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**Literature—Untamed element  
(A proposal of a typology of the modern Arabic prose)**

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2006 Naǧīb Maḥfūz died—a legend and symbol of modern Arabic literature, so far the only Noble Prize winner (1988) in that field. For decades he had enriched literature with new novels, short stories and dramas. He influenced the artistic prose of his region so much that a famous Egyptian critic Raǧā' an-Naqqāš asked if “Naǧīb Maḥfūz became an obstacle on the way of development of the Arabic novel?”<sup>1</sup> It seemed that its creators had no other choice but to imitate the master.

Thankfully, it was a deceptive notion since the Arabic literature, including the modern prose, has been developing dynamically and energetically since its birth in the 2nd half of the 19th century until today. When Naǧīb Maḥfūz departed, which became a symbolic and epochal moment in its development, it is again worth looking at the prosaic output of modern Arabs as a whole.

From the perspective of the beginning of the 21st century, with its inheritance of the last two centuries, in the development of the Arabic literature one can notice three main phases, together with their trends and ways of development: the Renaissance–Nahḍa, the period of the origination of new Arabic countries in the 2nd half of the 20th century, and that of the literary output after the year 1967.

These stages include the evolution of poetry, prose and drama, and—what is crucial here—became the ground for the formation of the modern prose.

<sup>1</sup> „Muṣawwar” 24, 1971 after: Bielawski J. Bocheńska K., Jasińska J., *Nowa i współczesna literatura arabska 19 i 20 w. Literatura arabskiego Wschodu*. Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1978, p. 486.

### **Nahḍa—the Renaissance: the first stage in literature**

The first stage in this division, known as *nahḍa*—the Renaissance, met with a response in the history of the Arab world: it was then, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the world, after centuries of stagnation, experienced a rapid progress, initiated symbolically by the expedition to the Near East by Napoleon Bonaparte. The emperor, unwelcome by the inhabitants, failed to strike roots in Egypt and Syria to start the rebuilding of his empire. Yet, the ice was broken: the West became increasingly interested in the Arab world, and Arabs noticed values and advantages of the Western civilization. A new Arabic literature started to be created, which has been abundantly written about, and the writers' names, who inspired its development, became a part of history and found their ways into school books (Rifā'a at-Ṭaḥṭāwī 1801-1873, from Egypt, Nāṣif al-Yāziǧī, 1800-1871, Buṭrus al-Bustānī, 1805-1883, Aḥmad Fāris Ṣidyāq, 1884-1887—all from Lebanon). Translations flourished and, apart from adaptations, there appeared more and more reliable renditions of the European literature, which became popular and fascinated the people of the Renaissance.

As a famous Egyptian critic Muḥammad Mandūr writes: "Let us repeat that we introduced the art of writing novels and short stories into our own modern literature from Europe, just as we took drama from it, which we cannot consider a continuation of popular culture, developed by our people starting from the Middle Ages until modern times."<sup>2</sup>

However, even though the prose and drama were inspired by a contact with foreign culture, right from the beginning both were advancing as a synthesis of foreign and familiar patterns, and in this spirit they also influenced novel and short story as two, earlier unknown, literary genres. A whole group of writers—pioneers took part in their development, among them Ğurǧī Zaydān (1861-1914), the author of first historical novels and Mārūn 'Abbūd (1886-1962), a novelist and author of early social and moral short stories, both of them from Lebanon; as for prose, forerunners were Muḥammad al-Muwaylihī (1858-1930), Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī (1876-1924), Salāma Mūsā (1886-1958), Abd al-Qādir al-Māzinī (1890-1949), from Egypt—writers, whose importance for the development of the modern Arabic literature cannot be overestimated.

<sup>2</sup> Muḥammad Mandūr, *Al-Adab wa-funūnuhu*, Dār Nahḍat Miṣr li at-Ṭab' wa-an-Naṣr, Al-Qāhira, no date, p. 9.

Still for the first Arabic *nahḍa* prose writers, the European tradition was the key reference system, a driving force to synthesize Arabic patterns, Muslim as well as foreign, especially the newly created literary genres: prose and drama. According to the canons of this tradition, moral romances and melodramas flourished, such as *Zaynab*—a story from the life of the Egyptian country by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888-1956, Egypt), with its characters behaving after the European fashion.

Although moral romances became very popular—their coryphaeuses were Yūsuf as-Sibā'ī (1919-1978), Iḥsān 'Abd al-Quddūs (1919-1990) or 'Abd Ḥalīm 'Abd Allāh (1913-1970)—it is difficult to acknowledge that in Arabic prose there developed Romanticism in the same sense as in Europe. The emotional plots may possibly be called romantic, yet they are dominated by realism and surrender to this artistic method. With the development and modernization of the Arab world, realism took the foreground in its whole artistic output, in prose as well as in drama.

#### **New Arab states—the second stage in literature**

The shape of the Renaissance of the Arab world changed after centuries of fall and stagnation, with the formation of new states in the area, especially in the period of the emergence from colonialism and the following revolutionary changes between the 1950's and the 1970's. With them, the modern Arabic literature entered its next stage of its development, on the grounds of which a new poetry would develop, and prose and drama would toughen. In the Arab region, modern countries were formed, such as Egypt, Iraq and Syria, and with them—national literatures. It was the prose of those three states, together with drama and poetry, that dominated literature in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and novel and short story received a prominent position in the literary output. Of course, in other countries and Arab areas a rich political life took place in Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Sudan, and the countries of the Arabic Peninsula, and of the Maghreb: political events shook their foundations (to mention the birth of Israel and the Arab-Israeli War of 1948)—they filled newspapers and, naturally, created “ready-made” literary themes, which were used by those writers who were deeply identified with the surrounding reality. A counter-point for this dynamics were social changes, resulting from a constantly returning question about the style of action, norms and patterns. The more severe political fights, the more technical novelties and new forms of life broke into the people's minds.

During this time, as a new quality, realism was being developed in prose. The output of this current was faithful to the needs of the realistic convention shaped in the Western literature: characters were individualized, yet they did not grow above the average, representing various social problems; the world depicted in the works reflected typical phenomena of the reality and pretended to proclaim the life truth; events developed in a cause-effect sequences, diversified by a chance.

The realism of this epoch responded to the needs of the era. When the new Arabic reality was being formed, it accompanied individuals and communities in their search for identity. The first moral pictures were painted by Muḥammad Taymūr (1892-1921) as a kind of pseudo-documentary, in which the foreground was taken by a description of various phenomena. They were to convince the reader with their “realism” more than with their literary form; as short stories, these were collected under the title sanctioning this kind of “documentalism”: “What the eyes saw” (*Mā tarāhu al-‘uyūn*)

Prose reaches for typical phenomena and characters, trying to depicture them emphatically. Such figures like a *šayḥ* in a red turban telling his grandson a goodnight story (in *Aš-Šayḥ Ğum‘a*), a honorable but unmerciful *ḥāḡḡ* (*Al-Ḥāḡḡ Šalabī*) asking a matchmaker to find him a fiancée, or an Egyptian *affandi* (The Dwarf—*Qazam*), a clerk—a man admired for his ability to reach for modern patterns from a volume of short stories by Maḥmūd Taymūr (1894-1973), a brother of Muḥammad—a senior of prose<sup>3</sup>—they move imagination deeply and ask for a search for a prototype in Egypt. The world depicted by the writers is vibrant with life: we can recognize streets of big cities and almost every house, all the time we meet with specific and one of its kind ways of thinking and customs.

In the period of the Renaissance, a move from the idea of a great Arab community towards independent, modernizing countries created also a need for a new self-determination: in individual as well as social categories. As far as psychological categories are concerned, it involved establishing two kinds of identity: personal and social. “The sense of identity is a result of forming the idea of “I”. As other notional categories, “the idea of I” is created due to processes of creative differentiating (separating) and assimilation. (...) The process of differentiation of the “I” category is the basis for

<sup>3</sup> Maḥmūd Taymūr, *Aš-Šayḥ Ğum‘a* in: M. Taymūr, *Qāla ar-rāwī*, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Al-Qāhira, pp. 327-340; M. Tajmur, *Hagg Szalabi* (translated by K. Skarżyńska-Bocheńska) in: (ed.) J. Bielawski, *Skorpion. Opowiadania egipskie*, PIW, Warszawa 1979, pp 42-51.

the perception of one's own separateness from the environment, while the process of assimilation—of the perception of one's own similarity too the environment.”<sup>4</sup>

As a result of the first process, a personal identity is created, while due to the other—a social one is formed. Facing a new type of statehood, formed not a result of a revolution but because of colonial and post-colonial divisions, an individual in the Arab world felt uncertainty and doubts while the new system of social organization remained in an embryonic stage. An example of a character who experienced conflicts and doubts resulting from such research and, at the same time, a very realistic one, is Qāsim from Mubārak Rabī's (Morocco) “Good People” (*Aṭ-Ṭayyibūna*, 1971). He is madly in love with an unhappy daughter of a collaborationist from the period of fights for national independence between Morocco and France; suspended between a rural tradition, or even a tribal one, and his sense of belonging to the middle class, a need of progress as well as an expansion of Sufi Islam understood as a social threat, he feels extremely misinformed and lost.

During this period, hitherto existing sources of identity can be seen as old-fashioned, while the new ones, of the western style- too drastic. Thus realism with its tendency of extracting unique features of an individual, which make them different from others, favors the search for a personal identity. Arabic realists, such as Muḥammad Taymūr, Maḥmūd Taymūr, Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987), Naḡīb Maḥfūz (1911-2006), Yūsuf Idrīs (1927-1991) (all from Egypt), ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Maḡīd ar-Rubay‘ī (b. 1939, Iraq), Ḥanna Mīnā (b. 1924, Syria) or Mubārak Rabī, mentioned earlier; they all depict individualized characters who, although not above the average life in their by-lane or village, yet they live through their own, unique adversities because they differ from others, while thanks to their similarities, they form a community with the rest. Behind described events there lie efforts to establish, first of all, one's own personal identity as well as a confirmation of their social identity connected to their birthplace.

Naḡīb Maḥfūz penetrates the human psyche with passion, especially in his “Trilogy of Cairo” (*Aṭ-Tulāḡiyya*), and through its prism as well as with the help of a method similar to the stream of consciousness he paints customs and social problems of his times; he also departs from realism, experimenting and going into other directions. Similarly to the Egyptian Nobel Prize winner and other realist writers, he develops his narrative from the

<sup>4</sup> J. Reykowski, *Kolektywizm i indywidualizm jako kategorie opisu zmian społecznych i mentalności*. „Przegląd Psychologiczny”, 2/1992, Warszawa, pp. 147-171.

point of view of inner experience and feelings of his characters. As formulated by realists, the personal identity is a subject of an investigation, research and uncertainty.

It also seems a point of departure in the works by another coryphaeus of literature: Ḥanna Mīnā (b. 1924). His novels have a deep subjective dimension; not some outside events but experiences of an individual are the sources of the story and the driving force of the plot. Thus, in the author's works, an entanglement of psychological, social and political realism.

According to the spirit, he wrote his first debut novel "Blue Lamps" (*Maṣābiḥ az-zurq*), where he depicted a typical life of broad circles of the Syrian society; against that background, lives of individuals become entangled: a brutal father of a highly patriarchal family and his meek wife, as well as a couple in love separated by the ongoing Second World War. From Fayāḍ's psychological experiences in "The Snow Blows from the Window" (*Aṭ-Talḡ ya'tī min an-nāfiḍa*) there appears his fate of a political refugee but also the patriotism of the Syrian who deeply loves his homeland.

In the realistic prose, the social, or even more precisely, the national identity is formed intuitively; it results naturally from the citizenship of a given country: as seen through the characters in the works by the Taymūr brothers or Yūsuf Idrīs's are Egyptians, Ḥanna Mīnā's—Syrians, and 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ar-Rubay'ī's—Iraqis.

Still, the reality is presented dynamically, in the course of changes and the characters have a feeling of continuing new forms of life; the realistic prose suggests that both the personal as well as social identities, depicted in those works, are unstable phenomena and the process of their formation is not finished.

### **In search for the identity after 1967—the third stage of literature**

In the 60's, the culture of the Arab world underwent further changes under the influence of two main factors; one of them was the origin of the Arabic TV, which increased a trend towards modernity, enlivened even more contacts with the West; from there TV makers, at least in the beginning, took their models and inspiration. The second factor was diametrically different: the June defeat of Arabs in the Six-Day War against Israel in 1967. Considered the biggest repulse in the modern times, it led to despair as well as a deep reflection, which made writers look closer at the reality, enlarged then by new horizons. The world shown went beyond the borders of villages and town by-lanes, its prospects seemed to be unlimited. It resulted from the fact

that in prose a motif of *ḡurba* was being developed, i.e. one of alienation, not only that experienced by Palestinian refugees but also by individuals from other countries, made to leave their lands.<sup>5</sup> Among others, this motif is developed in the works by ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān ar-Rubay‘ī, who presented some of his characters as refugees from Iraq, at the same time being faithful to the demands of realism. A great fresco of a refugee fate is a novel by this writer titled “The Meridians and the Parallels” (*Ḥuṭūṭ at-ṭūl, ḥuṭūṭ al-‘ard*), in which one can see different waves of the Arab emigration in Beirut and an Iraqi intellectual going through different vicissitudes, who finally settles down in Tunis.<sup>6</sup>

The motif of *ḡurba* and the search for one’s identity formed the foundations of prose output, however, when compared to the prosaists of the previous period, the subject of their search had changed. It was realism that seemed conformable to the spirit of the times during which the formation and advancement of organizational structures seemed to have primary importance. Together with the development of this motif in prose, one can see a changing consciousness of literary characters and authors.

Alienation was accompanied by a search for one’s own place in the world, and thus into the foreground of the meaning layer of the works, there went the need for self-determination of one’s won personal and social identities. The shaping of both becomes an especially painful process particularly in the works by ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Munīf (1933-2004)<sup>7</sup>, dedicated to changes of the Arab world after the discovery of crude oil (especially in his five-volume “Cities of Salt” (*Mudun al-milh*)). Munīf creates realism of a new type, which source is a ruthless encounter with traditional values and the collective culture, for the benefit of a ruthless building of a new society; its measure is supposed to be individualism understood as an atomization of former communities, which are to be harnessed and changed by mechanisms of predatory development, with the help of every possible technical means. A conflict between the East and the West is being developed.

Especially after 1967, a search for cultural identity<sup>8</sup> in the Arab world was increased, and in connection with it, a key reference system for the lit-

<sup>5</sup> Cf.: E. Machut-Mendecka, *Search for identity in modern Arabic prose*, “Studia Arabistyczne i Islamistyczne” 12/2004, pp. 5-20.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Cf.: E. Machut-Mendecka, *Space and time in the novels of ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Munīf*, “Studia Arabistyczne i Islamistyczne” 11/2003, pp. 30-43.

<sup>8</sup> Cf.: *Tożsamość kulturowa w świetle społeczno-regulacyjnej koncepcji kultury* (*Cultural awareness in the light of socio-regulatory conception of culture*)

erary creation was changed. The European tradition, penetrating the Arab world together with the development of the media, more and more clashed with the Arabic one as a source of a desired inspiration.

### The subjective current

On account of the search for the cultural identity, revived by the key events of the 60's and an increasing consciousness of the place and times when individuals came to live, a new wide current was being developed, which I have named "subjective", resigning (in connection with a change of the key reference system for the literary tradition) from such names of literary concepts going away from the conditions of realism, European in character, such as existentialism, surrealism or expressionism, etc. Although many works of this current may be associated with phenomena typical for those notions, yet the conditions and inspirations for those works created in Europe and in the Arab world were different; thus, the proposal of a different terminology. The subjective current resulted from the right of creative freedom and *licencia poetica* attributed to writers, as well as from leaving the reader with more space for a free interpretation than in the case of realism. With opening the borders of countries, there was also an intensification of the search for the cultural identity.

A group of Egyptian writers, assembled in "Gallery 1968" magazine (Bahā' Ṭāhir, b. 1935; Ṣun' Allāh Ibrāhīm, b. 1937; Ibrāhīm Aṣlān, b. 1935; Yaḥyā Ṭāhir 'Abd Allāh, 1942-1981; Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Qa'īd, Ḍiyā' aš-Šarqāwī), tended to literary changes. Their works, with time, differentiated and they looked for their own literary methods. In the beginning, they were united in the tendency for a deepened subjective look at the reality, together with unconscious psychic content. The founding father of "Gallery 1968" magazine and a pioneer of this current was one of the greatest modern Arabic writers: Idwār al-Ḥarrāṭ (b. 1926).

During the period of realism and the violent events in Egypt and in the Arab world, also an increasing contacts with the West that caused an abundance of matters and phenomena that moved hearts and minds, made writers react and rise their voice, if not from official tribunes, then at least in passionate debates led in countless Arabic cafes.

in: (ed.) J. Nikitirowicz, M. Sobecki, D. Misiejuk, *Kultury tradycyjne a kultura globalna*, Trans Humana, Białystok 2001, pp. 79-80.



At the same time, a new poetry was developing and its creators were fascinated by European symbolism. The prose writers were influenced by the tension connected with the events often associated with personal problems, by a pressure of creative theories: known so far and those pouring from the West, by the active attitude of Arabic poets and playwrights (poetry and drama had been flourishing since the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, together with prose). They looked for possibly subjective ways of expression for their feelings, acknowledging that the outer and inner realities form a unity. The writers concentrated around “Gallery 68” think that they opened a new phase, giving themselves the right to put into the foreground of their literary output their own subjective way for emotions: “In what way, in this new phase, the opposition between the cruel reality and the exciting dream is arranged? Contradictions maintain their reality as parties present in a mutual agreement. The dream means a change of reality and its revival, the result of which will develop as a new quality.”<sup>9</sup>

In the literary output of the writers associated with “Gallery 68”, especially Idwār al-Ḥarrāṭ or Ibrāhīm Aṣlān, a poetics of symbolism and vagueness, related to the poetic works of that time, was put into the foreground. As the former has put it:

“Why do I write then? I write because I don’t know why I write. Does the impulse come from some powerful force? I know that I use it as a weapon to bring about change, change both in the self and others... for something better, more beautiful perhaps... something warmer to ward off the bitter chill of barbarity and loneliness... something soothing in the oppressive heat of violence and suffocation... I write because I want there to be something in what I write—in everything I write—which will make even a single reader lift his head proudly and feel with me that in the end the world is not a desolate, meaningless landscape... I write because the world’s a riddle, a woman is a riddle and so is my fellow man. All creation is a riddle...that is what I want to write about, and that is why I write.”<sup>10</sup>

Idwār al-Ḥarrāṭ, today one of the most renowned writers of the Arab world, belonged then to the vanguard of mutineers, as one of its leaders, and his novel titled “Rāma and the Dragon” (*Rāma wa-at-tinnīn*), dated for 1970-1978, seemed to exemplify subjectivism based on outright poetic forms of experiencing moods, sensitivity and impressionism, taking into

<sup>9</sup> Idwār al-Ḥarrāṭ, *Ibrāhīm Aṣlān wa-qina‘ ar-rafd*, “Gallery”, fabrā’il 1971, “Gallery”, p. 76.

<sup>10</sup> Idwār al-Ḥarrāṭ za: Amal Amireh, *Edward al-Kharrat and the Modernist Revolution in the Egypt Novel*, „Al-Jadid Magazine”, 2003, <http://leb.net/~al-jadid>.

account the crucial question about social and political stories. In this novel, at first, the real world, with an exception of the feeling between two people who remain in an impossible love relationship—she, as a Muslim, cannot marry him—a Christian—seems to be so trivial that we doubt its importance for the novel's plot. At this stage of reading, we are disoriented, and flashes of lights from that reality, although so concrete as the name of the Cairo district of Al-‘Ağūza, the car, the room, still they seem a noise that disturbs the stream of thoughts. Love dominates, takes the whole space and, page after page, it gets more and more complicated. The novel, full of passion and soulfulness does not contain erotic scenes, yet the story as a whole leads to a sense of erotica of the described relationship; at the same time it gives to it a sacral dimension, creating thus the key to deeper layers of the character's psyche, although there is no complete vivisection of the soul.

“He did not say that the earthquake destroyed the surface of his mind and the balance. He won't guess which of them is more honest and closer to the source of life. But what is the use of a salty spring? He has the feeling of a constant presence, so incessant and perceivable at each moment of time. Ecstasy, he withdraws, he is cut off, from everything that exists. A clash—a separation; contradictions that can't be united, psychic tissue gets torn and heals, joining in an eternal rebellion, changes reach the boiling point that melts the truth and falsehood. There your love is. Does it last unceasingly? It exists, goes out like a flame, gains power and disappears a thousand times a day in my imagination. You told me once: “I love you”. We were in the middle of a volcano. She hasn't told that again.”<sup>11</sup>

The novel's plot is not, however, hang in mid-air and slowly, as if with the feelings and high sensation the outside world takes over, beyond the relationship and the protagonist's emotions. The lovers chat and from fragments of their conversations, Egypt emerges as a reference space for the story: the country going through its stormy years of the 1950's, when it was being transformed from monarchy into republic and it was a cradle of various political movements. In the background of the subtle love plot with a psychic reality in the center of attention, the distressing events clash even harder. The delicate, adored lover, almost a saint, appears to be an ex-commando; against herself as a woman who is reluctant taking part in man's activities, especially in “games with the arms”, she does a military training shoulder to shoulder with fighters of various kinds.

“Who was in the camp with you?” he asked

<sup>11</sup> Idwār al-Ḥarrāṭ, *Rāma wa-at-tinnīn*, Dār al-Ādāb, Bayrūt 1990, p. 15.

“Everybody. From reserve officers to agents, from communists of different groups and fractions to Muslim Brothers, from the National Guard (*Al-Ḥaras al-Waṭani*) to the People’s Underground Army (*Al-Muqāwama aš-Ša‘biyya*), from the Young Egypt (*Miṣr al-Fatāt*) and the old party of Delegation (*Al-Wafd*) to Trockists, the independent and ordinary chauvinists, those who later died in Port Said, and those who were wounded and injured by bullets and bombs of the English, Italians, and those who died, fought and survived prisons of the revolution, sent to camps and oases. All are the country’s soul and its essence. Where is it?”

“It is. It exists. It doesn’t die. From thousand of years, for ever- he answered.”

“Please, don’t be so romantic- she replied.”<sup>12</sup>

The romance lasts until the end of the novel—and beyond it; sometimes it gets complicated, accompanied by nervousness or doubts, but the end of “Rāma and the Dragon” remains open. The novel proves that the social, political and moral background, which is so difficult to be seen beyond the dominant feeling of emptiness and loneliness in many works by subjectivists, it is a place of undefined plot; it lies in wait somewhere close to the main plot and may be the symbolic dragon from the title.

In this novel, crucial events stand out from the hidden background: so-called Nasser’s revolution (the uprising which overthrew the monarchy in 1952) and the three-sided aggression (England, France, Israel) on Egypt in 1956, which resulted from the nationalization of the Sues Canal by the Egyptian government. Thanks to the clashes and the penetration of the inner and outer realities, “Rāma and the Dragon” is a significant novel, simply exemplary for the subjective current. Within its borders, later Arabic writers looked for the means of expression for shocking experiences when faced with events and dramas of the Arab world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Stories that belong to the subjective current develop according to the rule of collage of the most intimate inner reality and the severe or brutal outer reality: in this spirit, tens of modern prosaists write, especially autobiography<sup>13</sup> stands out here as a genre.

In the subjective current, a trend stands out that I would call “the creation of the borderland”, in which a complex problem of the cultural identity comes out. J. Nikitorowicz and H. Mamzer use the notion of the border-

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 192, 193.

<sup>13</sup> Compare: E. Machut-Mendecka, *The Realism of Fright in Contemporary Arabic Literary Autobiography*, “Studia Arabistyczne i Islamistyczne” 6/1998, pp. 80-86.

land identity: "(...) the cultural identity must be built in a different way in borderlands than in those areas belonging to the center. It happens so because on the borders, value standards of one community do not function. Values and social norms overlap and filter one another, which results in a need for reference too the "thought" layer of the reality."<sup>14</sup>

Only apparently Mağīd Ṭubyā's (an Arab and Egyptian, b.1938) output escapes this definition, and he is identified as a realist writer. Still, from beyond the typical pictures of Egypt described by him, with its politics, social and moral problems, a specific culture of the Egyptian south emerges. When the action of his works reaches the Upper Egypt, especially in the novels "A Girl from al-Ġurūb village" (*'Aḍrā' al-Ġurūb*) and "The Circles of Faintness" (*Dawā'ir 'adam al-imkān*), nothing is univocal and contents get saturated with multiple meanings, which reflect the search for one's own cultural identity of that region (where the writer himself comes from) among the legends and beliefs, rural and Bedouin environments.

Salīm Barakāt (b. 1951), on the other hand, is a Syrian writer of the Kurdish origin, and his works, in which the poetic language, a typical Arabic anecdoticism and elements of naturalism and surrealism—looking at it in European categories, are one big manifestation of a complex fate of the modern Kurds and resulting suffering—so a literary study of a familiar cultural identity (especially in the novels "Astronomers on the Day of the Fatal Tuesday. The Passage of a Flamingo" (*Al-Falakiyyūn ṭulātā' al-mawt: 'Ubūr al-bašrūr*), "Ruins of the Second Eternity" (*Anqāḍ al-azal at-ṭānī*)). The borderland of those people without their own state, with other cultures and nations, is rather broad. It is engaged not only by Arabs, but also Persians, Turks, tribal and settled population as well as national or religious minorities, abundant in the Near East and in the Muslim Asia. Thus it is not surprising that the motifs of the cultural identity interwoven into the one of *ḡurba* are the foundations of the plot dynamism in the author's prose.

Ibrāhīm al-Koni (b.1948), an Arabic-speaking writer of the Tuareg origin, from Libya, fluctuates between realism and, according to the European convention, the magical realism (especially in the novel "The Magi" (*Al-Mağūs*), "The Sorcerers" (*As-Saḥara*)). The tribal Tuareg culture dominates in stories of his works dedicated to the desert, referent towards forms and phenomena of the Tuareg life. Still, under the influence of magic and mythology, characteristic for the people's beliefs, the works cross the bor-

<sup>14</sup> H. Mamzer, *Tożsamość kulturowa w świetle społeczno-regulacyjnej koncepcji kultury* in: (ed.) J. Nikitirowicz, M. Sobecki, D. Misiejuk, op.cit., pp. 79-80.

ders of the probability—a tendency that the writer develops so much that his novels and short stories get a symbolic and metaphorical significance.

The subjective current and another one, separated here—the narrative current, penetrate each other. As a matter of fact, most of the writers whom I count among the authors of the latter trend can be considered “subjectivists”—they share a passionate search for literary inspiration in the native tradition.

### The narrative current

After 1967, an increased interest in *turāt*—the Arabic cultural heritage—seemed to be an inspiration for the development of this current. A means of expression for this revival was a turn towards old literary traditions, observed in prose output.

In the classical prose of that region there were no novels or short stories in today’s understanding but narration flourished in the form of stories, oral and written down. With reference to this tradition, in prose there was formed a phenomenon which I call the narrative current, and since many writers from different corners of the region advocated it (among them Ġamāl al-Ġiṭānī, b. 1945, Yaḥyā Ṭāhir ‘Abd Allāh from Egypt, ‘Izz ad-Dīn al-Madanī from Tunisia, b. 1938, Aṭ-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ, b. 1929, from Sudan), the more so it means a tendency towards a revival of the Arabic cultural identity. The writers of this current refer to a phenomenon that makes the basis and foundation of their identity: the Arabic language with its lexical and syntactic richness.

Just as playwrights from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they called for a narrator who departs from the customary narration in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, dominant in realism, but for one who is revealed in the text as the creator of the story, which, in this case, should be taken into inverted commas. He is an equivalent of an ancient Arabic story-teller, known as *rāwī*, *maddāḥ* or *ḥākī* (*ḥakawātī*). In dramas as well as in prose works, the narrator (and sometimes another character, who, de facto, plays the same function) makes a stylistic figure as well as an element of the content full of meanings, referring to traditional stories.

An old technique of *istiṭrād*—digression—entered prose too. Popular in the classical prose, and closely connected to the literature of *adab*, together with its aspirations characteristic for this genre, it was formed in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Now, it can beautifully describe the world in the form of colourful treaties. The digression technique and the character of the narrator can be

seen in a volume of short stories titled “Fabrications” (*Hurāfāt*) by ‘Izz ad-Dīn al-Madanī. As a result of *istiṣrād*, the output of this current is characterized by a far-fetched story-making. The writers readily stylize their works according to the patterns of the classical Arabic literature: its decorative syntax and didactic tone, which, because of its naivety and enlargement on purpose in modern texts, loses its significance and acquires esthetic values. The writers return also to the old Arabic *ḥikma*—a wise maxim, which is seen already in precursory works by Ğubrān Ḥalīl Ğubrān (1883-1931; *The Prophet*): a short and esthetic way of expressing the main idea of his works. In modern Arabic prose, many writers reach for allegories and parables, especially Yaḥyā Ṭāhir ‘Abd Allāh in his short stories, e.g. from the volume “Goodnight stories for the Prince” (*Ḥikāyāt li-l-amīr ḥattā yanām*). Within their framework, there is stressed the meaning of elementary situations and archetypical phenomena, especially in the forms of oppositions, such as wisdom–foolishness, speechlessness–expressiveness (e.g. in short stories “A Country Tale” (*Al-Ḥikāya ar-rīfiyya*) or “The Cage for all Birds” (*Qafaṣ li kull tuḡūr*)). The primary world of the Upper Egypt is the theme of the famous novel “A Necklace and Bracelets” (*Aṭ-Ṭawq wa-al-iswirra*). Novels by a modern virtuoso of prose Ğamāl al-Ġīṭānī (especially “The Voice of the Setting Sun” (*Hātif al-maġīb*) and “In the Labyrinth of the City” (*Ṣaḥḥ al-madīna*)) are stylized for old Arabic stories with their parables of the reality set in Egypt and the Arab world. Egyptian tales with their medley of various plots and folk heroes, who can kill lions with their bare hands or palaces with slave-women of exceptional beauty (*Bandaršāh. Daww al-Bayt*)—these are developed by the Sudanese master of the word- Aṭ-Tayyib Ṣāliḥ (the author of the famous “Season of Migration to the North” (*Mawsim al-ḥiġra ilā aš-šamāl*)). In his prose works, Sudan, as the world both African and Arabic, with its hot climate and human warmth, expressed by everyday stories told long into the night, and its feeling of community, clashes with the coldness of the midnight and Europe.

The writers of the narrative current, maybe in a defense against this coldness, fan the feeling of their own cultural identity, eagerly looking for inspiration in their native tradition.

The modern Arabic prose with its three currents is closely connected with the problems of the present day and expresses it in the forms of a pseudo-documentary within the realistic framework, in experiences from the borders of the consciousness and unconsciousness within the subjective current, as well as in the stylized or parabolic formulations used by the writers in love with the traditional Arabic narrative.