak takes each sentence of the seventy pages of Al-Aghani dedicated to ‘Umar and scrutinises them word by word to prove that Abū al-Faraj al-Asfahānī, the author of Al-Aghani, was completely wrong. He also sharply criticises what has been attributed to Ibn Abī Rabī‘a of new poetic allegories and novel, creative wording. He says that this kind of focus on poetics bears unknown, or unfamiliar method in studying poetry.(17)

Zaki Mubarak depicts Ibn Abī Rabī‘a as a young man envied by his young contemporaries, desired as a sweet hope by so many pretty girls. Young virgins would dream of him, cherishing the agonising wish to win his favour. Pretty women, we are told, were caught between the two layers of desperation and hope in their love for him. In their restless sleep they would murmur his name. In private female gatherings, women are said to have spoken of him as their favourite topic. A loving young girl fond of the poet would only confess to her sister, at times a daughter would uncover her secret love for him to her mother. His fame was great, and the desire of females for him was even greater. Much to his delight, ‘Umar knew well that he was the focus of attention and conversations at male gatherings and female private social meetings at night.(18)

But Ibn Abī Rabī‘a sought to propagate this image more widely. For this purpose he perhaps invented vividly subtle and charming images of females, to lend his message
to them a tender poetic character. He pleased them with his sweet words and lovely praise of their beauty, glamour and charming features. He deliberately gave overstated descriptions of the moments of secret encounters and night adventures. He insistently and consistently gave impudent, uninhibited accounts of these delicate moments of love. Such dissoluteness and immorality were never seen before by the community. And Umar did his best to go beyond all limits. (19) "He was characterised by sweet narrative and lovely wording in depicting his night adventures with his charming concubines." (20)

Cunning as he was, Umar used his poetry as a camouflaged net to hunt his females. (21) After forty, the ageing Umar almost deserted love poetry, and only resorted to it, the classical tellers of his life story say, when an agonising memory occasionally overshadowed his mind. (22)

b. A Portrait of Jamīl

Zākī Mubārak explains that the consensus of the classical poetry narrators on the great status Jamīl had in the realm of verse and love was, in a sense, a response to a strong psychological drive, namely the desire to have in Arab history a lover who would reach, by dint of his generosity and honest emotions, the same sublime status heroes usually enjoy. (23)

Jamīl's poetry was emotive, well-built and had an elegant style. He was totally ripe for writing verse, "he was the narrator of Hudba b. Khashram, Hudba was a poet and narrator of al-Ḥuṭay'a, and al-Ḥuṭay'a was a narrator of Zuhair." (24)

For passionate love he was prepared and well equipped with literary skills that would make his story more attractive than ever. Jamīl was a man of integrity, dashing heart, feared by the foe and liked by the friend. To him, love was not an art of
having fun but an ordeal befalling his bold heart. His agony was prolonged by his uncontrollable affection. Only death could save him as a lone expatriate. (25)

His first encounter with his beloved, Buthayna, took place on one day of the Muslim holiday (ʿid), and the love he felt for her at first glance is liberally depicted by him without any due respect to keeping the affair in secret. But Buthayna marries a man other than him and falls in love with a third. Hence an estrangement between the two. The details of their affair reveal that both held love in high esteem, seeing it as transcending the vulgarity of worldly sensualities. (26)

Jamīl suffered most in his passion. The Wālī (Governor) issued an order to have him beaten if and when caught in the act of visiting Buthayna. To avoid persecution, he headed for Yemen, then for al-Šām and lastly for Egypt, where he died.

c. A Portrait of Kuthayyir

Kuthayyir b. Abd-al Raḥmān is the second poet Zāki Mubārak studies. The physical and moral character of Kuthayyir is thoroughly pictured. These traits left their impact on his love verse. He was "so short that he was mocked at and ridiculed. He was also one-eyed. Shortness and eye loss are two horrible defects in the Bedouin communities." (27) Thus, "the poet felt too feeble to retaliate when other poets would wage attacks on him. Perhaps deep in his heart he felt he was inept to wage battles in the field of love." (28)

In his religious belief he was "an extreme šīʿeh to the point of absurdity, and this absurdity is the invincible power that made him one of the magnates of the time ... He also believed in reincarnation, the transmigration of souls from one form into
another. He believed in the rise of the dead in the hereafter and saw no point in fearing death." (29)

It is unclear whether or not this belief was the product of a philosophical contemplation or some psychological illness, the more so when we come to know that he praised the Umayyads and played the hypocrite. The answer is he "abides himself by the rule of Taqiyya [Al- Shi' tradition to hide one's own beliefs to avoid persecution], the rule of the weak." (30)

As for his passionate love, "it is not difficult to see that when Kuthayyir was accused of lying, the accusation was out of prejudice and mockery against him. Perhaps he started his love pretensions to lend his life a mantle of curiosity and put it on equal footing with the interesting lives of the many poet-lovers of the time. But what was started as mere humour ended up seriously. He said:

What I did for fun became serious

Seriousness may well come out of play. (31)

d. A Portrait of al-Abbas b. al-Ahnaf

The last of the three lovers is al-Abbas b. al-Ahnaf: "He is the Imam of the honest lovers in the Abbasid epoch. He hoisted aloft the banner of decent affection in that age which was so bewildered by the Imam of the most dissolute libertines, Abū Nuwās." (32) He dedicated his verse to only one woman. He was a man of heart. His verse was richly lyrical and confined to love themes. He was unattracted to travels with the Caliphs. Fawz was the only woman al-Abbas loved and cared for. She was clever and well versed, she read his letters, and on occasions replied to them. But he never revealed her name. He was the poet of concealment par
excellence. He was among the companions of Harun al-Rashid in some of his travels and serious moments. On his way to Mecca he died.

e. A Portrait of al-Sharif al-Radi

Zaki Mubarak describes the era in which al-Sharif al-Radi (359-406 A.H.) was born - the second half of the fourth century of Hijra - which was also notorious for its widespread political corruption. His father, Abu Ahmad al-Musawi, was arrested and incarcerated in the Castle of Faris from (369-376 A.H.). His property was confiscated. The arrest was ordered by Ajud al-Dawla, the prime vizier (minister) and the actual ruler during the time of the Abbasid Caliph, Al-Taqif. The caliph, in fact, was a toy in the hands of the Buwaihi warlords who assumed premiership.

Al-Musawi remained in prison until the death of his oppressor Ajud al-Dawla. Fighting for their father's crown, Ajud al-Dawla's two sons split the kingdom into two halves. Simsam al-Dawla controlled and ruled over Iraq. His brother, Sharaf al-Dawla seized Faris. It is the latter who released al-Radi's father from the cell.

Before his personal tragedy of incarceration, al-Radi's father had another traumatic experience. Chaos reigned in Baghdad when the fight broke out between the Daylam and the Turks. Baghdad suffered most. Al-Karkh city (the part of Baghdad on the western bank of the Tigris river) was conquered and it was declared permissible for the warriors to loot, kill and burn at will. The Karkh was set ablaze, and the arson continued for a week or so. Men were burnt in public baths. Women were killed by sword or fire in their family houses or public female baths. Pillage reigned. Abu Ahmad al-Musawi, al-Radi's father (al-Radi was in his infancy then) could not watch these tragic events unfolding before his very eyes without uttering a word. The catastrophic events caused al-Musawi deep sorrow. And in his capacity as the Chief
of the Guilds of Notables (in the classical Islamic guilds), he approached and reproached Abbas b. al-Husayn, the vizier of Bakhtiar for the massacre and arson in al-Karkh. Angered by this challenge, the vizier excluded al-Músawī from the guild of Ashrāf (nobles), a post of paramount importance for any noble family to assume. (33) Political life was extremely unhealthy, fraught, as it was, with plots and conspiracies.

Intellectual life, on the other hand, was rich and vigorous. Literary criticism, philosophical debates and artistic prose thrived. There were also magnificent poets who enjoyed great popularity. Their verse was widely read and admired.

In this atmosphere, al-Rádī's poems were ignored, much to his bitterness and agony. His wounded pride produced that kind of hatred towards those who neglected him. His reactive attitude was to develop an inflated ego, plagued with vanity and arrogance. With such a responsive self-inflation, it was only natural that the poet became so egocentric that he could see no other poet but himself.

Zakī Mubārak explains that al-Rádī was but the product of such negative political, and positive intellectual, environments.

Mubārak says: "My approach to him is not that of a master to disciple, but that of friend to friend. We have many traits and features in common. We are very similar to each other. Were he to rise now from the dead, he would certainly have come to embrace me and kiss me on the cheek as a brother does to a brother, because what he suffered in his life is similar to what I have also suffered in mine: he fought so resolutely for glory but his community and his epoch ignored him, and I fought so resolutely for glory but my people and time ignored me." (34) and "We go around a depressed soul that suffered injustice, a soul that honestly struggled and decently endeavoured for honour, sublimation and glory." (35) he adds.
In Zaki Mubarak’s words, al-Sharif al-Radi was a permanent companion of wretchedness, and he relentlessly fought misfortune. His qualities made him a genius and enabled him to overcome these difficulties.

Like his father and the magnates of his extended family, al-Radi was a knight. He inherited from his parents many Bedouin connections and friendships which he further consolidated during his trips from Iraq to Hijaz (west Arabia). His brother was one of the celebrities in religious and philosophical sciences. Al-Radi was a healthy man with colourful talents and skills; he was a poet, writer, grammarian, jurisprudent, knight and politician. In his character, sweetness and bitterness, seriousness and janting, sentiment and reason were combined.(36)

In matters of religious belief, he had a free thinking mind that could transcend the communal and theological divisions in order to study all schools and illuminate his mind with the lights beaming from all Islamic schools. His great interest in the Shafi'i school of Islamic law is well known.(37)

Al-Radi took an active part in the literary and scientific life of his era. He also made genuine contributions in his writings. He studied the verse of Ibn Ḥajjaj, the most humorous and mocking poet of the fourth century of Hijra, mostly renowned for powerful descriptions of liberal laxity. Al-Radi’s ambitions were limitless, he even prepared himself for assuming the Caliphate. As an intellectual and educated person, he clearly saw and realised how fiercely minds, passions and schools of religious thought struggled with each other. He looked at life through the eyes of a noble intellectual rather than those of a base pauper. Caught in the middle of the battlefield between heart and mind, he endeavoured to have in one all the realms of glory. He wanted to be a great jurisprudent, a magnate of poetry, and the most prominent Caliph.(38) He considered the poetry of al-Mutanabbi inferior compared to his own.
Had people been unbiased and free from religious, political and literary prejudices, they would have crowned him, not al-Mutanabbi, as the best, he thought.(39)

ZaKī Mubārak analyses and describes the factors which contributed to the moulding of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī’s character and prepared him for the transition to the second phase of his life, that of the search for power and glory, the stage of desperately searching for a role that would satisfy his wild desire for eminence, a role that would compensate for the moral and material loss his family had sustained.

This shift in al-Raḍī’s career is well apparent in his eulogy dedicated to the Caliph, al-Qādir. He simply claimed his right to the Caliphate before the Caliph himself, winning the latter’s anger and wrath, and of course severance of any kind of relationship for ever.

In this challenging piece, al-Sharīf al-Raḍī says:

Oh, the Commander of the Faithful be humble/

In the garden of the noble we are together

When we compare our glory, no difference exists

Except for the Caliphate

From which I am deprived and by which you are surrounded.

The Caliph angrily retorted: I am surrounded by it in spite of you.

This incident reveals an important side of his character, namely how he conceived of the Caliphate as a legitimate right of his, as a post for which he was prepared and destined. It is perhaps for this reason that there would be no channel, method or way he would not try to achieve his political ambitions. We see him praising in long poems the Caliph, al-Ṭāʾī, and the latter is so pleased that he bestows on him great
gifts and endowments, yet when the Caliph is humiliated at the hands of Bahāʾ al-Dawla, the warlord and the actual ruler, who storms the court with his men and deposes the Caliph by force, we see al-Sharīf al-Raḍī run away, leaving the unseated Caliph to his tragic demise.

He redirects his eulogies to Bahāʾ al-Dawla, bestowing on him the most delicate, moral and spiritual qualities. His verse collection betrays the great gifts he received from Bahāʾ al-Dawla, the honours and rewards he had, and how the warlord, the true ruler in Baghdad, heavily relied on him in various affairs.(40)

Yet, the life of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī was in constant turmoil, hesitation and bewilderment, shifting him from right to left and back and forth. For example, we know how much he hated the Abbasids, but also we know how far he went in praising them. He likes the Caliph, al-Ṭāʾif, who handsomely rewarded him, but he shifts his loyalty to his successor, al-Qādir.

No explanation is provided by Zaki Mubarak as to why al-Sharīf al-Raḍī was so keen on showing his constant loyalty to the Daylam and the Turk, or his drive to strike a political marriage, namely getting the daughter of Ibn ʿAlī, the vizier under Bahāʾ al-Dawla, as a wife.

Zaki Mubarak, it seems, could not explain or justify why al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, the Chief of Pilgrimage, the symbol of religious power at the time, should ever chant erotic verse which runs contrary to the delicate religious status he enjoys. He says in one such piece:

Ask my bed what I and she had

We accept what the mattresses testify
There are many examples of his obvious contradictory attitudes. although Zaki Mubarak justifies this by saying that it seems that the "end justifying the means" was the supreme principle and guiding ideal which al-Radi was brought up to accept and cherish. And this was due to circumstances under which he and his family had to live. This is the outline of the life story of al-Sharif al-Radi as told by Zaki Mubarak in his two volumes.

**His characteristics as a Biographer**

Zaki Mubarak in his portrait of Ibn Abi Rabi'a was more a transmitter of what has been said about Ibn Abi Rabi'a than a critic or even a biographer in his own right. He re-introduced what the previous authors had said, but he reorganised the material so as to support his idea that Umar, the poet, was an impudent, uninhibited lover, a jester void of any sincerity in his passions.

But did Zaki Mubarak ever seem to be willing to investigate the inner motives behind some insincere immorality, or behind that liberal impudence and sex-thirst, or the erotic lust which verges on the pathetic?

Was Ibn Abi Rabi'a that type of a sex maniac, or in another possible reading of his personality, was he a Don Juan type of man, searching for the ideal perfect love that exists only in the head, hence the continuous, and ever ongoing search for a new love? Or is it simply a phenomenal narcissism? Many possible interpretations perhaps exist to give what may be called character typology.

Zaki Mubarak did not touch upon the history of the Makhzum extended family from which Ibn Abi Rabi'a descended, and never investigated the possibility of whether such an erotic disorder was, say, a family symptom.
From Zaki Mubarak’s accounts we know nothing of the attitude of the community. Their reaction towards such laxity practised even on days of holy pilgrimage when man is expected to do his best to regain purity of soul and body, absolve himself of previous sins rather than going after lust, flirting and courting with this or that female.

Other questions may also arise. What was the effect of such a supposedly erotic, adventurous life on his own family, his wives and sons? What about his last days, and ultimately his death? If, with occasional exceptions, he had almost given up poetry at the age of forty, as Zaki Mubarak contends relying on many classical narrators, then what did he do and say during the last thirty years separating him from his demise as he died at the age of seventy? What sort of culture and intellectuality had he? How did he start his career as a poet?

His work is more of a portrait, a traditional image reminiscent of what had already been done by al-Afahani in his classical historiography, Al-Aghani.

Zaki Mubarak in his portrait of Jamil attempts a presentation of Jamil b. Mammar showing him as a mystic sufi lover, driven by an invisible force towards this woman. He is unable to disconnect himself from the unseen fetters that tie him to this married lady. It is difficult to imagine such desperate emotions unless the lover is psychologically unbalanced, yet the personal features given by Zaki Mubarak contradict the possibility of such a mental disorder. Jamil is said to be brave, decent, feared by the enemy and respected by the friend. A bold man of integrity would and should show due respect to a married woman in that conservative community. In addition, Zaki Mubarak gives no details about the poet’s childhood. Had he done that, perhaps we would have come to know the hidden motives behind his passive
agnosticism. Man is but the sum total of his previous lives. If Jamil was so
passively obedient, a man without a will, humiliated by his own clan, running away
from Buthayna's next of kin who chase him in order to exact revenge on him for
their wounded honour, dying in exile, if Jamil was all that, then it was either that the
classical narrators fabricated all these accounts of his attitude and verse, or the secret
of this pathetic behaviour goes back to his childhood, an aspect totally unknown to
us and completely neglected by the author.

Jamil's submissiveness is reduced by Zaki Mubarak to his (Jamil) being "forced to
submit to his emotions by a hidden force, it is the hidden hand of destiny which
mercilessly and relentlessly controls human hearts."(41) He even adds, "Jamil the
dashing, aggressive young man did not know the meaning of submission but in love.
His dignity was so strong that he stood aloft from praising any Walis or Caliphs.
No one could ever say he saw Jamil degradingly begging except in love."(42)

Such a confirmation is still questionable since the bulk of "Jamil's poetry was lost,
and only few poems were left, reproduced in certain literary sources such as Al-
Aghani, Al-Amali or Muntaha al- Talab."(43)

What Zaki Mubarak presented was only a portrait rather than a life traced from
beginning to end. No light is shed on the sequence of the development of the
personality and character. Instead, only his love is depicted. There might have been
a possibility to analyse Jamil's psychology and study the influence of the
environment on him. Should this analysis have been done, the piece written about
him might have been a modern literary biography.

Zaki Mubarak, with Kuthayyir, does not confine his presentation to depicting the
character of Kuthayyir, or simply repeating what has been said of him, but tends to
psychologically scrutinise these anecdotes told about him. The traits attributed to him are related to each other in a cause and effect chain of interaction. Physical deformations produce mental qualities which in their turn are reflected in his verse.

His excessive shortness and his graphic thinness produced in him that complex of cowardice and idiocy, and it is perhaps this led him to believe in his self-reincarnation, that he would return to this world on an old horse after forty nights of his death. It is also perhaps this complex that led him to imitate and emulate the handsome, powerful celebrities among the poet-lovers, like Jamil for instance.

Perhaps the presentation would have become clearer had Zaki Mubarak given more details about Kuthayyir’s descent and parentage. Zaki Mubarak thinks that Kuthayyir “suffered from real failure in his passionate drive to reach his beloved woman, hence his anxiety doubled and his excitement inflamed.”(44)

Zaki Mubarak successfully presents vivid images of Kuthayyir’s love affairs, attributing the latter’s rise to prominence among the poets of his days to what is inhibited in his soul, spirit and heart, for Kuthayyir was a torch of intelligence, and intelligence is not created by a complex of inferiority; it is rather the food of a talented person.(45) These factors combined to mould Kuthayyir’s character, not to mention the environment in which so many poets of different walks were present.

But al-Abbās’s portrait was a very traditional description of the poet’s character which did not add any new detail to what the author of Al-Aghāni had already mentioned about al-Abbās. Zaki Mubarak never analysis the poet’s psychological depths as the poet of concealment. Secrecy is the direct antithesis of statement. Why should a prince-poet so close to Caliphs hide his concubine’s real name and never take the path of Jamil and Kuthayyir who, by contrast, did their best to disseminate
their love stories and reveal very delicate details of their concubines and beloved women, whether these were real or imagined?

Zakī Mubārak never touches upon the negative and positive effects the life of wealth, luxury and relaxation had on al-ʿAbbas's poetry, and the mental features that rendered him so hesitant, unable to reveal the name of his woman lover. The personality of Fawz is not investigated by Zakī Mubārak, and he did not raise the question as to whether she really existed, since so many classical narrators claimed she was the product of imagination.

If so, was Fawz a sublime ideal sought after by the poet in his everyday life, as dissolute poet? Or was she a symbol of retreat into the self, into the ideal, to escape from the triviality of actual reality?

In addition, his family life, his connections with friends and clan, his intellectual attributes and character, are all left without any thorough investigation or even a superficial survey.

In his portrait of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, Zakī Mubārak has great admiration for his personality. Feeling that medieval writers and intellectuals had unfairly neglected al-Raḍī, he sets off to restore things to the right path. Perhaps that is why he takes al-Sharīf al-Raḍī's life in every detail, resorting to a critical method which he employed creatively. The essence of this method is that the personality of the poet is the product of the various circumstances under which he lived, and this comprises the environment, the private and general social backgrounds and the spirit of the age in which he existed. This method also specifies that the verse we come to read and enjoy is the product of this personality, moulded by these specific conditions.
To summarise the methodology employed by Zakī Mubārak in his presentation and interpretation of al-Šarīf al-Rādi’s biography, it could be said that it is based on the following assumption: that the genius of the poet was the natural fruit of the political, social and intellectual conditions of his era. Many factors contributed to the maturity and emergence of this genius, among which are his descent from the line of Ālī b. Abī Taʿlīb, the fourth Caliph after the prophet, and, by Shīʿī standards, the first and sole legitimate Imām; and the high social and religious status of his father as the Chief of the Guild of Nobles and the Chief of Pilgrimage. That is, he was brought up in a house of prestige and high culture. On this basis, al-Rādi considered himself a continuation of such sublime lineages and, by extension, a legitimate contender for the post of Caliphate. He considered himself as having the right to magnify his ego and parade his imagined superiority, to use his poetry as a political instrument to achieve his political ends, including praising various Abbasid Caliphs though he despised them, and to look for political marriages to accelerate his ambitious advance.

All these factors might well have contributed to the creation of this genius, but Zākī Mubārak misses the fact that the difficulties which al-Rādi had experienced since the arrest of his father and the loss of the social status his family had (Presidency of the Guild of Aṣhrāf) left in him a deep, anti-social bitterness. His self or ego was over-inflated as some sort of defensive response. Perhaps his Shīʿī dogmatic belief in the Taqīyya, i.e. concealment of one’s opinion for the sake of safety, developed in him that duality of praising, yet despising, Caliphs and viziers.

The poetic talents of al-Šarīf al-Rādi are undoubtedly rich and original. He was renowned for his sincerity in agony and love, for the constant struggle in his heart which was tormented and torn between the luxury of wealth and power on the one hand and the subservience of the heart on the other. It is true that in a sense he was a
strong man, his masculinity would let him accept no less than the most honorable marriages. In a word, his psychological rebellion was a struggle between love and glory. (46) but; Among the most outstanding defects in this biography is the colossal amount of space given to quotations from his verse. Almost two thirds of the 600 pages are covered by poetry.

Zakī Mubārak’s admiration for al-Raḍī hindered his critical faculty from analysing his excessive duality, notably in politics.

For the same motive, Zakī Mubārak failed to mention, even implicitly, that the Taqiyya principle was a main attribute in al-Raḍī’s character and behaviour.

The very title of the book, ʿAbqariyya (i.e. genius) is completely irrelevant. It is perhaps the preference of attractive terminology that inspired this choice.

The artistic structure of the biography is utterly wanting. The book looks more like separate lectures heaped together, although the biography contains major and minor dramatic personae.

His judgements on al-Shaʿrīf al-Raḍī’s poetry are mainly subjective impressions based on his personal taste. It is the same impressionist method employed by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn.

Lastly, al-Raḍī’s relations to his mother, wife, and to his father after the release of the latter from jail, his alienation from his brother, al-Shaʿrīf al-Murtaḍa, even his sudden and perhaps untimely death, are aspects and questions left by Zakī Mubārak without any mention.

Had Zakī Mubārak abstained from looking at the subject-matter of his study as a friend, the book itself might have improved as a biography in its own right.
NOTES


3. Al-Shihābī, op. cit., p. 52.


5. Al-Shihābī, op. cit., p. 53.


11. Zākī Mubārak, op. cit., p. 44.

12. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

13. Ibid., p. 46.


15. Ibid., p. 59.

16. Ibid., p. 60.

17. Ibid., p. 90.

18. Ibid., pp. 96-97.

19. Ibid., p. 106.


21. Ibid., p. 113.

22. Ibid., p. 118.


26. Ibid., p. 29.
27. Ibid., p. 47.
28. Ibid., p. 48.
29. Ibid., pp. 50-52.
30. Ibid., p. 52.
31. Ibid., p. 54.
32. Ibid., p. 110.
34. Ibid., pp. 14-15.
35. Ibid., p. 60.
37. Zaki Mubarak, op. cit., Vol 1, p. 163.
38. Ibid., p. 61.
40. Ibid., p 288.
41. *Al-Ushshâq al-Thalâtha*, p.32.
42. Ibid., p. 33.
43. Ibid., p.46.
44. Ibid., p.75.
45. Ibid., p.82.
CHAPTER VIII

A. Muhammad Sā'id Al-Iryān (1905-1964)(1)

Introduction

A Portrait of al- Rāfi'ī

His characteristics as a biographer
Introduction

Al-İrýan, who is regarded as one of the prominent Egyptian writers was born in Mahallat Hasan village in Al-Gharbiyya governorate. In 1930 he graduated from Dâr al-'Ulûm in Cairo, and worked as a teacher until 1942. He participated in editing many literary reviews and edited several books, which were historical tales (2). he wrote one biography; Hâyât al-Râfi (1939).

A Portrait of al- Râfi

The author says: "I shall write about al-Râfi, the man with whom I had close bonds of friendship for years, whose company I enjoyed, whose self I mixed with mine, whose heart spoke to my heart, and whose soul shared its inner depths with my soul. I shall write in an attempt to bring together the fragments of a life that were scattered in pieces of news, tales, anecdotes told by his contemporaries, or were hidden as secrets in the hearts of his family and special companions."(3)

The first edition of Hâyât al-Râfi (Mustafa Şâdiq al-Râfi) appeared in Cairo in 1939, exactly two years after al-Râfi's death. It is a well-known fact that al-İrýan was the closest follower of al-Râfi although he was in his close company for not too long a period, around five years. Yet he was a great admirer of the master and his literature even before he first saw him. He says: "I first heard of al-Râfi's name some ten years or so ago. At that time I was a naive boy who hardly comprehended what was written. Yet the name had a special music or melody; it was like a hymn evoking echoes in my soul. I had the desire to get acquainted with him since that moment."(4)

This wish was fulfilled and: "I saw him first a few months later. In fact I saw a man looking like some of the men whom I knew. He was sitting in a coffee-house at the pavement, reading a newspaper. For a moment I stood motionless, glaring at him, hardly believing that the man before my eyes was the same man I have heard of."(5)
The bonds of acquaintance grew into deep friendship and constant companionship. With the passage of time the student came to know the pith and marrow of his master, his private life, his character, how he thought and read, when he wrote, his love stories, the first and the second and the third, how his pride in love led him to lose his beloved, whom al-İryān calls "SHE", when he saw her giving a special warm welcome to one of her guests before his eyes. He also grasped his master's double standards and his endeavours to be King Fuṣṣad's special poet; how he "continued to send his eulogies to the monarch from 1926 to 1930."

Al-İryān, however, justified these vain attempts as the status of the king's poet or the prince's poet was "an old title in the realm of literature, in fact it had its own history in the annals of Arab literature since the days of al- Nābigha, al- Nūmān, Zuḥair, Ṣinā' pre-Islamic, and al-Akḥṭāl of the Umayyad era; or al-Nuwasī and Abū al-Atāḥiyya under the Abbasid, or al- Buḥtūrī under the reign of al-Mutawakkil, and al-Mutanabbī in the royal court of Sa'īf al-Dawla, down to uncountable poets and kings."

The biography, as we have contended, is a search for the true essence of the life of a unique human being, uncovering his hidden deep-seated talents and the hidden secrets of his genius, those usually buried in the environs of his life and the events he faced and the marks he left on his generation. It is a complete human life often from cradle to grave; it may dig deep even beyond that harking back to his pre-cradle history and going beyond his grave-stone to reach out for the deep marks it may leave on the next generation.

The biographer has one essential job to do: to follow the life-course of the subject with a constant eye on the outward countenance and its changing appearance, on the inner, esoteric development, the psychological tensions, the motion in its full extent and the thought in its entire perspective.
In 338 pages al-Iryan presented one of the first literary biographies. I believe, in Egypt; and he performed it as a faithful disciple to the al-Rafi' out of both affection to his master and a commitment to serve the cause of Arab literature. His companionship with al-Rafi' began in 1932 and lasted until al-Rafi's death in 1937. The previous period al-Iryan covers on the basis of what he extracted from al-Rafi's friends' testimonies, from al-Rafi himself, his private papers and correspondence.

This book is a necessary introduction for those interested in knowing the nature of al-Rafi closely. (11) It explores al-Rafi's lifespan in detail compared to the meagre and narrow details known about our deceased old notables, writers and poets. (12) Al-Iryan describes the sublime place he holds in his soul for al-Rafi. "When I remember him at this instant, I feel as if I am not alone, as if a beloved spirit flying with wings of light is around me, as if a tender voice with soft tones is speaking to me from behind the hereafter with a voice whose music and melody I know, yet I see none, I hear none, and I am here alone, over-possessed by the memories, conjuring up what is not of this real world." (13)

Al-Iryan lived with al-Rafi for only part of his life, when he was plunged into his books and essays, so he knew him not only in his depths, but he also accompanied al-Rafi in his literary salūn, and in his elite circle. Obviously, al-Iryan was depressed by his bereavement, the loss of his friend, when he was jotting down these passionate and warm words: "he had, in fact, hastily taken the pen to write this biography while his sorrow was still fresh, hence, he could not avoid a degree of exaggeration." (14) In other instants he gives a bold picture of al-Rafi bereft of any prejudice. He says: "When one looks at his face one would doubt that there exists behind this countenance any superiority, genius or sublime thought." (15) He even
describes how al-Rafî described how al-Rafî was so short-tempered at his work that he never met his commitment of coming to work on time, although this negligence runs counter to the values of al-Iryân, who looks upon him as an ideal writer. Al-Iryân was extraordinarily superstitious, believing, as it were, in the invisible, the supernatural, transmigration, reincarnation, metempsychosis, magic, soothsaying. Hence we come more than once across words and expressions like these flowing from his pen: "My soul told me...", "I was given command...", "a voice from behind the world said to me". And he literally meant what he wrote.(16)

Al-Iryân spoke of how al-Rafî benefited from his links with King Fad when he was included in the royal entourage: "He had a free, first class pass to use all Egyptian trains, and he considered the acquisition of such a pass a great achievement because it enabled him to travel around the country without any barrier."(17) The kind monarch also patronised him and gave his royal consent to granting his son, Muḥammad, a scientific scholarship in medicine to study in France, where he spent years studying in the University of Lyon.(18)

Heeding to none but the truth, al-Iryân boldly uncovered the royal connections of al-Rafî. This may refute the allegation that due to his deep sorrow for the loss of his friend, al-Iryân swept the negative aspects under the carpet. He tried his best to give the clearest picture of al-Rafî, his parentage and career (his work at the Tantâ Court), and to his social life, his links with the bourgeois circles interested in thought and culture. His romantic life is also covered in detail. His female liaisons were numerous and that shattered the life of his wife whom he married when he was aged 24. Al-Rafî's literary battles and the rivalries and hatred they generated are given due attention. Al-Rafî rallied so many enemies against himself during his life and after because he was a severe, aggressive critic, with a harsh tongue and void of any
partiality or courtesy in defying his rivals. He had the fiercest fights against Ḥusayn al-Aqqād and Zakariyā Mubarak.

Al-Iryān's remarkable dexterity is at its best when he describes the way al-Raḍī writes: "He would choose his subject from everyday life, from what he sees, hears, observes and feels. The idea he gets and the elements of this idea are important to him only if they have an echo in his soul, a parallel in his thought and an emotion in his heart."(19) When he dictated a text "he would never raise his eyes to cast a look at me as if he were speaking from behind a curtain to an invisible audience, or as if he was in a soliloquy without receptive ears or murmuring sounds, as if he were in a trance-like state, addressing himself in solitude."(20)

Al-Iryān depicts al-Raḍī's self-pride, his arrogance, and his obstinacy and stubbornness: "Right from his early days, he grew up eloquent and interested in wide areas... With his excessive, literary pride, his great literary potentials, his ultra-sensitive and ultra-responsive nerve system, he was able to be what he wanted to be and to achieve the great status he assumed among the Arab literary elite."(21) He had wished to have in his career a great standing in poetry so that his fame would "pale any reputed celebrity in the realm of verse."(22)

Al-Raḍī is thus the product of inherited qualities, the effects of his environment and the pulses and motives of encounters al-Raḍī had with the writers of his generation: Shawqi, Şabri, Muṭrān. He was, however, influenced by the pioneers of his era, namely al-Barūḍi, Ḥāfiz and Kāzimi.(23)

**His characteristics as a biographer**

In this biography, the narration of al-Raḍī's life took a form verging on the novel. The author, as a matter of fact, reviewed al-Raḍī's life-story and the human passions underlying it. It was a tale depicting the life of a prominent figure, exploring his
psychological motives (psychological conflict), and how this conflict developed and changed. There is no explanatory discussion of al-Rafi’s life, but rather an attempt to build up the pieces of a portrait by relying, in fact, on direct personal contact with the hero and the documents available to the student of this hero. The fact that the author was himself a short-story teller and an analyst had contributed to deepening the study. For among the essential features the successful biographer should have are the psycho- and socioanalytical faculties.

To achieve his objective, al-Iryan employed psychological dissection of al-Rafi’s motives. The fact that al-Rafi became deaf so early in his life left bitter marks on his mood and mentality. He was hot-tempered, violent in his critical remarks, too proud of himself, an egoist, never content with less than being at the focus of attention, basking in the spotlights. He would accept no less than being the poet of the king, or being the first lover, the supreme athlete, the brightest poet of all Arabs, the best advocate of the holy Qur’an. Even within the narrow circle of his special friends he would move to assume the role of the leader, and would accept nothing less. He preferred solitude, independence of opinion, self-confidence and fanciful pride. These traits were too strong to be compromised even for the sake of courtesy with friends or prudence with his community.

He was hardly sociable, and never met any traditional obligation towards the community. He cared for nothing but his own opinion, his own needs and his interests. (24)

Al-Iryan tried hard to reach the remotest possible limits of criticism. He advised al-Rafi of what he should and should not read: "I would spend hours with him. He used to read a text and I would be listening, whether at his place or in a private corner, or simply at the coffee-house. Sometimes we
would go to the cinema. During that phase, I had also to read books sent to him as gifts on his behalf so as to advise him of what is worth reading to save him the trouble of wasting his time on worthless writings."(25)

This might have helped al-Iyân to better analyze the very writings of al-Ra'î himself, or even to trace back the origins of certain ideas and the influences to what al-Ra'î had read. Al-Iyân was also able to specify the occasion on which this or that text was written and how long it took al-Ra'î to finish it.

Al-Iyân left certain phases in al-Ra'î's life, such as his relation with the "Prince of Poets", Aḥmad Shawqi, who enjoyed great privileges in the royal court, or his rivalry with the "Poet of the Nile", Ḥafiz Ibrāhim. Were these rivalries tense? Was competition so harsh? It would have been better had al-Iyân mentioned this, even if only briefly. Al-Iyân neglects or superficially covers the period extending from the time al-Ra'î became deaf to the moment they got acquainted with each other. What thoughts al-Ra'î had during this interval? Who was his companion and friend? Also, there is no mention of al-Ra'î's connection with the literary şāluns and their stars, notably if the patron of one of these şāluns is a prominent lady, the well known Mayy Ziyāda.

Despite many shortcomings in al-Iyân's book, it represents the first nucleus of biography in Egypt. It was a mature work, comprising a novel-like literary biography based, if not consciously, then spontaneously, on modern methodologies - above all Taine's theory of studying the "great man" as being the product of his era, milieu and race, and the theory of Sainte-Beuve, which considers the great figure as being the fruit of a certain genius which has its own circumstances.
Al-İryan employed the psychological method to analyze the character of al-Rafî. His deafness produced in him a strong hatred for the celebrities of his time, such as Häfîz İbrahim, Abbas al-Aqqad and the rest. It is perhaps the reason why he broke off that bond with "SHE" - the lady who had the literary  sălun.

Al-Iryan lacks the shining qualities which usually attract women. In his appearance he was very ordinary, and there was nothing in him that was explicitly or implicitly indicative of uniqueness in character or depth of mind, let alone genius. (26)

He had "a flat, rectangular-like face, a bit whitish in complexion, as most of Syrian origin have, rather than the brownish Egyptian marks. His cheeks were always reddish like his lips. His eyes were queerly situated, as if he were looking at himself rather than at others. They were void of that light that moves your soul. His tone was meaningless and colourlessly harsh, as if you were listening to the screaming of a child." (27)

From this graphic description we can understand why he was deeply shy, how far he was from the requirements of genius, despite the fact that he felt deep in his heart that he was such. It is perhaps this sense of self-glorification that urged him to go to the extremes by calling for the destruction and elimination of all those who advocated ideas dissimilar to his. Al-Rafî used to go to soothsayers and fortune tellers, for he believed in magic. When he once fell in love with "SHE" and was up to his ears in this passion, he sought fortune-tellers to manufacture a talisman (charm). He got one and hung it over a post at the roof of his house. (28)

Saîd al-Iryan employed all these theories and critical methodologies to vividly depict al-Rafî's character but, shortcomings aside, this is a pioneering work in biography writing in Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century.
B. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ṣīdqī (1896-1973)

Introduction

a. A Portrait of Baudelaire

b. A Portrait of Abū Nuwās

His characteristics as a biographer
**Introduction**

Abd al-Rahman Siddiqi was born in al-Manṣūra. In his childhood, he moved with his father to Cairo where he grew up, received his education and died. He worked at the ministry of education, and was the director of the Opera House for twenty years. (29)

**a. A Portrait of Baudelaire**

In his preface to his work: *al-Shā'ir al-Rajīm Baudelaire*, [The Cursed Poet Baudelaire], Siddiqi explains that "this is neither a pure *Tarjamah* of Baudelaire's life nor a critical literary study of his poetry, but the two in one." (30) He further adds: "We could never know the man in earnest without contemplating his poetry, but we could never thoroughly appreciate the poet and comprehend what he actually says unless we study his life and scrutinize his attitude." (31) Then he presents the poet: Baudelaire was born in 1827 to an orphaned, 27 year old, mother. She had been brought up by old intimates, a fact which might have left in her heart a sense of deprivation, or even discontent and desolation which she passed on to her son.

His father was a man of the court of the ancien regime. He was 62 years old, of a refined taste who treasured luxury, grandeur, splendour and appearances. Together with an affection for the arts, this trait was inherited by the child, Baudelaire. He developed a "propensity to sensualism and lust." (32) But he remained dutifully faithful to his patrons and comrades.

Baudelaire was influenced by these natures. With the death of his father, when he was six years old, he focuses his affection on his mother and their relation grows deeper. With her over-possessiveness towards the child, Baudelaire, she disturbed his emotional world to such an extent that the impact would remain with him. Suddenly she remarried and Baudelaire developed a sense of deep loss which he would put into verse to exact his revenge from his "first love", his mother.
Upon his step-father's instructions, he is lodged in a boarding school in Lyon. Detached and distanced, he shelters hatred against this alien invader of his life. Baudelaire becomes nervous, irritable, conceited, arrogant, sarcastic, idle and distracted.

At the age of 15, he returns to Paris to study at the Louis le Grand College but neglects his studies and shows interest in love stories and poetry reading. In 1839, he is expelled from the college. Again his step-father entrusts him to a special philosophy tutor to instruct him for politics rather than his favourite topic: literature. In Paris, the Latin quarter becomes his haven, and the company of whores and prostitutes is a source of consolation. He is driven by a desire to behave as improperly and unethically as possible, to audaciously do what is forbidden or detested, attracted always to dark hide-outs, following the example of Balzac.

In 1841 he is shipped off to India but he returns home before the voyage is completed because he is fed up with his ship mates and their narrow ways of thinking. This atmosphere and experiences are warmly reflected in his verse with penetrating force, refined glamour and sensual mysticism. The latter trait characterized his verse all along. The journey to the Orient is a turning point in Baudelaire's literary career. In February 1842 he returns to Paris only to leave his mother's mansion, receive his share of his father's inheritance and steadily indulge into the Parisian world of pleasures, keen to exhibit himself in fashionable outfits. Attending a performance at the Latin quarter, he encounters Miss Jenn Duval whose figure he admires. She reminds him of the charming, exquisite females of the Mauritius island in the Indian ocean where his ship had anchored a few years after. Jenn Duval is a half breed, with a brown complexion, dark, curled hair and a slim, tall figure. Perhaps she provoked in him that longing for nature he had experienced in Africa.
She conquerors his emotions and imagination and he soon finds himself a captive of love, but she proves unfaithful and they part. Leading an extravagant life, he lives beyond his means and soon runs into debt and is obliged to win his bread with his pen, trading the fruits of his mind and heart for money. The verse he writes in this period is so fraught with these hardships that he calls it the dark period.

A sudden change in his thirties: he is active "The stimulus behind this abrupt burst of exertion and liveliness is the work of the American poet E.A. Poe and the Swedish mystical philosopher Swedenburg. Both deeply influenced Baudelaire."

Another inducement is his romance with Mrs. Sabatier, which traps him in a blend of platonic love and Hamlet's grudge for the rest of his life. In his last years, however, he is in constant melancholy and repentance looking back at bygone days. He died in 1867.

b. A Portrait of Abū Nuwās

In his Abū Nuwās Qissat Hayātihi wa-Shā'rihi, (1944) [Abu Nuwas, the story of his life and poetry], Šidqi writes that this book, "is a connected, chain-like Tarjamah of Abū Nuwās which depicts his life from birth to death one phase after another."

He explains his method in this biography saying: "Besides depicting his life and external circumstances, our main concern is to study the manifestations of his emotional life and the revelations of his psychological demeanour."

Šidqi gives details of Abū Nuwās' parentage. His mother, he says, is Jullobān, a charming Persian slave from the Ahwāz who wove stockings and made saddle-bags. His father, Hā ni', was a foot-soldier serving in the Ahwāz region, between Baṣrāh and Persia under the Umayyad caliph, Marwan b. Muhammad. His regiment was in charge of challenging any potential surprise onslaught coming from Persia or Khurāsān. When the Umayyads were defeated by the Abbasids at the Great Zāb
battle (132 A.H.), his regiment was disbanded and he became a shepherd. His son al-Ḥasan, nicknamed Abū Nuwās, was born during the reign of the second Abbasid caliph Abī Ja’far al-Mansūr in (141 A.H.)(37) The boy al-Ḥasan was very handsome, of white complexion, slim, tall, with a long, soft forelock. He lisped with a husky voice, pronouncing the (R) more like a (Gh). He was tender, lenient, delicate, witty and intelligent."(38)

The family moved to Baṣrah when al-Ḥasan was an orphan at the age of six."(39) In line with the customary practice "the boy was sent by his mother to the Kuttāb (traditional schooling) to learn writing, reading and reciting the Qur’ān."(40) His poetic leanings made themselves so manifestly felt that his mother was afraid they would jeopardize the career she thought would suit him best: to become a druggist. He would work in a drugstore as an apprentice during the day, but would go to the mosque in the evening to attend lecture circles in linguistic sciences (syntax, grammar) and theology at the hands of his sheikhs. (41) While he was busy labouring and educating himself, his mother was having an affair and in the end got married, "neglecting him altogether, leaving him to his fate with his master, the drug store keeper. The boy and the mother parted ways, and he never mended fences with her to the last moment of his life." (42)

This was a moment of emancipation for him as well. He could indulge both in knowledge and lust seeking both without any hindrance. The city of Baṣrah was the appropriate setting for this behaviour. It was a centre of advanced learning of the time, but it was also a den of lust, sensuality and wild liberality.

Abū Nuwās got acquainted with Walība b. al-Ḥubāb al-Asadī "a jesting, liberal, sensual person, notorious for squandering money on female-slaves and gay boys."(43) Walība was seldom seen sober, and "he initiated his novice, Abū Nuwās.
into this wild life until every moral scruple or ethical constraint was removed from
the young Abū Nuwās' conscience."(44) He went with his patron to the city of
Kūfā, remained there for a while, but departed for a new destination: to live among
the desert bedouins in order to learn the Arabic language in its purest forms of
unadulterated eloquence, forms of expression and pure vocabulary. He spent a year
or so in the desert, and then returned to Basrah and met his second patron, Khalaf al-
Aḥmar who played an important role in "educating and developing the skills Abū
Nūwas longed for." (45)

In his new life, Abū Nuwās encountered a multi-cultural society, a blend of different
religions, civilizations and cultures. He attended "the councils of various Muslim
theologians without much inclination to their dogma. On the contrary he amused
himself in displaying his infidelity so as to tease them."(46)

In Basrah he would fall in love at first sight. His beloved was a female-slave, Jinān.
But "Jinān was different from the usual type of female-slaves. She was prudent,
wise, shy, virtuous, high-minded, not so much inclined to talk, attractive and
sweet."(47)

To him, loving her was a destiny he could not avoid, and he kept his affection for
her. But she did not respond. His passionate incessant calls convinced her, at last,
to meet him. The liberal, jesting uninhibited poet became a passionate, true platonic
lover.(48) They had different characters. Jinān soon broke off her relationship with
him much to his disbelief and dismay. But neither his passions, nor his hopes to
regain her, withered. When he knew she decided to go on pilgrimage to holy Mecca
with her Lady, he hurried to Mecca to meet her at the site of the Black Holy Stone in
the shrine. His wild passion moved no chord, it seems, in her heart. To avoid his
company, she moved out of Basrah. Abū Nuwās tried to find out her whereabouts
but in vain. In anguish, he left to Baghdad wretched and depressed. Under the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd the city was the centre of the Arab-Muslim civilization, with its glittering monuments, large palaces, organized canals and formidable walls, "The artifacts of Persian civilization were so overwhelmingly present in every aspect of social, cultural and political life, even in the insignia and the processions of the Caliphate." (49) This new civilized Persian spirit was suffused with sensualism (wine, music, singing festivals or love gatherings). As if this environment was made for him, Abū Nuwās not only indulged in every manifestation of this new life, but took it upon himself to become its mouthpiece, advocate and representative.

His ambitions were so high that he declined to remain an underdog, feeble and poor. In his search for fame and wealth, he managed to have access to the royal court but without debasing or degrading himself. He achieved his goal, and indeed Hārūn al-Rashīd not only admitted him in his entourage but found his verse fascinating. Aspiring for more fame and wealth, he travelled to Egypt; the Egyptians, however, did not show the expected generosity and he returned to Baghdad angry with them. He expressed this indignation in satirical poems which ridiculed the Egyptians. Back in Baghdad, he again indulged in libertine conduct in public.

Upon orders from the Caliph, Hārūn al-Rashīd, Abū Nuwās was incarcerated on charges of infidelity. He could not secure a pardon from Caliph al-Rasīd and remained behind bars until the inauguration of his successor, Caliph Muḥammad al-Amin in (193 A.H.).

The new Caliph was liberal in character. Wine, music, comedy and humour were his favourite topics, and singers, poets, jokers, belly-dancers and gays were in his company. In this new atmosphere, Abū Nuwās became the poet of the court.
Caliph and the poet had much in common and the two developed a strong relationship, caring little for concealing their drunkenness or rakish conduct.

For the poet, this was a blessing, for the caliph a political fault. As differences grew between the Caliph, al-Amin, and his brother, al-Ma'mun, then the governor of Khurasan, the Baghdad-based supporters of the latter attacked the Caliph for his debauchery, accusing him of retaining a court of debased, sinful elements such as Abū Nuwās and his likes.

To avoid such grave accusations, al-Amin decided to distance himself from his favourite poet. In fact, Abū Nuwās was apprehended and incarcerated together with irreligious disbelievers. He spent much of this period in a vicious circle of arrest, detention, pardon, new arrest, new detention, and new amnesty.

At one point, the idea whether or not it was more advisable to have Abū Nuwās executed, crossed the mind of the caliph, al-Amin. The escalation of the political crisis led to a fratricidal war with al-Amin defeated at the hands of his brother al-Ma'mun who successfully seized the seat of power, Baghdad. Poets flocked to the court to recite their eulogies. Abū Nuwās, on the other hand, remained faithful to his previous patron. At the age of 59 he died, and was buried in Baghdad.

His characteristics as a biographer

In both Baudelaire's and Abū Nuwās's biographies, Ṣidqi employed the necessary requirements deemed essential by Taine, who premised his study on the fact that the great man is the product of his era, environment and race (50), Sainte Beuve who predicated the great personality on specific genius (51), and Freud who postulated conduct on the libido, the trouble-maker, and the sub-consciousness, the repository of suppressed past experiences.(52)
These three methods were employed by Şidqi to dissect both Baudelaire's and Abū Nuwās's personalities, propensities, and psychological transformation as reflected in their behaviour among their relative milieux. Perhaps Şidqi chose these two poets because, to his mind, they had much in common, particularly the curious blend of sensual liberality and mysticism. Unlike his meagre portrayal of Baudelaire's life, Şidqi's analysis of Abū Nuwās is deep, thorough and investigative. A contrast between the two is instructive.

In his biography on Baudelaire, Şidqi depicted the image of a child agonized by negligence shown by the mother, the first love, tortured by an emphatic, commanding step-father, self-insulated in his own literary world, his only means to hide away from cruel reality. But the complex of the unfaithful, betraying mother made him fearful for the rest of his life.

The climax occurred in the Latin quarter in Paris where he was betrayed again by his black mistress. Both betrayals interacted to strengthen his desire for revenge. He acted against his lofty ideals, displaying his anti-religiosity, breaching ethical standards. He "experienced Hamlet's wild jealousy which engulfed his existence."(53) In his thirties, he experienced a transformation to the opposite, to mysticism, repentance and love, to the last breath.

Baudelaire appears here more like a character in a novel, whose make-up is gradually formed. It is the result of interactive elements, the qualities inherited from his father, the responses triggered in him by the cruelty of his mother. Both ingredients blend, breeding a sensitive poet, an outsider with great passion for life.

In analysing Baudelaire's character, Şidqi's approach was predominantly psychological. The environment, in the social sense of the word, was missing if the Latin quarter is exempted. The social and political conditions under which
Baudelaire lived and acted were also absent. Şidqi never specified whether or not Baudelaire was a psychopath (Halâh Marâdiyyah), or what trademarks this specific mentality and psychological composition had left in his poetry. Perhaps it is Şidqi's reliance on translated sources on the poet's life which prompted him not to deduce the poet's disposition from his verse. Generally, this is more of a psychological biography.

By contrast, in the Biography of Abû Nuwâs, Şidqi reveals a more confident, masterly analysis of the poet's personality. Şidqi paces untrodden paths to graphically and vividly depict Abû Nuwâs in his living reality, in Başrah, Kuфа, the bedouin habitat, Baghdad, influenced by the luminous manifestations of the Persian civilization in the heyday of Harûn al-Rashîd, or in the magnificent royal court of al-Amin. He carefully studies the poet's family origin, "his Persian mother"(54) and his protectee father "from the Ḥakam Yemen tribe"(55), [a servile lineage by the norms of the day] as an important factor in his later development. He brings into bold relief the contradictory attitude that distinguished his life, as a dissolute, skeptical adulterer who lived in the age of scepticism, on the one hand, and a believer at the bottom of his heart on the other (56), or as a gay lover, and a passionate female seeker in one.

In all these detailed narratives, Şidqi combines the influences the family and environment had on Abû Nuwâs' demeanour. Şidqi shows how the very Abbasid era, with its people, leaders and pioneers, had determined not only his rakish debauchery and atheism but also the flagrant modes of displaying them. Şidqi also goes down to minute details to explain how Abû Nuwâs could combine his alcoholism and infidelity with belief in divine mercy. For example, Abû Nuwâs was not only influenced by liberal poets but also by the Başrah theologians. And it is from the latter that he borrowed the doctrine of Irjâq, postponement, which postulates
that the punishment of major sinners shall be postponed until the day of judgement when the matter would be settled by divine grace either way, i.e. with or without punishment. Like Baudelaire, he developed a traumatic sense of being deserted by both his mother and his beloved. But unlike the French poet, he resorted to spirits and gay-sex to forget these macabre experiences.

Şidqi portrays him like a character in a novel, developing clearly, influenced by changes, reacting and acting in response to his environment, driven by an intrinsic catalyst and sensitive temper to hoist aloft the banner of rebellion.

Perhaps rebellion or mutiny is the key to the understanding of his personality, his drive to seek new horizons, new life, new literary modes of expression. He rejected the career his mother wished for him, he rebelled against his first tutor Walība, he abandoned Kūfa.

Şidqi's approach here was predominantly social. His mainly social approach leaves so many unanswered questions and gaps, such as how and why mysticism and atheism could blend in the mind and soul of one and the same person, or how could passionate love meet with impudence, unless the agent is a psychopath or is plagued by a crippled will, or even by a schizophrenic nature.

It is also unclear why should Şidqi skip over Abū Nuwās' pornographic poetry on his flirting with the gay boys, although these pieces constitute a volume in their own right. We are also left in the dark as to whether or not Abū Nuwās ever got married. The work, however, is an attempt at literary biography which combines narratives and criticism in one. In Şidqi's own words, in this biography we may feel that "Abū Nuwās returns to live as a real human being after more than 1100 years or so." (57)
NOTES

4. Al-Iryan, op. cit., p. 11.
5. Al-Iryan, op. cit., p. 11.
19. Al-Iryan, op. cit., p. 221.
22. Al-Iryan, op. cit., p. 43.
31. Ibid., p. 7.
32. Ibid., p. 16.
33. Ibid., p. 124.
34. Ibid., p. 125.
36. Ibid., p. 4.
37. Ibid., p. 13.
38. Ibid., p. 19.
39. See Shawqī Daīf, Al-Fann wa-Madhahibuḥu fī al-Shī‘r al-ʿArabī, he says that Abū Nuwās was two years old.
40. Sīdqī, Abū Nuwās, p. 17.
41. Ibid., p. 18.
42. Ibid., p. 21.
43. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
44. Ibid., p. 31.
45. Ibid., p. 43.
46. Ibid., p. 68.
47. Ibid., p. 82.
48. Ibid., p. 87.
49. Ibid., p. 115.
52. ʿAlī Adham, op. cit., p. 95.
54. Sīdqī, Abū Nuwās, p. 50.
55. Ibid., p. 48.
56. Ibid., p. 184.
57. Ibid., p. 4.
CHAPTER IX

Muḥammad al-Nuwaihi (1917-1980)

Introduction
a. A Portrait of Ibn al- Rūmī
b. A Portrait of Bashshār b. Burd
c. A Portrait of Abū Nuwās

His characteristics as a biographer
Introduction

Muḥammad al-Nuwaḥī was born on 20 April 1917 in Mit Ḥibais near Tanta/Egypt. He was the eldest of the seven children born to a poor but literate judge's assistant who aspired for his four sons to become lawyers. Because a school had not yet been established in the village, Muḥammad daily walked the six-mile round trip to and from Tanta. His daughter, Majida, summarised the experience of her father's primary and secondary education there: Quite soon he excelled in Arabic and English and gained the admiration of his teachers. By the age of ten he was spending most of his pocket money on literary magazines. His father's heart was set on sending him to law school, but he insisted on the Faculty of Arts.

During his four years in the Department of Arabic Literature at Cairo University, he attached himself to the liberal iconoclast Tāḥa Ḥusayn who came to regard him as his best student of that time and who became something of a patron to him.

He travelled to England in the first year of the war and he earned his doctorate from SOAS in 1942. In 1944 he married Ruth Hiller, a German born girl, who was completing her nursing education in England.

Having failed in his efforts to secure a position at one of the Egyptian Universities by 1947 when his lectureship at SOAS expired, he accepted the challenge to create a department of Arabic in the capital of the Sudan where Gordon Memorial College was being transformed into the University of Khartūm.

Al-Nuwaḥī was associated with the University of Khartūm from 1947 until 1956. After returning to Egypt (1956) al-Nuwaḥī took another wife named Feryal. This second marriage was contracted without ending the first one until they were officially divorced in 1971, after which his first wife returned to England.

In 1957 he lectured at the American University in Cairo, but this period was broken during 1967-68 by his first sabbatical leave, which he spent as a visiting professor at
Harvard University. His second sabbatical leave was during 1972-73 as a visiting professor at Princeton University. He passed away on 13 February 1980. (1)

Al-Nuwaihi took three classical, literary figures for his biographical writings. These figures were: Ibn al-Rūmī, Bashshār b. Burd and Abū Nuwās. In the strict sense of the word, these works were far from being literary biographies but were, in point of fact, mere psychological analysis of character; that is studies focusing mainly on the personality of the man of letters concerned, his psychological features, his motives and the factors that had the greatest influence upon this human personality.

As al-Nuwaihi says: "The student of the literary figure should know how to understand this figure, how to dissect him, how to distinguish the various, contradictory aspects of its inner realms, how to explore the incentives and driving forces which, combined together produced the heterogeneous and conflicting elements in this personality, how to deduce from these antagonistic elements and factors a vital, living, integrated unified system." (2)

He arrives at these conclusions in the wake of reading the anecdotes about and the verse of the poet in question. He would meticulously and gradually follow the sequence of details, combining the pieces of the jigsaw to reach the full image of the character.

The first celebrity al-Nuwaihi studied was Ibn al-Rūmī. This was done in his book entitled: Thaqāfat al-Nāqid al-Adabī [The education of the literary critic], Cairo, 1949.

In it, he stressed the need for the literary critic to have a scientific education, because, he says, "mere reading of literature or mere literary education is
insufficient for the literary critic and researcher. They [critics and researchers] should have a wider horizon, encompassing the core of scientific facts at which the various scientists from the various disciplines have arrived. We should digest these scientific achievements, and on their light we ought to study any subject we wish to approach without confining ourselves to abstract, theoretical thinking. Certain works of the men of letters shall be incomprehensible unless we conduct a thorough, physiological and psychological research in earnest."(3)

In his somewhat lengthy preface to the above mentioned book, al-Nuwaihi outlines the theoretical framework he would apply and upon which he would rely to analyse the literary figures he was about to approach.

a. A Portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī

Al-Nuwaihi presents Ibn al-Rūmī in the following manner: "His mind was suffering from neuropathy, his sexual system from disorder, perhaps his glands were in a similar condition."(4)

To further explain why Ibn al-Rūmī was what he was, the latter describes the environment in which Ibn al-Rūmī lived, that is "the time and place where he grew up, the political, economic, social and cultural circumstances under which he lived, his parents, the familial atmosphere that enveloped him, the kind of instruction and education he received, the kind of traditions, norms, ethics and morals he absorbed, the course along which he travelled, the experiences and events and persons he encountered in his life ... all these are the factors that would have their say in moulding his personality."(5)

This is the first aspect. The second, as al-Nuwaihi sees it, is the physical structure of the person, his body, the genetic units he had inherited from his parents by dint of specific factors that influenced him in his early moments of being; that is, as he was
still in the embryonic stage of his existence, or at the moment of birth. Such influences would produce a certain structure, and this structure has a great, if not decisive, impact on his mentality, mood and behavioural qualities (his brain, nervous system, sexual system and ductless glands).

Hence Ibn al-Rūmī was a pathetic study case, a case of disorder. "The decisive factors which affected him were not anchored in his epoch, family, home-town, education and instruction, but were deeply rooted, imbedded in the physical factors. Everything in his body was abnormal, his nervous system, sexual system and glands. Hence it is not in the least surprising to find that his brain, his mental faculties are abnormal as well." (6)

As was known, Ibn al-Rūmī was pessimistic, believing that evil was associated with various things in nature. In short, any physical deformation of whatever nature would scare him in earnest. He was utterly moody and extremely unsociable and unpopular. Yet, he was a food lover and an eater with a great appetite. He would stuff his mouth with great quantities of food and sweets.

These are among his outstanding qualities and characteristics. His genius, al-Nuwaihī thought, was not bequeathed to him by dint of his Greek origin, as al-ʿAqqād and al- Mazinī earnestly believed, but is "due to his individual nature produced by his queer physiology and the specific mentality emanating therefrom and enhanced by his life circumstances." (7) Ibn al-Rūmī's culture was the product of the Abbasid civilisation, "He absorbed its philosophy, both the translated and the newly authored, digested its logic, came under the influence of its sciences, rational dialectics, intellectual practices and all the productive thought which lend the Abbasid that quality of deep thinking and the faculty of analysis and mental abstraction." (8)
But, as al-Nuwaiḥī says, Ibn al-Rūmī remains one of the greatest poets in the history of Arab verse. His character is one of great renovation, his literary taste is uniquely independent. These literary talents are but the combined work of his specific physiological and mental composition and the conditions of his epoch and society. This is the general portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī as al-Nuwaiḥī presented it. We shall later return to his presentation with several critical remarks.

b. A Portrait of Bashshār

The second poet studied by al-Nuwaiḥī is Bashshār b. Burd in his book entitled Shakhsiyat Bashshār (Bashshār’s Character). The reason why al-Nuwaiḥī studied Bashshār is, in his words, that Bashshār constituted a personality of great maturity and thorny complexity governed by a plethora of contradictory elements. Another reason is that the contemporaries of the poet himself, as well as our present day modern critics misunderstood him. Bashshār "was not an ordinary blind person but an excellent man, a great and deep thinker, with wider intellectual horizon and keen, refined and extremely sensitive, even first class, poetical conception."(9) Bashshār’s portrait is strictly based on his own poetry, a procedure already adopted by al-ʿAqqād and al-Māzīnī (the life of the person lies in his poetry).

He says that Bashshār was born blind to a family of the Mawāli (a weak alien tribe protected by a strong Arab one, usually considered part of the ruling military-aristocratic Arab rulers). Very ugly, downtrodden, disenfranchised, aggressive and quarrelsome, fighting for his dignity. When he was rebuked or taunted for his blindness he would boast of his humanity, and overstate his pride in his liberal sexuality. In the end, he would not go to the extreme of scepticism and hesitation. He was one of the great minds of his era.
Bashšār "had also a great deal of tenderness, compassion and goodness. He was helpful to his family, very caring towards his servants, generous and liberal with his friends and strangers alike, faithful to his companions and comrades, highly appreciative of the value of friendship, patient, a person of great tolerance, witty, humorous, nicely sociable, a man with great literary courage that deserves no less than our full admiration no matter how far we disagree with his views and positions." (10)

Al-Nuwaiḥī would trace in detail every single word uttered about Bashšār, commenting on it in order to support his point of view. He says "Bashšār was not evil by nature, nor was he cruel or a man full with hatred by his very essence. What created in him that kind of evil, cruelty and hatred towards others was a multitude of factors encompassing social conditions and life, traumatic experiences." (11)

Taking Bashšār's well-known poem, the Rāyya (11.A) al-Nuwaiḥī would justify the obscene vulgarity in it by saying: "The obscene whoredom in this poem is to exact vendetta and show extreme cruelty, a deliberate exaggeration to revenge or to cause mischief." (12) The majority of his behavioural qualities and features "were formed under the influence of social environment rather than the compulsion caused by the elements of physical composition." (13)

The Umayyad and Abbasid epochs drove Bashšār to the brink of the anonymous. Had not these factors been at work, his blindness, ugliness and aggressive lust would have been as common as what we may find in a multitude of the blind and the ugly among men. Had not society and people at large been merciless towards him he would not have gone too far in his sharp, obscene satire.

In this manner, al-Nuwaiḥī goes on to raise questions and gives answers about Bashšār's poems. Repetition becomes the rule in the first half of the book, the second half is reduced to mere analysis of most of his poems.
notably those which the author thinks would suit his purposes: "Bashshār
was a womaniser. He was far from being a mere aggressive and 'wild
animal' with no desire but to have the female into his arms to quench his
physical thirst. In fact he wanted what a passionate and sentimental man
would also seek, namely feminine softness, tenderness, compassion,
affection, love, care and warm-heartedness."(14)

Bashshār was killed, al-Nuwaṭi says became the Caliph, al-Mahdi, gave orders to
punish Bashshār to avoid public pressures. The ʿUlama (religious scholars) strongly
criticised the Caliph for his friendship with Bashshār b. Burd. Al-Nuwaṭi would
attack al-Mahdi, the Caliph, saying he was cowardly and unfaithful. By contrast,
Bashshār is a martyr, in the philosophical sense of the word, in that he died for
holding firm to his opinion, that he was faithful to the end to what he thought was
right and truthful.

c. A Portrait of Abū Nuwās

The third personality which al-Nuwaṭi takes as a case study of psychological
analysis is Abū Nuwās, in his book titled: Nafsiyyat Abī Nuwās (The Psychology of
Abū Nuwās). In his second edition, 1970, al-Nuwaṭi believes that we need the
psychological analysis to understand Abū Nuwās’s Character.(15)

Right from the start, al-Nuwaṭi decides that the character of Abū Nuwās is
incomprehensible unless it is approached in line with the modern science of
psychology. The reason is because Abū Nuwās was psychopathic (Ḥalah
Maradiyah), hence he is worth studying and explanation. The key to his psyche is his
relationship with his mother. The untimely death of his father left him to his careless
mother, who remarried soon thereafter, and the child, Abū Nuwās, lost the motherly
care and tenderness so much needed in those early years of childhood. He developed
a hostile or aggressive attitude towards his mother. Perhaps it is this kind of
aggression towards the mother that deprived him from extracting any natural pleasure
from intercourse with females, hence his preference for male sodomy. As this again
would not satisfy him, he turned alcoholic, imagining the burning liquid a female
with which he was in sensual contact, "some sort of compensation for the lost
mother who deprived him, by her early remarriage from motherly compassion."(16)

It is this complex that al-Nuwaihi takes as a starting point and an ultimate end, to the
validity of which he would dedicate his utmost energetic power to prove, the same as
with the cases of Ibn al-Rūmī and Bashshār, by means of uniting the effect of
biological factors = individual composition and the impact of the surroundings in
building the personality. Abū Nuwās rejects women because they remind him of the
motherhood that brought him agonising experience. The very sight of the female
sexual organ would fill him with awe and horror, because it leads to the womb, the
symbol of the unfaithful mother. Young males constituted an alternative. He would
court males until he got a woman slave who would let him sodomize her.

His lust for spirits is more than "mere having drinks. Intoxicating beverages were,
for him, a living creature, an ego endowed with life, a being which would unite with
Abū Nuwās' self and reaches out for the inner depths of his psyche."(17) He
considers spirits an integral part of his self, he would court "her", long for "her",
desert "her" for a while only to passionately miss "her" and go back into "her" arms.
To sip "her" is a mime of kissing "her", to mix "her" with water would be
tantamount to undressing "her", to drink "her" would mean to remove "her"
virginity, and the coming of spirits in a cup is but the coming of a virgin bride in
"her" wedding dress, and so on and so forth.
Intoxication, al-Nuwaïhi says, arouses in him the feelings of supplication and sacred rituals. His alcoholism intensified his psychopathic condition and led him further into the realm of mixing in one cup both religiosity and fornication. Indeed, al-Nuwaïhi describes Abû Nuwas as being a solemn worshipper of God and an indecent adulterer. This duality, he confirms, is the product of the complex caused by his mother.

On the other hand, the environment in which he lived completed the second half of his tragedy. That is because "Abû Nuwas did not introduce into his epoch some sort of immorality which was not already in existence."(18)

Spirits, alcoholism, fornication, sodomy, homosexuality, hypocrisy, vulgarity and disturbances were so common in his era, "had not these effects emanating from the surroundings been at work, Abû Nuwas' character would not have taken this specific shape. What actually happened is that his extremely sensitive soul received all the influences beamed by his epoch and deeply absorbed them. These effects remoulded himself, increased it's aggressiveness and wildness, then threw it back endowed with sharpened delicacy."(19)

This is the image which al-Nuwaïhi tries to draw of the personality of Abû Nuwas on the basis of psychoanalytical methodology.

**His characteristics as a biographer**

In analysing the characters of Ibn al-Rûmi, Bashshâr b. Burd and Abû Nuwas, al-Nuwaïhi applied two methods complementing one another, the social-historical method and the psychoanalytical method. The social-historical method was pioneered by the well-known French critic Taine. The essence of this method is to study the surroundings and the epoch to reach for the explanation of the man of letters. In his
preface to the *History of the English Literature*, he says: "Three different sources contribute to produce this elementary moral state - Race, Surroundings and Epoch."(20) Perhaps it was Ṭāḥā Husayn who first applied this concept in his study of the great classical Arab poet, al-Maʿarrī.

The second method introduced by al-Nuwaiḥī is the psychoanalytical which he extended, as was obvious, to the extremes. This school uses symbols to infer individual behaviour. Long before al-Nuwaiḥī many writers in Egypt advocated this method, but perhaps he was the first one to apply it in this extraordinary manner that took us, in the words of Leon Edel (21), to analytical laboratories. The only exceptions are M.A. Khalf Allah (22), Amin al-Khālī (23), and perhaps Anwar al-Muʿaddawi, who argued for the introduction of psychological concepts and categories into literary studies during the first half of this century.

A comparative look at al-Nuwaiḥī's studies might well lead us into saying that in the case of Ibn al-Rūmī, al-Nuwaiḥī laid more stress on the physiological structure of the poet than on his epoch. In the case of Bashshār, the opposite may seem true. Emphasis here was laid more on the influences of the epoch rather than on the specific structure of the person in question. Lastly, in the case of Abū Nuwās, both factors, the epoch and specific personal structure, seem to have equal weight. In these three cases we find a subjective inclination to accommodate realities with the conceived psychological categories. This led al-Nuwaiḥī to:

Over interpret the text, to read into them more than what they actually carried, not to mention, of course, the "scientific" tautology on the effects of glands, nerves, psychosis and neurosis.

At points, it seems as if al-Nuwaiḥī has gone astray into irrelevant digressions, explaining the texts as his taste deems fit. This would get him in trouble, as in the case of reflexive deduction.
He criticises both al-Åqqād and al-Māzīnī for what he sees as their inadequate differentiation between Roman and Greek but he commits the same error. (24)

His assertions that Arabs oppressed all the Mawāli (non-Arab protectees), trampled them underfoot and treated them like dogs and mules are in need of historical verifications. In fact the "unbiased reader should guard against the inconsistent judgements which al-Nuwaiḥī introduced. They are inconsistent with historical facts in so many cases." (25)

Is it also true that "sexual deviation prevailed in society for three centuries, starting from mid-second century of Hijra"? (26)

Al-Nuwaḥī's interpretations of the texts produced by the poets he studied took him off on a new trajectory, far away from the realm of concretely analysing the personality to the abstract realm of psychoanalysis. And "the general feature of al-Nuwaḥī's writings is absolute judgement and reading into the texts things they do not contain." (27) On the whole, al-Nuwaḥī "seems so fanatically supportive of the conclusions of the science of psychology, even more than Sigmund Freud himself." (28)

However, al-Nuwaḥī presented studies of three classical poets in a manner that would incorporate this work in the genre of psychoanalytical biography, which "attempts to depict its subject on the basis of his writings and may picture the mind or the creative personality behind it." (29)
NOTES


4. Ibid., p.79.

5. Ibid., p.80.

6. Ibid., pp. 128-129.

7. Ibid., p.177.

8. Ibid., p. 246.


10. Ibid., p. 86.

11. Ibid., p. 194.

11A. The poem rhymed with a word ending with R, a classical method of classifying the poems, a way of giving them identifiable title.


13. Ibid., pp. 149-150.


16. Ibid., p. 95.

17. Ibid., p. 12.

18. Ibid., p. 162.

19. Ibid., p. 169.


27. ‘Allām, op. cit., p. 303.
CHAPTER X

A Comparative analysis of five literary personalities as reflected by leading Egyptian biographers

Introduction

a. Bashshār b. Burd (95-167/ 714-783)
b. Abū Nuwās (140-200/ 757-815)
c. Ibn al-Rūmī (221-283[284]/ 836-898)
d. Al-Mutanabbī (303-354/ 913-965)
e. Al-Mā‘arrī (363-449/ 973-1058)
Introduction

This chapter might appear to be a mere repetition of what has been said, but it is important, and, perhaps more interesting, in biographers terms of the contradictory views it presents on controversial personalities, old and new. In as much as medieval writers disputed over the true characters of Bashshār, Abū Nuwās, Ibn al-Rūmī, al-Mutanabbi and al-Maʿarri, lending them paradoxical attributes which are re-introduced by some of our contemporaries to this very moment, modern critics debated and argued different interpretations of the characters of these poets and the significance of their verse.

I have comparatively presented the personal images of those poets in the manner they were analysed by modern Egyptian critics explaining to what extent they have succeeded in their portrayal of the characters concerned, what critical methodology they employed and how these presentations only narrowly differed.

There were five poets, Bashshār, Abū Nuwās, Ibn al-Rūmī, al-Mutanabbi and al-Maʿarri, who have been selected because they were placed at the centre of attention by most modern critics who analysed these personalities using modern, literary methodologies. These methodologies were brought to them through the works of orientalists, who took credit for shaking the dust off the lives of these Arab, classical poets.

Let me first examine the methods applied in the analysis of these characters.

The first is the social-historical method which investigates the extent to which literary works or their creators are influenced by or influence their environment. (1) It is anchored in the close relation between literature and history, because "the literature of a nation is a true expression of its political and social life and one of the refined sources of its history." (2) This methodology reached its peak with Taine who specified that "three different sources contribute to produce this elementary moral state - Race, Surroundings and epoch." (3)
The second is the personal method which utilizes the writer's biography as a means for critically comprehending and assessing his works. That is, it concentrates on studying the writer's personal, familial and professional life, his mates, tutors and disciples, their papers, customs, views and traditions. The pioneer of this method is Saint-Beuve.

The third is the impressionist method which is occupied with, "defining and explaining the impressions we have from a literary text when reading it." It demands that "no scientific rules or theories should ever be applied to literary creation."

Fourthly, we have the artistic method which investigates the literary text itself, seeking to extract the aesthetic and imperishable elements inherent therein, employing to this end objective, literary standards derived from rhetoric, linguistics, style and intellectual experience.

Lastly, there is the psychological method which examines the process of literary and artistic creativity from a psychological point of view, investigates how far conscious and sub-conscious elements are fed in this process, what role internal and external catalysts play in it, and lastly whether or not the literary creation reflects its creator's psyche.

The modern biographers in question differed in their approach and methodologies, but we can conclude, in Gibb's words, that, "The majority of modernist Egyptian writers fall naturally into two groups, one composed of writers whose Western background is mainly French, the other of writers who have been more strongly influenced by English literature."

Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn, "introduced the modern French methods of critical study into Egypt." (11), but with al-ʿAQqād and al-Māzīnī we find that, "one of the main features of their work, consequently, is a careful study of such poets, as Ibn al-Rūmī
and al-Mutanabbi and the valuation of their productions somewhat on the lines of Hazlitt."(12)

This does not imply that al-‘Aqqād did not make use of the French method, on the contrary he utilized it to a great extent, in as much as al-Māzīnī made use of the German method.

In this chapter, I encountered a thorny problem: I could not lay my hands on all the texts written by the critics under consideration, either because the copies available are very few, or they are out of print.
Undoubtedly, Bashshār b. Burd is conceived of as the most controversial personality past and present. With few exceptions, his contemporaries raised great question marks about him, abhorred him and belittled him. Modern critics, in particular those under consideration (Tāhā Husayn, al-ʿAqqād, al-Mażīnī, and al-Nuwayḥī), were somewhat tainted by these views.

Their point of departure was the analysis of his poetry as a means to analyse his personality. Although his poetry was limited in volume, it was interpreted to suit the image each critic had in mind. Their methods hardly differed. While, Tāhā Husayn openly declares that he dislikes Bashshār whom he considers abusive, malicious, chauvinistic [anti-Arab], cowardly and atheistic, al-Nuwayḥī regards him as the first martyr in the history of Islamic thought (13), because the caliph, al-Mahdī, put him to death "to eschew public criticism."(14) Al-ʿAqqād and al-Mażīnī, on the other hand, were moved by Bashshār's individualistic make-up. For al-ʿAqqād the key to Bashshār's character is his huge body and his lust-seeking nature; for al-Mażīnī, the key lies in his rebellious aptness.

They took his satirical and love poems to examine his nature. Satire was Bashshār's favourite speciality in which he showed powerful skill. His sarcastic satire was so vigorous that people complained about him to his father.

* For the life of Bashshār see:
In his profile of Bashshār, Tāhā Ḥusayn singled one element, untruthfulness in the poet's behaviour. He questioned Bashshār's intentions, morals and honesty. In his opinion, Bashshār was neither faithful in his love poems, nor truthful in his pride. He was an apostate, irreligious, anti-Arab, lustfully interested in women, deceitful in his love, suspicious and dubious towards people at large. To prove his point, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn ignored the various good qualities in Bashshār, his generosity, tenderness, humour, forgiveness and even faithfulness. This deep rooted bias on the part of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, who starts his study with an outright declaration of repugnance, is inexplicable indeed. It had been more in line with literary standards to start research with an examination of Bashshār's blindness, his environment, the political conditions obtaining at the time. In his judgement on Bashshār, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's approach was impressionist. Perhaps it is his animosity towards Bashshār that prompted various responses in defence of the latter and a different reading into his poetry.

If, perhaps, Bashshār's satirical verse was the reason why Ṭāhā Ḥusayn loathed him, this satire, according to al-Āqqād and al-Māzīnī, was a product of the poet's multi-faceted make up: being blind, a protectee, hard-featured, ugly, oppressed, and living in an environment hostile to such human creatures. Hence, he had to equip himself with the necessary defensive weaponry, and satire was both his protective shield and his weapon to intimidate others and extract cash tribute.

Al-Āqqād reiterates that Bashshār was not truthful in his satire, neither was he repugnant, on the contrary he was a man of a worldly demeanour and animal spirit. Al-Māzīnī stresses an inferiority complex originating in Bashshār's blindness, ugliness and servile origin (being a protectee) which drove him to rebel.

Bashshār's sexual fetishism is another point of controversy. He was obscene and vulgar in his sexuality, according to Ṭāhā Ḥusayn; but he was a passionate female-
seeker and a sensual depicter of love in the eyes of al-\textsuperscript{Aqqād}. Al-Māzīnī again attributes Bashshār's wild, excessive overindulgence in his attitude towards women to his inferiority complex which keeps his imagining of the female in the realm of primitive sensuality.(15)

Al-\textsuperscript{Aqqād}'s portrait of Bashshār is primarily psychological. Al-Māzīnī applied the same method but in a more subtle and flexible manner, notably his emphasis on the effects of the environment and the epoch, combined with the psychological sway of Bashshār's physical impairment, which deformed his liaisons with society. Hence al-Māzīnī occupied a middle position between literary biography and literary criticism.

Al-Nuwaïlī agrees with both al-Māzīnī and al-\textsuperscript{Aqqād} on the impact these factors usually have, but he arranges them in an inverted manner. The environment, he maintains, is the supreme and decisive factor which drove Bashshār to stand in a position of constant offensive, to over-focus his senses on his physical deformity. Had he lived in a different society, al-Nuwaïlī maintains, Bashshār would have probably been a normal man and an ordinary poet, but he was victimized by repressive society and he did his best to contain his grievances but he failed; and it is this failure that led him to loathe Arabs.

Unlike his predecessors, al-Nuwaïlī took the bright side in Bashshār, his compassion, kindness, sympathy, humour and reverence. Al-Nuwaïlī utilized the concept of compensation in his analysis of Bashshār's psychological make-up: his attachment to his Persian ancestry was a compensation for him being despicable in the eyes of Arabs; his deliberate boasting of his sexuality was a compensation for the agony his deformity caused him and the pain of being scorned by others. His religious and intellectual scepticism urged him to seek in sexual pleasure a kind of consolation, solace and comfort. His brutality and intolerance were but a reflection of the harm done to him by others. His human dignity and pride were only a
response to the disdain shown by the others. His pornographic love-poems were meant to exact revenge on men by symbolically stripping naked and raping their women.

The extreme lengths (rather than overstatement) to which al-Nuwaihi goes in his interpretation of Bashshar's poetry to suit his psychological theorization is not unclear. But in the end, al-Nuwaihi seems to restrain his reading into a more moderate position. His sympathy for Bashshar leads him to blame society, and Bashshar is what he is because of that society itself. He looks more like "an attorney" taking the floor in defence of his client Bashshar.(16) His is an analytical biography.

As Bashshar was differently conceived of by his contemporaries, according to their dogmatic preferences and prejudices, so he is by our modernists who conceived of him according to their literary tastes; in all cases his character remained controversial as ever. Perhaps Bashshar was after all a psychopath, a mentally disordered person who so wildly indulged in obscenity.
b. Abu Nuwas* 

In this section, we shall examine four different interpretations of the life, poetry and personality of Abu Nuwas, one by Taha Husayn, who focuses on his poetic creativity, a second by Abd al-Rahman Sidqi which covers the poet’s life passage, i.e. from birth through different stages down to death; the third and fourth by al-Nuwaihi and al-Aqqad. The former considers him a mentally disordered personality whose relationship with his mother is the key to his psychopathic state, the latter diagnoses narcissism as the key to understand the poet’s psyche.

Abu Nuwas’ character is analysed here by means of modern methods in order to reach out for his inner depths. These methods were contradictory and/or complementary. Whereas the artistic and historical methods were manifestly apparent in Taha Husayn’s work on Abu Nuwas, psychoanalysis was predominant in al-Nuwaihi’s and al-Aqqad’s works, partly supported by a historical approach. Sidqi’s, however, was more of a literary sirah biography because of the narrative techniques of the novel which he employed to portray his hero, Abu Nuwas. He combined both the historical and psychological methods in his study of the environment which influenced and formed Abu Nuwas, and of the poet’s relationship with his mother.

* For the life of Abu Nuwas see:

Taha Husayn stresses the importance of Abū Nuwās's verse, splitting it for his purposes into wine-poetry, ascetic-poetry, and love-poetry. The latter is again divided into gay poetry and female love poems. Lastly there are his satirical poems. Taha Husayn arranges these types on a differential scale, according to what he deems their literary value. His best, Taha Husayn contends, are gay poems, his female love poetry betrays how false, untruthful (17), conceited and pompous he is; his eulogies are artificial and pretentious, his obituaries are the weakest of his poetry, whereas his satirical pieces are manifestly political. Taha Husayn maintains that Abū Nuwās "hated and despised life, only overcoming it through sex-fetishism and joy-seeking, whereas Abū al-'Afa' detested life but defeated it by means of asceticism and self-inflicted deprivation." (18)

It is clear from these assessments that Taha Husayn utilizes his personal, literary taste to distinguish and classify Abū Nuwās' poetry. The poet's fascination with and majestic exaltation in wine is interpreted by Taha Husayn as evidence testifying that Abū Nuwās is an innovator, because he deserted the format of the classical poem which traditionally begins with "remembrance of the past". Abū Nuwās disdains this opening theme, replacing it with exaltation of spirits. Al'Aqqād on the other hand reads this change in the structure of the poem as an expression of an inferiority complex caused by the poet's servile parentage, hence his desire to rebel against the traditional format simply reflects his desire to ridicule traditions and satirize them.

Taha Husayn accounts for the work of this poet (Abū Nuwās) entirely by the cultural depression of this period, by conjunction of time (qaṣrb) and the social environment (bi'dhār), particularly the transition from the Umayyad era to that of the Abbasid (19). Abū Nuwās reflected in his poetry the spirit of his own age.(20)
Al-Nuwaʻiḥī, on the other hand, begins his analysis of the personality of Abū Nuwās with a self-evident confirmation that personality is formed under the combined influence of the individual make-up and of the environment. Being deserted by his mother at an early stage of his boyhood, Abū Nuwās's deprivation of motherly care and affection causes him to reject females, seek pleasure with young gays or turn to wine which, to him, becomes a figurative sexual partner. He suffers from psycho-neurosis which inflicts upon him distraction and destroys his ability to behave properly. This neurosis is the manifestation of an Oedipus complex (his relation to his mother). Al-Nuwaʻiḥī brings almost every psychological term available to him to prove this point, which we have already discussed in the previous chapter. The sum-total of al-Nuwaʻiḥī's analysis is anchored in "revealing the sub-conscious side in Abū Nuwās' character, attributing it to an abnormal relation with his mother in line with psychoanalysis."(21)

Al-ʻAqqād construes the case of Abū Nuwās as one of narcissism. He maintains that Abū Nuwās's nature harboured a latent femininity (22), whereas his exhibitionism is simply a defiance coded in the expression of singularity and difference, his alcoholism is a means of a peacock display of the self. His is a case of regression as well. Regression is the case where the narcissist falls for another who is similar to him in appearance and demeanour but different from him in potency and power. The caliph, al-Amnī, is this powerful alter ego.(23) Abū Nuwās, then, is a natural born deviant whose delinquency is reinforced by the influences of family, society and epoch. In his approach, al-ʻAqqād reiterates what al-Nuwaʻiḥī describes as the dual interaction of both individuality and environment.(24)

Al-ʻAqqād portrays the natural born physical qualities of Abū Nuwās, his soft, long hair, tender body, his lisping, coarse voice, on the one hand, and he describes how
this individual interacts with his Abbasid society and epoch, on the other. For him Abū Nuwās is a "typical character" (Shakhşiya Numuzaiya) whose drunkenness reflected a desire to forget his debased lineage, to relieve the agonies caused by this complex of inferiority. In a sense, intoxication is a symbolic act of self-glorification, because, in his own words, he "sips what Persian Caesars and royals before him drank." But this inferiority complex would act upon his verse. That is why, contrary to Arab poets, he rejects the traditional remembrance of the past, simply because he does not belong to this ancient past. Al-Aqqād maintains that Abū Nuwās' sexual fetishism is a natural outcome of his narcissism, he is not a homosexual, but simply loves young boys because they look like girls, and loves young girls because they resemble young boys. Lastly his repentance is a manifestation of the last, weak phase of sexuality, the so-called climacteric period.

In the end al-Aqqād declares he has no intention of writing a biography of Abū Nuwās, yet, I presume, he studied him from a psychological point of view without neglecting other factors. He incorporates both Freud's narcissism and Taine's historical determinism. Al-Aqqād's work is more of a psychological portrait, very near to what al-Nuwaihi had presented. Both al-Aqqād and al-Nuwaihi, however, are severely criticised by Ṭahā Ḥusayn who says that al-Nuwaihi "mixed the miscellaneous extracts from Abū Nuwās, Freud and other thinkers, to produce a freak whom he displayed in his book under the name of Abū Nuwās." He also adds, "He [al-Nuwaihi] went too far and simply deformed Abū Nuwās." Ṭahā Ḥusayn has the same opinion of al-Aqqād's study: "He [al-Aqqād] exceeded the proper bounds in his utilization of the concept of narcissism, usually applied by psychiatrists in their therapy of the living patients, to dissect the character of an ancient poet." Ṭahā Ḥusayn dismisses this method because it concentrates in his opinion on the poet not poetry.
The fourth, and last, study of Abū Nuwās come in a different context, combining all these methods and applications. This is the case with 'Abd al-Rahmān Şidqi who anticipates both al-Aqqād and al-Nuwa'ī. He reveals a conscious understanding of the basics of biography writing which he aptly expounds in the preface. (30.A)

To sum up, in Ṭahā Husayn's view, Abū Nuwās is a normal, thoughtful poet like any other poet of his era. In the eyes of al-Nuwa'ī and al-Aqqād, Abū Nuwās is an abnormal pervert whose verse can only be examined in the light of its creators' neurotic disorder. With Şidqi, a third interpretation is offered: Abū Nuwās is a moody lust-seeker whose obscenity is artistic, potential rather than actual, because he is more often than not powerless. And Ṭahā Husayn's attacks on the psychological method applied by al-Nuwa'ī and al-Aqqād are a personal retreat from this method which he had applied in his study on Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī.

Abū Nuwās's character had been controversial in his time. The ancients wove anecdotes and myths around him. The modernist created no less controversy, at least in their application of different European literary methods. In varying degrees, they managed to produce an image of the poet which mainly reflects their intellectual leanings and different tastes. To apply a mono method is, I believe, insufficient to build a literary biography or depict the image of a literary persona.

A comprehensive, complementary method, based on artistic, historical and psychological approaches, is necessary. Neither the individual nor his production should have priority over the other. That is because, "no single school can single-handedly analyse a certain character, and shed light on its ins and outs, whether or not the character in question is normal, deviant, rebellious against, or submissive to the political, social and literary realities." (31)
c. Ibn al-Rūmi*

There are two considerations, al-Aqqād contends, behind the renewed interest in and focus on Ibn al-Rūmi by the aforementioned four modern critics. The first consideration is that the poet has deliberately or otherwise been neglected by both classical and contemporary critics, the second is that Ibn al-Rūmi represented a unique psychopathic case which was well reflected in his poetry. Perhaps this is why modern biographers attempted to apply their theoretical approaches on his case, notably psychological methods which were extensively used, as has already been outlined in chapter four.(32)

Al-Māzīnī and al-Aqqād are of the same opinion; that the key to understanding Ibn al-Rūmi's character is his Greek creative genius. His love of nature, his cult of life, his faculty of personification and portrayal and his keen sensibilities were all qualities bestowed on him by dint of his Aryan-Roman ancestry. Later on, however, al-Aqqād dropped this lineage-based reading.(33)

Ṭāhā Husayn, on the other hand, attributes the classical poet's brilliance to his cross-cultural composition anchored in the Arabic-Islamic culture.

Al-Nuwaihī for his part focuses on Ibn al-Rūmi's individuality generated by his unique physical stature and the matchless disposition such uniqueness usually carries with it. Genetic units inherited from his parents, according to al-Nuwaihī, first formed his mentality, temperament, character, mind, nervous and sexual systems and

* For the life of Ibn al-Rūmi see:
C. Huart, A History of Arabic Literature, pp. 82-83.
C. Brockelmann, Tarikh al-Adab al-ʿArabī, Vol. 2, p. 44
his endocrine glands, and the environment came second to sustain and aggravate these defects.(34)

The epoch, in al-Aqqad's view, was crucial in defining Ibn al-Rumi's disposition and behaviour, because for a weak person like Ibn al-Rumi, that epoch of cunning, deceit, corruption, indulgence and rebellion was extremely unfavourable.

As to what constituted his qualities and characteristics the four biographers widely agreed, but as to their causes they widely disagreed. For them Ibn al-Rumi was intelligent, witty, discontent, pessimistically paranoid, harshly satirical, self-insulated, physically ill, moody, obsessed with sexual organs, a heavy eater and haunted by fear of death.

His paranoid pessimism, according to al-Aqqad and al-Mazini, is the product of a disorder in his nervous system which kept him haunted by a constant sense of being victimized and targeted. His satire, on the other hand, is but the outcome of his failure and vulnerability, a shield to face the bitter reality and a cover up for the loss of fame and wealth he thought he should have been entitled to. His rakish obscenity and vulgar satire are but manifestations of his sensuality and lust-seeking, his recurrent reference to genitals is spurred by his suffering from a sexual disorder. Yet these symptoms would have not taken the sharp forms they had assumed, had not his society and environment been so inimical.

Al-NuwaIhi takes a different line of argument and stresses that the original cause is the very physical disorder of the poet. Attacking al-Aqqad for his confusion of Roman with Greek origins, al-NuwaIhi reiterates that Ibn al-Rumi's genius is the result of all these factors combined: his physical and mental set-up as well as the conditions and the environment under which he lived. Al-NuwaIhi maintains that Ibn al-Rumi's self-insulation is the outcome of the new, complex, multi-cultural and multi-ideological civilization. Ibn al-Rumi's failure, however, is contrary to what al-
Aqqād and al-Mazini hold, not caused by social injustices, but by the poet’s paranoid mind and mental disorder.

To sum up, al-Mazini provided a psychological portrait of Ibn al-Rūmī, al-Aqqād gave a psychological biography which surpassed Tāhā Ḥusayn's piece on al-Maarrī in that al-Aqqād was more of a critic and psychoanalyst than a historiographer, since he portrayed both Ibn al-Rūmī’s environment and character in one unified context, dissecting the latter's behaviour on the basis of his method. Yet, together with al-Mazini, al-Aqqād over-emphasized the Greek nature of the poet's genius. Tāhā Ḥusayn, however, challenged their approach and accused them of taking the poet rather than the poetry. Yet he agreed with their definition of Ibn al-Rūmī’s psychological traits.

Al-Nuwaihi presented a psychoanalytical biography with more of a laboratory-like analysis than a literary study. In this, he over-stretched the interpretation of the texts of Ibn al-Rūmī to suit his ends. His explanation of the forms, functions and operation of the glands in the human body is clear evidence of this aspect.
d. Al-Mutanabbi

The poet Abu al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbi is renowned for being the figure who overwhelmed the horizons and bewitched people at large. This is how classical critics defined him. Now we shall see him through the eyes of al-Mazini. al-ʿAqṣād and Taha Husayn.

Al-Mazini produced no more than a biographical sketch based on the same method he adopted, seeking the key to the personality of the person under consideration. (35) I have introduced him here because he applies the same method engaged by al-ʿAqṣād in that he selects figures renowned for their individuality and unique brilliance. In the eyes of al-Mazini, al-Mutanabbi is a man with a calling or purpose in life, fighting for his quest with every means, making money for this end. He is strong in terms of character, he is also self-composed and self-confident, yet he changes colours like a chameleon to achieve his ends without feeling the slightest sort of guilt or regret. In this, al-Mazini turns a blind eye on dissecting al-Mutanabbi's psyche to dig out the motives behind his opportunistic, unprincipled greed and ambitions.

In their study of al-Mutanabbi's character, both al-ʿAqṣād and Taha Husayn used certain methods which were similar in content, but were different in form.

Al-ʿAqṣād tries his best to convince his readers that al-Mutanabbi was what he was, a lust-seeker who took pleasure exactly in "what the others conceive as sin or lapse."

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* For the life of al-Mutanabbi see:
  Ibn Khallīkān, Ṣafāyī al-ʿAdabiyyān, Vol. 1, p. 120.
  Shawqi Daif, Al-fann wa-Madāḥihābū hu al-Shīrī al-ʿArabī, p. 303.
Supremacy, to him, was the ultimate end in life, but power was the source of ethics, virtues, merits, fame and glory. (37)

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, by contrast, presents al-Mutanabbi's biography, "within a historical and psychological context reminiscent of that applied by Saint-Beuve in his well known literary critical studies." (38) That is why Ṭāhā Ḥusayn divides the poet's life into five temporal and psychological phases, taking the latter's verse as a means to depict each period and extracting his supporting evidence from the various environments under which the poet lived and laboured, linking both aspects in this study of al-Mutanabbi's life. (39)

Both al-Аqqād and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn accede to the fact that the environment and the epoch had a crucial influence on al-Mutanabbi's personality; they are also of the same mind on his subjective qualities, such as his strong character, over self-confidence, magnified self-esteem, keen sensibilities, sensitive composure, creative fantasy and piercing intellect. Al-Аqqād lays stress on the poet's natural instinctive tendencies: he never fasts, never prays, has no respect for prophets, does not recite the holy Qur'ān, harbours scepticism derived from Greek philosophy and other texts by the materialists and heretics. By contrast, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn singles out "the debased lineage and parentage of al-Mutanabbi as the prime factor which defines the poet's personality and renders him abhorrent in the eyes of his contemporaries. This is what made him conceive of his life as one plunged in ambiguity and eccentricity." (40)

The key concept in al-Аqqād's psychoanalysis of al-Mutanabbi is megalomania. This is very evident in "his over-confidence in the self, his strong character, his multi-faceted experiences and the inclination of the people to quote his aphorisms and maxims." (41) The diminutive forms he recurrently uses in his verse are but a manifestation of his self-magnifying aptitude, his propensity to portray himself in
great stature to lend the others a lower standing. He is "so preoccupied with expressing this subjective sense of greatness." (42) Al-\(^{\text{q}}\)Aqqad calls these traits as the internalized or inner factors on which he builds his conclusion that, given such qualities and having such environment and circumstances, it is not extraordinary for the ambitious poet to claim holy prophethood.

To servile birth, Taha Husayn adds poverty and the conversion to the Qarmati heresy as the constituent factors and elements of his complex psyche where the feeling of servility coexists with the feeling of power derived from his egoistic belief in his own self; al-Mutanabb\(\text{i}\) 's poverty is the spring of his vindictive, malicious attitude towards the wealthy, and the source of his being bent on extracting money with every possible means, because wealth is cornerstone of power and glory. Taha Husayn presents the facts and details supporting this view.

With less emphasis on the historical approach, Al-\(^{\text{q}}\)Aqqad confined his presentation to the analysis of certain aspects of al-Mutanabb\(\text{i}\) 's personality. His is more of a psychoanalytical portrait. Taha Husayn, by contrast, brings into play integrative, literary methods, a combination of the naturalistic, impressionist and psychological methods. With these tools, Taha Husayn explains how the intellectual environment has its influence on al-Mutanabb\(\text{i}\) 's character and verse. In Kufa (Iraq), the city of plunder, pillage, killing, outrage, disdain of traditions or values and customs, al-Mutanabb\(\text{i}\) came under wickedly disruptive influences which bred in him wild desires for rebellion and mutiny.

In Aleppo (Syria), al-Mutanabb\(\text{i}\) finds an advanced intellectual haven where he enjoys wealth and power and sees his ideals embodied in the triumph of Arabs over aliens. Yet Aleppo is also the seat of disturbances and chaos, of Arab-Roman wars, of tribal mutinies against the rule of the Hamdan dynasty. It is an environment which requires improvisation and bravery, hence we see al-Mutanabb\(\text{i}\) in his war poems, rise, in artistic terms, to perfection, and his ambitions and expectations become great.
In Egypt, the poet encounters a precarious environment which demands vigilance and caution. He arrives there broken, humble, sycophantic and hypocritical, but soon leaves it, a chased fugitive, deceived by the cunning politician, Kafur, consumed by his unfulfilled political ambitions.

Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn links the changes in al-Mutanabbi’s temper and psyche with the changing context of the environment. He observes al-Mutanabbi’s changing psychological phases during his career: he is always miserable, he praises today the prince whom he had ridiculed yesterday; one day he is a sycophant, the next he is paranoid; a rebellious Qarmatī in his youth, a conformist years later, always running for the unknown "unable to settle down and lead a normal life of a creative, productive, progressing poet unless he is under the protection of a noble or princely patron as if he is a parasitical plant only capable of growth and maturity under the shades of giant trees." (43) Being a slave to gold and a servant to princes and driven by his ambitious enterprises and greed, he meets his end. His restless changes of place from Kufa to Baghdad to Aleppo to Egypt to Shiraz is a fact which reveals a complex self tormented by a desperate search for that unattained glory.

In this biography which resembles a novel-type narrative, Ṭāḥā Ḥusayn relied on al-Mutanabbi’s poetry and his life circumstances.(44) The hero in this novel-like biography is al-Mutanabbi himself, the supporting characters are the princes, rebels and slaves of the time. The major character develops in space and time gradually and logically in different social spaces.

In his childhood, he was in great pain caused by his poor lineage; in his youth he was a radical rebel seeking social justice but ended in gaol; in his manhood he was fighting with poetry in the service of his prince, Saif al-Dawla. When he became the target of palace conspiracies and fled for his life, the stage was set for the climax of the plot. His flight to Egypt, his failure with Kafur and his death after the Shiraz trip
sets up the final chapter of the novel. The secondary characters in the drama become symbols signifying the political turmoil in that era.

Yet, Taha Husayn's narrative was interrupted by digressions on the various views of old and contemporary critics and historians, or on different readings into the aesthetic values of al-Mutanabbi's poetry. These digressions spoiled the continuity and fragmented the flow of episodes, shifting the whole text into a literary textual criticism of poetry. Yet, Taha Husayn succeeded in bringing into bold relief the psychological features of al-Mutanabbi on the basis of Saint-Beuve's methodology, and in portraying the environment and its influences on the basis of Taine's approach. He also engaged his literary taste to explain and read into al-Mutanabbi's verse, following the line of Jules Lemaître's impressionist method. Unlike his predecessors, Taha Husayn masterfully used a multi-methodological approach to unveil the hidden depths of al-Mutanabbi.
e. Al-Ma'arrī

The blind, philosophical poet, Abu al-Ý'Al;? al-Ma'arrī is one of the most anxious, disturbed classical personalities, and may have not been done justice in the past or the present. Classical scholars studied al-Ma'arrī either graciously or abominably according to their subjective preference. Modernists, including Orientalists, explained al-Ma'arrī with no less subjective criteria. Modern biographers under consideration viewed al-Ma'arrī's personality in the light of the methodologies they borrowed from their European Orientalist masters.

Al-Ma'arrī was the first figure to attract wide attention and interest from the pioneers of Arab renaissance. For Taha Husayn, al-Ma'arrī is an idol, perhaps, he postulates, because they both have much in common. As for al-Aqqâd, al-Ma'arrī is a case which merits psychoanalysis.

Taha Husayn tries to reconstruct al-Ma'arrī's life story, whereas al-Aqqâd attempts to depict a section of the poet's character: his temperament.

Al-Ma'arrī, according to Taha Husayn, has a unique personality which develops under circumstances of social degeneration, hence he is the product of two sets of factors, internal and external. Internally, there are his sightlessness, bashfulness, timidity, disdain, sense of honour and compassion for the weak. Externally, there are his poverty, the untimely death of his father, the corruption of political, social and

* For the life of al-Ma'arrī see:
  C. Huart, A History of Arabic Literature, pp. 88-89.
  C. Brockelmann, Tarīkh al-Adab al-Àrabi, Vol. 5, p. 35.
  Ý'ishah Abd al-Rahmān, Abū Ý'Al;? al-Ma'arrī in Abbasid Belles-lettres,
  Shawqi Daif, Al-Fann wa-Madhahibuhufi al-Shi r al-Irāqi,
    pp. 376ff.
  P.Smoor, Al-Ma'arrī, El2, p. 927ff.
economic life, the waning influence of religion, the spread of deception, cunning, hypocrisy, slander, defamation and self-interest together with the progress of intellectual life. In this context, al-Maarrhi's true image, Taha Husayn contends, merits an accurate reconstruction which makes the study of his character a study of his age and vice versa. To this end, Taha Husayn examines al-Maarrhi's life and the powerful factors that influence his life using the analytical tools of historical and psychological methods.

Al-Maarrhi is the product of his epoch, matured by certain political, social and economic conditions. His demeanour and composition are objectively moulded by these factors. Taha Husayn goes into ramified details to explain the working and mechanisms of these factors in formulating al-Maarrhi's character. Al-Aqqad stops short of biographical narratives, confining his presentation to the poet's melancholic, or depressed mood, as he calls it, searching for the causes behind this downcast pessimism. Al-Maarrhi's genesis lies in internal (psychological) and external (environmental) realities. Perhaps al-Aqqad reproduces these factors from Taha Husayn, only adding to them that al-Maarrhi has "a masochist temper, [i.e a tendency to inflict self-torture] like any mentally disordered psychopath." Al-Aqqad adheres to the same approach: his characters are complete and mature for they neither develop nor mutate, and he is concerned mainly with finding out the "key" to the character, a method which is shared by al-Mazini.

In more than one hundred pages, Taha Husayn studies the environment of al-Maarrhi in such detail that it gives the impression that the author is presenting a text of Muslim history. He also reviews al-Maarrhi's verse, prose, thought and philosophy. This part also covers some hundred pages in which Taha Husayn appears more of an editor who is concerned with registering and criticising all the opposing, classical views on al-Maarrhi. These detailed historical and literary departures steer the work
beyond the limits of biography proper into a literary history of that era. There are only one hundred pages dedicated to al-Ma\\'arri’s life, divided into three phases during which his soul is suffused with sorrow and agony. This gloomy mood is all the more aggravated by his failure to communicate with the others or deal with them; ultimately he is driven by this alienation into self-imposed solitude.

Taha Husayn’s portrayal of al-Ma\\'arri’s life is reminiscent, so to speak, of the novel’s narrative techniques: a talented boy, born to a poor family, orphaned prematurely, loses his eyesight, migrates to different cities, Aleppo, Antakya, Tripoli and Baghdad, seeking learning, good income and fame, but, being thwarted and frustrated, he retreats to his hometown to spend his life in seclusion and privacy to the last breath. The tragedy of the hero is caused by his unique psychological set-up moulded, as it were, by the circumstances under which he lived. With the journey to Baghdad, the story arrives at its sudden climax. Taha Husayn is keen on explaining every single piece of behaviour and action al-Ma\\'arri performs. His paranoid timidity is caused by his blindness, his compassion and sympathy for others is the source of his discontent towards human behaviour and existence; his powerful talent in writing poems of condolence (Mar\'\text{\textbar}th\text{\textbar}) is embedded in his agony-ridden life; his self-insulation is motivated by his ascetic and puritan propensities and by the distaste he harboured for the corruption surrounding him; his concealment of his own views is prompted by the desire to avoid hostile reactions.

The narrative mould, however, lacks various elements, particularly the temporal sense of progression and sequence of events and developments which may justify al-Ma\\'arri’s maturity and psychological mutation. The chain of events is constantly broken by the author’s commentary or by quotations of commentaries from other writers.
It seems that there is a strong reason, although yet unclear, which urges most students of Ṭāḥā Husayn's works to consider his *Tājid Dhikra Abī al-ʿAlā* as being the first literary biography in modern Arab times. In my opinion, it is an attempt to write a literary biography.

Nowhere does Ṭāḥā Husayn seem as influenced by historical determinism as in this work. Every single phenomenon or trace is attributed to its source and genealogy. In this work on al-ʿAlāʾ, Ṭāḥā Husayn looks more of a historian. He himself admitted this fact, saying "This is a book we authored on history." In a second book, *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlā ʿFi Sijnihi*, Ṭāḥā Husayn shifts to another aspect of the classical poet's life: his intellectual biography, the development of his mind, his thought. Here, Ṭāḥā Husayn conducts what amounts to a philosophical dialogue to unravel the inner thoughts of the blind poet.

A similar philosophical reading into the mind of Abū al-ʿAlā is also attempted by al-Aqqād in his *Raj'at Abī al-ʿAlā*.

Both Ṭāḥā Husayn and al-Aqqād sought to study and analyse the character and behaviour of al-ʿAlāʾ, applying two intertwined methodologies, the psychological and historical approaches. The literary scholars of the second generation in Egypt, such as Hamdī al-Sakkuṭ and jābir Qumāīḥa simply copied their example.
NOTES


7. Ibid., p. 64.


11. Ibid., p. 454.

12. Ibid., p. 461.


16. J. Qumãhã, op. cit., p. 313.


18. ʻĪnáyã Husayn, op. cit., p. 137.


20. ʻĪnáyã Husayn, *Hadith al-Arbi* Vol 2, p.44 [This quotation has been taken from D. Semah, *Four Egyptian Literary Critics*. p. 114].

23. Ibid., p. 40.
24. Muḥammad al-Nuwaḥī, Nafṣiyāt Abī Nuwās [see pp. 199-201].
26. Ibid., p. 106.
27. Ibid., p. 129.
29. Ibid., p. 681.
30A. See the chapter on Ṣāḥib al-Rahmān Shīdī pp. 179-189.
37. Ibid., p. 155.
39. Ibid., p. 11.
41. Al-Aqqād, Muḥāla’at, op. cit., p. 143.
42. Ibid., p. 130.
44. Ibrāhīm ʿAbd al-Rahmān Muḥammad, op. cit., p. 27.
46. Ibid., p. 17.
47. Ibid., p. 16.


50. See Chapter 4, Ţāḥā Husayn.

CONCLUSION
This thesis is an attempt to fill a lacuna in modern Arabic literature. The majority of the studies in this field have concentrated on genres such as poetry, prose and the theatre, which flourished more or less at the same time with the beginning of this century.

Biography in general was a pivotal subject in classical Arabic literature, e.g. Ibn Khallikan and his book, *Wafayät al-‘Ayn wa-‘Anbā‘ Abna‘ al-Zamān* (Obituaries of Eminent Men and Notices of the Sons of the Epoch). This book is a good example of Arabic biographical dictionaries. Some Orientalists (M. Young), however, have considered this book a combination of the features of *Who's Who* and a *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Literary biography in Egypt is, relatively, a new literary genre, which has been dealt with in a very scanty way by mainly non-professional critics. Added to this, there has been confusion in general terms in the conception itself, which resulted from mixing between literary, political and historical biography. I have therefore tried to offer the reader a more academic dimension, as it is normally found in European literature.

Compared to other genres, literary biography has not been given due attention within the general framework of the modern thought.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the first attempts to write literary biographies were initiated by members of an enlightened elite, basing themselves on the introduction and employment of methodologies which were, perhaps, archaic or well-known in their country of origin, but which were totally novel in Arab thought in general.

Ṭāḥa Ḥusayn, al-Aqqād, al-Māzīnī, Zākī Mubārak, al-Iryān, Sīdqi and al-Nuwaihī, leaned in their biography writing on European methods. Of course, embracing a method theoretically is one thing, and applying it successfully is another. Hence, Egyptian applications were of divergent value in terms of skill, style and artistry.
A case in point is the application of psychoanalysis by al-Nuwayhi in his research on Bashshar, Abu Nuwas and Ibn al-Rumi, or by al-Aqqad in his study of Abu Nuwas and others.

By dint of his academic training and direct contact with the West, i.e. France, Taha Husayn was the most prominent initiator of this trend. He adopted and introduced the various methodologies of French critics and thinkers like Saint-Beuve, Hippolyte Taine, Brunetiere and Lemaitre. At times he employed their respective methods in combination irrespective of whether or not, or to what extent he was or was not, successful in this application or combination.

In addition to the role played by Taha Husayn, the greatest contribution in this respect was made by Cairo University. It is this institution that invited and delegated orientalist scholars to assume an enlightening role in accordance with a wider plan envisaged to put the Egyptian society on the road of scientific progress.

Al-Aqqad on his part tried to continue the efforts initiated by his contemporary, Taha Husayn, and consolidate the theory of biography in Arabic literature. His vast readings and knowledge of English gave him access to wider European methodologies from French, German and English schools. He digested these systems and yielded a deep, comprehensive method although it was unsuccessful in certain applications. Al-Aqqad was prolific in producing every kind of biographical essay. Unlike Taha Husayn who was confined to the French literature, al-Aqqad fell under different influences from Carlyle, to Strachey, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Beuve, Taine and Freud. And his short or long, literary biographies constituted thoughtful attempts to lay the foundations of this art.

Al-Mazini's method echoed that of al-Aqqad. This similarity may well be attributed to the strong friendship between the two men and the English education al-Mazini had.

Al-Iryan, on the other hand, produced one work, Hayat al-Rafi'i, which followed the example of Western novel-biography, or what is called a rounded biography. To
a great extent, al-Iryân’s text resembles the work of Mikhaîl Nuayma on the life of Jibrâ‘n Khalîl Jibrân. Hayât al-Râfi‘î should be put in its right place on the literary map in Egypt.

Lastly, al-Nuwallî was so entangled in the web of the laboratories of psycho-analysis that he overstretched the application of their concepts beyond any reasonable limits.

On the other hand, there appeared traditional biographers whose texts were set within the limits of collecting and presenting the good deeds of their subject, supplemented with life details like date and place of birth and death, together with selective texts (e.g. chapter three)

Examples of both the modernists and the traditionalists have been supplied and reviewed in an attempt to deduce the method of biography writing in Egypt during the first half of the twentieth century. In general, these attempts wavered between modern thoughtful creations and shallow traditional ones.

Biography is not only the art that deals with lineage, date of birth and death, childhood, education and travels, achievements, appointments and hobbies. It is a penetration into the soul and private life of the person studied offering the reader an analysis of a character by assessing the biographee's personality. A biographer has, therefore, great responsibility because he often has to expose and highlight areas which are either unknown or deliberately hidden from the public eye. It seems to me that the Egyptian biographers I dealt with have met in part some of these criteria.
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