Int. J. Middle East Stud. **46** (2014), 175–184
doi:10.1017/S0020743813001384

REVIEW ARTICLE

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WHENCE? WHITHER? THE MODERN ARABIC LITERARY NARRATIVE: SOME HAZARDED SPECULATIONS

TAREK EL-ARISS, *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

ZIAD ELMARSAFY, *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012).

MARGARET LITVIN, *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost* (Princeton, N.J., and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011).

SYRINE HOUT, *Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction: Home Matters in the Diaspora* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012).

SAMIA MEHREZ, ed., *The Literary Atlas of Cairo: One Hundred Years on the Streets of the City* (Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2010).

SAMIA MEHREZ, ed., *The Literary Life of Cairo: One Hundred Years in the Heart of the City* (Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2011).

SAMIA MEHREZ, ed., *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir* (Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2012).

SHADEN M. TAGELDIN, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley, Calif., Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2011).

Postwar Lebanon, Sufism, imperial translations, Hamlet, trials and atlases, city streets, literary cafés, and Tahrir Square: disorienting as these various themes might appear to be, they nonetheless entitle eight recent inquiries into contemporary—and precedent—directions of literary critical studies of the modern Arabic novel and their calculated revisions of, perhaps, another Arabic literary historical narrative that necessarily engages multigenre, comparative literary–historical investigations. Each of the works under review here was published between 2010 and 2013, with just one specifically, and that ex post facto, addressing the momentous events in Cairo's Tahrir Square in the early months of 2011. In other words, these works might well have already anticipated a more than seasonal, some would even argue historic, "Arab spring," and at least several of the works' authors found it necessary to append an epilogue to their in-production text,

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or otherwise slightly, subtly, revise at the last minute their presumptive chronologies and the contested trajectories of modern Arabic literature that attend them. From the classically proverbial "tradition versus modernity" discussions through their historicist implications for the cultural production of new media and alternative public spheres, each of these studies seeks, in its own way/s, to instantiate Arabic literature—and Arabic literary criticism—within and against its respected precursors. But where will that self-same literature, and its current critical mediations, eventually wind up, whether globally, nationally, or historically?

Whereas the received wisdom regarding the "origins" of the Arabic novel—*turāth* (tradition) or *ḥadātha* (modernity)—is assiduously rehearsed, and at considerable length, in Wen-chin Ouyang's two compendious and recherché monographs on "nation-state, modernity and tradition," *Poetics of Love in the Arabic Novel* and *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel*, that canonical wisdom is more effectively unsettled in other consentaneously published studies of modern Arabic narrative.[1] Like Ouyang's surveys, each of the studies under review here is, directly or obliquely, concerned with charting the literary historical trajectory from classical Arabic literature through the 19th-century *nahḍa* (or renaissance, according to some anglophonic historicizing critics) and continuing into the (so-called) postcolonial period, with its uncertain and convulsive present of regional uprising and rapidly spreading political upheaval. Ziad Elmarsafy accounts perhaps for the longest durée of all in *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel*, invoking as he does the influence of early spiritual thinkers in recontextualizing six modern, and altogether canonical, Arabic novelists. Elmarsafy's geohistorical focus on the centuries-long tradition of Sufi thought gives way both to an extension of its reach and a narrowing of its purview, however, in Syrine Hout's *Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction*, a study of "home matters in the diaspora" and their specification in the immediate aftermath of the Lebanese civil war (1975-c.1990) as it is made manifest in the "rise of the diasporic Anglophone Lebanese narrative since 1998" (p. 3). Tarek El-Ariss' *Trials of Arab Modernity* and Shaden Tageldin's *Disarming Words* in turn narrate a chronology that emphasizes the newly recognized classics of the *nahḍa* as necessary preliminaries to a comprehension of the progression of an Arabic literary narrative into modernity. If El-Ariss looks ahead to "literary affects and the new political" across the Arab world, Tageldin identifies "empire and the seductions of translation in Egypt" as already crucial to its comprehension. Sustaining the central place of Egypt in those traditional debates over a newly revisioned political arena, Samia Mehrez's two edited volumes, *The Literary Atlas of Cairo* and *The Literary Life of Cairo*, anthologies of selected writings from "one hundred years on the streets of the city" and "one hundred years in the heart of the city," respectively, reprise the classic—and classical—Egyptian contributors to a modern Arabic literary history. Mehrez's most recent publication, *Translating Egypt's Revolution*, which is also the most recently published selection in this concatenation of modern Arabic literary criticism, is redolent perhaps of the most poignantly nostalgic narrative of all, collecting as it does interpretive readings of the vital signs of a reactivated street life of Egypt's short-lived eighteen-day *thawra* (revolution) of January–February 2011. That critical itinerary is dramatically remapped yet again in Margaret Litvin's *Hamlet's Arab Journey*, which connects postrevolutionary Cairo with Renaissance London's Globe Theatre through a provocative examination of the roles variously played by "Shakespeare's prince and Nasser's ghost" on the stages and in the

pages of Arabic literature, from that historic year of another, rather earlier, Egyptian revolution in 1952 to just before its eventual and eventful successor in 2011.

"GLOBAL KALEIDOSCOPE"

In *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost,* Margaret Litvin projects a "global kaleidoscope" as a new methodological lens through which to view Arabic literary history. The book offers, that is, a study of Arab "appropriations" of Shakespeare's tragedy. The term itself, "appropriations," is critical to Litvin's readings of staged and literary examples of Hamlet's more than a century-long intercontinental itinerary and its principal as well as less recognized performances in Arab and Western capitals over the last six decades, since ʿAbd al-Nasir's 1952 revolution in Egypt. Eschewing the more traditional approaches to modern Arabic literature and their biases toward either establishing sources or origins within the Arabic *turāth* (classical heritage) or, alternatively, salvaging that generic corpus as part of post/colonial paradigms of confrontation, Litvin proposes, as she describes it, a "global kaleidoscope," an approach that would instead insist on "reinserting Arabic literature into world literature" (p. 2). Such a combined emphasis on "content" and "context," if you will, is a distinguishing feature of the "global kaleidoscope," which necessitates critical attention not only to the cultural artifacts themselves but also to their geopolitical and sociohistorical circumstances. Those very circumstances are recounted by Litvin through readings of ʿAbd al-Nasir's early penchant for revolutionary theatricality and his subsequent censorial antipathy to dissident playwrights and intellectuals, as well as of the disastrous impact of the 1967 war with Israel and the equally calamitous effects of his successor al-Sadat's economic policies of *infitāḥ* (open door) and political capitulations at Camp David. Thus it is that *Hamlet's Arab Journey*, which culminates inconclusively with "six plays in search of a protagonist," so effectively and convincingly grounds the scripts and performances of Hamlet's appearances on the Arab stage and between the covers of the storied plays' published versions in a demandingly informed historical materialism—nothing short of, but grasping further than, a "global kaleidoscope," a re-cognition of Arabic literary history as more than a bit player in an ever more contentious global literary politics.

That kaleidoscopic vision is further enhanced by Ziad Elmarsafy's explorations of the Sufi inflections in the writings of contemporary writers: Egyptian Najib Mahfuz, Sudanese Tayeb Salih, Tunisian Mahmud al-Masʿadi, Egyptian Gamal al-Ghitani, Libyan Ibrahim al-Koni, Algerian/Berber Tahar Ouettar, and, finally, another Egyptian, Bahaa Taher. Invoking Virginia Woolf, Elmarsafy argues that the "novel has become a global art form," a claim backed up apparently by the additional citation of Frank Kermode's argument that the "novel lends itself to explanations borrowed from any intellectual system of the universe which seems at the time satisfactory" (p. 5). "At the time": for Elmarsafy, that time comes

> between the assassination of Sadat, the consolidation of dictatorship as a political norm from Morocco to Kuwait, the atrocities of civil war in Lebanon and Algeria, the ongoing travesty that is the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, the invasion of Kuwait and the two Gulf Wars, and the fate of Iraq under Saddam and under American occupation. (p. 6)

That time, those times, in other words, warrant what Elmarsafy discerns in these writers as the "turn to Sufism," a turn that the critic will argue is the "net result of

a sense of abandonment that pervades both the writer and the surrounding world; a world for which nothing—not science, not progress, not revolution—can do any good" (p. 7). It is this desolate sense of abandonment, Elmarsafy maintains in his analyses of the sequence of novels, that compels the Nobel laureate Mahfuz to seek in literary creativity new options for legislating social justice in the apparent Sufi contradictions between disengagement and political commitment. With Tayeb Salih, then, come the "returns of the saint" to the Sudanese village of Wad Hamid, in an allegory, claims Elmarsafy, "of postcolonial development"; but the critic goes on in turn to discover Mahmud al-Masʿadi "witnessing immortality" and the "failure of self-overcoming," a protagonist who is to be followed by the "survival of Gamal Al-Ghitany" and Egypt's "60s Generation" of writers and intellectuals, reported in a chapter that explores al-Ghitani's "appropriation of Ibn ʿArabi. . .as a way of dealing with issues of authorship, political change, mourning, writing and survival" (p. 79). If it is survival that is in question, however, in the Egyptian writer's oeuvre, it is an alternative Sufi "identity as an Arabophone Touareg" (p. 107) that invests Elmarsafy's discussion of the "writing and sacrifice" in and of Libyan Ibrahim al-Kony's desert novels, a dramatic conflict that eventually erupts in further conflagration in Algerian Tahar Ouettar, presented as a "saint" living through the "nightmare of history," compelled, as the critic describes the struggle, to "remap the nature of political inquiry" (p. 139). Historical circumstances, that is, are not antithetical to Sufism; on the contrary, "far from being an ahistorical, apolitical or politically disengaged undertaking . . . the turn to Sufism in contemporary Arabic fiction faces the intractable forces of history head on" (p. 166). What is crucial, however, according to Elmarsafy's epilogue on Bahaa Taher, another representative of Egypt's "60s Generation," is that this "turn," so to speak, revolves "without turning the novel into a political agenda." After all, invoking the "movement and upheaval of the 2011 Arab Spring," "it remains to be seen," Elmarsafy speculates, "what the cultural outcome of these events will be" (p. 166).

While Syrine Hout's *Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction* follows a similarly straightforward organizational format as that drafted in *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel* (author/s = chapter), her "kaleidoscope" is at once more historically specific (post-Lebanese civil war) and more geographically dislocated, dealing as she does with "home matters in the diaspora." Hout draws significantly for her argumentation on a collage of critical citations, both referencing the novels themselves and overdetermined by favored Euro-American commentators. Hout nonetheless introduces the chosen narratives of "post-war Anglophone Lebanese fiction" with an accounting of the authors' "roots and routes," emphasizing their critical relevance in a situation where, she claims, "there can be no agreement on a consistent war narrative" in no small part because "state-sponsored forgetfulness becomes a strategy to suppress political memory" (p. 2). The prolific writings of a diasporic generation—"a quarter of the [nation's] population left the country between 1975 and 2007," she pointedly notes—thus combine to demonstrate, oppositionally, if disputedly, their "collective endeavour of memorialising a contested and largely suppressed history of the civil war" (p. 2). That very endeavor remains even here and now in question.

Unlike Elmarsafy's presentation of Sufi-influenced modern Arabic novels, Hout's discussion of "post-war Anglophone Lebanese fiction" is organized chronologically according to the works' dates of publication, attending thereby to the imperative of

constructing an intellectual history—even if one that is only a generation long. Divided into three sections, with another one-chapter concluding section, Hout's generic discussion of these generic, "foreign language" (or non-Arabic), variants begins with a focus on questions of competing sexual and national identities and HIV/AIDS in novels by Rabih Alameddine, Tony Hanania, and Nada Awar Jarrar. The related thematics of "homesickness" and "sickness of home" underwrite Hout's arguments connecting the Lebanese war and the AIDS epidemic in North America; eventually, these thematics become traumatic memories that are the focus of the following section on the "scars of war." This second section considers two more novels by Alameddine, stories that describe in painful detail the effects of protracted violence on that war's survivors who were "too young at the time to translate their fears and hopes into writing" (p. 12). Hout pursues these traumatic interrogatories and self-reflections in Part Three, "Playing with Fire at Home and Abroad," in reviewing multiple novels, including the 1999 autobiographical *L'Ecole de la guerre* (The School of War) by Alexandre Najjar. Najjar, according to the critic, "describes the experience of many of his generation," a generation, involving here again Alameddine, Nathalie Abi-Ezzithat, and Rawi Hage, who together "protested loudly against the madness and the futility of factionalism" (p. 106). That very project insinuates itself into the conflicted environment despite the culture of militarization in which the fictional characters—and their very real authors—endured excruciating rites of passage from childhood innocence to wary adolescence, and eventually from an erstwhile home to the "utopian" discoveries of diaspora. Finally, in the last section of *Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction*, Hout compares—and contrasts—exile and repatriation, in a reprise of other novels from the oeuvre of Najjar and Hage. She then concludes in a poignant afterword that necessarily reflects on both the timeliness and the shortened longevity of a "genre" so provocatively and productively located in the immediate aftermath of a national-historical crisis even as the critic just as necessarily argues for its perduring place in "world literature."

Shaden Tageldin returns the reader of these very recent literary critical accounts of the origins and genesis of a modern Arabic narrative, and its contemporary crises, to Egypt and the 19th-century *nahḍa* in *Disarming Words*, an erudite study of "empire and the seductions of translation in Egypt"—and, once again, their consequentiality for the renovations of the erstwhile provincial parameters of "world literature." As Tageldin describes the critical process in the "overture" to *Disarming Words*, "cultural imperialism revisited," the process vitally entails a scholarly revisitation that will be executed through a perverse revision of the conflicted, even violent at times, interrelations of translation, seduction, and power. According to Tageldin, the "culture of imperialism," certainly in the case of Egypt, her focus, "might be better understood as a politics that lures the colonized to seek power *through* empire rather than against it, to translate their cultures into an empowered 'equivalence' with those of their dominators and thereby repress the inequalities between those dominators and themselves" (p. 4).

It is this politics of a "translational seduction" that is examined in *Disarming Words* by way of close readings of the "cultural afterlives of two modern colonial occupations of Egypt—the French in 1798 and the British in 1882" (p. 7). Tageldin's probing research into the politics of translational seduction argues, while not altogether against the grain of an inherited and obdurate binarist proclivity, toward, at least, its modest rearticulation in the exposure of the dependent distribution of power relations that have long endorsed

the paradigm of "Europe and its others": "the traditional province of a postcolonial studies centered on domination and resistance" (pp. 17–24). Drawing on international, but, as with Hout's referential bibliography, largely Euro-American critical sources of translation theory and sexuality studies, *Disarming Words* interworks this outsourced referentiality with a probing excavation of contemporary—19th century, that is—archives to frame and reframe her argument turning "capture" into "rapture" as the guiding trope in the narrative of the "culture of imperialism" (p. 76). In the course of its chronologically arranged six chapters, from the 1798 arrival of Napoleon on the Mediterranean shores of Egypt to "Egypt at empire's end" a century and a half later, Tageldin's book narrates a story of "rule more by seduction than by fiat," a seduction that is resisted, volubly and fluently, by the provocative—even seductive—translational strategems at the hands wielding the inky pens and on the tongues that so eloquently riposte and ventriloquize the colonizers' languages. In her chapter "The Irresistible Lure of Recognition," for example, it is the translations of Napoleon's proclamations that betray the foreign and indigenous perfidies alike, whereas "The Dismantling *I*" transforms the colonized into beholder, whose very gaze eventually feminizes the predatious colonizer in a perverse seduction plot that involves the imaginative literature of the *maqāma* of al-ʿAttar in a prominently active, even activist, role. It is al-Tahtawi who steps up next, in "Suspect Kinships," to "interrupt conventional historiographies of Egyptian-European cultural contact" (p. 108), to be followed in "Surrogate Seed, World-Tree" with Ali Mubarak and al-Sibaʿi jousting with the prolific British pundit of empire, Thomas Babington Macaulay, in endeavoring to uncover "something to love in imperial culture" (p. 173). As the century turns, and one revolution succeeds another, al-Mazini is observed to take the stage in a valiant effort to pose new questions regarding "order, origin, and the elusive sovereign." According to Tageldin, by providing these storied seductions within their historical context, it becomes eminently evident that it was "between the afterlife of French occupation, the spasmodic renewal and slow death of Ottoman rule, and the long shadow of the British Empire, then, [that] modern 'Egypt' was born," a birth that must necessarily have implicated the "illicit copulations of Egypt at empire's end." The discursive intercourse of the final chapter, "English Lessons," focuses on the post–World War II work of two Nobel laureates, Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* and Najib Mahfuz's *Zuqaq al-Midaqq* (Midaq Alley), and their shared concern with the "illicit copulations of Egypt at empire's end," as the final chapter's subtitle describes the exchanges. In other words—those of Tageldin at the book's culmination—the project inherent in "disarming words" can be none other than "to reimagine cultural imperialism as a dynamic of translational seduction rather than unilateral imposition," all without "neutraliz[ing] either the cultural or corporeal violence that domination has visited upon the colonized" (p. 288).

The titular trials in Tarek El-Ariss' *Trials of Arab Modernity* refer more to the tribulations than any actual judicial prosecutions of that historic violence—whether cultural or corporeal—unleashed by the imperial enterprise. In his own compellingly kaleidoscopic survey of the "literary affects" of those "trials" and the anticipated "new political," El-Ariss, like Tageldin, opens his narrative of the modern Arabic novel in and with the *nahḍa*, and similarly seeks to situate the ensuing tribulations of "Arab modernity in the relation to the body" (p. 1). *Trials of Arab Modernity*, extending the narrative into the digital era, plays further with the myriad lexical components that serve to

make up his kaleidoscope and disorganize the teleological storyline—*ḥadath* (event), *ḥādith* (accident), *ḥaditha* (episode), and their plurals *aḥdāth* and *ḥawādith* (conflict)—to reframe Arab modernity (*ḥadātha*) as somatic (see p. 5f), connecting "links" that are "inscribed in the body, a site of literary and cultural narratives and histories" (p. 5). In his inquiry into the "trials (and tribulations) of Arab modernity," the critic argues once more with and against the binarist grain, offering instead a literary critical narrative that precipitously wends its way "in between and beside East and West," a perspicuous trajectory that demands "close yet lateral readings that are philological and comparative at the same time" (p. 11).

El-Ariss sets out in pursuit of that literary-historical itinerary with al-Tahtawi en route from Egypt to France, where the young Egyptian student studies, at the behest of his Ottoman governor Muhammad ʿAli, with the critic hailing the earlier traveler through the unsettling accounts of his travels—and travails—in Marseille. El-Ariss is guided along much of the peripatetic route by Walter Benjamin's 20th-century dragomanic and illuminating insights that assist in the 21st-century critical traveler's assessment of what Ibrahim Abu-Lughod once referred to as the "Arab rediscovery of Europe."[2] Accompanying the Syrian al-Shidyaq, al-Tahtawi's successor-fellow traveler at the other end of the century, however, it is less the seductions of European civilization than its revolting repugnance that physically and sensorially overwhelm El-Ariss and otherwise intrepid intellectual tourists in England, both city- (London) and country- (Cambridge) wide. In "Aversion to Civilization," that is, El-Ariss seeks to fumigate Shidyaq's travel diaries of their all too noxious excoriations of "British meat-eating habits," the country's "libertine posture and attitude" (ultimately tantamount, it would seem, to barbarism), its all pervasive smoke and darkness, by closely reading the texts as the hypersensitive traveler-writer's "staging of the critique of civilization." In further deftly executed lexical manipulation, El-Ariss discovers for himself—and reveals for his readers—in Shidyaq's *kashf* (or "discovery," as in the title of one of the Syrian nahdist's memoirs) nothing short of an exposé of "modernity as a disgusting work of art (*fan*, *funun*), disgusting dish, and a disgusting 'modern' text that reeks and smokes" (p. 77). Nor is the pestilential air of British imperialism mixed with "Arab modernity" altogether cleared in the modernist-like leap forward into the 20th century in the following chapter, "Staging the Colonial Encounter," with its examination of the subsequent "transformative experience of a male Arab student studying in France or England" (p. 88). The student in question is Mustafa Saeed, one of two ex-student narrators in Tayeb Salih's controversial, if also curricularly canonical, *Season of Migration to the North*. This novel, since its publication in Arabic in 1966 and English translation in 1970, has become a mainstay of "introduction to world literature" surveys, not least, perhaps, for the narrative acrobatics of its geo-literary straddling of three geopolitical regions: Europe, Africa, and the Arab world. "I am Arab-African," Mustafa Saeed, after all, had told his multiple European interlocutors and cross-examiners in the one actual courtroom trial cited in *Trials of Arab Modernity*.

Mustafa's notorious sexual encounters in London recounted in Salih's *Season of Migration* are recast in the next chapter, "Majnun Strikes Back," in its development of a "new configuration of Majnun" (p. 116), the classically star-crossed romantic hero of the story that tells of his ill-fated love for Layla.[3] The Majnun who "strikes back" is now, according to El-Ariss, a "queer Majnun," a "homosexual rebel and impassioned lover, disrupting social norms and exposing structures of violence," in at least two

works, *Innaha London* and *Thieves in Retirement* by Hanan al-Shaykh and Hamdi Abu Golayyel, respectively, and the situationally peripatetic *aḥdāth* (previously, preciously called events and/or accidents) are audaciously rewritten as "sexual encounters, fits of madness, and acting out" (p. 117). Noting that the "treatment of 'the modern' in modern Arabic literature as an unchanging and clearly circumscribed time period, associated with specific political struggles, intellectual debates, and literary works, is out of touch with Arab social, political, and cultural transformations" (p. 141), El-Ariss invokes as evidence the fall of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in early 2011. Thus, in the final chapter of *Trials of Modernity*, a "new generation of Arab authors . . . entering the scene of writing from the world of blogging and scriptwriting" (145) looms large. Brazenly and unabashedly "publishing blogs as novels," these scriptural upstarts are described as boldly engaged in "hacking the modern." This new generation, according to El-Ariss' representation, relate—kaleidoscopically perhaps, but certainly globally—to "English not as a foreign language, but rather as the language that is constitutive of their cultural landscape and their subjectivities" (p. 147). Citing nonetheless writers such as Lebanese Elias Khoury and Egyptian Sonallah Ibrahim as 60s generations precursors, the critic examines Ahmed Alaidy's celebrated 2003 "novel," *Being Abbas el Abd*, as a radical upstaging, an undaunted hacking event, of the long prevailing "liberationist master narrative of Arab literary and political modernity," denouncing that narrative as always already an "advertisement, disseminated and marketed by Arab autocratic regimes and Islamists alike" (p. 159).

Arab modernity, it would seem, is being variously hacked, disarmed, diasporized, spiritualized, and/or restaged by its contemporary critical readers in response to the ongoing tribulations of modernization and the residual and renewed vicissitudes under colonialism and neo-imperialism, economic and political, as well as literary critical. There is, according to El-Ariss, nonetheless still "talk of a new *Nahda*" (p. 180), a phenomenon that yet other readers refer to, however allusively or in ex post facto epilogues, as a "post-Arab spring," talk in which Cairo's Tahrir Square remains writ large through the premises—literary critical and geopolitical alike—of the accounts of both the past promises and new directions of modern Arabic narratives.

Published in 2010, Samia Mehrez's *Literary Atlas of Cairo* reads almost nostalgically now, just three years later. Mehrez collects in the atlas an assemblage of translations, many of them her own, of literary representations of "one hundred years on the streets of the city," both cartographizing and topographizing the selections into an eloquent map of Cairo's distinguished jurisdictional position within modern Arab literary history. "Entering the City Victorious" in the waning years of the *nahḍa*, *The Literary Atlas of Cairo* and its writers are choreographed into four sectional quadrants that, after "mapping Cairo," walk the itinerant lector through the city's "public spaces" and "private spaces" before propelling the wayfarer toward getting "on the move in Cairo." With no fewer than fifty-six guides to show the way through the atlas, the wandering reader is led further still, into a second volume: Mehrez's compendium of the literary remnants, the haunts and hauntings of the writers themselves, the heralded "icons" of Cairo, that "mother of cities," describing their global cosmopolitanism and loyal provincialism alike, their schools, their struggles in and over the streets, the city's women, its underworld, and even its drug culture. *The Literary Life of Cairo*, that is, ventures behind the facades of the atlas to reveal the faces of the Egyptian capital's denizens and citizens, its

trespassers and its indigenes, indulging their favorite habits and inhabiting their preferred spaces.

Mehrez's *The Literary Atlas* and *The Literary Life of Cairo*, prepared on the brink of the Egyptian *thawra* (revolution) of early 2011, consummate in critically important ways both the storied history of a "city victorious" and a critical account of its literary historiography. In her most recent edited volume, however, *Translating Egypt's Revolution*, published in late 2012, Mehrez and her AUC students of translation studies excavate, as if picking up the pieces of that literary narrative, the "language of Tahrir," from the shattered and graffitied detritus of the fabled, palimpsestic *midān* (city square) following the exhilaration of the uprising and the fall of Mubarak and their calamitous aftermath with the election of Muslim Brother Mohammed Morsi as Egypt's new (if soon to be short-lived) president. Was it, in other words, a "coup" or a "revolution" that was transpiring not only in Cairo's barricaded streets but throughout the region during the summer months of 2013? What, that is, will be the consequences for the "global kaleidoscope" of modern Arabic literature?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The curfew, however, would seem to have lifted for now at least on the once-lamented shuttering of the modern Arabic literary narrative, both behind and between the forbidding binarisms of *turāth* and *ḥadātha*, tradition and modernity. Nor is the often paralyzing and dichotomizing problematic of continuity versus discontinuity as prevalent as is sometimes claimed to have once been the case. New directions, new and improvised alternatives, even repeated challenges, to be sure, but as the "acknowledgments" pages of these several volumes luminously betray, Arabic literary history is very much still in good standing, its apparent unmaking notwithstanding. These too often unacknowledged, left unread, mostly numbered in italics, acknowledgements pages provocatively testify, sometimes discreetly, at other times less so, not only to the intellectual genealogies that have influenced the pages to come, but to the contemporary circles, academic and otherwise, that have informed, influenced, assisted (and/or obstructed) in sundry ways the research, the thought processes, the composition, the publication history, and the production of the book itself. For all that Shakespeare may have provided inspiration for Arab dramatists and novelists—the stuff of *Hamlet's Arab Journey*, that is—Margaret Litvin thanks her University of Chicago dissertation committee, including eminent literary critic Farouk Moustafa. In Cairo, her gratitude goes to, among others, Arabist Abbas Al-Tonsi and dramatist Mahmoud El Lozy. She acknowledges scholars in Alexandria, Beirut, Kuwait, Baghdad, and Amman, as well as at U.S. universities, and the support of such disparate academic guilds as the American Comparative Literature Association, the Middle East Studies Association, and the World Shakespeare Congress. For Ziad Elmarsafy, in turn, tribute is paid to Rasheed El-Anany, editor of the Edinburgh University Press series in Modern Arabic Literature (in which several of the works under review were published), but also to the author's home institution of and colleagues at the University of York (United Kingdom) as well as several counterparts in Paris dedicated to the study of Islam and the Arab world. The acknowledgements of Sabine Hout, for her part, consist of thanks to those several journals that granted permission to reprint articles that earlier appeared in their own pages, but also express gratitude for the

insights provided by her graduate students at the American University of Beirut, as well as her colleagues at the same institution in the Department of English. Like Elmarsafy, Hout speaks to the importance of El-Enany's editorship in promoting the publication of new studies in Arabic literature. Shaden Tageldin begins by acknowledging that her book is a "translation of many minds, times, spaces, and voices," a concatenating litany that includes the Europe in the Middle East—the Middle East in Europe (EUME) program, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and her home institution of the University of Minnesota. On a less institutional level, she salutes such mentors as Gaber Asfour in Cairo, Wen-chin Ouyang in London, and Judith Butler in Berkeley. Tarek El-Ariss has praise for his home institution in Austin, Texas, and for his colleagues across the College of Liberal Arts there. His teachers and mentors at Cornell deserve mention too, including Jonathan Culler and Emily Apter, as do his Beirut intellectual interlocutors such as Hoda Barakat and Mona Amyuni. No less important to El-Ariss is eminent Columbia professor of Arabic studies, Muhsin al-Musawi. Samia Mehrez thanks in particular the "authors of Cairo," as well as the Ford Foundation and The Netherlands Cultural Fund in Cairo and the Rockeller Foundation's Villa Serbelloni in Bellagio, Italy, for their financial support and intellectual sustenance. AUC's long-standing librarian, Jayme Spencer, was indispensable to the project, as were members of the staff at AUC Press. Mehrez's translation students at AUC are each fully cited for their contributions to "translating Egypt's revolution." To paraphrase, or rather, more to the point, to cite nearly verbatim these varied protocols in the art of "acknowledgment," the names are "too numerous to list in full."

Kaleidoscopically numerous as their influential literary critical protagonists are, it might have to be acknowledged too that those very acknowledgment pages stand as a powerful and provocative testament to the global, genealogical, historical, institutional, and interdisciplinary reaches and trajectories of the study—and its histories—of the "modern Arabic narrative."

NOTES

[1]Wen-chin Ouyang, *Poetics of Love in the Arabic Novel: Nation-State, Modernity and Tradition* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012); idem, *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel: Nation-State, Modernity and Tradition* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2013).

[2]Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *The Arab Rediscovery of Europe: A Study in Cultural Encounters* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963).

[3]See Tarek El-Ariss, "Majnun Strikes Back: Crossings of Madness and Homosexuality in Contemporary Arabic Literature," special issue "Queer Affects," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 293–312.