

to the various questions put by the Arabic novel about the problems of the legitimacy of political power. The codes of conduct for the ruler and ruled are analysed in the light of *The Thousand and One Nights* and of the allegory *Layālī alf layla* by Naguib Mahfouz, to put in evidence the possibility of improper use of power on the part of the state. The third part explores the subject of desire in modern Arab history, essentially with two objectives: decolonization and modernization. Indeed Ouyang's attention dwells upon the intersection between the two impulses (decolonization and modernization), which provoke a strong impact in modern Arabic literary expression. A deep analysis of the nostalgic impulse present in the Arabic novel shows how the Arab nation has sometimes been oppressed by its own past. However, according to the author (p. 274), desire and utopia are necessary to imagine and develop a plausible society and a modern structure moving towards its autonomous configuration. Moreover, in the complexity of elements like desire, love and nostalgia, the role of women is also underlined as essential in the literary genre of the novel, in both its symbolic and its concrete or physical functions (pp. 249–53).

The epilogue to the volume opens with a quotation from David Lowenthal, pertinent to the spirit of Wen-chin Ouyang's analysis: "The past is everywhere ... whether it is celebrated or rejected, attended to or ignored, the past is omnipresent" (p. 273). In her conclusion the author underlines, once again, how the persistent ambivalence of positions regarding the formation of the nation and the acceptance of modernity in modern Arab culture reflect themselves also in the modern Arabic novel, sometimes revived to legitimize the foundation of the future, sometimes surpassed to avoid previous errors. According to the author, this is an enormous paradox denoting great uncertainty about the future. In fact, she writes: "Nostalgia at once imprisons the present in the past and distorts the past, making it impossible for the present and future to have the freedom they need to take their own shape" (pp. 273–4).

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WEN-CHIN OUYANG:

Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel.

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In this volume Wen-chin Ouyang, discussing the theme of the politics of nostalgia in the Arabic novel, analyses some typical phenomena of the post-modern period based on "a new understanding of the past" (p. 225). In fact she goes on to inquire about the discourse of the Arabic novel on modernization, and focuses particularly on the subjects of nostalgia and madness. She examines the ways in which this literary genre looks at the present through the lens of the past, nostalgically reviving the tradition and rewriting it in a dialectic discourse. In the light of the strong contrasts suffered by the Arab literary world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries until today, she underlines some paradoxical aspects of the "new" attitude, showing how easily the past tradition can become a burden for the present, when nation building and modernization come face to face with insurmountable political realities. However, she also admits that heritage can be the first step towards linking tradition with modernity and towards building a new postcolonial national identity (p. 225).

Ouyang divides her volume into three parts, and each part into two chapters. In part I she brings to light the features of literary politics still turning towards the past. To rewrite tradition with new ways using newly revisited traditional genres, to engage positively with the past, to keep nostalgia as a force in creating a new present and a new future: all those actions seem to be positive powers for the formative evolution of the modern Arabic novel. Finally, in this first part of the volume, Ouyang underlines both the importance of nostalgia as a motive power in the labyrinth of intertextuality and the role of the active action of “archaeology” in the Arabic novel (p. 68).

In the second part the author faces the complex theme of madness and alienation due to the difficulty in finding a common identity and a definite national ideology: in Arabic literature the ruins of dream and memory seem to be buried under a world of crazy words and of questions without answers, where a widespread deep anxiety about life shows a close affinity between stories and history. In this way, she observes, the madness of the surrounding world seems to be reflected in the madness of the language of literary texts. Among the various writers and the many texts Wen-chin Ouyang uses to integrate her work, there are *Dākira li 'l-nisyan* by Maḥmūd Darwīsh and *Maḡnūn al-ḥukm* by Bensalem Himmich: the first to demonstrate how illusory a love passion could be, the second to offer evidence for how desire could often resemble madness, how madness could often be a tyranny and how often tyranny is bound to the wish of liberation, in a triangle of signs which is sometimes impassable. The author writes: “Madness (*ḡunūn*) and reason (*'aql*) make an odd couple in Arabic epistemology. They are not necessarily diametrically opposed on Arabic poetics of love . . . Madness and sanity are two sides of the same coin when tyranny is omnipresent” (p. 125).

The third part of the volume is devoted to the analysis of the triad formed by time, history and story, used in modern Arabic novels in order to write a new national literature. Wen-chin Ouyang shows how some traditional literary genres, such as biography, autobiography or the *musāmarāt*, are intensively used by modern writers in a modern way (pp. 147–57). Among the texts she cites and analyses, she writes at length about the novel *Awlād ḥāratinā* by Naguib Mahfouz, underlining that in this novel the allegory of the history of the whole of humanity represents also the story of Egypt searching for the right government system and a better distribution of wealth. In this third part of the volume the author speaks about a kind of “nationalization of history” (p. 165).

In the epilogue (pp. 224–7) the author confronts the problem of the renewal of the modern Arabic novel in its various forms and underlines that “the dominance of the nation-state as the structuring episteme and chronotope is problematical politically and aesthetically for various groups of writers” (p. 225). However, in this epilogue she appears less pessimistic than in the previous volume, *Poetics of Love in the Arabic Novel*. Once again she uses a passage by Loventhal to introduce her thoughts: “All at once heritage is everywhere . . . One can barely move without bumping into a heritage site”. We can suppose that she agrees with him when he says, answering the question about the reasons why heritage is so crucial in a world beset by poverty and hunger, enmity and strife: “We seek comfort in past bequests partly to allay these griefs” (p. 224). Wen-chin Ouyang concludes her volume by expressing her personal ideas about the modern Arabic novel, underlining that “the story the ‘Arabic novel that employs tradition’ tells is only one part of the history of this genre in Arabic” (p. 226).

The rich bibliography offered by the volume, above all in Arabic, offers to scholars a precious cue for research on the fascinating themes analysed by the author. Her choice of the various writers quoted in her study is based on her personal

sensibility, her personal aesthetic tastes, her personal sympathy and, not least, her specific interest in their ideas in the light of her analysis.

Despite the complexity and richness of the subjects treated by Wen-chin Ouyang in these two volumes, and despite the undeniable difficulty in rationalizing a phenomenon as rich and composite as the evolution of the modern Arabic novel, Ouyang's work is serious and interesting, and offers a valuable contribution to the study of modern Arabic literature, in a new and variegated key.

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SARRA TLILI:

Animals in the Qur'an.

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This work is not, as the title might suggest, a thorough examination of the various occurrences of non-human animals in the Quran, although for readers interested in such information, two appendixes provide a comprehensive catalogue of Quranic non-human animal species and categories. Rather, in this revision of a PhD dissertation written under Joseph Lowry at the University of Pennsylvania (2009), Tlili mounts a formidable argument for animal rights in Islam rooted in Quranic concepts. She challenges the prevalent Muslim view of humanity's elevated status over other animals through what she calls an eco-centric reading that disputes common interpretations of Quranic passages that seem to suggest human superiority, and by arguing that anthropomorphic perspectives have often been projected on the Quran. With the help of the polyvalent interpretations of four Muslim exegetes (al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, and ibn-Kathīr) and intricate philological detective work, she foregrounds a Quranic depiction of animals as spiritual, moral, intelligent and accountable beings, a depiction she believes stands out from the less positive representations of animals in other faith traditions.

After introductory chapters on portrayals of animals outside of Islamic tradition, and on Quranic exegesis, Tlili first deconstructs the notion of the inferiority of non-human animals attributed to the Quranic concepts of *taskhīr* and *tadhīl* (subjugation of non-human animals), *istikhlāf* (vice-regency of humans), and *maskh* (metamorphosis of disobedient humans into non-human animals). She argues that *taskhīr* and *tadhīl* do not imply coercive subjugation of non-human animals to humans (a notion she attributes to the biblical concept of "dominion"), but rather the God-ordained willing serviceability and adaptability of only certain animals for human needs; that humans require such service shows their lack of self-sufficiency instead of their superiority. Vice-regency, she submits, has been read into the Quranic notion of *istikhlāf* from the later political development of the caliphate; the term originally refers simply to "succession". And metamorphosis of disobedient humans into non-human animals does not necessarily imply the inferiority of the latter, but rather signifies the punishing confusion and pain of humans trapped in non-human bodies.

Tlili then turns to construct a non-speciesist, theocentric Quranically-based view of non-human animals, beginning with a key verse that places humans and animals