Writing in Cairo:
Literary Networks and the Making of Egypt's Nineties Generation

by

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Dedication

Writing in Cairo is dedicated to my parents, Dorothy and Tom Linthicum, with much love and gratitude for their unwavering encouragement and support.

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Transliteration Note

Throughout this dissertation, I use the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) transliteration system for Arabic words. For proper nouns, I defer to common Latinized spellings (e.g., Naguib Mahfouz for Najīb Maḥfūẓ) and the authors' preferred spellings of their own names. When I have been unable to locate or inquire as to an author's preferred spelling, I have used a simplified transliteration without didactics so as to not distinguish these authors from their peers. For ease of reference, authors are listed as they appear in the body of the text followed by the transliteration of their names, for those interested in locating their works in Arabic, as well. Nora Amin, for instance, is listed alphabetically in the bibliography as "Amin, Nora (Nūrā Amīn)." I provide translations for all Arabic titles of articles and works of fiction in the body of the dissertation. Works that have not been translated into English are immediately followed by my translation of the title, then the year it was originally published, e.g., *Mir'āt 202* (Mirror 202, 2003). Works that have been translated are followed by the year when the original Arabic was published, then the published translated title, and finally the year of publication of the translation, e.g., *An Takūn 'Abbās al-'Abd* (2003; *Being Abbas el Abd*, 2006). While full bibliographic details are listed in the bibliography, I include this information in the text because often it is pertinent to my discussions. When there are major discrepancies between the original Arabic title and its title in English translation, I include a note and a literal translation of the title. Except when needed for clarity, I typically use the translated titles of novels, after first noting the Arabic title in each chapter.

Abstract

Cultural institutions—e.g., publishers, journals, prizes, among others—have played significant but frequently overlooked roles in shaping groups and movements in the modern Arabic literary tradition. *Writing in Cairo: Literary Networks and the Making of Egypt's Nineties Generation* explores how a number of such locally situated, but often globally inflected, institutions participated in the formation and evolution of an experimental, diversely composed literary group at the turn of the twenty-first century.

This dissertation draws on literary criticism and theory from book history in an interdisciplinary approach that investigates the development of Egypt's "nineties generation" of writers over the 1990s and up to the 2011 Egyptian revolution. The group was initially dismissed by local critics, due in part to the young writers' marked shift away from issues concerning the national collective and because this was the first Egyptian literary generation defined particularly by emerging women writers. Departing from existing scholarship that favors Pierre Bourdieu's conception of the literary field, I employ concepts and terminology from Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and incorporate interviews and research I conducted over several years in Cairo to propose a methodological intervention by investigating the generation as more than just the authors and literary traits that have come to define it. *Writing in Cairo* reveals that key cultural institutions—the newspaper *Akhbār al-Adab* (Literary News); two small, local presses, Dar Sharqiyyat and Dar Merit; and the internationally focused translator, publisher, and prize grantor the American University in Cairo Press—were significant actors that influenced the production,

circulation, and reception of the nineties generation and their texts in ways that have not been previously understood.

This project is part of a growing body of scholarship in postcolonial studies, modern Arabic literature, and the sociology of literature, among other fields, that seeks to reorient literary studies to include critical discussions of what are often considered simple intermediaries in cultural production. The institutions I examine were not mere gatekeepers or a medium through which others crafted discourses about the value and place of this generation but were themselves constitutive of it. Close readings of foundational nineties generation texts, including Nora Amin's *Qamīṣ wardī fārigh* (An Empty Pink Shirt, 1997), Hamdi Abu Golayyel's *al-Fā'il* (2008; *A Dog With No Tail*, 2009), Miral al-Tahawy's *al-Khibā'* (1996; *The Tent*, 1998), and Mustafa Zikri's *Mir'āt 202* (Mirror 202, 2003), demonstrate how radically shifting paradigms of authorship and readership, which were linked to the institutions I study, were part of the fabric of the literature and how it was read. The issues my research raises have larger implications for canon formation and how local cultural institutions help shape national and global literary histories and inform present-day conceptions of world literature.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In Cairo at the turn of the twenty-first century, local cultural institutions underwent a host of interconnected changes that transformed how Egyptian literature was produced and circulated. The rapid growth of the small, independent literary press marked a move away from the state-controlled model that had dominated since mid-century and from the censorship and stigma frequently associated with government-run houses. Alongside this growth and diversification of publishing came new modes of bookselling, including the establishment of Egypt's first Barnes-and-Noble-style bookstore, Diwan (est. 2002),[1] and the rise of the Arabic "bestseller." Writers had more opportunities to publish, and literary debates flourished on the pages of several new cultural journals that opened in Cairo during this period. A number of private literary prizes established locally and regionally over these two decades simultaneously allowed texts and authors to cross national boundaries and provoked heated debates over whether a ruinous "prize culture" was lowering standards of Arabic literature throughout the region. Literary works and authors were launched into even broader international networks and readerships with the

[1] Some of the bookstores in Cairo that opened between Diwan's founding and the year of Egypt's 2011 revolution and which feature healthy literature sections include: Al Kotob Khan, first branch opened in Maadi in 2006 (and later became a publishing house); al-Balad Cultural Center, located across from the American University in Cairo in downtown Cairo, established in 2007; Omar Bookstore, a few blocks away from al-Balad on Talaat Harb and which opened that same year; another chain bookstore Alef, first branch opened in 2009 in Heliopolis; and Tanmia Bookstore, located around the corner from Omar Bookstore, and which was founded in 2011. I refer to some of their locations here to give an idea of the density of bookstores in downtown Cairo (*wasṭ al-balad*), which was—and remains at the time of writing—the heart of literary activity, publishing, and bookselling in Egypt.

dramatic increase in the translation of Arabic literature into foreign languages, especially English, that came on the heels of Egyptian literary giant Naguib Mahfouz's winning of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988 and again, for more political reasons, following September 11th. It was amidst and, I aim to show, in tandem with these changes in how literature was produced and circulated that a new literary group known as Egypt's "nineties generation" emerged in Cairo.

Writing in Cairo examines the genesis and development of this diversely composed, experimental literary group over the 1990s and up to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Specifically, I demonstrate the ways in which several locally situated, but regionally and globally inflected, cultural institutions in Egypt influenced the production, circulation, and reception of the nineties generation, including its literature, in ways not previously understood. Drawing on literary criticism and book historical theory, I bring critical discussions of cultural institutions—e.g., publishers, journals, prizes, bookstores, among others—into conversation with close readings of a body of contemporary Arabic literature of growing scholarly attention.[2] This dissertation is interested in what James English has referred to as "the middle-zone of cultural space" (*Economy* 12) which falls "between acts of inspired artistic creation on the one hand and acts of brilliantly discerning consumption on the other" (13).[3] Scholars working in fields such as the sociology of cultural production, postcolonial studies, and Arabic literary studies, among others, have increasingly employed sociological and materialist approaches to literary studies. Several seek,

[2] For studies in English that seek to characterize Egypt's nineties generation, see: Mehrez *Culture Wars* (chapter seven), Elsadda (chapters seven, eight, and nine), Hafez "New Egyptian Novel," Jacquemond "Shifting Limits," Junge, and Anishchenkova.

[3] English *Economy*, the first long study of the contemporary cultural award, remains focused on the middle-space actors themselves, as does much scholarship that investigates the roles played by cultural institutions, and does not engage in close readings of the literature it studies.

as this dissertation does, to correct the notion that these methods necessarily ignore the literature itself.[4] Instead, "middle-space" literary actors are shown to be a viable interpretative lens through which to make new meaning in literary texts.

The new book history that developed in the latter part of the twentieth century, through the directed efforts of Roger Chartier and Robert Darnton, helped create space in literary studies for commonly overlooked cultural actors which operate in the liminal space between a text's composition and its critical interpretation and which directly affect literature's production and circulation. Since Darnton's formulation of his "communications circuit," as articulated in his 1982 article "What is the History of Books?" (see Chapter Four), this "new-style Histoire du Livre of the 1980s and 1990s [began] emphasizing readers, materiality, and meaning" (McDonald and Suarez 7). Particularly influential in literary studies have been works that explore the "socialization of texts," a term that Jerome McGann, among others, popularized in the 1980s to refer to the ways in which publishers, editors, marketing staff, and others imposed their own intentions on a text during the process of commercial book production. McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991) and D.F. McKenzie's *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1986),[5] as two prime examples, suggested new methods for analyzing the effects of production on a text.

[4] See, for instance, the special issue of *New Literary History* (Vol. 41, No. 2, Spring 2010) *New Sociologies of Literature*, which contains both approaches and provides a representative sampling of some of the new turns in this "field" which, James English argues in his introduction to the issue, is no longer necessary to recognize as a distinct discipline. He suggests that despite the disavowal of "sociology of literature" as a term, interest in theorizing relationships between the literary and the social has increased since the 1980s ("Everywhere" viii). He writes, "Wherever they might be located on the map of named and recognized subfields—postcolonial studies, queer theory, new historicism—their shared disciplinary mission was to coordinate the literary with the social" (viii). See also English and Underwood for an overview of recent scholarship seeking to bridge literature and social science with a focus on digital humanities.

[5] McKenzie's work is widely recognized as challenging and correcting underlying assumptions of the "New Bibliography" approach, which posited printers/ publishers as "fixed" actors who had little to no effect on the texts they printed. See McKenzie "Printers of the Mind" and McDonald and Suarez for further interpretation and discussions of McKenzie's arguments and contributions to the field.

They showed how the decisions made by authors, editors, publishers, typographers, layout designers, cover artists, and others involved in making a specific edition of a book did not simply provide background or context for a text, but instead had a significant impact on its subsequent interpretation. Gérard Genette's work on paratexts, principally *Seuils* (1987; *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, 1997), similarly emphasizes the traces left by such cultural actors on texts (e.g., prefaces, formatting, titles, illustrations, blurbs, etc.) that introduce new meaning and affect how they are read and understood (see Chapter Three). Such studies have destabilized texts and textual intentions through foregrounding of activities of producing and consuming books, thereby raising new implications for reading and interpretative practices.

In the field of postcolonial literary studies, the emphasis on material properties and the social context of production and circulation as influential producers of meaning in a text has proven a rich and productive approach in recent years. Sarah Brouillette and David Finkelstein, in their introduction to the 2013 special issue of *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* on "Postcolonial Print Cultures," describe what they see as a "substantive materialist turn" within the field,[6] which they date, roughly, to Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) (Brouillette and Finkelstein 3). In his groundbreaking work, Huggan demonstrates how analysis of the production process of postcolonial works, including the various agents involved in their circulation, distribution, and reception, sheds new light on the value ascribed to such works and the postcolonial field as a whole. Through exposing how postcolonial products are marketed and prepared for consumption by Western audiences, who act as tourists

[6] In addition to the articles within this special issue of *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (Vol. 48, 2013), see also Brouillette's *Postcolonial Writers* and *Creative Economy* and Fraser as other examples of this "materialist turn". See Dalleo (in which Brouillette and Huggan are featured, as well) for further examples of Bourdieu's influence on postcolonial studies and the growing number of materialist studies in the field since 2000.

consuming "exotic" cultures, Huggan contends that these cultural actors "tur[n] the literature/ cultures of the 'non-Western' world into saleable exotic objects" and turn marginality into a commodity (10).[7] Brouillette's *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007) is also interested in what she terms the "industry of postcoloniality," but significantly, she foregrounds textual analysis in her materialist approach to the study of the author-figure in the Anglophone postcolonial novel. She draws on book history and postcolonial studies, among other fields, to demonstrate the connections between changes in the commercial, globalized publishing industry in the latter decades of the twentieth century, which turned postcolonial literature into a market commodity, and the emergence of a specifically postcolonial author-figure who is concerned with "the politicization of incorporation into a discredited global sphere" (4). In an Arabic literary context, Anne-Marie McManus recently contributed further to this body of scholarship in her article that theorizes the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) and provides fresh insight into some of the effects of the literary prize on the texts it recognizes. She shows how the meaning of two IPAF-winning novels shifts as the texts move to new contexts via this hybrid cultural institution (see Chapter Five). *Writing in Cairo* similarly seeks to bridge a materialist approach with textual analysis in its consideration of Egypt's nineties generation.

One of the most influential and controversial figures to theorize the relationships between the literary and the social (if we are to consider them as separate spheres) has been Pierre Bourdieu. In particular, his concepts of the "literary field" and notions of "cultural capital" and

[7] While noting the significant contribution of Huggan's arguments, Brouillette offers an important critique of Huggan's approach. As she notes, in addition to the global reader Huggan describes, he also presumes the existence of a group of elite readers—of which Huggan is a part—who are capable of more responsible readings and interpretations of postcolonial products (*Postcolonial Writers* 5-6).

"symbolic capital"[8] have been adapted and complicated by numerous literary scholars working in a variety of subfields (Huggan; Guillory; Frow; Casanova; English *Economy*; Brouillette *Postcolonial Writers* and *Creative Economy*; among many others), including those working specifically on Egyptian cultural production in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Winegar; Kendall; Stagh; Jacquemond *Conscience*; Mehrez *Culture Wars*). However, I have found that the messiness and host of changes in Egypt's cultural scene including in the very structures that constitute it—as described in the whirlwind paragraph that opened this introduction—invites a more flexible theoretical approach. I therefore draw on some of the concepts and terminology of Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT) as articulated, in particular, in his *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (2005)[9] in my analysis of the Cairene cultural scene and Egypt's nineties generation of writers.

A common critique of Bourdieu's sociological approach to cultural production is the sometimes deterministic and prescriptive nature of his theories, especially for non-European settings, that obscures the presence and influence of actors not accounted for in his original models. For example, Bourdieu proposes the existence of a central, underlying binary that governs the literary field of production. This binary is comprised of what he terms the heteronomous principle, which favors bourgeois, large-scale art, and the autonomous principle

[8] Among Bourdieu's prolific output, the works most often cited and drawn upon by scholars working at this intersection are: *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (original French: *Les Règles de l'art*), and the compilation of his major essays on literature and art, *The Field of Culture Production*. I do not discuss his definitions here, as I opt for a different theoretical approach. For good introductions to Bourdieu's thoughts and theories and how he has been taken up by scholars working in various subfields, see, for example: Johnson, Thompson, and Swartz & Zolberg.

[9] Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law were three major figures who first developed ANT in the early 1980s, originally in the context of science and technology studies. It has since expanded and been adapted to fit a wide range of disciplines. For good overviews of Latour's body of work and central theories, see Schmidgen, and Blok & Elgaard Jensen.

that promotes art for its own sake and smaller scale production, simply put (Bourdieu, *Field* 321). Such a binary is predicated on the professionalization of authorship that occurred in France during this time in conjunction with the commercialization of literary production, which made it possible for literary authors to seek and acquire compensation for their artistic work. In Egypt in the 1990s, however, there was no mass market for literature, and authors typically remained unable to earn a living from their creative publications (see Chapter Four).[10] Despite these stark differences, Bourdieu's conception of the "literary field" has been convincingly adapted and complicated by several scholars who have provided significant studies on the modern Egyptian literary scene, as referenced above. Such studies have shed light, for instance, on the complex, ongoing power struggles between the Egyptian state, the writer/intellectual, and growing Islamist sentiment and movements, as well as between consecrated writers of older generations and newcomers to the field.[11] However, my interest lies not in uncovering fixed structures that have dictated the actions of known players, but rather in exploring unanticipated connections and agencies involved in the formation of an Egyptian literary group during a period when the structures that supposedly governed such a field were in flux. In addition, I find that ANT's treatment of the perspectives and opinions of the actors being studied—including those who are part of "peripheral" literary networks—as valid modes of analysis promotes approaches that may help broaden frequently Eurocentric literary theory.

[10] Despite increased circulation and opportunities to be translated during this period, bestselling literary titles rarely exceeded 10,000 copies in sales.

[11] See, in particular, Mehrez *Culture Wars* (chapter one), in which she adapts Bourdieu's heteronomous principle to include political, alongside economic, profit/capital and expands his dominant and subordinate positions vis-à-vis the field of power to include intellectuals, the state, and Islamist groups and movements. Kendall (chapter four) likewise adapts Bourdieu's model of the literary field in her study of Egypt's sixties generation, drawing on his conception of (set) positions within the field to analyze the relationship between that literary generation, which she theorizes as an avant-garde literary group, and mainstream literary production in Egypt in the 1960s.

In his formulation of ANT, Latour has distinguished between two types of sociology. The first, dominant kind of sociology, which he terms "the sociology of the social," "in most situations…is not only reasonable but also indispensable, since it offers convenient shorthand to designate all the ingredients already *accepted* in the collective realm" (11). However, Latour contends, this kind of sociology works only when the subject of study is, for the most part, set. In situations like that which we find in Cairo at the turn of the twenty-first century, "where innovations proliferate, where group boundaries are uncertain, when the range of entities to be taken into account fluctuates," Latour notes, "the sociology of the social is no longer able to trace actors' new associations" (11). Instead of imposing structures or revealing an underlying order that determines which actors—and types of actors—may be included for analysis, one's task in ANT is to "follow the actors themselves" (12) and, hopefully in the process, discover new and at times unexpected relationships that are continually developing. Drawing on Latour's purposefully capacious "actor," throughout this dissertation I use this term to denote human and non-human participants who comprise the literary network(s) I describe and who affect or change, in some way, the literature and authors of my object of study: Egypt's nineties generation.

I have found particularly useful Latour's distinction between "intermediary" and "mediator" and take up these terms at various points in this dissertation. Latour defines mediators as those who "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (39). An intermediary, on the other hand, "transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs" (39). Within this distinction lies the crux of the difference between approaches which consider cultural institutions to merely publish, print, distribute, etc., a literary text with few to no discernible effects, and

those which, like mine, understand these institutions to have significant and varied influences on the texts, authors, and literary movements with which they interact. Since Latour's formulation of ANT, several scholars in the field of literary studies have drawn on his theory to revise and challenge an older sociology of literature that is predicated on strict dualities and a motivation to reveal the "real" meaning of a literary text.[12]

This dissertation similarly does *not* try to reveal the "truth" about the Cairene literary scene of the 1990s and early 2000s, to pass judgement on whether or not "the nineties generation" was a valid way to categorize this body of literature and group of authors, or to suggest that the readings I perform reveal a deeper or more authentic truth within the text than those arrived at using other analytical methods. Rather, I aim to trace a network comprised of authors, texts, publishing houses, cultural journals and newspapers, translators, prizes, critics, literary discourses, interpretative frameworks, and readers to propose new understandings of who is involved in the formation of a literary group and how these actors variously affected the production, circulation, and reception of this literary generation. I began my preliminary research on the nineties generation in 2009-2010 while studying at the Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA), housed at the American University in Cairo. During that year, I undertook a collaborative project with my colleague Michele Henjum that began with a series of interviews and culminated in *CairoBookStop* (launched August 2014), a digital project that provides a visual and textual guide to Cairo's literary publishers and bookstores. Though my initial interest had been in the literature of this generation, my conversations with Egyptian authors and critics

[12] See, for example, Bennett, Dromi & Illouz, and Love, each of which incorporates various elements of Latour's ANT and appeared in *New Literary History*'s 2010 special issue on "New Sociologies of Literature." Rita Felski, in *The Limits of Critique,* also draws on Latour's ANT in her argument to move away from a "suspicious" mode of reading embraced and practiced by critics and toward what she calls "postcritical reading."

about nineties generation texts continually turned to publishing. I was encouraged to talk to the publishers Mohamed Hashem of Merit and Hosni Soliman of Sharqiyyat, specifically, in order to better understand this body of literature. In an attempt to "follow the actors themselves," I thus began this project on Egypt's nineties generation with their two primary publishers. During my year at CASA and my subsequent research trips to Cairo (Spring 2013 and two additional summer research trips in 2011 and 2015), I had countless conversations and conducted formal interviews with more than thirty cultural actors, including authors, publishers, bookstore owners, literary critics, translators, cultural journalists, and editors. This dissertation incorporates textual analysis, strains of book historical theory that take up, variously, the author, publisher, and reader, and the interviews I conducted with the actors themselves to propose a methodological intervention by investigating the literary group as more than just the authors and the aesthetic traits that have come to be synonymous with it.

In my discussion of the nineties generation, I situate the group within both national and transnational literary networks, the latter of which developed as part of a larger global market for postcolonial literature that was firmly established by the 1990s. I do not intend the "national" and "global" to be taken as part of a dualistic ontology and, in fact, actively seek to trouble such a notion (see Chapter Five). However, to ignore the nation would be to discredit a key element for understanding this generation, its literature, and the networks in which it participated. As recent scholarship on the worlds of literature, art, and culture in Egypt has shown, the nation was a central actor and imaginary in the Egyptian cultural scene, particularly since the founding of the Egyptian Republic in 1953 and the period of nationalization that followed under Gamal Abdel Nasser's administration (1954-1970).[13] Within Egypt, debates about cultural products and their

[13] Jacquemond *Conscience* and Mehrez *Culture Wars* both seek to explain the Egyptian literary and larger cultural scenes, respectively, and provide important insights into the relationship between writers and the state in particular.

producers, including their legitimacy and monetary and symbolic value, often were couched in terms of their ideological and actual relationship to a national collective and to the state. Intellectuals, artists, and writers have been tied to the central government in Egypt since Muhammad Ali's reign (1805-1848). Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, the state took on more visible and contradictory roles of supporter and opponent, benefactor and censor, and became a central means by which writers and other cultural producers could gain or lose legitimacy.[14] While they were expected to distance themselves from state propaganda and serve as a critical, enlightened voice of reason, writers also frequently relied on the state as an employer, publisher, and general patron of culture. The state's involvement in cultural activities waned under Anwar Sadat's presidency (1970-1981), but Hosni Mubarak's administration (1981-2011) made a concerted effort to reinvigorate Egypt's cultural scene, simultaneously reinstating itself as a key actor with significant influence on cultural production and activities (see Chapter Four). To further complicate their relationship with the government, the largely secular base of writers and intellectuals also began to form uneasy alliances with the state, beginning with Nasser, in light of growing political and popular Islam in Egypt. According to Mehrez, "Control of the cultural field has been the state's consistent strategy in countering the rising influence of the Islamist movement and groups" (*Culture Wars* 3).

Throughout her thorough and insightful study of the art world of Egypt in the 1990s and early 2000s, Winegar details how the nation was constructed and employed as "a primary frame for perceiving and evaluating artworks, for articulating one's understandings of history and social change, for making sense of one's experiences, and for making, staking, and organizing political claims" (20-21). Kendall and Stagh also examine the state/nation as a key component and influential actor in literary journals and book publishing, respectively. Turning to other media, Abu-Lughod and Armbrust similarly explore the centrality of the Egyptian national imaginary as it was repeatedly constructed and contested—in various iterations—through television and other forms of pop culture.

[14] See, in particular, chapters one and two of Jacquemond's *Conscience* for a discussion of the development of this relationship between what he refers to as the "triad of *dawla* (state), *katib* (writer and/or clerk, or functionary), and *kitab* (book), set up from the nineteenth century onward, [which] continues to fashion the literary production and ideology of contemporary Egypt" (6).

One reason the nation was so entrenched in cultural debates and "the 'work' of art" (10), Winegar argues, is because the nation "was the dominant frame through which the majority of art world people made sense of the transformation from socialism through neoliberalism, as well as the concomitant rise of American dominance, often addressed locally as a new imperialism" (8-9). In this way, the nation was a valid and productive framework to discuss art within Egypt and, moving outside of national boundaries, to understand and contest global narratives and international hierarchies of power that extended beyond the literary or art world. Within literature specifically, since the nineteenth century *nahḍa* (roughly, Arab cultural renaissance) authors typically have conformed to a specifically Egyptian "literary commitment"[15] that has further linked writers to the nation and established the latter as an important literary icon that was continually formulated and reformulated over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first (see Chapter Two). Thus, when a new generation emerged in Cairo in the 1990s that openly rebelled against a nationalist framework and rejected traditional modes of engagement with a recognizable national collective in their literature, they immediately were recognized as a distinct literary group whose texts marked a clear shift in Egyptian literary tradition.

Though this change was widely recognized, there has been much debate over the best way to categorize and refer to this new body of literature and its writers. Some have preferred to use phrasing like "writing of the 1990s" to refer to the decade in which the texts were published, regardless of the age of the author. Others have used the term "new writing" (*al-kitāba al-*

[15] The notion of "committed literature," as inspired by Sartre's *littérature engage* in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1948), became widespread in Arabic, not just Egyptian, literature in the 1950s (see Chapter Two). Significantly, unlike in Sartre's conception of this kind of literature, it was poets who were at the forefront of promoting and writing committed literature in the modern Arabic literary tradition.

jadīda),[16] which similarly was tied more so to a text than the author and has been used to refer to writers who began to publish in the 2000s, as well. Most commonly, though, writers, critics, and scholars have referred to this body of literature and its authors as belonging to a literary "generation," which is the term I likewise employ throughout this dissertation. In Egyptian literary critical practice, the use of "generation" to categorize authors based on the decade when they first began to publish dates to the "sixties generation" and has continued with each passing decade (e.g., seventies, eighties, nineties).[17] However, this convention has long been contested, and the "nineties generation" was no exception. Writers and critics frequently denounced what was described as a journalistic move and evidence of the poor state of Egyptian literary criticism, which resorted to classifying literature based on non-literary factors such as an author's age, gender, or birthplace. Indeed, the use of "generation" and other such factors to categorize literature became a major debate in the literary scene at this time (see Chapter Three). Richard Jacquemond echoes this concern in his discussion of this literary critical practice, arguing that it makes assumptions across distinct levels of analysis, including the political, local, and aesthetic levels. In addition, many of those who purportedly belong to one generation exist in another simultaneously (*Conscience* 8). However, as Elisabeth Kendall points out in her discussion of Egypt's sixties generation, referring to groups of literary writers by generation can still be effective if we take the generation as the "spearhead" of a larger movement or trend in literature rather than as the entire embodiment of it (3). Despite the obvious limitations of the term, I likewise have found it to be effective in discussing this group of writers for two main reasons:

[16] Speaking at a three-day conference called "The Writings of Young Storytellers" held at Egypt's Supreme Council of Culture in 2002, for example, the organizer and esteemed author and critic Edwar al-Kharrat used the term "new writing" to describe what he saw as an emerging "movement" in Egyptian literature (Elbendary and Rakha).

[17] The 2011 Egyptian Revolution disrupted this literary practice, and it is too soon to say whether it will continue, or a new categorization system will take its place.

first, it reflects the popularity of this designation among writers, critics, and scholars, both within Egypt and writing from the outside; and second, it clearly positions this literary group within the larger narrative of modern Egyptian literary history.

Since they first began to publish in the early 1990s, writers of Egypt's nineties generation have been described in relation to—and often as the antithesis of—the sixties generation and its literary commitment. This older literary generation, which emerged in full following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war or *naksa* (setback), successfully challenged the literary realism that had dominated Arabic prose fiction through the mid-century.[18] Some of the most influential writers of this generation include: Ibrahim Mansour (1935-2004), Gamal al-Ghitani (1945-2016), Edwar al-Kharrat (1926-2015), Bahaa Taher (b. 1935), Sonallah Ibrahim (b. 1937), Ibrahim Aslan (1935-2012); Abdel Hakim Qasem (1934-1990); and Yahya Taher Abdullah (1938-1981), among others. These authors wrote existential, nihilistic, and absurdist pieces of literature, and they moved away from linear plots related by an infallible and omniscient narrator, towards fragmented, labyrinthine narratives featuring an anti-hero who frequently broke taboos and acted against the morals of society.[19] Significantly for the purposes of this discussion, the writers of the older generation typically wrote a kind of committed literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) which presented the avant-garde Arab author as a political conscience that rebelled against established norms and tastes in order to reform society, and more specifically the nation. The nineties generation has likewise been understood as an "avant-garde" group by critics, scholars, and

[18] While not negating the influence of literary realism in Arabic literature, recent scholarship such as Allen "Literary History," Selim "Narrative Craft," Hassan, and al-Musawi, among others, has begun to decenter the hegemonic Western realist novel in modern Arabic literary history and to locate new sites of resistance and innovation in the modern Arabic literary canon.

[19] For more on Egypt's "sixties generation" as a distinct literary group, see: Hafez "Egyptian Novel in the Sixties," Y. Ramadan, and Kendall (especially chapters three, four, and five).

sometimes the writers themselves, in reference to the ways in which their literature sought to negate their literary predecessors and antagonize dominant literary styles.[20] In such assessments, the sixties generation is posited as the previous avant-garde—one that had become the literary elite and orthodoxy by the dawn of the nineties—and thus the group against which the new generation rebelled. Some have gone so far as to argue that the nineties generation represented the first true aesthetic challenge to the sixties generation,[21] while others have cautioned against such a narrative that arguably discounts the achievements and influence of writers of the 1970s and 1980s and overemphasizes the discontinuity between generations.[22]

Roughly speaking, the works of Egypt's "nineties generation" have been characterized by a marked turn away from the nation and a refusal to engage with the major issues (*al-qaḍāyā al-kubrā*) of the day, a prizing of the self (*al-dhāt*) and the individual above the collective as a source of literary inspiration and focus in their works, a fascination with the everyday that manifested in the exploration of minute details and the use of a language closer to daily life, and an outspoken rebellion against traditional literary genres and styles established and employed by older generations. The authors of this generation grew up surrounded by the disillusionment that

[20] For instance, Kendall (109), Mehrez (*Culture Wars* 143), Jacquemond (*Conscience* 76), and Anishchenkova (102), among several others, use the term "avant-garde" to refer to the generation as a whole or to specific writers whom they take to be representative of it.

[21] Hafez, for instance, asserted in an interview published in *Akhbār al-Adab* in 2000, "[W]riters who emerged between the 1960s and the 1990s produced a continuation of, or variation on, the achievement of the 1960s, while one can argue that the generation of the 1990s concluded a narrative rift with all that had come before" (quoted in Rakha "News").

[22] Seymour-Jorn "Ethnographic," for instance, in her discussion of Miral al-Tahawy's *The Tent*, argues that seventies generation women writers had significant influence on women writers of the nineties, specifically with regard to the former's "experimentation with language to express women's experience of their bodies and sexuality, their emotions, and their minds" (110). See also Seymour-Jorn *Cultural Criticism* for a detailed discussion of such influential seventies generation women writers, including among others, Ibtihal Salem (56-83), Etidal Osman (130-48), and Salwa Bakr (17-55).

followed the 1967 *naksa*, and came of age in post-*infitāḥ*[23] Egypt, amidst a crumbling nationalist project and economic and political stagnation. They had lived under Emergency Law, declared by Mubarak in 1981, since before they were old enough to vote, and found little space to participate in politics or society at large. The 1990s in Egypt also witnessed a growing consumerism, further fueled by globalization, and a continued rise of Islamic fundamentalism at home. As popular Islam and Islamic political movements grew over the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, this group of writers—who, like their predecessors, were largely secular—felt themselves further ostracized by society, as they became sometimes unwilling participants in the ongoing battle over the ideological direction of the country.

The nineties generation was arguably Egypt's most diverse literary group up to that time, with regard to gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and regional representation. For the first time in Egyptian literary history, as Mehrez has pointed out, women were on par with men in terms of literary production and representation in an emerging literary group (*Culture Wars* 125), some of the repercussions of which I explore in Chapter Five. This group was also well educated, with most of its members having attained at least a B.A. and several writers, particularly the women, having completed doctoral degrees. Many of the writers were fluent in more than one language, and some wrote in languages such as English, Spanish, and French, in addition to

[23] "*Infitāh*" refers to President Anwar Sadat's "open-door" policy that took shape following the 1973 October War. It sought to reduce the state's involvement in the economy by expanding the private sector through opening the country to foreign and domestic investment. It was generally viewed as overly ambitious project tainted with cronyism and corruption, which led to its failure amid the "Bread Riots" of 1977. During the riots, hundreds of thousands of lower-class Egyptians took to the streets to protest the government's termination of subsidies on basic foodstuffs, a legislative move that was ordered by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Arabic. Though the majority of nineties generation writers wrote and lived in Cairo, many of the authors originally came from other cities and small villages spread throughout Egypt.[24]

The most prominent examples of nineties generation writers include: Mustafa Zikri (b. 1966), Nora Amin (b. 1970), Miral al-Tahawy (b. 1968), Hamdi Abu Golayyel (b. 1968), Montasser al-Qaffash (b. 1964), May Telmissany (b. 1965), Adel Esmat (b. 1959), Ibrahim Farghali (b. 1967), Hoda Hussein (b. 1972), Yasser Abdel-Latif (b. 1969), Mona Prince (b. 1971), Samir Gharib Ali (b. 1966), Amina Zaydan (b. 1966); Yasser Shaaban (b. 1969), Sahar al-Mougy (b. 1963), and Somaya Ramadan (b. 1951), among others. Others frequently discussed as belonging to the broader "new writing," which overlaps with the more narrowly defined "nineties generation" in terms of aesthetic traits and critical discussions of their works, include: Ahmed Alaidy (b. 1974), Mansoura Ez Eldin (b. 1976), Hamdy el-Gazzar (b. 1970), Muhammad Aladdin (b. 1979), Youssef Rakha (b. 1974), Yasser Abdel Hafez (b. 1969), Safaa Ennagar (b. 1973), and Magdy El Shafee (b. 1961), among others. Ahmed Alaidy's *An Takūn 'Abbās al-'Abd* (2003; *Being Abbas El Abd*, 2006), which presents a hybrid, interrupted narrative that follows a schizophrenic narrator on his futile quest for identity and connection, for example, quickly became a cult classic and a defining text of the "I've-got-nothing-left-to-lose generation"[25] (36), as Alaidy's protagonist dubs it. In addition to these authors who mostly wrote prose fiction, Egypt's nineties generation includes poets such as Iman Mersal, Ahmad Yamani, Ala' Khalid, and Mohab Nasr, among others. The poetry of this generation is a subject of growing interest[26]

[24] For example, Miral al-Tahawy and Hamdi Abu Golayyel came from Bedouin backgrounds and villages in the Delta and outside of Fayum, respectively. Adel Esmat grew up in Tanta, Mansoura Ez Eldin in the Nile Delta, Amina Zaydan in Suez, and Ibrahim Farghali in Mansoura, among others who hailed from outside of Cairo.

[25] This quote is from Humphrey Davies's translation.

[26] To read some of the "new writing" of Egyptian poets, see, for example, Metwalli. One of the most translated (into English) "nineties generation" poets is the translator, literary scholar, and professor Iman Mersal. A selection of Mersal's poems was translated into English by Khaled Mattawa and published as *These Are Not Oranges, My Love*

and certainly merits further critical attention. However, because of my interest in the form of the novel and the connections between this genre and the cultural institutions involved in its publication, translation, and circulation, as well as literary prizes for the Arabic novel specifically, I focus in this dissertation on the prose fiction writers of the generation and their novelistic texts.

With the exception of Chapter Two, which considers how contemporary shifts in Egyptian cultural institutions as a whole affected the notion of authorship in the 1990s and early 2000s, each chapter in this dissertation focuses on a specific cultural institution that I show to have had significant impact on the formation and development of Egypt's nineties generation. In Chapter Two, I provide an aesthetic introduction to this literary group and examine how their literature engages reflexively with changes in how Egyptian literature was produced and circulated during this period. Through close readings of Nora Amin's *Qamīṣ wardī fārigh* (An Empty Pink Shirt, 1997), Mustafa Zikri's *Mir'āt 202* (Mirror 202, 2003), and Hamdi Abu Golayyel's *al-Fā'il* (2008; *A Dog With No Tail*,[27] 2009), I demonstrate the various ways in which the texts demote the figure of the literary author, and I read the author's disestablishment as a rejection of the idea of the author as the enlightened voice of the nation that dominated Egyptian literature throughout the twentieth century. I argue that these texts, which disavow traditional

(2008), and her poetry has appeared in translation in journals such as Michigan Quarterly Review, The Kenyon Review, The Nation, American Poetry Review, Parnassus, and Paris Review. For a scholarly approach to Egypt's modern poets, see Radwan *Colloquial Poetry*. While her study focuses on specifically colloquial poets of an older generation, it provides important context for the poets of the 1990s and beyond, as she situates a significant but little-studied body of Egyptian poetry into the broader modernist movement in Arabic poetry. Though itself a work of prose fiction, Youssef Rakha's *al-Tamāsīḥ* (2012, *The Crocodiles* 2015) provides an insider perspective on poetry cliques in Egypt in the 1990s, and his *Diwan 90*, a collection of essays Rakha published in English over the 1990s and early 2000s, includes several articles on the younger generation of Egyptian poets.

[27] The title of Abu Golayyel's novel in Arabic translates as "the laborer." The author chose a different title for the English version of his book, as translated by Robin Moger and published with AUC Press (Qualey, "One-Minute Review").

notions of the national imaginary and collective, are not apolitical, as they often were read, but present a critique of an outdated, ineffective model of political engagement that was predicated on the nation and gesture, instead, towards new collectivities.

Chapter Three examines the role played in the 1990s by the widely read and influential Cairo-based cultural newspaper *Akhbār al-Adab* (Literary News, est. 1993) in the making of narratives about Egypt's nineties generation, narratives which were themselves constitutive of this literary group.[28] Referring to Latour's ANT, I argue that the nineties generation is best defined not by a set list of texts, authors, and literary styles, but by the ongoing process of formulating and reformulating the group. We see this process clearly played out in the newspaper's "Malāmiḥ Jīl" (Features of a Generation) series of interviews with writers affiliated with the nineties generation that ran sporadically between 1997 and 2001. Drawing on scholarship on Egyptian literary journalism and the literary interview as a genre, I provide close readings of the interviews and examine how traces left by multiple, competing agencies affect meaning in the printed texts. With the publication of these interviews, itself an act in Egypt's literary scene, the complexly polyvocal claims and narratives about the individual writers and their literary group helped generate and interrogate the boundaries of what constituted the "nineties generation."

Turning to publishing houses, Chapter Four incorporates book historical theory to posit publishing houses as the matrix through which writers, readers, and other stakeholders approached literature in Egypt at this time. I focus my discussion on the small, private presses Dar Sharqiyyat (est. 1991) and Dar Merit (est. 1998) and demonstrate the ways in which each

[28] An early version of this chapter was published as "The Cultural Newspaper *Akhbar al-Adab* and the Making of Egypt's 'Nineties Generation'" in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (No. 37, Literature and Journalism, 2017, pp. 229-261).

took part in establishing this literary group as an integral and integrated part of Egyptian literature. Adapting Robert Darnton's "communications circuit" as a point of critical comparison, I first establish the primacy of the publishing house as an actor in the Cairo-centered literary scene and demonstrate the reach of the publishing house in the larger network of production, circulation, and reception of books in Egypt, paying particular attention to the role of censorship in this setting. I then turn to Sharqiyyat and Merit, referring to several interviews I conducted, and approach each as a complex actor comprised of owners, editors, layout designers, cover artists, etc., in my exploration of the connections and interactions between each publishing house and the emerging literary group.

Finally, Chapter Five situates the nineties generation in the larger domain of "world literature," focusing on the American University in Cairo Press as a major translator of Arabic literature into English and a dynamic, hybrid mediator that negotiated between "local" and "global" markets and reception contexts. The chapter brings scholarship on Western reception of Arab women writers into conversation with a hotly contested local literary critical debate centered on the generation's women writers: *kitābat al-banāt* (girls' writing). Close readings of Miral al-Tahawy's *al-Khibā'* (1996; *The Tent*, 1998) show how exposing intersections among these supposedly distinct interpretive communities allows us to locate new modes of gendered and subaltern resistance within the literature. By considering the Cairene literary group as part of a global network of literary production and reception, this chapter illuminates how the nineties generation participated in debates over the transnational consumption of postcolonial women's literature.

In the increasingly globalized field of literary studies, scholars working on literatures previously confined to area studies in the Western academy are challenging dominant,

Eurocentric models that are frequently based on a singular notion of modernity and a narrative of progression in order to create more inclusive, self-critical literary histories and theory. This dissertation demonstrates how cultural institutions mediate between "national" and "world" literary fields, as they inscribe literary groups with their historical and geographic specificity and allow texts and authors to enter new, transnational networks. In light of these institutions' unique positionality and crucial roles in shaping literary production and circulation, it is all the more imperative to reorient literary studies, whether located within a single national tradition or transnationally, to include critical discussions of what are often considered mere intermediaries in cultural production.

Chapter 2

The Changing Terms of Authorship: Examining the Figure of the Author in Three Novels by Nora Amin, Mustafa Zikri, and Hamdi Abu Golayyel

When a loosely affiliated group of predominantly young writers—including Nora Amin, Mustafa Zikri, Hamdi Abu Golayyel, Miral al-Tahawy, and Iman Mersal, to name a few—began to publish experimental literary works in Cairo in the 1990s, they were initially dismissed by local critics and established authors, due in large part to the young writers' marked shift away from issues concerning the national collective. Indeed, the prominent absence of the Egyptian nation in their literature became a defining trait of the nineties generation. In this chapter, I argue that the literature by this group of writers rejects the dominant model of Egyptian literary authorship that is predicated on the nation and presents a search for new modes of literary authorship that lay outside the nationalist framework. Drawing on scholarship on modern Arabic literature and the Egyptian literary field, I first establish how the conception of literary authorship in Egypt at the turn of the twenty-first century was tied to the nation. I next describe the literature of the nineties generation, highlighting its salient features, to explore why the turn away from the national collective has been identified as the single most important trait of the generation. I contend that this shift marked not only a change in literary style but in the paradigm of authorship itself.

Turning to the literature, I provide close readings of three texts by quintessential nineties generation authors, Nora Amin's *Qamīṣ wardī fārigh* (An Empty Pink Shirt, 1997), Mustafa

Zikri's *Mir'āt 202* (Mirror 202, 2003), and Hamdi Abu Golayyel's *al-Fā'il* (2008; *A Dog with No Tail*, 2009),[29] to explore how the changing terms of authorship that I describe are reflected in the literature. All three texts present metafictional, hybrid narratives that incorporate autobiographical elements but can be categorized loosely as novels, and each features a narrator-protagonist that doubles as the book's author. Through close readings, I examine the literary strategies that Amin, Zikri, and Abu Golayyel employ to variously erase, blur, and signal the absence of the literary author's traditional roles, paying particular attention to the ways in which the texts engage readers in the process. I argue that each novel effectively demotes the literary author, who is no longer capable of observing, reflecting, or reforming the nation through his/her literature, and read this demotion as a rejection of the dominant paradigm of authorship. The kind of democratizing move found in the literature that increases readers' involvement in the construction of meaning in the texts and places readers and authors on a more equal plane, however, is not toward a new ideology or unified practice. Rather, the disestablishment of the literary author present in these texts presents a critique of an outdated, ineffective notion of political engagement and gestures, instead, toward new relationships and collectivities defined outside of nationalist terms.

The Terms of Authorship

By the time writers of the nineties generation began publishing their works, the image of the literary author as a moral and intellectual guide for society was well established in the modern Arabic literary tradition, including within Egypt. This conception of authorship dates

[29] The English title, which is quite different from the Arabic *al-Fā'il* or "The Laborer," was chosen by Abu Golayyel (Qualey, "One-Minute Review").

back to the nineteenth-century *nahḍa* or Arab cultural renaissance, when writers frequently sought to help their readers navigate this period of intellectual and cultural modernization and new relationships with the West via their prose fiction.[30] The formation of national identities as a means to confront Ottoman, British, and French powers in the region was a central goal of the new Arabic literary forms that were emerging at that time, as authors consciously sought to connect their literature to political and social reality (Klemm 52). The development of the novel in Arabic as a genre, in particular, was tied to the emergence of nationalist and other unifying ideologies, and the dialectical relationship between this novel, especially its realist tradition, and the nation has been well established and theorized in the modern Arabic literary tradition, including within a specifically Egyptian context.[31] Even during what Sabry Hafez has called the 'embryonic stage' of modern Arabic narrative discourse during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,[32] the emerging Arabic novel's claim as a genre to represent reality made it particularly well suited to national causes and the new bourgeois intelligentsia that promoted them (Selim, *Novel* 70).

The notion that writers, artists, and intellectuals had a responsibility to use their cultural work to better their societies, especially through expressions of anticolonial, nationalist, and pan-Arab sentiment, gained traction in the 1920s in Egypt and the Levant. Especially vocal were

[30] Prominent examples of such didacticism include, for example: Lebanese intellectual, journalist, translator, and writer Salīm al-Bustānī's (1848-1884) *al-Huyām fī jinān al-shām* (published serially in the 1870s in his newspaper *al-Jinan*), and Egyptian writer and journalist Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī's (1858-1930) *Ḥadīth 'Isā Ibn Hishām* (serialized in al-Muwaylihi's newspaper *Miṣbāḥ al-sharq* under the title *Fatra min al-zaman* between 1898 and 1902 and originally published in book form in 1907).

[31] For discussion of the development of the Egyptian novel and the significance of realism since the nineteenth century *nahḍa*, see Elsadda, Kilpatrick, Selim *Novel*, Brugman, Jad, Mousa-Mahmoud, Sakkut, Siddiq, and Allen *The Arabic Novel*.

[32] See Hafez *Genesis*, chapter three, in particular, for Hafez's discussion of this period.

critics in Cairo and Beirut who "advocated more resolutely than anybody previously a definite change in the understanding of the political and social mission of the writer" and "firmly demanded the participation of the writer in the liberation, modernization and democratization of his nation" (Klemm 52). Commenting on the use of fiction to coalesce and organize society, Samah Selim points to the accompanying shift in the character of the narrator that came at that time. she notes, noting that the narrator changed from a voice that represented a collective heritage, to an elevated individual narrating what he witnessed. She writes, "[t]he new narrator was…an *individual* standing 'outside' the collectivity, observing it, describing it, narrating it, not as a communal historian, but from a position that embodied a subjective but nonetheless authoritative and hegemonic point of view" (emphasis in the original, "Narrative Craft," 112-113). Moreover, Selim argues, it was through this narrator that conflicts between the individual and society were resolved (113), a marked difference from the literature of the nineties generation which purposefully maintained the tension between self and collective.

The notion that literary works should contain a political or moral message alongside their aesthetic and entertaining aspects progressed further in the modern Arabic literary tradition with the rise of "committed literature" (*al-adab al-multazim*), inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre, in the mid-twentieth century.[33] Sartre's term and his discussion of the responsibility of the author to society was first introduced to Arabic circles by the influential Egyptian writer and intellectual Taha Hussein in 1947 in his review of Sartre's essays that would later be published as *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1948; *What Is Literature*, 1950) (Klemm 51). Due to the already well-established relationship between literature and its surrounding sociopolitical conditions in the modern Arabic

[33] Significantly, while Sartre excluded poets from his discussion of *littérature engagée*, in the modern Arabic literary tradition, poets were at the forefront of the call for modern Arabic literature to engage with and better one's society.

literary tradition, as well as growing nationalist sentiment and anti-colonial movements in the region, the notion of committed literature found a particularly receptive audience among Arab intellectuals. The terms *al-adab al-multazim* and *al-iltizām* (commitment) spread quickly and widely thanks to the efforts of the Beiruti literary magazine *al-'Ādāb*, established by Suhayl Idris in 1953 and still in print today. From its first issue, the magazine "convey[ed] an exemplary nationalist message," as writers were charged with creating responsible and thoughtful readers (Klemm 52), and it soon became "the mouthpiece of a whole generation of committed writers and poets" (53). *Al'-Ādāb* published and participated in debates over how exactly Arab authors should practice literary commitment up through the 1960s. Despite the differences of opinion expressed in these debates, the essential notion that authors had an obligation to connect their literature to social and political reality was widely accepted and practiced. During this time, "committed literature," unsurprisingly, was tied to society defined along national lines, both in terms of emerging republics such as Egypt and Lebanon and a pan-Arab *umma*.[34] The literary realist novel was particularly adept at promoting nationalist sentiment and action and reached its peak with Naguib Mahfouz's masterful *Cairo Trilogy* in the late 1950s,[35] which he wrote during the hopeful prelude to the Egyptian revolution of 1952.[36]

[34] "Umma" is defined as "nation, people, community," and *al-umma al-'arabiyya* as "the Arab nation, the sum total of all Arabs" ("Umma"). The idea of a single pan-Arab nation that encompassed all Arabs, from North Africa through the Levant and down to the Arabian Peninsula, dates to the *nahḍa* and arose largely in response to encroaching Western military and cultural influence in the region. Pan-Arabism reached its peak during the 1950s and 1960s, when it, like other forms of nationalism in the region, began to decline.

[35] The *Trilogy* consists of: *Bayna al-qaṣrayn* (1956; *Palace Walk*, 1990), *Qaṣr al-shawq* (1957; *Palace of Desire*, 1991), and *al-Sukarriyya* (1957; *Sugar Street*, 1992).

[36] Though written before the war (and, indeed, the trilogy reflects the optimism of the pre-revolution period), the novels were not published until shortly after Gamal Abdel Nasser officially assumed power in 1956, following a three-year transition period from Egypt's establishment as an independent republic.

A major shift in modern Arabic literature occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s in response to a general, growing disillusionment with the newly established Arab governments, which were often were authoritarian and oppressive, and the 1967 *naksa* or setback that exposed the inability of Arab regimes to counter Israeli military action. Writers began to purposefully challenge the dominant literary realism that assumed the genre of the novel could capture and reflect reality. Moving away from linear plots related by an infallible, single, omniscient narrative voice, they wrote fragmented texts in a fallible narrative voice that itself would often splinter. The protagonist-hero of the realist novel was replaced with an anti-hero who defied social mores, just as the texts broke linguistic and stylistic taboos. However, as Stefan Meyer notes in his discussion of the post-realist, experimental Levantine novel, while writers varied in how they challenged the formal unity of the realist novel, they all continued to work "from a standpoint that reflects the values and priorities of the *engagé*" (7). In other words, despite the shift away from literary realism and embrace of techniques often labeled as modernist and postmodernist—some of which were adopted by nineties generation writers, as well, though often to different effect—the idea that the literary author was responsible to his/her society remained a dominant ideology in modern Arabic literature throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

Similarly in Egypt, when the avant-garde sixties generation began to break with the narrative conventions of literary realism, they continued to promote a connection between literature and reality, specifically its social and political spheres, as defined along national lines.[37]

[37] Radwan "One Hundred Years" has challenged the assumption that the employment of modernist and postmodernist techniques necessarily marks a work as non-realist. In her discussion of modern Egyptian literature, she argues, instead, for a broader understanding of "realism" that refers to a text's ability to make the reader see or experience an unexpected, but nonetheless true, version of his/her reality (275). Radwan contends that the same is true for the nineties generation and that "the radical rejection of readily recognizable narrative structures in the

In his comprehensive study of Egypt's literary field over the course of the twentieth century, Richard Jacquemond argues that two of the main *doxa* of twentieth-century Egyptian literature were "the idea of the writer as the conscience of the nation and of literature as the mirror of society" (*Conscience* 5). He further contends that the primary expectation of the modern Egyptian literary author is to produce socially engaged writing that relates to and represents a collective readership (88-91). In a separate discussion centered on the nineties generation, Jacquemond extends this argument, maintaining that the younger generation of writers faced repercussions in the 1990s and early 2000s when they diverged from what he calls the "realistic-reformist paradigm" ("Shifting Limits" 45). This paradigm, which was still in place in turn of the twenty-first century Egypt, posits literature as capable of—and responsible for—reflecting reality as a means to help one's society progress. Jacquemond reasons that because nineties generation authors eschewed the role of reformer of the nation, they did not receive the same level of support as those who embraced this role when they faced formal and informal censorship.[38] Caroline Rooney similarly has highlighted the responsibility with which contemporary Egyptian writers and intellectuals have been charged. However, in contrast to Jacquemond's conception of authors as those who provide a reflection of the nation's past, Rooney describes their responsibility as more "prospective" (371), with "the writer or

Egyptian fiction of the 1990s does not reflect a departure from realism. Rather it represents the socioeconomic conditions of life on the peripheries of global capital" (276).

[38] Jacquemond shows how critics and writers legitimized literary works facing censorship such as Mohamed Choukri's *al-Khubz al-ḥāfī* (1982; *For Bread Alone*, 1973) "by inserting [them] within the realistic-reformist paradigm" ("Shifting Limits" 49). However, Jacquemond contends, responses to censorship of literary works by the younger generation that could not be reconciled with this paradigm, such as Samir Gharib Ali's *al-Ṣaqqār* (The Hawker, 1996), reveal that the intelligentsia's "apology for the writer's freedom remains conditional: the interference of authorities 'external to the circle of creativity' is rejected, but the writer must question his 'conscience' and his 'sense of responsibility'" (44). In other words, while they denounced censorship coming from the outside, Egypt's established writers and critics nonetheless promoted a kind of internal policing that promoted socially responsible and committed literature.

intellectual […] presented as a seer able to realize through anticipation both the pitfalls and the progressive opportunities of history as it unfolds" (370). I contend that both a recognizable, shared past and such a future are markedly missing in nineties generation literature. Instead of trying to represent the past or future of a nation that the author seeks to reconcile with and to guide, the new literature focuses on a present that is defined by the intensely personal self of the author-figure protagonist, who remains resolutely detached from any familiar representation of a national collective.

The nineties generation of writers came of age and began publishing in the midst of a crumbling nationalist project. Rampant corruption in the government, which had imposed the Emergency Law continuously since 1981, had exacerbated the wealth gap and contributed to a growing lack of confidence in the state. Egypt's turn from Gamal Abdel Nasser's (1954-1970) socialist policies to Anwar Sadat's (1970-1981) open-door policy (*infitāḥ*), which relaxed regulations on private investment in Egypt in an attempt to stimulate Egypt's economy following the 1973 war, further increased the social and economic disparity between lower and upper classes, as well as state-level corruption. Additionally, following Egypt's decision under Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) to end its guaranteed employment policy for graduates of technical secondary school and university in the 1990s, youth unemployment, including among skilled workers, rose dramatically. By 2011, estimates suggest that, on average, only 200,000 new jobs were created each year for the roughly 700,000 new graduates (Provost). On the political front, since Sadat's signing of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in 1979, a rift had grown within the country between the policy and actions of the state and popular sentiment. Egypt's regional standing has declined due to its relations with Israel and the U.S. and its tacit support of U.S. military interventions and wars in the Middle East. Operation Desert Storm marked a particularly

poignant moment of defeat for the younger generation, many of whom were in university at that time and watched powerlessly as Iraq was attacked.

Given this dismal reality and the exclusion they felt from political and social life, the generation of writers that was emerging in the 1990s found themselves at odds with both the broader tradition of commitment present in the modern Arabic literary tradition and the dominant notion of literary authorship that was tied to the Egyptian nation as an imaginary and collective. However, this is not to say that nineties generation literature does not engage with society or that Egypt has disappeared from these texts. Rather, the new literature exposes the absence of a stable, homogenous notion of Egypt and reveals the inability of the nation, as an organizing principle, to form a single, unified collective. In these texts, instead of leading and reforming the nation as such, the author's role becomes one of challenging a single understanding of "Egypt" and the centrality of being Egyptian to individual identity. As the prominence of one's nationality fades as an identity marker, other traits such as gender, ethnicity, education level, among others, come to the fore, and the present moment of writing the text takes on new significance, as we will see in the three texts discussed later in this chapter.

The Literature of the Nineties Generation

Before turning to the generation's refutation of an identifiable Egyptian imaginary and collective, a brief discussion of other salient literary features that have come to define this literary group is helpful to further contextualize and understand their literature. Nineties generation prose fiction is characterized by multiple layers of fragmentation that affect form, character, and language. These "intransitive narratives," as Sabry Hafez has referred to them, are explicitly more interested in the processes of their own construction than establishing

connections between the world of the text and the real world ("New Egyptian Novel" 62). Typically, these texts are related by highly unreliable, isolated narrator-protagonists who often acts as the (implied) author. At times, the narrators are so fragmented that they encounter their own alter-egos within the text, as we see for instance, in Ahmed Alaidy's schizophrenic protagonist in *An Takūn 'Abbās al-'Abd* (2003; *Being Abbas el Abd*, 2006), the counter that al-Tahawy's young protagonist Fatima creates out of Bedouin folklore in *al-Khibā'* (1996; *The Tent*, 1998), and Maryam's *qarina* in Ez Eldin's *Matāhat Maryām* (2004; *Maryam's Maze*, 2007), among many other examples. While the protagonists typically share some traits with the authors, the novels were not autobiographical in a traditional sense, despite claims some made about the literature by this generation's women writers in particular.[39]

Authors of this generation frequently played with literary form in their works, intentionally breaking genre conventions as they experimented with new forms like *al-riwāya al-qaṣīra* or "the short novel,"[40] *al-kitāb al-shi'rī* or "the poetic book,"[41] and *al-kitāb al-qiṣaṣī* or "the story-esque book,"[42] among numerous other examples. Writing in the mid-1990s, esteemed literary critic Edwar al-Kharrat identified and analyzed this emerging trend among Egyptian

[39] While the writers do not deny the overlaps between their personal lives and those of their characters, they often rejected the term "autobiography" as a means to categorize their literature (see Chapter Five).

[40] In the prologue to *Mā ya'rifuhu Amīm wa-khams riwāyāt ukhrā* (What Amin Knows and Five Other Novels,), Mustafa Zikri describes the constitutive texts as *riwāyāt qaṣīra* or "short novels." This categorization refers to a combination of two genres, the short story and the novel, that attempts to maintain the integrity of each. In Zikri's words "this form demands an expressive intensity on the one hand, and it provides an opportunity for a kind of concise outpouring…on the other" ("Muqaddima" 9).

[41] Hoda Hussein has described some of her early works as falling under the category of *al-kitāb al-shi'rī* or "poetic book," which she describes as a kind of open text that does not separate one poem from the next but instead falls between the novel, short story, and prose poem (see Appendix A for bibliographic details of Hussein's interview with Yasser Abdel Hafez as part of the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" interview series).

[42] Montasser al-Qaffash used this term to describe his *Fī mustawā al-naẓar* (At Eye Level, 2012) because a reader could pick up the book and read one "story" as a complete piece of writing, or read the book from start to finish as a series of interconnected texts that "plays at being a new kind of literary genre" (al-Qaffash, Personal interview).

writers in his 1994 book of criticism *al-Kitāba ʻabra al-nawʻiyya: maqālāt fī ẓāhirat ʻal-qiṣṣa—al-qaṣīda wa nuṣūṣ mukhtāra* (Trans-genre Writing: Essays on the Phenomenon of the "Story-Poem" and Selected Texts). In these essays, al-Kharrat argues that "trans-genre writing," as he intends it, does not simply refer to a transgression of boundaries between categories of genres that permits each genre to retain its individual properties; rather, this kind of writing signifies a intermixing that, through the interaction of various genres within a given work, comes together to create a new, distinct genre (*nawʻ*) that is more than the sum of its individual parts (11). In his 2010 article "The New Egyptian Novel: Urban Transformation and Narrative Form,"[43] Sabry Hafez similarly highlights the formal features of this generation's literature. He suggests a series of formal homologies between the winding narrative structure of the texts that are full of dead ends and the topography of Cairo's "third city," a chaotic sprawl that contrasts sharply with the well-planned, open structure of the neighborhoods built previously.

In addition to deliberate experimentation with literary form and genre, the generation of writers emerging in the 1990s and early 2000s also began to create new, hybrid forms of language. Humphrey Davies, in his "Translator's Note" to Alaidy's *Being Abbas el Abd*, notes that the young generation's "rebellions and alienations do not express themselves solely at the level of ideas and attitudes, but also find a wide-open area for havoc in language" (128). Indeed, this body of literature challenged the underlying assumption in Arabic literature that there are, generally speaking, two registers: a "low" colloquial Arabic and a "high" literary Arabic.[44] By

[43] Hafez's article was translated into Arabic by Muḥammad Ḥamāma as "*al-Riwāya al-miṣriyya al-jadīda: al-taḥawwul al-ḥaḍarī wa-l-shakl al-sardī*" and was published on *Waḥdat al-dirāsāt al-ishtirākiyya*'s website in 2012, thus inserting Hafez's arguments into local, Arabic literary critical debates, as well.

[44] The debate of "low" colloquial versus "high" literary Arabic has long been phrased as such. It refers to the division among writers and intellectuals as to whether any colloquial should be permitted in Arabic literature, especially to create a more realistic portrayal of voices in new literary forms that developed during the *nahḍa*, or whether colloquial Arabic's inclusion would cheapen and degrade both the Arabic language and Arabic literature. Over the course of the 20th century, it became the norm to use colloquial dialects in the modern Arabic novel and

defying linguistic conventions, they introduced an even more fragmented yet capacious Arabic language via narratives that are presented as if they represent a single, though heterogeneous, Arabic language, rather than in a bifurcated Arabic comprised of the literary and the colloquial.[45] The nineties generation also incorporated marginalized and stigmatized dialects like Bedouin ones that often were absent in Arabic literature, as we find in Bedouin authors Miral al-Tahawy's[46] and Hamdi Abu Golayyel's works, examples of "text speak" inspired by SMS and the internet, and words from a host of foreign languages. Their irreverent mix of registers, dialects, and languages sometimes led critics to dismiss the younger generation as uninterested and uneducated in the rules of Arabic rhetoric and grammar (Hafez, "New Egyptian Novel" 49).

While the traits discussed above capture some of the key features of nineties generation writing, the single most distinctive trait of this literary group since its emergence has been authors' turn away from traditional conceptions of the nation and a larger national collective and toward an often alienated, marginalized self.[47] As Hoda Elsadda has noted, one of the central

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short story, and many authors have experimented with adding multiple registers to a single text by varying the register to match the age, education, and background of a specific character. However, attitudes towards the colloquial and distinctions between colloquial literature and 'real' literature have continued to dominate in critical discussions.

[45] Prime examples of this include Alaidy's *Being Abbas el Abd* and Youssef Rakha's *Kitāb al-ṭughrā* (2011; The Book of the Sultan's Seal, 2015). Rakha, writing up to the eve of the 2011 revolution, presents in this book a 500-page, complexly multilingual, hybrid novel that follows the three-week journey of its protagonist, a young, disillusioned, Egyptian journalist named Mustafa Nayif Çorbacı through Cairo as he travels physically across its sprawling neighborhoods and traverses the city's vast history via books. Language experimentation was a central element of this book, as Rakha acknowledges in the Prologue, in which he states forthrightly:

> *The Book of the Sultan's Seal* does not merely welcome solecisms and bad language but actually celebrates them, imitating speech in all its variety. The author and those who have assisted him have dealt with colloquial language in an open-minded spirit because they like the life that it can impart to the classical tongue. The book also welcomes expressions from foreign languages that have been imported into Arabic, instead of rejecting them or being disturbed by their presence, and for this reason colloquial and foreign expressions have not been distinguished from other words in the typography. (3-4, Starkey's translation).

[46] See Seymour-Jorn "Ethnographic" for a discussion of the ethnographic elements of al-Tahawy's novel *The Tent* and analysis of how al-Tahawy used the Bedouin language as expressed in authentic Bedouin poetry in her text.

[47] Scholarship on the nineties generation has focused on the aesthetic traits considered to represent a break with previous literary norms, particularly the move away from issues concerning the national collective (e.g., Mehrez

debates that surrounded this generation "revolved around the value of their writing from a nationalist perspective" and concerned the young writers' eschewal of *al-qaḍāyā al-kubrā* (major issues) and the resultant absence of the nation in their writing (145). Already in 1996, as writers and critics were beginning to acknowledge the "new writing" (*al-kitāba al-jadīda*) as a distinct trend, nineties generation writer and literary critic May Telmissany highlighted the surprising absence of the Egyptian nation in works by her peers in her article "al-Kitāba ʻalā hāmish al-tarīkh" (Writing on the Margin of History) that details some of the characteristics of the emerging literary group. She argues that Egyptian writers typically achieved a connection with their readers through a kind of shared code that allowed them to imagine a shared national identity: "geographic place, shared history, and the Egyptian character" (*al-shakhṣiyya al-miṣriyya*) (98). This new generation of writers, however, broke with this tradition and noticeably omitted from their texts any such code that would connect writer and reader through a common Egyptian identity (97-98).

Samia Mehrez, referring to writings of the 1990s more generally but still focusing predominantly on works by the younger generation, similarly has singled out the lack of the Egyptian collective as a defining trait.[48] Specifically, she argues that the novels of that time present "the death of the family as a literary icon that represents the Egyptian national imaginary" (*Culture Wars* 123). Providing readings of several texts, she demonstrates how the family, which is the traditional symbol of the national collective in Egypt, is markedly absent, whether due to migration, death, or irreconcilable misunderstandings between generations of

"Where Have All of the Families Gone", Hafez "New Egyptian Novel", Telmissany "al-Kitāba", Jacquemond "Shifting Limits", Junge, Anishchenkova, and Elsadda).

[48] These arguments originally appeared in her 2002 article "Where Have All the Families Gone?," which was later expanded and included as a chapter in *Egypt's Culture Wars*.

family members. Mehrez argues that these writers turn, instead, to explorations of the isolated self; however, like the national icon of the family, they, too, cannot exist in the bleak reality of the present (127). The writers themselves often engaged in these debates and expressed a range of opinions. For instance, Zikri, one of the most outspoken and combative of his generation, boldly claimed that "[t]here is no longer a nation" ("No More Big Issues"). Mersal, by contrast, reflected in a recent interview on her connection, or rather, sense of disconnect, from the nation. She referred specifically to her inability to relate to the "grand narratives about the nation, about the future, full of ideology" as espoused by Adonis and his contemporaries, despite the beauty of the poetry (Qualey, "Iman Mersal"). Taking another approach to the question of the nation in Egypt's new literature, Hamdy el-Gazzar has argued that this body of writing does, in fact, engage with the real world and politics, since a refusal to write about the nation is still a political statement (el-Gazzar, Personal interview).

Given the absence of the nation in nineties generation literature, this body of literature has often been interpreted as apolitical and as one that promotes a strict self/individual versus nation/collective duality. However, in agreement with recent scholarship that has begun to rethink the political nature of these writers' works,[49] I argue that the authors' rejection of a traditional paradigm of literary authorship in which an author's role is defined in relation to the nation can be read as a call for a reconceptualization of the political that lies outside a nationalist framework. As we will see, one key way the texts challenge this outdated paradigm is by

[49] There has been a turn in scholarship on the nineties generation in recent years, particularly since the 2011 Egyptian revolution, as scholars have begun to locate alternative, non-nationalist politics in this body of literature, especially by women writers. See, for instance, Elsadda's discussion of writing as feminist praxis (chapter seven) and Elsadda chapters eight and nine in which she explores other ways in which the new generation created new, fluid identities and hybrid spaces that defy strict binaries. See also Anishchenkova, who contends that the women of this generation offer a "New Age feminist writing," which she describes as a "nonconformist, antiestablishment feminism [that] rebels against the ideologies of previous movements and feminist waves" (89) and actively moves away from binaries and toward plural, hybrid identities and collectives.

disestablishing the figure of the literary author. Engaging—and at times alienating—readers in the process, the texts frequently call attention to the purposeful absences of the nation and of the traditional roles of the author, as they erase guideposts such as plot, chapter numbers, and recognizable characters, and they blur the boundaries between supposedly distinct categories such as autobiography/fiction and reader/writer/narrator. The author-figures in the texts I examine, which are representative of a larger trend in this body of literature, continue to play an important role in society. However, instead of guiding readers toward a single, shared ideology, the texts invite readers to participate in dismantling such a notion of authorship, in the process creating possibilities for new collaborations and gesturing toward collectivities not defined by the nation.

Nora Amin's *Qamīṣ wardī fārigh*

Turning now to the three novels by Amin, Zikri, and Abu Golayyel, I show how each rejects the traditional model of literary authorship that is predicated on the nation through a demotion of the figure of the author—that is, a removal of the author from an elevated position that had allowed for detached commentary and calls for social reform of the larger national collective—which is realized through the texts' engagement with their readers. No longer in the position of national subjects receiving or decoding the author's message, the readers of these novels participate in constructing meaning in the texts in ways that involve them in the disestablishment of the literary author and search for new possible modes of authorship. All three authors involve readers actively through their use of autobiographical and metafictional elements that subvert the false dichotomy of text and reality.

The first text I examine is Nora Amin's debut novel, *An Empty Pink Shirt* (1997). This experimental piece of writing serves as the narrator-protagonist's—and also author's—personal means of resistance, an example of writing as personal expression and agency in the face of the restrictive, stifling gender norms and expectations of her conservative society. Though Amin is now a celebrated author, actor, theater director, choreographer, and educator in both Egyptian and international circles,[50] she was an emerging writer in 1997 when she published her first novel, just two years after her first book of short stories appeared on the market in Cairo.[51] She has received much critical acclaim for her short stories and her longer works of fiction, including *An Empty Pink Shirt,* which was chosen by the Andalucía Foundation for Culture and the Arts in Alexandria as the best novel by a writer under 40 years old in 1998, and her short story by the same name that took first place in *Akhbār al-Adab*'s 1996 short story contest for young Arab writers.[52]

In her novel *An Empty Pink Shirt,* which serves as one example of the kinds of intensely personal texts produced by this generation and particularly by the women writers, the figure of the author is presented not as an inspired artist who writes impassive observations on society with the goal of reform, but as an individual, Nora, who uses her writing to assert herself and her agency within the text and in the world. The reader plays an integral role in realizing this agency

[50] Among other accolades received, Amin has been a UNESCO-Aschberg Laureate for the Center for the Theater of the Oppressed in Rio De Janeiro (2003), a fellow at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (2003-4), the Samuel Fischer Guest Professor for Literature at the Freie Universität Berlin (2004-5), and a fellow at the International Research Center "Interweaving Performance Cultures" at the Freie Universität Berlin (2015-16).

[51] Amin's first literary book was *Jumal i'tirāḍiyya* (Dependent Clauses, 1995).

[52] Amin's short story "Qamīṣ wardī fārigh" (An Empty Pink Shirt) was published as the winning story in *Akhbār al-Adab* on September 15, 1996. The story repeats verbatim in the book and comprises its opening section (11-22), except for the last ten disconnected lines, which she moves to the end of the novel, some 69 pages later. In this way the reader has the sense of exploring what was left unsaid between the succinct beginning and conclusion of Nora's story.

since, as we will see, it is through the narrator-protagonist's interactions with the "you" to whom much of the book is directed—simultaneously a specific reader, i.e., her lover, and the reader of the book—that she creates a space for her voice and demonstrates her autonomy and ability to effect change. Eschewing a conventional plot, the novel has two central foci: the failure of Nora's romantic relationship with her lover, a constantly traveling Egyptian film director, and the act of composing the text that we are reading. The text consists of a series of disconnected scenes and reflections that follow the protagonist's stream of consciousness; however, despite its non-linear nature, Amin includes four distinct sections that provide a clear structure and guide the reader through the various flashbacks, hypothetical situations, and interactions. Though designated a "novel" on its cover, like many nineties generation works, the text blurs the line between autobiography and fiction, and "Nora Amin" refers both to the author of the book and to her narrator-protagonist. Both are liberal, well educated, 26-year-old women who, as divorced mothers with one young daughter each, feel judged by and at odds with their conservative society's values. Throughout, Nora[53] searches for a different kind of romantic relationship, one free from suffocating gender norms and expectations. However, as the novel foreshadows from the first line, which reads[54]: "In moments like these, we separate" (11),[55] Nora's relationship with her lover fails to become a successful, society-approved one in which each would be the possession of the other. Nora rebels against this notion and, in fact, loves her lover precisely because he remains *rajul* (man), an indefinite noun without a possessive suffix that would show

[53] For clarity sake, from this point on, I use "Nora" to refer to the character in the text and "Amin" to refer to the historical author.

[54] All references are to the Sharqiyyat edition. Throughout this dissertation, for literary texts that have not been translated and articles that were part of the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series (Chapter Three), I provide my own translations in the body of the text and the original Arabic in footnotes for the reader.

[55] "في لحظات كهذه نفترق." (١١)

he belongs to her. She continually prepares for her lover to depart, whether on a temporary trip or permanently, and the text, written from a retrospective point of view, anticipates the inevitable demise of their relationship.

Through her use of metafictional and autobiographical elements, Amin's work refuses a neat divide between reality and fiction which allows "Nora Amin" to use her writing to effect change both within the world of the text and in reality. But the change she seeks is not located in society, nor is it an attempt to advocate for reform that might be possible in a larger collective of which she feels a part. Rather, writing becomes her personal means of resisting the values and gender norms of her conservative society, from which she always feels estranged, and of processing the loss of her relationship with her now former lover. Hoda Elsadda, in her reading of *An Empty Pink Shirt*, argues that Amin's novel can be read as a kind of *l'ecriture feminine*, as championed by Helene Cixous, that serves as a specifically feminist and "experimental praxis of writing the body" (155). Like other writers of her generation, Elsadda contends, Amin illustrates how the personal is political and destabilizes the fixed binary of public versus private spheres (146). She characterizes Amin's literary project as "a persistent struggle against hierarchical structures of thought, as well as cultural, literary, and linguistic conventions that resist the horizons of expression available to women writers who are struggling to find a voice of their own" (156). In addition to challenging the limitations placed on women writers and carving out a space for her own voice, as Elsadda demonstrates, Amin also uses her writing to explore potential new positions and roles of the literary author who is no longer beholden to society or the nation, which often relegated women, their needs, and their voices to the margins. Furthermore, Amin succeeds at resisting the conventions that threatened to stifle her art and her life precisely through asserting her agency as a writer.

Nora's understanding of writing and its relationship to reality, a recurrent theme in the text, serves as a key difference between her and her lover, who sees her writing as an attempt to escape reality. Nora, meanwhile, does not set the two in contradistinction to each other, but instead positions writing as a means of loosening the strictures of reality. It becomes a tool she uses to resist society's expectations and judgments against which she is fighting and which, were she to stop writing, would defeat her. This difference in opinion between Nora and her lover becomes one of the insurmountable obstacles that causes their relationship to end. In the final section of the text, Nora gives the narrative over to her lover for the first time, affording him a space to speak as he takes up the personal pronoun "I" and Nora acts the part of the reader. He accuses her of inaction and forsaking reality for her writing, which causes her to lose herself, in his opinion. At this point, Nora realizes that he is asking her to abandon her world of writing for a place in (his) reality. Nora resumes her narrative with the following response: "Fine. Very well, my love. You want to return me to the text of reality. Do you think that I'd ever left it?"[56] (84). Here the disconnect between their interpretations of how Nora uses her writing to navigate reality is clear, and it is at this point that she understands that their relationship has already failed.

Because Nora situates her writing within reality and, moreover, uses it as a means of resistance and self-assertion, instances in which she draws attention to her decisions and actions as a writer within the text take on added significance, as they likewise confirm her agency in the world. At several points in the text, Nora refers to the mutability of the novel and her role in deciding to alter or retain parts of her text. For example, near the end of the text she declares her intention to change the title of the book we are reading, and we learn that *An Empty Pink Shirt*

[٥٦] "حسناً. حسناً جدا يا عزيزي. تريد أن تردني إلى متن الواقع إذن. فهل تظنني قد غادرته؟" (٨٤)

had originally been titled *A Tall Pink [Male] Writer* (*riwā'ī wardī ṭawīl*) (89). Such an admission invites reflection on the text as a whole and what has changed for Nora over the course of the novel that drives her to replace a title that is full of her lover, with one that refers to his absence. Nora also repeatedly draws attention to various parts in the text that could be changed, but which she resolutely decides to keep. It is typically her lover who proposes changes to the text, and his attempts to alter what Nora has written can be read as endeavors to control, limit, and stifle Nora's voice.

In her choice to write the novel in second-person address, using "anta," the single, masculine pronoun "you," throughout the novel, Amin the author also writes *her* reader into the text. In this way, she demystifies the process of creating a literary text and makes the reader privy to the editing process. The requests to alter the text that are voiced by her lover are attributed to Amin's readers, as well, and Nora's refusal to acquiesce serves as a rejection of society's demands of her and an assertion of her own will. In the second section of the novel, Nora shows her lover what she has written and anxiously awaits his response. She writes, "Then a question slipped from your mouth that brought to a close an entire stage of our relationship: 'Are you ready to change the story?'" (33).[57] His suggestions that she can and should change their story, both in the text and in reality, continue throughout the text as he seeks to impose his desires on her text. They culminate in the final section in which, as discussed above, he asks Nora to abandon her writing and return to "the text of reality" (*matn al-wāqi'*) a question that marks the failure of their relationship. Equally disappointing for Nora is the motivation behind her lover's requests: he asks her to change because of his concern over readers' reaction to Nora's search for a relationship free from traditional gender roles and the openness and intensity

[57] "ثم ينزلق من فمك سؤال ينهي مرحلة كاملة من علاقتنا: 'هل أنتِ على استعداد لتغيير القصة؟'" (٣٣)

with which she describes their passion for each other, a topic not suitable for women to discuss in public. She writes, “I’ll hide, at that point, my surprise at your anxiety over readers and our social responsibility” (53).[58] Frustrated and saddened by his commitment to social norms she had hoped to transgress with him through their relationship, she recognizes their differences as irreconcilable and chooses to conceal from him her reaction, thereby driving them further apart.

Amin also uses the character of the lover to represent, at times, the dominant views of contemporary Egyptian (often male) writers and intellectuals, and she thus affords herself the opportunity to participate in timely literary debates over the figure of the author and the role of literature in Egyptian society, including potential criticisms of her work specifically. Given that the majority of Amin’s readers were members of Cairo’s insular literary scene, a fact that would not be lost on the author,[59] her use of “you” in her discussions of these literary topics is particularly fitting and allows Amin to insert her voice directly into these debates. For instance, she comments several times on her book’s slippage between the genres of autobiography, short story, and novel. She writes, “You wondered how I could pull in this and that. How could I write an autobiography of us that was simultaneously a work of fiction? I replied, That’s the genius of writing” (31-2).[60] Through this indirect conversation, Amin enters into the larger debate over “transgenre writing,” to use al-Kharrat’s classification, and the extent to which the boundaries can be broken down between distinct genres without sacrificing the art of each. In addition, she reasserts the fictional nature of her text and refutes any designation of the work as strictly

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[58] "سوف أستر وقتها تعجيبي من قلقك على القراء وعلى مسؤوليتنا الاجتماعية..." (٥٣)

[59] The realities of Egypt’s book market at that time, including small print runs and poor distribution, helped effectively limit access to the literature of the nineties generation to those already a part of the local cultural community. Authors were all too aware of the inadequacies of the book market and how few copies of their books were printed and sold.

[60] "تتساءل كيف أجمع بين هذا وذاك، كيف أكتب سيرة ذاتية لنا وتكون متخيلة في ذات الوقت؟ أجيبك تلك هي عبقرية الكتابة." (٣١-٢)

autobiographical. Labeling works of fiction by young women "autobiography" or "autobiographical" was a common practice among Egyptian literary critics during the 1990s and early 2000s, and part of the larger "girls' writing" (*kitābat al-banāt*) discourse that I later explore in detail in Chapter Five. Therefore, Amin's description of her text as a hybrid genre that includes, but is not predominantly, autobiography effectively counters criticism that would suggest otherwise. At another point in the text, her lover alludes to the girls' writing debate by asking some of Amin's artistic choices stem from 'feminine writing' [*al-kitāba al-'unthawiyya*] (82). He also undercuts Nora's purposeful transgressions and insistence upon writing openly about the intimacies of their relationship by dismissing them as "accessories of 'new-fashioned writing'" (30),[61] which refers to another term used to classify the body of literature produced by the emerging nineties generation. By including such comments and immediately dismissing them, Amin both acknowledges the assumptions her readers may have about "new-fashioned" and "feminine" writing and refutes any attempt to undermine her artistic license and agency in her novel.

Amin similarly uses the character of the lover to voice her criticism of stereotypical Egyptian intellectuals who considered themselves proponents of culture and free artistic expression yet balked at the new writing being produced. She writes, once again addressing her lover, "…you said (I'm writing here what you said): Usually, the contemporary Egyptian intellectual—let's say, rather, he who strives for culture, so that we don't overburden you with symbolism—promotes liberty and breaking taboos but is then shocked by the result. In the end,

[61] "...من مستلزمات 'الكتابة المستحدثة'" (٣٠)

he finds nothing in his heritage to help him to deal with it" (47-8).[62] She continues, "I reply that your shock is disingenuous, that it doesn't suit you. There's no need to borrow the problems of other kinds of men simply to enrich this writing and make it a panorama of today's Egyptian intellectuals. You're cut from a different cloth" [literally: you're from another context] (48).[63] In this exchange, Nora exposes the hypocrisy of those in the cultural scene who claimed to champion freedom of expression in writing yet found themselves at a loss when confronted with writing (such as Amin's) that was transgressive in a way other than they had anticipated. In addition to writing openly about sexual passion and desire, one of the liberties that Amin takes in her text that shocks the literary establishment is her refusal to write within the dominant paradigm that presumes an author's engagement with the nation, creating a noticeable absence within the text. As we have seen, Amin rejects the notion of the literary author as simultaneously detached from and deeply committed to her society, and instead offers an intensely personal perspective of a non-professional writer who uses the act of writing to assert herself and demonstrate her agency. The reader actively helps her realize these aims by providing a foil for Amin's own views and allowing her to successfully counteract attempts to stifle her voice. In the passage quoted above, Amin cunningly exempts her lover—and the reader who stands in for the "you" in the text—in her response, thus challenging him to resist such reductive interpretations of her work.

[62] "...تقول (وأكتب أنا ما تقول) إن المثقف المصري المعاصر، أو لنقل الساعي إلى الثقافة، كي لا نثقلك بالرموز، عادة ما ينادي بالتحرر وكسب التابو ثم يصطدم بالنتيجة لأنه في النهاية لا يجد تراثاً يمكنه من التعامل مع تلك النتيجة." (٤٧-٨)

[63] "أجيب بأن صدمتك مفتعلة ولا تتماشى معك، ولا داع لاستعارة مشكلات أنماط أخرى من الرجال لمجرد إثراء هذه الكتابة وجعلها بانوراما لوسط المثقفين المعاصرين. أنت من سياق آخر." (٤٨)

Mustafa Zikri's *Mir'āt 202*

Like Amin, Mustafa Zikri is another prominent nineties generation voice that participated actively in the debate over the figure of the literary author and the author's relationship to the reader and society. Although he is a quintessential member of this literary group, Zikri simultaneously has situated himself—and is perceived as being—on its fringes, an extreme example of the dissociation from politics and direct social commentary that are among the group's defining features, the boundaries of which Zikri helped set. Published in 2003, *Mir'āt 202* (Mirror 202)[64] was Zikri's fourth book of fiction and appeared on the scene well after the arrival of the "new writing" (*al-kitāba al-jadīda*), but while debates over its contours were still being negotiated. A native of Cairo, Zikri was born in Helwan in 1966 and left the capital briefly in the late 1980s to study at the University of Alexandria. He returned to complete his undergraduate studies at the Film Academy of Cairo, and cinema has been a lasting influence on his works, particularly his "Mā ya'rifuhu Amīn" (What Amin Knows, 1997).[65] To date, Zikri has published a collection of short stories, seven novels, and two "diaries" (*yawmiyyāt*),[66] and he has been well received by critics locally, his works having won a number of Egyptian literary

[64] Prior to appearing in book form with Merit in 2003, Zikri published a piece titled "Mirror 202" in *Akhbār al-Adab* in December 2000. This text reads as an early draft of what would become his later book project. The following year, in December 2001, Zikri published another piece called "Mirror 202" in the literary journal *al-Kitāba al-ukhrā*, which was a nearly verbatim version of what would become the 'Imad-centered story in the book.

[65] "What Amin Knows" is labeled as the first of "two novels" (*riwāyatān*) that comprise *Hurā' matāha qūṭiyya* (Drivel About a Gothic Labyrinth, 1997). This text was originally conceived as a screenplay (Faraj). Zikri also composed two screenplays *'Afārīt al-asfalt* (*Asphalt Kings* 1996) and *Jannāt al-shayāṭīn* (*Fallen Angels' Paradise* 1999), each of which received critical acclaim and particularly the former which, unlike any of his books, has been made available in English translation.

[66] His published books of fiction include: *Tadrībāt 'alā jumla i'tirāḍiyya: qiṣaṣ* (Drills on the Subordinate Clause: Stories, 1995), *Hurā matāha qūṭiyya: riwāyatān* (Drivel About a Gothic Labyrinth: Two Novels, 1997), *al-Khawf ya'kulu al-rūḥ: riwāya* (Fear Eats the Soul: A Novel, 1998), *Lamsa min 'ālam gharīb: riwāya* (A Touch from an Alien World: A Novel, 2000), *Mir'āt 202* (Mirror 202, 2003), *al-Rasā'il: riwāya* (Letters: A Novel, 2006), *'Alā aṭfāf al-aṣābi': yawmiyyāt* (On Fingertips: Journals, 2009), *Ḥaṭab ma'idat ra'sī: yawmiyyāt 2* (Fuel for the Furnace of my Head: Journals 2, 2012), *Aswad wardī: riwāya* (A Rosy Black: A Novel, 2014).

prizes.[67] Familiarity with his books of fiction is restricted, for the most part, to the Egyptian literary community, though his work as a cultural journalist at *Rūz al-Yūsuf*, where he had a weekly cultural column from 2008 to 2010, and his penchant for posting shorter works of fiction online have allowed him to reach broader audiences.[68]

In his own performance of authorship in Cairo's literary scene, Zikri presented himself as a contrarian and set himself and his writing style in opposition to dominant trends, established authors, popular writers, his own peers, and even the next generation of writers. Among his most inflammatory and oft discussed comments were those directed against readers, particularly in light of changes in local cultural institutions that allowed for the rise of the bestselling author and consumerist reader. Despite his claims of not writing for any reader and his condemnation of authors who wrote with their readers in mind,[69] Zikri has demonstrated at multiple points in his writings a near obsession with his readers. His complaints about and engagement with readers in his texts reflect deeper concerns about the role of the literary author, specifically his rejection of literary realism and the notion that authors have an obligation to society. Commenting on the state of literature in the early 2000s, for example, Zikri lamented, "The Arabic novel is drowning in reality because authors want to be popular" (al-Sākit). He expressed this opinion frequently and equated the use of literary realism not with a sense of commitment to society and the nation,

[67] *Drivel About a Gothic Labyrinth* was the recipient of the inaugural Wa'il Ragab Prize for the Novel in 1998; *A Touch from an Alien World* won the government-sponsored State Encouragement Prize from the Supreme Council of Culture in 2004; and *Mirror 202* won a Sawiris Cultural Award in 2006.

[68] Despite Zikri's works being well known in Cairene literary circles, only one of his books has been translated to date: *Hurā matāha qūṭiyya* (Drivel About a Gothic Labyrinth, 1997) into German as *Viel Lärm um ein gotisches Labyrinth* (2004).

[69] See, for example, Shu'īr "Muṣṭafā Dhikrī: al-kitāba ḍidd al-jumhūr" (Mustafa Zikri: Writing against the public) and al-Sayyid "Muṣṭafā Dhikrī: Listu mashghūlan bi-an yakūn lī qurā' kathīrūn" (Mustafa Zikri: I don't care if I have a lot of readers).

but to selling out as an author for the sake of fame. Such concerns about the author and his relationship to his reader are apparent in *Mirror 202,* one of Zikri's most self-referential, experimental texts in which acts of writing and reading are foregrounded at the expense of character and a cohesive, singular plot. As with Zikri's other texts, not only is any semblance of a national collective missing, but the reader has to work to construct the few spaces in which the narratives take place. In this text, Zikri destabilizes the traditional conception of the Egyptian author as national reformer by elevating the status of the reader and the act of reading, achieved through the work's meta-impulses and careful occlusion of context that blur the boundary between reader and author and their respective responsibilities. As a result, the text widens the democratic possibilities for reading while simultaneously restricting who is able to perform as "reader," creating a tension that remains unresolved throughout the text.

In *Mirror 202,* Zikri clearly breaks with the realist-reformist paradigm that had dominated Egyptian fiction for much of the twentieth century. His text, instead of serving as al-Ghitani's "mirror of reality," holds a mirror up to itself, instead, both with regard to the book's mirrored structure and in a metafictional sense.[70] The work is a labyrinthine, fragmented, experimental text, at once playful and studied, that explores the possibilities and limitations of writing and creates a doubled, thoroughly self-referential text in the process.[71] Throughout, Zikri

[70] For instance, Linda Hutcheon writes that in metafictional texts, "the text is its own mirror" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 14), and Patricia Waugh suggests that metafiction may be understood as "the mirror [held] up to art" (14).

[71] Christian Junge also has explored nineties generation prose fiction's metafictional elements and self-reflexivity, and he locates new significance in the act of writing within this body of literature. Focusing on Zikri's *Drivel*, Junge argues that Zikri and his peers create a specific kind of self-assertion through narration that he terms "autobiographic metafiction" and which, unlike more traditional metafiction, is more interested in the fictional author who dwells within the text than the historical author who wrote it. He writes, "When the self is the text and the text is the self, then metafiction becomes more than fiction about fiction: it becomes fiction about the fiction(s) of the self," or to put it more succinctly, "a kind of meta-autobiography" (446-7). In other words, any discussion of the text in such works becomes a discussion of the self, as well.

is concerned more with formal play and *how* the story is told than with the story itself. As the title suggests, mirrors play a central role in the text. Structurally, the book builds not along the lines of a traditional story arc but takes the mirror's act of reflection as its inspiration. The result is a book that can be divided roughly in two, with the second half appearing as a distorted, expanded reflection of the first. In the second half, texts we read in the first are revisited, rearranged, explored from different angles, and placed alongside new writing. The book as a whole can be read as a kind of skewed *mise en abyme* that serves as a metaphor for the acts of writing and reading. While the traditional *mise en abyme* technique refers to placing an exact but reduced-scale copy of an object within itself such that a certain symmetry is maintained, the mirrors in Zikri's *Mirror 202* do not reflect faithfully the original placed before them. Rather, they introduce distortion by providing new context that renders the familiar strange. Like the original and reflection in Zikri's text, the acts of writing and reading prove to be two distinct and only marginally related entities: the text composed by the writer and placed before the reader is not the same as the narrative then produced through the act of reading.

Two loose plotlines, pieces of which run throughout the first half of the book, emerge in the two texts that constitute the book's second half: "Mirror 202" and "A Dead Life" (*ḥayāat mayta*) Both texts provide clear examples of the fragmentation and intense isolation that characterize the works of the nineties generation, as well as the eschewal of grand narratives in favor of the margin. The main plot, "Mirror 202," follows 'Imad, a 50-year-old writer who, at times, strongly resembles Zikri and who is consumed by his inabilities, over the course of a single night and day. The narrative explores Imad's feelings of isolation, his struggles with writing, and his now passionless marriage to his wife Nadia. It follows the protagonist's stream of consciousness as he moves between a nightmare from which he has just awoken at the text's

open, trivial tasks, and glimpses of memories too brief to provide insight into ‘Imad’s character. In “A Dead Life,” which progresses chronologically and remains firmly fixed in the present, an anonymous, semi-omniscient narrator relates the events of a single night that the protagonist ‘Atif, another character who is a writer, spends at a hotel, though the story lacks any sort of conclusion. The narrative moves into the realm of the surreal as it relates ‘Atif’s brief encounter with Shakir, an older man whom ‘Atif knew briefly in his childhood but who is now a stranger living in the adjacent hotel room. Having recognized ‘Atif, Shakir kicks through the thin wall separating their rooms with his prosthetic leg, claiming he intended it as a “message” (*risāla*) to catch ‘Atif’s attention (85). As ‘Atif and Shakir talk, the electricity cuts out, and Shakir fears that his real leg, which he keeps in a freezer in his room, will begin to spoil. At Shakir’s request, ‘Atif and two female hotel employees retrieve a large slab of ice from the hotel’s basement freezer and place it on top of Shakir’s amputated leg. The story, the end of which also serves as the ending of the book, closes with Shakir in his hotel room, balancing on one leg and leaning on one of the employees as he sighs with relief and urinates into an empty water bottle.

While it is possible to discern these two major plotlines and sketch their composite characters, the text places a number of demands on the reader, particularly through its distorted mirror structure and the near repetition of texts that are, at first reading, removed from any larger, clarifying context. As readers progress through the text, Zikri blurs the boundary between the act of reading and that of composition, specifically the processes of revision and rewriting. Readers make initial interpretations of the snippets of text that are presented in the first half of the book, and they then must revisit and edit these assumptions in order to account for the texts’ new order, arrangement, voice, and context in the book’s second half. In the first half, texts range from one to five pages in length and are distinguished from one another by vague titles such as

"Years" (*sanawāt*) and "An Image" (*ṣūra*) or, in the latter part of this section, simply a number, with the final set of brief texts labeled from one to twenty-two in sequential order. The narrator(s) describe(s) equally anonymous scenes that are disjointed and fragmentary, and nearly all of the characters are nameless, which invites the reader to wonder about and perhaps try to guess the larger context and story into which each of these fragments fits.

The two texts that comprise the second half of the book each departs from a text from the first half: "Mirror 202" draws its three characters—'Imad, Nadia and 'Imad's friend Karim—and vague plotline from "A Scene from Married Life" (*mashhad min ḥayāat zawjiyya*) and "A Dead Life" takes as its starting point the characters and events of "An Artificial Leg" (*sāq ṣinā'iyya*). Texts from the first half that recur in the second rarely appear verbatim or in their entirety. Instead, excerpts of the original texts are rewritten and incorporated into the new context, and there are no guideposts to help the reader locate the repeated texts and make sense of their changes. Their original titles are stripped from the texts, and they appear intermixed with one another and with new writing. The repeated, rewritten texts sometimes appear, at first glance, to be exact copies of their originals; however, upon closer inspection, nearly every text that repeats has at least some minor change, such as the inversion of noun and verb, an additional few words, or the substitution of a synonym. The reflection is neither a replica nor a simple inversion of the original, and it is the role of the readers to puzzle over various potential connections and the significance of the pieces that recur and those that disappear from the text.

Within this structure, Zikri introduces further confusion and the need to revise one's initial assumptions with vague referents and shifting narrative voice. Sometimes the texts in the first half are so brief it is difficult to make sense of them. For example, one text reads in its

entirety[72]: "Two sides (*ṭarafān*).[73] One is distant, remote in a solitude on which it depends. It exists alone. The other, nearby, feels intuitively its separation and distance" (29).[74] Clarity as to what this cryptic passage means only becomes possible in a new framework in the second half (44). In its new context, the passage describes the distance between 'Imad's and Nadia's two limbs as they sleep. With regard to voice and character, the anonymous "he," "she," and "I" that appear scattered throughout the texts often refer to recurring characters; however, the reader is not made aware of these connections until the second half of the book. For instance, readers learn that the woman referred to as "the wife" in "An Image" is also: the woman referred to as "my mother" in "My Father's Words" (*kalimāt al-ab*); the corpse in "20"; and the mother of 'Imad, the protagonist of "A Scene from Married Life." In addition, several texts that originally appear in first-person move into third-person in the second half of the book, but not with any consistency. Some of these texts are later attributed to 'Imad, and others to 'Atif. Through the shifting perspective, seemingly random reattribution of voice and character, and absence of guideposts for the reader, the text requires a more specialized, engaged and even insider audience who would choose to—and be able to—take part in the work of re-reading and reconnecting the two halves as they progress through the text, making reading a recursive activity that mimics the act of writing.

Another way Zikri blurs the boundary between writer and reader is through his use of metafiction, particularly a text titled "Mirror 202" that appears in both halves of the book and in

[72] All references are to the Merit edition, and all translations are my own.

[73] The word *ṭaraf* in Arabic has numerous meanings that make the original text even more ambiguous than it appears in translation here. *Ṭaraf* also means: "utmost part, outermost point, extremity, end, tip, point, edge, fringe, limit, border, side, region, area, section," as well as a few other words like "limb" that also refer to a part of a whole ('Ṭaraf" 652).

[74] "طرفان. طرف بعيد ناء في وحدانيته، بنفسه يقوم، وعليها يعتمد. وطرف قريب يستشعر النأي والبعد بالمناجاة." (٢٩)

which Zikri refers explicitly to the book's literary project. It serves as a kind of textual *mise en abyme*, which according to Lucien Dällenbach, offers "an intertextual résumé or quotation of the content of the work" (55) and separates that which is essential to the work from its surrounding context (56). In it, the first-person narrator writes of his experience of looking at his own body in a mirror, striving for an impossible symmetry, and connecting this act to one of his potential literary works:

> …[This] reminded me of a book the structure of which I'd already begun to plan out, though I hadn't started writing it yet. There will be 202 pages: 100 pages before the center page, and 100 pages after it, and the center page itself will contain pages 101 and 102. The first 100 pages will be an introduction to page 101, and the latter 100 pages a commentary on page 102. [...] Nothing will connect the introduction and the commentary. It will be as if the first 100 pages are an introduction to one book, and the second 100 pages a commentary on another. Meanwhile, the facing pages 101 and 102 will be completely compatible with each other, in perfect harmony, in contrast to the introduction and commentary.[75] (22-3, 59)[76]

While the text's title suggests that this passage is a key part of the work, upon their first encounter of it, readers are unaware that the text refers to the book they are reading, albeit in an idealized form.[77] Upon reaching this text in the second half of the book, readers are immediately aware of the text's metafictional properties and recognize they are now in the reflection or "commentary" half of the book. As fiction that "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between

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[75] "ذكرتني... بكتاب قمتُ بتصميم شكله الخارجي دون الشروع في كتابته. عدد صفحات الكتاب ٢٠٢ صفحة، ١٠٠ صفحة قبل صفحة المنتصف، و١٠٠ صفحة بعد صفحة المنتصف. وصفحة المنتصف تحمل رقمي ١٠١ و١٠٢. الـ١٠١ صفحة الأولى بمثابة مقدمة لوجه صفحة المنتصف ١٠١، والـ ١٠٠ صفحة الثانية بمثابة تعقيب لظهر صفحة المنتصف ١٠٢ [...] لا شيء يجمع بين المقدمة والتعقيب. كأنّ الـ١٠٠ صفحة الأولى مقدمة لكتاب، والـ١٠٠ صفحة الثانية تعقيب على كتاب آخر. أما صفحة المنتصف بوجهها ١٠١، وظهرها ١٠٢، فهي صفحة متجانسة مؤتلفة، عكس المقدمة والتعقيب." (٢٢-٣)

[76] The brief text titled "Mirror 202" within the book is one of the few to recur nearly verbatim. The excerpt as quoted here appears twice in the book, on the pages noted.

[77] The original Merit book was just 88 pages long, and the text begins to repeat itself a few pages before the halfway point. Moreover, the book lacked the idealized center page, that would make sense of everything for the reader and be "in complete harmony."

fiction and reality" (Waugh 2), metafictional texts engage readers differently than do texts that remain wholly in the fictive worlds they create.

Zikri's readers are reminded throughout of their role in constructing meaning in the text, particularly through the passage quoted above, which refers to the project of the book as a whole. Linda Hutcheon has termed the role that readers of metafictional work are compelled to play the "paradox of the reader" (36), given that they must recognize a world as fictional while simultaneously helping to construct it. Such "narcissistic narratives" collapse the boundary between frame and story, reality and fiction, storytelling and story told (6). In order to make meaning of the text as a whole, readers must distinguish between the product and the process, and the novels become codes to be deciphered, rather than stories to be consumed (14), a description that suits well Zikri's book that clearly aims at an engaged readership. The second time this metafictional passage occurs, it is in the context of an interaction between 'Imad—who is referred to simply as "the writer" at this point in the text—and an anonymous reporter. The narrator relates, "The reporter sat down across from the writer with a faux breathlessness and placed a magazine on the table within his reach. The writer opened it to a story of his titled 'Mirror 202' and silently began to read it as if he weren't the author" (58).[78] There are multiple claims and refutations of authorship within this complex layering: the narrator attributes the text "Mirror 202" to 'Imad, who pretends the story is not his own, while the metafictional text itself alludes to the book, authored by Mustafa Zikri, in which it lies.

Throughout *Mirror 202*, writing is continually supplanted by the act of reading. For example, both protagonists, 'Imad and 'Atif, are identified as authors, a fact that stands out given

[78] جلس الصحفي أمام الكاتب بنفس لاهث مصطنع، ثم وضع المجلة على المنضدة في متناول يد الكاتب الذي فتح المجلة على قصة له بعنوان مرآة ٢٠٢، وأخذ في القراءة بعينيه، كأنه لم يكن هو مَنْ كتبها." (٥٨)

the lack of description afforded them by the narrative generally. But in the text, they are only ever depicted as engaged in reading. Our first glimpse of ‘Atif is of him reading silently in his hotel room. It is only later, in the recounting of his dream, that we learn he is a writer by profession. With ‘Imad, we encounter failed attempts to start writing, a rumination on his procrastination techniques, hopes about what might be written in the future, and his readings of texts written previously. There are several examples of such texts that appear undistinguished in the first half of the book, but when they repeat in the second are identified as ‘Imad’s writings, as is the case with the metafictional “Mirror 202” quoted above. Rather than witnessing him compose the texts, we encounter traces of a previous act of writing that are brought into the present through ‘Imad’s reading of them into the narrative. By presenting writers as readers and continually drawing readers’ attention to their role as such through the many metafictional moments that punctuate the text, *Mirror 202* emphasizes the agency that exists in the act of reading. Indeed, just as reading is portrayed as an essential component of writing, the text suggests the inverse is true, as well: reading contains within it an element of composition.

Zikri introduces another metafictional code through his inclusion of autobiographical elements that link his character ‘Imad to Zikri himself. However, while writers like Amin and Abu Golayyel, to whom I turn next, included at least some autobiographical elements easily recognizable to the uninitiated reader (such as naming their protagonists after themselves), the affiliation between ‘Imad and Zikri would only be obvious to readers who were familiar with Zikri’s professional career and the dynamics of the Egyptian literary scene. For instance, at one point ‘Imad narrates:

> Let’s suppose there is a writer who, just like me, has worked in film and literature for the past ten years. His name appears here and there in newspapers and magazines, and he’s

> frequently seen. He has two novelistic films and three books out that are meager in length, though he likes to consider them meager in content, as well. (55-6)[79]

Readers familiar with Zikri's publishing record and his outspoken criticism of what he saw as the corruption and decadence of the insular scene, from which he sought to distance himself (al-Sākit), would recognize him in these details, with "me" referring both to 'Imad and Zikri. At another point in the text, in reference to his distinctive writing style, 'Imad says, "They say I'm a master of beginnings" (76),[80] which is another trait the protagonist shares with Zikri, who has readily admitted this about his own works (Muslimānī). By writing this personal code into the text which only others involved in the scene would be able to decipher, Zikri limits who is able to act as a fully aware and capable reader of his text.

In addition to the ways in which the text itself presents multiple opportunities for the reader to act as author in creating meaning in the text, the book's paratext, or, more aptly, the lack of a common paratext, plays a similar role. In the 1990s and early 2000s in Cairo, the vast majority of books of fiction were published with a subtitle denoting the work's genre, thus providing the reader with an interpretive code of how to approach the work that lay within.[81] In fact, *Mirror 202* was the only book published by Merit that year in its *Literary Revelations* (*tajalliyyāt adabiyyah*) series to appear without its genre on the cover.[82] Moreover, Zikri already had taken advantage of this practice to manipulate readers' interpretation of his fiction. In 1997,

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[٧٩] " سنفترض أن هناك كاتباً يعمل بالسينما والأدب، مثلي تماماً، منذ عشر سنوات. يتردد اسمه في الصحف والمجلات قليلاً، ويراه كثيراً. له فيلمان روائيان، وثلاثة كتب هزيلة من حيث عدد الصفحات، إلا أنه يفضل اعتبارها هزيلة أيضاً من حيث المضمون." (٥٥-٦)

[٨٠] "يقولون عني إنني منجز بدايات عظيم." (٧٦)

[81] *Mirror 202* was the only of Zikri's books published without a genre subtitle, at least in the original Merit publication.

[82] Interestingly, Merit's catalog lists *Mirror 202* under the category of "novel" for books published in 2003 ("Qā'ima"), while the publishing house's website refers to the book as a collection of short stories, in reference to the Sawiris prize (https://www.darmerit.com/?s=202+مرآة, accessed 1 March 2018).

he published *Hurā' matāha qūṭiyya* (*Drivel About a Gothic Labyrinth*) with the subtitle "two novels" (*riwāyatān*). At first glance the book appears to contain two distinct texts: "What Amin Knows" and "Drivel About a Gothic Labyrinth." However, upon reading both, it becomes clear the book should be read as a single novel. Shortly after the book was published, fellow nineties generation author and cultural journalist Yasser Abdel Hafez asked Zikri in an interview, "Why does [*Drivel*'s] cover indicate that the book contains two novels, when the second part, "Drivel," is really a continuation of the first, "What Amin Knows"?" (Zikri AH).[83] Though Zikri argued that for him, the stylistic differences between the two subtexts were great enough to warrant consideration of them as distinct novels, he ultimately affirmed Abdel Hafez's reading of his work. This is one example of how Zikri intentionally manipulated his readers' perception of his works, while also leaving clues within the text as to other possible readings.

By refusing to affix a neat genre categorization to *Mirror 202*, Zikri denies readers a convenient, predetermined interpretive code and compels them to decide consciously for themselves how to approach the book, inviting them to adopt a role that was more often reserved for the author, that is, determining the book's genre. The layout of the book similarly provides only ambiguous clues to the book's intended genre, and as a result, readers have approached and presented the book both as a novel and as a collection of short stories,[84] thus allowing for potentially radically different interpretations of the text. While Zikri clearly encouraged such

[83] See Appendix A for bibliographic details of Abdel Hafez's interview with Mustafa Zikri as part of the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" interview series.

[84] For example, in 2006, *Mirror 202* took first place in the category of "short story" by young writers of the Sawiris Cultural Award competition, a highly regarded Egyptian literary prize that was established the previous year. In 2012, on the other hand, Dar al-Tanweer's compilation *What Amin Knows and Five Other Novels*, which includes *Mirror 202*, confirms the interpretation of this text as a novel. Zikri himself, true to form, refers to *Mirror 202* in the introduction of the Tanweer collection as a "short novel" (*riwāya qaṣīra*), thereby affirming both interpretations ("Muqaddima" 9).

confusion that forced the reader into a more writerly role, he simultaneously imposed strict limits on who could act as reader through *Mirror 202*'s rarifying elements and metafictional codes. As in Amin's novel, Zikri's readers play a key role in destabilizing the figure of the literary author and rejecting his elevated status vis-à-vis the reader and society. However, whereas in Amin's text the narrator-protagonist and Amin herself use the reader to realize their personal agency, in Zikri's experimental, mirrored text, readers displace the author by taking on roles and responsibilities typically assigned to him. Zikri's text presents and engages with readers as cultural actors with agency who can—and should—participate actively in the construction of the text, though not with the aim of imposing upon it a (false) cohesion or bringing it to a neat conclusion that seeks to reflect reality.

Hamdi Abu Golayyel's *al-Fā'il*

Turning now to a different style and approach—though we find a similar preoccupation with the act of writing and figure of the author—we come to Hamdi Abu Golayyel's *A Dog with No Tail*. Published originally by Merit in 2008, this was the second novel written by Abu Golayyel, who began publishing works of fiction in the 1990s and had begun to receive favorable reviews, as well as a few regional literary awards for his short fiction. Though his debut novel *Luṣūṣ Mutaqā'idun* (2002; *Thieves in Retirement*, 2006) has received the most scholarly attention to date,[85] it was *A Dog with No Tail* that was awarded the American University in Cairo Press's Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 2008, which included its

[85] See, for instance: El-Ariss "Majnun Strikes Back" in which he argues that the novel's "association of homosexuality with madness serves to identify a new site of resistance to social and political violence" (295); and Mehrez (*Culture Wars*, 144-167) for her thorough analysis of the ways in which *Thieves* maps an alternative geography of Cairo as part of a larger trend that uses Cairo as a central metaphor and explores new types of polarization occurring in the modern, sprawling capital city.

subsequent translation into English. Throughout his larger literary project, Abu Golayyel is interested in the question of identity, particularly that of his generation of doubly dispossessed young Bedouins. This generation both inherited a sense of lost Bedouin identity and lifestyle, which came with the forced sedentarization of tribes that began under Muhammad ʻAli, and experienced a second displacement that accompanied their migration from the village to the capital, where they sought livelihood and a sense of belonging.

In the semiautobiographical *A Dog with No Tail*, the narrator-protagonist, likewise named Hamdi Abu Golayyel, is a young Bedouin who has moved away from his village in the Fayoum to Cairo, where he works as a day laborer and is an aspiring writer. The "novel," like Amin's and Zikri's, rejects genre conventions and moves freely between tales of Hamdi's present life as a laborer, his past life as an apathetic student, his grandfather's exploits in the village, and the lives of his coworkers and friends who are similarly making their way in Cairo. The dislocated stories start and stop abruptly and loop back on themselves, as the narrator revises and expands upon them. However, unlike the other two authors discussed in this chapter, Abu Golayyel presents a more ambiguous demotion of the literary author, as he signals the ineffectiveness of the author in the present paradigm but does not cede the potential power and importance of the figure of the writer, should he break free of this framework. From the first page, we find Abu Golayyel's signature sardonic humor and dry wit that serve as a commentary on the wide-scale corruption present in Egypt, particularly the state. However, rather than advocating reform, the narrator focuses on the resultant hardships that afflict individuals who exist outside of a national collective and are powerless to introduce change. Nothing is sacred in *A Dog with No Tail*, including the literary author, though the idea of the author has great significance for the narrator. Throughout the novel, being an author is presented not as a sacrosanct vocation, but as a

performance, including at a meta-level. Through the various kinds of performance of authorship, the text reveals the author-figure not to be an enlightened, moral guide concerned with what he can do for society, but instead an ordinary individual concerned with what society, by virtue of perceiving and treating him as an elevated author, can do for him. As we will see, "author" becomes the means by which the narrator navigates his hybrid identity which is, itself, at odds with a traditional notion of a homogenous, unified Egyptian nation. Engaging the reader through humor and metafiction, the text enacts a new mode of authorship that leads the reader not in reaching a deeper understanding of the nation, but in dismantling a paradigm of authorship based on selfless commitment to the nation.

Throughout Abu Golayyel's novel, the narrator is never able simply to be an author, but he must convince others of this identity through his actions. He performs what he understands to be the role of an author in contemporary Egyptian society, thereby providing insight into local tenets of literary authorship and making his readers, both other characters in the text and readers of the book, a necessary and active part of his authorship. Instead of routinely engaging in acts affiliated with authorship, such as composing, publishing, and reading, Hamdi makes a show of each of these writerly acts. For example, whenever he publishes a piece in a newspaper or magazine, he immediately draws everyone's attention to his feat. The narrator tells us:

> As I undressed to begin my day's work I would carelessly toss down the newspaper or magazine and no sooner had my victim—my boss, a homeowner, any passing stranger—picked it up than I would remark, with the humility befitting an ordinary working man, "By the way, I've got a thing in there…"
> "Thing? What thing?" the dupe exclaims, astonished.
> "I mean…something published…"
> This would usually win me an awe-struck look. (32)[86]

[86] All references are to Robin Moger's translation (Abu Golayyel, *A Dog With No Tail*).

By presenting this hypothetical scenario as an exchange between the narrator and his coworkers, the text creates a space for his audience and acknowledges the significance they have in realizing the narrator's literary achievement. However, in this case the imagined reader's role is also that of the "victim" and "dupe," as though the narrator tricked him not only into asking about the "thing in [the newspaper]," but also into considering Hamdi to be an Author. In this way, we see a different kind of demotion of the author-figure than in Amin's and Zikri's texts, as Abu Golayyel uses humor to desacralize the role of the author, inviting the reader to laugh along with him at those "dupes" impressed by his performance of authorship.

Alongside the act of publishing, Hamdi's reading of others' works also becomes an opportunity to flaunt his identity as an author and enlist others in affirming it. Near the close of the book, as we move toward the point when Hamdi finally acquires a room with a desk and thus "an appropriate setting in which to write a novel" (147), he and his fellow laborers have just begun squatting in an old villa in Shubra that they are contracted to refurbish. He describes his exaggerated response to being presented with a box of used books found under one of the beds: "I accepted my colleague's gift with a demonstration of appreciation appropriate to a serious wordsmith. My excessive joy was actually a chance for me to prove my talents. Situations like these were welcome opportunities for public celebration of my literary identity" (146). Once again, the narrator seizes the opportunity to perform as "Mr. Author" (146), a role expected of him by his colleagues and one he expected of himself. Abu Golayyel's use of sarcasm in this passage, as in many of his texts, highlights larger issues, in this case the superficial side of contemporary authorship and, ironically, the tendency to turn it into a performance. Sarcasm here also marks a deeply important aspect of the narrator's personal identity and, significantly, the only element of his identity emphasized in the text that he was able to choose and perform as he

desired. By contrast, the other formative elements described by the text, such as the narrator's Bedouin ethnicity, distinctive dialect, class, and work, among others, were all circumstances of his birth and, for the most part, immediately recognizable to outsiders. His author status, on the other hand, is both self-selected and necessary for him to establish, given the contrast between his appearance as a lower-class, Bedouin day laborer, and the stereotypical image of an author, including among other literary actors.

Authorship as a performance also occurs in *A Dog with No Tail* at a meta-level. Though the ways in which the narrator performs as an author requires the active participation of a reader or an audience, the text is more concerned with the effects of his performance on the narrator himself than with its effects on society. The content of the narrator's published works to which he alludes in the text is rarely discussed. In the two cases where the narrative does address their content, his writings not only have no effect on society, but are, in fact, misinterpreted by the very people he sought to represent. In the first case, he writes what he intended to be a "maudlin story about the family martyr" (25). Instead of successfully elegizing his ancestor and bringing his family pride, though, he is met with anger and resentment, with some family members cutting him off entirely and one going so far as to open a court case against him. Later, we learn about another piece he intended as a melancholy short story and which was inspired by his coworker, Khalaf, who suffered from mysterious back problems. The narrator tells us:

> I wrote a melancholy short story about him entitled *Qitharatu Khalafi-l-bannaa'i*, or "The Guitar of Khalaf the Builder," but due to my ignorance of proper voweling it was published as *Qitharatun khalfa-l-binaa'i,* "A Guitar Behind the Building." Khalaf himself understood it as a formal complaint on his behalf, an eloquent plea directed at senior officials to get the state to pay for his treatment. (116-7)

In this passage, Hamdi reveals that it was his own ignorance of Arabic grammar, the mastery of which is a foundational part of an author's craft, that led to Khalaf's misunderstanding of his

story. Moreover, whereas Khalaf believes Hamdi to have made "an eloquent plea" on his behalf, attempting to reclaim the dignity and rights of a poor worker who is being mistreated by the state, Hamdi had no such lofty intentions for his literary piece. Once again we see a rejection of the traditional mode of authorship and role of the literary author as societal reformer and a refocusing on the writer himself and his feelings of embarrassment and failure.

As noted previously, being an author was the only part of the narrator's identity that is presented as his choice. Thus, the ways in which he performs as an author become a declaration of his agency and self-definition since, as he asserts frequently, "I'm not like your run-of-the-mill labourers" (38). While the narrator's use of his authorship to raise his status socially at first glance may appear to affirm the elevated position of authors, in fact, the text further disestablishes the notion of author as detached, selfless intellectual by revealing the narrator's self-motivated interests in drawing others' attention to his role. It is important for him that both the families in whose homes he works and the other laborers, his friends, are made aware of and, ideally, acknowledge the distinction between him and other day laborers. He loudly recites poetry while he works, interspersing "erudite turns of phrase of the kinds spouted by lovers of culture and learning" (19) in his conversation, and leaves copies of newspapers with his published stories on display. He does not just fashion himself as a published author in front of strangers and customers, but also feels the need to fabricate a profession and educational background to match the image of himself he wishes to portray to his fellow laborers. He notes:

> I was digging at the bottom of a foundation trench beneath a three-story house, but everyone, even those closest to me, were left in no doubt that I was first and foremost a journalist. The stories I'd had published were enlisted to support my claims that I was, in fact, an editor for *al-Ahrar* newspaper, which, I reckoned, was just about credible for someone in my position. (3)

Here, the narrator's juxtaposition of his work as a manual laborer working in a trench and his "lofty" ambitions of being a journalist and editor sheds light on these two contradictory professions and Hamdi's struggle to attain the latter while being stuck in the former. Abu Golayyel also mocks Egypt's cultural journalism, as Hamdi considers it reasonable to assume that a day laborer who worked full-time could simultaneously hold the position of editor at a cultural newspaper. The narrative continues, noting that Hamdi invented his post-secondary education, as well, and sometimes claimed to be pursuing an advanced degree at "something called The Institute of Literary Criticism," which he chose based on the grandeur of its name (3).

While passages and fabrications such as these suggest that the narrator is concerned solely with appearances, his performance of authorship is tied intimately to his identity and should be interpreted as much more serious than the sarcastic tone of the novel might at first imply. In this way, we see that it is not that the notion of "author" is devoid of value for Abu Golayyel and others of the nineties generation, but that the roles of the author have shifted. In this case, instead of writing to effect change in society, Hamdi talks about writing as a means to change himself, or more accurately, how he is perceived by others and understands himself. By "demoting" the author and removing him from a national context and cause, Abu Golayyel opens up the role of authorship to include advocating for a clearer understanding and expression of the self, similar to what we see in Amin's *A Pink Empty Shirt*. Hamdi admits in one of the few non-tongue-in-cheek passages, "[W]riting lets me take pride in myself, even as I lug sacks of earth around. Just the thought that I've penned stories puts everything to rights" (4). This identity which is, significantly, one that he can at least somewhat control, becomes all the more important to Hamdi in light of his other experiences recounted in the text. He is presented as one of Egypt's many dispossessed with no real opportunities in his Bedouin village and no sense of freedom or

belonging in Cairo. Over the course of the novel, we see him humiliated, beaten, abused, mocked, and swindled, and nowhere is there a promise of retribution or redress. Tragicomic in tone, the text recounts more than one of his failed sexual encounters with women. Several chapters are devoted to Hamdi's arrest when he was an indifferent college student and accused of demonstrating with the Muslim Brotherhood. He is subsequently beaten in prison, and these violent, humiliating acts to which the narrative alludes continue to haunt him throughout the text. However, Hamdi's acts of authorship are not a response to the wrongdoings and injustices he has suffered or an attempt to inspire reform but are rather a means to lay claim to his ability to define himself. Thus, despite the mocking tone, we recognize the significance for Hamdi of his identity as an author, and we believe him when he tells us, "The author was someone else, someone out of the ordinary. Making light of literature seemed a useful evasion, a way of excusing my scribblings and making them acceptable both to myself and to others" (32).

Throughout the text, Hamdi's performance of his authorship is also the means by which he negotiates between the Bedouin and Cairene parts of his hybrid, personal identity. The sharp contrast and tensions between Bedouins, the capital city, and the state that existed in Egypt are represented within the text, as well. The narrator refers to his Bedouin identity—most identifiable by his accent and dress—at several points in the text, including his pride in his heritage, though, like everything in the novel, it is certainly not exempt from Abu Golayyel's biting humor. "Bedouin" is set clearly as a counter to Cairo and, even more so, the state at different points in the text. For example, in a brief passage in which Hamdi discusses the 1919 revolution in Cairo and the Fayoum, he contrasts the images depicted on television screens of brave, young Egyptian men filling the streets of the capital and chanting "We die, we die, and Egypt lives!," with the more chaotic (but, the text suggests, perhaps also more successful)

looting and property damage carried out by Bedouins against the British in the Fayoum. He points out the hypocrisy and imbalance with how each group of men was treated by the emerging Egyptian government, writing, "Despite the large number imprisoned or slain by the English the revolutionary courts did not subsequently treat [those in the Fayoum] as revolutionaries or resistance fighters who had sacrificed their lives for the nation but as a mob of petty crooks and bandits" (124). Interestingly, the text notes that the scene of triumphant, nationalist Cairo is one that was brought to audiences by Mahfouz and his *Trilogy*, adapted for the silver screen. In this way, Abu Golayyel signals the disconnect and antagonism not just between Bedouins and the Egyptian state, but also between Bedouins—including the narrator—and the older literary generations, as represented by Mahfouz, the master of the realist novel and himself considered a national treasure after he became the first Arab writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988.[87]

At other points, the text refers more directly to the narrator's personal sense of alienation and lack of belonging that stem from his existence as a Bedouin in Cairo. Remembering his arrival in the city, Hamdi relates, "From my very first day in Shubra I thought of [our village Abu Tahoun] as my true home, the only place where I move free from fear, a citizen with rights and obligations" (111). His words reveal that it was his relocation to the capital that pushed Abu Tahoun to the status of homeland in his mind, which he defines as a place where he can move freely and be a part of a community, a position that comes with both duties and rights. In this case, it is not a matter of the usual displacement one may feel when migrating to the city, but is rather a bigger issue of discrimination and denial of basic rights that should be afforded to all of Egypt's citizens, including the Bedouin. In another scene that highlights his outsider status,

[87] To date, Mahfouz remains the only Arab author to have received this accolade.

Hamdi recalls the earthquake of 1992 that shook Egypt. He remembers, "Down in the foundation trench, I felt none of the tremors that shook the rest of the nation. I labored on diligently as, over my head, people fled death" (31). Even in the event of a natural disaster, Hamdi remains alone, unaware of what is affecting everyone around him. In the end, he emerges from the trench and is surprised to find everyone running in panic. He begins to run, too, though without knowing why, and is embarrassed when he has to be told that the cause for alarm is the ground shaking beneath them.

Despite the antipathy between Bedouins and the Egyptian state and the narrator's own feelings of discomfort in Cairo, because Hamdi has relocated to the city, he no longer feels completely at ease in his village and feels compelled to explain why he left. His performance of authorship within his home village becomes a way to boast of his successes (only some of which are real) and to justify, in the process, his decision to leave Abu Tahoun for Cairo. He describes his visits home:

> I'd rub oil and white spirit into my neck and hands to wipe away the last traces of plaster and cement, put on a clean, pressed gallabiya, and spend the holiday at home posing as a man of importance, playing the village intellectual to a tee. Rising late, towel slung over my shoulder, I would make my way down to the canal bank, toothbrush and toothpaste held aloft, then sit all day on the bench leafing through books and reading not a word. (118)

This passage appears nearly verbatim at two different points in the text, underscoring its significance and alluding to the frequency with which he may have performed this role. Here, the role of author-intellectual is once again one based on appearances, with the clean, pressed clothes replacing dirt and grime that would mark him as a laborer. Though he mocks here the notion of "the village intellectual," whose position can be assumed by one with good hygiene, a clean robe, and books as props, authorship for Hamdi was just as much of a performance in Cairo. Elsewhere in the text, Hamdi uses his established identity as an author—confirmed by his

publications and acting of the part when at home—as proof that he has attained a certain amount of leverage that he could achieve only living in Cairo, which he describes as "the enemy's backyard" (113). This leverage can be used, he suggests, on behalf of both himself and others. He writes, referring to his fellow villagers, "Both I and they are in constant need of protection, not from enemies immediately at hand, but from more distant foes: the police and the government" (114). He thereby aligns himself with those from Abu Tahoun and sets himself in opposition to both the Egyptian state and the police. He continues, "I'm currently trying to make [the villagers] understand that my Cairene exile has not been time wasted, that an 'author' is no mean protection. He is a man capable of reprimanding, even of abusing, police officers and can push open, and on occasion kick in, the doors of government officials" (114). Here Hamdi both alludes to and ridicules the old model of authorship: a romanticized notion that what an author writes has the power to introduce meaningful change at a national level. He scoffs at the idea that words can speak as loudly as violent acts carried out by the state and police, such as those described in the text during the narrator's arrest.

At several points, the text comments on the crumbling infrastructure of cultural organizations, particularly state-run institutions and ministries that served as major publishers, cultural venues, and means of employments for writers and artists. For instance, in Hamdi's description of the Literary Club that he joined as a college student in the Fayoum as being located "in the Old Cultural Palace: two apartments in a slowly crumbling building" (126), the physical building matches the dilapidation of such institutions more broadly. Early in the text, we learn of Hamdi's unsuccessful interview for a cultural official position in one such cultural institute. He portrays the established official as a buffoon, as he turns abruptly to Hamdi and demands he identify a catchy song after humming a few bars. Hamdi, surprised by his question

and the surreal situation in which he finds himself, bursts out laughing and, as a result, loses his chance to "become a distinguished cultural official" (4). Even Hamdi's college, Umm Hassan College, which is a constant source of embarrassment and shame for the narrator, includes a dig at the state and their cultural apparatus. At the school, which is named after a bordello next door, the narrator tells us, "The students, esteemed colleagues one and all, were mostly poor and lazy" (97), and Hamdi's aunt described the school as "a college for donkeys" (98). He also makes sure to include in the college's description the fact that "the college fell within the purview of the Ministry of Higher Education" (97). In the latter half of the twentieth century, such state-run institutions and ministries, were an integral part of the dominant model of Egyptian authorship that posited the literary writer as an informed, rational guide for the nation. It was also this model and its ties to the nation as an imaginary and collective and the state as a patron of the arts that Abu Golayyel and his generation of writers actively challenged in their literature.

Conclusion

The radical shift in authorship that defined this literary generation, as described in this chapter, occurred at a time of significant change in how Egyptian literature was produced and circulated. I have demonstrated the various ways in which nineties generation authors Amin, Zikri, and Abu Golayyel challenged and rejected a dominant paradigm of literary authorship that both presumed the presence of a nationalist project and conceived of an author based on his/her commitment to it. Instead of serving as rational, intellectual guides for the nation, these writers engaged their readers in the process of disassembling such notions through the disestablishment of the literary author. In their texts, the authors often removed clear guideposts that would neatly identify their texts or characters as belonging to individual, distinct categories (e.g.,

autobiography or novel, narrator or author or reader, fiction or reality, etc.) and created opportunities for more fluid identities and groupings that were continually being negotiated. Moreover, such a demotion did not signal a loss of the author's importance or efficacy; rather, by removing the literary author nationalist framework, these texts invite new theorizations of the political outside of formal relations to the nation.

The subsequent chapters in this dissertation investigate the roles played by key Egyptian cultural institutions that mediated literary production, circulation, and reception in the making of the nineties generation. As we will see, two of the largest changes were: the state's loss of its monopoly over the culture industry, with the rise of several independent publishing houses, prizes, booksellers, cultural venues, etc.; and a dramatic increase in circulation. In addition to texts and authors having significantly higher access to local and regional markets during this period, they also began to reach new audiences and reception contexts via the growing "global" literary market, as their works were translated into English at an unprecedented rate. Just as we have seen the notion of "author" move beyond the bounds of the nation in the literature of this generation, we now turn our attention to the ways in which the group's texts and writers crossed national and other borders to enter new and expanding literary networks.

Chapter 3

Akhbār al-Adab: Crafting a Narrative of the "Nineties Generation"

In the 1990s there were two conditions of literary authorship in Egypt: one, writing and publishing literary works, and two, participating in the literary scene. Around the same time as the young writers who would become known as the "nineties generation" began publishing their texts, the weekly, state-run, Cairo-based cultural newspaper *Akhbār al-Adab* (Literary News, est. 1993) was established and circulated throughout Egypt and the region. Poetry, short stories, and novel excerpts by both prominent and emerging writers appeared on the newspaper's pages alongside criticism, reviews, book announcements, gossip, interviews, coverage of cultural events, and longer articles concerning cultural figures and debates from Egypt, other Arab countries, and around the globe. The paper quickly became "the most widely distributed and read literary journal in the Arab region," in the words of Samia Mehrez (*Culture Wars* 26). By publishing new texts and covering the literary scene, *Akhbār al-Adab* helped Egyptian writers meet the two conditions of authorship, while simultaneously reinforcing them. One prominent example that illustrates some of the ways in which the newspaper and emerging nineties generation writers interacted, as well as the effects of this collaboration on the emerging literary group, is the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" (Features of a Generation) interview series. The first interview was published in mid-1997, and it grew into an intermittent, four-year series of literary interviews with writers generally associated with the new generation. In the interviews, the writers discussed their works of creative writing and the publishing process and engaged in debates

about their generation, including its most salient traits, membership, and place in modern Egyptian literary history. They also discussed hotly contested topics such as the young writers' purposeful breaking of taboos and the place and value of literature produced by women of the generation.

In this chapter, I investigate the ways in which *Akhbār al-Adab* helped writers identified with the nineties generation perform as authors and reshape debates about their own collective artistic legitimacy. Rather than treating the newspaper as a neutral, passive source of information about this Egyptian literary group, I explore how *Akhbār al-Adab* actively participated in the debates that were themselves constitutive of the generation. Drawing on Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT), I argue that the *process* of formulating and reformulating the group and its boundaries is what defined the "nineties generation," not merely a static list of aesthetic traits and authors that comes out of these debates. Briefly sketching the history of *Akhbār al-Adab* and engaging with Elisabeth Kendall's work on Egyptian literary journalism in earlier periods, I show why and how this newspaper was uniquely positioned to contribute to debates about the new generation of writers, rather than just report on them. The "Malāmiḥ Jīl" interview series serves as a case study that establishes *Akhbār al-Adab* as a complex, plural actor with competing agencies that played an active role in the making of the nineties generation. Drawing on the concept of paratext as well as scholarship on the literary interview as a hybrid genre, I focus first on the ways in which *Akhbār al-Adab* introduced new meaning to the published interviews and explore how the series allowed the featured writers to perform publicly as authors in front of Egypt's literary community. Indeed, I argue that taking part in the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series became an act in the literary scene, as the conversations in which the young writers challenged appraisals of their generation and offered their own judgments were transformed into texts that

subsequently were published and circulated on the pages of the widely read *Akhbār al-Adab*. Turning finally to the featured authors and the content of their responses, I pay particular attention to the dynamics of group formation and the ways in which the newspaper and the interviewees co-produced the boundaries of what constituted the "nineties generation."

Akhbār al-Adab and Egypt's "Nineties Generation"

While *Akhbār al-Adab* was one of several Cairo-based literary periodicals that engaged with debates about the nineties generation and published their texts at that time, this paper was distinguished by its well-stocked masthead, highly accessible format, and extensive reach. From its founding, *Akhbār al-Adab* presented itself as both a new, distinct actor in Egypt's literary scene and one tied to earlier traditions in Egyptian literary history. *Akhbār al-Adab* first appeared in 1985 as a weekly page that ran in the state-owned newspaper *al-Akhbār* (The News, est. 1952), and even in this early form, it reflected a broad approach to culture and an interest in debates, events, figures, and texts from Egypt, the Arab world, and abroad. In 1992 the page's founder Gamal al-Ghitani, a prominent sixties generation author and literary figure, proposed to expand the page into a full-fledged newspaper. Al-Ghitani notes that since its founding, the newspaper had a dual purpose: providing journalistic coverage of the literary and larger cultural community, and promoting literary texts (al-Ghitani, Personal interview[88]). When the parent company *Akhbār al-Yawm* (Today's News, est. 1944) accepted his proposal, al-Ghitani developed and subsequently served as the paper's editor-in-chief, a position he held until shortly before the Egyptian revolution of 2011. By the time the first issue appeared on newsstands on

[88] Interviews were conducted in Arabic, and the translations appearing in this chapter are my own.

July 18, 1993, the paper had already secured the endorsement of one of Egypt's most recognized and respected literary figures: Naguib Mahfouz. At the request of al-Ghitani (al-Ghitani, Personal interview), Mahfouz wrote the inaugural issue's opening editorial, which appeared in his scrawling handwriting just inside the cover. Since this first issue, the paper has been printed in broadsheet form on inexpensive paper typically used by newspapers, rather than on glossy pages associated with magazines, in a conscious move to tie the publication to the field of journalism and make it affordable for the average Egyptian citizen (al-Ghitani, Personal interview). The use of newsprint—a cheap, non-archival paper—in addition to the lack of a digital database of *Akhbār al-Adab* even today[89] has ensured that the printed issues of the newspaper that have circulated each week in Egypt and throughout the Arab world are largely ephemeral, preserved only in a few physical archives.[90] Despite the ephemerality of the individual issues, *Akhbār al-Adab* consistently reached a large readership in the week it was produced, with a regular distribution estimated at between 10,000 and 20,000 copies in Egypt alone during this period.[91]

To this day, the paper has retained the same format, distribution levels, and breadth and diversity of content, all of which distinguish it from more narrowly focused publications associated with specific trends or movements that primarily publish creative writing, what

[89] Nowhere is there a database or listing of the articles that have appeared in *Akhbār al-Adab*, nor do the individual issues include a table of contents or an index. At the time of writing *Akhbār al-Adab* maintains a website through its parent company *Akhbār al-Yawm* (http://www.dar.akhbarelyom.com/issuse/?mag=a); however, the material on the website is replaced every week to reflect the content of the printed edition (al-Taher, Personal interview).

[90] Egypt's national archives, Dār al-Kutub, houses a nearly complete hard-copy collection of *Akhbār al-Adab*, as do the offices of *al-Akhbār* in Cairo.

[91] In a personal interview, al-Ghitani noted that *Akhbār al-Adab*'s average circulation within Egypt was 20,000 copies per week during his tenure as editor-in-chief. Mehrez, writing in 2008, offers 10,000 as the newspaper's weekly circulation, though she notes that the figures' "exact accuracy cannot be ascertained, since [*Akhbār al-Adab*] deal[s] with distribution figures as if they were military secrets" (*Culture Wars* 36).

Elisabeth Kendall identifies as "specialist literary journals."[92] As Kendall shows, specialist literary journals in twentieth-century Egypt played an integral role in the rise and reception of new literary movements and generations, often announcing a group's arrival on the scene, defining its aesthetics and ideologies, and creating unity among the voices published. In the 1990s, two such specialist literary journals that were strongly associated with the nineties generation were in print: *al-Kitāba al-ukhrā* (Alternative Writing, 1991-2001) and *al-Jarād* (The Locust, 1994-2000?), the latter of which focused on poetry. Many of the writers of this generation who were featured in the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series—for example, Iman Mersal, Mustafa Zikri, Yasser Shaaban, Nora Amin, and Hoda Hussein, among others—also published creative works in these journals.

Kendall notes the importance of *al-Kitāba al-ukhrā* and *al-Jarād* as independent, experimental, dissident journals for nineties generation writers, given the antagonism and resistance they faced from established authors and literary critics and the publications they oversaw (109). In April 1991, the esteemed poet Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi, writing as the recently appointed editor-in-chief of the state-run monthly journal *Ibdāʿ* (Innovation/Creativity, 1983-2002), declared that the journal would now be reserved for the "elite" [*ṣafwa*] rather than the "riffraff" [*ḥarāfīsh*]. The latter referred, at least in part, to Egypt's rising authors, for whom Hijazi recommended a continued engagement with *Ibdāʿ* through the act of reading, noting in a patronizing tone that "reading is one half of innovation" (7). The following month, poet Hisham Qishta published the inaugural issue of his *al-Kitāba al-ukhrā*, and he used his editorial to criticize Hijazi and purposefully set his journal in opposition to mainstream, state-run journals

[92] Some prominent examples of specialist literary journals in the Egyptian context include *al-Fajr*, *Apollo*, and *Gallery 68*, the last of which was associated with Egypt's sixties generation.

like *Ibdā'*.[93] Often barred from publishing at more traditional venues where opinions like Hijazi's were common, nineties generation writers regularly published texts in *al-Kitāba al-ukhrā* and *al-Jarād* that otherwise would not have made it to print. Both journals provided an important venue for the young, loosely affiliated writers to experiment publicly as a group. By publishing their creative works and presenting them to readers alongside one another, these journals also presented the writers as a loose collective and invited readers to look for stylistic and thematic connections among their creative works.

According to Kendall, it is specialist journals like these that have been affiliated with successive avant-garde movements and that "became a real hotbed of innovative literary activity" in Egypt in the twentieth century (1). However, while these journals undoubtedly played a significant role in the development of the new generation—a role that warrants further scholarly attention—the nature of *al-Kitāba al-ukhrā* and *al-Jarād* as specialist literary journals precluded them from presenting the voices of the writers they published as a dynamic, integrated part of the literary scene to the same extent that *Akhbār al-Adab* could and did. Additionally, the journal's short-lived, non-periodic nature prevented them from consistently reaching a wide, diverse readership, and their importance thus should not be overstated.

As what I term a general cultural newspaper, *Akhbār al-Adab* had a different relationship with the emerging generation than that which existed between the young writers and these specialist journals. Al-Ghitani's vision of the newspaper was inspired by similarly broadly focused cultural journals in Egypt from the *nahḍa* through the 1960s, as he sought to tie *Akhbār al-Adab* to what he saw as a rich tradition that had fallen into decline (al-Ghitani, "Akhbār" 7). Of particular importance were *al-Risāla* (The Dispatch, 1933-53, 1963-5), *al-Thaqāfa* (Culture,

[93] Jacquemond provides a brief discussion of this back-and-forth in *Conscience* (170-1).

1939-53, 1963-5), *al-Hilāl* (The Crescent, 1892-), and *al-Majalla* (The Journal, 1957-1971) (6; al-Ghitani, Personal interview), each of which Kendall identifies as falling into the category of "general cultural journal." Kendall defines Egypt's general cultural journals as publishing both literary material and pieces concerning cultural debates, events, and figures. She argues that they "tended to lack a specific sense of duty within the literary field; their literary content was of a more tried and tested nature, rather than experimental, intended to respond to popular demand, rather than to provoke debate" (39). *Akhbār al-Adab* departed from this trend in Egyptian cultural journalism, given its regular publication of new writers, its proclivity for not just provoking but actively participating in cultural debates, and its founding principles that point to a clear vision and sense of duty in the Egyptian and broader Arab cultural scenes. These principles include: publishing all writers based on the quality of their texts and regardless of their affiliation, political or otherwise; reporting on events, writers, and literary trends from outside of the capital, as well; acting as a bridge between old and new writing; and covering culture in Egypt, the Arab world, and around the globe (al-Ghitani, "Akhbār" 4-5).

With regard to the first principle, *Akhbār al-Adab* saw itself as committed to promoting and defending artistic freedom of expression, and it has been called "the only state-owned literary publication that regularly attacks the government" (Ziyad).[94] Additionally, while the

[94] This has remained true through Egypt's recent regime changes. Under the presidency of Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), for example, the paper regularly waged battles against Farouk Hosny, Egypt's Minister of Culture from 1987 to 2011. In 2013 as the country staged mass protests against the government of Mohamed Morsi (2012-13), the staff of *Akhbār al-Adab* led a similar revolt against the appointed editor-in-chief Magdy Afifi who was perceived as pushing a Muslim Brotherhood agenda, and they eventually took over the journal in July of that year. More recently, under the presidency of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (2014-), a large controversy shook Egypt's cultural scene in 2015 as state prosecutors charged Egyptian novelist Ahmed Naji with "violating public modesty" for his novel *Istikhdām al-ḥayāat* (2014; *Using Life*, 2017). Excerpts of the novel first appeared in print in 2014 on the pages of *Akhbār al-Adab*, where Naji also worked as a journalist. Though originally acquitted, he and *Akhār al-Adab*'s editor-in-chief Tarek al-Taher returned to court in February 2016, resulting in a two-year jail sentence for Naji and a LE10,000 fine for al-Taher.

newspaper published "tried and true" literary styles and established authors, it also printed a number of experimental and controversial writings from both classical and contemporary authors. For example, Alaa Al Aswany first published on the pages of the newspaper parts of his *'Imārat Ya'qūbyān* (2002; *The Yacoubian Building*, 2004), a novel that was originally rejected by a number of publishing houses because of its controversial political and sexual content before the more daring Mohamed Hashem of Merit Publishing House published it.[95] In addition to taking risks by printing potentially controversial pieces, the newspaper also regularly circulated works by young, unknown writers without established readerships. In the mid-1990s, it held some of the first widely publicized literary contests for young writers from Egypt and the Arab world. The paper dedicated several pages over a number of issues each year to interviews with the authors and their winning stories and poems.

The act of publishing or being published about—whether a literary text, feature article, editorial, interview, or brief mention—in *Akhbār al-Adab* was itself an event in the scene, such that the newspaper actively helped constitute the very literary scene it covered, as well as specific groups within it. In this way, the newspaper acted as a "mediator," in Latour's terms, "transform[ing], translat[ing], distort[ing], and modify[ing] the meaning or elements which [it was] supposed to carry" (50). In his formulation of ANT, as articulated in *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Latour argues that instead of concerning themselves with creating a stable definition of a "group," sociologists should take as their object of study the process of the group's formation and examine, in his words, "the traces left behind by [actors'] activity of

[95] The serialized novel *'Imārat Ya'qūbyān* appeared in the following issues and pages of *Akhbār al-Adab*, running from February to May of 2001: 397 (26-7); 398 (26-7); 399 (26-7); 400(26-7); 401(26-7); 402 (33); 403 (26-7); 404 (26-7); 405 (26-7); 406 (26-7); 407 (30-1); and 408 (24-5).

forming and dismantling groups" (29).[96] He contends that studying the formation of a group, while more abstract than studying one that is already and recognizably established, is, in fact, easier because the former focuses on discernible controversies about a group's definition. He writes, "Group formations leave many more traces in their wake than already established connections which, by definition, might remain mute and invisible" (31). While the specific "group" under consideration in this chapter is the literary "nineties generation," Latour's approach to actors and emphasis on the process of group formation—whatever the group may be—applies generally to *Akhbār al-Adab* and the ways in which it participated in the Egyptian literary scene, which we can take as a larger network.

In his article that analyzes *Akhbār al-Adab* based on a survey of twenty-six issues of the newspaper from 1995, Richard Van Leeuwen also points to its active presence in the scene, cataloging instances and establishing the means by which the paper interceded in contemporary literary debates. He writes, "*Akhbār al-adab* does not only intend to comment on the activities of others in the field of culture, but itself actively intervenes to promote the proliferation of literary texts" and "a certain approach to culture and literature" (164). However, while Van Leeuwen presents the actions of *Akhbār al-Adab* as those of an outsider who "greedily interferes in the intellectual and political debates which affect the cultural field" (158), I consider the newspaper an intrinsic part of the Cairene literary scene in which it circulated. Moreover, in arguing that *Akhbār al-Adab* served as the medium through which political and social forces acted to influence literary taste and fashions, Van Leeuwen seems to treat *Akhbār al-Adab* as an

[96] Latour uses purposefully capacious terms like "actor" and "group" to signal their flexibility and ANT's far-ranging applicability. In characteristically combative style, he writes, "If someone pointed out to me that words like 'group', 'grouping', and 'actor' are meaningless, I would answer: 'Quite right.' The word 'group' is so empty that it sets neither the size nor the content. It could be applied to a planet as well as to an individual; to Microsoft as well as to my family; to plants as well as to baboons. This is exactly why I have chosen it" (29).

"intermediary" – that is, in Latourian terms, "what transports meaning or force without transformation" (39). In treating the newspaper as an intermediary of anonymous sociopolitical "forces," Van Leeuwen's analysis obscures its specificity and its agency. Taking *Akhbār al-Adab*, instead, as a plural actor that includes journalists, editors, layout designers, guest authors, interviewers, printers, among others, it becomes clear that the newspaper did not simply print articles that intervened in external conversations about literature, but rather participated in the debates that were part of the ongoing process of forming and defining groups, including the "nineties generation." Furthermore, as we will see in the "Malāmiḥ Jīl series," *Akhbār al-Adab* introduced several layers of paratexts to the published interviews, thereby producing new meaning in the texts.

Though some scholars, such as Sabry Hafez, have suggested that *Akhbār al-Adab* was outspokenly against the "new writing" (*al-kitāba al-jadīda*) associated with the emerging generation,[97] the newspaper actually provided the writers opportunities to perform publicly as authors on its pages by publishing their creative works and by commenting on writing and the state of literature in Egypt. One of the most important ways in which the newspaper engaged with the nineties generation was through regular publication of their literary texts in its section *Sāḥat al-ibdā'* (Creative Space). While publishing books notionally carried more weight, the

[97] In his article that examines the Egyptian novel produced by this new generation in the 1990s, Hafez writes, "The Egyptian literary establishment has been virtually unanimous in condemning these works. Led by the influential Cairo newspaper *Al-Akhbar* and its weekly book supplement *Akhbar al-Adab*, its leading lights conducted a sustained campaign against the new writers for a number of years" (49). Of the eleven writers he mentions by name as "principal exponents of the new wave" (49), all published literary works in the weekly *Akhbār al-Adab* and six were featured in the "Malāmiḥ Jil" series (Mahmoud Hamid, Wa'il Ragab, May Telmissany, Yasser Shaaban, Mustafa Zikri, and Nora Amin). It is possible that Hafez, here, is referring to the page "Akbār al-Adab" that ran from 1985 until 1993 also under the guidance of Gamal al-Ghitani; however, the so-called nineties generation of writers were just beginning to publish in the early 1990s, and Hafez himself points to the publication of the collaborative collection of short stories *Khuyuṭ 'alā dawā'ir* in 1995 as having signaled "[t]he arrival of this new wave in Egyptian fiction" (50). This suggests he is referring to the independent literary newspaper that was founded in 1993.

small print runs, poor distribution networks, and inadequate bookselling venues endemic to Egyptian publishing meant that many authors found a wider readership via literary journals, magazines, and newspapers like *Akhbār al-Adab*. Furthermore, the few book publishing opportunities that existed at the beginning of the 1990s were predominantly state-run, and they favored established authors over newcomers. Several young writers resorted to paying to self-publish their books. By the end of the decade, there were more opportunities to publish thanks to increased publishing initiatives undertaken by the state and the rise of the small, independent literary press in Cairo, particularly Hosni Soliman's Sharqiyyat (est. 1991) and Mohamed Hashem's Merit Publishing House (est. 1998), a topic I explore in depth in the following chapter. However, the vast majority of books, whether by new or established writers, achieved only a single print run of 1,000 to 3,000 copies that circulated almost entirely in Cairo. By contrast, as an affordable, weekly literary newspaper with access to much wider distribution networks, *Akhbār al-Adab* consistently put literary works in front of a diverse and large readership.

In addition to pieces of creative writing, nineties generation authors also wrote articles that expressed their opinions on literary texts, trends, and figures. By publishing such pieces, *Akhbār al-Adab* presented the young authors as capable of making valid and worthy contributions to contemporary cultural debates. Moreover, in the 1990s, the staff of *Akhbār al-Adab* consisted of several young journalists who were also creative writers, and some, such as "Malāmiḥ Jīl's" creator Abdel Hafez, even self-identified as members of the nineties generation (Abdel Hafez, Personal interview). Though they had yet to establish their bylines, they contributed regularly to the content of the paper and its overall vision (al-Ghitani, Personal interview; Abdel Hafez, Personal interview).

Akhbār al-Adab also printed pieces about the new generation's already published literary works and provided journalistic coverage of cultural events in which the young writers participated. Whether the book reviews and articles were positive or negative, their presence in this newspaper ensured that the young writers' names and works were consistently put in front of those involved in the literary scene in Cairo and more broadly. For instance, the celebrated author and literary critic Edwar al-Kharrat, who contributed regularly to *Akhbār al-Adab*, wrote several reviews of books by the new generation shortly after they appeared in print, such as Adel Esmat's *Hājis mawt* (Fear of Death, 1995), Hosni Hassan's *Ism 'ākhar li-l-ẓill* (Another Name for Shadows, 1996), and Mustafa Zikri's *Hurā' matāha qūṭiyya* (Nonsense about a Gothic Labyrinth, 1997).[98] Additionally, the newspaper regularly covered literary conferences, cultural salons, academic discussions and the like, often featuring longer articles that noted the participants and reported on the content of the conversations. *Akhbār al-Adab* also frequently included brief blurbs that provided weekly updates on authors' movements and participation in cultural events that predominantly took place in Cairo. For instance, the January 24, 1999, issue (No. 289) which dedicated several pages to coverage of the Cairo International Book Fair, includes the following brief note[99]: "On Monday, the first of February, there will be a *nadwa* entitled 'Young Novelists.' Participants include Miral al-Tahawy, Mustafa Zikri, Hoda Hussein, and Abdel Sattar Hasanayn, with Saʿid Nuh directing [the discussion]" (4).[100] By listing the four

[98] The book reviews, respectively, were: "*Hājis mawt* am hājis taḥaddī?" (Fear of Death or Fear of Challenges?); "*Ayyuhā al-ẓill*: Mā asmā'uka al-ukhra: Qirā'a fī riwāyat Ḥusnī Ḥasan" (Oh, Shadow: What are your other names? A reading of Hosni Hassan's Novel); and "Fī al-sikka: *Hurā' matāha qūṭiyya*" (Along the Way: Nonsense About a Gothic Labyrinth).

[99] All translations from *Akhbār al-Adab*, including the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" interviews, are my own.

[100] "...وفي يوم الاثنين ١ فبراير يقام ندوة بعنوان 'شباب الرواية' يشارك فيها ميرال الطحاوي، مصطفى ذكري، هدى حسين، وعبد الستار حسنين ويديرها سعيد نوح." (٤)

participants of the upcoming event, the first three of whom had been featured in "Malāmiḥ Jīl" two years earlier, *Akhbār al-Adab* continued to affirm these writers' professional presence in the scene by keeping their names featured regularly on the pages of the paper. In other words, it was not just the young authors' participation in the event itself, but also its coverage in the widely circulated *Akhbār al-Adab* that established the authors as active in the literary scene.

"Malāmiḥ Jīl": Authoring the Interviews

According to its founder Yasser Abdel Hafez, "Malāmiḥ Jīl" was the "first serious and sustained journalistic consideration [of the nineties generation] with a clear, central goal of getting to know the individuals of this generation" (Abdel Hafez, Personal interview). The series appeared in two iterations. The first ran from mid-1997 until early 1998 and consisted of eighteen interviews, ten with men and eight with women, a breakdown that reflected the near parity of literary production between men and women that developed in the 1990s for the first time in Egyptian literary history (Mehrez, *Culture Wars* 126). These interviews were conducted by Abdel Hafez, who received enthusiastic support when he proposed the project to then editor-in-chief al-Ghitani (Abdel Hafez, Personal interview). The series returned in 1999 under the guidance of Hassan Abdel Mawgoud and consisted of twenty-one interviews (fifteen with men, six with women) that ran between March 1999 and April 2001, with the vast majority of the interviews taking place in 1999.[101] Authors featured in this series usually had published one or two books of creative writing—novels, collections of short stories, diwans of poetry, and transgeneric texts—prior to their interviews, though a few had published only in *Akhbār al-*

[101] See Appendix A for a complete listing of the interviews that ran in the series.

Adab and other literary journals. The interviews themselves typically took place in Cairo at a location of the interviewee's choosing (Abdel Hafez written correspondence). The interview texts covered roughly one-third to one-half of a page and appeared under a banner that read "Malāmiḥ Jīl." They typically consisted of six to eight questions printed in question-answer format,[102] and they covered topics such as the author's relationship with writing, the mechanics of authoring and publishing a book, and the authors' opinions on contemporary literary debates, particularly in relation to his/her generation. The second iteration of interviews conducted by Abdel Mawgoud also featured a short prose text or poetry by the interviewee that ran alongside the interview.

Literary interviews often are approached as unproblematic sources of information on what an author thinks or how s/he consciously presents himself/herself to a given audience. However, instead of simply conveying an author's thoughts on a given topic, printed interviews contain traces of the multiple mediators who were involved in the production of the published texts and, in the case of the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series, in the ongoing formation of a literary group. Such traces are particularly visible in the form of the paratexts that accompanied the interviews and introduced new meaning to them. Paratexts are "the liminal devices—titles, signs of authorship, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, notes, intertitles, epilogues, and the like—that mediate the relations between text and reader" (Macksey xi). For a newspaper, this extends, as well, to its format, content, and reputation.[103] Gérard Genette, in his seminal work on the topic, contends that paratexts act as "a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but

[102] Exceptions include interviews conducted with Asmaa Hashem and Ashraf al-Khamaisy, which were printed with a longer introduction written by Abdel Hafez followed by nearly uninterrupted monologues by the interviewees.

[103] See Hagvar for a discussion of how the concept of paratext, specifically, may be applied as an analytical tool in discourse analyses of newspapers. His argument is part of a larger, recent move within media discourse analysis to examine how format and content are influential makers of meaning in texts and other media.

also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that…is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (1-2). Genette links paratexts closely to authorial intent;[104] however, the paratexts described here are significant precisely because they were introduced by *Akhbār al-Adab*, not the featured authors, and thus further illustrate the multiple, and at times competing, agencies present in each published interview.

In the case of the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series, where the newspaper was more widely known than the interviewed authors, *Akhbār al-Adab* contributed several important paratexts. The interviews were published in the midst of information on current, local and regional literary events, literary texts by Arab authors of all ages and from various countries, translations of foreign literary texts and literary criticism, and discussions of contemporary literary debates and trends in Egyptian, Arabic, and "world" literature. As a result, the content of an issue of *Akhbār al-Adab* helped situate the emerging generation within regional and international literary networks. With regard to its format, we have already established that the use of newsprint allowed *Akhbār al-Adab* to reach a broad audience economically and geographically. Because of the severe distribution limitations facing the Arab book market, *Akhbār al-Adab*'s circulation as a regional cultural newspaper helped further establish the "nineties generation" simultaneously as a specifically Egyptian literary group and as part of larger contemporary trends in Arabic and other literary traditions. The two interviewers, who acted as representatives of *Akhbār al-Adab*, likewise significantly affected meaning in the texts of the printed interviews. While the questions they asked during the interviews frequently were not exceptional to the generation, Abdel Hafez

[104] Genette's overemphasis on the author is a criticism common among scholars who engage with his notion of paratext.

and Abdel Mawgoud elevated the status of the young authors by providing them the same platform afforded to established authors, whose interviews also often were published in the same issue. Moreover, the form of the literary interview granted Abdel Hafez and Abdel Mawgoud, and by extension *Akhbār al-Adab*, additional power in crafting not only the interviews as they appeared in print, but also the narrative of the nineties generation.

In recent scholarship, the literary interview—that is, a personal interview with an author that addresses his/her writing and thoughts on writing—has begun to be treated as a genre in its own right.[105] Bringing together research on the literary interview from English, French, and German traditions, Anneleen Masschelein, Christophe Meurée, David Martens, and Stéphanie Vanasten argue that the literary interview is a hybrid genre with its own distinctive poetics. This hybridity exists on a number of levels: the interview as a genre lies between the oral and the written, the spontaneous and the scripted, the present and the past, and the authentic and the edited. Because it involves both the event of the dialogue between author and interviewer and the final, edited text (or speech, depending on medium), the literary interview is not simply an unproblematic presentation of facts about an author and his/ her opinions on given topics; rather, the final text is the culmination of an interactive process involving multiple actors that is then placed in front of a reader.

In this hybrid genre, common notions of authorship are undermined in various ways, with the interviewer and interviewee each acting as "author" of the interview and competing for control over what is said during the event of the interview and how the writer is presented in the final version of the published text (Masschelein, "Toward a Poetics" 21). Though scholars of the literary interview have often pointed to the tensions that arise between journalists and creative

[105] For an overview of recent research in this field, see Masschelein, et al, "Annotated Bibliography."

writers due to the former's desire to assume the latter's role, this is typically not the case in the Egyptian context, where creative writers throughout the twentieth century and to the present have often worked in the field of cultural journalism. Many of the writers interviewed, such as 'Azmy Abdel Wahab, Mohamed al-Hamamsy, Yasser Shaaban, and Mustafa Zikri, among others, also worked in cultural journalism, and some, like Shaaban, were later employed at *Akhbār al-Adab*, which itself was founded and run for almost twenty years by an acclaimed novelist. Additionally, when working on "Malāmiḥ Jīl," both Abdel Hafez, who has referred to himself as a member of the nineties generation (Abdel Hafez, Personal interview), and Abdel Mawgoud were themselves young writers who sought to establish themselves as authors in the literary scene, and they have since each become award-winning novelists.[106] Abdel Mawgoud began his relationship with *Akhbār al-Adab* while at university when he began submitting his short stories for publication and attracted the attention of al-Ghitani. He won one of the newspaper's contests for young writers and subsequently was recruited by al-Ghitani to work for the paper (Rakha). Abdel Hafez's and Abdel Mawgoud's simultaneous positionality as journalists at *Akhbār al-Adab* and creative writers further demonstrates the newspaper's position as an intrinsic part of the scene in which it participated.

That Abdel Hafez and Abdel Mawgoud were journalists at *Akhbār al-Adab* was also instrumental in the series' development and execution. After having worked as a journalist at the newspaper for four years, Abdel Hafez conceived of the series as one that would appear over several months, if not longer, on the pages of *Akhbār al-Adab*. His conviction that the interviews

[106] Abdel Mawgoud's first novel, *'Ayn al-Qiṭṭ* (The Eye of the Cat, 2004) was awarded second place in the 2005 competition for Egypt's privately run Sawiris Cultural Award in the category of "Novels by young writers." Abdel Hafez's novel *Kitāb al-Amān* (2013; *The Book of Safety*, 2017) tied for first place in the Sawiris Cultural Award's 2015 competition for "Novels by senior writers." Robin Moger's translation of it as *The Book of Safety* also won the 2017 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation.

belonged to the field of journalism was so strong that he later declined a publishing house's offer to collect the interviews in the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series to be published as a book by the same name (Abdel Hafez written correspondence). Additionally, Abdel Hafez was partially inspired by the contests *Akhbār al-Adab* ran for young writers, and he conducted some of the first interviews in the series with winners of the early contests, including those with Nora Amin, Mahmoud Hamid, and Yasser Shaaban (Abdel Hafez, Personal interview). With regard to the event of the interview, Abdel Hafez and Abdel Mawgoud played a large authorial role: they selected the writers to be interviewed, set the questions, and conducted the interviews (Abdel Hafez written correspondence). In doing so, they made public declarations about who belonged to the nineties generation, bolstered by the authority of the newspaper. Their questions, which often engaged with existing narratives about the new literary generation, reaffirmed ideas about its defining traits while simultaneously inviting dissent and a more nuanced discussion by the writers to whom the label was applied.

The interviews appeared in print with several prominent paratexts, namely titles, headshots of the author, a brief introduction that appeared at the top, and the label "Malāmiḥ Jīl" that identified each interview as belonging to the larger series. Though Abdel Mawgoud and Abdel Hafez were responsible for each of the paratexts (Abdel Hafez written correspondence), they also suggested a shared authorship, at times presenting the interviewers, and at others the interviewees, as the texts' authors. As is often the case with published interviews, the titles consisted of the name of the author interviewed followed by a brief quote or paraphrase of a point s/he made. In the case of the first interview to be marked as part of "Malāmiḥ Jīl,"[107] the

[107] The interviews conducted with Girgis Shukri, Samir Gharib, and Hamdy Abu Golayyel were not identified in *Akhbār al-Adab* as belonging to "Malamih Jil" when they appeared in print, though Abdel Hafez considers them to be part of the series (Abdel Hafez, personal interview; Abdel Hafez "Malāmiḥ al-Mustaqbal").

title read: “Nora Amin: My solitude pushes me towards a writing that seeks completion.”[108] Both the prominent placement of Amin’s name at the top of the interview and the use of first-person voice suggests her role in authoring the interview. However, Amin simultaneously appears as its subject: the quote was attributed to her by the interviewer, and it was Abdel Hafez, rather than Amin, who chose to highlight her solitude as a defining trait of her writing, since it was he who wrote the interviews’ titles. Because this series aimed to introduce writers who were relatively unknown, the titles played a larger role in shaping readers’ impressions of the writer than would similar framing of a more established author. Interestingly, common paratexts such as the author’s bibliography and basic biographical information, such as birthdate, were missing from the interviews, though most did provide a short introductory paragraph with some information about the authors’ formative experiences.

The series ran with a total of six different introductions: Abdel Hafez consistently used the same opening, and Abdel Mawgoud’s interviews had a total of five different introductions. Most of Abdel Mawgoud’s introductions were only a sentence long and were rather general, noting the large volume of books being produced at the time and the rarity of those often quieter voices who were worthy of defining the generation. For instance, the second version of the introduction that ran at the top of five interviews[109] read: “Without clamor, those who are distinguished reach the summit. It is they who rightfully form the features of a generation.”[110] Abdel Hafez’s introduction read:

> Walking by a newsstand, you are assailed by an incredible number of poetry titles, short story collections, and novels. Few of the names are familiar, and the rest write seeking

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١٠٨ "نورا أمين: وحدتي تدفعني لكتابة تنشد الاكتمال."

[109] This introduction appeared at the top of “Malamih Jil” interviews published in issues: 322 (30-1); 323 (28-9); 324 (30-1); 327 (29); and 328 (27).

١١٠ "بلا صخب يعبر هؤلاء المتميزون القرن إنهم بحق يشكلون 'ملامح جيل!'"

> affirmation that their attempts to break into the field are legitimate. The next day you'll find other titles, making it more difficult for you and for the authors, since no one writes just for themselves or to be called a "writer," an appellation that has lost its shine. Certainly no one can prevent another from publishing books. What we and the reader can do, though, is select the truest among them, that is, those we feel convey something that alters or expands what we already know.[111]

Of particular interest in this introduction is Abdel Hafez's reader, that is, the "you" mentioned in the opening sentence who is the implied reader of "Malāmiḥ Jīl." Due to the relatively recent ease with which one could publish, Abdel Hafez suggests, one must be discerning as a reader, evaluating authors based on their creative output. He switches from referring to the reader as "you" to writing "we" in the final lines, placing the reader and *Akhbār al-Adab* on the same plane. It is not just literary critics, established authors, or the cultural institutions who are capable of and responsible for determining literary taste and trends; rather, Abdel Hafez suggests, anyone who reads the new literature is capable of determining which texts have literary merit and which authors are worth reading.

While the newspaper aspires to reach a broad audience (Abdel Hafez, Personal interview; al-Ghitani, Personal interview; al-Taher, Personal interview), it is often the case in practice that journalists address those already involved in the conversations that take place on the pages of *Akhbār al-Adab* (Abdel Hafez, Personal interview). It was this more specialist audience at which "Malāmiḥ Jīl" was aimed. Anyone who read the interviews could learn something about the writers interviewed; however, an uninitiated reader would be unaware of the claims being made about the generation as a whole and the stakes of these conversations. Nor did the printed paratexts provide much context for the series as a whole, though in December 1997, at the end of

[111] "عندما تعبر على بائع جرائد تفاجئك عناوين كثيرة لدواوين شعر ومجموعات قصصية وروايات.. قليل من الأسماء معروفة والبقية تكتب باحثة عن تأكيد لمشروعيتها في اقتحام هذا الميدان.. في اليوم التالي ستجد عناوين أخرى ليزداد الأمر صعوبة عليك وعليهم فلا أحد يكتب لنفسه أو لمجرد التزين بلقب "أديب" فلم يعد له البريق الذي كان! وبالطبع لا يملك أحد منع آخر من إصدار الكتب، لكن ما نستطيعه نحن والقارئ انتقاء الأصدق.. ذلك الذي نشعر أنه ينقل إلينا ما يغير أو يضيف إلى ما نعرفه."

the first year of the series, Abdel Hafez penned an article summarizing the series to date and thus provided *Akhbār al-Adab* readers a chance to reflect on the series as a whole ("Malamih al-Mustaqbal"). While the series was clearly labeled as being concerned with the "features of a generation," more often than not the generation in question was not identified directly, neither in the paratexts—which almost always avoided mention of the 1990s[112]—nor in the interview texts. As we will see, questions and responses frequently addressed common critiques and controversial debates that concerned the group. However, the interviewers and interviewees often did so indirectly, and thus their allusions would be apparent only to those already participating in conversations about what constituted the "nineties generation." Outsiders and casual readers would be unable to follow the claims made and the thick intertextual web that emerged in the interviews, as interviewees referred to one another in their efforts to mark the boundaries of their still-forming group.

Performing Authorship in the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" Interviews

Within the literary interview, both interviewer and interviewee act not only as "author," but also as audience. In addition to addressing each other in the present moment of the interview, both also address a third, absent audience: the future reader of the series. The multiple levels of performance within the literary interview as a genre has been identified by several scholars as one of its defining traits. Typically, scholars who have written on the performance aspect of the literary interview have studied interviews with established authors and based their arguments on

[112] Exceptions include Wa'il Ragab's obituary interview, in which he is identified as the "sentinel of the nineties" in the title of his interview, and the introduction at the top of Abdel Mawgoud's interview with Khalid Mahmoud that identifies the "nineties generation" as that under discussion in the interview.

the ways in which the authors' responses confirmed or contradicted their public images. John Rodden, for instance, has argued that the literary interview, at once hybrid and postmodern, may now be considered "a distinctive genre of literary performance" ("Literary Interview" 402).[113] In his book *Performing the Literary Interview: How Writers Craft Their Public Selves* (2001), Rodden draws on his own experience as an interviewer to investigate the roles of interviewer and interviewee, and he presents a typology of three distinct types of literary interviewees, namely the traditionalist, the raconteur, and the advertiser, based on how they interact with their existing reputations as authors. In her dissertation that systematically explores the literary interview through the *Paris Review*'s famous interview series "Writers at Work" (1953–), Kelley Lewis also examines the performance aspect of the literary interview, which she attributes to the authors' purposeful self-fashioning during the interview and the subsequent editing of its final form prior to public consumption (4). Lewis pays particular attention to the ways in which each party competes for control over the persona of the author that is presented to the reader. She writes, "Literary interviews depend upon strong authorial personae for their readerly interests" (245), and she chooses interviews with Ernest Hemingway, Robert Frost, and Marianne Moore, among others, to examine because of their "larger-than-life personae well known to their readers and the larger literary culture" that allow her to examine how their personalities were constructed in the *Paris Review* interviews (247-8).

The writers interviewed in "Malāmiḥ Jīl," however, were all early-career writers just beginning to craft their public personae. Thus, instead of using the interviews to engage with

[113] In *Performing the Literary Interview*, Rodden argued that while the literary interview had the potential to be treated as a "distinctive genre of literary performance" (1), it had not yet achieved this status. However, in a brief follow-up article from 2013, Rodden writes that this potential has now been realized, pointing to scholars' engagement with the literary interview "not only as a tool of research but also as an independent aesthetic artifact" ("Literary Interview" 402) as evidence of the development of the genre.

existing reputations, these up-and-coming writers worked to fashion themselves as authors in the interviews, performing their authorship in a collaborative process in which the individual writers, the interviewers, and *Akhbār al-Adab* all took part. Moreover, while they did not yet have individual, public reputations to contradict, affirm, or complicate, they could and did engage with the still molten and predominantly negative narratives about the nineties generation with which they were associated. The interviewers similarly relied on their interviewees' collective identity as alleged members of the generation to help shape the debates over the group and delineate its boundaries.

As noted earlier, to be an author in Egypt at that time was both to write and to participate in the literary scene, a duality affirmed throughout the interviews. With regard to the former, the interviews regularly addressed early influences, personal philosophies on writing, and other topics concerning the interviewee's relationship with creative writing. Furthermore, the second iteration of "Malāmiḥ Jīl" included short stories or poems by the featured writers alongside the interview texts. Thus, the series not only provided the young writers a space to talk publicly about their experiences with writing and publishing, but also afforded them another opportunity to publish and circulate their works. As for the second condition, authors participated in the scene by being highly visible, attending conferences, *nadwa*s, cultural salons, and book discussions, or they took part by writing and publishing pieces and participating in interviews like those in "Malāmiḥ Jīl" that presented their opinions on current events, trends, and debates in the literary scene. Even those who made a point of distancing themselves from cultural events and spaces, including what the outspoken sixties generation author Sonallah Ibrahim has dubbed the "Triangle of Horror"— the area in downtown Cairo that lay between the café Zahrat al-Bustan, restaurant Le Grillon, and exhibition space Cairo Atelier and that is filled with cafés and

bars frequented by authors and intellectuals (in Jacquemond, *Conscience* 175)—effectively participated in the dynamics of the scene through publicly disavowing it.

Abdel Hafez and Abdel Mawgoud often opened their interviews with open-ended questions about writing, such as "What does writing mean to you?"[114] (Badawi AM;[115] N. ʻAlam AM; Abdel Samiʿ AM; N. Shaaban AM; Nabil AM) and the partial question, "[What about] writing?"[116] (Amin AH; Hamid AH; al-Sayyid AH) that typically followed a question about the interviewee's early formation as a writer. By posing these questions, the interviewers presented their subjects as having reached a level of maturity in their writing that allowed them to reflect on these formative experiences and provide insight into the creative writing process. The writers frequently responded by emphasizing their commitment to writing in personal terms. Noticeably absent from their answers was any discussion of a national collective or reference to the "literary commitment" that had come to define their literary predecessors. For instance, Fathi Abdel Samiʿ (AM) noted, "Writing to me is everything. I don't feel alive except when I'm writing. When I finish writing a poem, I feel like the only person in the world."[117] In response to Abdel Mawgoud's question about why she writes, Ghada al-Hilwany similarly equated writing with (her) life as she quipped, "And you, why do you breathe?"[118]

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[١١٤] "ما الذي تعنيه الكتابة بالنسبة إليك؟"

[115] For bibliographic details of the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" interviews, see Appendix A, which includes a complete listing of the interviews categorized by interviewer and presented in the order in which they appeared in print between 1997 and 2001. The initials "AH" and "AM" indicate whether the interview was conducted by Abdel Hafez or Abdel Mawgoud, respectively, and are included when it is not clear from the context who conducted the interview being referenced.

[١١٦] "وماذا عن الكتابة؟" (Hamid AH)؛ "والكتابة؟" (Amin AH, al-Sayyid AH).

[١١٧] "الكتابة بالنسبة لي هي كل شيء، فأنا لا أشعر بوجودي إلا عندما أكون مشغولا بالكتابة، وعندما انتهي من كتابة قصيدة أشعر بأني الشخص الوحيد في العالم."

[١١٨] "وأنت لماذا تتنفس؟"

Both interviewers affirmed the interviewees' vocations as authors by posing questions about their future ambitions and literary projects that presumed a continued commitment to creative writing. Abdel Hafez ended the majority of his interviews with the question, "What about your upcoming work?".[119] By concluding thusly, he highlighted the ongoing work of the authors and gave them a platform to promote themselves and engage with their (potential) readers. However, while this question provided an opportunity for self-promotion, the authors were careful to avoid what might be interpreted as shameless advertising that would put the desire to be published and read above more "pure" motives for writing. When asked about his literary ambitions, for example, Abdel Samiʿ (AM) first criticized those who wrote to achieve fame and then set himself in opposition to this trend, stating his ambitions to write throughout his life and to achieve something new and daring in his poetry. When writers did discuss their upcoming book projects, they typically referred to general themes and literary styles (Amin AH; Mersal AH; Khairallah AM), and only in one instance did the author provide the title of her upcoming novel (al-Tahawy AH). Others discussed more general shifts in style and a maturity their readers could expect to find in their next publications (al-Hamamsy AH; Abdel Wahab AH), and still others noted challenges facing writers – and particularly young writers – in Egypt that hindered their creative output. Mahmoud Hamid (AH), for example, spoke of the poor conditions for writing professionally in Egypt due to the fact that no one could subsist solely on one's work as a creative writer.

An important part of the first condition of authorship, publishing—that is, the process by which one who writes is transformed into an author whose works appear in front of an audience—was introduced often by interviewer and interviewee alike. Some writers, like Nora

[119] "ماذا عن العمل القادم؟"

Amin (AH), Mohamed al-Hamamsy (AH), and Mahmoud Maghrebi (AM), emphasized the importance of reaching readers. Others, such as Ghada al-Hilwany (AM) and Manal al-Sayyid (AH), equated too much emphasis on publishing with selling out, suggesting that writers who published frequently put commercial gain and fame above the craft of writing. Readers similarly encountered competing ideas about whether it was better to publish with a state-run house or to self-publish. In response to Abdel Mawgoud's question about the publication of his first book, for example, Maghrebi notes that he chose to re-publish his collection of poetry with the Supreme Council of Culture after originally self-publishing because of the Council's respected status and access to distribution networks that would put his book in front of more readers. However, as several scholars have noted, one of the defining features of the nineties generation was its general, collective eschewal of state-controlled publishing houses in favor of either small, independent presses like Sharqiyyat and Merit, or self-publishing (Mehrez 125; Elsadda 146; Jacquemond "Shifting Limits" 42). The latter, in particular, was viewed as a way in which authors could stay true to their artistic vision. For instance, at the end of Hoda Hussein's interview (AH) that centered on her experimentation with genre and style to create what she dubbed "the poetic book" (*al-kitāb al-shi'rī*), she suggested that her writings were often too daring to find traditional publishing venues. She then announced her intention either to publish her latest "poetic book" in *al-Jarād* or to pay to publish it herself.

With regard to the second condition of literary authorship, by taking part in "Malāmiḥ Jīl," which ran on the pages of the respected, widely circulated literary newspaper, the young writers effectively participated in the literary scene. In particular, the interviews provided writers the opportunity to engage in timely debates about the literary generation with which they were affiliated, whether it was an affiliation of their choosing or one forced on them. Through the

interviews, the participants co-authored narratives about the nineties generation that further set the boundaries of this still-developing group. They debated the generation's defining traits, its membership, their positions in relation to the generation, and its place in the larger Egyptian literary scene. They also disputed critical narratives such as that concerning "girls' writing" (*kitābat al-banāt*), a dismissive term that referred to the literary production of the generation's women writers. In this way, the interviewees acted as spokespersons for the group, defining, as Latour puts it, "who they are, what they should be, what they have been" (31). Abdel Mawgoud often asked open-ended questions that invited his interviewees to comment on the literary scene, specific literary generations, presumed differences between writers from the capital and those from outlying regions, and the role of literary criticism at the time. Abdel Hafez approached similar topics (with the exception of a Cairene versus non-Cairene culture clash) but tended to do so via more targeted questions that typically either tied his interviewee to a specific trait or debate affiliated with the new generation, or set the writer up as an exception to the trend.

The interviewers occasionally asked the writers' opinions about the Egyptian literary critical practice of using decadal divides to categorize literary authors, thus inviting them to comment on the overarching categorization that influenced how their works generally were approached (Fath al-Bab AH; Maghrebi AM; Ismail AM; Abdel Aziz AM; Nabil AM; Badawi AM; al-Hilwany AM). Abdel Mawgoud was particularly fond of including questions of this nature. His interest in the authors' views on local literary critical practices perhaps reflects the more settled nature of the nineties generation narrative when his later part of the series ran, which allowed for a consideration of the literary critical framework itself. The writers answered with an array of responses, ranging from a complete dismissal of the practice and refusal to engage with the question (Badawi AM) to a listing of the writer's favorite authors of her

generation (al-Hilwany AM). In their interviews with Manar Fath al-Bab and Mahmoud Maghrebi, respectively, Abdel Hafez and Abdel Mawgoud explicitly labeled the writers as belonging to the "eighties generation." Their inclusion of these writers in a series that largely featured those affiliated with the nineties generation suggests the interviewers' own disavowal of a rigid application of generational labels and that perhaps they, like Fath al-Bab, believed that "these two generations really formed one," particularly, continued Fath al-Bab, "with regard to their outlook and their reception and expression of reality."[120]

With regard to the group's make-up and position within the Egyptian literary scene, the young writers sought to distinguish their own writings, as well as those of a select group, as offering something fresh and daring in their writing. They positioned themselves in contradistinction to a presumed majority of similarly aged writers who, in their esteem, were producing amateurish texts that sought to attract readers primarily through cheap sensationalism. Several interviewees listed peers whose works they deemed literarily interesting and who shared a similar aesthetic to their own. By naming individual authors, including twelve who also participated in the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series,[121] the interviewees took part in a larger conversation about the membership of their generation and further set the group's boundaries. These intertextual references reaffirmed the position of those writers mentioned as members of this "generation," and their credibility in naming others who belonged to their group. In response to questions regarding the contemporary Egyptian literary scene, the writers typically spoke of a general state of corruption they found, particularly in Cairo. Maher Mehran (AM), for instance,

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[120] "يشكل هذان الجيلان جيلا واحدا من حيث الرؤية وتلقي الواقع والتعبير عنه."

[121] Those who were interviewed in "Malāmiḥ Jīl" and who were also mentioned by other writers in the course of the series' interviews include: Nora Amin, Ashraf al-Khamaisy, Emad Fouad, Manal al-Sayyid, Asmaa Hashem, Iman Mersal, May Telmissany, Mustafa Zikri, Yasser Shaaban, Atef Abdel Aziz, Fathi Abdel Samiʿ, and Abdel Nasser ʿAlam.

spoke animatedly about the corruption he found in the capital, stating, “Cairene cultural life is much worse [than that of Upper Egypt] because it celebrates malignant cultural tumors and abscesses at the expense of true creative writers” (29).[122] Pointing to a general corruption without naming specific individuals or groups responsible for it, the young writers provided a justification for why their works were often misinterpreted and their generation generally criticized, while avoiding direct confrontation. The writers also occasionally named those whose critical interpretations of their works they valued (al-Tahawy AH; al-Qadi AM; al-Qirsh AM), thereby providing commentary on who was capable of providing thoughtful, critical interpretations of their writings.

Abdel Hafez and Abdel Mawgoud also invited the writers interviewed to clarify their individual positions in relation to the rest of their generation. They often did so by associating the interviewees with characteristics that were already identified as defining, though not necessarily exclusive, traits of the generation, including: removing traditional genre boundaries, linguistic play, breaking moral and cultural taboos, avoiding the major issues of the day, and immersing their works in a consideration of the self, the present moment, and minutia. For instance, Abdel Hafez broached the topic of breaking taboos in a question he posed to Iman Mersal in which he stated that she frequently broke a taboo by indicating a desire to be rid of the father. Before giving her time to respond, he immediately tied this comment about her work specifically to a more general trend, asking, “What do you think about the view that new writing clashes with taboos just to get attention?”[123] By connecting Mersal to what he presented as a negative characteristic of “new writing,” Abdel Hafez pushed her to defend not only her own

[122] "فالحياة الثقافية القاهرية أسوأ بكثير حيث أنها تحتفي بالدمامل الثقافة والأورام الخبيثة الثقافية على حساب المبدعين الحقيقيين."

[123] "وما رأيك فيما يقال من أن الكتابة الجديدة تصطدم بالتابو لمجرد لفت الإنظار؟"

writings, but also those of a larger group made up of her peers. Using "we" to speak on behalf of the group, Mersal responded that new writing "deals with the taboo that we know,"[124] referring to the moral taboo, and argued that moral, political, and religious taboos were, in fact, interconnected. Thus, breaking moral taboos and writing about the body, for instance, were other ways of addressing the political.

One of the most frequently discussed topics, and one broached with nearly every woman writer interviewed, was the debate over "girls' writing" (*kitābat al-banāt*), a topic I revisit in greater detail in Chapter Five. As Hoda Elsadda notes in her discussion of Egyptian fiction of this decade, this debate was one of the biggest in Egypt's literary scene at that time (145), and terms like "girls' writing" and "writing the body" (*kitābat al-jasad*) "were hotly debated as indicative of a hegemonic and patriarchal literary establishment" (145-6).[125] Women were accused of exploiting their sex and writing seductive texts that allowed them to achieve an unfair amount of attention domestically and abroad, particularly through translation. *Akhbār al-Adab* and other Egyptian literary periodicals participated regularly in these discussions. An example that sparked much debate was the July 1996 issue of *Ibdā'* published with the provocative title "*al-Banāt yaktubna ajsādhunna*" (Girls Write Their Bodies), which included stories by fifteen young women, six of whom were later interviewed by Abdel Hafez and Abdel Mawgoud in "Malāmiḥ Jīl."[126] Later that year, Abdel Hafez published in *Akhbār al-Adab* "'Veto' 'alā kitābat al-banāt" (A Veto of Girls' Writing), an article that presents the opinions of several women

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[124] "هذه الكتابة تتناول التابو الذي نعرفه..."

[125] See Elsadda chapter seven for a discussion of the debate over "girls' writing" that takes into account the various proponents and critics of this 'phenomenon' and how writing by women was discussed at the time in literary circles in Egypt.

[126] The six writers were: Nora Amin, Miral al-Tahawy, Nagla 'Alam, May Telmissany, Manal al-Sayyid, and Manar Fath al-Bab.

literary critics and authors and of nineties generation men about "girls' writing." In it, Ahmad Gharib voices the widespread fear and belief that Arab women were more likely to be published in translation than Arab men, since foreign publishing houses would translate Arab women's debut books, but would only translate men who had published at least two books (8). Criticism was not reserved for up-and-coming women writers alone, and more established authors found themselves and their works facing similar accusations of willful manipulation and immorality. Seventies generation writer Niʿmat al-Bihayri, for example, suffered censorship and personal ostracization following the publication in *Ibdāʿ* of her short story "*al-ʿAṣāfīr tu'arriq ṣamt al-madīna*" (The Sparrows Disturb the City's Night Silence, Aug. 1994), in which a lower-middle-class woman watches a young couple having sex in a car outside her window. Both she and her story became the topic of a flurry of opinion pieces and articles published in Egypt's literary periodicals, including *Akhbār al-Adab*.[127]

Of the young writers, Nora Amin and May Telmissany were two whose works lay at the center of the controversy over "girls' writing" (Elsadda 146). In the case of Nora Amin, Abdel Hafez said in his interview: "You often use 'writing the body,' or writing about it, as a means to comment on woman's place in a society that tries perpetually to subjugate her. This style, despite its poetics, is often understood as 'porno' writing. How do you define this style of writing, particularly given that you are working on your master's degree on this topic?"[128] Through his careful phrasing, Abdel Hafez signaled that Amin had been the subject of this controversy while he simultaneously established her as an expert on the topic and called for her to provide her own

[127] See Booth "Framing the Imaginary" for a detailed discussion of the controversy that erupted over al-Bihayri story.

[١٢٨] "الكتابة للجسد وعنه أسلوب تستخدمينه بكثرة للتعبير عن وضع المرأة في مجتمع لا يتخلى عن قهرها، لكن هذا الأسلوب رغم شاعريته يفهم في الأغلب على أنه كتابة 'بورنو'. ما هو تصورك تحديدا لمفهوم تلك الكتابة خاصة وأنت تعدين رسالتك للماجستير حول هذا الموضوع؟"

definition of "writing the body." Amin began her answer by correcting the term, saying, "You mean writing in which the subject is the body."[129] She next explained that in Egyptian society, where individual bodies had become the property of society, any writing that dealt with the body broke a taboo. Writers therefore had a choice: either follow the strict rules laid out by society, or follow one's artistic instinct. Amin's response both redefined what it meant to "write the body" and upended arguments against this style, as she suggested that those who did break this taboo were not writing sensational literature for the sake of shocking readers and making a quick name for themselves. Rather, they were the ones who remained true to their artistic sensibilities, refusing to curb their creativity to meet the demands of a conservative society.

As a different response than Amin's, when Manal al-Qadi (AM) was asked her opinion on the trend of "girls' writing," she dismissed the term outright, stating that all who have a pen and an idea they want to convey can be considered a writer; the gender of the person holding the pen does not matter. Nagwa Shaaban (AM), meanwhile, agreed that there were women writers who exploited their sex to gain fame and readers. However, she also distinguished between this group and another, smaller group of women who "wrote the body" in a more meaningful way that had artistic merit. In this way, Shaaban also commented on the character of her generation and who should be counted among its members. Ghada Nabil turned the question on Abdel Mawgoud, demanding, "Let me ask you: if I were a man, would anyone scour my texts for sensationalism or what's left unsaid? Would I be asked this question?!"[130] She then proceeded to criticize this notion in contemporary Egyptian literary criticism as one that made her feel as though her texts were scoured for secret meaning simply because a woman wrote them. The

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[١٢٩] "أنت تقصد كتابة موضوعها الجسد."

[١٣٠] "ولكن دعني أسألك: لو كنت رجلا هل كان أحد يفتش في نصوصي عن الحس أو المسكوت عنه؟! وهل كنت أسألني هذا السؤال؟!"

range of opinions expressed over "girls' writing" in *Akhbār al-Adab*'s "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series reflected some of the wide variety of attitudes that existed in Cairo's literary scene over the literary production of women of this generation, while at the same time reproducing the debates themselves, with the interviewers and interviewees as active participants.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have striven to show how Egypt's "nineties generation," particularly during its development in the 1990s and into the early 2000s, is better understood by studying the *process* of defining and redefining the group's boundaries than by using such debates to create a single, fixed, and "correct" definition of the literary group. The complex, influential role *Akhbār al-Adab* played in the making of this generation invites further consideration of the functions of state-run, popular, and other literary publications in the development of literary groups, both inside and outside of Egypt. As I have demonstrated, this newspaper was neither a passive repository of mainstream literary taste nor a record of existing debates. Rather, the publication of literary texts, articles, gossip, and interviews in *Akhbār al-Adab* acted as events that themselves were constitutive of the literary scene. I have demonstrated how the material properties of the newspaper—particularly those related to its ephemerality and circulation—and the form of the interview with its multiple, competing agencies were significant producers of meaning in the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series. The hybrid genre of the literary interview employed in this series reveals the collaborative, polyvocal production of narratives about the nineties generation that were taking place on the pages of *Akhbār al-Adab*. As the interviews were printed and circulated among the newspaper's large, diverse readership, the young writers were able to contribute their claims of legitimacy—both individual and collective—to the mix of

still-emerging narratives about this generation, which was reshaping the Egyptian literary landscape. In addition, the published interviews contain traces left by various actors engaged in the production of the texts, including the interviewer, interviewee, editor, and layout designer, among others. As a result, these actors also took part in the formation the literary group that the interviews sought to describe. With this understanding of who the nineties generation was and some of the central debates that defined it, I turn next to the young authors' most influential and involved local publishers, Dar Sharqiyyat and Merit. I explore how they, like *Akhbār al-Adab*, were significant mediators that affected the development of the nineties generation and, moreover, developed in tandem with it.

Chapter 4

Small Press, Big Impact:

How Sharqiyyat and Merit Changed Egypt's Literary Landscape

In 1991, Hosni Soliman opened what would mark the beginning of the rise of the small, independent literary press in Egypt with the founding of his modest but important publishing house Dar Sharqiyyat. Soliman lived abroad and worked in the book business for almost twenty years, primarily at the Stockholm Public Library, before returning home with the dream of opening his own literary publishing house that would combine the general quality of books and respect for authors he found in Sweden with the wealth of fresh, innovative, literary styles and voices that were coming from the east, or *sharq*, with a focus on Egypt (Soliman, Personal interview). His aspirations and reputation as a well-read intellectual who actively pursued new talent were widely known and valued by authors, publishers, translators, readers, and others in the Cairene scene, and he is commonly credited with finding and cultivating rising literary voices that became the heart of the nineties generation. Soliman's house presented itself as distinct from the state-run enterprises that had dominated the book publishing industry since the 1960s and from larger private houses that tended to favor more established, mainstream authors, and it offered young writers the opportunity to publish away from the bias of their critics and the stigma of and increased censorship at government houses. Quintessential nineties generation writers like Hosni Hassan, Miral al-Tahawy, Iman Mersal, Wa'il Ragab, Nora Amin, Mustafa Zikri, May Telmissany, Adel Esmat, and May Khalid, among others, all published with

Sharqiyyat in the 1990s, and many published more than one title with the house. Before long, authors both young and old began to approach Sharqiyyat, as well, and the house became one of Egypt's foremost literary publishers and a recognized center of "new writing" (*al-kitāba al-jadīda*) in the mid to late 1990s, despite its limited production. While there was a clear need for a house like Soliman's in Egypt's book market and a demonstrated desire among authors to publish with Sharqiyyat, the financial challenges of running an independent, wholly literary house in an underdeveloped market with poor distribution and low sales overwhelmed Soliman by the end of the decade. He was forced to reduce drastically his operations for a few years and share the costs of publication with the authors he published.

At the same time that Soliman scaled back production, Mohamed Hashem was developing the vision and laying the groundwork for Merit Publishing House, which he opened in 1998 with the support of a group of intellectuals led by respected sixties generation author Ibrahim Mansour. Like Soliman, Hashem had worked in the book industry prior to opening his own house, though his experience in the field was limited to Egypt. Frustrated with the limitations he found at the Cairo-based Dar al-Mahrousa where he had worked for twelve years, Hashem quit in order to establish a different kind of house, one that eschewed the various kinds of censorship commonly practiced at other publishers and that could foster genuine creative expression (Hashem, Personal interview). Hashem's professional objectives complemented his outspoken, leftist political views and engagement, for which he had been arrested and detained in 1980 under Anwar al-Sadat (presidency: 1970-1981). Within a few years, Merit surpassed Sharqiyyat in annual production and was widely thought of as Egypt's most innovative literary publisher. While Sharqiyyat remained more closely linked with the nineties generation specifically, Hashem was "acknowledged as a supporter, or mentor, of the new writing" (Elsadda

146) more generally. Merit's catalog includes a number of authors affiliated with the nineties generation and "new writing," including Hamdy Abu Golayyel, Yasser Shaaban, Yasser Abdel Hafez, Ahmad Alaidy, Mansoura Ez Eldin, and Ibrahim Farghali, as well as writers who also published with Sharqiyyat, such as Khalid, Mersal, Amin, Zikri, and al-Tahawy, among others.

Critics, scholars, and authors alike frequently list the authors' tendency to publish with these two small, independent houses among the defining traits of the nineties generation. Egyptian literary scholar Samia Mehrez writes, "[O]ne of the significant elements that bind many of the writers of the 1990s is their collective distance from state-controlled publishing houses" (125), noting that several of this group "have come to be known as the 'Sharqiyyat generation,' in reference to the name of the private publishing house that published their work" (125). French academic and translator Richard Jacquemond similarly highlights the new generation's avoidance of state-run houses and lists as "its main publishers… the small publishing houses Dar Sharqiyat and Dar Merit," as well as the literary journal *al-Kitāba al-ukhrā* ("Shifting Limits" 42). In his discussion of what he deems the "new Egyptian novel," the prolific literary critic and scholar Sabry Hafez, who frequently published in local literary journals in addition to academic publications, argues that the arrival of the new generation came with Sharqiyyat's publication in 1995 of a compilation of short stories by six authors titled *Khuyūṭ 'alā dawā'ir* (Lines on Circles) ("New Egyptian Novel" 50). He also refers to Hashem's Merit as another of the "significant sites for the new writing" (50). Listing "the distinguishing characteristics of the new generation of writers," Hoda Elsadda, another prominent Egyptian scholar, writes: "Credit is always given for the establishment of new publishing houses, which are not state owned, but run by entrepreneurial publishers, particularly Dar sharqiyyat, and Dar merit" (146). All four of these scholars note the significance of these two publishers that lay outside the direct oversight of the

state, but their inquiries go no further. Why and how did Sharqiyyat and Merit, as publishing houses, have such an indisputable impact on this literary group? In what ways did they and their owners influence the texts and authors they published, and what are the discernable, lasting effects?

This chapter posits publishing as the matrix through which writers, readers, and other stakeholders approached literature in Egypt in the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s; I argue that Sharqiyyat and Merit were instrumental in the development of nineties generation writers as an integral and integrated part of Egyptian literature and the Cairene literary scene. While at times I refer to the larger transnational literary networks in which Sharqiyyat, Merit, and the authors participated, I foreground the publishing houses' activities and relationships within Egypt, specifically Cairo, because this local focus reflects the nature of the Egyptian book market at that time. Before turning to my discussion of the two houses, I propose a modified version of Robert Darnton's "communications circuit" to establish the centrality of the cultural institution of the publishing house in the larger network of production and reception of literary books in Egypt, with regard to the many, varied functions performed by the house and its positionality vis-à-vis other key actors. I briefly demonstrate how one such influential actor, censorship, had the potential to affect a book at any stage in the circuit, and thus loomed large in the minds of writers and publishers alike. With this broader understanding of the publishing house and literary production in Egypt, I turn to the two houses that were formative for the nineties generation: Sharqiyyat and Merit. Drawing on numerous personal interviews that I conducted with authors and publishers, I argue that Sharqiyyat, as a solely literary, private house with professional standards for its authors, operations, and books and an owner interested in locating and cultivating new, local talent paved the way for the new generation. As the

generation became more established and expanded, Hashem's politically charged Merit and outspoken commitment to freedom of creative expression became all the more relevant and significant for this group of writers who were becoming known for breaking taboos and who had only ever known the stifling climate of citizen-led censorship that engulfed Egypt's cultural scene. Turning to a discussion of the books themselves, both their physical properties and how they moved through Cairo, I demonstrate how both houses helped build associations between text, author, and house, simultaneously solidifying their own reputations and bolstering and shaping those of the new generation. Such associations also manifested in person, as each house cultivated distinct networks of authors and encouraged direct interaction and dialogue among them, thus helping ensure that nineties generation writers worked and were perceived not in isolation, but in rich conversation with other trends and voices, both dominant and marginal, in the scene. While much of my discussion centers on what Sharqiyyat and Merit offered the young writers, I also consider the mutual nature of their relationship, showing how the two houses developed not just contemporaneously but in conversation with the new literary generation.

The Place of the Publishing House in (Egyptian) Book History

While at first glance Egyptian publishers may appear to have acted as "mere intermediaries between authors and printers" (Abou-Zeid 6), as some have claimed was the role of the Arab publishing house, in actuality they were complex, influential, well-connected actors in a larger network of writers, books, critics, bookstores, distribution networks, censorship, and other actors that comprised Cairo's thoroughly interwoven literary scene. In the field of the history of the book, more traditional studies that examine the role of the publisher in literary developments have tended either to focus on the texts, looking for effects of literary editors or

paratexts on specific books, or to take a more biographical approach that centers on the people and personal relationships that defined the house. In recent years, scholars have begun to expand their investigations to study the broader impact of publishers on literature and their roles in the making of literary groups and movements, including both people and texts in their discussions.[131] Such questions and studies are of particular interest in the field of Arabic literature because they shed light on one of, if not the, most significant modes of literary production and a primary site of literary experimentation and development in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first: the printed book. This form was particularly important for the nineties generation because it allowed for the kinds of experimentation with longer narrative forms that were a defining trait of this emerging body of literature. Furthermore, books notionally carried more weight than publications in printed literary journals and online forums, and authors could only enter published books in the various literary prize competitions that were springing up in Egypt and the Arab world at this time, a topic to which I return in Chapter Five. In pausing to examine the process by which literary manuscripts became published books that spread throughout Egyptian society—or, in this case, the much smaller but very active literary community—a dense web of associations among various, often overlooked actors that engaged with the texts and their authors becomes visible, as do the multiple and varied ways publishers might influence text, author, and literary group.

[131] An example of the kind of study that takes into account both publisher and literary trends is Glass's *Counterculture Colophon* that examines the role of Grove Press, its owner Barney Rosset, and literary review *The Evergreen Review* in incorporating the avant-garde texts of the 1960s into the mainstream. Gertzman also explores the connection between publishing and literary development in his biographical account of the publisher Samuel Roth, often reviled for his political views and eccentricities as a publisher. Gertzman incorporates synopses of several key literary publications in his analysis of Roth's influence on American literature over a period of several decades.

The act of publishing does not occur in isolation, but is one part of the larger, complex process of transforming an author's manuscript into a book that circulates on the market and subsequently is read, interpreted, and assessed by readers and, if it is successful, enters into a new circuit upon its completion of the first. Noted book historian Robert Darnton proposed his oft-cited "communications circuit" in his 1982 article "What is the History of Books?" in an attempt to depict this larger process and draw attention to the people whose actions and interactions drove each stage in the life of a printed book. Darnton's circuit, which he admits is heuristic, aims to address the entire field of book history and unite the various specialized subfields that were threatening to splinter the field (67). In this circuit, which is based on eighteenth-century France, the life of the book began in manuscript form with the author who interacted directly with the publisher. The book then proceeded to printers (who worked with suppliers), shippers, booksellers, and finally to readers (who, at that time, worked with binders to turn the purchased manuscript into a bound volume). Because readers, many of whom were authors themselves, could and did influence an author's future literary productions, Darnton's circuit thus comes full circle.[132]

Darnton labels his model a "communications circuit" in part because he focuses on the people involved in the various stages of the life of a single edition of a book and suggests that, with the exception of manuscript books and illustrations, it would be applicable to any time period in the printed book's history (67). Strengths of his model include the emphasis on numerous types and modes of communication that occur and the recognition of one's ability to

[132] His stages, as shown in his diagram of the circuit, include: Author; Publisher; Printers (consisting of compositors, pressmen, and warehousemen) working with Suppliers (paper, ink, type, labor); Shippers (agent, smuggler, entrepot keeper, wagoner, etc.); Booksellers (wholesaler, retailer, peddler, binder, etc.); Readers (purchasers, borrowers, clubs, libraries) working with Binders; and finally an arrow leading back to the beginning of the circuit ("History" 68).

be involved in multiple stages of the circuit even when not the primary figure. However, while the circuit reflects the presence of multiple actors in most stages (e.g., , the stages of both "Author" and "Publisher" contain no such list of other possible participants and are the least developed. While the circuit draws attention to the complex and multifaceted stages in the life of a book, the omission of a list of possible actors at the stage of "Publisher" promotes the perception of the publisher, as divorced from that of printers and other manufacturers, as a relatively straightforward and singular actor. In addition, by listing the primary figures of each stage in the singular, the circuit does not readily allow for collaborative works with more than one author nor for joint publication efforts.

If one were to adapt Darnton's circuit to an Egyptian context at the turn of the twenty-first century, it might look something like the model drawn in Figure 1. The circuit pictured here follows the life of a single printing of a book as it moves through the following stages, each of which is identified by its primary action: composition (of the manuscript)/ deciding to publish, publication, manufacture, distribution, marketing and sales, reception, and moving to other circuits (e.g., reprinting, new edition, translation, etc.). By emphasizing action rather than person, this circuit allows for the participation of an unlimited number of actors, both human and non, and for the same actors to take part in a number of stages. Actors' multiform participation becomes especially relevant for the publishing house which, as we will see, could potentially play a part in every stage of the circuit.

In this heuristic circuit, we begin with composition, a stage that concludes with the decision to publish. During the 1990s and into the 2000s, authors usually initiated contact with a publisher. Because the position and function of the literary agent never took hold in Egypt,

authors negotiated directly with their publishers.[133] Writers might select a publishing house based on a variety of factors, including, but not limited to: the house's catalog; its brand or reputation, as well as that of its owner; its affiliation with the state; the number and type of awards won by the house and the house's publications; the number of titles put out by the house that had been translated out of Arabic; the amount of input authors had in the final appearance of their books; any financial obligations on the part of the author; and the length of time it would take for their books to appear in print. Authors could choose from three different types of publishers: government-run houses and series; semi-autonomous enterprises affiliated with newspaper presses, e.g., al-Ahrām (est. 1875), al-Akhbār (est. 1952), al-Hilāl (est. 1892), and Rūz al-Yūsuf (est. 1925); and private houses. They could also opt to self-publish, a decision made by several authors, including prominent nineties generation writers like Hoda Hussein and Youssef Rakha, and one that was generally respected, though their books often did not achieve as wide a readership nor as much acclaim as did those published by houses. The majority of Egypt's publishing industry was—and remains—under the government's control, a condition that has been true since the early 1960s. Nonetheless, the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s marked a transformative moment in Egypt's literary book publishing industry. Specifically, the private literary book publishing sector, which includes Sharqiyyat and Merit, expanded to offer both established and emerging writers a consistent and viable alternative to government-run enterprises for the first time since the wide-scale nationalizing of the industry in the 1960s.[134]

[133] A brief exception, Sphinx Literary Agency was founded in 2006 by Khaled Abbas and Ahmed Ibrahim and billed itself as the Arab world's first literary agency (Abbas and Ibrahim, Personal interview). Sphinx also operated as a publishing house and distributor before it seemingly stopped operations around 2013.

[134] In 1960, the relatively newly formed Egyptian government acquired the four largest presses-*cum*-publishing houses, namely al-Ahrām, Dār al-Hilāl, Rūz al-Yūsuf, and al-Akhbār. The next year, in 1961, the state took over two of the country's largest publishing houses: Dār al-Maʿārif (est. 1890) and Dār al-Qalam (est. 1948). By 1963, the largest publisher of literature was a state-run house, and the number of private publishers producing works of literature had dwindled to just fifteen, the majority of which produced annually only a single literary title (Stagh 56).

Upon selecting a publisher with whom they wanted to work or, much less commonly, being approached by one, authors usually submitted their manuscripts directly to the house. Once the manuscript reached a house, depending on its size, it then would pass to designated readers, a committee of readers, or the editor of a specific series, or it would remain with the publisher himself or herself. Contracts for literary books typically covered a single printing of 500 to 5,000 copies, with an average of roughly 1,500 copies, depending on the size and status of the publisher and the fame of the author. They stipulated the amount of compensation the author would receive from sales, an author's financial contribution to the costs of publishing (if any), and the conditions under which rights to the text would return to the author, typically when a printing sold out or a specified amount of time had elapsed. While usually written, contracts with smaller publishers sometimes were negotiated orally.[135] The timeline from when an author received word that his or her manuscript had been accepted to when the book appeared on bookstore shelves was relatively short. The entire process usually took a few months at private houses, though some larger ones took up to a year, and between one and three years at government-run houses.[136]

With nationalization and an influx of government funding, there was likewise a surge in book production. Though the 1960s were generally seen as a period of literary flourishing, an increase in the number of literary books produced does not necessarily correlate to a thriving period of literary expression and innovation. Stagh has argued that the books produced by the government presses did not have the same literary merit as those published by their private counterparts prior to nationalization. She writes, "My assumption is that a generous policy of publication in these years, was paired with a certain lack of literary discernment; a readiness to accept manuscripts for publishing, but an inability to discover and foster 'true talent'" (52). Along similar lines, Nadia Rizk, former librarian at the US Embassy in Cairo, notes in her discussion of book publishing under Nasser that the government's motto of "a book every six hours" led not to an explosion of literary publishing and reading, but instead to debt and stacks of unopened books piling up on warehouse shelves due to insufficient oversight, inadequate distribution networks, and poor marketing techniques (556).

[135] al-Taher Sharkawi, for instance, recalls that had a spoken agreement with Soliman rather than a written contract with Sharqiyyat for his novel *Fānīliyā* (Vanilla, 2008) (Sharkawi, Personal interview).

[136] Wael Wagdy, a writer who published several works with Sharqiyyat, went so far as to claim that small, independent houses like Sharqiyyat were founded in order to address the problem of long waiting periods authors had to face at government houses (Wagdy).

One of the characteristics that distinguished Egyptian publishing houses from their Western counterparts during this period and continuing to the present is the general lack of a literary editor.[137] Most if not all houses employed a copyeditor (*muṣaḥḥiḥ*), but the majority did not have a position or a team dedicated to making suggestions and edits at the content level. That said, smaller houses sometimes did provide this kind of editing, though it typically was done at the discretion of the publisher or reading committee and was reserved for inexperienced writers, as this kind of editing would be considered an insult to an established author. The success of Egyptian (and Arab) houses was not determined by their ability to develop a list of exclusive, productive authors, a measure often used to assess the achievements and predict the longevity of houses in the West and elsewhere in the world. Indeed it was rare for an author, regardless of fame, to work with a single publishing house throughout his or her career.[138] Renowned sixties generation author Sonallah Ibrahim, for instance, worked with nineteen different publishers to put out twenty-five titles between 1966 and 2008, and he published seven different editions of one of his most popular books, the novel *al-Lajna* (*The Committee*, 2001), with six different publishers (Jacquemond, *Conscience* 81). Even the most commercially minded and prosperous private houses such as Dar el-Shorouk and Nahdet Misr managed to obtain rights to all or much of an author's oeuvre only in rare cases, as they did with Naguib Mahfouz and Yahya Haqqi, respectively. Moreover, they negotiated these contracts only at the end of the author's career or posthumously, that is, after the books had proven to be profitable.

[137] This condition remains true, as does much of the description of the circuit, at the time of writing.

[138] Naguib Mahfouz was a notable exception. He published nearly all of his books with the privately owned Maktabat Miṣr (est. 1932) until 2005, when he signed a contract with Dar el-Shorouk, a move that made headlines on the pages of Egypt's newspapers and cultural journals.

During this period, manufacturing the physical book involved several actors. Layout and design were often done in house, and it was not uncommon for private houses, particularly smaller ones, to engage authors in design decisions.[139] Prior to printing, publishers obtained an International Standardized Book Number and a legal deposit number (*raqm iydā'*) from Dar al-Kutub, Egypt's national archives and library, and post-printing they were required to submit to Dar al-Kutub five copies of each edition published.[140] It was not uncommon for small, private houses to omit this step of the publishing process entirely. This has made it difficult if not impossible to compile accurate, comprehensive statistics on Egypt's book publishing industry[141] or to find a complete collection of books published in Egypt, including those by nineties generation authors who frequently opted to self-publish or partnered with small houses that did

[139] For instance, Sharkawi listed among the benefits of working with private houses, namely Sharqiyyat, Kotob Khan, and Nahdet Misr, his being involved in decisions pertaining to the appearance of his books. In particular, he liked to supply the artwork for his covers, as he did with *Vanilla*, providing a cover designed by the artist Makhlouf (Sharkawi, Personal interview).

[140] The ISBN system was introduced to Egypt in 1975. Legal deposit was first introduced as a result of the Egyptian Protection of Copyright law of 1954 and was strengthened in 1968. Despite the presence of these laws, they are rarely enforced and many books published in Egypt lack either or both of these numbers.

[141] There is a dearth of adequate bibliographic information on books published not just in Egypt but throughout the Arab world. Despite the fact that Egypt now has some of the best bibliographic control in the Arab world (Van de Vate 5), statistics for books published from the 1950s to the present are lacking in precision and consistency. Book historians and others interested in statistics and bibliographies on Egyptian literary and other book production from the *nahḍa* to the present typically consult one or more of the following sources: the monthly, quarterly, and subsequently annual national bibliography put out by Egypt's National Archives and Library, Dār al-Kutub, first published in 1955 and continuing to the present; *Accessions List, Middle East* put out by the Cairo field office of the Library of Congress (1963-1993); bibliographies compiled by Egyptian authors, which proves a particularly helpful source when filling in gaps of lists of fiction; literary periodicals that include reviews of recently published books; and as we move into the latter part of the twentieth century, booksellers' lists, where available, and catalogs from book fairs. The single, most often consulted source has been Dār al-Kutub's publication. Originally published as *al-Nashra al-miṣriyya li-l-maṭbū'āt* (Egyptian Publications Bulletin), its name was changed to *Nashrat al-iydā' li-l-shahriyya* (Legal Deposit Bulletin) in 1974, and it is still published today under that title. In 1960, the quarterly publication introduced title, author, and subject indexes, and in 1969, an index by publisher was added. Depending on the source consulted for bibliographic information, the researcher will note different statistics for the same period under investigation. It becomes even more difficult to produce accurate numbers on specific genres of prose fiction because even when bibliographers noted a more discriminate genre than simply "literature," genre categories and nomenclature were quite fluid from the *nahda* through the mid- to late twentieth century, and it is rare if not impossible to find two bibliographers who agreed on which books should be included in each category.

not always adhere to this publishing standard. Larger houses like Dar al-Maʿarif, a government-run house that was founded initially as an independent printing press in 1890, and privately owned Nahdet Misr (est. 1938) had their own in-house printers, while most small and mid-sized houses partnered with printers, many of which were located on the outskirts of Cairo.

Once printed, the book moved to the distribution stage and then to the market. Distribution was—and remains—the single biggest challenge facing Egypt's book publishing industry. A 2005 study conducted by Egyptian e-book and content company Kotobarabia found that just 10% of the books sought were sold along "conventional distribution routes," while 90% of books could be found only within a five-kilometer radius of the original publishing house or with the author (Habeeb). The government maintained an independent distribution network that worked with these venues and that was available to private houses, particularly via the semi-autonomous al-Ahrām company; however, although they provided the most extensive networks in the country, the distributors were criticized frequently for being ineffective, inadequate, and discriminatory, prioritizing books produced by state-run and larger publishing houses (A. Ghoneim). It was not uncommon for authors to act as their own distributors, especially young writers who had to purchase a certain percentage of their book's print run to help defray costs of publishing. Distributing books outside of Egypt was even more problematic. The Arab world did not present a unified market, a condition that remains true today. Publishers had to enter into negotiations and contracts with distributors in every country, and sometimes city, with which they did business. To complicate matters further, each country had its own censorship laws, tax codes, and unique, local markets, all of which further restricted book circulation. Egyptian books primarily reached non-Egyptian readers via international book fairs that have been hosted annually since the 1970s by major cities throughout the Arab world, including Riyadh,

Casablanca, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Beirut, Doha, Tunis, Algiers, and Muscat, among others. Publishers also regularly attended the Cairo International Book Fair (est. 1969) run by the General Egyptian Book Organization (GEBO; al-Hay'a al-miṣriyya al-'āmma li-l-kitāb), the Arab world's oldest and, until recently, largest book fair. For many Egyptian publishers, sales at this fair accounted for a significant amount of their annual revenue (Mohie el-Din).

Egyptian publishers also were instrumental in how their books sold on the market. At this time there was no developed, commercial market for literature in Egypt, with literacy rates at just 55.6% in 2000 (UNESCO 13), Egyptian literary bestsellers typically achieving only a few print runs of a few thousand copies each, and restricted access to books due to inadequate distribution networks that were only marginally compensated for by access to the internet and new modes of reading.[142] Publishing houses often served as the principal sellers of their own books, with most houses doubling as bookstores. Consequently, their offices became spaces where visitors encountered each house's works collectively. Interested readers frequently travelled to the publisher to acquire a specific title, an act which made publishers much more visible and ensured that publisher, author, and title were linked in readers' minds. In addition to their original publishing houses, literary books also were sold at other publishing house bookstores, kiosks, newsstands, a small number of independent bookstores and, more recently, Barnes-and-Noble-style bookstores like Diwan (est. 2002) and Alef Books (est. 2009). The collective of authors and titles created by publishing at a given house often was reproduced at independent bookstores, as they tended to shelve books first by publishing house, then genre, and finally by author's last

[142] Downloading and reading texts online as well as the online sale of books were not feasible for the vast majority of the population given that many lacked access to the internet at home and only a very small percentage of Egyptians had a credit card (4%) or debit card (<2%) in 2010 (Axelrod et al.). Some booksellers like Omar Bookstore (est. 2007) implemented an intermediary solution that allowed customers to receive books at home via courier, who would obtain payment upon delivery of the requested book.

name.[143] In this way, readers navigated bookstores by publishers, whether they were looking for a specific title or merely browsing. The books typically would appear on bookstore shelves for a few years after publication, after which point they largely disappeared from the market.[144] The number of libraries increased greatly during the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s, thanks in large part to the national Reading For All (*al-qirā'a li-l-jamī'*) campaign initiated by First Lady Suzanne Mubarak in 1991 to combat illiteracy throughout Egypt and particularly among children. However, there still were not enough libraries to serve Egypt's growing population, and they remained a poor repository of recently published literature, especially with regard to books put out by private houses, which were always more expensive.[145] With regard to marketing, government houses usually did not publicize specific texts, though they bought space in state-run periodicals to advertise their organizations and book series generally. In the private sector, marketing was typically undertaken by both publishing house and author. Publisher-organized and hosted book release parties for new titles became a regular phenomenon in the early 2000s, though those invited personally by the author usually comprised the majority of the attendees.

Finally, the book reached its readers and entered the reception stage of the circuit. In the case of works of contemporary Egyptian literature, many of the readers were themselves authors or otherwise involved in the literary scene. Because of this involvement, these specialized readers' opinions and comments—whether aired publicly at a cultural salon, in a literary journal,

[143] Some stores including larger bookstores like Diwan and Alef broke with tradition and grouped books as one might encounter in Western bookstores, i.e., first by genre and then author's last name, with no consideration for publisher.

[144] At this point any remaining copies tended to be available only with the original publisher, the author, or perhaps a copy or two would end up in Sūr al-Azbakiyya, Cairo's oldest and largest used book market.

[145] Despite this increase, a survey conducted by the RAND National Defense Research Institute shows that in 2007 Egypt reported having 1,257 libraries. To put this in perspective, Germany, which had a similar population size at the time, had 10,339 libraries (Schwartz et al., 13).

or via another venue, or aired privately among a group of literary actors—were more likely to reach the original author and potentially influence his or her future literary production. Publishing houses sometimes participated in this kind of exchange by hosting events that allowed authors to discuss their published works directly with their readers. The final stage of the circuit model that I'm proposing, "moving to other circuits," reflects the "Survival" stage proposed by Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker in their revised version of Darnton's circuit, an addendum Darnton himself has commended ("Revisited" 504). This stage allows for the many transformations the text might undergo as it surpasses the life of the original book. In the present context, this stage might entail: a re-printing at the same house; a new edition, whether with the same house, a different Egyptian publisher, or one outside of Egypt's borders; translation into foreign languages; or adaptation to other genres and media. Given the small size of printings, limited distribution, and ephemerality of Egyptian books, this stage took on added significance during this period and up to the time of writing, especially for younger writers still seeking to establish themselves.

The Stakes of Publishing

Thus far, I have discussed the book circuit without reference to the myriad of other elements that were not inherent to any particular stage but influenced—sometimes greatly—the lives of Egyptian literary books. In his circuit, Darnton groups what he treats as external forces that acted upon people who comprised his circuit into three overlapping categories: "intellectual influences and publicity," "economic and social conjuncture," and "political sanctions." Shifting the focus so that these outside forces become, instead, actors that participate directly in the circuit, in an Egyptian context such corresponding and intersecting elements might include

intellectual influences and public reputations, economic circumstances, religious convictions and social pressures, national laws and policies, and most importantly for literary books, censorship. Censorship came in a variety of forms and encompassed many of the other listed elements. It had the potential to influence every stage of the circuit, and was introduced by various individuals for a host of reasons: from authors who self-censored during the writing process due to religious convictions or fear of persecution, for example; to employees at publishing houses, printers, and bookstores who willingly censored texts or felt compelled to do so out of fear of repercussions, or fell victim to censorship carried out by the state; and to readers who wielded significant power in deciding the illicitness of books.

The official, state-appointed position of *raqīb* (censor) was abolished in 1977, which meant publishers were no long required to obtain approval of manuscripts prior to publication. However, the state-sanctioned and run system of censorship was replaced with what Egyptian cultural actors have called "street censorship," a term that refers to the increasingly common practice of non-state actors to impose dominant, conservative, Islamic morals on the largely secular cultural scene in ways that sought to restrict and redirect cultural production. Under this new system, citizens could file a complaint against an author and publisher for a piece of writing they found offensive. State prosecutors then decided which complaints to pursue, usually in the form of *ḥisba* lawsuits, in which one Muslim accuses another of blasphemy.[146] Because publishers were responsible for turning a private manuscript into a publicly accessible commodity, they could be tried alongside writers in *ḥisba* cases. As a prominent example, when

[146] Under current law it does not become a legal matter unless the Egyptian state prosecutor decides to open a case. This change came about following a lengthy controversy in the mid-1990s concerning Egyptian academic, theologian, and author Nasr Abu Zayd, who was accused of being an apostate for his writings on the Qur'an and whose marriage was declared void by Egyptian civil courts.

Magdy el-Shafee's graphic novel *Mitrū* (Metro, 2008)[147] was confiscated in 2008 shortly after its publication, both el-Shafee and his publisher Mohamed Sharkawi of Malamih Publishing House were put on trial. On April 15, 2008, Egypt's morality police (*shurṭat al-'ādāb*) confiscated all printed copies of the book from Malamih's office in Garden City. El-Shafee was detained and questioned, then both he and Sharkawi, a blogger and well-known political activist, entered a lengthy trial process that concluded in November 2009. In the end, they were both convicted of disturbing public morals and decency and required to pay a fine of 5,000 Egyptian pounds each.

At times, publishing houses and printers took it upon themselves to censor objectionable texts before they made it to their final, printed form, whether out of personal conviction or a fear of potential lawsuits. For instance, publishing houses might remove objectionable words, phrases, or passages, or sometimes even insert new phrasing that changed the work's original meaning. Such was the case with the 1994 edition of *Anna ḥurra* (I am Free, 1954) by Ihsan 'Abd al-Quddus (1919-1990) that was put out by Maktabat Miṣr, a generally respected house and one that used to adhere to high standards of publishing and recordkeeping. A journalist found in the new edition over one hundred changes to the original text that transformed the formerly proud, inspiring heroine into a stubborn, stupid girl whose final cry of "I am free!" was now completely undercut by the added text: "she imagined, in her ignorance, that marriage was a hindrance, and she lived a dissolute and depraved life because of her false idea of freedom" (quoted in Jacquemond, *Conscience* 70). Maktabat Miṣr defended the edition, saying changes

[147] El-Shafee's novel tells the story of young Egyptian computer engineer Shehab who lives in the midst of Cairo's chaotic din and financial and social instability and has become so disillusioned with the corruption he encounters at all levels of society that he decides to rob a bank. It contains a couple of political references and modestly drawn scenes that allude to sex but present no nudity.

were necessary to make the book exportable to countries in the Gulf (Jacquemond 70).[148] A house, or even a single employee, also could reject outright any manuscript they found objectionable or were concerned might be found morally offensive by readers. Though printers were neither responsible for nor expected to read and monitor the texts produced on their presses, employees at printing houses occasionally would intervene and refuse to print texts they found offensive. Though not a book, a famous case of censorship at this level occurred when print-shop workers refused to set the type for Niʿmat al-Bihayri's short story "al-'Asafir tu'arriqu samt al-madina" (The Sparrows Disturb the City's Night Silence) that was to appear in the August 1994 issue of the state-run literary journal *Ibda'*. Initially stating their objection to the story due to the fact it was filled with sex scenes, or so they claimed, the foreman later clarified that they were acting on orders of the GEBO's director, Samir Sarhan. A public battle ensued on the pages of literary journals, particularly *Akhbār al-Adab*, over the story, its author, and what kinds of books government funding should be used to publish.

Once books were on the market, they were open to the judgement of the general public and not just those who worked in the book industry. Government houses were held to higher moral standards than were private publishers, which also led to higher rates of publisher-initiated censorship at state-run houses. In 2000, the General Organization of Culture Palaces (GOCP; al-Hay'a al-'āmma li-quṣūr al-thaqāfa) published as part of a series overseen by respected author Mohamed el-Bisatie three Egyptian novels, *Qabla wa-ba'd* (Before and After) by Tawfiq Abdel-Rahman, *Aḥlām muḥarrama* (Forbidden Dreams) by Mahmoud Hamed, and *Abnā' al-khaṭa' al-rūmānsī* (Children of Romantic Error) by Yasser Shaaban, the last two of which were by nineties

[148] See Jacquemond, *Conscience* (69-72) for a discussion this incident that was part of what he deems a "general fall in professional standards" (69) that began with the nationalization of the press in the 1960s.

generation authors.[149] The novels were deemed "pornographic" by several in the cultural scene, including most notably Egypt's Minister of Culture Farouk Hosny (1987-2011), who was responsible for banning the books. In a pointed response that ran in Egypt's weekly newspaper *al-Ahrām,* literary critic and scholar Ferial Ghazoul rebuked Hosny for his actions and argued convincingly that the books were censored precisely because they were issued by a state-run house, which meant public money was used to print them. She writes, "The problem is thus not in [the books] themselves, but is the identity of their publisher" (Ghazoul). In the wake of this dispute, the GOCP's general director was fired and al-Bisatie, among others, resigned. As Ghazoul points out, Hosny's decision and the act of banning not only affected these three books but also "inaugurate[d] the renunciation of experimentation and freedom of creative expression."

This kind of citizen-initiated, state-enforced censorship meant that publishers, alongside their writers, faced the constant threat of censorship, confiscation, lawsuits, and even imprisonment. Nineties generation writer, cultural journalist, and publisher Hamdy Abu Golayyel has described the crippling effect of this system as follows:

> I reread any story I write several times. Given the number of prohibitions and my inability to determine them I have resorted to a legal adviser, a young lawyer who is my neighbour. He reads every story I write and every book I publish especially when written by a naive writer. My agony begins as soon as the book enters the print shop: the book contains a scene of a woman sitting with a man, the book contains someone who thinks, the book contains someone eating with appetite, the book contains people, and wherever there are people, there is sin. (Quoted in Mehrez, *Culture Wars* 20)

In a climate such as this, the support and outspoken commitment to freedom of expression authors found at smaller publishers that lay outside of government control, and particularly

[149] See Mehrez *Culture Wars* (14-16) for a more detailed discussion of this controversy, those involved, and how it illustrates the various alliances and power struggles between mostly leftist intellectuals and writers, the state, and Islamists.

houses like Merit, became all the more significant for fostering creativity and literary experimentation.

Sharqiyyat: A Literary Press for the New Generation

Publishing a book was a vital way that literary writers participated publicly in Cairo's literary scene and (re)asserted their status as authors. As we have seen, conditions of the Egyptian book publishing industry and market made books largely ephemeral, due to small print runs, restricted distribution networks, a brief shelf-life, and only a small number of libraries with limited collections. The relatively short amount of time a book spent on the market necessitated a quick publishing process so that authors could ensure their names and works remained in circulation. Writers who failed to produce new titles, printings, and editions faded quickly from relevant conversation both in person and in Egypt's many cultural pages and journals. When Sharqiyyat came onto the scene, those who would come to be recognized as nineties generation writers faced additional challenges when choosing a publisher. They posed too much of a financial risk for private houses, as they typically did not yet have an established readership and were quickly gaining a reputation for writing controversial works at odds with members of older generations who still dominated local literary conversations about artistic taste and quality. The young writers often sought to avoid government and state-affiliated houses because of their slower turnaround times and inferior product, and, more importantly, the stigma of publishing with a venue of the state. Books appearing as part of state-run series faced a higher chance of publisher-initiated censorship and were scrutinized post publication more closely for possible moral or religious infractions.

While nineties generation writers' relative lack of experience, experimental aesthetic, and potentially controversial content were a deterrent for other houses, Sharqiyyat, and later Merit, purposefully sought out such writers and texts, and they, in turn, played a large part in shaping the "brand" of the house. From the beginning, Sharqiyyat was different for its focus on publishing solely literary works. As the years passed, Soliman remained true to his initial vision for the house, eventually expanding to works of literary criticism and other relevant cultural books. He was celebrated as an intellectual and a careful reader who was rumored to have read every text that Sharqiyyat published (Muḥammad Abū Zayd; al-Qaffash, Personal interview). In its early years, the house was known for Soliman's commitment to finding and cultivating new, local talent, a commitment that extended beyond reading manuscripts submitted to his house and to the active pursuit of young writers who could invigorate Egyptian and Arabic literature. In this way, Soliman participated in selecting and encouraging some of the formative writers of the nineties generation who published at his house.

Between its founding in 1991 and 2010 when this investigation stops, Sharqiyyat published over 470 titles by more than 320 different authors.[150] The house produced an average of twenty-five new titles each year, with peaks in 1997 and 2005 and a low point in 2001 when the house published just seven new titles. Though its annual production was modest in terms of quantity, Sharqiyyat made a significant contribution to Egyptian literature thanks to Soliman's vision and his discerning eye for new talent. Given the market's limitations and given that religious books and textbooks were the most profitable genres, Soliman took a large risk in

[150] Data presented on Sharqiyyat's catalog are based largely on the list of published books available on Sharqiyyat's website. When discrepancies between the online catalog and hard copy data arose, I deferred to information gathered from title pages of Sharqiyyat publications acquired from the house's office and bookstore in Cairo and from the University of Michigan's Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library's extensive collection. While I have taken efforts to recreate an accurate, comprehensive catalog, I did not have access to the publisher's complete records, and there may still be lacunae in my listing.

dedicating his house solely to literature. During this period, novels and books of poetry accounted for just over half of Sharqiyyat's catalog (27% each), while short stories (16%) and criticism (20%) made up another sizeable chunk, and the remaining titles (11%) were from a number of miscellaneous categories, including children's books, art, collections of articles, and lexicons, as well as autobiographies and journals (*yawmiyyāt*) of Egyptian and foreign writers and artists. Spanning the range of genres listed above, translations accounted for more than a quarter (27%) of Sharqiyyat's total publications, an impressive percentage given the high cost of securing foreign copyrights. To help offset costs, Soliman built relationships with several foreign cultural institutions and other publishing houses, notably including the French Institute. Sharqiyyat's translations included works by authors commonly cited as influences by nineties generation writers, including Jorge Luis Borges, Franz Kafka, Marguerite Duras, Milan Kundera, Julio Cortázar, and Herman Hesse, to name a few, and works by important literary critics and theorists such as Tzvetan Todorov, Jean-Paul Sartre, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Ian Watt, among others. Publications such as these translations and Soliman's relationships with European publishers also establish Sharqiyyat as part of a larger, transnational literary network, despite the fact that its operations and readers were nearly entirely restricted to Egypt.

Its first year in operation, Sharqiyyat put out just three titles, but each was in keeping with the house's vision: a new edition of *al-Lajna* by Sonallah Ibrahim (b.1937), the first edition of *Amwāj al-layālī* (Night Waves) by Edwar al-Kharrat (1936-2015), and *al-Diwān al-akhīr* (The Final Diwan) by Abdel Hakim Qasem (1934-1990). The titles represented a range of genres and were written by recognized Egyptian literary figures, each of whom had been imprisoned at some point by the Egyptian regime. Ibrahim was the most vocal in his criticism of the Egyptian government. His popular Kafkaesque novel *al-Lajna*, which provides a bitter satire of Sadat's

open-door policy in the author's recognizable, minimalist style, was published originally in 1981. Al-Kharrat, a prolific writer who went on to publish six more titles with Sharqiyyat over the course of the 1990s, was another pioneer in Arabic literature in the mid-twentieth century. In addition to his fiction, he was recognized for his literary criticism and role in founding *Gallery 68*, the cultural journal often cited as the mouthpiece of the sixties generation. His *Night Waves* presented what he deemed a "story-series" (*mutatāliyya qiṣaṣiyya*), a genre designation that appeared on the cover of the book and alerted readers to the experimental style of writing they would find within. With *The Final Diwan* Soliman presented his readers with the final collection of stories and a play by the recently deceased Qasem, another pillar of Egyptian literature in the twentieth century.

Soliman continued to build the reputation of his house by publishing works of fiction by more established Egyptian writers the following year, as well, but by 1993, he began to expand his catalog to include the young authors who would come to define his house. One of the first such writers Soliman took on was Montasser al-Qaffash. Al-Qaffash is commonly considered a member of the nineties generation and was singled out early on by al-Kharrat, among others, for his inventive use of multiple genres within a single text that inspired others to experiment with genre and form and left readers, critics, publishers, and booksellers wondering how to categorize his books.[151] Soliman's attention was drawn to al-Qaffash when he read his 1989 experimental text categorized loosely as a novel, *Nasīj al-asmā'* (The Fabric of Names), that was published by the small, private house Dar al-Ghad.[152] Upon reading al-Qaffash's debut book, Soliman

[151] See al-Kharrat *al-Kitāba*, specifically his chapter on al-Qaffash.

[152] Al-Qaffash originally thought to publish this novel with GEBO's "Mukhtārāt Fuṣūl" series, but he chose to work with Dar al-Ghad instead because he was informed that it would take up to three years for his book to reach the market. In his words: "I finished the collection in 1989, and I wanted it to be published in 1989" (al-Qaffash, Personal interview).

expressed interest in working with the author and was eager to be the publisher of his next work (al-Qaffash, Personal interview). In 1993, he succeeded in this goal and published al-Qaffash's *al-Sarā'ir* (Inner Thoughts). This marked the beginning of al-Qaffash's close working relationship with Soliman and the house, which he maintained in some form throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s. Al-Qaffash also published with Sharqiyyat *Taṣrīḥ bi-l-ghiyāb* (A Declaration of Absence) in 1996 and *An tarā al'ān* (To See Now) in 2002. As I discuss in more detail later, in addition to publishing with the house, al-Qaffash also served as a member of an informal reading committee comprised of nineties generation writers that developed at Sharqiyyat in the mid-1990s.

The house was also distinct for the professionalism Soliman instilled in it from its founding. Of the few other small, private houses, many, like Dar al-Ghad, were founded and run by authors. Soliman, on the other hand, was already a professional in the field when he opened Sharqiyyat and thus could draw on his years of experience working in the book industry, specifically in Sweden. He insisted on official contracts, advances, and royalties, rarities at the time for Egyptian houses, though he was only able to offer these amenities to authors during the 1990s (Soliman, Personal interview). Additionally, the house's books were of discernibly higher quality than most on the Egyptian market, particularly state-run publications which were marked by their translucent paper, lighter ink, and flimsy, high-gloss paper for covers. Thanks to Soliman's attention to detail regarding format, layout, cover design, and prominent placement of Sharqiyyat's logo and name on both spine and cover, the books were immediately identifiable, if not recognizable, by readers as Sharqiyyat publications. The professionalism authors encountered at Sharqiyyat was particularly appealing to writers of the new generation, who were seeking to establish themselves as serious writers and who wanted to avoid the stigma of

government houses. However, while Sharqiyyat's high standards were appealing to authors, they also made the books more expensive, and despite Soliman's attempts to make them as affordable as possible, he could not compete with the low prices of books coming out of government houses. Financial difficulties, insufficient distribution networks and bookselling venues, and a lack of interest among the general public all led him to discontinue the house's largest series, "Sharqiyyat for All" (Sharqiyyāt li-l-jamīʿ), in 2001 (Muḥammad Abū Zayd). While the content of Sharqiyyat's catalog did not substantially change after the series' cancellation, it is worth noting that the same year Soliman discontinued the series and dramatically scaled back production, with just seven new titles published that year, Merit became a contender in Egyptian literary publishing.

Merit: Pushing the Boundaries

Mohamed Hashem originally founded Merit in 1998 to create, in his words, "a true Egyptian entity able to adopt the issues of the nation and to make [an impression]" (al-Faris). While none of the nineteen publications Merit produced during its first year in operation were literary, Hashem quickly redirected his house's focus to novels, short stories, poetry, transgeneric texts, and graphic novels, because, he noted in an interview, it was literature that contained original, bold ideas capable of reinvigorating Egyptian culture and making its citizens think anew (al-Faris). In other words, publishing literature—including that of the supposedly apolitical, disengaged generation—for Hashem became a political act. Like Soliman, Hashem sought to effect change through literature and to attract pioneers in Egyptian literature to his house. When the house began publishing literature, the idea of what constituted the "nineties generation" was

stable enough that young writers seeking to publish their works faced strong bias against their texts at many of Egypt's publishing houses, and Merit was a welcome addition to the scene.

Merit produced nearly 600 titles by more than 400 authors between 1999 and 2010,[153] with an average forty-five titles per year.[154] In 2001, the house established what was soon recognized throughout the Arab world as an esteemed series of contemporary and often avant-garde Egyptian literature: *Tajalliyyāt Adabiyya* (Literary Revelations).[155] It quickly became the highest volume series of the house, accounting for seventy percent of Merit's publications between the year it was founded and 2010 and with roughly twenty to thirty new titles produced each year. As with Sharqiyyat, novels and poetry were the two biggest genres, though Merit's series produced twice as many novels (48%) as books of poetry (24%). Short story collections were the next most productive genre (19%), and the remainder of the books in *Tajalliyyāt Adabiyya* consisted of translations, plays, graphic novels, and children's books (9% total). Several books appearing in the series have brought Merit recognition at the local and regional level. For instance, titles appearing in this series have won Sawiris Cultural Awards (est. 2005),

[153] Though the house was founded in 1998, Merit did not begin publishing until 1999.

[154] All data pertaining to Merit's catalog are based on the printed publisher's list "Qā'ima bi-iṣdārāt: Dār Mīrīt li-l-nashr min 1999 'ilā 2010" (Catalog of Merit Publishing House publications from 1999 to 2010) that was provided by Mohamed Hashem during a personal interview that I co-conducted with Michele Henjum in 2010. As with the Sharqiyyat catalog, I found a number of discrepancies with regard to date of publication and titles published when cross-referencing multiple sources, including WorldCat, University of Michigan's catalog, Good Reads, and physical copies of books I was able to locate in person. When such inconsistencies arose, I typically deferred to the printed books. The house's use of several variations of its name, including "Dār Mīrīt," (Merit Publishing House), "Mīrīt li-l-nashr wa-al-maʿlūmāt" (Merit for Publishing and Information), and simply "Mīrīt" (Merit), made it difficult to cross-reference other listings of Merit publications with the publisher's list to address such discrepancies. While every effort was made to compile a complete, accurate catalog, the number of inconsistencies I encountered suggests there are likely some discrepancies that have yet to be identified and resolved.

[155] The series name "*Tajalliyyāt Adabiyya*" appears on the title pages of some books published in 2000 (for instance, Ibrahim Dawud's *Yabdu annanī ji'tu muta'akhkhiran* (It Seems I Arrived Late)); however, the publisher's catalog makes no mention of the series until 2001, and it is in 2001 that "*Tajalliyyāt Adabiyyah*" began to be printed on the covers of books belonging to this series.

awarded annually by the privately run Sawiris Foundation for Social Development,[156] the American University in Cairo's Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature (est. 1998),[157] and were short-listed for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (est. 2008).[158]

As is often the case with small presses, Merit, like Sharqiyyat, was closely associated with the personality, motivations, and politics of its owner, such that it became difficult to distinguish between Hashem's personal reputation and the developing brand of his house. Hashem was—and is—known first and foremost for his political activism and continues to face various lawsuits for his work as a publisher and an activist.[159] In addition to his role in forming

[156] Titles of Merit publications that won Sawiris Cultural Awards during this period include: Ihab 'Abd al-Hamid, *'Isḥāq khā'ibūn* (2005; Unsuccessful Lovers); Ahmed Alaidy, *An takūn 'Abbās al-'Abd* (2003; *Being Abbas el Abd*, 2006); Hamdy el-Gazzar, *Siḥr aswad* (2005; *Black Magic*, 2007); Mustafa Zikri, *Mir'āt 202* (Mirror 202, 2003); Mohamed Makhzangi, *Awtār al-mā'* (Water Chords, 2002); Haytham el-Wardany, *Jāmi'at al-adab al-nāqiṣ* (The League of Incomplete Literature, 2003); Yasser Abdellatif, *Qānūn al-wirātha* (The Law of Inheritance, 2002); Hassan Abdel Mawgoud, *'Ayn al-qiṭṭ* (The Cat's Eye, 2004); and Muhammad al-Mansi Qandil, *Qamar 'Alā Samarqand* (2005; English: *Moon Over Samarqand*). Ibrahim Aslan's *Ḥikāyāt min Faḍl Allah 'Uthmān* (Stories from Fadlallah Uthman), which was published with Merit in 2003, also won a Sawiris Award, but it originally appeared with Shorouk in 1999.

[157] The Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature winners include: Hamdi Abu Golayyel, *al-Fā'il* ([The Laborer] 2008; *A Dog with No Tail*, 2009) and Miral al-Tahawy, *Brūklīn Hayts* (2010; *Brooklyn Heights*, 2011). This award was particularly coveted because it guaranteed the winning book translation into English via the American University in Cairo Press. See Chapter Five for a discussion of this award and Appendix B.

[158] Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* also was shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2010. Mekkawi Said's *Fi'rān al-safīna* (The Ship's Mice, 2003) shortlisted in 2008, was originally published in 1991 by the GEBO and republished by Merit in 2003. While Mansoura Ez Eldin's shortlisted novel *Warā' al-firdaws* (Beyond Paradise, 2009) appeared with Dar Elain, the author got her start at Merit, where she published her first two books.

[159] In December 2015, Merit's new office as well as two other independently run cultural institutions nearby, Townhouse Gallery and its affiliated Rawabet Theater, were raided by an interagency effort, and Townhouse and Rawabet were closed temporarily as a result, and Merit staff member Mohamed Zein arrested and some of Merit's paperwork was confiscated. Hashem believes that the raid occurred in advance of the launch of a new book titled *Fūdkā: al-bighā' al-ṣuḥufī 2* (Vodka: Journalistic Prostitution 2) by Ashraf Abdel Shafy, whose earlier novel *al-Bighā' al-ṣuḥufī* (Merit 2012) had created a stir. In response to the raid, Hashem offered himself in exchange for his staff member and stated publicly, "If they want to scare us because of the noise we cause for them, we will continue to be noisy" ("Update").

the Egyptian Movement for Change, commonly called Kefaya,[160] in 2004, he also was instrumental in the founding of its affiliated group Writers and Artists for Change (WAC) in 2005. He has used his publishing house to further these political causes, though not by publishing overtly political works. Merit frequently served as a venue for WAC meetings, and during the Egyptian revolution of 2011, it became a physical haven for intellectuals, artists, and others involved in the fighting.[161] Hashem has won two prestigious international awards for his commitment to promoting free speech via publishing: the American Association of Publisher's Jeri Laber International Freedom to Publish Award (IFPA, 2002), and the German PEN Herman Kesten Award (2011). Thanks to the publicity provided by these awards in particular, Hashem and his house received a large amount of coverage in foreign press in a number of interviews and articles that helped shape Merit's reputation internationally. Articles in foreign media have emphasized the shabby, modest appearance of Hashem and his office and the intimate, heady atmosphere at Merit, painting a romantic picture of "Hashem's threadbare sofas [on which] you'll find the cream of young Egyptian writing talent, chain-smoking cigarettes, chatting with literary critics and thumbing through some of the thousands of books stacked from floor to ceiling," as Shenker described for readers of *The Guardian* in 2010.

In contrast to Hashem's vocal political stances that came to define his house, Soliman was much more circumspect. When asked during a 2005 interview about his opinion on censorship in Egypt, Soliman replied, "We have freedom of expression in Egypt. In publishing

[160] Kefaya was founded in 2004 to protest the current regime and demand major constitutional, economic, and election reforms, including a demand for transparent presidential elections with multiple candidates rather than the proposed election referendum that would afford Mubarak six additional years in power as president.

[161] See Prince *Ismī Thawra* (2012; *Revolution is My Name: An Egyptian Woman's Diary from Eighteen Days in Tahrir*, 2012) for a firsthand account of the revolution by a nineties generation writer and literary scholar. Hashem and Merit's office feature frequently in the account.

there is complete freedom because censorship of creative works was abolished in Egypt in 1977. Any person has the right to publish whatever he wants." He then continued, "If what he publishes harms someone […] then that person has the right to bring a legal suit against the author" (Muḥammad Abū Zayd). Here, Soliman carefully provides a narrow definition of censorship that refers to the official position in the government of the *raqīb*, an office that was abolished under Sadat.[162] Soliman sets up the current system as one of equivalence: publishers have the right to print whatever they want, and readers have the right to hold the author accountable. In his considered response, Soliman makes no mention of whether he believes readers have the right to hold publishers, in addition to writers, accountable for a given work, nor does he offer his own judgment on the contemporary system of unofficial censorship and how it impedes writers and publishers. His public stance on censorship was significantly different from that of Hashem, who regularly denounced what he viewed as government infringements on creative expression, published texts deemed too risky by other houses, and hosted political meetings at Merit's office. In Egypt's book publishing industry and market, where the threat of censorship pervaded every stage of a book's life, Hashem's bold statements and public display of support for artists facing charges of censorship became all the more important to writers in their creative output and when choosing a publisher.

With regard to admitting to the market potentially controversial texts, Alaa Al Aswany's *'Imārat Ya'qūbyān* (2002; *The Yacoubian Building*, 2004) is perhaps the best-known example of

[162] In a series of interviews that translator Michele Henjum and I conducted over several months in 2009, 2010 and 2013 with eighteen publishing houses (15/3, Afaq, Atlas Publishing, AUC Press, al-Dar, Dar Elain, Dar al-Maʿarif, al-Dar al-Masriah al-Lubnaniah, Dar el Shorouk, Dar al-Tanweer, al-Hadara, Madbouly, Malamih, Merit, Nahdet Misr, Nevro, Sharqiyyat, Sphinx Literary Agency), this narrow definition of censorship was used commonly by publishers in response to our questions about the presence of censorship in Egypt.

a successful text published by Merit that had been rejected previously by another house.[163] Though Al Aswany's novel, with its realist bent and overt moral and political messaging, contrasts greatly with those of the nineties generation, it is worth mentioning here given its enormous impact and popularity: The book was at the top of the bestseller list for the Arab world for five consecutive years (Jaggi); it has been translated into more than twenty languages and subsequently taught at several foreign universities as a representative of Egyptian literature, culture, and politics;[164] and it was adapted as a high-grossing film and a television miniseries that aired throughout the Arab world.[165] Prior to finding success at Merit, three of Al Aswany's texts had been rejected by the GEBO, and the author received a phone call from a representative of the house to inform him that the state-run house would never publish any of his books (Jaggi). While Al Aswany's creative works often delve into the political, the personal and hostile nature of his rejection from the GEBO was more likely a response to the author's vocal critiques of Mubarak's regime than the literary text itself. Al Aswany was another founding member of Kefaya, which was established two years after Hashem and the author began their professional relationship with the publication of *The Yacoubian Building* in 2002.

Al Aswany's novel was perceived as risky by publishers because it depicts the travails and suffering of a host of characters representing various social strata in Egypt, features thinly veiled criticism of the state, and relates an ongoing sexual relationship between two male

[163] As noted in Chapter Three, while Merit was the first to publish the complete novel and in book form, a significant portion of the text appeared in serialized form in *Akhbār al-Adab* between February and May of 2001.

[164] For instance, Duke University offered a political science course that included the novel as required reading, and Washington University in St. Louis included the text in a comparative literature course on world literature in 2011.

[165] The eponymous film debuted in theaters in 2006 and incited much controversy over the film's depiction of a gay man and relationship. This part was excised from the television version of the film, which came out the following year. Like Al Aswany's novel, the film is available in English.

characters. Each of these features had the potential to invite some form of censorship and other negative repercussions for author and publisher. Instead, Hashem's risk paid off, and the first edition sold out within four weeks. With the text's worth and viability on the market established, Al Aswany was able to sign a new contract with the older, more established Madbouly (est. 1970). He next moved to Dar el-Shorouk, one of Egypt's largest private publishers that typically only published literary titles and authors guaranteed to sell. Though *The Yacoubian Building* proved lucrative for Shorouk, when Al Aswany proposed his potentially controversial short story collection *Nīrān ṣadīqa* (*Friendly Fire*, 2009) in 2004, Shorouk hesitated and Al Aswany once again turned to Hashem to introduce the text to the market. As with Al Aswany's first novel, once the book proved to be profitable and successfully avoided any kind of censorship, Shorouk signed a contract with Al Aswany for this title, as well.

The year after Merit published *The Yacoubian Building*, up-and-coming writer Ahmed Alaidy approached Hashem with the manuscript for what became his debut novel *An Takūn ʻAbbās al-ʻAbd* (2003; *Being Abbas el Abd*, 2006), which had just been rejected by another independent house.[166] Alaidy recalls telling Hashem:

> Read it. I'm not thinking about publishing it, and I don't have any money to publish it. I know you don't read [manuscripts submitted for publication] yourself and it's already been turned down, so I'd really like you to tell me why it's bad so I can have the benefit of your opinion. (Zikri, "A Conversation")

Alaidy's words reflect many realities of the book publishing industry for young writers seeking publication at this time, including the strong likelihood that young authors would have to

[166] While Merit's edition was the first printing of the complete novel, excerpts appeared first in the cultural newspaper *Akhbār al-Adab* in November 2003 (No. 540), shortly before the book came out with Merit. The text is identified as "Excerpts from the forthcoming novel by the same name" (23). Though no mention of Merit is made, the reference to the novel as "forthcoming" suggests that it had already been accepted for publication when the text ran in *Akhbār al-Adab*.

contribute to the costs of publication at a private house and the desire among Alaidy and his peers for feedback on their manuscripts from publishers. His words also imply an added value placed on Hashem's personal assessment of their works. Though no one, including Alaidy, thought the book would sell (Zikri, "A Conversation"), Hashem published the text in 2003, and it soon became a cult classic and a defining text of the "I've-got-nothing-to-lose-generation," in the words of Alaidy's protagonist (Alaidy 36).[167] The novel presents readers with a fragmented, hybrid narrative that incorporates text-speak and mixes classical and colloquial registers of Arabic to ironic effect as it details the unraveling of its schizophrenic narrator-protagonist and his fruitless search for connection and meaning. In his examination of some of the aesthetic and stylistic shifts of Egypt's new writing, Tarek El-Ariss writes of Alaidy as having "infiltrate[d] the publishing establishment from which he was excluded and disrupt[ed] the codes of Arabic literary production" ("Hacking" 534). While this assessment is true if we take Egypt's publishing industry as a whole, Hashem's support of Alaidy's text, which he published in three editions, demonstrates that authors did not (always) work independently to hack their way into the world of publishing; rather, as we see in this example, Merit worked *with* authors to upend conventional norms in literary content and modes of production.

Sharqiyyat and Merit: The Books Themselves

The publisher's lists cultivated at Sharqiyyat and Merit included a range of literary authors and texts. This broader interest combined with the houses' emphasis on new voices and talent meant that nineties generation writers featured regularly enough that a clear affiliation

[167] Humphrey Davies' translation.

between the two houses and the generation was made, but the houses did not publish the new literary group to the exclusion of other writers. The houses thus presented the writers as a substantive part of a broader array of literary voices and styles, including more traditional and senior Egyptian authors, other Arab writers, and those brought into Arabic via translation. In 1995, for example, Sharqiyyat published sixteen books, all of which would have appeared on the market together at roughly the same time. Nineties generation writers Iman Mersal, Adel Esmat, May Telmissany, Wa'il Ragab, Ahmad Gharib, Ahmad Faruq, 'Ala' al-Barbari, Nadeen Shams, and Haytham el-Wardany[168] featured alongside more established Egyptian cultural figures and writers like Fatima Kandil (b. 1958) and Mustafa 'Abd al-Ghani (b. 1947) and other Arab authors, such as Jordanian poet Amjad Nasser[169] (b. 1950), a pioneer in modern Arabic poetry known for his prose poetry. That year Sharqiyyat also added diversity to its translated offerings, a list that had consisted primarily of French titles of contemporary fiction and criticism up to this point, and produced translations of Toni Morrison, J.M.G. Le Clézio, and W.B. Yeats.

We find a similarly diverse array of literary voices and styles at Merit in a given year, in addition to Merit's other, non-literary publications that came from fields such as politics, philosophy, and sociology, among others. For example, in 2001, the year Merit launched *Tajalliyyāt Adabiyyah*, sixteen of the house's twenty-eight publications belonged to this literary series, and another twelve were categorized in Merit's catalog under the more general heading "*Mukhtārāt Mīrīt*" (Merit's Selected Writings). The house offered a comparably diverse mix of nineties generation writers, namely May Khalid, Ibrahim Farghali, Mansoura Ez Eldin, and

[168] Gharib, Faruq, al-Barbari, Shams, and el-Wardany all appeared in a single book, *Lines on Circles*, as did their colleague Ragab, who also published his own novel, *Dākhil nuqṭa hawā'iyya* (Inside an Air Bubble, 1995), that year with Sharqiyyat.

[169] This is the pseudonym of Jordanian poet Yahya Numeiri al-Naimat.

Mahmoud Khayr Allah, along with respected, veteran Arab writers like Egyptian novelist Ibrahim Abdel Meguid (b. 1946) and Palestinian writer and historian Yasmine Zahran (b. 1933). Like Sharqiyyat, Merit's list also included a few translations, including Paulo Coelho's 1996 novel *The Fifth Mountain* (Portuguese: *O Monte Cinco*) and a Japanese-Arabic dictionary, which reflected Hashem's personal taste and interest in bringing Japanese literature to Egypt (Hashem, Personal interview).

Because Egyptian publishers played a key role in how their books circulated and were sold on the market, the diversity represented in Sharqiyyat's and Merit's catalogs was reproduced on the shelves where readers encountered their works. In this way, ties among author, work, and publisher, and those among the authors published, were reinforced through the movement of the books. Both Soliman and Hashem sold their own publications at their offices and may even have been their own biggest sellers.[170] Interested and informed readers would visit the houses directly to make their purchases, affording them the opportunity to interact with Soliman or Hashem himself and to encounter all of each house's works collectively. Moreover, because many independent bookstores organized their shelves first by publisher, rather than alphabetically by author, readers would continue to find books published by Sharqiyyat or Merit grouped together, especially those that appeared on the market around the same time, as in the two examples above.[171]

[170] Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain exact distribution and sales information from Soliman or Hashem, and thus it remains unclear which house or bookstore sold the majority of each house's wares.

[171] Many bookstores did separate fiction from non-fiction, such that Merit's translation of Bourdieu's *Choses dites* (1987; translated as: *Bi-'ibāra ukhrā: muḥāwalāt fi-itijāh sūsūlūjiyya in'ikāsiyya*) [*In Other Words: Essays toward a Reflective Sociology*], for instance, would not be placed next to Mansoura Ez Eldin's novel *Ḍaw' muḥtizz* (Shaky Light), though they both came out in 2001.

In addition to a range of literary styles, generations, and nationalities, we also find some gender diversity represented in Sharqiyyat's and Merit's catalogs. However, male writers still significantly outnumbered women overall. At Sharqiyyat, women produced a little less than a quarter (24%) of all titles published between 1991 and 2010, while at Merit, women accounted for just 15% of the house's titles up to 2010. One of the defining traits of the nineties generation, as identified by writers, critics, and scholars, is the dramatic increase in literary production by women in the 1990s. In a discussion of the nineties generation, Mehrez writes, "The work by women writers of this generation matches, if not surpasses, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that of their male counterparts" (*Culture Wars* 126). A number of prominent nineties generation women writers got their start or developed their vocations as serious creative writers at Sharqiyyat and/ or Merit, including Nora Amin, May Telmissany, Miral al-Tahawy, Mansoura Ez Eldin, to name but a few. Despite this support and the more general, marked rise in the number of women writing and the number of texts published by women of this generation, the catalogs of Sharqiyyat and Merit do not suggest an equal rate of production between the two sexes. The two houses did not publish solely nineties generation texts, though, nor were they the exclusive publishers of the generation. Thus, further research is necessary to determine the precise breakdown of literary publication (both at these houses and via other forums, including other publishing houses, literary journals and newspapers, etc.) along gender lines of this generation. However, even without these exact numbers, the vast gender disparity in the catalogs of Sharqiyyat and Merit, the two publishing houses most closely associated with this generation, suggests that more books, at least, were still published by men than by women writers of the nineties generation during this period.

The books produced by Sharqiyyat and Merit also created ties between author and publishing house and among authors via their physical properties, design, and paratexts. Sharqiyyat and Merit were known for their quality books and distinctive, attractive covers. Particularly in its early years, Sharqiyyat books were immediately recognizable. The spines bore the author's name, title of the work, and "Sharqiyyat" in some form, and displayed prominently on the covers was the house's logo, a modified compass with four arrows pointing outward from the center with the arrow pointing to the east (*sharq*) bolded (see Figure 2). The front covers boasted original designs, all of which were created by the same designer, Muhyi al-Din al-Labbad, father of the young illustrator and artist Ahmad al-Labbad, who later worked as one of Merit's main cover artists. In addition, many early Sharqiyyat books were distinct for the inclusion of an envelope flap that folded under the front cover. The additional flap not only provided a unique look in modern publishing that alluded to the Islamic manuscript tradition, but also created a third cover space for the publisher to fill. For literary texts, the envelope flap typically contained an excerpt from the text and Sharqiyyat's logo, while the back cover featured a large, stylized headshot of the author. In this way, the covers added to the celebrity status of the authors, particularly those whose countenances were not yet familiar to seasoned cultural actors, by circulating their image alongside their name, a custom not practiced by the vast majority of Egyptian publishers at that time. The house also created a sense of affiliation among writers and texts published at Sharqiyyat via the final pages of its books, where readers would find a listing of Sharqiyyat works. Early books included a complete list of publications, while later ones contained a sampling of the growing house's offerings. Sometimes forthcoming titles were mentioned, turning the book into an advertisement for the house, as well.

Merit's imprint and logo of a pharaoh marked the house as unmistakably Egyptian while simultaneously disavowing any contemporary, nationalist imagery (see Figure 3). The name "Merit"[172] and its logo quickly became associated with works of serious literature which contained something daring and surprising that often upset readers' expectations and made the familiar strange. Merit's characteristic red spine with the author's name, book's title, and "Merit" printed in white lettering caught readers' eyes on bookstore shelves, especially when stacked next to one another. Because most of the young writers of the new literary generation had not yet established their own public reputations in the 1990s and early 2000s, the imprints of both houses played a more significant role in shaping readers' impressions of these relatively unknown authors than of writers whose names were already familiar.

Facilitating Author Networks

The insular nature of the Cairene literary scene meant that much depended on frequent, direct, personal contact among the actors, including the publishing house. As their books were being prepared for publication, authors would travel to the house to meet with publishing house staff and sometimes the publishers themselves, especially at smaller, private houses like Sharqiyyat and Merit. The two houses also used the physical spaces of their offices to facilitate interactions and dialogue among writers, whether or not they were under contract with the house, and in Merit's case, with a host of other cultural actors, as well. Both Sharqiyyat's and Merit's offices were located in downtown Cairo (*wasṭ al-balad*) in the heart of its literary neighborhood, which helped them became central meeting spots for writers, though the nature of the gatherings

[172] The house is named after Hashem's eldest daughter.

differed at each house. This part of the city was—and remains—replete with publishing houses, bookstores, and newsstands, as well as cafes, bars, and coffee shops where writers, artists, and intellectuals gather on a nightly basis. Soliman moved Sharqiyyat from the more distant, wealthy suburb of Heliopolis to downtown in 1993, the same year that the house greatly increased production and expanded its catalog to include up-and-coming writers. In 1998, Hashem opened Merit a few blocks away.[173] (See Figure 4.) Each house provided writers a private space to meet that was located in the very public center of Cairo's literary activities. Because much business, including publishing, was conducted in person, a central location helped these small publishers stay visible and competitive. In addition, the close proximity of publishing houses, bookstores, art galleries, exhibition spaces, and cafes frequented by artists, intellectuals, writers, and the like meant that authors often physically traversed the same small space in Cairo in which their books circulated.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given Soliman's reputation for being a well-read intellectual and publisher, but also a somewhat politically cautious one, the network among authors that Sharqiyyat fostered was a semi-private one comprised of those who had already published with the house. Soliman cultivated close working relationships with writers of the new generation and provided them with opportunities to build a group identity through collaboration, an exchange of ideas, and discussions of their own literary projects. Al-Qaffash, who began publishing with the house in 1993, recalls meeting and conversing regularly, sometimes even daily, with other young writers who published with Sharqiyyat, and the friendly competition between them (al-Qaffash, Personal interview). With regard to more tangible collaboration, Sharqiyyat published in 1995 a

[173] Merit remained at this location until early December 2015, when Hashem was forced to move the office to another space downtown, in the neighboring Abdeen neighborhood.

compilation of stories by several young writers that some have used to mark the arrival of the nineties generation (Hafez 50): *Khuyūṭ ʻalā dawāʼir* (Lines on Circles). This book contains stories by Ahmad Gharib, Ahmad Faruq, ʻAla' al-Barbari, Nadeen Shams, Wa'il Ragab, and Haytham el-Wardany, each of whom presented something that critics and authors were beginning to discuss as an emerging trend in Egyptian literature. By publishing a collection of their works in a single, slim volume, the house simultaneously admitted the works of several young writers to the market and promoted an affiliation among the texts and writers gathered between the covers.

One of the most significant ways Sharqiyyat influenced the nineties generation and encouraged collaboration among its authors was via an informal committee of readers that developed at the house in the mid-1990s. The core of the committee consisted of al-Qaffash, Amin, Zikri, al-Tahawy, Esmat, Telmissany, and Hassan. They met several times a week and sometimes even daily to discuss manuscripts submitted to the house and offer their opinions about whether or not to accept the texts and, consequently, their authors for publication at Sharqiyyat (al-Qaffash, Personal interview). In this way, these nineties generation writers, through Sharqiyyat, determined who would be admitted to the market and which texts would be turned into Sharqiyyat books that circulated alongside their own. In addition, this informal committee occasionally suggested edits to the manuscripts they read, particularly those belonging to other emerging writers (Soliman, Personal interview), and thereby influenced the content of new literary works, as well. Reflecting on his time spent as part of this informal group, al-Qaffash recalls sitting with Soliman and other authors, such as Telmissany, and taking turns reading aloud new manuscripts and offering their opinions, which Soliman would then convey to the text's author. According to al-Qaffash, "Often the writer […] would be interested to hear our

thoughts and ideas because […] when he heard May [Telmissany]'s opinion, or mine, or Hosni Hassan's, he'd feel he was hearing an authentic perspective, one that came from a true reader and not just an academic opinion" (al-Qaffash, Personal interview). Al-Qaffash's words allude to the value that writers placed on their peers' opinions as readers of their works in contradistinction to opinions and criticism offered by academics, who often were viewed as being too removed from the creative process to offer insightful suggestions. The generally high level of respect for fellow writers' opinions suggests that this informal committee had the potential to influence greatly both the texts they workshopped and their authors.

The network of cultural actors cultivated at Merit was less restricted in its membership than that of Sharqiyyat, given the house's multiple functions as a publishing house, a site of WAC meetings, the host of several book launches and public discussions, and an informal meeting place for artists, writers, intellectuals, translators, and the like, regardless of whether or not they had published with the house. However, while the house became a common destination for cultural actors and avid readers of Egyptian fiction, like most small Egyptian publishers it was difficult for casual readers and outsiders to find, with minimal signage to announce its presence.[174] Thus Merit maintained its reputation for being open to all, yet in practicality was reserved as a space for those already active in the literary scene or with personal connections to it.

Comments made publicly by and about Hashem as reported in local and foreign media further determined the network of authors cultivated by Merit. For instance, when being honored

[174] Merit's location was marked with a modest sign with Merit's name, logo, and "First Floor" posted on a wall in the foyer of the building where it was located. Upon reaching the first floor, visitors would find a closed and sometimes locked door, though ringing the bell usually would prompt either Hashem or a regular visitor to the house to come and open the door and invite in the guests.

with the International Freedom to Publish Award in 2006, Hashem said that he "never thought that people on the other side of the world would recognize the tiny role that Merit Publishing House is trying to play in both the cultural and the political spheres in Egypt" (quoted in Platt and Huntington). As this quote demonstrates, Hashem was not afraid to explicitly link his house to his political efforts and a critique of the regime. Following the 2011 revolution, the international press, in particular, highlighted Hashem's activism and gave him a forum to state his beliefs not only in front of his fellow countrymen, but also to a wider audience he knew was sympathetic to his cause. Merit, not unfairly, was presented as a bastion for liberal thinkers and writers. The German-based, English language Qantara.de ran a profile on the house in 2011, six months after the January 25th revolution, titled "The Merit Publishing House in Cairo: A Mecca for Intellectuals, a Centre of the Revolution" (Grees). Hashem is described as "a die-hard opposition figure against the government, the president and the corruption that blights the nation" and a "vehement advocate of civil society and secularism in Egypt." Whether a direct quote from Hashem or an outsider's perspective on Merit, these statements, headlines, and articles further delineated who participated in activities hosted at Hashem's house and who chose Merit as a publisher. They also bolstered the perception of the emerging nineties generation and others affiliated with Egypt's new writing as secular and leftist and set the writers in opposition to those unwilling to condone Hashem's leftist views and Merit's admittedly political agenda.

Author and House: A Co-Productive Relationship

The list of authors who appeared on shelves featuring Sharqiyyat and Merit publications changed frequently due to authors' tendency to partner with a succession of different houses and the ephemeral nature of the book in Egypt's market. Nonetheless, both houses often established

lasting relationships with the writers with whom they worked. Those who found in the two houses a willing publisher when others were not became loyal readers, basing their decisions on what to read on the houses' reputations for publishing serious, experimental literature that they helped create. It was rare for either to advertise explicitly, though each eventually developed an online presence.[175] Their writers frequently acted as their unofficial spokespersons, and the young writers they published became some of the houses' biggest and most vocal advocates due to the formative role the houses played in their careers as creative writers.

Those who desired to champion a specific house had no lack of opportunity to do so in Cairo's small, close-knit literary community in which cultural actors continually met and exchanged opinions face-to-face and in writing. At times, their support took the form of personal recommendations to colleagues of where to publish. Al-Taher Sharkawi, for instance, chose to publish his first, award-winning novel *Fānīliyā* (Vanilla, 2008) with Soliman because of the recommendation of a colleague who had worked with Sharqiyyat previously (Sharkawi, Personal interview). Writers also served as the houses' unofficial spokespersons via their roles as public figures whose actions and comments were featured often in the press, including in the form of literary interviews. Interestingly, the topic of publishing arose frequently in such interviews, whether the topic was introduced by the interviewer or the interviewee, and this subject provided authors the opportunity to share their experiences with various publishers publicly. For instance, in an interview with *The Rumpus*, Mansoura Ez Eldin, an award-winning author of the new generation who published her first two books with Merit,[176] introduced the role of the publisher,

[175] Both Sharqiyyat and Merit launched websites (which worked intermittently), and Merit created a Facebook page, though Hashem's personal page, which contained some information about the house, was much more active.

[176] Ez Eldin's first two books were the short story collection *Ḍaw' muhtazz* (2001, Shaky Light) and the novel *Matāhat Maryām* (2004; *Maryam's Maze*, 2007).

and Merit specifically, in response to a question about how Egyptian writers deal with the fear of being persecuted for what they write. She responded, "The daring independent and small publishers—like Merit Publishing House—were the lungs that helped Egyptian literature to stay alive, vital, and daring" (Toutonghi). Instead of speaking solely of the responsibility of the author, which she addresses in the first part of her answer, Ez Eldin gives credit to small, private houses for the continued growth and development of Egyptian literature.

It was also common for authors, and especially those of the new generation, to work as staff writers in the recently reinvigorated field of cultural journalism,[177] which gave them the power and opportunity to shape public perception and awareness of local publishers. They conducted literary interviews with authors, including interviews with their peers, covered cultural events held at publishing houses, and wrote about the world of book publishing more generally. In this way, literary authors brought continual and renewed attention to specific publishers and, in this case, helped fashion the brands and reputations of Sharqiyyat and Merit as essential, esteemed publishers of important new works that were setting the path of Egyptian literature. One prime example of a cultural journalist and self-identified nineties generation author who influenced the narrative of his generation is Yasser Abdel Hafez, who published his first novel, *Bi-munāsabat al-ḥayāat* (On the Occasion of Life), with Merit in 2005 and created the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" (Features of a Generation) series that ran in *Akhbār al-Adab* from 1997 to 2001. This series helped constitute the nineties generation and participated actively in forming and reforming the literary group's boundaries (see Chapter Three). Moreover, in his capacity as a staff writer at *Akhbār al-Adab,* Abdel Hafez published numerous other interviews and articles

[177] While writers have worked as cultural journalists in Egypt dating back to the rise of the printing press during the *nahḍa*, by the 1990s, many of the older generation were in administrative positions of power rather than working as staff writers, which were positions held mostly by the younger generation.

with and about authors publishing at both Merit and Sharqiyyat. Ez Eldin (*Akhbār al-Adab*), Youssef Rakha (*al-Ahrām*), Ibrahim Farghali (*Rūz al-Yūsuf, al-Ahrām*), and Hassan Abdel Mawgoud (*Akhbār al-Adab*) are just a few of the other authors of the new generation who have made their careers at Egyptian cultural journals and newspapers, and many, if not most, of those who were not cultural journalists by trade often contributed guest articles and reviews, in addition to their creative writings, to Egypt's literary journals. Members of older generations such as Edwar al-Kharrat, who frequently published reviews and opinion pieces in *Akhbār al-Adab* and secured his own column for a period, also acted as proponents of the two houses.

Support of the houses took on a more personal tone at times. When Sharqiyyat fell into financial decline in the early 2000s, al-Qaffash notes that he, along with several other authors, agreed to publish their books with the house without compensation (al-Qaffash, Personal interview). Thus, while he was paid for his first two books that came out with the house in the 1990s, al-Qaffash took no money for his third, *To See Now*, published in 2002. Speaking about his publishing experiences with seven different Cairo-based houses, both state-run and independent, al-Taher Sharkawi showed similar esteem for Soliman and his house. He notes, "I enjoyed my experience with Hosni, even though I had to pay," referring to his award-winning novel *Vanilla*[178] that came out with the house in 2008 and for which he paid some of the costs of production. He then added, "[Soliman] is an intellectual and a good reader," speaking to the qualities that attracted him to Sharqiyyat and marked the experience of publishing with this house as unique (Sharkawi, Personal interview).

[178] Sharkawi's *Vanilla* won a Sawiris Culture Award in 2011, taking first place in the category of "Youth Novel Award."

In Hashem's case, one of the clearest, boldest forms of support he received from authors and a host of other cultural actors was a very public, coordinated show of support in December 2011 when the Supreme Council for Armed Forces (SCAF) issued a warrant for Hashem's arrest for his alleged involvement in inciting violence in Tahrir during the 2011 revolution.[179] Hashem's involvement in the revolution was well documented: He turned Merit into a headquarters and refuge for protestors and openly criticized Mubarak's regime. Upon learning of the warrant for his arrest, Hashem announced, "Anyone who wants to arrest me can go ahead and do it… I believe there is a revolution and I am one of the people who started it – and [the revolution] won't abandon me" ("Egyptian Publisher"). He was correct in his prediction, and hundreds of supporters signed petitions and issued formal statements in his defense, including the Association of American Publishers (which had granted Hashem the IFPA), the International Publishers Association, the Egyptian Publishers Union, the Union of Egyptian Writers, and the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (Qualey, "U.S., International Publishers"). Partly in response to the public pressure placed on SCAF, including from international organizations, they quickly withdrew their charges.

While literary interviews and events provided a forum for authors to praise a specific publisher, they also allowed writers to air their grievances. For instance, an article ran in 2010 in the state-run newspaper *Rūz al-Yūsuf* with the blunt headline "Hamdi Abu Golayyel: State publishing institutions hide their books in warehouses" (Ḥamdī Abū Julayyil: Mu'assasāt al-nashr al-rasmiyya tukhfī kutubhā fī al-makhāzin). It recounts that Abu Golayyel was asked at the launch for his new short-story collection *Ṭayy al-khiyām* (The Folding of the Tents, 2010),

[179] The charges of "sabotage" and inciting violence against the Egyptian army brought against Hashem were based on the testimony of witnesses who had observed Hashem handing out food, helmets, and blankets to protestors (Qualey "U.S., International Publishers").

recently released with Merit, why the collection contained stories that he had published previously in book form.[180] In response, Abu Golayyel accused state publishers of a willful lack of distribution that was akin to censorship for its effectiveness in keeping books from readers (Mayy Abū Zayd). He replied, "No one even saw my two previous collections. It's as though the people responsible for publishing them effectively confiscated them by not distributing them" (quoted in Mayy Abū Zayd). The two books to which Abu Golayyel refers were *Asrāb al-namal* (Swarms of Bees), which came out with the GOCP in 1997, and *Ashyā' maṭwiyya bi-'ināya fā'iqa* (Things Folded with the Utmost Care), published three years later with the GEBO.

While this example refers to complaints about two government-run houses, tensions and grievances between authors and their publishers Sharqiyyat and Merit certainly also existed. At this time in Egypt and the Arab world at large, discussions about the various crises facing books and literature took place regularly.[181] Various cultural actors weighed in on the debates and assigned blame to cripplingly ineffective distribution networks, the lack of interest on the part of the reader, or the flood of poor-quality literary books, in terms of material and content. This last charge placed responsibility for the crisis on the shoulders of publishers, who were accused of lacking discernment and blindly publishing copies of any inoffensive manuscript that crossed their desks, and authors, who were blamed for writing to subpar standards and, in some cases, for ignorance of the craft and a lack of mastery of necessary linguistic skills. The most common

[180] It was fairly common for authors to republish short stories that appeared originally in literary journals as part of a collection or to insert them into novels they later composed; however, the issue raised here was Abu Golayyel's reprinting stories that had been published previously in other books.

[181] This debate continued after the 2011 Arab uprisings, as well. For instance, in a pair of articles published in *Asharq al-Awsaṭ* in 2013, Hashem squared off with Rana Idriss, Director of Dar al-Adab in Beirut. Hashem claimed that publishing was not to blame for a lack quality literature; rather, he attributed the responsibility to the readers, claiming, "We are facing a reading crisis." He continued, "We are simply a society that does not like reading" ("Debate"). On the other side, Idriss argued that the problem lay in the making of books and that Arab publishers undoubtedly were facing what she called "an acute crisis" (Idriss).

complaint of authors of the new generation against their publishers was a lack of transparency with regard to sales of their books. Some authors complained that publishers purposefully withheld sales information so they could keep more of the profits for themselves. Others believed that publishers, both private and public, exaggerated the costs of the materials and production of their books in order to drive up prices, which resulted in lower sales (Ramaḍān). Specific complaints against Sharqiyyat and Merit were quieter, more often shared among friends in conversation than posted on the pages of journals, perhaps out of respect for the two houses that were recognized for their contributions to Egyptian literature, or perhaps out of a fear of offending a potential future publisher that was championed by one's colleagues, friends, and readers. Moreover, in a climate that was often uncomfortable for, if not hostile toward, this group of largely young, leftist-leaning, avant-garde writers, outward solidarity typically was advised among similarly inclined cultural actors, including publishers.

Conclusion

The questions raised at the beginning of this chapter regarding the specific impact of Sharqiyyat and Merit on the nineties generation invite further consideration of more general questions about how we might study the relationship between publishing houses and literary groups, including their composite authors and texts. Too often, models that consider the author and the publisher "maintain the assumption of a division of labour between [the two]," as Frank de Glas characterizes Bourdieu's approach (386), which rests on the notion that the field of cultural production is driven by competition and tension, as various positions in the literary field vie for legitimacy and the power to assert their judgment over other cultural producers and products. De Glas continues that for Bourdieu, "The author writes the work, [and] the publisher

brings it before the public," thereby reducing the role of the publisher to that of gatekeeper (386). As a result, the complex network of associations and interactions that exists not just between house and author but also among a host of cultural actors—like that which I have traced here—is lost. This chapter has shown how decisions made by authors, publishers, cover artists, and others involved in literary publishing houses in Egypt at this time, and specifically Sharqiyyat and Merit, affected the development of the nineties generation as a literary group, including its authors and books. While the effects of such actors on meaning in individual literary texts have been widely recognized and studied, I drew on book historical theory and a materialist approach to demonstrate how these actors affected the formation of an entire literary group. New modes of investigation are especially necessary when considering non-Western contexts like Egypt, where, as we have seen, the publishing house has had a strikingly different relationship the authors with whom it works and books it publishes. By broadening expectations of what falls under the purview of a publishing house and by "following the actors" to determine the various ways these institutions have engaged with local literary groups, it becomes possible to move away from the narrative of a house making an author—or, in this case, a generation of authors—and towards one in which both house and author take part in producing the other.

Chapter 5

The American University in Cairo Press and the Reception of Nineties Generation Women Writers

In the 1990s, for the first time in Egyptian literary history, women participated as foundational figures in an emerging literary group, as opposed to being viewed as exceptional to it or a small minority within it. Concurrent with the emergence of the "nineties generation," a fiercely contested debate arose on the Cairene literary scene over *kitābat al-banāt* or "girls' writing," a discourse that lumps together uncritically the literary works that were produced at that time by young women writers. This and other dismissive terms like "writing the body" (*kitābat al-jasad*) appeared in a flurry of articles, interviews, op-eds, conferences, and cultural salons, and they colored interpretations of women writers and their works generally. Though this literary critical debate was, for the most part, confined to Egypt, the discourse was influenced by and participated in transnational discussions about the consumption of postcolonial—specifically Arab—women writers. It is not a coincidence that this discourse developed during an age of increasing globalization of literature, which resulted in greater mobility for Egyptian authors and their texts as they entered a growing market for "world" literature[182] through the efforts of publishers like AUC Press.

[182] Throughout this chapter, I refer to notions of a "global" Anglophone market for literature and an underlying idea of "world" literature. Recent dominant models of "world literature" include Damrosch, Casanova, and Moretti, and they assert, generally, that a text becomes a part of world literature as it leaves the original culture in which it was produced. For this reason, the roles played by cultural institutions involved in translation, publication, marketing, and circulation come to the fore in discussions of a text's transition to the field of world literature. Scholars such as

This chapter situates the Cairo-based nineties generation of writers within a global network of literary production and reception and examines how increasing access to new markets and readerships—whether potential or realized—affected local reception of nineties generation women authors. First, I establish how and why AUC Press, more than any other single publisher, was able to successfully introduce the emerging literary generation's texts and authors to a global Anglophone market for modern Arabic literature that grew significantly over the 1990s and early 2000s. I consider AUC Press not as a neutral literary intermediary, but as a dynamic, hybrid cultural institution that influenced the texts and authors it published in translation as it negotiated between "local" and "global" spaces. Next, I examine some of the implications of this increased transnational mobility—access to which was perceived in Egyptian literary circles as being biased in favor of women—by examining the politics of Western reception of Arab women's literature at that time and concurrent debates among Arab writers over the impact of translation on Arabic fiction. I argue that the young women writers' growing access to the global Anglophone marketplace and readership were critical components of the hotly contested debate over "girls' writing," a discourse that promoted specific paradigms for reading young Egyptian women's literature similar to those that governed how Arab women writers were read in the West. Finally, I turn to the foundational nineties generation writer Miral al-Tahawy and her debut novel *al-Khibā'* (1996; *The Tent*, 1998) and establish how they were presented both within debates in Egyptian literary circles over "girls' writing" and in a transnational Anglophone

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Laachir et al., Apter, and Beecroft have critiqued and challenged these models, which presume the primacy of the English language, the genre of the novel, and global circulation and overemphasize a separation between "national" and "world" literary fields. This chapter participates in these discussions by acknowledging the influence of the notion of a field of world literature as one that exists in English and circulates "globally," insofar as English has become a hegemonic language, while challenging the notion of seemingly disparate national/local and world/global literary fields. By exposing and analyzing the ways in which the two intersect and affect each other, we move away from an overly simplified model of the (Arab) periphery producing raw material to be consumed and analyzed by the (Western) center and toward one that allows for fluid movement and boundaries between the two.

market via AUC Press. Close readings of *The Tent* show how, by exposing intersections between the supposedly distinct local and global reception contexts between which AUC Press mediated, it becomes possible to locate new modes of gendered and subaltern resistance within the literature of nineties generation women writers.

AUC Press: Between the "Local" and the "Global" Market

More than any other single publishing house, AUC Press was responsible for moving nineties generation authors and texts from a small Egyptian market, where most got their start, to a growing, transnational, Anglophone one. As discussed in detail in chapter three, Egypt's book market faced severe limitations during this time. In the 1990s, there was no developed, commercial market for literature, a situation that remains true today. National adult literacy rates were at just 55.6% in 1996 (UNESCO), and Egyptian literary bestsellers typically achieved only a few print runs of roughly 3,000 copies each. Distribution was (and remains) one of the biggest challenges facing Egyptian publishers and booksellers, such that 90% of books were available only within a five-kilometer radius of the original publishing house or with the author, according to a 2005 Kotobarabia study (Habeeb 3). Therefore, despite the success that nineties generation authors found at home via the small, independent literary presses Sharqiyyat and Merit, their books rarely circulated outside of literary circles in Cairo.

All of the limitations of the Egyptian book market meant that, for the most part, in order to reach an audience outside of Egypt, a book of literature needed to: (1) be picked up by an international publishing house, (2) win a prestigious regional literary prize, or (3) be translated into another language. AUC Press provided all three opportunities. Additionally, the Press was headquartered in downtown Cairo, just a few blocks from Sharqiyyat and Merit, and therefore

also within the small area in which most literary books by nineties generation—and other Egyptian—authors were circulating and in the midst of the Cairene cultural scene. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, AUC Press became the nearly exclusive publisher of nineties generation authors and those similarly affiliated with Egypt's "new writing" (*al-kitāba al-jadīda*) in English in the 1990s and up through the year of the Egyptian Revolution, publishing novels by Miral al-Tahawy, Ahmed Alaidy, Hamdi Abu Golayyel, Hamdy el-Gazzar, Mansoura Ez Eldin, Amina Zaydan, Mai Khaled, and Mona Prince. In total, AUC Press published fourteen of the fifteen novels by this group of emerging Egyptian authors that were translated into English between 1998, with the publication of al-Tahawy's *The Tent*, and 2011, the year of the Egyptian revolution and when this study concludes (see Appendix B).[183]

However, publishing with AUC Press was not a simple move from a "local" to "global" market by a disinterested literary intermediary. Since its founding in 1960, AUC Press has been in a unique position geographically and ideologically as an English-language, American university press located in the middle of the Middle East. As such, it has been enmeshed in the politics and disputes of both the local Cairene literary scene and the transnational market for globalized literature, including a submarket for postcolonial literature in English that was well established by the 1990s,[184] and therefore was well positioned to mediate between the two. In addition, the Press's positionality and cultural hybridity challenge the notion of a strict duality between local and global. In her analysis of a similarly situated cultural institution that facilitates the transition of works of Arabic fiction into English, the International Prize for Arabic Fiction

[183] The one novel by this group of writers translated into English during this period that did *not* come out with AUC Press was May Telmissany's *Dunyāzād*, that came out with Saqi Books in 2000.

[184] In recent years, works of scholarship such as Huggan and Brouillette *Postcolonial Writers* have begun to analyze the roles that cultural institutions like publishers and prizes have played in developing the "global" Anglophone market for postcolonial literature, with implications for both readers and writers of postcolonial fiction.

(IPAF, est. 2008), Anne-Marie McManus likewise cautions against this overly simplified model. She writes, "A stark either/or between national and world literary frames…cannot apprehend the ways in which a movement between them is institutionalized in bodies such as the IPAF" (219).[185] By instead considering AUC Press as a site where "local" and "global" spaces come together and, at times, merge and as an active mediator in this process, new understandings emerge of the relationship and interconnectedness between these purportedly distinct markets and their readerships.

From relatively early on, AUC Press has based a significant part of its identity on its dedication to publishing modern Arabic literature in English translation, even though literary works have never accounted for the majority of the Press's catalog.[186] The Press originally was founded to provide "the University staff and other scholars…with an instrument by which reports on research and other creative work in the various fields of knowledge may be disseminated," according to its charter (quoted in Rodenbeck, viii).[187] It made its first forays into publishing Arabic fiction in translation in 1978. In 1985, under the leadership of Mark Linz (Director, 1984-1986, 1995-2011), the Press was reorganized to become, in Linz's words, "a professional, productive, and profitable… leading university press," a move that included "mak[ing] Arabic literature in translation a major focus" (Linz, Personal interview). Egyptian

[185] In her assessment of the IPAF, McManus refers specifically to the parallels between it and AUC Press's NMML, including their hybrid nature as Arab literary prizes administered and overseen by local cultural institutions in partnership with foreign ones and both prizes' claim to be able "to consecrate the best Arabic novel from anywhere in the world" (223).

[186] In 2010, AUC Press's catalog included the following series: Arabic Literature in Translation; Archaeology and Ancient Egypt; Architecture and the Arts; History and Biography; Language Studies; Politics, Economics, and Social Issues; Religious Studies; and Travel Literature and Guidebooks (The American University in Cairo Press).

[187] The American University in Cairo itself is a private, English-language institution that was founded in 1919 as a preparatory school and university.

literature and culture have always been at the forefront, and between 1978 and 2010, 100 of the 141 titles of modern Arabic literature published in translation by the Press were by Egyptian authors.[188] Despite the common but unsubstantiated critique that young women were more readily translated than men—a claim I explore later—of these one hundred works, just twelve were by women. The house's restructuring also included a concerted effort to locate and develop literary translators (Linz, Personal interview) and the opening of its first bookstore, housed at AUC's main campus in downtown Cairo in Tahrir Square.

The changes in AUC Press's policy and development of the literary section of their catalog not only reshaped the Press's identity at home, but also had major effects on the growing canon of Arabic literature available in English in the latter part of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. At the time of the Press's restructuring in the 1980s, there was a dearth of Arabic literature available in English, and it was difficult and even potentially risky to publish Arabic literature in translation. In one famous example, Edward Said tried to interest a commercial, New-York-based publisher who was "known for his liberal and unprovincial views" in translating a couple of novels by Naguib Mahfouz in 1980, eight years prior to his winning the Nobel Prize for Literature (278). The house, however, declined, and when Said inquired as to rationale behind the decision not to translate Mahfouz, he was told "The problem…is that Arabic is a controversial language." Said continued, reflecting on this response, "[O]f all the major world literatures, Arabic remains relatively unknown and unread in the West, for reasons that are unique, even remarkable, at a time when tastes here for the non-European are more developed than ever before and, even more compelling, contemporary Arabic literature is at a particularly

[188] All publication dates and statistics about AUC Press refer to *The American University in Cairo Press: A Complete Bibliography 1960-2010*.

interesting juncture" (278). Given the increasingly globalized nature of literature and the "particularly interesting juncture" of Arabic literature at this time, the efforts of AUC Press to bring more modern Arabic literature into English were all the more significant. Indeed, though AUC Press did not begin to publish modern Arabic fiction in translation until 1978, according to Salih Altoma's bibliography of modern Arabic literature in English translation between 1947 and 2003, the Press produced 21% of all modern Arabic literature published in English translation worldwide during that period.[189]

Outside of the sheer number of texts and authors the AUC Press introduced into English in the latter quarter of the twentieth century,[190] the Press's biggest impact on Arabic literature in the global Anglophone marketplace came through its relationship with Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz. Mahfouz's winning of the Prize in 1988 both increased the visibility and presence of Arabic literature in the field of "world" literature and confirmed AUC Press as a serious publisher of this body of literature in the growing marketplace. That AUC Press was instrumental in Mahfouz's winning of the Nobel Prize has been widely acknowledged. The Press began its longstanding relationship with Mahfouz in 1972,[191] and by 1988, eight more of his works were available in English through AUC Press: *The Thief and the Dogs* (1984), *Wedding*

[189] In his bibliography, Altoma divides translation efforts into three phases. The first phase, 1947-1967, Altoma describes as a period of "little interest" on behalf of Western readers in Arabic fiction. The second phase, 1968-1987, reflects a growing, though largely academic, interest and marks "a more active and continuous effort to translate modern Arabic literature in general, and modern Arabic fiction in particular" (55), efforts which were bolstered by an increasing number of studies on Arabic fiction. The third phase, 1988 onward, begins with Mahfouz's winning of the Nobel Prize and marks a period of many new initiatives by foreign publishers to translate Arabic literature.

[190] While interest in Arabic literature was growing, the market in general for literature in English translation was and remains very small. AUC Press Director Mark Linz, speaking at the 2002 Cairo International Book Fair, estimated that fewer than 1% of literary translations were from Arabic each year (in Mehrez, 55).

[191] According to Linz, it took three translators six years to produce the first of these texts, Mahfouz's novel *Mīrāmār* (1967; *Miramar*), which was first published in 1978 (Linz, Personal interview).

Song (1984), *Autumn Quail* (1985), *Midaq Alley* (1985), *The Beginning and the End* (1985), *The Beggar* (1986), *Respected Sir* (1987), and *The Search* (1987). Mahfouz himself said, in reference to AUC Press's early translations of his works at a time when very few others existed, "I believe that these translations were among the foremost reasons for my being awarded the Nobel Prize" (quoted in Walz). Former Director of AUC Press John Rodenbeck (Director, 1974-1983) likewise attributed Mahfouz's international success and the Nobel to "a sixteen-year campaign by the Press to get the genius of Egypt's great novelist acknowledged in the West" (Rodenbeck ix).

Building on Mahfouz's success, the Press began to expand its operations and diversify its catalog. Immediately upon Mahfouz's being awarded the Nobel, the Press began a partnership with Doubleday (est. 1897), at the time one of the largest American publishing companies, which began to reprint the translations of Mahfouz already published by AUC Press. Mahfouz's success also meant the Press could take more risks in its catalog, publishing lesser known authors and more experimental works in an effort to "to build up a canon of modern, essentially twentieth-century, writers in the Arab world" (Linz, Personal interview). The Press also worked with more writers from outside of Egypt, though Egyptian writers remained its focus, and by 2010 the house had published translations of several novels and collections of fiction by authors from Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine, Algeria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Libya. By the early 2000s, the AUC Press had offices in London and New York and worked with distributors around the world, including throughout the Middle East and in Singapore, southeast Asia, and Australia. This meant that up-and-coming authors like Egypt's nineties generation who had yet to form their own public reputations and connections, particularly internationally, benefited from the Press's pre-established networks and resources, including a growing number

of translators the Press had cultivated since the mid-1980s. Moreover, the Press's reach extended beyond English translations, as it took on the role of agent for all foreign translation rights for several major clients, including Mahfouz.[192] By 2010, AUC Press managed nearly 600 foreign language editions of Mahfouz's more than 40 titles in over 40 languages (Linz, Personal interview).

As the Press's international reputation as a major publisher of Arabic literature in translation grew—as did its ability to shape transnational reception and perception of what constituted "Arabic literature"—so, too, did Egyptian and Arab intellectuals' skepticism of the Press and its motivations. Nowhere were AUC Press's competing priorities and contentious local reception more visible than in the debates surrounding its annual literary prize: the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature (NMML).[193] Established in 1996, the prize consists of a silver medal and $1,000 cash prize and is awarded annually to an untranslated, contemporary Arabic novel from any country. The winning novel is translated into English and published with the AUC Press. In his seminal work on the literary prize and the various, complex types of transactions it facilitates, James English notes that "to most observers, cultural prizes represent an external imposition on the world of art rather than an expression of its own energies" (2). He continues in this vein, arguing that prizes often are conceived of "not [as] a celebration but [as] a contamination of the most precious aspects of art" (3). These deep-seated beliefs have a

[192] In his memoir, Johnson-Davies writes of the shock he felt when he learned that Mahfouz entrusted the AUC Press with the translation rights of his works in any language and without advance payment. He recalls that Mahfouz, in response to Johnson-Davies' expressed dismay, asked him, "And how many of my books have you published?... At least this way I get some of my work translated and published in English and other languages" (36). Johnson-Davies continues, "To this I had no answer, and his wisdom in concluding the foreign rights agreement was shown when, unexpectedly, he was awarded the Nobel prize—due in the main to nine of his novels having appeared in translation through the AUC Press" (36).

[193] See Appendix C for a complete list of winners from the Prize's founding to 2010.

significant impact on how literary prizes and their recipients frequently are interpreted, especially by the cultural elite. Speaking to prizes specifically in the context of increasing globalization and the rise of "world" cultural categories, English argues that "to honor and recognize local cultural achievement from a declaredly global point of vantage is inevitably to impose external interference on local systems of cultural value" (298).

In the case of the NMML, the wariness and disdain toward prizes to which English points was, indeed, exacerbated by the hybrid nature of the AUC Press. As an American institution, the Press has financial and ideological ties to the American academy and was perceived by several of Egypt's cultural actors as an outsider imposing itself and its (foreign) values on Egyptian literature. For example, celebrated author and outspoken leftist Sonallah Ibrahim quietly refused the inaugural NMML because of its affiliation with AUC. Drawing attention to the early history of the award, Egyptian literary scholar Samia Mehrez, who served on the committee for several years and as the Prize Chair from 2003 through 2011, writes, "Even though Ibrahim's discreet refusal represented his personal position towards the American University, it was used by those opposed to the award to represent its 'anti-national' nature, thereby stigmatizing the annual recipients" (*Culture Wars* 46). Alongside objections to the Press as an American institution operating within Egypt, because the Press published exclusively in English and its distribution was concentrated in the U.S. and Europe, it was perceived as publishing books that perpetuated Orientalist stereotypes about Arab culture and society and Islam, a point to which I return later. Commenting on local reception of the Medal, Mehrez notes the intensity of the debates that surrounded the award, writing that "[a]nnouncing the name of the winner ha[d] systematically become a declaration of war within both the Egyptian and Arab cultural fields" (44). Younger and first-time writers, such as the three nineties generation authors who won awards between the

Prize's founding and 2010, were particularly susceptible to scrutiny and criticism in local literary journals.[194]

With regard to its influence on the canon of modern Arabic literature available in English, as we have seen, AUC Press was explicit about its ambitions in this regard, and this carried over to its literary prize, as well. Indeed, Mehrez argues that the most contested part of AUC's prize was "the declared role that the AUC Press ha[d] assigned itself in presenting the *best* Arabic literature worldwide, a role that is perceived as a potential 'deformation' of the representation of the modern Arab literary field at large" (*Culture Wars* 44, emphasis in the original).[195] Mehrez further contends, "It is precisely because the Naguib Mahfouz Award guarantees translation into English that it has become the target of the [Cairene literati's] attention and contempt" (54). In other words, the NMML was (and remains) so fiercely contested because it both claimed the right to declare which novels represented the pinnacle of contemporary Arabic literary achievement, and then presented the winning novels in English as such. In this way, the Press sought to shape both literary taste in the region and the growing canon of modern Arabic literature in English. AUC Press's literary prize also marked the

[194] The three "nineties generation" writers to win the prize for their subsequently translated novels were: Hamdi Abu Golayyel (2008: *A Dog With No Tail*), Amina Zaydan (2007: *Red Wine*), and Miral al-Tahawy (2010: *Brooklyn Heights*). Al-Tahawy received more praise than criticism in the local press upon receiving the NMML in 2010, but it should be noted that by this time, she had published three other novels, a collection of short stories, a book of literary criticism, and was already recognized as an established author inside and outside of Egypt. The awarding of the prize in 2001 to respected literary critic and scholar Somaya Ramadan for her debut novel *Awrāq al-narjis* (2001; *Leaves of Narcissus*, 2002), on the other hand, provoked much controversy in the local literary scene. See Mehrez's discussion of the reaction of several prominent Cairene literati to Ramadan's winning of the prize (*Culture Wars* 50-52), as her novel was lambasted in *Akhbār al-Adab* as a "national disaster" and the "death certificate of [Mahfouz's] prize!" (quoted in Mehrez, 50).

[195] See Mehrez *Culture Wars* chapter two for a complete discussion of her Bourdieuan analysis of this award and its reception of the local literary scene. While Mehrez's analysis takes into account issues of gender of the recipients of the prize, it is also significant to note that the committee that awards this often-controversial prize has always been chaired by women, each of whom was also an Arab scholar and professor at AUC: Ferial Ghazoul (1996-2002), Samia Mehrez (2003-2011), and Tahia Abdel Nasser (2003-present).

beginning of a proliferation of literary prizes in Egypt and several pan-Arab awards, which provoked further debates over the decline of Arabic literature due to a growing award culture that prioritized mass-market appeal over literary merit.[196]

Comments from major figures in the European and U.S. literary translation and book markets demonstrate AUC Press's effectiveness in influencing which authors and texts have become representative of "Arabic literature" in the global Anglophone marketplace. For instance, speaking in his capacity as one of the organizers of the 2004 Frankfurt Book Fair, when the "Arab World" was the guest of honor,[197] Peter Ripken called AUC Press "an exceptional enterprise," justifying his view by noting the Press's dedication to not just publish, but also promote, Arab writers. As a result, Ripken continued, AUC Press was regarded even more highly in Europe than other U.S. university presses that put out translations of Arabic literature in English (Bryson). American writer and translator Esther Allen, who worked with PEN America on the PEN/Heim Translation Fund from its founding in 2003 to 2010, notes that when she co-founded PEN World Voices Festival in 2005, the planning committee used AUC Press's catalog as a directory of potential writers to include (Bryson). As top representatives of the world's largest trade fair for books that is located in the middle of Europe and of an international organization that, in its own words, "stands at the intersection of literature and human rights to

[196] Some noteworthy Egyptian and Arab literary prizes established after AUC Press's NMML include: the Sawiris Cultural Award (Egypt, est. 2005), the Sheikh Zayed Book Award (pan-Arab/ UAE, est. 2007), the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (pan-Arab/ UAE, est. 2008), and the Katara Prize for the Arabic Novel (pan-Arab/ Qatar, est. 2015).

[197] The annual Frankfurter Buchmesse is the world's largest trade fair for books in terms of number of publishers and visitors. The Fair is held annually in mid-October in Frankfurt, Germany, and lasts for five days. Having "the Arab world" as the (singular) guest of honor at the fair provoked much debate and criticism among Arab authors and intellectuals, even as roughly 200 authors made plans to attend the fair from the countries in the region. The director of the fair's Arab program, Mohamed Ghoneim, summed up his team's approach as "You don't have much of a chance but make the best of it" (quoted in Rayyan).

protect free expression in the United States and worldwide" ("About Us," PEN America), Ripken and Allen's comments not only spoke to how they personally used AUC Press's catalog of Arabic literature, but also invited others in their fields of publishing and translation to do the same.

We see a continuation of this trend in 2008 when the British publishing houses Arcadia Books and Haus Publishing announced their new imprint, Arabia Books, which initially was primarily comprised of books from AUC Press. The imprint was launched at the 2008 London Book Fair, which featured as its guest of honor that year "the Arab world." AUC Press also established contracts with Oxford University Press (2011) and I.B. Tauris (2013) to distribute their books in North America and the rest of the world, respectively, thereby further solidifying and expanding the Press's reach across the globe and its influence over the canon of modern Arabic literature in English.

Transnational Reception and the Politics of Being Published in Translation

As Egyptian and other Arab texts and authors crossed linguistic and national borders via AUC Press, they not only entered a new market, but also a new reception context.[198] This context effectively shaped the way such authors and their literature were read, since, as Amal Amireh notes in her reception study of Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi (b. 1930), "meaning [is] not an attribute immanent in texts but, rather, a product of the larger discursive contexts in which

[198] In her discussion of the IPAF, which likewise translates Arabic novels into a new language and geographies, McManus similarly locates two "literary frames" between which the IPAF "produces a contingent intersection": the national and the world, though she cautions against treating the two as a strict binary (219). While McManus examines how a reading from within each of these two frames produces alternate meanings in the Arabic novels she examines, the present discussion focuses on the similarities and intersections between the two "frames" or reception contexts between which AUC Press mediated in the 1990s and early 2000s.

they are read" (216). Since Arab women literary authors began to enter English-language markets in the 1980s,[199] they and their texts have predominantly been framed and interpreted in the U.S. according to negative, Orientalist stereotypes. Particularly prevalent have been notions of exoticism, oppression, and misogyny, as well as Islamophobia that grew considerably following September 11. Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj, in the introduction to their groundbreaking edited volume of reader reception studies titled *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers* (2000), assert that "Third World" women's literary texts "have been viewed primarily as sociological treatises granting Western readers a glimpse into the 'oppression' of Third World women" (8). Moreover, they note, "Not only were Third World women construed as representatives of their culture, they were often viewed as if they *were* their cultures" (9). Amireh and Majaj touch on two central problems of how Arab—and other postcolonial—women authors typically were read: 1) readers often conflated the author and her text, and 2) Arab women were presumed to be "oppressed" in some way. Often this oppression was attributed in some way to Islam since, as Mohja Kahf has argued, the reception context in the U.S. in the twentieth century was heir to a colonial discourse that posited Islam as inherently oppressive to women (149-150). This approach to Arab women's literary texts meant that, by and large, they typically were not read and evaluated as literature, but rather were approached as native, "authentic" accounts of an oppressed, exotic Other.

[199] See Altoma for a list of Arab women writers in English translation (97). While he dates the first representations of Arab women writers in anthologies dating back to the 1960s, Altoma notes that the second part of his periodization, 1968-1988, marks the beginning of an increased effort to translate Arab women writers (56-57). In addition to an increase in literary production by women in the Arabic literary tradition in the latter half of the twentieth century, Altoma also points to the reception context as a contributing factor to the rise in translations by women during this time. He writes, "[T]he global orientation of feminism in the West has brought into focus the cause of feminism in developing countries and women's perspectives about major political and social issues in their respective countries" (56). Here we see again the tendency to read women's literature as sociology and, moreover, one that exposes the ills of the women's societies.

In her reader reception study of the memoirs of early twentieth-century Egyptian feminist and nationalist Huda Shaarawi, Kahf presents a convincing threefold typology of the Arab woman as perceived in Western contexts: "One is that she is a victim of gender oppression; the second portrays her as an escapee of her intrinsically oppressive culture; and the third represents her as the pawn of Arab male power" (149). In her assessment, nearly all Arab women writers (literary and non-literary) have been interpreted as fitting one of these stereotypes. Following her typology, arguably the most notorious example of an Egyptian woman writer who figures as an escapee of an oppressive, patriarchal Arab society is feminist activist, writer, and psychiatrist Nawal El Saadawi (b. 1931). In sum, she typically was (and is) presented in the West as an example of a strong feminist writer who suffered and was persecuted at home for her radical, liberal ideas. Discussions of El Saadawi frequently refer to her childhood experience of female genital surgeries (FGS),[200] her brief imprisonment under Anwar Sadat in 1981,[201] and the threat made to her life by Islamists in 1988, which caused her to flee to the U.S., where she held prestigious positions at several universities before eventually returning to Egypt.

Already in the 1990s, El Saadawi was one of the most widely translated Arab authors, male or female, and had significantly more English translations of her works than any other Arab woman writer. The first English translation of one of her books, published as *The Hidden Face of*

[200] Many feminist scholars working on FGS have proposed this term in lieu of the sensationalistic and Eurocentric "female genital mutilation," which is still in common use today and suggests that the practice is always performed elsewhere and uniformly. In short, this body of scholarship seeks to correct the dominant discourse on FGS that ignores the role played by Western colonization in reviving this practice and ascribes blame to "barbaric" and "backward" local customs, thereby vilifying these cultures. See, for instance, Abusharaf, Gunning, James, and Walley. Also see Wade for an analysis of academic debates over this topic since the 1980s, in which she argues that prior to the mid-1990s, scholars typically portrayed FGS (she uses the term "female genital cutting" (FGC)) as a sign of inferiority, while after this period the practice was largely approached as "imperial." Wade, meanwhile, argues that both are reductive and "eras[e] African opposition to FGC and Western feminist acknowledgment of transnational power asymmetry" (26).

[201] El Saadawi was one of more than 1,500 intellectuals, activists, Copts, and those suspected of Islamist ties, arrested by Sadat in September 1981, the month prior to his assassination.

Eve: Women in the Arab World,[202] appeared in 1980, eight years before Mahfouz won the Nobel, and fourteen of her books were available in English by 2000. El Saadawi was also an incredibly influential thinker and writer in the latter half of the twentieth century in Egypt and the region; however, the general view among Arab intellectuals was that her fame in the West was due "more to her radical and outspoken portrayal of women's conditions in Egypt and Arab societies than to the intrinsic literary value of her works" (Altoma 56). In her thoughtful, nuanced study of the reception of El Saadawi by academic and non-academic audiences in the West and Arab countries, Amireh highlights the ways in which El Saadawi "has been inscribed [by the U.S. academy] as both a celebrity and a representative Arab writer" (217). Amireh shows how El Saadawi's reception abroad influenced her reception at home, where she was often perceived as purposefully perpetuating stereotypes that appealed to Western audiences for her own personal gain.[203] For instance, renowned Egyptian author and literary critic Gamal al-Ghitani wrote in 1994 in his influential, weekly cultural newspaper *Akhbār al-Adab* (Literary News), "[El Saadawi] is living in America because she wants a Nobel Prize. She is writing for the West, she cannot feel the true problems of women" (quoted in Amireh, 238).

Though she is of an older generation and differs ideologically from most of the young women writing in the 1990s due to her open embrace of feminism, El Saadawi's international reception is of particular relevance to the present discussion for two reasons: first, because many

[202] The original Arabic title was *Al-Wajh al-'ārī li-l-mar'āah al-'arabiyyah* (literally: the naked face of the Arab woman). See Amireh for a detailed discussion of the reception of this particular novel in the Western context (219-229) and in the Arab context (229-232) and the ways in which the text changed as it moved from Arabic to English and was then reinterpreted by Arab audiences.

[203] Throughout her study, Amireh complicates overly simplified readings of El Saadawi that either reify or demonize this controversial figure to provide a richer, more complex reading of El Saadawi's reception. Her work, like Kahf's, contributes to a growing body of scholarship that challenges the trenchant stereotypes that have overshadowed how Arab women writers and their works frequently have been discussed.

Arab critics and readers attributed her popularity to an affirmation of Western stereotypes about Arab societies rather than literary merit; and second, because these accusations and debates about El Saadawi, though they began earlier, continued to be a prominent, hot-button topic among Egyptian writers and other intellectuals as the "girls' writing" discourse was developing. This meant that discussions of El Saadawi's transnational reception appeared on the pages of the same journals like *Akhbār al-Adab* which were publishing articles that sought to shape the conversation about the new generation of young women writers. El Saadawi also was embroiled in heated international debates and the general condemnation of FGS that arose in the 1970s and intensified during the United Nations' "Decade for Women" (1975-1985).[204] As Amireh demonstrates, El Saadawi was credited by U.S. media with introducing the issue to an international (Western) community. At first, she rejected their sensationalizing of the practice which, she cautioned, obfuscated real social and economic problems (220-1); however, El Saadawi later changed her view and referred to FGS as "barbaric" in her introduction to the U.S. edition of her book *The Hidden Face of Eve* (224). Particularly prior to "the postcolonial turn in the mid-1990s" when the discourse on FGS began to change (Wade 32), the practice was often invoked by activists and scholars as evidence of "the tyranny of patriarchy and the oppressive nature of gender relations in African [and other implicated] cultures" (Abusharaf 113). Thus, references made by El Saadawi and other Arab and African women to FGS—in non-fiction or fiction writing and in other forums— typically were immediately seized upon and heavily scrutinized, as Amireh shows in her analysis of El Saadawi's reception.

[204] In 1976, the term "female genital mutilation" (FGM) was coined by Fran Hosken, who "mobilized a generation of Western feminists for whom FGCs [female genital cuttings] symbolized the extreme nature of gendered oppression in 'Africa'" (Wade 27).

While thus far I have focused on the reception of Arab women authors and their literature among Western readers, it is important to note the ways in which publishing houses as institutions broadly speaking have shaped this reception context. In the context of publishing Arabic literature in translation, one of, if not the, most consistent accusations is that publishers select texts that uphold the Orientalist stereotypes discussed above. For instance, Ula Al-Dabbagh notes that the institutions that undertake translating Arabic fiction into English are often branded by intellectuals and academics as "repressive agents that advocate orientalist views since the fiction they select for translation reinstates the stereotypical images of the Arabs, and hence fulfills the Anglo-Saxon readers' expectations and the [institutions'] financial aspirations" (792). In his blunt assessment of contemporary Arabic literature that has been translated into English, Sherif Ismail accuses the development of "world literature" of "encouraging aesthetic impoverishment" (919) and contends that "texts that reiterate stereotypes and use the minimum of literary innovation are those that can be well marketed and circulated and hence can have access to the canons of world literature" (918). In other words, publishers select literary texts that uphold both stereotypical ideas about the Arab world and conventional aesthetics of Western literature, thereby further marginalizing local literary traditions and innovation in the global market.

Such views were expressed regularly about AUC Press specifically, as well. For example, during a press conference for the 2006 NMML, which was awarded that year to Sahar Khalifeh, nineties generation writer and journalist Ibrahim Farghali voiced his criticism of the Press's annual literary prize and questioned the judges' commitment to literary merit and style. Mehrez, who was Prize Chair that year, recalls that Farghali "insisted that the panel of judges catered to 'western literary taste' that continued to seek the 'storytelling' aspect of Arab literary works

when more recent texts…have shown a tendency to be more 'philosophical' (*Culture Wars* 283n14). Despite his criticism of the Press, Farghali still signed his own contract with AUC Press and, as Mehrez points out, his novel was forthcoming with the Press at the time of his comments. AUC Press's policy to not accept any unsolicited proposals in the category of Arabic literature in translation directly from authors likewise has raised suspicions that the Press selects the works it publishes based not (solely) on literary merit, but its intended audience and their taste. The AUC Press policy was—and remains—that literary works must be selected by "a board of distinguished literary advisors" or be submitted for consideration by a translator ("For Authors").

As noted previously, publishers of Arabic literature also are frequently criticized for translating, editing, and marketing Arabic literary texts—particularly those by women—in ways that encourage readings that align with Orientalist tropes and exoticizing tendencies. Michelle Hartman, for example, has shown how the English translations and the marketing of contemporary Lebanese novelist Hanan al-Shaykh and seventh-century poet al-Khansa' present the two vastly different authors and their texts as, essentially, the same. This is due not to the two writers' actual congruences, but to a "sameness of representation" that shapes the perception of Arab women in the West, she argues (18). Translator and scholar of Arabic literature Marilyn Booth similarly highlights a "sameness of representation" that dominates the market in a recent article that details her experience and frustrations in working with Penguin on the translation of Rajaa Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* (2007; *Banāt al-Riyāḍ*, 2005) ("Muslim Woman"). She argues that both the author and the publishing house introduced changes to her translation that glossed over gender nuance and politics and, further, added paratexts and marketed the book in such a way that catered to Western stereotypes and played into what she has termed "Orientalist

ethnographism." She describes this as "a way of seeing and writing the Other that grounds authority in a written narrative of personal experience, 'capturing' a society through the I/eye" such that "not only the translated book but also the figure of the author circulates as a cosmopolitan commodity conversant in the global language of the literary marketplace" (151). The "Orientalist ethnographism" practiced by publishing houses and their affiliated cultural actors—such as translators, editors, marketing departments, etc.—is reflected in the actual reception of Arab women writers, as we have seen with Shaarawi and El Saadawi.

In addition to influencing the reception of the texts they publish through the acts of selection, translation, editing, and marketing, publishers like AUC Press that move Arabic literature into English also affect literary production itself. As Arabic literature began to make a place for itself in "world" literature, a heated debate over the extent to which certain authors were "writing for the West" or "writing for translation" developed among Arab intellectuals. For instance, in a 1998 article titled "The Perils of Occidentalism: How Arab Novelists are Driven to Write for Western Readers" published in *The Times Literary Supplement,* Jenine Abboushi Dallal, without mincing words, argued that Arab writers were detracting from their own literary tradition by writing with the goal of translation, implicating the publishers who were bringing contemporary Arabic fiction into English and other Western languages. Though she blamed the West for its parochial taste and preponderance of stereotypes that dictated what was selected for translation from specific languages and parts of the world, most of her ire was directed at Arab writers themselves who, she claims, conformed to these expectations. Dallal writes that "the politics by which such [Third World] literature is selected for translation and promoted indicates that the Western reader is staying put, and many Third World writers are the ones who are making the crossing." While some of her claims that specific novels were "written for

translation," such as Hanan al-Shaykh's *Misk al-ghazāl* (The Gazelle's Musk, 1988; translated as *Women of Sand and Myrrh*, 1989) and Salim Barakat's *Fuqahā' al-ẓalām* (Jurists of Darkness, 1985[205]), have been challenged and debunked,[206] the central point she raises was an important one and reflective of larger debates among Arab intellectuals at that time.

While AUC Press itself has avoided bigger scandals and more egregious marketing strategies[207]—such as featuring the heavily shrouded face or figure of a woman on the covers of books by Arab or other Muslim women regardless of the content of the book—it nonetheless has been criticized for catering to Western sensibilities and encouraging writing that perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes. For example, Mehrez notes that AUC Press's NMML frequently was accused generally by local cultural actors "of creating a generation who write with an eye on the west and on translation" (*Culture Wars* 44). Such criticisms of the Press reveal the direct link

[205] Barakat's novel has not (yet) been translated into English, though Marilyn Booth provides a translation of an excerpt of his acclaimed novel that was published in a Words Without Borders anthology titled *Literature from the "Axis of Evil": Writing from Iran, Iraq, North Korea, and Other Enemy Nations*, published in 2006.

[206] See Hartman (33-35) for a discussion of al-Shaykh's *Misk al-ghazāl* and its distorting translation *Women of Sand and Myrrh* and Hartman's response to Dallal's specific claims about the novel. Hartman concludes, "Abboushi Dallal is right that *Women of Sand and Myrrh* is written for a Western audience. This does not mean, however, that *Misk al-Ghazal* is" (34-35). In this way, she highlights the role played by the publishing house, Doubleday, and its affiliated cultural actors responsible for the translation, editing, and paratextual choices that transformed the novel into one for Western audiences. Salim Barakat himself entered the conversation with an article titled "Ilā man yuhimuhu al-amr wa-man la yuhimuhu" (To Whom It May or May Not Concern) that was a direct rebuttal to Dallal's claims. His article was published in the pan-Arab newspaper based in London two months after Dallal's article was published and therefore circulated similarly in international networks, though obviously his was directed at an Arabophone audience.

[207] This is certainly not to suggest that there has been no criticism of the Press and the books and translations it has produced. However, publications by AUC Press typically have not been the focus of scholars' and critics' discussion of Orientalist marketing strategies and translation and editing practices. There have been some notable criticisms of the translations produced, however, by the authors themselves. For example, Algerian novelist Ahlam Mosteghanemi has been vocal of her distaste for the quality of the translation of her 1993 novel *Dhākirat al-jasad* (1985; *Memory in the Flesh*, 2000), which won the NMML in 1998. In an interview from 2015, Mosteghanemi said that the Press was "in a hurry to publish" and therefore produced an inferior translation (Baaqeel 146). She subsequently found a different publisher, Bloomsbury, who commissioned Raphael Cohen to translate her novel, which appeared in 2013 as *The Bridges of Constantine*. While Mosteghanemi felt her literary style better represented in the new translation (147), unfortunately the British publishing house chose for the cover the too-familiar image of a close-up of a woman's face, covered except for the eyes, which gaze at the reader seductively.

Arab writers and other intellectuals perceived between it and new, local literary production. As we will see, writing with the goal of attracting a larger readership, in Arabic and particularly in translation, instead of practicing writing as a craft was a common critique of the nineties generation and "new writing" in Egypt during the 1990s and early 2000s, and a key element of the "girls' writing" discourse.

"A Season of Girls' Writing" in Egypt

At the same time as access for Egyptian and other Arab writers to a global Anglophone market and readership dramatically increased, particularly through the efforts of AUC Press, more and more Egyptian women were writing and publishing creative works in Egypt. This meant that, for the first time, young women were shaping the aesthetics of the emerging literary generation locally, and perceptions of Egyptian and Arabic literature globally. Moreover, due to the politics of the reception context into which their books were translated, these women served as cultural ambassadors through their literary expressions, which commonly were read as sociological works expected to confirm negative, Orientalist notions about Arab culture and Islam. It is this new visibility and responsibility of Arabic literature that circulated in a global, Anglophone network, I argue, that explains the intensity of the backlash against young Egyptian women writers in the 1990s and the widespread and persistent nature of the "girls' writing" discourse in Egyptian literary circles. In considering the major claims and underlying paradigms of this discourse, several key intersections and parallels emerge between the ways in which proponents of the "girls writing" discourse and readers in a Western, Anglophone reception context framed and interpreted young Egyptian women writers at that time.

The term "girls' writing" (*kitābat al-banāt*) was first used by respected Egyptian critic and novelist Edwar al-Kharrat in the mid-1990s as a way to categorize and refer *en masse* to the creative writings of the emerging literary generation's women writers, and it was picked up and spread rapidly in Egypt's cultural press. In sum, this discourse presumed that the disparate writings being produced in the 1990s and early 2000s by young women could be categorized as a distinct subset of literature, based on a number of traits that typically included an autobiographical subject and engagement with the female body as a central topic, and a lack of practiced literary style and nuanced language in favor of a more intuitive, undisciplined approach. Some of the most notable figures to employ the term were: Gamal al-Ghitani, novelist and editor-in-chief of the weekly, widely read cultural newspaper *Akhbār al-Adab* (Literary News, est. 1993); Ahmed Abdel Mu'ti Hijazi, acclaimed poet and editor-in-chief of the influential, monthly literary journal *Ibdā'* (Creativity, 1983); and scholar and author Shukri 'Ayyad, who wrote a three-piece series titled "Our Young Women Teach Us Love" (*Nisā'unā al-ṣaghīrāt yu'allimnanā al-ḥubb*) for the monthly cultural journal *al-Hilal* (The Crescent, 1982-2007) in 1999.[208]

That such esteemed figures, each of whom was at the helm of a major cultural publication, encouraged this discourse demonstrates the far-reaching impact of this debate and the power imbalance between those advocating for a discussion of "girls' writing" and those against such a designation, including the young women writers themselves. At the height of this discourse, it was nearly impossible for an Egyptian woman writer born in the 1960s or 1970s to avoid this label, regardless of the content of her literary works. Despite criticisms of the

[208] 'Ayyad's three-part series ran in *al-Hilāl* in three successive issues in 1999: July (pp. 34-40), August (pp. 16-22), and September (pp. 9-15).

discourse that circulated regularly in the press as well, the debate continued until well into the 2000s, as evidenced by the 2010 publication of the book *Mawsim kitābat al-banāt wa-būrtrayhāt ukhrā* (A Season of Girls' Writing and Other Portraits), a collection of interviews with several nineties generation women writers conducted by female journalist Birkasam Ramadan and originally published in *al-Akhbār* between 1993 and 1997.[209]

While Egyptian women writers have long faced criticism of their works, as Hoda Elsadda notes in her discussion of nineties generation writers, it is the scale and intensity of the attacks against this particular group of women writers that was distinct in Egyptian literary history (151). Proponents of this discourse claimed it was justified due to the unprecedented number of women publishing, and because their writings were distinct for their apolitical nature and focus on details of life and the self, including the body. Critics of this discourse were quick to point out that, by and large, these aesthetic traits were characteristic of the nineties generation as a whole. The implied difference, then, became one's motivations for writing and the talent and artistry with which one wrote these narratives. The young women frequently were presented *not* as emerging authors undertaking a serious creative endeavor, but as laypeople recording their personal emotions and experiences, which resulted in—it was often claimed—stylistically weak, attention-seeking texts. The girls' writing discourse, I contest, detracted from women's achievements by relegating them to the margins and presenting them as outside of or second to "real" Egyptian literary developments, specifically the "new writing" (*al-kitāba al-jadīda*) affiliated with the nineties generation that was successfully challenging established aesthetics and literary taste.

[209] Ramadan's book includes interviews conducted with Iman Mersal (October 18, 1995), Miral al-Tahawy (September 27, 1995), Suzanne 'Alyuwan (March 15, 1995), Bahija Husayn (May 17, 1995), 'Afaf al-Sayyid (December 8, 1993), Manal al-Qadi (May 1, 1996), May Telmissany (August 23, 1995), and 'Azza Badr (no date).

While debates over "girls' writing" predate the translation of nineties generation writers specifically, as women of this literary group began to gain access to new markets and readerships via translation beginning in the late 1990s, the common critiques of "writing for the West" and "writing for translation" followed. Egyptian women authors' success on the foreign market became a means to discredit them. A common and influential, though also unsubstantiated, critique was that young women were more readily translated than men, due to the cultural politics of Western publishers. Even prior to the translation of any book-length work by a nineties generation authors, women of this literary group already were subject to such accusations. In 1996, for instance, in an article titled "'Veto' 'alā kitābat al-banāt" (A Veto of Girls' Writing) that ran in *Akhbār al-Adab* and gathered the opinions of several writers and critics on the "girls' writing" debate, nineties generation author Ahmad Gharib both accused women of his generation of being more susceptible to the temptation of writing for translation, and voiced his belief that they were more readily translated. According to the article, "The only time [Gharib] felt any bitterness was when a female German translator told him that she couldn't translate his first book because they only did that with women," whereas men would have to wait until after their second books had been published in Arabic (8).

Women also often were accused of exploiting their sex and producing overly personal, sensationalistic texts with the aim of being translated into Western languages, thus opening the door to compete for foreign literary prizes. As an example, when asked his opinion on the nomination of the English translation of nineties generation writer May Telmissany's first novel *Dunyāzād* (1997; *Dunyazad,* 2000) for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in 2001, Edwar al-Kharrat warned against letting prizes and translation suggest literary worth. He wrote specifically of the temptation for emerging authors—and women in particular—to write with the goal of

being translated (Ez Eldin, "Dunyāzād" 5). In other words, rather than being a marker of success, translation, particularly in conjunction with literary prizes, became a potential indicator of inauthenticity and a lack of commitment to the literary craft.

Alongside justifications for this discourse, opposition to it also circulated regularly in the cultural press. There were three main criticisms. The first was that the terms "phenomenon" or "season" that were often used to describe the proliferation of works by women suggested that young women's literary production was a passing fad. Such terminology, celebrated Egyptian novelist Radwa Ashour cautioned, undermined the artistic contributions and skill found in the works of many women of the new generation. It created a purposefully broad category that encompassed all literary production by women at that time, regardless of quality (Abdel Hafez, "Veto" 9). The second major criticism was that the discourse implied that women played no role in Arabic and Egyptian literary history prior to this period. Separating the current generation from the long history of literature by women in the Egyptian and Arabic literary traditions detracted from both current and past contributions by Egyptian women authors. Finally, critics argued that the discourse encouraged considering young women authors in isolation, rather than looking for connections between them and other writers, as well as their participation in larger literary trends. Writers of both genders, especially of the younger generation, were vocal in their objection to "girls' writing" as one of many false categorizations they saw being imposed upon contemporary Egyptian literature by critics and journalists.[210]

[210] For example, in "'Veto' on Girls' Writing," authors Montasser al-Qaffash, Haytham el-Wardany, and Radwa Ashour all spoke to the problems of such categorizations, which were rampant in contemporary Egyptian literary criticism, and the need to forego such false distinctions and consider men's and women's writings based solely on their merit, not the gender of the author.

A prime example of the kinds of claims made about young women writers and how they played out in the local cultural scene can be found in the cultural magazine *Ibdā*''s special issue provocatively titled "*al-Banāt yaktubna ajsādhunna: 15 qiṣaṣ qaṣīra*" (Girls Write Their Bodies: 15 Short Stories)." The issue featured a cover with an image of pink flowers and white lace and created a stir when it hit the newsstands in July 1996. Hijazi, the editor-in-chief and a renowned poet and respected literary critic, wrote an introduction to the issue with an equally suggestive title, "al-Jasad yaktub nafsuhu!" (The Body Writes Itself) (4-7). In it, he explicitly affirmed a division between male reason and the mind, and the one hand, and female intuition and the body on the other. In a patronizing tone, he praised the women in this issue—and young women writers generally—for writing in such a way that "there is no longer a separation between the writer and the subject" (6). By describing these women as those who "seize the pen to write…as if it were her body itself that was thinking and writing" (6), Hijazi effectively erases the writers' agency and reduces any literary skill and carefully honed literary craft to female intuition and natural expression. Throughout the text, phrases like "I advise readers…" reaffirm the power Hijazi claims for himself to determine the conversation about the women writers and their literature that appear in his magazine. He concludes the article by reminding readers that all fifteen short stories selected for this issue are written in the style he has described. This issue of *Ibdā',* which includes one of the earliest attempts to classify the young women writers as a distinct subgroup and phenomenon, demonstrates some of the ways in which established cultural figures sought to construct a specific frame of interpretation for reading literature by women of the emerging generation, and one that kept them on the margins of the Arabic literary tradition.[211]

[211] In part due to the controversy that arose over the initial publication of the July 1996 issue, *Ibdā'* invited literary critic Somaya Ramadan to write a response in the following issue. Ramadan wrote a stinging critique of the issue and paid particular attention to Hijazi's problematic introduction, highlighting specific problems such as the logic of this being a "phenomenon" or a "season" and his paternalistic and patronizing attitude towards the "girls" included

The "girls' writing" discourse and paradigms it promoted for reading young Egyptian women's literature also participated in older debates about the merits of Arabic literature written by women. The first is a debate over the validity of the category of "women's literature" itself. As Elsadda notes, the term "feminist" is often interpreted as a pejorative in Arab literary circles. Even "women's literature," while potentially useful in foregrounding the works of women authors, is met with skepticism, as it runs the risk of further marginalizing their contributions to modern Arabic literature (152). It is unsurprising, then, that prominent writers of older and younger generations have frequently rejected such labels.[212] Elsadda further suggests that it was this "long-standing controversy around the value of using the terms 'women's literature,' or 'feminist literature' [that] transformed into a deliberate effort, be it conscious or unconscious, to undermine the work of young women writers, by referring to their writings as *kitabat al-banat* (girls' writing)" (152).

The label of "feminist" and similar references to writing about "women's issues" often reappeared in discussions about nineties generation authors when their texts moved to Western languages and readerships. Often, they found themselves struggling once again to change the terms of the discussions in which they and their works featured. For example, having been

in the issue, including some women who were in their 30s ("Lisān wa-shifatān" 36). While Hijazi ran Ramadan's article in full in the August 1996 issue, he wrote a one-page piece that directly preceded Ramadan's invited response and expressed his dismay over Ramadan's misunderstanding of his article and the nature of *Ibdā'* as a cultural journal ("Ḥawla milaff: kitābat al-jasad"). In this way, Hijazi provides the reader once again with a frame with which to read and interpret a woman's writing.

[212] Miriam Cooke, in an article that centers on her personal experience organizing a *nadwa* on women's literature in Syria in 1995, notes that beginning in the late 1980s, there began to be a softening in the outright refusal among many Arab women of the category of "women's literature." She points to an influential speech given by celebrated Egyptian novelist and nationalist Latifa al-Zayyat in 1990 in Fez, in which she reversed some of her views on the topic and acknowledged that one could consider men and women as equals while also acknowledging some differences in their works (33).

invited to contribute to an edited volume titled *Min Fami: Arab Feminist Reflections on Identity, Space and Resistance* (2013), al-Tahawy opened her article with the following:

> "Women's writing" is a confinement I have tried to escape, yet the label persists, chasing me in others' pointed questions—questions that carry implicit assumptions of a long history of persecution and marginalization, an already-formed judgment of its dreadfulness, and a persistent focus on man, freedom, Arab societies, long wars for liberty, the prohibited, the tacitly accepted, the difficulty of publishing, and the impartiality of criticism. ("Hidden Voice" 209)

Though al-Tahawy here is addressing a specifically Anglophone, Western audience, her comments also recall the ways in which this label and its affiliated "girls' writing" have relentlessly pursued the writer in Egyptian literary circles, as well.

The second debate in which the "girls' writing" discourse participated was over the autobiographical nature of women's writing and the tendency to read fiction by Arab women writers as autobiography. Nineties generation women writers frequently were asked to explain supposedly autobiographical elements in their works of fiction, encountering questions that began with bold statements such as, "Women's writing (*kitābat al-mar'āah*) typically falls under the heading of autobiography or writing that concerns the self…" (Sharīf).[213] In Chapter Three, I refer to some of the ramifications of conflating an author with her text in the case of seventies generation writer Niʿmat al-Bihayri. Following the publication in *Ibdāʿ* of her short story in which a woman watches a young couple having sex in a car outside her window, al-Bihayri faced censorship, was transferred from her office at work, and suffered personal ostracization. As Booth notes in her assessment of the incident, the attacks on al-Bihayri "exemplify one well-tested means of undermining women writers in any society: yoking the writer autobiographically to her writing, passing judgment on her character and speculating on her personal history"

[213] This statement appeared in an interview with May Telmissany from 2003 that was published in the pan-Arab newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*.

("Framing the Imaginary" 139). Here we find another parallel between Egyptian and "global" Anglophone audiences, both of which approached Egyptian women's fiction for hidden truths. Though the latter largely read for sociological reasons, to "peek behind the veil" (or any other tired trope about unveiling) and gain insight into Arab societies and women's place therein, both groups of readers sought to learn something about the historical author's personal life from the fictitious worlds and characters she created. Commenting on the repercussions of this interpretive frame, al-Tahawy wrote of the fear Egyptian women writers faced at home of "the knife of the critic who works to find the similarities between the writer and her text" ("Hidden Voice" 211).

Miral-Tahawy's *al-Khibā'* / *The Tent*

Despite the differences between the supposedly distinct "global" Anglophone and "local" Egyptian reception contexts in which nineties generation women writers were being read, several clear parallels and intersections emerge when considering the two in conversation. These include, most notably: the use of gender as a means to categorize literary production; the tendency to conflate author and protagonist/text and the expectation that their literature reveals lived, embodied experiences; an exaggerated focus on women's bodies; and a heightened sensitivity to topics or themes that may be perceived as confirming Orientalist stereotypes. By exposing these overlaps, I argue, it becomes possible to locate new modes of gendered, subaltern resistance within the literature of women of the nineties generation. Turning now to *The Tent* by foundational nineties generation writer Miral al-Tahawy, I consider the novel both as one of the texts most often invoked in the "girls' writing" discourse and as the first novel by a nineties generation writer to be translated into English, appearing with AUC Press in 1998. I explore

some of the implications for reading that arise from taking into account the similarities of the two reception contexts in which *The Tent* circulated and was being read in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Specifically, I contend that al-Tahawy's successful inclusion of a number of sensitive, gendered issues centered on acts of physical violence done to women—namely, female infanticide, domestic abuse/rape, forced marriage, and FGS—without reducing the events to spectacle or allowing them to overtake the narrative can be read as a form of resistance to the reductive reading modes encouraged by these two reading contexts.[214]

Al-Tahawy is an accomplished novelist and short-story writer and is presently an Associate Professor at Arizona State University. She was born in 1968 to a Bedouin family in the Sharqiya governate in the Delta, where she lived in seclusion throughout her childhood. She completed a B.A. in Arabic literature from Zagazig University and studied Arabic literature at Cairo University, where she obtained her Master's (1995) and PhD (2006). Upon completing her degree, al-Tahawy moved to the U.S., where she has taught Arabic language and literature in several different academic positions. She is the only nineties generation author (male or female) to have had all of her novels translated from Arabic into English and is one of the more widely translated living Arab authors of any generation. Her novels have received several accolades and prizes, including, among others: the Egyptian State Encouragement Prize for her second novel *al-Bādhinjāna al-zarqā'* (1998; *Blue Aubergine*, 2002); the Cairo International Book Fair Prize for her third novel *Naqarāt al-ẓabā'* (2002; *Gazelle Tracks*, 2008); AUC's Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature for her fourth novel *Brūklīn Hayts* (2010; *Brooklyn Heights*, 2011), which

[214] This is not to suggest that every Western or Egyptian reader would have approached al-Tahawy and her literature in this way. My interest here is in the ways in which these two specific reception contexts framed al-Tahawy for readers and the underlying paradigms that promoted a specific way of reading literature by young Egyptian women at this time. In recent years in particular, several nuanced studies of al-Tahawy's works that resist the modes of reading discussed in this chapter have been published. See, for example, Alshammari, Anishchenkova, H. Ghoneim, and Seymour-Jorn "Ethnographic."

was also shortlisted for the IPAF in 2010.[215] Al-Tahawy has featured regularly in Egyptian, pan-Arab, U.S., European, and international publications, and she has participated in numerous interviews, cultural salons, conferences, and invited talks around the world. To date, she has published a collection of short stories, four novels, a book of literary criticism, and numerous articles, essays, and works of creative fiction in various literary journals. Her first novel *The Tent* has been translated into more than 24 languages, making it one of, if not the, most widely translated novel of Egypt's nineties generation.

From the beginning of her literary career in the mid-1990s, al-Tahawy has been linked to discussions of "girls' writing," and Egyptian critics and scholars have used *The Tent*, in particular, to discuss the salient traits of this supposed phenomenon. In 1996, the same year that she made her debut as a novelist in the Cairene cultural scene with Dar Sharqiyyat's publication of *The Tent*, al-Tahawy published a short story as part of *Ibdā'*'s special issue "Girls Writes Their Bodies: 15 Short Stories," discussed previously. Therefore, as al-Tahawy was beginning to establish herself as an author, she was labeled as part of the implicitly passing fad of "girls' writing," with readers encouraged to engage in specific, limiting readings of her works—including the newly published *Tent*—that focused on the body and sought references to the historical author within her fictional text. Taking a different tactic, the following year, journalist Yasser Abdel Hafez asked al-Tahawy in an interview published in the widely circulated *Akhbār al-Adab* how she managed to avoid the characteristics of "girls' writing" in *The Tent*.[216] In doing

[215] Following the announcement of the shortlist for the IPAF, publishers showed renewed interest in al-Tahawy and her novels. In addition to new translations for some of works in several languages, she also signed a contract with the major Egyptian commercial publisher Dar El Shorouk to republish *Brūklīn Hayts* as well as her three earlier novels.

[216] See Appendix A for bibliographic details of al-Tahawy's interview with Abdel Hafez, which was part of the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series discussed in Chapter Three.

so, he simultaneously set al-Tahawy outside of this phenomenon, which he painted as negative, and affirmed its existence as a potential lens through which to read al-Tahawy's novel. An emphasis on the body and the ties between protagonist and author were further reinforced in 2003 with the academic study titled "Riwāyat al-sīra al-dhātiyya al-jadīda: qirā'a fī ba'ḍ 'riwāyāt al-banāt' fī miṣr al-tis'īniyyāt" (New Autobiographical Novels: A Reading of Some 'Girls' Novels' from Egypt in the 1990s) by Egyptian literary scholar Khairy Douma that appeared in the pan-Arab cultural journal *Nizwā*. Douma used *The Tent* to mark the start of what he claims was a flourishing of young women's autobiographical novels, a problematic reading of *The Tent* to say the least.[217] These brief examples provide a sense of the extent to which al-Tahawy and *The Tent* featured in discussions of "girls' writing" and the reductive reading practices it encouraged and which, despite this reception context, al-Tahawy's text resists.

In 1998, just two years after *The Tent* was published in Arabic, AUC Press launched al-Tahawy and her novel into a transnational Anglophone market and reception context with its translation of the novel by Anthony Calderbank. Due to the realities of the market for Arabic literature in English at the time and AUC Press's place within it, the Press's publication of *The Tent* in English positioned al-Tahawy as a representative Arab woman writer for "global" Anglophone readers. The year that AUC Press published *The Tent,* its first translation of a work by an emerging Arab literary voice, it also published works by three major Egyptian literary figures: Naguib Mahfouz's *Akhenaten: Dweller in Truth*, Yusuf Idris's *City of Love and Ashes,* and Said al-Kafrawi's *The Hill of Gypsies and Other Stories*. The last pages of *The Tent* included

[217] While al-Tahawy's novel does center on a young Bedouin woman who feels confined by her upbringing and conservative society, the story of the protagonist Fatima is set in the early twentieth century and tells the tale of a young girl growing up in a house of women (al-Tahawy had several brothers) whose mother dies while Fatima is still a girl (al-Tahawy's mother did not). Furthermore, Fatima must have an operation to amputate her leg shortly before reaching puberty to save her life and, at the end of the novel, chooses to descend into silent madness rather than transition to adulthood, all of which stands in stark contrast to al-Tahawy's own life.

a complete backlist of AUC Press's then titled "Modern Arabic Literature" series, which included authors such as Ghassan Kanafani, Yahya Taher Abdullah, Taha Hussein, Mohamed El-Bisatie, Ibrahim Abdel Meguid, and Salwa Bakr, among others. Through this paratext, AUC Press helped establish al-Tahawy as part of the larger Arabic literary tradition and affiliated her and her novel with some of the most influential Arab writers and works of Arabic fiction of the twentieth century. Because there were so few women literary authors translated from the Arabic into English at this time, al-Tahawy also became a representative of women's literature from the region with her novel's publication with AUC Press. She was only the third woman published by the Press,[218] and according to Altoma's bibliography, she was one of the first twenty Arab women authors to have a book of fiction translated from Arabic into English (and the fourth Egyptian woman writer). Furthermore, *The Tent* became only the forty-second book of contemporary fiction originally composed in Arabic available to Anglophone readers through translation.[219]

While AUC Press did not market or frame her book through paratexts in ways that explicitly played into Orientalist stereotypes,[220] the selection and translation of her novel reveal problematic underlying assumptions and practices that resulted in al-Tahawy being left out of the processes that produced the text published by AUC Press. With regard to selection, al-Tahawy

[218] AUC Press published Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant* in 1992 and Salwa Bakr's *The Wiles of Men and Other Stories* in 1997.

[219] I rely here, again, on publication information compiled in Altoma's bibliography.

[220] AUC Press had a long-established policy to only use original artwork by an Arab artist on the covers of its Arabic literature in translation series. *The Tent* featured an etching titled "Flying" by Huda Lutfi (1997) that avoids the stereotypical portrayal of a covered woman. The brief biography of the author that appeared on the flap refers only to her professional career and education, not her personal life. The most questionable paratext added by the Press is the description of the novel as one that "provides an intimate glimpse inside the women's quarters" that appears as part of the summary on the inside front flap.

did not choose the Press to translate her work into English, but rather was approached by them. Additionally, according to a profile published in *Arab News* on Calderbank, the translator of three of al-Tahawy's four novels, her work was selected because it "would appeal to Western readers" (Mubarak). With regard to the translation process itself, al-Tahawy used her platform at the 2010 NMML awards ceremony, where she was honored, to speak publicly about being excluded from the translation process of her first novel. It was her family who intervened and prevented her from speaking with the strange man who had drawn attention to al-Tahawy and her family by asking those who lived in the village about her. She remarked at the NMML ceremony twelve years after the novel was published in English translation, "My younger brother sat across from him [Calderbank] ready to answer on my behalf, explaining and rectifying various aspects in my novel, which he had not read … All my attempts to intervene and to impose my presence on the translation process, from which I had been deliberately marginalized, in spite of myself, utterly failed" (quoted in Qualey "In Other Words"). This is not to accuse Calderbank of impropriety since he did seek out al-Tahawy when working on his translation; however, it remains that AUC Press published a text that involved a translation process from which the author, despite herself, was excluded. This is especially problematic in a case like al-Tahawy's, given that she was one of the very few emerging Arab authors in English translation at that time, and therefore all the more susceptible to having her voice marginalized in the process.

In her novel *The Tent*, al-Tahawy subverts traditional nationalist narratives, upending the symbol of a hopeful, fertile, vibrant Egypt as embodied by a female character, and offering,

instead, "Fatim, the deaf-mute cripple"[221] (115),[222] a young Bedouin woman who chooses madness over transitioning to adulthood. For most of the text, Fatima lives in seclusion in her father's compound, and with the exception of her beloved father, her world is populated almost entirely by women: her silent, mentally unstable, and isolated mother who dies of a miscarriage; her three older sisters; her tyrannical grandmother; several female servants and others employed by the house; and Anne, a Western anthropologist who has come to the village to study and record Bedouin culture and who takes a particular interest in Fatima. Following an accident shortly before she attains puberty, Fatima goes to live with Anne—whom she refers to as "my only way out" (44)—at her home in an unnamed Egyptian city. There, Fatima has her leg amputated, an operation that saves her life but leaves her permanently and visibly "crippled." Having reached a crossroads, Fatima ultimately rejects both her own Bedouin society and the Western one she glimpses through Anne, choosing to crawl on the ground and retreat to her own, private reality inspired by Bedouin folklore.

Within the novel, al-Tahawy includes several sensitive, gendered issues centered on physical acts of violence directed at women; however, she prevents these events from being reduced to spectacle through a narrative distance that the text carefully constructs between the protagonist and the reader, on the one hand, and the traumatic act, on the other. In this way, al-Tahawy creates space within her novel for these often marginalized, painful, and private experiences while not allowing them to be appropriated by her readers. Keeping the protagonist Fatima sheltered from the violent acts themselves is crucial to al-Tahawy's success in avoiding sensationalism, given the tendency among both Egyptian and Western readers, as we have seen,

[221] This phrasing refers to how Fatima feels that society has judged and labeled her by the end of the novel.

[222] All translations are from Calderbank's translation with AUC Press.

to conflate women authors with their texts and protagonists. Al-Tahawy carefully balances between having Fatima be close enough to the violent acts that she may relate to them, and far enough from them that she does not fall victim to them directly. In addition, the text creates space for the traumatic aftermaths of the acts of female genital surgery, domestic abuse/rape, female infanticide, and forced marriage in the novel through Fatima's questions and her translation of the events into folktales, as she struggles to understand and process the violence of the world around her.

The first gendered, violent act we encounter in the novel is the repeated domestic abuse/rape of Fatima's mother. With this event, we see clearly the primary strategy al-Tahawy employs to remove the protagonist and her readers from the acts of trauma and violence suffered by her female characters: the use of a naïve narrator-protagonist. For much of the text, Fatima, who also serves as the narrator, is a little girl. At times, she proves to be quite savvy and astute, especially in her assessment of the foreigner Anne, who serves as a critique of the ways in which Westerners reduce the lives and experiences of Bedouin women to exotic wonders to be recorded and consumed. However, Fatima typically is presented as innocent and uncomprehending of the violence that exists in her world, even when she witnesses it firsthand. With regard to Fatima's mother, through the childlike narration, we see only hints of the violence and trauma her mother suffers and Fatima's resultant pity and fear. For instance, she first describes her mother in the novel as a "pale, emaciated figure, [with] thin veins on her eyelids, and her nose swollen from floods of tears" (3). Later, with her father's arrival at the compound, Fatima innocently narrates, "I went back inside to look for him, but I couldn't find him. Only the sound of sobbing came from her room. His return always made her cry" (6-7). The text further emphasizes Fatima's naiveté as she asks older sister Fouz and her Grandmother, referring to her mother, "Why doesn't

she love him like I do? Why doesn't she ever leave that dark room?" (7). The older women do not answer her questions, instead calling her foolish for asking such questions.

One night, Fatima witnesses her father leaving her mother's room followed by "another, muffled, sound which turned into a terrible inconsolable sobbing" (38). Once again, Fatima does not understand and seeks an explanation, this time from the young servant Sasa. Sasa tells Fatima that her father regularly strangles her mother. She says, "He used to lie on top of her and put his hands round her neck," and that in the morning, "They would find on her neck dark lines…[and] [t]hey might also see on her dress or on her bed a patch of dried blood" (38). The act of domestic abuse/rape (it is unclear from the text) is filtered not only through Fatima, whose innocence and naiveté are repeatedly affirmed throughout the text, but also through another young girl. Moreover, Sasa guesses at what has happened based on what she saw from behind a cracked door and the traces of the previous night's violence she sees on Fatima's mother's body and clothes. In this way, the reader, like Fatima, remains outside the closed door of the room where the violence occurs.

Al-Tahawy likewise uses Fatima as a naïve narrator to gradually reveal the unhappy, arranged marriages of two of her sisters, Safiya and Fouz. Fatima relates her excitement over the new activity and people in her father's compound and tells us, "I wasn't paying much attention to what was happening. The important thing was that the main gate was left wide open and every day the jeweler brought a new bag of wares" (30). Only after descriptions of the belt-making, signing, and other activities she witnesses does Fatima understand these are preparations for Safiya's and Fouz's joint wedding. Even then, it is only through a conversation Fatima overhears between her overbearing Grandmother Hakima and her father and the tears she sees on Safiya's face that the text reveals that these marriages have been arranged despite the wishes of the girls,

especially Safiya. Her father says that the girls are still young and that Safiya's husband to be is so old that "his teeth have fallen out," but he does not contradict his mother's decision (34). Though his objection is meek, al-Tahawy incorporates through the father a critique of the practice of arranged marriage, particularly for young girls. The narration of this conversation also stands out for Fatima's lack of response. Typically, the text relates Fatima's thoughts and reactions to what she sees and hears. However, in this case, Fatima's perspective is noticeably absent. By playing the role of a detached narrator who merely relates what she hears, Fatima herself remains at a distance from this conversation and its implications. Moreover, the text never enters the bedchambers of the newlyweds of Safiya and Fouz, nor do we witness any interaction between the girls and their new husbands at their wedding.

The next act of gendered, physical violence we encounter in the text is that of female infanticide. Fatima's Grandmother Hakima, we learn along with Fatima, is suspected of having killed all of her daughters upon their births. Here again Fatima serves as a detached narrator and relates a conversation she hears at Safiya's and Fouz's joint wedding between her grandmother and the group of women gathered. Her grandmother brags, "I haven't had one daughter who's lived[…] I pray all the time and God is protecting me from their evil" (60). One of the women replies, "You're right, Grandmother Hakima, you're right, but all of them dying like that, is it really just God's will, or…?" (60). In this ellipsis (also present in the original Arabic) lies the act itself, which remains unspeakable though nonetheless present. The grandmother replies, "God's will, my girl. I've always said my prayers and not one of them has survived" (60). At this point, the text turns to a description of the wedding feast and provides no insight into Fatima's reaction to learning that her grandmother allegedly murdered her own daughters. Though Fatima does not immediately react to the conversation, the conversation she overheard haunts the young

protagonist, and she begins to weave the tale into her own stories and alternative reality that she has constructed out of Bedouin folklore. Her grandmother's past actions become tales of a king who throws his daughters down a well upon their births (73). Fatima retells this story in several different iterations, sometimes just in her own head and sometimes in an attempt to communicate her confusion and pain to her sisters. Indeed, after each major act of violence that she witnesses or overhears being described, Fatima retreats to her fantasy world and translates the violence of her reality into stories she can share with the characters that populate her private world and especially her alter-ego Zahwa.

The final major act of gendered violence to occur in the novel is arguably also that which was most fraught for al-Tahawy's Egyptian and Western, Anglophone readers: FGS. As with the other examples, al-Tahawy introduces the act first through exchanges that Fatima overhears and witnesses but does not completely understand. In this instance, she refers to exchanges between Sardoub and Umm Sasa (literally: mother of Sasa) over Sasa's nearing adolescence. Fatima narrates, "Sardoub said: 'There's a fire raging in that girl's slumbering body.' Umm Sasa turned to her with fear in her eyes" (75). Fatima returns to the topic a paragraph later when she narrates a conversation that she overhears between the two women:

> Umm Sasa said to Sardoub: "If our masters go out hunting, we can nip it in the bud."
>
> Sardoub said, "Leave the farming to the farmers." Then she continued: "As long as the mind is sound, leave things to the man who'll take her."
>
> Umm Sasa, however, had made up her mind: "She's young, the mind is easily led astray, and no man has appeared. My daughter is still young, Aunt."
>
> Sardoub sighed reluctantly: "She's your daughter and you're the one who must look to her honor. (76)

The women do not discuss the removal of Sasa's clitoris prior to puberty in direct terms, but instead couch the discussion in metaphors, allowing Fatima to remain ignorant of what she hears and witnesses.

The narrative continues, "I asked Sardoub about the bud, but she wouldn't answer. Then I said, as Sasa screamed in the locked room and the blood ran down between her thighs: It's not fair, Grandmother. […] It's hurting her, ya-Mama Sardoub…Sasa's going to die" (76). Significantly, al-Tahawy does not omit the pain, blood, and violence of this act, even as Fatima expresses her own incomprehension of what she is witnessing. Sasa's screams and pain are present, even as al-Tahawy is careful to confine them to "the locked room" and keep Fatima at a distance through her childish ignorance. While Fatima is in close physical proximity to Sasa during this traumatic act, Fatima is the furthest removed from her with regard to their backgrounds. The other female characters who suffered acts of gendered violence in the novel were all Fatima's relatives. By contrast, Sasa is a servant who is therefore of a different class and ethnicity than the wealthy Bedouin protagonist—and author. Given the tendency among both al-Tahawy's Egyptian and Western audiences to read Arab women's fiction for insight into the author's personal life and for revelations about her Bedouin society, it is perhaps unsurprising that there is added distance between Fatima and Sasa. However, in this case, instead of resisting negative tropes about Arab women, the distance that al-Tahawy introduces encourages a reductive discourse about FGS that was prevalent in international circles in the 1990s. Sasa is a servant/ slave and thus belongs to a purportedly inferior family and class than Fatima's. By choosing this specific character—who, like Sardoub and other servants, is not developed fully in the text—to be portrayed as the victim of FGS, al-Tahawy shows the practice as something

happening to "other" women in a way that may fuel problematic stereotypes about barbarous gendered practices that were a sign of cultural inferiority and difference.

These examples of acts of violence against women that occur marginally within *The Tent* come to light through a reading that is itself resistant, in this case to the interconnected "local" Arabic and "global" English reception contexts in which al-Tahawy's debut novel circulated in the mid- to late-1990s. At the beginning of my discussion of al-Tahawy, I established this writer and her works as central to debates over "girls' writing" within Egypt, and I showed how she was presented as a representative Arab, Muslim, Bedouin woman writer with *The Tent's* translation into English and publication with AUC Press. Despite the resultant increased scrutiny that she faced from Arabophone and Anglophone audiences and their expectations, al-Tahawy and *The Tent* avoided becoming entangled in debates over FGS, female infanticide, forced marriage, and domestic abuse, while nonetheless being read as autobiographical and feminist. Both of these reception contexts, as we have seen, placed significant emphasis on the gender of the author, women's bodies, potential connections between the author's characters' and her own life, and breaking taboos, particularly in ways that might be interpreted as confirming Western stereotypes about Arab women. They also tended to encourage thematic readings of women's literature. By taking a formal approach, instead, that focuses on what al-Tahawy achieves through the narrative distance that she creates between her protagonist and acts of gendered violence, I have shown how al-Tahawy's text challenged these dominant reading modes. *The Tent* carves out space for female voices and highly emotional, physically traumatic events for women that are often written out of literature, while refusing to turn them into spectacle. However, the text does not present a neat, uniform resistance that suggests there is a specific ideology underlying al-Tahawy's approach. Rather, there are sometimes contradictory

perspectives, such that while al-Tahawy's careful inclusion of violent acts within the novel generally challenges reductive readings encouraged by the "girls' writing" discourse and Orientalist tropes, at other times, as in her treatment of FGS through the character Sasa, the text arguably confirms such stereotypes.

Conclusion

Cultural institutions—e.g., publishers, prizes, journals, among others—frequently operate transnationally, serving as the launching point of literary works and authors into new languages and geographies. As a result, these institutions influence the development of literary groups and the circulation and reception of bodies of literature both locally and globally. Theorizations of such institutions, particularly those located in the Global South, challenge the notion of seemingly disparate national and world literary fields that is dominant in present-day conceptions of world literature, and they highlight the power imbalances inherent in this model for literary groups and movements that lay outside of Western centers of cultural production.

As a hybrid cultural institution that was primarily responsible for introducing nineties generation writers and their texts to the transnational Anglophone literary market, AUC Press simultaneously mediated between local and global spaces and complicated such a stark distinction. By challenging the notion of a strict local vs. global binary, it becomes possible to trace significant interactions and parallels between the two dominant reception contexts—i.e., Egyptian Arabophone and Western Anglophone—of literature by Egyptian women of the emerging generation as it circulated in the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s. Indeed, the women writers of Egypt's nineties generation, far from being an Egyptian "phenomenon," were participating in and contributing to larger, interconnected local and global networks of literary

production and reception. Furthermore, recognizing the relationship between these two reception contexts and the similarities of the paradigms that underlie each has implications for how we might read Egyptian women's literary texts. As we have seen, a formal reading of al-Tahawy's *The Tent* which takes into consideration dominant reception discourses at home and abroad sheds new light on various—and at times inconsistent—means of resistance within the novel that are largely obfuscated in thematic readings.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I have striven to demonstrate how and why cultural institutions are central to the development of literary groups and movements. By using an approach that is built on Latour's emphasis on continually shifting group boundaries and the involvement of unpredictable actors and inconstant relationships, rather than Bourdieu's interest in underlying structures that govern a literary field, I proposed a methodological intervention in the study of the genesis and evolution of literary groups. In this study of Egypt's nineties generation of writers, instead of deriving an immutable definition of the group, my aim was to examine and describe the various interactions among publishers, editors, authors, texts, journals, readers, interpretative frameworks, and other actors involved in the ongoing process of formulating and reformulating the "nineties generation." While there undoubtedly were other institutions and actors that one could examine in a discussion of this Egyptian literary group—e.g., the Ministry of Culture or one of its branches, such as the Supreme Council of Culture or the General Egyptian Book Organization, or smaller, non-periodic journals like *al-Kitāba al-ukhrā* and *al-Jarād,* among others—I chose to focus on the institutions highlighted in this dissertation for two reasons. First, they were more connected to the form of the novel, to which I limited my study; and second, these institutions, more than others, were consistently mentioned as significant players by those whom I interviewed and spoke with in Cairo's cultural scene about the nineties generation.

The arc of this dissertation roughly followed the stages of the life of a published text, using a loose adaptation of Darnton's "communications circuit" (see Chapter Four): composition, publication, circulation, reception, and then back again to the beginning of the circuit. These stages are not discrete, however, and thus each chapter touched on several if not all of the stages, thereby demonstrating further the high level of involvement of each institution in the making of this literary generation. Beginning with the literature, I provided close readings to establish and explore a transformation in the notion of what it meant to be a literary author in the 1990s and early 2000s in the Egyptian literary tradition. The paradigm shift I read in the texts reflected not only a new relationship between the author and the nation, but also the host of changes in how Egyptian literature was produced and circulated at that time, changes that further removed authors and their literature from a nationalist framework. I next turned to one of the earliest and most active publications that regularly featured works by and about the nineties generation: *Akhbār al-Adab*. Rejecting an approach that would treat *Akhbār al-Adab* as a repository for debates about the authors and their texts, I instead demonstrated the various ways in which this cultural newspaper helped constitute the literary group through its active participation in shaping what "the nineties generation" meant, who belonged in the group, what the central debates that surrounded it were, how it could be defined literarily, and whether this body of literature merited further consideration.

My discussions of the two small, private presses Sharqiyyat and Merit similarly highlighted the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the emerging literary generation and institutions. The extent to which the houses' and literary group's development was intertwined was possible due, in large part, to the position of the publishing house as an institution in the Cairene literary scene and book market, which made it possible for publishers to be involved in

every stage of a book's life. Turning finally to a different kind of publishing house—one that was significantly larger, internationally focused, and affiliated with a major literary prize in the region—AUC Press provided a kind of zooming out that allowed for a clearer, more accurate positioning of the nineties generation as part of broader, transnational networks, rather than a literary group confined to Cairo. Centering my discussion on the reception of women writers of the generation—who, significantly, were recognized as central, rather than marginal, figures—I challenged the notion of a binary "world" versus "national" literary frame and exposed overlaps and interactions between these two supposedly distinct reception contexts to propose new readings of the literature. In this way, the dissertation also came full circuit, beginning and ending with close readings of the literature.

My investigation of the nineties generation stops somewhat abruptly and intentionally with the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 or the January 25 Revolution (*thawrat 25 yanāyir*). At this point, the literary generation was fairly well established in the scene, which meant there were fewer formulations and reformulations of the group to study. Moreover, the revolution brought significant upheaval to nearly every aspect of life in Egypt, including cultural production, circulation, and reception. It began with mass protests that erupted throughout Egypt, including large protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square, against the corruption, cronyism, and violence of Mubarak's regime (1981-2011) that had stifled any opposition since assuming power. The initial phase of the revolution lasted until Mubarak's successful overthrow on February 11, 2011, which was significantly aided by the military. This phase consisted of mass protests, occupations of public places, marches, and strikes throughout the country, which at times were violently countered by the government, but were marked by hope and a sense of camaraderie. Following Mubarak's forced departure, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) suspended the

constitution and dissolved parliament, largely in line with the people's requests. SCAF then began a somewhat chaotic reign, punctuated by further protests and clashes as Egyptian citizens sought quicker and more extensive reforms and elections that would lead to a transition of power to a democratically elected government. Eventually Mohamed Morsi, representing the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected in June 2012, which brought to the surface ideological and political rifts that divided Egypt between a growing popular Islam and Islamist movements and more secular groups, which included, by and large, Egypt's writers, artists, and many intellectuals. Following more mass protests and demands for Morsi's resignation and early elections, which Morsi refused, SCAF once again intervened in a coup d'état that wrested power from Morsi and his administration, suspended the 2012 constitution, and instituted another period of military control of the central government. In January 2014, a new constitution was institutionalized by the interim government, and two months later, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi officially resigned as head of the SCAF in order to run for President. He was sworn in on June 8, 2014, and reelected in 2018, when nearly all of his opponents dropped out or were forced to withdraw from the race for various reasons, and his presidency has suggested a return to the violence and corruption against which Egyptians originally rebelled in 2011.

Throughout this period of tumultuous change and violence, writers, artists, and intellectuals have been on the frontlines fighting against the regime. As discussed in this dissertation, Egypt's largely secular cultural producers frequently have existed in tension with the state and been critical of its rampant corruption since Egypt became a Republic in 1953. Despite recurrent claims that their literature was (too) apolitical, nineties generation writers also were active participants in the uprisings, and several documented their participation and responses to the revolution in writing that was published shortly after and, at times, concurrently

with the unfolding events. For instance, Mona Prince published *Ismī thawra* (2012, *Revolution is My Name: An Egyptian Woman's Diary from Eighteen Days in Tahrir*, 2014) that chronicles her experience fighting against the Mubarak regime in Tahrir Square at the beginning of the revolution, and Hamdy el-Gazzar turned to fiction, publishing his novel *al-Ḥālimūn fī thawra* in 2013 (The Dreamers of a Revolution).[223] There have already been some early attempts to locate seeds of the Arab uprisings in the literature of the 1990s, both in Egypt and in other Arab countries, and to describe and categorize potential new literary trends since the "Arab Spring" that began in Tunisia in 2010. However, it is still too early to tell whether this will be a watershed moment in Egyptian (and Arabic) literature that significantly shapes the direction of literature for years to come, much like the *naksa* for Arabic literature or the Lebanese Civil War for Lebanese literature, or if it will be an important historical moment, but one of many with which Egyptian and other Arab writers engage.

In addition to changes within the literature, there were significant disruptions in the cultural institutions discussed in this dissertation. Unsurprisingly, given its connection to the state, *Akhbār al-Adab* underwent the most significant series of transformations, some of which ran parallel to the changes in the government. In January of 2011, prior to the start of the revolution, Mustafa Abdallah was appointed as the paper's editor-in-chief after respected founder Gamal al-Ghitani stepped down. The staff was not pleased with Abdallah's appointment, given his affiliation with Mubarak's regime, and in late May 2011 they protested, calling for his resignation. After a two-and-a-half-month strike, literary journalist and author Abla el-Roweyni was appointed the new head of the cultural newspaper in accordance with the wishes of the staff

[223] El-Gazzar published pieces of this novel as short stories in several Arabic journals and newspapers beginning in 2011, and two excerpts appeared in English and French.

and regular contributors. In August of 2012, however, Egypt's new parliament dismissed el-Roweyni and announced that Magdi Afifi, who was associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and had very little experience in the world of literary journalism, would be taking over immediately as editor-in-chief. The following year, amidst the growing protests against Morsi, the newspaper's staff likewise began to protest against Afifi and redoubled their efforts in the summer of 2013 following Morsi's ouster. Shortly after Morsi's removal from power, the staff was successful in removing Afifi from his post, and the remaining editors took up a collective management of the newspaper in July of that year. The paper remained under this unique management structure until June 2014, when one of their own, Tarek al-Taher, who had been with the journal since its inception and had served as interim editor-in-chief in 2010 when al-Ghitani was indisposed due to health reasons (al-Taher, Personal interview), was appointed.

Sharqiyyat underwent the fewest changes in light of the multiple government overhauls, which is perhaps unsurprising given owner Hosni Soliman's preference for keeping the publishing house out of politics as much as possible. It has continued to produce quality literary titles, though it is no longer the preferred choice for nineties generation writers, a trend that was already beginning in the early 2000s as writers moved to Merit. Meanwhile, as I discussed briefly in Chapter Four, Mohamed Hashem remained at the forefront of the battles against Mubarak's regime and the subsequent governments that have similarly restricted freedom of expression, and his Merit became an unofficial headquarters of the revolution. Most notably, the interim government led by the SCAF issued a warrant for Hashem's arrest in December 2011 for his alleged inciting of violence in Tahrir during the revolution earlier that year (charges were dropped soon thereafter due to international pressure), and in December 2015, under Sisi's administration, Merit's new office in Abdeen, Cairo was raided. The authorities in charge

claimed that the raid was warranted because the house did not have a valid publishing license, though the volunteer who was taken into questioning during the raid was reportedly asked about the seminars Merit held, Hashem's political views, and the content of books published by Merit (Lindsey). In the current repressive political climate, where the Ministry of Education in 2017 announced that it would be removing references to the 2011 and 2013 uprisings from Egyptian history books, Merit has continued to play a crucial role of defiance and rebellion by serving as a haven for writers, artists and intellectuals and publishing works that challenge official narratives.

AUC Press, while its main offices and central bookstore branch are located in Tahrir Square and thus were at the heart of the revolution, has remained more removed from direct political action than Merit. However, the Press has published several titles about the Egyptian revolution and Arab uprisings.[224] In 2016, it further expanded its literary production, as well, with the founding of its imprint Hoopoe Fiction. In its own words, this imprint presents "fresh writing from Marrakesh to Baghdad and Khartoum to Aleppo" and is directed at "engaged, open-minded readers hungry for outstanding fiction that challenges headlines, re-imagines histories, and celebrates original storytelling" ("About Hoopoe"). While the imprint retains all the benefits of being part of the well-established AUC Press, including its connections and reputation discussed in Chapter Five, it also moves away from any stigma associated with a university press that might deter non-academic readers from picking up one of their books. Between 2012 and 2015, under the leadership of Nigel Fletcher-Jones (Director, 2012 – present), the Press experienced another significant change in its operations, as it shifted from selling 85% of its titles within Egypt to selling 75% of its books abroad (Harington). In this way, the Press arguably has taken on an even larger role in representing Egypt, its literature, and local

[224] See, for example, Korany, Gröndahl, Mehrez *Translating*, and Prince *Revolution*, among several others.

happenings to those unable to access the country or its literature and other writings in Arabic since the revolution.

* * *

In my examination of AUC Press, Merit, Sharqiyyat, and *Akhbār al-Adab* and how they "made" Egypt's nineties generation over the 1990s and up to the 2011 Revolution, I purportedly focused on Egypt; however, I sought throughout to expose the limitations of such a categorization and the problems inherent in considering distinct "national" versus "world" literatures and markets. Cultural institutions like those foregrounded in this dissertation frequently operate transnationally, mediating between "local" and "global" spaces and serving as the launching point of a literary work into new languages and geographies. *Akhbār al-Adab*, for instance, had the largest circulation in the Arab world of any Egyptian newspaper at that time. Publishers like Sharqiyyat and Merit, though small in operation, were responsible for ensuring their books were sold at international book fairs and for submitting their titles to prestigious regional literary prizes, such as the International Prize for Fiction. AUC Press, meanwhile, introduced authors to new markets and audiences through their translation, publication, distribution, and marketing of their books in English, processes which also affected meaning in the texts and how they were read.

Given their participation in multiple and often intersecting literary networks, institutions such as these provide rich sites for theorization, as they contest the notion of seemingly disparate national and world literary fields that is dominant in present-day conceptions of world literature. Moreover, studies of cultural institutions located across the Global South draw attention to the ways in which power imbalances inherent in this model manifest for literary groups and

movements that lay outside of Western centers of cultural production and how they are studied. This dissertation is part of a larger call among scholars working on literatures previously confined to the field of area studies to broaden literary theory—largely conceived of and debated in the West—through theorizations of supposedly "peripheral" literatures.[225] Typically, models based on European and other Western scenarios, such as Bourdieu's conception of the literary field that is based on nineteenth-century France, have been treated as globally applicable and thus capable of explaining "local" literatures and literary groups from various geographies and sociohistorical contexts. If, however, we take non-Western literatures and movements as equally capable of shaping the models themselves, new approaches emerge which variously challenge and complement existing literary theory in ways that encourage more ethical reading practices and provide more adequate, flexible concepts for the increasingly globalized field of literary studies.

[225] See, in particular, Omri's brief but pointed essay that calls for Arabists to "act as a corrective to uni-directional traffic" between Western theory and Arabic literature (732).

Figures

Figure 1: Darnton's "Communications Circuit" Adapted for Turn-of-21st-Century Egypt

The above figure is my adaptation of Robert Darnton's "communications circuit," as articulated in his "What is the History of Books?". This figure shows the stages of an Egyptian book's life at the turn of the twenty-first century, with an emphasis on the *actions* involved, rather than the people, given that both human and non-human actors were present in each stage. In the middle are additional elements that influenced the life of a book in Egypt at this time, with "Censorship" at the very center to reflect its significant influence.

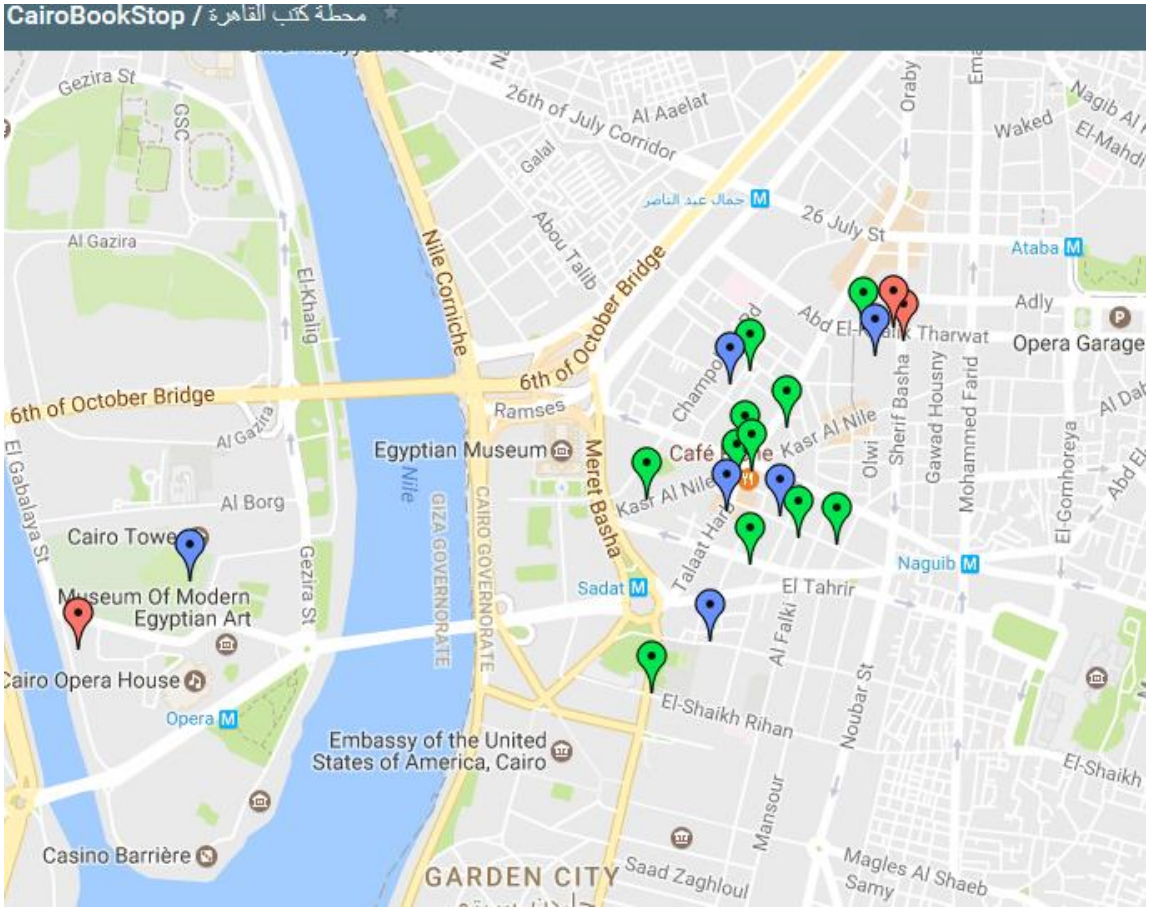
Figure 2: Dar Sharqiyyat Logo

"Dar Sharqiyyat for Publishing and Distribution": Since its founding in 1991, Hosni Soliman's literary publishing house Dar Sharqiyyat has had a logo that depicts, roughly, a compass, with arrows pointing to north, south, east, and west. The arrow pointing to the east or *sharq* is bolded and enlarged, referring both to the name of the house and to its emphasis on literatures from the East, particularly Egypt.

Figure 3: Merit Logo

The logo for Mohamed Hashem's Merit Publishing House has changed slightly since its founding in 1998 but has always featured the image of a pharaoh. In this way, the house marks itself as Egyptian but also distances itself from the contemporary Egyptian state, seeking, instead, older cultural markers with which to affiliate itself.

Figure 4: *CairoBookStop* Map of Downtown Publishers and Bookstores (2010)



The above image was taken from *CairoBookStop* (https://cairobookstop.wordpress.com/, 15 Mar. 2015), a website I created in collaboration with Michele Henjum that provides a visual and textual guide to Cairo's literary publishers and bookstores (launched Aug. 2014). This section of the map shows where private publishing houses/bookstores (green), independent bookstores (blue), and state-run publishing houses/bookstores (red) were located in 2010 in downtown Cairo (east of the Nile River) and on the island Gezira. The image of the twenty houses and bookstores located within this roughly one square mile illustrates the dense concentration of publishers and booksellers in this part of Cairo and the neighborhood's centrality to the Egyptian book market and cultural scene.

Appendices

Appendix A.

Akhbār al-Adab's "Malāmiḥ Jīl" Interview Series (1997-2001)

The interviews in Appendix A were all part of the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series that ran in *Akhbār al-Adab* between 1997 and 2001. The two tables below refer to interviews conducted by Yasser Abdel Hafez and Hasan Abdel Mawgoud, respectively. Bibliographic details are provided in this Appendix rather than in the Bibliography, for ease of reference.

Interviews conducted by Yasser Abdel Hafez:

Author Interviewed	Date	Issue	Page
Shukri, Girgis*	? 1997		
Gharib, Samir*	? 1997		
Abu Golayyel, Hamdi*	? 1997		
Amin, Nora	8 June 1997	204	9
Ragab, Wa'il	6 July 1997	208	9
Hamid, Mahmoud	13 July 1997	209	9
al-Tahawy, Miral	20 July 1997	210	13
al-Sayyid, Manal	27 July 1997	211	7
Mersal, Iman	3 August 1997	212	7
Abdel Wahab, 'Azmy	10 August 1997	213	7
Telmissany, May	24 August 1997	215	7
Shaaban, Yasser	31 August 1997	216	7
Hussein, Hoda	21 September 1997	219	7
Zikri, Mustafa	5 October 1997	221	7
Hashem, Asmaa	12 October 1997	222	7
al-Hamamsy, Mohamed	26 October 1997	224	7
al-Khamaisy, Ashraf	2 November 1997	225	7
Fath al-Bab, Manar	4 January 1998	234	7

*These interviews were part of the "Malāmiḥ Jīl" series but, according to Abdel Hafez, were not marked as such at the time they appeared in print (Abdel Hafez, Personal interview). I learned of their existence after my period of archival research had ended, and thus am unable to provide bibliographic details here.

Interviews conducted by Hassan Abdel Mawgoud:

Author Interviewed	Date	Issue	Page
Maghrebi, Mahmoud	14 March 1999	296	21
al-Qirsh, Saʿd	21 March 1999	297	20-1
al-Ghobashy, Samy	28 March 1999	298	21
ʻAlam, Abdel Nasser	4 April 1999	299	21
Abdel Samiʿ , Fathy	11 April 1999	300	21
Khairallah, Mahmoud	18 April 1999	301	21
Khaḍer, Faris	25 April 1999	302	21
al-Zuhayri, ʻIsam	13 June 1999	309	21
Fouad, Emad	20 June 1999	310	21
Ismail, Khalid	27 June 1999	311	21
al-Qadi, Manal	4 July 1999	312	21
ʻAlam, Nagla	11 July 1999	313	21
Khalifa, Ihab	12 September 1999	322	30-1
Mehran, Maher	19 September 1999	323	28-9
Shaaban, Nagwa	26 September 1999	324	30-1
Abdel Aziz, Atef	17 October 1999	327	29
Hashem, Tarek	24 October 1999	328	27
Nabil, Ghada	21 November 1999	332	29
Badawi, Siham	9 January 2000	339	28-9
Mahmoud, Khalid	23 January 2000	341	30-1
al-Hilwany, Ghada	29 April 2001	407	33

Appendix B.

Nineties Generation and other Egyptian "New Writing" Novels Translated into English by the American University in Cairo Press (1998-2011)

Author	Translated Title	AUC Press Year	Arabic Title	Arabic Publisher	Arabic 1st Edition
Miral al-Tahawy	*The Tent*	1998	*al-Khibā'*	Sharqiyyat	1996
Miral al-Tahawy	*Blue Aubergine*	2002	*al-Bādhinjāna al-zarqā'*	Sharqiyyat	1998
Somaya Ramadan	*Leaves of Narcissus*	2002	*Awrāq al-narjis*	Sharqiyyat	2001
Ahmed Alaidy	*Being Abbas El Abd*	2006	*An takūn 'Abbās al-'Abd*	Merit	2003
Hamdi Abu Golayyel	*Thieves in Retirement**	2007	*Luṣūṣ mutaqā'idūn*	Merit	2002
Hamdy el-Gazzar	*Black Magic*	2007	*Siḥr aswad*	Merit	2005
Ibrahim Farghali	*The Smiles of Saints*	2007	*Ibtisāmāt al-qiddīsīn*	Merit	2004
Mansoura Ez Eldin	*Maryam's Maze*	2007	*Matāhat Maryām*	Merit	2004
Miral al-Tahawy	*Gazelle Tracks***	2009	*Naqarāt al-ẓibā'*	Sharqiyyat	2002
Hamdi Abu Golayyel	*A Dog with No Tail*	2009	*al-Fā'il*	Merit	2008
Amina Zaydan	*Red Wine*	2010	*Nabīdh aḥmar*	Dar al-Hilal	2007
Mai Khaled	*The Magic of Turquoise*	2011	*Siḥr al-tirkwāz*	Sharqiyyat	2006
Miral al-Tahawy	*Brooklyn Heights*	2011	*Brūklīn Hayts*	Merit	2010
Mona Prince	*So You May See*	2011	*Innī 'uḥaddithuka li-tarā*	Merit	2008

**Thieves in Retirement* was originally published with Syracuse University Press, 2006, and subsequently published by AUC Press by arrangement with Syracuse UP.
*** Gazelle Tracks* was originally published by Garnet Publishing, 2008, and subsequently published in 2009 by arrangement with Garnet.

Appendix C.

Recipients of the American University in Cairo's Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature

(1996 – 2010)

NMML Awarded	Author	Translated Title	Arabic Title	Arabic 1st Edition
1996	Ibrahim Abdel Meguid	*The Other Place*	*al-Balda al-'ukhrā*	1991
1996	Latifa al-Zayyat	*The Open Door*	*Al-Bāb al-maftūḥ*	1960
1997	Mourid Barghouti	*I Saw Ramallah*	*Rā'itu Rām Allah*	1997
1997	Yusuf Idris	*City of Love and Ashes*	*Qiṣṣat ḥubb*	1956
1998	Ahlam Mosteghanemi	*Memory in the Flesh*	*Dhākirat al-jasad*	1985
1999	Edwar al-Kharrat	*Rama and the Dragon*	*Rāma wa-al-tinnīn*	1980
2000	Hoda Barakat	*The Tiller of Waters*	*Ḥārith al-miyāh*	1998
2001	Somaya Ramadan	*Leaves of Narcissus*	*Awrāq al-narjis*	2001
2002	Bensalem Himmich	*The Polymath*	*al-'Allāma*	2001
2003	Khairy Shalaby	*The Lodging House*	*Wikālat 'aṭiyya*	1999
2004	Alia Mamdouh	*The Loved Ones*	*al-Maḥbūbāt*	2003
2005	Yusuf Abu Rayya	*Wedding Night*	*Laylat 'urs*	2002
2006	Sahar Khalifeh	*The Image, the Icon, and the Covenant*	*Ṣūra wa-ayqūna wa-'ahd qadīm*	2002
2007	Amina Zaydan	*Red Wine*	*Nabīdh aḥmar*	2007
2008	Hamdi Abu Golayyel	*A Dog with No Tail*	*al-Fā'il*	2008
2009	Khalil Sweileh	*The Scribe of Love*	*Warrāq al-ḥubb*	2008
2010	Miral al-Tahawy	*Brooklyn Heights*	*Brūklīn Hayts*	2010

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*Hosni Soliman asked that we not record his interview but allowed us to take notes during our conversation. Henjum and I compared our notes following the interview, and I clarified points with Soliman, as needed, to ensure that I was accurately representing his views.