INTRODUCTION

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Literature is the art of language. Through the mighty instrument of language human being can change their environment. They can communicate not only realistic information, but also pass this information on to succeeding generations who can obtain the benefits of this knowledge and experience of the past. They can convey thoughts and emotional experiences through the written word, and do so in a manner that is aesthetically satisfying to them and in an artistic form. To make it meaningful to their readers they not only record, but contemplate and interpret the experience. When an artistic form is created through the medium of language, it is known as literature.

The study of literature cannot be dismissed as a pastime for the dilettante, or as an escape from life's problems. On the contrary, in literature we are confronted with the most fundamental issues in life. Literature is concerned with the very stuff of everyone's experience; and it is in this quality of universality that its value lies. Even though a literary work is many hundreds of years old, it may still have something to say about the common human experiences of birth and death, of love and loneliness, of desire and fulfillment. It may still comment meaningfully on problems as old as humans themselves, which can never be finally solved, but must be considered and interpreted in a new way by every generation. It is doubtful whether the mere fact that someone is acquainted with literature will inevitably make a better person of him; but the study of literature offers the opportunity for the widening of one's horizons, for the refinement of one's sensibilities, and for the deepening of one's understanding of the

human condition[1].

Arabic is a language that has a literary culture which is conspicuous by its continuity and richness. Following the rise and expansion of Islam, many advanced and prosperous societies developed in various Middle East cities. They gave expression in a language and literature of great variety and sophistication.

Arabic literature is generally divided into *shi'r* (poetry) and *nathr* (prose). *Nathr* is in turn classified into *nathr fanni masju'* (artistic rhymed prose), *nathr mursal* (unrhymed prose) and *nathr 'ilmi* (scientific prose)[2]. The type of great interest to us will be *nathr fanni masju'* because it includes the social essay, the sermon, the story (short, long, narrative), the play, the biography and autobiography, the epistle, the *maqama*, and literary criticism.

Furthermore, mainly to facilitate study and research, Arabic literature is normally divided into historical periods. Muhammad Mahmud al-Bawi, for example, distinguishes the following six periods:

1. The period before Islam – also known as the *Jahiliyya* period – which stretched back to about one hundred and fifty years before the dawn of Islam.
2. The Islamic period – starting from the beginning of Islam and ending with the establishment of the *Umawi* (Umayyad) dynasty in 41 AH (661 AD).
3. The Umayyad period – starting from 41 AH and ending with the rise of the *Abbasi* (Abbasid) dynasty in 132 AH (750 AD).
4. The Abbasid period – starting from the fall of the Umayyad dynasty in 132 AH and ending with the invasion of Baghdad by the Mongols in

[1] Heese, Marie & Lawton, Robin. (n.d.). *The Owl Critic: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. Cape Town: Nasou Limited, pp.1-2.
[2] Al-Bawi, Muhammad Mahmud. (n.d.). *A'maliqa al-Adab al-Arabi al-Muathir*. Beirut: Sharika Dar al-Arqam bi al-Arqam, p.12.

656 AH (1258 AD).

5. The *Uthmani* (Ottoman) and *Mamluk* (Mameluke) periods – these periods followed the fall of Baghdad and lasted until the 'modern era'.

6. The modern period – the period that started roughly with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798[3].

Arabic works that discuss these genres (their development, characteristics, authors, etcetera) – and in Egypt specifically – are, amongst others, *al- qissa al-Arabiyya fi Misr* by Hamza Muhammad Buqari, *al-Adab al-Arabi al-Mu'athir fi Misr* by Dr. Shawqi Daif and *al-Manfaluti Imam al-Bayan al-Arabi* by Dr. Muhammad Abu al-Anwar. Other sources discuss the development in the whole Arab world generally. Invariably they also highlight certain aspects at the expense of others – and these 'others' may be equally important – and, due to their brevity, contain information that others do not. Some of them (by, for example, Gibb, Goldziher, Le Gassick, Nicholson, Badawi, Khouri and Algar, Qasim) will be mentioned as we go along. Buqari discusses life in Egypt during the 19th century and its role in the development of the short story and the *maqama*. Abu al-Anwar very briefly traces the development of the Arabic essay until the appearance of al-Manfaluti; the rest of his book is about the life of al-Manfaluti and some of his essays. Shawqi Daif, again, firstly writes about the history of Egypt before and after Napoleon's Egyptian campaign to put the development of Arabic poetry and prose in perspective. He is the only author who gives due justice to the role that the press had played in the development of modern Arabic literature, its struggle to rid literature of artificiality and forcedness, enigma and obscurity (*saj'* and *badi'*), and the way in which Western literature influenced Arab writers. Our endeavor will be to coordinate and integrate all these different aspects

[3] Al-Bawi, op. cit., pp.10-11.

in order to present a comprehensive and clear image of the development of the Arabic essay and short story.

The book in the English language that gives a general overview of the development of Arabic literature is *Modern Arabic Literature, 1800 – 1970* by John A. Haywood (1971). It deals with the development of poetry and prose in the Arab countries that produced significant literature at the time, but for our purpose we shall restrict the overview to prose in Egypt. Another book *Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* (1974), by M.M. Badawi, also gives an overview, but as the title suggests, its main focus is on poetry. The account of the appearance of the novel in Egypt by H. Gibb (*The Egyptian Novel,* published in 1933 as part of his *Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature)* we could unluckily not find, but Haywood quotes Gibb speaking of the "great variety and satisfaction to be enjoyed in classical Arabic literature" and of the fact that "Egyptians with modern education could read French and English novels in the original"[4].

Haywood elaborates in his book about al-Manfaluti as a novelist and essayist in a subsequent chapter. He only mentions al-Manfaluti's adaptations of "several French Romantic novels – *Paul et Virginie,* Coppee's *Pour la Couronne,* A. Karr's *Le Tilleul,* and Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* among them"[5]. We, of course, endeavor to deal with them in greater detail.

The chief aim for writing about Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti is to study the different factors which influenced him, whether special factors related to the position of his family or friends, or general factors related to the period in which he lived. This will in turn help us to understand his literary methodology as well as why he chose to

[4] Haywood, J. A. (1971). *Modern Arabic Literature 1800-1970.* New York: St. Martin's Press, p.135.
[5] Ibid., p.135.

concentrate on that specific form of literature and not on another. It will also be an aid in understanding why he preferred to write on the topics which he did, and at the same time we shall understand why his literary style is regarded as innovative, original and so effective, and why his essays and short stories, for example, excelled in treating social issues of the day.

Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti was famous for the literary articles which he wrote in the newspaper *al-Mu'ayyad* from 1907 onwards. Al-Manfaluti was the only writer who enchanted the Arabic populace with his new literary *bayan* (eloquent and clear rhetoric). He started out with poetry and then started to write short stories, becoming the liberator of literature from difficult *saj'* (rhymed prose – a passage in *saj'* is said to be *masju'*) and awkward *badi'* (literally, innovation = metaphoric style). His most memorable feat can be summarized as being 'a teacher of manners (*mu'allim al-akhlaq*), a caller to virtue (*da'i al-fadila*) and a leader in promoting social welfare (*qa'id al-islah*)'[6].

Al-Manfaluti was primarily a writer of social issues, who lived solely for the concerns of his society. He involved himself with revealing the vices and shortcomings of his nation, writing about gambling, dancing, suicide, drukenness, bribery in government departments, and about the nature of the battles between the conservatives and the reformists, and about some of Western civilization's evil and immoral aspects, not forgetting also the dangers and drawbacks of living in the past with its stagnation. In everything he wrote, his aim was to fill the ever-widening gap in the Islamic society and in doing so, he called for reconciliation, the liberation of thought from the chains of imitation and the judicious and erudite use of the

[6] Al-Anwar, Dr. Muhammad Abu. (2000). *Al-Manfaluti: Imam al-Bayan al-Arabi*. 1st edition, Cairo: al-Dar al-Misriyya al-Lubnaniyya, p.7.