

**THE ARABIC SHORT STORY IN TUNISIA UP TO 1970**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

In order to ensure a thorough survey of the available corpus of Tunisian short stories from 1906 when the earliest modern Tunisian story is recorded, I have adopted a broadly historical framework for the presentation of this thesis.

The introduction contains a geographical, historical, social and cultural sketch of Tunisia followed by an analysis of the validity of the existence of the Tunisian Arabic short story in Chapter One. In Chapter Two, I discuss the problem of language - classical or colloquial - in the modern Tunisian short story.

Chapter Three is about the pioneers of the story in Tunisia between 1906 and 1912. These were al-Suwaisī, al-Jādawī, Manāshū, Fahmī and al-Ja<sup>c</sup>āibī whose stories reflected their general concern for socio-political reforms.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī 'school' of short story writers (1930-1938) and the prominent rôle played by this review and its contributors in laying the first firm foundation for the Tunisian Arabic short story.

Chapter Five is on the period 1940-1956 when <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī the 'father of the Tunisian Arabic short story' emerged and with him, al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī the metaphysical story-

writer and other smaller fries like Karabāka, the two Bakīr brothers and Tawfiq bū Ghadīr.

Chapter Six deals with the principal themes in post-independence Arabic short story such as politics and nationalism, social conditions, conflict of generations, and it concludes with a note on the cross-fertilisation of ideas among Tunisian short story writers.

Chapter Seven is about short stories by Tunisian women in which they portray their lives, problems and aspirations and Chapter Eight deals with the latest trends in story-writing among Tunisian youths (especially al-Madanī) who are highly influenced by French nouveau-roman writers.

The conclusion is a résumé of the socio-cultural content of the Tunisian Arabic short story based on the works of some key-writers and the factors which portend a future expansion of the short story in Tunisia.



PREFACE and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Why did you choose the Tunisian Arabic short story for a thesis? Why not Egyptian or Lebanese short story? I've never heard of any Tunisian Arabic story writers before."

This was the reaction of an Eastern Arab student at my school when I told him at the commencement of my studies what I was going to write about. I was later to find out that such ignorance of the existence in North Africa of a modern Arabic literature worth studying was not confined to this Eastern Arab student but was widespread among many of his compatriots. I was therefore not surprised by the scarcity of information on this subject not only in English, but also in periodicals and books emanating from the Eastern Arab world.

This situation further reinforced and encouraged my earlier decision to write, unlike most of my compatriots, on a 'non-Nigerian' topic in order to make a contribution which would at least draw attention to this little-known part of the Arab world. It is no exaggeration to say that the literary life of modern Tunisia is little-known. This is true even of my school library which, in spite of its high reputation for documentation in Arabic studies, had little that was relevant to my topic and consequently

I had to arrange to obtain most of the necessary books, reviews and journals by myself and sometimes on the spot.

It is my hope that more English-speaking scholars will, in the near future, study not only the progress made in other literary genres such as poetry and drama in Tunisia, but also in the modern Arabic literatures of the other two countries of the Maghreb, namely Algeria and Morocco.

In writing on such a topic as the short story, it would be impossible to mention every-one who has ever written a short story. I have therefore had to do much sifting and selection especially in the post-independence period when many youths began to write short stories. However, excellence alone was not the criterion for selection. Some stories qualify because they best illustrate the thematic or technical progress or the principal trends and ideas of a given period.

I have kept to the system of transliteration used in the Encyclopaedia of Islam (new edition) except for ج which I transliterate as 'j' instead of the E.I.'s 'dj' and ق for which I adopt 'q' instead of the E.I.'s 'k'. For many Tunisian names of non-Arabic origin, I have stuck to the local pronunciation. In this connection, I would like to mention the two names القرمادي and قيفة which I transliterate as al-Garmādī and Guiga respectively.

I am indebted to my employers, the University of Ife, Nigeria, for granting me the study leave to write this thesis and for providing the fund for my first visit to Tunisia in 1970. I am also highly indebted to the Association of Commonwealth Universities for awarding me the scholarship without which I would not have been able to study in London.

I am grateful to my Tunisian friends, especially al-Bashīr al-Bakkūsh, al-Ustādh al-<sup>c</sup>Arūsī al-Matwī - chief editor of Qisas, Abū 'l-Qāsim Muhammad Kerrou, and all the short-story writers - al-Marzūqī, al-Ḥamzāwī, Hasan Naṣr, al-Bashīr Khraīf, al-Madanī to mention just a few - who answered my written and oral inquiries and without whose invaluable assistance my task would have been impossible. I thank the staff of the Tunisian National Library and the Tunisian Archives and the other smaller libraries which I consulted during my two visits to Tunisia. I must particularly record my gratitude to the Deputy Chief of the National Library for granting me a special permission to use the Library during the summer of 1971 when it was closed to the public.

Finally, I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. H.T. Norris for his enlightening comments and patient guidance throughout my study.

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## I N T R O D U C T I O N

### 1-A Geographical Sketch of Tunisia

Tunisia forms a wedge of territory between Algeria to the west and Libya to the east and is the smallest of the three countries that constitute the Maghreb of North-West Africa.<sup>1</sup>

The climate is 'Mediterranean' with hot dry summers followed by warm, wet winters. The rainfall however varies greatly with district and even with years and is much influenced by proximity of the sea in the northern and eastern districts and also of the Sahara desert in the south.

In the North-East, there are farmlands especially in the promontory terminating in Cape Bon and lying between the Gulfs of Tunis and Hammamet. The coastal plains of Sūsa (Souss) are sufficiently well-watered to make possible the cultivation of olives which also thrive around Jarjis (Zarzis) on the mainland, South-East off the large flat green Island of Jarba (Djerba).

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1. The other two are Morocco and Algeria. According to a 1966 census figure, the population of Tunisia was about four and a half million. It has an area of 63,380 square miles.

From the Gulf of Qābis (Gabes) inland in the central part of the country, a low-lying stretch of land cuts across the country where there is an abundant supply of underground water which gives rise to the famous date-producing region of Jarīd with the most notable area being the northern edge of Shatt al-Jarīd (Shott el-Jerid) around Nifṭa and Tūzar (Nefta and Tozeur).

The extreme south of the country experiences full desert conditions with less than eight inches of rainfall and so, it only supports sparse nomadic population.

The principal towns of the country are the capital Tunis, which has a population of 764,000; Sūsa (70,000); Safāqus (Sfax 100,000); Binzarta (Bizerta 70,000); and the old capital and holy city of al-Qairawān (40,000).<sup>2</sup>

## 2 - An Historical Sketch of pre-Arab Tunisia

Ease of access by sea and by land from the east has rendered Tunisia vulnerable to successive penetration of foreign influence and hence its varied cultural tradition, resulting from the peoples that have invaded it in the past, namely, Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Turks and French.

The Phoenicians established colonies leading to the Carthaginian Empire, which, by about 550 B.C. had attained a position of commercial and naval supremacy over the

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2. Middle East and North Africa, Europa Publ.Ltd., 1969, pp. 703ff & Encyclopaedia of Islam, art. 'Tunisia'.

Mediterranean sea with control over part of Sicily and trading posts as far afield as Southern Portugal. Carthage, which was the capital of the empire, was later to play an important rôle in the political history of Tunisia.

Following the famous <sup>Punic</sup> wars in the third and second centuries B.C., Carthage as a political entity was destroyed and its domains were incorporated within the Roman Empire.<sup>3</sup>

The city of Carthage was rebuilt by the Roman Empire after it was abandoned for over a century and then recolonised as the 'province of Africa'.<sup>4</sup> During the first two centuries A.D., Carthage was generally considered the second city of the Empire but soon afterwards, her new lease of life began to wane due to the decline of the Roman Empire's influence in the west and by 439 A.D., the province with its capital Carthage was lost to the Vandals.

The occupation of Carthage by the Vandals was short-lived and by 534 A.D., they lost the territory to the Byzantine Empire whose control did not last for more than a century.

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3. The Cambridge Ancient History, C.U.P., 1930, Vol.viii, pp. 466ff.

4. Ibid., p.584

### 3 - The Arabs in Tunisia

The most significant event in the history of Tunisia, and indeed, the whole of North Africa, was the series of military expeditions of Arab Muslims, the first of which took place in 647 A.D., only fifteen years after the death of Muhammad.<sup>5</sup>

The first raid on Ifrīqiya<sup>6</sup> was ordered by the third Orthodox Muslim caliph °Uthmān (644-656) and was carried out by °Abd Allah b. Sa°d Abī Sarh, his governor in Egypt.<sup>7</sup> It was inconclusive and had to be followed by further raids in 656 and 670, the last of which marked the real beginning of the establishment of Arab influence in Tunisia. The alleged leader of the expedition, °Uqba b. Nāfi° al-Fihri, reputedly founded the famous Islamic city of al-Qairawān which subsequently became an important religious and political capital for Muslim North Africa. He is also reputed to have aligned the mihrab of the grand mosque which bears his name until this day.

5. These raids were part of the Islamic expansion movement which immediately followed the death in 632 of the prophet of Islam.

6. This is the name given by the Arabs to central North Africa bounded on the east by Barqa (in modern day Libya) and on the west by al-Maghrib al-Aqsā (modern Morocco). Although ancient Arab geographers differed as to the precise limits of Ifrīqiya, Ibn Khaldūn's definition of it roughly corresponds to the central and northern parts of modern-day Tunisia. Cf. E.I. Vol. ii, art. Ifrikiya.

7. Egypt had earlier been conquered in 641 by °Umar b. al-°Aṣ who also conducted raids into Barqa and Tarābulus (Tripoli) two years later.



During the last two decades of the 7th century, the gains of the Muslim army in Tunisia were consolidated and extended further westwards to include the areas of modern-day Algeria and Morocco and from their base in North Africa, they crossed the straits of Gibraltar during the first quarter of the 8th century into Spain.

From this time on, Tunisia was successively ruled by various Arab and Berber dynasties the first of which was the Aghlabid dynasty (800-909)<sup>8</sup> followed by the Fātimid<sup>c</sup> Ubaida dynasty (909-969).<sup>9</sup> The Zīrid dynasty of Berber princes ruled from the departure of their overlords till the Norman invasion put an end to their power in 1148 when they were driven out of Mahdiya their capital. It was during their time that Tunisia was reputedly over-run by Hilālī and Sulaim Arabs from Egypt, believed to have been sent in 1051 by the Fātimid rulers of Egypt as a reprisal against the Zirids for renouncing their allegiance to Egypt and transferring this to the Orthodox<sup>c</sup> Abbāsīd caliphs of Baghdād, a move which resulted from a general wave of resentment, led by al-Qairawān, against the Isma<sup>c</sup>īlī Shī<sup>c</sup>a sect on which the Egyptian dynasty was founded, in favour of the Mālikī orthodox Muslim rite.

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8. Founded by Ibrāhīm b. al-Aghlab (ruled 801-812), son of al-Aghlab b. Sālim al-Tamīmī, an Arab soldier who went to Tunisia in 765.

9. The capital of this dynasty was transferred to Cairo in 969, leaving the territory to the Zīrid dynasty in compensation for the family's support and services to the Fātimid cause.

The Normans were ejected twelve years later (1160) by the al-Muwahhidīn (Almohads) and Tunisia became part of the Almohad caliphate centred in Marakkesh. By the third decade of the 13th century (1229), the Abbasids had regained brief control of Tunisia and they set up a strong provincial government under a member of the Berber family of the Hafsids, who, having held the governorship of Tunisia since 1184, were to continue as the main political force in the area,<sup>10</sup> until the Turkish conquest in 1551 put an end to their rule which had been very precarious from the end of the preceding century due to Spanish and Turkish threats to their power.

#### 4 - Islamisation and Arabisation in Tunisia

The original inhabitants of North Africa are the Berbers. Their ancestors were composed of large tribal groups including the Liwāta who lived in Barqa; the Hawwāra to the west of Tripōli and in Tunisia; the Ṣanhāja in Algeria and Kutāma, Maṣmūda, Miknāsa, Yafarna and Hintāta in Morocco.<sup>11</sup>

The original Berber speaking people of Tunisia had the cultures of their successive invaders superimposed

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10. M.E. & N.A., 1969-70, Op.cit.

11. H.H. <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhāb, Khulāsa Ta'rīkh Tūnis, 4th ed., Tunis, 1948, p.14. I have followed Abd al-Wahhāb's book in my vocalisation of the tribal names.

on them although they always managed to maintain their identity and show their opposition to their foreign rulers by, for example, adopting extremist heresies from the latter. During the Roman and Byzantine periods, they sided with the schismatic Donatus Magnus who led the Donatist North African religious faction during the 4th and 5th centuries,<sup>12</sup> and so after Islam was introduced into North Africa in the second half of the 7th century, they adopted the various Islamic heresies especially Khārijism. The greater part of the 8th century was taken up by the occupying Arab forces in suppressing Berber rebellions under the banner of Khārijism.<sup>13</sup>

At the time of the Arab conquest, most of the Berbers living on the coastal plains were nominal Christians but they did not seem to have been deeply affected by Roman civilisation "for the Romans and Byzantines lived mainly in towns on the coast and represented a culture that was quite alien to the mentality of these nomadic and semi-nomadic North Africans".<sup>14</sup>

Concerted efforts were made by the Muslim Arabs to propagate Islam among the native Berber population. An outstanding example of this was the party of ten scholars despatched in 718 by the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz to North Africa with orders to teach Islam to the Berbers and the result was that "many natives hastened to join Islam."<sup>15</sup>

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12. Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics, J.Hastings (ed.) Edinburgh 1911, Vol.4., p.844.

13. H.H. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, op.cit., p.66.

14. P.K.Hitti, History of the Arabs, London, 1964, p.214.

15. H.H. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, op.cit., p.64.

Many of these converts joined the Muslim Arab armies in the conquest of Spain and by the end of the 9th century, there was one of the earliest North African Muslim scholars of Berber origin - Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd b. Ḥabīb al-Tanūkhī (777-854). It is however doubtful whether there was at this time any considerable Arabisation of the Berbers in view of the numerically insufficient strength of Arab soldiers who were also always on the move to quell revolts in one place after another.

The thorough Arabisation of the Tunisian Berbers was to come about in the middle of the 11th century (c.1048-1053) with the invasion of Ifrīqiyyā by the Hilālī and Sulaim Arabs.

The invaders, reputedly numbering about 400,000, were large enough to effect the Arabisation of the Berber population with whom they soon mixed and intermarried. One factor which aided this process of Arabisation was that, unlike the previous waves of Arab soldiery some of whom formed themselves into a kind of political and scholastic aristocracy isolated from the local population,<sup>16</sup> the Hilālī and Sulaim Arabs were nomads who had little class distinction and could easily mix with and integrate into the local population after the initial shock of invasion and its attendant devastation had passed.

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16. Some of them were actually among Muḥammad's contemporaries known as his companions like the seven Abdullāhs who led the 648 raid and Abū Zam<sup>c</sup>a Ubaid Allah al-Balawī, a member of the 665 raid whose tomb is still a venerable spot in al-Qairawān.

The effect of these immigrant groups on the Tunisian Berber population was so comprehensive that today, Tunisia is more completely Arabised than either Morocco or Algeria and the remnants of the original Berber-speaking population in Tunisia are confined to only a few isolated localities in the south, especially around Matmāta and on the Island of Jarba.<sup>17</sup>

#### 5 - Pre-Independence Tunisian Society

Apart from the Berber and Arab inhabitants referred to previously, it is appropriate at this point to mention another important group of Tunisian residents of foreign extraction. This is the Jewish population. The settlement of Jews in Tunisia dates back to the dissolution of the Jewish state by the Roman General Titus during the first century A.D. when he is believed to have sent a great number of Jews to Mauretania and some of these settled in Tunisia. These were augmented over the centuries by other waves of Jewish refugees from Spanish persecution in the 7th, 14th and 15th centuries<sup>18</sup> so that by the first quarter of the 20th century their number stood at about 60,000 in Tunisia. They played a major rôle in the commercial and intellectual life of the country although the exclusive nature of their faith which has received alternately favourable and unfavourable treatments from various rulers,

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17. H.H. <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhāb, op.cit., p.14.

18. The Jewish Encyclopaedia, New Ed., Vol.xii, pp. 271-276.

limited their integration into and influence on the predominantly Arab/Muslim culture of the country.

The descendants of the ruling elements among the Arabs and their court officials constituted an aristocracy whose standard of living was considerably better than that of the general public. However, the stratification of the Tunisian society which persisted until the period of intense nationalist struggle, began to form a recognisable pattern in the 16th and 17th centuries with the arrival of Spanish Muslim Arab refugees who fled their native Spain due to religious persecution after the fall of the Muslim Spanish kingdom to the Christian rulers in 1492.<sup>19</sup>

The largest group arrived in Tunisia during the time of the Turkish ruler <sup>c</sup>Uthmān Dey (1593-1610) who granted them land, financial as well as other material assistance to enable them to settle down. Many of them continued their former professions as craftsmen and agriculturalists and their descendants have preserved this family tradition. They therefore formed a class of highly honoured professionals next in rank and esteem to the ruling Turks.<sup>20</sup>

19. The immigration had actually started during the 4th decade of the 13th c., when the Spanish Muslims began to feel the pressure of the Spanish Christian rulers who began to make territorial gains from the Muslims. Cf. J.D. Latham, 'Towards a study of Andalusian Immigration and its place in Tunisian History', art. in Les Cahiers de Tunisie, Nos. 19-20, 1957, p.204.

20. This does not mean that the Tunisian society did not have a social pattern before the influx of these immigrants but that the arrival of these groups radically altered the social structure. Their number is estimated at about 50,000. (Cf. Latham, p.211).

The professions were subdivided into groups according to their degree of lucrativeness and the degree of physical exertion and dirt involved. In the top group comes the shawāshī - makers of shāshiya, a kind of red headgear similar to the tarbūsh; sericulturists and the weavers of silk materials and farmers, many of whom were merely "gentlemen farmers" living in the capital while their lands in the countryside were entrusted to khammās<sup>21</sup> and other hired labourers. Also in the first group but sometimes on a slightly lesser level were embroiderers, tailors, saddle-makers and traders. The second group consists of "less clean professions" like shoe-making, carpentry (especially cabinet-making) and butchers' trade. The third group of "dirty professions" includes such jobs as hair-dressing, cloth dying, masonry and carriage-driving.<sup>22</sup>

Outside these urban upper- and middle-class groups were the poor class of unskilled and landless people who worked as carriers, door-keepers, water-carriers in the urban centres and as farm labourers in the rural areas.

Beside this economic factor which played a major rôle in the class structure, another factor which dictated a broad division of the population was the place of abode, namely town-dwellers and country-side dwellers.

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21. Khammās is a sharecropper who receives one-fifth of the crops (khums) as his wages.

22. A. Demeerseman, La Famille Tunisienne et Les Temps Nouveaux, Tunis, 1967, pp. 237-238.

"The town-dwellers are called al-baldīya<sup>23</sup> or ahl al-buldān. Being sedentary, they are considered as belonging to a superior civilisation, culture and education. Their more polished language, their more diversified activities and their specialised trades all contribute to their prestige."<sup>24</sup>

This definition applied to the inhabitants of large urban centres like Tunis, al-Qairawān, Sūsa, Monastīr and Sfax. On the other hand, the inhabitants of the countryside were all considered to be rough and rustic while residence outside the urban centres was equated with nomadism although it was not denied that these people had their own notables.<sup>25</sup>

The social grouping also depended to a great extent on the family background of each individual. It was not unusual to ask whether any particular person had a long family history of respectable occupation, of court or military service or of learning. Extreme care was always taken to record and preserve family genealogy and traditions which were then transmitted from generation to generation.

Mobility up the social ladder was extremely rare and difficult but one notable example of a group who moved up the ladder were the white slaves of the Turkish rulers. These men, many of whom were European renegades - Neapolitans, Venetians, Sardinians, Sicilians, Maltese and Russians -

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23. This is the colloquial pronunciation of the classical al-baladī.

24. A Demeerseman, 'Catégories Sociales..' in IBLA, 1967/1, p.4.

25. Ibid., p.5.



and from parts of the Ottoman Empire - Georgians, Circassians, Kurds and others, were called mamālik. They were at first used in various domestic capacities but their foreign origin made them particularly useful to the Turkish rulers, who, in order to counter the influence of the native population, soon promoted them to high civil and military offices such as wazīrs, chamberlains, treasurers, governors of provinces and even envoys to foreign countries.<sup>26</sup> The process of ennoblement was largely by adoption and by marriage alliance. However, in spite of the elevated position which they attained and the noble status which they passed on to their descendants, their slave origin was not forgotten for a long time afterwards and references to them were often derogatory and suggestive of the disapproval and contempt which their society had for parvenus of their kind.<sup>27</sup>

Another piece of evidence for the almost exclusive nature of the class structure was the reluctance of the upper- and middle-class to give their daughters in marriage to anyone from a lower class. This could have raised the status of such a man since the children of the union would have acquired the benefits of their mother's class. Similarly, the marriage of a male from the privileged classes

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26. A.Demeerseman, 'Catégories Sociales en Tunisie au XXX<sup>ème</sup> siècle d'après la Chronique de A.Ibn Abi el-Diyaf', art. in IBLA, 1969/2, No.124, pp. 241-272.

27. Ibid., p.263

to a girl from the lower classes was often disfavoured although opposition to this was usually not as great as it was if the union was the other way round. Consequently, in marriage matches, individuals did not count so much as their family or social background. This is confirmed by a 24 year old Tunisian girl interviewed by Demeerseman:

"Dans la bourgeoisie ... on continue a tenir compte de l'origine pour le mariage. Ainsi, par exemple, pour mon cas, on a commencé par pendre des renseignements sur mon beau-père, comme si mon mari<sup>ne</sup> comptait pas. La réalité est là: l'individu n'est rien, c'est sa famille qui compte. C'est si vrai que moi<sup>28</sup>, j'ai connu<sup>mon</sup> beau-père avant de connaître mon mari".

The nationalist movement which gathered additional momentum after the split between the 'Old' and 'New' Destour (constitution) party early in 1934 was to alter drastically the basis of power and the class structure. The old Destour party which emerged after the First World war has been aptly described as "traditionalist Tunisian bourgeoisie" which in its concepts and attitude was:

"Islamic, traditionalist, socially reactionary and inflexible and unrepresentative of all the various interests in Tunisia, particularly the economically underprivileged and those classes being created and expanded by the colonial situation".<sup>29</sup>

Its leadership comprised the traditional élite, many of whom were from the upper- and middle-class families of the capital. On the other hand, the Neo-Destour, then under

28. Demeerseman, La Famille Tunisienne, p. 240

29. C.A. Micaud, Tunisia: The Politics of Moderation, London, 1964, pp. 38+69.

the leadership of the present President, al-Habīb Bourguiba:

"was largely made up of men of both modest and provincial origin, those who had most successfully mastered the techniques of modern, western civilisation by means of a modern western education. Although an élite, they remained identified with their origin, becoming the Tunisian "populists" in the best log-cabin styles (sic), they vaunted their modest beginnings, championed the cause of the "man in rags", the sharecropper, the urban worker, and the have-nots in general" <sup>30</sup>

Whereas it was previously considered the height of contempt to be referred to as a commoner (sha<sup>c</sup>b), it became fashionable to identify oneself with the sha<sup>c</sup>b, the masses who were almost entirely mobilised by the Neo-Destour in their arduous 21-year long struggle for Tunisian independence.

History, language, social and religious customs and concepts inherited since ancient times constantly found expression in literature, especially the fiction of the period. <sup>31</sup>

For example, the 16th century unrest in Tunisia which arose from the competition between the Spaniards and the Turks for control over Tunisia was partially re-echoed in al-Bashīr Khraîf's Barq al-Lail and among his short stories, Mihfazat al-Samār celebrates the memory of one of the victims of the April 1938 nationalist anti-colonial demonstration as symbolised by the undying love of the story's heroine for her martyred lover. <sup>32</sup> Class consciousness as expressed by discrimination against marrying a

30. Ibid., p.63

31. There are many examples of these in chapters three to seven of this thesis.

32. Cf. his collection entitled Mashmūm al-Fill, Tunis 1971, pp. 69-117

'commoner' was also the subject of many a Tunisian short story of which Zarrūq's Najāh published instalmentally in al-Zamān newspaper issues of 12th, 19th December, 1933, 2nd, 9th and 16th January 1934 was a significant example.

## 6 - Arabic Scholarship in Tunisia

Tunisia has had a long and continuous history of Arabic/Islamic culture. This cultural tradition has been kept alive through the centuries by a line of scholars. Since Arabic language is the language of Islamic jurisprudence and literature, the development of the language and its history cannot be separated from the blossoming of the other disciplines. Thus, the Tunisian Zaitūna 'university mosque' - the Tunisian 'al-Azhar' - built late in the 13th century and the important centres of learning in al-Qairawan have both done much to preserve Islamic scholarship in Tunisia and may be said to have equally served in maintaining the standard of classical Arabic in the country. One of al-Zaituna's earliest famous scholars of jurisprudence and literature was Abū <sup>c</sup>Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. <sup>c</sup>Arafa (1316-1402), a Mālikī scholar whose numerous works included al-Mabsūṭ on fundamentals of Islamic jurisprudence and another work on scholastic theology.<sup>33</sup> Among well-known scholars who studied in al-Qairawān were Abū Ja<sup>c</sup>far Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. Abī Khālīd (d.1004) who wrote many medical and historical treatises and Abū <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Ḥasan b. Rashīq

33. H.H. <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhāb, op.cit., p.139

al-Qairawānī (c 1005-1064) a Tunisian littérateur who composed works on the art of poetry and on Arabic grammar and language.<sup>34</sup>

One must also associate with the influence of these Tunisian centres of learning another external factor. This was the regular contacts with the centres of Islamic culture and learning in the Arab East - Egypt, Iraq and the Arabian peninsula. Such contacts made it possible for Tunisian scholars to study in the East and thus keep their country abreast with new thoughts and methods prevailing in the East. Thus, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmān b. Ziyād b. An<sup>c</sup>am al-Mu<sup>c</sup>āfirī al-Ifrīqī (648-778), born in al-Qairawān of a father who was a member of the Arab forces in Tunisia, studied in <sup>c</sup>Irāq and returned to al-Qairawān where he was appointed a judge. Similarly, his disciple <sup>c</sup>Abd Allāh Asad b. al-Furāt (759-829) studied the Hanafī and Mālikī schools in the East and was appointed a judge in al-Qairawān in 819, a post which he relinquished in order to lead a Muslim army of invasion to Sicily; and lastly his own disciple Abu Sa<sup>c</sup>īd b. Sa<sup>c</sup>īd b. Ḥabīb al-Tanūkhī (777-854) who was the first to set the Mālikī school on a firm footing in Tunisia, visited Egypt, the Hijāz and Syria in search of knowledge and was also appointed a judge in 848 like his master and teacher.

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34. Ibid., p.115

Tunisia was not exempt from a general decadence of Islamic scholarship which afflicted the Muslim world after the fall of the Caliphate in 1258, a decadence which became more pronounced during the Turkish rule over the major part of the Arab world although it would be unwise to over-exaggerate this decline. Tunisia was also not left behind when the reawakening of the Arab world began in the middle of the 19th century and it produced among the earliest Arabic littérateurs the famous Shaikh Mahmūd Qabādū (1812-1871) who was one of the foundation teachers of the military academy founded by Ahmad Bey I in 1840. Appointed in 1841 to teach Arabic language and religious sciences in the academy, he translated a number of books of military subject into Arabic. He was also a poet of considerable ability<sup>35</sup> and was the first editor of al-Rā'id al-Tūnisī, the first Tunisian official gazette founded in 1860.<sup>36</sup>

From the French occupation of the country in 1881 up to the late 1920's, the preoccupation with politics adversely affected Arabic literary interests among Tunisians but the

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35. The first two volumes of his poetry were published posthumously by Muhammad al-Sanūsī, one of his disciples in 1878.

36. For a fuller account of Qabādū's life and works, see H.H. Abd al-Wahhāb, Mujmal Ta'rīkh al-Adab al-Tūnisī, Tunis, 1968, pp.271-278; Ibn 'Ashūr, Arkān al-Nahda al-Adabiya bi-Tūnis, Tunis, 1964, pp.5-10; and Husayn Shikālī 'Qabādū', art, published in two parts in al-Thurayyā, No.1, Dec. 1943 and No. 6, June, 1944.

nineteen thirties were to reveal a new generation of Tunisian men of letters who excelled in prose and poetry, the most famous of them being the poet Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī.

## CHAPTER ONE

THE BIRTH OF THE TUNISIAN ARABIC SHORT STORY<sup>1</sup>

The title of this thesis immediately raises the issue of the validity of the existence of a Tunisian Arabic short story and if so, how worthy is it of consideration. What are its origins and from whence its inspiration?

French readers have been made aware of contemporary Tunisian literature, and in particular Tunisian Arabic

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1. By 'short story' in this thesis, I mean written short story as distinct from folk-tales, that is "fiction of the unlettered" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol.9, P.519, 1970 ed.). Tunisians have their fair share of these traditional stories which are handed down, usually orally, from one generation to the next with no spark of originality. Most of these have remained largely uncollected except for a few that have appeared in French translations of Tunisian folk literature such as in M. Paollilo's Contes et légendes de Tunisie, Paris, 1952, and in Contes de Tunisie, ed. Hassan Mzali, 1949. Muhammad al-Marzūqī also made reference to Tunisian folk-tales in his study entitled al-Adab al-Sha<sup>c</sup>bi fi Tūnis, 1967.

While admitting that both folk-tale and written short story have some common features such as theme, ultimate objective and, to some extent, narrative technique, and that a few of the Tunisian short story writers discussed in this thesis borrowed their material from folk-tale, I have decided to leave out the former because, firstly, it varies considerably from one Tunisian community to another and from one town to another according to occupation (nomadic or agricultural), region (north or south) and mode of living, a thorough coverage of which would require separate study of each of the different communities, a task which is better left to social anthropologists and specialists in linguistics. Secondly, folk-tale is mainly oral and entirely in the Tunisian Arabic dialect which does not, strictly speaking, fall within the framework of contemporary Arabic literature to which this thesis is intended to be a contribution.



short story, through the medium of French language periodicals notably IBLA<sup>2</sup> which has, since 1963, been publishing translations from works of Tunisian fiction writers and brief biographical notes on them,<sup>3</sup> and Orient.<sup>4</sup> There are also numerous articles and interviews constantly appearing in the major Tunisian French-language dailies - L'Action and La Presse as well as a prominent mention in Raol Makarius' Anthologie de la littérature arabe contemporaine - Le roman et la nouvelle.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the articles and translations published in French, all the studies which seek to manifest and establish a Tunisian short story genre have appeared in Tunisian Arabic reviews and dailies written largely by Tunisians themselves.

The modern Arabic story owes as much of its origin and development to the short narrative of classical Arabic literature as it owes to the influence of western literature,

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2. Published by 'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes', 12, Rue Jama'a al-Hawā, Tunis. Up to 1967, it was published quarterly but since the beginning of 1968, it has been appearing bi-annually.

3. Cf. IBLA, 1963, pp. 45-50, 137-143, 337-349; 1964, pp. 361-368; 1965, pp. 61-91, 183-192, 293-321; 1966, pp. 413-419; 1968, 45-49, 239-254; 1969, pp. 119-138, 273-299.

4. Published quarterly by "Orient" Society, 114, Champs-Élysée, Paris, See. No.12, 1959/4, pp. 131-197.

5. Published in Paris, 1964. Preface written by Jacques Berque.

especially French and English. The pioneers of the genre during the last quarter of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th were Eastern Arabs - mostly from 'greater Syria' and Egypt. Although their earliest attempts were prompted by the existence of this genre in Western literature, they drew heavily from the classical Arabic literary heritage for their materials, style and technique.

The most outstanding examples of Arabic prose which have had a marked influence on them are al-Jāhiz's anecdotal collection Kitāb al-Bukhalā', the belle-lettrist Abū 'l-Faraj al-Isfahānī's Kitāb al-Aghānī, al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī's picaresque and euphuistic maqāmāt and the folk-tale and professional story-tellers' repertoires which are richly represented in the Arabian Nights. These are but a few examples.

Beginning with Salīm al-Bustānī's earliest translations, adaptations and trial original compositions of short story published in al-Jinān journal during the 1870's,<sup>6</sup> Arab writers of the genre gradually acquired more skill and experience through better understanding of its techniques so that during the first decade of this century, the philosophically minded Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān (1883-1931), one of the foremost writers among the Lebanese emigrés to America, was already making a note-worthy contribution to the genre and between the two world wars, Egyptian and

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6. Abdel-Aziz Abdel-Meguid, The Modern Arabic Short Story, Cairo, no date, p.77.

Syrian writers, aided by copious translations from western works and the availability of Arabic periodicals and dailies willing to print their works, were contributing works of a considerably high standard to the Arabic short story. The 1930's saw the rise of Egyptian Mahmūd Taimūr who is now widely acknowledged as the "father of Arabic short story".<sup>7</sup>

In Tunisia, and indeed, in the three countries that constitute the Maghreb the emergence of the short story occurred much later than in the Arab East. What would account for this late development which seems paradoxical in view of Tunisia's long contact with the West, especially with France?

Egypt had in Muhammad <sup>o</sup>Alī at the beginning of the 19th century, a ruler who was anxious to modernise his country's military and administrative machinery by sending Egyptian students to study abroad, by building schools staffed mostly by European experts and by getting western books translated into Arabic. 'Greater Syria' has also had a long history of cultural contact with the west arising from the wandering and adventurous spirit of its citizens which had taken them to various parts of Europe and America,<sup>8</sup> and the fact that European missionaries have established themselves in the country as early as the 17th century.<sup>9</sup> While Egypt and

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7. Ibid. pp. 77-130. This section of Abdel-Meguid's book contains a useful summary of the emergence and development of modern Arabic short story, especially in Egypt and Syria.

8. Ibid., p. 57; and p. 58, footnote 1.

9. P.K. Hitti, op.cit., p. 728.

Syria had this background of cultural contact with the west which made possible the appearance of the earliest attempts at Arabic story writing within their borders late in the 19th century, Tunisia's pre-1881 contacts were largely on political and commercial levels. Add to this the almost universal illiteracy among the masses of the inhabitants and the strict attachment of the 'ulamā' class to medieval Islamic culture<sup>10</sup> which was hostile to light fictional literature<sup>11</sup> and the political unrest of the mid-19th century and it will be clear why there was no serious attempt on the part of learned Tunisians to adopt new literary genres from western literature.

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10. Abdel-Meguid, op.cit., p.58.

11. Although pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabic literature abounds in stories, both realistic and fantastic, (see Ibn Nadīm's Fihrist, p.422ff) it is true to say that fiction as an independent genre did not receive the approval of classical Arab littérateurs and theologians. Soon after the advent of Islam, prophet Muḥammad had cause to warn against listening to such tales (Qur'ān 31 v. 6-7). The influence of story-tellers in the new Muslim community soon constituted such a big menace that <sup>c</sup>Alī the fourth orthodox caliph found it necessary to exclude them from the mosque. (E.I. art. Kissa). As late as the 14th century, one al-Subkī, an Egyptian canon lawyer prohibited copyists from copying fictional tales which he regarded as a waste of time and as possessing no intrinsic value. (G. Wiet, Introduction a la littérature arabe. Paris, 1966, p.102).

After the French occupation and especially until the opening years of this century, the Tunisians Arab population adopted a rather antipathetic and reticent attitude to the French colonial authorities and French culture. This attitude was further hardened by the French government's encouragement to French immigrant colons by granting them lands which the indigenous population considered to be theirs.

It is worthy of note that although Tunisia had its first newspaper - al-Rā'id al-Tūnisī<sup>12</sup> - in 1860, the first periodical was not established until 1904 when the short-lived al-Sa'āda al-<sup>c</sup>Uzmā appeared.<sup>13</sup> When it is realised that because of periodical review's relative freedom from secondary considerations such as fanatical commitment to a cause or the need to ensure a regular readership and profitable running by printing news of current affairs and items of general interest, considerations to which most newspapers are often subjected, they (i.e. periodical reviews) would be more suitable for the publication of distilled thoughts written by the cream of the élite as well

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12. It was a kind of official gazette. The first unofficial newspaper was the weekly al-Hādīra established in 1888 by <sup>c</sup>Alī bū Shūsha.

13. There were, however, two earlier official publications but they were no more than almanacs containing tables of months and days with astronomical data, lists of government personnel and foreign diplomats. These almanacs were al-Nuzha al-Khairīya (1874-1900) and al-Ruznāma al-Tūnisīya (1901-1916).

as for introducing a new literary genre of western origin such as the story, it would be clear that the absence of any Tunisian Arabic periodical review prior to 1904 must have been one of the results of the lack of interest in literary matters in general and much less so in a genre like the story. When one considers the fact that popular magazines played a major rôle in the development of the short story into an independent literary genre in the United States and Europe and that they are still the largest outlet for it,<sup>14</sup> the extent to which the absence of such media in Tunisia until the 30's has delayed the growth of the genre in Tunisia would be further appreciated.

Between 1904 and the outbreak of the first World War, ten Arabic periodicals appeared in Tunisia<sup>15</sup> and it was in one of them entitled Khair al-Dīn that the first Tunisian story was published in 1906. Before the war, there were some translations from Chateaubriand and Tolstoy, adaptations from French authors and a few original compositions to mark the beginning of the story in Tunisia.

The political situation in the country was the main pre-occupation of Tunisians in the 1920's after the war. Towards the end of that decade, a new generation of youths emerged who, in the 30's, laid the first solid foundations for the Tunisian short story with the review al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam

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14. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 9, p.449.

15. IBLA, No.69, 1955/1, pp. 153-169.

al-Adabī and the newspaper al-Zamān playing a very significant rôle as organs for the publication of these stories.

The 1940's saw an improvement in the skill of Tunisian story-writers and a better understanding on their part, of the genre. This 'Experimental Stage' of the Tunisian short story was marked by the emergence of <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī whose career as a fiction writer began in the preceding decade on the pages of al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī with a modern travelogue and some cartoons.

The reviews al-Mabāhith, al-Thurayyā and the weekly newspaper al-Usbū<sup>c</sup> of the 40's were succeeded in the task of familiarising Tunisian readers with the story in the 50's by al-Nadwa (1953) and al-Fikr (1955). The period just before independence and after it has been marked, and this is obvious in chapters six to eight of this thesis, by an unprecedented increase in the quantity and quality of the Arabic short story by Tunisian writers, so much so that the period may be called the 'Blossoming Stage' of the Tunisian short story.

A close review of books published outside Tunisia and particularly in the Eastern Arab world, however, tends to give a defective picture of the state of this genre in Tunisia. An important study of the modern Arabic short story by <sup>c</sup>Abd al-<sup>c</sup>Azīz <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Majīd at the University of

Manchester from 1949<sup>16</sup> had only one unknown Tunisian writer<sup>17</sup> among his thirty four selected stories and he could not find any Tunisian or North African short story writer he deemed to be worthy of mention in his work. Basing his argument on Henri Pérès's La littérature arabe et l'Islam par les textes - Les xix<sup>e</sup> et xx<sup>e</sup> siècles,<sup>18</sup> he concluded that the story had made no impact in Tunisia because of the very few North African men of letters quoted in Pérès's book and the "lack of reference in his introduction to any literary movement or school in North Africa."<sup>19</sup>

The omission of Tunisian authors from a study of the modern Arabic story is even more obvious in Professor Mahmoud Manzaloui's recent Arabic Writing Today - The Short Story<sup>20</sup> where the only reference to a Tunisian writer in a work meant to be representative of the present state of Arabic short story is in a footnote on page 25. Similarly, Denys Johnson-Davies's Modern Arabic Short Stories<sup>21</sup> only includes translated selections of authors from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, with a note in the preface indicating that he deliberately excluded "the work of Arabs whose writing have been contributed to the literature of some other culture, as for instance the North African

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16. The thesis was published by 'al-Maaref Press', Cairo in 1955 under the title The Modern Arabic Short Story. There is no indication of the date of the completion of the thesis but it was probably 1953.

17. Ibid., p.201.

18. Published in Alger, 1938; 4th ed. 1949 & 6th ed. 1955.

19. Abdel-Meguid, op.cit., p.59. Also see p.119 for Similar view.

20. Published by American Research Centre in Egypt, Cairo, 1968.

21. Published by O.U.P., London, 1967.



writers writing in French",<sup>22</sup> so as to preserve what he called the Arabic character of his selections. While this might be justified in connection with North Africans who write in French, one might be tempted to ask whether there were no North Africans whose Arabic works could have been included.

The main reason for this apparent lack of reference to Tunisian short story in works on the Arabic short story could be summed up in the words of Mahmūd al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī, one of the Tunisian fiction writers of the 40's. When asked by a Tunisian journal:<sup>23</sup>

"In connection with the story, our Eastern brothers deny that it exists in the Maghreb and they only exempt your stories<sup>24</sup> and even these are exempted with some reservations - what do you think of this?"

he replied :

"Our Eastern brethren are excusable in their judgement because our output in the field of the story and other genres is not much and they are ignorant of the little that is available".

- 1 - The effect of the limited circulation of periodicals and Tunisian newspapers on the development and preservation of the Tunisian Arabic short story.

Many of the pre-independence Tunisian periodicals and newspaper publications which carried the work of Tunisian

22. Ibid., p.x of preface.

23. al-Nadwa, Feb., 1956, p.54.

24. The allusion here was most probably to Dr. Suhail Idrīs's article entitled al-Qissa al-<sup>c</sup>Arabiya fī Ifrīqiya al-Shamāliya published in the Lebanese review al-Adab, issue of January 1954, pp. 17-19.

writers did not enjoy the patronage of readers beyond the borders of the country, hence their writings remained relatively unknown to the outside world. This limited circulation may in turn be attributed to the fact that the Tunisian press did not have anything to offer to, for example, the Egyptian reader which the latter could not obtain in his own country's publications whereas Egyptian and other Eastern Arab publications were eagerly sought after by Tunisian readers who have over the years come to look eastwards for cultural guidance and for their literary model par-excellence, an outlook which has drawn bitter attacks from Tunisians who see in this attitude a disregard for local works and who are eager to encourage more indigenous writers.<sup>25</sup>

On the factors which contributed to the transitoriness of Tunisian journals, Demeerseemann once said :

"One must not forget that the earliest journals had to attempt to win over readers already enticed by eastern publications ... The readers did not find in Tunisian reviews what they had been accustomed to look for and find in eastern [Arab] publications such as al-Risāla, al-Hilāl or al-Muqtatīf... In fact, for every Tunisian review, the old bookstalls would sell three or four Egyptian ones..."<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, a majority of the Tunisian publications were very ephemeral and also printed a very limited number of copies during their invariably short lives.

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25. al-Bashīr b. Salāma, Difā<sup>c</sup>an<sup>c</sup> al-Adab al-Tūnisī, in al-Fikr, May 1967, pp. 2-6 and various articles by Dr. al-Tāhir al-Khmairī, Uthmān al-Ka<sup>c</sup>āk and others in al-Fikr, April, 1959.

26. A. Demeerseemann, 'Soixante ans de pensée tunisienne à travers les revues de la langue arabe' in IBLA, No. 61, 1953/1, pp. 116-117.

The circulation of Tunisian journals abroad is still not on as large a scale as that of their counterparts from the Arab East although the position of al-Fikr and Qisas is better than their pre-independence predecessors. It is believed among certain Tunisian writers that there is a deliberate unwillingness on the part of Eastern Arab book-dealers to distribute Tunisian publications.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from the limited circulation of Tunisian publications outside the country, there was also no adequate provision by the pre-independence French-supervised government to keep a record of and preserve the literary works of leading local Arabic writers. This has made it difficult even for succeeding generations of Tunisians to collect and publish the works of their pioneering predecessors because many journals and newspapers did not survive the time of their publication and the very few that survived have remained in private collections.<sup>28</sup> This situation has given rise to the almost complete ignorance by many young Tunisians of the works of a writer like <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī of whom it is said in the introduction to a collection of some of his stories :

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27. Interview with al-Madanī, 23/8/70.

28. As further proof of this, many of the Tunisian journals listed in IBLA, No.69, 1955/1 are not available even in the Tunisian National Library and most significantly, al-Mabāḥith which was the most learned and outstanding review in the 40's is not available outside Tunisia (not even in the French Bibliothèque Nationale!) and yet the only copy in the Tunisian National Library is incomplete. The present writer had to consult a private volume belonging to al-<sup>c</sup>Arūsī al-Maṭwī, the Editor-in-Chief of Qisas and one of the older generation of Tunisian story writers.

"A scholar collecting the literary essays, stories, plays and poems left behind by <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī is confronted by numerous and enormous obstacles. This is because his works are widely dispersed in reviews, newspapers and even pamphlets which were published in Tunisia during the second third of this century; and because the part of his works which are still in manuscript (such as his plays, some stories and a number of letters) are still in the possession of his friends who are still living... It would seem as if the scholar was investigating a literary production by an unknown author who lived during the middle ages in a country other than ours".<sup>29</sup>

## 2 - An Aesthetic Appraisal of the Tunisian Short Story

It may now be asked : What do the available materials, both past and present, indicate about the quantity and quality of the Tunisian short story?

They present the picture of a gradually evolving indigenous corpus of short story-writing which, after the sporadic and highly individualistic approach of Tunisian translators and adaptors in the pre-World War One era, had its first real exponents and pioneers in the 1930's on the pages of al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī and al-Zamān to mention a few; in the 40's, al-Mabāhith, al-Thurayyā and al-Usbū<sup>c</sup> on the pages of which were published among others the works of al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī. Such compare favourably with those of other contemporary writers of the genre in the Arab East.

The post-independence period has witnessed an enormous increase in the number of Tunisian short story writers. This has made possible the emergence of a new generation

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29. al-Madani's introduction to al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's Sahirtu minhu '1-Layālī.

of Tunisian writers, who, led by a handful of pre-independence generation of writers and equipped with a thorough acquaintance with the works of westerners and Eastern Arab writers of short stories as well as those of some of their local predecessors, enjoy the unprecedented privilege of having publishers who are eagerly willing to accept their stories for publication. Tunisian society's transitional changes in the sphere of politics, economics, religious and social values provide this new generation with raw materials for their stories.

Apart from the Arabic language national dailies - al-Amal<sup>c</sup> and al-Sabāh which have some regular weekly pages for culture and literature where many young short story writers have made their début, the Tunisian review al-Fikr, first published in October 1955, just a few months before independence, has devoted considerable portions of its pages to the publication of short stories as well as translations from foreign masters of the genre. During its first fifteen years of life (1955-1970) it published more than 250<sup>30</sup> short stories written by Tunisians.

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30. Rashād al-Hamzāwī in his article entitled Wāqī<sup>c</sup> al-Adab al-Tūnisi al-Mu<sup>c</sup>āsir (The State of Contemporary Tunisian Literature) published in al-Amal<sup>c</sup> weekly supplement dated 8/8/69, estimates that al-Fikr published about 400 short stories between 1957 and 1969 at an average of 4 stories per issue but this estimate is highly exaggerated. Many issues of the review did not contain any short story at all while some others had only one or two short stories.

The 'Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī' story club founded in 1964 by a group of Tunisian fiction writers headed by Muhammad al-<sup>c</sup>Arūsī al-Matwī has since its inception proved to be the most significant factor in the progress of the Tunisian short story to its fullest extent ever attained. In consonance with its declared aim to "inject life into the Tunisian story, to crystalise its concept and unite the efforts of its writers", it soon founded its own quarterly review called Qisas (Stories) to help prosecute these objectives.

From September 1966, to July 1970, a total of sixteen issues of Qisas have been published. Every issue contains an average of ten short stories by Tunisian writers. In some issues, there are also translations of foreign short stories, studies in the past of Tunisian story-writing, extracts from short Tunisian novels with brief biographical notes on their authors.

The 'story club' has also augmented the efforts of other publishing agencies by sponsoring the collection and publication of its members' stories in bound volumes. Of the volumes of short stories published by the club up to December of 1970, eight belong to living writers,<sup>32</sup> one

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32. These are (i) Hasan Naṣr (Layālī 'l-Matar); (ii) <sup>c</sup>Izz al-Dīn al-Madanī (Khurāfāt); (iii) Muhammad al-Fārisī (al-Qanṭara hiyā 'l-Hayāt); (iv) Yahyā Muhammad (Nidā' al-Fajr); (v) Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz (FI 'l-Darb al-Tawīl); (vi) Abd al-Qādir b. al-Hājj Naṣr (Salā' Yā Ḥabībatī); (vii) Samīr al-<sup>c</sup>Iyādī (Sakhab al-Samt); and (viii) Abd al-Rahmān <sup>c</sup>Ammār Ibn al-Wāḥa (Warda wa Rasāsāt).

to a recently deceased member<sup>33</sup> and one to °Alī al-Dū°ājī.

Other published collections of Tunisian short stories include Muḥammad al-Marzūqī's °Urqūb al-Khair<sup>34</sup> (The Tendon of Goodness), Fī Sabīl al-Ḥurriyya<sup>35</sup> (In the Cause of Freedom) and Baina Zawjatain<sup>36</sup> (Between Two Wives) and Lailā b. Māmī's Sawma°a Tahtariq<sup>37</sup> (A Minaret in Flame).

It is also worthy of note that the post-independence period has seen the earliest Tunisian Nouvelles about eleven of which have been published up to the present moment<sup>38</sup>. Most of these can really be classified as longish short stories,<sup>39</sup> judging by their length<sup>40</sup> and the limited scope of their subject matter.

33. al-Tāhir °Alī °Umrān (d.1969) (al-Shaikh Karāma).

34. Published by Dār al-Kutub al-Sharqīya, Tunis, 1956.

35. Published by Maktaba al-Najāh, Tunis, 1956.

36. Published by Kitāb al-Ba°th, Tunis, 1957.

37. Published in Tunis, 1968.

38. i.e. up to summer of 1970. These nouvelles are al-Bashīr Khraīf's Iflās which was serialised in al-Fikr issues of December 1958, Jan. & Mar. 1959; his Barq al-Lail and al-Digla fī °Arājīnihā; Rashād al-Ḥamzāwī's Bū Dūda Māta; °Abd al-Majīd °Atīya's al-Manbat; Muṣṭafa al-Fārisī's al-Mun°arij; al-°Arūsī al-Maṭwī's Wa min al-Dahāyā, Ḥalīma and al-Tūt al-Murr; Ṣāliḥ al-Jābirī's Yawm min Ayyām Zamrā; and °Abd al-Qādir b. al-Ḥājj's al-Zaitūna lā Yamūtu.

39. This is why I have preferred, in referring to them, to use the French terminology nouvelle which accurately describes this genre midway between the short story (conte) and the full-length novel (roman).

40. With the exception of Khraīf's al-Digla which is 448 pages, the average length of the others is about 150 pages and both Iflās and Wa Min al-Dahāyā are 45 and 96 pages respectively.

In view of the foregoing account which shows a sizeable quantity of short stories from the country, it would be hypercritical to deny the very existence of a Tunisian short story. As for its quality, it is inconceivable that all the stories could be of the same standard of perfection. There are, nonetheless, enough among them to merit the attention of readers and critics. Judged by accepted literary standards, many of them conform to the general principles that constitute the simple tests for good short stories, namely, unity of theme which implies economy of language; completeness of experience and aesthetic satisfaction; proportionate and balanced presentation of the different parts of the story and timing, which means introducing every event, action, or conversation in the story just at the right time.<sup>41</sup> As for those which may not measure up to this simple test or those that deliberately defy the test, they still qualify to be taken into account in assessing the total output and achievements of Tunisian short story writers. The only criterion of a short story is that each short piece of fiction should have an aim worthy of an artist and should succeed in reaching it. Plot or no plot, situation or no situation, form, length, provided it is within reason: these are the needs for the short pieces of prose fiction of the recent past and the future. The free extension of

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41. L.A. Strong, The Writer's Trade, London, 1953, pp.79-85.



the term "short story" covers them all. "Without that freedom, the art of the short story can neither develop nor thrive".<sup>42</sup> Even the works of the great masters of the genre like Edgar Poe<sup>43</sup> and E<sub>a</sub>rnest Hemingway<sup>44</sup> have their flaws.

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42. Abdel-Meguid, op.cit.p.137. Abdel-Meguid quoted from The Short Story - English Language and Literature, 1950, p.323.

43. Ray B. West (Jnr), The Short Story in America 1900-1950, Chicago, 1952, p.12.

44. Jim Hunter (ed.), The Modern Novel in English, London 1960, pp. 49-50.

## CHAPTER TWO

### COLLOQUIAL AND CLASSICAL ARABIC IN TUNISIAN FICTION

The question of the language to be used in writing modern Arabic prose literature has been one of the major issues to engage the attention of Tunisian men of letters since the immediate post-independence period.

The problem, in connection with Arabic fiction-writing, is concerned with the language that the writer should use. Should he employ the classical Arabic (al-<sup>c</sup>Arabīyat al-Fushā)<sup>1</sup> in his work or write in his own local dialect?

This dilemma in which Arab writers find themselves is due to the peculiar nature of the Arabic language whereby the literary Arabic (which is uniform in all parts of the Arab world if one allows for regional variations in, for example, administrative and technical technologies), is different from the spoken dialects which vary not only from, for example, the South of Tunisia to the Sāhil in the North, but also from one Arab country to another.<sup>2</sup>

Tunisian fiction writers are divided on the question of the language that should be used in their works. In one camp is a group of writers who are ardent supporters

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1. Designated as the 'High Arabic' by Gibb in his Arabic Literature, O.U.P., 1966, p.6.

2. For a brief note on the spread of Arabic in the early Islamic Empire and the characteristics of the Tunisian colloquial Arabic, see my Appendix II.

of Tunisian colloquial Arabic. This group has among its chief exponents al-Bashīr Khraïf, the author of Iflās, of two other long stories and a number of short stories. He and his group believe in the use of Tunisian colloquial Arabic in story-writing because "one would be translating the thoughts of the characters of the story if he wrote in "classical arabic".<sup>3</sup> They also argue that classical Arabic "is the language of the desert.....".<sup>4</sup>; that the colloquial is a living language, it is used in everyday conversation and as such more expressive of the people's emotions than the classical Arabic which they consider to have been prevented from growing by the rules with which it was hedged about by the early Islamic grammarians and philologists. "Classical Arabic", they say, represents "the language of just one of the [different] civilisations which Tunisia has known" and so, there is no justification for giving it a prominent position over the Tunisian colloquial which is a melting-pot of all the country's cultural past.<sup>5</sup>

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3. According to an oral communication with the present writer. Also see his Khatar al-Fushā <sup>c</sup>alā 'l-<sup>c</sup>Arabiya in al-Fikr, July 1959, where he developed his argument against the Fushā along the same line of thought. He called it the language of non-Arabs!

4. Rashād al-Hamzāwī in al-Amal supplement, 8/8/69.

5. Muḥammad b. Sālih b. Umar, al-Amal supplement, 27/6/69.

Al-Bashīr Khraif's Mihfazat al-Samār<sup>6</sup> is an extreme example of the short stories belonging to this group. In a section of this short story where a small boy-guest unexpectedly wanders into the women's section of his hosts' house, the reaction of the girls and their mother is recorded in this way :<sup>7</sup>

هاونصف راجل هذا يتخباو منه النساء وضحكوا من ارتباكه وعانقوه وسلموا عليه  
وادخلوه حجرة تعج بالسامرين والسامرات . فاجلسوه بينهم ورجعوا الى ما كانوا  
فيه من حديث . قال عمرا لاخ الاكبر :

انت خوذ راجل . واذ احب يهزك حتى لجهنم ما يمنعه حد  
تكلمت اخنها :

الراجل اللي باش يعجب نفثيسه ما زال هبط من السماء  
اجابتها :

علاش ؟ يا خي الرجال الكل عندهم حاجب اعلى من حاجب ؟ ( ١١ )  
فصامت عظمت ( sic ) الاخت لتهكمها على خطيها

امي ه شوف بنتك ( ١٢ )

6. al-Fikr, Yr. 15, No.7, April 1970, pp. 2-26

7. Ibid., pp. 3-4.

- ٨ هذا نصف رجل هذا تحتجب منه النساء ؟
- ٩ تزوجي . واذ اراد زوجك ان يأخذك لجهنم فلا يمنعه مانع .
- ١٠ ان الرجل الذي سوف يحظى باعجاب نفيسة لم ينزل بعد من السماء .
- ١١ لماذا ؟ هل ان جميع الرجال عندهم حاجب اعلى من الاخر ؟
- ١٢ اماه ! انظري ابنتك .

The most important argument of those who want the colloquial to replace the literary Arabic in fiction-writing is that the latter appears stilted and artificial when used to convey the thoughts of a character who would not speak the literary Arabic in real life and so, that the colloquial makes for more realism.

Some of them, like al-Hamzāwī, see their advocacy of the colloquial as part of a general campaign for the evolution of a genuinely Tunisian culture. They consider the use of the classical Arabic by some of their contemporaries as an acceptance of external cultural domination and deplore what they call the absence of a "linguistic awakening" alongside the political and religious awakening which Tunisia has achieved.<sup>13</sup>

The opponents of the use of the Tunisian colloquial Arabic in writing are no less vocal than its supporters. They dismiss the argument that the colloquial is more expressive of the people's emotions and more suitable for conveying modern thoughts than the literary Arabic by referring to the past of the literary Arabic, especially during the Golden Age of Arabic literature when the language was able to cope with intricate philosophical texts. Referring to the skilful and successful use of

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13. al-Hamzāwī, Op.cit., (al-Amāl Sup. 8/8/69).

the literary Arabic by Mahmūd al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī in al-Sudd,<sup>14</sup>  
 a Tunisian philosophical play on the subject of human  
 existence in the face of the relentless forces of the  
 unseen, the late Dr. Farīd Ghāzī wrote :

"Indeed, the Tunisian colloquial, like other Arabic colloquials, is incapable of expressing these 'situations'. Only the classical Arabic is competent to convey its abundant human feelings... The Arabic language expanded in the middle ages to [accommodate] complicated Greek philosophical thoughts and it is now widening to [cope with] modern philosophy in spite of its difficult nature, and it (i.e. literary Arabic) is capable of providing us with whatever vocabulary we may need."<sup>15</sup>

Among the upholders of the inviolate nature of literary Arabic are Muhammad Faraj al-Shādhilī, al-Mukhtār Janāt, Hasan Nasr, Muṣṭafā al-Fārisī who are all short story writers. The group also includes most of the pre-independence generation of writers. They maintain that colloquial Arabic is fundamentally a spoken language and not structurally suited to writing. As it has no recognisable and standardised orthographic system of writing and it is not subject to most of the rules of literary Arabic grammar, everyone who has used it has had to 'invent' his own system of writing it.

They accuse some of their opponents, although without much justification, of not being well-educated in classical Arabic language and literature and consequently not having enough self-confidence to use it effectively

14. al-Sudd was written before the 2nd world war but was not published until 1955. Cf. *infra*, Chapter 5.

15. M.F. Ghāzī, in al-Fikr, April, 1959, p.25.

and correctly to convey the most intimate human emotions. Incidentally, the majority of those who advocate the use of the Tunisian colloquial have a good knowledge of French language<sup>16</sup> which is used against them by the pro-classical group.

Midway between the two extreme camps are a third group of writers whose position on the language problem may be considered liberal. Representative of this group is a young Tunisian writer <sup>C</sup>Izz al-Dīn al-Madanī, who, although having a much more radical idea on the whole question of the adequacy of the Arabic language in its present form for the modern technological age,<sup>17</sup> is content to write, for the time being, in literary Arabic while conceding some place to colloquial words of wide local usage. In actual fact, the majority of Tunisian fiction writers fall within this group because, apart from those who write everything in classical Arabic, there is so far no known case of a Tunisian who has written everything in the Tunisian colloquial.<sup>18</sup> Many Tunisian short story writers, including those who do not envisage any future for the colloquial in the literary sphere, such as

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16. e.g. al-Hamzāwī who is a University teacher and al-Tayyib al-Trīkī who is a very senior civil servant.
17. His views on this issue are dealt with more fully in the chapter on the latest trends in Tunisian fiction. Cf. Chapter Eight.
18. With the exception of some short stories by Muḥammad al-<sup>C</sup>Arībī (under the pen-name of Ibn Tūmart) and <sup>C</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>C</sup>ājī in al-Surūr a short-lived weekly founded by the latter in August, 1936.

Muhammad al-<sup>c</sup>Arūsī al-Maṭwī, would not mind writing the narrative portion of their story in literary Arabic while the conversation between the characters is written in colloquial in order to give the story an added air of realism.

An example of the language used by this group of writers is the following short extract from al-Maṭwī's al-Tajribat al-Thāniya which is the story of the failure of a young girl to secure a job because she would not yield to the indecent suggestions of the prospective boss:

... " وفي الدهليز وقف شاب يحادث حاجبا آخره فلم تهتم ولم تلتفت لكن اذنها سمعت ايضا :

( ... اسمع يا عمي خليفة ... اللي فيه طبه ما تتخبس ... والله الذي لا رب سواه لاخذن حقي اليوم او غدا . وعقب الحاجب في لهجة مرتعشة ) ... يا ولدي . انا في عمر جدك . . الطلوع بسرعة يعقبه النزول . . واذا كان انت عندك ستة شهـور . . انا عندى ستة اولاد . . جيل اليوم مُشيم بالصاروخ .<sup>١٩</sup>



In addition to the above, there is also a suggestion that a "third language" (al-Lughat al-Thālitha) should be used by fiction writers. There is, however, no unanimity over the exact definition of this third language. It has been differently defined as the language of contemporary Arabic press<sup>20</sup>; the spoken Arabic of an Arab in conversation with a fellow Arab from another country, which is neither colloquial nor literary;<sup>21</sup> "a language that lies mid-way between the fushā and colloquial, related to the fushā in its observance of the rules of Arabic syntax and the [standard] orthography, while it bears semblance to the colloquial in the simplicity of its expressions and construction so that it is spoken with a vowelless pause" (al-wuqūf 'alā 'l-sukūn).<sup>22</sup>

An attempt was made by one <sup>C</sup>Umar al-Mzayy to write his story entitled Yawm Hallāq<sup>23</sup> in what may be regarded as his own definition of the 'third language'. This story is about a barber who dupes people by claiming that he has friends in high official circles and that he can influence them to do certain favours for anyone who approaches them through him. In describing his boasting in the presence of his friends on one occasion, al-Mzayy's use of the 'third language' is very obvious. He writes :

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20. Rashād al-Hamzāwī quoted by Sālih b. <sup>C</sup>Umar in al-<sup>C</sup>Amal supplement for 27/6/69.

21. al-<sup>C</sup>Arūsī al-Maṭwī in a private interview during July '70

22. al-Shāwīsh, al-Lughat al-<sup>C</sup>Arabiya in al-Fikr, July 1970, p.7.

23. Qisas, No.12. July, 1969. pp.91-118.

- بالله عليك اى شيء يحمل لي عندما يتحلف في . لو كنت صاحب شر  
لحططته في الحبس في اربع وعشرين ساعة . وانت تعرف رئيس شرطة القسم الخامس  
سي الموفق كاخي البشير واعوان الشرطة كلهم احبابي . انا افرق الاستدعاءات  
عوضهم ، لو اغمز عليه التالي فيهم لبات الليلة في دار خالته وقتها بيعت  
امه تجبهي وتحاول لا يا سيدى ما انا ولد حرام لو كنت مدعيا لدخلت سلك  
الشرطة السرية عام ١٩٤١ عدت المناظرة ونجحت انا وسي الموفق وجماعة  
اخرين . . سمع الوالد جاء يجرى وقال لسي :  
" لا نرضى عليك " انا وامك " في الدنيا ولا في الآخرة ، اقلنا  
من دعاء الشر . القسم على ربي . لو كان عيني في الوظيفة لدخلت غدا  
الى المحافظة ، اصحابي في القسم الخامس يقعدون باهتين في يقولون  
لي على اى شيء لا تدخل معنا . . تبارك الله عليك تعرفت قرا وتكتب وتتكلم  
بالسورى اى شيء يخصك ؟ اقول لهم : " يكثر خيركم خلوني من بعيد  
لبعيد " معاون " فيه مائة الف بركة 24

In evaluating the arguments for and against the use of colloquial Arabic in Tunisian fiction-writing, it may be of interest to consider the attitude of readers to the works belonging to the two main camps since the value of any work of fiction depends on what its readers think and say about it.<sup>25</sup>

The suitability of the fushā as a language of fiction has never been seriously called into question by the large majority of Tunisian readers except by a handful of die-hard protagonists of the colloquial. We shall, therefore, concentrate our examination on the latter's product.

Among the advocates of the use of the colloquial in Tunisian fiction, al-Bashīr Khraîf is an outstanding example of one who applies his theories in most of his stories. As far back as 1936, when he wrote his first story entitled Nukhkhāl Bayyih<sup>26</sup> and Lail al-Watya (published in 1937), his extensive use of the colloquial in the dialogue raised a storm of opposition from the literary circles and this made him decide not to write

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25. An exception must be made here of the 'avant-garde' writers (cf. infra, Chapter Eight) who regard readers' opinion as immaterial to the value of their work.

26. This is the Tunisian colloquial for the classical Nukhāla lil-bai<sup>c</sup>.

any more stories.<sup>27</sup> His next story was published in 1957 after independence and in it, as in all his subsequent output of short stories, nouvelles and one novel, he has struck to his earlier practice and has even written some narratives in colloquial idiom in addition to the dialogues. His use of the colloquial has, however, not made his stories much welcome among many Tunisians especially as he often uses the colloquial of his home region Nefta (in the Jarīd region of Southern Tunisia) which fellow Tunisians from the same province but from the town of Qafsa do not fully understand. Writing on Khraïf's last novel al-Diqla fī 'Arājiñihā, Jannāt quoted many of those he interviewed in connection with the language of the novel as saying :

"If the colloquial of al-Diqla were the dialect which is spoken in the capital, it would have been easier [to understand] but the author ... employed the dialect of the characters of his story ... How are we to understand this dialect?"<sup>28</sup>

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27. Although this is the reason he gives for not writing any story between 1937 and 1957, (see al-Fikr, No.10, July 1968, p.55) one must accept this excuse with some reservation. Other writers such as al-Dū'ājī and al-'Arībī (see infra. Chapter Five) used a similar language at that time and yet continued writing into the forties, undeterred by any opposition.
28. al-Mukhtār Jannāt, writing under the pen-name of 'Abū Shadī' in the Tunisian Broadcasting Journal (al-Idhā'a wa 'l-Talfaza) No.256, July 15, 1970). Jannāt is from Qafsa and he told me in a private conversation that there were words which he could not understand in Khraïf's al-Diqla. This was corroborated by others from the same region who I also interviewed.

Similarly, comments and criticisms on his other novels have always contained emphasis on the language used. In his article on Iflās, the late Dr. Farīd Ghāzī wrote :

" وهذه المادة اللغوية العامية يستطيع خريف ، لو شاء ان يعرضها  
 بمادة فصيحة ويستطيع ان يخرج قصته من جديد ، بعنوان " افـــــــــلاس "  
 فقط ، يخرجها بأسلوب سهل التناول ، خـــــــــالي من الخربـــــــــاب والشقشقة  
 اللفظية ومحلى بحوارات فصيحـــــــــة سهلة العبارة .<sup>29</sup>

Also, Nājiya Thāmir, a Tunisian woman short story-writer,<sup>30</sup> said in connection with the same story that it was a good story but that she could not understand why so much local dialect was used in the conversation. "If I were not conversant with the Tunisian dialect", she added, "I would have missed a considerable part of its meaning as has been the case with me after reading (many) <sup>c</sup>Irāqī stories.....".

This may perhaps explain why in some of his stories published in 1970<sup>31</sup> Khraîf resorted to explaining his

29. Hawla Iflās, art. in al-Fikr, Yr.4, No.8, May'59, p.42.

30. See *infra*, Chapter Seven.

31. al-Fikr, Yr.3, No.9, June 1959, pp. 39-41.

colloquial dialogues in literary Arabic footnotes, a practice which, to say the least, makes reading them rather boring.

Beside this reaction from local Tunisian readers, similar remarks have been made about Khraîf's stories by non-Tunisian Arab critics such as the Egyptian Fawzî<sup>c</sup> Abd al-Qādir al-Milādī who, in his Jawlat Ma<sup>c</sup> Udabā<sup>t</sup> Shamāl Ifrīqiya, concluded his criticism of Barq al-Lail with the words :

"... اتنى ان اراها قبل ذلك في طبعة جديدة في المشرق العربي وقد استبدل المؤلف بحواره الدارج عربيا سليما فنحن احوج ما نكون اليوم الى امتزاج الثقافات العربية المنعقدة المنابع والمصدر والف تحية لادباء المغرب ... " 32

In al- Mukhtār Jannāt's comments on Khraîf's al-Diqla referred to above, there is the indication that the Tunisian colloquial varies considerable from one region of the country to another. The difference in the colloquial is very much wider from one Arab country to another, so much so that a work of fiction or poetry with many colloquial words in it cannot be fully understood by an Arab reader from another country. Therefore, the Tunisian short story writers whose stories are heavily loaded with local dialectal Arabic risk condemning their works to a limited local circulation. When it is realised

that Tunisia is one of the smallest countries in the Arab world in both size and population, the extent to which its writers need the patronage of readers in the bigger Arab countries and of non-Arabs who have a knowledge of literary Arabic, if they are to keep up their present rate of expansion, will be appreciated.

Even when a writer intends his works for local consumption as suggested by Dr. Ghāzī in connection with many of Khraîf's type of stories,<sup>33</sup> it is doubtful whether the use of colloquial in the dialogue makes a story more attractive to the reader. In Tunisia, for example, the majority of those locally reading contemporary Tunisian fiction is composed of people who have had the traditional Arabic schooling from the Zaitūna mosque-university and also those who have the 'modern' French-oriented schooling from secular secondary and university education at home and abroad but with enough knowledge of Arabic to enable them to enjoy fiction written in classical Arabic. The man-in-the-street, the farmer, the trader and the housewife whose language the advocates of the Tunisian colloquial want to use in writing "in order to make for realism" does not himself have any schooling to enable him to read either classical or colloquial Arabic. Those who can read have been educated in the literary Arabic and it is in this literary Arabic that the majority of them prefer to have

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33. al-Fikr, Yr. 4, No. 8, May 1959, p.41.

their fiction written as borne out in the comments by Jannāt and Nājiya Thāmir referred to above.

It is sometimes argued that the use of colloquial in written dialogue clothes a story with more realism while the use of the classical Arabic in the same situation smacks of artificiality. There are copious examples from classical and contemporary Arabic literature such as the prose compositions of al-Jāhiz and Tāha Ḥusayn's al-Ayyām which make it hard to agree with this view. There are also examples in Tunisian short stories such as Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī's Mawlid al-Nisyān<sup>34</sup> where very complicated metaphysical situations are successfully depicted by the use of the classical. Muḥammad al-Mukhtār Jannāt's al-Nisyān<sup>35</sup> is another psychological short story in which the dialogue is vividly rendered in classical Arabic without any loss of naturalness. The story opens this way :

صاح الاطفال خلفه : " مجنون ! مجنون ! "

وانتهوا وراءه الى الجامع ، فالتفت اليهم ، وابتم ، ثم كش—رعن اسنانه

وبصق عليهم ...

— مجنون ! مجنون !

وروقف امام الجامع—مع المقفل—ل ودفع رأسه وحدث في ثقب

34. Published in al-Mabāhith, Nos. 13-16, 1945. See infra, Chapter Five.

35. Qisas, No. 13, Oct. 1969, pp. 5-20.



- المفتاح ... خيط من ضياء يقود للظلمة.....
- يا مجنون ! ما اسمك ؟
- فصاح بهم : " دعوني ، سارى اسمي ... " وضحكوا وهزجوا مصفيين :
- نسي اسمه .. اسمه في جسمه . نسي اسمه .. ما اكبر رأسه ....
- وظل يحدق في خيط الضياء المؤدى الى الظلمة ، وشهدق . ثم
- قهقهه بكل قوته : - " ها هو اسمي .. رايته .. انه طويل ومنبطح .. "
- و داروا حوله وصفقوا وغنوا :
- " نسي اسمه .. انه مجنون .. يا مجنون ، ما اسمك ؟ "
- فاستمر يحدق في ثقب المفتاح ويهز جسمه في حركات راقصة ينسجم مع تصفيق الاطفال وهو يغني :
- " اسمي في الجامع .. والجامع مقبول ..... " 36

In concluding, it <sup>may</sup> be appropriate to quote the words of a Tunisian intellectual, Muḥammad Mzālī when he said:

"There is no doubt that [classical] Arabic is the language of the *littérateur* and it should remain so. That is because the colloquial, beside its regional (*iqlīmiya*) character, or even its provincial (*jihawīya*) and local variations, cannot rise to the level of being used to express abstracts and is not flexible enough to express

the inflections of complicated human thought ...

Arabic language is one of the assets of the Tunisian nation and if it disappears and its foundations perish, an essential part of our personality shall have disappeared and we shall have lost any hope of being able to conduct a civilised discussion in our own language and in a spirit which radiates our ingenuity".<sup>37</sup>

This does not, however, preclude the use of some colloquial words which, although not found in dictionaries and encyclopaedias of classical Arabic, are nonetheless used in a larger part of the Arab world with little or no variations in meaning from one area to another. This continual absorption of such widely-used colloquial words will ensure a constant contact between the two. The colloquial of each country can continue to enjoy the adequate attention already being devoted to it on national radio and television networks. As for its use in plays meant to be staged locally, this is a completely different topic.

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37. Quoted by Muḥammad al-Maṣmūlī in his article entitled Fi 'l-Luġhat al-Thālitha marratan ukhrā in al-Amal supplement of 6/6/68.

## CHAPTER THREE

PIONEERS OF THE STORY IN TUNISIA : 1906-1912

The first Tunisian Arabic story<sup>1</sup> was not written until 1906 and between this year and 1912, a series of translations of foreign stories, especially Russian and French stories, into Arabic were published in Tunisian newspapers and periodicals while a few Tunisians tried their hand on the art of story writing, although this did not immediately result in the birth of what could be called the Tunisian story. Arabic stories written and published by Egyptians and Syrians were also reproduced by the Tunisian Arabic press.

These earliest Tunisian stories were not of a high literary standard but they at least provided the foundation on which later generations of writers built. The pioneers

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1. In line with other parts of the Arab world (cf: Abdel-Aziz Abdel Meguid, op.cit. p.21), there was at this time in Tunisia no fixed Arabic terminology for the different types of fiction. Hence we find that plays, novels, nouvelles (or novelettes) and short stories were all classified as riwāyāt, a word which, if not compounded, simply means; tale, narrative, report, account, story, novel, play, drama, etc. It was not until the publication of al-Ālam al-Adabī in the thirties that a distinction began to be made between 'short story' and the novel proper by the use of qissa or uqsūsa for the former and riwāya for the latter. In view of this, it should not be surprising that some of the stories discussed in this chapter were originally published under various titles such as riwāya, qism al-fukāhīya ('humour column' as in al-Taḡaddum newspaper) or al-qism al-khayālī ('fiction column' as in Murshid al-Umma newspaper)

of the story in Tunisia, unlike the earliest generation of Near- and Middle-eastern Arab writers of fiction, were more interested in the content than in the form and language. They were keen on social, religious and political reforms and so their works were in many cases no more than essays cast in the form of stories in which characters and events were merely contrived to express the opinions of the writers.

2 - (a) Sālih b. <sup>c</sup>Umar Suwaisī : The Theme of Social Consciousness and Political Reform.

The first Tunisian story-writer was Sālih b. <sup>c</sup>Umar al-Suwaisī al-Sharīf al-Qairawānī (1880-1940)<sup>2</sup> Born in al-Qairawān, his family soon moved to Tunis, where he studied the Qur'ān. At fifteen, he and his mother returned to their hometown and his father, who stayed behind in the capital, died the following year. He was his mother's only child.<sup>3</sup> It was in al-Qairawān that his literary and reform interests developed. He attended some of Muḥammad al-Nakhīlī's lectures which were delivered during vacation periods in al-Qairawān.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Muḥammad al-Ṣālih al-Jābirī, Awwaliyat al-Qissa al-Tūnisīya art. in Qisas, No.7, April 1968, p.42.

3. Ibid., p.46.

4. Al-Nakhīlī was a teacher at the Zaitūna 'mosque university' and his reform ideas considerably influenced Suwaisī. Cf: Muḥammad al-Fādīl ibn <sup>c</sup>Ashūr, al-Haraka al-Adabīya wa 'l-Fikrīya fī Tūnis, Cairo, 1956, p.75.

Tunis was not completely left out from the Islamic reform movements which were set in motion by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1898) and his Egyptian disciple Muḥammad °Abduh (1849-1905). There had been regular contacts between °Abduh and Tunisians beginning from 1884. He stopped over in Tunis for about four days when he was returning from Paris after the journal al-°Urwat al-Wuthqā which he and al-Afghānī founded in Paris ceased publication. During these four days, he established contact with Tunisians like Muḥammad al-Sanūsī (1849-1900) with whom he kept up the contact and by the turn of the century, there was already a group of Tunisians who believed in °Abduh's reform ideas. The periodical al-Manār<sup>5</sup> was so popular in Tunis that °Abduh came to consider "Tunisia as the most fertile ground for his reform ideas and he believed that the highest ideals which he was striving to achieve in Egypt had been fulfilled to a great extent in the foundation of al-Khaldūnīya school in Tunis and the enlightenment emanating from it".<sup>6</sup> He paid another visit to Tunis in 1903 and was offered a rousing reception. He gave lectures and talks entitled "Science and Methods of Education" to various gatherings organised by graduates of al-Khaldūnīya<sup>7</sup> school who were among the leaders of the

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5. Founded in 1897 by Rashīd Rīdā as an organ of reform based on the ideas of °Abduh.

6. Ibn °Ashūr, op.cit., p.59.

7. This college was founded in 1897 to provide education in secular subjects such as History and Geography.

intellectual movement in Tunis at that time.<sup>8</sup>

One of the earliest Tunisian exponents of this movement was Suwaisī who was an ardent reader of Egyptian periodicals and newspapers like al-Mu'ayyid and al-Manār by means of which he became further familiar with the ideas of the reform leaders and the foremost Egyptian leaders and writers. The others whose ideas he came to admire were Sa<sup>c</sup>d Zaghlūl (1857-1927); Muṣṭafā al-Manfalūtī (1876-1934); Muḥammad Rashīd Ridā (1865-1935); and Shaikh <sup>c</sup>Alī Yūsuf the founder and editor of al-Mu'ayyid.<sup>9</sup> The influence of these men and the Egyptian press on Suwaisī was so pronounced that a Tunisian newspaper said of him that "al-Shaikh Sālih Suwaisī graduated in the school of al-Mu'ayyid, he was influenced by the call for reform made by al-Afghānī, <sup>c</sup>Abduh and their disciples; he was guided and inspired by their thoughts; he followed their example and imitated their style [of writing]".<sup>10</sup>

It was the call for the revival of Islam, the reform of society by showing further concern for the needy and the spread of modern education that ran through all his writings. It is noteworthy that these were broadly the same ideas for which Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Abduh of Egypt became famous.

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8. Ibn <sup>c</sup>Āshūr, op.cit., p.50.

9. All these men were Egyptian politicians who played important rôles in the affairs of their country in the first two decades of this century. There is a fuller exposition of their rôles in Albert Hourani's Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age. 1798-1939, OUP, 1962, Chapters V-IX.

Suwaistī's first poem published in 1900 in the Tunisian newspaper al-Hādīra<sup>11</sup> contained the gem of the campaign which he was to further expound in his later writings.

He wrote :

افيقوا يا بني وطني المعلى      فقد طالت بكم سنة الرقاد  
افيقوا واذكروا تأريخ مجد      لأبناء لهم بيض الأيادي

and on the contemporary Tunisian situation, he concluded with a note of sadness :

فما لي لا أرى إلا حيارى      أضاعوا الرشد في طريق الفساد

From then on he published articles in Tunisian as well as Egyptian press and in 1906 he published his first book entitled Minhaj al-Batṭar fī 'l-Nazm wa 'l-Nathr which was a collection of rhyming essays and maqāmāt in which he employed the style of the classical maqāmah to express his opinion on the need for modern education. The hero of the maqāmah was one Abū 'l-<sup>c</sup>Ibar and the author played the rôle of narrator.

In the third maqāma, the hero Abu 'l-<sup>c</sup>Ibar says of himself : "I am struggling for reform of the religious sciences, I am acquiring the benefits of modern education by means of which I intend to benefit my nation, for this

11. A Tunisian weekly first published 2nd May, 1888.

12. 11. A Tunisian weekly first published 2nd May, 1888.

12. Zain al-<sup>c</sup>Abidin al-Sanūsī, Al-Adab al-Tunisi fī 'l-Qarn

should be the attitude of the knowledgeable ones.  
 Remove from your thoughts the curtain of superstition  
 do not turn away from the sciences if you lack understanding, you must read newspapers and journals so as to learn wisdom from them and cast away corruption in beliefs...."<sup>13</sup> Like many of the traditional classical maqāmāt, the stories in this book are to a large extent essay-type of stories in which there is little or no psychological motivation for the actions and statements of the characters who are merely made to utter what the author has in mind which in the case of this writer, was the revival and reform of Islam and the spread of education.

Later in the same year, he tried his hand at original story writing in which he avoided imitating the classical maqāma form. The story has been acclaimed as the first Tunisian story to be written.<sup>14</sup> The story was entitled al-Haifā' wa Sirāj al-Lail. He intended to serialise it in Khair al-Dīn, a Tunisian journal but the journal went defunct after publishing only two parts of the story in its sixth and seventh issues. It was not until 1921 that the story was republished in another Tunisian newspaper called al-Qairawān with some minor revision and an additional section.<sup>15</sup>

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13. al-Jābirī, op.cit., p.48.

14. Muḥammad al-Fāḍil Ibn ʿĀshūr, Arkān al-Nahḍat al-Adabiya bi-Tūnis, Tunis, 1964, p.57.

15. al-Qairawān, issues of Jan. 30, Feb. 12, 19, 29 and March 19, 1921.



The heroes of the story are Sirāj al-Lail and his mother al-Haifā'. It tells of this boy's birth to an Arab father and a mother of mixed Turkish-Arab parent-hood. The scene of the story is the Arabian peninsula. Sirāj al-Lail's father, a pearl diver, dies while his son is only ten but the mother gives him a sound upbringing and religious education. Consequently, he grows into a mentally and physically sound boy. Due to the lack of facilities for modern education in their neighbourhood, she decides to send him to Cairo where he can have further religious instructions. She takes advantage of a stroll in their garden to give the boy some instructions on the advantages of environmental hygiene and an incident of back-biting and dishonesty on the part of one of their hired workmen offers her a chance to lecture the boy on these social vices. So also does the visit of the Shaikh who is to take the boy to Egypt give an opportunity to comment on the benefits of frugal spending and eating and the disregard of rulers for the interest of their subjects.<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting to note the element of reality in this story. These consist in the author's projection of his life and ideologies. There is a complete correspondence between the life of the writer and his hero Sirāj al-Lail.

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16. The Arabic text of the story was reprinted in Qisas No. 6, Jan. 1968.

Both of them were their parents only children and both were bereaved of their fathers while still young. The pan-Islamic ideas of al-Afghānī which were current at that time are also evident in the story. For examples, the Arabian peninsular which is the cradle of Islam serves as the scene of the story, al-Haifā' is an Arab while her father is a Turk, that is, a citizen of the nation that was the custodian, weak though it was, of Islam at that time. There is also a mention of Muslim India.<sup>17</sup> These were all Muslim countries whose unification was one of al-Afghānī's principal objectives. The name of the Shaikh who is to take the boy to Egypt corresponds with that of one of al-Afghānī's disciples, namely Muhammad Rashīd Ridā.

The structure of the story is, however, too simple and the plot is weak. The personality and opinions of the author are constantly thrust on the reader. He makes his characters say things which cannot be justified by the sequence of events as narrated in the story. For example, after al-Haifā' had asked her son what must follow prayer and thanks to Allah, telling him that "the true spirit of worship embraces gratitude, respect and appreciation of the grandeur of the Unique and the Almighty One...." Sirāj al-Lail exclaims without any motivation : "Oh mother, in order to comprehend these lofty thoughts one needs a

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17. One of their farm employees holds a higher certificate in agriculture which he obtained after studying in India.

teacher who dives into the ocean (of knowledge) to uncover for him the obscurities of its secrets."

Al-Haifā' immediately says : "This is why I have called you this very hour...."

Further on in the story, after performing the morning prayers on the day following the above-mentioned incident, Sirāj al-Lail suddenly bursts into a laudatory oration into which the author contrives to weave his concept of the importance of knowledge saying: "... ignorance is death and knowledge is life..."

In their garden, al-Haifā' gives a long discourse on the merits of Islam, and on the incessant internecine warfare among the different tribal groups in the Arabian peninsular and on mutual strife and envy as important factors in weakening the Islamic umma. She gives "a return to the origin of Islam" as the only solution to the problems of the Muslim nations.

When the family is visited by Shaikh Muḥammad Rashīd, he takes the opportunity of the two items of food served by his hosts to inveigh against the social habits of over-eating which he sees as incompatible with frugal spending. He condemns the failure of the rich to feed the orphans and the needy ones especially during the Ramadān fast which is the very time they engage in eating various kinds of dishes until they are gluttoned. From this, he extends his tirade to the gamblers and

the morally-debauched, the rich and the ruling classes who neglect the poor and the orphans while they travel out during the summer in "Paris".. and London for debauchery and enjoyment of the excellent baths in these places, they have observed in these capitals the high schools and excellent industries which are the basis of their progress and happiness... but they refrain from remembering these... Whenever you remind them of their duty toward the poor and the needy, they are sure to tell you that this is the responsibility of the government".<sup>18</sup>

It is hard to see what connection these statements have with the discussion over the menu served at the meal except we recognise them as the author's ideas which he was merely putting in the mouths of his characters.

The section of the story beginning from the visit of the Shaikh was added when the story was reprinted in 1921 and the first part was slightly revised to give it a Tunisian setting. Shaikh Muḥammad Ridā becomes Muḥammad al-Nakhlī and it is to Qairawān that al-Haifā' plans to send her son instead of Cairo.<sup>19</sup>

In 1911, Suwaisī published another book entitled Fajā'i' al-Yatāmā wa 'l-Bā'isīn (The Misfortunes of the

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18. Qisas No. 6, Jan. 1968, p.66.

19. These alterations were in part an admission of the failure of the pan-Islamic zeal of the first decade since by this time, there was no longer any illusion about the continuation of the Islamic umma under the aegis of the tottering Turkish empire.

Orphans and the Poor'). It consisted of essays on poverty and the appeal of charity by two Egyptian literary men - al-Manfalūtī (1876-1924) and Ḥāfiz Ibrāhīm (1872-1933) and also a Lebanese writer Najīb al-Haddād (1867-1899). He also added two essays of his own in which he incorporated two sentimental stories in support of his plea for assistance to the needy. The first was about a childhood spree during which he shot a pigeon and thus deprived its chicks of their parents. The second was the story of the pitiful sight of some orphaned children in a friend's funeral cortège. The words of one of the orphans betray the writer's objective. He exclaimed : "...Oh you wealthy Muslims, fear Allah over the condition of orphans, lend a helping hand in improving their lot in the world... If you turn away from them, not considering their poverty, who will guarantee a pleasant future for your own offspring after you?"<sup>20</sup> This book is a further evidence of Suwaīsī's close contact with Egyptian literary and intellectual movements.

In spite of the literary deficiency of Suwaīsī's stories, they stand out as the earliest attempt by a Tunisian to write stories and they provided the foundation on which later writers were to build. They also kindled the interest of others in this genre and during the next

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20. Al-Jābirī, op.cit., p.49.

few years, there was increased activity in this field including the translation of many foreign stories.

(b) Sulaimān al-Jādawī : The Theme of Opposition to French Colonialism.

The political situation of Tunisia in this pre-world war one period did not fail to find an echo in story- and play-writing among Tunisians apart from the purely political polemics which filled most of the newspapers and periodicals of the time. One Tunisian who more than any others used the story as a medium for criticising the French colonial administrators was Sulaimān al-Jādawī.

He was born on the small island of Jarba off the south-east coast of the Tunisian mainland and from there he moved to the capital towards the end of the 19th century. He attended the Zaitūna 'mosque university' but instead of taking up a government appointment as was the vogue at that time, he founded a newspaper which he first called Murshid (1906) and later Murshid al-Umma in 1909. He also founded a sarcastic and humorous newspaper called Abū Nuwās in 1908.

The Tunisian press was constantly under censorship by the French who it invariably criticised and many newspapers and periodicals were often closed down by order of the colonial administration. As a result of this, al-Jādawī, who was one of Tunisia's most active politicians during the first three decades of this century, found it prudent to hide behind his stories to criticise the administration

and to say what could not be said in his purely political essays without reprisals. He was fond of picking on individual members of the administration and identifying them either by name or by their official designation.<sup>21</sup> His Abū Nuwās was a light-hearted newspaper in which he held his heroes to ridicule. An example was his story Dalmās in which he set out to criticise one Delmas, a French-born director of al-Ṣādiqīya school<sup>22</sup> whose aim was to treat the indigenous students contemptuously and to show favouritism toward French and Jewish students. He considers it his duty to dampen any feeling of self-respect and national pride among the Tunisian students whose religion Islam he also despises. He sees the Tunisian students' demonstration and their demand for better living conditions as an effrontery and a threat to his ambition of becoming the sole and indisputable boss of the institution. His soliloquy at the beginning of the story sums up the light in which the author wants his readers to see Dalmas who whispers to himself : "...I have been hoping to attain a high status which will make me the sole controller of education so that I can extinguish the light of knowledge among the natives and turn them out after a quarter of a century as simpletons who will not know their

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21. M.S. al-Jābirī, Awwalīyāt al-Qissa al-Tūnisīya, art. in Qisas No. 8, July 1968, p.83.

22. One Delmas actually headed the Ṣādiqīya school early this century. Cf: Paul Lambert's Dictionnaire Illustré de la Tunisie, Tunis, 1912, p.151.

position in life and will submit to the smallest and the most insignificant person as long as he is a European and a Christian ... The duty of slaves is to obey their masters and carry out any order given to them. Fate has been unkind and unfair to me but yet nothing befits me better than to serve my race in particular and Christianity in general so that I can increase their wealth and blessings (Long live my lord the Pope and the Church)."

The story which is in seven parts, ends with a student delegation's request for improved food and other conditions being turned down by Delmas and these students calmly accepting their lot as a 'divine act'. Delmas, however, marvels at the courage of the hitherto timid and subservient students in coming to meet him and he sees in this an omen of his inevitable failure, by which the writer intends to forecast the end of absolute colonial domination over his country.

This story, written in the form of a play, gives an idea of the style and content of al-Jādawī's writing. He had in his paper Murshid al-Umma a special column entitled al-Qism al-Khayālī (In the World of Fiction) in which he often wrote his imaginary satires of the colonial administrators, especially against Victor de Carnières, one of the most hated French settlers in Tunisia during the first decade of this century particularly



in connection with the sequestration of land from the indigenous population for the use of the French settlers.<sup>23</sup>

Al-Jādawī as noted above, did not write fiction for its own sake. His works, therefore, lacked in most cases proper plot and character shading. He depicted his heroes in the light of the moral, religious and political concepts which he believed to be proper, the kind of preconceived ideas and direct pronouncements which ought to be avoided in an artistic short story. Nonetheless, he numbers among the earliest Tunisians to practice the art of story-writing and his works were an excellent reflection of the political realities of his day.

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23. In Murshid al-Umma of 10th February, 1911, it was announced that the "director of the newspaper has completed a wonderful 'De Carnières Story'. It is a historical, humorous, conversational fiction in which the author deals with the rôles of this man since his arrival in this country, embracing all his open and secret life. This story is to preserve this man's memory so that future generations can get to know the Ferdinand and Louis XIV of the twentieth century..."

It has, however, been impossible to trace a copy of this story. There were some short imaginary anecdotes published in the fiction column of Murshid al-Umma in 1909 and 1910 sometimes entitled al-Dūkarnīya where the hero in every case was De Carnières but it is doubtful whether he would have been referring to these pieces in the announcement quoted above.

(c) Muhammad Manāshū : Light Entertainment Story.

Muhammad Manāshū was born in Tunis in 1884. He entered the Zaitūna 'mosque university' in 1894 from which he graduated in 1901. After first teaching in a Qur'anic school, he later became a teacher in his alma mata.<sup>24</sup> He died in 1933<sup>25</sup>.

Beside his deep religious interest - he was an adherent of the Tījāniya sūfī sect in defence of which he composed a treatise - he was also interested in Arabic language and literature.<sup>26</sup> He wrote one of the best Tunisian short stories of that period under the pen-name of 'al-Ma<sup>c</sup>arrī'.<sup>27</sup>

The story was entitled Fukāha Majlis al-Qadā' and was published in Murshid al-Umma, No. 23, April 11, 1910, pages 3 and 4. It is the story of a young judge who becomes infatuated with a rich neighbour's daughter. The liason is short-lived but the girl has become pregnant by the time they both fall apart. To avoid the shame she has thus brought upon herself and her family, she flees from home to live a lonely and wretched life with her daughter whom she delivers with the assistance of an old woman.

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24. Zain al-<sup>c</sup>Ābidīn al-Sanūsī, op.cit., Vol.1, p.273/4.

25. Jarīdat al-Wazīr, Yr.13, No.381, June 1, 1933.

26. Ibn <sup>c</sup>Āshūr, op.cit., p.108.

27. I have relied on Ibn <sup>c</sup>Āshūr in attributing this story to Muhammad Manāshū. As one of the younger contemporaries of Manāshū, the late Ibn <sup>c</sup>Āshūr knew who used which pen-name among his fellow Tunisians who were very fond of pen-names and pseudonyms until the late forties. Cf: Ibn <sup>c</sup>Āshūr, op.cit., Appendix pp 75-79.

After she has sold all her belongings, she becomes acquainted with a professional prostitute who encourages her to join her. She reluctantly agrees but finds her new life more unsatisfactory than the former. She is, however, helpless and unable to obtain sustenance in any other way.

She soon falls out with one of her clients who accuses her of theft and she is charged to court. Who else would she find on the judgement seat other than the father of her seven year old daughter! Once in the dock, she challenges the right of the judge to try her case. She holds him responsible for her predicament. "We are both thieves and we are both dishonest", she says, adding : "I steal money but you steal honour and honour is more precious than money, so you are more reprehensible than I". She inveighs against the legal system which puts a man like him on the judge's seat. In the end, the embarrassed judge, who has now recognised the unveiled face of the woman, tries to save his face by saying that the woman is mentally unbalanced and orders her to be taken away for medical examination. He then declares the court adjourned. He resigns his job on the grounds of illness after a few days, moves away from the town with the girl and his daughter and they both get married and live happily thereafter.

Muhammad Manāshū had an excellent mastery of the

language and this enabled him to write in a smooth and flowing style of Arabic. His story is interspersed with some rhymes and balancing of words and phrases here and there but this does not impede the flow of thought and development of the story. He also gives a skilful analysis of the heroine's mind. Her outbursts against the judge is an excellent piece illustrative of the situation in which she finds herself. She tells the judge : "...the man whose money I stole can comfort himself by having his money refunded to him, but the girl whose honour you stole, my lord judge, cannot console herself. Honour once lost cannot be retrieved.. If it were not for your deed, I would not have stolen money and would not have got into this situation..." Her sarcasm gets more biting when she says : "Blessed be those who placed you on this seat and put you in charge of the Law and gave you this policeman to obey your orders, to execute your judgements and to be guided by you!"

Muhammad Manāshū would have done his story more credit if he had expatiated a little more on the earlier affairs between the girl and the judge so that the reader would be convinced that the judge is really to blame for the girl's predicament. This point notwithstanding, Muhammad Manāshū's story stands prominent among the short stories written by Tunisians in this pre-world war one period.

### 3 - Stories Reprinted from non-Tunisian Sources

Early in this period, it became a popular practice among newspaper proprietors to reprint stories which had been published in other Arab countries such as Egypt and Syria with or without acknowledgement of the source of such reproduced works.

In its issues of 21st and 28th July, 1907, the Tunisian newspaper al-Munīr carried a story entitled Inna Baʿda al-Zann Ithm (Suspicion can be Sinful) written by one Salwā Buṭrus Salāma and reprinted from Fatāt al-Sharq a Syrian journal.

It is the story of the happy reunion of two Syrian youths named Māryā and Jurjī after a long painful separation.

At a party given by a Syrian charity organisation, the girl Māryā rises from among the guests and gives a brief intelligent speech which earns her the admiration of everyone in attendance. At the close of the party, a high-ranking lady approaches Māryā and invites her for tea in her home where Māryā is persuaded to tell her life-story. She reveals that she and a brother of hers called Jurjī emigrated with their father to America and when their father died, both of them set sail to return to Syria. While on their journey, she became very friendly with a sickly widow whom she persuaded her

brother to cater for. She and her brother also became acquainted with the captain of the ship because they both helped him to communicate with English-speaking passengers during a frightening storm.

When the ship called at a port the name of which she couldn't remember, she was sick and had to remain in bed. After the ship left the port, she found a note left by her brother in which he said that he was disowning and abandoning her for misconduct with the captain. She then became disconsolate, not knowing what to do as that was the first time she had been left on her own. When she arrived in Syria, she obtained a menial job to make a living.

Her story so moved the lady that she employed her as a tutor for her children, a job which she performed to the lady's satisfaction.

Soon afterwards, Farid, the brother of her mistress returned from a business trip. He too was soon impressed by the girl and eventually proposed to marry her. The match was supported by everyone in the family and the marriage was performed.

Sometime after moving to their new home, Farid employed a ragged-looking young man as his cook out of sheer compassion for him. At breakfast table on the following day, after inquiries into the new cook's background, it was discovered that he was no other than

Māryā's lost brother. Remorsefully, Jurjī asked to be forgiven by his sister for suspecting her of improper conduct with the ship's captain as a result of his lover-widow's false accusation. The widow, he said, had infatuated him. She died a long time ago but she confessed before dying that her accusation against Māryā was false and requested that if he ever met Māryā again, he should ask for her pardon for both of them.

Māryā was too happy over the reunion to bother herself with the unhappy past.

The story contains some elements of magic reminiscent of folkstory and the One Thousand and One Night's stories - a factor which places a story in the realm of fantasy and diminishes its value to the reader as a mirror of contemporary conditions. This was, however, a common feature of the Arabic story at that time.<sup>28</sup>

A similar reproduction of an Arabic story from another Arab country appeared in al-Sawāb newspaper issue of March 15, 1909 entitled Dam<sup>c</sup>at min Ta'rīkh Hayy (Tears Over the History of a Living Man) by one Imīl Khūrī.

It is the story of the defeat of a Muslim (Turkish) army in one of the Empire's wars with Czarist Russia.

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28. Like for examples, the rise of the Pāsha in al-Muwailihī's Hadīth <sup>c</sup>Isā bin Hishām from the dead and the soothsayer in Hāfiz Ibrāhīm's Layālī Sutaih.

In a very touching manner, the narrator describes the tense atmosphere in the Turkish army camp before the fateful day. The commander's son, who is one of the soldiers, comes to give his father a farewell kiss because "my mind tells me that today is my last day" but his father flatly refuses this request, because, as he later explains to one of his colleagues who chides him for turning down the boy's request, "I am now father to all these soldiers; not to my son alone - and a commander should not show weakness in a situation like this..."

The battle is fierce and bloody. The commander's son is among the early casualties. Describing the reaction of the commander to this event, the narrator says : "...I saw him like a statute on a horse. It seemed as if the blood in his veins had dried up and that he had stopped breathing. He was as restless as a lion which has lost its lioness. He gave order for the usual farewell salute for the dead - brandishing the sword in the air. Swift as blood spouting from a wounded man, hot tears rolled down the commander's cheek followed by what sounded like the roaring of a hungry lion : char....ge!!!

Similarly moving is the commander's denunciation of the government in Istāna (Istambul) for not sending him supplies and for being indifferent to the men's



plight. "May you be damned, you men of Istāna, you oppressors of the army. You are given to pleasure, sipping the cup of pleasure while soldiers are hungry, suffering from pain and grief. You and the Russians are living at ease. By Allah, both you and the Russians are enemies of these brave men..."

The defeat and heroic withdrawal of the army is described, resulting in the replacement of the crescent by the Russian flag.

In the final pathetic scene, the writer sees tears streaming from the eyes of the narrator who, he discovers, also lost a leg in the battle. "Tears rolled down the cheeks of the army officer who was my narrator and he wiped it with his hand. He left me to go away. He was limping and when I looked at his feet, behold! one of them was wooden!"

The author of the story avoided making any direct comment but his objective was obvious in the Turkish empire's tottering condition, this empire which was seen by al-Afghānī and some of his disciples as the symbol of the Muslim world's unity and independence. The selflessness of the soldier who sacrificed one of his legs in the national struggle was perhaps meant to serve as an example for Muslim nationalists in their struggle against the threat of foreign domination and this selfless service contrasted sharply with the

indifferent attitude of the government in Istāna.

Although al-Sawāb did not give the source of this story, the writer's name (Khūrī) suggests that it was written by a Syrian and might have been reproduced from a Syrian or Egyptian periodical.

In the issue of December 31, 1909 and January 1-4 1910, al-Taḡaddum (Tunisian) newspaper published a story entitled al-Laḡīta (The Foundling Girl). There was no indication as to whether the story was a reprint or an original composition and there was no author's name.

The story had as its theme the age-long social concept of the "virtuous (and consequently oppressed) orphan" and the "unjust rich man".

It tells of a homeless orphan girl who is found and taken home by a kind-hearted rich man. She turns out to be beautiful and good-mannered and she is admired by all those who visit the rich man's house. The man however has a spoilt daughter whose "modern upbringing" has made her very proud and selfish. She begins to envy this foundling girl whom she considers a rival for her father's affection and she tries every form of insult and provocation to make this girl miserable but the latter would not be bothered.

One day, the man finds on the staircase a letter containing an appointment by a lover with his girl-friend for one o'clock that night and the bewildered man

immediately concludes that the letter must be meant for the foundling girl and not for his daughter. He decides to hide near the rendezvous so as to find out the truth of the matter. Just at this moment, the foundling wakes from her sleep and finds out all about the matter and immediately tips off the man's daughter about her father's plan, offering herself as a substitute for the appointment. The man is relieved to find that the foundling is the one with whom the appointment has been made and he sends her packing that very night. She drowns herself, fully convinced that by saving his honour, she has fully repaid the man for his generosity. Her corpse is recovered and brought back to the man on the following day and he remorsefully buries her. The story ends with two paragraphs of warning to wealthy parents on the danger of "modern education" and differential treatment of the poor and the rich.

The writer employed a smooth and lively language and used conversation in appropriate places. However, like most stories written at that time, al-Laqita lacks coherence and analytical development. For example, the sequence of events from the moment that the man finds the letter until he sends away the foundling girl lacks a convincing logical development. The girl is said to be sleeping in her bed when the letter is found and yet she wakes up just in time to learn of the letter, (we are not told how!) its content and the

man's plan in spite of the fact that it is said elsewhere in the story that it is almost time for the appointment when the letter is found.

The story is too didactic and too dogmatically committed to combatting (by ridicule) what the writer saw as the unsavoury effects of "modern education".

Apart from the foundling girl's reply to her would-be benefactor on their first encounter which offers a thorough insight into the lot of orphans in her type of society, the hero of the story - the foundling girl - and the secondary characters - the rich man and his daughter - are flat characters one of whom is held out as an absolute model of virtue and the others as absolute villains.

In an introduction to the reprint of this story in Qisas No.12, July 1969, on pages 76-77, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Jābirī argued that this was the first Tunisian short story. He based his claim on his knowledge of men and matters in Tunisian literature and certain expressions in the story which he considered to be peculiar Tunisian usages. He wrote :

ولحل الاسباب التي تحدثونا الى القول بان هذه القصة - رغم جهلنا  
لكاتبها - هي اقصوصة تونسية هو ما في النفس من ثقة بتاريخنا ،

وتوثق برجاله ايمان بمقدرات وقابليات سبقت على الدرب ولم يكن منا  
 غلوا ولا افراطا في التباهي . ولكنه بعض ما في التقدير والاعتبار . امـ  
 البعض والاخر فتوكده الاشارات الهامة التي جاءت بسياق الاقصوة وتختص  
 بها كتاباتنا ، ولا تكثر الا في استعمالنا الخاصة ، من مثل " يتلطف  
 بـه " للهمالين ذي الطبع الناعم ، وهي عندنا تفيد " تقبل الدلال "   
 ومن مثل " ستر العار " الذي يعني الحفاظ على الشرف . ومن مثل  
 ما ينعت به الاوربي عامة من انه " رومي " نسبة الى الرومان . وهي  
 اشارات وارادة في نص الاقصوة ومن ينعم/فيها الفكر يتضح  
 له انها تونسية في الصياغة والاحكام .

However, some aspects of the story seem to suggest that it was reprinted from a foreign unnamed source like the two preceeding stories. For example, it would have been anachronistic during the first decade of this century to talk of the existence of very many indigenous Tunisian girls whose upbringing was so threatened by the incursion of foreign culture as to inspire the writing of such a story by a Tunisian. One was far less likely to come across a Tunisian Muslim family whose daughter had enough liberty for those "vices" listed in the story such as jabbering a foreign language to her negro-maid and to her European ('roman') dog,

reading love stories and wearing the most trendy dresses. The idea of a Tunisian family at that time owning a detached castle surrounded by gardens was also very remote from reality. But perhaps the most 'untunisian' idea in the story is the drowning of the expelled foundling girl in a river (nahr).<sup>29</sup> A Tunisian fiction writer at that time (and even today) was most likely to make the victim fall into a well (bi'r), cistern (mājil) or the (mediterranean) sea (bahr), especially in a story such as this one which couldn't have been set anywhere except in a big town, presumably in the capital. Drowning rarely occurs in Tunisian fiction and in the only instance I have come across it, the victim got drowned in a well.<sup>29</sup> One reads of spring (ʿain) and sea-side (shāti' al-bahr) but never shāti' al-Nahr in Tunisian prose literature.

The story would, therefore, have been reprinted from an unnamed Egyptian or Syrian magazine and could appropriately be classified along with Inna Ba<sup>c</sup>da al-Zann Ithm and Dum<sup>c</sup>at fī Ta'rīkh Hayy.

#### 4 - Translations and Adaptations from non-Arabic Stories.

Story-writing in Tunisia during this period was not yet on a firm footing in spite of the isolated attempts

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29. Maḥmūd al-Bājī, al-Infijār al-ʿĀtifī in al-Nadva, No. 1, January 1953.

of a few Tunisians many of whom wrote just one or two stories each. Their meagre output was in most cases not comparable to that of masters of the art from nations with a tradition of story-writing in their literature like the Russians and the French whose influence was soon to become noticeable in Tunisia as a result of translation of some of Tolstoy's works and that of some French authors notably Chateaubriand (1768-1848). The wave of translations between 1910 and 1912 undoubtedly sharpened the interest of Tunisians already stimulated by works reproduced from other Arab countries and the few stories by Tunisian writers which have been published.

(a) Mushairiqī's Translation of Tolstoy and Chateaubriand.

One of the Tunisians who pioneered the translation of foreign works into Arabic was Muḥammad al-Mushairiqī. Born in 1885, he studied at the Ṣādiqīya school and the Zaitūna 'mosque university'. He obtained a higher diploma in translation and legal draftsmanship. He worked in the Tunisian government's legal affairs department in 1907 and 1908 after which he became a professional government translator.<sup>30.</sup>

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30. Paul Lambert, op.cit., pp. 284/5.

He had a good mastery of French and Arabic and was interested in the literature of both languages. He read Arabic books, newspapers and periodicals from the Arab east, especially from Egypt, as well as French literature.<sup>31</sup>

He was the first to introduce, by his translations, the Russian story-writer, Leo. N. Tolstoy (1828-1910) to his fellow Tunisian readers of Arabic.<sup>32</sup> He became acquainted with Tolstoy through French.

In 1911, he published a book entitled Tolstoy. The introduction contains a biography of Tolstoy with the elegies written by two contemporary Egyptian poets on the occasion of the Russian author's death in 1910.<sup>33</sup> This is followed by excerpts from Tolstoy's War and Peace and Anna Karenine. He then added the complete translation of the stories Reasons for Human Life and How Much Land will Satisfy Man both of which, according to Mushairiqī's comments, Tolstoy wrote "for the moral refinement of the rural agricultural population and for encouraging them to be generous, faithful, sincere and contented". The

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31.<sup>c</sup> Izz al-Dīn al-Madanī, Muhammad al-Mushairiqī art. in Qisṣa, No.5, Oct. 1967, p.115.

32. It had even been claimed that he was the first to translate any part of Tolstoy's works into Arabic. (Cf: al-Madanī, op.cit, p.112). This claim seems to be supported by the absence of reference to any other Arabic translation of Tolstoy beside Mushairiqī's in both of Henri Pérès' Le Roman dans la littérature arabe moderne, Alger, 1938, and Dr. Y.Najm's al-Qisṣa fī 'l-Adab al-'Arabī 'l-Hadīth, Beirut, 1952.

33. The poets were Aḥmad Shawqī (1868-1932) and Muḥammad Ḥāfiz Ibrāhīm.



book ends with a summary of Tolstoy's philosophical views on life, religion, art, love, patriotism and death.<sup>34</sup>

He had previously translated in 1909 another work by the nineteenth century French author - Chateaubriand. He entitled his translation Khātim °Iqd Banī Sirāj (The last of the Banī Sirāj)<sup>35</sup> which was about an ancient Andalusian Arab family. In the introduction, he wrote about the life and works of Chateaubriand as well as the history of Banū Sirāj. This excellent translation earned him a gold medal at a French Exhibition of books in 1911.<sup>36</sup>

His translations received a wide acclamation in the Tunisian press thus bringing these non-Arab authors to the attention of a wider public. Al-Sawāb newspaper issue of September 1st, 1911, carried a review and advertisement of the book Tolstoy. The editor of the newspaper expatiated on the reform of the Russian society for which Tolstoy intended many of his stories in which he highlighted the society's ills. The editor likened the contemporary Muslim society to the Russian society which was depicted in Tolstoy's stories and concluded

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34. °Izz al-Dīn al-Madanī, op.cit., (Qīṣaṣ)(No.5) p.114.

35. F. René de Chateaubriand's Le Dernier Abencérage.

36. Al-Jābirī, Awwalīyāt al-Qīṣat al-Tūnisīya, art. in Qīṣaṣ, No. 11, April 1969, p.123.

about the book by saying that it was "very useful" and that it "contained between its lines, wisdom and lessons which are indispensable to every Muslim who is interested in revival and in catching up with the developed nations ... it is impossible for Muslims to rise up after the loss of their Islamic civilisation except by thoroughly mastering the ideas of western philosophers and by making these the guiding lamps to lighten their paths from the abyss of retrogression and decline to the direction of progression and civilisation."<sup>37</sup>

Al-Mushairiqī's translation of Tolstoy's work in 1911 was a very important landmark in the literary awakening of Tunisian writers since it opened the way for them to read more of foreign literature in general and the story in particular. This translation which was produced just one year after the death of Tolstoy showed the eagerness of educated Tunisians to become acquainted with foreign works and then to imitate these models thereafter.

(b) Ibrāhīm Fahmī b. Sha<sup>c</sup>ban : Fazā'ī<sup>c</sup> al-Muqāmara, an Adaptation with the Theme of Moral Reform.

Bin Sha<sup>c</sup>bān was also one of the pioneers of the story in Tunisia. He was born in Tunis in 1892 and studied at

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37. Ibid., p.125.

both the Zaitūna university mosque and the Khaldūniya between 1903 and 1909. He participated in a student demand for reform of the Zaitūna educational system in 1909 and was expelled along with leaders of the demonstration.<sup>38</sup> Between 1909 and 1911, he collaborated with others in editing some Tunisian newspapers. In 1919, he joined the teaching profession and in 1920, he established Majallat al-Ta<sup>c</sup>līm al-<sup>c</sup>Arabī, an Arabic teachers' monthly. He died in 1930.<sup>39</sup>

His story entitled Fazā'i<sup>c</sup> al-Muqāmara (The Sad Consequences of Gambling) was published in 1910. The story was designed to discourage its readers from gambling by depicting one of its unpleasant results.

It tells of a young man, Charles, who is an heir to a large fortune from his very rich father. He is born into the family when his father is already aged. Being the only child of the family, his father spares no efforts in giving him the best available education. In spite of his fortunate background, Charles becomes a gambler and squanders his whole inheritance. He decides in desperation and shame to commit suicide but just at the moment he would have shot himself on a lonely coast, he sees a fellow gambler to whom he has lost much of his money. He does not disclose his intention to his friend

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38. Zain al-<sup>c</sup>Ābidīn al-Sanūsī, op.cit., Vol.II, p.98.

39. Qisāṣ, No. 4, July 1967, p.72.

whom he lures into an abandoned boat where he kills him and dumps his body into the sea after removing the money on his victim. The disappearance of this man is reported by his wife and son to the police who delegate a detective to investigate the case.

Meanwhile, Charles becomes engaged to a girl whom he plans to marry a few days after the murder. The detective investigating the case disguises like the murdered man and accidentally meets Charles whose reaction at the sight of the disguised policeman makes him suspect. Further observations made on him by the detective and his two assistants confirm their suspicions and they decide to arrest him on the day of his wedding.

Charles is arrested, tried and condemned to death. His newly-wedded wife pleads with the victim's family for clemency and pardon, telling them that the death of Charles means her own end too but the dead man's wife and son retort that by murdering their family head, Charles has "murdered" three persons and does not therefore deserve any mercy. Charles is ordered to be taken away for execution.

In his preface to the story, Bin Shā<sup>c</sup>bān said that his composition was the result of an external influence - that of the cinema. He said that he once watched a film on the hideous consequences of gambling and this reminded him of this pressing social problem among his fellow

Tunisians. He wished that every Tunisian could watch the film but since this was not possible, he felt the urge to compose a story carrying the same message.<sup>40</sup> He did not say how much of the film he incorporated in his story but it seems that he did not add anything substantial to the original materials. His story has French characters - the murderer and hero of the story is named Charles, his friend and victim is called Georges, the detective and one of his assistants are named François and Nicholas respectively. The setting of the story is also in a French surrounding. It is therefore clear that apart from the social problem which the story highlights and which must have been applicable to the Tunisian society of Bin Sha<sup>c</sup>bān's time, it was a little more than a translation of a foreign story.

This being the first time he had tried his hand at the art of story-writing (and the only one we know of) his work has some defects which are not unusual for a beginner. It contains so many direct observations and moral pronouncements from the author who sees every aspect of the life of the principal characters in terms of gambling. For example, he introduces Charles as someone "in whose head the wine of greed pervaded, he preferred to enter the gambling casino, that accursed room whose founders, builders, directors, clients and proprietors ought all to be anathemised."

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40. Ibid., p.75.

Why shouldn't they be anathemised when it (gambling) is the only cancer that eats wealth and sows the seed of corruption..."<sup>41</sup>

Bin Sha<sup>c</sup>bān sees the grey hair on the head of fifty-year-old Georges as evidence of his indulgence in gambling. This does not sound convincing enough besides the fact that he does not portray Georges as having lost anything in gambling.

The description of the first meeting between Georges and his girl-friend is too unnatural and contrived. They both meet for the first time and neither has said anything to the other apart from a few meaningful glances and gestures and yet the first thing that the girl does is to beckon to Charles to come and sit by her side, saying : "sit down, loved one, for it does not befit the like of you to remain standing."

He gives an excellent description of the activities of Francois the detective whose investigations lead to the arrest and conviction of Charles. It may however be observed that the second paragraph of section five<sup>42</sup> is superfluous. It contains the author's comments on the reason why the detective disguises and dresses like the murdered man. If that statement has been omitted, subsequent events would have made this clear to the reader without his being told. Besides, a story-writer

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41. Ibid., p.79

42. Ibid., p.95

makes his work more attractive if he challenges the imagination and wit of his reader by not telling him everything.

Bin-Sha<sup>c</sup>bān's work, apart from showing the influence of the cinema on Tunisians at that time, it also illustrates how capable the educated Tunisians were of adapting and applying foreign literary works to their own local conditions. This was a step further than mere translation of such works.

(c) Al-Ja<sup>c</sup>āibī & the love story entitled 'Faidūra'

A good example of the extent to which Tunisian writers became interested in French authors at that time was the story Faidūra which was published in 1911. The author was described as "one of the supporters of Tunisian literary renaissance" but his name was not mentioned.<sup>43</sup> Muḥammad al-Ja<sup>c</sup>āibī (1878-1938), the founder and editor of al-Sawāb weekly is mentioned as having put the finishing touches to the book.<sup>44</sup> It contains a love story.

43. It is strongly believed among older Tunisians who know the traits of all the writers of that generation that the story was adapted by Muḥammad al-<sup>c</sup>Arabī al-Jalūlī who, like al-Mushairiqī, was widely read in Arabic and French literatures.

44. <sup>c</sup>Izz al-Dīn al-Maḍanī, Faidūra, art. in Qisas, No.7, Apl. 1968, p.76. Al-Ja<sup>c</sup>āibī was in his own right a littérateur of some note. In 1911, he wrote the first Tunisian Arabic play to be acted and subsequently played an important part in the rise of Tunisian theatre. Cf: al-Fikr, No. 8, May 1968, p.49.

The French original of the story has not yet been traced. A comparison with Vitorien Sardou's Fédora<sup>45</sup> does not reveal any similarity between the two. Sardou's book is in form of a play while Faidūra is not. The events, characters and place of each work differ considerably from the other. Faidūra therefore seems to have been adapted by its author from several French sources. The narration of its events lacks symmetry and coherent development and it does not have a single artistic concept. It alternates between romanticism and realism.<sup>46</sup>

The only value of Faidūra is that it illustrates its author's wide reading in 19th century French literature and his adaptation from it is an evidence of the efforts of Tunisians to imitate the western authors whose works were available to them.

## 5

The years 1910 to 1912 were fruitful years for the Tunisian literary circles considering the numerous translations of Western stories into Arabic. These included many European works translated in other Arab countries which came into the Tunisian market and were advertised and sold alongside those translated locally. Murshid al-Umma issue of 10th February, 1911, and al-Tūnisī of 20th March

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45. Victorien Sardou 1831-1908. He composed Fédora in 1882.

46. Al-Madanī, op.cit., Qisāṣ, No. 7, p.77.



1911 both announced the availability of such translated works which included detective and adventure stories with such titles as Jule Mary's The Rope-Cutter and the Innocent Criminal, The Robbers of Paris, and The Secret Police ; Ponson de Terral's Rocambole and Rocambole's Mother ; Maxime Wilmer's The Lost Child and Fénelon's Telemachus to mention a few.

The development of story-writing in Tunisia in this pre-world war one period followed a recognisable pattern, namely, acquaintance with stories written and published in another Arab country, especially Egypt and sometimes reproduction of these as in the case of Salwā Butrus Salāma's "Suspicion can be Sinful"; these were soon imitated by Tunisian writers who attempted to write their own stories on the pattern of Eastern Arabic works and the European stories which were available to them. In some cases, their stories were mere adaptations of their sources, in which the characters and events were not altered to suit the Tunisian situation but in others one sees evidence of the authors' ingenuity in adapting and applying their original materials to their local conditions.

Most of the stories written by Tunisians at this time had as their theme the reform of the social, religious and political orders. They were designed to illustrate some of their society's problems like the care of the

poor and the orphans and some were direct criticisms of the men in political and religious authorities whether these were Tunisians as in Suwaisī's Sirāj... or colonial administrators as in al-Jādawī's Dalmās.

Some of the translated works were meant to achieve this same end as al-Mushairiqī stated in the introduction to his Tolstoy that he was moved to translate part of Tolstoy's works by "what I observed between its lines by way of criticism of Russian manners and customs which are comparable to our own Tunisian manners."

To the extent that most of these stories were merely a means to an end it could be said that they were not strictly speaking meant to be works of art.

These stories, both original and foreign, often drew comments, commendatory and critical, from the Tunisian press. This marked the birth of some elementary literary criticism of fiction in the country. Writers were offered criticism and advice which in spite of its often superficial nature, encouraged them and provided some guidelines for other prospective writers. A Tunisian newspaper, after reviewing al-Mushairiqī's Tolstoy commented "... How wonderful it would be if our writer-brethren would weave along the pattern set by this excellent gentleman who has expended his utmost in the service of literature.... If they did that, they would have guaranteed our quick revival and sound progress which would raise the Tunisian

nation from the depth of ignorance and open the door to a flourishing future and a golden age".<sup>47</sup>

Only a few<sup>48</sup> of the Tunisians who wrote stories at this time produced any considerable number of stories large enough to enable us to assess their individual style and concepts of the art. This paucity of output was due to various factors including the lack of financial incentive, the difficulty of getting their works printed and the fact that none of them was a professional fictioneer. As we have noted previously, many of the stories were printed in newspapers and periodicals which were in most cases organs of propaganda for political and reform groups.

The increased activity in the translation of European works into Arabic between 1910 and 1912 did not last long enough for its effect in encouraging more adaptations and original works to become manifest. This was because the first world war soon put an end to intellectual and literary movements in the country. The colonial government imposed a total ban on the Tunisian press and the country was almost completely cut off from outside contact which had been a very important factor in the intellectual and literary development of the country.<sup>49</sup>

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47. al-Ṣawāb, Sept. 11th, 1911.

48. The most notable one was al-Jādawī, the founder and editor of Murshid al-Umma and Abū Nuwās whose ownership of a printing press enabled him to write consistently into the thirties.

49. Ibn Ashūr, op.cit., p.112.

## CHAPTER FOUR

THE TUNISIAN SHORT STORY IN ITS EXPERIMENTAL  
STAGE : 1930 - 1938

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The 1920's did not provide an ideal condition for the development and flourishing of the story because of the political activities which began immediately after the war. The end of the war saw many social and political questions confronting Tunisians such as the search for a united and organised political front to co-ordinate their struggle for self-determination, the concern and involvement of some Tunisians like al-Tha<sup>c</sup>alabī, Muḥammad al-Sādiq al-Nufair and <sup>c</sup>Uthmān b. al-Khūja about the unsettled political situation in Turkey and the call for religious and social reforms which had been going on since the beginning of the century.

Under the leadership of <sup>c</sup>Abd al-<sup>c</sup>Azīz al-Tha<sup>c</sup>alabī, a vigorous campaign was launched for the lifting of the total ban imposed on the press during the war. Although the ban was eventually lifted and a few periodicals and dailies resumed publication, politics dominated the whole scene and occupied the attention of Tunisian writers. In such a politically-charged atmosphere, one would have expected to have a re-echo of these events in form of stories, but apart from two stories published in al-Fajr

in 1920, there is no trace of any other stories published in Tunisia throughout this decade.

The first of the two stories was published anonymously in Numbers 2 and 3, Volume One, Year One, September/October, 1920 issue of al-Fajr. It was entitled Alā Firāsh al-Mawt (On the Death-Bed) and was about a young girl who was nearly forced to become a prostitute because she had no means of looking after her sick brother who was previously her only financial supporter. Not even the chemist would accept the small sum of money which was insufficient to cover the cost of the prescribed medicine. As she left the drug store in despair, someone who witnessed her encounter with the chemist approached her, took her aside, and after listening to her story, he took her to a charity institution where her brother was treated free of charge, thus saving her from shame and denigration.

The story ends with a profuse sermon on the virtues of charity and goodness.

The second story under the rather vague title of Haqīqa lā Khayāl (It's no Fantasy but Truth) was published in No.5, December 1920 issue of the same journal. It was the story of two neighbouring families. One was rich and the other poor. The boy from the poor family was given a sound education and grew up to become a doctor. On the other hand, the rich man's son learnt nothing from the private tutor employed for him and

after his father's death, he was surrounded by spongers who helped him to squander his family's fortune and then abandoned him. His family's home was eventually sold to the poor man's son who was now a doctor. The story concludes with the tragic end of the formerly rich boy. He exclaimed :

سبحانك اللهم كان ابن جارنا بالامس بائسا وكنت غنيا فاحسن ابوه تربيته واساء  
ابي تربيتي قال مثاله الى السعادة والغنى وآل مثالي الى التعاسة والعناء  
سبحانك اللهم اني انا الشقي .

He then put a revolver to his throat and said, quoting the words reputed to have been inscribed on al-Ma'arri's grave :

هذا جناه ابي علي وما جنيت على احد .

The second story was signed by one <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmān al-Ka<sup>cc</sup>āk, brother of the well-known Tunisian historian <sup>c</sup>Uthmān al-Ka<sup>cc</sup>āk and although the first story was unsigned, the language and style are so similar as to suggest the same authorship.

Perhaps the most important reason for the absence of any other story during the rest of the twenties after these two didactic pieces was the transient nature of the Tunisian journals and dailies of this decade. For example, a monthly journal entitled al-Badr edited by Muḥammad al-<sup>c</sup>Arabī al-Mushairiqī only published ten issues during

its two-year life (1920-1922) and its successor al-<sup>c</sup>Arab under the editorship of Zain al-<sup>c</sup>Ābidīn al-Sanūsī only published four issues in 1923 before it was banned by the administration. It went underground and published each issue under different titles such as al-Maḡālāt, Maḡālāt al-<sup>c</sup>Arab and Laṭā'if al-<sup>c</sup>Arab until it finally ceased publication in 1926.<sup>1</sup> The monthly al-Munīr which was devoted to cultural, literary, economic, political and current issues, like its predecessors, merely appeared twelve times in 1925 and al-Tha<sup>c</sup>alabī's monthly al-Fajr was no less ill-fated, being able to publish only from 1920-1922.<sup>2</sup>

The position, however, improved from 1930 onwards with the appearance of periodical publications such as al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī, al-Afkār and al-Jam<sup>c</sup>īya all of which showed a remarkable interest in literature.

Zain al-<sup>c</sup>Ābidīn al-Sanūsī's al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī<sup>3</sup> was very active in reviving the literary interests of its readers. It did this by publishing historical and literary articles about the Eastern Arab world and the West (which here includes Russia and America) and introducing the latest books in various languages.

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1. Ibn <sup>c</sup>Āshūr, al-Harakat..., op.cit., pp. 125/126.
  2. A. Van Leeuwen, 'Index des Publications Périodiques Parues en Tunisie (1874-1954)' in IBLA, Tome XVIII, 1955, p. 153.
  3. It first appeared as al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam in Jan, 1930 and after the Feb. issue, it changed its title to al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī in March. Throughout 1930, it was published monthly but in 1932 which its editor regarded as the review's third year although no issue was published throughout 1931, it became a weekly and continued so, with some irregularity until '36.

It was particularly active in publishing short stories translated from other languages, thus encouraging Tunisians to write on the model of these translated works. In one case, it reprinted Egyptian Mahmūd Taimūr's short story entitled Hasan Aghā.<sup>4</sup>

There were articles like 'A look at Contemporary European Literature'<sup>5</sup> in which the characteristics of the short stories written by masters of the same genre such as Emile Zola, Anatole France and Paul Bourget were examined and translations of short stories by English, Irish, Spanish, French and Russian authors. It also encouraged lively discussions of the genre among its Tunisian writers so that we find articles by Muhammad<sup>c</sup> Abd al-Khāliq (al-Bashrūsh) on 'The Story in Arabic Literature'<sup>6</sup>; 'The Story as it Ought to be Understood'<sup>7</sup> and others by al-Tijānī b. Sālim on 'The Story and its Relationship to History'<sup>8</sup> and 'Narrative Fiction'.<sup>9</sup>

These two Tunisians had definite views in which they disagreed with each other on the nature of the story. While al-Tijānī b. Sālim believed that the writer should be functional in his approach to the story, choosing his hero from the populace, analysing his natural attitudes and reactions in various circumstances and making him

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4. al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī, Yr 3, No. 27, 10/10/32, p.11.

5. Ibid., Yr.3, No.36, 6/3/33, p.2.

6. Ibid., Yr.3, No.13, 6/6/32, p.3.

7. Ibid., Yr.3, No.19, 25/7/32.

8. Ibid., Yr.3, No. 3, 7/4/32.

9. Ibid., Yr.3, No. 7, 17/4/32.



triumph over all odds in the end in order to provide a moral lesson for his readers. Muhammad <sup>°</sup>Abd al-Khāliq believed in the fundamental freedom of the author to choose his characters from any class of the society and regarded as a "faulty understanding" of the nature of the story any talk of "subjecting the story to the service of the nation alone because art must be absolutely free, not bound by these fetters which restrict journalists and sociologists...."<sup>10</sup>

In their articles, both of them displayed a thorough knowledge of the genre and showed that they were familiar with French writers and critics of that time.

Only a few of the journal's short story contributors signed their real names under their stories. These were Mustafā Khraîf, Muhammad <sup>°</sup>Abd al-Khāliq, al-Bashrūsh, al-Tijānī b. Sālīm, <sup>°</sup>Abd al-<sup>°</sup>Azīz al-Wuslātī, <sup>°</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>°</sup>ājī and Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī. The other stories were published under various pseudonyms.

## 2 - Mustafā Khraîf

He was born in the Southern Tunisian oasis town of Nefta in 1909. He memorised the Qur'ān in a kuttāb in his home town after which he went to the capital where he studied first at the Zaitūna 'mosque-university' in 1926 and later in al-Khaldūniya Institute.<sup>11</sup> He died in 1957.

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10. Ibid., Yr. 3, No.19, 25/7/32, p.6.

11. Zāin al-<sup>°</sup>Abidīn al-Sanūsī, op.cit., Vol.II, p.271.

In the capital, he came in contact with other talented Tunisian youths of the thirties such as al-Shābbī and al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī. He became closely acquainted with the latter to such an extent that in 1936, they both collaborated with Bairam in editing a short-lived newspaper called al-Surūr.

Mustafā Khraīf was first and foremost a poet but he tried his hand with some degree of success in short story writing. His first short story entitled Dumū<sup>c</sup> al-Qamar was published in al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī<sup>12</sup> in 1930 but after this he turned his attention to poetry and did not publish his next story entitled al-Hājj <sup>c</sup>Alī until 1944.<sup>13</sup> His latest works entitled Khū 'l-Qahwājī, al-Thaluth, Bābā 'l-Hājj, Dahīyat al-Mujtama<sup>c</sup> and al-Hājj Khudra al-Bawwāb, were all published between 1954 and 1956 in al-Zaitūna newspaper.

'The Tears of the Moon' (Dumū<sup>c</sup> al-Qamar) is about a poor man whose lover is forced to marry a rich cousin. She dies as a result of her separation from him and he too commits suicide by jumping down from the top of a palm tree. The narrator of the story is one Sālīh and the forlorn lover is named <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmān Sāsī. The story is cast, like many of Guy de Maupassant's short

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12. al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī, Yr.1, No.8, Oct.1930, p.30.

13. al-Mabāhith, No.4, July 1944. The story was published under the pseudonym of 'al-Jāhiz al-Saghīr' but Khraīf's authorship of the story is indicated in Qisas, No3, 1967.

stories,<sup>14</sup> in form of a story within a story.

The theme of the story may be summarised in the words of <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmān b. Sāsī mid-way through the story when talking to a friend about his lover's plight.

He asks : "Can't she tell them that she does not want anyone beside me?" to which his friend replies :

"Hush...sh...sh! Do you want your fiancée to be killed? They will certainly kill her if she shows the slightest indication of her preference for a spouse...Don't be a fool, my friend. Go about your affairs cautiously."

<sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmān Sāsī's final words are :

"It seems to me that the whole world has gone bleak! Only death offers me an escape... What? My dear friend, can such a thing happen? Will they force my girl to marry a man she does not love? She will no doubt be miserable...I...I can't stand the distress".

Mustafā Khraîf's second story entitled al-Hājj <sup>c</sup>Alī published in al-Mabāhith was actually little more than a collection of anecdotes on the life of the hero al-Hājj <sup>c</sup>Alī, an ex-serviceman who returns to his village on the Algerian/Tunisian border. He is appointed a messenger in a government office. He parades the streets in his army uniform. Many of his habits are considered foreign by his fellow villagers.

One can easily recognise the influence of the author's friend al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī on him in this work. He goes for the

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14. M.Laurie's Guy de Maupassant-Short Stories, London, 1967, contains many examples of this kind of technique. See for example pages 78-92 for the story 'Le Rose de Mme Huson' in which the main tale is preceded and anticipated by a shorter story.

strangest characteristics and incidents in the life of his hero and humourously portrays him as an odd-man-out in the village. Whenever the pious and kind-hearted

°Ali attends community prayers in the mosque (and he never misses any prayer) the imām would "invoke Allah's protection from a man who prays in Christian attire."

He becomes the 'doctor' and amulet maker for the villagers.

"It is worth noting that he treats whoever comes to him, free of charge and he also visits the sick free of charge but with regards to the charms and amulets, the cost must be paid in advance because this payment is fundamental to the efficacy of the medicine...He prepares remedies for all kinds of illnesses, giving away part of them and retaining the remaining for his own patients who come from all places. He is also a 'veterinary surgeon' and is never baffled by animal diseases, nay, he experiments by giving laxatives to his own goat to make it produce more milk. He has a wonderful gift for explaining the causes of diseases and their treatments. He has a donkey called 'Sa°Id' which he feeds with bread every morning and addresses in French language. He also rides it and gives it treatment when sick."

He is the honorary mu'adhdhin of the village. One day, he has giddiness and gets up before midnight and without seeing what time the clock indicates, he goes to the minaret to make the call to prayers. When the mistake is brought to his notice, he returns to the minaret and shouts in the same tone as the call to prayers : "Pardon me, Oh community of Muhammad, I am miiiiii.....staken!"

The story has no plot but it gives an interesting description of al-Hājj °Ali's type of ex-servicemen in the countryside especially after World War I, when some of them after being demobilised, used their smattering

knowledge of the outside world for their own personal benefit by playing on the ignorance and gullibility of their fellow peasants.

Mustafā Khraïf's stories have a peculiar country-side flavour about them and this sometimes leads to excessive romanticism such as when depicting the character of Sālih the narrator of Dumū<sup>c</sup> al-Qamar who thinks<sup>of</sup> the regular flow of waters on clean white sand, the rustling of the palm-leaves, the sound of the nightingale's song and the twittering of the pigeons and the enthusiastic songs of the birds as constituting "a kind of music which delights the soul and inspires it with beautiful sweet dreams" From Sālih's point of view, "the stream walks with dignity without the faintest noise as if it was aware of its majesty and the credit due to it from the people; nay, as if it knew their lives, the life of these fields and birds all depended on it and so it has set out to walk proudly and silently, listening to the songs of the birds as if these constituted its troops' music..."

Mustafā Khraïf chose an oasis as the milieu for his first story and has a theme which was a favourite one among most Arab writers of that time, namely that of the oppressed love-stricken pair who were not allowed to marry because of the poverty of the boy and the fact that the girl was not free to marry a boy of her choice. His later stories, however, are much more lighthearted

although lacking in a proper plot.<sup>15</sup> He had a flare for unconventional characters in the countryside. He can be regarded as one of those who blazed the trail for the writing of short stories with a typical Tunisian setting and theme although his influence in the field of poetry is more predominant.

### 3 - Muhammad <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Khāliq (al-Bashrūsh)<sup>16</sup>

Al-Bashrūsh was born in 1911 in Dār Sha<sup>c</sup>bān village near al-Hammāmāt. He was trained as a teacher and taught in many different Tunisian towns and villages. He contributed to numerous Tunisian newspapers and journals from the early thirties till his death in 1945.<sup>17</sup>

As previously indicated, Muhammad <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Khāliq was familiar with French literature and had a thorough grasp of the art of story-writing. In his articles : 'The Story as it Should be Understood', 'The Story in Arabic Literature' and 'The Story and Author's Detachment' (al-Qiṣṣa wa 'l-Tajarrud fīhā),<sup>18</sup> he made numerous references to the works of French writers such as Anatole France (1844-1924) and Paul Bourget (1852-1935). His stories published in al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī included

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15. All of Khraïf's post 1940 stories were singly re-issued in illustrated pamphlet form for children in 1969 by al-Sharika al-Tūnisīya lil-Tawzī<sup>c</sup>. The story al-Hājj <sup>c</sup>Alī becomes al-Hājj al-Zayyān in this children's series.
  16. The surname is put in brackets because it was not always used by this writer. Sometimes he merely signed Muhammad <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Khāliq' and at other times he wrote his full name.
  17. Muḥammad al-Hulaiwī, Fī 'l-Adab al-Tūnisī, op.cit, p.107
  18. al-Ālam al-Adabī, Yr 3, No.13, 6/6/32, p.3 and No.19, 25/7/32.

'Aḥmad Sharūda's Wife', 'al-Tayyib Bū °Adhīr, '°Alī °Ayyārī' and 'Who is the Enchanter'.

'Aḥmad Sharūda's Wife'<sup>19</sup> is about the agony of Sharūda's wife and daughter arising from the strict moral code of the countryside. On a cold dark night, the two of them sit by the fireside in their small hut, unable to participate in the drum-accompanied merriment of their neighbour whose daughter is getting married the following day. Sharūda has recently died leaving nothing behind for his family except a small hut. His daughter has once been betrothed but as he had no money for the ceremony, the marriage had been repeatedly postponed until the prospective husband of the girl called off the engagement. Since then, no one has called at their door to ask for the girl in marriage.

She is now 30 years old and still unmarried. She dejectedly asks her mother: "When shall I marry?" to which the equally sad mother answers: "That's in Allah's hand, child". She says in a tone of helpless resignation: "I shall die of celibacy!" and her mother tries to console her by saying: "Allah abides with the patient ones."

To sustain themselves, mother and daughter start working as farm hands until the girl suddenly shuts herself indoors and people begin to wonder why they have

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19. Ibid., Yr.3, No.5, 4/4/32, pp.5f.

not been seeing her. When asked, her mother says she is ill of fever but gossip soon has it that she is pregnant.

One day, an aborted foetus is found in a well and the mother and daughter are detained for three months since they are the main suspects although no one has seen them commit this offence.

When they are released after being cleared of the charges, the villagers are enraged. "Why hasn't the judge punished these murderers? Isn't this an encouragement to debauchery and immorality?" they murmur.

The woman cannot bear the taunts and the jeers and the ostracism imposed on them by their fellow-villagers. She falls ill and dies while her daughter moves to the capital to become a professional prostitute.

The story illustrates one of the possible consequences of the closely-knit village community where everyone knows or pretends to know what every other person is doing, thus giving rise to a situation rife in malicious gossips often rooted in man's tendency toward self-righteousness. The plot is good and the characters are tolerably developed.

'Al-Tayyib bū 'Adhīr'<sup>20</sup> is about the triumph of a boy and girl over the forces of tradition which enables a girl's parents to decide who their daughter is to marry.

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20. Ibid., Yr.3, No.16, 27/6/32, p.6.



The story begins with a description of the setting sun, the approach of darkness and the activities that accompany this time of the day in a village.

Si <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Barwāl goes to the village chief to complain that his honour and prestige have been soiled and the chief promises to look into his complaint which is in connection with a sexual relationship between his daughter and al-Tayyib bū <sup>c</sup>Adhīr. The villagers' sympathy is with the girl's father who is regarded by them as a "pious....and harmless" person. They are incensed against the "sons of this age who have no respect for religion."

The following day, al-Tayyib bū <sup>c</sup>Adhīr is detained in the local prison to await transfer to the prison in the capital at a later date. This event becomes the talk of the village that night among people gathered in small groups around their lantern light and gramophone records. Some say that he raped her while others argue that she consented in order to spite her father who wants her to marry a seventy-year-old wealthy man.

The boy's father sells his land in order to obtain money to feed himself and to fight for his son's release. He struggles hard "but in vain until it dawns on him that success in the world is dependent on material possession, not on the strength of truth and not on the power of the law either." After spending almost everything he has, a settlement is effected between the

families and the boy is released.

One summer forenoon "when you only see fowls walking here and there; when you only hear kuttāb boys reciting verses of the Qur'ān from far away places; when you only hear the buzzing of flies around you" and when those at home "are the very young and the very old with their heads drooped, thinking of bye-gone days and their happy days, and now sorrowfully and painfully expecting their approaching day of death", Sī<sup>c</sup> Alī al-Barwāl's daughter walks past, ostensibly to take food to her father in the farm but the boy has been waiting for her. She runs in and they quickly conclude the marriage pact.

"News quickly spreads to the inhabitants and talks and abuses and pessimistic speculations become rife... This one says : 'the Hour has arrived and the world is about to cease'. Another one declares that belief in Allah's religion is weak in people's mind and prays : 'May Allah spare us and not bring on us the Last Hour'."

All of them agree on the nearness of the end of the world in divine vengeance against "These downright ugly acts".

The boy and the girl however announce : "We are mutually in love and no force, not even the force of poverty and traditions can destroy our love or separate us. Nature has made us husband and wife for life. Why do you want to destroy what nature has done?"

This incident destroys the reputation of Sī<sup>c</sup> Alī, the girl's father and he becomes the laughing-stock of the village. He becomes grief-stricken and consequently dies.

In this story, the author approaches the problems of the rural society from a different angle - that of the woman's freedom to choose her marriage mate. In Tunisia, as in many African and Asian societies, a girl's parents have a major say in the choice of her husband. Where the traditional Arab custom of the first cousin's pre-emptive right to the girl is not exercised, the parents may give her to the highest bidder who, in some cases, may be old enough to be the father or even the grand-father of the girl he is marrying. This problem, therefore, occupied many Tunisian story-writers of that period apart from social reformers like al-Tāhir al-Haddād who studied the general position of Tunisian women in a book entitled Imra'atunā.<sup>21</sup>

Muhammad <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Khāliq employs his excellent descriptive ability to give the reader a picture of the countryside. In describing the setting of the second day's events, he writes :

"...the sun was setting peacefully, clothing the humble gardens and farm-lands with a charming robe... the night was ascending into the throne of the sky and had started to spread its darkness over the Universe; you could see at this moment of the passing day and the approaching night, a scenery of quietude and splendour which inspires the soul with pleasure and happiness... and engenders sweet silent dreams.

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21. al-Tāhir al-Haddād, Imra'atunā fī 'l-sharī<sup>c</sup> a wa 'l-Mujtama<sup>c</sup>, Tunis. 1930.

"The road leading to Nābul was full of villages and flanked on both sides by fields of pepper and garden mallows; you could see among these villagers those returning from the sea-side after spending the evening giving their soul a rest from its toil during the daytime which they spent building some houses or castle or watering their trees and vegetables. The splendour of this hour penetrates into the hearts of these simple folks and you could see them walking quietly, not making any sound except silent whispers to their soul asking it to enjoy the beauty of sunset. From time to time, some cars pass swiftly, blarring their horns for people to give way and leaving behind a cloud of dust; this car heading for Tunis loaded with pepper and vegetable and that car going to 'Banū Khayyār' and the next one to Nābul carrying some European madams and mademoiselles."

The story is padded with many such descriptions of natural scenery which, taken alone, are very fascinating but out of proportion in a short story of this length. It may also be added that in the author's attempt to be realistic and to press home the theme of the story, he makes his heroes - <sup>c</sup>Alī Bū <sup>c</sup>Adhīr and his girl friend - do and say things which would have been almost impossible to be true in their environment. It is doubtful whether that kind of brazen-faced abduction could have been tolerated and encouraged as portrayed in the story especially in the early thirties when the story was written.

In the story entitled <sup>c</sup>Alī al-<sup>c</sup>Ayyārī<sup>22</sup>, Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Khāliq delves into the kind of simple and rather naïve beliefs that are to be encountered in a sūfī zāwiya. The Shaikh of the al-<sup>c</sup>Isāwiya zāwiya falls ill and is treated by one Doctor Fox until he recovers. He after-

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22. al-<sup>c</sup>Alam al-Adabī, Yr.3, No.23, 29/8/32. p.11.

wards announces that this doctor has become a Muslim and an adherent of his order. His people believe him and all of them go to the doctor to be 'blessed' and healed. The doctor receives patients from far and wide in the countryside.

One day, the Shaikh asks <sup>C</sup>Alī al-<sup>C</sup>Ayyārī to go and pay the doctor's bill. The former claims he has no money but he is told to pay up by all means.

When <sup>C</sup>Alī is later met in town by the narrator of the story, he tells the latter of how he had been forced out of the zāwiya with a curse. His wife died and the Shaikh told him that he would die a horrible death, which, as the story has it, happens to him a day later when he is crushed by the collapsed wall of the salt mine where he has been working.

The doctor himself dies before the Shaikh but in spite of his assurance to the Shaikh that his conversion to Islam has been written into his will and the Shaikh's promise to ensure that the doctor, "a Muslim at heart", is buried according to Muslim rites and his estates divided accordingly, the dead doctor's relatives deny any knowledge of such a thing. The Shaikh himself dies and is buried and praised as pious by poets of the area.

The story is of a lesser degree of accomplishment than the earlier two but it adequately gives the reader an idea of the kind of things people talk <sup>about</sup> and believe in such a superstition-infested religious environment.

He makes ample use of conversation to bring out what is in the mind of his characters. For example, after the Shaikh announces the doctor's conversion to Islam, one of his men stands up to say: "...from the day we saw him toiling at your illness, we said to ourselves: 'There is no doubt that this is one of those who believe in my Patron Bin <sup>o</sup>Isā and here you are, Allah has confirmed our guess'". The Shaikh himself says sometimes later: "No patient is seen by Doctor<sup>o</sup>Abd al-Qahhār [the name adopted by the 'converted' doctor] without Allah curing him of his ailment."

Al-Bashrūsh's third story "Who is this Enchanter"<sup>23</sup> is about a woman who sends a small girl to invite a man who has previously not known her to meet her at the stream at midnight. The man responds to the invitation and both play around and lie on the sand while the perplexed man continues to ask the woman who she is. She gives him evasive answers: "Don't you know me?" and "I am a woman". She promises to meet him again at his request. She goes away while the man follows her with his eyes "until she disappeared and I went toward the palm-tree trunks, bathed myself in the running stream and wished I were a bird so I could swim in the emptiness of space and fly to the farthest planets. I was then embracing the Universe in enchantment."

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23. Ibid., Yr.3, No.25, 19/9/32, p.10.

He then concludes:

"I am a toy in the hands of destiny. Oh man, [take note that] in women are hidden all the mysteries and secrets of the world. I went along and returned to my house and kept asking myself until morning : 'Who is this enchanter?'"

The event is set in the last night of the year and the hero is at a loss as to what to do and where to go that night.

"Everyone is looking ahead with smile and hope but I only look backwards with distress and distrust. They are looking at this new year while I look at the one which has just been cast away. I cannot understand why people are delighted by a year whose days and nights hold in stock things they do not know. What does this new year hide and veil from me? Is it pleasure and ease or misery and calamity? Ah...I know not!"

The author was probably using the mystery woman as a symbol of many of the things that daily puzzle man as he goes through life.

Most of the stories written by Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Khāliq have the countryside community as their milieu and women as their heroines. He was a strong advocate of a truly Tunisian literature,<sup>24</sup> and by extension, a Tunisian story to reflect the Tunisian environment and Tunisian problems. He therefore treated the problem of poverty in the countryside in 'Aḥmad Sharūda's Wife'; the problem of woman's

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24. See al-Nahda newspaper for the summer of 1930. Also in an article entitled Uslūb published in al-Ālam al-Adabī, Yr,1, No.9, November 1930, he called for a Tunisian literature which must be "Tunisian in style, for it is an unpardonable sin to smother our thinking process in order to imitate certain Arabic styles..."

freedom in 'al-Ṭayyib bū <sup>°</sup>Adhīr'. He attempted to be realistic and practical in his stories although there is a tendency to make his principal characters end up in death in many cases. In <sup>°</sup>Alī al-<sup>°</sup>Ayyārī, for example, the death of the poor debtor does not add anything to the development of the story just as the father of the girl in 'al-Ṭayyib bū <sup>°</sup>Adhīr' does not need to die in order to press the theme home.

Muḥammad <sup>°</sup>Abd al-Khālīq participated with other Tunisian writers of his time in giving the story a Tunisian flavour and by his critical essays, contributed to a better understanding of the genre among his contemporaries.

#### 4 - Al-Ṭijānī b. Sālīm

He was better known for his literary criticism published in the journal al-<sup>°</sup>Ālam al-Adabī. His articles demonstrated a good understanding of the story in the principal European languages and more especially in French language. In his article entitled 'The Story and its Relationship to History' he attempted to establish a definite connection between history and the story. He asserted that both were one and the same thing until the Middle Ages when the story began to acquire a distinctive artistic form distinguishing it from history although both still continued to deal with different aspects of the same thing.



He wrote :

"...if we compared the story and history, we would find that the difference in the subject and the ultimate aim which would enable us to explain why readers preferred the story. While history deals with the life of a nation in general, the story deals with the life of one individual in special circumstances; while history relates the course of a war or revolution, we see the story narrating daily events in most of which we find ourselves involved and while we find history in its analysis of a war reminding us of the mutual struggle for ascendancy for selfish interest, expressed in internecine fighting on account of envy and racial differences, we see the story filling its pages with love, making its heroes live in the natural environment in which we live as if showing us many of our lives' pictures".<sup>25</sup>

He further expatiated on his functional approach to the story in another article entitled 'Narrative Fiction' in which he attacked Muhammad <sup>C</sup>Abd al-Khāliq's concept of the freedom of the story-writer to depict whatever aspect of human life appeals to him without bothering to use his art as a vehicle of moral and religious instructions. Al-Tījānī concluded in this second article that democracy had aided the development of the story since it offered the individual the freedom to assert and express himself.<sup>26</sup>

His story entitled, 'Is he really Mad?'<sup>27</sup> is an attempt to apply his concept of the nature of the story. It is about a man of strange and abstruse behaviour who appears

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25. al-<sup>C</sup>Ālam al-Adabī, Yr. 3, No.3, 7/4/32.

26. It may however be said that history has not completely borne out his opinion as the French and Russian writers of the 19th century did not always live under a democratic political system and yet they produced works of a considerable importance.

27. al-<sup>C</sup>Ālam al-Adabī, Yr.3, No.2, 14/3/32, p.7.

unduly worried about a neighbour's cock, the crowing of which, he claims, is disturbing his sleep although he admits that others, including his own father and the cock's owner, regard the cock as a good time-keeper and an alarm clock.

This man is generally liked in his community although people think him mad because of his abnormal ideas. When asked why he is so worried about the cock, he answers :

"The law forbids me to drink a cup of wine which could stupefy my head and yet it permits cocks to live near me and fill my ears with their hateful noise and so disturb my peace..."

Towards the end of the story, the man wonders why he is so concerned about a cock and not about death and he himself gives the answer by saying :

"the truth is that I am one hundred percent stupid like all other men with the simple difference that I know the degree of my stupidity by the extent of my ability...While others take the crowing cock as a companion in their loneliness toward the end of the night, I see it as a bad omen for my life and each time it crows, I almost jump to choke the next crowing in its throat."

The author makes simple use of conversation and the story is full of thought-provoking reflections although naïvely presented. It highlights the elements of contradiction in human nature. The hero is the kind of puzzling personality one finds in every community and his concluding remarks provide a clue to his state of mind.

5 - Muhammad al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī (Ibn Tūmart)

One of the story-writers of this period was Muhammad al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī whose only contribution to al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī entitled <sup>c</sup>Azīza<sup>28</sup> was published under the pseudonym of Ibn Tūmart.<sup>29</sup>

Al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī was a graduate of the Zaitūna 'mosque-university'. He was a journalist and contributed to many of the Tunisian newspapers of the thirties apart from editing a provincial (al-qairawānī) paper called Sabra in 1939.<sup>30</sup>

Like many young Tunisians of his generation, he led a restless life. He was unable to stick to one job or remain in one place. During the second world war, he left Tunisia for France, having been jailed for a short time by the colonial authorities for his political activities and his press attacks on them. From Paris, he went to Brazzaville where he worked as an announcer on Radio Brazzaville. He returned to Paris where he was employed by the French Radio until he committed suicide in December, 1945.

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28. Ibid., Yr. 4, No.16, 11/11/35.

29. Al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī is identified as the writer of this story in a profile of him published in al-Thurayyā; Yr.1, No.3, March 1944, page 5. See section 6 of this chapter on the incidence of pen-names in the thirties.

30. M.S.al-Jābirī, Qisaṣ, No.2, Jan.1967, p.43. This article has been helpful to me on <sup>c</sup>Arībī's other stories beside <sup>c</sup>Azīza and al-Ramād.

His °Azīza is about the promiscuous life of a young girl who began her life by being forcibly married to an old man. After she was divorced, she was again married to a young man who took her to town where she became a singer and dancer. She soon discovered that the boy was only interested in exploiting her (we are not told how) and she divorced him and gave him back his dower.

She now recollects the different men who have since come into her life without any of them giving her real happiness and satisfaction. Just recently she broke off with Sī Muḥammad after a late-night session of drinking. She has now got another man for whom she promises her lasting love.

The story might well have been based on actual experience in the life of many actresses whose frequent contacts with many members of the opposite sex due to the nature of their profession often have an adverse effect on their life and we shall later see how al-Bashīr Khraīf in one of his post-independence stories entitled Iflās has an actress character whose life is similar to that of °Azīza.

His other short stories published before the war included Laila 27 (Night 27),<sup>31</sup> Qalb lil-Kirā' (A Heart for Hire)<sup>32</sup>, Banāt al-Yawm (Girls of Today),<sup>33</sup> Hiwār fī

31. al-Sardūk, 30/4/37.

32. Ibid., 12/5/37.

33. al-Qalam al-Hurr, for 1938.

'1-Zalām (Conversation in the Dark) and al-Nahd al-Mujrim (The Delinquent Bust).<sup>34</sup>

In Laila 27, the author tells the story of a girl who, in company of another girl from her neighbourhood, begins to lead the life of a street girl on 'Night 27'. On that night, as they are both picked up by two youths in a carriage bound for the Belvédère Park, she recollects all her past and especially a suitor <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Salām whom she rejected for no obvious reasons. She now regrets all that as shown by the tears she is shedding.

In Qalb lil-Kirā', a young man is asked by a woman who claims to love him to perjure himself in a case in which she is interested. He consents but in the end, she jilts him.<sup>35</sup>

While in Brazzaville, <sup>al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī</sup> wrote his only story which falls within the period considered in the next chapter of this thesis but since it was similar to the rest of his stories, it may properly be mentioned here. The story, entitled al-Ramād (Ashes), was published in al-Mabāhith, No.10, January 1945. In it, al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī, in the first person, talks of an early morning when he is abandoned on a Brazzaville street by a girl whom he meets in a public house. He gets into conversation with

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34. Both appeared in Sabra for 1937.

35. al-Sardūk, No.5, 12/5/37.

the girl, dances with her, buys her drinks and cigarettes. It all seems to be going well for him and he feels that he has completely gained her confidence. When they both leave the public house, she just says : "Thank you" and goes her way. He is highly disappointed. When he thus finds himself alone, he recalls an incident in his childhood when he was similarly left alone. His family had planned to spend a day at the sea-side. When the rest of the family left home, he was still busy packing some of the things needed for the holiday. On getting to the railway station, he found that he had been left behind. He cried very bitterly. He concludes the story :

"Were it not for pride, the residue of adult hypocrisy, I would have filled the dance-hall with tears and sobs that night, like I did when I was young..."

Al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī's stories were a true reflection of his wild and restless life, always with the theme of sex, women and <sup>an</sup> underlying feeling of loneliness which he often made his stories' characters to express.

Like his friend <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī whose stories are considered in more details in the next chapter, his style was very conversational and often characterised by a spirit of rebellion against, and derision of, their society. In a colloquial weekly called al-Surūr founded by al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī and published only for four weeks, late in August and September 1936, al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī published

three stories written in Tunisian colloquial Arabic<sup>36</sup> in which his pungent treatment of the same theme was noticeable but his main contribution to the Tunisian story in the thirties was written in fluent classical Arabic. He used less narration and more dialogues thus carrying the story a step further than many of his contemporaries.

#### 6 - The Use of Pen-names by Tunisian Short Story Writers.

The practice of using pen-names was quite common among Tunisian short story writers and translators up to the early forties. In addition to the use of these pen-names, some of them also signed only a part of their names, such as Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Khāliq al-Bashrūsh who, beside the pseudonym al-Qarawī which is believed to have been used by him, also signed most of his short stories simple as Muḥammad <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Khāliq. Among the short story writers whose pen-names have been identified with certainty were Muṣṭafā Khraîf and Muḥammad al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī who used 'al-Jāhiz al-Ṣaghīr' and 'Ibn Tūmart' respectively.

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36. As an example of the language in these stories written in the Tunisian colloquial, the conversation at the beginning of one of these stories entitled Qash<sup>c</sup> al-Rūh in al-Surūr dated 27/9/36 goes like this:

(Give me back the book which I lent you) أعطيني كتابي الذي سفتهولك

(No I am not giving it back to you). لا مانعطيها لكش

The two most probable reasons for this practice are to be found in the attitude of their society to the genre.

Firstly, as fiction in general (including short story) is not one of the genres that constitute adab proper in the classical sense,<sup>37</sup> none of these writers would have wanted to soil, as it were, their reputation by being openly identified with such a dakhil genre.

The need for anonymity was further made necessary by the type of situations depicted in many of their stories, especially the domestic life of oppressed Tunisian womanhood which was a very touchy issue on which many of these writers would not have wanted to risk their reputation. It may be worth noting here that al-Tāhir al-Haddād ran up a wall of opposition from the traditional Tunisian scholars on account of his book Imra'atunā fī 'l-Sharī'a wa 'l-Mujtama' so much so that he was stripped of his Zaitūna diploma and of his right to teach in the mosque university.<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, many of these short story writers were beginners in the art and so some of them found it convenient to hide behind the cloak of anonymity to publish works which they thought not to be of a high standard. This view is supported by the fact that

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37. See Chapter 1 of this thesis, especially footnote 11.

38. Ibn <sup>c</sup>Ashūr al-Harakat al-Adabiya wa 'l-Fikriya fī Tūnis, Cairo, 1956, p.161.



writers like Muḥammad al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī and <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī used their real names in their stories published in the forties when they felt themselves much more competent than when they first began in the thirties.

7 - Unsigned Stories Published in al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī.

Among the stories published under various pseudonyms in al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī were <sup>c</sup>Azā' al-<sup>c</sup>Arūs (Comforting the Bridegroom)<sup>39</sup> and (Min Dahāyā 'l-Inqilāb (A Victim of Change)<sup>40</sup> by al-Muḥaddith; Khabar Akalat al-Bashar (About Cannibals)<sup>41</sup> and Imra'at <sup>c</sup>Āhira (An Adulterous Woman)<sup>42</sup> both signed 'al-Rāwī'; and finally al-Barī'a (The Innocent Girl)<sup>43</sup> and Insti<sup>c</sup>bād al-Banīn (The Enslavement of Sons)<sup>44</sup> both of which are signed 'al-Qarawī'.

'Comforting the Bridegroom' is about someone who rebels against a custom which requires a bereaved husband to remain standing in order to receive the consolation of seven hundred sympathisers.<sup>45</sup>

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39. al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī, Yr.1, No.9, Dec.1930, p.285.

40. Ibid., Yr. 1, Aug. 1930, p.184.

41. Ibid., Yr.2, No.1, March 1931, p.23.

42. Ibid., Yr.3, No.4, 28/3/32, p.69.

43. Ibid., Yr.3, No.1, 7/3/32, p.11.

44. Ibid., Yr.1, No.7, Sept.1930, p.208.

45. I enquired from many of my Tunisian friends about the prevalence of this custom and most of them said that it was not widespread. They added that while it was customary for a bereaved husband or spouse to receive people who came to sympathise with him, neither the number of sympathisers nor the posture of the bereaved was stipulated by custom. This story may therefore have been a case in which a writer allowed his imagination a free rein.

The hero is a staunch supporter of a political party and has once been exiled for his political activities. He tells a friend whom he meets at a railway station, of a bereaved spouse. The girl was his aunt's daughter. The marriage day had been fixed but had to be cancelled because of the girl having consumption.

The groom came regularly with a doctor but although the doctor was allowed in to treat her, the man was never permitted to see her. The story-teller once asked his relatives to let the man see his wife but they "rose against me as if I had become an infidel". Finally, when the girl felt that her end was near, she asked the man to be allowed to see her with her wedding gown on but this too was refused. After the girl's death, they asked the bereaved groom to put on the robe he had prepared for the wedding in order to receive the 'traditional' condolence procession. In spite of the fact that the man fainted after the fourth of the seven-hundred-long queue had reached him, they still wanted to hold him up for the ceremony until the story-teller's vigorous protest ended the man's ordeal.

The following day, when the dead girl's relatives began to talk about the bereaved groom, the story-teller interrupted and blamed them for not allowing the man to see his wife while she was still alive in spite of the fact

that he came daily with a doctor and that both man and wife would have been able to comfort each other if they had been permitted to meet. The girl's mother protested against this insinuation by saying that the man and his doctor merely came in order to recover the bridal gown which he had given her as part of the dower and concludes :

".....Beside, how could he see her before going through the marriage ceremony! Oh my God! You boys of these days have no (regard for) religion!"

The character sketch of the hero as a party enthusiast and reform-conscious patriot at the beginning of the story is quite vivid and apt although it is not quite essential to the development of the theme.

In 'A Victim of Change', the author depicts a fellow Tunisian,<sup>who,</sup> in an attempt to break free from all religious and social restrictions, overreaches himself and has himself to blame in the end.

The 'rebel' is met in the capital by an old friend. His head is bare, his collar is open and he wears a pantoufle without socks contrary to his previous strict adherence to traditional manner of dressing and his patriotic opposition to foreign customs. When asked about the reason for the change, he curses everyone in his home-town and their customs. He says:

"They have deprived me of my pleasure and they angered me with their assertion that a woman has no

right to go to the theatre".

They even once abducted his wife when he was away to the theatre. When he took her out to the theatre during the week after their marriage, there was a big hullabaloo of protest, so he finally sold his house and migrated. He now owns a villa and lives with European neighbours "who neither both about their neighbours nor spy on them". His wife, he says, has just gone out with a good friend called Monsieur 'Binazier'.

Sometime later, this same man is seen working as an attendant in a park. When told by his friend that the work is not suitable for a married man, he answers that he has divorced his wife<sup>141</sup>. He complains that his wife became rash and uncontrollable and he adds in self-condemnation :

"I have done with her what no other person would have done. I went with her to the theatre and cinema in spite of the fact that it hurt my eyes to watch it; I went with her to European quarters and I learnt the French language to please her."

On one occasion, he adds, when his aunt paid them a visit, she persistently asked to be allowed to go to a party on two consecutive nights and defiantly went out with the 'Monsieur' on the second night and this was the final straw which led to divorce. Furthermore, he soon discovered that she was pregnant.

Although he holds Monsieur 'Binazier's' recklessness

responsible for egging on his wife, he blames his own lax observation of religious and social norms for this incident saying :

"...but are we not Muslims before anything else? Doesn't the zeal for Islam forbid us to leave our women in the hands of foreign men for nights-out?"

The author successfully illustrates the dangers of blind imitation of foreign social habits although the setting of the incident which leads to the divorce story seems rather artificial as it is hard to see why it is unsuitable for a married man to work as a park attendant. The link here is weak and the author could well have left his readers to deduce the blame due to the 'rebel' instead of making him say it.

'The Cannibals' is the story of a Tunisian student in a French University, He is approached by a Russian girl from one of the aristocratic families liquidated by the Russian revolution who asks him to suggest an Arab country where she can spend her summer vacation practising her spoken Arabic. He suggests his country Tunisia but to his horror, the girl rejects his suggestion, saying :

"Excuse me please, my wish is to go to a country where I shall have no fear for my safety and in your country, there are those who eat human flesh and find it very pleasant! I don't want to be a victim of one of your negroes who relish this kind of flesh and so..."

The boy's protests and efforts to correct this wrong impression are to no avail. She wants Algeria or Egypt or some other place.

The story is no more than a paragraph from the memoirs of a student, with no plot and no easily discernible objective. It might, of course, have been written to refute one of the fallacies about Tunisia and about the negro race which were given credence in Europe in the early decades of this century.<sup>46</sup>

'Adulterous Woman' is about a man who divorces his wife due to unfounded complaints. The list of complaints against her includes going on a visit to a girl-friend's father (he says that she claimed to have gone to visit her girl-friend); correspondence with her first cousin who would have married her (he admits that she said there was nothing to hide between them and apart from promising to stop corresponding with him, she offered to recall all her letters to him in order to prove her innocence); and regularly going to a public bath against his advice.

Seven months later, he is forced to admit the real cause of the divorce. He has a sister who has been a divorcee for five years living with him. She has been the one behind most of the complaints against his brother's first wife and now that he has taken another wife, she has started to complain against her also.

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46. See for example, Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics, J. Hastings (ed.) Vol. III, p.203. "...Capt. Hudes, at the meeting of the British Association in 1895, said, 'The Negro takes human flesh as food purely and simply, and not from any religious reasons...'"

The man says:

"I divorced my wife on account of her...Let her go away and live with the Devil! Even jinns can't tolerate her".

The author ingeniously solves the mystery of the first divorce. The reader is given a picture of the kind of intrigues that go on within the home in a society where all or most members of the extended family system can live under the same roof and the lot of a wife in this kind of situation.

'The Innocent Girl' and 'The Enslavement of Sons' both have the same theme - that of the lack of freedom for sons and daughters in the choice of their marriage partners.

'The Innocent Girl' is about a girl, who in spite of her wish to marry a young man "in the bloom of youth like herself" is forced by her parents to marry the sixty-year-old village chief, Sī al-Tāhir, in order to enjoy the prestige of being the in-laws of the village chief. This village chief himself has a daughter whom he refuses to give in marriage to many suitors because they cannot offer a dower befitting a chief's daughter. He finally marries her to his nephew who has just returned from the army for a dower of ten thousand francs whereas he offers only a thousand francs for the girl he has just married. His daughter's unhappiness over the marriage adversely affects her

mental health while his young wife soon poisons him because she is not happy to be married to him. She is condemned and hanged.

The plot of the story is thin and the issues involved are oversimplified. The author falls into the mistake of presenting a contrasting picture of an extremely wicked chief on one hand and on the other, a pair of innocent girls all of whose actions are attributed to their lack of freedom to choose their husbands. The author's opinion comes to the fore at the end of the story when, after echoing the public verdict that the girl is a debauchee who killed her husband in order to be free and that she has been justly punished, he adds : "but the innocent girl has gone to where all men go while her guilty parents are left free...."

'The Enslavement of Sons' is about a boy who is expelled from home by his parents for refusing to marry his first cousin.

He is found sitting helplessly on the sea-side by an old friend to whom he relates the story of his expulsion from home. His parents, he says, consider it a duty on him to marry the girl whose parents, they claim, have turned down all other suitors because "she is for you". To make matters worse for him, the parents of another girl<sup>whom</sup> he loves have asked for a prohibitive



sum as her dower and since he hasn't been able to pay this sum, "she has been married off recently like a humble slave, a victim of greed and customs, led to the slaughter like a goat."

Like the 'Innocent Girl', the plot is thin. The author merely makes his hero say things which couldn't have been put differently in an essay. For example, he writes:

"...Marriage is one of our greatest social problems and doubtlessly, the fact that it is never based on mutual love is the most serious factor...love among Tunisians is an unforgivable crime and if a girl shows her love, she is labelled a whore and a debauchee who will be excluded by Allah from His paradise and they enjoin upon everyone to shun this one on whom there is said to be Allah's indignation; and the poor girl endures all kinds of hatred and thus brings shame on her family, a sense of shame which continues for generations...There are also hearts that know no pity for a girl and treat her like an oxen or sheep so that the unlucky girl cannot express her personal inclination and has no right to say that she wants to be happy for the rest of her life....As a girl is blindly subjected to the tyranny of her parents, so also is a boy not free from his parents unless he rebels and I don't think that such rebellion can be regarded as disobedience because a son has a right to be free to choose his wife and by usurping this right, parents are goading their children to rebel...Perhaps we ought to do something about parents who think that they are doing good in this manner even if that means rebellion, in the interest of the Tunisian society. If a boy can rebel, a poor girl who is in love cannot rebel because she is weak and so she considers it obligatory to bow to tradition..."

The author is even more direct at the end of the story when he adds :

"...Here ends the story of Ahmad b. Wā'ir (the hero of the story who is driven away from home) and I said to myself : 'when will dowers be lowered? Girls have become commercial commodities from which profits are expected...."

In an article by Muḥammad al-Jābirī published in Qisas No.2, January 1967, he stated that the pseudonyms under which these stories were published were known to have been used by Zain al-<sup>c</sup>Ābidīn al-Sanūsī, al-Bashrūsh, al-Wuslātī and al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī and other lesser-known contributors to the journal.

The theme and style of 'The Enslavement of Sons' and 'The Innocent Girl' appear to point to al-Bashrūsh as their author. His other stories considered earlier in this chapter betray a strong tendency to portray the lot of the poor and oppressed, many of whom he had ample opportunities to live with during his teaching life in the Tunisian rural areas. These two unsigned stories fall into that category.

Of the remaining ones, 'Comforting the Bride-Groom' and 'A Victim of Change' under the pseudonym of al-Muḥaddith are attributed to Zain al-<sup>c</sup>Ābidīn al-Sanūsī the editor of al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī by al-Jābirī in the above-mentioned article. In support of this attribution, I have also found another story entitled Hadīth Shābb Muslim ma<sup>c</sup>a Bārīsiyāt Hisān published in 1930 under the same pseudonym and when this story was reprinted in al-Nadwa Journal in 1955, it was signed by al-Sanūsī who obviously gave permission for this reprint.

In the two stories, the author's message is clear - it is a note of caution to over-zealous imitators of

foreign customs and ideas which encourage contempt for local traditional way of life and that is similar to the theme of the story reprinted in 1955.

#### 8 - Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī

The other fiction contributors to the journal al-<sup>o</sup>Ālam al-Adabī included the famous Tunisian poet al-Shābbī whose stories, as would be expected, were characterised by the romanticism of his poetry. A typical example of them was entitled Rūh Thā'ira (A Rebellious Spirit)<sup>47</sup> in which he stressed the need to have a firm and positive approach to life in spite of the inherent weakness of human nature.

It is cast in the form of an encounter on a sea-side resort between al-Shābbī and an acquaintance who is a poet of note and a man of letters. They start off with a discussion of the beauty of nature and its value as a book of knowledge comparable to printed books. They soon see a boy leading about a monkey which rehearses tricks which it has been taught for the amusement of tourists. This sight inspires the poet-friend (who seems to be none other than the alter ego of al-Shābbī) to observe :

"Everyone in his journey through life's rugged paths drags along with <sup>him</sup> his peculiar type of monkey...With one it is his weak-mindedness and his groundless assertions; with another it is his pride and self-delusions, and with

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47. al-<sup>o</sup>Ālam al-Adabī, Yr.3, No.8, 30/4/32.

yet another it is his meanness of nature and his vileness of character...and many such-like are the types of metaphoric monkeys which people drag about without knowing..."

He finally likens the world to a beautiful woman who will not give herself to "one who stands before her weeping, imploring and complaining in anguish or one who stands under her window in moon-light singing the praise of her charming eyes, her fine lips and her fascinating hands, or chanting the most pathetic songs and the sweetest poems...she will rather give herself to the strong tyrant who carries her off her feet in his firm arms and tells her: "You are mine!"

The positive approach to life advocated in this story is similar to a line from one of the poet's poems in which he reports an imaginary conversation with Mother Earth and receives this reply from her :

"I bless among mankind the ambitious type  
Who delights in facing danger,  
I despise him who doesn't move with time,  
But sits contentedly in a room".<sup>48</sup>

## 9 - Translations

Although many foreign non-Arabic short stories were translated and published during this period, only one translator, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-<sup>c</sup>Azīz al-Wuslātī signed his real name under the stories translated by him.

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48. Zain al-<sup>c</sup>Ābidīn al-Sanūsī, Abū 'l Qāsim al-Shābbī-Hayātuhu wa Adabuhu, Tunis, 1956, p.62.

Al-Wuslātī was born in 1905. He obtained a diploma in Arabic and French which qualified him to work as a translator with the French colonial government in Tunisia.<sup>49</sup>

While his translations covered a wide range of topics, he nevertheless showed a marked interest in stories about women in society. For examples, al-Sahra<sup>50</sup> is about a woman whose daughters discovered from her letters during the first night after her death that her life had not been as 'saintly' as she seemed during her lifetime. Al-Wadā<sup>c51</sup> tells the story of a woman who meets one of her former lovers after many years of married life. She looks a completely changed woman, and her faded beauty seems to have been transferred to her eldest daughter. She complains that while man retains his handsomeness till death, woman quickly loses her beauty with child-bearing.

The majority of al-Wuslātī's stories, and indeed, most of the translated stories published in al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī were from French sources although beside merely stating that a translated story was, for example, 'from French' (<sup>c</sup>an al-Faransiya), no further information was often given on the precise source of any translated story.

Like many translators, al-Wuslātī himself made some attempts to compose some stories of his own. An example of these was his lakum Fannukum wa lī Fannī<sup>52</sup> which was

49. al-Thurayyā, No.10, Yr.2, Oct.1945, p.5.

50. al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī, No.7, Sept.1930.

51. Ibid., Yr.3, No.15, 20/6/35.(52) Ibid, Yr.4, No.13, 2/9/35

an unsuccessful attempt to depict the life of a young woman singer in the Tunisian society of the thirties. This was a further indication of his commitment to the issue of the position of women in society. Artistically, his original composition were failures as his characters did not develop.

10 - Short Stories in other Periodicals beside  
al-<sup>C</sup>Ālam al-Adabī

The effect of the interest generated in short story by al-<sup>C</sup>Ālam al-Adabī was most evident in the numerous newspapers that sprang up in Tunisia between 1936 and the beginning of the second world war as a result of the relaxation by the colonial authorities of the stringent rules to which the local press was subjected.

Many lesser-known writers published one or two stories each in these newspapers and immediately disappeared from the scene like the newspapers themselves.

Among these writers were <sup>C</sup>Alī al-Jandūbī who published a story entitled Māmiya in al-Tatawwur al-Ijtimā<sup>C</sup>ī, No.2, 1936. It was the story of a girl named Māmiya who fled from home due to repressive parental control.

Al-Hādī 'l-<sup>C</sup>Ubaida published a story entitled Fatūma in al-Qalam al-Hurr of November 11, 1938 about a girl named Fatūma who was forced by her family to marry an old man and they further contrived to make her bear a

son to inherit the old man's property. The child turned out to be too dark-skinned to have come from the man's loins and when the oldman discovered the trick played on him, he divorced the girl as a reprisal.

Even the weekly al-Zamān which had been in existence before al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī began to publish stories occasionally. One of the few stories it published was entitled Najāṭ by Muḥammad Zarrūq. It is about a young man named Muṣṭafā whose aristocratic, class-conscious father objects to his plan to marry a commoner called Najāt. Muṣṭafā's obstinacy and his friend's persuasion fail to change his father's mind. Muṣṭafā finally falls ill. The story ends with him saying to a friend :

"I am miserable...Najāṭ is my life...Najāṭ is my hope...I cannot bear to see her become another man's wife. If it be Fate's will that I do not get out of this bed except on a hearse, all I request from you is that you visit my grave and give me news of the disappearance of the wicked aristocratic system and its replacement by equality among all the classes of the society..."

The theme of all these stories is not different from that of most of the stories in al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī - namely : social injustice and inequality of opportunities.

The only exception to this general theme was the series of maqāmāt published in al-Shabāb,<sup>53</sup> one of the

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53. This weekly was founded by Maḥmūd Bairam and published only 20 issues from November 1936 to March 1937.

mushroom papers which sprang up in 1936/37.

The series was about one of the 'petite bourgeoisie' of the Tunisian society of the thirties - the Union of Pall-bearers - nicknamed mrūqīya.<sup>54</sup> Written in seven short episodes, it traced the picturesque language, a rift within this union which leads to its eventual breakup.

The stories are very revealing about the mentality of this 'petite bourgeoisie' of the Zaitūna-educated élite of whom it is a critique.

The whole series was written in the style of the classical Arabic maqāmāt in which rhyming, phrase balancing and the use of unfamiliar words, played an important part. This is more noticeable in episode five,<sup>55</sup> where the author combined the maqāmāt style and language with the cryptic riddle language of the soothsayer. To the landed gentleman from Jarjīs, he says :

54. This nickname, derived from the classical word marāq (broth, gravy), implied greed on the part of the pall-bearers who usually demanded plenty of food and drinks from bereaved families as part payment for their services in connection with the burial.

55. This is the episode in which Shaikh Dawwāra, in rebellion against his colleagues in the Pall-bearers' Union, sets himself up as a fortune-teller. His clients include a landed gentleman from Jarjīs with a case pending in court; a notary with a love problem; a boy who is too impatient to wait for his father's death to inherit and a woman whose husband has been missing for a long time.



امامك ظلام \* ومنصة فوقها حكام \* وحوله اخصام \* ولكنك سوف لا تباليهم  
لان يد الله فوق ايديهم \* وستعود بالسلامة \* الى بلدك بلغتك من الفرحه  
في يدك .

to the notary with a love problem he gives the counsel:

نريد سلوى ولكن \* السهم في القلب ساكن \* صبر يطول ووعد مطول فيا  
حسرة للعاشقين \* اذا قضاوا العمرين الرجاء والانيه \* اذهب ايها العاشق  
السقيم وخذ حقنة من تراب قبر قديم \* واجعله في كيس صغير من جلد  
ذنب البعير ، واجعله تحت ابطك \* ثم اكتب لها مكتوبا بخطك تاتيك  
منقادة ترتني امامك على الوسادة .

And he assures the impatient youth:

ارى ضيقا بعده فسحة \* وحرمانا بعده منحة \* وستمشي في جنازة \*  
تخرج منها الى جوازة .

The deserted woman also receives a similar ray of hope:

القلب مشغول بذكر من الذكور حفظناه فضيعناه \* ورقعناه ، فقطعنا \* لم  
نفتنه في البحر ففاتنا في البر \* ولم نبعه بالتبر فباعنا بالتبن \* ولكنه سيطوف  
الكون \* ويجرب بنات حواء من كل جنس ولون \* ثم يعود الى حبيب القلب وهو  
الكون \* ويجرب بنات حواء من كل جنس ولون \* ثم يعود الى حبيب القلب وهو  
كالقلب . \*

The author successfully portrays in his depiction of Shaikh Dawwāra the gradual withdrawal of many individuals like him from strict adherence to the traditional way of life such as that of the Qur'ān reciter in the mosque or at a burial ceremony because this was becoming insufficient to provide money for their day-to-day expenses. After becoming a soothsayer and diviner, many of the Zaitūna-educated élite visit him for consultation which is an evidence of the double life that this class often leads.

Like many other stories written at this time, these maqāmāt were not signed but it is most probable that they were written by Maḥmūd Bairam, the editor of the paper. He was one of a group of young men, which included al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī and al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī, who were not prepared to be bound by any traditional sanctions and were openly contemptuous of the bourgeoisie.

## 11 - Conclusions

In the period between 1930 and 1936, there emerged what could be called al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī 'school' of Tunisian short story writers. Among the distinguishing marks of this 'school' was its better acquaintance with European, especially French and Russian, masters of the genre as evidenced by the learned essays published by writers like al-Bashrūsh, al-Tījānī b. Sālīm and Sanūsī. The second and most important mark of this 'school' was its remarkable degree of originality which differentiated them from their predecessors - the pioneers of the genre who are discussed in the preceding chapter. Their originality consists in their strict adherence to the realism of their age which they portrayed with picturesque effect and vividness. Thus we find the country-side peasant with his/her problems of poverty, lack of privacy and superstitions as well as the general problem of Tunisian womanhood who were subject to male tyranny, depicted in all of al-Bashrūsh's stories; the alarm of the more conservative elements in the Tunisian society of the thirties at the imitation of foreign cultures, customs and tastes by some of their countrymen is sounded in al-Sanūsī's stories published under the pseudonym of al-Muḥaddith; and at the end of this call for caution and conservatism come the stories by al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī and the maqāmāt believed to have been written by Bairam. The

latter works which were all published between 1936 and 1940 reveal a bohemian tendency which was intended to ridicule all the social and religious values which meant much to the traditional élite. For example, the characters of al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī's stories would go to cinemas and dance halls (<sup>c</sup>Azīza), drink alcohol, prostitute openly and even perjure themselves in court (Laila 27) and (al-Ramād), all of which made them anti-social from the point of view of the traditional élite whose attitude was echoed in one Maqāmat al-Sīnīmā'iyya published in Jarīda al-Sardūk, No.2, 14th April, 1937. When invited to cinema, he said :

يا قوم لقد قضيت حياتي بين المحبرة والدفترو ساخت العمر بجانب المحراب  
والمنبر فلا تأخذوني الى مكان يحط من قدرة العلماء والامجاد ويلحقني بالسفلة  
والاوغاد كطبرنات الخمر التي تشوى الكبود والمرقاز على الجمـر....."

Although all of them endeavoured to use the objective style of writers like Maupassant whereby they depicted the social realism around them just as they saw it, al-Sanūsī and al-Bashrūsh often got so emotionally involved toward the end of some of their stories, as in the latter's Istī<sup>c</sup>bād al-Banīn<sup>56</sup>, that they turned the conclusion into a sermon on social reform. It seemed that al-Sanūsī, the editor of al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī was

aware of this defect (from which he himself was not free) as he commented in the editorial of his journal's September 1930 issue saying :

"We are very happy to note the spread of the interest in fiction-writing among the rising generation of Tunisians.. (however) most of what we have received until now are such that after reading through them, we noticed that social concepts are still being confused by us with fiction-writing hence most of the works sent to us have only a thin veneer of social analysis and their readers will almost forget that they are reading a story as they are plunged into a socio-philosophical discourse and a large measure of logic which is completely outside the realm of life....We sometimes wish that these writers would permit us to publish some sections of their stories simply as essays....There is a great difference between this and the style of story-writing in which the events are related not by way of arguments and expositions which are the pillars of the essay...."

By 1936, this flaw had considerably disappeared and in most of the stories written by the 'rebel' editors and contributors to al-Shabāb, al-Sardūk, al-Surūr and other papers and magazines of that period, objectivity and humour prevailed. Incidentally, al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī who wrote most of his stories during this period was the most talented among his contemporaries. His smooth, conversational stories showed a skill which was unique among his contemporaries.

In view of the fact that the Arabic short stories of this period reflect many of the social and intellectual controversies of the decade, one would have expected to find echoes of the 1934/35 split in the Destour Party which gave birth to the Neo-Destour party, but there is

hardly any trace of this in the available works beside a very subjective and highly partisan short piece published in al-Watan, No.7, 19th September, 1937, which was simply an undisguised caricature of all the leaders of the 'Old' Destour.

There is also no trace of the controversy between the colonial authorities and the Tunisian society over naturalisation (al-Tajnīs) and the burial of such naturalisés in Muslim cemetery which was a very lively issue in the thirties, nor is there any mention of the threat which cheap materials imported by the colonial government constituted to local domestic crafts about which there was a continuous campaign in newspapers such as al-Zamān during this decade.

It is therefore obvious that the social realism of the short story writers of this decade was limited in range in spite of the improved standard of their stories.

It was not until the forties that there emerged a Tunisian whose works were comparable in range of theme and quality to those of his contemporaries in other parts of the Arab world. The writer in question was <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī.

## CHAPTER FIVE

ALI AL-DU'AJI AND HIS 'SCHOOL' OF SHORT STORY WRITERS

1 - The Role of the Radio in the Growth of the Tunisian Short Story.

During the period extending from 1940 to independence in 1956, the radio emerged as a significant factor in the growth of the Tunisian short story. This was due to the opportunities which the writers had of reaching a wider public.

There was no local broadcasting station in Tunisia until 1937. Before then, the few Tunisians who could afford a radio set had to tune to Egyptian, Algerian, Italian and French radio stations and they preferred the Egyptian and Algerian stations as these had more Arabic programmes on Arab history and literature. The Egyptian station was particularly favoured because it offered them their major contact with the Arab world, a contact which had been severely curtailed by the frequent ban on one newspaper after another by the colonial administration.

In 1937, three private radio stations were set up in Tunis, Binzart and Sfax. The first two stations concentrated more on broadcasting in the Arabic language. Scholars of Arabic literature and Islamic culture were

invited to participate in the programmes. The scope of broadcasting became wider when the government set up their own broadcasting stations and <sup>c</sup>Uthmān al-Ka<sup>cc</sup>āk, a Tunisian scholar whose historical and literary articles were well-known to readers of al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī was put in charge.<sup>1</sup>

These private and state broadcasting stations encouraged short story writers to improve their skill not only by the fact that they could reach a wider public than through the press but also by the financial reward which they sometimes received for works of considerable merit. The editorial staff of the radio stations were also able to offer constructive criticisms and suggestions which assisted the writers to become better acquainted with the art of story-writing. A weekly magazine entitled al-Rādiyū wa 'l-Sīnīmā<sup>2</sup> also contained the texts of a few short stories along with programmes and news.

## 2 - Outlets for Tunisian Short Stories : 1940-1956.

The Tunisian periodical reviews which played an important rôle in the publication of Tunisian short stories during this period were al-Mabāhith<sup>3</sup>, al-Thurayyā,<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibn <sup>c</sup>Āshūr, al-Harakat al-Adabiya, p.185.

2. Published in Tunis, 1938/39.

3. First published as a quarterly journal in 1938. After the first two issues, it ceased publication. The second series were published from 1944 to 1948.

4. Published in Tunis from 1953 to 1957.



and al-Nadwa,<sup>5</sup> The Tunisian dailies and weeklies, especially al-Usbū<sup>c</sup>, also printed stories which could not appear in the few periodicals due to limited space.

The periodicals and dailies of the thirties had provided opportunities for talented Tunisian story writers to serve their apprenticeship. In the café houses which served as the 'editorial rooms' for many of these reviews and dailies,<sup>6</sup> young men who were interested in literature came together to discuss, to make merry and to provide 'situations' for creative art. Recalling one of these literary clubs and gatherings, one of these youths wrote in 1944 :

"... فلقد انشأنا نادي (السبعة) سنة ١٩٣٧ وكان يضم نادينا جماعة من اهل الفن والشعر والصحافة برئاسة الاستاذين الحروي وبيرم وكان سهراتنا لا ينقصها الا تخليد ما كان يدور في سهرتنا من ادب وفكاهة وفن ولو كان ذلك لملاءمة مجلة وكان النادي في ١٩٣٨ يدعى بنادي المجانيين وكان ملتقى المصورين والمطربين والمطربات والعازفين والعازفات من المؤمنين والاسرائيليين وكانت النكت تقال وتصور على الجدران بريشات الغرائري وابن عبيد الله والصبد لله ( وهو غير بن عبد الله ) وغيرنا من اهل الفن والجنون " ( ٧ )

5. Published in Tunis from 1943 to 1950.

6. Such a situation is depicted in <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū'ājī's al-Rukn al-Nayyir published in al-Thurayyā, November, 1944.

7. <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū'ājī's Ramadān, in al-Mabāhith, No. 6, Sept. '44.

It is against this background that we should view the emergence, after the second world war, of a group of short story writers whose stories were similar in style and content. The most outstanding among them was <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī whose influence on his friends and contemporaries was very great.

3 - <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī, 1909-1949, 'Father of the Tunisian Short Story.'

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<sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī was born in Tunis to a middle-class family. His father, who was of Turkish extraction<sup>8</sup> died when <sup>c</sup>Alī was only three, leaving his care and education to his mother who was a Beylical government's senior official's daughter and so her own upbringing considerably equipped her to bring up her son after her husband's death. Both mother and son became so closely attached to each other that it has been suggested that this fact contributed to his remaining a bachelor throughout his life.<sup>9</sup> What we are certain of is that his attachment to his mother left a lasting mark on his emotions as is evident in the kind and sympathetic portrayal of the female sex which abounds in his short stories.

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8. M.Khraîf, <sup>c</sup>Alī Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī - Shujūn min ḥadīthihi, in al-Fikr, Yr.3, No.8, May 1958, p.22; and al-Ḥashimī b. <sup>c</sup>Azīz, al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī baina al-Būrjuwaziya wa 'l-Būhimīya, in al-Amal suppl. 25/7/69, p.4.

9. In an interview accorded Lailā b. Māmī, al-<sup>c</sup>Amal female journalist by <sup>c</sup>Āfīsha Jum'a, <sup>c</sup>Alī's only surviving sister she said that <sup>c</sup>Alī never desired to marry except once when he became interested in one of their relatives but his mother vehemently opposed this move because she believed that he could not make a good husband and that he was not financially strong enough to cater for a wife. See al-Amal supplement for 6/6/69.

There is no evidence to support the late Dr. Ghāzī's claim that °Alī was a Zaitūna graduate.<sup>10</sup> He had only a primary school education in Khair al-Dīn school where some emphasis was laid on giving a rudimentary knowledge of the French language to their pupils.<sup>11</sup> He also attended a local Qur'anic school<sup>12</sup> where he learnt literary Arabic. The sound knowledge of both languages which he was later to manifest was acquired by self-effort. He became acquainted with both Arabic and French literature by reading foreign literary periodicals and dailies as well as bound volumes, especially those from Egypt.<sup>13</sup>

Through the medium of French, he acquired a thorough knowledge of the art of story-writing and this language also enabled him to read translated works of English and American story writers. This extensive reading, coupled with his natural talent as a cartoonist made his stories very delightful to read. As an artist, his stories are notable for their pictorial depiction of characters so much that the reader can effortlessly form a mental picture of them, a style which has been likened by Ghāzī to the 'camera-eye' style of the American

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10. M.F. Ghāzī, La littérature tunisienne contemporaine, in ORIENT, No.12, 4<sup>e</sup> Trimestre, 1959, p.144.

11. M. Khraïf, op.cit., p.22.

12. Ibid., p.26 & also Dr. Tawfīq Bakkār's °Alī al-Dū°ājī - Fannān al-Ghalaba, in Majallat al-Tajdīd, Yr.1, Nos.5/6, June/July 1961, p.70.

13. Khraïf, op.cit., p.22. Also see al-Amal suppl.6/6/69 where al-Marzūqī recalls °Alī's deep interest in the works of the French poet, Baudelaire (1821-1869).

fiction writer, John dos Passos.<sup>14</sup> It was reported by Ghāzī<sup>15</sup> that in a personal discussion he had with <sup>c</sup>Alī, he acknowledged the strong influence which the American writer, Jack London<sup>16</sup> had on him. This did not, however, mean that he was in any way a copy-cat because he thoroughly assimilated the foreign influence on him and his works show a degree of originality which makes it difficult for critics to identify his foreign masters. That he was opposed to any blind imitation of the west in anything is borne out by his denunciation of some Egyptian scholars for their uncritical acceptance of Western orientalist's ideas<sup>17</sup> and by his criticism of some Eastern Arab fiction writers whose stories he said, were full of clichés borrowed from the stories of western authors so that "if we were to replace the oriental names in them (i.e. in the stories) with western names, these would perfectly fit since they do not describe to us Cairo or Damascus or Baghdad except as these would be described by a European writer...."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>c</sup>Alī's good sense of humour permeates all his works and gives them a stamp which distinguished him from all

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14. Passos (1896-1970) was the famous American socialist novelist and historian whose best work is the striking trilogy entitled U.S.A. published between the two world wars. It portrayed the American capitalist society of much of 1910-1930.

15. M.F. Ghazi, al-Fikr, Yr. 4, No. 7, April, 1959, p. 22.

16. Jack London was born in San Francisco 1876, died 1916.

17. Khraif, op. cit., p. 23.

18. <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī, al-Qiṣṣa fī 'l-Adab al-Maghribī 'l-Hadīth, in Majallat al-Thurayyā, Yr. 3, No. 3, May 1946, p. 20.

his contemporaries with the exception of his poet-friend Muṣṭafā Khraïf whose desultory output of short stories after his contribution in the early thirties as earlier discussed had a similar, if to a lesser degree, touch of humour.

<sup>c</sup>Alī's family conditions enabled him to live without having to do much physical work to earn a living and so he was able to devote most of his life to writing. Although his family was well-to-do, he was in constant contact with the reality of the lowest classes of the Tunisian society of his time. Like his Egyptian contemporary Maḥmūd Taimūr,<sup>19</sup> his family is said to have owned land as well as a summer house in the countryside<sup>20</sup> which made it possible for him to watch the rural inhabitants from close quarters. At fifteen, his mother, who did not want him to do any hard work, was finally persuaded to let him work as a shop assistant/apprentice (qalfa) where his daily contact with different kinds of clients offered him a unique opportunity to study human nature at close range.

His short stories were often meant to depict the lot of the poor and to illustrate and sometimes imply criticism of the egotism and hypercritical morals of the Tunisian higher classes.

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19. al-Ādab [al-Beirūtī], No. 9, Sept. 1960, pp.10-15.

20. Ghāzī, op.cit., (ORIENT) p.144.

### His Stories

His earliest important story to be published was Jawlat Hawla Hānāt al-Bahr al-Abyad al-Mutawassit (Excursions around the Pubs of the Mediterranean Sea)<sup>20a</sup> It is a travelogue full of humour and ingenuity. It is a modern version of Arab travel tales but unlike the traditional Arab travellers whose journey's were in one way or another connected with some religious motive,<sup>21</sup> al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's journey was, as the title of his account suggests, for the pleasure of the 'wine that maketh glad the heart of man', and for adventures after elegant and easy women. In the first instalment of his account, he summed up his purpose in these words..."I travelled in order to amuse myself and so I write my account in order to amuse my reader..."

The account illustrates all the peculiarities of al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's works - his apt humour, incisive sarcasm and his 'camera eye-like' description. In describing the

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20a. It was serialised in al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī, Yr.4, No.13-18, 1935 and reprinted in al-Mabāhith, Nos. 5-10, 1945. It has also been collected into a volume under the same title, published by al-Sharikatal-Qawmiya lil-Nashr wa 'l-Tawzi<sup>c</sup>, Tunis, 1962.

21. Like the Rihla of the 12th C. Andalusian Ibn Jubair (1145-1217) on his pilgrimage from Grenada to Makka and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304-1377) whose extensive travels first started as a simple pilgrimage to Mecca in 1325 and the whetting of his curiosity by the adventures of this first journey led him to resolve to visit every Muslim country. Cf. Gibb, op.cit., pp.138 and 139.

movement of their steamer, he wrote: "It slit through the mountains of raging waves, leaving them to run after it. How on earth could the waves overtake it when it had steel propellers turning like the spirals of destiny in front of it."<sup>22</sup>

Recording his impression of the girls whom he saw at Nice, he likened them to "female devils who can snatch your heart no matter how deep in your chest you hide it away. They snatch it with claws painted with the colour of rose."

In describing some of the people he met at a bar in Nice, the artist and cartoonist in him came to the fore as he gives a graphic picture of two couples in which he employs the contrasting features of the couples to good effect.

In the second instalment, he said of Naples : "Naples is a beautiful town situated under the mercy of Allah and the mercy of Vesuvius volcano - this volcano which is ever angry and always smoking (I doubt whether it could be smoking Italian cigarette which is very expensive) unmindful of the fact that Allah does not like the extravagant ones..."

Among his stories published in al-Thurayyā was al-Rukn al-Nayyir (The Bright Spot)<sup>23</sup> It is the story

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22. al-Ālam al-Adabī, No.13, 1935.

23. al-Thurayyā, No.11, November, 1944.

of a poor father of three who has no money with which to buy a sheep for the <sup>c</sup>Id celebrations. His children are also sad because they have no sheep of their own to play with while the other children in their neighbourhood play with their parents' sheep.

He relates his grief to a newspaper director whom he meets in a café and the director gives him a letter of introduction to an actress against whom he conducts a press war in a column specially devoted to this tirade. Neither the newspaper director who gives the note nor the man to whom it is given is sure of what the reaction of the actress will be to the note yet the diffident old man goes to her. Surprisingly, the actress receives him kindly, gives him a well-fed sheep and even follows him home to see his five-year-old daughter named Rādiya.

This shows that in spite of the notoriety of this actress's profession for moral turpitude, there is still a bright spot in her. We find that deep down in a heart dominated by the love of money and luxury is a small 'bright spot' of purity in which lurks some human compassion which is almost unthinkable in such a circle.

Another one of his stories of this kind is entitled: Amin Jīrān bi-dhī Salam? (Is it in Remembrance of Neighbours in Dhī Salam?)<sup>24</sup> As the theme is similar

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24. al-Ālam al-Adabī, No.11, Feb., 1945. The title is taken from the first hemistich of the Burda poem by the 13th century Egyptian poet, Muḥammad al-Buṣairī. A French translation of this story is in R. & L. Makarius, Anthologie de la littérature Arabe Moderne, 1964, pp. 342-345.



to 'The Bright Spot', the plot and events are almost similar. It is the story of a greedy kuttāb teacher, his wife and one of his pupils towards the ʿId time. The Shaikh of the kuttāb is a widower with one child and he soon gets married to another young widow who has two children, a woman who, "once remarried, changes from her coquettish, smart and gay life into a devoted woman, as pious and strict as her husband, praying at the prescribed hours and never exchanging a word with all those who knock at her door except from behind the curtain."

It is customary for distributors of the religious endowment (waqf) funds to visit the school the day before the ʿId to give gifts of money to the pupils. One of them comes to offer some money which the Shaikh does not usually count until the departure of the donor so that the pupils are never sure whether what the Shaikh distributes is the whole gift or not.

In order to make sure that some of his pupils do not go home with their share of the money, "he has established a custom which has the force of law, according to which he subjects us on that day to very severe examinations (indeed very severe because he usually stops revision during the preceding week). Whoever stammers when reciting his verses is subject to a fine ranging from a sixth to a third of a riyāl. The fine may be higher for pupils with rich parents."

There is one boy named Ibrāhīm who, although clever, is nevertheless always overcome by fear in the presence of the Shaikh who realises this complex and so often delegates one of his senior pupils to supervise Ibrāhīm. "However, on the 'distribution day' he personally asks him to recite. Ibrāhīm does not succeed in uttering a word and has to pay a whole riyāl in fine. He has nothing left with which to buy butter or honey for the festival cake. He therefore returns home crying."

The Shaikh's step-son tells his mother all that has happened to poor Ibrāhīm. She knows the condition of Ibrāhīm's father and that without the money, the boy would have no cake for the following day, so "after saying the evening prayer, standing behind her husband and while the latter goes to the local café, she goes to his bed and begins - she has never stolen before - ransacking the pillow in which the Shaikh normally keeps his purse. She wonders how much she should take from it to help Ibrāhīm and his father. She finally takes five riyāls and sends her son Ahmad to look for Ibrāhīm. When he comes, she takes him aside and soon afterwards, he goes running home to his father full of joy.

"We usually have breakfast together at the kuttāb on the mawlid day, eating dishes sent to us by pious persons and well-to-do parents of some pupils. We often

have al-Qairawānī cakes looking like <sup>an</sup> erupting volcano, spreading out their lava <sup>of</sup> butter, honey and cream with foams of pistachios and milk. Some of us arrive followed by domestics carrying trays while others carry their trays themselves. On that day, Ibrāhīm arrives carrying a tray the like of which we have never seen before."

Ibrāhīm grows up and becomes a fairly wealthy man and then he begins to go every year to the tomb of his benefactress whose death occurs two years after the above incident; he goes there "elegantly dressed, a chain of gold round his neck, squatting in front of a tomb holding the text of a prayer, reciting as we used to do when we were in the kuttāb, in the same tone... and from time to time, tears roll down from his eyes. The tomb is that of the 'thief' of five riyāls. (May Allah have pity on her soul) The man who never ceases to mourn her since thirty mawlids is Ibrāhīm."

The story is marked by an artless recollection of childhood days which in part reminds the reader of Ṭāha Ḥusayn's al-Ayyām. Like 'A Bright Spot', here is a woman of the middle class who could still provide a poor man's child with money for the 'cakes for the mawlid festival.'

Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī and the Tunisian Short Story.

While it would not be correct to say that the Tunisian short story had its beginning with al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī, it is nonetheless true that, having been forced to lead a life of idleness by his mother's over-protective concern for his health, he became the first Tunisian to devote all his life to the writing of fiction and this includes numerous short drama pieces and zajal (which is popular poetry). He was one of the earliest to use the unlimited opportunity offered by the radio to reach a wider audience with his stories and plays. More than 150 of the latter genre are presently held to his credit by the archives of the Tunisian radio. As for his short stories, he published most of them in various periodicals in the early forties but never had them collected into bound volumes during his lifetime. As a result of the post-independence drive to revive interest in the Tunisian literary heritage, eighteen of his short stories have been collected into a small book that takes its title from one of the collection - Sahirtu minhu 'l-Layālī.

In most of his short stories, he avoided the pitfall into which most of his contemporaries fell - that of using the story as a pulpit for moralisation or for airing the opinion of the author in general. Rather than show his approval or disapproval of a character,

he objectively sketches every detail like a faithful artist and leaves his reader to form his opinion on the story. In his own words, "the [short] story is different from the novel; it is in essence a true picture of a [limited] scene...the [short] story writer's task is to present the bare facts in unambiguous and distinct words and he must restrain his pen from making superfluous comments or describing his own personal feelings or giving a cumbersome sermon"<sup>25</sup>

His 'camera-eye' depiction of his characters has enabled him to leave behind a unique picture of different customs and diverse classes of the Tunisian society in the 30's and 40's most of which are now 'extinct' and would now have been difficult to imagine but for <sup>C</sup>Alī's exquisite sketches. Outstanding among these classes is the picture of a nouveau-riche family contained in his Nuzha Rā'iqa<sup>26</sup> (A Delightful Excursion) which captures the mentality of this type of Tunisian in the 30's and 40's when some hitherto poor people, benefitting from the opportunities offered by the colonial situation to make more money either by taking to new skilled crafts or working as employees of state undertakings like the railways and to acquire new habits, for example, in dresses and foods from European (mostly French and Italian) foreigners among them, they often turned themselves into the most outlandish characters

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25. al-Dū<sup>C</sup>ājī, Thurayyā, May 1946, op.cit.

26. al-Mabāhith, Nos. 27 and 28, June/July, 1946, and pp. 115-139 of his collection Sahirtu.

ever known in their community - like al-Hājj °Alī of Muṣṭafā Khraīf's story to which reference has been made in the preceding chapter.<sup>27</sup> In Nuzha Rā'iqa, °Alī is invited for an outing by one of such families - the family of the parvenu °Abd Allāh. In a way that recalls the upstart Baghdādī merchant in al-Hamadhānī's al-Maqāma al-Mādirīya, °Abd Allāh does not cease telling his guest about the exquisite baked-bricks, the expensive doors and windows used in building his fīlā (villa) which the host finds out to be a shapeless structure housing the most bizarre collection of decorations where Italian, Andalusian and French paintings compete for attention with an overall effect that reveals "the modern taste which defies all moderation."

°Abd Allāh, who "is dressed in European outfit on top of which he wears a cotton jubba,"<sup>28</sup> with his head covered with "a tarbūsh round which he has wound a silk turban", introduces his 'brother' whom the guest is told by his host after further probing to be "the step-son of my father's second wife and has come today from the Sāhil in his special car". °Amīra, °Abd Allāh's 'brother' is met standing beside his car "examining every part of it as if that was the first time he had seen it". The 'car' itself is found by the guest to be a contraption, a ridiculous mixture of all colours, shapes, "a

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27. See p.110.

28. A jubba is a long outer garment, open in front, and without sleeves.

conglomeration of all cars in the world - both old and new", a 'car' which, at the end of the day, has to be dragged back from their excursion tied to an ass-drawn cart. <sup>c</sup>Amīra, whose dress is as absurd as that of his brother, makes sure that he shows everyone that he is the owner of the 'car' and speaks with an artificial accent as well as with a stammer.

<sup>c</sup>Abd Allāh's wife and mother-in-law also manifest their family's new status by their dress and make-up and the various concoctions - mostly an imitation of European dishes in some of which sugar is wrongly used instead of salt and vice-versa, which they have carried with them for the excursion.

Similarly, <sup>c</sup>Alī draws a vivid and lively picture of the lemon-juice and groundnut hawkers on the Hamām al-Anf beach in Fī Shāti' Hamām al-Anf<sup>29</sup> (On Hamām al-Anf Beach); of the Sīdī (Sayyidī) al-Mu'addib in Amin Tadhakkur Jirān bi-dhī Salam; and the water carrier in Mawt al-<sup>c</sup>Amm Bākhīr<sup>30</sup> (The Death of Uncle Bākhīr) to mention just a few examples.

The influence of his filial affection for his mother is reflected in the way he presents women's compassion and love in al-Rukn al-Nayyir where the actress, contrary to expectation, responds favourably to a poor man's plea for an <sup>c</sup>Id ram for his children; in Amin Tadhakkur... where the middle-class wife of the mu'addib could still

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29. Jarīdat al-Surūr, Sept. 1936, & pp. 34-38 of Sahirtu...

30. al-Usbū<sup>c</sup> 21st Jan, 1946, & pp. 95-100 of Sahirtu...

have compassion for poor Ibrāhīm by giving him money for the <sup>c</sup>īd celebration and most significant of all, in the story from which the collection takes its name<sup>31</sup> where a woman in her first year of marriage complains of the intolerable conduct of her husband that he is "a drunkard who drinks all night, does not return home until midnight and only then to pick up quarrels with me and my child...I wish our son Ḥamādī were not between us...when he first started to drink he used to hurl abuses at me, make the ugliest description of me and give me the names of the most disgusting fishes and birds... he then forced me to make fire and to cook al-mashlūsh for him after two a.m. failing which he would change his description of me to that of a she-ass that couldn't cook..." In spite of this bitter complaint to her aunt who originally gave her in marriage to this man without her consent, she can still tell her aunt toward the end of the story not to disturb her husband's sleep. "Let him sleep...poor fellow...he stayed up throughout the night..." These problem, tension, suspense and surprise elements in most of his stories also reflect <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's careful attention to the plotting of his short stories. All the essential components of the traditional Maupassian story - the plot, climax and denouement - which give the reader complete satisfaction are present in his stories.

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31. pp.101-106 of the collection. It was first published al-Usbū<sup>c</sup> 11th March, 1946.



<sup>c</sup>Alī's creative ability is further observable in the ease with which he was able to make completely new stories out of existing legends. Two such stories that stand out among his stories are Sirr al-Ghurfat al-Sābi<sup>c</sup>a<sup>32</sup> (The Secret of Room Number <sup>Seven</sup> Seven), and Umm Hawā'<sup>33</sup> (<sup>Eve's</sup> Eve's Mother). The first is based on the legend of the sorcerer who abducts the king's son and carries him into a seven-room enchanted castle filled with every imaginable precious stone all of which are placed at the prince's disposal except the seventh room which he is forbidden to enter or even approach on pain of death - a restriction which makes this seventh room all the more mysteriously inviting.

From this point, <sup>c</sup>Alī commences his own story of two girls whose movements are restricted by their parents and who are also banned from going near the attic room in their home. This ban makes the forbidden room more attractive. When curiosity gets the better of them and they eventually defy their parents in the latter's absence, they find that although there is nothing notable inside the room itself, its little window reveals to them a world they have never known or seen before; they see in the<sup>neighbouring</sup> courtyard a mat spread out on the floor with a boy and a girl lying on it close to a table full of bottles and cups, slices of red water-melon and a piece of

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32. al-Usbū<sup>c</sup>, No.26, May 1946 & pp.107-144 of Sahirtu...  
 33. Sahirtu...., pp. 145-155.

ice-block...! When their parents return, they are severely beaten but the elder one escapes...and moves into the neighbouring house!

While this story had a local application at that time to many Tunisian families in their attitude to the treatment of their wives and daughters and much in consonance with the social reform campaign of his friend and contemporary Tāhir al-Haddād, the second story of this type - Umm Hawā' had a much wider message. It is based on the biblical story of Adam and Eve and the author retained the general outline of the original story - the scene of the story is the garden of Eden, there is a forbidden fruit and the fall is brought about by a tempting snake and then the ouster. But the title of the story brings in a character not in the original story. She is Eve's mother who is depicted as living in the garden and sharing in the fruit and then being ejected with her daughter and son-in-law into 'the earth'. She is the only one who denies the theft charge in al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's story. Other elements introduced into this story to bring it closer to his age are the public prosecutor, the court registrar, the police, the newspaper and even two place-names like Bāb al-Banāt Street and Halfawain both of which are located in the Tunisian capital.

The introductory explanation to the story, said to have been written by Tāha Ḥusayn to this story, strongly

suggests that the names of the characters have symbolic connotations. Sālih b. <sup>c</sup>Umar, a Tunisian critic has also suggested that in this story, "Adam is Man in all places and Eve is Woman wherever she lives; as for Eve's mother, she is the divisive power between the two, the tragedy of the extended family..." Commenting on the presence of the old and the new in <sup>c</sup>Alī's version of the story, the critic says it is "a symbol of the contemporary Arab whose life is no more than a mere repetition of the obsolete old legend and in spite of his advancement and his daily contacts with various aspects of civilisation, the legends which have taken root in him still continually prompt him on to weave his life on the same pattern left behind by his ancestors..."<sup>35</sup>

Although al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī wrote most of his plays in the Tunisian colloquial,<sup>36</sup> all his short stories were written in literary Arabic with a sprinkling of some local or Arabicised foreign words. His attitude to the question of language is put in the mouth of one of his characters in his play entitled Taht al-Misbāh al-Ahmar (Under the Red Lamp): "Write, please, with what (language) you please and give me a play, may you be blessed".<sup>37</sup>

There can be no greater tribute to the contribution

35. Muh. Sālih b. <sup>c</sup>Umar, Ma<sup>c</sup>a 'l-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī fī Darb al-Asāla, in al-Amal suppl. for 30/6/69.

36. al-Amal suppl. for 6/6/69.

37. In Tunisian colloquial:

يا سيدي اكتب بالتي تحب واعطيني (sic) رواية برک

of al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī to Tunisian fiction than the fact that a fellow Tunisian, Tawfīq Bakkār, is known to have written a doctorate thesis at the University of Tunis<sup>38</sup> on al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's works in which the short story constitutes a prominent part. It is only a pity that many of his short stories are now missing as many unpublished ones are still believed to be in the hands of some of his acquaintances<sup>39</sup> and others were published under various pseudonyms as was the vogue among some Tunisian short story writers of the thirties. His only attempt at writing a novel is said to have produced a story entitled Shāri<sup>c</sup> al-Aqdam al-Mukhaddaba<sup>40</sup> (The Street of the Henna-dyed Legs) but no one in Tunisia today seems to know the whereabouts of this unpublished novel<sup>41</sup> which, according to the late Dr. Ghāzī, portrayed the life of the inhabitants of the peasant quarters of Tunis.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's Sahirtu minhu 'l-Layālī is illustrative of his simple but ingenious style and language.

It opens with a 'camera-eye' description of Auntie, one of the three characters of the story as she arrives

38. Lailā b. Māmī's interview with Dr. Bakkār in al-<sup>c</sup>Amal suppl. for 30/6/69.

39. Like the unnamed acquaintance to whom he was said to have been giving four to five stories and plays <sup>regularly</sup> to be read on the radio or published towards the end of his life when his illness prevented him from moving about. See al-Hāshimī b. <sup>c</sup>Azīz's article in al-<sup>c</sup>Amal suppl. for 25/7/69.

40. See Ghāzī's article in ORIENT, op.cit., p.146.

41. See <sup>c</sup>Izz al-Dīn al-Madanī's introduction to Sahirtu... p.9.

42. ORIENT, op.cit., p.146.

at her neice's home which is the scene of the story :

كانت الخالة امرأة مثقلة الجسم ، يتحرك كل جزء منها بفرد ، وهي تطلع دج السلم لاهثة شاخرة تنصب عرقا وهي تصرخ مداعبة ابنة اختها من قبل ان تراها .....

With this opening, the story undoubtedly arouses a reader's curiosity to know what this fat woman is up to in her neice's home. Then follows a series of dialogues revealing the young woman's plight. The old woman's reaction to her neice's description of her unhappy life with her husband is vividly brought out in a manner which reflects al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's ability to capture the mentality of

كيف لطمك انت ، ولا تقولين لي هذا من الاول ؟ آه ... ان الامر اهم مما كنت اظن ، كيف ، أيرفع يده على امرأته وام ولده ، هذا الا يطاق ... وصلنا الى اللطم ! اسمعيني يا فتاتي انت صغيرة فافتحي اذنيك الى نصائح خالتك المجربة : لقد زففت الى ثلاثة رجال ، وانا اعلم الناس بهم . ان الرجل الذي يضرب امرأته ليس برجل ( تحتسدر الخالة كل الحدة وتصرخ في ابنة اختها ) اسمعي ! اطلبي طلاقك منه وسنحاكمه اونطالبه بتعويض وندخله السجن ان القضاء وكل الشرائع ( الخمسائة دين ) لا تبج لاي رجل كان لطم امرأة ضعيفة . اطلبي طلاقك منه ! قلت لك !  
اذ ليس بعد اللطم من معاشرة !  
اذ ليس بعد اللطم من معاشرة !

When the young woman expresses horror at the idea of divorce, her aunt continues :

" اتصيرين على معاشرة هذا الفظ ؟ قلت : انه احق ، قلنا لا بأس

ككل الرجال . قلت : انه يسميك اسماء البهائم قلنا لا بأس سيغير  
نعوته وتحسن معاشرتك له ، قلت : انه سكير ، قلنا لا بأس ستنتفخ  
كبدته ويترك الخمرة . قلت : انه يحب مطالعة الكتب ، قلنا : لا بأس وهي  
وان كانت ضرائر لك الا انها اخف وطأة من ضرة بشرة واحدة . لكن وصلنا  
لسوء المعاشرة والضرب . . . واطلبي طلاقك ، وانا الضمينة بحصولك  
عليه من اقرب السبل . . . "

And as the story reaches its climax where one would have expected the young wife to pack her things and follow her aunt, the former, in a sort of anticlimax, tells the latter :

خالتي لا ترفعي صوتك ! وتتحمس الخالدة . ويهتر كل جسمها  
اهتزازا لا تجيده الا المرأة الشعبية ، وهي غضبي وتصرخ :

" لا ارفع صوتي ؟ سارفع صوتي ويدي ! لا ارفع صوتي ؟  
ولماذا من فضلك ؟

لئلا تزجج ... "تزججه" !  
ازعج من ؟

هو . دعيه ينام . . . . . المسكين . . لقد سهر كثيرا ليلة البارحة  
يا خالتي . . ؟ !

This kind of masterly style, language and plot which are characteristic of most of his over 150 short stories (printed and broadcast) are sufficient to give him a place among the best short story writers of the Arab world. There is undoubtedly enough justification for according him the title of "the undisputed father of the Tunisian (short-) story."<sup>43</sup>

### 3 - Smaller Writers Influenced by <sup>c</sup>Alī

Contemporaneous with al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī in the second half of the forties were a small group of writers who could be called an <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī 'school' on account of their similarity to him in the style and content of their stories.

Among them was the journalist Tawfīq Bū Ghadīr. He was a newspaper cartoonist and he also wrote a few plays for the Tunisian radio.<sup>44</sup> He is at present working as a journalist for al-<sup>c</sup>Amal newspaper.

43. Dr. Bakkār, in al-Tajdīd, op.cit, (Nov.1962), p.4.

44. Al-Thurayyā, Yr.2, No.9, Sept.1945.

His few stories were published in al-Thurayyā (al-Jazā' - Recompense, Thaman al-Majd - The Price of Honour, al-Qurbān al-A<sup>c</sup>zam - The Greatest Sacrifice, all printed in Numbers 9-11, September to November, 1945 in that order) and in the weekly al-Usbū<sup>c</sup>, December 1945 and January to March, 1946.

His stories were generally a portrayal of some domestic intrigues as in Khutta Fāshila (A Miscarried Plot)<sup>45</sup> and Fi Finjān al-Qahwa<sup>46</sup> (In a Cup of Coffee) in which the wronged party always won in the end. His plot was often simple except in Thaman al-Majd. This is the tragic love story of a girl who damages the eye of an artist whom she loves because he refuses her marriage proposal on account of his dedication to art. The story writer attempted a complicated plot in an effort to explain the motives for the girl's subsequent suicide but this merely muddled up the story.

The others in this 'school' were the two Bakīr brothers - Ahmad <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhāb and Muḥammad<sup>47</sup> and they both made some contribution to the short story of this period. <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhāb's al-Walīma (The Feast)<sup>48</sup> depicts a disappointing moment in the life of a typical parasite in the Tunisian capital of the forties. He goes out in

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45. Al-Usbū<sup>c</sup>, Yr.1, No.6, 28/1/46.

46. Ibid., No.2, 31/12/45.

47. Both of them started their working lives as teachers. They are both at present senior civil servants in the Tunisian Ministry of Education.

48. Al-Mabāhith, No.14, May 1945, p.82.



the daytime, sees a ram being slaughtered and guesses that there is going to be a party in that house in the evening. He returns there in the evening and meets many other uninvited guests like himself. The table is set and they rush to take their seats. He plans to eat and then take some home for his wife. Just as he is taking the first morsel to his mouth, "a hand touches my body and a voice calls out : 'Wake up, <sup>C</sup>Ammār, it's daytime....' Everything disappeared from before me and I found myself in bed with a feeling of hunger...My wife gazes at me and calls out again: 'Get up, <sup>C</sup>Ammār, the sun is up! I shouted at her: 'May you go dumb! You cheated me [of my food] and thus deprived yourself [of it]...."

His brother Muḥammad, besides writing a series of essays entitled al-Qissa fī 'l-Adab al-<sup>C</sup>Arabī 'l-Qadīm (The Story in Classical Arabic Literature) which appeared in al-Mabāhith Numbers 29-41, August 1946 to August 1947, he also wrote two stories entitled Ya'kul al-Dunyā wa Yatasahhar bil-Ākhira (He Eats the Present and makes a Light Meal of the Hereafter)<sup>49</sup> and al-Hallāq (The Barber)<sup>50</sup> The former story is a transposition of an old Tunisian folk story while the latter describes a scene at the barber's shop.

The few stories by the Bakīr brothers were characterised by the same touch of local colour and fine sense

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49. al-Mabāhith, No.24, March 1946, p.3.

50. Ibid., No.14, May 1945.

of humour demonstrated by al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's stories.

Another member of this group whose work is worth mentioning was <sup>c</sup>Ayyāsh Mu<sup>c</sup>arrafa who specialised in cock and bull stories some of which were merely a juggling of words and meanings. He, however, sometimes demonstrated in portraying his characters, a wit which reminds the reader of al-Jāhiz of classical Arabic literature. Among his good short stories were: al-Wālī (The Saint)<sup>51</sup>, al-Ghaira (Jealousy)<sup>52</sup>, Ramadān,<sup>53</sup> al-<sup>c</sup>Abqarī (The Genius)<sup>54</sup>, and Qāla Sadīqī : Ūf Qālīnā (My Friend Said : Ūf Qalina).<sup>55</sup>

Al-Wālī and Qāla Sadīqī are simple detective stories. The first is about a youth in a Qur'anic school who pretends to hate any discussion other than what is strictly religious or literary. He hates dancing and singing and avoids associating with his classmates. One day, he is caught unawares by one of his classmates while he is chanting a love poem in a very melodious voice. When questioned about this unusual incident, he becomes enraged and throws a book at the other boy but the book misses him and overturns the inkpot on the teacher's table. He weeps so bitterly that the other boy has to accept responsibility for the spilled ink on the following day out of pity for him.

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51. al-Usbū<sup>c</sup>, No. 159, 23/5/49.  
 52. Ibid., No. 160, 13/6/49.  
 53. Ibid., No. 164, 18/7/49.  
 54. Ibid., No. 162, 3/7/49.  
 55. Ibid., No. 164, 18/7/49.

°Ayyāsh Mu°Arraf was probably using this boy as a symbol for the ultra-conservative traditional (Zaitūna) scholars whom many of the young writers of the late thirties dealt with in the preceding chapter, considered hypocritical and ill-equipped to face the realities of a changing society.

The second world war provided the theme for the second story. The narrator °Alī tells of an experience in his village near Sūsa during the war years. Having been rendered nervous by the constant noise of planes overflying his village, his condition was aggravated when a detachment of Italian soldiers arrived in the village and commandeered the school building in which °Alī was living. When the villagers came round to see the new arrivals, they were driven back by the soldiers with the word 'Ūf qālīna' which they didn't understand anyway. These soldiers soon began to boast to °Alī about their numerous successes over British and American soldiers. Some days later, Allied planes made an air raid on nearby Sūsa as a result of which the Italian soldiers in that village fled in panic and left °Alī still more frightened. Contrary to his expectation, no harm came on the village.

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Although these writers who made up what I call <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī 'school' were less talented than their 'master', yet their stories are full of action and humour like their master's. They also resemble him in their simplicity of style and in the use of the story as a critique of society.

It is perhaps significant that their story writing careers did not survive the death of their master in 1949 in spite of the fact that they are all still living. This phenomenon which is not limited to them alone, is discussed in the next chapter.

#### 4 - Mahmūd al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī, the Symbolist.

Contemporaneous with <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī and his 'followers' whose stories are characterised by their concrete realism with emphasis on local Tunisian events and characters, we have some stories written by another Tunisian writer whose style, language and theme are entirely different from those of <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's school. This Tunisian, who is a virtual loner in the history of Tunisian short story, who employed a variety of fictional forms in his stories which were more concerned with philosophical issues and with probing the meaning of life itself, is by name Mahmūd al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī.

Mahmūd al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī was born in Tazarka (Cape Bon) in 1911. He had his secondary school education at the Sādiqī College and his post-secondary education in France where he obtained the agrégation d'arabe.<sup>56</sup> From 1936 to 1955, he was a teacher at the Institut des Hautes Études, Tunis and from 1955 to 1958, he was placed in charge of the secondary education section of the Tunisian Ministry of Education before finally becoming his country's Secretary of State for Education from 1958 to 1968.<sup>57</sup>

An astute supporter of the Neo-Destour party since its inception in 1934 and a trade unionist, he is also an Arabic scholar with a considerable degree of originality. Early in 1945, following the death (in December 1944) of Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh, the founder and first editor of the literary journal al-Mabāhith, al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī collaborated with <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhāb Bakīr in continuing the publication of the journal. In view of the important rôle which this journal played in the development of the story in the forties, it could be said that he thus contributed to the genre by his activities in connection with the journal.

His contribution was, however, much more direct in that he wrote some fiction himself. Although he is mostly known for his play entitled al-Sudd (The Dam)

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56. The approximate equivalent of a Master's degree.

57. 'Un écrivain tunisien - Mahmoud Messadi' in IBLA, 1969/1, No. 123, p. 1.

which he wrote in 1940 but did not publish until 1955<sup>58</sup> he also published, along with many essays on Arabic literature,<sup>59</sup> one longish short story entitled Mawlid al-Nisyān<sup>60</sup> (The Origin of Oblivion) as well as a number of short fictional narratives such as Hadīth al-Qiyāma<sup>61</sup> (Narratives of Resurrection), Hadīth al-Ba<sup>c</sup>th al-Awwal<sup>62</sup> (Narrative of the First Resurrection), Hadīth al-Kalb and Hadīth al-<sup>c</sup>Adad<sup>63</sup> (Narrative on Dog & Narrative on Numbers).

Unlike other Tunisians who wrote fiction before him and majority of his contemporaries, his stories are highly symbolical and metaphysical in content and his Mawlid al-Nisyān is a good representative of his style.

It is the story of a doctor called Madyan who devotes all his life to the search for a potion to help him obliterate memory, movement, Time and Death. This problem arises as a result of the haunting recollection of a woman, (Asmā') he once loved and who was snatched from him by Death, so that his memory of her began to follow him as

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58. al-Sudd, published by Sharikat al-Nashr li-Shamāl Ifrīqiya, 1955.

59. For examples, see al-Mabāhith, No. 12, Dec, 1944 (on Abū 'l-<sup>c</sup>Atahīya) al-Nadwa, No. 2, 1956, pp. 33-36 & 53-56 (on literature) and al-Fikr, Yr. 1, No. 9, June 1956, pp. 102-107 (on Culture).

60. Serialised in al-Mabāhith, Nos. 13-16, April/July, 1945.

61. Ibid., (al-Mabāhith), No. 5, August, 1944.

62. Ibid., No. 6, Sept., 1944.

63. Ibid., No. 8, November, 1944.

constantly as his shadow. Although he wants to be rid of the woman's memory, he will still like to meet her if he can and this fact is displeasing to his present wife, who is jealous of a past which she has not shared. The idea of Death becomes an intriguing phenomenon to Madyan.

To assist him in his search for oblivion, he becomes acquainted with a lady magician by name of Ranjahād who promises to take charge of the doctor's experiment. She assures him that if he could reach the spring of the god Salhawā of whom she is custodian (sādina), he will attain his objective.

One day, Madyan goes into a sacred forest where Ranjahād suddenly appears to him in a moment when everything begins to swirl round him and a stream of Dantesque images pass through his mind. He is then led to a cave which Ranjahād tells him is "the cave of those whose souls passed away but their bodies did not die, a cave in which are gathered the shadows of the dead who are (merely) locked up with the dead like yourself from the day that Asmā' died".<sup>64</sup> So, Madyan is one of the dead left behind among the living by the dead. The spirits in the cave tell Madyan :

"You have been resting with us in this cave away from the world, Oh Madyan"

after which they swirl and twist and rise into the air. Madyan becomes frightened and asks Ranjahād to save him. He shouts :

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64. Ibid., (al-Mabāhith), No.15, June 1945, p.7.

"to the end, to the woods, to Salhawā and to the spring".

He is led further into the bush where Ranjahād

"takes him across a [spatial] distance as if it were ages in length. It appears to Madyan as if he has a wing with which he flies through Time or that he is motionless and stable with Time below him. He passes on and remembers his soul the way a ghost is seen in the farthest part of the horizon of thought, and, behold! it is as if he has lived for centuries or has died and then was resurrected after some ages."<sup>65</sup>

Ranjahād tells him that he is now in the sphere of Absolute Time where, for every creature, birth, life and death occur simultaneously in just a twinkling of an eye.

She then further relates to him the story of the creation by the Salhawā of Man endowed with Grandeur, Purity and Beauty; followed by the creation of the Universe with Light and Fire; and finally the Earth with filth and impurities. Earth is enraged by this and takes her revenge on Salhawā by subjecting Man to Death but Death merely separates Matter from Soul so that the latter constantly bemoans the loss of, and eternally yearns for reunion with, the former. Furthermore, Earth delegates Time to perpetually remind Matter of its past union with the Soul.

On a later occasion, Madyan locks himself up in his laboratory, compounds his potion with the assistance of Ranjahād and drinks it. But this medicine which he thinks is the solution to his problem is a killer. He dies and leaves Lailā to mourn his loss. She in turn feels lost as she sees no further valid reason for her

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65. Ibid., No.16, July 1945, p.10.



continued existence.

A brief mention may perhaps be made of al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī's al-Sudd which, although written as a play, is, according to the opinion of Arab critics including the celebrated Tāha Husayn<sup>66</sup>, more suited to reading than for putting on the stage because of its highly complicated meta-physical connotations which can hardly be fully depicted on the stage.

The eight-scene al-Sudd is the story of a couple, Ghailān and Maimūna. Both arrive riding on their mule at a barren valley among a tribe whose whole life is dominated by a goddess called Šāhabbā'. She is the goddess of dessication, drought, dearth and thirst and she communicates with the tribe through some voices which are channelled through a human "prophet of the tribe". Although a stream flows down the side of the mountain, the tribe has never exploited the waters of this stream because of its complete subjection to Šāhabbā'.

The situation is summed up in the following words of Ghailān :

"I say that the people of this valley have deprived the lowland of its water. They have worn their leanness like a royal robe. The voice of their prophet has adopted many forms like the tongue of female demons (sa<sup>c</sup>āl, plural of si<sup>c</sup>lāh). They submit to a hidden lordess and they say: '(Let's have) thirst and drought and let the waters dry off...' Helplessly and spinelessly, they flee from action. Look<sup>67</sup> at the marvellous spring that gushes from the side of the mountain, how they have neglected it for thousands of years and allowed its waters and its life to sink into the ravine at the extreme end of the valley. Look at how

66. Tāha Husayn Yanqudu 'l-Sudd, in al-Fikr, Yr.2, No.8, May 1957, p.23.

67. He is at this point addressing his wife.

the rain waters only flow on the mountain, how they have let it flow down the hillside to join the waters of the spring and then sink at the extreme end of the ravine. It has never occurred to them to build a dam above the ravine so as to preserve the waters of the spring and of the rain and the mountain...I shall see my dam materialise before my very eyes with water channels and pipes laid above the ravine leading to the valley. I shall certainly make the waters gush forth irresistibly and forcefully...Let creation take place and multiply by procreation...This dusty earth wrinkled like a licentious old woman, I shall unfailingly impregnate her with water, I shall certainly fill her belly and cause it to bring forth life. You shall definitely witness that day, Oh Maimūna, you shall surely see them turn their backs on Ṣāhabbā' and the Sun and Drought and they will cast her into the open air..."

On the other hand, his wife Maimūna does not share his ambition which she sees simply as pride, and this, she believes, will eventually lead him to a tragic end. She is ever calling him to 'believe' and stop his vain affront to the gods. He will never defeat Ṣāhabbā'. In section five, she reminds him of the numerous warning 'signs' of his impending doom already given him by the goddess. Were not all his tools stolen during the first month? Did fever not decimate half of his men during the second? Didn't the dam itself burst through during the third month sweeping away the work of the preceding two months? Didn't a whole convoy of men transporting iron equipment to the site get wiped out by hurricane on their way? Has he not been confined to bed for over a month by fever which has prevented him from getting to his dam and thus left his men like blindmen without a guide? To each of these questions Ghailān answers in such a way as to show his determination to carry out his

68. al-Sudd, op.cit., pp. 77 and 78.

plan in spite of the supernatural odds he is battling against. Even his workers revolt and would have killed him if they had not been restrained by Ṣāhabbā' but this would not dissuade Ghailān.

In the sixth section, another character named Mayyārā enters the story as a rivaling influence to Maimūna's pessimism. Mayyārā eggs Ghailān on in his scheme, to the great grief of Maimūna.

Finally, Ghailān is deserted by all his men after which the dam is destroyed by a terrible storm induced by Ṣāhabbā' but Ghailān and Mayyārā "ascend skyward borne by the storm.<sup>69</sup> Maimūna, left alone, darts off into the darkness and descends into the valley. She thinks that she has reached (the valley) but the valley keeps receding farther and farther away and the earth keeps opening up endlessly before her...."

The short narratives (hadīths) written by al-Mas'adī, like his longer fictions, also treat metaphysical themes in rich symbolic language.

In Hadīth al-Qiyāma, Abū Durayra, the hero of all the narratives, meets one Abū 'l-Madā'in, a dealer in perfumes, toilet materials and candles. He buys some candles but promises to pay him in some way other than cash. He invites him to come in the evening to a party in his country-house outside the city. At the party, the vendor finds himself among a group of twenty nude

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69. Al-Sudd, op.cit., p.185.

couples dancing to the music of Isāf and Nā'ila,<sup>70</sup> in the dim light of fifty or so candles. One of the girls, Rayhāna (?Abū Durayra's girl-friend) outclasses the others in the dance. Suddenly, a storm begins and sets the candle lights to the house and a panic situation arises. Rayhāna attempts to throw herself into the fire but Abū Durayra saves her. Abū 'l-Madā'in, the narrator says that he sees both of them disappear into the darkness of the night after which he himself flees for his life.

The following day, Abū 'l-Madā'in returns to the spot and finds Abū Durayra sitting on the charred remains of his house. He relates to the vendor how he had taken Rayhāna back to Mecca from the estate and on returning, he found his wife anxiously waiting for him... She took his horse in order to tie it in the stable but then suddenly got ablaze. Everything including her was burnt. Abū Durayra however explains that this fire has purified her and that she thus "became, as I always wanted her to be, fit to be among the angels and the immortalised souls." The event of the previous day, he adds, has merely prefigured what has happened to his wife.

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70. Isāf (or Asāf) and Nā'ila were two of the pre-Islamic idols worshipped by Muḥammad's tribe, the Quraish. There are varying accounts of the origin of these male (Asāf) and female (Nā'ila) idols but all of them tend to suggest that they were both regarded as a symbol of sexual orgy. Cf. Lisān al-<sup>c</sup>Arab under Asāf.

Abū Durayra again reappears in Hadīth al Ba<sup>c</sup>th al-Awwal where he is invited by a friend to go with him on a journey from Mecca. They both miss their way and find themselves in an open desert never before crossed by caravan. After a long time, they spot a boy and a girl (both nude) on top of a sand dune. The couple sing and dance and the boy carries her by the waist and thrusts her toward the sky. They soon come down the dune.

This incident then reminds Abū Durayra's friend of his first encounter with this couple. He says that he once lost a camel and went looking for it but he suddenly found himself in a strange city with a river, fruit bearing palms, figs, grapes and what have you- but there were no houses. He, however, met only two people and they were this nude couple with whom, after some misgivings, he became friendly and they invited him to join them in nudity and 'naturalism'. Although he loved to respond, and enjoyed looking at them, he couldn't bring himself to do like them. He has nonetheless made it a habit to go there secretly regularly "to listen [to their music and song] and <sup>to</sup> look at them for some days until this became like an obsession and a craving and I became tired of living among the dead."

Hadīth al-Kalb illustrates a classic case of ingratitude by a tribe to a desert tramp (su<sup>c</sup>lūk). In times of drought the tribe benefit from his services but when the time

of plenty arrives, they forsake him. This contrasts sharply with his dog's faithfulness to him.

The setting of Hadīth al-<sup>c</sup>Adad is similar to that of al-Sudd. Abū Durayra, the hero, tells Kahlān about the peoples with whom he has associated in the past and the social ills as well as the self-satisfied complacency he has noticed among them. The multiplicity of desires and acquisition of material things by some of the different tribes he has moved with in the past have merely resulted in selfishness, backbiting, and complacency coupled with the desire for even more without any productive effort. His unsuccessful attempt to infuse life into one of these 'dead' tribes has made him (unlike Ghaylān) to retrace his steps and start living in a world of his own.

Apart from these short narratives published in the 40's, al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī published one more of the same genre entitled Hadīth al-Ghaiba tutlabu falā tudraku<sup>71</sup> (Narrative of a desired but unattainable state of Selflessness) in 1956. It contains the adventures of Abū Hurayra with a nun named Zulma al-Hadhalīya whose father is a convert to christianity. She lives in a remote mountain convent to which Abū Hurayra goes one day as a guest. About what happens after this, Zulma, who is the narrator, says :

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71. al-Fikr, Yr.1, No.6, March, 1956, p.6.

"I used to be alone with him in his cell every night teaching him devotion and prayers. On my first night with him, he approached me, held my hand and said : 'Have you attained the degree of piety which enables you to become pregnant and give birth to a child without a male?'<sup>72</sup> I shook off his hand while a cold shiver ran through my body. He said: 'If not, prayers are no more effective than wine. How do you get rid of the body and soul?' I said, 'We tear it (i.e. the body) into shreds until we forget pain. As for the soul, its obliteration (fanā') is into Allah and the messiah (al-masīh). (They used to torture the body until it became extinct)'. I then went to fetch him a whip and thrust it at him (but) he said: 'Not with this but with my hand' to which I replied: 'The messiah's blood and flesh will wipe away the sinner's errors.' He then said: 'Is there no way of teaching me what can be forgotten? Is there no way (of knowing) the unreasonable? Teach me conception and childbearing and the mystery of the heredity of the soul or sing for me and put me at rest! Is there no expert among you good at music-making to invite the gods and smash Time and divulge the circumscribed (knowledge)...?"

After a severe emotional crisis, Abū Hurayra finally seduces Zulma from what he calls her delusion into what he regards as the natural sexual life of a man and woman. He gives her a lecture on the different kinds of monks and nuns that he knows and concludes that the body cannot be deadened or denied and that many monks and nuns are merely deceiving themselves in seeking a state of self-abnegation (al-ghaiba) which they cannot attain.

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72. The allusion here is obviously to the virgin birth of Jesus which is reported in both the Qur'ān (Surah 3, V.47) and the Bible (Mathew I: 18 & 23; Luke I: 30 and 31).

### Al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī and Existentialism<sup>73</sup>

Al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī has attempted in his stories to present the complicated situations in which man finds himself trapped, challenged and confused; to tell the story of man who finds himself in front of a terrifying emptiness and sometimes exposed to the ridicule of things beyond his comprehension.

In his handling of this problem, he has been greatly influenced by French existentialist writers, especially Jean-Paul Sartre (b.1905)<sup>74</sup> with whose influence he combined his wide knowledge of the religious experience of Muslim mystics like Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (1058-1111), Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d.1023) and the poet-philosopher Abū 'l-<sup>c</sup>Alā' al-Ma<sup>c</sup>arrī (d.1057).

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73. Although there is no consensus among philosophers as to the precise meaning of some of the postulates of "existentialism" (such as 'existence', 'nothingness', 'the absurd') and in spite of the rivalry among the high-priests of the creed, 'existentialism' may be summed up as "a philosophy of freedom which places human will at the centre of everything" and sees Man as "that being for whom existence precedes essence" - (A. Maurois, tr. C. Moise & R. Bruce, From Proust to Camus-Profiles of Modern French Writers, London, 1970, p.305). Or, in the words of Simone de Beauvoir, "Man is man only by his refusal to be passive, by the urge which throws him from the present toward the future, which thrusts him toward things with the aim of dominating and shaping them; for him, to exist is to remake existence, to live is the will to live" (H.M. Peyre, French Novelists of Today, O.U.P., 1967, p.306. The creed's outstanding contemporary exponents are Sartre, Camus (1913-1960) & de Beauvoir (b.1908).

74. For a brief account of his life and works, see: Maurois, op.cit., pp. 299-324, and Peyre, op.cit., Ch. IX.



Instead of writing abstract metaphysical treatises, al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī has given a measure of concreteness to his ideas by making his characters live out the various human experiences he wanted to portray.

His protagonists in Mawlid al-Nisyān, Madyan and in Hadīth al-Ghaiba tutlabu..., Zulma, both fall into the illusion of thinking that they could separate the 'existence' of the body from that of the 'existence' of the 'soul'. The death of Madyan after drinking the potion which he thought to be capable of giving him 'oblivion', that is, dispense with physical existence in order to enter into the 'absolute being', shows the futility of this dualism which is sometimes resorted to in order to escape the realities of life. Similarly, the failure of Zulma to deaden the body and thus deprive it of its natural functioning and craving explodes the illusion that there could be any effective separation of the two 'existences'. In Madyan's aspiration to solve the mysteries and absurdities of life in connection with which he sees Time and Death as his greatest enemies, he is egged on by Ranjahād, a character which is no more than Madyan's own imagination and fantasies like Mayyārā in connection with Ghailān in al-Sudd.

It is in al-Sudd that al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī's treatment of the existentialist theme becomes clearest. In an article which he wrote in reply to Dr. Ṭāha Ḥusayn's criticism of the

play<sup>75</sup>, he said that his play was a contribution to man's "vital need to know: his own essence, the ultimate aim of his power and his methods, his end and objectives, his (given) situation and his future, and to know the relationship between that power and his situation and to what extent that power is compatible with, or subservient to, or a substitute for, or a modifier of, or directed to... or a nullification of his (given) situation.."

One is tempted to see a similarity between the plight of Ghailān in his futile efforts to fight against fate represented by the goddess Šāhabbā' and that of Sisyphus of Greek mythology who was condemned by the gods to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain from whence the stone would fall back of its own weight but al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī was quick to point out in the article referred to above that he intended to convey a more positive attitude to life, absurd and impossible though it might seem, than that portrayed by the pure absurdity and unfettered severity of fate in Sisyphus of mythology. He saw Ghailān and Maimūna as embodying in themselves the Eastern/Islamic concept of the "essence of Man, his situation as Man, his ability as Man and the honour of Man from the point of view of his humanness". Ghailān, he explained, portrayed "the tragedy of the living who is required by life to live, struggle, work, grow, exert

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75. Al-Fikr, Yr.2, No.8, May, 1957, pp.28-36.

energy relentlessly, untiringly, indegatingly, undespairingly, unafraid and unflinchingly as if he lived eternally in spite of the fact that he bears in his breast the certainty of the believer that Life is transient and that there is no permanence except in Allah; that Man's power is impotence compared to Allah's; that Immortality and Continuity are not decreed for whatever Man creates but only for Allah's creation."

The story puts in full focus the question of whether to be or not to be.

"Either the human belief in his inevitable extinction and his bracing up for preparation for sunset at the break of dawn should be one of the factors of despair enervating the source of life, paralysing the limbs, breaking the wings, destroying the force of life and causing a retreat to the selflessness of Nirvana and the tranquility of the inanimate; or, on the contrary, this thought which is ever present in every moment of the conscious mind, should be an incentive which impels the Will power and human valour toward the excellence of greater struggle and more sublime endeavour."

Al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī sees Ghailān as taking the latter alternative while Maimūna accepts the former. He believes that while the capabilities of the human soul are limited in comparison with the Divine and Universal Power, it could at the same time distinguish itself from other beings by "utilising its Will power" because it is "derived from another greater soul which is the Universal Soul".<sup>76</sup> As a result of this derivation, it becomes in itself a derived source of creative ability because

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76. His language and concept of the origin of Man here is similar to that advanced by al-Ghazzālī in his al-Ma<sup>c</sup>ārif al-Aqlīya.

"when Allah blew in Man a part of His Soul<sup>77</sup> and put in him the characteristic individual essence deriving from His Divine Nature and made it (i.e. Human Soul) a diminutive picture of His Absolute Divine Soul, He thus wanted it to be a distinctive Cause (‘illa shakhsiyya) capable of action, creation and final deed as a result of the free will He has endowed it with - this, in 'existence', is the position of Man, a free creator of his own future, and this, in the Universe, is his position which makes him the viceroy (khalīfa) of Allah on the earth<sup>78</sup> and which enables him to accept the 'trust' (amāna) which Allah offered to the Universe and it refused in fear and (self-) pity".

This view of the position of Man is much more nearer to the 'theistic existentialism' of the French Gabriel Marcel (b.1889) than it is to that of Sartre and Albert Camus (1913-1960) and Simone de Beauvoir (b.1908) in whose concept of existentialism there is no place for a god.

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77. See: Qur'ān Surah 15, v.29.

78. Ibid., Surahs 2, v.30 and 38, v.27.

External Influence on al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī.

The influence of classical Arabic literature is most evident in his hadīths,<sup>79</sup> especially the influence of Isfahānī's Kitāb al-Aghānī and of the narrative parts of Ayyām al-<sup>c</sup>Arab. These récits were written in the spirit of the classical Arabic hadīths, having one or two reporters and with very little attention to plot.

In his hādīths, there is a recurrence of the theme of song, dance and sex orgies reminiscent of the famous classical Arab poet Abū Nuwās of whom al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī once made a special study.<sup>80</sup> This theme also recurs in Kitāb al-Aghānī.

However, under this superficial structure of the hadīths lay a more serious treatment of some aspects of human existence in which al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī was interested as illustrated in the life of his principal hero \* Abū Durayra (or Abū Hurayra in Hadīth al-Ghaiba). For example, Rayḥāna's purification and restoration by fire in Hadīth al-Qiyāma suggests an experience similar to

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79. The word hadīth, apart from its theological meaning of the saying or account of the action of the prophet (Tradition), has been variously used by philologists and men of letters to denote meanings ranging from ordinary conversation and cock-and-bull tales to serious articles such as Tāha Husayn's Hadīth al-Arbi<sup>c</sup>ā, ed. Cairo, 1925.

80. Ghāzī, ORIENT, op.cit., p.142 footnote.

the purification by love and death of the emancipated woman in Henrik Ibsen's Romersholm written in 1886<sup>81</sup> or even the biblical Old Testament usage of fire and thunder as a symbol of divine presence (Exodus 20:18) and the Divine use of fire as a purifying agent (Isaiah 48:10). Similarly, Abū Durayra's friend's recollection of a past event as a result of their encounter with the nude couple recalls Marcel Proust's<sup>82</sup> theory of evocation of the past through the coincidence of present sensation in his A la recherche du temps perdu.

Hadīth al-<sup>c</sup>Adad and Hadīth al-Kalb treat of some sociopsychological observations by Abū Durayra.

#### Al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī's Language

Al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī has united in his language all the influences of the numerous literary landmarks of Arabic literature.

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81. Ibsen (1828-1906) was a Norwegian dramatist and poet. His writings were mostly on the theme of the conflict of will and power. He has been described as an "inscrutable doubter" who puts searching questions everywhere and answers none". (Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics, op.cit., Vol.VIII, p.75.) Al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī mentions him as one of those whose works have had some influence on him. See al-Fikr, May 1957, p.31. Al-Sudd has even been qualified by some as 'Ibsenian' - See V. Monteil, Anthologie Bilingue de la littérature Arabe Contemporaine, Beyrouth, no date, p.241.
82. Marcel Proust (1871-1922) was a notable French philosophical novelist who is mostly famous for his philosophy of involuntary memory and the relativity of feelings. See Maurois, op.cit., pp.1-29 & Peyre, op.cit., pp. 67-97.

In his al-Sudd<sup>83</sup> comes the following extract which reminds one of the concise and crisp language of the pre-Islamic Arab poets and that of the early Sūrahs of the Qur'ān :

يدخل جماعة من الرهبان قومة صاهباء في خشوع ذل ومشية قَهْقَرَى . ستة وفيهم  
 مشعل وسابعهم طبل . ثم ستة وسابعهم انا ماء<sup>84</sup> مشتملون ببرائيس اسباط .  
 وليس يبدو منهم الا الرؤوس ناتئة كالعناصل وقد نبتت في قللها خصال من شعر  
 سوداء ، مرسلة كصفائر النساء ، وسالت منها اللحى غزيرة كثيفة شعطاء . اولئك  
 قومة صاهباء وسدنة بيت النار والماء . يدخلون فيظن البغل انه المسقى . ولكنهم  
 يجعلون الماء امام الكهف وسط الفناء . ويستديرون حوله ، وعين البغل مشتتة ناظرة  
 حيرى . ثم يبتدىء الترتيل ويبتدىء الدعاء . وتقوم الضوضاء . فتسير الهويناء :  
 سحر ماء الهباء  
 سبحت صاهباء  
 هلهباء هلهباء  
 سبحت صاهباء

83. Al-Sudd, op.cit., pp. 84-85.

84. For very close similarity of style, see Sūrat al-Kahf (18)  
 Verse 22: ".... سيقولون ثلاثة رابعهم كلبهم ويقولون خمسة سادسهم كلبهم."

His qhādīth bear the influence of the rich discursive language of classical Arabic hadīth literature; and the philosophical language of Arabic/Islamic philosophical writers such as al-Tawhīdī, al-Ghazzālī<sup>85</sup> and Ibn al-Muqaffa<sup>86</sup> is evident in the following extract from his Mawlid al-Nisyān:

وكنْتَ اظن الموت ذروة الآلام وكمال الحياة والراحة الكبرى . كالذي يكون في اقصى الحذاب من كمال النعيم : لكن الزمان وراء الروح يذكر وينزع الندامة والاسى والوله والحسرة . وهذه هي السرقة يا ليلى والختل والحيلة . هذا الموت الذى يعيد الحياة في صورة شواء قبيحة ويعجز ان يكون مصبها ومقرها واقصى درجات قرارها سكونا ويثقلها ذكريات واسفا على الجسد وافتقادا لماضي الحياة ولوعة . . . . .  
وقد بلى الجسد وفنيت كل حياة .<sup>86</sup>

" . . . هذا عالم الموت . ماتوا ولم يدركوا الفناء وجاءوا فلم يصلوا العين . يذكرون السى الابد الاجساد وسيرجعون ما بان من حياة . وما مضى من ملاء ويشكون الفراغ ويجدون صداعا في رؤوسهم وقد ضاعت وادواء في صدورهم وقد حوت . . . وقد اكلت الارض بهم الزمان يذكروهم تذكيرا ويشتد فيهم ويحصف ويجتذب الماضي وما كان فيه المستقبل الابد وامكاناتها فيعجنها جميعا ويجعلها على الروح وقد تعي بعضا لارواح فتطلب مثلك مستراحا وتميل الى النعم فاذا هو ينخسها كالمهماز نخسا بل انظريا مدين الزمان ما يصنع<sup>٨٧</sup>

85. It is interesting to note that he epigraphed some of his writings with quotes from some of these Arab literature, e.g. from al-Ghazzālī in Hadīth al-Ghaiba; from al-Tawhīdī in al-Musāfir (appended to al-Sudd, pp. 190-198).

86. al-Mabāhith, op.cit., No. 14, p.11.

87. Ibid., No. 16.



The solid and sometimes terse desert-like language that al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī often employed, coupled with the symbolisms of their content, have made his writings difficult to understand not only by the ordinary Tunisian reader accustomed to reading the traditional naturalistic story<sup>88</sup> but even by such <sup>an</sup> eminent Arab littérateur as Tāha Husayn who ended his criticism of al-Sudd with the note:

"...how I wish that the author's language were a bit simpler than it is! He has hewn it out of rock as if it were a piece from the mountain which is the scene of his story and he has thus added the difficulty of expression to the difficulty of meaning and style..."<sup>89</sup>

Nonetheless, his works mark an important achievement in the history of Arabic literature in Tunisia because they have proved that the classical Arabic language is capable of being used as a vehicle for expressing modern philosophical ideas just as it was able to cope with Greek, Persian and other foreign cultures in the eighth and ninth centuries A.D.<sup>90</sup>

#### 5 - Other Lesser Short Story Writers of the Forties and Fifties.

Besides the writers identified with the foregoing two types of short stories, there were also some lesser writers

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88. Some Tunisians, among them writers and readers, with whom the present writer discussed during the summer of 1970 still said that they did not fully comprehend much of his fictional writing especially al-Sudd. It is almost impossible to render section 2 of al-Sudd into any other language.

89. al-Fikr, Yr. 2, No. 8, May 1957, p. 25.

90. P.K. Hitti, op.cit., Chapters 24 & 27; Gibbs, op.cit., pp. 63-86.

whose stories were heavily committed to defending some ideology or cause. Among these writers of apologetics and polemics were <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Razzāq Karabāka and Muḥammad al-Marzūqī.

<sup>c</sup>Abd al-Razzāq Karabāka

He was born in 1901 of a family which traces its origin to Andalusia (Muslim Spain). He was educated at a local Qur'anic school and also attended the Zaitūna 'university-mosque' from 1917 to 1921 when his studies were abruptly terminated.<sup>91</sup>

Between 1919 and his death in 1945, he participated in the literary life of Tunisia in various rôles - as a journalist, a play writer, dramatist, essayist, poet, story-writer and even as a trade unionist.

He started his career as a journalist immediately after the first world war and by 1920, he had become the editor of the newspaper al-Mudhik. After the eclipse of this paper, he continued his journalistic career by contributing to another paper called Lisān al-Sha<sup>c</sup>b a series of article <sup>entitled</sup> Hadīth al-Thalāthā,<sup>92</sup> and in 1932, he was again appointed the editor of al-Zamān, a paper which he employed in defence of domestic handicrafts such as weaving which were being threatened with extinction by cheap imported goods in the thirties.

91. Abū 'l-Qāsim Muḥammad Karrū, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Razzāq Karabāka, Shā'ir al-Ghinā' wa 'l-Masrah, Tunis, 1965, p.8.

92. This was believed to be a parody of Tāha Ḥusayn's Hadīth al-Arbi'ā', see Karrū, *ibid.*, p.13 footnote.

He was also a poet of some note and he even contested the position of Amīr al-Shu<sup>c</sup>arā' of Tunisian poets in the 1930's against the noted Tunisian poet Muhammad al-Shādhilī Khaznadār and won, supported by no less a poet than al-Shābbī among others.<sup>93</sup>

He was a restless person who moved from one field of activity to another and successfully left his mark on each of them. This restlessness is believed to have resulted from his belief in his own immense ability to succeed in everything he wished to do. He was, like many of his contemporaries, a kind of Bohemian who loved pleasure and the company of the opposite sex. His stories, therefore, were a reflection of his view of life and society.

In the early twenties, he joined a number of drama groups but it was not until the second half of the thirties that he became famous for his short tragi-comedies which were acted on the Tunisian stage and also read on the radio. Some of his more notable short plays were Amīrat al-Mahdiyya, Ā'isha al-Qādira and Wilāda wa Ibn Zaidūn<sup>94</sup>.

His stories, like those of his contemporaries, were published in various journals and many of them were read on the radio.<sup>95</sup> In a series entitled Ġibra fī Qissa

93. Karrū, p.24 & al-Ālam al-Adabī, Yr.3, No.22, 15/8/32, p.1.

94. Karrū, p.19.

95. Ibid., p.14, Even when these were later published, one could still see traces of the radio edition in them. For example, his ABŪ 'l-Qitat (see below) opens with the words :

كنت اعرف الرجل هذا الذي احدث لكم عنه الساعة...

(Lesson in a story) which he read on the Tunisian radio every Wednesday, one can detect the general trend of his thought. In these, he criticised the moral code of the Tunisian middle-and upper-class society of the period between the two world wars. For example, in Abū 'l-Qitāt which was published in al-Thurayyā, No.4, Yr.2, April, 1945, his principal character is a retired customs official who cannot get over his obsession for the exercise of authority over others to which he has become accustomed during his twenty years at a border post. He eventually erects a pen near his house where he arranges disused plates and other receptacles. Every evening, he goes round the district collecting remnants of food which he puts in the pen which soon becomes a rendezvous for all the cats of the district. He is always there to control the cats with his small wooden staff. The writer concludes the story by saying :

وسواءٌ لديه السلطة على البشر بعقولهم وذواتهم الممتازة وسواء السلطة على القطط التي لا تعقل ولا تمتاز . . . .

In another one of his stories published in al-Thurayyā, Yr.1, No.2, January 1944 under the general title of 'Lesson in a Story', he sketches the plight of two patients who are visited at <sup>their</sup> homes by the same doctor. One is very rich and contented and his illness brings sorrow and apprehension to all his family. When his wife sends their car to fetch the doctor, the car is too

big for the narrow alleys of the peasant quarters to where the doctor has gone to visit one of his patients. When the doctor finally comes round to examine the rich man, he exclaims, (quite unnaturally though) :

"I've come to you people after visiting a wretched patient whose only illness is hunger (mā bihi illā 'l-Jū<sup>c</sup>); I am now before a contented patient whose only ailment is satiety, (mā bihi dā' illā 'l-Shab<sup>c</sup>). Oh Lord, Oh people, how I wish this would give to that so that both can become healthy and happy...."

Since some of these stories were rooted in the author's life experience, they were full of life and were often adorned with his poetic style of writing. Other stories by him reflected his literary, social and historical opinions which, therefore, rendered them a little more than essays cast in the form of a story. For example, his Jarīmat Shahrāzād (Shahrāzād's Crime) was an echo and criticism of the absurd concepts of an exotic East propagated by various Western authors like Blasco Ibanez and Pierre Loti,<sup>96</sup> although the author's poetic presentation of his materials invests the stories with some merit.

#### Muhammad al-Marzūqī.

Muhammad al-Marzūqī was born in a Southern Tunisian village in 1916 and had his earliest education in a kuttāb

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96. Karrū , p.45, contains the text of Jarīmat Shahrāzād. The journal al-Thurayyā issue of April, 1945, was a special issue in memory of Karabāka and it contains some of his stories along with an assessment of his life's achievements.

at his home village. In 1933, he moved to the capital for further education, first at the Zaitūna 'university-mosque' and later at the Khaldūniya college.

He worked as a journalist for a considerable length of time and also as an announcer on the state broadcasting station.

He is the author of a number of short plays and many short stories. His stories, which were first published in various newspapers and journals and read over the radio have been collected and published in three booklets entitled Urqūb al-Khair (The Tendon of Bounty),<sup>97</sup> Fi Sabil al-Hurriya (In the Cause of Freedom)<sup>98</sup> and Baina Zawjatain (Between Two Wives).<sup>99</sup>

The collection Urqūb al-Khair takes its name from the first of a collection of six stories written in 1952 and 1953. The first five stories in the collection are illustrative of the customs, beliefs, practices and social conditions of the pastoral Arabs of Southern Tunisia from where the author came.

The first story tells about a severe drought which completely desicates the desert, equally affecting vegetation, animal and man. In this foreboding atmosphere, a couple find a child along the road which cuts through their farm. The boy tells them how he has been orphaned

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97. Published in Tunis, 1956.

98. Published in Tunis, 1956.

99. Published in Tunis, 1957.

by the drought. The couple, at great expense to themselves, take care of the boy until he grows into a young man and marries. Soon after this, a local government officer is transferred to the area. He turns out to be the orphaned young man's long lost half-brother about whom his father had told him before his death. The story contains an excellent picture of the nomadic environment and way of life.

Two other stories in this collection - Matbū<sup>c</sup>a (A Pursued Woman) and FI Khayāl al-Mādī (In the Shadow of the Past) depict the relentlessness of the bedouin in clearing his family name of any stigma of shame or 'taking a soul for a soul' in revenge for the death of kinsman.

The first (Matbū<sup>c</sup>a) concerns a girl who elopes with a lover after having been betrothed to another person. Her father dies of the shame that she has brought upon him from his kinsmen who blame her action on the way he has brought her up. Her brother eventually catches up with her and slays her in spite of the fact that she has become reconciled with her first spouse and has <sup>even</sup> had two children by him. Speaking to his sister's husband, he exclaims :

"You've had children by that accursed soul! May Allah render you ugly! If you were someone who respected the traditions of your people, you would have slain her... What do you expect from children born by a defiled woman? Her abscondence from you with a vile man was enough reason for you to put her beyond the scope of mercy..."

In Fī Khayāl al-Mādī, there is the story of a young man who goes in search of his father's killer but unknowingly marries the daughter of the man he is looking for. When he finally discovers the truth, he is torn between love for his wife and child on one hand and his loyalty to the memory of his slain father which requires the blood of his father-in-law on the other. He finally kills his father-in-law, and while putting the severed head on the grave of his father, he exclaims :

"This is your adversary's head, dear father, rest in peace in your grave. Your son has avenged your death in accordance with your oath and in keeping with the duty which you put on his shoulders while he was yet a kid."

The sixth story in the collection is completely different from the others. It is entitled Fī 'Ālam al-Dhurra (In the World of the Atom) and it is a kind of science fiction cast in form of a dream by a bedouin Arab.

The last sentence of the story which goes thus:

"I praised Allah that the world of atoms in which I had just lived for some moments was no more than the world of dreams and that the destruction of civilisation by means of atomic bombs was no more than a thought which I entertained in real life."

throws light on the author's objective which was an indirect scepticism and criticism of the atomic age and the real-life danger in the mass production of atomic weapons.

Muhammad al-Marzūqī's second collection entitled



Fī Sabīl al-Hurriya (In the Cause of Freedom) contains eight short stories written in the closing years of the thirties with the exception of only two which were written in 1953 and 1954. In his introduction to the collection the author wrote:

"These short stories were composed on different occasions. The aim behind their being written and collected in this booklet is to kindle the aspiration, zeal and gallantry of patriotic Muslim Arab youths who are eagerly looking forward to a liberated East where we shall build our new glory on the foundation of our past honour."

In keeping with this pre-conceived objective, the stories are all very much like essays on freedom and the liberation movements in various parts of the Arab world from Palestine as in Fī Sabīlik, Yā Filistīn<sup>100</sup> (In Your Service, Oh Palestine) and Watanī qabla al-Jamī'<sup>101</sup> (My Country Before all Else) to Morocco as in Anā wa 'l-Dustūr<sup>102</sup> (The Constitution and Me). The stories lack any discernible characters but are rich in symbolisms, especially the last one - al-Bāhith li-Dhātihi<sup>103</sup> (The One in Search of His Self) - the hero of which is a symbol for a nation in search of self-identity. This story, first written in 1954, quotes the hero as saying he had almost got his long sought-for 'self' which might have been intended by the author to imply the impending Tunisian independence.

100. al-Marzūqī, Fī Sabīl al-Hurriya, Tunis, 1956, p.48.

101. Ibid., p.35.

102. Ibid., p.41.

103. Fī Sabīl al-Hurriya, p.83.

Muhammad al-Marzūqī's third collection entitled Zawjatain (Between Two Wives) contains ten short stories the majority of which are of a better quality than his other collections. The style and content are better and they are relatively free from the political partisanship and the folkloric fantasy which abound in the other two collections.

This last collection presents a picture of the Tunisian society in its period of intellectual, social and political fermentation, the conflicts between the old and the new, and some of the social problems that beset the society.

The first story from which the collection takes its name<sup>104</sup> is a very skilful representation of the society's dilemma over its inherited traditional, social and religious values and those imported from abroad as a result of colonialism and contact with foreigners. In al-Marzūqī's attempt to highlight social injustice and the suffering of the poor and needy, he seems to have overdrawn the picture by taking highly grotesque examples that are most unlikely to be met in real life and which

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104. 'Between Two Wives' is about a young active man who, at thirty, is made to look older by matrimonial problems. He is first forced by his parents to marry a girl steeped in old sūfī beliefs and superstitions and who is anything but 'progressive' in her outlook. All efforts to reason with her are to no avail. She dies while giving birth to her first baby. He later marries a girl of his choice. She is the sophisticated, cinema-going, free-moving and equality-seeking type. She is always arguing with him and he eventually divorces her.

are, therefore, less likely to move the reader's genuine sympathy. The third story in the collection entitled al-Ya's (Misery)<sup>105</sup> is an example of this kind of presentation. The same thing can be said of the fifth story entitled Allāh Yaftahu (Allah Will Provide)<sup>106</sup> which presents an extremely exaggerated picture of man's inhumanity to man. It is very doubtful whether such a heartless person who would squeeze a piece of soaked bread meant for a cat out of a beggar's mouth could be met in real life.

A defect common to most of al-Marzūqī's stories is the intrusion of the author's voice where that of his characters ought to be heard such as the following

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105. al-Ya's is about a young man who takes refuge in solitude and darkness from all sorts of social injustices of which he has been a victim. Having been bereaved of his mother at fourteen, his father married another woman but she ill-treated him with his father's connivance. He had to flee from home. He got work as a domestic servant with a master who would rather feed his dogs and cats than feed his servants. He left him and went to work in a factory where a machine cut his fingers but instead of being paid compensation, he was sacked. Meanwhile, he learnt of his father's death and hurried back home but his father's wife had appropriated all his property for herself and her children. He got another job and married but his wife died of tuberculosis after having a child for him. At three, the child was knocked down by a car. The owner of the car was eventually acquitted and offered to pay him compensation for the loss of his child. He refused the money by saying his child "was not a beast offered for sale". He was even blamed for negligence.

As a consequence of these successive tales of woe, he becomes fed up with life and with people in general. He goes away from them as soon as darkness falls but the moon follows him everywhere to expose his hiding place to the gaze of men.

106. Baina Zawjatain, op.cit., p.50.

declamation by the narrator entitled Bint Dhawāt<sup>107</sup>.

As the narrator watches a boy and a girl disappearing at the end of the story, he comments:

"... وتصورت خلفهما موكبا من الاخلاق الاسلامية السامية تختفي خلفها في الظلام ، نادبا متحسرا على ما كان في هذه البلاد من قوة وتمكين زلزل اركانها ابناء الذوات فابناء الطبقة التي يسمونها بالعليا والتي نزع ثيابها لتلبس قشورا وفواضل لم تخلق لها ولم يخلقوا اليها وجنوا بذلك على مجتمعهم المتماسك بالتدهور والانحلال واندفعوا في طريق اادت بهذا المجتمع المسكين الى هدم اركان شخصيته التي بها يسمى شعبا بين الشعوب." <sup>108</sup>

Also, he often breaks in to make comments and give narrative information, and where his characters are made to say these, they often appear artificial and the author's views are easily discernible. For example, at the end of 'Between Two Wives', the disillusioned hero is made to say that he bringing his daughter up in a way which he considers "suitable for the Tunisian girl" and he finally disclaims responsibly for his

107. Baina Zawjatin, op.cit., pp.81-91.

108. Ibid., p.91.

predicaments:

"...neither I nor any other person is responsible for all these but the circumstances in which we find ourselves here have been fated to witness the onset of an uncontrollable social revolution..."

Apart from there being no event in the story to support this comment, it is also an oversimplification which ignores individual responsibilities in a society in the process of change and adaptation.

The use of flat characters who do not reveal the contradictory tendencies in human nature may also be remarked as one of his defects. In spite of all these things, he was one of the Tunisian short story writers of the period between 1940 and independence whose works illustrated the contemporary Tunisian society. His contribution to the study of the Tunisian folklore literature (poetry and prose) from which he has recorded some of his stories also deserves to be mentioned here.<sup>109</sup>

## 6 - Conclusion

The Tunisian stories of this period reveal a higher degree of improvement over earlier periods. There was a greater attention to realism which made the majority of them to write on some of the problems of their society as vividly as possible. The Tunisian authors of this period also demonstrated a better grasp and assimilation of their foreign models so that their works were no

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109. He has published a book on this topic entitled al-Adab al-Sha<sup>chī</sup> fī Tūnis, Tunis, 1967.

longer a blind imitation of foreign short story writers but original compositions which in the case of talented writers such as the humorous <sup>°</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>°</sup>ājī and the philosophically-inclined Maḥmūd al-Mas<sup>°</sup>adī, showed the potentiality of the Arabic short story in Tunisia for further development. The defect which has characterised the Arabic short story right from its inception, namely, the inability of its writers to refrain from making direct judgements on their characters and events, was still noticeable among the group designated 'lesser writers' represented in this chapter by Karabāka and al-Marzūqī.

The fact that many of the stories of this period were read over the radio and were often never published afterwards due to lack of funds and publishing facilities has made it difficult to retrieve and collect the stories written by Tunisians at this period during which the humble beginnings of the preceding three decades were consolidated.

After independence, there was a blossoming of this genre due to increased publishing facilities.

## CHAPTER SIX

THE ARABIC SHORT STORY IN POST-INDEPENDENCE  
TUNISIA

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1 - Transition from pre-independence Short Story

When Tunisia became independent in 1956, many of the short story writers of the pre-independence period who were still living seemed to have diverted their efforts to other directions.

A notable example of this generation of short story writers is Maḥmūd al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī who became a minister in his country's post-independence government. The pressure of his political and administrative responsibilities must have seriously contributed to his disappearance from the literary scene. When asked in an interview early in 1956<sup>1</sup> about this break, he attributed it, first to his emotional shock at the eclipse in 1948 of al-Mabāḥith to which he had an intellectual as well as a sentimental attachment, and secondly, to his increased pre-occupation with party and trade union activities. He then concluded in manner characteristic of his philosophical twist of mind :

"...Literature does not consist merely of writing and publishing, on the contrary, relaxation is a necessary part of literature. Also, the experience of living which involves working and accepting responsibility for urgent practical responsibilities is a spring from which one must drink in order to be regenerated..."

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<sup>1</sup> See Majallat al-Nadwa, Yr.4, No.2, Feb.1956, p.55.

Another writer of that generation is al-Marzūqī, who, besides becoming a senior civil servant, has also diverted his attention to research into folklore literature. The most probable reason for the disappearance of al-Marzūqī's type of short story writers from the scene is that, with the achievement of independence and the increasing acceptance of such characters as disapprovingly portrayed in Bint Dhawāt<sup>2</sup> as a fact of life in the Tunisian society,<sup>3</sup> the raison d'être for such stories ceased to be valid in the post-independence situation. To this can be added the stricter selectivity of the publishing media which ensures that stories of very low quality do not get printed.

2. See his collection Baina Zawjatin, pp.81-91. Bint Dhawāt (Daughter of a Rich Family) is depicted as one who speaks French to you when you speak Arabic to her. She sees Dīwān Shawqī in the hand of the narrator. She does not know what dīwān means and asks who Shawqī is and whether he is as great as Victor Hugo about whom it is later discovered that she knows nothing. She says that she is now learning ballet dancing as demanded by her fiancé and approved by her father. When she gets down at the station, the inquisitive narrator follows her and her fiancé (whom she calls 'Tūtū') to the ballet hall where they both drink whisky and dance. When the narrator says he neither drinks nor dances because he is a Muslim, he is ridiculed by both the boy and the girl. Soon, a drunken non-Arab youth staggers in and asks the girl to dance with him. She expects her fiancé to refuse this request but for fear of the drunken boy, he asks her to dance with him. The furious girl says that she is surprised that the boy is so cowardly and the narrator cuts in to say: أنت خاطئة يا أنسى فلوليس جيانا. He then bemoans the lack of valour, gallantry and Islamic spirit of devotion among contemporary Tunisian youths.
3. See my introduction to the next chapter on the post-independence Tunisian legislation on the status of women.



This situation in Tunisia is to some extent similar to what happened in Morocco where most of the pre-independence story writers were absorbed into their country's administration thus depriving the genre of its most promising talents.<sup>4</sup>

There was, however, no complete break in Tunisia between the two periods as there were two writers whose writing career spanned both periods. The first of these Tunisian mukhadramān is al-Bashīr Khraîf whose earliest story was written as far back as 1937 and the second one is Muḥammad al-Tayyib al-Trîkî.

If the preceding generation of writers had their al-Mabāhith and al-Thurayyā journals, the new generation of writers also have their own al-Nadwa,<sup>5</sup> al-Fikr,<sup>6</sup> al-Tajdīd,<sup>7</sup> al-Idhā'a wa 'l-Talfaza<sup>8</sup> and of late Qisas<sup>9</sup> journals in which to publish their stories.

The younger generation of writers are cognisant of the trend towards realism in the works of their elders and they have largely built upon the latter's foundation.

The social, political and religious problems of their society which have provided them with materials for their works can be roughly classified along these lines :

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4. M.S. Al-°Afîfî, al-Qissa al-Maghribîya al-Hadîtha, Casablanca, 1961, p.24.
  5. First published, Tunis 1953. It went defunct in 1957.
  6. First published, Tunis, Oct.1955, Still in progress.
  7. First published, Tunis 1961 and ceased appearing in the following year.
  8. First published in 1959. It is still in progress.
  9. First published, Sept, 1966. It is still in progress.

Stories that deal with the theme of politics and nationalism; those that are about social problems such as gambling, drunkenness, prostitution, poverty, juvenile delinquency, mental illness and the like; then what I call 'proletarian' short stories; and in the last group are stories which are concerned with the 'conflict of generations', especially in connection with the relationship between the sexes in love and marriage and customs that have a bearing on these.

It must, however, be remarked that these groups are not completely exclusive of one another as there are stories that fall into more than one category just as most of the writers themselves do not limit their stories to one particular theme although it is possible to identify, in the case of some writers, a predominant theme which recurs in most of their works.

## 2 - Politics and Nationalism

In a country such as Tunisia which has had to struggle bitterly with the French colonial power in order to obtain its independence, it is natural to expect that this theme should find expression in the works of fiction writers. Muḥammad al-Marzūqī, a writer of the preceding generation had this theme running through his mediocre collection entitled FI Sabīl al-Hurriya but the writers of the present generation have, to a greater extent, avoided the main pitfall of the

preceding generation which is the use of the story as a thin veneer for political pamphleteering.

While most of them, at one time or another, have written stories with this theme, those among them whose works are more outstanding in this respect and who could, therefore, be taken as representative of this group are Hasan Naṣr and Muḥammad Faraj al-Shādhilī.

Hasan Naṣr<sup>10</sup> often centres his stories around revolt and underground movements of Africans against French colonialism and shows a skilful imagination in depicting the pathetic and sometimes heroic situations of his characters. His stories have appeared mostly in the journals al-Fikr and Qisṣa starting from 1959.

His Waladī Ilā 'l-Abad (My Son Forever)<sup>11</sup> is about a nationalist who is imprisoned along with many others for their part in the resistance against the colonial administration. When they are released from prison, his four-year-old son does not recognise him as his father. His hero's comments show that the story is at the end of the nationalist struggle "after we have obtained our legitimate right."

10. Hasan Naṣr was born in the Tunisian capital in 1937. He was educated first in a local kuttāb, then at a primary school and at the Zaitūna 'university-mosque'. After working as a teacher for some time, he went to the University of Baghdad where he read for a B.A. degree in Arabic literature.

11. al-Fikr, Yr.4, No.10, July 1959, pp.80-83.

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Dumū<sup>c</sup> Ghāliya (Copious Tears)<sup>12</sup> is a story told in form of a letter written by a girl on the run to her father telling him of their plight and their encounter with the French soldiers.

From the earlier part of the letter, we understand that her family have been decimated by the French gendarmes in Algeria who have killed her brother and led her sister away without anyone being able to protest. Her enraged father decides to send her mother across the border into Tunisia in spite of her mother's protest and determination to remain with her husband. The woman and her daughter meet other Algerians fleeing to Tunisia. The girl particularly recounts how one of their fellow refugees became fond of her, kissed and fondled her because she said "I resembled her daughter who was killed by the gendarmes".

Her letter closes with the tragic news of the French soldiers' pursuit of the refugees across the border and the death of her mother and that of the other woman who fondled her, both hit by their pursuers' bullets.

This story is told with unaffected simplicity and freshness in a style that immediately suggests to the reader that it is written by a young girl in distress. There is a vivid and pathetic picture of the other refugees they come across on their flight. These are described as:

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12. al-Fikr, Yr.5, No.2, November 1959, pp.91-93.

نساء وكهول ، واطفال صغار . . . وكانوا فقراء تعساء وشبابهم  
 غفنة ممزقة وتتصاعد منهم رائحة كريهة لم اذكر اني شممت مثلها  
 في حياتي .

Laisa Ghaira 'l-Matar (Nothing But Rains)<sup>13</sup> is the story of one Ṣālih, a member of a clandestine resistance movement. He suddenly disappears from home without telling his wife. When he sneaks back in the night of the third day, he faces an angry wife who demands the reason for his disappearance from home. It is then that he explains to her that he has been involved in a hand grenade incident and he is being sought <sup>for</sup> by the police. Just at that moment when he is trying to convince his wife of the need to take part in opposing the forces of colonialism, there is a hard sudden knock on the door, which, instead of the sound of rainfall which they at first thought it was, turns out to be the approach of the police who arrest and whisk him away.

It is worth remarking that Ṣālih the hero of the story does not convince a reader as a symbol of resistance against colonialism. He does not sound convincing in his argument in support of his participation in the nationalist struggle. He tells his wife:

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13. al-Fikr, Yr.6, October 1960, pp.69-71.

... " فنحن بطبعنا معدمان فقيران تعسان فلنحاول على الاقل ان نأتي  
 اى فعل يثبت اننا اثرا ضجة في يوم ما خير من ان نفارق هذه الحياة صامتين  
 مثلما قدمناها صامتين . "

In Ghurfat al-Asdiqā' (Friend's Room),<sup>14</sup> Hasan Nasr gives a description of student participation in the nationalist struggle. The hero of the story - Muhsin - is now jobless and friendless. He roams about in the streets everyday. One day, he meets a friend named Thābit and this encounter brings back the memory of his school-days and the incident that led to his expulsion from school.

"At that time, we knew neither fear nor retreat; we did whatever we wanted without hesitation or second thought"

He then describes the beginning of the student demonstration and its procession through the town:

"...the French director tried to send us back to our places...we stormed through the door and went into the street...we raised our voices in protest: 'Down with Imperialism'... Our hands went up and down, with craned necks we shouted and swarmed the streets like roaring waves. More and more people joined us along the street and shouted with us...Women greeted us with tears which seemed to say: The country needs you... Its liberation depends on you..."

He then recounts the fierce encounter with police and the death and arrest of many friends and supporters. He now imagines the empty room in which he used to meet

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14. al-Fikr, Yr.11, No.5, February 1960, pp.79-83.

and play with some friends of whom he has heard nothing since the day of the bloody demonstration. His plight and that of his friend Thābit is due to their being expelled from school as a result of their part in the demonstration. This kind of reprisal against students as well as teachers was often resorted to by the French administration in Tunisia in order to curb student political unrest.<sup>15</sup>

The story reveals Hasan Naṣr's excellent descriptive ability couple with internal dramatisation and ample use of conversation.

Muhammad Faraj al-Shādhilī

He was born in al-Qairawān in 1927 and after his primary school education there, he moved to the capital Tunis in 1945 for his secondary education. He has been writing short stories for publication in al-Fikr since the journal's inception late in 1955. One fact which is noteworthy about him is the absence of colloquial in his stories, even in the conversational parts.

Like many of his writer-colleagues, he writes on both political and social issues and it may even be said that he has been more successful in the latter than in the former theme.

In Masra<sup>o</sup> Sālīh (Sālīh's Death)<sup>16</sup> we are told of events that lead to the death of the hero, a young

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15. See Ibn 'Ashūr, al-Harakat al-Adabiya..., op.cit., pp. 119-120, and pp. 181-182.

16. al-Fikr, Yr.1, No.3, December 1955, pp.29-32.

peasant named Ṣālih. He is considered unfit for conscription because of anaemia. This makes his family happy because he will be able to remain at home with them and not die fighting against his own people. His death is, however, to come in a different way.

One day when he returns from his farm, his mother is weeping bitterly, a mood in which he rarely sees her. He is told what has happened:

الم يبلغك يا ولدي ما وقع في هذا الصباح ؟ ان عمك الحاج المكي وابن عمك محمود قد القي القبض عليهما . ان الجند والجندمة قد اقحموا عليهما الدار فانسدوا كل شيء : كسروا جدران الزيت واحرقوا ما ادخراه من صوف وافرغوا عدل القمح في التراب — لم يتركوا شيئاً يا ولدي — لقد امتحنوا عمك الشيخ الوزع الوقور امام زوجه وحجروا عليه بندقية الصيد ، ثم اقتادوه مغلولا مع محمود — لقد ظعن الامن وكثر الحيف يا صالح ! كل هذا لانهما من حزب الدستور . . . . .

He comforts his mother by saying:

"Cheer up, mother, and wipe off your tears. Don't be sad, I shall stand in for my uncle in his farm work as from tomorrow and I shall provide for his children.."

Sometime later, he is told while in the field that his village has again been besieged by soldiers who torture men and women including his mother and sister.



When he returns home, he again meets his mother and sister in a miserable mood. He decides to avenge their disgrace. "Revenge is inevitable, revenge must be taken!", he rages.

Soon afterwards, he disappears from the village without anyone knowing his whereabouts. He joins a group of freedom fighters. There comes a time when he longs to visit his village and he sneaks in at night. He meets with old friends at the village café and it seems that one of these 'friends' betrays him. The gendarmes storm the café but like most members of such underground movement he is not caught unarmed. He kills two soldiers before he is himself eventually cornered and killed.

This story is told in smooth classical Arabic like his other stories. The plot is quite realistic and better than what we read from other writers on this theme.

In Hāmil al-Haqā'ib (The Carrier of Bags)<sup>17</sup> there is a greater degree of psychological analysis and the characters are richer. The story commences with a description of a rural community under a military dusk to dawn curfew imposed to curb nationalist activities. The villagers can only go "to the farm when a considerable part of the day is past and must return as soon as the

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17. al-Fikr, Yr.1, No.5, February 1956, pp.44-48

sun inclines; they are unable to spend their evenings in the market squares of the village as they are accustomed to doing; they find nothing to fill the time at their disposal as before when they used to move around, old and young, men and women, in the markets of the village in the evenings, chatting, relaxing and amusing themselves, feeling satisfied with the day's work."

The nights seem longer. No one dare go out in defiance of the curfew or return home late.

الويسل لمن نسي الوقت أو تناسى أو تأخرت به رجلاه . فهم يذكرون جيدا كيف  
ان حمدون الاعمى بائع الحوت قد لقي حثفه بعد الوقت بقليل واذ هو يتلميس  
ويتحسس طريقه الى الدار ، وهم يعلمون ان ذلك مصير كل من خالف الامر  
او تريث ولو قليلا ، فالجنود لا يغفرون الذنب ولا يرحمون . . . ."

Then follows the main part of the story. There are two hand bags of ammunitions to be delivered to some colleagues in the resistance groups in the nearby town. Sālih insists that the village teacher, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Mu'min is the most suitable person for the assignment because of his 'European Dress' which renders him less suspicious-looking and his command of the French language which means that he can talk his way out if he gets into trouble. The teacher, however,

feels that the curfew night is not auspicious enough for such a job and when he is eventually persuaded of the urgency of the task, and the arrangements already made with the contacts who will collect the bags, he expressed his lack of confidence in his ability to endure torture without selling out his colleagues. He recalls the experience of Maḥjūb who has just escaped from detention and adds:

"Do you think that a weak man can bear such tortures and maltreatment? Do you blame him if he does what he loathes when he is unconscious? They [the gendarmes] are more awful than the angels of hell! Their hearts are callous and their conscience is dead. They are insensitive to compassion. I fear that if I am arrested and treated like Maḥjūb, I may be forced to speak... I want you to remain alive and continue the task so that even if I die, our mission will not come to an end..."

He then requests that Rashīd, another member of their group should shadow him and shoot him if he is in trouble so as not to endanger their movement.

They agree and leave the village by a mountain path, led by Ṣālīḥ until they get to a rendezvous where the bag bearers are picked up by their contact. They eventually get into trouble when they are halted in the town by a sentry but Rashīd kills the sentry and saves his colleagues.

In addition to the excellent description of the disturbed social life of the rural community under military curfew, the story offers a good insight into the psychology of the teacher, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Mu'min who is very frank and realistic. Al-Shādhilī, however, betrays a general weakness on the part of the Tunisian story-writers

when he makes Ṣālih say in reply to 'Abd al-Mu'min's first sign of reluctance to accept the assignment:

"You educated men beat my imagination. It seems that the more educated you are, the more cowardly you become; that your education is the very antithesis of courage. You are spectators who neither brave dangers nor wade through the hustles and bustles of war who merely sit down and theorise!"

It is also doubtful whether an educated man like 'Abd al-Mu'min would have demanded to be killed as a means of escaping torture.

In Wahy al-<sup>c</sup>Awda (The Inspiration of a Return Visit)<sup>18</sup> we find the recollections of a man who returns to his village after a long absence. Memories of the past begin to stream back into his mind as he visits the cemetery to look at the tombs of the political martyrs and remembers their shed blood and thinks of death and its inevitability. Isn't death in essence "a call (to action), a triumph and a challenge?" He recalls his youthful days and the martyrdom of Ibn al-Arqash in his kadrūna<sup>19</sup> when he opposed the policy of assimilation. He indicates his preference for the kadrūna rather than the European dress of his relative <sup>c</sup>Amlaq who is a supporter of assimilation and a lackey of the colonial authority.

The setting of this story in a graveyard lends itself to some sentimentalism which makes the story full of direct moral and religious pronouncements. For example,

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18. al-Fikr, Yr.1, No.6, March 1956, pp.28-30.

19. This is a kind of native gown for men.

one of the characters describes assimilation as "apostasy and denial of the past and contentment with ignominy."

Among the other Tunisian writers who have expressed their patriotic sentiments in form of story is Muḥammad al-Mukhtār Jannāt<sup>20</sup> whose stories appeared in Qisas journal. In his Sutūh al-Ghasl<sup>21</sup> (The Wash-House) he invokes the picture of a French air raid from their base in Binzarta against a Tunisian army post which ends in the death of many Tunisian soldiers including their divisional commanding officer. The hero (and we can recognise in this the author's voice) says towards the end :

"My fellow countrymen, how deeply devoted you are to Bourguiba and how dearly you love Tunisia! This blood, this blood is very dear to us!"

The story is undoubtedly inspired by the long-drawn Franco-Tunisian conflict over the control of the Binzarta air base which flared into armed confrontation between the two sides in 1957 and 1961.<sup>22</sup>

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20. Jannāt was born in Qafsa (Southern Tunisia) in 1930. He studied first at a local Qur'anic school, then at the Qafsa branch of the Zaitūna and finally at the main 'university-mosque' itself in the capital Tunis. He graduated in 1954 and entered the teaching profession which he left after twelve years. He is at present working in the Destour party headquarters. The first part of his Urjuwān, a novel based on events during the nationalist struggle was published early in 1971.

21. Qisas, No. 1, Sept. 1966, pp. 39-49.

22. The Middle East and North Africa. 1969-70; Europa Publ. Ltd., London, 1969, pp. 708-710.

Another one is Yahyā Muḥammad<sup>23</sup> who in his Raḡṣat al-Sighār (Dance of the Young)<sup>24</sup> shows the disillusionment of a young Arab student in France who finds himself despised and discriminated against "because I am an Arab". The narrated incidents are rather very superficial and we are not offered any real insight into the personality of the principal character some of whose statements sound too apologetic and unsupported by the trend of the story.

The Tunisian short stories with nationalism and politics as their theme are generally very moving and realistic. This is due in the main to the fact that many of the authors have themselves passed through the experiences of their characters. Some of them are still not free from the preceding generation's defect which consists in making moral judgements on their characters. It is worth noting, however, that the incidence of such remarks is very minimal and the stories of writers such as Ḥasan Naṣr and Muḥammad Faraj al-Shādhilī reveal a talent which augurs well for the future of Tunisian short stories with this theme.

### 3 - Stories with the People's Social Conditions as Theme.

In a country such as Tunisia where the society has been subjected to French colonial rule since the last

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23. He is a clerk by occupation.

24. Qisās, No. 4, April 1967; also included in author's collection of short stories entitled Nidā' al-Fajr, Tunis, 1967, p.156.

quarter of the 19th century with its attendant influx of foreign settlers especially French and Italians and the inevitable interchange of social habits between the indigenous and settler communities; the general awakening in the whole of the Muslim world resulting in the modification and readjustment of attitude to certain religious injunctions and practices, the questionings and re-examination of many long-standing social norms and customs, the weakening and disintegration of the traditional family ties and sanctions as a result of the growth of urban societies and migrations to towns and even abroad in search of employment and the social problem of delinquency which often accompanies this phenomenon: in a society in such a state, it is natural to expect that social conditions should recur in fiction-writing and should even be the dominant theme.

There is hardly any Tunisian fiction-writer who does not have one story or more based on his people's social conditions. We shall, therefore, select a representative list of writers in this group to illustrate their style. Al-Ṭayyib al-Trīkī, Muḥammad Rashād al-Ḥamzāwī, Mustafā al-Fārisī and al-Bashīr Khraîf stand out prominently among those whose stories vividly convey the old and the new Tunisian society.

Muhammad al-Tayyib al-Trīkī<sup>25</sup>

Al-Tayyib al-Trīkī, one of the post independence generation of writers has revealed in his short stories a keen interest in the condition of the poorest classes of the Tunisian society. He depicts<sup>in</sup> intimate family scenes, the joys and the sorrows of his class. He also demonstrates a sensitive imaginative capacity in portraying the lot of the juvenile delinquents who are sometimes forced into this situation by their family circumstances.

Apart from four stories which he published in al-Nadwa journal, most of al-Trīkī's stories have been published in al-Fikr.

His two stories Sālim al-Hawwāt<sup>26</sup> (Sālim the Fishmonger) and Sa'īd al-Hammāl<sup>27</sup> (Sa'īd the Carrier) depict the scenes from the market of 'al-Rabt', one of the numerous shanty 'towns' for the poor situated outside the old city walls.

In the first, Sālim the hero is described as he goes about his fish-selling job. There is the usual scene of bickering fish-mongers each trying to out-manoeuver the others in attracting the attention of clients.

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26. al-Nadwa, May 1954, pp. 41-46.

27. Ibid., August, 1954, pp. 27-30.



The story throbs with live and realism. The conversation is all in colloquial Arabic which is even used in some narrative parts of the story, a step further than most Tunisian writers are prepared to go in their defence of colloquialism.

The second story 'Sālim the Carrier' depicts a day in the life of an ass-hirer in al-Rabt. Before he goes out for the day, he invokes Allah's help - Yā fattāh Yā Razzāq. The reader is given a glimpse of Sālim as he solicits for clients and of a casual meeting with his fellow ass-hirers with whom he is on cordial terms. He returns home in the evening to his wife and children who gladly accept the fish he has brought for them. He "sleeps happily and contented with his lot and satisfied with his small family until day-break when he commences another day".

The author could have added a little more realism to his story if his hero did not have it all smooth-sailing as this story suggests. It is not always possible to forget all <sup>of</sup> one's problems and there are therefore bound to be some unpleasant incident or recollection in the day of a hero like this.

Damār al-Fagr<sup>28</sup> (The Destruction due to Poverty) is the story of the tragedy of a poor butcher and his large family. As a young man, Khalīfa works as an

assistant to <sup>c</sup>Amm Tāhir the butcher. The author here gives an interesting and fascinating account of the slaughtering process and the butchers' slangs that accompany it. Khalīfa's admiration of <sup>c</sup>Amm Tāhir makes him take up the same profession. All seems happy at first but the growth of the young butcher's family gradually drives him into poverty. He is unable to pay his tax and so he is taken to court where he frankly discloses his condition to the judge :

"لماذا لم تدفع ما عليك من ضرائب يا ولدي؟ اتعمى امرالدولة؟"

"حاشا وكلا يا سيدي! ولكني لم ادفع الامر يعوقني..."

اي امر تعني؟ "مرض يا سيدي"

"اي مرض؟ اراك نشيطا كالعفريت"

"يا سيدي اصابني مرض - حفظك الله - يعوقني حتى على شراء خبزة قوت اولادي..."

"فما هو مرضك؟ ... "الفقر يا سيدي!"

The story of an unsuccessful trick he once played on his children is then told. It was one Ramaḍān night, he recalls. He tried to get the children to bed so that he and his wife could eat the pastries he had bought for the night but the plan miscarried and all the eight children woke up and shared the pastries leaving only one for their parents. Khalīfa ate half of it and went to bed sniffing his fingers for the odour of the pastries and cursing his star.

Another story by the same author illustrating the predicament of a poor family is Farhat al-Awlād<sup>29</sup> (Children's Happiness). It is the story of a small family quarrel between Khadīja and her husband over the prospect of celebrating an ʿĪd without good cakes for the children. This would bring shame on her among the inhabitants of al-Ghāba, their small village. During the previous years, she used to save enough honey, olive oil and sugar due to her sparing use of provisions but the crops have been very bad during the last harvest season hence she does not now have enough for her need. She becomes very sad, invokes the help of Allah, the prophet and the saints. She wonders what her neighbours will say of her and how sad her children will be. She imagines herself becoming the gossip of the village :

"باهي الله ! آش قال لك وآش قلت ، خديجة تريكية بعثت للكوشة  
 قدام الناس اربع كحبات مقرور بيض متلغين يطنطنوا في طبق قد الكف ،  
 عاد بلاش خير ."

No, she wouldn't make this contemptible kind of cake for her children. Her whole attitude to her husband changes and she tells him that she will like to spend ʿĪd day with her parents while the children remain with him. She, of course, recognises that he is hard-working, which is evident from her comments made with tearful eyes on seeing him toiling hard on

the farm :

” مسكين ولد الناس يجاهد علينا جهاد !... ”

The husband, who does not want to see his wife and children so unhappy goes round friends asking for a loan and he even asks to be advanced some wages in return for farm labour which he would later perform but all in vain. He finally succeeds with a neighbour who is a trader.

The joy of his wife and children knows no bounds and we are given a lively drama of the mother and her children when she is kneading and cutting the dough until it is proudly taken to the baker's the following day.

Like the other stories by al-Trīkī, the atmosphere of poverty is skilfully embodied in the personality and the frugality of Khadīja. Her pressure on her husband to make him find a way out of their predicament is also well sketched.

It is in his two stories entitled al-Shabāb al-Mahrūm-Sillīm al-Farzīt (Unfortunate Youths)<sup>30</sup> and Kilāb al-Sūq (Market Dogs)<sup>31</sup> that al-Trīkī demonstrates his literary skill in presenting the way of life of the waifs and strays of the society.

Sillīm al-Farzīt is the hero of the first story and he is seen mingling with other boys of his type in the market place where they do odd jobs such as the carrying

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30. al-Nadwa, No.2, February 1955, pp.13-17.

31. al-Fikr, Yr.1, No.4, January 1956, pp. 33-44.

of loads for tradesmen and shoppers for which they receive very poor fees. At the end of the day, they gather together in one corner of the market to play various types of tricks and sleights of hand. They also play a card game called al-Hufra in which each player has to stake some pennies.

The four characters in Kilāb al-Sūq are much better presented as the reader is given their family backgrounds and so he can understand the reason for their way of living as well as their state of mind. Like Sillīm in the story above, they spend their daylight hours in the market running small errands for the shop-keepers and market women, helping them to carry their merchandise to and from the market and helping to sweep the stalls, all for a small fee. At other times, they organise themselves into a shop-lifting gang with edible fruits and grains as their prime targets.

The oldest and leading member of the gang is nicknamed 'Labbiz' (Basher) because he is :

"by nature very defiant and he becomes a member of an association whose members are haughty. You see him fuming and raging all day long whenever he is treated the way he treats his colleagues with a disdainful scorn. You then hear him threaten his colleagues with the expressions which he repeats again and again: 'I swear by Allah, I shall 'bash' you up' and this has given him the nickname of Labbiz."

His father migrated from his home town in the South [of Tunisia] after Labbiz's mother's death and married

another woman who did not care for the boy and so he drifted into the company of others similarly rejected by their families.

The second character in the story is nicknamed Bū Jarāda because of his resemblance to the locust. Like the long legs of the locust, he is so tall that his comrades poke fun at him: "Next year we'll have to climb a ladder to give you food". His father too died leaving him and five others for their mother to bring up. She finally became tired of trying to provide for all of them and so she was forced to ask the eldest - Bū Jarāda - to go and fend for himself.

The third is nicknamed al-Firtās because of his head. His parents died and left him in the care of an uncle whose wife neglected him and "allowed vermins and dirt to eat away the skin of his head. His hair had fallen out leaving the skin of his head septic and covered with white, black and green spots...."

The fourth member of the group goes by the name of ʿAin al-Liss (Pilfering Eye). His parents are both alive but his father has three wives and consequently many children. They are herded together in a small room. Their food and clothing are inadequate and they receive no medical attention. They are disease-ridden and this boy has been sore-eyed many times and ends up with only one eye, the second one having been 'plucked' out by disease, hence his nickname.

The four of them do not live together, each comes from his hideout every morning and they meet in the market place. Their shop-lifting escapades are led by Labbiz. He engages the attention of the shop-keeper with conversation, higgling and haggling over the price of the grains and nuts. While examining the nuts between his right-hand fingers, he appears to the man behind the counter to be dropping them back into the bag when in fact he is filling his left hand with the nuts which he passes to one of his comrades who seems to be just passing by. After passing enough grains to go round all of them he ends the conversation by saying with his hands raised : "Here are my hands, so you don't say behind my back that I've stolen your thing" to which the shop-keeper retorts : "I thought you wanted to buy something, you son of a dog."

Their other adventures consist of going to the fish market to join in knocking the qirnīt<sup>32</sup> on the ground to make it supple and smooth. This affords them an opportunity to pilfer as well as collect the unsuitable ones for their consumption. They join in street fights, follow funeral processions to the grand mosque, and later to the burial ground outside the city and they also play sports and tricks on bedouins who come to the town to buy provisions. At the end of each day everyone returns to his hideout in the suburb of the city.

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32. Qirnīt is the local word for octopus.

Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib al-Trīkī's style is smooth and vivid with the colloquial being used in the conversation. He has a special interest in the less privileged members of the society. It is a pity that he has written no more stories since 1956.

### Mustafā al-Fārisī

Mustafā al-Fārisī was born in Sfax in 1931. He received his secondary education in his home town after which he went to France for higher education where he submitted a thesis on the Carmathian movement for the Diplôme d'Études Supérieures<sup>33</sup>. He was once Director of SATPEC<sup>34</sup> but he now works for the Radio-Tunis. He started writing fiction when he was still in school by writing short plays which earned him many college prizes. Between 1952 and 1956, he wrote many short plays which were relayed over the BBC, Radio-Moscow and Radio-France. Since his return to Tunisia in 1956, he has written many more short Arabic pieces for the Tunisian radio and four of these have been collected and published in a small booklet entitled Qasr al-Rih<sup>35</sup>. He has also written a few short poems in French<sup>36</sup> as well as some critical essays on North African Arabic story and play-writing.<sup>37</sup>

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33. IBLA, Yr.26, No.104, 1963, p.337.

34. 'Société Anonyme Tunisienne de Production et d'Expansion Cinématographique.'

35. Published in Tunis, 1961.

36. IBLA, op.cit., pp. 339-343.

37. See al-Fikr, April 1959, July 1961 and May 1963.



Some of his short stories have appeared in both al-Fikr and Qisas and these cover a fairly wide range of social issues such as love, native (traditional) and modern medicine and the struggle between the poor and the rich.

Man Yadrī...Rubbamā (Who Knows...Maybe)<sup>38</sup> is the story of two youths - Tawfīq and Hind - who live in two houses opposite each other. They develop a longing for each other but they are too shy to disclose their feelings to each other. The erection of a third building between their houses serves to heighten the feeling that their longing for each other is becoming unattainable and this forces them to take the desperate step of coming together.

The story makes a delightful reading because of the light-hearted humour and pointed observations which it contains. It reveals the double-sided life of its heroes in whom many contemporary Tunisian youths can recognise themselves. In spite of their relatively free and western-oriented way of life, they still act with a reserve that shows the remains of their Arabo/ Islamic background and upbringing. As the story-teller says midway through the story :

ليس من السهل ان يتخاطب خجولان • وهند وجارها من الصنف الخجول  
ثم ان احدا لم يعرفهما الواحد الى الآخر.

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38. al-Fikr, Yr.7, No.5, Feb.1962, pp.12-18.

In the end, the two youths in the story get round their difficulties.

Yawm cĪd (The Festival Day)<sup>39</sup> is the story of an old woman named Baraka, wife of a beggar called Miftāh. She is forced in spite of herself to steal bread in order to feed her dying husband and starving children.

After the author's general comments at the beginning of the story which sound like the introduction to an essay on the poor, the story is told in a smooth style full of the heroine's reflections which shed light on her state of mind. For example, when torn between her moral objection to stealing and her need for bread for which she has no money, we read :

”... وفي السوق قرب باب المدينة الجبلي خبز كثير . فلم لا تذهب الى السوق وتأخذ رغيفا او اثنين فتكفي مؤونتها وتسد رمق اطفالها ؟ انها سرقة ..... السرقة بعينها لدى القضاة وذوى الاحكام القاسية ؟ بركة تعرف ذلك جيّدا . ولكن ما حيلتها وهي جائعة ؟ كانت تظن انه ليس من السرقة في شيء ان يسترجع الانسان من المجتمع المغتصب الظالم حقّا من حقوقه الشرعية : وهو حقه في ان يأكل ليعيش . اتموت جوعا هي وعائلتها والخبز على قارعة الطريق يخربى الاكلىين ؟

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39. al-Fikr, Yr.5, No.6, March 1960, pp.25-28.

40. The theft of bread by hard-pressed destitutes is an event which frequently recurs in Tunisian short stories. See for examples, al-Hamzāwī's (infra) longish-short story Bū Dūda Mātā and al-Marzūqī's (supra) Allāh Yaftahu.

Al-Nafhat al-Shāfiya (The Health-giving Aroma)<sup>41</sup>

is another story illustrating the conflict between the old and the new, the competition between the traditional native doctor and the modern doctor in which the latter triumphs. There is an excellent description of the native doctor who treats every type of illness including sterility in women :

كان في ثيابه القدرة من الرقبة الى الاطراف اشبه ما يكون باليهودي التائه " اسحاق " الذي تحدث عنه اساطير الاولين ، لا يشبع من مشي ولا يملأ معدته اكل ولنهمه هذا سماء بعض الخبثاء في القرية الشيخ دجاجه ...

Modern science soon invades the hitherto exclusive preserve of the Shaikh and he is eventually driven out of business in the village and he emigrates. The Shaikh remorsefully says:

لقد وجبت هجرتي ان طغى الكفر على العباد وتكرت لي الاكباد ... هذا من بوادر آخر الزمان ... النفحة الشافية لا تمر على هذه الديار بعد اليوم ...

Al-Fārisī's Tathīr al-Fatātīsh (Purification of the Fatātīsh)<sup>42</sup> is a highly symbolical story which combines elements of the various themes under consideration - political, social and metaphysical - although the priginal

41. al-Fikr, Yr.8, No.1, October 1962, pp.21-32.

42. al-Tajdīd, Yr.1, No.7, October 1962, pp.21-32. Fattāsh is an instrument with curved, forked heads used in Tunisia for retrieving pails and buckets from the well.

inspiration for its composition, according to the author, derived from the political struggle of his country and the events in the Congo in 1960.<sup>43</sup>

The story commences with a little boy who inadvertently kills a cricket which he mistakes for a scorpion and while he sits down to meditate on the enormity of the 'crime' he has committed, a group of ants begin to drag the dead cricket away. The boy begins to imagine that "this cricket has come back to life by borrowing legs and life from the ants". He imagines that "Allah has granted a little boy's prayer".

While thus submerged in his dream, his mother's voice startles him and asks whether he has gone for their neighbour's fattāsh.

Their own fattāsh has fallen into the well for two weeks and his mother is now asking him to borrow a neighbour's fattāsh so that they could use it to retrieve their own, but the boy feels his mother is unnecessarily breaking into his sweet contemplation. He eventually goes to the neighbour's house while still thinking of the cricket incident.

On his way back, he meets a friend called Muḥammad who leads him into conversation on the reason for the mutilated appearance of the fattāsh. Muḥammad says :

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43. Sālīh al-Garmādī, al-Qiṣṣa fī Tūnis Mundhu 'l-Istiqlāl, in Hawliyyāt al-Jāmi'a al-Tūnisīya, No.2, 1965, p.98.

"When the night comes and children go into their beds...When darkness, my friend, covers the houses and silence reigns everywhere, the fatātīsh shake in their places and come off their hooks quietly so as not to wake up the children and within a short time, they go out of the house gliding like a snake<sup>and</sup> producing a slight rustle like that of leaves blown by the wind. They leave the houses and make for the city walls, which they scale, using their claws. Each of the rings on their head is a glittering eye which guides them in their journey. They descend into the external roads with the same calmness and the same rustle... they make their way to a vast plain, an isolated place unknown to man but familiar to the fatātīsh".

On being asked why the flight to the desert, Muhammad continues :

"...It is said, Oh Šālih, that once the fatātīsh breach the desert, they form themselves into two dreadful armies consisting of the fatātīsh of the poor on one side and the fatātīsh of the rich on the opposite side and a fierce battle ensues with hands and claws interlocked and you hear a jingling sound of iron. Within a short time, the whole plain is enveloped in fire and uproar. The resounding of iron announces the misfortune: fingers are cut away, eyes are plucked out, hands are savagely and mercilessly amputated amid a general cry of agony which gradually replaces the tumult until the light of dawn flashes on the plain, when, Oh Šālih, the two armies disperse and, behold, the ground they leave behind is engulfed in dust mixed with rust; each wounded one drags itself to the city wall which it again painfully and sorrowfully scales. This one has had its leg cut, that one has left on the battle-field its fingers or its ear or its nose...The fatātīsh return to our homes, we humans; they climb back over the walls while blood drips from their wounds and tears from their eyes until they settle back on their hooks and the storm subsides".

Muhammad then likens their truce to that of man, adding that they do not want man to interfere in their affairs. "You must realise that the cock plays an important rôle in the proclamation of the daily truce. Have you noticed that every day, at early dawn, the cock climbs to the highest point of the house? It is to

announce the truce, by a call which the fatātīsh understand and listen for in spite of the clattering of iron and the long distance between the desert and the city wall."

The author said that he first composed the story in 1952 during the colonial days in Tunisia but revised it in 1960 during the Congo<sup>44</sup> crisis. The following interpretations have been given to the symbolisms employed in the story :

1. The dead cricket which seems to have been revived by the ants which it uses as legs illustrates the inter-relationship <sup>between</sup> life and death.

2. The fact that the neighbour's fattāsh is borrowed not for retrieving a pail but for retrieving another fattāsh depicts the extraordinary experiences that often come into man's life when he least expects.

3. The fierce battle that rages between the two groups of fatātīsh is a symbol of the perennial class-struggle between the rich and the poor.

4. The purification of the fattāsh from its crime when it falls into water stands for the purifying power of water, an idea which the author claims to have borrowed from the Carmathians.

5. The cock's crowing represents the attempt to ensure world peace. The late Secretary-General of the United Nations Organisation, Dag Hammarskjöld, was seen

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<sup>44</sup>. al-Garmādī, op.cit., p.100.

by the author as playing the rôle of the cock in the story.

The story is told in very pleasant classical Arabic. It reveals that Tunisian writers are not only awake to their local political and social conditions, but also to that of the world as a whole.

In 1963, Mustafā al-Fārisī's literary talent earned him half of the 'Municipality of Tunis al-Bahlawān's prize' for the best long story which he shared with another writer for his novel entitled al-Mun<sup>c</sup>arij.<sup>45</sup> He has definitely emerged as one of the new generation of Tunisian story-writers with a clear interest in the Tunisian society's social problems. His plays also draw inspiration from the same source.

Muhammad Rashād al-Hamzāwī

Al-Hamzāwī was born in 1934 in Tāla, a Tunisian village where he had his primary school education before entering the Ṣādiqīya college for his secondary school education. He had his higher education at the Institut des Hautes Études in Tunis and later submitted a dissertation to the Université de Paris on 'The Damascus Arabic Academy and the Problem of Modernising the Arabic Language,' for the Diplôme d'Études Supérieures.<sup>46</sup>

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45. Published by al-Dār al-Tūnisīya lil-Nashr, 1966.

46. IBLA., No.102, 1963, p.137.

He was an active member of the Tunisian student movement - Union Générale des Étudiants de Tunisie - which he served in various capacities between 1952 and 1956 and in 1957, he became a staff of the International Student Organisation and entered the University of Leiden where he obtained a Master's degree in 1963.<sup>47</sup>

His first short story entitled Tarnanū<sup>48</sup> was published in al-Fikr and he has since written five more short stories<sup>49</sup> for the same journal as well as a fairly long story with the plot and content of a short story and this was also partly serialised in al-Fikr.

Tarnanū is the story of a youth by this name from one of the peasant quarters of the city and the other youths of the same quarter. It depicts the successive transitional stages in the lives of these youths from the pre-independence period of national struggle to the post-independence period. Besides describing their participation in mass political demonstrations (which for them means just another adventure), the reader is given a picture of their activities on the football pitch either as players or as supporters and their evenings

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47. al-Fikr, Yr.7, No.9, June 1962, p.11.

48. Ibid., Yr.4, No.8, May 1959, pp.18-22.

49. These are : Bāb al-Arsh, Jan.1962, Hayāh, May 1962, Dāda Fāṭima, Feb.1964, Dajāja Ammatī, June 1964, and Shārib al-Nahr, May 1968.



the homes of the prostitutes. The story is a vivid portrayal of the youths' life in that quarter of the city, and especially of the problem of juvenile delinquency.<sup>50</sup>

After describing Tarnanū's favourite square in the centre of the town, the author says of him and his companions :

"... اتخذ من بطحاء تربة الباي مقرا وموعدا يتقرب فيه اصدقاء للعب الكرة وتقتيل الوقت. فيقبلون عليه زرافات ووحدا من الربط الاخر وباب الجديد وبطحاء رمضان باي فيظهر حمادي " الفطائري " وعبد الستار الروفليين ومنصف جايمن كاني " ثم يصل البوهالي الملاكم واصحابه " القرادرة " ذوو السواعد المفتولة والاسنان الذهبية الصفراء ، يجرون احذيتهم المنقوبة ، مالتين الطريق ضجيجا وقهقهة وصفيرا وعناء مضطربا . ويلتحق بهم بائعو السجائر وتذاكر الحافلات وحبوب القرع والبطيخ . فينتهي مطاف الجميع بالبطحاء فتتلاقى الاحباب وتتبادل التحيات بالمصافحة او بكلمة على الصدر يصوبها البوهالي الى ادنى الواقفين منه ...."

Tarnanū, the story's hero, is adequately presented in a series of dramatic scenes which fully convey to the reader what the author means to say about him. His life represents a progressive evolutionary process in the Tunisian suburban population from the pre-independence days. It is noteworthy that the scenes and characters

50. In a personal interview with the writer, he told me that he was inspired to write this story on the problem of delinquency in a similar vein to Trīkī's Kilāb al-Sūq.

are presented without any lyricism but with humour.

In Ta<sup>c</sup>īsh wa Turabbī 'l-Rīsh<sup>51</sup> al-Hamzāwī tells the story of a bedouin youth who leaves his village to look for a job in Tunis in order to provide sustenance for his widowed mother and two sisters. He replies to his mother who is trying to dissuade him from travelling :

اللي ما يهرش من الجوع الجوع ما يهرش منه . ناية ماشي تونس بعد  
ثلاثة أيام .

After a farewell party during which he is advised by different people on how to conduct himself in the capital, he departs from the village full of hopes and loaded with shopping lists from his mother and <sup>his</sup> two sisters. Following a long, arduous and eventful journey by foot, and by a lift in a car, he arrives in the capital where he meets his first disappointment. A fellow villager Sī Mubārak who has been in Tunis for two years has no fixed job and lives with his wife in abject poverty!

بينها خاليا الا من بعض الاوانش الطينية وحصير تكدست عليه "عباته"  
جرداء فحول نظره الى نواحي البيت الاخرى فلم ير شيئا الا الظلمة والندى  
والضيق الذي لا يملأه شيء . . . .

When he goes out on the following day in search of a job, his host pretends to be ill. The couple flee

51. al-Tajdīd, June/July 1961, pp.102-120.

52. "Whoever does not flee from hunger, hunger does not flee from him. I am off to Tunis in three days' time."

from home during the day carrying with them all<sup>of</sup> their guest's little belongings. His bitter tears on returning home in the evening only brings an unsympathetic crowd of onlookers of whom the story says :

البكاء ليس غريبا بينهم لفقد البكاء . فاعليته بين الناس .

His search for employment over a long time proves as fruitless as that of his fellow villager. He is eventually forced by hunger to steal a bunch of flowers which he sells cheaply. With the proceeds of the flower sale, he buys and drinks beer until he is intoxicated. While he is returning home at one o'clock in the night, with the copper coins jungling in his pocket, he begins to imagine what he would do with the remaining money. His first plan is to send some money to his hungry mother and sisters back in the village. Suddenly, he is attacked by two men who knock him unconscious.

The story ends with him regaining consciousness in the early hours of the morning :

فنظر الى قميصه فوجد الدم يكسوه سائلا من رأسه وانفه وعينه اليمنى التي انتفخت فكان يحس ان الالم قد سكن جسمه كله فلا يمس منه جزءا الا عوى تفقد جيبه فلم يجد فلما بحث عن عصاه لا فوجدها مهمشة الى نصفين فجلس وسط السكة وراح يعوي ويكي وينوح في ظلمة الليل بينما كان السكران يتعد عنه متماثلا متعشرا يردد : " اتعيش وتربّي الریش وتأكل الكسكس والبتشيش ."

In Bāb al-<sup>c</sup>Arsh (Door to the Throne),<sup>53</sup> al-Hamzāwī tells the story of a rich man's black slave who imagines that his requests for social equality has been granted by the 'Lord of the throne' on Lailat al-Qadr. This man lives in imaginary happiness and luxury for a while but the truth soon dawns on him that he is still a slave.

The story gives us the other side of al-Hamzāwī the story-teller. From the concrete reality of Tarnanū and Ta<sup>c</sup>īsh, we are introduced to the world of magic and talisman in this story as well as in Dāda Fāṭima and Shārib al-Nahr. These stories depict various aspects of poor people's lives and in Dajjā<sup>c</sup> Ammatī (My Aunt's Fowl), he tries to highlight the plight of farm labourers whose signing (by thumb impression) of complicated legal agreements the content of which they do not understand, often ensures that they remain perpetually bonded and indebted to their employers. It also illustrates the difficulty of obtaining adequate medical attention in the rural areas due, in the first place, to the distrust of modern medicine by practitioners and clients of traditional native medicine such as the midwife in this story who regards a child delivered by a male doctor as an accursed child (walad ḥaram). The second reason is the greed of some of the few available

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53. al-Fikr, Yr.7, No.4, January 1962, pp.23-33.

doctors for financial gains such as the doctor in this story who would not accept payment in kind (unlike his predecessor in the village) so that a woman in difficult labour dies because Ummuka Salīma, the old traditional midwife is incapable of handling the situation and the 'modern' doctor wouldn't see her. In laughing off the offer of a fowl by the woman's son, the 'modern' doctor sneers :

"I was in France for seven years and never did I see people given medical care in return for fowls."

Bū Dūda Māta (Bū Dūda is Dead) is the title of al-Hamzāwī's long story which, in spite of its length of 155 pages, is admitted by the author to be a short story to which he added a few events to lengthen it.<sup>54</sup> The story has, for its milieu, the author's hometown of Tāla and the subject is the need for social and political solidarity. A group of youths in the village try to collect some money to redeem Būdūda from jail to where he has been committed for the theft of a piece of bread. The reader is given a picture of life in a Tunisian village and the colourful characters of the village, apart from the youths (Mahmūd and his friends), are the Shaikh of the kūttab, the public crier, Madam Martini the proprietor of the only hotel in the village and the village teacher, whose wife is a French woman.<sup>55</sup>

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54. al-Fikr, June 1962, p.11.

55. Bū Dūda Māta was published by the Société Nationale d'Édition de Diffusion in 1962 and was also serialised in part in al-Fikr starting from the issue of June 1962, p.12.

The author, in an interview given on the story said :

"Bū Dūda Māta is a call for solidarity in everything. Bū Dūda is still alive but dead in actual fact, because he is alone. Solitude in our country is loneliness, exile and death..."<sup>56</sup>

### Al Bashīr Khraîf

Al-Bashīr Khraîf is the brother of Muṣṭafā Khraîf, one of the Ālam al-Adabī group of writers whose stories have been considered earlier. He was born in 1917 in Nafta, South of Tunisia. He is well-read in both French and Arabic literatures.

He wrote his first story<sup>57</sup> entitled Lailat al-Watya (The Night of Love) which was published in September 1937 in al-Dustūr, a weekly under his brother Muṣṭafā Khraîf's directorship at that time. It is the story of a Tunisian girl's last night with her childhood friends before she is forcibly married to a spouse chosen for her by her parents. She slips away from the festivities and from her friends to go to the riverbank in order to bid farewell to the boy whom she loves.

This story raised a strong storm of protests against him because he used colloquial Arabic in the conversation

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56. al-Ṣabāh daily newspaper, Tunis, 24/5/62.

57. He, however, claims to have published one entitled 'Rubbish for Sale' (Nukhkhāl Bayyih in colloquial) earlier in 1936 although he cannot now remember in which paper it was published. See al-Garmādī, Hawliyyāt, No.2, 1965, p.105.

and he decided not to write any more stories especially as al-Dustūr soon went defunct.<sup>58</sup>

It was not until twenty years later that he returned to the literary scene with the story Iflās (Bankruptcy)<sup>59</sup> and has since then published other stories in al-Fikr including the award-winning Barq al-Lail which earned him the Municipality of Tunis "al-Balhawān" prize for 1960.<sup>60</sup>

In Iflās, Khraîf demonstrates his sharp sense of observation and his imaginative talent. He gives an unaffected description of the Tunisian society in the late twenties and especially the atmosphere which pervaded the numerous small drama groups of that time.

The hero of the story is a twenty-year-old boy called Sillīm. Having finished his primary school education, he is admitted into Zaitūna 'university-mosque' but he fails his examinations several times and gives up his studies in protest against the school's educational system. His reaction is described in the author's words:

ولم يعد يفهم شيئاً من خصوصية المعتزلة وأهل السنة ولا اختلافات البصريين والكوفيين وابتغت نفسه الخوض في ميدان الحياة . ففرّ من الجامع وجدياته الكالحة واختلف الى مجتمعات الشباب اللاهية الريانة . . . .

58. Interview given by Khraîf, al-Fikr, No.10, July 1968, p.55. See Chapter two of this thesis for my view on his excuse for this twenty-year break.

59. al-Fikr, Yr.4, December 1958; also issues of Jan.1959.

60. Early in 1970, a collection of five of his short stories was published under the title of Mashmūl al-Fill by Dār al-Tūnisiya lil-Nashr under the auspices of the Abū 'l-Qāsim Story Club.

He secures employment as a lawyer's clerk along Bāb Banāt. He begins to frequent the various drama groups in the capital and soon starts to write impartial criticisms on the plays he is able to watch until he too begins to act some minor parts in these plays. He becomes acquainted with a young married actress with a licentious past. He falls in love with her and after many adventures together, they part company and the girl travels to Algeria to meet another lover.

The story is marked by an uninhibited presentation by Khraïf of the carefree morals of the theatre groups at that time regardless of the objection that might be raised against it by his society's moralists. He defends himself against charges of condoning immorality by giving undue prominence to it by saying that the importance of his story does not lie in the incidents but in the psychological analysis of the crises which beset a Tunisian youth in rebellion against all social and religious restrictions.

The story has a few defects connected with the plot. One would have expected to see some traces of the widespread political movements and other events which took place in Tunisia during 1925 (the year in which the author sets his work) in the story especially as the hero Sillīm is, above all else, given to a life of adventures into various sectors of the world outside the narrow confines of his school. Furthermore, the picture of



Sillīm as an ex-Zaitūnī is not sustained by the life which he leads after leaving the school. There is, no doubt, that loyalty and commitment to Islamic ideals and principles were still very firmly rooted in the lives of Tunisians at the time and, therefore, one would have expected some traces of this background in the conversations of Sillīm and Fawziya and especially as women are always better noted for their conservatism in matters of religion. In spite of these minor defects, the story ranks high among the post-independence longish-short stories. Its frankness, imaginative originality and realistic description of the good and bad aspects of Tunisian society without any direct moral judgements are some of its fine points.

In another story entitled Khalīfat al-Agra<sup>c61</sup> (Khalīfa the Bald-Headed), Khraīf demonstrates the same keen sense of observation as in Iflās. It is the story of Khalīfa, a social parasite in a peasant quarter of the city like Tarnanū and Kilāb al-Sūq.

Khalīfa is bald-headed but not without his physical charm. He is a gay fellow whose malevolence enables him to live on others. He has an ally in the person of Bū Bakr, a Moroccan fortune-teller with whom he colludes to subject the people of the district to the whims and caprices of both of them.

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61. al-Fikr, Yr.6, No.1, October 1961, pp.33-47.

He helps people to carry their baggage home and plays indecent games with girls. His hobbies are eating and flirting with girls and satisfying his lustful passion in them. His bald head makes him attractive to many girls and so offers him an easy access to many homes where he would never have been welcome and so he meets the girls and women of his choice. His sports and jokes with them know no moral bounds.

<sup>c</sup>Amm Bū Bakr, the Moroccan, is also a parasite. He is a drunkard and swindler who deceives people and gets money from them by writing bogus charms for them and 'interpreting' their dreams.

The author gives very vivid accounts of the adventures of both men with various groups in the quarter, especially women and girls who are their prime targets.

In the end, both of them quarrel with each other and begin a session of recriminations in which each of them tries to put the whole blame for their misconduct on the other. For example, Khalīfa sneeringly asks Bū

Bakr during this recriminatory exchange :

والطفلة الحبلى اللى جبتهالك باش ترمي . سقطت لها صغير وعملت لها صغير آخر . 62.

62. All of Khraïf's dialogues are in the colloquial. This sentence means: "...the pregnant little girl I brought to you, didn't you pregnate her again after helping her abort the first one...?" The story further on shows that Khalīfa was responsible for the first pregnancy.

Finally, Khalifa reveals the real cause of his unhappiness. His hair is now growing again! With tearful eyes, he appeals to Bū Bakr to prepare for him a potion to restore his baldness:

سي المختار ما عادش يحبني نقابل بناته . . والنساء ما عادش تلعب معايا 63

This story is marked by the same frank portrayal of life in a peasant quarter of the city which is characteristic of Khraïf's other stories.

Other Tunisian short story writers such as Hasan Naṣr and al-Shādhilī whose works have been considered earlier in this chapter also have stories which deserve to be mentioned along with those that have social conditions as their theme.

Al-Shādhilī's Tabībān (Two Doctors)<sup>64</sup> is dedicated by him to "every doctor about whom there is much talk of his humanitarian service when in fact he has no human feeling beyond the filling of his pocket" and "to every poor who sees his sick one die before him, with no money to spend on him and no doctor to call upon," and finally "to every compatriot who lives in his ivory tower and does not feel hurt to learn some of what he does not know about the villages and cities."

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63. "Si al-Mukhtār, they won't let me meet the girls again...and the women (themselves) wouldn't play with me..."

64. al-Fikr, Yr.1, No.10, July 1956, p.2-6.

The story treats the problem of obtaining modern medical care due to the shortage of doctors and the high cost of private treatment. It then turns to the 'mumbo jumbo' of the native doctor to whom many people in the rural areas often resort for lack of any other alternative.

Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>id's wife is seriously ill. He tries all home-made remedies without success. What is he to do next, he wonders.

"If he called a doctor, he would have to pay him one thousand francs...apart from the cost of the prescribed medicine...one thousand francs...to examine his wife for a quarter of an hour...That's unbelievable! He works...whenever he finds one...from sunrise till sunset...toiling, struggling and exhausting his energy only to earn two hundred francs...the price of his exertion.."

He finally decides to borrow an ass to take his wife to the dispensary in the neighbouring village the following day which is the day on which the doctor normally visits that village.

When they get there, they "find many people, a host of mules and asses and various scenes resembling the day on which a nomadic group changes camp." The story goes on to describe the people who are suffering from a variety of ailments which are compounded by the filth and squalor of poverty. They are all waiting for the doctor.

When the doctor arrives, he attends to only a few patients and then "the nurse emerges to announce to the crowd : 'It's now time for you to return to your

homes and villages. Come back here the same time next week'".

This announcement strikes them like a thunderbolt. Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd carries his wife back to his village. The man who loaned him the ass suggests that he goes to see Shaikh Abū Hanzala, the village native doctor.

The native doctor tells Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd that his wife is being punished by the jinns for having eaten fish and thrown away its bone which hit and plucked out the eyes of one of their daughters. He asks Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd to bring "a black cock with no white spot, a white plate without any dent, and the egg of a red fowl which has neither white nor black spots" in order to appease Shamharūsh the chief of the jinns. This appeasement fails and the woman dies three days later.

Al-Shādhilī's style in this story<sup>65</sup> has been likened to the French master Emile Zola's naturalism.<sup>66</sup> He skilfully describes the principal character and his encounter with the two 'doctors' and without making any direct judgement on them, the reader can easily deduce his objective which has been tersely stated in his introductory dedication.

In Lahn al-Khurāfāt (Melody of the Fable),<sup>67</sup> al-Shādhilī tells of a woman who tries to amuse and divert

65. See appendix 1 for the translation of this story.

66. al-Garmādī, Hawliyyāt, op.cit, p.117.

67. al-Fikr, Yr.2, No.3, Dec.1956, pp.10-14.

the attention of her hungry children by telling them a story the keynote of which is the futility of human effort and man's helplessness in the hands of the gods, an attitude which is similar to that of al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī in his play al-Sudd.

#### 4 - 'Proletarian' Short Stories

It is ironic that while all ranks were closed during the nationalist struggle when the politicians mobilised most sections of the community against the colonial authorities,<sup>68</sup> the pre-thirties' class-structure seemed to reappear soon after independence was achieved and the common enemy, the colonialist, had gone away.

This rift was the theme of five short stories written by Tāhir Guiga<sup>69</sup> and published in al-Fikr on the eve of Tunisian independence.

The first of these was published in the November 1955 issue of the review. Entitled Wasīya (Will or Testament), it is a piece of dramatic monologue in which a poor father, sensing his death is near, tells his son:

اي بني اني مفارق هذه الدنيا ولست بتارك لك شيئا الا هذه النصائح فاضغ اليها...

68. See p. 22 in my introduction ; also see M.al-Mukhtār Jannāt's novel Urjuwān, published in Tunis, 1970, for a novelist's depiction of the nationalist struggle.

69. He was born in Takrūna in 1922. Like his father, he became a teacher and was once president of the Tunisian Union of Teachers. He is at present Director of the Arts and Literature division of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. He wrote an introduction to his father's Min Aqāsīs Banī Hilāl which he also rendered into literary Arabic from the Tunisian dialect in which the manuscript was left by his father at the time of his death.

After reviewing his own life spent mostly as an unemployed person, he says to his son: "Don't waste your life hankering after employment, for employment is for the pampered sons of townships or men of means and you are neither the one nor the other..." and in a veritable indictment of the attitude of the rich to the poor, the dying father says: "Dear son, don't expect any benefit from the men of position because they merely look down on the mass of humanity from their high pedestals without giving any thought to them since they are so far away from them". In the end, he strikes a note of tragic optimism: "Tomorrow, every poor shall rise to demand his right to live; at that time, the problem of the empty stomach shall be clearly seen without any shred of doubt...At that time, the men of high status and the leftists (dhawī 'l-Jāh wa 'l-Yasār) shall witness the stream of human pests advancing to forcibly retrieve their plundered honour. For the time being, go about the land begging and holding your head high. If you ask them for anything, ask for just a little of your plundered right..."

The problem of the underprivileged also recurs in Guiga's next story entitled Batn Yatahaddathu (A Talking Stomach)<sup>70</sup> which is an interior monologue:

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70. al-Fikr, Yr.1, No.3, December 1955, pp.48/49.

امشى في الزقاق مشية الاعيان مترنحا البطن خاو والذهن صقيل والصمت حسن  
 ما وجدت انسانا يستأجرني فيئست وسلمت امرى لله و . . . . الحكومة \*

He then begins to sniff the smell of food emanating from the houses along the street. He can quite easily distinguish the sources of the different smells - the smell of fried food from the house of Ibrāhīm the teacher; the smell of boiled beans comes from the house of <sup>c</sup>Alī the labourer who works in some yard once a week and the smell of rich macaroni comes from the kitchens of Uncle Mas<sup>c</sup>ūdī. These smells build up into a tantalising mental picture of food so near and so far, the kind of picture which only a hungry man can imagine:

وهي بعيدة بعيدة المنال ! امد يدى اليها فيبتعد عني كأنها سراب بقية

With a feeling of revulsion, he asks himself: "What if I attacked Uncle Mas<sup>c</sup>ūdī, snatched the cooking pot from him and swallowed its content?...Where, then, is the respect for one's neighbour? Where is human dignity? Has he given me any regard when he taunts me with this sweet odour..."

Tāhir Guiga's next story, Munājāt Abī Jirāb wa Mūsā (The Secret Conversation between Abī Jirāb and Mūsā),<sup>71</sup> is a veritable criticism by imaginary Abī Jirāb and Mūsā, of parliamentary democracy without economic equality. One recognises in Abū Jirāb the Tunisian

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71. al-Fikr, Yr.1, No.4, January 1956.



peasant all through the ages as he traces his unchanging life under the different rulers from the Phoenicians down to the French. Now (with independence), "fate has offered me a new sustenance, [to wit] the vote". When Uncle Mas<sup>c</sup>ūdī switches on his radio Abū Jirāb learns that he "has now become a citizen after having been a subject" and that he could "elect but cannot be elected, as an igneramus like me is unfit to occupy the seats in Parliament when there is an enlightened élite soliciting for my affection and vote, ready to cater for the general interest..."

In Tahta Shi<sup>c</sup>ā<sup>c</sup> al-Sham,<sup>72</sup> Guiga captures the thoughts of a hungry student while his Shaikh is delivering a lecture on destiny and free will. His thoughts wander away as they sit round the Shaikh in the mosque courtyard, overwhelmed by a nauseating smell emanating from the layers of dried droppings of cats and pigeons:

" ما يخنيني من الجبر والاختيار واقوال المعتزلة وارا القدرية والحياة خارج هذا القبر ! "

Further on in the story, he says: "The Shaikh is a ghost addressing ghosts...the Qadariya...acquisition (al-kasb)... acquisition of what while the stomach is empty and the collar bones are showing?"

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72. Ibid., Yr.1, No.7, April 1956, p.8.

In Sawt al-Ard (The Voice of the Earth) published in al-Fikr, Year 1, No.8, May 1956, Guiga approached the problem of the poor from a different angle - from the point of view of a rich Tunisian landowner who resents the increasing power of his labourers as a result of their being united into a trade union. Cast in form of an interior monologue, the landed gentleman pours his unspoken fury on the sons of Miṣbāh "who have established on our farms trade unions which are always demanding a (minimum-) legal wage..." and who are prepared to go on strike in order to obtain their demand. He wonders why they are angry that he fares better than they are simply because he owns a car and other properties. Have they forgotten "that Allah differentiates between the one and the other by their ranks and that this is Allah's prerogative in dealing with his creatures and that a believer is one who is contented with what Allah gives him?..."

In a situation where the masters are becoming servants, he sees nothing but an evidence that "the last Hour is at hand...May Allah protect us and give us victory".

Al-Tāhir Guiga drew his inspiration for all his stories from real-life experiences, especially from the experiences of many of his compatriots from the same village of Takrūna where much of the land was sequestered from the indigenous owners early in the colonial days, thus forcing many of them to become farm hands or to

move to the capital where they remained largely unemployed. This situation persisted until the eve of Tunisian independence when most of these stories were written.<sup>73</sup> One can, therefore, understand how he was so successful in capturing the mentality of the poor and particularly the unemployed. "Poverty", he said in his interview with Hasan Naṣr, "is a great misfortune, especially if it is compounded by unemployment".

One of Rashād al-Hamzāwī's stories mentioned earlier on has a similar theme. In Ta<sup>c</sup>īsh wa Turabbī 'l-Rīsh<sup>74</sup>, Sālīh the hero leaves his village in the interior for the capital in search of employment. After his adventurous and tiring journey, he arrives in the capital and asks the wife of Sī Mubārak, his compatriot from the same town who has migrated to the capital two years earlier, "Where is Sī Mubārak, your husband. It seems he's away to work?" to which she replies: "I wish it were so! He has been unemployed for the past two months. He is away in search of a job."

His own experience later in the capital turns out to be similar to Sī Mubārak's:

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73. See the report of Hasan Naṣr's interview with him published in Qisas, No.18, January 1971, pp.48-57.

74. al-Tajdīd, Nos. 5/6, June/July 1961, pp.102-120.

"He sets out from Burj 'Alī Ra'īs every morning, dragging his stick along in search of a job but he is unsuccessful in spite of his uncountable trips to the town. He begins to think after some days that he has become like a spinning top turning round and round and then falling either on its head or on its side...One day, he concludes that finding employment is not written in his star as if this were beauty or intellect which (he thinks) are the preserve of some races of mankind to the exclusion of others..."<sup>75</sup>

## 5 - Conflict of Generations in Short Stories

In Hasan al-Nasr's story entitled al-Thawr alladhī Khallafahu Abī (The Bull which my Father left Behind)<sup>76</sup>, he criticises his society's blind adherence to age-long customs.

The father of the story's hero is dead. He leaves behind a bull about which the boy's mother tells him: "Your father enjoined on me before his death to keep this bull and not to part with it at any price for its loss means perdition for us and for our field."

The boy rebels against his mother's blind adherence to the dead man's wish. When the bull becomes mortally sick, the boy recalls the occasion when his mother refused to let him sell the bull in order to use its proceeds to buy modern irrigation equipment and wonders :

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75. Ibid., p.117.

76. al-Fikr, Yr.6, No.7, April 1961, pp.74-77.

"... لماذا اُمّي تريد منّي ان اتبع ابي في كل شيء؟  
 ان اكون مثله في كل شيء؟ ... واذا كان ابي قد اتبع اباة في كل  
 ما وجده عليه، فانا لا نستطيع ان اتبع ابي في كل ما خلفه لي ... لا أستطيع ان أحيا حياة ابي ...  
 لي حياتي الخاصة احياها كما يتفق لي انا ... ليس لانسان ان يفرض علي اراءه  
 مهما كان وايا كان ... حتى لو كان هذا الانسان ابي نفسه ...."

This revolt against blind imitation of his father's <sup>pattern</sup> life is actually a rebellion against many time-honoured social and religious traditions which are now being modified or even completely rejected <sup>so</sup> as to meet the practical demands of the present day. The Tunisian leaders' call for flexibility in the observance of an important Islamic practice such as the Ramadān fast is an example of such modifications.<sup>77</sup>

The position of women in society also provides a theme on which the old and the young do not usually agree because the younger generation want to be free to choose their marriage partners without interference from their elders.

Among the writers of the post-independence generation who have written on this theme, Rashād al-Ghālī stands out prominently. Like most of his contemporaries, many of his stories have been published in al-Fikr.

77. D.H. Moore, Tunisia since Independence, University of California Press, 1965, pp. 56-59; and H. Bourguiba, Direct Contact : the Basis of Action, Tunis 1967, pp. 15-17.

In Yaqza (Wakefulness),<sup>78</sup> al-Ghālī relates the story of a woman who develops affection for a man but they could not marry each other. The man says in despair : "Everyone of us is searching for his mate yet we shall remain like this until we perish". The style of the story is sentimental and poetic.

Lan As'alaka (I Shall Never Ask You)<sup>79</sup> is similarly about a love affair rendered almost impossible by parental intervention. The statement of the girl in the story is indicative of the general trend of revolt which runs through most of Rashād al-Ghālī's short stories, she says:

اني احس بحسرة متعمدة في عواطفني  
اريد ان اطيره ان انفلت من سيطرة امي وابي والتقاليد ...  
In the following short stories by the same author,

the dominant theme centres around youth's frustration and uncertainty about the future. These are: Min Amṣī (My Past),<sup>80</sup> Ilaiḥā (To Her),<sup>81</sup> al-Ghabī (The Stupid One)<sup>82</sup> Qālat Lī (She Said to Me),<sup>83</sup> In al-Ghabī for example, the frustrated hero is unable to explain his situation in life: "He wanted to leave all his movements to chance so that he would not be responsible for his actions.... He had several times wished to solve the mystery of existence so that his soul would be free from its perplexion

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78. al-Fikr, Yr.10, No.4, January 1965, pp.68-70.

79. Ibid., Yr. 5, No.3, December 1959.

80. al-Fikr, No. 6, March 1960, pp.15-18.

81. Ibid., No. 7, April 1960, pp. 25-28.

82. Ibid., Yr.6, No.1, October 1960, pp.25-30.

83. Ibid., No. 3, December 1960.

ever life's inconsistencies...but all to no avail, so he wept..." In relation to his lover, he "suddenly finds himself trying to explain his presence with a girl to whom no legal or customary link binds him..."

In Dhāta Lailat Mādiya (One Evening in the Past),<sup>84</sup> the author describes the traditional restraints still observed by courting couples in the country-side. The parents of Mahmūd go to ask for the hand of a country-side girl for their son. The atmosphere of the country-side pervades the story although the youthful revolt against customs and parental authority is evident in the girl's refusal to heed her father's instruction that she should not go to fetch water from her prospective father-in-law's well after her betrothal.

The resentment of youths to religious and social restraints on the freedom of association between the sexes is further emphasised in Min al-Ams (From the Past).<sup>85</sup> It is the story of a boy from the town who goes to the country-side in order to marry a girl. His fiancée considers kissing as forbidden while he insists that "It is more permissible than the law itself".

The young man is described as "spending the night... until the early morning, drinking plenty of alcohol..." This is too much for the elders of the village to accept.

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84. Ibid., Yr.8, No.2, November 1962, pp.65-68.

85. Ibid., No.3, December 1962, pp. 37-40.

The girl is eventually married to someone who is mockingly described by the young man in his memoir as a person of "dignified comportment, of noble family descent...not addicted to wine, does not smoke cigarette nor wear the dress of European 'infidels'. He doesn't go to the cinema. Nay, he has memorised the sixty sections of the Qur'ān."

Rashād al-Ghālī's style of writing is generally inclined to be lyrical and sometimes very sentimental although it is not difficult to identify his interest in the obstacles that confront the younger generation in their sexual life. The revolt against any restrictive customs and against the older generation who still champion these customs is the theme of many of his stories.

It is, however, remarkable that, in spite of this rebellion by some of the younger generation against many age-long customs and traditions and their readiness to imitate new literary techniques and even themes from the west,<sup>86</sup> there is no significant trace of obscene short stories in form of overt love stories among the post-independence Tunisian short story writers, even in such radical periodical as al-Thaqāfa.

The few love stories that have appeared are mostly in the form of travel stories during which the writers

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86. See infra, the chapter on 'New Trends in Tunisian Story Writing.'



(or narrators) fall in love with foreign girls as in, for example, Muḥammad al-Sāliḥ al-Jābirī's al-Khidūti<sup>87</sup> where the narrator tells how he falls in love with a Bulgarian girl during his summer holiday in that country, an affair which inevitably terminates with the end of the holiday period. In Aḥmad al-Hargām's 'Aināki wa 'l-Nahr (Your Eyes and the River)<sup>88</sup> and al-Thalj wa 'l-Milā... (The Snow and Christma...),<sup>89</sup> the narrator tells of an affair with a French girl while in Paris and in both stories, he has cause to recall some of his childhood experiences. In another of al-Hargām's stories (al-Wajh al-Ākhar lil-Qamar)- The Other Side of the Moon)<sup>90</sup> the love affair takes place in Tunisia between a middle-aged American lady separated from her husband and who is teaching English in Tunisia and a young Tunisian from the country-side who is a student in the capital. At the end of her contract, the woman returns to her country, leaving her lover in the lurch.

None of these stories contain any overt sex scenes that could be considered pornographic in the European sense of the word. The absence of such materials from Tunisian short stories is probably due to the fact that most of the young writers, conscious of the aesthetic and religious tastes of the majority of their readers,

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87. Qisas, No. 10, January 1969, pp. 13-28.

88. Qisas, No. 2, January 1967.

89. Qisas, No. 7, April 1968.

90. Qisas, No. 1, Sept., 1960.

would rather introduce their innovations in such relatively neutral aspects as technique and form than in theme and content so as not to provide ammunition for the conservative elements among the older generation who are ever so prone to charge them with wholesale importation of pornography from the West.<sup>92</sup>

The second and most important restraining factor is probably the self-imposed censorship of indigenous newspaper proprietors and publishers who would not risk offending the general public by allowing such materials to pass through their press.

## 6 - Conclusion

Due to the increase in the number of Tunisian short story writers in the post-independence period, and the increase in the quantity of their output which treats a great variety of themes and trends, it is impracticable to give a complete coverage in this chapter of all the

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92. It may, however, be remarked here that pornography is not uncommon in classical Arabic literature as attested to by the ghazal poetry of <sup>C</sup>Umar b. Abī Rabi'a and Jamīl (see A.Kh.Kinany's The Development of Ghazal in Arabic Literature, Damascus, n.d.) and the love stories in the 1001 Nights Stories. Other lesser known sex treatises in Arabic literature are Rujū' al-Shaikh ilā Sibāhu believed to have been composed in the 12th or 13th century and controversially attributed to Ibn Kamāl Pāshā or Ahmad b. Yūsuf al-Tifāshī. It was translated by an anonymous Englishman in 1898 under the title An Old Man Young Again and published in Paris in the same year. There is also al-Tifāshī's Nuzhat al-Albāb fīmā lā Yūjadu fīhi Kitāb which was composed in the 13th century.

writers and all the short stories of this period. It is, however, true to say that social condition in its various aspects has been the dominant theme in the short stories of this period.

The few short story writers who have been considered in this chapter are among the bulk of those whose stories are generally conventional in form, by which is meant those stories in which some attention is given to plot and characterisation as opposed to the group of 'anti-convention' writers who are discussed in Chapter eight.

Besides al-Bashir Khraif who is not a new hand to the short story, none of the post-independence writers has emerged as an outstanding figure. The fact that many of them demonstrate a considerable degree of originality and skill makes it all the more difficult to rate anyone of them far above the others. Hasan Nasr may, however, be mentioned along with al-Bashir Khraif as two writers who stand slightly higher than their colleagues because they both have certain styles and language which are peculiar to them and because of the unbroken continuity of their output since the immediate post-independence time.

Khraif has shown his inclination for the historical story, both long and short, as borne out by his two longish-short stories Iflās and Barq al-Lail and his

collection of short stories entitled Mashmūm al-Fill.<sup>93</sup>

As earlier pointed out in chapter two of this thesis, al-Bashīr Khraïf's style is characterised by the use of Tunisian colloquial Arabic in the dialogues and the classical, with a good sprinkling of colloquial words, in the narratives. As illustrated by his Khalīfat al-Aqra<sup>c</sup>, his stories are full of life, vivid descriptions and very subtle allusions. For example, his description of a scene in which the bald-headed Khalīfa is pushed into a cistern by a group of his girl-friends reads in part:

تملص مرة وحبا وامسك محرزية من حيث لا ينبغي فدفعته فوق في الماجل  
ففجعن ، وحثون يطلن عليه واخذت محرزية تتبرا من فعلتها ، وهويطفو  
على الماء ويتظاهر بالموت . ثم تعاون على اخراجه بالحبال والسلوم والتخفن  
به ، وهويقطر ماء فاصبحت ثيابه شفافة وزاد ضحكهن .  
ثم جعلن يجردنه وحاولت حنييفة الخبيثة ان تخطف عمامته  
فتكشف قرعته . وتغطن لاغتنامهن الفرصة فحسسنه من مواضع شتى ، وخاصة محرزية  
فانها امرت يدها على جسمه بشره لا يقل عما كان يفعل لو كان الجسم جسمها  
والييد يده . . . . .

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93. Published in 1971 by Dār al-Tūnisīya lil-Nashr. It contains only five of his short stories originally first published in different issues of al-Fikr between 1959 and 1970.

A reader does not need to be further told of the reason for the girls' laughter after the author has told him of Khalīfa's wet clothing and the last sentence about the manner in which Maḥraziya passes her hand over Khalīfa's body is sufficient for the reader to imagine the kind of relationship that must have existed between Maḥraziya and Khalīfa.

As for Ḥasan Naṣr, the most outstanding feature of his short stories is that most of his principal characters are generally children and youths, hence he always sees events through their eyes. Consequently, his style is marked by a simplicity of style, imagery and subject matter hardly matched by any of his contemporaries. His collection entitled Layālī 'l-Matar is very illustrative of these characteristics.

Here are a few examples of his young heroes :

His al-Tifl wa-'l-Samaka<sup>94</sup> is the story of a small boy who catches fish for the first time after many unsuccessful angling trips. On flinging his hook out of the sea with the fish dangling at its end, the boy's reaction is described thus :

اية سمكة ! انه يراها بوضوح ... وبوسعه ان يلمسها ، ان ينظر الى عينيها  
اللامعتين كالعقيق ... ولونها الذي يشبه لون سحابة في السماء .....  
وذنبها ! ... هذا الذنب العجيب ، الجميل ، انه يحبها .. يحب  
كل الاسماك في البحر والصيادين ... والشمس ايضا ١ ... واصدقاء الصغار ..<sup>95</sup>

94. Layālī 'l-Matar, pp. 9-14.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 10

After thinking of his friends and parents to whom he would proudly show his catch, he begins to take pity on the fish which, he imagines, must be suffering severe pains just like him on the occasion when a piece of broken glass got stuck in his leg :

... " تماما .. مثلما شعر بذلك هو نفسه .. يمم انغرزت في قدمه شظية بلور حادة .. فانه رغم ما كان يجسده من الم .. و قد لوان البلور ظل في قدمه لا يلمسه احد .. لولا وجود ابيه الذي انتزعه منه كرها ، تاركا اياه يصرخ ويلطم الارض بكفيه .. " .

He then sets about relieving the fish of its pain so that it could die without any pain.

واخذ يعمل يده ليقلع الصنارة من فم السمكة .. وفجأة انقلب مخطاف الصنارة فانغرز في كفه .. واذا السمكة تسقط من يده لتأخذ سبيلها في اليم .. واذا هو يرقبها وهي تغيب امام عينيه غائصة في الاعماق .. " .

Also, in Waladī Ilā al-Abad, which was discussed earlier in this chapter among the stories with the theme of politics and nationalism, after the small child has been convinced by his mother that the man who has just entered their house (that is, back from imprisonment by the colonial authorities) is his father, the boy asks the 'stranger' in his childlike innocence :

" انا لم ارك من قبل . امي قالت : الوحش هو الذي اخذك في احدى ليالي الشتاء " " نعيم ، يا ابني ، الوحش .. الوحش هو الذي اخذني منكم ، فلم اقدر ان اراك طوال الايام " .

" لماذا لم تختف مثلما فعلت امي عندما رأيت الوحش ؟ "  
 " لو اخفيت ، يا ابني ، لوجدنا الوحش انا وامك ، ولعدمنا  
 جميعا " " وكيف تركك الوحش تعود الينا الان ؟ "  
 " لقد قذفت به انا ورفقائي الى قعر البحر ! .. ونجونا  
 منه الى الابد " " واين هم رفقاؤك " ؟ " لقد رجعوا الى اطفالهم الصغار  
 يا عزيزي .. "

It is with such an unaffected and direct style  
 that Hasan Nasr succeeds in depicting his juvenile  
 heroes' simple conceptions of love, fear, courage,  
 hope and their joys and sorrows.

#### 7 - Cross-fertilisation among Tunisian Short Story Writers.

In view of the credit which is due to the pre-  
 independence generations of Tunisian short story writers  
 for the gradual growth of this genre in that country, it  
 is no great surprise that some of the present (post-  
 independence) generation of writers should manifest  
 certain linguistic and stylistic traits which are directly  
 traceable to the influence of some of their predecessors.

Among the post-independence writers whose generic  
 source can be accurately traced is Muhammad Faraj al-  
 Shādhilī. He has shown himself to be a disciple of al-  
 Mas'adī especially in three of his short stories entitled  
Nakhl al-Majnūn (The Madman's Date Palm),<sup>97</sup> Lahn al-

96. Layālī 'l-Matar, pp. 171 and 172.

97. al-Fikr, April, 1956.

Khurāfat (Melody of the Fable)<sup>98</sup> and Min Hadīth Abī 'l-Madārik : Qurrat al-<sup>c</sup>Ain (From the Conversation of Abū 'l-Madārik : The Delight of the Eye.)<sup>99</sup> The language, form and style of all these stories remind one of al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī's stories, especially his Mawlid al-Nisyān. For example, in Min Hadīth Abī 'l-Madārik which relates the dream of one Abū 'l-Madārik, we are told of how he suddenly finds himself in a sacred grove where he hears an invisible voice (hātif) telling him :

اياكم والنسيان والغفلة.

Like Madyan in al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī's Mawlid al-Nisyān, he encounters some spirits who suddenly turn out to be pygmies but unlike Madyan's life of fruitless obsession with abstract ideas, these pygmies are more concerned with their lives' realities and they storm the castle of their giant ruler who chides them :

ايها الاقزام كفوا ما تسبحون ؟ لقد ازعجتموني ونغصتم علي ! اما كفى الا اراكم لي ساجدين<sup>(100)</sup> الا اين احترام الرعاع للامير ؟ .

to which they respond :

لست لنا اميرا لن تكون لنا اميرا ما لم تكن قرة عين .

and one of their number urges them on:  
الى القصر فخذوه ، الى العملاق فخلوه ، ان بقاءه مظهر من موتنا اياكم والنسيان والغفلة . . اياكم والنسيان والغفلة ! . . .

They besiege the castle, destroy it and all of them in turn become giants.

98. al-Fikr, December, 1956.

99. Ibid., June, 1957.

100. Like al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī's Qur'anic style, this phrase recalls to mind رايتهم لي ساجدين of Joseph's dream. See Q. Surah 12, v.4.



This tone of positivity bears a greater resemblance to Ghailān's stand in al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī's al-Sudd. In fact, Lahn al-Khurāfa has nearly all the features of al-Sudd - a drought-stricken city, where a man named Haffān sets out to get water out of dry land in spite of an unseen voice's scoffing at his defiance of the gods. Haffān, like Ghailān in al-Sudd, determines "to teach the gods how to convert imagination into concrete reality...."

Al-Bashīr Khraīf is another such writer. He has been called hafid al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī (al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's grandson) by a Tunisian literary critic.<sup>101</sup> While this would not be wholly true with regard to the language about which al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī did not hold Khraīf's rigid and well-nigh doctrinaire stand, they are both alike in their narrative technique, characterisation and subject matter. This similarity is best illustrated by the depiction of <sup>c</sup>Abd Allāh in al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's Nuzhat Rā'iqa<sup>102</sup> and <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Karīm in Khraīf's al-Nugra Maḥdūda.<sup>103</sup>

Rashād al-Hamzāwī, the writer of Tarnanū admits having been strongly influenced by al-Tayyib al-Trīkī<sup>104</sup> who published all his stories at about the year of independence and has since not returned to the literary scene. Al-Trīkī's influence on al-Hamzāwī embraces language usage - colloquial in dialogue and classical in the narrative and more particularly the type of

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101. Ahmad Hassūn writing in al-Amal supplement for 5/11/71, p.8.

102. Sahirtu minhu 'l-Layālī, op.cit., pp.115-139.

103. Mashmūn al-Fill, op.cit., pp.118-135.

104. This was during an interview with the present writer in August, 1970.

characters depicted by both. They both have an extremely sympathetic concern for the very poor members of the Tunisian society. It is enough to read the story of Sālih in al-Hamzāwī's Ta<sup>c</sup>īsh wa Turabbī<sup>105</sup> and Khalīfa in al-Trīkī's Damār al-Fagr<sup>106</sup> or the poor boy in al-Hamzāwī's Dajājāt <sup>c</sup>Ammatī<sup>107</sup> along with the poor boys in al-Trīkī's Sillīm al-Firzīt<sup>108</sup> and Kilāb al-Sūq<sup>109</sup> to see the extent of al-Trīkī's influence on al-Hamzāwī.

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105. al-Tajdīd, Nos.5/6, June/July, 1961.

106. al-Nadwa, No.1, January 1955.

107. al-Fikr, June 1964.

108. al-Nadwa, February 1955.

109. al-Fikr, January 1956.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

FEMININE ARABIC SHORT STORIES IN TUNISIA

The contribution of Tunisian women to their country's Arabic literature in general has been severely limited. This is largely due to the social limitations to which they have been subjected until 1956 when the post-independence Tunisian government passed the epoch-making Majallat al-Ahwāl al-Shakhsiya (Code de Statut Personnel) which at least made illegal many age-long traditional practices such as the male's exclusive right to divorce a woman without her having a similar right; concubinage and polygamy, <sup>and</sup> the parents' much talked-of prerogative to impose a suitor on their daughter without her consent to mention just a few.<sup>1</sup>

On account of the lack of opportunity for women to receive formal school education and thus acquire the necessary intellectual training to enable them to contribute to their country's written literature, there was no Tunisian woman writer of importance until the early fifties although there had earlier been some sporadic literary contributions by Tunisian women in the fields of poetry and short story writing. The earliest

1. For a summary of the main aspects of this law, see J. Magnin, in IBLA, No.81, 1958, pp.85-90. For a comparison of this law with similar legislations in Syria, Iraq and Morocco, see: M.Berrmans, IBLA, No.103, 1963, pp.205-259.

of these was in 1938 when the Tunisian monthly Tūnis al-Musawwara published a short Arabic free verse entitled Ummāh Da<sup>c</sup> Inī Abkī (Oh Mother! Let me Cry)<sup>2</sup> by an anonymous woman writer who signed her poem as Ibnat al-Dāhiya (Suburban Girl) and also in 1948 when another Tunisian weekly al-Masrah wa 'l-Sīnimā published a short story entitled Zahra Dhābila (A Faded Flower) anonymously signed by a woman writer. These two contributions betrayed a very strong inclination towards romanticism and were of poor artistic and stylistic standards although they conveyed the frustration of the deprived pre-independence Tunisian woman. It is noteworthy that these two writers considered it necessary to use pseudonyms in their contributions. This must have been partly due to the unfavourable social climate around them which frowned at any attempt by women to dabble in a field considered an exclusively male business.

This male prejudice, however, began to weaken gradually especially in the main cities (Tunis, Sūsa and Safāqus) with the active participation of women in the nationalist struggle that led to the attainment of the country's independence. In the historic mammoth demonstration organised by the Neo-Destour party on April 8th, 1938, women came out for the first time to join their menfolk. Although it is probable that many

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2. Muḥ. al-Sāliḥ al-Jābirī, Adab al-Mar'a fī Tūnis in al-Amal suppl. 18/8/67, p.4.

of the women who joined this demonstration might not have fully understood all the issues involved (and this was also the case with many of the men who were merely following the instructions of their party leaders) it is nonetheless true that the wives and daughters of the casualties of the demonstration would subsequently have gained a greater awareness of their country's political situation and so women's participation in political movement subsequently increased and some of them were even later to be considered dangerously influential enough to be arrested and placed under restriction in the 1952 Tunisian political crisis.

Alongside this increasing interest in politics, a gradual change was taking place among certain elements of the Tunisian population, especially those who had government appointments, who began to see the importance of formal education for their children of both sexes. By 1947, there was a considerably enough number of female Tunisian youths in schools to enable Demeerseman to say that among some Muslim government employees, education was "no more considered a luxury for a young girl, but, to employ a Tunisian expression, it is henceforth an indispensable part of her wedding outfit".<sup>3</sup>

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3. A.Demeerseman, L'évolution féminine tunisienne : son programme familial, culturel et éducatif, in IBLA, Yr.10, No.40, 4<sup>e</sup> Trimestre, 1947, p.310.

There is little wonder then, that in the early 50's, there emerged Tunisian women who were well informed enough not only to organise and lead a movement to campaign for women's rights<sup>4</sup> but also to found a review completely contributed to and edited by Tunisian women. It is not surprising also that it is in this review that we come across the first serious attempt by a Tunisian woman to write a story. Zahra 'Abla's story entitled Rahmat al-Samā' (Divine Mercy) was ambitiously intended to be a serialised nouvelle but only one instalment was published before the review ceased publication.<sup>5</sup>

2 - The Tunisian Feminine Short Story as a Reflection of Woman's Social Conditions and her Aspirations.

The contribution of Tunisian women to Arabic short stories often mirrors the social conditions <sup>under</sup> which their sisters have lived for a very long time and in a few cases, it reflects the changes that have taken place and the hopes and aspirations of the enlightened Tunisian female for the future.

Zahra 'Abla's incomplete 'Divine Mercy' tells of the tragedy of Mahmūd's small family consisting of his wife

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4. The first of these movements was formed in 1951 under the leadership of Mme al-Shādhiliya bī Zaqarū for social and political objectives. Cf: al-Amal suppl. 18/8/67, p.8.
5. The fact that this review entitled al-Ilhām appeared only briefly in 1955 was not peculiar to this review alone, rather, it was due to the general fickleness of Tunisian periodicals. See Chapter One of this thesis.

and daughter when he becomes ill and paralysed and is sacked by his employers. Destitute and with no other source of sustenance, his wife asks him for permission to go out to work but he refuses saying that "men are evil and they have no mercy for afflicted humanity... except for some ulterior objectives." However, matters soon get so bad that the woman is compelled to go out to look for a job but instead of offering her a job, she meets men who are prepared to shower their affection and money on her. Before she could succumb to any of them, she leaves the public house where she meets them and promises to return the following day.

Unfortunately, she did not return to the pub just as the review al-Ilhām did not reappear after that first instalment.

Nonetheless, Zahra <sup>c</sup>Abla's debut in al-Ilhām served as an incentive to other women writers so that in 1956, many short stories were published in the Tunisian Arabic dailies and in the Tunisian Radio Journal by Zubaida Bashīr, one of the earliest Tunisian female short story writers to win recognition for her work not only at home but also in France where she has twice won prizes from Radio Paris for her short stories.

Her earliest short stories were published in al-<sup>c</sup>Amal<sup>6</sup>

(Munīra) and in al-Sabāh (Khawātir Tā'ira - Fleeting Thoughts)<sup>7</sup>

The first story depicts the tragedy of Munīra who, as a young girl, is very ambitious and aspires to become a scholar and poet. She succeeds in attaining her objective but not until she has been infected by an incurable illness unnamed by the writer.

In 'Fleeting Thoughts', Zubaida Bashīr, playing the rôle of the narrator, describes a young poetess<sup>8</sup> who is perplexed and frustrated because of man's inhumanity to man. She wonders why some are happy while others are sad. Feeling very lonely in her room, she decides to go out to meet others who are in a state of mind similar to hers. "I met a sad-looking girl and asked her: 'What's the matter with you, my girl? Don't you find any cause for joy and smile in life?' In turn she asked me: 'How do you live?' I said to her: 'Like other people, ...!' I don't need to explain to you the causes of my sadness because you are no doubt feeling the pains I feel and which every Tunisian girl feels so long as our society is afflicted with an illness called 'narrow-mindedness' (al-tazammūt) which denies us all the pleasures of life and the fun in the world so that we are thus left to content ourselves with tears instead of smiles, with

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7. Issue of 2/9/56.

8. Like a few other Tunisian girls, Zubaida Bashīr started her literary career as a poet for which she became better known as the first Tunisian woman to publish a small dīwān of her poems entitled Hanīn, publ. by al-Dār al-Tūnisīya lil-Nashr, 1968.



crying instead of laughing...' " The perplexed poetess then holds the girl's hand, squeezes it gently and tells her: "Let's ~~leave~~ dreams and fantasy to poets and philosophers and maybe we shall obtain some happiness from life before we miss the train of a lifetime (qitār al-<sup>c</sup>umr) for we do not have two lives to live."

Zubaida Bashīr's third short story on the same theme was <sup>c</sup>Awdā' al-Mādī (Return of the Past) published in Majallat al-Idā<sup>c</sup>a.<sup>9</sup> It recalls the meeting of Wahīd and Zainab in a train where a stealthy exchange of glances sparks off a memory of the past and opens up an association which would have ended in marriage but for...

Zainab, who bashfully tries to cover her face with her small daughter - evidence of an earlier broken love - recalls her first contact with Wahīd seven years earlier when he was employed by her family to give her private tuition.<sup>10</sup> They gradually develop an affection for each other but her mother often remains nearby during the teaching sessions thus making any intimate discussion impossible.

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9. No.6, 25/7/59, pp. 28,29 and 32.

10. Many religiously conservative families in the pre-independence days who wanted to give their daughters some Arabic language instruction employed private tutors rather than send them to formal schools where, they believed, not without some justification, that more emphasis would be placed on French and that they might be indoctrinated to rebel against their parental control.

Both Zainab and Wahid are now much more mature than they were seven years before. Wahid can now reciprocate her love in a manly manner and "as for Zainab, love has given her courage and lessened her shyness and reticence in his presence". They now meet more frequently and "she can (now) discuss with him without stammering, fidgeting or blushing..."

At this time, a wealthy merchant, who is also a relative of the family, comes to ask her parents for her hand in marriage and as he satisfies her mother's dream for a suitor, whose wealth and class are comparable to theirs, she is married off. She despondently writes to Wahid and after encouraging him to take heart, she drops the bombshell: "...You know, Wahid, how much I obey my mother...how I honour her wishes and carry out her order...and much more, how I fear and dread her. My mother has asked me, rather, she has imposed on me, something beyond my power...Do you know what it is, Wahid?...What do we oppressed maidens have beside silence and tears?"

All of Zubaida Bashir's stories deal mostly with the pre-independence social restrictions on Tunisian women and girls and more importantly the revolt against this situation which many of them were beginning to see as unjust and in need of a change. Besides the content, the artistic standard of her stories also improved with practice. While the first two hardly had any commendable

plot and tended to be straightforward enumeration of facts and opinions without much skill - like the poet-heroine of 'Fleeting Thoughts' - she seems to have acquired more skill by 1959 when she wrote her ʿAwdat al-Mādī which she handled with some expertise, creating a suspense at the beginning of the story to make the reader want to read on.

It is a loss to Tunisian short story that with such a promising start, she should have decided to stop writing stories and devote more attention to poetry. However, by the time she quit, there were already many more Tunisian girls and even some grown-up women, whose interests previously laid elsewhere were beginning to turn attention to short story writing. Among these were Nājiya Thāmir, Hind ʿAzūz, Fāṭima al-ʿAlānī, Khadīja al-Shatiwī, Bayyat al-Nūrī and Lailā b. Māmī to mention only the outstanding ones.

### 3 - Nājiya Thāmir

Nājiya Thāmir, a Syrian by birth, Algerian by marriage and Tunisian by naturalisation, is by far the most prolific woman short story writer in Tunisia and one of the best known in the country because most of her stories were first broadcast in the 'Women's Education' programme of Radio-Tunis.

Her literary activities commenced as far back as 1948 when she started to write about the Arabic theatre in

al-Masrah wa 'l-Sīnimā and by 1956, she had published three of her short radio plays in one collection entitled 'Adāla al-Samā'<sup>11</sup> (Divine Justice). Between 1957 and 1964, she made a considerable contribution to literary criticism of Tunisian fiction on the Tunisian radio, in the Arabic dailies and in al-Fikr<sup>12</sup> beside publishing another collection of short stories entitled Aradnā 'l-Hayāt<sup>13</sup> (We Desire to Live).

Due to the fact that most of her stories were first carried over the mass circulation medium of the radio, and thus destined for a largely illiterate, socially underprivileged and politically unawakened audience, she often made her stories an undisguised platform for giving instructions to women on the household chores of an ideal wife and mother and for arousing a consciousness of the colonial situation in her women audience and readers.

In Sawt al-'Anādīl<sup>14</sup> (Voice of the Nightingales) she tells the story of a widow with her only son whom she so loves that she has to desert a man whom she marries after her first husband's death because he resents her boundless affection for her son. The boy

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11. Publ. by Dār al-Kutub al-Sharqīya, Tunis, 1956.

12. For examples, see her reply to al-Fikr, questionnaires on the Story in Tunisia on pp. 9 and 10 of the review's special issue, Yr.4, No.7, April 1959 and her criticism of B.Khraïf's Iflās in al-Fikr, Yr.4, No.9, June 1959, pp. 39-41.

13. Publ. by Dār al-Kutub al-Sharqīya, Tunis, n.d.

14. al-Fikr, Yr.6, No.9, June 1961, pp.71-74.

grows into manhood and she advises him to marry and he reluctantly agrees to marry. She begins to dream of the wonderful life she will enjoy with her daughter-in-law and the delightful smiles and cries of joy of her grandchildren playing around the house.

For sometime after Ridā's marriage to Su<sup>C</sup>ād, his mother continues to take charge of the house cleaning, cooking and preparing the shopping list for the servant but soon, the daughter-in-law, who is beginning to feel bored of remaining idle, assumes full responsibility for running the house and for looking after her husband and her mother-in-law begins to feel insecure and unwanted. "Certainly, there was nothing left for her, for Su<sup>C</sup>ād had snatched everything from her and so she felt a flame of anger welling up her throat and a feeling of hate and repugnance toward Su<sup>C</sup>ād..."

The story ends with a reconciliation between the mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law because the couple offer their first baby - a girl - to the grandmother to keep and care for as she sees fit so that she can, in Su<sup>C</sup>ād's words : "grow up into a devoted girl like her father."

This story is unique among Nājiya Thāmir's published stories in that it does not have a direct political overtone like most of the others (excluding of course, her short plays).

All her stories in 'We Desire to Live' are written

in the same spirit as Muḥammad al-Marzūqī's Fī Sabīl al-Hurriyya<sup>15</sup> and the Moroccan 'Abd al-Majīd b. Jallūn's Wādī 'l-Dimā'<sup>16</sup> (The Valley of Blood) with the only difference that all her principal characters are weak and defenceless women who nonetheless invariably put up a strong opposition to the forces of oppression and evil often personified in the French gendarmerie and French air force planes from which they are miraculously rescued by divine providence!

In Walā'...Ilā al-Abad<sup>17</sup> (Loyalty...Forever), the heroine is Wadī'a, a nurse whose fiancé Tawfīq dies in the nationalist struggle against their colonial rulers. As she relentlessly cares for those injured in the struggle, she feels that she too is sharing in the struggle, its pains, anguish and sorrow accentuated in her case by the loss of her fiancé. In Lailat...Lailā' (Night of Nights)<sup>18</sup>, al-Difā' 'an al-Sharaf (Defence of Honour)<sup>19</sup> and Insān...<sup>20</sup> (Human), the plot is similar. The heroine is a defenceless woman at home alone because her husband has been prevented from returning home due to the sudden outburst of bombing and shooting by French soldiers (as in 'Night of Nights') or because her husband

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15. Discussed earlier in Chapter 4, p. 212

16. Publ. by Maktabat al-Najāh, Tunis, 1957. Bin Jallūn, born in Casablanca in 1919, has been in his country's diplomatic service since 1950. He is also a journalist. His other fiction apart from the above is Fī 'l-Tufūla (Childhood Days) which he published in 1959.

17. Aradnā al-Hayāt, pp. 7-11

18. Ibid., pp. 12-20.

19. Ibid., pp. 28-35.

20. Ibid., pp. 36-43.

has left home to join the nationalist fighters (Human). French soldiers enter the house to search for suspected terrorists and to loot and in the three stories, an attempt is made to rape the heroine who puts up a fierce fight and is miraculously saved from dishonour in every case.

Similarly, the heroine of Anā Lastu Mithlaka<sup>21</sup> (I am not Like You), is a young girl whose fiancé is killed in the nationalist struggle but her real 'enemies' this time are her parents. After remaining single for seven years following his death, she is finally forced by her parents to marry someone else but her real affection is still for her dead fiancé. On seeing a procession of placard-bearing demonstrators against colonialism, she breaks down and weeps, begging for the dead man's pardon "for ever marrying anyone beside you..." She continues in her silent supplication: "...Pardon me for weakening under my parent's pressure and their continuous insistence, for, in their opinion, a young girl cannot live without an husband, and no principles, sentiments or affection would justify her remaining (single) to the memory of one who is dead without binding her life to another man's life..." The heroine now rings a universal note in her reflection on society's reasons for forcing a woman to seek security in marriage. "... Who will remain with her after her parent's death???"

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21. al-Amal suppl. 18/8/67, p.3.

Who will care for her, protect her and defend her from (long-standing) feuds (al-ihan) when she is alone? Why should she remain a spinster throughout her life only to find herself one day without shelter or home...Her brothers' homes are not for her, and after her parent's death, she becomes a burden on friends and relatives and sheds blood instead of tears...and even if she is working and living on her own sweat, what kind of life will she lead..."<sup>22</sup>

On the whole, Nājiya Thāmir's stories suffer from over-simplified and sometimes naïve plots, a profuse sentimentalism in her direct opinions openly inserted into the narratives such as the following paragraph from 'Night of Nights' :

"That is the way of the strong in his dealings with the weak...he only knows the language of iron and fire by which he silences everyone who raises a finger of protest against his injustice and oppression. He forgets that there is divine justice which inescapably visits retribution on oppressors..."<sup>23</sup>

The last sentence sums up the philosophy of Thāmir's stories which, while they depict the social, economic and political conditions of the silent majority of Tunisian women, especially before independence, <sup>they</sup> were nonetheless

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22. As if this universal note was being echoed by Dr. Germaine Greer, a lecturer in English at Warwick University, <sup>sometimes</sup> described as the 'High Priestess' of the British women's liberation movement, who, in her interview on her controversial book, The Female Eunuch, Publ. by Paladin, London 1970, is quoted as saying: "Women who refuse to marry are seen to be daring in-security-facing a desolate old age, courting poverty and degradation", but she goes on to refute this idea by saying that there is no security in marriage itself. Cf: (British) Sunday Mirror, March 21st, 1971, p.10.

23. Aradnā al-Hayāt, p.13.



originally designed to instruct and guide rather than to entertain. Hence, we find that she often contrives her stories and plays to illustrate the importance of family and especially marital fidelity, the dangers of adultery and divorce and the inevitable visitation of divine justice on the guilty party - all of these are depicted in a deeply Islamic spirit.<sup>24</sup> From the artistic point of view, her stories are nearly always narrative with no dramatisation which could have been used to better effect in, for example, making the mother-in-law's jealousy in Sawt al-<sup>c</sup>Anādīl, more vivid. Her plots, too, are always too artificially contrived to ensure the traditional story teller's 'happy ending'. Notwithstanding these defects, it must be conceded that in some of her stories, (for example, Anā lastu mithlaka), her opening sentences manifest a considerable grasp of the suspense technique which enables a fiction writer to arrest and sustain his reader's interest.

- 4 - Bayyat al-Nūrī, Khadīja al-Shatiwī, Fāṭima al-<sup>c</sup>Alānī and Jalīla al-Mahri.
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These ladies were among the most recent crop of Tunisian women short story writers who have published their stories in the Radio Journal and other Tunisian periodical publications that have appeared during the

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24. See, for example, her collection entitled <sup>c</sup>Adālat al-Samā'

last fifteen years like al-Fikr, al-Mar'a and Qisāṣ.

Bayyāt al-Nūrī and Khadīja al-Shatīwī both made their small contribution between 1961 and 1963 in al-Fikr. Al-Nūrī published three short stories entitled al-Dawh al-Fārigh<sup>25</sup> (The Empty Cot), Kādat an Tataghayyara Hayātuhu<sup>26</sup> (His Life Almost Changed) and Law lā 'l-Quffa<sup>27</sup> (But for the Basket...).

In 'The Empty Cot' she tells the story of a young couple excitedly awaiting their first child for whom the wife has made all necessary preparations. The husband returns from work tired, takes his supper and before he goes to sleep, he remarks his wife's pale look but, after being assured by her that she is well, his mind is at rest. Suddenly, her birth pains commence, she wakes him up and he hurried first to call Auntie (Khālatī) Sallūha in a very dramatic trip by a taxi which he literally hijacks. Later on, he goes to call the midwife. Before the arrival of the midwife, Khālatī Sallūha tries to comfort Thurayyā by a mixture of incantations and old wives' tales including one about a childless merchant who is given a date-nut brought back from a pilgrimage by 'al-Maddab'<sup>28</sup>. He is asked to share it with his wife and both will immediately be blessed with a child...

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25. al-Fikr, Yr.6, No.7, April 1961, pp.24-29.

26. Ibid., Yr.7, No.10, July 1962, pp.59-62.

27. Ibid., Yr.8, No.7, April 1963, pp.53-64.

28. Colloquial for al-Mu'addib, a kuttāb teacher or a scholar of some sort.

The treatment administered by the midwife seems very bizarre to Šallūha who quarrels with her throughout the delivery.

A baby girl is born; her parents are very happy and Šallūha fumigates the house and its environs with incense to invoke Allah's blessing on the baby and to ward off 'the evil eye'.

But the family's happiness is not to last long for the child dies early on the following day while her parents are still trying to agree on a name for her.

Šallūha once more tries to console the bereaved couple by telling them that the Lord will give them a replacement. She gets ready to return to her home and as soon as she has put on her safsārī<sup>29</sup> she further encourages Thurayyā to take her mind off the unfortunate loss and just at this time, the latter moves near Šallūha and whispers into her ear: "May you live long, Ummī Šallūha, please ask the Maddab if he still has the pilgrimage nut and bring me one...."

'His Life Almost Changed' is the story of an illiterate young loafer who succeeds, by deceit and impersonation, in

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29. This is the large wrapper often worn by Tunisian women. It has an attached head-piece used as a veil. Its colour and texture vary from the white, fine linen in the North to the thick handwoven, often multicoloured cloth used in the South. For the regional variations of the veil in Tunisia, Cf: S. Boutarfa, IBLA, No.104, 1963, pp.317/318.

gaining the love of a school girl who proudly mentions his name whenever she and her friends discuss their boy friends.

He often meets her after school hours but he spends the morning loafing around and helping market traders to carry their merchandise in return for a few coins. Before going to meet his lover, he often makes sure that he picks up from the rubbish heap an empty packet of some superior brand of cigarettes in which he puts a stick of the peer stuff which he never smokes except in the presence of his girl and her friends. In fact, he smokes cigarette-ends picked up from the street when he is alone. The packet is often taken out and thrown away with elaborate ostentation so that the girls can see his brand of cigarette. Sometimes, he goes to Nahj al-Jazīra<sup>30</sup> at the time when government employees normally close from work so that he can walk beside Ṭāriq, "the elegant youth with a respectable job and the owner of a new villa in al-Mirkād"<sup>31</sup> so that his presence among these government employees can further boost his spurious prestige in the eyes of his girl friend.

After one year of his association with this girl, it seems that the stark realities of his situation from

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30. This street leads to Qasba where many of the government offices in the Tunisian capital are concentrated.

31. Another area in the Tunisian capital.

which he has been trying to escape are suddenly brought home to him as he unexpectedly decides to learn to read and write in the evening classes.

Meanwhile, the girl's parents have withdrawn her from school in order to marry her to another educated young man who has asked them for her hand in marriage. Although Rahīma the illiterate boy does not see her anymore, he still continues his classes, hoping and praying that she will one day return to him!

One day, while out for a walk holding one of his books in his hand, he suddenly meets Su<sup>c</sup>ād with her new fiancé and this gives him the greatest shock of his life. Stunned with disbelief, he utters a sigh of despair and throws away the book. He exclaims that the book is no more worth all his trouble.

Law lā 'l-Quffa<sup>32</sup> is the story of a girl's life in the ancient part (madīna) of the Tunisian capital in the pre-independence days. The principal characters are the girl Zannūkha, her father's apprentice Tayyib and her mother. In a manner that only a woman writer is capable of doing, Bayyat al-Nūrī depicts Zannūkha's relationship with her mother at home and the subtle ways in which she reveals her affection for Tayyib who is the only male she is ever able to steal a look at while at home.

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32. A translation of this story into French was published under the title : "S'il n'y avait pas eu le couffin" in IBLA, 28th Année, No.111, 1965, pp.293-307.

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After dramatically depicting an early morning scene involving Zannūkha and her parents in which her father orders her to fetch him this or that while he performs his ablution and prayer before leaving for his shop in the shāshiya<sup>33</sup> market in the centre of the madīna, we also see a little domestic quarrel between Zannūkha's parents over housekeeping money and the food which she ought to prepare for breakfast and lunch.

After 12 noon every day, Tayyib arrives to collect his master's lunch packed in a basket (quffa) and each time he arrives and knocks at the door, the daily drama commences :

"The old woman calls her daughter who is busy preparing the table"

- Zannūkha!

- Yes, mum

- What's the matter with you? Are you deaf? Go and see who's there.

"She goes out of the room, and feeling pleased with the clapping sound of her wooden clog which she augments, she puts a bit of coquetry in her gait. On reaching the ante-chamber (sagīfa) she claps her hands to enquire about the visitor. A male voice, clear and sweet, answers her :

- My Master (ḥurfi) asks me to fetch his lunch.

- Alright, just a minute.

"She goes in to inform her mother who gives her the basket containing the lunch which she has just prepared and orders her to go into the reception room to collect a parcel of shawāshī (pl. of shāshiya). She then admonishes her saying: "Look here! Make sure that you don't let him see your face. Give him the basket while you hide behind one half of the door. If I wasn't too busy, and my hands weren't so dirty, I would have gone to him myself!

"Her mother's words irritate her and she replies :

"That's right mummy! Why do you act like this? Have I been known to be in the habit of uncovering my face to men? Here am I, locked up and none but the walls of the house knew how I look!

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33. On the shāshiya, see my introduction, p. 18

"Now then! That's indecent enough! Come on, the man is waiting. I have nothing to add to my advice. May you live long, daughter.

"She remains silent at first, then raises her head and murmurs :

"'She is always counselling! What, in fact, do I lack if someone comes to look at my face?'

"The youth stands in front of the yellow-painted door staring at its rough black nails and the two rings attached to it. He stands in front of the beautiful door expecting to see what is hidden behind it...

"One side of the door opens and the basket appears and with it (also appears) a handsome slender wrist which fascinates him. He wishes he could caress it but his morals, honour and bashfulness would not allow him, so he contents himself with glancing at it although it quickly disappears. She feels the urge to go back but her curiosity impels her to stick out her head to look at him...She peeps...It seems as if it is the full moon appearing...Suddenly, their eyes meet...She blushes. She is disturbed and unable to take a second look at him. She slams the door with her full force and goes inside...

"The young man is bewildered and starts wondering: 'Why did she shut the door at me with all her force? Why? Didn't I impress her...? Or is she proud...?'

"Zannūkha, for her part, experiences some strange moments. She feels for the first time ever that her heart throbs with a sentiment she has never felt before, a latent sentiment. His glance has startled her...that glance which penetrated her unattached heart...She then settles down to think...and think..."

After this spark of interest, Zannūkha eventually contrives to make her love known to Tayyib who is also having a similar feeling toward her. Her first trick is to hide a clove flower under the serviette used for covering the basket and the symbol is immediately understood by the already sensitive Tayyib.

Since her society disapproves of a girl openly acknowledging such an affection, she has to keep this feeling to herself and suffer in silence. Her suffering is nonetheless relieved on most evenings when her father

talks approvingly about his apprentice and his satisfactory service. She also enjoys taking the lunch basket to the door everyday, since this enables her to see him daily and pass small gifts to him under the basket cover.

It seems that her unusual interest in the lunch basket soon makes the old woman to suspect her activities and so she stops her from taking out the basket with the threat:

"Look here, your father doesn't like that! If he knows, you've had it..."

She now assumes the responsibility of handing the lunch basket to Tayyib. This change causes a great deal of grief and disappointment to the two lovers. Zannūkha confides her plight to <sup>c</sup>Arabiyya, a neighbour's daughter whose family atmosphere is similar to hers. All her tricks to enable her to obtain a glimpse of him and possibly pass a message to him each time he comes for the lunch basket are foiled by her vigilant mother.

For Tayyib too, the lunch basket loses its meaning when the shaky, wrinkled hand of the old woman replaces the elegant and charming wrist of the girl. Unable to understand the reason for this sudden change and having no further channels of communication with her, he resorts to a woman street fortune-teller<sup>34</sup> who tries to gain admittance into the lover's home one afternoon when, in the absence of the Shaikh, mother and daughter are both independently thinking of the girl's advancing age and her future, a state of mind which pre-disposes



them to listen to the fortune-teller. By the time the consultation ends, Zannūkha has comprehended the fortune-teller's riddle-language, and, realising that she has been sent by Tayyib, she manages to slip a clever picture into the fortune-teller's hand as a message for Tayyib while her mother does not understand what is going on. By the time the woman leaves, both Zannūkha and her mother have had their minds put at rest although for different reasons.

The next section of the twelve-page short story depicts different feminine scenes at the bath where Zannūkha goes one day when her mother goes out for a short time. The scenes include one in which she meets <sup>c</sup>Arabiyya and starts a row with her because some days

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- 34.<sup>a</sup> The term used for fortune-telling in this story is "striking the light-weight" (daraba al-Khafif), a euphemistic term for lead. This is because her method, humouredly described in the story, consists of giving a piece of lead to the consultant (Zannūkha and her mother in this case) to whisper his/her request into it. She then puts the piece in a metal ladle which she puts on a coal-pan until the lead melts while she too whispers as she stirs the liquid lead: "By Allah's power, tell us what is in the heart and reveal to us the unknown" (bi-jāh Allāh, khabbirnā bimā fī 'l-qulūb wa 'allimnā bi-l-ghaib). She puts some water in a mortar into which she empties the boiling liquid lead which causes a small explosion that sends pieces of lead upward towards the roof while the remainder solidifies at the bottom of the water. The minor explosion is interpreted by the fortune-teller as an exorcism of the evil eye (...That's the devil's eye departing! That means that you have some luck here in this house). She then begins to 'read' the future of the client from the configurations of the solidified lead. Such fortune-tellers are also locally called daqqāz (fem. daqqāza).

earlier, after Tayyib had collected the basket and her mother had gone back to her work, she ran to the door, peeped and saw Tayyib knocking at <sup>c</sup>Arabiyya's family's door. She immediately concluded that <sup>c</sup>Arabiyya was going to snatch Tayyib from her.

Zannūkha's marriage day arrives and we are given a fine description of the festive mood of the children and the guests but most importantly, we are offered an insight into Zannūkha's great emotional anxiety since she as yet does not know who has been chosen as her husband by her parents.

"...Will it be him?...But he hasn't been coming to collect the basket since her wedding-day was fixed,<sup>35</sup> and even her father has not mentioned the bridegroom's name, for he rules as he wishes and must be obeyed. No one is allowed to meddle in his affairs or question him.."

When she hears an increase in the uproarious singing and shouting, she knows that the bridegroom has arrived. Her heartbeat increases and her tension mounts.

What a pleasant surprise when she sees that the bridegroom is the very man she has been dying to see. Both of them shed a few tears of joy. Zannūkha then asks him in a spontaneous fit of jealousy :

"You didn't take <sup>c</sup>Arabiyya our neighbour's daughter?"

"Never!"

"Why then did you knock at their door on that day?"

"My Master sent me to her father for an errand".

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35. He has presumably been stepped by his master to prevent any contact between them, a contact which he probably didn't realise had existed for a considerable time!

The two of them look happy and contented with the attainment of their wish and they receive the usual blessing of friend's and relatives for a successful marriage.

This story shows the great potentiality of Bayyat al-Nūrī as a good woman story writer. The plot is good and she successfully holds the reader's interest with the elements of suspense which she introduces in connection with the episodes of 'Arabiyya and the fortune-teller, not to mention the pleasant surprise at the end of the story. Beside the main part of the story, she also gives us a fine description of some social, and economic aspects of her society in her depiction of daily life in the shāshiya market,<sup>36</sup> the points of interest often discussed by Zannūkha's father with his neighbours.<sup>37</sup>

Bayyat al-Nūrī amply uses dramatisation in all her stories and one aspect of her story that singles her out of all the present Tunisian women story writers is her extensive use of pure Tunisian colloquial Arabic in the conversations of her characters, a point which has prompted some Tunisian critics to see the strong influence of Bashīr Khraif in her style to such an extent that if "someone does not see the writer's name at the beginning of the story and reads it, he will no doubt

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36. Cf : p.56 of the story.

37. Ibid., p.58.

(think) that he sees Khraif's hand at work..."<sup>38</sup>

### Khadija al-Shatiwi

Khadija al-Shatiwi's story, entitled al-Hadhbā'<sup>39</sup> was also translated into French and published in the same issue of IBLA in which al-Nūri's last story appeared.

It is the story of two youths from the tribe of 'Gharīb' in the South-East of Tunisia. Marzūq, after his father's death, is being cared for by his mother Halīma and his uncle whose son 'Alī hates and often physically assaults Marzūq because he is more brilliant in the kuttāb and consequently more liked by the mu'taddib. Marzūq is always thinking of his future higher studies and the opportunities that will be opened to him by his success in the future.

When he goes to a nearby field to graze his goats, he begins to recollect his childhood friends prominent among whom is Hadhbā', who, during their childhood, was very beautiful, well-behaved and playful. She is now an orphan and her stepmother makes her life miserable. She doesn't allow her to go out any more. Marzūq hopes that she will one day be free and he will marry her but this is no more than wishful thinking at the moment.

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38. al-Amal suppl., 18/8/67.

39. al-Fikr, Yr.8, No.7, April 1963, pp.37-43.

In course of time, Marzūq leaves his village to enter the Zaitūna branch-college in Qābis where he becomes friendly with some of the teachers because of his brilliance. After holidaying in his village where he learns, to his greatest grief, that Hadhbā' has disappeared and gone with a lover as speculated by some, he returns to his school only to find that she has not eloped with a lover as has been suspected but has merely fled from the intensified cruelty of her step-mother to live with her maternal uncle in Qābis and that uncle happens to be one of Marzūq's favourite teachers. So he is able to renew his acquaintance with Hadhbā'.

Like many of Khraif's stories, al-Shatiwī's story is set in the South of Tunisia. She sketches some aspects of village life - the kuttāh, the oasis with its date-palms - as well as student life in the college at Qābis.

The story is less accomplished in artistic merit than al-Nūrī's third story. The various sections of the story are not harmoniously welded together since there is no discernible plot. However, since this is her only published story, it does not constitute an adequate basis for making any conclusive remark about her literary talent and one could only wish she had continued writing after this debut.

With Fāṭima al-<sup>c</sup>Alānī, we begin to see Tunisian women short story writers drawing their materials from the lives and experiences of the post-independence educated Tunisian females who are free in varying degrees from many of the limitations under which their pre-independence sisters lived.

Fāṭima's first story, published in a Tunisian woman's magazine<sup>40</sup>, paradoxically has a male hero called Sha<sup>c</sup>bān whose name is the title of the story. Sha<sup>c</sup>bān is very reluctant to join the co-operative farming system<sup>41</sup> and when he learns that the government are going to acquire his land along with others and then employ him as a worker on the farm, his fears are further heightened. But when he attends a farmers' meeting with the provincial administrator for his area, and sees a demonstration of 'rain',<sup>42</sup> heavy agricultural machinery and scientific manuring together with the welfare and housing facilities that will be provided for him, he changes his mind and joins others "in building his country's economy."

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40. Majallat al-Mar'ah, May 1964.

41. Co-operative farming was a very prominent feature of the Tunisian government's agrarian economic policy between 1963 and 1969 when, due to many abuses that have crept into the organisation and the discontent of many participants, the government decided to wind up many of the farms. The downfall of Ahmad b. Salāh, the former Prime Minister who was tried for corruption and jailed in May, 1970, was to a large extent connected with the financing of the defunct system.

42. This would be a mechanical irrigation which must have looked like rain to him.

Fātima's two most recent short stories were published in Qisas and have educated Tunisian heroines.

Rajul wa 'Mra'atāni<sup>43</sup> (A Man and Two Women) is the story of Zainab, a Tunisian girl married to an Algerian who has come to study in Tunis. At the end of his studies, al-Hādī returns to post-independence Algeria with his wife who has to leave her widowed mother behind in Tunis. The couple have a little boy and lead a happy life in Algeria as al-Hādī is well placed in his job. They employ a house-maid from the area where they live.

Suddenly, Zainab receives a letter from her mother, (who did not object to her following al-Hādī to Algeria), saying that she is ill and asking Zainab to come at once. Without enough time to put her home in order, she hurries back to Tunis leaving her husband and son behind. She finds that her mother is paralysed and has to stay in hospital.

The first letter she receives from her husband complains of the family's loneliness without Zainab and pleads with her to return soon. But the second letter contains a bombshell. In it, al-Hādī regretfully informs Zainab that in a fit of passion, he put Nawwāra their maid in the family way and has, therefore, no choice but to marry her if his job and reputation are not to be jeopardised. He pleads with Zainab to forgive him and above all, to return and succour him in his distress.

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43. Qisas, No.16, July 1970, pp.109-116.

Zainab's dilemma is summed up in her words to a friend who asks her why she appears very sad :

"I couldn't bring my son with me because it was during the school term; I couldn't bring my husband because his job would not permit him. I couldn't return to them quickly because my mother is very ill and I am the only one she has. Now, I cannot alter the fait accompli, their<sup>44</sup> country's law permits them to marry more than one wife<sup>44</sup> but I cannot go back to find that my maid servant has become the landlady."

She, therefore, prefers to remain in Tunisia where she takes up a civil service appointment in order to be able to look after her mother. Her friends encourage her to forget the past and regard herself luckier than others since she can work to maintain herself.

Her third story, Sirr al-Nazzāra al-Sawdā'<sup>45</sup> (The Secret Behind the Dark Glasses) is the story of Lailā who is an enigmatic personality in the Faculty of Arts at the Tunisian University.. She wears a dark pair of glasses which she never takes off and this baffles everybody.

There is another youth in the same Faculty who is also an introvert. He would have nothing to do with most Tunisian girls because he considers that they are not the girls of his dream who should be beautiful and

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44. She is here referring to Algeria where polygamy is still legal unlike post-1956 Tunisia. It is interesting to note this radical change in the thinking of the younger generation of Tunisians regarding polygamy which is viewed differently by the older generation of Tunisian women.

45. Qisas, No.17, October, 1970.



above all else exceptionally intelligent. He meets Lailā and after a fairly long acquaintance, he finds that they both have common interests: "...she is not like the other women I knew...She meets my requirements..." But no sooner has he proposed to her than she tells him never to come near her again.

The disillusioned Munīr goes to his regular café where he chances to meet an old school friend who looks equally sad and distracted. From their discussion outside the café, Munīr finds out that Lailā is the mate's sister and that since her youth, one of her eyes has been blinded due to a childish prank. She does not know the cause of her loss of one eye and the brother who was responsible for this has just picked up this information from a prattling neighbour since their parents did not tell them. He is worried by a feeling of guilt. This new information offers Munīr a ray of hope and he reveals his feeling towards Lailā to her brother.

Fātima al-<sup>C</sup>Alānī's stories are well plotted and cleverly told and their climax and dénouement are well-timed and satisfying except that the beginning of Sirr al-Nazzāra al-Sawdā' is loaded with too much personal information about Munīr that neither adds to the development of the story nor is capable of exciting a reader's curiosity and interest to read on.

Jalīla al-Mahrī also made her earliest contribution to Tunisian short story in al-<sup>C</sup>Amal supplement of 18th August 1967. The story, entitled Fanājīn Salūmā (Salūmā's Cups), is about intrigues in a small village. The intrigue is planned by two people in the village in order to trick an overbearing father into giving his daughter, well past the bloom of youth because her father would not accept any of her suitors, to one of the suitors previously turned down by him. The trick succeeds especially as they use a strong financial bait to lure the father but the girl commits suicide two days after this forced marriage. When this news reaches the only café in the village, Salūmā, the waiter, suddenly trips and breaks all the cups of tea he is carrying. Gossip soon has it all over the village that Salūmā had secretly been the dead girl's very intimate lover and that contrary to popular gossip, Halūma the dead girl was not delighted to remain a spinster in spite of her age.

Beside this story, which sketches some aspects of life in a village, al-Mahrī wrote three more stories in Qisas. These were entitled, Adā<sup>C</sup>at Anfahā (She Swallowed Her Pride)<sup>46</sup>, Min al-Mawqūd ilā al-Thallāja<sup>47</sup> (From Hearth to Refrigerator) and Indamā Yazūl al-Dabāb<sup>48</sup> (When the Fog Finally Clears).

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46. Qisas, No.7, April 1968, pp.114-118.

47. Ibid., No.8, July, 1968, pp.121-124.

48. Ibid., No.12, July 1969, pp. 70-74.

"She Swallowed her Pride" is about a female university student whose defiant attitude to suitors and men in general is encouraged by her proud mother but in the end she is forced by her emotional and sexual needs to conclude that she cannot continue to spurn men indefinitely. She summons enough courage to do the extremely unpleasant thing in her case - write to a man in whom she became interested when he visited her in hospital.

'From Hearth to Refrigerator' has a similar theme - that of the complimentary nature of the sexes and the loneliness of one without the other. The young girl in the story, without any reason she can easily explain, ends her association with her fiancé but regrets this action later on.

Apart from 'Salūmā's Cup' which has a somewhat simple plot, the remaining three stories haven't much artistic merit except that they portray the author's disagreement with the extreme elements among young Tunisian women whose stories paint a picture of an extremely liberated Tunisian womanhood with no need for marriage like Lailā b. Māmī whose stories are discussed below. Al-Mahrī tends to see an emotional security in marriage. Of one of her secondary characters in 'From Hearth to Refrigerator' she writes: "...she is successful. She has a (marriage) certificate, she has her rights and duties. She is probably happy"<sup>49</sup> This is also the

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49. Ibid., No.8, July 1968, p.123.

message of her third story (When the Fog Finally Clears) in which a girl contemplating to cut off her fiancé finds this impossible when they both meet because of his irresistible smile, sweet words and soothing touch.

5 - Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz, the enlightened conservative short story writer.

Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz<sup>is</sup> the third Tunisian female short story writer to publish a collection of their short stories.<sup>50</sup> Her Fī 'l-Darb al-Tawīl<sup>51</sup> (On the Long Road) is a faithful reflection of her conservative upbringing in a family very much rooted in the pre-independence traditional conventions regarding women's position in society while at the same time, she attempts to advocate some moderation of extremely indefensible aspects of the old tradition like the complete claustration of young girls to the extent of stifling their natural artistic talents<sup>52</sup> or the traditional view that the woman is the faulty partner in every case of a childless couple.<sup>53</sup>

Mrs. Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz was born into one of the Tunisian capital's families that stuck to the ancient tradition of keeping their womenfolk indoors like Zannūkha in Law lā 'l-Quffa. She was, however, slightly luckier than Zannūkha in that she was sent to primary school from which she was withdrawn before she could complete

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50. The first two are N.Thāmir, earlier discussed, and Lailā b.Māmī, discussed below.

51. Publ. by Dār al-Tunisiya lil-Nashr, 1969.

52. Mawāhib Maghmūra, on pp.92-102 of her collection.

53. Hanī'an lakum Ma'shar al-Rijāl-pp.81-92 of the collection.

her course. Her family was somewhat more forward-looking than many such families at that time in that she and her sisters were further given instruction by private tutors. Hind soon began to contribute articles and stories to Tunisian periodicals and dailies. Since 1959, she has been working for the Tunisian broadcasting service. She is an active member of the Union of Tunisian women as well as being a member of the editorial committee of the women's journal, al-Mar'a. Both the organisation to which she belongs and the journal with which she is associated advocate moderate views on the social conditions of Tunisian women and one can clearly see many of these views woven into the stories in <sup>C</sup>Azūz's collection.

Her earliest story, which also comes first in the collection, was first published in Majallat al-Idā<sup>C</sup>a, issue of December, 1960. Entitled <sup>C</sup>Alā Tarafay al-Maqīd (Diametrically Opposed), it is the story of a fairly rich couple, Khālīd and Salīma, who, like many families of substance in the Tunisian capital, have moved from the congested housing of the ancient Madīna to new villas in the spacious housing estates in the suburbs.

The husband is described as one who "does not run after material things, does not give <sup>them</sup> an important place thus resembling many littérateurs who wander about in an imaginary world and hover around in a high plane that may have no connection with the reality of life."

while the wife is "ambitious, fond of life, of ostentation and luxury, desiring costly dresses and superb furnishing..."<sup>54</sup>

The author sets the scene for the story by describing their garden. "One night, Khālid and Salīma sit in the garden of their little house...They are surrounded by flowers on every side and the breeze diffuses the fragrance of jasmine everywhere so that it gains the upper hand over the smell of the scent radiating from the wife and the full moon appears and shines on them its silvery light and white rays thus increasing the charm and splendour of their evening..."<sup>55</sup>

After an argument between the couple over a flower which is cut from its tree by the husband, he makes a statement which sums up the whole basic difference in the couple's philosophy of life : "It seems to me, Salīma, that we are diametrically opposed to each other. You believe that the beauty of the flower is completed by its vase while I believe that the beauty of the flower vase depends on the flower..."<sup>56</sup>

The crisis comes to a head at the birthday celebration of the wife when the romantic and idealistic husband gives his wife a poem when the latter has been expecting a golden breech. The wife is bitterly enraged and contemplates ending the marriage but changes her

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54. FI 'l-Darb al-Tawīl, p.14.

55. Ibid., p.15.

56. Ibid., p.16.

mind on second thought. Living together soon becomes an ordeal because of their irreconcilable ideas of life but suddenly, each of them begins to seriously consider the other's point of view until the husband becomes "a person who does not understand anything except the language of numbers and figures and does not differentiate between one thing and another except by their material value..."<sup>57</sup> while Salīma becomes absorbed in literature and aesthetic considerations. Armed with this new point of view, each tries to show the other that he/she has now turned to accept his/her partner's view of life but alas! this only further complicates the situation as the difference has merely changed name and the story ends with Salīma going to 'Cuthmāna Club' to hear a lecture on famous Tunisian women while Khālīd goes to the race-course to watch the horses 'anveleu'<sup>60</sup>.

The next story Hanin Ya'ūd<sup>61</sup> (A Longing that Returns) is the story of a widow who recalls her days of youth while considering the future of her young daughter. In advising her daughter on the need for circumspection in choosing her life's partner, she remembers her first love that failed to end in marriage. She met this young man at a summer resort where they both fell in love. A day before they were due to return home toward the end

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57. Ibid., p.24

58. Ibid., p.28.

59. Ibid., pp.29-46

of the summer, they met and the boy asked for her permanent address but she did not give it to him. She promised to give it to him on their last meeting on the following day. She returned up for the last appointment but the boy was nowhere to be found. She then concluded that the boy must be just a creek and a flirt and decided to be more wary about such proposals in the future.

Her daughter now informs her of her teacher's unusual interest in her and after sometime, both become very friendly. A day is fixed for the boy to come and formally ask her mother for the daughter's hand in marriage and on that day, the mother has the greatest surprise of her life - she discovers that her prospective son-in-law's father was her summer-resort lover who disappeared. She hides her feelings and postpones the arrangement. The following day, the equally surprised and embarrassed former lover returns alone to apologise to her and to explain the circumstances of his failure to honour their last appointment some twenty years before. He was sent on an urgent errand by his father and in an effort to return in time for the date, his car was involved in an accident and he has a scar to show for it. She is perfectly satisfied with the explanation and agrees to her daughter's marriage to the man's son. Very soon, their former love is revived and becomes so strong that they too marry [the man too is a widower] on the



very day that their children are marrying.

The sixth story in Hind's collection is Hanī'an lakum, Ma<sup>c</sup>shar al-Rijāl<sup>60</sup> (Congrats to you, Oh Men) is the story of a childless couple. The husband takes his wife to the doctors at home and abroad and they all say there is nothing wrong with her medically. A doctor finally suggests that the man too should be examined and he agrees. On the day the woman goes to collect the result of the examination which shows that the cause of their childlessness lies with the man, she discovers on their tape recorder the text of her husband's disclosure to a neighbour of his plan to marry a second woman who will bear children for him. The tape recorder had been playfully and inadvertently switched on by the neighbour's little daughter during the discussion in which the neighbour registers an opposition to such an unfair action. The woman immediately deserts home, leaving a note behind explaining the reason for her action with the result of the doctor's examination.

On getting back home, Farīd, the husband, goes wild with rage because he thinks that a trick has been played on him by his neighbour. He takes a revolver and goes to look for this neighbour but he is not at home. He returns home and shoots himself. He is taken to hospital and when he regains consciousness two days later, the first person he finds at his bedside is his wife Hājar to whom he remorsefully apologises.

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60. Ibid., pp.81-92.

"This is the work of fate. I am sorry...All I beg for is (your) forgiveness...Pardon me please, Hājar. I have been less sincere and less tolerant than you. I am indeed very sorry..."

Another childless couple constitute the heroes of story number eleven in the collection. Entitled Zubaida<sup>61</sup> it is the story of an ideal couple in a plural society. They are very rich, and they cater for their peerer relations. In order to have a child of their own, they decide to adopt one after they have been told by the best gynaecologists that they cannot become natural parents. They have a very peer neighbouring couple with nine children and when the wife becomes pregnant for the tenth time, they decide to abort it but Zubaida and her rich husband step in and ask to be allowed to look after the pregnant woman until her child is born for them to adopt. The peer couple agree and when a baby girl is born she is named Wahida and cared for by her adoptive parents until she is old enough to marry. The marriage day is fixed. Her fiancé is from a very rich family. Just at this time, her adoptive parents become sad and in Wahida's absence, her fiancé is told by Zubaida her adoptive mother, that their sadness is due to the fact that Wahida's natural parents now want to reveal their identity to their daughter's bridegroom<sup>62</sup> and they are

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61. Ibid., pp.149-160.

62. This is obviously meant to enable them to benefit financially from this girl's husband as they will thus be recognised as his in-laws. Such a situation can easily arise as there are no proper adoption laws in many African countries.

unwilling to do this as it may upset Wahida but the fiancé shocks her by telling her that Wahida already knows this and that she too is afraid that this demand may upset her adoptive parents. He assures her :

"Don't bother about them henceforth. I know how to deal with commercialists of their type. Keep calm, dear aunt, for the evidence of your upbringing (of Wahida) is obvious and your motherhood is undeniable. If you had only one daughter previously, you now have a son in addition."

The foregoing three stories are typical of Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz's thirteen stories in the collection. The principal characters in all but one (al-Hamāmatāni - Two Doves) are women and they all depict domestic scenes in which various aspects and problems of Tunisian womanhood are highlighted. In <sup>c</sup>Awātif Umm (Mother's Feeling)<sup>63</sup> for example, she illustrates the plight of a widow who becomes jealous of his only son's wife because she feels that the latter has usurped her son's affection which used to be exclusively her's alone. She relents from her determination to ask both to give her their first child after she considers the enormous emotional sacrifice this may involve for her daughter-in-law and they all become happily reconciled.<sup>64</sup>

Al-Khā'ifa (The Frightened One)<sup>65</sup> is about a woman who has a nervous breakdown. She imagines there are

63. Fī 'l-Darb al-Tawīl, pp. 47-58.

64. This theme recalls to mind Nājiya Thāmir's Sawt al-<sup>c</sup>Anādil discussed earlier in this chapter.

65. Fī 'l-Darb al-Tawīl, pp. 59-70. This story was first published in Majallat al-Idā<sup>c</sup>a.

enemies haunting her everywhere and when she is admitted for observation and treatment by a psychiatrist, it is discovered that her trouble is due to fatigue and anxiety arising from her combined rôle of mother of six and a wage-earner. The author, speaking through the psychiatrist, elaborates on the need for family planning and limitation of the extra-domestic activities of a married woman with children to look after. A similar theme is depicted in the last story of the collection entitled al-Hā'ira (The Perplexed One)<sup>66</sup> in which a woman, whose husband insists that she must work as a wage-earner in order to be able to meet the family's expenses which include the repayment of a mortgage, is thereby exposed to the amorous advances of her boss and this situation threatens to wreck her marriage.

It is not surprising that Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz employed the short story as a means of highlighting the social and economic conditions of her Tunisian sisters as has been done by many other male and female Tunisian writers. Questioned about her objective in writing stories, she is reported to have said : "The story, as far as I am concerned, is a reflection of events, concepts, emotions and historical occurrences in the life of an individual and the society. The story is created by an occurrence which is taken over by the imagination and expressed by

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66. Ibid., pp.171-183.

the writer. It is an experience no less and no different from <sup>the</sup> conception and birth of a child... With me, story-writing is a likeable hobby, a kind of literature which I pursue as a recreation for expressing some feelings and ideas whenever other social and domestic duties permit..."<sup>67</sup> In keeping with this aim, she draws the material for Mawāhib Maghmūra (Buried Talents) from the plight of many Tunisian girls whose clausturation by their parents has hampered the development of their natural talents like that of this story's heroine whose singing talent has not been allowed to blossom because, as she puts it, "my family will kill me if I become a professional dancer...and personally I cannot imagine myself entering that field." Similarly, in Aina Sāliha? (Where is Sāliha?)<sup>68</sup> Hind makes the theme of the story the lack of security of tenure for domestic maids who are employed by relatively well-off families to assist in household chores and the fatal action that may be taken in desperation by such helpless girls if suddenly turned out as in the case with Sāliha the principal character of this story when she finds herself unceremoniously turned out at night by a family in which she has grown up from childhood to puberty just on account of an

67. Muḥammad Maṣmūl, in al-ʿAmal suppl. 9/1/70. p.4.

68. Fī 'l-Darb al-Tawīl, pp. 117-132.

unverified accusation made against her by the eldest son of the family.<sup>69</sup>

From the literary point of view, Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz must be commended for her excellent use of language in her stories. She strikes a moderate balance between the classical and the dārija. Of her language and style, a Tunisian critic wrote: "... (it is) a language much like the language of drama or of the narratives (ahādīth) of al-Sabāh<sup>70</sup> with their set objectives; ordinary style (but) without banality and without the kind of sensationalism of some male story writers; a style not devoid of age-long traditional expressions and some dārija phrases without of course sinking to the level of (verbal) spasm and convulsion often indulged in by some male and female (Tunisian) authors...."<sup>71</sup>

Most of her stories also have very good plots, often starting where the action is most intense thus arousing the reader's curiosity and then working backwards and forwards to fill in the events that lead to the opening paragraphs.

There are, however, two defects which detract from the excellence of her stories. The first is a tendency

69. It is interesting to note the similarity in the main outline of this story with another one published in Tunisia in 1909 and discussed earlier in Ch.2 (see p85) Might this not contribute to the view that Hind holds a traditional outlook on many social issues?

70. al-Sabāh is the 2nd leading Arabic daily after al-<sup>c</sup>Amal.

71. M. Masmūl, al-<sup>c</sup>Amal, suppl. 9/1/70.

to break into the story to offer her own direct comments on certain events with moral, social or political implications. For example, at the end of al-Khāifa, the author takes over from the psychiatrist to offer comments on the social and moral advantages of family planning<sup>72</sup> and also, she almost spoils her thrilling and well-plotted story al-Khāin al-Amīn (The Loyal Traitor)<sup>73</sup> when at the end she gives rein to her nationalistic feelings and delves into a doctrinaire commentary on Tunisian anti-colonial struggle: "Praise be to Allah in any case. The credit for that<sup>74</sup> is due to January 18, 1952, the day the Great Freedom-Fighter (al-Mujāhid al-Akbar)<sup>75</sup> was imprisoned which was a spontaneous call to jihād and a spur to positivism and the first spark of the revolution into which the nation (sha<sup>c</sup>b) plunged with all its resources until we attained our present honour, dignity, nobility (cizza, karāma, majd) and independence."<sup>76</sup>

The second defect is her attempt to make most of her stories have a "happy-ending". In order to achieve this, she sometimes resorts to a ludicrous degree of

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72. FI '1-Darb al-Tawīl, p.70.

73. Ibid., pp.103-116.

74. That is, the events of the story in which a nationalist is being given a hero's welcome from his exile abroad after independence.

75. This is the laudatory epithet given to the President al-Habīb Bourguiba who is regarded by many of his supporters as a charismatic leader whose nationalistic leadership equals that of the leader of a religious holy war against unbelievers. (jihād)

76. FI '1-Darb al-Tawīl, pp.116.

artificiality which makes such stories less near to reality than would have been the case if they had been left without this final part. A glaring example of this is Ḥanīn Ya<sup>c</sup>ūdū in which the widow is made to marry her first lover at the same time that her daughter is marrying the son of this lover, an event which is very unlikely to be met in real life. Life is no doubt more complicated and often more tragic than the sleek atmosphere in which she tries to envelop the latter part of her stories. If she had allowed the principle implied in her Ḥamāmatāni (To Dāves)<sup>77</sup> of employing <sup>the</sup> shocks of life to make her characters grow up and face the stark realities of life as it often runs, many of her stories would have been more realistic.

6 - Lailā b. Māmī and Zahra al-Jalāsī, the Convention Busters.

While Tunisian feminine writers like <sup>c</sup>Azūz and Nājiya Thāmir and the elder generation of leaders of the Association of Tunisian women formed in the early 50's were not interested in a radical disruption of the old order relating to Tunisian women in the society and would rather be contented with ameliorating the more extreme denials of basic freedom of girls and women while still keeping the family structure together, there is a growing evidence that many young Tunisian girls are

77. Ibid., pp.161-170.

78. Printed by al-Ittihad al-<sup>c</sup>Ummāl al-Tūnisī lil-Shughl, May, 1968.



becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the 'gradualist' approach of their elder sisters to their problems and would prefer a complete break with the past and a thrust into the future with absolute freedom for a girl or a woman "to do her own thing". One such youth in Tunisia is Lailā b. Māmī, a young journalist, whose collection of short stories is appropriately entitled Sawma<sup>c</sup> a Tahtariq (A Minaret in Flame)<sup>78</sup>. In all the stories, not a single prohibition stands in front of the protagonist and not a single taboo daunts her boldness. Lailā has a compeer in the person of another young Tunisian girl Zahra al-Jalāsī whose short stories have mostly appeared in Qisas.

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Lailā was born in 1944 on the Island of Jarba (Djerba) off the south-east coast of Tunisia. She had her primary school education at al-Hammāmāt (Hammamet), al-Mahāris (Mahares) and Jarjīs (Zarzis) until her family finally settled in the Southern Tunisian town of Qafsa. She is a graduate of the University of Tunis and now works as a journalist on the state-owned Tunisian Arabic daily, al-<sup>c</sup>Amal<sup>79</sup>.

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79. Jean Fontaine, 'Aspects de la littérature tunisienne contemporaine', in IBLA, No.129, 1969/1, p.127.

78 - See page 331

Like Zubaida Bashīr, Lailā started her literary career as a free-verse poetess and she published her first poem at the age of fourteen. After some fifty or so poems, she turned to short story writing, making her debut in 1966 with two stories which appeared in al-Sha<sup>c</sup>b<sup>80</sup>. One of these stories is Rāqisa al-Sullam which is included in her collection.

The first few pages of the collection (pages 9-14) are Lailā's own introduction to this book as this section contains her views on the functions of art and the artist as well as a denunciation of what she considers the outmoded ideas in the Arab world with ample quotations from some contemporary Arab writers including the female Lebanese fiction writer, Lailā al-Ba<sup>c</sup>q<sup>81</sup> al-bakkī.

She concludes the introduction with a comment on the non-conformism of her two protagonists<sup>81</sup> who "swim in a world of unconcern...challenging values and life... scoffing at principles and rationales...deriding existence and ambitions."<sup>82</sup>

While some of the pieces in the collection are not stories in the strict sense, there is a good deal of them that will pass for good short stories. One of

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80. A semi-monthly magazine of the Tunisian Trade Union Movement.

81. Told throughout in the first person singular, all the stories have a female protagonist with a shadowy male character often appearing in a secondary rôle.

82. Sawma<sup>c</sup>a Tahtariq, p.13.

these is entitled Tadhkira Tā'ira (An Air Ticket)<sup>83</sup> in which the protagonist, a Tunisian girl, meets a Lebanese boy while both are studying in France. They fall in love but are parted at the end of the year and each reluctantly returns to his/her country with a burning desire to be re-united some-day. The Tunisian girl who is the narrator in the story, sees no reason why she should have to wait in Tunisia and expect the move to be made by the boy. "It is useless.. to wait...like this...Why must you be the one to come to me...the one to obtain an air ticket...to wait for you. Let it be the other way round...Why not?" She therefore takes the action, which would be unusual of an Arab/Muslim girl, of travelling to Lebanon as soon as she obtains her ticket.

On getting down in Beirut, she takes a taxi and, unable to restrain her curiosity, she buys a newspaper and right in the centre page of the paper is a heading which announces: "The young journalist commits suicide: Sālim Fakhrī" and without reading what comes under the heading, she faints and when she regains consciousness, she finds herself in an hospital bed. She later finds out that the heading is merely the title of a story by Sālim Fakhrī, her fiancé, likening the one year he has spent after returning from France to suicide because of its drudgery and meaninglessness without his Tunisian lover. She is eventually reunited with her fiancé who

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83. Ibid., p.43.

is very surprised because he is not expecting her.

Another piece in the collection with a considerable measure of artistic merit as a short story is Inahu lā Yaktubu (It Doesn't Write)<sup>84</sup> in which the protagonist, a young girl, gets into an embarrassing situation as a result of her forgetfulness. She buys a new ball pen everyday to replace the one for the previous day and each pen gets lost at the end of the day. On this particular day, she buys a new pen and writes her name and telephone number on it (or so she imagines) in case it gets missing. When she returns home in the evening, the telephone rings and a strange, {sweet male voice asks her : "Are you, dear miss, the one who left a pen at the central post office with your telephone number on it?" She frantically searches for the pen but it is nowhere to be found and so she replies: "Yes... yes, it's mine. Do you really want to give it back to me?" to which the voice curtly says: "Who tells you that?" The girl then queries: "Then, why do you phone me if you don't want to return it to me?" and she is told: "I just want to know why it won't write!"

She becomes angry at the rudeness of the caller and tries to calm herself down by taking a bath. After this, the telephone rings again and she finds that it is the same interrogating voice: "Why doesn't the pen want

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84. Ibid., pp.105-112.

to write? Why does it refuse to write? Why does it stop writing? Why...??" She bangs the receiver down after bluntly saying: "Perhaps the ink is exhausted."

She begins to wonder why the pen wouldn't write. After all, she used it in the morning and it functioned well. After answering this seductive and taunting voice a third time, she decides not to lift the receiver anymore. But the telephone keeps ringing and preventing her from sleeping. At midnight, she lifts it and gently speaks to the caller requesting him to be patient until the following day when she will be able to tell him why. Although the telephone thereafter stops ringing, it keeps ringing in her mind asking her why and urging her to find an answer to the puzzle.

Early the following day, she hastens out of the house lest he phones again. On getting to the office, there on her table lies the new pen bought the previous day. She then looks into her bag and finds that an old exhausted pen that used to be there is missing. She then realises that she must have taken it out of the bag after buying the new one and written her name and telephone number on it instead of the new one. This old pen was, no doubt, the one left on the post office counter. She then concludes that the caller thinks that the girl-owner of the empty pen must have left it there intentionally to attract his attention to herself and that his queries over the phone are intended to

sound out this girl who must be looking for 'kicks'!

As soon as she returns home in the evening, the phone rings and she fully explains the circumstances of the empty pen to him. "I am sorry, gentleman, I am not looking for 'kicks' as you must have imagined," she concludes, to which the man, obviously a foreigner (a Frenchman, no doubt), replies: "Perhaps you are right. The sun is very beautiful in your country. It enchants people and causes them to forget everything except itself!!!"

All the other pieces in the collection reflect in general the rebellious attitude of Lailā b. Māmī to the status quo of the Tunisian woman. While the law has granted her certain legal rights, she still needs to be emotionally free to love and be loved by a man of her choice.<sup>85</sup> Lailā's heroine would not subscribe to any family intervention in her love affairs, so one does not come across formal betrothal ceremonies at

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85. The absence of this emotional freedom was confirmed by many young Tunisian girls interviewed by the present writer. One of them said that their parents, especially the strictly conservative ones, were still not yet reconciled to the changed conditions stipulated by the law. On the freedom to choose a fiancé for example, she said that much as she would want to do so on her own, she would not upset her mother in particular if she had any objection to her choice. This girl was a post-graduate student at the University of Tunis and she was representative of many of the young educated girls who were not bold enough to drag their parents to the law-court to enforce their legal rights. Two of the older generation of Tunisian short story writers with whom the present writer discussed this issue too would not concede any such rights to their daughters. One said: "The President, al-Habib Bourguiba, adopted a policy of 'gradualism' (al-tadrij)- referring to his policy of first accepting whatever the colonial ruler was ready to offer as a stepping-stone for asking for more) in everything except in the law on women's right" and concluded that the law was premature. The other one commenting on the anniversary of the law (cid al-Mar'a) celebrated every August, called it "a counterfeit anniversary" (cid muzayyaf).

which a girl's fiancé formally receives her family's approval of the union in Lailā's stories. If anything, her heroine sees no emotional security in marriage as in Lam Yakun Hubbuka Safīnatī (Your Love is not my Beat)<sup>86</sup> in which she prefers her association with her lover to remain at the level of friendship (al-sadāqa) which can survive much longer, be purer and truer.<sup>87</sup> In Banafsaj fī 'Ainaihi<sup>88</sup> (Violet in His Eyes), she tells her man when the latter offers to marry her : "Why do you want me for a wife...I shall offer myself to you without marriage...without any fetters...without any conditions." She is quite prepared to share him with another woman as in Jazā' Ikhlāsi (Reward for my Sincerity)<sup>89</sup> although this kind of libertine, free love can sometimes lead to shock and despair as in Khuliqtu (I was Created),<sup>90</sup> Law lā 'l-Kalīma (But for the Word)<sup>91</sup> and Amīrī 'l-Saghīr (My Little Prince).<sup>92</sup> In the last piece, her feminine nature gets the better of her and she confesses: "Thus did I hate jealousy but I am jealous".<sup>93</sup> Although rejecting the idea of conventional

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86. Sawma 'a Tahtariq, pp.63-69.

87. Isn't she here re-echoing Balzac the 19th c. French novelist who is reported to have said: "women's friendship is superior to their love"? Cf. Peyre, op.cit, p.297.

88. Sawma<sup>Ca</sup>....., op.cit, pp.81-85.

89. Ibid., pp.55-59.

90. Ibid., pp.73-77.

91. Ibid., pp.89-93.

92. Ibid., pp.151-156.

93. Ibid., p. 154.

marriage, she is still influenced by convention to seek a sense of achievement in motherhood but she stands at odd with tradition in wanting to be an unmarried mother. However, all her lovers seem to be dedicated artists whose lives have been given over to their art and they therefore don't always share her aspiration. One of them tells her like the famous blind Arab poet/philosopher Abū 'l-<sup>c</sup>Alā' al-Ma<sup>c</sup>arrī (973-1057): "I don't like children, I hate children...I shall never commit a crime against children by fathering them."<sup>94</sup>

Lailā's protagonists' aim in defying all conventions and social norms, in her own words in the introduction, is "to enable Man to be the Master of his religion, his morals, his future, his life, his paradise and his emotions"<sup>95</sup> but this defiance makes them live a miserable life "because they cannot ignore what is around them."<sup>96</sup>

From the technical point of view, many of her stories in the collection do not have formal plots of the traditional type of stories but are more akin to the stream-of-consciousness technique<sup>97</sup> as they contain a series of internal monologues recalling the aspirations and despairs of the female protagonist in the field of love. These reminiscences, mostly arranged with no regard for any logical sequence, depend for their effects

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94. Al-Ma<sup>c</sup>arrī is reported to have instructed that on his grave should be written the words:

95. *Sawma<sup>c</sup>a....*, p.13. هذه جناة ابي علي  
وما جئت على احد

96. *Ibid.*, p.14.

97. This style is discussed more fully in the next chapter.



on their poetic diction and cadence. It is obvious that Lailā merely gave up writing pure poetry only to replace it with poetic prose. The extent of the poetry in her collection formed the basis of an article by a Tunisian critic who revealed that many passages in the book would perfectly scan into six of the classical Arabic poetic metres and also mentioned the significance of the fact that her two main characters were a poet and a poetess.

The figurative action of Lailā's female character to illustrate her demand for sex equality consisting in cutting short her hair in defiance of parental authority and social norms as well as her symbolic use of the equality of the hands appear similar to those used by the Lebanese authoress, Lailā al-Ba<sup>c</sup>alabakkī in her novel Anā Ahya (I Live)<sup>98</sup> a striking similarity

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98. Publ. by Dār Majalla Shi<sup>c</sup>r, - al-Maktabat al-<sup>c</sup>Asriya in Beirut, 1963. This 317-page novel is very remarkable in the way the authoress skilfully puts forth her outright rebellion against any form of parental control or compliance with social norms. The protagonist shaves her head to the consternation of her parents, takes up an office job without consulting her parents, goes to the cinema alone, stays out till late at night and even smokes!!! She expresses her utmost abhorrence for her mother because of her unquestioning subjection to her father whom she (i.e. the girl) suspects of being enamoured by a fat woman neighbour. She will be satisfied with nothing short of absolute freedom, a proposition which would seem an anathema to a Muslim/Arab family in most parts of the Arab world.

which has prompted some of her country's critics to accuse her of plagiarism.<sup>99</sup> This charge would, nonetheless, be impossible to sustain on the basis of similarity of ideas alone in view of the universal nature of women liberation movements which sometimes give rise to a remarkable degree of similarity of expressions and attitude. For example, Dr. Germaine Greer in her interview on her book The Female Eunuch referred to earlier, puts forward the same basic ideas as the <sup>two</sup> Lailās when she attacks women who "are forever trying to straighten their hair if it is too curly and curl it if it is straight." in order to conform with convention and to appear attractive to men. Dr. Greer's theses on conventional marriage and woman's freedom are similar in many respects to those of the French novelist, Simone de Beauvoir<sup>100</sup> and yet this does not necessarily mean that the former made a carbon copy of the latter. It only shows that the background from which their conclusions are drawn is observable and similar in many human communities especially those with common cultural backgrounds.

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99. See al-Amal, suppl. 22/8/69.

100. Simone de Beauvoir, born in Paris in 1908, is one of the foremost contemporary exponents of <sup>the</sup> existentialist philosophy for which her novels are noted. Le Deuxième Sexe (The Second Sex) is the book in which she deals with the problem of women's liberation. On her life and works, see André Maurois, *op.cit.*, pp.325-368; and Henri Peyre, *op.cit.*, pp.287-307.

The other female Tunisian story-writer whose stories have dealt with largely the same theme as Lailā b. Māmī is Zahra al-Jalāsī. Her earliest stories appeared in al-Sabāh newspaper in 1966 (Kibriyā' : Pride); in the same paper's edition of 15/1/67 (Hattā Yadfā'a 'l-Thamāna - Until he has Paid the Price) and in al-Amal supplement of 18th August, 1967, (Qurbān al-Jafāf - The Drought Victim). In the last one, a poor family in a drought-stricken village offer their young daughter Fāṭima in marriage to a rich old man in return for some money and provisions to keep them alive during the drought. The old man accepts her because his two older wives have only female issues and he hopes that this young girl will provide him with a male heir. Sometime after the marriage, the first rains fall and the young children of the village who have taken part in prayers for rain (al-Istighāth) during the drought, jump out into the rain to sing and dance and the little girl-wife, forgetting her new status, innocently joins the party only to be suddenly seized and given a very good thrashing and then told by the Shaikh : "You are divorced, divorced...You've desecrated my honour and ridiculed my beard,"<sup>101</sup> you offspring of a

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101. The beard is regarded in a Muslim community as a mark of learning, wisdom and reverence and "to defile someone's beard" is to tarnish his character and honour.

deg!" When her father intervenes, the Shaikh tells him off by saying he has divorced her so that her father could have another girl to offer during a future drought in view of the fact that he hasn't any daughters left with him. He, however, grabs his 'wife' again and takes her back home.<sup>102</sup>

When he has waited for a long time during which the girl gives birth to neither a male or female child, he casts her off like the other two wives but her father has no redress and lives to regret his action in 'selling' her off as he did in the first place.

After writing this story, al-Jalāsī seems to have 'rebelled' against the traditional plotted story and adopted a largely stream-of-consciousness technique, and in a series of internal monologues, her characters' thoughts rebel against the traditional position of women in the Tunisian society and also demand equality and freedom for her sex. Most of these stories have appeared in Qisas.<sup>103</sup>

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102. He is able to do this because his divorce was not absolute since he pronounced the word 'divorce' only twice instead of thrice.

103. There are five of these: 1-Ughuwān Yahtadir (A Dying Camemile) in Qisas, No.6, Jan.1968, pp.125-127; 2-Tārat Markabat al-Qamar (The Mooncraft has Taken Off) in Qisas No.7, April 1968, pp.35-41; 3-Anā wa Mir'ātī wa 'l-Radhādh (The Drizzle, My Mirror and Me) in Qisas No.8, July 1968; 4-Law Iftaraqnā (I Wish We Fell Apart) in Qisas, No.9, Oct.1968, pp.114-117; and Baqāya Qināc (The Remnants of a Veil) in Qisas, No.11, April 1969, pp. 97-108.

Typical of her later stories is Law Iftaragnā in which the heroine suddenly decides to sever her relationship with her boy-friend while they both sit in a café. As she is returning alone from the café, she sees a woman waiting for a taxi wearing her wedding ring. She pities this woman for imagining that she owns a man. She wishes she could get at this woman's husband and lure him into recounting his wife's faults to her. This woman would then be deserted and she would then "realise that the ring is a forgery palmed off on her by the man." She also feels that her severance of her association with her boy-friend is "a victory against custom." The heroine in Anā wa Mir'atī wa 'l-Radhādh defies her mother's advice<sup>and</sup>, ignores her fiancé when he comes to visit her. When forced to try on her wedding robe, she goes with it into the rain, climbs back through the window into her room, wraps up the wet robe in an opaque waterproof wrapper and gives it to her fiancé as a 'gift' which she tells him not to open until he gets back home. After this, she says in the story : "I felt I needed some rest. I fell into a long slumber... I woke up...tired of lying down...I gazed at the hands of the clock...I then remembered an interesting event... the sight of my fiancé in a dream as he opened the 'gift'...I had a hysterical laughter...How great my joy has been since that time! I saw for the first time my fiancé's nerves tensing up..." The heroine

of Bagāyā Qīnā<sup>c</sup>, like that of Lailā<sup>b</sup> in one of her stories, shaves her long hair in defiance of her family and society who see in woman's hair one of "the chief distinguishing marks of her beauty so much<sup>so</sup> that cutting off the hair of tyrant queen-heroines of children's tales is considered an adequate punishment for their tyranny."

Al-Jalāsī's style and form are similar to Lailā's but without the same degree of poetry and apart from her earlier story - Qurbān al-Jafāf - which is fairly well-plotted and well padded with an interesting description of some aspects of village life which serves as background to the story, her other stories have no such plots although they possess their own measure of artistic merit consisting in the vividness with which the characters are depicted through the working of their minds.

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The need for short stories written by Tunisian women cannot be overstressed. No male writer can depict the conditions of women as vividly and realistically as women writers can do especially in portraying their mental attitude to their situation. Although Tunisian male writers like <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī<sup>104</sup> and the

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104. For example, see his al-Ghurfa al-Sābi<sup>c</sup> and Sahirtu minhu 'l-Layālī in his collection.

Majallat al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī group of short story writers in the thirties<sup>105</sup> made some attempts to depict the position of women in story form, they were incapable of writing short stories with the same degree of candour and penetrating psychological analysis which we find in the stories of women writers like Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz and Bayyat al-Nūrī on the lives of their Tunisian sisters. For example, no male writer could have been in a position to give the delightful description of the goings-on in the bath given in al-Nūrī's Law lā al-Quffa.

The emergence of some female Tunisian short story writers starting from the 50's has, therefore, been a blessing to the Tunisian short story in thus richly filling a gap which can only be adequately plugged by these female writers.

These female writers vary in their ages, skill in the art of story-writing and in their views on the problem of their sex within their society. From Nājiya Thāmir, a middle-aged woman with a prodigious reservoir of stories often written like popular tales with direct moralising junks thrown in here and there and largely aimed at encouraging a hatred of their colonial rulers but a passive resignation of women to their domestic status quo, one advances gradually to the stories by Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz, more skilled in the art of modern story

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105. See Chapter III, pp.

writing than Thāmir, cautiously advocating a limited innovation but not a dismantling of the traditional structure of society in which the rôle of the woman is that of a dutiful wife and mother and that of the daughter is as directed by her parents. A third group includes the 'rebels' against the old order like Lailā b. Māmī and Zahra al-Jalāsī whose demand is for freedom from parental authority, equality of the sexes and possibly superiority of the female sex, a demand which can only expect to be viewed with a great deal of disapproval and contempt by the older generation. This last group also differ in their style and diction from the other group. They dispense with plot in most cases and achieve their effect through the manipulation of language, atmosphere and their characters. The male counterparts of this last group are discussed in the next chapter.

It is, however, a matter for great regret that unlike their fellow male writers, many of these female story writers drop out of the genre after a few hope-raising pieces. Apart from Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz, Lailā b. Māmī, al-Jalāsī, Jalīla al-Mahrī, and a few beginners who are just coming into the genre, all of the female writers discussed above are no more publishing stories. With the ample opportunities that the dailies and periodical reviews (especially Qisas and al-<sup>c</sup>Amal weekly supplement) now offer to prospective writers, the Tunisian



short story can be further enriched if more and more women writers contribute and treat, not only the limited theme of women's position, but also broader themes connected with their society as a whole and possibly the outside world.<sup>106</sup>

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106. Lailā b. Māmī took some encouraging steps in this direction in her collection which includes some pieces on 'existentialism' and equitable use of earth's resources. In Min 'Abath al-Wujūd (The Futility of Existence), pages 97-102 and Wujūdī (My Existence), pages 135-141, her theme is 'existentialism' and in Limādhā 'l-Qamar? (Why the Moon?), pages 125-131, she questions the wisdom of space explorations while millions starve on the earth.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

NEW TRENDS IN TUNISIAN SHORT STORY WRITING

Amidst the intense literary activity of the period between 1966 and 1970, there has emerged a group of young Tunisian story writers who advocate an escape from the traditional novelists' pre-occupations with straight-line plot, psychological analysis and moral engagement. Their technique is very much influenced by the avant-garde French novelists like Alain Robbe-Grillet,<sup>1</sup> Nathalie Sarraute,<sup>2</sup> Michel Butor,<sup>3</sup> and two English writers

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1. Born in 1922 in Brest, France, Robbe-Grillet is a trained agronomist and statistician. His first novel Les Gemmes was published in 1953 and it earned him the 'Prix des Critiques' two years later. He has since published many more novels among which are Les Veyeur (1955), La Jalousie (1957), Dans le labyrinthe (1959) and La Maison de Rendezvous (1965). Not wanting to be compared to any past authors like Kafka and Balzac, he asserted that "the past had to be transcended, perhaps rejected, and that he was riding the wave of the future". According to him, "it is the novel which thinks itself, questions and judges itself; not through the means of the characters developing superficial commentaries, but through an incessant reflection at the level of the narrative itself, of each element upon itself; gesture, object, situation." (L'Express, Nov 8, 1955, quoted in Henri Peyre, op.cit., p.369).
  2. Sarraute was born in Russia in 1902 but since the age of nine, she has lived in France where she had her education up to the first degree level. Her earliest work entitled Tropismes was published in 1938. Other works by her are Portrait d'un inconnu (1949), Planétarium (1959) and Les Fruits d'or (1963). In her novels, she attempts to capture and record the 'sub-conversations' of the human mind which are often contradictory to spoken words but which she believes to be the real world of human relations.
  3. Born in 1926 in Northern France, Butor abandoned university education so as to become a full-time writer. His most important works are L'Emploi de Temps (1956), La Modification (1957), Degrés (1960), Mobile (1962) and Réseau Aérien (1962). Most of his novels contain meticulous details of the 'time' lived by his characters and unlike Robbe-Grillet, he does not believe in doing away with the 'time' element in fiction.

James Joyce and Samuel Beckett.

The most outspoken member of the 'nouveau-roman' group is <sup>c</sup>Izz al-Dīn al-Madanī, a young Tunisian writer whose short story entitled al-Insān al-Sifr (The Void Man) has given rise to one of the most severe controversies ever known in Tunisian literary circles. In addition to al-Madanī's belief in the superiority of the novel over the traditional Balzacian plotted story because of its elimination of conventional plot, characterisation and author's intrusion, the question of the Arabic language in our present technological age also assumes a new significance in his writing.

<sup>c</sup>Izz al-Dīn al-Madanī was born in one of the peasant quarters of the Tunisian capital in 1938. After his primary school education he entered the Lycée Carnot for his secondary school education. Between 1959 and 1961, he attended a few sociology lectures at the University of Tunis although he was not registered for any academic degree.

He started his literary career in 1957 when he began to translate the work of well-known foreign writers like Bergés, Kafka, Durrel, Ionesco and Virginia Woolf to mention a few. Besides introducing Western authors to Tunisian readers, he has also contributed to the rekindling of interest in the Tunisian literary heritage by publishing a collection of <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's<sup>4</sup>

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4. See supra, chapters one and five.

short stories to which he wrote an introduction as well as essays on little-known men of letters from the pre-independence days such as Muhammad al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī<sup>5</sup> and Muhammad al-Mushairiqī.<sup>6</sup>

Between 1966 and 1970, he wrote numerous literary essays in support and defence of his literary concepts which he vigorously projected in his stories. He is an active member of almost all the literary societies (the film club, story club, drama club, Ibn Khaldūn cultural group, etc.) operating in the Tunisian capital. After working as a journalist for the 'Agence Tunis Afrique Press' until 1968, he joined the staff of the Arts and Literature section of the Tunisian Ministry of State for Cultural Affairs and Information.

Three of his short stories stand out prominently as an embodiment of his ideas on how to revolutionise the technique of story-writing in Tunisia. They are each entitled al-Insān al-Sifr and were published at different times between July 1967 and November 1969 in two important Tunisian reviews - Qisas and al-Fikr.<sup>7</sup> A common feature of the three stories is the stream-of-consciousness presentation in which he records the thoughts (or dreams?) of a man who is sleeping, a fact which partly explains the incomprehensible vocabulary, the mixture of unorthodox ideas<sup>7</sup> with perfectly normal thoughts and numerous word-plays.

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5. Faidūra in Qisas, No.7, April 1968, p.76.

6. Muhammad al-Mushairiqī in Qisas, No.5, Oct.1968, p.111.

7. That is, from the point of view of an 'orthodox' Muslim.

ميم لحظنتاً... عين... نم... غين... ميم لحظنتاً نم... ريبر... جيم  
يخن نون لحظنتاً ندم ميم لام صاد ظاء ضاد جـ جريحن ح هاء ألفن نون  
دبوز الغووووووول ما أطو الليل لا أ همة لمزة س سن فر سر شر  
صرف سفر أليف لا شيء عليه ميم لحظنتاً نمم الباكثة من سفلى غرينجر  
يخن اتنا اثينا من فوق تاء اندم ديكي ديكي انت صديقي انت رفيقي أصصح  
أصحب اثنا اثلاثة من فوق دثثازه با سسصح----- صبر  
ح ح ح ح ح ظن هل ل ألف لام ميم ما أقساع سع ستنفس ش شين  
صين صاد ظاء ضاد صبح شينينتر فمناً ص مناً أنيكاف كالدم  
ندم عظم حدم يتنهده يتأوه يتس للل يتمطنا نا يتسرر رب ي أفعل  
لماذا ورم برم برم برم أ ف ع ل يا ألهي واهللو واكبرو تكبرا  
صلوا علا محامدن و.... قا قم. أبجد هوز حطبي كلمن سعفس قرشت  
ثخذ ضطخ يتمطنا يتسرر بيتنهده يتمغظ يتمرغ أفعلاما لو ينتشر ططاعون  
الماعون ألكا نون قرشتن. ألبق - بقاء. الموت. لو ينتشر صر ينتصر لو ينتشر  
العا ما أصنع لو أو يعمم لفاء. وزلزلة زلزلة الارض زلزالها. ألع دم  
يتناها الى مس سمعى سو صوطت. تك تك تك تك تك كلمن. هذا امر

The first text was published in July 1967 issue of Qisas.<sup>8</sup>

The first page contains a collection of Arabic letters written singly and in various combinations like shb, hsb, sbh, 'h' and 'y'. It seems as though it was an attempt by a stammerer to pronounce words such as 'ssabahaaaa'. Like the first pages of the two other texts, only a photographic reproduction could convey an idea of its content.<sup>9</sup>

This is followed on the next five pages by a medley of perfectly readable but unrelated words and phrases interspersed with quotations from the Qur'ān such as the following :

... " قبر قدر • النعش الاصفر • الناس الاكف • الايدي تنبش • تحفر •  
غنة • رتبة • همهمة • النعال تحل الارض • رائحة التراب فوهة ظلماء • تراب  
مبلل اسمر • تراب بارد ثقيل • خفافس • دود • خفافيس  
بقايا حشيش • اذا السماء انشقت واذنت لربها وحقت • انتحار • اذا السماء  
انفطرت • واذ الكواكب انتثرت واذ البحار فجرت • واذ القبور بعثرت • دمار ... (10)

8. Qisas, No. 4, pp. 64-69

9. See page 352<sup>A</sup> (opposite) for a photocopy of the first page.

10. Qisas, No. 4, p. 65. Some of these phrases are quoted out of context from Sūrah 84. (Sūrat al-Inshiqāq).

It is possible to extract certain ideas which throw some light on the content of the subject's mind. "...I must be myself, not someone else. I must be a picture of myself. I must not be metamorphosed. Why do you want me to be like my neighbour in wealth, profession and intellect? I want to preserve some of my personality. I invite you to be 'you' yourself, so that you die within your limits and putrify within your efforts and perish within your capabilities."

On underdevelopment (al-takhalluf), we read : "Unbelief (al-kufr) is evil but underdevelopment is even worse". This is followed by quotations from Surah 2, verse 35 : " And We said : Oh Adam, you and your wife should live in the garden and eat freely from it what you wish, but go not near the tree lest you become one of the wrong-deers".<sup>11</sup> This injunction comes in for some questioning in the mind of the subject as if this order were directly issued to him. "What is my objective? Is the apple created in order to become a sin, then a curse and then a revolt?"

On life in an underdeveloped country, he says that the "desire to remain (alive) in an underdeveloped country has been the problem of (past) centuries."

The picture that emerges after reading the text through is that of a disturbed subconscious mind with flashes of its real-life's hopes, doubts, disappointments

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11. Here the word al-Zālimīn used in the Qur'ān is replaced with al-Khātī'in in al-Madanī's quotation.

and distress unfolding one after another. These are succinctly expressed in sentences like : "Yes, you are possible, effective! Nay, you are toward, in the direction of, facing, intending and against : in brief, you are néant!"<sup>12</sup> "I am void, because I am stupid and a complete negation of any absolute truth." "Real imaginations are veils. Everything is an illusion, even your face which you sometimes see in a mirror is an illusion!"

There are also numerous hints of the subject's state of mind in the text - he is dreaming and he is being overwhelmed by sleep.

Al-Insān al-Sifr, Numbers 2 and 3

The second and third texts were published in al-Fikr<sup>13</sup>.

Unlike the first text which attracted very little critical remarks judging by the absence of much press comments on it,<sup>14</sup> the second text excited an all-time record of critical press remarks, debates over the Tunisian national radio and television networks and comments at all literary circles. Why did it attract so much attention? Perhaps the opening lines would partly explain the reason for this.

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12. نعم انت ممكن فاعلا . بل انت الى ونحو وتجاه وقصد وبإيجاز انت لا ا

13. Yr.14, No.3, Dec.1968, pp.55-68, & Yr.15, No.2, November 1969, pp.17-33.

14. Its first page could well have scared off all but the most determined reader.



الزبان الممفر

قصة تجريبية بقلم : عز الدين المدني

## حزب الفجر

اقْرَأْ ﴿١﴾ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِّنْ عَلَقٍ اِقْرَأْ  
وَرَبُّكَ الْكَرِيمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ  
الَّذِي خَلَقَ غَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِّنْ غَلَقٍ اِقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَعْظَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ  
بِالْقَلَمِ كَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَمُ الَّذِي فَتَقَ  
فَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ الْأَفْلَقَ مِّنْ فَلَقٍ اِقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْتَمُ الَّذِي دَرَسَ  
بِالْقَلَمِ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَدْرِسْ اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْأَحْلَمِ الَّذِي فَتَقَ رَتَقَ  
الْإِنْسَانَ مِّنْ خَرَقٍ اِقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَشْفَى الَّذِي لَمَعَ بِالْقَلَمِ  
عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ الْأَشْمَى بِالْقَلَمِ الْأَشْكَى مَا لَمْ يَلْمَعْ اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ  
رَبِّكَ الْأَشْمَى أَذَلِّي تَمَقَّ بَعَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ الْأَشْهَى مِّنْ بَرَقٍ اِقْرَأْ  
وَرَبُّكَ الْكَرِيمُ أَذَلِّي لَعَمَّ بِالْمَقَلِ مَلَعَ بِالْمَقَلِ الْإِنْسَانَ  
الْأَرْقَمَ مَا لَمْ يَلْعَمْ اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ أَذَلِّي بَشَقٍ مِّنْ شَرَقٍ بَطَقَ  
الْإِنْسَانَ الْأَشْمَقَ مَا مَلَّ يَلْعَمُ مَن رَعَقَ اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ بَرَكَ  
الْأَكْبَرِ أَذَلِّي فَهَمَّ نَسَا الْإِنِّ الْأَصْغَرَ مَا لَمْ يَفْهَمُ اِقْرَأْ

(\*) هذا تعبير رجل يبحث عن نفسه من خلال عالم اللغة والأشياء . وهو يختلف باختلاف ساعات النهار والليل . وفيه من الغموض ما فى أنفسنا ، ومن البيان ما فى ألسنتنا . وقصته دورة كونية تنطلق من الفجر لتتلاشى فى الغسق . وأقسامها سبعة مواقيت متواترة . يستفيق الرجل وهو بين الحلم واليقظة ويعى نفسه والكون فى « حزب الفجر » وستتلوهم أحزاب « الصبح والظهر والعصر والمغرب والعشاء والشفع والوتر » .

It starts off with a quotation from Surah 96 (Sūrat al-<sup>c</sup>Alaq) verses one to five. He then begins an elaborate word-play with these verses of the Qur'ān, coining new words by interchanging the root letters with an assonance which is better listened to than read. For example, he writes directly after the qur'anic quotation :

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَعْظَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ  
 بِالْقَلَمِ كُلَّمُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَمُ الَّذِي لَفَقَ فَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ الْإِفْلَقَ  
 مِنْ فَلَقٍ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْتَمُ الَّذِي دَرَسَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا لَمْ يَدْرِسْ اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْأَحْلَمُ  
 الَّذِي فَتَقَ رَتَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ خَرَقٍ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَشْفَى الَّذِي لَمَعَ بِالْقَلَمِ لَمْ  
 عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ الْأَشْقَى.....\*

There are words which are printed in extraordinary large characters namely : 'fear', 'no' and 'silence'.<sup>15</sup> Certain words are underlined, others are repeated for one or more lines, blank spaces are left between some words and others are printed upside down. Some pages are also adorned with abstract painting by another Tunisian artist named Belkheja. As in the first text the sacredness of Arabic language is ridiculed and self-satisfied complacency is attacked. "We are the water and you (singular) are the mortar but where is the edifice?

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15. al-khawf, lā and al-samt.

I shall build you, Oh father-land, I shall build you with clear letters, with bright words, with expressions sparkling with eloquent meanings; I shall construct you, Oh father-land, with a revolutionary pen, with a combative prose and a poetry of struggle; with a progressive and defiant style, with a sincere, living and popular expression; I shall build you constantly with an effective ideology, with a constant meditated action, with a continuous struggle until I am no more; I shall build you up at all times, Oh my country, with my grammar and my syntax, with the consonant 'u'<sup>16</sup>, with elevation, eminence and might, not with disintegration; with zeal and not fatigue; with activity, with sound, safe letters and not with weak and irregular letters;<sup>17</sup> with the complete verb and not with a defective one;<sup>18</sup> with a declinable (noun) and not an indeclinable one;<sup>19</sup> I shall raise your superstructure, Oh father-land, with sublime imagination, with a perception bursting forth with sincerity and not with the inspiration of prophets and (divine) messengers.

16. Bil-Raf<sup>c</sup>. This is the consonant 'u' which comes at the end of an Arabic noun in the nominative case. There is a play on this consonant which is normally written above the line on top of the last letter of a noun and thus contrasts sharply with the consonant 'i' written below the line under the last letter of a noun in the genitive case. The word raf<sup>c</sup> may also be translated as 'loftiness' without altering the sense of the sentence.
17. The weak letters of the Arabic alphabet are ا, و and ي. The rest are sound letters.
18. An example of a defective verb is عدا (to run) and of a sound verb كتب (to write) is an example.
19. While most Arabic nouns in the singular are fully declinable, plurals on the pattern of mafā<sup>c</sup>il and the active participle of weak verbs such as 'qadī' (from the verb قضى) are not fully declinable when indefinite.

and not with the sweet talk of the foolish demagogues nor the sophistry of so-called wise men; not with the deceitful slogans of mean leaders nor with the clichés of feeble-minded journalists; not with the elegant (style) of silly littérateurs nor with the (poetic) metres of conservative poets...."

Perhaps one of the notable features of this text is the deliberate flouting of the Arabic grammatic rules of syntax. This is much more noticeable because the text is completely vocalised and especially in the section of the patriotic song, many nouns preceded by the proposition ب(bi) are vowelled with the nominative case ending 'u' instead of the genitive case ending 'i'.<sup>20</sup>

The third text of al-Insān al-Sifr exhibits a much more chaotic external presentation than the two earlier texts although the author avoids direct quotations from the Qur'ān, probably due to the charge of deliberate derision of Islam to which he had been open in connection with the second text, a charge which he dismissed in one of his polemical essays as a misconstruction of his literary intention which had nothing to do with the religion of Islam.

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20. " ... سَابِنِيكَ يَا وَطَنِي بِالْفِكْرِ الْفَاعِلِ دَوْمًا بِالْفِعْلِ الْمَتَامِلِ دَوْمًا بِالْجَهْدِ الْمُتَوَاصِلِ دَوْمًا حَتَّى يَفْنِيَ الْجَهْدُ دَوْمًا سَابِنِيكَ يَا وَطَنِي بِنَحْوِي وَبِصَرْفِي بِالرَّقْعِ وَالْعَلَاءِ وَالسَّمَوِّ بِالْجَبْرِ وَلَا بِالْكَسْرِ بِالنَّشَاطِ وَلَا بِالنَّصْبِ بِالْحَرَكَةِ ... "

## الإنسان الصفر (\*)

(2)

### هزب الصبغ

قصة تجريبية بقلم : عز الدين المدني

فِي الْبَدْءِ كَانَتِ الْكَلِمَةُ أ فِي الْبَدْءِ كَانِ الْفِعْلُ  
 ب فِي الْبَدْءِ كَانِ الْبِرَآكْسِيسُ ج فِي الْبَدْءِ  
 كَانَ الصَّبْحُ د حَتَّى عَلَى الصَّبَاحِ ه فِي النِّهَآيَةِ  
 لَمْ يَكُنْ فَيَكُونُ و كَانَ التَّنْفِيسُ ز مِنْ الظَّلَامِ  
 ح مِنْ الْإِبْهَامِ ط مِنْ الْاَوْهَامِ ي كَانَ  
 الْحَرْفُ ك حَتَّى عَلَى الْحَرْفِ ل حَتَّى عَلَى الْكَلِمَةِ  
 م حَتَّى عَلَى الْبَيَانِ ن حَتَّى عَلَى الْإِفْصَاحِ س  
 حَتَّى عَلَى الْإِفْهَامِ ع حَتَّى عَلَى الْإِبْلَآغِ ف حَتَّى  
 عَلَى الْإِدْرَآكِ ص فِي الْبِدَآيَةِ فِي النِّهَآيَةِ فِي الْعَرْضِ  
 فِي الطُّوْلِ فِي الْعِلَآءِ فِي الْاَعْمَاقِ كَانَتِ الْكَلِمَةُ  
 الرَّبَّآئِيَّةُ ق كَانَتِ الْجَهَآئِيَّةُ الْبَشَرِيَّةُ ر كَانَتِ اللَّغَةُ  
 الْقُدْسِيَّةُ ش كَانَتِ الطَّبِيعِيَّةُ السَّحَرِيَّةُ ت بَعْدَ سَبْعَةِ أَيَّامٍ

\* هذا تعبير رجل يبحث عن نفسه من خلال عالم اللغة والأشياء . وهو يختلف باختلاف ساعات النهار والليل . وفيه من الغموض ما في أنفسنا ، ومن البيان ما على ألسنتنا . وهذا هو الجزء الثاني من هذه القصة التي هي بمثابة دورة كونية تنطلق من الفجر لتتلاشى في الغسق . والحزب في اصطلاح الكاتب هو ما تماسك في النص من العلامات والرموز والصور والبياض ، وهو ما تلاحم في مساحة الدلالات وما انصهر في درجاتها الشتى من الأغراض والمقاصد ، وهو ما تآزر في الشكل والأدوات من هياكل فنية ، حتى يكون النص موحدا كليا .

This third text opens as usual with a play of words and a play of all the letters of the Arabic alphabet according to the order in which they occur in the أبجديه (abjadiya), the old semitic alphabetical system which was employed to indicate numerals in most Arabic poetic and prose compositions before the twentieth century. This system of numerals is called in this story : "an artificial language...the antithesis of the language of life." He continues: "You have forgotten the language of action, today, the language of figures, the language of electronic numbers (لغة العدادات) (the speech of mechanical brains, the raving of I.B.M....<sup>21</sup> this is the modern language whether you like it or not."

After this comes a direct appeal to adopt a positive attitude to life and to discard age-long traditions:

"The age of harām is past! You do not believe in interdiction like your forefathers. When will words like 'forbidding', 'ban', 'interdiction', 'freezing'; when, when will these become disused words in our world? Rid yourself of these complicated plague-like words. Learn freedom of thought and heart. Say that you hate (such sermonisation as) 'Oh son, heedest thou...'<sup>22</sup> like the dawn which breaks and shatters the fetters of darkness. He that is not at liberty in himself, how can he be free in his society? You are Life itself..."

He goes on to deride the complacency of fatalism and to disclaim being a pupil of any ancient master of Arabic

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21. Written simple as I.B.M. ١

22. That is, the language of a father giving his son instructions on what to do and what not to do. The punctuations are mine since al-Madanī does not believe in the use of such 'traditional' literary appendages.

literature - al-Jāhiz is specifically mentioned here.

This section is followed by some musical lines, news broadcast in Tunisian colloquial Arabic, a weather forecast and quotations from an Ancient Arabic scholar on the origin of man. A quotation from Ibn Khaldūn to the effect that "the distinguished men among urban scholars consider i<sup>c</sup>rāb<sup>23</sup> as the basis of eloquence but this is not so" leads to a scathing reference to the opponents of colloquial Arabic; "This is the truth, Oh Dr. Mutadaktir<sup>24</sup> of Arabic language. Know that each of us has Arabic in his blood,<sup>25</sup> there is no commoner's Arabic and no élite's Arabic. They put a distinction between the two on account of their personal interests, their salaries and their (faculty) chairs...." As if to press the point further, he next writes some lines containing a mixture of Arabic words and transliteration of French, English and Italian words in Arabic characters. This portion reads in part :

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23. This is the correct grammatical syntax of the fushā.

24. —————→ يا دكتور المتدكتور على العربية.  
The name means an imposter, holder of a doctorate degree which he does not merit.

25. Literally: "Each of us carries Arabic in his chest."

٢٨ ٢٧ ٢٦ ٢٩  
 انما المسألة كيف ذهب عمر حسين إلى القبرية ففبرك في الماكينة  
 ٣٣ ٣٣ ٣٤ ٣١ ٣٠ ٢٩  
 " " ٣٧ ٣٥ ٣٤ ٣١ ٣٠ ٢٩  
 تونس مع الطرطرات البسكلات والسكوتارات والكراهِب

٣٤. A local onomatopoeic word for motor cycle.  
 ٣٥. From the French word 'bicyclettes' (bicycle).

With further quotations from some popular tunes,  
 from another classical Muslim scholar on the origin  
 of the four elements ; (fire, water, air and earth) <sup>٣٥</sup>  
 and a few disconnected narratives, the text ends with

سرق خبزة يا بولس شد شد شد شد شد

Other external features of this text include four  
 words - creation or creativeness (al-khalq), light  
 (al-Nūr), consciousness (al-Wa<sup>c</sup>y) and music (mūsīqā)  
 printed in very bold characters, some astrological  
 signs, an astrological table of the days of the lunar  
 month divided into the 'state of life' and the 'state  
 of death', two pictures apparently taken from posters  
 with some rhomboid geometrical drawings each of which  
 has a name under it.

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26. The classical ʿAmm Husayn as it would be pronounced in the colloquial.  
 27. "...to the factory and manufactured." Both are the French words fabrique and fabriquer.  
 28. From the French/English word 'machine'.  
 29. From the Italian word 'spaghetti'. 30. ?Italian-'Bavalou'  
 31. "...then loaded the goods..." Both are the French words charger and merchandise.  
 32. From the French word 'camion' (lorry).  
 33. Local word for 'tarred road'.  
 34. A local onomatopoeic word for motor cycle.  
 35. From the French word 'bicyclettes' (bicycle).  
 36. Scooter. 37. Cars.



Al-Madanī's 'interpretation' of his al-Insān

What meaning did al-Madanī expect his readers to attach to these texts? Perhaps the footnote on the first page of the second and third texts is a pointer to the literary and technical values which he puts on the texts. The two texts have the sub-title "experimental story" and he explains in the footnote as follows :

"This is the expression of a man in search of himself in the world of language and objects. It varies according to the variations in the hours of the day and night; its ambiguity reflects the content of our minds and its clarity shows that which we emit from our lips. His story is in a cosmic cycle which commences at dawn and gradually abates toward dusk...The man wakes up while he is still between complete wakefulness and dream and he is conscious of himself and the universe..."

In addition to the above words which are repeated in the footnote to text number three,<sup>38</sup> he explains the significance which he attaches to the diverse external features of the texts :

"The term hizb<sup>39</sup> in the terminology of the writer indicates the harmony given to the text by the signs, symbols, pictures and blanks, the coherence in its depth of meanings, the fusion of the different levels of objects... and the unity of form and content in an artistic framework so that the text emerges as a complete unity."

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38. He explains in the footnote to the text which I refer to as number two that this is really the first of a series that will run up to seven when finally completed.

39. He here uses a technical term which is applied to a sixtieth division of the Qur'ān.

In another article which he wrote on this story in reply to one of his critics,<sup>40</sup> he warned against mistaking the content of his experimental story for an attack on Islam.

"The concern of the writer [of al-Insān al-Sifr] is to endeavour by means of the story, which he considers a unique artistic medium, to sincerely express and vividly illustrate the problems of our age and society. He did not do this at the expense of the 'sacred religion' as claimed...but rather, he employed the Arabic language in his experimental story."

If he wanted to attack the people's religious beliefs, he added, he would have written an essay instead of an experimental story. He agreed with his critic that the subject of the story was not to blame, that he did not realise what he was saying since he was still half asleep, that he did not understand what he was saying because he was not in a state of consciousness. He, however, deplored the direct identification of the principal character of the story with the author which he saw as having the undesired result of turning the story into a confession of faith.

#### Public Reaction to al-Madanī's al-Insān al-Sifr.

The reaction of the Tunisian reading public to the story, especially the second text, was as widespread as it was diverse. For a whole year after its publication, a

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40. al-Mughālata, in al-Fikr, Yr. 14, No. 5, Feb. 1969, p. 70.

week hardly passed without one article or more being printed in the Tunisian press on this story.<sup>41</sup> It included unfavourable reactions from many on grounds of religion and others from a literary point of view, as well as a considerable approbation from the youths.

Many critics were quick to see in this story a denigration of Islam and its holy book. They contended that al-Madanī had likened the prophet Allah, in disregard of his exalted position, to a man in search of himself.<sup>42</sup> He has written a parody of the verses of the holy book and thus shown himself to be an unbeliever. He intended to sow doubt in the minds of believers. He ought to have considered properly the repercussions of his attempt to modernise - a good idea in itself - at the expense of religious beliefs and the sacred text.<sup>43</sup> These charges recurred in most of the articles published in connection with al-Madanī's story. Others added that Arabic was the language of Islamic civilisation of which Tunisia was a part and as such the language deserved the respect of every Muslim. "Any claim made against it (i.e. the language) was a treason against the father-land, against the Tunisian nation and against the people's struggle."<sup>44</sup>

41. For a brief account of the main literary criticisms of al-Madanī's story, see J. Fentaine's Naissance d'une nouvelle tendance littéraire en Tunisie, in IBLA, No. 124, 1969/2, pp. 273-299, & al-Bashīr al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī's al-Qurbān al-Azīm in Jawharat al-Islam, Yr. 1, No. 7, Dec. 1968, pp. 44-57.

42. al-Bashīr al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī, op. cit., p. 45.

43. <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Shimlī, al-Insān al-Sifr... Khayāl wa Ilhād, in al-Fikr, Yr. 14, No. 4, January 1969.

44. Yūnis al-Ruwaīsī, Ahādha Tajdīd aw Falsafa?, in al-<sup>c</sup>Amal 3/1/69.

Al-Madanī was also accused of attempting to destroy all accepted social and religious values by giving to Allah attributes far removed from His majesty and honour - a thing never attempted by man or angel in the past - and unashamedly playing jig-saw puzzle with qur'anic expressions.<sup>45</sup>

The most scathing attack was from the Tunisian National Union of Memorisers of the Holy Qur'ān entitled Ilā Musaylima al-Jadīd,<sup>46</sup> The writer of the story, they said, could not have chosen a worse time<sup>47</sup> for publishing such an exceedingly derogatory material against the Qur'ān. He has chosen the anniversary of the first revelation of the Qur'ān for deriding the five Muslim prayers and the ascension of the prophet. They invited him to publicly renounce this 'audacious innovation' and ask for Allah's forgiveness. Less direct attacks on the religion in the past, they recalled, had been met with the most severe repercussions. The Tunisian constitution recognised Islam as the state religion and defined the limits within which anyone could exercise his freedom of thought vis-a-vis the religion.

45. M. al-Ṣadiq Busais, Hizb al-Hunshufār in al-Ṣabāh, 3/1/69; and Dayājīr al-Fajr, in al-Ṣabāh, 9/1/69.

46. Published in al-Ṣabāh, 8/1/69. The metaphor here is to Musaylima who led Banī Hanīfa bedouin tribe against Islam immediately after Muḥammad's death in 632 A.D. Musaylima is called al-Kadhḥāb (the Liar) in Muslim tradition because he claimed prophethood and imitated the early style of the Qur'ān with ludicrous effect.

47. The story was published during the Ramadān fast.

From the literary point of view, it was said that al-Madanī's story lacked any artistic unity; it was not the result of the author's personal experience and could not be identified with any known rule of logic. It was far removed from literature and it was nothing but defiance of contemporary intellectual climate.<sup>48</sup>

It was further said that al-Madanī's story was a disservice to Arabic language which has been the basis of Arabic literature over the ages. It was a manifestation of the dangerous intellectual legacy of the colonialists who encouraged a bilingualism aimed at undermining any sense of pride in Arabic language and literature. Most of the 'coinages' contained in al-Madanī's story were meaningless.<sup>49</sup> Analysed according to well-known linguistic criteria - phonetically, morphologically, syntactically, semantically and metaphorically - they were too obscure and if this trend were to be encouraged, it would spell the death of the language.<sup>50</sup> Further on the question of ambiguity, another critic Shaikha Jam<sup>c</sup>a asked : "Does he (i.e. al-Madanī) not realise that we are living in an age which does not permit the reading one story ten times or more...only to emerge in the end with an empty hand?" All the inversions and transpositions were after all not necessary in order to express simple

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48. ʿAlī al-Shimlī, op.cit.

49. Yūnis al-Ruwaisī, op.cit.

50. M.al-Ṣadīq Busais, op.cit., (9/1/69).

and almost hackneyed ideas such as the ones al-Madanī was trying to put across to his reader.<sup>51</sup>

A different note was sounded by eight students of the University of Tunis who wrote in support of al-Madanī's literary technique. They believed that an age which has witnessed the unveiling of women could not but see the removal from literature of obstacles to freedom of thought :

"We are living in the age of man who makes mistakes as well as does the correct thing, experiences success and failure, disbelieves and believes, walks with the crowds on the streets and in the market-places, yearns for perfection, feels lazy and becomes zealous and like the others, carries in himself all the inconsistencies of existence. The literature of the modern avant-garde writers endeavours to capture all the incoherent facets of life and does not obey any precise rules. The result is that their writing appears in form of a container of inconsistencies which make out of life a surprising heap of heterogeneities."

This, asserted the students, was exactly what al-Madanī's story had done.<sup>52</sup>

There were those who saw in al-Madanī's story a natural reaction against the sacralisation of the Arabic language. Language was a means of communication and it should therefore be possible to re-create it. Secondly, it was a reaction against the constraints of Arabic grammar. This was demonstrated in the deliberate disregard of grammatical rules of declension. Did not the Qur'ān

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51. Jam' al-Shaikha, Hal min Jadīd fī 'l-Tajdīd, in al-Fikr Yr.14, No.5, Feb.1969, p.77.

52. Kalimat al-Ta'rikh in al-Fikr, Feb.1969, p.75.

itself set the lead for such deliberate linguistic licence where a dual subject in the plural was followed by a plural masculine verb?, they queried.<sup>53</sup>

Attention has also been drawn to the musical character of the story. For a reader to appreciate its aesthetic value, he ought to hear it read to him. This story, said al-Garnādī, would join the rank of the works of profound writers such as Joyce and Faulkner and would help to break through social taboos in order to project the relatively unknown Arab personality.<sup>54</sup>

Attempts have been made to analyse the story structurally.<sup>55</sup> It has been likened to a symphony of eight overlapping movements. The first is composed of the calmness and tranquility of a believer who approaches his creator in prayer. He recites Sūrah 96 up to a point where he suddenly forgets what his Lord has taught him. The Lord has shut him out! The transposition of letters is symbolic of this tragic destiny of the Arab Muslim. In the second movement, he regains some composure. This part is where the problem of the Arabic language is raised - its supposed inimitability which is seen by the Void Man as engendering in him a feeling of helplessness, weakness and failure. He gradually becomes agitated again in the third movement which commences after the word: "Wake up" and we see the Void Man

53. Jean Fontaine, op.cit., p.283. The point about the Qur'ān is also made in al-Hamzāwī's al-Wāqī'... (al-Amal, suppl. 8/8/69). He is the critic whose view is summarised in this paragraph.

54. Sālih al-Garnādī, as quoted by Jean Fontaine, op.cit.

55. Al-Munṣif Hashīsha, Ḥawla 'l-Insān al-Sif', in Thaqāfa, No.1, Winter 1969, pp.36-40.

beginning to abandon the world of liturgy and rites in an attempt to understand part of the divine secret. He wants to wake up and learn how to say 'No' to everyone wishing to oppress him. The Void Man approaches the fourth round in full consciousness and in it, he repeats the word 'No' sixteen times while in the fifth, he decides to pass from the stage of object (al-maf<sup>c</sup>ūl bihi) to that of subject (al-fā<sup>c</sup>il), from a defensive position to the launching of an offensive. The sixth is a persistent call for belief in one's self and in the power of reason. He becomes vehement in his direct attack on religious rules and rites, armed with the "sun of knowledge and thought". The seventh round is composed of the three lines which are printed upside down. Why? Because "your Lord fears to teach you His hundredieth name which would have revealed to you His divinity." In the eighth, the Void Man understands why Allah speaks to man only in signs and symbols.

Another Tunisian critic<sup>56</sup> summarised what he thought the author wanted to say under two headings. The first was an examination of the relationship between man and God. Al-Madanī tried to show his skepticism about this Power which wanted man to be subjected to its whims and caprices and he has handled the Arabic language the way

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56. Jam<sup>c</sup>a Shaikha, op.cit.



this power handled mankind. Secondly, al-Madanī has tried to show the inconsistencies of man's life.

Al-Madanī's collection entitled Khurāfāt

The interest generated by al-Madanī's al-Insān al-Sifr which almost degenerated into a slinging match of passionate personal abuse has, to some extent, succeeded in taking attention away from his first collection of stories which has earned him one of the Tunisian National prize awards for literature for 1968/69.<sup>57</sup>

This collection is made up of seven stories ranging in lengths from 10 to 105 pages.

The first four stories - Futūh al-Yaman (The Conquest of Yemen), Ahādīth al-Raḡm (Reports of Numeral), Ahādīth (Reported Events), Madīnat al-Nuhās (The City of Brass) - are taken from the world of fables and sacred superstitions and he attempts to demythologise some of them either by ending them with historical facts that take the veil off their supernatural nature as in the case of 'The Conquest of Yemen' or by showing the futility of the reasoning on which they are based as in 'The City of Brass'. The last three stories in the collection - Ikhtilās (Fraud), Muftaraq al-Turuq (The Crossroads) and Suḡyā, Yā Matar (Irrigate us, Thou Rain), are a new

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57. The list of awards was published in al-ʿAmal supplement dated 30/10/70.

treatment of social reality of the individual in the evolving Tunisian society, of man trapped between the past, present and future. The stories also project al-Madanī's concept of the novel.

### The Conquest of Yemen

The story begins with a description of Nature and the immediate vicinity of the event which is a ramshackle quarter of a city. The stage is then set with a tall raggedly-clothed man entering a circle of equally haggard-looking old and young people. The man entering the circle is followed by a small boy, a monkey and a small drum.

The vulgar-looking man is a maddāh<sup>58</sup> and after saying the traditional prayer on the prophet, he begs for generous donations from his audience and then begins his story of the conquest of Yemen. There are minute details of the consultation between Muḥammad and his companions over the 'unbelieving' ruler of Yemen before he finally sends 'Alī b. Abī Tālib against the Yemeni 'tyrant' who is called Ra's al-Ghul. After thousands of Muslim soldiers have lost their lives in the fight against over 60,000 soldiers of the 'tyrant'

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58. This is the Tunisian name for a professional popular story-teller whose tales are often a folkloric rendering of Arabo/Islamic popular tales. The stories are often sung to the tune of popular music and provide a good entertainment for the listeners.

a hand to hand combat between Ra's al-Ghul and <sup>c</sup>Alī lasting for a whole day ends in <sup>c</sup>Alī being wounded and his death on the seventh day after the combat.

Al-Madanī ends this story by relating how angry the Maddāh's audience grew because they did not like the end of the story which showed <sup>c</sup>Alī, one of the heroes of Muslim tradition, dying at the hands of an 'unbeliever'. They beat up the Maddāh, rough-handled his boy and monkey and tore up his old drum. The author then relates what the history books say about the events related in the story and how inaccurate the maddāh's version is. His conclusion : That the blood of Muslims was not shed in the conquest of Yemen and that <sup>c</sup>Alī b. Abī Tālib was not killed in Yemen but was assassinated by one <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Rahmān b. Muljam al-Murādī.<sup>59</sup>

Ahādīth and Hadīth al-Raḡm are two stories which are simply a collection of statements in the mouths of four narrators - Suhail, al-Ṣāmit, Lu'ā and Ma<sup>c</sup>in - and arranged in such a way that each statement contradicts what comes before and it is in turn contradicted by what follows. Hence we find the author's comment under the list of characters that "every narrator is responsible for his statement" appropriate.

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59. Among the epithets given to the neveau-roman school of fiction by which al-Madanī has been influenced is the 'anti-hero' school of fiction. The conclusion of this story with what is clearly common knowledge is intended, among other objectives, to deflate the 'hero' status of <sup>c</sup>Alī as depicted in traditional religious tales.

The first two pages of Ahādīth summarise the kernel of the story to which the remaining thirty-four pages are merely additions and clarifications. They contain the story of al-Sāmit whose mother hates him from birth but she nonetheless reluctantly brings him up. He is shunned by the youths of the quarter. When he grows up, he seeks consolation in the quest for knowledge but his is an insatiable quest. No sooner has he embraced a school of thought than he renounces it for a new one. He then meets a woman in whom he finds a respite for his troubled soul although she finds him difficult to get along with because of his abstruse ideas and behaviour. She dies suddenly and he becomes once more unsettled. He returns to his mother but both cannot understand each other. Al-Sāmit dies before he is forty.

This story is further expanded by other narrators who give varying reasons why al-Sāmit and his mother do not agree, why and how he dies, the relationship between them and other narrators in the story with al-Sāmit himself making statements about the other characters in the story.

Similarly, Hadīth al-Raḡm gives an account of the unfriendly relationship between Ma<sup>c</sup>in who is a teacher and Lu'ā his pupil. This is attributed to their differing ideologies over the true source of literary inspiration.

Madīnat al-Nuhās is a pastiche of the story with the same title in the 'One Thousand and One Nights' collection. Like the '1001' nights story, the king Shahryār and the story-teller Shahrazād are all present. The motif for the story - as a means of escape from death for Shahrazad - is also present. Other characters in al-Madanī's story differ from the '1001' nights. Mūsā b. Nuṣair, the North African governor who is sent by his caliph in the '1001' nights to search for the mysterious bottles from the City of Brass in the original '1001' nights story becomes the Chief of Secret Service of a modern state, who is ordered by his Minister of Defence to procure information about the military strength and atomic rockets of a mysterious City of Brass.

Al-Madanī's version looks like a modern spy story. But while Nuṣair of the '1001' nights succeeds in procuring the mysterious bottles for his master the Caliph, the spy action in al-Madanī's story fails. Shahrazād the story-teller becomes fed up with telling the king useless fictional tales :

ملت من الخرافات الكاذبة التي تخذر اعصاب الملك فيرتاح اليها ضميره  
وتطمئن اليها نفسه....."

She also gets stuck with providing a suitable conclusion for her story, so she ends it with a series of suppositions which, as in other stories by al-Madanī, are designed to destroy the whole idea of a well-ordered ending of the

traditional story-teller. Shahrazād's story ends with these words to her king-husband :

لنـفـرض يا ملكي ، العزيزاني<sup>أخي</sup> ارى نفسي انظر في مرآة تراني وصورتـي  
المنعكسة في مرآة ثانية والصورة تعكس الصورة الى ما لا نهاية لها ، كأنني لم  
اوجد . بل كأنني عدم . لتتخيل<sup>أن</sup> خراقة مدينة النحاس فراغ دوار . ولم تكن سوى  
السبات العميق . . . . .

Ikhtilās & Muftaraq al-Turuq are largely auto-biographical as many of their events can be identified with the author's personal experiences.

The principal character in Ikhtilās is called ع<sup>60</sup> and everything is seen by the reader through ع's subconsciousness. The story begins with a contrast between the cloudless sky and the restlessness of the cooing and fluttering pigeons and the gently blowing wind which disturbs every object around.

The quietness of the Bāb al-Baḥr square disquiets ع and he resolves: "I am in need of noise". He sees a marine on guard duty at the Ministry of Defence moving up and down as required by the rules of his employment. He takes out a newspaper which he is too absorbed in thought to read. He involuntarily turns the pages of the newspaper until a mulberry fruit drops on it and smears it and he has to throw it away.

60. This is the letter عain of the Arabic alphabet.

He moves away to a fish pond where he meditates on the sight of a big fish ignoring the provocative pranks of a smaller fish until the big one is eventually forced to sting it once and send it swimming unsteadily to its corner. While watching this scene, he recollects quite inexplicably, how he learnt watch-repairing from one of his father's friends when he was young, and the usual scene and sound at the watch-repairer's shop: *اتي اعيش على الموت*, he moves

No sooner is he free from this thought than he comes across a raggedly-clad street-hawker who persuades him to buy an old lighter. The bare-footed hawker persistently reduces the price of the lighter from 300 millimes to 100 but he doesn't succeed in getting even a single word from *ع* who is not in need of a lighter as he has stopped smoking. The hawker begs *ع* to give him 100 millimes as alms to enable him to get some money for that day and in exasperation, he shouts at to take it free : *تعال خذها بلاش ! خذها*

*ع* asks himself where he is heading for. Why is he on the pavement which is the sleeping place for ticket-sellers, shoe-shiners and the unemployed? And what about this weak and emaciated bedouin woman breast-feeding one of her three children sitting on her lap while they all sit on the edge of the pavement like alcoholics, wearing torn clothes,

patched trousers and dirty coats, with signs of grief, misery and even shame showing on their scorched faces?

He is still not sure of where to go : لا يعرف هل  
يذهب الى المقهى لتناول عصير البرتقال أم يذهب الى المكتبة  
No! He will keep moving. It is now evening time when  
most people are returning home and he watches the heavy  
flow of traffic, the continuous stream of people to the  
bus stops and a policeman directing traffic. He takes  
a bus back home.

That night, he attempts to write but doesn't  
succeed. The sound from the radio set increases his  
frustration. After taking a look at the town from the  
balcony at 10.00 p.m., he returns to his room and burns  
the picture of a girl-friend after which he goes out to  
a public house where he mixes with the crowd of clients  
and prostitutes. One of these girls winks and smiles at  
him but he is not interested and walks out of the pub.

He feels forsaken and lonely. He feels selfish.  
He does not want to eat although he is hungry. He is  
accustomed to taking only one meal a day.

He now remembers his childhood best friend Ahmad  
from whom he has not heard since he (Ahmad) travelled  
abroad. They used to do everything in common. He racks  
his brain morning and evening and spends sleepless nights.  
He is now enmeshed in piles of writing sheets, books and  
magazines. He is inseparably welded to writing and he  
cannot free himself from it. It tortures him and he



too torture it. It enervates him with reflections and contemplations. He remembers how he decided while still young to become like a writer whose picture he saw and how, after he took to writing, it earned him the contempt of people, hunger and empty pockets.

انـي اعيش على موتي

He retraces the path which he followed earlier on in the day and sees different people sleeping on the pavement until he gets into an alley where he is

suddenly confronted by five men who accuse him of snobbery:

نعم نحن نـشاهدك شيء نراقب حركة ! نحن

حضور في كل مكان وفي كل وقت.

One of them urges the others:

حاكموه ! انه بورجوازي !

Another one rears:

اتاني ! فردي ! وجعي قدرا !

Another one rears:

اقتلوه ولولم يكن بورجوازيا لماذا دخلت

عالمنا المحظور ؟

He is beaten up until he becomes unconscious.

Some distance away from this spot, there lies a lighter.

Muftaraq al-Turuq is similarly the reflections of a man who muses over the difference between the old city<sup>61</sup> with its close-knit society where everyone knows who's who in the quarter and the new town with its tall towering

61. The city referred to here is the Tunisian capital which consists of the 'old' city (madīna) which still retains its oriental appearance in the centre and the 'modern' city extending from the Madīna to the Lake of Tunis.

blocks of flats composed of cell-like apartments whose occupants hardly know one another since there is no relationship between them:

هم متجاورون صدقة وكما اتفق فلـ

منهم رقم يعرف بـ

Sugyā, Yā Matar is the longest of the collection.

It consists of three chapters which are in turn subdivided into smaller sections. In most cases, the subdivisions are separate short stories not directly connected with what precedes them nor with what comes next. Sugyā, Yā Matar is thus a collection of short stories linked together simply by the mind of the author. The reader will have to develop a keen sense for co-ordinating details in order to be able to establish links between widely scattered events.

The story begins with a beautiful description of scenes at a port. Seagulls flap their wings above the water, soar high into the sky only to return and dive into the water to pick up a wriggling and bleeding fish. Amid these birds that appear free and happy, the ship's horn blares to invite its passengers, who are busy going through custom formalities, to board the ship as it is almost time to go. Among the travellers is a man bidding his wife and six-year old son farewell with tearful eyes. Anchor is weighed and the ship moves out of the harbour: "و... ورحل من رحل و بقي من بقي..."

Who are these left behind? They include the duty-ridden customs Chief "moving slowly to and fro in front of his office, hands in pockets, a bulging belly, a pair of creaking dusty shoes, a cap with a shining silvery badge sitting on one side of his brow. From time to time, he stares at his uniform, shouts at his private secretary, adjusts his glistening black belt and mutters some incomprehensible words."<sup>62</sup>

There is also this deck-worker, enfeebled by age, who is left behind when others have gone. He is found by the Customs Chief who suspects that he is a smuggler. His reply is: "Is it possible for me to do that at my age?" After interviewing him, the Chief delegates his secretary to investigate further the reason for the man's presence on the premises. The secretary has to consult the 'G.O.' before he could say the hours during which the yard is open to the public. The old man asks: "Can I remain here since entering and going out are forbidden at this time?" "As you like it", answers the secretary, "the law is clear. Do whatever seems good to you. You are free to choose what you like." "Am I, in fact, free as this fool claims?", wonders the old man.<sup>63</sup>

This section is followed by the story of another decrepit old man in search of a quiet place to rest and

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62. Khurāfāt, p.167.

63. Ibid., p.175.

sleep but who is not even accepted by the other loafers sleeping on the pavement. He is searching for freedom from his 'situation'. He has sought for this Freedom and for Existence in Faith and in man but to no avail. In his wandering at night, he comes across a girl who has fled from home because of her family's strict control over her. She offers herself to him free for the night but he runs away from her. In desperation he sees Love, Existence, Creation and Life embodied in the rain which is drenching him at the moment.<sup>64</sup>

The next section is about a fisherman who quits the poverty of the countryside for the capital in the hope of getting a job or some social security allowance to maintain his family. His wife and daughter haven't heard from him for a long time. His daughter now decides to go away too, leaving her mother alone behind.

Meanwhile, the fisherman has been experiencing more difficulties in the capital. He is denied any allowance and can't get a job but "he dares not return to his village for fear of disappointing the expectation of his daughter for a new gown and his wife's hope for perfumes and other trifles and for fear of his neighbours' sharp wagging tongues."<sup>65</sup>

The last section of this first chapter contains a notice of divorce given by the fisherman's wife "for not

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64. Ibid., p.183.

65. Ibid., p.189.

knowing his whereabouts, dead or alive" and for "leaving her with no money or clothing for four months,"<sup>66</sup>

The second chapter begins with a description of Nature as is usual at the beginning of a new story. Then comes the story of an employee in an advertising agency. He has asthma and yet has to go to work in order to maintain his family. He normally rides a bus or taxi to work but today there is neither of these two means of transport available, so he has to walk the whole distance in order to get to work. For a man with asthma, it is indeed a very long distance and he has to take nine tablets before he could get near his office instead of his daily dose of three.

This section contains many unrelated details woven into the employee's story. For example, on page 192, there is a forecast of the future based on the man's star. On page 194, there are newspaper headlines entitled: من عناوين الصحف الصادرة صباح اليوم and this is followed on page 197 by the text of the world news in brief as one would expect on the radio. Pages 201 and 202 contain a recollection by the employee of his plan to give his children good education in spite of the incurable illness of one of them and his meditation over his life with his nagging wife. There is a newsflash of a suicide on page 204 and pages 206 and 207 contain

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66. Ibid., p.190.

the man's recollection of his school-days' interest in philosophy after seeing in the public park along his route to the office a man talking about 'Freedom'. Lastly, there is the account of the court trial of a government official accused of fraud.

All these congeries of apparently unrelated events are presumably intended to represent the content of the sick man's mind. A few steps before he reaches his office, he collapses.

The first section of the third chapter is the story of the life of a company executive who is also caught up in the web of the daily routine of his employment until he takes recourse to heavy drinking. The second section contains a list of organisations and individuals which send goodwill messages to the Tunisian president on the occasion of the 'Workers' Day' ('Id al-Shughl) while the third section takes up the executive's story in the public house where he drinks until he is turned out by the landlord after midnight. Under the influence of alcohol, he recollects his childhood days when his father, who was the deputy leader of a Sūfī brotherhood, was grooming him to become his successor. All that hope has now vanished.

The fourth section contains a mock government statement setting out the country's economic and social policy - a kind of democratic socialism.

The fifth section (pages 248-255) records an encounter between a writer and a bourgeois-friend who asks him for the conclusion of all the previous sectional stories to which the writer answers that the conclusion of a story is not his concern. The friend accuses him of ambiguity and advises him to write the traditional type of story. Towards the end of their encounter, the friend questions the usefulness of the arts to a nation :

هل الادب يمول شركة من الشركات ؟ هل الفن يفجر مداخل النفط  
من باطن الارض ؟ هل القصة تزود البنك المركزي بالعملة الصعبة ؟ هل  
الشعر يقضي على التخلف ؟ هل الرسم يرفع الجهل والامية ؟ هل  
السينما تكسو العراة ؟ هل الرقص يطعم الجائعين ؟ هل المسرح يدير المناجم  
يسير المصانع ويجلب السواح الاجانب ؟ هل الموسيقى تصد العدوان في  
فيتنام وفلسطين

The writer feels it will serve no useful purpose trying to convince such a bigoted ignoramus who counts everything in terms of pounds, shillings, pence and he classifies him among the bourgeois of whom Preust said in his prose writings that "they go to the theatre at night only to digest their supper." He leaves him in the bar and goes away.

When the bourgeois leaves the bar in some remorse over the reaction of his writer-friend, he sees a girl-beggar holding a child in one hand and stretching the other one out for alms. He pities her and when he asks what her name is, she answers: "Zanīkha".<sup>67</sup>

The sixth section contains a medley of slogans and catch-phrases on advertisement posters and the seventh section picks up once more the story of the company executive ruminating over his life : فأنت

سجين وضحك his subconscious mind seems to be telling him.<sup>68</sup> After leaving the Casine, he distractedly drives his car away at a very excessive speed which attracts the attention of the traffic police who chase him while he increases his speed until "suddenly, the car hits a petrol station at a junction of two roads between al-Kurm and Carthage. The station bursts into flame which engulfs the car..."<sup>69</sup>

#### Al-Madanī and The Tunisian Story

Al-Madanī has certain well-defined ideas about the technique and form of the story as well as the language to be employed in its writing. He has systematically

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67. This name immediately suggests that she is the daughter of the fisherman who moved from his village to the capital. (Khurāfāt, pp.183-190). See infra, p.393 on al-Madanī's idea of distorted events in a story.

68. Khurāfāt, p.262.

69. Khurāfāt, p.265.



set out these ideas in his numerous essays published on the pages of all Tunisian newspapers, magazines and reviews. More important, however, are his attempts to project these concepts in his published stories.

In his al-Insān al-Sifr, his main concern seems to have been the problem of the Arabic language in the modern world as well as an illustration of the unity of literature with other forms of artistic expression, such as drama, cinema and painting.<sup>70</sup>

On the Arabic language, he believes that it is necessary "to examine Arabic language in regard to literary expression with a view to developing and modernising it by injecting into it the language of everyday life and by reviewing morphological and grammatical rules so as to expand it and discard any aspect of it that may hamper the language in moving abreast with the present age."<sup>71</sup> The object of this operation on the language is to radically change and modernise literature so that it can speak for its Age and for Progress.

Al-Madanī also believes in the indivisibility of all the various forms of artistic expression, indeed,

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70. With this broad outlook which believes in the unity of all forms of literary expression and his wide reading he may well have known about such surrealist painters as Giorgio di Chirico (1881) who believe in "shocking the beholders by displaying ordinary objects...to satirise and destroy the notion of serious meaning in art as it had traditionally existed." See R.B. Merre & G.W. Irwin (editors), An Encyclopaedia of the Modern World, London, 1970, p.1001.

71. Al-Madanī, al-Adab al-Tajribī, in Thaqāfa, No.2, Winter, 1970, p.8.

in the compositeness of human knowledge. Thus he advocates the "blending of literature with art so as to benefit from the artistic value of all the Arts; and the incorporation of the human sciences and perhaps some of the pure sciences in the realm of literature, taking from them their theories and applications..."<sup>72</sup>

In executing this plan for the reform of literature, the writer must be prepared, if necessary, to tread on sacrosanctities and political, social and moral prohibitions.<sup>73</sup>

It is these concepts that he tried to embody in his series of al-Insān al-Sifr. Considering the great influence of the Qur'ān on classical Arabic and the importance attached to it in the life of the average Muslim Arab, it is not surprising that the content of the book should come up for first consideration in the subconsciousness of the principal character in al-Insān al-Sifr. It is unfortunate that this literary experiment was misconstrued for a spite on the Qur'ān by many readers.

What about his collection in Khurāfāt? It should be noted that al-Madanī adheres to the solid and clear language of the literary Arabic throughout in this collection with very few exceptions such as in the

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72. Ibid., p.8.

73. Ibid., p.9.

introductions to the Maddāh's narration<sup>74</sup> of Futūh al-Yaman and the final words of the desperate hawker who wants to sell an old lighter to ع in Ikhtilās<sup>75</sup> where some Tunisian words are introduced. It is, therefore, clear that a linguistic experiment was not involved. Nonetheless, Khurāfāt is part of al-Madanī's process of showing the practicability of his literary theories in Arabic literatures.

Al-Madanī sees no difference between long, short and medium length stories. His only distinguishing criteria for the story are: form, presentation and style. There is also no basic difference between Form and Content of a story. "Form is the architectural design, content is the execution; Form is the building while Content is the background. Form is the symphony while Content is the musical notes..." He also attempts to apply certain metaphysical observations on Reality, Existence and the World borrowed from Western, especially French writers, to the Tunisian society and the under-developed "third world" by extension. This is in keeping with his belief that "writers, artists and intellectual leaders are usually the first to perceive the factors operating on the Reality of human life and its changes, in this position, they are like the sharp indicator of the seismeter which records the slightest

74. For example, see Khurāfāt, p.21.

75. e.g. تعال خذها بلاش (Come on, take it for nothing).

76. Al-Madanī, Kalimat Can al-Qissa in Thaqāfa, No.1, 1969, pp.16-19.

earth tremor and the faintest movement in the deepest part of the sea..."<sup>77</sup>

Having faithfully recorded and dispassionately analysed what he sees on the human scene, it is not for the writer to moralise on the situation. He presents each problem in form of a question for the reader to answer.

The maddāh's story of the conquest of Yemen is to be seen in the light of the dictionary definition of the word khurāfāt as given by the author at the beginning of this book. "An absolutely worthless talk" and that is how he sees such superstitious stories as the one told by the maddāh whose account does not agree with historical records. "Alī b. Abī Tālib of history was assassinated as a result of political intrigues about eighteen years after Muhammad's death and not by Ra's al-Ghul. Furthermore, isn't the real Ra's al-Ghul of al-Madanī's story what the author wants man in the underdeveloped country to be? Instead of a terrible two-horned monster as illustrated on page 31, isn't he a socialist and positivist of some sort?"

"He talks heresy, says that all religions are superstitious, worthless tales and conjectures...He asserts that the earth belongs to all people and that the rich have no priority over the poor except by virtue of work..."<sup>78</sup>

The same point about the futility of tales and

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77. Al-Madanī, al-Shakl al-Fannī wa 'l-Wāqic, in al-Fikr March 1970, p.20.

78. Khurāfāt, p.23.

superstitions is put in the mouth of Shahrazād in the 'City of Brass' when she exclaims towards the end of the story: "I am fed up with lying tales which drug the King's nerves and tranquilise his conscience and put him at ease".<sup>79</sup> Are not Shahrazād the tale-teller and Shahryār the king both fleeing from the reality of their lives by taking refuge in tales? Shahryār is fleeing from the burden of his duties as head of state and from the crime of having to shed the woman's blood while Shahrazād too is fleeing for her life. Isn't this similar to *what* obtains in most underdeveloped countries today where people shy away from reality and take recourse to religious superstitions and taboos? This reality is faced in the end by both of them as Shahrazād ends the story with a series of hypotheses which negate the whole tale and could hardly have been satisfactory to the king. In the end, she says: "Let us imagine that the tale of the City of Brass is void and an illusion,<sup>and</sup> that it is no more than a deep slumber.." <sup>80</sup>

Hadīth al-Raḡm is an attempt to demonstrate the alternating process of certainty and doubt involved in the quest of a poet for the ultimate Reality. The poet Ma<sup>c</sup>in's "tongue spoke poetry when he began to sit in valleys, caves and mountains which he considered to be

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79. Khurāfāt, p.123.

80. Ibid., p.126.

his personal temples.<sup>81</sup> He seems to have attained absolute Reality because he claims to see Reason in everything. But the contradictory nature of things around him soon arouses doubt in him and he swerves to the other extreme where he rejects everything!

"I reject, I disown my absoluteness because my insight has lost the meaning of sight, my hand has lost the sense of touch and my thought no longer accepts explanations, descriptions and characterisation."<sup>82</sup>

This story shows the marked influence of French existentialist writers like Preust and Valery on al-Madanī's philosophical views. Didn't Valery believe that rigorous thought disproves in turn everything it creates?<sup>83</sup>

In Ikhtilās and Muftaraq al-Turuq, one cannot help seeing an identity between ع the protagonist of Ikhtilās and al-Madanī the writer. Ikhtilās shows the young Tunisian writer submerged in his own world of thoughts and reflections, moving among his poverty-stricken fellow country-men in the capital in search of inspiration. Lost in contemplation, he is thought by these he comes across to be proud, aloof, selfish and reactionary as he is branded by one of the six men who beat him up during the night. However, if these other secondary characters knew that ع's seeming aloofness

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81. Ibid., p.86.

82. Khurāfāt, p.93.

83. André Maurois, (tr. by C. Morse & R. Bruce) Profile of Modern French Writers - From Preust to Camus. London, 1970, p.63.

was evidence of an excruciating subconscious rigour due to his failure to fulfil his childhood ambition of becoming a great writer and that he did not mean to spite them, they would not have blamed him for his attitude. In Muftaraq al-Turuq, as the title suggests, we see the modern Tunisian at the crossroads between his past, present and future as represented by the old and new cities. It is the tragedy of a man caught in the labyrinth of a society in the process of change.

In Suqyā, Yā Matar, al-Madanī puts all his 'nouveau-roman' ideas. This story, as has been previously pointed out, is really a collection of short stories the sum total of which becomes too long for a single short story. Yet al-Madanī does not believe in calling a story long or short according to its length, so he sees Suqyā.... as a perfect model of a harmonious story neither long nor short.

His belief in doing away with the traditionally-plotted ending of a story is re-echoed in the confrontation between the anonymous writer (in whom one clearly recognises al-Madanī himself) and his bourgeois friend<sup>84</sup> as well as in the unorthodox conclusion of Shahrāzād's tales in the 'City of Brass'. Not satisfied with the loose ends left in all the short stories that make up Suqyā...., the bourgeois friend asks what happened in

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84. Khurāfāt, pp.248-255.

the end to the principal characters in each of the short stories :

"Let's imagine that he was forced out of the bar, that he took a taxi, went home and had a very pleasant sleep by the side of his wife...The conclusion is not my concern..."

- And the man with asthma, did he die?
- Who told you that he died?
- At least, it seems that he died of an asthmatic fit.
- And the fisherman who quitted his village for the capital, what happened to him? Did he commit suicide?
- Maybe he did. And maybe he did not obtain his social security benefit entitlements. I say to you: The problem of death in a story is a purely artistic problem. I say to you also: That it is the story that leads its writer and not the other way round. Understand that?<sup>85</sup>

And as if to further clinch the fact that he detests ready-made short stories which do not give the reader food for thought, he says : "I don't want to write concluded stories at all because my stories are questions. They are an expression of a question put to the reader..."<sup>86</sup>

The anonymous writer's contempt for the general taste draws a scathing remark from his friend who says: "If your stories indicate anything at all, it is your total ignorance of what a story ought to be..."<sup>87</sup>

Al-Madanī's literary technique and outlook on life, doubtlessly owe much to external influences, especially continental 'anti-novel' school of writers whose contemporary exponents include Alain Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, Claude Simon and Michel Butor. His

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85. Ibid., p.248.

86. Khurāfāt, p.249.

87. Ibid., p.250.



existentialist ideas have also been borrowed from continental philosophical novelists. His wide reading too has brought him in contact with James Joyce and William Faulkner whose stream-of-consciousness technique has had a considerable impact on him.

His stories, for example, demonstrate the influence of Sarraute's technique of eliminating the tell-tale 'he said' or 'she answered' as dialogue indicator which, according to Sarraute, is an unnecessary intrusion by the author and an inhibition of desirable direct rapport between the reader and his material.<sup>88</sup> Like Sarraute, al-Madanī's transitions from conversation to sub-conversations or from one character to another are simply presented by shifts in conversation.

Having rejected the yardsticks by which the success of the traditional story is measured, namely: plot, characterisation and authorial intrusion, al-Madanī, like the leaders of the school by which he is influenced, demands an unusual degree of reader participation and concentration. The details of a story are not all assembled in one sequence because this would, in the view of this school of writing, be a distortion of what happens in real life. The chronology of events is sometimes so dislocated that the reader is at first hopelessly caught in the labyrinth of a seemingly

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88. B.F. Steltzfas, Alain Robbe-Grillet and the New French Novel, Southern Illinois University Press, 1964, p.6.

inexplicable sequence. Take for example the story of the fisherman in 'Suqyā....'. His suicide is not recorded in the section in which his story begins but is inserted simply as a piece of newsflash in another apparently unrelated story. This dislocation of narrative sequence in time-space requires the reader to "contribute actively to the elaboration and metamorphosis of thought and emotion."

Present and Future Impact of These new Trends in Tunisia.

It may be appropriate to conclude with an evaluation of what al-Madanī and his group<sup>90</sup> have done for the Tunisian Arabic story.

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90. Al-Madanī is not alone in spear-heading this new phenomenon in Tunisian literature. He is just a representative of a trend which has extended to other forms of literature such as poetry, drama and literary criticism (see: J. Fontaine, op.cit. pp.287-298). In the field of the story, among the other youths whose works show similar characteristics to al-Madanī's are Samīr al-Iyādī, Mahmūd al-Tūnisī and Ridwān al-Kawnī. Al-Iyādī, who was born in 1947, has published a collection of short stories entitled Sakhab al-Samt (The Clamour of Silence) in which the stream-of-consciousness technique is dominant and the theme is reliance on self-determination in order to achieve one's objective such as in the story of a small child who defies his father and grandmother in silence and his step-mother openly in order to maintain his affection of his divorced mother and visits her in the end. (Sakhab al-Samt, p.56). Al-Tūnisī too has published a few stories of the same type in Tunisian reviews notably al-Fikr and Qisas. (See for example Qisas, No.6, Jan.1968, for Sahn al-Kaftājī). With most of these practitioners of the nouveau-roman, Form takes precedence over other aspects of their stories.

On the issue of language, al-Madani in particular has succeeded in drawing considerable attention to it and in inviting his reader to take a more critical look at the language although it is doubtful whether the nihilistic approach which he advocates can solve the problem. Influenced to a large extent by the creative deformation and cunning artifices which Jorge Luis Bergés, the Argentinian writer applied to the Spanish language,<sup>91</sup> he tried to apply the same devices to Arabic but the resulting story is far from being easily understandable. It is not likely that the 'futuristic' language of his al-Insān al-Sifr will have any chance of becoming absorbed into the written Arabic language although his advocacy of the acceptance of loan words from other living languages into Arabic agrees with what scholars in other parts of the Arab world and in Tunisia have been saying. It is remarkable that in his much more serious collection entitled Khurāfāt, he finds it expedient to use accepted Arabic, the language of the present.

With regards to their technique of story-writing, it is not surprising that such radical artistic innovations should be accompanied by incomprehension and that it

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91. J.L. Bergés, Labyrinths, edited by A.Yates and J.E. Irby, Penguin 1970, p.21.

should meet with hostility especially in a society where most readers are accustomed to the traditional type of story. Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute and other leaders of the school of writers by whom these youths are influenced have experienced a similar reaction from readers in the much more literarily sophisticated French society.<sup>92</sup> It is hoped that the ease with which it is possible by means of this technique to capture and record the intimate gropings of human subconsciousness which are dimly sensed in the subconversational world of inner monologues, and especially as this enables a true picture of the 'inner man' to be presented, may gradually win the acceptance and admiration of the Tunisian reading public for this new trend which, if used as a second force to the traditional type of story, will enhance the quality and diversity of the Tunisian Arabic story.

It is, however, too early at the present time to evaluate adequately the success and the potentiality of a trend which has been on for only half a decade but judging from the present favourable reaction of many Tunisian youths to this new trend, it is likely that it will gain firmer grounds and open up new horizons for the Tunisian Arabic story.

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92. Ben F. Stoltzfus, op.cit., see the preface to this book as well as al-Amal supplement for 13/12/68 for report of an interview between al-Madani and Robbe-Grillet.

## C O N C L U S I O N S

### Tunisian Short Story - A Study in socio-cultural history

From the mine of information contained in the Tunisian Arabic short story, it is possible to reconstruct the social and cultural history of that country during the first seven decades of the twentieth century. This is because all the writers who have contributed to it throughout this period have come from the different classes of the Tunisian society and hence many of them have been able to depict characters which are types that reflect their own class or contemporaries with varying degrees of accuracy. Unlike, for example, Edgar Allan Poe's formalised short stories in which reality was often an artificial one,<sup>1</sup> Tunisian short stories are similar to those by the French writer Guy de Maupassant and the pre-revolution Russian writers, containing real life and abounding in the pleasures and pains of Tunisian life.

Due to the presence of 'lean years' in the Tunisian short stories of this period, it is inevitable that any reconstruction of socio-cultural history based on this

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1. S.H. Steinberg, (ed.), Cassell's Encyclopaedia of Literature, Vol. 1, London 1953, p.504.

genre should have some gaps, the most prominent of which is the period between 1920 and 1930. These lean years were usually concurrent with periods of intense anti-colonial political activities in which the local Arabic press often shared and thus rendered itself liable to suppression by the colonial authorities.

#### First Period : 1900 to 1930

In Tunisia during this period, there was a general awareness of the weakness of the Arab world vis-a-vis the west, and this feeling was aggravated by the colonial situation, the full consequences of which were beginning to dawn on the Tunisians. The result of this was that Tunisian leaders of thought, like their counterparts in other parts of the Arab world, began to look back on the glorious past of the Arabo/Islamic empire and to lament the deficiency among their own contemporaries of the virtues which had contributed to the attainment of such heights of power. They also suggested remedies for a renaissance which consisted in a return to the social and administrative set-ups and the religious practices of the early days of Islam while not neglecting the modern sciences on which the development of the west had been built. This was summed up by Jacques Berque as a "desire for a return to its [Islam's] own sources and for purity of dogma [which] concealed an acceptance

of the modern world and a just aspiration towards some positive compromise."<sup>2</sup>

Although poetry was the popular medium of expression among the scholars and intellectuals of that time as borne out by Zain al-<sup>c</sup>Ābidīn al-Sanūsī's two-volume al-Adab al-Tūnisī fī 'l-Qarn al-Rābi<sup>c</sup> 'Ashar,<sup>3</sup> a few of them tried their hands on short story writing and their stories contained the same message as their poetry. This is obvious from the stories considered in the third chapter of this thesis, especially those written by al-Suwaisī, Manāshū and al-Jādawī.

In al-Suwaisī's Minhaj al-Batir fī 'l-Nazm wa 'l-Nathr, published in 1906, Abū <sup>c</sup>Ibar the principal here says in commenting on the situation in his country :

اجتهد في تصليح العلم الدينية واكتسب فوائد المعارف العصرية  
واقصد بذلك نفع الوطن وتلك شئنة اهل الفطن وارفع عن فكرك حجب  
الوهم ولا تعرض عن العلم وان عدت الفهم عليك بمطالعة الجرائد  
والمجلات وخذ منها الحكم وابذ الفاسد من الاعتقادات . . . . .<sup>4</sup>

He thus attributes the contemporary situation to widespread ignorance of secular and religious sciences which was true of the Tunisian society of that period. This was what inspired Sirāj al-Lail the hero of al-Haifā' wa Sirāj al-Lail also published in the same year as

2. French North Africa, trans. by Jean Steward, Faber & Faber Ltd., London, 1967, p.75.

3. Published by Maktaba al-<sup>c</sup>Arab, Tunis, 1927/28.

4. Qisas, No.7, April 1968, p.48.

Minhaj to describe the prevailing state of illiteracy and ignorance "as death while knowledge is life",<sup>5</sup> The hero's mother al-Haifā' also described the Islamic umma of which Tunisia was a part as sick and the remedy which she recommended was al-rujū<sup>o</sup> ilā asl al-Dīn.<sup>6</sup>

This story also offers much information on the domestic and public life of the different classes of the Tunisian society of that time. In it for example, we read of the expensively furnished and ornamented house of the rich, their immoderately rich tables and their indifference to the plight of the poor. Even at that time, the ruling classes sometimes spent their summer holidays in Paris or London.<sup>7</sup>

Aḷ-Jādawī's Dalmās (1911) gives a picture of the political and intellectual fermentation which was taking place among Tunisian Arab Muslim students in institutions of higher learning during this period. They had gradually advanced from the stage of complacent fatalism to open protest against the partiality and contempt with which their French teachers were treating them.

By 1920, the result of the early 19th century campaign for acquisition of modern education had begun to produce results as borne out by the emergence of

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5. Ibid., No.6, Jan.1968, p.56.

6. Ibid., p.56.

7. Ibid., p.56.



such intellectually and politically mature men as Shaikh <sup>°</sup>Abd al-<sup>°</sup>Azīz al-Tha<sup>°</sup>alabī who, as early as 1919, had published in Paris his political treatise Tunisie Martyre and who also played an important rôle in the formation of the Destour Party in 1920. This was reflected in the few stories written at this time. For example, in a short story entitled Haqīqa lā Khayāl (It's No Fantasy but Truth)<sup>8</sup> by <sup>°</sup>Abd al-Rahmān al-Ka<sup>°</sup>āk, one of the two main characters studies relentlessly until he becomes a distinguished scholar and later, a medical doctor.

Although there was a dearth of short stories during the nineteen-twenties due to the colonial authorities' repression of the local press, political and trade union activities<sup>9</sup> flourished and the slow but steady spread of education, both western and oriental,<sup>10</sup> continued and this culminated in the unprecedented upsurge of literary and social activities of the nineteen-thirties.

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8. Majallat al-Fajr, Yr.1, No.5, December 1920, p.200.

9. For the history of the beginning of Tunisian trade unionism at this time, see al-Haddād's al-<sup>°</sup>Ummāl al-Tūnisīyun wa Zuhūr al-Harakat al-Niqābiya: Tunis 1927.

10. For example, Muḥammad <sup>°</sup>Alī, one of the earliest leaders of Tunisian trade unionism, returned to Tunisia in 1924 after obtaining a doctorate degree in Political Science from Berlin University. Cf: Munjī al-Shamlī, al-Ta<sup>°</sup>rīf bi-rā<sup>°</sup>id Maghbūn in Majallat al-Tajdīd, Yr.1, No.1, February 1961, p.31.

The Second Period : 1930 to Independence

The opening year of this decade, 1930, saw the publication of al-Tāhir al-Haddād's book Imra'atunā fī 'l-Sharī'a wa 'l-Mujtama'<sup>c</sup> on the issue of the status of Tunisian women which was one of the major problems to dominate the literary and social scenes during this decade.

Simultaneous with the emergence of the famous poet Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī in the early thirties, there emerged a new generation of short story writers whose stories vividly portrayed much of the social milieu of their time.

In the stories by Muṣṭafā Khraif and Muḥammad<sup>c</sup> Abd al-Khāliq al-Bashrūsh, we read of the unenviable position of Tunisian womanhood who could be forced to marry a man she did not love and thereafter remained miserable<sup>11</sup>. Al-Bashrūsh's Zawjat Ahmad Sharūda<sup>12</sup> gives a true picture of life in a Tunisian rural agricultural community where anyone hardly has any secret unknown to his neighbours. Similarly, his Alī al-Ayyārī<sup>13</sup> sketches life in a zāwiya with its members' overwhelming ignorance and crippling belief in the supernatural power of the Shaikh, their intermediary with the patron Shaikh and the extortions

11. For examples, see Khraif's Dumū' al-Qamar in al-Ālam al-Adabī, Oct., 1930, and the anonymously published Imra'a Ahira in al-Ālam for 7/3/32 and al-Barī'a, Ibid., Sept., 1930.

12. al-Ālam al-Adabī, 4/4/32, p.5.

13. Ibid., 29/8/32, p.11.

practised by many a Shaikh which contributed to making a maraboutism suspect among many enlightened Maghribīs.<sup>14</sup>

It is in Muhammad al-<sup>c</sup>Arībī's stories and those published anonymously in al-Shabāb that we find ample traces of the new outlook which was becoming prominent in the thirties in form of a conflict between the young and the old, between the old puritanical moral codes and the carefree attitude of the young to these and other social conventions.

Al-Arībī's characters of both sexes had no compunctions about forming 'illicit' associations with members of the opposite sex as is ʿAzīza, Qalb lil-Kirāʾ and Banāt al-Yawm. In the maqāmāt in al-Shabāb, the author sneered at well-established traditional religio-occupational associations such as the Mrūqīya; the anonymous author of al-maqāmāt al-sīnimāʿīya<sup>15</sup> holds to ridicule the mentality of the traditional scholar who considered cinema-going as unworthy of his station in life, having spent most of his life between the mīhrāb (prayer niche) and the minbar (pulpit); and not even Mustafā the young man in Muhammad Zarrūq's Najāṭ<sup>16</sup> would yield to the demand by his aristocratic father that he should not marry Najāt, a girl whom his father considered infra dig. His defiance is echoed in his death-bed wish to his friend: "If it

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14. Cf: Jacques Berque, *op.cit.*, p.74.

15. al-Surdūk, No.2, 14/4/33.

16. (Jarīdat) al-Zamān, 12th, 19th Dec., 1933 and 2nd, 9th and 16th January, 1934.

be Fate's will that I don't get out of this bed except on a hearse, all I request from you is that you visit my grave to give me news of the disappearance of the wicked aristocratic system and its replacement by equality among the classes of the society...."

Another sphere in which the authority of the old was being challenged at this time was in the nationalist movement as borne out by the split in the Destour Party into 'old' and 'new' in 1933/34 with the latter being led largely by young people who had recently returned from studying abroad, among them the present President of Tunisia, al-Habib Bourguiba. There is, of course, very little trace of this particular theme, that of nationalism, in the short stories of this decade.

After the second world war, the new type of citizen who emerged from demobilised ex-servicemen who had fought on the side of France is depicted by Mustafā Khraif's al-Hājj 'Alī.<sup>17</sup> They had seen many things abroad and on their return to their home country, they criticised the old ways and were in turn criticised by their compatriots for their abstruse behaviour and sometime 'uncanonical' habits like Al-Hājj 'Alī's fellow villagers who "used to pray for Allah's protection from a man who prayed in Christian attire...." All the same,

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17. al-Mabāhith, No.4, July 1944, published under the pseudonym of al-Jāhiz al-Asghar.

they were revered, or more appropriately, feared, because many of them became state employees as in the case of Al-Hājj <sup>c</sup>Alī who became a clerk-cum-veterinary/medical doctor-cum-honorary mu'adhdhin!

On the intellectual front, the war which greatly contributed materials for the emergence of the French existentialist literature of Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Camus<sup>18</sup> also produced in Tunisia the metaphysical fiction of al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī in which he attempted to capture the mysteries of human nature and destiny. Although his stories did not depict much that was of local significance, the very presence of this type of stories in Tunisian fiction underlines French literature as one of the major sources of external influence on Tunisian story-writing, an influence which once again became prominent in post-independence literature.<sup>19</sup>

It is in the short stories by al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī and al-Marzūqī that we have a very vivid portrayal of social conditions in the Tunisian society of the late forties and early fifties.

In al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī's Fl Shāti' Hamām al-Anf, al-Rukn al-Nayyir and Nuzha Rā'i<sup>c</sup>a, we read about some aspects of the social life of the well-to-do families - we read

18. Cf. H.M. Peyre, French Novelists of Today, OUP, 1967.  
 19. Chaps. IX and XI.

19. Cf. chapter on 'New Trends....'

of their day-long alternate sun-bathing and swimming at the famous sea-side summer resorts of Hammām al-Anf, of the café-table consultation between a newspaper director and one of his journalists and the ludicrous affectations of the neuveaux riches produced by the new economic opportunities presented by the colonial situation and the post-war boom, in displaying their newly-acquired wealth. Similarly, we learn of the suffering of the less privileged members of the society such as the groundnut and lemonade hawkers in Fī Shāti' Hammām al-Anf, or the old man who could not afford to buy <sup>C</sup>Id ram for his daughter like his neighbours in al-Rukn al-Nayyir, or Ibrāhīm whose father cannot afford the money for the <sup>C</sup>Id cake in Amin Tadhakkur al-Jirān bi-dhī Salam? or the poor friendless water-carrier in Mawt al-<sup>C</sup>Amm Bākhair.

Muhammad al-Marzūqī's collection of short stories entitled <sup>C</sup>Urqūb al-Khair is a rich source of information on the sociology of the bedouin Arabs in the southernmost part of Tunisia - their fatalistic resignation to the alternating drought and plenty is seen in the first story (<sup>C</sup>Urqūb al-Khair), their unyielding sense of family honour and the relentlessness with which they pursue anyone whom they feel has tarnished that honour, be that one their blood sister as in Matbū<sup>C</sup>a or a fee as in the blood-wit story (Khayāl al-Mādī) where the hero kills his father-in-law after discovering that he

had unknowingly married the daughter of his father's killer. In some of the stories in his second collection entitled Baina Zawjatin, he depicts some of the social revolutions that immediately preceded the independence era and the difficulty which some had in readjusting to it. For example, the hero of the first story entitled Baina Zawjatin, couldn't adjust to living with a wife who has had a western education and imbibed some western ideas of woman's freedom. Similarly, the observer/narrator in Bint Dhawāt couldn't tolerate some of the habits that have been cultivated by many urban Tunisian youths such as drinking alcohol, dancing, dating and the use of pet-names by young lovers.

The changes - social, economical and political which took place during this period of 1930 to 1956, prepared the way for independence which was to bring about more radical changes.

#### Post-Independence Period

Although independence meant a complete change of administration - a transfer of power from foreigners to nationalists, it did not immediately alter the social conditions of the large majority of ordinary citizens, many of whom were either unemployed or were working as unskilled labourers.<sup>20</sup> The feeling of many such people

20. Samir Amin, The Maghreb in the Modern World, Penguin, England, 1970, chap. 2.

is summed up in the series of short stories written at about the time of independence by Tāhir Guiga. Typifying them is the hero of Wasīya<sup>21</sup> who, having himself spent most of his life as an unemployed person, tells his son on his death-bed : "Don't waste your life hankering after employment, for employment is for the pampered sons of townships or men of means and you are neither the former nor the latter..." Tāhir Guiga's other stories illustrate the different privations of the poor and especially in Munājāt Abī Jirāb wa Mūsā, the peasant hero, unable to comprehend the logic of his newly-won status soliloquises: "Fate has offered me a new form of sustenance: <sup>namely,</sup> the vote..., I have now become a citizen after having been a subject.... I can elect but cannot be elected; an ignoramus like me is unfit to occupy the seats in Parliament where there is an enlightened élite..." or, as the hero of Hamzāwī's Ta'īsh wa Turabbī 'l-Rīsh puts it: "...One day, he concludes that finding employment is not in his star as if this were beauty or intellect which [he thinks] are the preserve of some races of mankind to the exclusion of others..."

Other social problems which have provided materials for post-independence short story writers are : the

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21. This and subsequent stories by him have been discussed in the chapter entitled 'The Arabic Short Story in Post-Independence Tunisia.'



inadequacy of medical personnel and medical attention especially in the rural areas as in al-Shādhilī's Tabībān and al-Hamzāwī's Dajājat <sup>c</sup>Ammatī; and the migration of rural population into urban areas in search of jobs which they often do not get and the vices that this break-up of the close-knit rural society gives rise to in the cities as in al-Trīkī's Kilāb al-Sūq, and al-Hamzāwī's Ta <sup>c</sup>Ish.....

The legal position of Tunisian woman was radically improved by the Tunisian government in the early days of independence. She was accorded greater freedom and rights than she had in the pre-independence days. This new situation is reflected in the stories by Fātima al-<sup>c</sup>Alānī such as in her Rajul wa 'Mra'atānī<sup>22</sup> where, for example, Zainab the heroine is well-educated and goes out to work in a government office, something which is much more common today in Tunisia than anyone could have thought possible in the pre-independence period. Short stories with this kind of setting and theme abound in Hind <sup>c</sup>Azūz's collection entitled Fī 'l-Darb al-Tawīl although her stories contain a hint of her disapproval of this trend which is understandable for a lady like her who has been brought up under the old traditional domestic set-up. In Lailā b. Māmī's

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22. This and subsequent stories have been discussed in the chapter on 'Feminine Tunisian Short Stories.'

collection entitled Sawma<sup>c</sup>at Tahtariq and in the stories by Zahra al-Jalāsi, we find their women heroines claiming all their rights under the new legislation - woman's right to marry someone of her choice, the right to remain single if she so desires, the right to initiate divorce proceedings, indeed, the right to control and direct every aspect of her life.

The cultural and literary influence of French which is obvious in many spheres of Tunisian life shows more prominently in the 'no-story' group of young Tunisian short story writers discussed in the last chapter. This too is another manifestation in Tunisian short story of the observable reality of the situation in intellectual and official circles where the French language and culture still compete with the indigenous Arabo/Islamic culture and language.<sup>23</sup>

It is obvious from the range of themes covered by Tunisian short story throughout the period considered in this thesis that current local politico-nationalist activities did not have a prominent treatment in the short stories of all the sections into which the whole

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23. Up to the end of the period covered in this thesis (1970) French and Arabic were still being simultaneously used in government departments and most official releases were made in both languages. French still plays a leading rôle as the language of instruction in schools and colleges although efforts are being intensified to encourage the use of Arabic. The debate on whether or not to go completely Arabic is still continuing in the country.

period has been divided besides al-Jādawī's comic satire of some French colonial administrators in 1909/10 and the post-independence stories which deal with pre-independence nationalist activities in retrospect. This omission may have been due in the first place to the desire of review and newspaper owners to steer a neutral course between the ever watchful eyes of the colonial authorities and the nationalists who were ever so eager to enlist the support of the Arabic press; and secondly, to the fact that unlike Arabic poetry, the short story does not lend itself to spontaneous reflection of matters-of-the-moment, rather, the short story writer requires a longer time than the poet to work out suitable plot and form for his subject.

#### The Future of the Tunisian Short Story

The two main obstacles which have hindered the rapid growth of the Tunisian short story are: lack of adequate readership and interest in the genre, and lack of publishers to accept manuscripts for publication. These problems have now largely been solved.

The weekly literary and cultural supplements of the two largest Tunisian Arabic dailies (al-<sup>c</sup>Amal and al-Sabāh)<sup>now</sup> devote a considerable portion of their contents, and especially al-<sup>c</sup>Amal, to short story. They publish texts, criticism and reviews of such texts and suggestions

to their contributors for improvement of their skill, Circulated in this manner with other current international and local news items, the Tunisian reading public have become better aware of the genre and it is not now an unusual sight to see a road labourer or a park attendant during break-time holding a copy of al-<sup>c</sup>Amal cultural weekly supplement and reading a short story to his colleagues. Such communal reading is also seen around tables at café houses and restaurants.

The spread of school education and the trend towards inclusion of local literary materials in primary, secondary and university syllabuses have also broadened the circle of local readership.

Concerning the problem of finding media for the diffusion of their stories as previously encountered by Tunisian short story writers, there are now many outlets for talented short story writers. Besides the newspapers referred to above, there are the two leading Tunisian periodicals entitled al-Fikr and Qisas, the first of which devotes a considerable portion of its pages to short story and the second almost exclusively given to short story.

With regard to publishers, the state-aided al-Sharikat al-Tūnisiya lil-Tawzi<sup>c</sup> (formerly al-Sharikat al-Qawmiya lil-Nashr wa 'l-Tawzi<sup>c</sup>) and al-Dār al-Tūnisiya lil-Nashr have been very active within the past few years in helping Tunisian short story writers to publish collections

of their stories. The latter in particular has published, between 1968 and June 1971, eleven small collections by Tunisian authors sponsored by Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Shābbī Story Club beside publishing two other collections by a Jordanian and a Moroccan. They are also the publishers of the Story Club's periodical-Qisas. There<sup>are</sup> also individual publishers like, for example, Qāsim al-<sup>c</sup>Arabī who sponsored the publication of Lailā b. Māmī's Sawma<sup>c</sup> a Tahtariq.

Beside the 'Story Club' which holds regular meetings where writers come together to interchange ideas, discuss and criticise one another's works, there are other associations which contribute to the growth of the short story such as the association of 'Literary Amateurs' (Huwāt al-Adab) which was founded early in the sixties by the Tunisian National Radio as a forum for aspiring young writers to meet together. It is interesting to note that at the association's annual meeting held in October 1971, the (short) story formed the main topic for discussion as the ratio of short stories entered to poems was three to one. The introduction to the report of the proceedings of the meeting says:

أما عن الإنتاج الذي عرضه الهواء وناقشوه في جلساتهم الرسمية - فقد كانت الغلبة فيه للقصة على الشعر عدداً ومضموناً حيث قدمت ثلاث قصص مقابل قصيدة واحدة لا يرتفع شأنها كثيراً حتى يمكن أن نهملها

فنقتصر حديثنا فقط عن القصة في الملتقى ..... ( 23 )

This is an evidence that the incubus of poetry which also retarded the growth of such a non-Arabic (dakhil) genre as the short story has considerably lessened its grip on the younger generation of Tunisian *littérateurs*.

Under these propitious conditions, coupled with the unlimited range of themes presented by the social, economic and political changes which are still taking place within the country, the short story has an enormous potentiality for further growth and development in Tunisia.

## A P P E N D I X    I

English Translations of Some Selected  
Tunisian Arabic Short Stories.

From al-Du<sup>c</sup>aji's collection entitled Sahirtu  
Minhu 'l-Layālī, pp. 101-106

For reference to and analysis of this story, see  
Chapter Five under <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Dū<sup>c</sup>ājī.

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كانت الخالة امرأة مثقلة الجسم ، يتحرك كل جزء منها بمفرده .  
وهي تطلع درج السلم لاهتة ، شاخرة ، تتصبب عرقا وهي تصرخ مداعبة  
ابنة اختها من قبل ان تراها : -

- اين انت ؟ ما هذا بسلم ! هذا الصراط اين انت يا فتاتي ؟  
لعن الله هذا الشحم الذي يعوقني عن التنفس . . . .

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" . . . لا ارفع صوتي ؟ سارفع صوتي ويدي ! لا ارفع صوتي ؟  
ولماذا من فضلك ؟

- لئلا تزعجي . . تزعجيه !

- ازعج من ؟

- هو . دعيه ينام . . المسكين . . . لقد سهر كثيرا البارحة يا خالتي ! "



°ALĪ AL-DŪ°ĀJĪ

HE KEPT ME AWAKE ALL NIGHT

Auntie was a large fat woman who moved every part of her body in turn as she climbed the stairs, panting, grunting, sweating profusely and fondly calling out to her niece before she saw her :

"Where are you? Where! This is no stair! This narrow path. Where are you my darling one? Damn this fat which is hampering my breathing".

"Auntie, bless you dear Aunt! Welcome. This seat will put you at ease and soothe your fat. Let me kiss you first"

She kissed her and seated her on the easy chair while she tried to remove the black bandage over her eyes. After a short searching look at Zakya her niece, she asked her:

"What is that? Why are your eyes swollen? Have you been crying lately?"

"There you are...Can't anything escape your notice, dear Auntie?"

"What's making my dear one cry? What's disturbing

my little doll? Tell your affectionate auntie. Are you still weeping in your second year of marriage? Your poor mum was like that. Even now that she is in the celestial home while you are still in the terrestrial home, she is manifesting herself in you. She was - may Allah's peace rest on her - very fond of weeping. Tell your auntie how you are getting on with..."

"Just as you wanted me to live in hell when you thrust me into the inferno of this marriage"

"Is your husband..."

"My husband? Say my hangman, he has a hangman's heart...He kills me instalmentally every day. You will find me stone dead on your next visit if I haven't dissolved and melted through my sockets in form of tears."

"Be kind to yourself...Tell me the first things first. What happened between you?"

"He is a stupid, wicked soul; an alcoholic who drinks every night and returns home after midnight only to assault me and my child. Aaah! But for Hamādī, my son who is between us!...ooh, listen my aunt. When he first began to drink he used to hurl hurtful abuses at me, giving me the ugliest epithets and never giving me names except those of the most horrible fishes and birds - I was, according to the drunkard, midway between a peacock and a bat or between a tuna fish and the ugly-headed nāzililī. He then forced me to make fire and cook mashlūsh after two o'clock in the morning, otherwise he could change his

description of me to that of an ass that couldn't cook..."

"God forbid! God forbid! He is a devil....a foul-tongued devil..."

As auntie was uttering these words she was stealing furtive glances at the shut bedroom door as if asking her relative by her glances whether he was still sleeping or had gone out so that she would know how far it was safe to criticise him.

Zakya answered :

"He wouldn't sober up until mid-day...and usually when he sobers-up it is only to sleep again."

"Sleeping?".

"Yes, sleeping among books and newspapers which occupy all his time. He never talks to me except when he is drunk. Whenever he regains his composure, he settles down to his books and papers. That's what you have all over the room. Woe betide me if a single sheet of it is missing. I wish you'd married me to an illiterate like me. This match is unbearable...unbearable!

"Could you imagine that when he returned yesterday drunk and staggering, smelling like a monkey, his leg stumbled on a book thrown on the floor by the poor child unknown to me and he immediately swooped on the child and boxed him until his spirit almost left his body and I wanted to snatch him from him..."

"The child or the book?\*

"No auntie, it was the child!...Hamādī...He in turn struck me.."

"How did he strike you? You didn't tell me that before! Ah, this matter is worse than I thought, isn't it? Did he raise his hand against his wife and the mother of his child? This is intolerable...How about the blows? Listen to me, my little one. You are still young, so open your ears to your experienced auntie's advice. I was married to three men at different times so I know men very well. Any man that strikes his wife is no man. (Auntie is now heated up and screams at her niece) Listen! Ask him to divorce you. We shall sue him and claim damages and get him imprisoned! Justice and the canon laws of all the five-hundred religions forbid any man to strike a young woman. Ask for a divorce. I tell you...there should be no cohabitation after beating!"

"Is divorce so easy?"

"Do you wish to continue living with this brute? If you said : he gives you the name of beasts, I would say that is not bad as he can still change his description of you and your companionship can improve. If you said : he is an alcoholic, I would say that his liver would swell and force him to abandon wine. If you said : he only loves reading books, I would say that the books are harmless and

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\*This confusion arises because the pronoun for child and book is the same in Arabic.

although they compete with you for his attention, they are less evil than a single fellow wife...But when we get to the evil of cohabitation and beating..., I would say : Ask for your divorce, I assure you that you will obtain it in the shortest possible time."

"How, my aunt?"

"If your blood is like that in my veins (she says this with a glance at her two fleshy wrists which are already getting too big for the bangles round them), if your blood is not water or sugar or orange juice, if you are indeed the daughter of the Lioness Munjiya, my sister, may Allah's peace rest on her - you will rise immediately, collect your belongings and follow me. You will then leave the rest to me."

Zakya blushed...raised her eyes in the direction of the bedroom door and immediately lowered her head.

"Auntie, please don't raise your voice!"

The aunt was heated up, shaking all the parts of her body in a fashion typical of folkwomen when they are angry and bellowing :

"What!! I shouldn't raise my voice? I shall raise my voice and my hand! I shouldn't... Why, for goodness sake did you say that?"

"So as not to disturb...disturb him!"

"Disturb who?"

"Him. Let him sleep...poor fellow. He was up until late last night...dear aunt..."

X X X X X X X X X X

From al-Fikr, Year 1, No.10, July 1956, pp. 2-6.

For reference to and analysis of this story, see Chapter Six, under the subheading on Social Conditions.

Page 2

طال سهاد " ابي سعيد " ولم يأخذه نهم وتعالى ابن زوجته  
كشوى الظلام ، رشقات في قلبه ودعوات سهام ، ولم يطق صبرا ، فقام  
الى الركن الاخر من البيت ، واشعل السراج ، كأنما كان يريد ان يدفـع  
بضوئه الباهت الخجول ، ما ركب نفسه من هم " وتقدم الى زوجته ... "

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Page 6

" ... فقام " ابو سعيد " فدفع " اجرة " الشيخ وشكر كثيرا ...  
وشكر صادقا وانقلب الى داره مسرورا وجاء اليوم الموعود ، واستعد الشيخ  
لقراءة السر الاكبر " ولكن " ابا سعيد " لم يذهب الى " الشيخ " لان زوجته  
كانت قد ماتت منذ يومين ! .

MUHAMMAD FARAJ AL-SHĀDHILĪ

TWO DOCTORS

"I dedicate it to very doctor about whom there is much talk of his humanitarian service when in fact he has no 'human feeling' beyond the filling of his pocket.

"To every poor who sees his sick one dying before him, with no money to spend on him and no doctor to call upon.

"To every compatriot who lives in his ivory tower and does not feel hurt to learn some of what he does not know about the villages and cities"

Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd's sleeplessness lengthened as sleep kept eluding him. His wife's plaintive moaning rose like the complaints of the night, like gun shots at his heart, like the imprecations of arrow shots. He could no longer bear it, so he got up and went to a corner of the house, lighted the wick lamp as if he wanted to dispel by its dull gloomy light the grief which weighed down on his heart. He moved towards his wife...

She too had neither slept nor eaten for two nights. She was rolling on the mat and trembling like a leaf that was being shaken by the wind. What was Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd to do now that he had tried all known remedies for this raving

fever? He had now run out of patience. He had tried his best to make it subside and had expended everything on it : He mixed vinegar with olive oil and rubbed his wife's body with it, then broke an egg on her collar bone as his mother used to do to him whenever he had fever. He covered her...wrapped her up...but the flame did not abate and her pain did not diminish...Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd became depressed and showed this by a very deep sigh which rent the silence of the night. He looked again at his wife and saw that pain was taking hold of her and her sickness was getting worse: "How can I save her or at least reduce her pain?"

There was no doctor in the village and no money in his pocket. If destiny had spared some of his wife's jewelry, he would now have sold it but he had earlier bought some seed with what remained of it and no sooner had the seed germinated than it dried up and withered overnight as if the land had trembled and had been struck by barrenness...Furthermore, was it not often said that doctors were like an incurable disease, nay, that they were more malignant and more greedy than the disease and that any house they entered went bankrupt and had a corpse taken out of it? The thought of his neighbour who sold all his belongings when his son took ill and then lost both son and goods suddenly crossed his mind like an apparition.

Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd became engrossed in thoughts as he looked



at the darkness which was swallowing up the light of the wick lamp...Two thousand francs...if he were to call a doctor he would have to pay him two thousand francs...excluding the cost of the medicine. Two thousand francs...for examining his wife for a quarter of an hour!...That's madness!...He tired himself out...in order to earn only two hundred francs...the cost of his exertion and toil and sweat...and slaving on the land...two thousand francs for the doctor? Where would he get that from when he possessed nothing in the world except one small milk-producing lamb! Should he sell it? Even if he sold it, it would still not satisfy the greed of the fever...and of the doctor...

The world went dark for Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd. He saw no light and no ray of hope anywhere. Darkness perched on his heavy heart and he spent the night badly while his wife spent it in the worst possible manner, sleepless, sweating, feverish...

In the morning, Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd found his wife still ill. He said : "I shall without fail carry her to the nearby village to consult the doctor who visits the village on this day every week to examine the sick free of charge..."

He rose, hired an ass, saddled it and put his wife on it and headed for the village. When he got there with the feverish patient, he took a deep sigh. On reaching the health centre, he found many people, a host of mules and asses and various scenes resembling the day on which

a nomadic group changed camp. Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd got down from his ass...took his wife into the women's section, leaned back on the wall and began to wait...The sun had become hot and burning while the people were looking forward to the coming of the doctor...They were men, women and children who had come to complain of some illness, to repair the fissure in their bodies...This man had a swollen leg from which flowed blood and pus and which was wrapped in pieces of paper. Flies swarmed around him. That boy had sore eyes full of purulent discharge and as the sun's rays kept scorching him, he shut his eyes and opened his mouth. Another one who had a running nose constantly flickered out his tongue to lick it. Next to him was a stark-naked boy whose mother leaned over him to wipe his body. Lying on the floor in the sun was an old woman who let her fingernails loose all over her body. There was a haggard-looking man with sunken eyes and an emaciated body as if he had just been spitted from the grave. Yet another one was brought lying on a plank as if he was being taken to a burial. Those women were almost driven to madness at the sight of their little ones writhing in pain, suffering from hunger and thirst. The whole atmosphere was filled with wailing, the cries of agony and the braying of asses as if a disaster had just struck the world.

Suddenly, all necks were stretched in unison like that of a person who had just regained consciousness.

All faces turned towards the door, followed by a period of complete silence. Alas! It was the doctor descending like the harbinger of life, from a beautiful and stately car. As he passed through that overflowing wave of humanity, pains were re-awakened, hopes were restored and sighs became louder. The door soon rattled and out came the yawning face of the nurse who peeped like a frightened man. The crowd surged forward like one seeking a blood revenge. A few of them were let in and the door was shut against the rest. The people called out loudly like the voice of one being tortured...The nurse kept opening and shutting the door, letting some in and turning others away and the crowd kept closing in on the door as if they were tied to it...

Then came midday. Only a few of the sick had entered. The nurse suddenly came out and said to the people : "It's now time for you to return to your homes and villages. Come back here at the same time next week..." Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd had never before heard anything more painful, more shocking and more hopeless than the nurse's words by which he asked them to go. There was an uproar which soon died down and disappeared like the nasty smell from *the excrement of an ass* or a mule's urine. The people returned to their asses and their paralysed souls, and plodded heavily along...

Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd gathered himself together like the debris of a demolished building. He betook himself to his ass and wife who was now only sweat and fever...and frail nerves.

He returned to his village a disappointed man, regretting ever going to the doctor. When his neighbour, the owner of the ass saw him, he ran up to him. Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd told him everything and the neighbour suggested : "Why don't you go to Abū Hanzala...He is known to have given treatment, consolation and advice, and to have rid some souls of devilish whispers, and refilled them with piety, contentment and gentleness which were as refined as the wind...Who knows, maybe she has been struck by an evil eye or a sorcerer's spell!"

...Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd rose, filled with high hopes, and went to the Shaikh...Abū Hanzala rarely went out of his house... Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd knocked at the door and when permission had been granted he entered and found the Shaikh at the entrance. He had a round face, thick black dangling beards, protruding nose on which hung a pair of spectacles that looked like a bird's wings. His eyes, over which there were no lashes, looked like two boils with pus oozing out of them. Perching on a side of his head was a turban which revealed his baldness. He wore a wooden jubba over his body which looked like the trunk of a tree. Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd was overcome at the door by an odour which was not incense or perfume, not rotten damp air or the Shaikh's flatulence but a mixture of all these...

Abu Sa<sup>c</sup>īd greeted him, told him his wife's plight and complained to him. The Shaikh listened attentively. He then ordered the door to be shut. He took a book the

cover of which was worn out due to frequent handling. He pulled a censer closer to himself and threw some incense into it. Its smoke ascended and he began reading, humming and muttering. He then opened his eyes wide like a frightened man, shook his head like one who had suddenly remembered a long-standing problem that <sup>had</sup> defied solution. His mumblings and hummings increased and he then began to yawn loudly like the mooing of a bull. Tears began to stream down his cheeks until his beard became moistened. Suddenly he uttered a scream which shook the whole building: "To my aid, Oh Shamharūsh, Oh Shamharūsh, Father of Wonders". He began to gaze up and down at the woman, then turned to Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd and said : "She has eaten fish!"

Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd said : Oh God...That was a month ago!"

He said : "She threw away its gills without saying Bismillah\* and they hit a genie and plucked out one of its eyes!"

Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd said : "My God...if that was so, it was not deliberate..."

He said : "The sons of Ibn al-Ahmar have punished her for her crime!"

Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd anxiously inquired : "Is there any remedy dear Shaikh?"

He answered : "Rise, go and fetch a black cock with no spot of white, a white plate without any dent, the egg of a red fowl which has neither white nor black spots.

Hurry up, Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd!" He then shouted : "I am at your

\* Arabic for 'In the name of Allah'

service, Oh Shamharūsh the great. I obey your orders, Oh Shamharūsh!"

Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd hastened...so fast that when he returned, the Shaikh had still not moved from where he left him, bending over the censer like a fire-worshipper. Smoke was coming out through his beard. He was still mumbling and muttering as he was doing before Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd went away. He immediately snatched the cock from him, slaughtered it, dipped his hand in its blood and then crawled to the woman to smear her forehead with the blood. As he was doing this, he was saying: "Your mercy is solicited, Oh Shamharūsh! Oh Shamharūsh your help please, Oh Shamharūsh!"

It seemed that the woman became frightened by what she was seeing and hearing so that she opened her sagging eyes. At this, the Shaikh exclaimed: "Her hour of deliverance is at hand...It's her hour of salvation..."

He took the plate and wrote on it until no white spot remained uncovered. He then poured a little water into it, stirred it with a finger and told the woman: "Open your mouth, open your mouth!" He made her drink it while he mumbled: "Oh Father of Wonders, Oh Shamharūsh!" When she had finished, he took the egg, scribbled some rough letters on it, turned it round her head seven times and then told her husband: "Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd, take this egg and bury it on a grave in which the dead has not been buried for more than two months. Take these small pieces of paper and burn one of them at sunrise and another at sunset and your wife will

soon recover, by Allah's grace. Rise, Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd and come back again this time next week so that I can protect her by invocation against any future affliction."

Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd rose, paid the Shaikh's fee and thanked him very much...he thanked him sincerely and returned home hopefully.

Then came the appointed day. The Shaikh got ready to chant the 'big secret' but Abū Sa<sup>c</sup>īd did not turn up at the Shaikh's because his wife had died two days earlier...

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X X X X X X X X

Silsilat Min Dhahab by Mustafā al-Fārisī.

From his collection entitled al-Qantara hiya 'l-Hayāt,  
pp. 63-71

Page 63

"ليست هذه قصة تناقلتها الافواه من امد بعيد . . وليست خرافة  
وصلت اليها من خلال الدهور . . . قصتنا هذه حديثة حية . لكن قد تتداولها  
الاسن ، وتناقلها الافواه في ربوع بلادى . . . . "

\* \* \* \* \*

Page 71

وهكذا امكن لرجال قرיתי في صبيحة يوم الاستقلال ان ينشروا الشراع على  
المركب الكبير يرفرف فوقها العلم الخفاق ، مركبنا وعلمنا ثم يحيا في ابتهاج  
نساء قرיתי .  
انهن وان خفت من الخلاخل ارجلهن سيرفعن الرأس عاليا ويمشين  
في طريق النور قدما همهن تشييد المستقبل وهن اليه سائرات وعليه ساهرات . "



MUSTAFA AL-FARISI

CHAIN OF GOLD

"This is a living picture from an actual story...the story of the women of al-Mahdiya who gave their jewelry as security in the wake of Tunisian independence to enable the country's industry to resume working after being paralysed and thus contributed their share side by side with men in raising the level of Tunisian economy by the establishment of a co-operative for fish preservation. To the women of al-Mahdiya we dedicate these lines in which we salute the emancipated and active Tunisian womanhood"

This is not a story passed down by word of mouth from the dawn of Time... It is not a fable that has reached us through the centuries...This story of ours is <sup>a</sup> recent, living story. It has been circulated by tongues and has been the talk of [all] the regions in my homeland...Fishermen relate it to you as they are on the sea-shore lifting their nets and they sing of it as they put their boats under sail. [They talk of it] as they continue their song, moving away from the coast until they disappear in the horizon.

The first person to transmit it was probably a young shepherd who was tending his sheep on this peaceful shore. Soon afterwards, the story encompassed all the flocks and fascinated the shepherds. They conferred over it and spread it to fill the whole broad al-Sāhil. It was from here that the shepherds of the South got the story and it became the songs of their nightly stories whenever they were taking their cattle back to the pen.

This story is no more than a pearl from the [string of] stories celebrating the praise of the women of my village.

My village is situated on the sea-shore in the middle position between Sousse and Sfax and is fed on the good things of the sea. The light of my white village<sup>1</sup> shames the blueness of the sky and the blueness of the sea. Its inhabitants accept the sea as the basis of their life and the source of their sustenance.

The children of my village make their own toys in form of row-boats, skiffs and ships which can float on the water. Don't wonder at that since boats are the source of their happiness as well as the cause of their quarrels. Their ships are made from wooden boxes and empty tins and they constitute the first work of art produced by the skilful hands of the children of my village. From their youth, before chins become green<sup>2</sup> they practise on their fathers'

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1. Referring to the whitewashed roofs of buildings.

2. i.e. Before they begin to grow beards.

boats far away from the mainland, the profession that would make them into strong active men. No other profession awaits them.

Thus years passed followed by more years from time immemorial and the boats continued to set off from this coast in search of sustenance; light row-boats liable to ship-wreck; boats loaded with ropes, nets and reeds, betaking themselves to the sea and meeting only rocks and sand-bars in their paths. Why do the fishermen have to go into the depths of the horizon while the fish is awaiting them here? The reeds and nets are arrayed in groups and in singles and when night falls, the fishermen return to their old-fashioned anchorage which, every sunset looks like a shell shut behind these boats which themselves look like the pearl in the shell...There is no difference for these sea-men between days of famine and days of plenty since [their] fishing is sufficient for providing the family's food and perhaps the seaman could sell some fish in the town on his way to his lowly house. He is overwhelmed by the joy of living and the smile of children.

The only external sign of affluence in my village consists in these golden anklets around the ankles of beautiful women whose gait they ornament. These are anklets given by men to their wives after spending all their lives saving to buy them and after economising in the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour as they gather their sustenance one fish after another...Old women in their

turn know when they ought to hand over these anklets to their daughters and daughters-in-law.

Then there appeared on this coast a big boat with an engine which made a reverberating noise as it hissingly sped toward the mainland tearing up the sand-bars and carrying [away] with it the sustenance of the men of my village...

Within a very short time, the sea-men were returning to the shore with empty hands.

The fishes have abandoned their hide-outs and fled!

Thus did hunger begin to creep into the entrails of the children of my village.

The sea-men flared up with rage on seeing their nets empty, so they gathered one day at the village square to deliberate on their affair. Some of the youths suggested launching an attack on the [engine-powered] boat had brought ruin to the coast...Who would blame them for taking this stand? Wasn't their anger justified? The force of anger often brings good...Do not violent gales shatter hard rocks?

But the elders, being more cool-headed and more endowed with sound judgement, requested a collective consideration of the problem and a thorough examination of its various aspects...These [elders] too were justified in their prudent approach : The rippling of water wears out rocks with the passage of time and leaves the shore a levelled plain.

Between the anger of those ones and the calmness of these ones, a compromise was reached.

The Italian owner of the large boat lived in the neighbouring village. He was making a large profit because he was buying up all the fish from the sea-men. Every morning his boat passed through the old-fashioned harbour trailing a rope behind to which every row-boat tied itself to be pulled to the deeps about twenty-five miles from the anchorage so as to fish there and when night fell the boat returned to the village drawing a chain of boats back to anchorage. People became angry, claiming that the sea-man's job had become more difficult while his profit was less than before but the boat-owner argued that progress demanded this and asked what then could be done about it..? Patience...Wasn't there enough to provide the children with the bare necessities then?

This situation continued until the last few years, indeed, it changed into a persistent death-defying process.

The country's independence was achieved as the fruit of popular (nationalist) tempests and a continuous struggle. It was a tasteful good fruit, more so as Tunisians had long been craning their necks in eager expectation and their hearts had been yearning for it.

But the problem was not at an end.

At the wake of independence, the boat did not appear at the harbour and the sea remained empty and in a state of anticipation all day long like the sea-men, while the

row-boats remained moored to their anchors loaded with their nets and ropes.

Then, one evening, the news was broken that the Italian had decided to sell his boats to the Island of Sicily and return with the proceeds to his homeland. The men immediately held a meeting...How would they be able to reach their fishing spots without a powered boat?...Could you imagine the sea-men rowing twenty-five miles in the morning and another twenty-five at sunset? That's impossible! The journey to and fro would not be completed in one day. The youths said :

"When he came to our village, he had only one boat and now he intends to desert us after he has acquired six boats! We must force him to leave one of them for us."

But the elders preferred to go instead to the boat-owner for discussion. The gathering selected Shaikh <sup>C</sup>Alī, one of the oldest sea-men, Shaikh Ahmad, a prudent trader and Shaikh al-Sāsī who was renowned for his sound judgement in spite of his (characteristic) reticence and little talking.

The three rode their asses and headed for the town to meet the boat-owner.

The negotiation was lengthy. The [boat] owner said : "You want me to leave one of my boats for you? That's alright...Pay me four million francs<sup>now</sup> and the boat is yours, otherwise I am quitting the village and you are ruined...What could you do without an engine-powered boat like mine? You will have to abandon this village soon

after my departure, if not, then pay..."

"We will pay...But how do we get this amount?" The three men returned to whence they came from, disappointed and dejected. The men assembled once again. They thought of taking recourse to a bank which could loan them this amount...The three again returned to the town and here also [at the bank] the discussion was long and the debate was copious...The bank was prepared to lend the required number of millions but where was the security? Who would guarantee their repayment of the loan? The three went back to the village to inform the assembly of the bank's decision to send an expert to the village very soon to assess the value of their security.

The expert arrived at the village and went round its houses casting a malicious and contemptuous look at them... mud houses with no stones in their walls, whitewashed with lime...What kind of security do these houses offer? Five-hundred thousand francs for all the houses in the village.. Five-hundred, no more.

The men then decided to show the expert the boats of the village but he examined these [also] distrustfully and contemptuously. What is the value of wooden boats with no motion-power other than oars, five hundred thousand francs for all the boats of the village, no more.

Five-hundred thousand plus five-hundred thousand - so the mortgage value of the village's houses and boats is no more than one million!

The men exchanged glances and [then] said : "We must quit this village and look for another profession elsewhere!"

But quitting the village did not just mean abandoning the old harbour and its old houses, it meant abandoning all those who founded this village and built its houses with their sweat and blood, these ones who were now lying in the belly of the village soil under recent white and dust-covered tombs. The women in particular felt very bitter when they thought of abandoning the village and so they congregated in groups at the cemetery to bid farewell to their people in silence and humiliation. They felt the weight of the calamity threatening them and hanging over their husbands and which made their future look like a toy blown by the wind along the route of the journey ahead of them.

People who obtain their sustenance from the sea know that its weed, al-darī<sup>c3</sup> is [only] a living weed when its roots cling to the rock and that once it separates itself from the rock, its existence is threatened and it undoubtedly becomes dead.

There were among the women of my village some young women who resented any idea of quitting the village. They said : "Our future shall not be the future of the dead darī<sup>c</sup>" and they therefore hurried round the houses knocking at

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3. This is a kind of moss-like seaweed.



one door after another. Golden anklets began to pour in as the young women went through the streets of the village bearing the shining anklets of gold.

The expert said, as they suddenly showed up with their anklets : "If the matter be so, the bank will lend you even more than four million."

The elders of the village and its wise men became convinced that the hearts of women could sometimes conceal much more profound wisdom than what lurked in the heads of the elders.

In this way, my village was able, by virtue of the gold that encircled the ankles of its womenfolk, by virtue of the gold of inherited traditions, to buy a big boat... the boat for activity...the boat of the present and the nucleus of the fleet of the future.

In this way, the men of the village were able, on the morning of independence, to put the large boat to sail with a fluttering flag hoisted on top, the boat was ours as well as the flag, and they saluted the women of my village with delight.

The women, even if their legs became shorn of their anklets, could hold their heads high up and march ahead in the path of light, their main concern being the building of the future, moving towards it and jealously guarding it.

DECEMBER, 1957.

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X X X X X X X X X

Tarnano by Muhammad Rashād al-Hamzāwī

From al-Fikr, Year 4, No.8, May 1959, pp. 18-22

For reference to and analysis of this story, see Chapter Six under al-Hamzāwī in the section on social conditions.

Page 18

انه عبارة عن شبح • يفر<sup>منه</sup> من يراه ليلا • تجده ببطحاء الباي متكئا على حائط كأنه يشد ازره يدور مع الشمس كالصدع، يكمد جسمه الذي يكاد يتكسر الى نصفين من شدة الضعف • فكلما عاش يوما ازداد ضعفا كأنه يأكل من نفسه .... \*

\* \* \* \* \*

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\* ... فسمع طرنو الناس يرددون في شوارع المدينة ان الشعب التونسي قد نال الاستقلال وان فرنسا خرجت من البلاد وعاد الزعماء • فطار طرنو لهم لكتفه عاد بعد ايام الى تربة الباي آملا رجوع الاصدقاء اليها وجمع الشمل بها • لكن انتظاره طال ولم يظهر احد حتى الفحام • لقد انتهى كل شيء • الكـ...رة والاحباب وحتى المظاهرات والبوليس ففارق المكان بدوره وتسلخ بقفـة كبيـرة ثم وقف امام السوق المركزية يتربع زبونا مثقلا يحمل متاعه \*

RASHĀD AL-HAMZĀWĪ

TARNANO

He is a ghost and, whoever sees him in the night, flees in fear. You will find him in Turbat al-Bey square leaning on the wall as if it were his supporting pillow. He changes his position with the movement of the sun. His pale-looking body is almost broken in two-halves by its weakness. He becomes weaker with each day as if he is eating himself. He spends several hours in the square shaking his big head on one side of which he balances a worn-out greyish fez-cap. (Allah will not impose on a fez-cap a greater burden than it can bear).

His occupation is loafing and resting. He sells the air to the boatmen and watches attentively everything that

moves.\* He greets Mubārak b. Sa<sup>c</sup>da when the latter passes by him while taking a group of children to school. He stands in front of the coalman scrutinising the coal and the scale in his cart. From time to time, he visits <sup>c</sup>Amm al-Hājj, the Moroccan night-guard of Zaitūna school or he goes to <sup>c</sup>Alī al-Tāhir the grocer, hoping to find someone sucking some sweets or eating bread so as to beg for a piece of it. He childishly jumps around to witness a quarrel between two children or to eavesdrop at al-Wālī Lane on <sup>c</sup>Alī, the vegetable dealer's daily quarrel with his wife.

He finds in this manner of life an outlet for his perplexed emotion and a consolation for his anxiety. He appears ageless; mixes with both young and old alike, talks to everyone according to everyone's language, occupation and tastes. He adopts Turbat al-Bey square as a residence and a rendezvous where he waits for his football companions. He also passes his leisure hours there.

His friends arrive in ones and in groups from the other suburbs and from Bāb al-Jadīd and Ramaḍān Bey Square: Ḥamādī the fritter seller, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Sattār 'Revolver', Munṣif 'James Cagney' and finally al-Būhālī the boxer and his gangster group with their bare arms and shining golden teeth. They arrive dragging their worn-out boots, filling

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\* This is a local proverb denoting idleness.

the street with uproar, laughing, whistling and singing discordant tunes. They are joined by cigarette-sellers, the ticket-sellers and the pumpkin and water-melon hawkers. They all emerge into the square where old friends meet, exchange greetings with a hand-shake or a punch on the chest from al-Būhālī to whoever is standing nearest to him.

If any of them misses his way, he calls out : 'Oh Tarnano' to which Tarnano replies in a shrilling Tarzan-like shout which rends the air : Hoy...Hoy...Hoy.

The lost friend immediately finds his way to the place because all members of the group recognise this shout which they all learnt with Tarnano when they watched the films of Tarzan and his monkey Shita and in the encounter of the brigand and the tough guys in the American cow-boy films which they watched at the Rex cinema at the end of Sayyidī al-Sardū Street or at the Bijou Cinema in Bāb al-Jadīd to which they often go on Friday when they have enough money or when, due to the pressure of the crowd, the gate-keeper cannot control those going in and those coming out.

When most of them have gathered, <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Sattār 'Revolver' runs to his house at al-Wālī Lane to bring a ball, then he and his friends head for Sayyidī al-Zahmūl Square to play football. They divide into two teams which usually take the names 'Sporting Hope' and 'African Club' and after commending themselves to Allah, the game begins.

In the game, every player considers himself a referee and bare fists freely fly from people like al-Būhālī the boxer to emaciated ghost-like creatures such as Tarnano. Bare legs intertwine with shod-legs; toes bleed and many fall prostrate on the ground and faint after being hit by a kick aimed at the ball.

Not even the passer-by is safe from the ball; a turbanned man suddenly sees his turban wound round him as if he is getting ready to do the 'hula hop' dance and the one with a fez-cap on his head is likely to find the cap flying in the air like a flying saucer. If it is a child, he falls to the ground face down. Woe betide anyone who argues. A hail of abuses and blows are likely to descend on him and he will thank his stars for what has gone before if he escapes with a slight injury.

The football game continues for hours while Tarnano continues shouting, shrieking and running after the ball and the ball also chasing him. He never plays the ball, but only appears to be playing it, kicking into the air without ever touching the ball and cunningly keeping at a safe distance whenever he sees al-Būhālī or any of the tough boys approaching.

If any misunderstanding arises over a goal score, the dispute is usually settled by a fierce brawl in which might is right. Tarnano is always on the side of the strong-fisted ones whether these are right or wrong.

He never opens his mouth when playing except to swear at Allah about whom he knows no more than that He lives in a part of the sky, and that He is pleased with himself. He also swears at Allah to frighten his mother whenever she refuses to open the door for him to take the ball from the rooftop and an abuse in a loud angry tone is enough to get the door opened like the sesame for opening cave-doors.

When the hitting and running have sapped their energy and the night is approaching; when everyone becomes certain that their feeling of nothingness and anxiety has disappeared with the approach of darkness and sleep, they stop the game. Tarnano hastens before everyone else to the water fountain to quench his thirst and to give himself a rest from the heat which has troubled him during the game. All the players follow him to the fountain. After some rest and arguments about the match, they regroup and move en masse toward Sabat <sup>c</sup>Ajam with Tarnano leading and singing in his thin voice :

"Pip hurrah! Pip hurrah! Football is a game

That gives good health and pleasure to the young!"

They are swallowed up by the dark dirty streets and they disperse to play with the prostitutes or to have a good chat with them for a while with the exception of Tarnano who seems destined to visit all the prostitutes and does not go steady with any one of them. He knows

the fat brown Asmahān, Dalinda the girl with tatoos on her arm, chest and face, and Lailā Murād whose cheeks are scarred. He is their platonic friend and never attempts to touch or kiss them in spite of the encouragement of his comrades who often egg him on : "Another kiss, Tarnano, kiss her, man!"

Indeed, he would love to do that but he fears the consequences and especially when he remembers the only occasion he ventured to do that with Asmahān who repulsed him with the words : "Get you gone. A beast will not accept you, let alone an old woman!"

He goes round them chewing a cigarette-end given to him by a friend. He sometimes snatches a pastry from a young hawker and he quickly swallows it in spite of the little hawker's sobs and protestations. He remains there for hours and then departs for home via al-Jadīd Street and the dark Blacksmith Street.

The sun rises and Tarnano returns with his comrades to the football field. They talk football, eat football and live football. On Sunday, they make an organised assault on the tramway and the Belvedere Municipal Stadium.

Tarnano sits in the best corner of the stadium keenly watching the players while other distinguished spectators sit near him. He is one of the supporters of 'Sporting Hope' of which he is very fond and enthusiastic. He rejoices at the victory of that team and feels sad when



it is defeated. Many atimes, his enthusiastic support for the club has thrust him into the hands of supporters of the opposing team. Sometimes it is a broken tooth or black eye, and sometimes he returns home in torn clothes. He however does not care and whenever 'Hope' team is destined to win, Tarnano returns to the suburb happy and contented. On the way home, he entertains the group and excites their enthusiasm, and intersperses that with a dance in the centre of the road in the Belvedere Square while the crowd clap for him : 'Pip hop! Pip hop!' He spins round and round for several minutes until he falls down. He then gets up and sings with the crowd : 'The soup! From a squeeze of lemon!'

The whole neighbourhood resounds with their shout. They sprint to invade the tram, hanging to its back, its doors and windows, dodging the attention of the ticket-sellers by getting down at every station and catching the tram again as it starts off until they get to the suburb where they alight to look forward to the week-days when they can return to their life's ambition, namely : football.

Then came a day when Tarnano did not go to the square to wait for his comrades. They did not come and there was no ball. The square has become dangerous with police bullets zooming in the air to repel a large angry crowd converging from every street and every alley as if it was a violent wave flowing toward the residence of

Salāh al-Dīn al-Bakkūsh. The crowd charged and retreated and filled the square with chanting and shouting and explosions. The police dislodged them in one instant and the demonstrators regained control of it the next moment. They have *usurped* Tarnano's square from him and he now becomes a spectator. He went out of his house to follow the demonstrations from a distance, keeping his mouth shut. He then began to get gradually absorbed into the spirit of the demonstrations until he found himself at the forefront shouting with the demonstrators, throwing at the police and their cars, stones and anything he could lay hand on from the bark of pumpkins and water-melons to broken bottles. He [once] sacrificed his greyish-coloured fez cap by throwing it in the hope that it would hit a policeman or create a crack in the wall of al-Bakkūsh's house. He was repeatedly yelling with all his limbs :

"Defender of the fatherland...Down with colonialism... Long live Bourguiba...Long live Bourguiba...Independence... Independence!"

Whenever he couldn't follow the song or forgot the slogan, he shouted : "Pip hop! Pip hop!, the drink, alone..!"

He began to hunt for demonstrations in all parts of the city, finding some and missing others. He ran, shouted, sang and boomed until he almost went mad of shouting. His joy and growth became bound to these demonstrations which

delighted him in spite of the blood which often flowed and the death which hovered above. He ran from it as he used to run from al-Būhālī on the football pitch.

Suddenly the demonstrations ceased and disappeared as fast as they started. It was as if they had gone to hide in a hole.

Tarnano heard people saying in the streets of the city that the Tunisian nation had achieved independence and that France had withdrawn from the country and the leaders have returned from exile.

Tarnano joined them but returned after a few days to Turbat al-Bey, hoping for the return of his comrades and a reunion there. He waited for a long time but no one appeared, not even the coal-hawker. Everything had ceased : football, comrades, even the demonstrations and the police. He in turn left the place. Armed with a big basket, he made for the central market and waited for a client with a heavy luggage whom he could help to carry his luggage.

X X X X X X X X X X  
X X X X X X X X X X

From al-Tajdīd, Year 1, No.1, February 1961, pp.70-73

This story fits well into the group of 'Proletarian Short Stories' considered in Chapter Six.

Page 70

أوقف سيارته في صف السيارات الواقفة على طول الرصيف واقحمه—  
 بجهد جهيد في مكان ضيق فارغين سيارتين وقد زادت في تشنيج—  
 قيادة حارس السيارات له وإوامره المتكررة في وقاحة •  
 اريال ! اريال ! اريال ! يزي ! براكي شوية - اريال ! باهي  
 اطفال الضو... !

\* \* \* \* \*

Page 73

— ".... اريال ! اريال ! براكي شوية ! شعل الضو • وانقض صاحب  
 السيارة على الحارس وقبله قبلات متتابعة متراحمة وقدم له مائة مليم كاملة قائـ—  
 - ابيه - ابيه - هاوكل حد رجع لبقعتو وكل شيء عاد كيما كان - ابي -  
 قول اريال يا خويا عمرك ما تقول اريال - لا - اقمعد باقي تقول اريـال  
 اريـال • "

SĀLIH AL-GARMĀDĪ

THE SHOE-SHINER

He stopped his car by the row of cars packed along the pavement. With great difficulty he started to manoeuvre the car into a narrow space between two cars. What angered him most was the direction being given to him by the car attendant and the latter's continuous impudent orders :

- Arrièl! arrièl! arrièl! enough! a slight brake! arrièl, good! Switch off the light.

The car owner got down, simmering with anger that he was compelled - whether he liked it or not - to accept orders from these lowly creatures who wore a copper badge on their chest to give themselves an official stamp and who called themselves 'car attendants'.

He was furious that he was obliged, when parking

or getting out his car, to take orders from this class of people who, instead of taking orders from their masters the car owners and experts at manoeuvring cars, they even had the effrontery to issue orders to the latter in a broken mixture of French and Arabic.

As he put his feet on the ground, the attendant rushed to shut the door of the car after winding up the glass to save the car-owner the trouble of having to lock it. He considered that in doing all this, he was discharging his duties before his conscience and before men, in return for the few millimes which car-owners often gave him as a reward for looking after their cars whenever they returned to collect their cars and go away.

The car-owner gazed at this poor wretch who was clad in rags<sup>and</sup> adorned with a copper badge.

- Couldn't you at least say : 'arrière' like others whenever you are lording it over us and not 'arrièl'

- Pardon me, sir. By Allah, if I keep my job, I shall say to you next time : 'arrière'.

The car-owner went his way holding high his head, filled with pride that he knew that 'arrière' in French was pronounced 'arrière' and not 'arrièl' and that his education, culture and linguistic ability had enabled him to give a brilliant lecture to that uncouth wretch who lacked any education and was so stupid that he couldn't correctly learn even a single French word when French language had been in use within the country for almost a century.

He betook himself to his usual evening life during which he forgot the day's problem, his family and those riffraff such as the impudent car attendant, with whom he had unfortunately been destined to share the same country.

His evening programme was usually simple and pleasurable. It often began with drowning some Tunisian or French alcohol : būkha or Ricard or Berger usually at 'Bar Paul' or at 'al-Baghdād'. This was accompanied by some types of kīmiya \* and different types of candies which every bar proprietor in Tunis diversified and varied in an attempt to surpass his competitors. These could be small fried fish or boiled octopus or bean or turnip or harīsa... This was followed by a large, rich, four- or five-course meal French-style, interspersed with wines, and then followed by fruits. After satisfying his material appetite, our friend who was a member of the élite-class upholding the standard of knowledge within the country, would remember that he had some intellectual obligations which he must discharge. He would then buy a French newspaper which was either France Soir or Paris Jour, or, on rare occasions, La Monde or L'Express or Canard Enchaîné. Already under the influence of the alcohol, he would first cast a quick glance at the headlines on scientific and political news, then he would turn to the Sports pages,

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\* This word is used in Tunisia to refer to small titbits usually served with the appetizer.

then to crime and murder reports and finally to the pages containing the amorous adventures of Brigitte Bardot. He would end his blessed soirée by watching one of the sex or non-sex films that abounded in Tunisia. While watching this, he digested, not without difficulty, the food which he had stuffed his stomach with. He would also relieve his distended stomach by letting off wind thus lessening his indigestion. Throughout the film, he would masticate chewing-gum until the end.

The car-owner commenced to review this programme which he had followed on previous nights. He had, however hardly taken a few steps into the chilly night, along the streets of the city centre with their multi-coloured lights when he noticed some dirt on his shoes. He saw traces of mud on them. He felt a stab on his sartorial prestige. How could he walk on one of the main streets of the city in soiled shoes which did not in any way match the elegance of the rest of his clothing and the beauty of his appearance and his neatness? What impression would he leave on the minds of Messrs. So and So if they met him on the high street wearing soiled shoes that would not be touched by any respectable person other than one of the poor peasants such as the car attendant!

The car-owner grew furious over this unexpected hindrance. Inwardly, he cursed his maid-servant for forgetting to polish



his shoes before he set out on his usual outing which had become impossible for him to skip. He turned to one of the professional shoe-shiners along the side of the street while cursing in his heart the environment in which he was living and the circumstances which, after obliging him to seek the assistance of a car attendant, was now forcing him to turn to a shoe-shiner. He went straight to the shoe-shiners box and lifted his foot onto it after resting his back on the tree selected by the shoe-shiner for his clients to lean upon. He lighted a cigarette and began to smoke while his eyes remained fixed to the street lights of the city because he did not want to lower his head to look at the wretch squatting in dirt in front of tin boxes labelled cirage and crème.

The car-owner did not look at the shoe-shiner nor did he give him any order because he knew that the job of a shoe-shiner was to polish shoes and that he merely had to put his feet on the box for him to set about his job.

Suddenly, the car-owner had a strange feeling : the shoe-shiner rose and in a swift and amazing swing, thrust a piece of leather in his mouth after pulling his cigarette out of his mouth and throwing it away.

-Hold on to this piece of leather-end so as not to soil your shoe!

The car-owner tried to shout but he couldn't. He

tried to spit out the piece of leather-end but in vain. He tried to raise his hand to his mouth to remove the stopper which had been stuffed into his mouth and then complain to the police against these criminal actions and this horrible assault on the dignity of his face and mouth by this despicable shoe-shiner. Inwardly, he criticised the situation in this land whereby car attendants became masters issuing orders to car-owners and shoe-shiners assaulted their clients' mouths with stoppers and their hands with ropes, yes, with ropes, because the shoe-shiner had seized his hands and tied them to the trunk of the tree which, in normal conditions, was intended for leaning upon and for comfort.

The shoe-shiner seized the car-owner's moustache, rolled it between his fingers and thrust it into his client's nostrils saying :

-It's better to hide this away because it hampers my polishing.

The shoe-shiner commenced his polishing. He put some black wax on the car-owner's right cheek and then began to polish it with every seriousness and attention. From time to time, he interrupted his polishing with shoe-shiner's usual remarks and complaints against the world around them :

-Ah, you see sir, people are ignorant...You know

it hasn't rained for quite some time, it's all because of their ignorance!

The car-owner fidgeted. He shook his head right and left and turned his eyes to the passers-by imploring them to rescue him from this accursed creature but the latter grabbed his head and stabilised it saying:

-By Allah, stop shaking. If you shake your leg too much, I'll not be able to polish it properly...Yes... What was I saying? The rain? By God, the rain is providential...Sir, take this man from Sidī <sup>C</sup>Amar near al-Qairawān. He had eight hundred sheep. They died of thirst save eighty. The poor man committed suicide...

The shoe-shiner finished polishing the car-owner's right cheek and slapped him on that cheek as he usually banged on his box when polishing shoes. "Bring the left one at once!"

The car-owner became indignant. His thoughts became confused. He was frightened by this nonsensical situation in which he was living, in which things changed so that shoe-shiners polished their client's faces instead of their shoes. Was he awake or dreaming? Why were the passers-by indifferent to his plight? Why haven't they snatched him from this persecution and taken reprisal action against this devil, this rebel against the established order and social norms? Have they gone mad and become unable to understand the respect

due to clients from shoe-shiners or was he the one who had gone mad? Was he now living in a country with strange laws and orders to which he was not accustomed? Restlessly, he shook his hand to see if he could undo the rope and release himself from this trap into which he had fallen.

The shoe-shiner continued to sully his cheek. He raised his right hand, showed it to his client and complained :

-Sir, look at my sores hand. By Allah, I am only polishing shoes at the risk of my life. I had some renovation to do in my house. The workmen asked me for some tea. While I was preparing it the kettle overturned on me.

He raised his sores hand a second time and struck his client's cheeks severely, saying :

-Right, bring the right and let me shine it for you!

He turned to loosen the car-owners tie. He began to use it to wipe the wax-smearred face of the man so that he could complete the final part of his professional code: smartening up and making the shoe gleam brightly.

-In any case, sir, may the Lord have mercy on us... Because if there is rain, there will be pomegranate and oranges and other good things...May the Lord save us from ignorance because people are ignorant and everyone is interested only in his own affairs...

The car-owner took a deep breath and with a strong

violent expiration, <sup>he</sup> forced out the piece of leather with which his mouth had been blocked. He was happy to be free. He would now be able to take reprisal action. He began to yell loudly, calling the police and asking for help :

-Oh people, come and rescue me from this dog who has sullied my cheek! Oh, Mr. Man, go and call the police! See how this shoe-shiner has treated me and my face! For God's sake, come for God's sake...

He implored people, beseeched them, asked for their help and succour but all in vain. It was as if people had become deaf, dumb and unconcerned, unable to understand anything. Or was he the one who couldn't make a sound as he shouted, hence people could not hear him and turn to help him? Everyone looked gay and happy as they went about their business, unperturbed. All the same, he kept shouting and hearing his own shout resounding in his head.

Why didn't they hear him or notice the strange situation he was in? Didn't they understand the language he was speaking or had he become incapable of communicating with them in an intelligible language?

All of a sudden, the car-owner began to cry and wail in order to lighten the severity of his wounded pride and sullied dignity. He also hoped to attract the attention of a passer-by by crying. After all,

wasn't crying usually recognised by everyone as a sign of sadness and tragedy?

The shoe-shiner struck his face for the last time and declared :

-There you are! I've finished. I've given them a marvellous glitter!

He withdrew the car-owners moustache from his nostrils, untwisted it and meticulously straightened it out on the left and right sides of his upper lips. He hastened to undo the strings. He stretched his hand out and demanded :

-Twenty francs!

The car-owner immediately fled from the shoe-shiner. He ran to two police officers with quick short steps, his blackened face shining, his eyes emitting sparks of anger, his mouth mumbling and shouting. He bawled in their face:

-Police! people! come and avenge me on this dog of a shoe-shiner who has sullied my face with wax! Come and champion the cause of law and order! Come and uproot this criminal, this bandit and put him where he belongs...

But the words got stuck in his throat. His voice box did not sound, so his speech remained incomprehensible mumblings.

-Oh Lord, for pity's sake, even the police can't understand my complaint. The world is upside down, or what? Are people mad or what's wrong with them? Oh Lord,

Oh Messenger of Allah, Oh Saints of Allah, have mercy on me! People no longer understand me. The world is upside down! The world is upside down! No law exists in this country. There is no longer any law...

He continued to scream and howl, asking for the help of Allah, His Prophet, <sup>and</sup> His saints, while people paid no attention to him. They all went about their business quietly as usual.

He returned to his car, opened the door forcefully as if he was mad. He sat behind the steering wheel, mumbling like an insane person. He started the engine and began to turn the steering wheel mechanically in an attempt to get his car out of the row and flee from this mad world in which he was living, a world in which everything had become impossible and disorderly. Suddenly, a voice reached his ears, saying :

-Arrièl! arrièl! a slight brake! arrièl! put on the light!

The car-owner jumped at the car-attendant, kissed him warmly and repeatedly, gave him a whole 100-millime piece and said :

-Ah, at last! Everyone has returned to his rightful place and everything has returned to normalcy. Yes, my friend, say : 'arrièl'. Never say 'arrière'. Go on saying 'arrièl, arrièl'.

Hadiyat al-<sup>c</sup>Īd by <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Qādir b. al-Hājǧ Nasr

From his collection entitled Sal<sup>c</sup>ā' Yā Habībatī,

pp. 41-47

Page 41

" كانت الشمس قد هبطت الى الغرب منذ قليل وتكاثر الجمع وضع  
مكان الحفل • واقامت الحلقات الشعبية وبدأ الرقص والغناء والموسيقى  
واصواتا محبوبة وانغاما هادرة ممتزجة ليس لها بدء ولا ختم .... "

\* \* \* \* \*

Page 47

" .... وارتفعت حشجة باردة ، ميته ، كحشجة الكباش المذبوح •  
وما زالت انامله مشدودة على النجمة الخضراء •

كان الالب يجرى في الظلام • لقد سمع الصياح ، وكانت الام وراءه •  
وكان الشبحان يسيран الى الشرق • وكان الليل يسلم آخره للنهار ....  
قريبا يولد الفجر • • وقريبا ستكون النجمة الخضراء في البيت "



<sup>c</sup>ABD AL-QĀDIR B. AL-HĀJJ NASR

FESTIVAL PRESENT

The sun had just gone down in the west and the crowd had increased. The festival square was bustling with noise. Small circles were formed for folk-dances, songs and music. These were popular sounds <sup>and</sup> a pell-mell of roaring tunes that had neither beginning nor ending.

<sup>c</sup>Alī was delighted at this scene. He leisurely stretched forward his legs and looked at the black sand on which he was sitting. He stole a quick glance at his begging-tray and rubbed his eye-balls with his index finger to ward off sleep from his eyes. His father had said to him the previous day : "Tomorrow you will obtain much as there will be many visitors." He suddenly felt a strong joyous excitement creeping on his nerves....

his feeling of gladness sounded like a long-drawn shrill note in his mind saying (You will collect seven-hundred millimes). If all these millimes were added up they would amount to a complete green currency note like that which <sup>C</sup>Amm Ahmad usually received and tucked away in his pocket without any fuss.

But a mist of fear soon streaked across <sup>C</sup>Alī's sky, a deep fear and disquiet, the cause of which he did not know. Perhaps its source was that blind man who sat by him the previous day and whose begging-tray did not attract a single millime. Or could it be that ugly lame veiled woman who sat opposite him, her back bent by age? It might be this or that. The strange thing about this overwhelming fear was that he didn't know when it began. It first started like a slight fog and then gradually darkened his horizon.

<sup>C</sup>Alī stretched forward his hand to pull the tray nearer. He glanced at the coins. The noise was rising. (How kind these people were! They gave generously, plentifully. He had never known such generosity). He saw a figure move in front of him...it was the blind man. The impulse of fear seized his small heart. His eyes curiously followed the man as he came to sit near him. The festival reached its peak...some shots...some shrieks of joy...The coins piled up on his tray and his desire to handle a green note, a currency note was re-awakened. A ruse came into his mind. He planned everything and his

dream became a reality...After some hours he would carry the gift to his parents. The small boy's sweet joy was like a green light which filled and illuminated all parts of his body, making him feel that he was above the festival, above everyone, hovering at the head of everything...What a charming thing the taste of happiness in the hearts of the young could be!

But this blind man, why was he gazing at him like that?

His parents were unknown in the history of the village. They were among the expendable burdens on society...They both joined the guild of beggars for many years and then they quitted when the hands of the givers became dry and when the practitioners of the trade became numerous and the market was glutted. They engaged in other grades but none provided them with enough to ward off hunger. When he was six, they trained and tutored him in this trade. Two years have now passed since that time and he has not creased stretching his tray to people. On festival and carnival days people were unusually generous.

He heard the blind man move in his place. He heard him hit the ground hard with his staff, roll his garment backwards, jump up and go to another direction. He cast a covetous look at the boy with his half-opened sightless eyes. His footsteps were slow and between one step and another, the boy's heart almost jumped out of him. He went to the old woman, leaned over and whispered something

to her. He then went away.

He burst out in a chilly fear and vague self-questionings.

"What does he want?"

Everything passed away within a few hours. He forgot these movements. He forgot the blindman and he almost forgot the old woman sitting opposite him. His abundant catch that night had intoxicated him. He was preoccupied with the thought of the gift which he would present after an hour or two...he brought out his handkerchief from his pocket and spread it on the ground.

He had felt the cold wind beating against his body.. he knew that the night was in its last hours...only a few people were left in the square.

He spread his palm, scooped the coins into the handkerchief and tied it to his loin. He passed by the small stores until he reached the store of <sup>C</sup>Amm Rahūma whom he jokingly asked :

"Will you give me one dinar?"

The shopkeeper laughed. He liked <sup>C</sup>Alī and he often drew him into conversation. He never chided him. He had for him a kind of fatherly affection which he has kept to himself up to now. Not having been blessed with a child of his own, he often generously gave him a gift...he put his hand into his drawer and brought out five millimes.

<sup>C</sup>Alī burst into a scornful laughter.

"I told you one dinar, dear <sup>C</sup>Amm Rahūma!"

He brought out his handkerchief and spread it out.

The man looked astounded. He counted the coins.

He gazed at him as if asking questions.

"You are a devil"

He then gave him the green note.

All went in the direction of the west. In order to get home, he must cross the valley and then walk almost two kilometres. Away from the square, he took the note out of his pocket, looked at it with the aid of star-light. He has plucked it from nowhere! He was overjoyed.

(My father was correct. Allah makes the dream of the young come true)

He doubled his speed. He hummed some words which he had always heard his father uttering in his room. (Protect me, oh Lord, protect me, Oh Lord).

He descended into the valley. Although he wasn't frightened, he did not feel at ease. He heard a creeping movement behind him and turned back to look...It's her! He almost shouted. It's the gray-haired old woman. He moved faster and repeated his mutterings : "Protect me, oh Lord."

He wanted to run, to escape, to fly. She too was moving faster. He wondered (Is she catching up with him) (The festival gift, Oh Lord!) He imagined his father waking up at that moment, to take his cane and run toward him, to save him and take the gift from him.

He had almost crossed the valley, but, oh God, that

blind man! He's coming from my front (Daddy! Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Where are you?)

He wanted to change course but the old woman's hand grabbed his gown and he became silent, not uttering a word...he implored Allah to make all those experiences a mere dream. He had experienced more bizarre things in dreams before.

The blind man arrived and gazed at him. He then screamed :

"You, you fox, you've left my tray empty. Did you think that you could get away with it? You've ruined me and cut off my sustenance. You've taken everything for yourself for two years, for two years! You disgusting monkey! Give me the tray! Give me!"

His hatred was boiling. His violence was reaching a peak. He didn't find anything in the tray. Nothing was on the boy. The gift was between his fingers. The gift was for his father and mother. A star that would fill their house with light and illumination...

The blind man roared :

"Where's the coins? Where's it?"

Ali remained silent..He would never give away the green star. It would remain for his parents. Suddenly, he shouted at the top of his voice, with as much force as his lungs were capable of mustering.

The blind man hastened to cover his mouth while the old woman wrung his neck. "Quiet you dog. Bring the coins

I shall kill you!"

A dull death-rattle was emitted, like that of a slaughtered ram. His fingers clung to the green star.

His father ran in the dark closely followed by his mother. He had heard the shout. The two figures fled eastward. Night was at last surrendering to day... soon morning twilight would be born...soon the green star would be inside the house.

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X X X X X X X X X X

## APPENDIX II

Style and Content based on Extracts from Arabic  
Texts of Tunisian Short Stories

The texts of Tunisian short stories written during the period under study reveal a wide variety of Arabic styles among the different writers. When examined in the historical order of their publication, one finds that they show a gradual regression in language, (there are Tunisian writers who would of course like to call it progression) from the classical style and language of Suwaisī's al-Haifā' wa Sirāj al-Lail, the first Tunisian short story published in 1906 to al-Bashīr Khraīf's almost completely Tunisian colloquial used in Mihfazat al-Samār.

In addition to the language variety, there is also an apparent evolution in the objective of the short story writers over the decades. This is reflected in the form and theme of the selected extracts which contain the almost naive moral didacticism of al-Laḡīta as well as al-Madanī's highly polemical al-Insān al-Sifr on the language problem.

Due to the considerable length of some of the stories from which these extracts have been taken, it is not possible to reproduce the complete texts of many of them. I have only extracted the sentences, and in some cases, paragraphs that best illustrate the features of the stories discussed in this appendix.



المهيفاء وسراج الليل : مجلة "قصص" عدد 6 ص : 49 - 67

"... فجلست على كرسي في حديقة لها هب النسيم على اشجارها فتمايلت وتضوع عبير ازهارها على تلك الارحاء فتطيت ، وناهيك بصفاء الفكر في اوقات السحمره وجعلت امامها منصة ونادت بصوت لطيف : ( ياسراج الليل ) فقال : لبيك يا امساء \* قالت : تعال اجلس امامي \* فأتى نحوها بادب واحتشام وجلس طبق امرها على المنصة التي امامها فافتكرت هنيئة وقالت يا بني اتدرى لماذا خلقت ؟ فقال : خلقت لعبادة الخالق وشكره \* فقالت : وما معنى العبادة والشكر ؟ فقال : نعبد به الملوات والاذكار ونشكره بقولي لك الشكر يا الله \* فقالت : وما يتبع هذا ؟ فقال : لا ادري \* فقالت : قد خفيت عليك يا بني روح العبادة وهي العظمة والاعتبار وتصور عظمة الواحد القهار \*"

ص : 50 - 51

"... ثم قال لها يا امساء ، ما احكم هذا الكلام ، ما ابلغ هذا الخطاب ، ما اعذب هذا البيان ! فقالت ياسراج هذا كلام مكسور الاكسوان فكيف لا يكون محكما \* كلام لو تدبر الناس معانيه وعملوا بما فيه لصاروا خلفاء السعداء في كل زمان \*"

ص : 53

"... وبالجملة فالدين الاسلامي من موجباته اتقان الاشياء لانه صديق العقل فالحمد لله الذي جعلنا ياسراج الليل منه ، فقال سراج الليل يا امساء اني رأيت الناس اعياء الاتقان فلا يتقنون على شيء صالح ، وهذه جزيرتنا العربية طالما اسمع عن اهل بيها الاخبار المكسرة فهي تموج بالفتن موجا وصبغت ارضها بدماء ابنائها في هذا الشقاء السذي نزل \*"

ص : 55

"... بحيث انه اذا رأى مشروعا حسنا قال هذه بدعة ، واذا نظرت في كتاب  
لنفس العم قال فيه نزعات ، واذا سمع كلاما بليضا قال انتقد على القائل كمنذا  
ومن حقه كذا عوض كذا الى غير ذلك من الاقوال الصادرة من صدر تغلي مراجله  
بنيران الحسد .

ص: 61 - 62

### Text One

al-Haifā' wa Sirāj al-Lail by Sālīh Suwaisī

This story has been summarised in the chapter on pioneers of the story in Tunisia.<sup>(1)</sup>

The language used by Suwaisī is classical Arabic which was regarded by him and his contemporaries as one of the essential pillars of the socio-political reawakening for which they were campaigning during the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>(2)</sup>

The characteristics of the classical Arabic contained in the text include the absence of proper punctuation marks when introducing the direct speech of the characters in the story, especially after قال. A colon is used in a few instances, but in most cases there are no punctuation marks at all to distinguish between narratives and direct speech as in the following examples

قال لها يا امالا ... فقال سراج الليل يا امالا اني  
رايت الناس ... قالت يا سراج الليل

The call for religious reawakening which is one of the features of this story is evident in the extract from page fifty-five which sounds more like a sermon than a story.

(1) See Chapter Three. (2) S. al-Garmādī, al-Ta'rif bi-Usus al-Adab al-Tunisi in al-Tajdid, Nos 5/6, June/July, 1961, pp. 12/13

اللقبية : مجلة "قصص" عدد 12 ص : 76 - 81

"... كان لصاحب القصر فتية من الفتيات اللواتي ترسبن التربية العديثة  
يسمون بها (التربية العصرية) ويريدون منها التربية الفرنجية فكان كل ما  
حصلت عليه من العلم والمعارف والفنون التالية :

- 1 - الرطانة الاعجمية حتى مع خدامها الزنجي وكلبها الروسي .
- 2 - الغرام بمطالعة الروايات الخرامية .
- 3 - البراعة في معرفة أى الأزياء أعلق بالقلوب وأجذب للعقول .
- 4 - الكبرياء والعظمة واحتقار كل مخلوق سواها حتى أبويها .
- 5 - الأثرة وحب الذات حبا يملأ قلبها غيرة وحسدا حتى أنها لا تستطيع  
أن تسمع وصفا من أوصاف الحسن يوسف به سواها .

ص : 79

"... أحمد الله أني قدرت على مكافاة ذلك الرجل الذى أحق الى بسستر  
عساره وازالة همسه وحزنه " .

ص : 81

"... يا أيها الآباء العظماء ان كنتم تريدون أن تسلموا بناتكم الى هذه المدينة  
الخرية تتولى عنكم شأنكم ، وتكفل لكم تربيتهم فانزعوا من بين جنوبكم قبل ذلك غرائز تلك  
المشاهد هادئين مطمئنين لا تنصبون ولا تتألمون .  
ويا أيها الناس جميعا لا تحفلو بعد اليم بالانساب والاحساب ولا تفرقوا بين تربية  
الاكواخ وتربية القصور ، ولا تعتقدا أن التفضية وقف على الأغنياء وحبائس على العظماء  
فقد علمتم ما أضر الدهر في صدره من رذائل الشرفاء وفضائل اللقطاء .

ص : 81

al-Laḡīta, author unknown

This story has also been discussed in the chapter on the earliest Tunisian short stories.<sup>(3)</sup> The extracts have been taken from the middle and end of the story.

Published at the end of the first decade of this century like al-Haifā' wa Sirāj al Lail, its language is classical with no incursions of colloquial idioms or words. It shows, however, a greater similarity in its form to journalistic essay than to the story. This is particularly more noticeable in the matter-of-fact fashion in which the author enumerated what he considered to be the 'vices' of the rich man's daughter in the story.<sup>(4)</sup>

It is also similar to al-Haifā' in its moral didacticism on child-training, the exercise of caution against the influence of 'western civilisation' and the evil consequences of class distinction.<sup>(5)</sup>

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(3) See Chapter Three

(4) See extract from page 97 of Qisas

(5) See extract from page 81 of Qisas

المقامة السينائية : جريدة السردوك عدد 2 - 14 أفريل 1937

حدثنا الاخفش بن قرمان قال :

قال لي جماعة من السفهاء \* قم بنا الى السينما \* قلت : وما السينما ؟ قالوا  
صور متحركة وضحك وفذ لكسة \* فقلت يا قوم لقد قضيت حياتي بين المنجمسة  
والدفتر وسلخت العمر بجانب المحراب والبنبر فلا تأخذوني الى مكان يحيط  
من قدير العلماء الامجاد \* ويلحقهم بالسفاسة والافساد كطهرنات الخمس  
التي تشوى الكبيد والمرقاز على الجمر \* قالوا بل لا تجد هناك قطرة من  
المسكرات ولا بادرة من المنكرات فقممت ودخلت معهم في هذه السينما اناس  
كالمدود \* على الكراسي قعود \* لا يتحركون ولا يتكلمون وليس امامهم ما يأكلون  
ولا ما يشربون \* فقلت في قلبي لقد خسر والله اهل هذا الجيل وأصبحوا  
جميعهم من المهاييل \* وما كاد ياقم يقربنا القرار حتى اطفأوا الانسوار  
فوضعت يدي على مكتوبي خوفا على مالي وخذرا من عني يميني وشمالتي ثم  
ظهر على الحائط اشباح تتكلم \*

فخلتني أحلم فقلت :

أعوز بالله من الشيطان	هذا اختراع آخر الزمان
اني أرى في هذه الجدران	رهطا من الرجال والنسوان
يرتلون القول باللسان	يفعلون كبني الانسان
وهكذا يظنهم اخواني	والله ما ابصر فير الجمال

الير لي عقل وليس عيوان

قال اخفش : ثم عاد النور فذهبت الشياطين كما ذهب اهل القبور فقلت لهؤلاء  
الاخوان : أهكذا يلعب الافرنج بعقولكم ويستولون على أموالكم ويفرجونكم على رهط من  
العفاريث تستحضر البخور والكبريت \* فقالوا : هذا ما كينات تدار ! فقلت رايين الفحم  
والبخار قالوا بل تنار بالكهرباء وتخرك بالتفريخ والامتلاء \* فلم ازل أقرعهم بالديسمل  
ويجيئون بالكذب والتمويل حتى يثبت من اقناعهم/ وعجزت عن ارجاعهم \*  
والله يهدي من يشاء

Text Three

al-Maqāmat al-Sīnimā'iyya : author unknown

This story was published in the thirties which was the time when the first firm foundations of the Tunisian story were laid. It is therefore not surprising that the classical maqāma genre should constitute one of the fictional forms favoured by these early Tunisian story writers, just as it featured prominently among the earliest attempts at fiction-writing in the Arab east such as Majma<sup>c</sup> al-Bahrain by Nāsif al-Yāzījī (1800-1871), Hadīth <sup>c</sup>Īsā bin Hishām by Muḥammad al-Muwailihī (1868-1930) and Layālī Sutaib by Muḥammad Ḥafiz Ibrāhīm (1872-1932).<sup>(6)</sup>

It is however noteworthy that although this maqāma resembles the classical genre in its copious saj<sup>c</sup> (rhyming prose) and in its inclusion of some rajaz verses, it is nonetheless far from being an exercise in linguistic acrobatics like, for example, many of Harīrī's maqāmāt.

As a short story, it is fairly well-proportioned in spite of the restrictive limits imposed by the form.

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(6) The last two works were published in Cairo during the first decade of the twentieth century.

الوليصة : مجلة "المباحث" عدد 14 ص 12 .

عمار بن الا جشع من أقطاب الطفيليين يرى التطفل مذمها قويا فلا يكتفي بسلوكه بل يدعو اليه وينشره حوايه \* الا أن الخيبة تلذعه في بعض الاحيان فيشكو ذلك السعي الاقصران . . .

حدثنا مرة قال :

أخذ مني الجوع يوما من الايام فخرجت أبحث عن قم كرام يعنون علي بشهي الطعام فجازيهم بطاي الكلام \* فبينما أنا في ازقة المدينة اطوف ان رأيت دارا أمام بابهم خروف فخرج منها رجل بدين بيده اليمني سكين فأهوى الى الخروف وقال : " باسم الله الرحمن الرحيم " وتأملت في ملامحه وقلت : انه رجل كريم ولعله يقيم وليمة فساكون من ضيوفه الليلة . . . ثم انصرفت والآمال تغمر نفسي واشباح الاطعمة تتسابق السعي رأسي ونويت أن أعود مع من سيأتي من الوفود ولما انقضى ذلك النهار الطويل وحصل محلله الليل الجميل اسرعت الى تلك الدار فوجدت دهليزها متلائلا بالانوار مزدا نسينا بالازهار \* فوقفت أتحين فرصة الدخول ان أنا عند صاحب المنزل مجهول وانا بفروج من الناس كثير نحو تلك الدار يسير يلوح عابهم أنهم كانوا مثلي متطفلين ولما همي سالكين فزال ما اشعر به من الوحدة وقلت : قد اتتني من الله الرحمة \* فدخلت بينهم لاهسبر الباب مصهم \* ولكن كلا منا يريد الاسراع فيسبق وضاق بنا مدخل الدار وصار يغص بنا ويشرق حتى لفظنا في منزل فسيح الارحاء فاشتد ما بأنفسنا من الرجاء \* فجلست رفاقي وجلست جانبهم اسمع منهم ظريف الكلام ريثما يحضر لطيف الطعام . . . ثم نصب العدم بفناء الدار مائدة طويلة مثل النهر عريضة مثل البحر تبشر البطون بكشمسة المزاد وتدعو الاضراس الى الاستعداد ونفذوا عليها خبزا نقيما ولحما مشويا وسمكا مقليا ودجاجا طرييا وعنبا رافانيا وطبخا قلحاويا وثينا زديا \*

وأما الماء فكان في بواقيله يلمع وبالثلج يشعشع \* وكانت روائح الطعام  
تنتشر في المكان فتدغدغ الأنوف وتنعش أفئدة الضيوف فاشربيت نحو المائدة  
الاعناق والتصقت بخيراتهما الآماق وجرى الدم في الحروق وترقرق الريق في الخلسوق  
وهشت النفوس واستبشرت وخفت الأجسام ونشطت وتنهت المعد وتحركت \*

أما أنا فسال لعابي واشتد عذابي حتى نفذ صبري واحترت في أمري وكنت أن أصبح  
هذه والله مناظر تنزى الآلام فمتى بالله نشرق في الطعام ! ولكن الله أتى بالفرج وسهل  
المخرج إذ وقف صاحب الولاية وقال : الآن حانت الساعة فقوموا يا جماعة فكنا لاصغره  
ممثلين وانتصينا حوله واقفين وذهبنا نحو المائدة مسرعين وتسابقنا اليها مزدحمين  
فالاكتساف تلاصقت والمرافق تدافرت والأرجل تطاحت فدفعني تيار الازدحام وذهب  
بي إلى الامام حتى أشرفت على مائدة الطعام \* فبادرت بالجلوس اليها وجعلت  
أفقس في ما عليها ونويت أن اشبع به معدتي وأحمل منه إلى زوجتي \* ولما استقست  
بنا المقاعد شعرنا عن السواعد فمدت يدي إلى لحة تقاطر شحمها وفاح طيبها  
وقربتها مني ولحمت ببعثها إلى حلقي وإذا بيد تجس جسدي وصوت يطرق سمعني  
فيقول : " أفق يا عمار " فقد طلع النهار . . . فغاب عن عيني كل ما كان لدى ووجدتني  
على فراش النوم يعذبني ألم الصوم \* وإذا بزوجتي تنظر إلى وتحسب علي " قم يا عمار  
فقد طلع النهار " فصحت بها : " حرمتني وحرمت نفسك ! اسكنك الله ومساكنه ! "

أحمد عبد الوهاب بكير



Text Four

al-Walīma<sup>(7)</sup> by <sup>c</sup>Abd al-Wahhāb Bakīr

Like the preceding text, this story is also in the form of a maqāma although it was published in 1945, eight years after the former.

It is a more well-rounded story than al-maqāmat al-sīnīmā'iyya. This may in part be due to the fact that the author paid less attention to saj<sup>c</sup> than to the content of the story, thus giving himself more freedom to plot the story rather than plot the language. It may be noted that by this time, the Tunisian short story was no more in its infancy and thus this maqāma may be considered a transitional stage to the better and well-proportioned stories of the later period.

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(7) This story has been discussed earlier among the Tunisian short stories published in the forties. See Chapter Five.

مولسد النسيحان : مجلة "المباحث" السنة الثانية من عدد 13 - إلى 16 سنة 1945

"... لا بد من حذف الزمان ياليلي \* فهو الذي أوجد الحركة \* والذي تورثه الحركة هو النقاد ياليلي \* لأنه كل متحرك فاسد نافذ \* وإن الزمان لكالرجي الدائمة الرجى لا بد من كسرها حتى تأمن الحبة \* ويطنن الكيان \*

"... وكنت أظن الموت ضرورة الآلام وكمال الحياة والراحة الكبرى \* كالذي يكون في أقصى العذاب من كمال النعيم : لكن الزمان وراء الروح يذكر ويزج الندامة والأسى والولس والحسرة \* وهذه هي السرقة ياليلي والختل والحيلة \* هذا الموت الذي يسيد الحياة في صورة شوها \* قبعة ويعجز أن يكون مصبها ومقرها وأقصى درجات قرارها سكونا ويثقلها ذكريات واسفا على الجسد وافتقادا لماضي الحياة ولوعة... وقسمسد يلي الجسد وفنيت كل حياة \*

المباحث : عدد 14 - ص 11

"... هذا عالم الموت \* ماتوا ولم يدركوا الفناء وجاءوا فلم يصلوا العيين \* يذكرون إلى الأبد الاجساد وسيرجعون ما بان من حياة \* وما مضى من ملأ ويشكون الفسارغ ويجدون هدايا في رؤوسهم وقد ضاعت وأدوا في صدورهم وقد حوت... وقد أركست الأرض بهم الزمان يذكركم تذكيرا ويشد فيهم ويحصف ويجذب الماضي وما كان فيهم المستقبل الأبد وامكاناتها فيعجنها جميعا ويجعلها على الروح وقد تعي بعض الأرواح فتطلب مثلك مستراحا وتميل إلى النوم فإذا هو ينخسها كالمهماز نخسا بل أنظر يا مدِين الزمان ما يمنع \*

ونظر مدِين فإذا هياكل من عظام رميم تقم فتعشي ثم تتكسر لحما وألوانا وجسمالا ثم تشيخ وتساقط فيأكلها الدود فتذهب رمادا وتعود رفاتا في طرفة عين \*

المباحث عدد 16

" يدخل جماعة من الرهبان قومة صاهبا في خشوع ذل ومشية قهقري \* ستة وفيهم  
 مشعل وسابحهم طبل \* ثم ستة وسابحهم انا صاه \* مشتعلون ببرانيس اسباط \* واييس  
 بيدو منهم الا الرؤوس ناتقة كالعناصل وقد نبتت في قلوبها شحال من شجر سودا \* ومرسل  
 كضفائر النسا \* وسالت منها اللحي عزيرة كثيفة شعشا \* اولئك قومة صاهبا وسدنة بيست  
 النار والماء \* يدخلون فيظن البخل انه المنيق \* ولكنهم يجعلون الماء أمام الكهف  
 وسط الفنا \* ويستديرون حوله \* وعين البخل مشتهية ناظرة حيري \* ثم يبتدي التريسل  
 ويبتدي الدعاء \* وتقيم الغوغا \* فتسير الموينسا :

سحر صاه المهبيا

سبحت صاهبا

هلمبيا هلمبيا

سبحت صاهبا

## Text Five

Mawlid al-Nisyan & al-Sudd by Maḥmūd al-Mas'adī

Al-Mas'adī's style and language has been discussed at some length earlier in this study.<sup>(8)</sup>

Mawlid al-Nisyan from which the first extract is taken has been summarised in the section where al-Mas'adī's other works are discussed.<sup>(9)</sup> The text shows the author's ingenious use of the classical language to convey his characters' metaphysical concepts on 'Time', 'Death' and 'Soul'.

While he used the discursive classical Arabic in Mawlid al-Nisyan, he chose the crisp and swift turns-of-phrase language of the early Surahs of the Qur'ān and that of the bedouin Arabs in al-Sudd as could be seen in the second extract which is taken from the beginning of the second scene of his play. He displayed his linguistic prowess by the use of many rare words. An example in the extract is قَوْمَةٌ.<sup>(10)</sup>

Sentences like: وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ مَسْجِدٌ وَسَابِعُهُمْ طَبْلٌ and and ثَم سِتَّةٌ وَسَابِعُهُمْ أُنَاءٌ مَاءٌ in the second extract, as well as others such as: وَكَانُوا سِتَّةً وَسَابِعُهُمْ كُتُبٌ bear such a close similarity to such Qur'anic verses like رَابِعُهُمْ ثَلَاثَةٌ and يَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كُتُبٌ رَجَاءُ الْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةٌ وَثَامِنُهُمْ كُتُبٌ...<sup>12</sup> that one is tempted to suggest that there was sometimes a conscious effort on al-Mas'adī's part to imitate the classical style of Arabic.

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(8) See Chapter Five

- (9) See Chapter Five
- (10) This word is not found in dictionaries of classical Arabic including Lisān al-<sup>c</sup>Arab. It is probably used here as a plural of قائم, that is, as a synonym for سدنة (custodian). Both words are used consecutively in the sentence: اولئك قومة صافياء وسدنة بيت النار وائمة
- (11) In his Hadīth al-Kalb, publ. in al-Mabāḥith, No.8, November, 1944, p.9.
- (12) Sūrah 18 (al-Kahf), v.22.

من عبث الوجود : من مجموعتها القصصية " صومعة تحترق " ص : 97 - 102

\* واعتدنا أن تكون الرسائل بيننا وديعة وداعة الإناسب في سذاجتها ، رقيقة رقة الينابيع في خريرها ، لطيفة لطافة الامومة في احتضان فلذاتها ، جميلة جمال الطبيعة في ريعها الزاهر ، موقعة ايقاع الموسيقى في ألحانها السكسري ، عفيفة عفة الحذر في ريعها العشرين .

ولم تكسفه رسائلك يوما على أن تكون بيضاء اللون ، صفراء لها في لونها وكلماتها ، وشذاهها وأريجها ، ومعانيها ومشاعرها وصدقها وطابعها \* فاللون فيها هو لسمون قلبك في محبته واخلاصه وتفانيه ، وفي اهتزازاته وانتفاضاته وخلجاته ، وفي تموجه ودلاله وخلقه .

ولم تكف رسائلني يوما على أن تكون وردية اللون صفراءها في لونها وكلماتها ، وشذاهها وأريجها ومعانيها ومشاعرها وصدقها وطابعها \* فاللون فيها هو لون قلبك في محبته واخلاصه وتفانيه وفي اهتزازاته وانتفاضاته وخلجاته وفي تموجه ودلاله وخلقه .

وكنيت أنا أحسب بيضاء قلبك في بيضاء رسائلك ، وكنيت أنت تحسب ثورة مشاعري في تورد رسائلني . . وكنيت أنا أنوب مع كل رسالة تأتي منك ، وأنوب مع اليبساض وكأني شمعة صغيرة من شموعات عيد الميلاد لا يطفئها الا نفس المحتفل بحبيده ، وأنا لا يطفئ نور قلبي ونار جسدي الا ما يأتي في رسائلك من عذب الاناشيد وحلو الانغام . فيهدأ روحي وتهبأ عاطفتي ويهدأ قلبي . .

وكنيت أنت تذوب مع تورد الكلمات \* وأديم الرسالة وكأنك وردة جميلة ترعياها أجمل يبد ويخسر عليها أجمل طقس وتعطف عليها أصدق المشاعر . . فتحيها \* ولا تميتمها الا يد المحب تنزعها من غصنها لتصير رمزا للمحبة عندما يهد يهدا لفتاته ، وتحيا الوردة من جديد في كلا القلبين . . ويحيا التورد للأبد في كلا القلبين ثم تذبل الوردة وتموت في ظاهرها وجنسها لكنها تبقى حية في قلب الحبيبة الصغيرة تمثل لها الحب وترمز للحب وتذكرها الحب .

" . . . واتصلت بالرسالة السوداء في يوم أسود ، واتصلت بالرسالة الكريمة

في يوم كريم واتصلت بالرسالة المشروسة في يوم مشرق .

ولكم ترددت في فتح الظرف حين لاحظت سواد لونه ، وتصورت «سواء» ما جاء فيه سواد  
الاديم وسواد الكلمات ، سواد الشذى وسواد الاريح . . . سواد المعاني . . . وسواد  
الشاعر . . . سواد الصدق وسواد الطابع . ولكنني عاهدت في نفسي الشجاعة ولو فسي  
الحب ، أي في الشعور الذي يبني كل شجاعة ، يبني كل قوة ، يبني كل عقل .  
وتشجعت . . . وقويت على نفسي وأحملت عقلي واستبسلت في لقاء المفاجأة ، وفتحمت  
الرسالة : وفتحت الرسالة ولم أندم يوماً على فتحها يا لها . . . بل بالعكس ، انها  
تمثل طورا ولو بائها من حياتي ، انها تمثل مرحلة ولو بائها من وجودي ، انها  
تمثل زمنا ولو مشروما من دنياي .

وفتحت الرسالة ، وتوقفت عند كل سطر ، كل جملة ، كل كلمة ، كل حرف ، وفهمت .  
فهمت فهمت . فهمت أن الحب لم يعد اكسير حياتك ، والاخلاص لم يعد مبدأ ذاتك ،  
وانك وضعت في الوجود وانك تهت في الكون ، وان العالم يستخف بك ، وأدركت ، أدركت  
الحقيقة أدركت مدى ما تعانيه من آلم في سبيل فهم الحقيقة . انك ضحية الوجود  
وضحية القدر . تتقاذفك الافكار وتتلاعب بعقلك الراء .

لقد أصبحت " تحيا " فلا ترى من الوجود الا الواقع . لقد أصبحت تدرك الحياة  
ومفاهيم الحياة وكنه الحياة . انك أدركت الحياة بأدراك هدف الحياة . الحياة عبث !  
الحياة روتينية ! الحياة مهزلة ! الحياة مأساة ! وأدركت كل هذا لأنك رجس ،  
لأن عقلك هو المسيطر فيك ، ولأن عقلك هو المسيطر عليك .

Text Six

Min <sup>c</sup>Abath al-Wujūd by Lailā b. Māmī.

The outstanding features of Lailā b. Māmī's prose are its musical and poetic presentation and these are well illustrated in this text which is taken from her collection entitled Sawma'a Tahtariq.

This is not surprising in view of what has been pointed out earlier in this study<sup>(13)</sup> that this writer started her literary career as a 'free-verse' poetess. Many of the phrases and sentences are measured on the pattern of some feet of classical poetic metres. For example, the phrases:

كل سطر، كل جملة، كل كلمة كل حرف in the last paragraph but one would scan perfectly into variants of the foot فاعلاتن which is one of the constituents of al-raml and al-khafīf metres.

The opening sentence of the text is as poetic in its measured vocabulary as it is musical in its refrains.

In the second sentence, there is the element of romanticism which pervades this as well as other stories by the same author. The lover's letter received on the day in question in this story<sup>(14)</sup> is black and the day itself is black in sympathy with the bad news contained in the letter.

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(13) See the chapter on feminine Tunisian short story writers.

(14) See paragraphs 1 & 2 on page 2 of the extract.



محظية السمسمار : مجلة "الفكر" السنة 15 العدد 7 ص: 2 - 26

"... هياؤه أبوه ، بعد العشاء ، للنعم هو تركه ونزل الى بيت السهارة . فلم  
ينم . وطغى تطلعه على تعب السفر . فنهض وخرج .  
السفينة ظلماء . وأبوه ومستضيفه في حديث وسمر . دخل باب الدار . فاذا وسط  
فسيح وطيف فتاة تفر منه الى الحجرة ، مطأطئة الرأس . وخرجت امها تخاضه ، كيف  
يدخل على الحرم وهو رجل . فبهت ، واستحي وكاد أن يأخذه الدمع . فخرجت اليه  
ضاحكة تقول :

- ها اوصف راجل ، هذا يتخاوم منه النساء . وضحكوا من ارتباك . وانقصر  
وسلوا عليه وادخلوه حجرة تعج بالسامرين والسامرات . فاجلسوه بينهم  
ورجعوا الى ما كانوا فيه من حديث . قال عمر ، الاخ الأكبر :

- انت خوذ راجل . واذا حب يهزك حتى لجهنم ما يمنحه حد .  
تكلست اختمهما :

- الراجل اللي باش يحجب نفيسة . مازال ما هبط من السماء .  
اجبا بتمهما :

- علاش ؟ ياخي الرجال الكل عندهم حاجب اعلى من حاجب .  
فامتعظت الاخت لتمكها على خطيبها .

- أهى ، شوف بنتك .

- الله غالب بنيتي . نفيسة ما عجبها حد . واحد خشمه كبير والآخر لحيتهم  
معوجة والآخر دقنوته مذبية والآخر اللي يخدم في الادارة . انسدى آش  
طلعت فيه من طلعية .

- قالت بيذا ديمه يرمش في عينيه .

- الآخر اللي جابه عمك التيجاني .

- هذاكه ديمه يرق . ما يرمشهمش بالكل .

تكلمت أختها الكبرى \*

— نفيسة تحب راجل يرمش عينيه بالمنقالة • كل دقيقة ترميشتين • يزي يعيشك •  
كثرت \*

— علاش كثرت • وخيتي • اللي رأيتم الكمل ما قرش عليهم قلبي • والا ولسه  
والآخرة • ولا ترميش لادقنونة مذبة • الرجال اللي خطبوني الكل • كأنه خايب  
يسخايل نفسه باهي • وكأنه باهي يحسب نفسه صمد بن ورد •  
— عداد آش يحملوا • المغابن •

— نحب راجل كانه باهي بيذا ما يعرفش اللي هو باهي وكأنه خايب • بيذا يصرف  
اللي هو خايب •  
تكلمت الصغرى •

— وهالك اللي جابلنا الحوت •

اجابت بسرعة • وبصوت خافت • لثلا تسمعها امها •

— هذاكة بالصحة • وحرجه غامق • وكيف يتكلم • يقيم يزوي • وفكوا على ماني  
ما خذه حد •

وعادت الى الطفل • تازحه • وتسأله عن بلده • وأهلها • وهيل اعجبتهم  
تونس • ثم أخذ حوارهم لهجة الترافع • هي تهجو أهل القسري • وهو يدافع  
عنهم • ففهرتها أمها • خوفا ان يأخذ في خاطره • فأجابتها أنها تفكر في  
اتخاذ زوجا لها • وامسوا في فكاهاة وأنس •

Mihfazat al-Samār by al-Bashīr Khraïf

The story from which this text is extracted was written by Khraïf as a contribution to the anniversary of the 'April 9, 1938' political demonstration against the French administration in Tunisia in which many Tunisians lost their lives. The small boy referred to in this extract is the hero of the complete story. He grows up to become involved in the nationalist movement and is one of the victims of the 1938 demonstration, but not before he has become the fiancé of the eldest daughter of the host family referred to in this extract.

The extract is very much representative of Khraïf's style and language. In the fully-published text of the story there are footnotes explaining some of the colloquial conversations in literary Arabic. This device, the author explained, was an afterthought which he resorted to after reading the discussion held at the 'Story Club' on the language controversy:   
ما اطلعت على ما دار بالمائدة المستديرة خلال فيفري ١٩٧٥ بنادي ابي القاسم الشابي حول موضوع "الانتاج الادبي وسلامة اللغة" بعد الفراغ من هذه القصة. فتلافيت ما امكن بالهامش. والعذر عند كرام القوم مقبول (١٥)

In the third paragraph of the story a bird jubilantly says in welcoming the spring:   
ها انا اذا لم يقض علي الشتاء فها هم   
للحياة يا اهل الحياة to which the author adds:

a sarcastic footnote in mockery of the defenders of the classical Arabic:

(16) الطيور تتكلم الفصحى

I have therefore dropped the literary Arabic footnotes from this extract, because they are not typical of Khraïf's stories in that they are not found in any of his other numerous long and short stories in spite of the fact that he uses basically the same language in most of them.

The historical motif of this story is one of Khraïf's favourites and it has dominated his stories majority of which are inspired by the history, ancient and modern, of Tunisia.

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- (15) See page 69 of his collection entitled Mashmūm al-Fill published by al-Dār al-Tūnisiya lil-Nashr, Tunis, 1971 in which the story is included. The footnote in the original publication of the story in al-Fikr is slightly different in its wording, but the substance is the same.
- (16) Mashmūm al-Fill, page 70

الانسان الصفيحمر : ( الفصل الثاني ) مجلة " الفكر " السنة 15 العدد 2

ص : 17 - 33

" . . . نقول كما قال سيدي ومسندى وقرة عيني عبد الرحمان بن خلمسدون ( ويحسب الخامسة من أهل العلم بالمدن أن الاعراب هو أصل البلاغة وليس كذلك ) وهذا واقع يادكتور المتدكر على العربية أعلم أن كل واحد منهما يحصل العربية في صدره لا عربية عامة ولا عربية خاصة إنما ميزوا ذلك عن ههنا من أجل مصالحهم ومرتباتهم وكراسيهم أفهمني يا أقرع في مجمع الاقارحمة والآن سأضربك بفتاح كما فعل ذلك النحوي مع المتنبي لأن مفتاحه لا يفتح شيئا إنما المسألة كيف ذهب عن حسين إلى الفبركة ففبرك في الماكينة السابقة مع باولسو ثم شرحيا المرشدين في الكميونة على كياس تونس مع الطرطرات والبسكلات والسكوتارات والكراهب ففرقا في هذا الصباح المبروك عجيبة عربية تطلع تزدرد تهضم كل شيء بفضيل مروتها وشكلها وعرابها وعدم اعرابها في هذه الدنيا الجديدة وهذه الحياة السميتي فيها الفيلات وكراهب الجقموار والهوندا وموتوافيل وهملتون والفريجيد ير على وزن البلفيد ير والاثاث الانصق الرشيق من طراز لوميس كانز من سوق النحاس حيث يضيح كل شيء في مدينة النحاس مع البروليطارين الذين يضررون الصباط على الكياس في كل صباح وهم يترنمون .

ص : 27 - 28

Text Eight

al-Insān al-Sifr by <sup>c</sup>Izz al-Dīn al-Madānī

While Khraïf is content to use the Tunisian colloquial or more appropriately, the southern (al-Jarīd) Tunisian dialect, in writing his stories, more extreme elements like al-Madānī would have neither the pure colloquial nor the classical:

" لا عربية عامة ولا عربية خاصة ... "

This extract from his al-Insān al-Sifr which has been discussed earlier in this thesis gives an idea of the kind of Arabic which al-Madānī hopes will become the "language of the future", an amalgam of classical and colloquial words as well as transcribed foreign words and proper nouns.

The extract is also a pungent attack on those who seek to standardise the Arabic language either in its colloquial or in its classical form.



"... قلم مصطفى من بقعته ودخل وراء العرصة ، فقفد على كرسي حضره له المعلم بجنبه . ثم أخذ قلم حبر وورقة جواب وزارى ، خبأها فوق أحد المرافع من الجمعة الفائتة واستعد للكتابة يستأنى فيما سيقول محمد الصالح . قال هذا " خطب الامم في موضوع الامر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر وحث المسلمين على اداء واجباتهم الدينية من صلاة وزكاة وصوم وحج وذكر الشهنشادة عند الترم لأن الترم عبارة عن موت أصغر ونبيهم الى أن الدنيا دار فنا والآخرة دار بقاء . وفي الختام دعاهم الى الالتفاف حول حبيب الأمة ومنقذها المجاهد الأكبر ... سائلا الله عز وجل أن يمدده بالصحة وطول البقاء .

ص : 116

"... صالح محمد الصالح أكثر ولا جد د عرضه . أما مصطفى فأنه خرج ليمشي في اتجاه حانوت ابن سليمان ليحصى عليه وقته . وتقابل العرف والصالح على غرفة من الرشته . وهما كذلك وإذا بالفحل يكسسه وفي جرتة شرطيان وجماعته تتبعهم زفليقة من أولاد الحومة وأهلها .

ص : 117



Text Nine

Yawn Hallāq by <sup>c</sup>Umar al-Mzayy

The story from which this extract is taken is about a pretentious barber. He has an apprentice whom he often ill-treats, but the latter soon learns how to conduct himself in order to escape his master's rough treatment.

The barber is always boasting of his acquaintance with highly-placed men in government and in the police force. He collects money from people in need of one thing or the other from local or central government offices, like, for example, obtaining a passport. In the end, he is arrested for obtaining money under false pretenses by two policemen in a scene which is an anti-climax to his career of fraud.

He asks the two policemen in astonishment: سيادتكما جدد لا  
عزفاننى انا معاون فى القسم الخامس واعرف رئيس الشرطة . اقباله  
كل يوم جمعة

to which one of the policemen reports:  
هذه حكاية قديمة واحكمها للحوت . هيا من فضلك ، ما عندنا  
وقت نضيقه

The point of interest in the extract is the language used by Mzayy.

While using the vocabulary of the Tunisian colloquial, he has completely retained the sentence structure and the i<sup>c</sup>rāb (syntax) of the classical Arabic. This experiment is unique and has not been given any serious consideration by other Tunisian writers interested in the problem of language in fiction.

It remains to be seen whether this 'classical colloquial' has any chance of becoming the language of prose literature. At the present time, it is being given a very cold reception in both camps as it does not satisfy their conditions.

\* \* \* \* \*

From the nine texts commented upon above, it is obvious that the classical maqāma genre featured prominently in the early history of the Tunisian short story - this is attested to by the two texts, the first of which was published in 1937 by an unnamed writer and the other by Bakīr in the forties; and secondly, that the language controversy seems to have dominated the content of many of the Tunisian stories published in second half of the sixties as evident from the last three extracts in this section.

### APPENDIX III

#### THE SPREAD OF ARABIC IN THE EARLY ISLAMIC EMPIRE

With the spread of Islam beyond the Arabian peninsula, the Arabic language was also spread alongside by the Arab scholars and soldiers who fought the Islamic wars of expansion as most of them settled in the conquered territories. Since the Qur'ān was, and still is, the "Bible, prayer-book, delectus, and first law-book of Muslims of whatever sect",<sup>1</sup> its language, Arabic, became a world language and the common literary language of all Muslim peoples.

Many of the Arab soldiers still retained their original tribal dialects and so the literary Arabic was preserved and spread only by the learned scholars and the administrative class since Arabic became the language of the government and administration of the Muslim empire which soon extended as far westwards as Spain. In places where Arabic succeeded in permanently replacing the original languages of the conquered and Islamised territories (from Iraq in the east to Morocco in the west), the effect of the dialectal Arabic of the Arab soldiery and the traces of the indigenous tongues of the peoples on whom Arabic was superimposed combined

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1. H.A.R.Gibb, Arabic Literature, O.U.P. 1966 ed, p.37.

to produce in each area a colloquial Arabic with its own peculiar characteristics. The regional variations in the Arabic dialects did not, however, seriously affect the 'High Arabic' which was further perfected by successive generations of Arabic scholars and rendered more flexible to cope with the cultural and literary blossom enjoyed by Arabic literature between the middle of the 8th century and the 11th century which even involved translating many Greek philosophical texts such as those of Aristotle, Plato and Galen into Arabic.<sup>2</sup>

### The Tunisian Arabic Dialect

The Arabisation of Tunisia resulted in the evolution of a local Tunisian dialect which has all the traces of the country's cultural background. Its vocabulary include words whose origin goes back to the various ethnic groups that inhabited the country before the Arabs brought Islam and their language, namely : the Berbers, the Phoenicians (Carthaginians) and even such pre-Islamic invaders as the Romans and Byzantians. The influx of Spanish Muslim immigrants also brought many words of Spanish origin into the Tunisian Arabic dialect and the increased commercial and political contacts with Europe led to the absorption of European, especially Italian and French words into the dialect. The Turkish rule over the country from the 16th century also left traces of Turkish language in the

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2. P.K. Hitti, op.cit., pp.311f.

3. al-Amal supplement for 27/6/69, and M.F.Ghāzī's article in al-Fikr, May 1959, pp. 40 and 41.

Regarding the classical Arabic content of the Tunisian dialect, it has retained the classical consonant system more perfectly than the spoken Arabic of any other country in the Maghreb.<sup>4</sup> Among its peculiar characteristics are the pronunciation of 'q' as a post-palatial 'g' as in 'Qafsa' (the name of a south Tunisian town) which is pronounced as 'Gafsa' and nāqa (camel) pronounced as nāga. The letter 'j' is treated as a solar letter and has the tendency to pass into 'z' in words which already contain this sound as in for example, jawz (walnut) which is pronounced zūz and jihāz (equipment, and in Tunisian colloquial, a bridal outfit) which becomes zihāz.

There is also the tendency to drop the first short vowel of most words. For examples, adhāb (suffering) becomes dhāb; ashā (dinner) becomes shā and halīb (milk) becomes hlīb. In addition, the second long vowel of the plural noun on the measure of mafā'il is often reduced to a short vowel. For example, asāfir (sparrows) becomes sāfir. The two diphthongs aw and ay are respectively reduced to 'u' and 'i' as in yawmain (two days) which becomes yūmin.

In the verbal system, the conjugation in the first persons aorist tense is naf'al for the first person

4. E.I. art. 'Tunisia', under the sub-title 'Spoken Arabic'.

singular and naḥ<sup>c</sup>alū for the first person plural.<sup>5</sup>

The nunation (tanwīn) and declensions in general (al-ḥ<sup>c</sup>rāb) have disappeared as with the colloquial Arabic in most parts of the Arab world.<sup>6</sup> In Tunisia, some traces are however still to be found in certain adverbial accusatives where the vowel of the old termination has survived, sometimes even lengthened as in dā'imān (always) which becomes dīma or dīmā.

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5. Cf. H. Stummes, Grammatik des Tunisischen Arabisch, Leipzig, 1896, pp.7ff.

6. On the complete disappearance of the case-endings, see S.Garmādī, 'Etude Lexical de "al-Qirā'a..." Premier Livre de Lecture Arab', in Cahier de C.E.R.E.S. No.1, Oct. 1968, pp.17-51.

QUICK REFERENCE ON KEY TUNISIAN WRITERS WHOSE SHORT STORIES AND TRANSLATIONS ARE DISCUSSED IN THIS THESIS

Chapter Three

BIN SHA<sup>C</sup>BĀN (IBRĀHĪM FAHMĪ), 1892-1930. Born in Tunis. Studied at both al-Zaitūna and al-Sādiqiya. He wrote adaptations from French sources.

AL-JA<sup>C</sup>Ā'IBĪ (MUHAMMAD), 1878-1938. He wrote adaptations from French sources.

AL-JĀDAWĪ (SULAIMĀN). He was a newspaper proprietor and all his stories which were published in the pre-world war one period were on the theme of opposition to the French colonial administration in Tunisia.

MANĀSHŪ (MUHAMMAD), 1894-1933. Born in Tunis. Although I succeeded in tracing only one light entertainment story written by him, it was nonetheless the best Tunisian short story in the pre-world war one period.

AL-MUSHAIRIQĪ (MUHAMMAD), 1885-?. Studied at al-Zaitūna and al-Sādiqiya. He translated French and Russian stories into Arabic.

SUWAISĪ (SĀLIH B. <sup>C</sup>UMAR), 1880-1940. Born in al-Qairawān. He was an advocate of socio-political reforms and he wrote his stories on this theme.

Chapter Four

AL<sup>C</sup>ARĪBĪ (MUHAMMAD, alias IBN TŪMART), ?-1945. He was a graduate of al-Zaitūna. His stories reflected the carefree attitude and the 'anti-tradition' mood among the Tunisian youths of the thirties.

BAIRAM (MAHMŪD). He was one of the 'rebel' group of Tunisian youths in the thirties. He is believed to be the author of many anonymous maqāmāt published in 1936/37 with the theme of the disintegration of some traditional elite associations.

BIN SALIM (AL-TĪJĀNĪ). He was better-known for his literary essays on the story.

AL-BASHRŪSH (MUHAMMAD °ABD AL-KHĀLIQ), 1911-1944. Born in Dār Sha<sup>c</sup>bān village near Hammāmāt. He was a trained teacher. In most of his stories, he portrayed the life of the countryside peasants.

KHRAĪF (MUṢṬAFĀ), 1909-1957. Born in Nefta in Southern Tunisia. Educated at al-Zaitūna and al-Khaldūnīy. He wrote some of his stories about pre-arranged marriages and others about unconventional characters in the countryside.

AL-SHĀBBĪ (ABŪ °L-QĀSIM), 1909-1934. A graduate of al-Zaitūna. He is better known for his poetry. His stories were characterised by the romanticism and positivism of his poetry.

ZARRŪQ (MUHAMMAD). Born in al-Qairawān. His stories were about what he considered to be the evils of the class system.

### Chapter Five

BŪ GHADĪR (TAWFĪQ). He is a professional journalist whose contribution to the Tunisian short story in the forties contained sketches of domestic feminine intrigues.

AL-DŪ°AJĪ (°ALĪ), 1909-1949. Born in the capital of Tunisia, he was a self-taught story-writer whose works portray a unique picture of the Tunisian society of the forties. Most Tunisian critics regard him as the 'father of the Tunisian Arabic short story'.

KARABĀKA (°ABD AL-RAZZĀQ), 1901-1945. He was educated in al-Zaitūna and became a journalist and trade unionist in the late twenties and early thirties. Most of his stories were in defence of his views on life and society.

AL-MARZŪQĪ (MUHAMMAD). Born in 1916 in Southern Tunisia. He was educated at the Zaitūna mosque-university. He is a journalist, politician and civil servant. His stories present a picture of the Tunisian society in its period of intellectual, social and political fermentation, the conflicts between the old and the new and some of the social problems that beset his society.



AL-MAS<sup>c</sup>ADĪ (MAHMUD). Born at Tazarka in 1911, he was educated in Tunis and France. Trade unionist, politician and a man of letters, his stories and plays, most of which were published in the forties, were concerned with philosophical issues and with probing the myst and meaning of life itself.

### Chapter Six

AL-FĀRISĪ (MUṢṬAFĀ). Born in Sfax in 1931. After his secondary education in his home town, he went to France for higher studies. His stories show his concern for the poor and the social privations they suffer.

AL-GHĀLĪ (RASHĪD). A post-independence writer whose stories have the theme of the conflict of generations.

GUIGA (AL-TĀHIR). He was born in Takrūna in 1922 and was educated locally and in France. He is now a senior civil servant. His short stories, published at about the time of the Tunisian independence, summed up the feelings of many a poor unemployed Tunisian in the mid-fifties.

AL-HAMZĀWĪ (MUḤAMMAD RASHĀD). Born in Tāla in 1934. Educated in Tunisia, France and Holland. He now works as a University teacher. His stories are mostly about countryside people and in particular, the unhappy experiences of those of them who migrate to the townships in search of employment.

KHRAĪF (AL-BASHĪR). Born in Nefta in 1917. He is Muṣṭafā Khraīf's brother. He is a trained teacher. He avoids the theme of politics in his stories which depict in historical perspective, the lives of different classes of the Tunisian society. He is the 'chief advocate' for the use of Tunisian colloquial Arabic in the story.

NAṢR (HASAN). Born in 1936. Educated at al-Zaitūna and at the University of Baghdād. He is at present a teacher. His stories on nationalism and social conditions attempt to recapture the mentality and imagination of the very young who constitute his major characters.

AL-SHĀDHILĪ (MUḤAMMAD FARAJ). Born in al-Qairawān in 1927. He has shown himself a disciple of al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī in the style of many of his stories. His main characters are the poor and the needy.

AL-TRIKĪ (MUHAMMAD AL-TAYYIB). He is a senior civil servant. All of his short stories, published at about the time of the Tunisian independence, demonstrates his concern for the less fortunate members of the Tunisian society.

### Chapter Seven

<sup>c</sup>AZŪZ (MRS HIND). She was born into an old conservative family in the Tunisian capital and her upbringing followed the traditional pattern of keeping women and girls in-doors. She was instructed in literary Arabic by a private tutor employed for her by her parents. Her stories are a faithful recollection of her conservative upbringing although she advocates in them some moderation of extremely indefensible aspects of the traditional treatment of women.

BIN MĀMĪ (MISS LAİLĀ). Born on the small Tunisian Island of Jarba in 1944, she was educated up to first degree level at the University of Tunis. She is at present a journalist on al-Amal newspaper. Her short stories are the women's lib stuff and they portray her open contempt for any tradition or custom that seeks to curtail her freedom as a woman.

THĀMIR (MRS NĀJĪYA). Syrian by birth, Algerian by marriage and Tunisian by naturalisation, she is by far the most prolific woman short story writer in Tunisia. Her literary career goes back to 1948. Most of her stories are contrived to give moral instruction to women.

### Chapter Eight

AL-MADANĪ (<sup>c</sup>IZZ AL-DĪN). He was born in 1938 in Tunis. He is now on the staff of the Arts and Literature section of the Tunisian Ministry of State for Cultural Affairs and Information. He is the most outstanding (and the most controversial) among the Tunisian youths whose stories are highly influenced by the French nouveau-roman school of writers. He tries to project his ideas on the 'modernisation' of the Arabic language and of the story-writing technique in his stories.

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<u>Abū Nuwās</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1908
<u>al-Ādab</u>	(Monthly)	Beirut, 1953-
<u>al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam</u>	(monthly)	Tunis, Feb. 1930.
<u>al-<sup>c</sup>Ālam al-Adabī</u>	(monthly, then weekly)	Tunis, 1930-1936
<u>al-<sup>c</sup>Amal</u>	(daily)	Tunis, 1955-
<u>al-<sup>c</sup>Arab</u>	(monthly)	Tunis, 1923
<u>al-Badr</u>	(monthly)	Tunis, 1920-22
<u>Cahiers de C.E.R.E.S.</u>	(irregularly)	Tunis, 1968-
<u>Les Cahiers de Tunisie</u>	(quarterly)	Tunis, 1953-
<u>al-Dustūr</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1937
<u>al-Fajr</u>	(monthly)	Tunis, 1920-22
<u>al-Fikr</u>	(monthly)	Tunis, 1955-
<u>al-Hādīra</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1888-1910
<u>Hawliyyāt al-Jāmi<sup>c</sup>at al-Tūnisīya</u>	(yearly)	Tunis, 1964-
<u>IBLA</u>	(quarterly) bi-annually from 1968) 1938-67	Tunis, 1938-
<u>al-Idā<sup>c</sup>a wa 'l-Talfaza</u>	(bi-monthly)	Tunis, 1959-
<u>al-Iḥām</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1955
<u>Khair al-Dīn</u>	(monthly)	Tunis, 1906
<u>al-Mabāhith</u>	(monthly)	Tunis, 1944-47
<u>al-Manār</u>	(monthly)	Cairo, 1898-1936
<u>al-Masrah wa 'l-Sīnimā</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1947-48
<u>al-Munīr</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1926-28
<u>Murshid</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1907
<u>Murshid al-Umma</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1910

<u>al-Nadwa</u>	(monthly)	Tunis, 1953-57
<u>ORIENT</u>	(termly)	Paris, 1957-
<u>al-Qairawān</u>	(weekly)	al-Qairawān, 1920-24
<u>al-Qalam al-Hurr</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1938
<u>Qisāṣ</u>	(termly)	Tunis, 1966-
<u>al-Sabāh</u>	(daily)	Tunis, 1951-
<u>al-Sabra</u>	(weekly)	al-Qairawān 1937-38
<u>al-Sardūk</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1937
<u>al-Sawāb</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1904, 1911
<u>al-Shabāb</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1937-38
<u>al-Surūr</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1936
<u>al-Tajdīd</u>	(monthly)	Tunis, 1961-62
<u>al-Taḡaddum</u>	(daily)	Tunis, 1907
<u>al-Tatawwur al-Ijtimā<sup>c</sup>ī</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1936
<u>al-Thaqāfa</u>	(irregularly)	Tunis, 1969-
<u>al-Thurayyā</u>	(monthly)	Tunis, 1943-50
<u>al-Uṣbū<sup>c</sup></u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1945-50
<u>al-Watan</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1937
<u>al-Wazīr</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1920-?
<u>al-Zamān</u>	(weekly)	Tunis, 1930-?

#### IV TUNISIAN NOVELS & COLLECTIONS OF SHORT STORIES

<sup>c</sup> Ammār ( <sup>c</sup> Abd al-Rahmān), <u>Warda wa Rasasāt</u> ,	Tunis, 197
<sup>c</sup> Azūz (Hind), <u>Fi 'l-Darb al-Tawīl</u>	Tunis, 196
al-Dū <sup>c</sup> ājī ( <sup>c</sup> Alī), <u>Sahirtu minhu 'l-Layālī</u>	Tunis, 196



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- " al-Mun<sup>c</sup>arij (novel) Tunis, 1966
- al-Hamzāwī (Rashād), Bū Dūda Māta (novel) Tunis, 1962
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- al-Mas<sup>c</sup>adī (Maḥmūd), al-Sudd (play) Tunis, 1955
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- " al-Tūt al-Murr (novel) Tunis, 1967
- " Wa Min al-Dahāyā " Tunis, 1956
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- <sup>c</sup>Umrān (al-Tāhir <sup>c</sup>Alī), al-Shaikh Karāma, Tunis, 1970

I. A. OGUNBIYI

Ph. D.

- (53) ق : سرقت له ماله  
(54) ح ، ق : ان العرض  
(55) ق : عن  
(56) ح ، ق : وانت  
(57) ق : ان الشريعة التي تعلم  
(58) ق : في  
(59) ق : هداك  
(60) ق : « ولا ناكل منها سقوا » ؟  
(61) ما بين القوسين سقط من : ق  
(62) ح ، ق : بالعناوين  
(63) م : تحبى ؟ وما اثبته عن ح و ق  
(64) ما بين النجمتين زيادة عن : ق وبدونها لا يستقيم السياق  
(65) ح ، ق : لتلك  
(66) م : ينتصب وهو تصحيف وفي ق : ينصف والمثبت عن ح  
(67) م ، ح : فيها والمنبت عن ق  
(68) ق : اذن لذكرتها  
(69) ق : حتى اخذ  
(70) ق : يستطيع



- (20) م : يسهرون وما اثبتته عن ح و ق  
 (21) ق : فخرا  
 (22) ق : فرزاتها  
 (23) ما بين المعقفين ساقط من ح و ق  
 (24) ما بين القوسين ساقط من ق  
 (25) ح ، ق : ذات يوم  
 (26) ق : يا ليت  
 (27) م : جنيته وهو تصحيف  
 (28) م : تغفر لي ، ولعل الصواب ما اثبتته  
 (29) ما بين المعقفين ساقط من ح و ق  
 (30) ق : تشتمل  
 (31) ما بين المعقفين ساقط من ح و ق  
 (32) ق : مرقعها  
 (33) ح : من  
 (34) ق : من  
 (35) م : المواحين وما اثبتته عن ح و ق  
 (36) م ، ح : فصرفت وما اثبتته عن ق  
 (37) م : الصحة وما اثبتته عن ح ووردت العبارة في : ق هكذا : « عز السعادة وسعادة المتعة ، ؟ »

- (38) ق : عشية وضحاها  
 (39) ما بين المعقفين ساقط من ح و ق  
 (40) ح : اشقى الاول ، ق : اشقى من الاول  
 (41) ق : « ... بالسهر وملات احشاءها »  
 (42) ما بين المعقفين ساقط من ح ، و في ق : قاده  
 (43) ح : اصيب  
 (44) ح ، ق : الاخير  
 (45) ق : فسبقت  
 (46) ق : شاء  
 (47) كذا في الاصل و في ح و ق : شوهت ولعلها : شردت  
 (48) ق : ان  
 (49) ما بين المعقفين ساقط من ح ، ق  
 (50) ق : برعدة  
 (51) ح ، ق : ما  
 (52) ق : انت



ثم قام من مجلسه بنفس غير نفسه وقلب غير قلبه . وما هي إلا أيام قلائل حتى هجر القاضي منصبه بحجة المرض . وما زال يسعى سعيه حتى ضم اليه ابنته واستخلص حبيبته الاولى من قرارتها وهاجر بها الى بلد لا يعرفهما فيه (67) احد فتزوج بها وانس بعشرتها واحترف في دار هجرته بحرفة لولا ان ادل عليه اذا ذكرتها لذكرتها (68) . ولا زال حتى اليوم (69) يكفر عن سيئاته الى زوجته بكل ما يستطيعه (70) من صنوف العطف والموان الاحسان حتى نسيا ما فات . ولم يبق امامهما الا ما هو آت .

«المعري»



\* كذا ورد عنوان القصة في الاصل وفي : ح ، ق : « فكاكة في مجلس القضاء » .

- (I) ح ، ق : مشتمل
- (2) ح ، ق : الرفاهية
- (3) ح ، ق : فتعلقها
- (4) ق : تفارقا
- (5) ح ، ق : روايتهما
- (6) ح ، ق : مسرح
- (7) ح ، ق : اجنحتها
- (8) ح ، ق : يضطرم
- (9) ق : فلا
- (10) م : افض وما اثبتته عن ح ، ق
- (11) ق : الداجنة
- (12) ق : فلبست
- (13) م : الجاملة وما اثبتته عن : ح
- (14) ما بين القوسين ساقط من : ق
- (15) ق : كما
- (16) ق : حياته
- (17) م : الى وما اثبتته عن ح ، ق
- (18) م ، ح : آمالها والاصلاح عن : ق
- (19) ساقط من : ح و ق

اكبر مني جناية واعظم مني جرما . ان الرجل الذي سرقت ماله (53) يستطيع ان يعزي نفسها عنه باسترداده او الاعتياض عنه ، اما الفتاة التي سرقت عرضها يا مولانا القاضي فلا عزاء لها ، لان العرض (54) المذهب لا يعود .

نفسه

لولاك لما سرقت ماله ولا وصلت الى ما اليه وصلت ، فاترك كرسيك لغيرك وقف بجانب ليحاكمنا القضاء على (55) جريمة واحدة انت (56) مدبرها وانا المسخرة فيها .

اي شريعة تعلم (57) اننا شركاء في الجريمة ثم تاتي بنا الى (58) هذا المكان فتوقف احدا في اشرف المواقف وتوقف الاخر في ادناها ، شريعة ظالمة لا علاقة بينها وبين العدل .

رايتك حين دخلت الى هذا المكان وسمعت الحاجب يصرخ لمقدمك ويستنهض الصفوف للقيام لك . ورايت نفسي حين دخلت والعيون تزدريني والقلوب تحتقرني فقلت : يا للعجب : كم تكذب العناوين وكم تخدع ! وكم يعيش هذا العالم في ضلالة عمياء وجهالة جهلاء . بخ . بخ . لاولئك القوم الذين منحوك هذه الشهادة شهادة العلم والفضل والاخلاق والآداب .

ومرحى مرحى لاولئك الذين اعدوك هذا المقعد ووضعوا بين يديك هذا القانون واوقفوا امامك هذا الشرطي ياتمر بامرك وينفذ حكمك ويجري على هواك (59) .

ان تحت هذه الثياب التي تلبسونها معشر القضاة نفوسا ليست باضعف من نفوسنا شرا ولا باقل منها سقوطا (60) وربما ( لا ) (61) يكون بيننا وبين الكثير منكم فرق الا العناوين (62) والالقب والشمائل والازياء .

اتيت بي الى هنا لتحكم علي بالسجن كانه لم يكفك ما اسلفت الي من الشقاء حتى اردت ان تجيء (63) بلا حق لذلك السابق .

الم احسن اليك بساعة من ساعات السرور فترعاها ... الم تكن انسانا فترثي لشقائي وبلائي . ان لم تكن عندي وسيلة اتقرب بها اليك فوسيلتي اليك ابنتك فهي الصلة الباقية بيني وبينك .

فرفع القاضي راسه الى ابنته الصغيرة ونظر اليها (64) نظرة شفقة ورحمة وقد قرر في نفسه ان لا يد له من ان ينصف قلبك (65) البائسة وينتصف (66) لها من نفسه غير انه اراد ان يخلص من هذا الموقف خلوصا مستقرا ، فاعلن ان المرأة مجنونة وان لا بد من احالتها على الطبيب فصدق الناس قوله .

فلم تزل ترسل اليها عقاربها وتثبت في نفسها عزائمها ورقاها حتى غلبتها على امرها وقادتها الى منزلها فما هي الا عشية او ضحاها (38) حتى بلغت الغاية التي لا مقر لها [ ولامثالها ] (39) من بلوغها .

عاشت تلك البائسة في منزلها الجديد عيشا اشقى [ من عيشها ] (40) الاول في منزلها القديم ، لانها ما كانت تستطيع ان تزود لقمته التي هي كل ما حصلت عليه في دورها الثاني ، الا اذا بذلت راحتها وشردت نومها واحرقت دماغها بالسهر واحشاءها (41) بالشراب وصبرت على كل من [ يسوقه ] (42) اليها حظها من اشرار الرجال وذنابهم على اختلاف صورهم وتنوع اخلاقهم . ولكنها لم تر لها بدا من ذلك فاستسلمت استسلام البائس الذي لم يترك له دهره الى الرجاء سييلا .

ولو ان الدهر وقف معها عند هذا الحد لالفت الشقاء ومرنت عليه كما يالفة ويمرن عليه كل من اصيب بمثل ما اصببت (43) به . ولكنه ابى الا ان يسقيها الكاس الاخيرة (44) من كؤوس شقائه فساق اليها رجلا كان ينقم عليها شائنا من شؤون شهواته ولدائه فزعم انها سرقت كيس نقوده في احدى لياليه عندها ورفع امرها الى القضاء واستعان عليها ببعض خصومها كشهود عليها .

جاء يوم المحاكمة فسيقت (45) المرأة الى المحكمة وفي يدها فتاتها ، وقد بلغت السابعة من عمرها فاخذ القاضي ينظر في القضايا ويحكم فيها بما يشاء (46) ويشاء له قانونه او ذمته حتى اتى دور الفتاة فادناها منه فما وقع بصرها عليه حتى شرمت (47) عن نفسها والم بها من الاضطراب والحيرة ما كاد يذهب برشدها .

ذلك انها عرفت وعرفت انه (48) ذلك المفتى سبب شقائها وعلة بلائها فنظرت اليه نظرة شرراء ثم صرخت صرخة دوى بها المكان دويا . وقالت : رويدك مولانا القاضي . ليس لك ان تكون حكما في قضيتي لان كلانا ! سارق وكلانا خائن والخائن لا يقضي على الخائن والمص لا يصلح ان يكون قاضيا بين اللصوص ، فعجب القاضي لهذا المنظر الغريب وغضب لهذه الجسارة [ العجيبة ] (49) . وهم ان يدعو الشرطي لخراجها فجرت قناعها عن وجهها فنظرت اليه نظرة شرراء ثم صرخت صرخة دوى بها المكان دويا . وقالت : وسكن في كرسيه سكون المحتضر على سرير الموت وعادت الفتاة الى اتمام حديثها فقالت :

انا سارقة المال (51) واثنت سارق العرض والعرض اثن من المال فانت (52)



ان كان في العالم وجود افضل منه المعدم فهو وجودي  
لقد كان لي قبل اليوم سبيل الى النجاة من الحياة . اما اليوم وقد اصبحت  
اما فلا سبيل .

أقتل نفسي فاقتل طفلي ام احيا بجانبها هذه الحياة المريرة ؟  
لا احسب الموت تاركى حتى ياخذ بيدي فماذا يكون حال طفلي من بعدي ؟  
انها ستعيش عيشي وتشقى شقائي لا لذنب جنته (27) ولا لجريمة اجترمتها  
سوى أنني أمها .

ايتها الفتاة ، هل تعيشين حتى تغفري (28) لي ذنب امومتي حينما تسمعين  
قصتي وتفهمين شكايتي ؟ لم يبق في يدي ، يا بنيتي ، من حلاي الا قليل سايبعه  
كما بعث سابقه فكيف يكون شائي وشانك بعد اليوم ؟

محال ان اعود الى ابي فاقص عليه قصتي ، لانه لم يبق لي مما يعزيني  
عن شقاء العيش وبلائه . الا ان اهلي لا يعرفون شيئا من امري . فهم ييكونوني  
كما ييكون موتاهم الاعزاء ولان ييكونوا مماتي خير لي ولهم من ان ييكونوا حياتي  
وكذلك ظلت تلك البائسة تحدث نفسها تارة وطفلتها تارة اخرى بمثل هذا  
الحديث المحزن حتى غلبها صبرها على امرها فارسلت من جفنيها قطرات حارة  
من الدموع هي كل ما يملك الضعفاء ويقدر عليه البؤساء [ (29) .

دارت الايام دورتها ، وباعت الفتاة جميع ما تملك يدها وما يحمل بدنها  
ومما تشمل (30) غرفتها من حلي وثياب واثاث ولم يبق [ لها ] (31) الا  
قمصاتها الخلقان وملاءتها وبرقعها (32) ولم يبق لطفلتها الا ثياب باليات تنم  
عن جسمها نميمة الوجه عن (33) السريرة ، فكانت تقضي ليلتها شر قضاء  
حتى اذا طار غراب الليل عن (34) مجثمه اسدلت برقعها على وجهها وانقررت  
بمئزرها وانشأت تطوف شوارع المدينة وتقطع طرقها لا تبتغي مقصدا ولا تريد  
غاية سوى الفرار بنفسها من همها ، وهمها لا يزال يسائرهما ويترسم مواقع  
اقدامها . واتفق ان عجوزا من عجائز المواخير (35) رأتها فالت بيعض شأنها  
فاقتفت اثرها ، فهجمت عليها . ثم سالتها ما خطبها فانست . وهكذا يانس  
المصدور بنفثاته والبائس بشكايته ... فكشفت لها عن نفسها والقت اليها  
بخبيئة صدرها . ولم تترك خبرا من اخبار نعيمها ولا حادثا من حوادث  
بؤسها لم تحدثها به . فعرفت (36) الفاجرة محنتها ، ورات بعينها ذلك الماء  
من الحسن الذي يجول في وجهها جولان الخمر وراء زجاجته . وعلمت انها  
ان احزنتها في منزلها فقد احزنت لنفسها عن الدهر وسعادة المتعة (37) .

ذلك ما اسهر ليلها واقض (10) مضجعها وملك عليها وجدانها وشعورها ، فلم تر له بدا من الفرار بنفسها والنجاة بحياتها ، فعمدت الى ليلة من الليالي المداجية (11) فلبستها (12) وتلفعت يردائها ثم رمت بنفسها في بحرها الاسود ، فما زالت امواجها تتلقفها وتترامى بها حتى قذفت بها على شاطئ الصخر فاذا هي في غرفة في ( احدى المنازل البالية في الاحياء الخاملة (13) واذا هي وحيدة في ( (14) عرفت لا مؤنس لها الا ذلك الهم المضطرب وذلك الجنين المضطرب .

كان (15) لها ام تحنو عليها وتتفقد شانها وتجزع لجزعها وتبكي لبكائها ففارقتها . وكان لها اب لا هم له في حياتها (16) الا (17) ان يراها سعيدة بآمالها (18) مغتبطة برغباتها فهاجرت منزله . وكان لها خدم يقمن [عليها] (19) ويسهرن (20) بجانبها فاصبحت لا تسامر غير الوحدة ولا تسامر غير الوحشة . وكان لها شرف يؤنسها ويملا قلبها غبطة وسرورا ورأسها عظمة وفخارا (21) ففقدته . وكان لها امل في زواج سعيد بزواج محبوب فرزتها (22) الايام في املها .

[ ذلك ما كانت تناجي نفسها به في صباحها ومساءها وبكورها واصائلها فاذا بدا لها ان تصرف علة مصائبها وسبب احزانها علمت انه ذلك المضرب الذي وعدها ان يتزوجها فخدعها عن نفسها ثم لم يوف بعده فقذف بها وبكل ما تملك يمينها الى هذا المصير .

فلا يكاد يستقر ذلك الخاطر في فؤادها ويأخذ مكانه من نفسها حتى تشعر بجذوة تنقد بين جنبيها من الحقد والوجدة على صاحبها لانه قتلها ، وعلى المجتمع الانساني لانه لا يعاقب القاتل على جرمه ولا يسلكه في سلسلة المجرمين ] (23) .

وما هي الا ايام قلائل حتى جاءها المخاض فولدت وليدتها من حيث لا ترى بين يديها احدا يأخذ بيدها ويساعدها على خطبها غير عجوز من جاراتها أملت بشانها فوفدت اليها واعانتها على امرها بضع ساعات ثم فارقتها تكابد ( على فراش مرضها ما تكابد ) (24) وتعاني من صروف دهرها ما تعاني . ولقد ضاق صدرها ذرعا بهذا الضيف الجديد وهو احب المخلوقات اليها واكثرهم قربا الى نفسها فجلس ذات ليلة (25) وقد حملت طفلتها النائمة على حجرها واستندت رأسها الى كتفها تقول في نفسها :

ليت (26) امي لم تلدني وليتني لم اكن شيئا .  
[ لو لا وجودي ما سعدت ولو لا سعادتني ما شقيت .

(4) وقد استعملت اثناء المقارنة الرموز التالية :  
« م » يرمز الى جريدة « مرشد الامة » وهو النص المعتمد في المقارنة .  
« ح » يرمز الى النص المنشور في كتاب « الحركة الادبية والفكرية في تونس » (3) .

« ق » يرمز الى النص المنشور في العدد العاشر من مجلة قصص جانفي 1969 (4) .

[ يرمز الى ما سقط من النصين « ح » و « ق » .  
~~« ح » و « ق »~~ .  
( يرمز الى ما سقط من احد النصين « ح » أو « ق » .  
ترميزان الى زيادة يقتضيها السياق او اخذت عن « ق » .

اسحاق اوغنييه

جامعة لندن

معهد الدراسات الشرقية والافريقية

## \* فكاة مجلس القضاء \*

علم فلان وكان شابا من شبان الخلاعة واللهو وقاضيا من قضاة المحاكم ان المنزل الذي يجاور منزله يشتمل (1) على فتاة حسناء من ذوات الثراء والنعمة والرفاهة (2) والمرغد . فرنسا اليها النظرة الاولى فتعلق بها (3) فكررها اخرى . فبلغت منه فتراسلا ثم تزاورا ثم افترقا (4) وقد ختمت روايتها (5) بما تختم به كل رواية غرامية يمثلها ابناء آدم وحواء على مرسح (6) هذا الوجود .

عادت الفتاة الى اهلها تحمل بين جانحتها (7) هما يضطرم في قوادها ، وجنينا يضطرب (8) في احشائها . ولقد يكون لها الى كتمان الاول سبيل . اما الثاني فسر مذاع وحديث مشاع اذا اتسعت له الصدور لا (9) تتسع له البطون . وان ضن به اليوم لا يضمن به الغد .

(3) : الحركة الادبية والفكرية ( قسم النصوص الادبية ) ص : 75 - 79

(4) : مجلة « قصص » عدد جانفي 1969 ص : 87 - 93

ومن المفيد ابداء الملاحظات التالية :

(I) ان القصة نشرت في العدد 23 من الجريدة المذكورة بتاريخ II افريل سنة 1910 ص 3 و 4 وليست في العدد 25 كما ورد في تقديم « قصص » للنص المنشور فيها . ويوجد هذا العدد ( اي 23 ) في المكتبة الوطنية تحت رقم 378 .

(2) ان هذه القصة ليست ممضاة بالاسم الصريح للشيخ محمد مناشو بل هي ممضاة بامضاء مستعار « المعري » . ولعل الفضل الاول يعود الى الشيخ ابن عاشور الذي كشف لنا عن اسمه الصريح . والشيخ ابن عاشور كما هو معروف له معرفة واسعة باساليب ادباء تونس القدامى والمحدثين مع معرفة بدخائل الحياة الادبية والفكرية في تونس .

(3) ان عنوان القصة قد ورد في جريدة « مرشد الامة » « فكاهاة مجلس القضاء » بدون حرف « في » الوارد بين الكلمتين « فكاهاة » و « مجلس » حسب ما جاء في كتاب « الحركة الادبية » و مجلة « قصص » .

(3) ويجدر بي ان اضيف الى ما جاء في مجلة « قصص » عن حياة الشيخ مناشو ما يلي :

(أ) ان محمد مناشو توفي في شهر جوان 1933 (I) .

(ب) يحسن بي ان اورد هنا - اتماما للفائدة - ما وصفه به الشيخ ابن عاشور في كتابه المذكور عند حديثه عن النثر الفني في تونس وتطوره قبيل الحرب العالمية الاولى :

« ... ولعل المفرد بين اصحاب الاقلام الصحفية الذي لم تنقطع لفتته الى ناحية النثر الفني ، هو ذلك الكاتب الذي عرفنا ان هوايته الكتابية كانت بالفن للفن ، وهو الشيخ مناشو ، فكان ينشر احيانا قطعاً من النثر الفني القائم على تخيل القصص والمخاورات ، وينشر احيانا مقالات في الاحداث السياسية الكبرى يجنح في تحريرها الى الطريقة الفنية البلاغية . وقد ولسع بالمحسنات البديعة . ونما فيه هذا الولع حتى اقام آثاره الكتابية على تزيين الفن القولي بزخرف القرائنيم ، فكانت له اليد الطولى في فن السجع المزيج ، الذي بلغ فيه اوج الاجادة ، وخفف من ثقل وطائه على قلمه ، ما كان له من معرفة واسعة باللغة ، ومقدرة على حسن التصرف في مفرداتها ، وممارسة مدينة لفنون البلاغة والادب ، زيادة على حسه المزهف في النقد بملكة الذوق المجرد » (2) .

(I) : جريدة « الوزير » عدد 381 بتاريخ I جوان 1933

(2) : « الحركة الادبية في تونس » ص : 108 - 109

محمد مناشو

## فكامة مجلس القضاء

تحقيق وتقديم

إسحاق أغنييه

فصله مستخرجة من مجلة «فلسف» عدد 22  
جانفي 1972

ضفادع النوم تقفز في احداقها .  
سرطان الشلل يغازل اطرافها  
الهوة النارية وراءها تتسع .  
اصوات الزبانية تهز اركان الجبل .  
الامل المالح المر يشدها الى فوق ...  
رجلاها تدوران في حركة حمقاء ...  
الرمال المتحركة تطحن الحركات المذعورة والذعر يديرها في حركة دائرية  
معوجة ....  
ابتسمت من اعماق عينيها المتعبتين المغلوبتين .  
- ماذا لو انزلتني الرمال المتحركة الى جوفها ...  
انسا لن اموت ما دمت ارفض ذلك .

عروسية النالوتي

71 - 9 - 15



# فكاهة مجلس القضاء

حققتها وقدم لها : اسحاق اوغنييه

تعتبر قصة « فكاهة مجلس القضاء » من باكورات القصة التونسية . ونظرا لاهميتها هذه ، نشرتها مجلة « قصص » في العدد العاشر جانفي 1969 نقلا عن النص الوارد في كتاب « الحركة الادبية والفكرية في تونس » للشيخ محمد الفاضل ابن عاشور المطبوع في القاهرة سنة 1956 . وقد بررت المجلة اعتماده على النص الوارد في كتاب الشيخ ابن عاشور دون الاعتماد على النص الاصلي المنشور في جريدة « مرشد الامة » بما يلي :

« ... ذلك اننا لم نظفر بها ( اي القصة ) في العدد الخامس والعشرين من مجموعة صحيفة « مرشد الامة » بالمكتبة الوطنية تحت رقم 318 » . ونتيجة لدراستي في القصة التونسية المعاصرة بتونس فقد عثرت على هذه القصة في المكتبة الوطنية . وبعد اطلاعي عليها وجدت ان في النصين السابق ذكرهما بعض اغلاط وانقاص كثيرة . ولهذا السبب بدا لي ان اعيد نشرها مع مقارنة بالنصين الواردين في كتاب الشيخ ابن عاشور ومجلة « قصص » .

ويجدر بي ان اقرر هنا انني لم اقصد بنشر هذه المقارنة الحط مما نشر في مجلة « قصص » او كتاب الشيخ ابن عاشور ، بل تكلفت بالمقارنة رغبة مني في ان يكون النص الوارد في المجلة اكثر فائدة لكل قرائها وخاصة لامثالي نحن الذين نعتبر المجلة مرجعا مهما للقصة التونسية - حديثها وقديمها - ونعتمد عليها في دراساتها . وارجو ان اكون قد اديت خدمة - ولو بسيطة - لقراء المجلة خاصة الذين هم خارج تونس . وقد يصعب عليهم المجيء الى تونس للاطلاع على الصحف القديمة .