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**Languages of Rupture: Language Ideology and the Modern Novel in Egypt and Turkey**

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**Languages of Rupture: Language Ideology and the Modern Novel in Egypt and Turkey**

by

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**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2020

## Acknowledgements

I have been so incredibly fortunate to study at the University of Texas at Austin, supported at every turn—through the difficult moments of faculty changes, existential dilemmas, and global pandemics. Along with official financial and academic support, my road has been paved by the selfless guidance of advisors, the sustaining solidarity of colleagues, and the long-enduring support of my family.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to both of my advisors (we should all be so lucky), who have both spent years supporting me with their ideas, their encouragement, and their edits. Professor Brustad has continued to be my advisor from afar for several years, even flying across the world to meet for coffee and talk about Arabic lexicography. She has shown an uncommon amount of commitment to sticking with her students through until the completion of their degrees, and I feel so grateful. Professor Okur's commitment has been equally enduring, if maintained at a shorter distance. She spent an entire semester reading *Tutunamayanlar* with me in her office, never ceased to amaze me with the care and details she gave to editing my writing, and even let me brew the tea for *Çay Saati*. She single-handedly maintains an active and engaging Turkish language learning community at UT, and I have been blessed to be part of her community. I would also like to thank Professor Drumsta and Professor Richmond-Garza for being so gracious with their time and being willing to step in last minute to not only serve on my dissertation committee, but to offer such important and productive insights. Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to those Professors whose courses I feel I am still learning from, including Professor Canbaz, Professor Blyth, and Professor Di-Capua.

Although my dissertation hermitage has stretched on for so long that attending classes or interacting with others seems like a distant memory, I am still grateful for my amazing colleagues. I would like to thank اقطاب الحدب في خطاب الإدب for their intellectual camaraderie, al-Jil al-Jadid for keeping the spirit of Arabic as One Language alive, and my far-flung Turkish literature friends and especially Kenan Sharpe, who has become a wonderful friend, editor, and comrade, even though we've never lived in the same place.

Lastly, and most importantly, I'd like to thank my wife, Nora Chovanec, for making absolutely all of this possible. Not only was she willing to pick up and move to Texas for a man, despite the incredulity of anyone who's ever known her, but she did so in order to let him sit around and think about literature while she supported him financially. A truer leap of faith for a dedicated feminist may not exist. Our partnership during the last six years has been built on all kinds of unpaid labor. There is mine which, due to the strange accounting practices of the modern university, was hard to know whether to classify as that of the student employee and the funded scholar. Then there was her emotional labor, which was vital to maintaining our relationships our community, our families, and to each other. And finally there was all of the routine and inexhaustible reproductive labor, from nursing injured chickens to washing dirty dishes, which we did together.

## **Languages of Rupture:**

### **Languages of Rupture: Language Ideology and the Modern Novel in Egypt and Turkey**

by

Matthew Latham Chovanec, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2020

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In arguing for the central role of language in the creation of the modern nationalist imaginary, scholars of recent literary histories of both Egypt and Turkey have focused a great deal of energy on commonly accepted narratives of linguistic dysfunction. In Egypt and other Arabic speaking countries, the “diglossia problem” has been the locus for conversations about monologic subjectivity, colonial violence, and the counter-hegemonic politics of language. In Turkey, the language reforms are said to have created a mix of cultural aphasia and historical amnesia, brought on in particular by self-inflicted lexical impoverishment. In these accounts, both popular and scholarly, the epistemic ruptures of modernity are embedded in language itself. However, from the perspective of linguistics, both of these apparent dysfunctions are ideological projections, having little to do with either language’s actual communicative functions and everything to do with the social meaning of variation, in a word indexicality. Taking seriously the insights of indexicality, this dissertation argues for a different account of the relationship between language, ideology, and literature. Such an account aims not only to expose the whorfian underpinnings of many previous literary histories, but to recast literature’s relationship to national language as one not of coercion and resistance, but one in which literature itself benefits narratologically from the forms that standard language ideology provides.

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### *Note on Transliteration and Translation*

For transliterations from Arabic, I have followed the *Journal of Arabic Literature's* modified version of the *IJMES* system. For all but the most commonly recognizable Arabic words, I use full diacritics, including for the names of Arabic authors who are known in English (e.g. I use Najīb Maḥfūz rather than Naguib Mahfouz). The one main exception is my use of Nasser for Gamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣr, whose English name (as well as the term Nasserism) is used so frequently in historiography I reference that it would be cumbersome to change. I render inseparable prepositions and conjunctions preceding the definite article with hyphens to indicate elision, rather than retaining the “a” (e.g. al-siḥḥah wa-l-salāmah). To avoid confusion, I use the Arabic and Turkish titles of books when referencing them, even when English translations exist. That being said, I maintain the spellings chosen by translators for character and place names from Arabic (i.e. Fikri Afendi). Throughout the dissertation, I have placed textual examples from the works of fiction I study within tables, with the original language above and the English translation below. Unless a specific translator is mentioned upon first mention of a text, all Arabic and Turkish translations are mine. In other instances, I have translated interviews or essays by the authors in question and given the original text in the footnote. For other scholarly works or journal and newspapers quotes which I have used, I have given the translation without the original as the linguistic specifics of the original text are not the focus.

## Introduction: Languages of Rupture

Looking back on the legacy of Arabic literary modernity, the Egyptian author and scholar Radwa Ashour asks in her book *al-Hadāthah al-Mumkinah (A Possible Modernity, 2009)* why the incredibly innovative and linguistically daring 19<sup>th</sup> century writer Ahmed al-Shidyāq was overlooked for most of the 20<sup>th</sup>. As the author of one of the most experimentally modernist (some say even postmodern) work of Arabic literature, al-Shidyāq nonetheless suffered from a state of relative obscurity throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a fact which is more of an indictment of the modern Arabic literary language than it is of the author. According to Ashour, the principle reason for his obscurity was al-Shidyāq's use of language, which employed the full diversity of Arabic, from the highest literary embellishment to the most colorful forms of daily speech:

The freedom of linguistic movement came easily to al-Shidyāq because of his extensive linguistic knowledge... he revived old words and employed them in his text, and he coined new words, and he used all types of rhetorical device (paronomasia and parallelism, and double-entendre and prolixity, etc.) and he used dialect if the occasion called for it.<sup>1</sup>

But the freedom of movement enjoyed by al-Shidyāq was not to last, as other members of the Arab intelligentsia saw his linguistic versatility as an encumbrance (عبء) rather than a distinctive feature (ميزة). The alternative modernity that they envisioned, which would come to

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وتسهل على الشدياق حرية الحركة بسبب معارفه اللغوية الواسعة...يحيي كلمات قديمة يوظفها في نصه، ويخت كلمات جديدة، ويستخدم كافة أنواع<sup>1</sup> Radwa Ashour, *al-Hadāthah al-Mumkinah* (التجنيس والمطابقة والتورية والإطناب...إلخ) ويستخدم العامية إذا عنّ له استخدامها في موقع يرى لها ضرورة فيه [A Possible Modernity] (al-Qāhirah: Dar al-Shurūq, 2009), 108-9.

be part of the Arab Renaissance (*al-Nahḍah*), would work to restrict al-Shidyāq's brand of unruly linguistic heterogeneity. Although its linguistic reforms focused on the material of grammar and syntax, Ashour and others argue that the Nahḍah's changes to Arabic inadvertently led to a new Arab subjectivity based on a repressive and homogenizing modernity and nationalism. Ashour and other scholars see the modernizing vision of this elite as a creative tragedy for the fate of 20th century Arabic literature.

Was the "modernity" that the elite settled on an actual modernization? Was this modernity, based on cultural estrangement, even possible? Was rupture a precondition of this modernity? Or was the rupture a fundamental element in the reproduction of colonial hegemony, one which impedes actual modernity and replaces it with an impossible modernity that has neither roots nor branches?<sup>2</sup>

The cultural estrangement and rupture of which Ashour speaks is, in large part, due to the ways that the Arabic language is perceived to have been changed by reformers. Jeffrey Sacks agrees with Ashour that the lack of reception to al-Shidyāq's work is tied to the removal of heteroglossic, ludic, and stylistically embellished language through "the institution of a new privileging of formal coherency in language, in the Arabic nineteenth century."<sup>3</sup> The juridical violence of the colonial state and its attendant European epistemologies repressed linguistic diversity, and the result was that Arabic literature was subjected to the "tyranny of the serious", as

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هل كانت <الحدائفة> التي استقرت عليها النخبة كفيلاً بتحديث فعلي، هل كانت هذه الحدائفة القائمة على القطيعة الثقافية ممكنة؟ هل كانت القطيعة شرطاً من شروط هذه الحدائفة؟ أم كانت القطيعة عنصراً أساساً من عناصر إعادة إنتاج الهيمنة الكولونيالية بما يعوق الحدائفة الفعلية ويستبدل بها حدائفة مستحيلة لا تتوفر لها جذور ولا فروع، حدائفة منبته <لا ظهراً أبقت ولا أرضاً قطعت Ashour, Al-Ḥadāthah, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Sacks, *Iterations of Loss: Mutilation and Aesthetic Form, al-Shidyāq to Darwish* (New York: Fordham Univ Press, 2015).

Egyptian writer Youssef Rakha calls it, during the 20th century.<sup>4</sup> Rakha is not alone in seeing the fate of classical Arabic as a central variable in cultural history. According to Niloofar Haeri “As anxieties about modernization, decolonization, independence, and political pluralism mounted in the course of this century, Classical Arabic came to stand, often simultaneously, as a language incapable of responding to the modern world, as the supreme vehicle for an indigenous and authentic modernity, as an essential ingredient of Arab identity regardless of religion, and as a language that insures a specifically Muslim identity.”<sup>5</sup>

In a sort of reversal from the Nahḍah’s own literary historiography, some literary historians now see the 20th century as representing the true age of decadence (‘aṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ), whereas the last few decades have brought a renaissance in the freedom of linguistic movement as new generations of authors have begun to rediscover the power of polyvocal and subaltern language. Fabio Caiani, for example, devotes a chapter in his study of *Contemporary Arab Fiction from 1979-2002* (2007) to the themes of ‘fragmentation’, ‘polyphony’, ‘intertextuality’ and ‘metafiction.’<sup>6</sup> Tarek el-Ariss’s *Trials of Arab Modernity* (2013) establishes a kinship between al-Shidyāq on the one hand, and the modern hacker-like author in *Being Abbas el Abd* (2003) on the other, arguing that they are the two bookends enclosing the story of the 20th century and its

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<sup>4</sup> Youssef Rakha, “Foreword,” in *Brains Confounded by the Ode of Abu Shaduf Expounded* (New York: Library of Arabic Literature, 2016), XV.

<sup>5</sup> Niloofar Haeri, “Form and Ideology: Arabic Sociolinguistics and Beyond,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (2000): 63.

<sup>6</sup> Fabio Caiani, *Contemporary Arab Fiction: Innovation from Rama to Yalu* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

staid, unitary Arabic language.<sup>7</sup> Rebecca C. Johnson claims in her forward to the new translation of al-Shidyāq's book *Leg Over Leg* (2014) that the narrative can be seen as a miniature portrait of Arabic literary modernity, if we understand modernity to be "a contested category marked by self-interrogation and a "constant reworking of the meaning of community" through language."<sup>8</sup> The language in fiction is, therefore, not merely of interest to writers and their critics, but stands at the very heart of battles over the fate of Arab identity and culture.

Writing a decade earlier than Ashour about the possibility for free and genuine (*özgün*) literature in Turkey, author Leylâ Erbil also laments a 20th century in which the Turkish language suffered from a litany of ailments, degeneracies, and neuroses.<sup>9</sup> As opposed to European countries, whose literatures remained contiguous and enriched by the legacy of their renaissance cultures, she maintains that Turkey has suffered from a profound belatedness and unnaturalness due to modernity's abrupt rupture with the past. Like Ashour, Erbil sees her own country's language reforms as central to this rupture, saying: "This literature was of course forced to a literature of rupture. The splitting off of the language of the Republic which began in 1925 went

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<sup>7</sup> El-Ariss, Tarek. *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political*. Fordham Univ Press, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmad Faris Al-Shidyāq, *Leg over Leg: Volume One*, trans. Humphrey Davies, vol. 6 (New York: New York University Press, 2013), xi.

<sup>9</sup> Leylâ Erbil, "Özgün Bir Türk Edebiyatı Var Mı?" Üzerine Düşünceler," in *Zihin Kuşları: Deneme* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2003), 103–14.

hand in hand with the removal of old forms of writing.”<sup>10</sup> Writing in 1996, 60 years after the height of the Turkish Language Revolution (*Türk Dil Devrimi*) carried out during Atatürk’s spate of cultural reforms, Erbil saw Turkish literature as caught in a state of linguistic purgatory. On the one hand, any revival of Ottoman styles and forms would result in inauthentic simulacrum: awkward postmodern recreations or religious fundamentalism. And on the other, an embrace and furthering of the Kemalist project would hamstring one’s writing with the inarticulacy and artificiality of modern Republican language.

It goes without saying, I think, that I am neither saying that good poetry cannot be written without a return to the classic prosody; nor am I advocating for a superficial, nationalist, schizophrenic world that looks askance at other cultures so that we can be free and genuine. I still believe in the creative power of the writer, and that without being him- or herself, a writer can be nothing else.<sup>11</sup>

For Erbil, writing is a quest to use art to repair the language which has been damaged by the forces of conformity. In the quest to find a genuine and independent voice, Erbil was known as a writer in revolt, fighting against bourgeois lifestyles, religious dogmatisms, middle class value judgments, chauvinism, marriage, family and bad writing. İlhan Berk says that her work represents a state of total rebellion, with the theme of language first and foremost at its center.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “bu edebiyat elbette bir kopukluk edebiyatı olmak zorundaydı. İlkın 1925’lerde Cumhuriyet’in kopmak zorunda olduđu dille, eski yazının kaldırılışıyla ilintiliydi.” Erbil, “Özgün,” 113.

<sup>11</sup> “Söylemeye gerek yok sanırım, ne aruzsuz iyi şiir yazılamaz diyorum ne de özgün olalım diye yapay, milliyetçi, başka kültürlere yan bakan, şizofrenik bir dünya öneriyorum. Ben hala yazınsal yaratıcılığın gücüne inanıyorum, her yazarın kendi olmadan hiçbir şey olamayacağına da.” Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> İlhan Berk, “Başkaldıran Yazarın Dili,” in *Leyla Erbil’de Etik ve Estetik* (İstanbul: Kanat Kitap, 2007), 257–58.

Her ‘grammar of revolt’ (*isyan grameri*), as Hulki Aktunç calls it, included a lexical and syntactical undermining of written standards, as well as novel attempts to excavate history through experimental language. In his article on Erbil’s stylistics, Aktunç recounts how she took her language to the extremes of purified Turkish (Öztürkçe), using neologisms such as *nen* (thing) and *ivecen* (hasty) and *üzgü* (torment) as a way to try to expose the absurdity of artificial language.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Necmi Sönmez describes Erbil’s use of a linguistic palimpsest in *Üç Beş Ejderha* (2010) and “Vapur” (1968) as a way to unearth the past through new approaches to language and form as a sort of linguistic archeology.<sup>14</sup> Because of the way that the language reforms haunted the Turkish language, Erbil was obsessed with trying to find the right spells to exorcise its demons.

She was not alone. As is the case with Arabic literature, scholars in recent decades have been interested in showing how Turkish writers fought back against linguistic authoritarianism. Likewise, the emergence of linguistic experimentation signals the end chapter of 20th century monologism in Turkey. According to Turkish literary critic Nurdan Gürbilek, Erbil and other dissident writers of her generation, such as Oğuz Atay and Vüs’at O. Bener, were able to finally confront the long impasse of Turkish language and identity in the 20th century by approaching the crisis of self-expression head on, turning the anxiety about being able to express oneself into the subject matter of the text itself. Like Oğuz Atay’s character Turgut Özben says in the novel

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<sup>13</sup> Hulki Aktunç, “Leyla Erbil: İsyân Grameri,” in *Leyla Erbil’de Etik ve Estetik* (İstanbul: Kanat Kitap, 2007), 45–48.

<sup>14</sup> Necmi Sönmez, “Leyla Erbil’in İzlek Arkeolojisi,” in *Leyla Erbil’de Etik ve Estetik* (İstanbul: Kanat Kitap, 2007), 203–8.

*Tutunamayanlar* (1970):

Ben anlatmak, filan falan demek istemiyorum. yeni bir dil yaratmak istiyorum...hiçbir mirasçısı değilim.

I don't want to narrate, to say this or that thing. I want to create a new language... I am nobody's heir.

15

Yıldız Ecevit credits Atay with doing as much, creating not only new polyvocal literary forms, but new ontological realities as well.<sup>16</sup> She credits *Tutunamayanlar*'s break with monologism as heralding the final arrival of a literary modernism, its arrival almost 70 years late compared to Europe.<sup>17</sup> Like Erbil, the tactics of Atay's rebellion were linguistic. Ecevit characterizes them saying, "It is a novel which is delivered in a multilayer structure by means of different forms and expressive elements."<sup>18</sup> Bener's work too has been lauded with claims of ontological importance, with Semih Gümüş claiming that his novel *Buzul Çağının Virüsü* (1984) "does not reflect the real world as it is; more than that, it establishes a new world image derived from the abstractable realities of the outside world."<sup>19</sup> By recognizing the centrality of language to literary freedom, these "writers of linguistic dissent" pioneered the emancipation from the unitary

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<sup>15</sup> Oğuz. Atay, *Tutunamayanlar*, 68th ed. (İstanbul: İletişim, 2014), 495.

<sup>16</sup> Yıldız Ecevit, *Türk Romanında Postmodernist Açılımlar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), 86.

<sup>17</sup> Ecevit, *Postmodernist*, 85-6.

<sup>18</sup> "Farklı biçim ve anlatım öğeleri aracılığıyla çokkatmanlı bir yapı içinde verildiği bir romandır." Ecevit, *Postmodernist*, 86.

<sup>19</sup> Semih Gümüş, *Kara Anlatı Yazarı Vüs'at O. Bener* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 2008). 5.

discourse of nationalism and the cultural hegemony of the early Republic language reforms and Turkish writers preceding them, “by exploiting local dialects, myths, legends, and esoteric texts, by venturing personal coinages or neologisms, or by attempting syntactic experiments” and “restored the power of words to the Turkish novel.”<sup>20</sup>

## The Whorfian Teleologies of Egyptian and Turkish Literary History

Radwa Ashour and Leylâ Erbil’s both use the concept of *rupture* to speak about the disruptive effect of language reforms on the course of the national literatures of Egypt and Turkey in the 20th century. Both nations’ reform movements have offered an event around which to frame the historiography: the process by which traditional, historical languages were violently modernized through intense campaigns of language engineering. Literary scholars claim that this engineering, which consisted of everything from lexical purification to the imposition of one standard register, had the unintended consequence of leaving artificial, dysfunctional languages in its wake. The spirit of modernity and nationalism, with its privileging of formal coherency in language, had pushed reformers to set their sights on reforming historically rooted and dialectically diverse languages. The visions of cultural elites and reformers in the 19th century were realized by early 20<sup>th</sup> century military regimes that put their ideas into practice; first in Turkey with the War of Independence and the foundation of the Republic in 1923 and in Egypt a

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<sup>20</sup> Jale Parla, “The Wounded Tongue: Turkey’s Language Reform and the Canonicity of the Novel,” *PMLA* 123, no. 1 (2008): 37.

generation later with the Officers' Coup in 1952.<sup>21</sup> These regimes' efforts led to the imposition of national languages which were artificial and sterile, inadvertently retarding literary progress.

While many recent scholars in the field of Arabic and Turkish are interested in challenging the notion of a radical break between pre-modern and modern forms of knowledge and cultural production, this project aims to confront the "rupture narrative" on the grounds of its very plausibility from a linguistic standpoint. That these reforms had a large effect on literary style and taste has been taken as evidence that these reforms affected the very DNA of language and thought itself, altering the expressive capacity and artistic potential of its speakers. Beyond mere tinkering with grammar and lexicon, language reforms are judged as epistemic revolutions which brought methods of Foucauldian control over the very power to communicate. Faced with this putative oppression, writers in the two countries struggled to deliver the literary modernism that Europe and elsewhere had already enjoyed for decades. In this way, the language reforms help to create a kind of linguistic teleology, whereby the last decades of the 20th century finally gave way to postmodern heterogeneity and rebellious experimentation after decades of monolingual cultural suppression.

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<sup>21</sup> In her book *Militarizing the Nation*, Abul-Magd explicitly connects the two countries experience by saying "the Turkish officers and their Egyptian fellows among those military elites that undertook "revolutions from above," Although they seized power without mass mobilization, their actions went beyond simple coup d'états. Their "military bureaucrats" embarked on top-down revolutionary reforms uprooting the ancien régimes. Generally in Third World countries during this period, societies sought development, and military institutions posed as the most organized, educated, and technologically advanced agents to carry out such a task." Zeinab Abul-Magd, *Militarizing the Nation: The Army, Business, and Revolution in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 16.

Take, for example, the way that both Stefan Meyer and Fabio Caiani employ the term ‘polyphony’ to mark a decisive turn in novel production in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In his book *The Experimental Arabic Novel* (2001) he explains the effects of the string of cultural defeats such as the failure of the Nasserist revolution and the Six-Day War on literary language by claiming that modernist strategies were introduced in the 1960s which marked “a democratisation of narration, or polyphony.”<sup>22</sup> Fabio Caiani in *Contemporary Arab Fiction* (2007) takes exception of what he sees as Mayer’s reductive use of Bakhtin’s concept of Bakhtin, and tries to offer a more complete list of narrative strategies for identifying multivoiced Arabic novels.<sup>23</sup> But his own literary survey of literary innovation in Arabic is “paired with a preoccupation with historiography.”<sup>24</sup> For his part, Caiani attempts to offer a series of caveats for his own periodization, using the *Naksah* as his literary turning point when the prevalent mode of realistic writing gave way to more Bakhtinian methods while also acknowledging that it’s merely a convention used to simplify what is a complex historical reality.<sup>25</sup> The problem however, is not with the exactness with which Bakhtin is brought to bear on literary history, but the belief that the phenomenon of multivoicedness is contingent on historical circumstances in the first place.

But for all of this metalinguistic attention that Turkish and Arabic literatures have received, much of these narratives rests on unexamined assumptions about how language, and

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<sup>22</sup> Stefan G. Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant* (SUNY Press, 2001), 9.

<sup>23</sup> Fabio Caiani, *Contemporary Arab Fiction: Innovation from Rama to Yalu* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 33.

<sup>24</sup> Caiani, *Arab Fiction*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

specifically variation within language, actually functions. Specifically, literary scholars have followed the very language reformers they fault by buying into the notion that variation is a feature of language that could ever be engineered or legislated out of existence. Whether by suppressing the register diversity of vernacular Arabic (the diglossia problem as it is called) or writing out the heterogeneous lexicon of Ottoman Turkish, literary scholars have worked from the assumption that a sort of linguistic monologism was more or less achieved. In some arguments, scholars appear to be simply running together two meanings for the term *language*: stylistic trends within the novel as well as spoken and written communication writ large. Other accounts have disapproved of the path that the reforms took, while still accepting the premise that diglossia in Arabic or the lexicon of Turkish represent a problem. This includes authors as well as scholars, those who, like Radwa Ashour and Leylâ Erbil, see literature as a better way to treat linguistic schizophrenia than monoglossia by decree. Finally, there are those histories which, by accepting the Arabic and Turkish language reformers' own ethnolinguistic rhetoric and claims to have intervened directly into national subjectivity and the capacity for expression, grant to the reforms power of universal and ontological dimensions. In this, they draw on a kind of folk linguistics whereby languages can be altered in such a way as to affect the epistemic or affective faculties of its speakers, what linguistic anthropologists pejoratively refer to as Whorfianism. They see the forging of modern national languages as having been the genesis of modern nationalist subjectivity. In doing so, they conflate linguistic consciousness and concern with the experiential concreteness of nationalist sentiment.

I claim that literary histories of Egypt and Turkey have underestimated both the endurance of natural variation in human speech and the crucial function it plays in providing social meaning. Seen from the perspective of linguistic anthropology, the Arabic and Turkish language reforms were merely ideological aspirations, limited to the creation and promotion of an ideal standard register, rather than an intervention into the nature of either language as a whole. As such, neither project succeeded in using language as its chief means to fundamentally alter national subjectivity or to achieve cultural hegemony. This dissertation will argue that a certain critical thrust of literary scholarship in Egypt and Turkey has attempted to take language politics seriously, but by doing so has inadvertently ended up perpetuating the very language ideology it critiques because it takes standard language ideology and the rhetoric of ethnolinguistic identity as transparent reality, dismissing or misrecognizing the normal state of variation and difference in existing social language. By exploring the relationship between linguistic variation and social meaning as understood by the concept of 'indexicality' from linguistic anthropology, I will show how an idealized standard language and the divergence from it are both a normal and persistent phenomena and, in fact, represent an important narratological tool from which Turkish and Arabic literature have benefitted.

My project examines a series of novels from Egypt and Turkey from the middle of the 20th century, at a time when the language reforms had supposedly achieved a level of success. Following Michael Silverstein's critique of Benedict Anderson's account of linguistic nationalism, I challenge the use of language in the novel as generalizable for the cultural order of language

writ large, as literature has a particularly ambiguous relationship to standardized language. Rather than fighting against the enclosing logic of the modern state, many novelists from Egypt and Turkey made use of standard language ideology in its forms and stylistics. Whether by means of the careful juxtaposition of linguistic registers, or their own creative interventions into lexicography, authors have been implicitly aware of the great potential for creating social meaning by means of linguistic variation. Bringing contemporary linguistics to bear on Arabic and Turkish literary history should help to illuminate the seemingly contradictory facts that natural variation in language works according to the same logic for both literary and all other forms of language, and that literary writers have unique ways of using language variation towards artistic ends.

### Indexicality and Standard Language Ideology

In the introduction to her recent book, *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey* (2011), Nergis Ertürk sees her use of Derrida as a sort of “unpaved road into the disciplinary territory of national area studies”, a field dominated by “the unrepentant positivism of social sciences.”<sup>26</sup> As I take almost the reverse route in this dissertation, I am sensitive to the fact that my attempt to use linguistics to venture into the realm of comparative literature might come off as credulously empirical. But in my own experience studying Arabic and Turkish language and literature, I have always been struck by how often the French Theorists have been taken as the ultimate authority on the nature of language, themselves drawing from the now ancient

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<sup>26</sup> Nergis Ertürk, *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23.

foundations of Saussure's *le Cours de linguistique générale* (1916). Semiotics as a field has continued apace since Saussure, and linguistics today is less interested in the interplay between the signifier and signifieds than it is in context, pragmatics, and the open-ended framework of potential meanings to which any individual or cluster of signifiers could be indexed. Hence, this project will center its understanding of language on just such a concept of indexicality, not out of an unrepentant commitment to positivism, but because I believe literary studies could benefit from a different approach to semiotics, exploring the homologies between social beliefs about language structure and use and aesthetic form.

Indexicality is now a major topic in the field of linguistics, and more specifically within linguistic anthropology (now distinguished from sociolinguistics with its own emphasis on data and statistical analysis), which attempts to explain how meaning is attributed to natural variation in human speech. Beginning from the distinction between the *denotational text* (what is said) and the *interactional text* (the way in which it is said), linguistic anthropologists demonstrate the consequences of the fact that “distinct, indexically contrastive ways of saying what counts as the “same thing” almost always exist.<sup>27</sup> Going beyond the signifiers of mere words, any linguistic feature has the potential to become indexical; this includes distinct grammar systems, particular groupings of lexical items, and, most commonly, differences in pronunciation. Different co-occurring linguistic features can come to cluster together in such a way as to create the

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Silverstein, “The Race from Place: Dialect Eradication vs. the Linguistic ‘Authenticity’ of Terroir,” in *Indexing Authenticity: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, ed. Veronique Lacoste, Leimgruber, Jakob, and Thimo Breyer, vol. 39 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2014), 163.

impression of a distinct style or level of language. Asif Agha says that these patterns become enregistered: indicative of a discrete style of speaking within a single language known as a 'register' (an allusion to organ music whereby an identical melody line can be played at varying timbres and pitches). In turn, these registers become indices of general sociological associations, such as the way that people from a specific profession, or from a specific geographical area speak. These 'first-order indexicals' (as they have been labelled by the linguist Michael Silverstein) proceed to form the basis of second order indexicals, which are subsequently made up of ideological information, social stereotypes, and folk-beliefs about the correctness or prestige level of various ways of speaking.

Allow me to give an example. Two English speakers each ask the same question (denotationally speaking). The first speaker asks, "Are you going to the night club?" while the second one asks, "Y'all goin' to the honky-tonk?" The crucial difference between these two sentences is not based on a single word, nor on the entirety of the utterance, but has to do with how the sum of individual differences adds up to make the two speakers appear to be speaking in socially distinct ways. While both are inquiring about multiple individuals' plans to attend a place to dance, the first speaker uses an almost imperceptibly standard form of English (i.e. it is not even clear which country the speaker is from).<sup>28</sup> The second speaker, on the other hand, uses several 'register shibboleths' which mark him/her as speaking in a distinct American South

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<sup>28</sup> It is important to note just how central a role phonetics plays in variation, an aspect which is harder to capture in writing than in spoken speech. I contend that literature engages in many interesting ways with the ambiguity inherent in its own limited ability to register phonetic differences.

register. The use of the regional pronoun for second-person plural (y'all), the elision of the final sound of the word 'going', and the use of the specific terminology for a dance club in the inland South (honky-tonk), all index him/her as 'sounding southern'. Recognizing this geographic identity through these language choices would constitute a first-order index. Subsequently, this style of speaking may inform several other second order indices, such as the second speaker being a cliché cowboy, or a country bumpkin, or even someone who is attempting to ironically mock those identities. It is important to note that it is not a wholly distinct dialect or language that the second speaker is using, but rather the co-occurrence of enough enregistered features clustered together so as to give off the impression of a particular style of speaking. Had the second speaker not elided the 'g', for example, the effect might ultimately be the same, but to a less salient degree. The point is that registers are not discrete, but rather, emerge as "typifiable voices on the basis of reflexive clues contained within the text segment which formulate them."<sup>29</sup> This is a crucial point, and will be explored in more detail in the chapters ahead.

As they are not static or fixed within language, registers are in a continual process of adaptation and change. In particular, it is the role of these second order ideologies (those which pass social judgement on difference rather than merely recognizing them as being representative of certain groups) to spur changes in the ways that people speak, valuing certain styles which index prestigious forms of social identity, and stigmatizing others. All speakers are simultaneously making register choices based on the appropriateness of the immediate micro-context as well as

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<sup>29</sup> Asif Agha, "Voice, Footing, Enregisterment," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2005): 39.

by being aware of larger social stereotypes, in a dialectical process which Michael Silverstein calls 'ethnopragmatics'. People do not inherently speak using certain predetermined registers, but rather, are constantly negotiating and modifying their own stylistic choices in response to the pragmatic conditions of the exchange. Because so much of linguistic—and thereby cultural—competence relies on being able to successfully perform a variety of registers, variation in the form of the interactional text is not some pre-modern vestige, some natural flaw of unlegislated pre-national language, but an absolutely central component of normal meaning making. Given that variation is itself a semiotic modality of language, it is therefore not possible to claim that any language was ever even partially made to comply to a kind of formal coherence. As I will show, even in the most normatively compliant types of belletrist literary language, variation continues to serve its purpose.

While certain literary scholars of Turkey and Egypt interested in language have recognized the existence of registers, few have appreciated the full extent of their semiotic dynamism. As I will show shortly, some literary histories of Egypt lock registers in Arabic into fixed representations of Manichean social categories, while others in Turkish studies have seen the standard register, as envisioned by elites and reformers, as having become comprehensive and hegemonic rather than aspirational and normative. But understanding variation and indexicality should be dynamic, an acknowledgement that language use by individuals is always being modulated according to the complex and multi-layered rules of the varied social milieus in which they participate. An account of language and politics which uses a reductive or un-dialectic

understanding of registers—one in which varieties of language can exist as distinct, whole, or complete—is one which inevitably talks about language ideologically in the linguistic sense of the word.<sup>30</sup>

The particular register which has been the object of the most misunderstanding and reification in Egypt and Turkey is that of the ‘standard.’ Despite the extensive powers of authoritarian regimes and religious and cultural dogmatisms, each working to enforce standardization throughout the last two centuries, “uniformity... is a property of the language system, not of the speakers.”<sup>31</sup> Standard registers are gradient in nature, never the precise adherence to an exhaustive grammar, but rather an approximation within “sloppy margins of performance, the coherent co-occurrence of a sufficient number of prescriptive ‘standard’-shibboleths.”<sup>32</sup> The tendency to believe differently, to imagine the standard as being done right somewhere, is what is known as standard language ideology (SLI). The cultural pervasiveness of this ideology makes it easy to link divergence from an idealized standard as problematic and

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Silverstein defines Language ideologies as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization of justification of perceived language structure and use.” Michael Silverstein, “Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology,” in *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels* (Chicago: Chicago Linguistics Society, 1979), pg. 5. Judith Irvine defines language ideology as “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests.” Judith T. Irvine, “When Talk Isn’t Cheap: Language and Political Economy,” *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 2 (1989): 255. Lastly, Alan Rumsey offer the simplest definition: “linguistic ideologies are shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world” Alan Rumsey, “Wording, Meaning, and Linguistic Ideology,” *American Anthropologist* 92, no. 2 (1990): 346.

<sup>31</sup> James Milroy, “Language Ideologies and the Consequences of Standardization,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 5, no. 4 (2001): 532.

<sup>32</sup> Silverstein, “Race from Place,” 163.

indicative of cultural ills and social dysfunctions, with the gap between normative and actual linguistic practices serving as the basis for innumerable literary and political debates. This is why so many Arabic and Turkish authors and scholars criticize the language reforms while still affirming an inherent problem in Arabic's diglossia and Turkish's lexicon.

In cultural studies of nationalism, like those by Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee, standard national languages as they appear within literature, and in the novel in particular, are used as central evidence of the transformation and reconstruction of the cultural domain by the national elite.<sup>33</sup> However, SLI is both a more universal and more partial phenomenon than how it is presented (albeit by other names) by these scholars. SLI is universal in that “a number of major (i.e. widely used) languages that possess written forms are believed by their speakers to exist in standardized forms.”<sup>34</sup> Although it tended in the 20th century to be “imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions which named as its model the written language” as Silverstein characterizes them, SLI is a commonly held belief across a wide variety of societies and historical periods, a belief which seemingly arises autonomously in individuals regardless of institutional support.<sup>35</sup> While one may associate standardized language with the image of state planners plotting out the implementation of dictionaries and school curriculums, “ethnolinguistic identity is not a mechanical institutional fact; it is a fact of a psychosocial sort that has emerged

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<sup>33</sup> In particular, I am referring to Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993).

<sup>34</sup> Milroy, “Language Ideologies,” 531.

<sup>35</sup> Rosina Lippi-Green, “English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States, 1997, 64.

where people ascribe a certain primordiality to language and a certain consequentiality to language difference.”<sup>36</sup> And SLI is partial in that although it has functioned as a powerful tool in the emblemization and projection of ethnolinguistic identity, it is ultimately no more powerful than any other kind of ideology, in that it is discourse about reality rather than reality itself, and requires a persistent advocacy that nonetheless, rarely, if ever succeeds in becoming a universal lens through which national identity is experienced.

Because many scholars in the fields area and literary studies have understood questions of modernity, nationalism, and language by reference to the works of Anderson and Chaterjee, they have repeated this tendency to see equate the cultural phenomenology of nationalism with standard language itself, inscribed with “its own trajectory of destiny, its own transcendent diachrony, the writers and readers of the texts of which participating in a primordial mystical union.”<sup>37</sup> Silverstein’s important article, “Whorfianism and the linguistic imagination of nationality”, aims to show how the semiotic mechanisms of language ideology can help us to understand what is problematic about Anderson’s heavy reliance on language in modeling the lived experience of nationalism. Silverstein sees in Anderson’s work a kind of Whorfianism. Whorf, for whom the tendency is named, originally was interested in how different languages (particularly English and Hopi) had different ways of denoting time and place, whether it be through tense, aspect or perfection in its verbs or other deictics, counting and measurement

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Silverstein, “The Whens and Wheres--as Well as Hows--of Ethnolinguistic Recognition,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 3 (2003): 531–57.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 533.

words, or other strategies. Whorf tried to show that these differences actually led to different cultural experiences of reality itself. He claimed, for example, that because the Hopi had no words, grammatical forms, construction or expressions that refer directly to what we call 'time', they therefore had no concept of time. According to Silverstein, Anderson makes a similar move with standardized national language. Rather than seeing it as a discursive linguistic form (a socially valorized register of speaking), Anderson takes the identity indexed by standard language and “takes its meaning to be the straightforwardly and uniformly presupposed order of imaginable homogeneity-of-identity in the discursive-equals-discoursed-about spatiotemporal envelope of “the nation” in which its speakers feel they reside”, as Silverstein puts it.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, many of those who use literature to study the history of modernity and nationalism misinterpret this ritually emblemized trope of “we-”ness in the novel as a transparently imagined “reality” representing the entire nation living outside its pages (I will return to this topic in chapter 5).

The language ideology of Whorfianism is alive and well in much of scholarship on Egyptian and Turkish literature, particularly that which focuses on questions of language. It exists mainly through what I call “the narrative of linguistic dysfunction”: ethnopragmatic accounts of how supposed dysfunctions at the linguistic level, resulting from language reforms, created problems for both national literatures which in turn are indicative of disorders of the national psyche. In the first two chapters of the dissertation, I will demonstrate how Whorfianism appears in all kinds of cultural and literary histories, sometimes as the notion that a language can be

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Silverstein, “Whorfianism and the Linguistic Imagination of Nationality,” in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity (Santa Fe: School for American Research Press, 2000), 124.

disciplined to somehow rid it of heteroglossia (and thereby its capacity for satire and irony), sometimes as the story of how a language can be subject to a campaign of linguistic purification that goes terribly wrong, leaving it in a state of culture-wide emotional aphasia whereby its speakers are left unable to fully express themselves. To counter these narratives, indexicality linguistics illuminates how languages are political, dynamic, and contested while nevertheless still maintaining the same cognitive and emotional faculties of all other languages. Its strength lies in its distinction between those aspects of language which are socially constructed and historically determined on the one hand, and those basic communicative functions that all languages share in common. This distinction is pithily summarized by Noam Chomsky's aphorism, "Languages change, but they do not evolve."<sup>39</sup>

## A Metalinguistic Strategic Formalism

Because of the invisible omnipresence of language ideologies in all cultures, in the novel as much as in everyday speech, it is important to ask about the actual scope of language practice which I plan to discuss. That is to say, if the standard language register is something which exists more in fiction than in everyday life, but at the same time the social meaning of variation still functions according to the same rules of daily speech, how, if at all, should we conceive of the linguistic divide between literary and spoken language? One approach to overcoming the narrative of linguistic dysfunction in Egyptian and Turkish literature would be to merely point to

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<sup>39</sup> Robert C. Berwick and Noam Chomsky, *Why Only Us: Language and Evolution* (MIT press, 2016), 92.

the demonstrably limited domain of linguistic standardization. In Egypt, the seemingly inescapable epistemic enclosure of the colonial order is assumed to have worked with the same ruthless efficiency on language that it did on institutions. Literature, and its eventual capitulation to standardization, is held up as evidence of this fact. But are we really to take a few canonical Egyptian realist novels as proof that the Arab subject lost his sense of humor? Did a privileging of formal coherency mean that films, radio shows, popular music, and the vast sphere of oral storytelling, jokes, poetry, and idioms were likewise stifled? This type of thinking has already been thoroughly discredited by Ziad Fahmy in his excellent book, *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Popular Nation Through Popular Culture* (2011). In it, he focuses on the diversity of popular culture, the satirical press, vaudeville, recorded songs, and *azjāl*, as an alternative way of understanding the rise of Egyptian nationalism, in contrast to most studies on early Egyptian nationalism (and the Nahḍah for that matter), which base their histories on the works of intellectuals and the political elite. The same can be done in the case of Turkey. Two recent works have undermined the narrative of the effectiveness and extent of modernist nation-building processes in post-Ottoman Turkey. Hale Yilmaz's *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923-1945* (2013) shows the limitations of cultural reforms, especially for the illiterate peasant, for whom "the reach of the state ... was uneven, irregular, and incomplete."<sup>40</sup> Looking at the experience of actual citizens who offered pushback, resistance, or dismissal of the Kemalist reforms, it is easy to see how standard language

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<sup>40</sup> Hale Yilmaz, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey 1923-1945* (Syracuse University Press, 2013), 7.

regime is a fragile order, “seething with contestation that emerges from actual plurilingualism, heteroglossia, and like indexes of at least potentially fundamental political economic conflict.”<sup>41</sup> Gavin Brockett’s *How Happy to Call Oneself a Turk: Provincial Newspapers and the Negotiation of a Muslim National Identity* (2011) likewise uses provincial newspapers to show how a rival popular Muslim national identity existed alongside Kemalism in the early years of the Republic. While “authors of Turkish fiction tended to write in line with Kemalist ideology” in the first decades of independence, other writers across Turkey, such as local journalists, were invoking completely different tropes of we-ness.

But recourse to historical demographic realities is not the approach that I take in this dissertation. Instead, I limit my attention to works of fiction themselves, in order to show that they neither suffered from the linguistic dysfunctions that supposedly plagued them, nor were they stifled by the strictures of standardized language which were brought to bear in an attempt to right these dysfunctions. I maintain that while not coterminous with the cultural phenomenology of nationalism, SLI is a central narratological element in modern Egyptian and Turkish fiction. Because it has played so central a role in the novel, standardized register has been often mistaken as the linguistic manifestation of national identity itself. Seen as a privileged but not exclusive register of both Arabic and Turkish, standardized language offers a metric against which the social meaning of variation becomes legible for works in which language is the only medium. After exploring the Whorfian assumptions within Egyptian and Turkish literary history

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<sup>41</sup> Silverstein, “Whorfianism,” 129.

in the first two chapters, I demonstrate in chapters three and four how fiction uses standard language along with other registers to literary ends. These ends include for example socialist realism's claims to mimetic authenticity, and the conceits by which works of speculative fiction create cognitive estrangement.

One might question this strict narratological focus on Egyptian and Turkish literature, wondering what the purpose of focusing on language registers is, if not as a way to directly map the social realities of the two countries in the 20th century. But just as previous scholars have examined the politics of language within the denotational text, I believe that is important to trace it as well within the interactional text. I use indexical linguistics not merely to explore literature as a site where the politics of language played out within the societies in which they were written, but also to show how the logic of ethnopragmatics functions within fiction at the level of form. This distinction between denotational and interactional texts closely mirrors the tension between content and form that Caroline Levine is trying to undo with her work in 'strategic formalism': a complex, composite vocabulary for thinking of the array of forms that overlap, compete, and interconnect. This refers not just to forms of class, gender, and race, as she claims, but also to forms of knowledge and mental organization (and now, hopefully, forms of ethnopragmatics).

Levine writes that literary studies in recent decades has been dominated by questions of emancipation, seeking out ways to disrupt dominant systems and unsettle oppressive norms

through various theoretical lenses, but that this agenda has brought with it a powerful, even hegemonic, anti-formalism:

Some critics charged that too close an attention to aesthetic form represented an assent to the status quo, preventing us from freeing ourselves from oppressive material historical conditions, and many others maintained that the purpose of forms themselves was to impose constraints, and for this reason we must seek out places where forms collapse or erupt. Both deconstructive and dialectical accounts set out to trace the undoing of forms and structures, training our attention on instability, dissonance, and emergence in the name of freedom from dominant or naturalized systems.<sup>42</sup>

This anti-formalism is mirrored in many sectors of Egyptian and Turkish literary studies by an ethos of progressive anti-authoritarianism and its micropolitics of difference. This ethos often takes the form of a critique of the authoritarian impulses behind language reforms, and the coercive language politics of the state, which leads to an over-simplified reading of Bakhtin in which “heteroglossia is necessarily good and democratic whereas monoglossia is inherently bad and antidemocratic.”<sup>43</sup> Much of this celebration of the Bakhtinian spirit in Egyptian and Turkish literature, whether it be praise for the linguistic rebelliousness of al-Shidyāq or Atay, the supposed flourishing of heteroglossia and *‘ammīyyah* in Arabic, or the return of Ottoman aesthetics in Turkish, has proceeded from this anti-formalism. In both Egypt and Turkey, the

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<sup>42</sup> Caroline Levine, "Critical Response I Still Polemicizing After All These Years," *Critical Inquiry* 44, no. 1 (Autumn 2017): 129-135.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Ives, *Gramsci's Politics of Language : Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 79. Ives offers a relevant discussion on the differences between Bakhtin and Gramsci's opinions about the political potential of a common unitary language, and the relationship between social diversity and heteroglossia

powerful and militaristic central states which dominated the 20th century are often associated with SLI in such a way that scholars have shared Bakhtin's enthusiasm for rebellion against the state, without understanding Bakhtin's point that heteroglossia is always present. The wedding of indexicality linguistics and Levine's strategic formalism, instead, should help me to show how neither standard language nor any other alternative register within a novel are either pro- or anti-state in themselves, but depend, like all language at all times, on the context.

The other reason to avoid ascribing a fixed social map to variation, and to instead insist on the ways that linguistic forms overlap, compete, and interconnect, is that it is not possible to map out the full range of social meanings that any given variable is indexing at any given time. In Paul Kroskrity's discussion of language ideology, he stresses the plurality of social interpretations as one of its major characteristics:

language ideologies are profitably conceived as multiple because of the plurality of meaningful social divisions (class, gender, clan, elites, generations, and so on) within sociocultural groups that have the potential to produce divergent perspectives expressed as indices of group membership. Language ideologies are thus grounded in social experience which is never uniformly distributed throughout polities of any scale.<sup>44</sup>

This is equally true of the literary text. As metalinguistic as it is, the language of the novel is too responsive to the subtleties of sociolinguistic life as to be justifiably used as a type of coarse-grained fossil record of the great political divides of the nation. Rather than being pressed into the service of national allegory, the language politics of the novel, especially as they exist at the

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<sup>44</sup> Paul V. Kroskrity, "Language Ideologies—Evolving Perspectives," in *Society and Language Use*, vol. 7 (John Benjamins Publishing, 2010), 197.

level of forms, can be shown to index stereotypes about the ways certain social groups speak and act, but also more abstractly to values and personas, and even judgements about the quality or specific narratological purpose of a particular style of language. All of these various claims to the social meaning of a variable compete at once in what Penelope Eckert calls an Indexical Field, a “constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable.”<sup>45</sup> Taking language seriously in the novel means finding a way within literary studies to grapple with this irreducible complexity. Indexical linguistics, for its part, offers a possible way to model an “orderly heterogeneity in the ever-changing indexical value of variables.”<sup>46</sup>

## Outline of Chapters

As a work of comparative literature, this dissertation establishes parallels between the histories of metalinguistic anxiety and language reform in both Egypt and Turkey, while also trying to credit how each were experienced uniquely. Rather than offering a history of the reforms themselves, I will limit myself to the specific narrative of metalinguistic anxiety I am referring to for each country, examined mainly through literary scholarship. I am confident that anyone venturing into literary studies, area studies, or any other field interested in Egyptian or Turkish culture will soon find ample examples of the discourse on the reforms.

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<sup>45</sup> Penelope Eckert, “Variation and the Indexical Field,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12, no. 4 (2008): 453.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 464.

The moral panic over language dysfunction in the Arabic case has centered overwhelmingly around what is perceived to be Arabic's "diglossia" problem: the idea that the prestigious written standard language, referred to in Arabic as *Fuṣḥa*, is different in kind from the Egyptian spoken colloquial language, known as 'ammiyyah.<sup>47</sup> Rather than understanding register as built up imminently in speech through co-occurring linguistic features as described above, the folk-linguistic understanding of dialect in the Arab world sees dialect as two distinct and stable approaches to communication. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I examine a little known *maqāmāt* by the Egyptian lawyer and author 'Abbās al-Aswānī (*al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah*, 1970) in order to complicate ideas about the historical contingency of heteroglossia and irony in Arabic literature, particularly in the satirical genre of the *maqāmāt*, which Abdelfattah Kilito claims first emerged in a particular moment of cultural crisis. However, al-Aswānī's *maqāmāt* pops up inconveniently right at a moment when the language is still living under its greatest period of standardization. To explain this, I use new work on the typification of voices by Asif Agha, who strengthens the Bakhtinian understanding of heteroglossia and polyphony in literary texts by offering an account of polyvocality and enregisterment as an actual sociolinguistic process, rather than merely a mystifying anti-hegemonic ethos. I argue that even within what would commonly be regarded as standard *Fuṣḥa*, al-Aswānī is able to index a whole host of typifiable social voices.

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<sup>47</sup> For a discussion on the problematic nature of the term "diglossia" and the ways that it continues to function as an active language ideology until the present, see Kristen Brustad, "Diglossia as Ideology," in *The Politics of Written Language in the Arab World* (Brill, 2017), 41–67.

The concept of typifiable voices is important because it undermines a Whorfian literary history of Arabic in which 20th century Arabic was too standardized to be carnivalesque.

In Turkey, much of the metalinguistic anxiety centers on the modern language's factitious lexicon: the once composite vocabulary of Ottoman Turkish, made up of a huge percentage of loan words and structures from Arabic and Persian, unequipped to handle the flood of new concepts emerging in the modern world, was engineered by language reformers into a farcically rigid and pauperized *Öztürkçe* in the modern period. According to the common metalinguistic story, the lexical engineering caused the literary language to be stunted, unable to wield the full range of expressiveness granted to other languages. This too is an account of the language reforms which buys into its own language ideology, a fact which I examine in the second chapter. By offering an account of how feeling and thought are communicated interpersonally and indexically through the concept of stand-taking and alignment, I seek to undo the overemphasis on lexicon as being central to the communicative faculties of Turkish. Recent work on the cultural psychology and linguistics of emotion suggests that emotions are not something persons have, but rather, something people *do together*. This understanding should help to mitigate the kind of emotional Whorfianism which has blamed a feeling of cultural belatedness or the inability to express oneself on shortcomings brought about by the lexical reforms. I show instead how much of the ennui of the misunderstood Turkish intellectual can be explained by his gendered and class-based narcissism. I do this through a close reading of three Turkish novels: *İçimizdeki*

*Şeytan* (1940) by Sabahattin Ali, *Aylak Adam* (1959) by Yusuf Atılgan, and *Bir Gün Tek Başına* (1974) by Vedat Türkali.

After dedicating a whole chapter to each of the two national narratives of linguistic dysfunction, the remaining three chapters of the dissertation each read one Egyptian work and one Turkish novel comparatively. In chapter three, I explore the possibilities for using indexicality expansively to interpret the social meaning of language choice within a genre of novel often seen as central to the drama of the nation-building project: the village novel. Above and beyond representing the struggle over national modernity, the village novel and its contrastive use of language registers can be interpreted with reference to a whole field of related meanings. These related meanings make up a world of indexical fields: a “constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable.”<sup>48</sup> For the village novel, this can include: the artistic agenda of socialist realism, the realist novel’s attempt to create a narrative “voice from nowhere”, and the efforts by aspiring writers to come off as both articulate and authentic in their personal stylistics. While I use this chapter specifically to ask questions about the literary uses of standard and non-normative registers, a concern more central to Arabic than Turkish literature, I nevertheless find numerous parallels between the novel *al-Ḥarām* (*The Sinners*, 1959) by Egypt’s Yūsuf Idrīs and in *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* (*Upon Blessed Land*, 1955) by Orhan Kemal.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 453.

Chapter four shifts back to the Turkish metalinguistic focus on lexicon, taking up the topic of lexicography and its relationship to fiction. I am interested in showing how ideologically motivated lexicons are not the special provenance of 19th century language reformers, but that lexicography always represents an ideological attempt to project a view of reality. By looking at the selective use of rarified and ambiguous words in Yaşar Kemal's *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* (*Murder in the Ironsmith's Market*, 1974) and Gamāl al-Ghīṭānī's *Khīṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī* (*The Plans of al-Ghitani*, 1980), I go so far as to suggest that this projection functions as a type of cognitive estrangement in these novels, enabling authors to use lexicons in order to create works of speculative fiction. Whether used as a statement against the state, or for other political purposes entirely, authors manipulate the boundaries of standardized language to narratological effect.

In the last chapter I employ Silverstein's argument about Whorfianism and nationalism to uncover alternative claims to "we-ness" which are indexable in novels written by socialist women who shared ambiguous feelings towards their countries' ostensibly progressive revolutions from above. As alluded to in the opening anecdote, Leylâ Erbil held mixed views about the legacy of Kemalism, and her novel *Tuhaf Bir Kadın* (*A Strange Woman*, 1971) acts as an exploration of how "to be oneself", not merely by rejecting all membership in a group, but by seeking out alternative collectives which could better support the needs of the individual. Similarly, *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* (*The Open Door*, 1960) by Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt can be read in a way that undoes the tendency to read the we-ness in the text as exclusively pertaining to national allegory. As in other chapters, I suggest that one of the most important benefits to reading the interactional text of the novel

indexically is that it allows one to counter the primacy of the national imaginary as a hermeneutic for exploring the politics of language in literary studies in Egypt and Turkey.

Returning to the concept of *rupture*, I see it as a central metaphor in the discourse surrounding language reform in Egypt and Turkey. Rupture in some cases refers to the historical break between classical Arabic and Ottoman Arabic on the one hand, and post-Nahḍah Arabic and Öztürkçe on the other. It can also refer to the dysfunctional structure of these languages themselves, with dialect or composite vocabularies somehow rupturing the synthetic whole of a national language. The term is often used similar to Derrida account in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," of the rupture that occurs when the very idea of structurality of the structure became a subject of thinking (read: language reforms.) At this point, supposedly, the center falls away and allows language to invade the scene and turn everything into discourse. This supposed moment of rupture in language, whether in Derrida's account, or those which have used the language reforms as a foundational moment of crisis, is based on a concept of language without the structuring element of context or indexicality. I believe that linguistic anthropology's conception of pragmatics has much to offer in pushing back on the idea of the infinite play of sign-substitutions, and thereby the micropolitics of difference.

## Chapter One: Tyranny of the Serious: Typifiable Voices, Irony, and Historical

### Whorfianism

ان المصنف لا يكون مصنفا الا اذا جعل الكلام صنوفا  
او ليس الضرب مثل الصنف في المعنى وقرع عصا اليه أضيفا  
-فارس الشدياق

Many of the eloquent tricksters (*bulaghā*) that the ‘Abbās al-Aswānī runs into in his *Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah* (The Assemblies of al-Aswānī, 1970) share suspiciously similar biographies. While out carousing with friends he gets interrupted by the genre’s famous fast-talking characters, who proceed to tell him their life stories. Like him, they are aspiring authors, equally unsatisfied with their day jobs, hatching get-rich-quick schemes to financially support their writerly ambitions. One day while sitting at Cafe Bahwāt, he makes the acquaintance of one Professor ‘Abd al-Salām, who is also a working lawyer with a penchant for embellishing words. In this episode entitled “Professor ‘Abd al-Salām...and the Embellishment of Speech” (الأستاذ عبد السلام...وتزويق الكلام), the professor explains to al-Aswānī how in the past he had only put his wordsmithery to use in the courtroom, helping a client get away with the murder of his wife on their wedding day by pleading insanity. His defense, in rhyming prose, is delivered with a clever mix of legal and literary rhetoric:

فليس على المريض حرج.. اذا هو عن طوره نخرج! ويستعين بتقرير استشارى.. من الدكتور زخارى.. يفيد أن المتهم مصاب بانفصام.. يشعل فيه روح الخصام؟ وأن حالته غير سليمة.. وليس مسئولاً عن الجريمة! فإذا تعارض هذا التقرير! مع تقرير الطبيب الشرعى.. دفع المحامى بأى دفع فرعى! واهتاج لولى بوزه.. واستشهد بلهبوزو

So the patient need not be ashamed...if he is out of control! He is asking for an advisory report...from Doctor Zackary..... stating that the accused suffers from schizophrenia ... is there a sense of strife arising in him? And that his condition is not sound ... and is not responsible for the crime! If this report conflicted with a report from the forensic doctor ... then pay the lawyer any subsidiary payment! And he became irritated and made a scowl.. and cited Lombroso!

49

The lawyer's tactics are as unscrupulous as his rhyme scheme, willing to present an agitated colloquial scowl (*lawā būzahu*) in order to work in the name of the phrenological criminologist and scientific racist Cesare Lombroso (*bi-lambrūzū*).

In the end Professor 'Abd al-Salām decided to make some real money off of his way with words, figuring out how to charm a business owner too stupid to deserve his own wealth

أصبح يملك الألوف .. رغم أنه حلوف<sup>50</sup>

'Abd al-Salām describes how he eventually talks his way into a marriage with the boss's daughter and her inheritance using the rhymed aphorism:

<sup>49</sup> 'Abbās al-Aswānī, *Al-Maqāmāt Al-Aswāniyyahh* (al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Anjilū al-Miṣriyyah, 1970), 138. All translations in this chapter by the author

<sup>50</sup> "he came to own thousands (alūf) even though he's a swine (ḥalūf)" al-Aswānī, *al-Maqāmāt*, 139.

أن الجاهل المغرور لا يسمح لك بالمرور الا إذا نفخت فيه حتى تكفيه

The arrogant ignoramus won't let you pass until you've sufficiently inflated him

51

At the end of the Professor's story, al-Aswānī claims to be disgusted by his unscrupulous cajolery.

من أجل طعام يملأ بطنه .. وامتحن ثقافته .. وأحنى هامته .. الذى باع كرامته . فأحسست بالقرف من هذا المخلوق الحقير  
بالعفن .. ومال يتركه اذا اندفن

I felt disgust with this despicable creature. He who sold his dignity .. and who bowed his head ..  
and who insulted his culture .. for food that filled his stomach with rot..and money that would  
leave him once he was buried

52

But since al-Aswānī's own literary ambitions were thwarted by mundane financial needs, one can only suspect that his disgust is caused in no small part by envy.<sup>53</sup>

The real al-Aswānī was trained as a lawyer, a career he pursued his entire life. But just like the many characters in his *maqāmāt*, he always had bigger dreams. al-Aswānī did see moderate success as a writer of short stories, novels, poetry and especially with his popular radio shows, but nonetheless felt a sense of frustration at the insularity and nepotism of the literary

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<sup>51</sup> al-Aswānī, *Al-Maqāmāt*, 140.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> In his eulogy of the author, 'Abbās Khadr claims that 'Abbās al-Aswānī died like dozens of others of his generation without his work ever receiving the level of accolades or even attention that it deserved. See 'Abbās Khadr, "‘Abbās Al-Aswānī al-Ḍāḥik al-Akhīr," Qatar 7 (1982): 120.

field. According to him, too much of literature was centered around fake ideals of celebrity, too much art being made in the name of political crusades or personal aggrandizement.<sup>54</sup> This frustration is reflected clearly in his *maqāmāt*, which feature a string of literary hucksters seeking fame through various literary schemes, with Professor ‘Abd al-Salām acting as one of many alter egos. Because of how much Professor ‘Abd al-Salām’s appears to be al-Aswānī’s ironic *doppelgänger*, going so far as to both speak in his same prosimetric cadence, as well as the almost complete overlap between the biographical al-Aswānī and his fictional self, in the end one is left wondering whose voice they are in fact listening to.

This is not the first time that the identity of the *rāwī* and that of the *balīgh* have overlapped in a *maqāmāt*. According to Marilyn Booth, Bayram al-Tūnisī collapsed the two roles into one in a series of self-portraits whose *rāwī* tells on himself, so to speak, by committing those very same *balīgh*-like acts he condemns in his status-seeking and money-grubbing colleagues.<sup>55</sup> But unlike the neo-classicist *maqāmāt* of the *Nahḍa*, al-Aswānī’s enterprise is decidedly more casual. He is not inventing duplicitous social stereotypes as much as rewriting stories from his own life into the *maqāmāh* form. Whether drinking coffee with friends at Cafe Bahwāt or mustering the will to buy an expensive glass of Otard cognac at the Semiramis hotel bar, al-Aswānī’s characters seem to share all the same haunts.

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<sup>54</sup> al-Aswany, Alaa. Interview by author. June 14, 2019. Interview by email correspondence.

<sup>55</sup> Marilyn Booth, *Bayram Al-Tunisi’s Egypt: Social Criticism and Narrative Strategies* (Ithaca: Ithaca Press, 1990), 353.

While al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah (The Assemblies of al-Aswānī, 1970) seem to adhere to the genre’s conventions in the technical sense—being written in rhyming prose (*sajʿ*), using a narratological framing device (*isnād*) and using the basic plot structure of eloquent tricksters swindling gullible victims—the work nevertheless comes off as decidedly nonchalant. Like any good *balīgh*, al-Aswānī has an immense lexicon at his command. But he rarely employs it unless stuck for a rhyme, or when hoping to give a little incongruous wink in the text. The haphazard, freestyle nature of the rhymes makes the maqāmāt sound like something he came up with off the top of his head while out drinking with friends. He shows a preference for low stakes humor over lexical showmanship, easygoing dialogue and half-baked colloquial poems, and seems less interested in social commentary than he is autobiographical gossip. But this seems to go against the essence of a genre known for firing off “bright, noisy linguistic fireworks.”<sup>56</sup> The Maqāmāt of al-Ḥarīrī, as the quintessential example, “do not simply include some excessive verbal performance; excessive verbal performance is what they are *about*.”<sup>57</sup> This has much to do with their social origins. Histories of the maqāmah genre have often explained their emergence as corresponding to periods of social turmoil, periods which are ripe for a cultural dethroning through linguistic satire and parody.

But in this sense, al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah are an anachronism. They were written decades after the turn of the century, when an aesthetic reorientation amongst a new *élite* swung

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<sup>56</sup> al-Ḥarīrī, *Impostures*, trans. Michael Cooperson (New York: NYU Press, 2020) xxix.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

the pendulum away from ornamental formalism.<sup>58</sup> What's more, countless scholars have classified the language of literary Arabic at mid-century as relatively homogeneous, the result of the Nahḍa project and its "institution of a new privileging of formal coherency in language."<sup>59</sup> In his introduction to the English translation of *Brains Confounded by the Ode of Abu Shaduf Expounded* (2016), Youssef Rakha claims that the Nahḍah profoundly affected Arabic literature in the 20th century, subjecting it to a "tyranny of the serious" whereby "written Arabic was transformed from a multifarious living language in ever evolving conversation with its earlier (Qur'anic) form to a single, standardized simplification of said form, purposefully divorced from day-to-day speech."<sup>60</sup> Wielding neither the ornamental formalism of his predecessors nor seeming to benefit from the humor and vitality which comes from "the authenticity, continuity, and plausibility of Egyptian dialect as a written language," how does al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah even function as a form of social satire and linguistic parody?<sup>61</sup> What is the mechanism of irony and the carnivalesque if not heteroglossia?

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<sup>58</sup> Pierre Cachia, "The Development of a Modern Prose style in Arabic Literature." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 52, no. 1 (1989): 71.

<sup>59</sup> Jeffrey Sacks, *Iterations of Loss: Mutilation and Aesthetic Form, al-Shidyāq to Darwish* (New York: Fordham Univ Press, 2015), 11.

<sup>60</sup> Youssef Rakha, Foreword to Yusuf Al-Shirbini, *Brains Confounded by the Ode of Abu Shaduf Expounded* (New York: Library of Arabic Literature, 2016), xvi. Youssef Rakha is the author of several novels including *The Book of the Sultan's Seal* (2011), which has been lauded for its innovative mixing of historical diction and contemporary dialects of Arabic writing.

<sup>61</sup> Rakha, Foreword, xv.

In answering these questions, I hope to introduce the work of al-Aswānī and use it to push back on an argument, implicit amongst Arabic literary historiography, that some ages carry more charge for linguistic parody than others. Al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah represent thoroughly modern maqāmāt, written in 20th century Arabic’s supposedly monoglossic literary register, but nevertheless able to invoke an array of social voices and sustain a tone of irony. Arabic literary studies interested in the question of language often work from an unacknowledged folk-linguistic understanding of dialect and register which seem them as comprehensive and fixed. Others see the phenomenon of heteroglossia in literature as dependent on the fortunes of literary innovation, whereby polyphony requires a certain “Bakhtinian” sensibility. Whether explaining the cultural conditions which give rise to the Maqāmah’s specific brand of verbal parody, reducing language politics to the “diglossia problem,” or praising literature’s subaltern resistance to monoglossia through a polyphonic aesthetic, certain Arabic literary historiographies can give the mistaken impression of offering a type of linguistic teleology. By using Asif Agha’s concept of voicing effects, I will show instead how heteroglossia and polyphony are not historically or formalistically contingent. There are a number of textual strategies which can produce the contrastive individuation of voices without recourse to the fuṣḥa/‘āmmiyyah binary, and even the smallest contrast between text segments within a seemingly monoglossic text will allow for a wide cast of social characters to emerge. By demonstrating how these textual strategies function within al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah, I aim to show how they still conform to the genre’s ability to perform multi-tiered parody, social satire, and the tropic use of language. As an ironic genre par

excellence, the maqāmāt retains the ability for parody and humor regardless of the historical age in which it is written. In fact, by bringing a slacker attitude to the whole enterprise, al-Aswānī ends up parodying the voice of the belletristic pretensions of the Maqāmāt composer himself, using a tropic non-congruence of an enregistered voice and thereby providing a genre parody.

This chapter begins by looking at how the maqāmāt genre has been used to narrate a history of the fate of language diversity (and social satire along with it) in histories of Arabic literature.<sup>62</sup> I will then discuss Asif Agha’s model of enregisterment and use it to perform a close reading of *al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyahh* demonstrating how heteroglossia functions despite being written to conform to commonly understood patterns of the standard register. In discussing the nature of irony, language, and genre, I will finally come back to the novel form by showing parallels between how irony functions in both al-Aswānī’s maqamat as well as in the novel *Malīm the Great* by ‘Ādil Kāmil. By doing so, I will claim that it is important to understand how literary history in 20th century Egypt has been shaped by ideologies about language rather than by the language itself.

### ***The Maqāmāt as Social and Linguistic History***

Al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah represents a fascinating collection of comedic texts written long after the commonly heralded Golden Age of Maqāmāt revival in the late 19th and early

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<sup>62</sup> Because maqamat are so often held up as both a pre-modern vestige and as a linguistic “canary in the coal mine” for cultural crisis, that I have chosen to focus on one in this chapter, even though the overall argument of the dissertation pertains instead to the novel. I address this fact later in the chapter

20th century by the likes of Nāsif al-Yāzījī (1800-1871), Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (1858-1930), and Bayram al-Tūnisī (1893-1961). Al-Aswānī's maqāmāt were originally published serially in the newspaper Sabāḥ al-Khayr in the late 1960s, and later adapted as a radio program. 'Abbās's greatest claim to literary fame was as a writer for radio serials, producing such well known works as "Dunya and the Beast," "Zakkiyya the Stupid," and his most famous work "Mawhūb and Salāmah." Many of the subjects of al-Aswānī's maqāmāt are his peers, with his work poking fun at the ivory tower, get-rich-quick schemes, mundane sexual lust, and the delusions of grandeur exhibited by the aspiring author.

In the technical sense, his maqāmāt seem to adhere to many of the genre's conventions. They are written in rhyming prose (*saj'*), most often using a narratological framing device (*isnād*) featuring al-Aswānī himself as the narrator (*rāwī*). They also center on the exploits of an eloquent trickster (*balīgh*) and often end with a summarizing poem written in colloquial at the end of each episode. Al-Aswānī adapts the classic genre as a vehicle for contemporary cultural criticism, lambasting the moral and intellectual pretensions of the literary classes. But unlike the neo-classicist maqāmāt by al-Yaziji, al-Muwayliḥī or even al-Tūnisī, al-Aswānī's enterprise is decidedly more casual. His maqāmāt do not seem to give off any pretensions of aspiring to emulate or even pay tribute to the historical legacy of the genre. Like any good *balīgh*, al-Aswānī has an immense lexicon at his command. But he rarely employs it unless stuck for a rhyme, or when hoping to give a little incongruous wink in the text. The haphazard, freestyle nature of the

rhymes makes the maqāmāt sound like something he came up with off the top of his head while out drinking with friends. With so many episodes beginning in cafes and bars, this seems fitting.

The whole mode of al-Aswānī's maqāmāt is that of nonchalance. His lack of regard for adhering closely to every rule of the maqāmāt genre, his preference for low stakes humor over lexical showmanship, his lazy plot structures and half-baked colloquial poems, which conclude most chapters, belie a certain type of ironic distance. He is not merely poking fun at certain social stereotypes and the literary culture. He is mocking the heights of literary taste, which are supposed to stand at the center of literary life. Al-Aswānī's maqāmāt are carefree insubordination against maqāmāt as belle lettres, an attempt at remaking the form into mass media entertainment. But in refusing deference to the artistic process, al-Aswānī nevertheless ends up contributing to the tradition of the maqāmāt, one suitable for the age of mass media. He parodies a wide range of generic and social voices in his various episodes, but in such a way as to undermine the binary between the linguistic register of "high" literature and the adventures and pranks of a common rogues, drunkards and tricksters.<sup>63</sup> al-Aswānī shows that it is the literati themselves who are down and out, trying to become famous, or merely to make a living out of writing literature.

Maqāmāt are often lauded as artifacts of resistance and compromise against the age in which they are written, rather than for how they satirize works which have come before them. In his study of the maqāmāt, Abdelfattah Kilito claims that the genre's initial flourishing was tied to

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<sup>63</sup> Mohamed-Salah Omri, "Local Narrative Form and Constructions of the Arabic Novel," in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 41 (JSTOR, 2008): 247.

"le démembrement de l'empire Musulman et la décentralisation culturelle que en est résultée."<sup>64</sup>

Their revival in the 19th century—when, according to Sabry Hafez, more maqāmāt were written than in the previous 900 years—has also been understood as brought about by cultural dismemberment and crisis.<sup>65</sup> Mohamed-Salah Omri says that the maqāmāt was a popular genre during the height of the Nahḍah because it was ideally suited to the challenges posed by the European versions of the novel, and because its discursive strategies helped to “keep alive the Arab writers’ claim to ‘authenticity.’”<sup>66</sup> Social turmoil brings with it an accompanying dethroning of linguistic hegemony, allowing satire and parody to thrive in the spaces of heteroglossic language. William Granara sees in this *historical context*, along with its attendant rebellion in the field of *language*, two of the three areas of conjuncture shared between maqāmāt and the western picaresque novel.<sup>67</sup> The flowery and pedantic language of the maqāmāt ironizes language and turns it on society in order to break up what Northrop Frye calls its “lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatisms, oppressive fashions.”<sup>68</sup> In its particular strength as a meta-genre, the maqāmāt seem especially suited to periods of cultural disruption.

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<sup>64</sup>abd El-Fattah Kilito, "Le genre "Séance": une introduction," in *Studia Islamica*, 43 (1976): 33.

<sup>65</sup> Sabri Hāfiz, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), 19.

<sup>66</sup> Omri, "Local Narrative," 259.

<sup>67</sup> William Granara, "Picaresque Narratives and Cultural Dissimulation in Colonial North African Literature," *The Arab Studies Journal* 11, no. 2/1 (2003): 43.

<sup>68</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 233.

But then how is it that despite the almost constant pace of demographic, cultural, and political change during the 20th century, the common narrative persists that heterogeneous and subaltern language withered later into the 20th century? Countless authors and scholars of Arabic literature have offered an account of the stultifying effects of language reforms on the literary language of Egypt in the 20th century?<sup>69</sup> Authors like Youssef Rakha who, in his introduction to the English translation of *Brains Confounded by the Ode of Abu Shaduf Expounded* (2016), claims that the spirit of levity and humor on display in that 18th century work were to become victims of the sombre and totalizing project of the Nahḍah. As a pre-modern work, *Brains Confounded* supposedly parades out everything that was lost to Arabic in the modern age: social parody and the stereotypical imitation of different classes, carnivalesque displays of style, and an overwhelming sense of jest and parody baked into language. Rakha calls for a return to the humor and vitality which comes from the authenticity, continuity, and plausibility of the Egyptian dialect. He envisions such a dialect “not in the sense of a separate alternative to or descendent of the classical tongue, but as a complex, inseparable dimension of it.”<sup>70</sup>

Like Youssef Rakha, Radwa Ashour has also imagined how differently modernity might have turned out if writers like al-Shidyāq had been allowed to keep the spirit of playful, multifarious language alive. This widespread praise for a specific type of eclectic, flamboyant, and

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<sup>69</sup> Youssef Rakha, “Foreword,” in *Brains Confounded by the Ode of Abu Shaduf Expounded* (New York: Library of Arabic Literature, 2016), xxv. Youssef Rakha is the author of several novels including *The Book of the Sultan’s Seal* (2011), which has been lauded for its innovative mixing of historical diction and contemporary dialects of Arabic writing.

<sup>70</sup> Rakha, “Foreword,” xv.

polyvocal prose as an antidote to the seriousness of Arabic literature—especially in the forms it took in the novel—is exemplified by al-Shidyāq’s evolution into a cause célèbre for recent Arabic literary scholarship. His text, it is claimed, “dismantles and unfixes the master narrative of European modernity and civilization.”<sup>71</sup> This excitement for the Nahḍawī gadfly was matched in earlier years by work on colloquial poets, and all other literary acts of colloquial subversion against the enormous monolith of prose writing sitting in the center of the modern Arabic canon. Throughout the 20th century, ‘āmmiyyah was on defiant display in the dialogue of feminist novels like Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt’s *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* (1960) and village novels like ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī’s *al-Arḍ* (1954), or in colloquial poetry such as the working class *ajzāl* of Faṭḥī Aḥmad al-Maghribī and the rubā‘iyāt of Ṣalāḥ Jahīn. As Marilyn booth says “the potential import of writing literarily in colloquial Arabic derives from a situation of diglossia or perhaps multiglossia: the presence of multiple and distinct “levels” of language, coupled with a consciousness among its users that each level present a different, if overlapping, communication sphere.”<sup>72</sup>

However, framing cultural history in this way brings with it an unacknowledged assumption that some ages carry more charge for parody than others. Satisfying as it may be to use stylistic trends as evidence for historical structures of feeling, too often these literary histories end up making claims about the evolution of language itself, claims which lapse into Whorfian metanarratives.

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<sup>71</sup> Tarek El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (Fordham Univ Press, 2013), 81.

<sup>72</sup> Booth, Marilyn. "Colloquial Arabic Poetry, Politics, and the Press in Modern Egypt." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 3 (1992): 420.

## The Epistemic Violence of the Nahḍah

The Nahḍah was a literary and intellectual reform movement aimed at Arabic literature, culture, and identity during the latter half of the 19th century. Although a transnational movement of thinkers and writers across several countries, it is understood by scholars as the prime instigator for sweeping epistemic and ontological changes in Egyptian society. The Nahḍah marks the passage from traditional Islamic modes of thought to the rational colonial order and modernity. Because the movement's efforts focused so much on the Arabic language itself, the Nahḍah is said to have profoundly affected Arabic literature in the 20th century, subjecting it to a "tyranny of the serious" whereby "written Arabic was transformed from a multifarious living language in ever evolving conversation with its earlier (Qur'anic) form to a single, standardized simplification of said form, purposefully divorced from day-to-day speech."<sup>73</sup> Like the Dil Devrimi in Turkey, the Nahḍah was a period of intense focus on the mechanics, structures, and forms of language itself, in which the perceived baroque archaisms of the classical language were abandoned for a more uniform and instrumental mode of communication. As Stephen Sheehi explains in his account of the role of language reformers in the foundation of modern Arab identity:

The creation of a language unencumbered by classical Ciceronisms and baroque embellishment is critical to the reform movement's desire for efficiency. It also accurately represents the epistemological foundation of the movement. That is, Arab reformers and modern literati needed a language that seemed to present objective, scientific knowledge

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<sup>73</sup> Rakha, "Foreword," xvi.

in a way that was not self-conscious or opaque. Despite their reverence for the ancients, these reformers and literati were committed to creating a language that would not call attention to itself or demand the erudition of its reader, thereby interfering with the naturalness of the knowledge that it presents.<sup>74</sup>

According to Stephen Sheehi, this linguistic and epistemological modernization can be seen clearly in works of literature, where embellishment (*tazwīq*), prolix, and ornate structures were eventually cast off in exchange for what Salamah Musa called the “telegraphic style” (*al-uslūb al-tilighrāfi*).

The story of this shift to monoglossia in Arabic has been told by scholars, like Sabry Hafez, who show how changes in literary sensibilities were driven by the emergence of a new reading public. Journalism was the first form of new discourse to appear in Arab world, and with it developed a new narrative voice with its “air of common speech”.<sup>75</sup> Sasson Somekh says that early translators of prose fiction from the West were “the first to face the necessity of making their language amenable to the requirements of the genre”, but that, nonetheless, “the process of shedding medieval stylistic norms in the style of modern Arabic fiction (translated and original) was a slow one.”<sup>76</sup> In both cases, it is possible to explain these changes in stylistics as responding to the practical needs of particular audiences and new genres of writing everyday speech; but often times, they are taken as representative of changes in the linguistic practices of society itself.

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<sup>74</sup>Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 109.

<sup>75</sup> Hāfīz, *Genesis*, 84.

<sup>76</sup> Sasson Somekh, *Genre and Language in Modern Arabic Literature*, vol. 1 (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1991), 23-4.

Like Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, several scholars of the Nahḍah look to the record of journalism and literary writing as emblematic of far more fundamental changes to Arab identity and knowledge. Sheehi claims that his book is a study not only of writing practices, but of the textual and epistemological roots of modern Arab subjectivity. He focuses on the work of a group of Arab reformers and intellectuals, but in doing so also extrapolates from their concerns with language a model of the cultural phenomenology of Arab society. Sheehi claims that “scrutinizing the narratives of even forgotten texts reveals the degree to which the discourses of self have already been inscribed within the popular consciousness of the day,” endorsing the idea that these shifts in stylistics should be taken as homologous to changes in the identity of the national subject.<sup>77</sup> It is easy to see how this type of conflation sees the rise of the national realist novel, for example, as evidence that a society submitted in total to the cultural order of monolingualism.

Sheehi is not alone in conflating stylistics with reality. In his recent book *Iterations of Loss*, Jeffrey Sacks speaks about the relationship between language and loss, specifically losses inflicted by the “state and the figures it privileges.”<sup>78</sup> In his account of the Nahḍah, he looks closely at a series of works by Buṭrus al-Bustānī, Faris al-Shidyāq, and Ṭaha Ḥusayn that are concerned with philology. In these works, Sacks reads moments in which language pauses, displaced from itself, in search of its own historical accounting. The goal of this philological work was to temporalize

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<sup>77</sup> Sheehi, *Foundations*, 109.

<sup>78</sup> Sacks, *Iterations*, 1.

and desacralize Arabic, to make it a single substance united with the social and political body. Ushered in by the juridical violence of the colonial state and European epistemologies, these efforts led to a new privileging of formal coherency in language, “from a theocratic to an anthropocentric understanding” of language and time.<sup>79</sup> But what is the mechanism by which this intellectual project was forced upon the actual speakers of Arabic? And more importantly, how are we to believe that these changes were not merely language-ideological in nature, rather than affecting the very cognitive and anthropological conditions of Arab culture and identity itself, as Sheeni and Sacks claim? It seems more likely that Sacks and others’ focus on “language as medium and even prototype of this cultural condition, it is itself a species of Whorfian construction from within that state or condition, a conceptual product of the linguistic condition on which it rests.”<sup>80</sup>

As I will show in my discussion on the process of enregisterment, the supposed monoglossic state of Arabic which Sacks uses as evidence of the epistemic violence of the Nahḍah, is itself a language ideology which dismisses or underplays the completely unremarkable yet fundamental nature of register diversity in language. These registers are themselves not static, much less policeable, but are constantly being negotiated in the dialectics of linguistic interaction. Because registers are immanent to a given language rather than isolatable from it, it cannot be argued that that the Arabic language was disciplined by the colonial administration along the

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<sup>79</sup> Sacks, *Iterations*, 11.

<sup>80</sup> Silverstein, “Whorfianism,” 86.

lines of those other institutions examined in Timothy Mitchell's Foucauldian reading of Egyptian colonial history in *Colonising Egypt*.<sup>81</sup> For Sacks, the inescapable epistemic enclosure of the colonial order is assumed to have worked the same ruthless efficiency on language that it did the barracks and the sewer system.

In her study *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt* (2004), Samah Selim tries to complicate what she sees as Mitchell's oversimplified account of Nahḍawī intellectuals by insisting on the "complexity and diversity of their political ideologies, as well as the nuances of their political affiliations."<sup>82</sup> Rather than seeing the Nahḍah as an evenly progressing monoglossic project, she shows this elite as holding ambiguous attitudes towards local popular culture, as is exemplified by the linguistic colloquial and hybrid popular narratives of the late 19th century, such as the theatre and short stories of Ya'qūb Sanū' and 'Abdallah al-Nadīm, and the Fallah character in the maqāmah of al-Muwayliḥī's *Hadith Isa Ibn Hisham*. However, she also acknowledges that this diversity eventually disappeared as

the narrative structure of the new fiction that emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century also implied a radical break with the old modes of the Arabic literary canon. In the same way that society came to be understood as a distinct and abstract field of human knowledge, constructed around a subject/object relationship, so the act of narration itself came to reproduce the split implied in this new ontology.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonising Egypt*. (University of California Press, 1991)

<sup>82</sup> Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (London: Routledge, 2004), 7.

<sup>83</sup> Selim, *Rural Imaginary*, 13.

Rather than the determined work of philologists, she argues, it was the entire thrust of modern history and politics that made the Arabic language and its diglossia increasingly emblematic of the binary categories of nationalist discourse: city/village, individual/community, alienation/authenticity, tradition/modernity.<sup>84</sup> Selim claims that nationalist fervor in the wake of the 1919 revolution set off a campaign of “dismantling the linguistic hybridity of the nineteenth-century social text ‘ –nationalizing’ it, so to speak – and hence unifying the language of narrative into a standard Arabic with minor variations of syntax and vocabulary that would mimic local speech patterns.”<sup>85</sup> Against this homogenizing power of national language, literature “fought back” through “subaltern textual language, occasionally and strategically employed by uneducated women, urban riff-raff and, of course, the peasant.”<sup>86</sup> According to Selim, all of Egyptian society’s social divisions are clustered into the great linguistic divide between the two great registers.

A classic example of literature “fighting back” in the 20th century by using the subversive power of vernacular language is the *Maqāmāt* of Bayram al-Tūnisī.<sup>87</sup> Because al-Tūnisī was an advocate of mass communication as opposed to society’s “learned culture,” one would expect to see al-Tūnisī avidly employ colloquial language in his satire. But in her monograph on the author, Marilyn Booth is very careful to consider al-Tūnisī’s literary works as “folk literature.” She claims

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<sup>84</sup> Selim, *Rural Imaginary*, 58.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Booth, Marilyn. *Bayram Al-Tunisi’s Egypt: Social Criticism and Narrative Strategies*. Ithaca: Ithaca Press, 1990, 12.

that colloquial texts and “folk” text production are too often conflated, and that in fact it is necessary to distinguish between “vernacular” and “colloquial.”

By ‘vernacular,’ I mean cultural production emphasizing and celebrating the material culture and social codes of a particular social context, implying loudly its distinction from other contexts and assuming a certain shared knowledge about that context as materially and linguistically represented. By ‘colloquial,’ I mean specifically a linguistic sphere, the language of non-formal oral communication in the society, that labelled as ‘āmmiyyah.<sup>88</sup>

Booth’s distinction helps to point out how often Egyptian literary history has reduced the exploration and performance of the great variety of cultural codes and values to the overt deployment of dialect. But even focusing strictly on the “colloquial,” i.e. linguistic aspects of a text, the term ‘āmmiyyah is highly reductive as it does very little to explain the complex ways that language can index specific social characters, groups, or beliefs. It offers, instead, a catch-all distinction from the imagined standard register. In order to look more meaningfully at the social meaning embedded in language, I now turn to the concept of “enregisterment.”

## Enregisterment

In his article “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment” (2005) Asif Agha seeks to expand on Bakhtin’s account of how individual and social voices appear in literary texts by using new insights from linguistic anthropology. Agha shows how utterances index social stereotypes through allusions to

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 10.

speech registers and how the impression of individual voices emerges through the flexible and subtle semiotics of voicing contrasts. Rather than conceiving of registers as discrete and exhaustive grammars, one should instead see them as interpretations of speech choices made when there are “distinct, indexically contrastive ways of saying what counts as the “same thing.”<sup>89</sup> The cumulative effect of different co-occurring linguistic features clustering together in such a way as to create the impression of a distinct style or level of language. This process, whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized, is what Agha refers to as enregisterment. These enregistered voices can then be used to index stereotypic social personae.

In a similar way, texts can use metrical contrasts between chunks of text to create a *contrastive individuation* of voices, which motivates evaluations of sameness or difference of speaker. These contrasts appear through “a vast range of text-forming devices—parentheticals, tense, person, mood, report frames of varying degrees of fragmentariness” which draw implicit text-internal boundaries that don’t always correspond to specific biographical identities.<sup>90</sup> Agha refers to these contrasts as being *entextualized* because of how they are “emergent and nondetachable: They are figure-ground contrasts that are individuable only in relation to an unfolding text structure (hence emergent) and are not preserved under decontextualization (hence nondetachable).”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Michael Silverstein, “The Race from Place: Dialect Eradication vs. the Linguistic ‘Authenticity’ of Terroir,” in *Indexing Authenticity: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, ed. Veronique Lacoste, Leimgruber, Jakob, and Thimo Breyer, vol. 39 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2014), 163.

<sup>90</sup> Asif Agha, “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2005): 44.

<sup>91</sup> Agha, “Voice,” 40.

Returning to the maqāmāh from the introduction, we see that Professor ‘Abd al-Salām and ‘Abbās al-Aswānī voice themselves as two separate persons even though both speak in more or less fuṣḥa-conforming rhymed prose.<sup>92</sup> But Professor ‘Abd al-Salām's choice of technical vocabulary and cunning use of rhetorical devices corresponds to a more specific linguistic stereotype, that of showboating legalese, which enregisters him as lawyers. Likewise, with his inventive insults and rapid-fire rhymes, ‘Abbās al-Aswānī keeps up the role as maqāmāh narrator. A focus only on diglossia misses this fact, and would assign Professor ‘Abd al-Salām and al-Aswānī to the same team, linguistically speaking. A model of language politics reliant on a model of two distinct registers overlooks the incredible diversity of enregistered voices, and fails specifically to see how these two characters’ voices are meant to simultaneously overlap and contradict.

And they do in fact overlap, with al-Aswānī himself being a lawyer, and Professor ‘Abd al-Salām delivering his fair share of rhyming jabs. They have stereotypical social identities because their voices are enregistered, but their voices are distinct from one another thanks to entextualized voicing contrasts. There are moments, for example, when we can clearly tell whether it is al-Aswānī explaining ‘Abd al-Salām’s despicable schemes or ‘Abd al-Salām praising his own ingenious plots merely by whether the adjectives used to describe them are pejorative or complimentary. The very sense that ‘Abd al-Salām is able to offer his side of the story is precisely what Bakhtin means by polyphony. *Al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah* exemplify this “collective quality

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<sup>92</sup> The idea that the text more or less conforms to a de jure standardized Arabic is a tricky claim as it runs counter to the effort to move past diglossic descriptions of the language style. There are words sprinkled all throughout the text which would technically count as Egyptian dialect in the lexicographical sense. But at the same time, the text strictly conforms to the verbal morphology rules of standard Arabic except in the final colloquial poems.

of an individual utterance, that is, the capacity of my utterance to embody someone else's utterance even while it is mine"<sup>93</sup> because it uses several text-forming devices beyond using dialect to create voicing contrasts.

Agha also recommends the term “virtual speaking personae” to help move away from the somatic metaphoricity of the term ‘voicing,’ allowing us to more accurately reflect the indeterminate nature of voicing contrasts. Oftentimes we cannot peg a voice to a specific character in the text, and oftentimes the voice being alluded to doesn’t belong to a person at all. Quoting Bakhtin himself, Agha reminds us that “dialogic relations are manifest in oral conversation but also in a variety of other discursive and semiotic genres, including novels, other literary works, even “images belonging to different art forms” as long as they are “expressed in some *semiotic* material.”<sup>94</sup> For this reason, it is misleading to speak of certain novel as having some appropriately “multivoiced structure” which allows for polyphony. Al-Aswānī simultaneously builds a dialogic relationship between his characters, bickering within and around the scaffolding of *saj‘*, while rhymed prose itself creates a dialogic relationship with the *maqāmah* genre.

The *maqāmah* has always been a genre which puts on display the diversity of not just persons and groups, but literary styles which can be brought forth through enregistered voices.

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<sup>93</sup> Linda M. Park-Fuller, "Voices: Bakhtin's heteroglossia and polyphony, and the performance of narrative literature." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 7.1 (1986): 2.

<sup>94</sup> Agha, "Voice," 39.

Each time and place has its own menagerie of speech genres, subcultures, and social types which can be mined for material. Abdelfattah Kilito explains how

le texte des séances, qui suit les métamorphoses du personnage dans un miroitement de discours, est aussi un hypokalamon. Le problème de l'identité se pose dans les mêmes termes pour le texte et pour le personnage: si Abu l-Fath est le support de virtualités d'existence qui passent à l'acte, la séance est le cadre qui accueille divers genres, pas seulement les genres poétiques traditionnels, mais aussi la devinette, le propos de table, la controverse, le parallèle, etc.<sup>95</sup>

The invocation of hypokalamon (moiré cloth/chameleon) as a metaphor for the way that virtual speaking personae are reflected in discourses should remind us that it is not always possible to precisely identify the figure reflected in the shimmer of parody. It is rather like the schemata of Agha, whereby the maqāmah is a cacophony of voicing contrasts, even within the unified stylistics of the single work. As I will now show using examples from al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah, there are constant glimmerings of a whole range of other discursive artifacts: ranging from oral narratives, to commercial jingles, to medieval prose genres like the maqāmah itself.

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<sup>95</sup> Kilito, "Séance," 87.

## Al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah

### Sartre wears a Galabiyah and speaks Arabic

The opening maqāmāh “Sartre Wears a Galabiyah and Speaks Arabic” (سارتر يرتدى الجلابية) (ويتكلم العربية) begins with al-Aswānī trying to meet Jean-Paul Sartre during the latter’s visit to Egypt. Sartre had actually visited the country during the run-up to the Six Day War, and was greeted at the airport by the who’s who of Egyptian intellectual life: Luīs ‘Awaḍ, ‘Anīs Maṣṣūr, Luṭfi al-Khūli, and even Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm (although Ṭaha Husayn did not receive an invite).<sup>96</sup> Sartre loomed large in Egyptian intellectual culture and represented in the late 60s the pinnacle of literary fame and renown. And so, of course, al-Aswānī is intent on meeting him.

فرسمت للقائه خطة..ورحت اتمسح كالثقة..ووقفت عند باب الدخول أتلصص..وبقدومه أتربص

So I drew up a plan to meet him... and I started to preen myself like a cat..and I stood at the entrance door like a voyeur...and laid in wait for his arrival.

97

But, as he explains, he doesn’t receive any of the many social invitations which would provide the opportunity, since he himself isn’t famous or renowned. When he goes to see Sartre speak in the theatre (presumably at the auditorium of Cairo University, where the real Sartre gave a lecture during his visit), the French intellectual is too thronged by crowds to be

<sup>96</sup> Yoav Di-Capua, *No Exit: Arab Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Decolonization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 200.

<sup>97</sup> al-Aswānī, *Al-Maqāmāt*, 2.

approached. Every time al-Aswānī tries to catch a glimpse of him, Sartre disappears. Despite his stealthy efforts, al-Aswānī never ends up meeting his hero.

Lying in bed one night, he wonders why he failed in his efforts. He is, after all, erudite and well read, and deserving of an invite.

وألا توجه الى الدعوات.. كأنتي من الأموات.. مع أنني أديب قراري.. ليل ونهارى.. أعرف الأدب الأوروبي..  
وأجلس في جروبي.. وأتناول المايونيز.. وأقرأ اللتر فرانسيز

And to not get an invite .. as if I was dead.. even though I am a seasoned scholar... all night and day ..I know European literature... and I hang out at Groppi.. I partake of mayonnaise.. and read *les Lettres Françaises*.

98

Peppering one's speech with French phrases and name dropping elite publications are the quickest ways, linguistically speaking, to index oneself as being part of the *cognoscenti*.<sup>99</sup> Al-Aswānī transliterates the name of the magazine into Arabic in such a way that one can practically hear the tell-tale guttural 'R' in French being earnestly pronounced. This name dropping "Les Lettres Françaises" is a perfect example of what Asif Agha refers to as a *text segment*. A text segment is any bit of semiotic code that produces a voicing contrast within a stretch of text. It is

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Silverstein refers to how this practice of speaking about elite forms of consumption contributing to one's own elite identity as "Wine Talk" ("Oinoglossia": "As we consume the wine and properly (ritually) denote that consumption, we become, in performative realtime, the well-bred, characterologically interesting (subtle, balanced, intriguing, winning, etc.) person iconically corresponding to the metaphorical "fashion of speaking" of the perceived register's figurations of the aesthetic object of connoisseurship, wine." Silverstein, Michael. "Indexical Order and the Dialectics of Sociolinguistic Life." *Language & Communication* 23, no. 3-4 (2003): 226.

the ever so brief keying into a metalinguistic stereotype, an imaginary voicing that is activated by the slightest allusion to the way that social types - in this case Gallophilic Egyptian intellectuals - are thought to speak. A relatively small collection of words, or one conspicuous turn of phrase, can be enough to hint at the full imaginary offered in a social stereotype. We do not need al-Aswānī to recite an entire speech in French to light up our imaginations. Social characters are invoked through mutually understood allusions to other jointly known social personae, rather than through exhaustive characterization or consistent linguistic costuming. As is the case with Al-Tūnisī, Al-Aswānī creates vernacular voices without them having to be colloquial.

Al-Aswānī eventually nods off, and in his dreams he finally comes across the famous French philosopher walking down the beach.

وفجأة أبصرت سارتر أمامي .. فكادت أفيق من منامي .. فقلت له بونسوار.. لأننا في الليل ولا النهار.. قال  
الكاتب المشهور .. وانا برؤيته مسحور.. مساء الخير .. في لغة عربية فصيحة قاهرية مليحة .. فتملكتني اندهاشة .. سألته  
بشاشة .. هل تعرف اللغة العربية.. قال.. وألبس قبل النوم جلاية .. لأنها من ناحية الصحة والسلامة .. أفضل من  
البيجاما

I Suddenly spotted Sartre before me .. and almost woke up from my dream .. and I said to him  
Bonsoir .. because it was nighttime and not in the day .. and the famous writer said .. while I  
was enchanted at the sight of him .. good evening .. in an eloquent and handsome Cairene  
Arabic .. so I was overcome with astonishment .. and I asked him with a smile .. do you know  
the Arabic language .. He said.. and what's more I put on a galabeya before bed .. because in  
terms of health and safety.. it's better than pajamas.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 3.

Sartre speaks a handsome and elegant Cairene Arabic which entrances al-Aswānī. Along with his perfectly befitting linguistic garb he is also dressed in the quintessential Egyptian outfit. His performance of Egyptian identity is above reproach. In al-Aswānī's dream, Sartre, dressed in a Galabiyah, seems to have nothing but respect for Egypt's cultural figures, both high and low. Of note is how many of these words and phrases, presumably belonging to different registers, are presented together within the unifying flow of the saǰ': Sartre rhymes the narrator's "al-ʿarabiyyah" with the Egyptian "galabiyah," and the familiar Egyptian "al-siḥḥah wa-l-salāmah" rhymes with the European "bijāmā," (which is itself actually a Persian/Urdu loan-word). The sing-song of the rhymed prose is made up of what Agha calls the metrical iconism of co-occurring text segments—the likeness or unlikeness of co-occurring chunks of text.<sup>101</sup>

Pressed on how he is able to speak perfect Arabic, Sartre says he's read everybody from ʿAmrū Bin Kalthūm to Umm Kulthūm, from ʿAntarah Bin Shaddad to ʿAbbās al-Aqqād. This is highly ironic given the role Sartre played in bringing down the idols of Arabic literature in the mid-century.<sup>102</sup> Sartre's theories of literary engagement had been incredibly influential on the literary scene of the country, with the Iltizam movement challenging the old cultural literary order of those like Ṭaha Husayn and ʿAbbās al-Aqqād. In the dream, Sartre even shares the old guard's linguistic prejudices when asked about his opinion of writing in ʿammiyyah, calling it an illusory lie ("الكذوبة وهمية").

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<sup>101</sup> Agha, "Voice," 40.

<sup>102</sup> See Di-Capua, *No Exit*.

While as al-Aswānī takes pains to invoke “Les Lettres Françaises” in order to invoke the speech repertoire of the typical Egyptian intellectual, quite often enregistered voices are used against expectations. According to Agha, while al-Aswānī speaks congruently to the linguistic stereotypes associated with him, his version of Sartre is comical precisely because of the non-congruence of his enregistered voice. The process of indexing social personae is “social” in part because a social indexing does not always have to be a pure imitation, but can also be done in creatively tropic ways. When al-Aswānī expresses his disbelief at Sartre’s ability to speak Arabic, Sartre responds:

ليس هذا ذنبي.. فكل أديب قابلني .. عذبي وأرهقني.. وكلهني بفرنسية.. تبعث على الأسية..  
وأقسم بعزة الخالق.. وليرميني من حالق

This is not my fault .. for every writer that has met me .. has tortured and exhausted me .. and spoken to me in French .. it gives rise to sorrow .. and I swear on the might of the Creator.. may He strike me from above.

103

Standard Arabic is mocked in Standard Arabic. Sartre is able to employ a series of articulate and superlative synonyms for being annoyed, give a flowery religious invocation, and coopts an idiomatic expression (من حالق, from above) in order to match the rules of saǰ. Not content to merely speak Arabic, Sartre performs his competence of the register. He is able to respond to al-Aswānī’s questions with rhymes, demonstrating his understanding of local references by speaking

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

about local authors by their first names (“Nagīb” for Nagīb Maḥfūz and “Iḥsān” for Iḥsān ‘Abd al-Quddūs), and even complaining about his problems with contemporary literary culture.

وإن زادت في تعبي.. لأن النقد عندكم.. مجاملة.. كأنه سلوك ومعاملة

And if I have become increasingly exhausted.. it’s because your form of criticism...is just flattery and pleasantries...nothing but manners and etiquette.

104

Sartre speaks like a typical Egyptian literati, except that he is arguably one of the country’s most famous foreigners. He is using an enregistered voice, performing metapragmatic stereotypes, but against the grain.

Agha emphasizes the point that enregistered voices are always and only experienced in the course of entextualized voicing effects. That is to say, one cannot recognize a voice as a social stereotype in isolation, but only within the context in which it is being used. The larger context surrounding an enregistered voice has the effect of making it either an example of appropriate use or, if the speech is non-congruent, an interactional trope.<sup>105</sup> Sartre’s way of speaking in this chapter is tropic because of the oddness between co-occurring signs, (i.e. the sign of him being Sartre vs. the fact he speaks like a Cairene have non-congruent indexical effects). The humorous irony is created not by the juxtaposition between figures speaking across Fuṣḥa/ ‘āmmiyyah binary, but by the competent use of Fuṣḥa by the wrong characterological figure.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>105</sup> Agha, “Voice,” 46.

## The Trial of a Critic Biased Against the Plain Truth

Keeping true to the maqāmah’s metaliterary spirit, a great many of al-Aswānī’s episodes deal with the state of literary production in Egypt in the late 1960s. But while many scholars have focused on how the cultural traumas of the Six Day War—not to mention the terrible effects of censorship, state coercion and control of the literary class—marked a decisive turning point in aesthetics orientation, al-Aswānī’s many tales of unlucky artists reflect more personal and mundane issues like that of inspiration, mediocrity, and simply making ends meet. There is a maqāmah about a talented zajal writer who can’t feed his family on a poet’s income.

الزجل وحده لا يكفي لضمان العيش..فانا أرعى أسرة كالجيش<sup>106</sup>

In another maqāmah, Professor Sail (أستاذ شراعة) dreams of becoming a famous writer of radio serials.

<sup>107</sup>منذ قطعت عن الرضاعة. وأنا مولع بسماع الإذاعة

Stories like these are less an ambitious meditation on the role of literature in society than an intimate poking fun at writers’ delusions of grandeur and the minor dreams of a literary field which was far less recognized or self-assured than it would seem from the outside. The number

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<sup>106</sup> “The zajal alone doesn’t guarantee a living... I’m taking care of a family as big as an army” al-Aswānī, *al-Maqāmāt*, 47

<sup>107</sup> “Ever since I was weened from the breast, I’ve been crazy about listening to the radio” Ibid, 61.

of ambitious *bulaghā'* that al-Aswānī encounters in his text satirize literary language by betraying a sense of their own imposter syndrome.

The feeling of literary fraudulence is put on trial, literally, in the maqāmah “The Trial of a Critic Biased Against the Plain Truth” (محاكمة ناقد مغرض عن الحقيقة معرض). In it, a literary critic named Ibrāhīm Ibn Jinnī is sent to the fictional “Arts Court” at the House of Fine Arts. When Ibn Jinnī is brought to court, the judge sits in front of an illuminated, buzzing neon light which reads “الفن لا يهون” (“art cannot be made light of”). It is here in the courtroom where the ambiguity of multivoicedness is really put on display. In this instance voicing contrasts are not merely indicated by shifts in register as much as by a shift in topical referents, represented speakers, and even subtle changes in stances and attitudes. The Judge stands and recites the accusation.

يا إبراهيم بن جني.. أنت متهم بالتخريب الفني. انك ناقد مغرض.. عن الحقيقة معرض.. فهل تنكر. أم تعترف  
فقال بن جني: لن أتعرف .. وأنا محرر مشهود له بالكفاءة.. والفهاوة والحداءة

Oh Ibrahim bin Jinni.. you are accused of artistic sabotage. You are a biased and partial critic ... whom truth has exposed.. So do you deny. Or do you confess and so Bin Jinni said: I will not confess .. and I am an editor acclaimed for his competence ...and for his understanding and sharpness.

Adhering to the layout of the traditional Maqāmāt, al-Aswānī mainly avoids using elements such as line breaks or parentheses which would help to differentiate between character and narrator voices. In the absence of parentheses, al-Aswānī often uses cues such as “قال” (“he said”) or “ف” (“and so”) to separate direct reported speech. His use of punctuation is mainly reserved to the two-dot ellipsis as a way to signal the division between rhymed lines, which proves helpful given his own slack adherence to prosody. However, as is the case in the quote above, the rhyme often extends between the division between two distinct sections of reported speech, and vice versa, creating a sort of signal interference. In addition to this, al-Aswānī goes further to overlap and mix the voices at the trial by shifting topical referents and represented speakers in and around the ongoing rhythm of saǰʿ. After Ibn Jinnī defends himself, the prosecutor stands to give his case.

فقام وكيل نيابة الفن.. وقال في تأن: ان ما ذكره المتهم..وعدده على أنه من مزاياه.. هو دليل دنياه.. ان المحكمة تعلم أن النقد السليم للفن دعامة.. وعلى ازدهاره علامة..ولكن المتهم في هذه القضية الهامة.. شخصية سامة

And so the Deputy Prosecutor of Art stood .. and said with a deliberate voice: that which the defendant has recollected.. and which he has listed as being his merits .. are but evidence of his baseness .. the court knows that good criticism is a support for art... and a sign of its flourishing.. but the defendant in this important case... is a poisonous character.

109

In this short excerpt, there are several subtle shift both in the subject of the speech, and the voice in which it's given. It begins with the narrator describing the prosecutor, and then gives a clear

<sup>109</sup> al-Aswānī, *Al-Maqāmāt*, 55.

signal that the voice is shifting through the cue “قال” (he said) as well as the use of a colon. But when the prosecutor then speaks, he first demeans Ibn Jinnī through strong rhetorical language, but then actually speaks on behalf of the court by saying that it is the “court” which knows that good criticism is a support of the arts and a sign of its flourishing. This *argumentum ad populum*, beyond being a typical strategy which marks the prosecutor’s speech as *lawyerly*, is an example of how frequently unnamed voices enter the entextualized structure of the text. It is not actually clear if “the court” here is meant as a metonym referring to the the presiding officer or officials, or as a synecdoche for the greater intellectual community and its other literary institutions. But while it’s the prosecutor speaking, he is channelling another unnamed voice. After this statement, the prosecutor follows up by claiming that the defendant is a poisonous character. But there isn’t any marker drawing the reader back from the court’s opinion to the prosecutor’s claim. We know it instead based on the nature of the information: that it is a specific statement pertaining to the defendant, and not a general one about the nature of art, and so most likely belonging to the prosecutor. Along with linguistic differences between text segments, we also recognize contrast between stance and affect. The purpose of this hair splitting is to underline Agha’s point that voices that are individuable but not always nameable. Just as one should move away from a concept of registers as discrete and static, typifiable voices are not always grounded in biographical personhood. Moving away from the metaphor of voice altogether, Agha refers to this process as *figures performed through speech*. By doing so, we can see how al-Aswānī can recreate

complex interactions between enregistered voices without having to rely on the cumbersome conventions for marking reported speech used in the conventional novel.

This same process is at work as well further into the prosecutor's invective against Ibn Jinnī, when he says:

ولو ان شيكسبير كتب رواية.. ولم يدفع له جراية.. لكتب أنه ناشىء في البداية.. أو أنه حرامى.. سرق البناء الدرامي..  
وذلك دون أى دليل.. ولا أدنى تعليل، وهو يستمر في الهجوم، والقذف المسموم

And if Shakespeare had written a novel... but hadn't paid him his "fee".. then he would write that he was just a beginner in the field... or that he was a thief.. who stole his storylines.. and all of this without any proof.. or the slightest justification, and he continues his attack, and the poisonous hurling of abuse.

110

How is it that we understand that "all of this without any proof.. or the slightest justification" is the voice of the prosecutor referring to Ibn Jinnī's criticism rather than Ibn Jinnī defaming Shakespeare's writing? The phrase "And all of this" ("وذلك") is not a sufficient clause boundary between the two voices. It is instead understood from what we already know about the stances of both Ibn Jinnī and the prosecutor. While the former would be critical of Shakespeare for being a plagiarist, is the prosecutor prosecutor who is incensed at Ibn Jinnī's lack of proof. *Figures performed through speech* don't always have to rely on enregistered voices, but can be distinguished through the contrast of those opinions and mental states which are being voiced.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

After the calling of several witnesses, and the submission of expert testimony and written reports, the Judge eventually issues his ruling:

حكمت المحكمة على ابن جنى بأبعاده عن الحقل الفنى.. على أن تنشر صورته في كل جريدة أياما عديدة.. ويكتب تحتها.. هذا وصولي. حاقدا .. ليس للفن ناقد.. يهاجم عزيزة .. من أجل بريزة وينكر جهد سلامة.. في حقبة وتلامذة .. فعلى الجمهور أن يحذر أمثاله.. ومن نسج على منواله.. أما دليل معرفتهم .. فمن كتابتهم.. فهى هجوم بلا تعليل.. أو ثناء بلا تدليل.. والحمد لله .. إنهم قلة.. وإن كانوا شلة!

The court ordered Ibn Jinni to keep him away from the artistic field ... that his image be published in every newspaper for many days .. and that underneath it be written... this is a spiteful opportunist... he is no art critic .. he attacks what is precious .. for the sake of a ten-piaster coin, and he rejects people's honest efforts .. with shamelessness and blame .. And so the public should be wary of his ilk .. And of those who are cut from the same cloth... As for recognizing their kind .. It can be seen in their writing .. It is an attack without explanation .. or praise without argumentation.. Thank God.. they aren't many of them.. even if they are a gang!

111

In the text that the judge orders be printed in the newspapers, it seems as though the very last lines here—in which he thanks God and calls the bad critics a gang— are not meant for publication but instead are his own interjection. Instead, they are the judge's own gloss on the preceding text which he has just dictated. While this is all technically all said in the voice of the choice, there is nonetheless a voicing contrast between what is meant to print and what is not, one which is understood both by the change in perspective represented by the exclamation, as well as by its shift to a more casual register (exemplified by the strongly familiar Egyptian word

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 58.

for gang (شلة). One understands voices based on the ways the text contextualizes them rather than via some grammatically idiosyncratic aspect that sets them apart. A difference of perspective, or the interplay between two perspectives, can be implied without either having to specifically represent a specific person. They can indeed be two voices contained within the single biographical person.

### **The Personal Status Law as Nazla and Bahiya Would Like to See It**

Al-Aswānī also made space in his maqāmāt for characters outside his immediate social circle. In the fourth maqāmah, “The Personal Status Law as Nazla and Bahiya Would Like to See It” (قانون الأحوال الشخصية كما تريده نظلة وبهية), al-Aswānī goes one evening to the feminist “Women’s Association”. Outside the building there is pandemonium. A member named Fawqah is speaking to the crowd, declaring some of the demands of the Association, saying:

..لا حرية للرجال.. كلهم دجال.. بجلوهم بالسلاسل والقيود.. والمواد والبنود.. لا إطلاق.. على الإطلاق

No freedom for men...all of them are charlatans.. tie them up with chains and bonds.. And with articles and clauses... no divorce...under any circumstance ..

112

Debates over Egypt’s personal status laws had been a major touchpoint for decades, and in the mid-1960s, the Nasser regime seriously considered annulling certain laws like that of *bayt al-ṭā’ah* (“the house of obedience”, whereby husbands claim the right to demand obedience from their wives,) in the name of women’s advancement.<sup>113</sup> Women’s magazines and national newspapers

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>113</sup> Fauzi M. Najjar, “Egypt’s Laws of Personal Status,” Arab Studies Quarterly, 1988, 321.

were full of articles and editorials likening the institution of bayt al-ṭā'ah to feudal relations of slavery.<sup>114</sup> In response, defenders of traditional Islamic values publicized stories about the broken homes and neglected children that result from the breakdown of the moral order.

This debate is on display in the maqāmah, as the rhymed slogans and speeches of the feminists are exaggerated to satirical lengths. In al-Aswānī's version, the usual objections to the ruinous effects of patriarchy on the country's women are spoofed as the untamed and liberated women lord over men with their oppressive beliefs. It is not mere liberation, but the subjugation of men that the Association's women members are calling for. Sister Lama'iyyah, the group's leader, famous for her many victories against lowly men, is called to speak. She herself is the wife to four men and author of such books as

“هادى الأبصار، القلوب.. في شيل الفكه من الجيوب”  
“كيف تحولين الانسجام والذندنة..إلى هم وعكنة”  
“ليصبح زوجك بلا أم ..كيف تستعملين السم”

“The Guide of hears and minds...when getting money out of someone”

“How to turn harmony and murmuring..into worry and irritation”

“How to use poison...to make your husband motherless.”

115

All of the slogans and fictional book titles index the speech repertoires of feminist discourse and the sort of “how-to” self-help rhetoric of women's magazines. This is not the language of a

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<sup>114</sup> Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford University Press, 2011), 117.

<sup>115</sup> al-Aswānī, *Al-Maqāmāt*, 24.

wholly separate dialect, the autonomous colloquial subaltern voice of women, but a relatively small string of conspicuous forms within speech which can be identified as “feminist discourse.” Sister Lama‘iyyah’s book titles are metapragmatic stereotypes about activist feminist language, taken to the absurd extremes of the unruly shrew who wants to unsettle marital harmony and thus poisons her mother-in-law. We have, in fact, two types of stereotypes working in tandem: the typical misogynist stereotypes about anarchy-loving feminists aiming to enslave men on one hand, and metapragmatic stereotypes concerning the phraseology of women’s liberation on the other. Al-Aswānī’s comedic effect relies on sneaking in the former dressed in the latter. This is possible for two reasons. The first is that because registers are the effect achieved by the social perception of a specific semiotic repertoire rather than comprehensive structures in of themselves, it is possible to condense and combine them, or play them tropically off each other. Secondly, registers often invoke discursive genres rather than always necessarily having to be rooted in a specific biographical identity or social class. Sister Lama‘iyyah’s book titles are not merely enregistering her own voice, but the different social domains in which she has register competence.

The members of the Women’s Association agree that some further amendments need to be made to the eleven amendments to the 1929 personal status law that are being proposed by the government. Sister Lama‘iyyah then lists 9 amendments in rhymed prose, meant to echo the language of constitutional legalese.

٢- الزواج عقد أبدي مكين.. يدوم طول العمر، لا بضعة السنين. ولا يجوز فسخه إلا بوفاة الطرفين

2-Marriage is a solid and eternal agreement... it lasts a whole life, not for a few years. It is not permissible to annul it except with the death of both parties

116

The various amendments make new regulations for husbands to both respect their mother-in-laws and restrict their visits to their own mothers, and even legislate against late evening carousing

٦ - السهر في المقاهي.. من أخطر الدواهي.. وللزوجة اقتحام للمكان.. والاستعانة بأى إنسان. لإخراج الزوج في الحال.. دون معارضة ولا سؤال

6 - Staying out late in cafes .. is an extremely dangerous affair ... and the wife has the right to break into the place ... and seek the help of any person. To get her husband out immediately ... without dissent or question

117

The amendments are a clever mix of tone, being simultaneously a type of impersonal admonishment and a well-known brand of female nagging. In fact, the actual proposed amendments to the 1929 Personal Status Law contained a similar element of moral reprimand. They were written in the authoritative voice of Nasserist style state feminism, a voice which was seen by conservatives and religious factions as reflecting a type of elitist idealism, issued from on

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 27.

high by institutions like the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Affairs. These western-oriented elites were well-connected and had never themselves dealt with the financial difficulties of divorce.<sup>118</sup> The pro-reform movement of the 1960s was actually led by professional women holding prominent jobs in the public sector as well as positions of cultural influence.<sup>119</sup> These women often wrote opinion columns in newspapers and magazines which made strong moral claims about personal freedom, national duty, religious protections, and the relationship between female subjectivity and the regulation of male behavior. The claim of a moral fact (late nights at the cafe are the most dangerous type of calamity) followed by a statement of rights (a woman may plunge into any place to extract her husband) is a structure shared by declarations of rights, the editorial pages of *Hawwa* magazine, and the combative spouse at home.

That the language al-Aswānī incorporates into his *maqāmah* is indexical of all of these repertoires is a testament to his competence invoking linguistic registers to play on social stereotypes, not to some inherent quality of language to act as a repository for them. The

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<sup>118</sup> The proposed amendments were (1) abolition of the house of obedience, (2) husband's obligation to pay his wife's medical expenses even if she had an independent income, (3) a woman's right to stipulate in the marriage contract that she could work, and that her husband could not marry a second wife, (4) reconciliation by family councils should precede litigation of conflicts between married couples, (5) temporary maintenance for the wife pending legal proceedings, (6) tightening divorce procedures to make divorce effective only after reconciliation fails, (7) an additional year of maintenance for a divorced woman, (8) invalidation of repudiation voiced in a moment of anger, (9) polygamy constitutes an injury to the first wife and is ground for divorce, (10) remarriage does not nullify a woman's right to custody of her children, and (11) child visitation (after divorce) is an act of love and compassion and should not take place in a police station as had been the practice. See Najjar, "Personal Status," 321.

<sup>119</sup> "Amina Sa'īd, in addition to serving as the editor in chief of Egypt's leading women's magazine, *Hawwa*, was also vice president of the press syndicate. Suhayr Qalamawi was a literary critic and head of the Department of Arabic Literature at Cairo University." Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood*, 112.

language is not indexical by any set of lexical or grammatical precepts that would allow us to define part of the text as itself being written in dialect, and yet it is still clearly indexes specific social types who are opposed to the hegemonic, patriarchal order.

After Lama'iyyah has finished reciting the 9 proposed amendments, the crowd breaks out into applause, at which point al-Aswānī tries to offer a rebuttal. But the feminists won't have anything to do with it.

وهنا علا التصفيق والهتاف واهتز المكان وإرتج.. فقامت لكي أعارض واحتج.. ولكن الست لمعية رئيسة الجمعية.. قاطعتني في حمية.. وقالت الآن.. الجلسة سرية. فأرجو من الرجال.. الانصراف في الحال.. فهناك مواد.. في حاجة إلى إعداد.. وستكتب بها النساء، وثيقة بالدماء.. نخرجت وأنا ناغم على لمعية.. هذه المرأة الجهنمية

And here applause and cheering arose up and the whole place quaked and trembled .. and I tried to register my objection.. But Sister Lama'iyyah, president of the association .. ardently cut me off .. Now she said .. the meeting is confidential. I ask the men .. to leave immediately .. there are matters .. that require preparation .. and the women will see that they are written, a document written in blood .. and then she left and I was left feeling spiteful of Lama'iyyah... this infernal woman.

120

At the close of the chapter, the female leader of the organization assumes the voice of traditional male authority, dismissing the men so that the women can get down to real work. At this point, Lama'iyyah is fully inhabiting the voice of paternalism for the sake of feminism. Her decisively dismissive and authoritative commands are of course associated with that of a man's voice, and so her speech is what Agha calls an interactional trope: a voicing effect which is

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<sup>120</sup> al-Aswānī, *Al-Maqāmāt*, 27.

noncongruent with the implicit image of personhood that that speech usually indexes. At the conclusion of the chapter, Lama'iyyah achieves dominance, leaving al-Aswānī passively spiteful and resigned to her authority. In his final poem which concludes the chapter, he can only complain about the evil women who would subject men to the authority of Nazla and Bahiya, and make his own plea for equality, saying: “أن العدالة تقتضى منح التساوى لا الأذية” (“justice requires granting equality rather than doling out punishment”). In this moment he too is switching roles, voicing the interactional trope of the moralizing feminist, complaining about society’s ills and gender tyranny, but for the sake of men.

### **How the Exorcism Started in the Home of the Herbalist**

In another episode entitled (كيف بدأ الزار في بيت العطار), the voices of even more marginalized groups literally come to possess one of al-Aswānī’s companions. In al-Aswānī’s 16th maqāmah, the usual cast of friends is sitting around talking when they come to the topic of *Zār*, a ritual exorcism cult. The group mainly agrees that the practice is ignorant, backwards, and an embarrassment. But one of the companions, Zakarīya, admonishes them, saying that it is the friends who are ignorant for not knowing the history of *Zār* not for respecting an important part of folk heritage.

*Zār* ceremonies are an almost ideal topic for showcasing subaltern speech and beliefs. Originally thought to have been brought to Egypt by slaves taken from Ethiopia, they were an important heterodox religious ritual carried out by a specific exorcist cult, derided by members of the mainstream Sunni culture in Egypt, and especially by those of higher socioeconomic

classes.<sup>121</sup> Zār exorcism has been interpreted by anthropologists as a means through which subordinate individuals can bring attention to their needs and express the otherwise inexpressible in public.<sup>122</sup> In this way, Zār ceremonies literally permit the subaltern to speak. The cultural debates over Zār are reflected in the humorous exchanges between al-Aswānī's friend al-Sa'adanī, who is extremely incredulous about the entire enterprise, and Zakariya, who claims to possess knowledge about the practice's elusive origins as well as detailed information about active groups. After the two bicker for some time, Zakariya says he knows of a woman named Zakiya who does weekly Zār exorcisms, and invites the friends to go see a ceremony firsthand.

Upstairs in the building where they arrive, they are greeted by Zakiya's husband 'Aṭiyyah who ushers them into a room where Zakiyyah stands before them, shaking violently in a silk shirt. Surrounding her are a darwish and three women holding tambourines and incense. The darwish recites the long list of demands that the demon has for releasing his host.

<p>فوقى ياويليه.. اسمعى طلبات العفريت.. انه يطلب توبين شيث.. وفرخة محمرة بالزبدة.. وجلباب صوف ولبده</p>
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<p>Wake up Woman... listen to the demands of the demon...He is asking for two gowns of chintz ...and fried chicken with butter...and a robe and a wool hat.</p>
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<sup>121</sup> Natvig, Richard. "Oromos, Slaves, and the Zār Spirits: a contribution to the History of the Zār Cult." *The International journal of African historical studies* 20, no. 4 (1987): 669-689.

<sup>122</sup> Tanya Luhrman, "Women Possessed," *The New York Times*, March 25, 1990, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/25/books/women-possessed.html>.

‘Aṭiyyah is exasperated that new demands seems to keep coming every week. Al-Sa‘adanī is incredulous once again, laughing and telling Atiya not to be a sucker and to keep his money.

تجمل يا عطية.. من أجل زكية.. أنني أعرف هذا العرفيت.. أنه مسرف متلاف.. ومدين لواحد  
علاف..

Be strong ‘Aṭiyyah, for the sake of Zakiyyah..I know this demon... he is an excessive spender..and indebted to a provender

For al-Sa‘adanī, Zār is nothing more than the bewitching power of mumbo jumbo. But just as he’s feeling confident, the darwish suddenly reveals that it is in fact al-Sa‘adanī who is possessed.

كيف لا تعرف أنك مركوب.. وحالك مقلوب.. وأنتك بالعرفيت ملبوس.. من يوم ما عرفت  
الفلوس.. والتفت الرجل نحو النساء وكن ينضحن وجه زكية بالماء.. وصاح كقائد يعطى أمر الهجوم فقال  
"وهو يزوم.. دقوا السعدنى.. دقة عثمانى. تحضر عفريته الجوانى

How do you not know that you are possessed .. and that your state is upside down .. and that you are being worn by a demon... from the day you came to know money .. and man turned towards women and they purified the face of Zakiyyah with water .. and he shouted as a leader giving the order of the attack and he said snarling.. “strike al-Sa‘adanī. with an Ottoman slap. and bring forth his inner demon.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 99.

The darwish here uses a specific term for possession, that of being “donned” by a demon (talbasuhu, the possessed being referred to by the passive participle “malbūs”), an example of the specific jargon used among Zār circles.<sup>126</sup> At this, al-Sa‘adanī is unable to move, and begins to go through the physical motions of exorcism: his mouth foaming, his body shaking uncontrollably, and falling to the ground. When he finally comes to, he has been cured of his incredulity. With tears in his eyes he proclaims:

لقد نجت من الموت.. وعدت من بطن الحوت.. آمنت بوجود العفاريت.. وأنها تضرب باليد والشلايت

I have been saved from death... and I have returned from the belly of the whale...I believe in the existence of demons...they strike with hands and with kicks

127

At this, al-Sa‘adanī is unable to move, and begins to go through the physical motions of exorcism, his mouth foaming, his body shaking uncontrollably, and falling to the ground. He is unconscious for a few minutes until Zakariya makes a motion to the Darwish, at which point al-Sa‘adanī finally comes to. His incredulity has come to an end. With tears in his eyes he proclaims

صدقوني ما رأيت مثله رجلا حريصا على الإفادة والتعليم.. حتى ولو ذهب إلى الجحيم

Believe me I have never seen a man like him who guard their advantage and their learning... even until it leads them to hell

128

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<sup>126</sup> Gerda Sengers. *Women and Demons: Cultic Healing in Islamic Egypt*. (Boston: Brill, 2003), 89.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 100.

They all leave and Zakariya takes a pot of herbs with him, vowing to learn this new esoteric knowledge, from its origins to the present day. The group of friends agree that he is the true genius amongst them, but are wary that the Zār is moving from an affair concerned mainly with incense (*ʿaṭārah*) to a stage which has the potential for butchery (*jazārah*).

This brief, comic episode reveals much about the relationship between register competence, social status, and vernacular epistemologies. The Zār cult is dismissed out of hand by a group of carousing intellectuals as a backward embarrassment. It is obvious that the group regards the Zār cult with a great deal of social stigma, as a set of backwards discursive practices. By reenacting the ceremony as a plot device in his *maqāmah*, al-Aswānī creates a connection between the Zār ritual and the *maqāmat*'s famous themes of linguistic hucksterism, hysteria, and superstition. The use of Zār in a *maqāmah* is particularly interesting because of its liminal position among gender, social class, and the urban/rural divide, a fact of which al-Aswānī makes clever use. While the ritual was originally introduced by black slaves, it was popularized and spread throughout Egypt by the middle class, eventually reaching the salons of upper class Turkish-Egyptians in the early 20th century.<sup>129</sup> But by the 1970s, it was widely regarded by the upper class as a thoroughly *baladi* (pejorative term for rural) practice.<sup>130</sup> But in al-Aswānī's version, the ceremony is still being conducted by the wife of a well-respected artist in a large decrepit mansion, a nod to the waning of this former elite.

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<sup>129</sup> Sengers, *Women and Demons*, 89.

<sup>130</sup> Cynthia Nelson, "Self, Spirit Possession and World View: An Illustration from Egypt," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 17, no. 3 (1971): 194–209.

Zār ceremonies are also liminal in that they were highly gendered, a practice meant specifically to reflect social conditions “in terms of sex segregation, gender inequality, low female status, the restriction of women from religious participation, relative isolation, and marital insecurity.”<sup>131</sup> But in al-Aswānī’s account, it originates in male anxieties, and one of its biggest proponents turns out to be one of al-Aswānī’s male friends, someone who successfully paints the group as themselves ignorant and backwards for being snobby about popular culture. Both he and the herbalist Makhlūf, who instigated the Zar’s arrival in Egypt, are aligned to the role of members of the Zār cult not by the nature of their biographic persons, but through “patterns of discursive and other semiotic behaviours.”<sup>132</sup> Rather than subaltern language being a fixed repertoire made up of wholly colloquial speech, it is portrayed in this maqāmah as a specific repertoire of a specific social domain: the elective code of a cult.

The Zār cult’s biggest critic in the story, Mahmoud al-Sa‘adanī, has his opinions overturned when he literally becomes possessed by the Zār discourse, emerging from his trance to speak in its same ecstatic register to give his endorsement. His possession is a farcically literal example of what Agha calls role alignment, whereby an individual aligns their self-image with the characterological figures of a given register. By ventriloquizing the discourse of the malbūsa upon his emergence from the demonic trance, al-Sa‘adanī magically obtains Zār register competency,

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131 Fahimeh Mianji and Yousef Semnani, “Zār Spirit Possession in Iran and African Countries: Group Distress, Culture-Bound Syndrome or Cultural Concept of Distress?,” *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry* 10, no. 4 (2015): 225–232.

132 Agha, “Voice,” 53.

which makes him radically alter his stance towards the cult. He asks for forgiveness from Zakariya and submits to the demon's extortion.

عفوك يا أبو الزيك .فو الذي خلق عرفا للديك .. لن أقبض مالا حتى أعطيك .. ولن تحدد لي ميعادا حتى أوافيك

I beg your pardon Abu al-Zayk...and from he who created customs for the rooster... I will not grasp for money until I have given it you... and I will not arrange a meeting before seeing you.

133

To say that the language associated with the Zār cult was colloquial, beyond being reductive, would be to miss out on the specific and elective ways that register acquisition “a form of semiotic capital that advances certain rights and privileges.”<sup>134</sup>

There is an interesting parallel between al-Sa‘adanī’s bewitchment in this fictional maqāmah and his own deep commitment to Nasserism in both thoughts and deeds in real life. Despite al-Aswānī’s hatred of the Nasser regime and al-Sa‘adanī’s being a prominent figure in the Vanguard organization, the secret organization of the Nasserite regime, the two maintained a warm friendship.<sup>135</sup> But a year after the maqāmat was published when al-Sa‘adanī was arrested during Al-Sadāt’s corrective revolution, al-Aswānī would refuse to do more than contribute legal memos on his behalf. Al-Sa‘adanī was angered by this lack meager showing of help and would write a critique of al-Aswānī’s reactionary politics after his death in an article entitled “the al-

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<sup>133</sup> al-Aswānī, *Al-Maqāmāt*, 99

<sup>134</sup> Agha, “Voice,” 55.

<sup>135</sup> The following account is based on an interview with al-Aswānī’s son.

Aswānī Tragedy” (1983).<sup>136</sup> In light of this context, it is possible to read al-Sa‘adani’s bewitchment in this maqāmah as pertaining to more than one cult.

### **Professor Ḥaṣāwī gets Subsidized Leave and Rolls Around in Money**

The preceding Maqāmāt have shown the ways that a plurality of voices can be indexed in subtle and complex ways within a text that seems linguistically coherent on its surface. While parodying social voices and crowding a variety of perspectives and personae into the work’s steady prosimetrum, al-Aswānī’s maqāmāt also enregisters the language of the maqāmāt. But what is the voice of a whole genre, and how can it be used tropically?

تعرفت من عامين في قهوة رضوان.. على رجل يدعى رشوان، يعمل موظفاً في حلوان
I met two years ago in the Cafe Radwan... a man named Rashwan, who worked as an employee in Helwan

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al-Aswānī’s maqāmāt has reproduced many of the generic conventions associated with the maqāmāt only to parody them. In the case of saǰ‘, he seems to follow the letter of the law more than its spirit by so often picking a rhyming word which technically fits, but oftentimes comes out sounding like a stretch, a mismatch, or a non-congruence. Sometimes they just come across as half-baked. For example, this series of rhymes for the word “Radwan.”

<sup>136</sup> Maḥmūd al-Sa‘adani, “Al-Ma’sah al-Aswāniyya,” Majallat Al-Doḥa 4 (January 4, 1983): 12–14.

<sup>137</sup> al-Aswānī, *Al-Maqāmāt*, 79.

Is there any doubt that the name of the balīgh and the place where he works were chosen to rhyme with the name of the cafe in which al-Aswānī was already hanging out, and not the other way around?

As in classic maqāmāt, the trickster character is often introduced as someone the narrator meets during his travels or via socializing. Al-Aswānī’s framing conceits are oftentimes set up half-heartedly, conforming to the situation al-Aswānī was already in. In the same maqāmāh which begins with al-Aswānī sitting at Cafe Radwan, the author explains how he comes to meet Rashwan.

وكان قد جاء إلى القهوة. وجالسنى على سهوة
And he had come to the cafe...and sat down next to me casually

138

What could be more casual than this? The entire pretense for the episode is just a random encounter at the local cafe. Whereas classic maqāmāt episodes were often named after distant cities to which the Rāwī has travelled, al-Aswānī never leaves Cairo.

Al-Aswānī also plays with the framing device (isnād) used in most maqāmāt. Throughout his second maqāmāh “Professor Ḥaṣāwī gets Subsidized Leave and Rolls Around in Money” (الأستاذ حصاصوى يتفرغ وفي أموال الميرى يتمرغ) al-Aswānī undermines the convention of the isnād and the role of the rāwī by setting up a pointless matrushka-like frame for a simple narrative: using reported speech of reported speech of reported speech, etc.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

In the beginning of the episode, al-Aswānī is hanging out in the lobby bar of the Semiramis Hotel drinking tea when the writer Professor Ḥaṣāwī greets him and offers to buy him some expensive Otard cognac. Al-Aswānī is taken aback by this show of wealth, and Ḥaṣāwī reveals to him that he is newly flush with cash. Ḥaṣāwī has been writing constantly but almost nothing has been published. But after reading an obituary about the death of an author named Hūwām whose book never saw much press, Ḥaṣāwī hatches a plan and buys up all of the books and store them in his own apartment, in order to sell them on the black market. At this point in the maqāmāt, the narration briefly passes back to al-Aswānī, who had in fact read the book, and considered it to be of poor quality and no sign of a talented writer. He goes on riffing on the terrible quality of the book in saǰ', until Ḥaṣāwī orders two more drinks and takes back over the narration.

This is the first sign that something strange is going on with the role of the rāwī. Ḥaṣāwī, a character with similar ambitions to the real life al-Aswānī, begins introducing the reported speech of yet another character, a boss of his. The narration will pass again to this boss until the point when it is very difficult to remember who is who. Ḥaṣāwī states that after the inability to sell the book, he hatched another plan and begins to work at an arts magazine, run by a guy named Professor Kabārah. Ḥaṣāwī takes no salary and earns only a pittance, and Kabārah hears him complaining to himself one day about his poverty and is confused. He tells Ḥaṣāwī that he should find a way to get subsidized to take time off by the government, so that he can “roll around in money” as the idiom goes. Ḥaṣāwī says he’s never thought of it before, and would need someone to vouch for him. He then asks if Kabārah will help him find somebody. If this sounds

confusing, then Kabārah’s narration begins. Ḥaṣāwī’s boss says he knows of a “great writer”, with whom he, too, had once discussed the topic of government subsidies. At the time Kabārah had himself objected to the idea, saying that he wasn’t into scheming, and that the truly great writers can write no matter the circumstance.

فالأديب غير الحلوف.. يكتب في جميع الظروف.. في مكان عار أو مسقوف.. وهو آمن.. وهو بالخطر مخفوف

So the man of letters is not a wild boar, he writes in a variety of circumstances...in a naked area or one which is roofed...whether he is safe... or in terrible danger

139

He also mentions the fact that famous European writers like Dostoevsky and Hugo both worked under duress, that the maqāmāt writer al-Tūnisī wrote while in the clutches of depression, and that al-Muwayliḥī had a job as a civil servant. Even Nagīb Maḥfūz worked at a government institute. Because the narration has changed hands so many times, and because the first and third narrator share the same attitude towards government subsidies in opposition to the second and fourth narrator, it takes a few seconds to pin down exactly who is talking. The reader finds him/herself counting backwards the parenthetical diversions and the series of قال (“he said”) to figure out whose opinion is whose and who is arguing against whom.

The unnamed great writer listens to this soliloquy only to finally respond, saying that the money isn’t a way of making a writer lazy, but only in assisting him for his work. Kabārah tells Ḥaṣāwī that he should go to this writer and flatter him, so that he will vouch for his quality as a

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 12.

writer. Ḥaṣāwī goes and pleads to the unnamed writer, saying he's read everything he's ever written. The man, in return, asks him about specific details in order to test his devotion.

<p>..هل سمعتني في الإذاعة.. قلت نعم مع جماعة          ..هل رأيتني على شاشة التلفزيون..قلت..مضيئاً كالنيون</p>
<p>Have you heard me on the radio? I said say along with everyone else...have you seen me on the television screen...I said...shining like neon</p>

140

In the end the author is taken in by the flattery and Ḥaṣāwī gets his subsidy. Ḥaṣāwī finishes out the chapter with a colloquial poem that invites al-Aswānī and the rest of us to also seek our own government subsidy.

<p>..وأنا باستلام المال نقداً ..نخفف عن ذنوب العالمينا          ،فلا عمل يؤدي..بل سطور تدل على قصور العاجزينا          على أن المواهب لن تلبسها فلوس..تشتري حجراً..وطينا          ..فهو حل ..فأهلا بالتفرغ ..لكل مشاكل التسكيننا</p>
<p>By receiving money in cash I lighten the sins of humankind (al-‘ālimīn) There is nothing          No works other than verses can point out the deficiencies of the powerless          And so talent is not born from money... it can only buy stones and mud          and so I welcome patronage—for it is a solution... to all the problems of idleness</p>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 15.

The text speaks about our shortcomings and the solution to our problems, which could be in reference to any number of characters and personae in and outside the text. The episode doesn't end in the opposition of one-upmanship, but in an open invitation to join in on the state sponsored bonanza. The closing of a long chain of contentious narration is with each perspective joining in on a deal for collective patronage.

If we can barely tell the voices apart, and if they come together in agreement in the end, then by what contrast does the text create irony? None of the individual stories are particularly funny on their own, and none of the characters stand out as particularly charming or wily. What is funny about the maqāmāh, rather, is how slackly its narrative thread is spun. al-Aswānī takes a maqāmāt convention in which he himself is not particularly invested and uses it in excess until it parodies itself. In this, he is in good company with other maqāmāt parodists. One sees how irony emerges, for example, in al-Shidyāq 's Leg Over Leg without any noticeable shift in tone (parabasis). The author begins his own satirical work with a notice that starts out earnestly enough.

الحمد لله الموفق الى السداد والملمهم الى الرشاد وبعد فان جميع ما اودعته في هذا الكتاب فانما هو مبني على امرين  
احدهما ابرز غرائب اللغة ونوادرها

Praise be to God, who each happy thought inspires, and to guide man to righteous acts conspires. To proceed: everything that I have set down in this book is determined by one of two concerns. The first of these is to give prominence to the oddities of the language, including its rare words.

But as soon as he begins to methodically list these oddities of language, and to give examples of some of these rare words, it become excessive, and serious lexicography becomes a parody of itself.

من خصائص حرف الدال اللين والنعومة والغضاضة نحو البرخداة والتيد والثأد والثعد والمشمعد والمشمغد والثوهد  
...والثهمد

Among characteristic associations of the letter d are softness, smoothness, and tenderness, as in the words *barakhdāh* (“a smooth, limp woman”), *tayd* (“kindness”), *tha’ad* (“soft, tender plants”), *tha’ad* (“soft dates”), *mutham’idd* (“clear-faced (of a boy)”), *muthamghidd* (“fatty (of a kid)”), *thawhad* (“fat and well-formed (of an adolescent boy)”), *thawmad* (“large and fair”)...

There is no clear break in register, only the growing sense that we can’t be expected to understand the special qualities of the letter D if we don’t even know the words which are being used to exemplify its connection to softness (that these words are all described by whole phrases in parentheses in the English translation should be an indication of their obscurity in the original Arabic). Irony arises as the speech style of the philologist becomes too much its own voice, turning from the appropriate use into a tropic use without changing its language. Its own excessive length begins to entextualize it as silly. The literary theorist Paul de Man famously offers an explanation of this phenomenon by giving a definition of irony as the “permanent

<sup>142</sup> Al-Shidyāq, *Leg Over Leg*, 8-9. Translation by Humphrey Davies

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 10-11.

parabasis of the allegory of tropes.”<sup>144</sup> That is to say, in a narrative which attempts to establish a consistent message and stance (an allegorical connection between its tropes), irony is always undoing the connection that these tropes have to one another. Parabasis is permanent because it is not just at one point but at all points, not set off by a change in register, but imminent within one’s own voice.<sup>145</sup> At an unexpected moment, for no apparent reason, the serious can all of a sudden seem quite silly. This is very close to Agha’s account of how a voice is *entextualized*: emergent and nondetachable. The going-on-too-long narrator becomes funny because through the context of the text itself, the Maqāmāt composer’s voice becomes non-congruent.

Linguistic anthropology helps us to examine the immediate dynamics of register use in interaction, there is still an important role for literary studies in recognizing double-voiced discourse across longer expanses of time. As Bakhtin himself says, “there exists a group of artistic-speech phenomena... [which] exceed the limits of linguistics... stylization, parody, *skaz*, and dialogue.”<sup>146</sup> There is style and parody detectable in al-Aswānī’s own voice as: the artist-speech of an author performing his register competence as the ultimate *rāwī* of his own maqāmāt. His lack of regard for adhering closely to every rule of the maqāmāh genre belie a certain type of

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<sup>144</sup> Paul De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, vol. 65 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1997), 165.

<sup>145</sup> From this we can conclude that the tropic turn also works to undo the seemingly stable allegory of MSA/EA tropes. Selim’s allegory of the fundamental existential rupture of the nation, represented by the juxtaposition of standard and colloquial speech, cannot be sustained within a satirical text in which all systematized methods of speech and writing are being mocked and imitated. Social dialects can not stand from a stable position to poke fun of one another across a breach.

<sup>146</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, vol. 8 (U of Minnesota Press, 2013), 185.

ironic distance, a sense of carefree insubordination against maqāmah as belle lettres, an attempt at remaking the form into mass media entertainment. Al-Aswānī is the inheritor of the legacy of al-Hariri and al-Shidyaq, but at first glance it doesn't seem that he takes the responsibility seriously. But it is precisely in those awkward moments when his rhyme meter goes slack, when his isnād loses its thread, or when the plots seem absurdly contemporary that we can hear the double-voice of parody. Bakhtin says we should always watch out for this second context, that of parody, lest “stylization will be taken for style, parody simply for a poor work of art.”<sup>147</sup> The seemingly clumsy execution of the genre conventions is in fact a knowing, competent bringing together social parody and a genre parody simultaneously. Like the non-congruence of Sartre speaking fuṣḥa, Al-Aswānī is performing the enregistered voice of the maqāmah author tropically.

In fact, al-Aswānī's ironic stance is the most maqāmaesque like aspect of his whole project. According to Pierre Cachia, al-Aswānī is was fully aware of his remoteness from neoclassicism, mocking the artificiality of his predecessors and pointing “in a back-handed way to the long road travelled by Arab prose writers from formalism to functionalism and to experimentation and virtuosity.”<sup>148</sup> But this is a common feature of the genre. Mohamed-Salah Omri makes an attempt at a classification system of different types of maqāmāt, from partial explicit reproduction of maqāmah (*Ḥadīth 'Isā ibn Hishām*) to parody of maqāmah (Al-Sāq 'alā al-sāq) to colloquialization of maqāmah (*maqāmāt al-Tūnisī*) or even implied maqāmah (*Sa'īd Abi al-*

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Cachia, “Development,” 76.

*Naḥs al-Mutashāʿil*).<sup>149</sup> What they all share is a metageneric engagement. Renegotiations and outright rejections of the maqāmah form go right back to its origin. Even the first maqāmāt were written as a parody of yet other genres. Whether ḥadīth scholarship or majālis “sessions” or “lectures” or Amālī “dictations”, as Devin Stewart claims, the maqāmah has survived as a genre through this very chain of turning and mocking what has come before.

Al-Hamadhānī probably adopted the generic label maqāmāt, literally “standings,” as an intentionally ironic inversion of majālis, literally “sittings,” but technically “assemblies” or “lectures,” a synonym of majālis al-implāʾ (dictation assemblies) or amālī “dictations.” To capture this allusion to the pre-existing genre, one might therefore venture to translate maqāmāt as “anti-lectures.”<sup>150</sup>

As Omri and others point out, each new maqāmah stakes its claim in some way by reevaluating or turning on what has preceded it, on making a maqāmah for this age. Each one is an anti-anti-lecture. Al-Aswānī composes his out of the dialogic material of the various discursive and semiotic genres of his own time. That dialogic relationships are a twofold discourse between contemporary social registers as well as historical language styles makes it so that polyphony is a deeply historical phenomenon, if not a easily wieldable historiographic yardstick for comparing the intensity of periods of social and linguistic upheaval.

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<sup>149</sup> Omri, “Local Narrative,” 255.

<sup>150</sup> Devin J. Stewart, “Of Rhetoric, Reason, and Revelation: Ibn al-Jawzī’s Maqāmāt as an Anti-Parody and Sefer Taḥkemoni of Yehudah al-Ḥarīzī,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 19, no. 2 (2016): 213.

## The Urge to Categorize and *Malīm al-Akbar*

Given all the ways that the maqāmāt genre has been extolled for being metageneric and highly attuned to social voices and stereotypes, it might seem an unfair example to employ in defense of 20th century Egyptian literature’s persisting heteroglossic levity. However, Agha’s schema for understanding the typification of voices is originally turned on the novel. His reframing of register and polyphony should be robust enough to cover practically any genre of fictional writing. Al-Aswānī’s maqāmāt was only one of the many different genres in which he wrote. Besides another maqamat series called *Returning From the Beyond*, he wrote a book of short stories called “a Man from Yesterday,” and (in stark contrast to his well-known comedic radio shows) a deeply serious novel called *High Walls*, which contained numerous symbolic nods to the military dictatorship.<sup>151</sup> For his literary output, al-Aswānī won a state literary prize in 1972. Comparing the difference in tone between his radio shows and this novel would be evidence enough that the nature of the Arabic language in the 1970s was flexible enough to allow the same author to produce two such different works.

Looking at al-Aswānī’s career should serve as a reminder that literary scholarship tends to focus on a few celebrated books and authors at the expense of all of the lighter, popular, and comic works which were written at the same time. One only has to look to the enormous archive

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<sup>151</sup> In *Returning From the Beyond* (al-rajāl min al-‘āms, 1973), Al-Aswānī shows Isa bin Hisham around modern Cairo, carrying on the tradition of un-dead sightseeing started by al-Muwayliḥī’s maqamat in which the same Isa bin Hisham showed the undead minister Ahmad Pasha al-Manikli around the Cairo of 1898 (perhaps not quite the flinging open of heaven that Walter Benjamin imagined).

of Egyptian films, radio shows, popular music, and the vast sphere of oral storytelling, jokes, poetry, and idioms to realize how many of those thinkers anxious over linguistic monoglossia have taken the linguistic tropes of the realist novel as transparent reality.<sup>152</sup> The sense of formal coherency in Arabic is, in fact, an effect created by the realist novel in its efforts to exert its own mimetic authority, as I shall explain in Chapter Three. In this way, the literature of literary histories is not the victim of monoglossia, instigated by the juridical violence of the colonial state and European epistemologies, but the beneficiary of the very language ideology which privileges its register as synonymous with the Arabic language as a whole.

The sense of seriousness which the Egyptian novel enjoys, and which weds its fate to that of standard language ideology, can be seen as arising in part from what Yasmine Ramadan calls the “anxiety of categorization.” In speaking about the ongoing debates over how to categorize a generation of writers from the 1960s, she states:

The urge to categorize (exhibited by emerging writers and established figures alike) speaks to issues of positioning, legitimacy and influence. What this group of emerging writers chose to call itself, and how its members understood this designation, reveal a great deal about how they wished to situate themselves vis-à-vis their predecessors, what

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<sup>152</sup> This type of thinking, which would not actually be endorsed by anyone when framed so plainly, has already been challenged by Ziad Fahmy in his book *Ordinary Egyptians: Creating the Popular Nation Through Popular Culture* (2011). In it, he focuses on the diversity of popular culture, the satirical press, vaudeville, recorded songs, and azjal, as a way of understanding the rise of Egyptian popular nationalism, in contrast to most studies on early Egyptian nationalism (and the Nahḍah for that matter) which base their histories on the works of intellectuals and the political elite.

they understood as being the social and political role of the writer, as well as how they imagined gaining access and authority within the field.<sup>153</sup>

Just like the maqāmāt, the Egyptian novel stakes its claim in some way by reevaluating or turning on what has preceded it, by making a novel for *this* age. Because of this, acceptance into the novelistic canon seems to be very serious business. The passing of the generational baton, from Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm to Nagīb Maḥfūz to Ṣun' Allāh Ibrāhīm, each author representing the successive zeitgeist of the country's weighty history, may have resulted in "lesser" comic or popular works not being remembered, especially when they don't clearly reflect the drama of political developments. In this way, the perception of a rigid monoglossia has more to do with the tone and stylistics of the novels which get taken seriously than it does with the expressive or satirical faculties of Arabic at any given time. For example, in the same year that Ṣun' Allāh Ibrāhīm published his modernist masterpiece *Tilka al-Rā'iḥa* (*The Smell of It*, 1966), Mustafa Musharafa published what may be the first modern novel written totally in colloquial Arabic, *Qantara Alladhi Kafara* ("Qantara Who Disbelieved").<sup>154</sup> Faṭḥī Ghānim's lighter and at times very funny take on the Rashōmon story in *The Man Who Lost His Shadow* is often overlooked when Nagīb Maḥfūz's *Miramar* (1967) provides such a conveniently decodable national allegory. And the hilarious parody of the Egyptian intellectual caught between idealism and social reality in

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<sup>153</sup> Yasmine Ramadan, "The Emergence of the Sixties Generation in Egypt and the Anxiety over Categorization," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43, no. 2–3 (2012): 430.

<sup>154</sup> Marcia Lynx Qualey, "Colloquialising Arabic Literature," Mashallahnews, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://www.mashallahnews.com/language/colloquialising-arabic-literature.html>.

1942's *Malīm al-Akbar* (*Malim the Great*) by 'Ādil Kāmil has for decades been overshadowed by the haunting meditation on the Egyptian intellectual caught between East and West in Umm Hashim's *Lamp* (*Qandīl Umm Hāshim*, 1944), published 2 years later.

The case of *Malīm al-Akbar* is worth a digression because of its parallels to *al-Maqāmat al-Aswāniyyah*. Written by another Egyptian lawyer with his own literary ambitions, the novel takes aim at the literary and intellectual establishment and its linguistic pretensions. Also, like al-Aswānī, Kāmil in his novel "restricts" the text to the standard register but nevertheless depicts colorful characters who also offer socially satirical stereotypes. The novel is a farce which shows the endless string of bad luck befalls those of lower social status, as well as the hapless actions of "political activists in their relationship with the objects of their struggle."<sup>155</sup> The characters in the novel are stereotypical representatives of their respective social classes, and their conversational interactions are carried out to great satirical effect. Like in the trial of the literary critic in al-Aswānī's *Maqāmat*, *Malīm al-Akbar* has an interrogation scene which contains a wide series of social voices. In the novel, the eponymous character is a working class man trying to stay away from his family's traditional trade of pickpocketing by taking up carpentry; but he inevitably runs into trouble with the law when he is charged with stealing money hidden in a windowsill in the house in which he was working. The house, and the money Malīm finds in the windowsill, belong to the father of the other protagonist, a young intellectual named Khalid. Khalid tries to

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<sup>155</sup> Marcia Lynx Qualey, "10 Authors' Favorites of 2015: The Year in Arabic Literature and Beyond," *Arablit* (blog), December 31, 2015, <https://arablit.org/2015/12/31/authors-favorites-of-2015-the-year-in-arabic-literature-and-beyond/>.

work with Malīm to execute a romantic plan to have Malīm return the money, but it backfires and Malīm is hit with the full brunt of the law which is dispensed upon the poor.

Burdened with guilt, Khaled defies his father, providing the reader with the most enjoyable dialogues of the book as their witty disputations reach almost Shakespearian grandeur and the law courts. Khaled's rebellion constitutes a stirring-up of pasha-oriented patriarchal rule. As Kamel's ironic depictions dispense with unnecessary pathos, this confrontation between conservatism and liberalism perhaps seems frivolous. It is undeniably a facetious, stylized satire.<sup>156</sup>

Just like in *al-Maqamat al-Aswāniyyah*, Kāmil's language "plays by the rules" of the standard register while also revealing the wide array of stereotypes, typified voices, idiosyncratic characterization, and tropic uses of speech repertoires. In its satirical panorama of Egyptian society in the 1940s, complete with stereotypical characters, verbose meditations on the nature of art, and the merciless persecution of the well-meaning intellectual, *Malīm al-Akbar* uses the same heteroglossic and parodic toolbox as *Al-Maqāmāt al-Aswāniyyah*.

But what makes *Malīm al-Akbar* a worthy comparison for looking at language and the history of satire in 20th century Egyptian literature is that both works attack the genre in which they are written by ironizing its form. Specifically, the novel is preceded by a 140-page essay (almost as long as the novel itself) in which the author stages a fictional Socratic dialogue with his own titular character about the relationship between the nature of the Arabic language and its effect on the ability to create literature. Like al-Shidyāq's explanation of the valences of Arabic

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<sup>156</sup>Sherif Abdel Samad, "Egypt's Literary Gems: Malim the Great," Mada Masr (blog), January 31, 2016, <https://madamasr.com/en/2016/01/31/feature/culture/egypts-literary-gems-malim-the-great/>.

letters, what makes the introduction become ironic is the fact that it is comically long. The introduction was written in response to Kāmil's novel failure to win a 1942 literary contest organized by the Institution for the Preservation of the Arabic Language. It was in this same contest that Nagīb Maḥfūz also lost for his early work "Mirage". The judges seemed to have objected to the simplified Arabic used in both works (seemingly belying the "modernization" rhetoric of the late Nahḍah). This introduction confronts the loss head-on, acknowledging the criticism of the jurors that the novel's language was overly simple. Kamil's introduction, entitled "Introducing Malīm to the Arts of Language and Literature", is a fictionalized dialogue between the author and the main character of his novel Malīm, a dialogue which eventually devolves into a long soliloquy on the state of language in the contemporary Egyptian novel. Malīm recites to the author the objections to his work as expressed by the jurors.

أنهم لا يعيبون عليك أن أسلوبك لم يكن بالسهل الواضح وإنما فهمت أنهم كانوا يريدونه جزلاً، متقعرأً، رناناً. فلقد كان من واجبك أن تستعمل ألفاظاً ضخمة تملأ الفم، وتلفق سججاً موزوناً يلذ السمع، وتأتي بمفردات غريبة تبهز النفس، حتى يقال إنك كاتب متمكن.

They do not fault you that your style was not so easy, but rather I understood that they wanted it to be rich, profound, resonant. It was your duty to use enormous words to fill the mouth, and to contrive metered, rhyming prose that pleases the hearing, and to bring forth strange words that dazzle the soul, if you wanted to be called a prestigious, masterful writer.

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This is far removed from the simple ways that Malīm speaks in the novel, and from his personality and interests. (It is Khālid not Malīm who has any interest in intellectual matters.)

<sup>157</sup> ʿadil Kāmil, *Malīm Al-Akbar* (al-Qāhirah: al-Karma, 2014), 26.

Malīm is, then, parroting the stereotypical verbosity of the literary cognoscenti. That Kamil's introduction is a direct response to losing a literary competition only makes it clearer that he is directly attacking those who have spurned him. Given this critique, the author will engage in an absurdly long Socratic dialogue in order to prove his point that form and content are interdependent, and that there is more to good writing than mobilizing an extensive vocabulary.

فإن هذه المعركة الكلامية المحتدمة، وتلك التراكيب الملتوية المعقدة، وهذا التكرار الممل، وهاته الألفاظ المتكاثفة التي بنحس الرجل قيمتها لأنه يلقي إليك بها كما تلقى الحجارة من المجرفة- كل هؤلاء للتعبير عن أن الأجدر بالرجل ألا يعتر بتقدمه في السن فينفق من ماله خشية أن يقع به ما لم يكن في الحسبان فيندم فهل هذه الفكرة التافهة المسكينة المعروفة هي التي استوجبت أن يحشد لها الجاحظ هذه الجيوش المتراصة من الإلفاظ للتعبير عنها، أم أن الرجل قد انتهز الكتابة فرصة للعبث اللفظي؟

This fiery rhetorical battle, and those complex twisted structures, and this tedious repetition, and these condensed words that cheapen the value of man because he piled them up on you like he's shoveling stones - all these expressions about how it is more worthy for a man that he he not be deceived by the advancing of age, so he spends his money from fear that he'll lose it and regret it if he doesn't spend it.

Is it this insignificant, trivial, emaciated idea that which necessitated the mobilization of these monolithic armies or words in order to utter their expressions, or has the man merely taken the opportunity for verbal frivolity?

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The essay falls on the opinion that “archaic” Arabic is need of reform to make it better suited for content rather than form.

<sup>158</sup> Kamil, *Malīm Al-Akbar*, 44.

But for an author so intent on advocating for simple, modern language, Kāmil certainly seems to be amassing his own lexical army. As it turns out, there is a double voice to be read in Kāmil's introduction. While seemingly a long-winded treatise on the relationship between the signifier and the signified, between language and literature, the introduction's very long-windedness slowly reveals that there is something else going on. Kāmil is talking about the richness of the Arabic lexicon, but in the process is showing us how many different articulate ways there are to say nothing. Kāmil's treatise threatens to undermine the distinction between showing deference to eloquence and proving its redundancy. The moment of irony does not come at any specific moment in the treatise, but emerges entextualized when seen in the context of its placement in a novel introduction which should by no means be this long.

Kāmil's double code reinforces the point that it is not the use of a specific kind of diverse or especially eloquent language itself which determines the course of literary history, but rather, the language ideologies of those who judge it. "Introducing Malīm to the Arts of Language and Literature" demonstrated that Kāmil in fact had rich, profound, and resonant language at his command, but that he didn't need it for the specific novel he was writing. For Kāmil, critics' obsession over language itself as the metric by which to judge the quality of literature, is what is truly "archaic." That Kāmil gave up writing after penning this response to the literary judges lends credit to the idea that the introduction was a type of retirement diatribe against the literary establishment which had snubbed him. Kāmil responded to the "urge to categorize" by mocking

the linguistic pretensions of the established generation of writers before him in their own language.

## Conclusion

This conflict between the older generation and aspiring writers like ʿĀdil Kāmil and ʿAbbās al-Aswānī who tried to turn against it, seems to me to be a much better explanation for the tyranny of the serious than the rhetorical faculties of Arabic. Both authors possessed the ability to use Arabic in a variety of ways, whether to record the nuances of political personae and generic conventions in the case al-Aswānī, or to push the limits of verbosity to their own parodic limits. Neither author seemed bound by the faculties of their language, but rather, restricted their own use of language in service of the types of works that would appeal to various audiences.

The politics of language do not move with the glacial speed and momentum of centuries, but are fought over with every novel and every literary competition. Rather than blaming the attitudes of language on a foundational event in the past like wars or coups, it should be understood that these attitudes are newly negotiated at each turn. It is not a trivial distinction to say that the course of literary history in 20th century Egypt was shaped by ideologies about language rather than by consequential changes to the language itself.

In Chapter Three, I will return to the issue of standard and non-standardized language to show that the Arabic literary language did not become monoglossic in the 20th century, and furthermore, that the contrast between various registers actually becomes a crucial feature from

which the realist novel benefitted. Even in the most sacrosanct of modern genres, Arabic dialects never became “a separate alternative to or descendent of the classical tongue”, in the words of Yusuf Rakha. Register diversity continued in Arabic in the way that variation exists in all language: as a complex, inseparable dimension of it.

## Chapter Two: The Philosophical Waiter: Cultural Aphasia and the Petit-Bourgeois Narcissist

عشق امر حالیدر قالی دکل  
Aşk emr-i hâlidir, kâlî değil

### Introduction

In one of the early flashbacks of the novel *Tutunamayanlar* (1972), the protagonist Turgut remembers something his deceased friend Selim once said about his approach to understanding the world: Selim lamented that Turgut always took things to their logical conclusion. With his rational, scientific mind, Turgut was unable to cope with the fact that people are complicated and multifaceted. As Selim declares:

Fakat, sonradan garson olmuş bir filozof ya da filozof olmuş bir garsona göre, insanlar karışık salataya benzer. Turgut da, insan ruhundaki bu karışıklık yüzünden yeni şartlara tamamen ayak uyduramadı.

But, according to a philosopher who later became a waiter or a waiter who'd become a philosopher, human beings resemble a mixed salad. But Turgut could not entirely adapt to these new conditions caused by the confusion in the human soul.

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The most self-effacing waiter might contain the deep spiritual vicissitudes of a philosopher, and vice-versa. As Turgut combs through the documents and memories left behind by Selim after he commits suicide, this tongue-in-cheek aphorism will ring truer and truer. Selim was impossible to distill into a single mood or stance and came off as a different person entirely, according to

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<sup>159</sup> Oğuz. Atay, *Tutunamayanlar*, 68th ed. (İstanbul: İletişim, 2014), 63. All translations in this chapter are by the author.

others who remember him. In this way, *Tutunamayanlar* complicates the question of whether it is possible for characters to express themselves by showing that their emotional life is not a secret contained within an individual, but rather, something that is shaped by the impressions of others.

Using this detective-like conceit of the novel, along with a heavy dose of irony and word play, *Tutunamayanlar's* author Oğuz Atay has been widely praised for having found a way to reinvigorate Turkish as a language, and to use it to portray the vagaries of the modern Turkish soul in a new way. As explained in my introduction, he represents a supposedly critical moment in breaking the stranglehold of monological language. Suna Ertuğrul claims that Oğuz Atay was the writer who broke open the narrow frames of art in order to allow the Turkish language to find the possibilities of expressing the distress of modern existence.<sup>160</sup> Other scholars have also crowned Atay with various dramatic achievements, such as being the first Turkish author to problematize language's ability to directly convey meaning,<sup>161</sup> the subversive artist who defied the sacrosanct language reforms,<sup>162</sup> and the author who finally confronted the anxiety underlying all of Turkish literature.<sup>163</sup> Before Atay, it is as though the Turkish language was somehow afflicted, like Turgut, with an excess of logic, which prevented it from fully accepting the subtlety and complexity of the Turkish soul.

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<sup>160</sup> Suna Ertuğrul, "Belated Modernity and Modernity as Belatedness in *Tutunamayanlar*," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (2003): 629.

<sup>161</sup> Yıldız Ecevit, "Ben Buradayım...": *Oğuz Atay'ın Biyografik ve Kurmaca Dünyası* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2013), 256.

<sup>162</sup> Parla, "Wounded Tongue," 32.

<sup>163</sup> Nurdan Gürbilek, *Kör Ayna, Kayıp Şark* (İstanbul: Metis, 2004), 206.

Because they fit so neatly into narratives about the transformative emergence of the modern Turkish state, the Language Reforms have long been assumed to be at the center of Turkish literature's sense of belatedness and cultural aphasia.<sup>164</sup> These feelings have been thoroughly psychoanalyzed by scholars like Jale Parla, who explained it as a history rooted in fatherlessness, or Orhan Koçak, who speaks of the infant-like helplessness of the local ego, and Nurdan Gürbilek, who sees a type of inevitable derivativeness of the national-literary subject, forced to choose between the snob enthralled with the West and the childlike local. But although they are focused on psychological dynamics, these readings betray a certain basic belief in the deleterious effects of language reform as having played a role in, if not chiefly caused, these dysfunctions. Offering another explanation for belatedness, Parla has amended her account to include more directly the ways in which the Kemalist language revolution left Turkish as a "wounded tongue," thereby delaying the emergence of its national literary canon.<sup>165</sup> Nergis Ertürk sees this wound as having been inflicted by a longer and more profound phenomenon, one in which the forces of phonocentrism sought to consolidate control over an unruly language.<sup>166</sup>

While these contemporary scholars' foci may be different, all of their accounts make some sort of tacit connection between linguistic expressiveness and cultural progress. We can see in

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<sup>164</sup> Ann Laura Stoler has introduced the concept of 'aphasia' to describe metaphorically the 'inability' of a whole culture to recognize things in the world and to give them suitable names. See Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France," *Public Culture* 23, no. 1 (2011): 121–56.

<sup>165</sup> Parla, "Wounded Tongue," 27.

<sup>166</sup> Ertürk, *Grammatology*.

them how a general cultural anxiety is tied directly to a sense of the inefficacy, incommunicability, and expressive inability of the Turkish language itself. When not an anxiety over expressing indigenous thoughts, then it is one over the awkward compromises of translation. Gürbilek addresses this crisis of originality and translation by comparing the differing translations of the word itself, both the adapted French word *orijinal* and the modern neologism *özgün*. But by adapting European methods of morphological derivation to produce an *öz Türkçe* substitute, *özgün* nonetheless “displays both the enchantment and the anger involved in Turkey’s relationships with the Western world.”<sup>167</sup> Translation is another means by which the Turkish language is left tongue-tied.

The problem with all of these accounts is that they assume that expressing emotions is chiefly a matter of having the right words. The language reforms were focused mainly on changing the alphabet and changing the lexicon, elements which don’t begin to cover the semiotic modes of language. Much of what the field of linguistics and psychology has discovered about emotions and language in the last two decades can be summarized by James Russell’s statement that no single index of emotion corresponds exactly to the emotion itself.<sup>168</sup> Emotions are not discrete states which can be communicated effectively just given the right lexical symbol. Emotional words are instead are only one highly flexible index for communicating feeling, one which is actively negotiated through interpersonal and cultural exchange.

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<sup>167</sup> Nurdan Gürbilek, “Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness, and the Turkish Novel,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (2003): 599–628.

<sup>168</sup> James A. Russell, “Emotions and the Lexicon,” *Psychological Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (2005): 26–27.

lexical differences can correspond, not to emotional differences, but to differences in the speaker's assumptions and intended audience. No lexicon, in English or any other language, maps directly onto emotion...any emotion researchers are already skeptical that language can be relied on to reveal much about emotion. In this regard, language is no different from any other symptom of emotion.<sup>169</sup>

One may still tell interesting stories about how certain synonyms are indexical to different cultural values and social stereotypes—for instance how the difference between Gürbilek's *orijinal* and *özgün* lies in how the words index a sense of foreignness or indigeneity respectively—but the difference lies in cultural context rather than in any cognitive or somatic distinction. Neither one itself more adequately expresses the truth of Turkish identity or alters its ontological relationship to authenticity. Word choice is an ethnopragmatic matter rather than a national-phenomenological one.

Nevertheless, it is easy to spot this drift towards equating Turkey's vocabulary wars with the existential trials and tribulations of the Turkish intellectual; the tragic figure who could express the Turkish longing for authenticity, who could speak plainly to the masses, who could achieve freedom against the closure of monolingualism if only they had the right words. Accounts of literary belatedness tend to focus on the various tortured characters who exemplify the crisis of expressiveness over the decades: Ahmet Cemil in *Mai ve Siyah*, Mümtaz in *Huzur*, and the aforementioned Turgut Özben in *Tutunamayanlar*. In these novels one hears a character wax poetic about his inchoate ability to express what he thinks and feels, and this, in turn, is given as

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 26.

proof of the dilemma of Turkish subjectivity writ large. But this proof mistakes a novelistic trope for transparent reality. I claim that the language and disposition of these particular novelistic characters has been overgeneralized as indicative of the Turkish national experience.

But even then, these fictional intellectuals worry about expressing themselves, only to turn around and carry out a richly affective interaction with little to no words. Given the analytical tools of stancetaking and the pragmatics of emotions which I will discuss in this chapter, it is possible to read incredibly rich intersubjective emotional communication in even the most banal instances of these characters saying what they want, ie. ordering food and drinks at bars and restaurants. Expressiveness is not necessarily impeded by an inadequate vocabulary because emotional language is “a multichannel phenomenon, affect floods linguistic form on many different levels of structure in many different ways.”<sup>170</sup> What’s more, affective and epistemological expression does not emerge from a place within subjectivity, but is constructed intersubjectively through collaborative practices of stancetaking. As John DuBois says of his theory of stancetaking, “without intersubjectivity, subjectivity is inarticulate, incoherent, unformed.”<sup>171</sup>

Following Turkish literary studies’ tradition of focusing on the intellectual dandy, but attempting to dethrone this figure’s privileged position as the stand-in for the Turkish soul, this chapter will look at the question of emotional expressiveness by using the figure of the petit-bourgeois narcissist. Rather than seeing these characters’ communicative failures as an indictment

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<sup>170</sup> Niko Besnier, “Language and Affect,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (1990): 422.

<sup>171</sup> John Du Bois, “The Intersubjectivity of Interaction,” in *Tenth Biennial Rice University Symposium on Linguistics: Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity in Interaction*, Rice University, 2004.

of Turkish society as a whole, I claim that their anxiety about self-expression has less to do with national destiny than it does with their own class and gendered positionality. Although appearing in novels written over the span of several different political eras and in contrasting prose styles, the protagonists of Sabahattin Ali's *İçimizdeki Şeytan* (1940), Yusuf Atılgan's *Aylak Adam* (1959), and Vedat Türkali's *Bir Gün Tek Başına* (1974) all have remarkably similar fondness for sitting around in cafes and restaurants. While these characters perceive themselves as living a life of ideas—peering into their own souls, interrogating the insufferable pain of their own class privilege and the inscrutable nature of their own desires—they are simultaneously interacting with real people in real spaces. And even in their most banal interactions with retail workers, waiters and bartenders, one can still clearly read their moods and thoughts. By showing the extent to which these recurring, mundane interactions are in fact rich in socioaffective and sociocognitive relations, regardless of the particular stylistics of the work at hand, this chapter will problematize the unacknowledged Whorfian teleology underlying several works of Turkish literary history.

This chapter begins by reviewing some of the main accounts of the language problem in Turkish literature, and then summarizes current linguistics research on the relationship between emotions and language. It is followed by a similar review of psychological readings of Turkey's belatedness, themselves enthralled with the language problem, and a subsequent summary of literature on stancetaking and the pragmatics of emotional expression. After this lengthy literature review, I will perform close readings of the intersubjective interactions in restaurant

and bar scenes from the three novels to show how emotions are everywhere, they are just hard to talk about.

## The Turkish Language Problem

In 1982, a year before the Turkish Language Academy would be folded back into the Ministry of Education, thereby bringing an end to what is portrayed as the long linguistic reign of terror of its commissars, the literary scholar Murat Belge wrote an article in *Yazko Edebiyat* assessing the achievements and shortcomings of the Turkish Language Revolution. Relying heavily on A. S. Levend's pioneering study entitled *Türk Dilinde Gelişme ve Sadeleşme Evreleri* (*Stages of Development and Simplification in the Turkish Language*, 1960), Belge recounts this history as one of misunderstandings and expressive shortcomings going back to the Ottoman era. With the rise of the modern state, the Ottoman government felt the need for an effective means of communication with the wider world, one that required a modern and legible language. Hoping to become a truly world-class civilization required the Ottomans to make a serious assessment of the communicative faculties of their language. This meant especially addressing the language's supposedly unworkable composite vocabulary, made up of indecipherable Arabic and Persian words. At the same time, this lexicon was somehow also bereft of many of the important concepts and technologies that the modern world technology was bringing about, requiring methods for coining new words. Stuck in the ornamental past, the Ottoman Empire was

hamstrung by its own archaic language. For Belge and many others, the entire project of modernity rests on an adequate lexicon.

Civilization, and science especially, cannot function “without terminology.” Since they are required, what will be done? At this point, the Ottoman civilization had to become aware of its fundamental shortcoming: the inadequacy of words<sup>172</sup>

According to this ubiquitous folk-linguistic history, the ability to express oneself, to communicate with others, ultimately rests on the wealth of a language’s vocabulary. It was not only the Ottoman administration, but also Ottoman literature that suffered from cultural aphasia. In assessing the well-intended linguistic experimentation of authors associated with the late 19th century literary movement *Servet-i Fünun*, Belge says

In poetry, in particular, they pointed to the importance of the word, suggesting that the associative power of the word was indispensable for poetry. (How much they went hunting for dead words from the dictionary is a separate subject.) These claims can be summarized as follows: the cause of linguistic self-determination may create a language which is not suitable for literary narrative; in other words, it may impoverish the expressive possibilities of language.<sup>173</sup>

Belge claims that the drive for modernity, and its concomitant fanaticism for linguistic purity, had a negative effect on the expressiveness of the literary language. As baroque as the vocabulary of

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<sup>172</sup> “Uygarlık, hele bilim, «terimsiz» alınamaz. Bunları almak zorunlu olduğuna göre, ne yapılacaktır? Osmanlı uygarlığı, bu noktada, asıl eksikliğinin bilincine varmalıydı: Kelimelerin yetersizliği.” Murat Belge, “Türkçe Sorunu,” *Yazko Edebiyat*, May 1982, <http://turkoloji.cu.edu.tr/GENEL/24.php>.

<sup>173</sup> “Özellikle şiirde, kelimenin önemine işaret ediyor, kelimenin çağrışımsal sıcaklığının şiir için vazgeçilmezliğini öne sürüyorlardı (bunun için sözlükten ölü kelime avlamak ne kadar geçerlidir, o da ayrı konu). Bu iddiaları bugün şöyle özetleyebiliriz: temelde toplumsal bir dava olan dilsel «özleşme» edebiyat anlatımına yatkın olmayan bir dil yaratabilir; yani, dilin anlatım imkanlarını yoksullaştırabilir.” *Ibid.*

the Servet-i Fünuncular might have been, it was certainly preferable to the laughable artificiality and lamentable sterility of the more extreme iterations of Öztürkçe that would eventually come with decades of continuous purification, leading straight from the Ottoman Empire into the Republican period and beyond.

According to many narratives like Belge's, the search for authentic vocabulary for authentic thoughts and feelings has plagued Turkish society ever since the first efforts to reform the language. It is a history filled with colorful characters, from the Tanzimat-era technocrats trying to think up a local version of the word for 'photograph,' to the Kemalist-era school student making illegible excuses in Öztürkçe to his bewildered mother. (In his article, Belge quotes this imaginary student who confounded his mother by saying, "Anne, bu gereksinmelerimi giderme olanağını elde edemedim." ("Mother, I was unable to ascertain the possibility of satisfying these requirements".)) The endless stream of farcical anecdotes in the annals of Turkish linguistic purism never fails to entertain and is used to liven up scholarly works ranging from Political Science to Mathematics. Like the "diglossia problem" in the Arab world, this "lexical problem" in Turkish represents a seemingly inexhaustible source of metalinguistic anxiety.

One aspect of particular concern for Turkey's special brand of metalinguistic moral panic is that of the lack of lexical diversity and nuance. Belge gives the example of the shades of meaning which were lost when reformers whittled down the Turkish language into having only one verb, "düşünme," to represent what in English can be rendered as «think», «reflect», «contemplate», «cogitate», «meditate», «reason», «cerebrate», «deliberate», «ruminate», «ponder»,

«muse»), «reckon»), «wonder»), or «consider».<sup>174</sup> A language without adequate synonyms to make precise emotional distinctions is doomed to constricted thought, the thinking goes. Because of its linguistic poverty, Turkish culture has merely been playing catch-up to other cultures unimpeded by this same type of communication problems. The perception of this particular language problem is in fact a common metalinguistic phenomenon. Michael Silverstein refers to this type of calculus, whereby when one

focuses on how well a particular language's lexical expressions correspond to "reality" they denote a type of ethnopragmatic theory of ontological relativism... This 'folk' approach focuses on "(mere) lexation and (mere) glossing in the face of the implicit richness of crosscutting categorical structuration in language."<sup>175</sup>

In the case of how language captures emotions and thought, oftentimes this folk-linguistic focus points to a lack of words and synonyms as compared to other languages as evidence of an almost ontological lack of expressivity, rather than seeing how human feeling is constituted at this level of "crosscutting structuration" which includes the full range of language's semiotic modes.

While arguments like Belge's have been made for decades in the pages of Turkish magazines and journals, the Turkish language problem gained an international audience with the publication of Geoffrey Lewis's 1999 study *The Turkish Language Reform: a Catastrophic Success*.

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<sup>174</sup> Lewis uses an almost identical example of a Turkish word which has many more synonyms in English

<sup>175</sup> Silverstein, "Whorfianism," 94-95.

His study has since provided fodder for an entire generation of scholars looking for tragicomic anecdotes about Turkish Republican history.<sup>176</sup>

Lewis focuses on the lexical richness of Turkish both before and after the language reforms and presents his own case of how the language was deeply impoverished in expressive nuance. Like Belge, Lewis offers the example of all the synonyms for the concept of ‘change’ that were once available to Ottoman—*istihale, tahavvül, tebeddül, tebeddülât, tagayyür, takallüp*— became narrowed down in modern Turkish to *değişmek* ‘to change’ and *başkalaşmak* ‘to become different.’<sup>177</sup> Lewis equivocates on what the ultimate consequence of this type of lexical impoverishment for wider Turkish society is, and more recent works begun to doubt just how wide-ranging and disruptive the reforms actually were. But lived experience and empirical realities aside, the grand narrative of the lexical impoverishment of the language reforms persists in the field of literary studies, in part because of the ways that literature represents a cultural institution at the very heart of these linguistic changes, regardless of what may have been the failure of Kemalist reforms to fully reach every corner of provincial and private life.

Jale Parla’s 2008 article, “The Wounded Tongue: Turkey’s Language Reform and the Canonicity of the Novel,” exemplifies a subgenre of scholarly work that looks to the language reforms as a source of Turkish literature’s ills.<sup>178</sup> Parla explains the belatedness of the emergence

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<sup>176</sup> Google Scholar has 527 academic results on a range of topic from the politics and poetics of translation in Turkey to the Gülen movement and the ambiguous politics of market Islam in Turkey

<sup>177</sup> Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 1999), 150.

<sup>178</sup> Parla, “Wounded Tongue,” 27.

of a national literary canon on the Turkish language having been “wounded” by the language reforms. She opens with an article with a quote from the author Hasan Ali Toptaş, who uses a play on words found in the term *dil yâresi*—meaning both “the wounded heart” and “the wounded tongue”— in order to refer to a “a long history of political censure in Turkey that muted and mutilated free speech, to the detriment of many kinds of expression, including the literary.”<sup>179</sup>

Parla explains that the language question is an

ongoing controversy around an unsettled language still vulnerable to disputes regarding its vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. The controversy is rooted in the linguistic schism between the new Turkish, which was implemented as one of the major reforms in the early years of the Turkish republic, and Ottoman Turkish, with its vocabulary of Arabic and Persian origins.<sup>180</sup>

This schism marks the beginning of a short 20th century in literary history in which Turkish novels were either cowed by or worked in stealth rebellion against what Parla calls the sacrosanct language reform. According to her, the linguistic norms of Republican Turkish were the “yardstick by which loyalty to the state were measured” and that “writers were intimidated from the outset.”<sup>181</sup> With the pressure to tell a national story about Turkish literature (and to give her own canonical account for an American scholarly audience), Parla is forced to reduce the complexity of language ideology to one source and one victim. Literature which does not conform to Republican ideology is seen as necessarily responding directly in opposition to it.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 30.

Parla names a few members of this opposition with the term “practitioners of early dissent,” mentioning Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Yaşar Kemal (whose own “dissent” will be discussed in a later chapter), and Oğuz Atay. Parla marks the end of this period of Kemalist language reform dominance, like many, with the 1980 military coup that let loose an unprecedented cultural diversification. She cites Yıldız Ecevit, who claims the linguistic monopoly of Turkish culture was, ironically, broken in this period in which the military was in full control. One piece of evidence Ecevit gives for this is the serious space given to the resurrection of Ottoman vocabulary in novels in the 1980s.

There were no doubt very real cultural shifts that took place during this post-coup period of the 1980s, and the presence of cultural self-censorship during the heyday of Republican ideology certainly had a massive influence on literature. But at the same time, culture and language are elided in national histories such as these. The extent to which Parla is claiming to trace linguistic evolution vs. merely a history of stylistic trends is unclear, because she uses the term ‘language’ imprecisely when speaking about stylistics in novels. Does she mean that Kemalist language ideology encouraged a certain set of norms in writing style and form, or that it restricted the structures and semantics of the Turkish language itself? It’s not entirely evident that this is understood *as* a difference. At one point in her essay, she wades directly into the mechanics of language by speaking about the idiosyncratic syntax of Orhan Pamuk, (a writer whose career is held up as tied to the loosening of cultural restrictions in the 1980s). She references a study by Necmiye Alpay, who argued that, because Pamuk displaces the subject in his sentences, putting it

closer to the verb than it usually is in standard Turkish, it accents characterization and works to foreground antiheroes. “He ironizes and underscores their inertia, their lack of ability to act, and the futility of their actions...The very syntax supports his outcasts’ self-indulgent irony.”<sup>182</sup> Parla gives Oğuz Atay the same treatment, describing language as a villain and a force with emotional energy when she writes of *Tutunamayanlar*:

In *Tutunamayanlar*, language is the only antagonist, against which everyone struggles—in vain. As implied by the novel’s title, the narrative, with its medley of styles, disconnects: it chops, cuts, separates; it does not cohere. It breaks the characters apart, impedes all forms of dialogue, carries no reliable information, results only in unfinished writing, fails in every attempt at expression or communication, and ends in a schizophrenic exchange between the protagonist, Turgut, and his double.<sup>183</sup>

Speaking, even if rhetorically, of language as an autonomous force with its own agency is a hallmark of language ideology. By calling Atay’s language ‘loud, impetuous, and pointlessly aggressive’, she anthropomorphizes language and passes strong ethnoprismatic judgements on it. This elision of language structures and cultural moods allows eventually for metaphysical teleologies, whereby the style of individual novels is explained by the autonomous evolutionary movements of the language in which they are written.

In *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey* (2011) Nergis Ertürk offers her own reimagining of literary-historical periodization as a way to undo the overemphasis on the Republican-era language reforms. By tracing the emergence of modern phonocentrism and its

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 32.

new representational writing all the way back into the second half of the 19th century, she shows how the reforms were not a radical break with the Ottoman past, but rather phonocentrism in a new form. With reference to Derrida, Ertürk defines phonocentrism as modern man's fantasy of "immobilizing the threat of that constitutive (and fatal) indeterminacy that is always imminent in writing, and of creating, through writing's reform, an ontology freed of death."<sup>184</sup> According to her periodization, the Kemalist short 20th century corresponds to a period when the linguistic field was "profoundly overdetermined by national grammarology of the first half of the 20th century."<sup>185</sup> Ertürk offers her own account of practitioners of literary dissent, this time using examples from Tanpınar, Peyami Safa, and Nazım Hikmet, in order to demonstrate that "against phonocentric forces aiming to control language... such fictive—and therefore figurative, nontransparent, and multifarious—acts of writing reopen the closed channels of linguistic travel."<sup>186</sup>

Phonocentrism is very similar to other accounts of standard language ideology that Ertürk has identified in the case of Turkey, but her choice to use grammarology as her main theoretical framework has the consequence of elevating literature to a seemingly unique linguistic status. Ertürk focuses on examples of literature that she calls "other-writing," made up of language that is territorially unbound, and freely circulating. According to her, "it is the power of literature's

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<sup>184</sup> Ertürk, *Grammarology*, 5.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

fictive performance itself to teach us how to relinquish the binding of language.”<sup>187</sup> But no linguistic understanding of language would grant to literature some special ability to break free from social context. As I explained in the previous chapter, the ways that literature uses language for rebellion, satire, or play relies precisely on a grounded social context. And on the flip side, even everyday casual interactions are replete with examples of language shaking loose from its bonds: the ludic use of noncongruency, tropic uses of language which exemplify the non-identical, and the manipulation of concepts, categories, and distinctions. And all of these moves are made not merely to disrupt meaning, but to create it. Literature by definition cannot be independent of a fixed referent, otherwise its *tropes* would have nothing against which they were *turning*. Literature is not language outside of empirical sociolinguistic reality, but rather is a metalinguistic showcase for its preexisting tropic potential. As much as Ertürk might express her contempt for the unrepentant positivism of social science, no amount of praise for “This Strange Institution Called Literature” can change the fact that it is still subject to the rules of social meaning making.

The point of these above literary histories is to reaffirm literary language as firmly belonging to the empirical reality in which the rest of language resides, making it thereby subject to what is more or less agreed upon as its universal capacity for the expression of human thought and emotion, as well as the pragmatic and interpersonal ways in which it is constructed. While ideological battles over national language and phonocentrism have raged over the course of the

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 22.

last two centuries, leading to very real cultural and political consequences, it must be affirmed that language ideologies affect beliefs and practices about language rather than the language's expressive potentiality.

## Emotions and Words

There are two main ways to criticize the above accounts from the standpoint of linguistics. The first is by discrediting the notion that emotional expressiveness depends on the robustness of a particular language's vocabulary. The second is by emphasizing that words themselves are only one means by which emotions are expressed. To begin with, it is important to address the idea that different cultures have different words (or lack thereof) for specific emotions. In their review of developments in the field of the cultural psychology of emotions, Mesquita et. al. show that differences between how different cultures verbalize emotion can be explained by differences in values and preferences rather than in innate cognitive or emotional dispositions, whereby "emotions that fit the cultural ideals are valued or condoned, whereas emotions that violate the cultural ideals are condemned."<sup>188</sup> For example, a culture which idolizes machismo would suppress or shame male expressions of vulnerability or tenderness. But this is a question of attentiveness and receptiveness to emotions rather than the strict ability to express them (much less experience them in the first place). An emerging constructivist model of emotions claims that our verbal expressions of affect are selectively chosen and prioritized from a large variety of phenomena (subjective, physiological, situational, behavioral), with culture

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<sup>188</sup> Batja Mesquita, Jozefien De Leersnyder, and Michael Boiger, "Cultural Psychology of Emotion," in *Handbook of Emotions*, Third Edition (New York: Guilford Publications, 2008), 407.

helping to sort out which cluster of experiences will be lexicalized.<sup>189</sup> For this reason, once an emotion has been identified as thematic in Turkish literature, it becomes a valorized interpretation which then begins to be applied for all types of experiences. The word acts like a spotlight, illuminating certain experiences at the expense of others.

Depending on culture, it dwells on whatever is taken to be associated with those raw experiences necessary for emotions . . . . How raw experiences are constituted as emotions depends on how they are illuminated. . . . Emotional elements which have no light thrown on them remain in the dark. And emotions which are focused on become enriched and highlighted in experience.<sup>190</sup>

Thinking of words using the spotlight analogy makes it clear how narratives about cultural belatedness and inauthenticity would be self-reinforcing. As we will see shortly with the case of “endişe” (anxiety), once it has been identified, it can be found all over.

However, the semantic coverage of words is not the only means by which language expresses emotion and meaning. A traditional approach to understanding emotions and language is the Aristotelian ‘depth model’ of feelings, whereby emotions are something that arise from within a person. Mesquita et. al. state in their article instead that “the reviewed literature challenges the notion that emotional experiences are fixed—if cross-culturally different—patterns of responses and calls instead for a view of emotions as action. The combined research on

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<sup>189</sup> See, for example, Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

<sup>190</sup> P. Heelas, “Emotion Talk Across Cultures,” in *The Social Construction of Emotions*, ed. M. Harré (New York: Blackwell, 1986), 257.

cultural differences suggests that the question should be *how people do emotions* across cultures, rather than *what emotions people have*.<sup>191</sup>

Rather than explaining how single words label expressive behaviors, linguists and psychological research is showing how much meaning making happens interactively, with participants making “inferences about the target’s desires and intentions, trait-like tendencies, strategic motivations, and surrounding context.”<sup>192</sup> These inferences are not based on words alone, but rather on a whole multimodal performance, the richness of which can be fictionalized by a whole range of narrative strategies beyond the choice of lexicon. As Niko Besnier states in his article, “Language and Affect” (1990), affect in language is in fact a “multichannel phenomenon [which] floods linguistic form on many different levels of structure in many different ways.”<sup>193</sup> An affective sign is multifunctional and contextually contingent. Too often emotionality in language is reduced to a series of illocutionary statements (e.g. I hate him), or a certain repertoire of emotional words. But much more commonly, emotions are alluded to, or encoded using a complex arrangement of words, structures, tones, and pauses. Besnier offers a provisional list of other levels containing affect, including address and kinship terms, pronouns, synecdoche, metonymy, onomatopoeia, exclamations, evidentiality, diminutive and augmentative affixes, modality, syntactic features such as clause parallelism or contrast, and word order

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<sup>191</sup> Mesquita, De Leersnyder, and Boiger, “Cultural Psychology,” 407.

<sup>192</sup> Dacher Keltner, Jessica Tracy, and Disa Sauter, “Expression of Emotion,” in *Handbook of Emotions*, Third Edition (New York: Guilford Publications, 2008), 476.

<sup>193</sup> Niko Besnier, “Language and Affect,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (1990): 421.

variation, not to mention the complex systems of acoustic phenomena such as volume and timber, (which cannot literally be heard in a novel, but which are often recreated through various textual strategies), and all of the other discursive and rhetorical changes which can be lumped under the category of “ways of speaking.”<sup>194</sup>

Looking at the diverse ways that emotions are implied beyond the lexicosemantic, it should be possible to read how even novels which agonize over expressivity in the modern world are still able to fictionalize rich interpersonal emotional exchanges, even when they are mundane. Take, for example, a scene in *Tutunamayanlar* where Turgut takes out Metin, Selim’s old acquaintance, for drinks in order to learn more about his deceased friend. As the two finish their first drinks, the waiter buzzes around them frantically. Turgut has already been a pain, ordering two big bottles of rakı and playfully threatening the waiter that if their drinks ever finish “you’ll be finished too.” The restaurant is busy, and they are having trouble flagging him down. After unsuccessfully summoning the waiter, Turgut remarks to Metin, “He must not recognize us.”

After another few minutes of conversation,

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<sup>194</sup> Beyond this, there is the further addendum that the written and spoken practices which we commonly refer to as “language” are in fact only arbitrary externalizations of cognitive processes. At the risk of parodying myself as a credulous linguistic, I will cite Chomsky at length: “The traditional conception of language is that it is, in Aristotle’s phrase, sound with meaning. The sound-meaning correlation is, furthermore, unbounded, an elementary fact that came to be understood as of great significance in the 17th century scientific revolution. In contemporary terms, the internal language (I-language) of an individual consists, at the very least, of a generative process that yields an infinite array of structured expressions, each interpreted at two interfaces, the sensory-motor interface (sound, sign, or some other sensory modality) for externalization and the conceptual-intentional interface for thought and planning of action.” Chomsky, Noam. “Language and Other Cognitive Systems. What Is Special About Language?” *Language Learning and Development*, vol. 7, no. 4, Oct. 2011, pp. 263–78.

Garson, masayla mutfak arasında koşuşup duruyordu. “Evet beyim, geliyor beyim, şimdi hazır beyim.”

The waiter was running between the table and the kitchen. “Yes sir, coming sir. I’m ready for you sir.”

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Nobody would take as literal the waiter’s assurances that he is, in face, ready and on his way to check in with Turgut and Metin. It is clear from the context that he is stressed, overworked, and anxious about incurring the wrath of his needy customers. But how does one know this? From the situational context and the structure of his utterances. It is clear that the waiter is running around, which helps us to interpret his frantic parallelism, repeating the word “beyim” (sir) not as a jokey sing-song or as a tenacious genuflection. He keep saying “beyim” because he is flustered, and this is clear because this is something people do all the time in real life. And what’s more, the particular way that the waiter uses the reverential term allows him to get away with a sort of antinomy: he is pledging both his continued deference to his clients, as well as gently letting them know that he is in over his head. The euphemistic nature of waiter communication is especially adept at conveying multiple inferences because even under the most stressful or debasing of circumstances, waiters are still expected to put on a pleasant affective veneer. Giving and taking food orders is a ritual upon which other affective concerns can be scaffolded, and

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<sup>195</sup> Atay, *Tutunamayanlar*, 251.

beneath which plenty of other feelings can be obfuscated. Words can easily mean their exact opposite, depending on context.

## Psychoanalyzing Turkish Literature

One might think of historical linguistic and psychoanalytic readings of the problems of Turkish literature as separate approaches, but at their root they share an understanding of the problem of language as restricting access to mental life. Going beyond the Lacanian maxim that “l'inconscient est structuré comme un langage”, certain psychological interpretations of Turkish literature see the very conscious language of the novel as intimately tied to the psychic economy; they read stylistic choices symptomatically, and the language reforms, aetiologically. In this section I will discuss this kind of psychological reading by using examples of specific literary analyses by Orhan Koçak and Nurdan Gürbilek.<sup>196</sup>

In his 1996 article “Kaptırılmış ideal: Mai ve Siyah Üzerine Psikanalitik bir Deneme” (The Missed Ideal: a Psychoanalytic Essay on Mai ve Siyah), Orhan Koçak reads the 1897 novel *Mai ve Siyah* as a staging for the Ottoman subject who introduces Western culture as an object of admiration, and as a model to be imitated. This outward facing aspiration inadvertently reduces native culture, ‘the local ego’ as he calls it, to a state of infant-like

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<sup>196</sup> Because they are both such prolific writers, and because each of their writing styles are marked by the use of digression, it is much more difficult to pin down their precise views on the relationship between lexicon and emotions. I hope the reader will afford me a similarly suggestive approach to my argument in this section. My claim is that regardless of their definitive views, both writers rely at least rhetorically on ethnopragmatic ideas of the ties between lexicon and expressiveness.

helplessness before the foreign idea, forever setting it up in a dynamic of inadequacy and belatedness. The trauma of this double bind has lasted throughout Turkish literature up to modern times, with the Turkish author either parroting borrowed desires, or left to an inarticulate and unmotivated local self. Authors were doomed, like *Mai ve Siyah*'s author Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, to the rootless emotions of an effete aestheticism or no ability to express one's desires at all.<sup>197</sup> Central to the debates that surrounded the publication of *Mai ve Siyah*, including those famously offered by Ahmet Midhat, was the question of language. Koçak writes:

The difference between writers like Ahmed Midhat and his followers like Gürpınar, and between Halit Ziya, was about the question of what or who would be giving the orders to language: would it be a language that would be in the service of more public and traditional expression, or would it be a language more dedicated to the individual or the psychological?.. At that point, it is noticed that the shadow of Narcissus falls upon language: The need for expression [Dışavurum ihtiyacı], the whims of the soul, in a word style entered the picture: The gaze of language upon itself, the author's search for his own impossible representation. Ahmet Cemil's words about the poem he wants to write shows both his proximity to apprehending language as well as his distance from it. understanding and his distance.<sup>198</sup>

Koçak claims that language, or at the very least literary language, is capable of only being either public and based on shared notions, or capable of attempting to map the unknown recesses of the individual soul. What's more, turning inwards requires using the gaze of language to search for one's own impossible form. This is a textbook use of the Aristotelian depth-model of feelings,

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<sup>197</sup> Orhan Koçak, "Kaptırılmış İdeal: *Mai ve Siyah* Üzerine Psikanalitik Bir Deneme," *Toplum ve Bilim* 70 (1996): 97.

<sup>198</sup> Koçak, "Kaptırılmış," 103.

one which stakes the ability of self-knowledge on the expressive capability of a yet-to-exist language. It is not entirely clear whether language (*dil*) in this quotation is only meant as a metonym for ‘stylistics,’ but because of the fact that Koçak is arguing that *Mai ve Siyah* is indicative of the wider cultural phenomenon of the Missed Ideal, one could be forgiven for assuming he means language in general.

In other writings as well, Koçak makes frequent use of examples which demonstrate this teleological movement towards more expressive language. Like others, he conceives of Turkish literature since the 1950s as moving along with the evolution of stylistics.<sup>199</sup> This tendency is at work in Koçak’s recent book (*Tehlikeli Dönüşler*, 2017) comparing the work of two authors who represent different generations of Turkish literature: Yusuf Atılgan (1921-1989) and Ayhan Geçgin (b.1970). During his long discussion comparing the two authors, he makes several general and specific references to new forms of expression unlocked by advances in language and stylistics. Right in the beginning of the book he speaks of the effect of different verb tenses on creating a sense of return and searching, claiming for example that: “Geçgin’s use of the simple past tense is the mode of the event which carries its meaning in itself, which does not require explanation, and which is exempt from searching and constant “wandering.””<sup>200</sup> He claims that Geçgin uses a type of sentence first pioneered by Orhan Pamuk, “a sentence style that moves

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<sup>199</sup> Fathi Altuğ, “Orhan Koçak’ın Tehlikeli Dönüşler’ine dair - K24,” T24, June 22, 2017, <https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/orhan-kocak-fatih-altug,1272>.

<sup>200</sup> “Geçgin’in kullanımında basit geçmiş, anlamını kendi içinde taşıyan, açıklama gerektirmeyen olayın, arayıştan ve o sürekliliği “dönüp dolaşmalardan” muaf fiilin kipidir.” Orhan Koçak, *Tehlikeli Dönüşler* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2017), 99.

towards containing a series of contradictory things but which also does not tolerate (or does not have the strength to allow?) any misunderstanding.”<sup>201</sup> At another point, he explains the expressive nuance of the Turkish neologism “boğuntu” (suffocation) and its semantic nuance in relation to the concept of “endişe” (anxiety). Whereas Yusuf Atılgan’s work expresses a lack and deferral, Geçgin’s work expresses an excess (*fazlalık*): “an overwhelming, suffocating, unbearable weight that paralyzes the subject.”<sup>202</sup> He speaks specifically about certain historical limitations of emotional vocabulary in Atılgan’s novel *Aylak Adam* as opposed to Geçgin by claiming “there is anger [*öfke*] in Aylak’s emotional repertoire, there is a lot of scorn, even a paranoia due to the feeling of a temporal distortion (being late) — but no worry [*kaygı*].”<sup>203</sup>

Koçak’s discussion of Atılgan and Geçgin’s novels draw heavily from Lacanian theories of desire, trying to show how the wandering by characters in their novels represents the theme of the endless deferred search for an inarticulable want. This desire is itself grounded by the nature of language. Lacan scholar Bruce Fink offers a summary of Lacan’s ideas by stating that “every human being who learns to speak is thereby alienated from her or himself—for it is language that, while allowing desire to come into being, ties knots therein, and makes us such that we can both want and not want one and the same thing, never be satisfied when we get what we thought we wanted, and so on.”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Koçak, *Tehlikeli*, 116.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, 140.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>204</sup> Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 7.

But while Lacan sees expressive frustration as constituted by the structure of language (and all languages) itself, scholars like Koçak project this frustration onto the history of Turkish literature, which has advanced over time towards a more direct and honest ways to confront this paradox of desire. They see in the development of stylistics a progression towards the cure so to speak, the purpose of psychoanalysis being none other than the bringing of unconscious desire into signifiers because “we only grasp the unconscious finally when it is explicated, in that part of it which is articulated by passing into words.”<sup>205</sup>

Nurdan Gürbilek has dedicated several of her books to the nagging idea that there is something amiss with Turkish literature. In her book *Kör Ayna Kayıp Şark* (Blind Mirror Lost Orient, 2004), she traces the mood of *endişe* (anxiety) back to the first Ottoman-Turkish novels. She reads in Turkish novels an intimate feeling of *huzursuzluk* (uneasiness), held by both authors and readers, coming from the inability to explain oneself to others.<sup>206</sup> Growing to the intensity of a form of spiritual torture for the Turkish author, it was first expressed as a national-cultural anxiety which arose in confrontation with the West. In a search for a native authenticity, a true subject that one could explain to others, the author is stuck in a double bind between imitating the West like an elite snob, or by trying to be authentically local, coming off as primitive, childlike, and provincial. In this, Gürbilek is building on Orhan Kocak’s earlier essay on the Missed Ideal seen in the work of Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil.

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<sup>205</sup> Fink, *Lacanian*, 38.

<sup>206</sup> Gürbilek, *Kör Ayna*, 9.

This anxiety over self-expression, according to Gürbilek, can be seen in various works by Turkish authors throughout the 20th century. One particularly important example is Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, (one of Parla’s early practitioners of linguistic dissent). His use of language and symbolism are, according to Gürbilek, all in the service of coming to grips with the anxiety over cultural lack and loss: “The pre-modernist Tanpınar, obsessed with plenitude, continuity and a “return to the true self,” and the modernist Tanpınar, who comes to terms with the fact that what we call the “self” is a place built of loss: The Tanpınar of the dried spring, the blind mirror, and the lost East – a writer of the aesthetics of loss.”<sup>207</sup>

One sees further evidence of the folk-linguistic nature of Gürbilek’s analysis by seeing how important a role language (as style) plays in overcoming this sense of loss. The bind represented in Tanpınar and others’ work is finally overcome, or at least frankly confronted, in the work of authors like Oğuz Atay, Vüs’at Oç Bener, and Leylâ Erbil. According to Gürbilek, they did not solve the question of “am I able to explain myself,” but they are the ones who finally address the question head on.<sup>208</sup> By transforming the collective sense of *endişe* into the essential

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<sup>207</sup> Nurdan Gürbilek and Victoria Holbrook, “Dried Spring, Blind Mirror, Lost East: Ophelia, Water, and Dreams,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20, no. 2 (2017): 133–61.

<sup>208</sup> Sibel Irzik offers a much more contextualized and specific psychological explanation for the change in stylistics in the 1980s, seeing it as more immediately tied to the cultural trauma of the 1980 coup. “Many of the significant Turkish novels of the 1980s and 90s evince this crisis in their obsession with the paradoxical power and impotence of writing. On the one hand, they betray the guilt of having failed to bear witness, the sense of inadequacy in the face of the unsayable and act out the traumatic loss of referentiality through the disintegration of their narrative forms, sometimes even of language itself. On the other hand, displaying its own crisis often becomes literature’s way of not being exhausted by that crisis, and these texts are also narcissistically preoccupied with their own capacities.” Sibel Irzik, “Yaşar Kemal’s Island of Resistance,” in *Resistance in Contemporary Middle Eastern Cultures, Literature, Cinema and Music*, ed. Karima Laachir and Saeed Talajooy (New York: Routledge, 2013), 54.

material of their work, these authors created novels which were better, more mature and expressive of the mysteries of feeling. Oğuz Atay is able to problematize the concern with delay as both a national and a national literary disability. Vüs'at O. Bener's work engages with an idea about the shared nature of narrative, and about the confusions arising from narration and silence which are shared by almost everyone. Central to his work is the desire to be authentic and the fear of being fake. And then finally Leylâ Erbil, who I spoke about in the introduction, takes the effort to "be oneself" as the fundamental problem of writing. Gürbilek offers these three writers' work as a culmination of the quest for emotional expressiveness whereby narrative fully incorporates ambiguity into the forms of the novel itself.

Gürbilek's argument, like Kocak's, ultimately comes back to language. She claims that scholars have spent so much critical energy in the last 100 years trying to free literary works from the biographies of their authors that it has led to a neglect of the ways that novels reflect lived experience. Literary scholars have privileged the text itself, overcoming "reflective literary theories that regard language as a transparent tool, naive approaches that ignore the mediation of literary discourse," but in doing so subtracted the role that the author and their psychology might still have on the work.<sup>209</sup> For Gürbilek, an author's subjectivity does not lie concealed behind the language seen on the page, but is represented by the very texture of the text. Because of this fact, the perpetually frustrated effort to express psychological reality manifests in the language of the novel. The essential theme of Bener's works is seen as the failure for the literary work to overlap

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<sup>209</sup> Gürbilek, *Kör Ayna*, 197.

neatly with one's life experience.<sup>210</sup> Atay's bombastic language style is viewed as a symptomatic acting out of his frustrations at expressing himself. Gürbilek says of Atay that "just like his protagonist Turgut, he undertook the role of "the rude, loud man," hastening to record all of the sounds of the internal (and external) world, with desperation, an incredible flood of words, using verbal midwifery and acrobatics to urge on all of the words he collected and deliver them to the challenge of "the unexplainable."<sup>211</sup>

By confronting *endişe* head on with language, authors like Atay supposedly created deeper works. But, once again, this offers an evolutionary account of expressive language whereby a sort of metalinguistic experimentation is seen as the key to honestly reflect the dilemma of emotional expressiveness. It is only through linguistic "gymnastics" and an "unbelievable flood of words" that the author can finally gesture to the mystery of our inner emotional lives.

## Emotions and Stancetaking

In their choice of metaphors, both Kocak and Gürbilek rely on the depth-model of emotions, whereby emotions lie concealed within, and which 'come out,' or are at least tentatively gestured at, with the right lexical intervention. But as Elise Kärkkäinen aptly puts it: "emotion, or at least the potential for emotion, is everywhere in social life; it is just hard to talk about it."<sup>212</sup> A

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 200.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>212</sup> Du Bois, John W., and Elise Kärkkäinen. "Taking a stance on emotion: Affect, sequence, and intersubjectivity in dialogic interaction." *Text & Talk* 32, no. 4 (2012): 433.

burgeoning consensus on the nature of emotions from fields as diverse as relevance theory, constructivist theory, and indexical linguistics points to the fact that emotions are not only expressed intersubjectively, but that “the link between emotional experience and emotion word is determined by the social context of communication.”<sup>213</sup> Rather than emotional expressiveness hinging on the usefulness of individual words, language users incorporate lexical items into a wider semiotic system which is itself always determined by the entirety of pragmatic conditions, and never solely on the literal meaning of words themselves. In short, meaning depends on pragmatics and on “stance”: a concept which can be summarized as the answer to the question: “What is it that speakers themselves think they (and other speakers) are doing when they are talking to each other?”<sup>214</sup> Kärkkäinen explain that “stance is not only constructed by grammatical or lexical means, but that the sequential occurrence of stance markers and the degree of syntactic, semantic, and/or prosodic parallelism or ‘resonance’ across speakers is also a resource for stance taking.”<sup>215</sup>

Emotions are not held up by the perfectly apt word to describe them, but rather emerge through the alignment of two speakers who use the entire semiotic repertoire of language in order to come to a mutual recognition of epistemic and affective claims. None of these things, it should be noted, require stylistic sophistication or some special artistic level of articulateness.

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<sup>213</sup> Simone Schnall, “The Pragmatics of Emotion Language,” *Psychological Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (2005): 28.

<sup>214</sup> Scott F. Kiesling, “Stance in Context: Affect, Alignment and Investment in the Analysis of Stancetaking,” in *IMean Conference*, vol. 15, 2011, 1.

<sup>215</sup> Elise Kärkkäinen, “Stance Taking in Conversation: From Subjectivity to Intersubjectivity,” *Text & Talk-An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language, Discourse Communication Studies* 26, no. 6 (2006): 700.

When looking for traces of affect and emotion, one should move away from seeing it as best revealed through the intensity of soliloquy, but in the bright moments of intersubjective stance, sequence, and dialogicality. Even in the simplest conversations, speakers are constantly assessing the epistemic and affective states of themselves and others through every semiotic mean available.

One crucial concept from the study of stancetaking is that of alignment. Alignment refers to any way that a speaker indicates during an interaction that they agree with aspects of the utterances they respond to. Nonalignment, on the other hand, refers to the non-confrontational, exception-making, subtle displays of disagreement or dissent from epistemic and affective claims being made throughout interactions. Alignment is so central to emotions and language because an utterance is most often reacting to or negotiating with the emotional claims and mood of the statement that came before. This is true even when the topic at hand is not directly relevant to emotions or the relationship between two people. Often times the content of a particular discussion acts as the surface upon which emotions are sounded.

The use of stancetaking can be used for close readings of literature because almost all works fictionalize everyday interactions, and in fact, only make sense in that they play by the rules, so to speak, of stancetaking. Even deciding what to eat at a restaurant can be an occasion for soliciting and negotiating feelings between two individuals with relationship issues that they aren't addressing directly. An individual or a couple who come to a restaurant are already "in a mood" so to speak, and so the moment of ordering something to eat or drink act is often colored by their other concerns. To return to the dinner scene between Turgut and Metin from

*Tutunamayanlar*, after the waiter tells the pair that he will be right there, Turgut immediately changes his mind:

Turgut, masalardaki aşırılığını yeterli bulunca, birden garsonun hızını kesti: “Oldu artık. Şimdi bizi rahatsız etmek yok. Bu masayı unut, ben seni hatırlayınca kadar.” Gülerek Metin’e baktı: “Her şey tamam mı? Muhabbete geçelim mi?” Garson, Turgut’u memnun etmek endişesiyle emrini hemen yerini getirdi.

When Turgut found that the excess at the tables was sufficient, he suddenly cut the waiter's speed: “That’s enough. Now don't bother us. Forget about this table, until I remember you.” He laughed and looked at Metin: “Is everything good? Shall we start real conversation?” The waiter, anxious to please Turgut, immediately obeyed his command.

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Turgut is not genuinely concerned with the well-being of the waiter, although it is clear from context that he has understood that the waiter is in a rush. Rather, he wants to convey to Metin a sense of authority and control over the situation. By ordering the waiter to ignore their table, Turgut is both showing his desire to get down to the business of discussing Selim uninterrupted, and also showing Metin, as he did by ordering alcohol, that he is the one in control of the encounter. Turgut dismissed Metin as a lightweight and a pushover from the moment he saw him, and so demonstrating his ability to boss around waiters gives him further authority. There is also the affect of the restaurant to which Turgut is responding. He decides to stop the waiter based on a sense of frenzy (*aşırılığını*) in the restaurant, a distraction from the focused mood he is trying to establish with Metin. At the same time the waiter is said to have anxiety (*endişe*) about

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<sup>216</sup> Atay, *Tutunamayanlar*, 251.

Turgut being satisfied (*memnun*), showing how much of waiting tables is about attending to feelings. All three characters in this emotional choreography are negotiating with each other, agreeing on how much alcohol to drink, bring an appropriate level of attentiveness to the table, establishing an unspoken set of power dynamics. Through the rituals of restaurant behavior, they are stancetaking and aligning.

### The Petit-Bourgeois Narcissist

But regardless of how the cultural psychology of emotions and stancetaking more accurately reflect the current state of linguistics, what is the benefit of such an approach to the study of literature? And what is its use to a critique of the ethno-metalinguistic “language problem” history of Turkish literature more specifically? Both Gürbilek and Koçak use the figure of the dandy as the protagonist in the struggle over authentic expression. I argue that many of these past readings have often generalized the particular experience of a specific male intellectual as representative of an entire culture’s struggle of belated modernity and obstinate inauthenticity. Along with other efforts in this dissertation to disentangle linguistic consciousness and concern with the experiential concreteness of nationalist sentiment, I want to ground the experience of the dandy figure and particularize his relationship to expressiveness. Seeing emotions as pragmatically constructed helps to reframe his universal existential woes as particular literary narcissism, and the crisis of “explaining oneself” as a more immediate lack of emotional intelligence.

Keya Anjaria argues that the figure of the dandy has survived, although transformed, through the 20th century and into the 21st because of the issues he centers.

It is the dandy's ambiguous literary endowment which has allowed him to so easily participate in the different styles and modes of the novel in the Republican period. At the same time, readings of the dandy are an avenue of approach to the various faces of the Turkish novel because the dandy refers back to the late 19th century and because of the novel's involvement with not only literary and political contexts, epistemological clashes, but also with form and function.<sup>217</sup>

In her article, Anjaria tries to update the Dandy by focusing on the character of Murat from Adalet Ağaoğlu's novel *Üç Beş Kişi* (1984). He is a post-1980 coup version of the dandy, enthralled by Yunus Emre rather than western artists. Murat's ridiculous level of passivity is contrasted with other characters in such a way that it creates a strong social critique, emphasizing "the constraints of both class and gender discourses by highlighting how characters feel stifled by the expectations placed upon them."<sup>218</sup> He is similar in many ways to the male characters that I will be examining, in that rather than being enthralled by the West, they are fully confounded by locals, whether it be fellow intellectuals or working class strangers. In order to dethrone the figure of the dandy and his universalized experience, I have relabeled him in this chapter as the petty-bourgeois narcissist. As much as the men in these novels may fancy themselves a '*tutunamayan*' (one who cannot hang on) or an '*aylak adam*' (Idle Man), the term

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<sup>217</sup> Keya Anjaria, "The Dandy and the Coup: Politics of Literature in the Post-1980 Turkish Novel, *Üç Beş Kişi*," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 17, no. 3 (2014): 277.

<sup>218</sup> Anjaria, "Dandy," 274.

*küçük burjuva* (petit-bourgeois) adopts their own pejorative as a way to emphasize the privilege and narcissism of which they feel so disgusted. Like Murat, they are passive, but they mistake this very passivity as an abstract crisis arising from the inability to express themselves.

In her book *Broken Masculinities* (2016), Çimen Günay-Erkol offers a pioneering attempt to problematize hegemonic masculinity in Turkey's previous generation of coup novels (known as the March 12 novels) in which "men occupied the frontlines of literature."<sup>219</sup> But as one can already see from the long history of the dandy, men have also been on the front lines of the struggle for emotional expressiveness as well. As such, Turkish literary history has centered a particular male experience of emotions as analogous to the national story. But rather than introducing women into the frame as Aġaoġlu does in fiction and Günay-Erkol does in scholarship, I will show how an understanding of different accounting of emotion shifts the frame for male experience itself. In specific moments in cafes and public spaces in three generations of Turkish novels, a look at the intersubjective pragmatics of emotions helps to dismantle the universalizing of male emotional experience by showing how emotions are not something they have by themselves, but something they are constantly doing with others, including people in restaurants and bars. You can tell a lot about a person by how they treat waiters, as the saying goes.

In three novels spanning from the 1940s to the mid-1970s, one finds the reoccurring archetype of the self-deprecating, overly contemplative, pathos-drenched male intellectual who

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<sup>219</sup> Çimen Günay-Erkol, *Broken Masculinities* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 8.

sits in cafes and casinos, trying to grasp at the vagaries of their own mental lives and relationships. Often times their meditations revolve around their relationships with women, the banality of modern society, and their remoteness from the working class. But we should understand their frustrations as caused not by the dysfunction of language, the crisis of belatedness, or literature's obstinate inauthenticity, but rather as a consequence of their own narcissism and emotional stuntedness. While they fancy themselves to be tragically misunderstood philosophers, they are still participating in daily emotional life, if only in cafes. Sabahattin Ali's protagonist Ömer in the novel *İçimizdeki Şeytan* neatly summarizes their predicament:

Üç beş cadde ile bir o kadar kahveden başka ne beliriz? Fikir hayatı, fikir hayatı diyoruz...En kabadayımız bile gevezelikten başka ne konuşuyor? Kahve münakaşalarıyla zihnimizi inkişaf ettirdiğimizi sanmakla pek akıllıca bir iş yaptığımıza kani değilim...

Where else do we show up other than three or five streets and as many coffee shops? The life of ideas, we call it the life of ideas... What's the most swashbuckling amongst us talk about besides gossip and chit-chat? I'm not convinced that we've done anything clever by thinking that we have developed our minds through coffeeshop discussions...

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Another reason to focus on these interactions is the unique affective ritual of service industry interactions. Because they are simultaneously emotional and financial transactions, they exhibit conspicuously mannered and asymmetrical displays of emotions, with strict norms guiding the affective displays of employees as opposed to the often performative detachment or

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<sup>220</sup> Sabahattin Ali Ali, *İçimizdeki Şeytan*, 13th ed. (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2008), 142.

imperiousness of the client. These are emotions on display, psychology and social relations staged at the level of affect. As such, they provide a set of pragmatic conventions which can be used to see how other contexts interface with them. The ideals of true love are tarnished when it comes time to buy presents. The atmospheric impressionism of the *flâneur* comes into sharp focus when a restaurant's clientele is being obnoxious. Class anxiety is suddenly no longer an existential woe when it comes time to order drinks. And the elusive nature of desire is only debilitating until the meze list is brought around.

### İçimizdeki Şeytan and Emotional Intelligence

*İçimizdeki Şeytan* (The Devil Inside Us, 1940) is a great example of the misplaced attention on emotion and language in a novel. Given the historical moment in which the book was written—immediately following the most dramatic stages of the Turkish Language Revolution in the 1930s—and following the linguistic-historical narratives presented above, one might imagine that the question of emotional expressiveness in the novel is centered on expressive artificiality, lexical constriction, and stylistic group think. But metalinguistic questions have little to do with the emotional focus of the novel. Like his other novels, *İçimizdeki Şeytan* “weaves socially critical information into his characters’ inner monologues, identity crises and ill-

fated love stories, creating a form of social commentary his good friend and fellow author Pertev Naili Boratav described as psychological realism.”<sup>221</sup>

*İçimizdeki Şeytan* is the story of a young, sensitive intellectual Ömer who falls in love at first sight of a young music student named Macide while riding on the ferry one day. Macide has come to Istanbul to study music at a conservatory and is living with a relative. In the opening chapters Ömer is vociferous about his enchantment with Macide, waxing poetic to himself and his friends about his deep feelings. This gushing is in-line with his other emotional soliloquies, in which he discusses freedom, and art, and how the mundane nature of everyday life hampers the pursuit of an artistic and authentic life. A short period after Ömer finally expresses his feelings to Macide, she leaves the difficult situation with her relative and moves in with Ömer, who is living in a rented room in a boarding house. They even decide to elope. But the marriage is immediately marred by Ömer’s financial situations, and more importantly his emotional volatility, with him sometimes acting as an attentive husband while at other times being thoughtless and vain. Their relationship is finally doomed one night when the couple is invited to a charity

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<sup>221</sup> Kristin Dickinson, “Sabahattin Ali’s Translingual Transnationalism,” in *The Transcultural Critic: Sabahattin Ali and Beyond* (Göttingen: Universitäts verlag Göttingen, 2017), 6.

concert where Ömer becomes drunk and flirts with another woman, totally ignoring Macide. When, during the party, Macide is sexually assaulted without Ömer intervening or even noticing, she decides to leave him, writing him a goodbye letter the following morning. While Ömer spends so much of the novel lamenting his inability to adequately express his own emotions, the actual conflict of the novel revolves around him not being able to understand Macide's.

*İçimizdeki Şeytan* was originally serialized in *Ulus* magazine in 1939, coming only a few years after Atatürk's brief flirtation with the Sun-Language theory. But despite the ceasefire that this dubious proposal offered to the Turkish language wars, the initial phase of the language reforms, including the purge of Arabic and Persian loanwords, would continue at least until the elections of 1950 when the Democrat Party would reverse course. Given the epochal importance of the language reforms to Turkish literature, one would assume that *İçimizdeki Şeytan* reflects this turmoil. But instead Sabahattin Ali's "diverse oeuvre attests to his ambivalent stance toward the large-scale cultural reforms at hand."<sup>222</sup> The effect of Ali's stylistics is not principally metalinguistic, but one of emotional realism, and an intimacy with popular forms of speaking. After a thorough analysis of the language and style of the author's writing, the scholar Ramazan Korkmaz makes a number of conclusions: 1) The language is quite simple and unvarnished. 2) He follows the principle of using language that the people both speak and understand. 3) He uses popular idioms and slang. 4) He emphasizes regional dialect in his characters. 5) He makes heavy use of assonant doublets (*ıvrır zıvrır, kitap mitap*), which makes his spoken language warm and

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<sup>222</sup> Dickinson, "Sabahattin Ali," 6.

lively. 6) Sincerity is fundamental. 7) Characters reveal their cultural level, social status through speaking.<sup>223</sup> While sweeping histories of the Turkish language see the expressive limitations of writers as dependent on the state of the language reforms, individual studies like that of Korkmaz reveal a natural development of stylistics in the author himself, who moves from imitating a socialist realist focus to the detriment of character development, to a more sophisticated and affecting approach in his final novel.<sup>224</sup> Sabahattin Ali faced more oppression by the one-party state for his own activities and beliefs than he would for his novels.

Beyond the realm of language politics, the novel was also written during a time of intense political uncertainty as the country's government did its best to stay out of World War II. Intellectual debates around whether Turkey should ally itself with the Fascists or the Communists is reflected in literature and journalism from the period, and especially in the works of Sabahattin Ali, who served as a flashpoint for fears over communism. He was arrested for possessing communist propaganda in 1931, and again for his connection to the left-wing satirical magazine *Marko Paşa* in 1946. The author would eventually die under mysterious circumstances while trying to flee the country in 1948, allegedly bludgeoned by a smuggler who discovered his true

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<sup>223</sup> Ramazan Korkmaz, *Sabahattin Ali: İnsan ve Eser: İnceleme*, vol. 185 (Yky, 1997), 370-380.

<sup>224</sup> Berna Moran says of the psychological descriptions of the titular character of Kuyucaklı Yusuf "Görüldüğü gibi, yazar, Yusuf'un ruhsal bunalımlarım okura aktarabilmek için ne hayal gücünü zorluyor ne de ciddi bir çaba gösteriyor" see Berna Moran, *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış 2: Sabahattin Ali'den Yusuf Atılgan'a* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1990), 42. as opposed to Maureen Freely's report on the huge contemporary reception for *Kürk Mantolu Madonna* "for the past three years, it has topped the bestseller lists in Turkey, outselling Orhan Pamuk. It is read, loved and wept over by men and women of all ages, but most of all by young adults." see Maureen Freely, "Sabahattin Ali's *Madonna in a Fur Coat* – the Surprise Turkish Bestseller," *The Guardian*, May 21, 2016, sec. Books, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/21/sabahattin-ali-madonna-fur-coat-rereading>.

identity. Unfortunately, these political intrigues have long overshadowed an artistic evaluation of his work, from the moment they were originally published. Most of the initial reviews of *İçimizdeki Şeytan* focused on its political content.<sup>225</sup>

Sabahattin Ali was a more sensitive and nuanced artist than caricatures of dogmatic left-wing politics might make it seem. His novel *İçimizdeki Şeytan* was an intimate critique of the intellectual, both his emotionally stunted masculinity and his existential anxieties. The author “was not looking to critique politics or ideology, but was aiming to make a criticism on common sense and morality.”<sup>226</sup> His humanistic moral message was echoed earlier in a letter to his wife in 1935, in which he tells her that the majority of people think only of themselves, and that all of the disasters and vulgarity come from this fundamental fact.<sup>227</sup>

Ali’s protagonist in *İçimizdeki Şeytan* serves as a case study of Ali’s ideas about morality. The novel is filled with soliloquies in which Ömer thinks about himself and his desires. He himself faults the limits of language as the cause of his aphasia. At the very beginning of the

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<sup>225</sup> “Eleştirmek istediklerini politik ve ideolojik açıdan değil, sağduyu ve ahlak açısından eleştirmeyi yeğ tutmuştur.” Korkmaz, *Sabahattin Ali: İnsan ve Eser: İnceleme*, 42.

<sup>226</sup> Asım Bezirci, *Sabahattin Ali: Hayatı, Hikâyeleri, Romanları: Araştırma, Eleştirme*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1979), 185.

<sup>227</sup> Letter to Aliye 28, February 1935. Reprinted in Sabahattin Ali, *Hep Genç Kalacağım* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2019), 283.

novel, in the moments before first seeing Macide, he complains of his deep boredom.

Hiçbir şey istemiyorum. Hiçbir şey bana cazip görünmüyor. Günden güne miskinleştiğimi hissediyorum ve bundan memnumum. Belki bir müddet sonra can sıkıntısı bile hissedemeyecek kadar büyük bir gevşeklğe düşeceğim.

I don't want anything. Nothing seems to be alluring to me. From day to day I feel myself becoming increasingly indolent and that makes me happy. Perhaps after a while I will fall into such a langor that I won't feel anything.

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For one who hopes to create something new in the world, to find unique new means of expression, the problem is that there seems to be no way to advance past the means of expression which have already been developed.

En akıllımızın kafası bile bizden evvelkilerin depo ettiği bir sürü bilgi ve tecrübenin ambarı olmaktan ileri geçemez. Yaratmak istediğimiz şey de bu mevcut malları şeklini değiştirerek piyasaya sürmekten ibaret.

Even the smartest one among us can't do much more than serve as a warehouse for storing a slew of information and experience from those before us. That which we aspire to create is nothing more than taking existing materials and changing their form in order to present it to the market.

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<sup>228</sup> Ali, *İçimizdeki Şeytan*, 14.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

As much as he tries to reach his desire through an inventive use of newly expressive language, Ömer admits that our very desires are articulated in the language of the Other. The anxiety over language in these opening pontifications closely matches that of Murat Belge and other narratives of the “language problem” who see the problem in the quality of the words at hand. In another early scene, Ömer listens in on a conversation between two colleagues, İsmet Şerif and Emin Kamil, and reflects on their philosophical language.

Her ikisi de büyük manalı kelimeler, girift cümleler kullanıyorlar, sözlerinin muayyen yerlerinde durarak yaptıkları tesiri kontrol ediyorlar, bazan de aynı zamanda söze başlayarak birbirlerini dinlemeden söyleniyorlardı. Ömer münakaşanın neye dair olduğunu anlamak istedi, kulağına gelen, idrak, tefekkür, kıstas, sistem, şuur gibi yüksek tabakadan kelimelere, kalıbımı basarım... fikir çığırtkanları, politika tellalı...mefkûre bezirgâni gibi münevver argosu numunelerinin karıştığını fark etti.

They both use big meaningful words, intricate sentences. They control the influence they make by checking the specific effect of their words, and sometimes, at the same time, they begin speaking without listening to each other’s words. Ömer wanted to understand what the conversation was about, those words reaching his ears, such as cognition, contemplation, criterion, system, and consciousness, I make my mold... idea-makers, policy-brokers... he noticed that the conceptual-mongering was mixed in with specimens of slang.

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The specific words that Ömer cites are indeed a diversity of different political and intellectual argots. The narrator gives the background of the two arguing men, explaining their constant search for new religious and philosophical ways of being. İsmet has used a traumatic injury from

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid, 55.

childhood as fodder for novels and in his weekly published articles. At one point, Emin even took up Buddhism, shaving his head and walking barefoot through farmland. He also briefly dabbled in Taoism (51). All of the colleagues use their life experiences and intellectual pursuits as ammunition to become more and more incomprehensible. There are almost too many words, a cacophony of speech in which one interlocutor is not waiting for the other to finish before contributing his own jumble of words. As opposed to the common belief that more words make it easier to explain oneself, the two intellectuals are overflowing with words that make them entirely incomprehensible to the other. The scene functions as one of Ali's best critiques of the Turkish intellectual and his linguistic anxiety: convinced he needs more words when he needs to focus on making them communicable to others. He is all expressiveness with no alignment. Exasperated by their senselessness, Ömer mutters to his friend Nihat that the two men are repeating themselves, and then promptly leaves the tavern in which they are socializing.

But Ömer is not much better. When it comes time to express his own thoughts, he often finds himself tongue-tied. Having expressed openly his desire for a more meaningful, less absurd existence, when faced with actual life in the form of a woman in need, he is suddenly at a loss for words. One of the major themes of the book is Ömer's struggle to put his thoughts into words. Not new words, but words at all. While the ostensible story revolves around his relationship to Macide, she most often acts as a backdrop for his own struggle to reconcile his inner world with reality, a struggle in which he mainly uses Macide as a vehicle.<sup>231</sup> In their interactions, Ömer

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<sup>231</sup> Korkmaz, *Sabahattin Ali: İnsan ve Eser: İnceleme*, 230-231.

immediately switches from the intellectual articulate about his frustrations, to a stumbling, stuttering child. This is true especially of the first time they actually meet. One evening Ömer decides to go to Macide's house in the middle of the night. Her caretakers are actually relatives of his, and he used to spend the night at their house when he was young. While there, he discovers that Macide is having financial and personal problems. Just before Ömer had arrived, Macide had been crying inconsolably, and had fled to her room and locked the door. Half drunk and love struck, he carries on an awkward conversation before being told his bed is ready for the night. As he sits up the night of the very day in which he first laid eyes on Macide, he promises to be of better consolation to Macide, and imagines how he will express his love for her as soon as he sees her.

But the next morning, as Macide exits her house, she sees Ömer standing dumbfounded in front of her door. With a nonchalant tone she asks.

"Siz misiniz? Bonjour!"
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"Is it you? Bonjour!"
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The rhetorical question and her tone, which indicates her slight surprise and perhaps even unease at his being at her house first thing in the morning after awkwardly coming over unannounced and half drunk in the middle of the night, unsettles Ömer's vision of a mutually enthusiastic and immediate infatuation. He stutters through a response.

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<sup>232</sup> Ali, *İçimizdeki Şeytan*, 65.

“Evet, benim... Geç vakit geldim...siz yatmıştınız.. Yani erken çekilmiştiniz, göremedim..geçmiş olsun..şey, yani başınız sağ olsun...”

“Yes...it’s me...I came by late... you had gone to bed... I mean you had withdrawn early, I didn’t see...get well soon...umm, I mean, my condolences...”

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Gone are all of his hifalutin proclamations of love and subtle expressions of feeling. But this does not mean that his response is void of emotion. He begins by aligning himself to Macide’s surprise by answering her rhetorical question, confirming both that it is him and that it is surprising for him to be there at her door. This sudden hesitance and bashfulness are actually a sign of Ömer’s emotional perceptiveness. They reveal his at least tacit understanding of Macide’s current difficult situation, perhaps less than interested to be talking about undying love first thing in the morning. There should be at least a moderate amount of pleasantries exchanged before a full-throated exchanging of vows. Ömer’s moderation is communicated through the combination of discourse markers (“yani” “şey”) and the author’s use of ellipses (meant to indicate pauses). He also offers a restatement of his well wishes, a redoubling of his recognition of her dismay, further aligning his own affective stance to the one that she has expressed in just three words. By centering his utterance around a recognition of her stress rather than his own plans for courtship, we can see how his words are as much a response to her mood as they are a statement of his own. Both of their emotional states are being actively constructed dialogically without any explicit illocutionary statements. Lastly, Ömer’s makes sure to say that he did not see Macide going to bed, which is to

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

say that Ömer heard from Macide's caretakers that she had been crying and locked herself in her room, and so wants to emphasize that he hadn't been there for that. By demonstrating his lack of definitive information, he steps back further from the assuredness he had planned to bring into the conversation and assumes a much more circumscribed epistemic stance, one that does not make claims to know fully Macide's actions or perspective.

It is not that Ömer is completely inept at reading other people's emotions. There are times in the novel where he is sensitive, perceptive, and even supportive of Macide. But more often than not he finds the actual work of emotional intelligence to be a much harder task than abstract emotional soliloquizing. Ultimately, he is a flawed protagonist because of his failures to be a husband to Macide, not because of his inability to clearly express himself.

This type of stancetaking-based reading is not limited to characters with complex emotional relationships. Even casual exchanges between strangers can reveal a great deal of emotional texture, drawn from social context and the motivations and negotiations of conversation participants. This can even be said of commercial and service sector exchanges in the novel. It should not be forgotten that one of the chief sources of conflict throughout the entire novel is money troubles. Financial insecurity troubles Macide when Ömer first meets her, and Ömer's own shortcomings to provide financially for his young wife also make him feel conflicted and inadequate. The beginning of chapter XVI, for example, begins with a description of their money troubles.

Parasızlık asıl en korkunç çehresiyle ay başında kendini gösterdi.

Pennilessness showed its worst face at the beginning of the month.

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Ömer is so worried about making ends meet that he gives off a look of desperation, as though to say, “Can’t you see the state I am in and offer to help?” to every person he sees in the street. He walks the streets of the city looking wistfully at shop windows, unable to buy any of the seductive wares they offer. One evening, he sees a large store is having a sale, and although he knows he can’t afford a thing, he is drawn in by the sight of a large crowd. In the scene that follows, Ömer stands over a pile of women’s socks and agonizes over whether or not to steal a pair as a present for Macide. He picks up a pair and greases it with his sweaty palms, moist from the crowded store and his own anxiety. He is afraid that if he soils it the shopkeepers will force him to buy it. He looks around paranoid that he will be apprehended at any moment by a shop attendant, asking him “Nedir bu avcunuzdaki?” (“What is that thing in your palm?”) The curt imagined call out by a store clerk combines the veneer of politeness (by using the second person formal pronoun) with a tone of accusation. But it isn’t even real. It is an imagined scenario in the mind of a young man obsessed with finding a way to express his love for his new wife.

Such a dramatic detour in the middle of the book about stealing socks might seem strange if the novel were actually focused on the internal torment of the wordless intellectual. But it makes perfect sense when understood as one of the ways that the emotionally inarticulate male character struggles to put his feelings into words and actions. Ömer admits that since they got married, he hasn’t bought Macide even the smallest gift, not even a single flower, not a piece of

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 144.

fruit or a handkerchief. To take a term from pop-psychology, he is thinking about the possibilities of gift giving since his other love languages have seemingly failed him. All he's had to prove his love so far is his words. But they are increasingly empty with nothing else to show for them. For this reason, buying socks is not merely a merchandise transaction, but represents the potential to express feelings where words cannot. As in all the examples from the books I will examine, service and retail interactions are invested with a whole host of other emotional concerns. This is especially true when those feelings, in turn, are intertwined with class anxiety or the gendered sense of responsibility towards the symbolism of gift giving.

Ömer's extreme hesitance towards spending money is contrasted by a brief moment in the next chapter. Chapter XVII begins with the narrator explaining that Ömer has recently been acting silent and lost in thought, a sign that he is trying to emerge out of a mental crisis. Macide for her part is trying to console him, to be helpful, and to show in any way possible that she doesn't doubt his inherent goodness. It is a brief portrait of one-sided emotional labor. But this brief marital tranquility will be interrupted one night, the narrator claims, when Ömer comes home with the news that they have been invited to a dinner and a music performance. It is clear from Macide's reaction to the news that she is less enthused; but, she does her best to dress up and be a good sport. When they arrive at the restaurant, Ömer looks out onto the garden and sees a group of bachelor men ignoring the music to instead constantly call on their waiters, stretching their necks to find them in the crowd, pointing in indeterminate directions, and closely examining their tabs. One of them calls out to the waiter:

Baksanıza!...Biz kaç porsiyon kaşar getirtmiştik?

Excuse us!...how many portions of Kashar cheese did we ask you to bring us?

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Why would Ömer focus on this small detail in the background of his own story? Because the bachelor men are so freehanded with their own money that they can't even keep track of what they've ordered. But at the same time, they don't care about the music that Ömer and Macide love so much. The bachelors represent a stark foil to the poor but mindful Ömer: they are rich and oblivious. Their attitude towards money, on display in the performative consumption of the restaurant, belies Ömer's own belief that if he somehow had the financial means, he would be able to properly care and show his affection for Macide. The bachelors are a sort of minor foil, partly because of the way that they expose Ömer's own delusions. They also show an unrepentant, arrogant machismo, holding a stance of hostile condescension and supremacy to anonymous waiters, whereas Ömer has shown himself to be paralyzingly concerned with what clerks and waiters might think about him. It is precisely because interactions with waiters and store clerks are inconsequential, brief, and anonymous that they show how much of morality begins in manners. Regardless of Ömer's personal failings throughout the novel with regards to his relationship with Macide, Sabahattin Ali fills the novel with these little peripheral details about affective interactions in order to show that Ömer is still thoughtful at certain moments.

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 160.

Waitstaff and the performative aspects of dining also play a small but important role at the climax of the novel. Ömer, Macide, and a group of their friends go to a fancy nightclub (*gazino*) in Büyükdere. Nobody in the group seems excited or energetic, giving off both an air of exhaustion (*yorgunluk*) and reluctance (*isteksizlik*), but they head into the nightclub nonetheless, out of a sense of duty to finish what they've started. At first the club and its staff seem equally unenthused, but once their presence is known, the nonplussed waiter at the door snaps into his service routine.

Burası müşterilerini savmış bir gazinoya benziyordu. Beyaz don ve gömlek içinde yalınayak ve uyku sersemi bir adam suratını asıp küfüre hazırlanarak ve camdan dışarı bakmaya bile lüzum görmeden kapıyı açtı, fakat muharrir Hüseyin beyle karşılaşınca tavrını değiştirip “Buyurun beyim!” diye itibar etti.

The place looked like a nightclub that was avoiding its customers. A man in white pants and shirt who had the look of a barefoot sleepwalker looked disapprovingly and was about getting ready to curse and without even needing to look out the window opened the door, but as soon as he was confronted with the editor Mr. Hüseyin, he changed his temperament and honored him with “Welcome, sir!”

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Unlike everyone else in this group, the waiter is made to perform the emotional labor or putting on a happy face and being attentive, even if it is an act. This attentiveness is critical, as Macide will soon reach a breaking point in her relationship with Ömer, specifically because of his lack of attentiveness to her. The group sits down at a table they are shown by the waiter, and they continue their conversation. After a few drinks, their shared mood of sadness returns, to which

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 229.

they attempt to remedy it with even more drinks. Macide tries to keep up, painfully taking shots, and is soon drunk. Flustered, she gets up to look for the bathroom.

Garson biraz ötede oturmakta olduğu iskemleden sıçrayarak tuvaleti gösterdi.

The waiter, who was sitting a little in front of her, leaped from his chair in order to show her the bathroom.

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Once there, she is the victim of attempted sexual assault by Ismet Şerif, who has followed in behind her. As Ismet looms over her, Macide thinks to herself that all of these men with whom she keeps company are all hypocrites and scoundrels. She thinks to herself:

“Müsamereden evvel birbirinden yüksek mevzularda konuşan, fikir aleminden yere inmek istemeyen, adi arzular ve ihtiraslara karşı numunelik bir istihfaf besleyen büyük ustalar..”

“Great masters who speak to one another about lofty subjects before ceremonies, who do not want to come down from the realm of ideas, who nurture an exemplary disdain against ordinary desires and ambitions..”

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Macide does finally make it out of the bathroom past Ismet and makes it back to the table where everyone is drunk and no one has noticed she was gone. More than that, there is now a strange woman sitting on Ömer’s lap, who claims to be his student and who owes him money. Ömer not only fails to protect his wife, but was busy flirting with another woman while she was being attacked. This is the last straw. Macide declares to herself that everything between them must

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 233.

end. In this scene filled with self-indulgent, emotionally oblivious intellectuals, who are absorbed in their own worlds and don't even notice their female friend being attacked, it ends up being a waiter who is the only one to notice Macide in her moment of need. In his quiet attentiveness in the background, the waiter who springs from his seat acts as a foil of the petit-bourgeois narcissist.

In her article about the lasting popularity of Sabahattin Ali in contemporary Turkey, Maureen Freely claims that the author had a special sensitivity and unwillingness to give in to the patriarchal expectations and stereotypes of Turkish society.<sup>239</sup> Freely says this stance closely reflects Ali's actual feelings towards gender relations in his life, for which he was publicly taunted for failing to act like a "real man". This helps us to better understand *İçimizdeki Şeytan* as a critical look not only at the emotional aloofness of the intellectual, but that of the emotional failures of men towards women as well. *İçimizdeki Şeytan* does not endorse or idolize Ömer's poetic ennui and expressive failures. It dramatizes them to show how a certain way of closed thinking and inability to bridge the gap between thought and action represents the devil inside of all of us.

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<sup>239</sup> Freely, "Sabahattin Ali"

## Aylak Adam and the Crowd of Strangers

Nasıl kolayca söyleyiyor bunu. Sevmek! Kelimelere herkes kendine göre bir anlam, bir değer veriyor galiba. Bu değerler aynı olmadıkça iki kişi iki ayrı dil konuşuyorlarmış biri olmuyor mu?

How easily he says this. To love! Words have a different meaning according to each person, they each give it a different value I suppose. As long as these values aren't the same, aren't these two people speaking different language?

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With these words, the narcissistic flâneur of the novel *Aylak Adam* (the Idle Man, 1959) seems to be expressing a truth that linguistics has been uncovering in recent decades: no single index of emotion corresponds exactly to the emotion itself.<sup>241</sup> The struggle of Turkish intellectuals to find the right word to express themselves is not a fate particular to them because of their dysfunctional national language, but because emotional expression is a normal challenge with which we must all grapple in our interpersonal relationships. *Aylak Adam* is the first novel by the author Yusuf Atılgan. The novel describes in detail one year in the life of a well-to-do, petit bourgeois idler referred to in the text as C., who spends most of his time sitting in coffee shops and restaurants, attending art events and movie screenings, and most importantly wandering the streets of Istanbul. During his wandering, he is on constant lookout for his ideal woman, one he

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<sup>240</sup> Atılgan, pg. 89.

<sup>241</sup> Russell, pg. 25

is sure he will recognize and instantly fall in love with as soon as he sees her. This male fantasy is almost identical to Ömer's.

Coming out twenty years after *İçimizdeki Şeytan*, the novel was published towards the end of the ten years of power held by the Democrat Party (DP), one which had tried to financially suffocate the activities of the Turkish Language Society (TDK). Shortly afterwards in 1960, a military coup would overthrow the DP and reinstitute funding for the TDK, along with a circular sent out to all ministries in January of the next year forbidding any older Turkish words for which Öztürkçe equivalents were available.<sup>242</sup> This contemporaneous history of the state of language politics, however, reveals very little about the stylistic choices of *Aylak Adam*, choices which have attracted a great deal of attention from critics since its first publication. Berna Moran, for instance, talks about some of Atılgan's narrative techniques which he pioneered for the first time in the Turkish novel:

In *Aylak Adam*...strategies such as internal analysis, internal monologue, and quoted internal monologue are used extensively in order to exhibit C's consciousness. The reader also learns about C's problems, his thoughts, his philosophy of life and his feelings through his internal conversations, from the narrator, and from what others say about C.. The reason why the writer focuses on C's psychology in his first novel is to delve deeply into the inner world of a person in a novel who doesn't resemble others and by doing so

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<sup>242</sup> Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 157.

create a new character.<sup>243</sup>

Moran says that this approach is used to draw out the theme of C.'s disconnection from society, and his inability to form relationships with others. Atılğan's choice of language was in the service of creating a psychological-literary portrait rather than offering a challenge to the Language Reforms. This focus on the apolitical individual came at a time right before the era of politically committed literature in the long 1960s.<sup>244</sup> But Orhan Koçak rejects this explanation, saying it is contradicted by the fact the novel's second edition was published by a leftwing press, by Atılğan's own socialist activism, and by the opinions of Fathi Naci, perhaps the most famous Turkish Marxist literary critic, who loved the book. Naci went so far as to say:

There is a conscious language effort. Moreover, it has a style. I say "moreover" because recently clean language has been the chief anxiety of our novelists; but when writing in a clean language, there is a difference between attaining the language shared among intellectuals and between having a personal style...he didn't just attain this shared

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<sup>243</sup> "Aylak Adam'da... C.'nin bilincini sergilemek için iç çözümleme, aktarılan iç konuşma, alıntılanan iç konuşma gibi yöntemlerden yararlanır bol bol. Okur da C.'nin sorununu, düşüncelerini, yaşam felsefesini ve duygularını kah C.'nin iç konuşmalarından, kah anlatıcıdan, kah C.'nin başkalarına söylediklerinden öğrenir. Yazarın, ilk romanında C.'nin psikolojisi üzerinde durmasının nedeni, başkalarına benzemeyen bir roman kişisini, onun iç dünyasına inerek derinlemesine işlemek ve böylece bir karakter yaratmaktır." Moran, *Türk Romanına*, 293-4.

<sup>244</sup> Term used by Kenan Sharpe referring to the period of insurgent leftwing activism in Turkey between the time of the first military coup in 1960 and the last one in brutal coup of 1980, as opposed to the second "coup by memorandum" in 1971. This popular refrain of claiming authors to have been misunderstood in their own times, has also been used in reference to Atay and Tanpınar, and therefore makes them the darlings of recent scholarship. See Soner Sezer, "Aylak Adam: 'Biliyordu; anlamazlardı' - K24," T24, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://t24.com.tr/k24/yazi/aylak-adam-biliyordu-anlamazlardi,1259>.

language with intellectuals; he found his own style.<sup>245</sup>

Orhan Koçak rejects the myth of a hostile leftist reaction to the book and shows that many ardent leftists spoke in its defense. He explains that the main resistance to the novel has always been its centering of individual psychology. There has been a resistance to the “individualism” or “extreme individualism” of the book as an explanatory framework, rather than looking to the social context for the protagonist’s social isolation. For example, writer and critic Tahir Alangu complained that the author reduces everything to a psychological explanation, whereas each person’s behaviors are ultimately rooted in social problems. Alangu faults the novel for failing to provide a synthesis between the individual and larger structures. We do not see the larger social context for C.’s social isolation, but rather, the glaring allusions to paternal trauma, still firmly isolated in one person’s psychic economy.

But I claim that *Aylak Adam* is actually very interested in the ways that C.’s emotions are shaped first and foremost by the society that constantly surrounds him. All throughout the novel, it is possible to see how the portrayals of his solipsistic mental life actually show him in constant affective interaction with those around him in the form of “visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion.”<sup>246</sup> As a physical

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<sup>245</sup> “Bilinçli dil çabası var. Üstelik üslubu var. Şunun için “üstelik” diyorum: Son zamanlarda temiz dil, bütün romancılarımızın baş kaygısı; ama temiz bir dille yazmak, aydın takımının ulaştığı ortalama dili sürdürmek başka, kişisel bir üslubu olmak başka...Ortalama bir aydın dilini sürdürmekle yetinmiyor; kendi üslubunu bulmuş.” Fethi Naci, *Yüzyılın 100 Türk Romanı* (İstanbul: Türk İş Bankası, 2007), 352-3.

<sup>246</sup> Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” *The Affect Theory Reader* 1 (2010): 1.

body placed in relation to loud bars and crowded cafes, C. is reflexively effected in ways he articulates using a variety of linguistic strategies, from emotional metaphors, to jarring imagery, to actual verbal interactions with the people he shares space with. This range of emotions—moving in real time from an unnamed intensity to one of C.’s many passive aggressive comments—is made possible by the stream of consciousness style narration for which the novel is famous.

The novel opens with the famous line that heralds C.’s elusive search for the perfect woman.

Birden kaldırımlardan taşan kalabalıkta onun da olabileceği aklıma geldi.
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Suddenly it came to me that she could also be there amongst the crowd overflowing the sidewalks.
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The ‘O’ (she) that C. longs for seems as if to be a stand-in for Lacan’s *Objet Petit a* as described by Lacan: the unattainable object of desire. Indeed, the novel has received no small number of Lacanian readings which frame C.’s wanderings as precisely the ever-deferred obtainment of one’s desire.<sup>248</sup> Because of how the book ties C.’s consuming search for an abstract ideal woman to a crucial Oedipal event in C.’s childhood, it has also received its fair share of more traditional Freudian readings. But rather than plumbing this depth model of emotions using increasingly obscure psychoanalytic formulations, one has only to read the next sentence in the

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<sup>247</sup> Yusuf Atılgan, *Aylak Adam*, 1st ed. (İstanbul: Can Roman, 2017), 13.

<sup>248</sup> Koçak’s *Tehlikeli Dönüşler* is largely a Lacanian reading of this sort.

novel to see feelings right at the surface. The second sentence shifts from third to first person, wherein C. gives the first mention of emotions in the novel. But they are not directed at C.'s fantasy woman. They are instead in reference to a waiter.

İçimdeki sıkıntı eridi. (Bu sıkıntı garsonun yüzündendi...

The annoyance within me dissipated (this annoyance was due to the waiter...

249

In the first example in the text of internal stream of conscious, C. speculates that his feeling of *sıkıntı* (agitation/annoyance) came from the revulsion at the physical appearance of the waiter who had just served him before the opening of the novel. C. remembers looking at his face, shriveled up from grinning, his eyes smarmy and obtrusive. Attempting to avoid touching the waiter's hand, he doesn't hand him his money. Most of the first page of the novel is devoted to C. experiencing himself immersed in his surroundings: the shaved faces of men, the carefree looks of women, the distorted purple color in the face of children selling newspapers in the cold. The stimuli of his environment disrupts his attention, leaving his *sıkıntı* sitting inside him like a heavy weight ("yine lök gibi oturdu içime o deminki sıkıntı").<sup>250</sup> On second thought, he decides, it's not the waiter who annoyed him, but a whole host of interactions he's built up from repeat visits to that particular street: a sex worker waiting in front of a cinema who gave him feelings of revulsion, the two tailors who had punched him a month ago on a night he also turned down this

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<sup>249</sup> Atılğan, *Aylak Adam*, 13.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

street, but also perhaps some extra, intangible reason. This initial scene corresponds to what Mesquita et. al. say about how socio-cultural environments influence emotions, and how emotions are themselves a type of ‘reaching out to the world’:

Emotions are not just subjective experiences, but rather, they claim a particular representation of the world and they represent the individual’s (intended) dealings with this relationship...Emotions (aim to) change relationships in a given direction, or alternatively, maintain their current state. They are thus consequential to the individual’s social environment.<sup>251</sup>

With so much attention given to the ways that the novel examines the inner psychological mysteries of C., seeing emotions as intersubjective makes C. far less enigmatic. This scanning by C. of his surroundings, followed by an emotional reaction to this environment, is a common refrain in the novel.

This actually makes sense with regards to the author’s goal of creating a psychological-literary portrait of the petit-bourgeois intellectual. As Abdullah Koçal explains

Before anything else, the Idle Man (Aylak Adam) isn’t seen as a normal person by those around him. Even his friend Sadık says he is crazy. One of the reasons for this is that C. is different from everybody, he isn’t an example. He isn’t one to spend his life in a three-

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<sup>251</sup> Mesquita, De Leersnyder, and Boiger, “Cultural Psychology,” 393.

room house, with one girl, one boy, two children and his wife, returning in the evening with packages in hand, in short, experiencing the same things every day.<sup>252</sup>

The petit-bourgeois lifestyle which C. lives, one of freedom from domestic responsibilities and mundane tastes, is predicated upon a rejection of the ways that the masses live their life. His love of art and cinema is as much a performance of his cultural capital as it something he enjoys for its own sake. The visceral repugnance he has for crowds and strangers throughout the novel is very much in line with his own identity as intellectual, one which requires a sense of superiority to function. By showing how much C. invests into condescending to the society around him, Atılğan is in fact using affect to provide a synthesis between the individual and larger structures.

These moments also come with attempts by C. to put words to his mood, grasping at vague emotional states with creative uses of words. Later in the book, while sitting in the pastry shop waiting for his love interest to show up, C. gets annoyed at the frantic crowd which has gathered.<sup>253</sup> Men and woman frantically push and pull their way into the space, and their overwhelming sameness is upsetting. At the same time, C. is waiting impatiently for one of his love interests to arrive. The feeling of delay makes him *üzgün* (sad) in a certain specific way that

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<sup>252</sup> “Her şeyden önce Aylak Adam, çevresinde normal bir insan olarak görülmez. Hatta arkadaş Sadık onun kaçık olduğunu söyler. Bunun sebeplerinden biri C'nin herkesten farklı olması, bir örnek olmayışıdır. Hayatını üç odalı bir evde, biri kız biri erkek iki çocuğu ve karısıyla geçirmek, akşamları ellerinde paketlerle dönmek kısacası her gün aynı şeyleri yaşamak ona göre değildir.” Abdullah Koçal, “Ahmet Mithat'tan Leyla Erbil'e Türk Edebiyatında 'Aylak Tipi'nin Kültürel ve Düşünsel Gelişimi,” Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi 2010, no. 21 (2010): 220.

<sup>253</sup> Atılğan, *Aylak Adam*, 31-2.

he tries to explain precisely with some creative adjectives.

Ama tatlımsı bir üzüntü bu, kahredici değil, yerleşik.
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But it was a sweet kind of sadness, not overpowering, settled.
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254

This would seem like a perfect example of a moment in which words fail to point precisely the emotion that C. is feeling. But as this stream of consciousness clearly demonstrates, his affective relationship to place has already done much to explain it. What frustrates his search for O is not merely the failure of particular women to fulfill his elusive desire, but the fact that his search necessarily takes place amongst such a large and undifferentiated crowd. His impatience is not experienced in isolation, but grows in reaction to the mood of the place he is in. We as readers don't need to rely on C.'s specific articulation of the precise type of *üzgün* that he feels through an unusual juxtaposition of adjectives, but through the contextualization of the atmosphere in which he is waiting.

C.'s romantic pursuits are almost always interrupted by the crowd. In another scene C. and the woman he is seeing, Güler, go to the cinema. As they take their seats, Güler asks C. what he is thinking, and he says he is thinking about how there is some sort of shared feeling among those entering the theatre. Everyone is using the space for different purposes, whether it be to get out of the rain, to take a nap, or to kiss in the dark. The few people who actually come to experience the art of cinema would prefer that the theatre remain silent. But instead there is the

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 32.

incessant interruption of the sounds of other people sharing the space: laughter, coughing, and sniffing. After themselves making out in the dark, C. and Güler get up to leave and C. notices a man caressing a woman's thigh underneath her skirt. The image gives C. a momentary emotional jumble (*duygular karmaşası*): he is happy to leave, but regrets having gotten up, and wishes to kick the man caressing the woman's thigh.

C. also has emotional reactions to individuals, oftentimes the waiters who tend to him while he sits around waiting for love interests to show up. Early in the novel he goes to an empty bar and sits next to the counter. The bartender is mechanically drying an already dry zinc countertop, a detail noticed by C. which makes the bartender appear at first as almost robot like. His verbal interaction with the waiter is curt and transactional, asking the waiter for non-warm Kavaklıdere wine and whatever meze is available.<sup>255</sup> He puts on an air of aloofness and indifference in order to soften what are in fact his very finicky demands. The waiter in turn fronts a sense of promptness, cutting down his order taking to the utilitarian but still servile “ne istersiniz?” (“what would you like”) But having flattened out his affect to a mere surface against which to give orders, the bartender arouses C.'s empathetic curiosity. He wonders who the bartender is speaking to behind an order window, then can't take his eyes off him as he stands in place as though having been struck. His mechanical subservience is off-putting to C., causing him to reflect on how boring work can be for people. This is perhaps not the type of understanding of how psychologies are rooted in social problems like that which Tahir Alangu was hoping for,

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<sup>255</sup> Atılğan, *Aylak Adam*, 25.

but it nonetheless shows how the feigned flatness of a bartender can act as an affective catalyst for interpersonal empathy. The interaction helps us to see how often C's mental reflections are rooted first and foremost in intersubjective exchanges.

This flat affect of the waiter comes up again in another scene when C. and Güler go for dinner at a seaside restaurant in Sariyer.<sup>256</sup> Güler is afraid of being seen, and C. selects a seat in the corner. When the waiter comes promptly with a menu, C. flippantly dismisses him.

Biraz sonra uğrarsın
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Come by a little later
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257

These three words can be dissected to reveal a great deal of emotional detail. Most glaring is the informal second person, normal for an exchange between clients and waiters at a fancy restaurant in Istanbul in the 1950s, but not entirely inevitable. But rather than a direct request, C. claims that the waiter return shortly by stating that he will. This has the effect of being both more patronizing and more nonchalant. From the surrounding context of the exchange with the waiter it is clear that C.'s primary motivation in the moment is to ease Güler's anxiety, who is visibly restless (*tedirgin*). The narrator uses this word directly, but like most feelings of anxiety throughout the novel, it's already been clearly shown from her behavior and past words. Much

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

has been made of the inclusion of Güler's perspective through the inclusion of her letters in the novel. One of their most important roles is in giving ample context for the hesitations, indecision, and silences that proceed in her verbal interactions with C. In her letter immediately preceding the dinner in Sariyer, she explains to her friend that she herself has trouble understanding C.'s words and motivations. In talking about his vague statement about love and marriage, she had wondered to her friend in a previous chapter:

Sevişmek dediği acaba neydi?
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When he said to make love, what did he mean?
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258

The meaning of any particular word cannot be deciphered in the abstract. C. too states the difficulty of building alignment in relation to overcoming Güler's anxiety when she shows up to the dinner.

Konuşmak yararsızdı ama konuştu
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Speaking was useless but he spoke.
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259

Although the content itself might be trivial, it is the only way to grasp, however indirectly, at what is meant. C. tries to ease Güler's worry by saying that nobody else can see her there in the

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 101.

restaurant; that it is just the two of them. He then tries to distract her by ordering something from the menu. When he asks her what she would like to eat, she responds:

Bilmem. Sen ne yersen ben de ondan yerim.
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I don't know. Whatever you eat is what I'll have.
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260

Ordering food is quite simply an opportunity for alignment. By moving from her asymmetrical feelings about the place to an opportunity to agreeing about what to eat, C. tries to prompt an easy agreement between the two. Güler's indifference and willingness to eat whatever C. wants is both an agreement as well as a reaffirmation that she is still more concerned with being seen in the restaurant. Not only that, but Güler is able to defer her choice making to C.'s judgement, presaging her following comment about not remembering that he is wealthy. Güler can barely remember the names of the exotic things that C. picks from the menu. After the waiter brings the food, C. encourages her to eat.

Pintilik etme sakın. İstakoz ister misin?
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Don't be cheap. Do you want lobster?
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261

By offering to order lobster, C. reaffirms both his ability to be undisturbed by social pressures thanks to his wealth, and his willingness to dote on Güler, if not emotionally in a consistent way

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

then at least materially. The two of them set to drinking their alcohol, with the narration describing the affectively invested ways that each does so (C.'s hand is *sinirli* and *gergin*, while Güler is bashful with a few sips and crinkles her nose in a childish way). Then C. goes to light a cigarette and the waiter approaches with a lit lighter.

—hep kendiminden yakarım...Sen bize iki istakoz getir.
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—I always light my own...you bring us two lobsters.
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262

Güler stops eating and says to C. “you’ve upset him” (*‘kırдын onu’*). C. reminds her that he doesn’t get upset, that it’s his duty to maintain a flat affect as part of the arrangement of the service economy. It is the waiter’s job not merely to bring food, but also to bear the brunt of dismissiveness and disdain from rich clientele. When Güler is able to see clearly in this interaction with a waiter how much money can smooth over the affective bumps of a social space, that she is finally able to align her mood completely to C.’s, allowing herself to indulge in carefree epicurean enjoyment. The couple finally finds gustatory alignment when there is enough food and drink to bring down the anxieties of confrontation.

But at the very end of the novel, C. reaches the limit of being able to push around those in the service industry. In the very last chapter of the novel, while sitting with a headache in a dessert shop, disdainfully comparing the crowds in the street to ants, he suddenly sees a woman

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 102.

who turns her head and looks into the shop. All of a sudden, C.'s headache disappears, and he realizes that this must be Her. He envisions grabbing her by the arm and speaking to her.

‘—Merhaba,’ dese, belki başka söz bile söylemeden anlaşacaklardı. Belki yalnız, ‘—sus, biliyorum,’ diyecekti.

If he said ‘—Hello,’ maybe they’d understand each other without saying another word. Perhaps she would merely say ‘—quiet, I know.’

263

As it turns out, and could probably be guessed, the perfect fantasy of the petit-bourgeois narcissist is to have a woman understand him perfectly without having to talk at all. He immediately takes off after her on foot, but she boards a bus. Desperate, he tries to flag down a taxi to follow in pursuit, but they are all full, so he decides to stand in the middle of the road and force one to stop. He does so, and as the taxi driver comes to confront him, C. can just make out the annoyed gaze of the passenger, guessing he is perhaps a commissioner. But because the taxi driver is already at the service of this rich passenger, he shows none of the same flat, deferent affect that C. is used to. The passive crowd, which he thinks he can control and lord over like ants, suddenly speaks back.

—İtoğlu, dedi. Canına mı susadın?

—Beni otobü...

—Son of a bitch, he said. Do you have a death wish?

—The bus was...

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 189.

Before C. even has time to think about alignment, the taxi driver shoves him in the chest. In return, C. punches him in the nose and he falls to the ground. At this point, we hear from the voices in the crowd, who are in shock that C. has broken the taxi driver's nose, A policeman shows up and an anonymous bystander explains that it was all C.'s fault, having waved down the taxi and punched the driver. It is as though the crowd, who for most of the novel has functioned as an ambient annoyance for C., is finally giving their own opinions of C. They all look on angrily at C., who realizes that the woman of his fantasies, whom he finally had discovered, has slipped out of his reach. Feeling sorry for himself, he is apprehended by the police officer.

—Ne oldu? Anlat.

—Otobüse yetişecektim.

Sustu. Konuşmak gereksizdi. Bundan sonra kimseye ondan söz etmeyecekti. Biliyordun; anlamazlardı.

—What happened? Explain.

—I was going to catch the bus.

He went silent. Speaking was useless. From then on, he wouldn't speak about her to anyone. He knew; they wouldn't understand.

When we think of C. not as a dandy tortured by the dysfunctions of the Turkish language, and more as a conceited and arrogant petit-bourgeois narcissist who is used to always getting his way,

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

especially with those in the service economy, these final words of the novel have much less of an existential ring to them. Rather than suffering from the ceaseless search for his *Objet Petit a*, C.s suffers from staking his identity and emotional outlook on condescending to those around him. The consequences of this outlook eventually catch up with him, before he can catch up to his desire.

### **Bir Gün Tek Başına and Class Politics at the Table**

*Bir Gün Tek Başına* (*One Day All Alone*, 1974) by Vedat Türkali, an enormous novel on its own, is also filled to the brim with feelings. These feelings do not simply emerge fully-formed from the tortured mind of the protagonist Kenan, but are shown at every step to be the result of Kenan's relationship to national politics, gender relations, class anxiety, and the looming crisis of masculinity. At the same time, the reader also spends considerable time with Kenan's mistress Günsel, and so is able to see how all of these contexts play out differently for a woman who in many ways represents his foil. Held up against Kenan's insecurities and toxic emotional self-policing, Günsel's own experiences prove that there is no one national emotional ethos, no default cultural psychology typified by the intellectual, but rather that this is the effect created by an overwhelming focus in Turkish novels by and for the petit-bourgeois narcissist.

The novel follows its protagonist Kenan as he pursues an extramarital affair with a younger revolutionary woman named Günsel behind the back (at least initially) of his petit-bourgeois wife, Nermin. In the beginning of the novel, Kenan grapples with his now apolitical

domestic life, having previously been detained as a student, an experience that scared him away from politics. As he admits in a monologue:

Bende iş yokmuş. İki tokatlıkmiş demek bütün direncim, inancım...

I have nothing to do with it. Two smacks meant that all of my resistance, my beliefs...

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It took very little to deter Kenan from politics in his youth. Kenan is now trying to find meaning in his married, petit-bourgeois life, and earning a living as a bookshop owner. This situation is similar to that described by Burcu Alkan (2018), wherein leftist novels in this period often show “the intellectuals’ disengagement from the state during the unfolding historical transformation, their inability to communicate with the people, and the consequences of their dual disconnection.”<sup>267</sup>

But Kenan’s domestic doldrums are suddenly interrupted when he meets Günsel, a college student who embodies the selfless, committed ethics of a dedicated revolutionary. Her very stance and attitude pose a challenge to Kenan’s masculine agency. From the very first moment when they meet at a restaurant, Kenan is unsettled by her personality: confident, opinionated, and committed. When she walks into the restaurant, a very drunk Kenan mistakes her for his own wife Nermin and tells her she’s late. Günsel is confused and Kenan quickly realizes he has mistaken her for his wife, becoming apologetic for doing so:

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<sup>266</sup> Vedat Türkali, *Bir Gün Tek Başına*, 6th ed. (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2018), 14.

<sup>267</sup> Burcu Alkan, *Promethean Encounters: Representation of the Intellectual in the Modern Turkish Novel of the 1970s* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018), 1-2.

— Kızgın mısın bana yoksa? dedi, yine yavaşça eğilip. Kız aynı yumuşak gülüşle bakıyordu Kenan'a.

— Kızgın mı? Neden?..

Kenan da gülümsemeye çalıştı, gözlerini kırpıştırarak. Yeniden toparlanmaya çalıştı.

— Sonra her şeyi anlatacağım Nerminciğim, dedi.

Kız iyice şaşırılmış baktı, baktı; birden gülmeye başladı. Sinirleri boşalmış gibi gülüyordu ki usulca topladı kendini; tatlı yumuşak gülümsemesine döndü.

— Are you angry with me? she said, leaning over again slowly. She was looking at Kenan with the same soft smile.

— Angry? What for?..

Kenan also tried to smile, blinking. He tried to gather himself again.

— I'll tell you everything later, sweet Nermin, he said.

The girl looked very surprised, she looked at him; Suddenly she started laughing. She was laughing like she had lost it, but then she gently returned to herself; her sweet, soft smile returned.

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From the very first moment, Günsel is cool and collected, while Kenan is thrown off balance, trying to align himself to her by first asking about her emotional state, and then trying to smile to pretend that he, too, is just having a good time. His smile here, already itself an unlexicalized emotion, is simultaneously indexable to three different pragmatic factors: Kenan's emotional state, but also the reader's assumption of why he is forcing a smile, and what Günsel, as Kenan's

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<sup>268</sup> Türkali, *Bir Gün Tek Başına*, 46.

intended audience, might understand from the smile. In return, Günsel's smile seems natural, effortless, although admittedly only to Kenan and the reader. Although multifaceted, the complexity of this initial emotional encounter sets the stage for Kenan and Günsel's relationship, which will involve a constant switching between different dynamics.<sup>269</sup> Immediately after this initial blunder, Günsel continues to show off her self-confidence by reciting Nâzım Hikmet from memory.

Published in 1974 in the wake of the 1971 coup by memorandum, the novel is set in the turbulent period leading up to and during the first military coup in 1960, (a common strategy for leftist reflection in the March 12 generation of novels). It is autobiographical in many aspects, with the author Vedat Türkali drawing many of the novel's vivid details from his own experience. Türkali had spent seven years in prison during the DP-era for his communist activities and was intimately familiar with both the left's struggle and the state's brutal reaction to it. In this way, *Bir Gün Tek Başına* reflects many of the psychological effects of what Günay-Erkol identifies as *endo-colonialism*, or militarized masculinity which creates a culture of oppression and alienation:

The military state treated its citizens like children who needed to civilize themselves into a culture of authority with masculine prerogatives..politics is not something people experience next to their personal affairs, but is rather a web of experiences that make

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<sup>269</sup> A common pattern which is often gendered is that of teaching versus play, two modes with both characters constantly fall into at various points in the novel. Whereas teaching and discipline share a stance focused on hierarchy and power, play and routine encourage a stance of connection and solidarity. See Paul Kockelman, "Stance: Sociolinguistic Perspectives—Edited by Alexandra Jaffe," *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 22, no. 2 (2012): E105–8.

them construct and realize their inner selves. Men are stuck between potency and impotence, and beset by questions about their masculine agency.<sup>270</sup>

Even though Kenan and other leftists like him opposed the oppressive military regimes which initiated coups throughout the middle of the 20th century, they were nevertheless deeply affected by them, both emotionally and physically. Also relevant is the legacy of Atatürk and his government, which was before everything else had been a military regime. Leftists of the “Hamlet Generation”, as Bülent Somay calls them, had inherited the masculine prerogatives of Kemalism’s paternalism, and tried to find a way to break out of them. Politics shades many of the emotions in the novel, but not through the abstract determination of a national allegorical psychosis as seen in Kenan’s dysfunctions, but through the much more specific dynamics of cultural chauvinism.

We can see how class politics, masculine fragility, and interpersonal emotional interactions intersect in some of the restaurant scenes in the novel. In one of the opening scenes which depicts his life before meeting Günsel, Kenan goes to a restaurant to see his childhood friend Rasim. Rasim represents the epitome of the petit-bourgeois lifestyle: a wealthy childhood friend who represents “the other side”, namely, those who support the conservative president Adnan Menderes.<sup>271</sup> When he arrives, Kenan sees Rasim gladhanding some acquaintances and being flocked to by the waitstaff. But Rasim demands to have his order taken by the head waiter. When he does come sit down at Kenan’s table, Rasim asks everyone what they should drink.

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<sup>270</sup> Günay-Erkol, *Broken Masculinities*, 163-4.

<sup>271</sup> Türkali, *Bir Gün Tek Başına*, 33.

Kenan responds:

Bilmem....Pek bir şey istemiyorum ben...
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I don't know... I don't really want much of anything...
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We can read Kenan's request as anything but literal. It seems more likely than he is trying to express his own general state of ennui by means of a feigned lack of appetite. The reader can understand from the context that Kenan is having a bad day, or that he is moping more generally over his meaningless petit-bourgeois existence. It is also possible that he understands Rasim's performative show of *torpil* (string-pulling) and is more than willing to let him show off his ordering savvy, or even that he is embarrassed by Rasim's conspicuous consumption and the political values it represents, refusing to play the game. Ordering food at a restaurant always offers the opportunity to perform, whether it be performing one's class, one's personal standing at a particular establishment, or even as a way to rub one's friend's nose in it. None of this is implied semantically by Kenan's actual response but is all clearly implied pragmatically. Despite Kenan's feigned (or real) lack of appetite, Rasim gets the waiter's attention and soon the table is filled with all types of appetizers and carafes of raki. Even though Rasim seems to represent everything that he claims to despise, Kenan still seems to suffer a twinge of inferiority when treated to such a conspicuous display of consumption. All of Kenan's class anxiety over being a

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 32.

member of the petit-bourgeois gets played out in this small dining scene. In another, the reader is shown how Kenan's class anxiety also surfaces when dining with the working class.

Later, towards the middle of the book, Kenan experiences a moment of acute crisis related to masculinity. He is feeling overwhelmed by his inability to get over his fears and get involved with politics and emasculated in the face of Günsel's seeming fearlessness. When she finally yells at him, saying, "I'm fed up with your petty bourgeois depressions"<sup>273</sup>, he decides to wander aimlessly, and ends up walking the streets of Mevlanakapı, a working class neighborhood of Istanbul. He peers into a coffee shop but shies away at the last moment and goes instead into what appears to be a ramshackle restaurant.<sup>274</sup> Unable to easily discern the unwritten contextual rules of the space based on the type of establishment it's supposed to be, Kenan is unsure how to act. A haggard looking waiter comes up to him quickly to receive him. In contrast to the deference paid to Rasim as he entered the restaurant at the beginning of the novel, Kenan is met by a man who offers a sense of camaraderie, offering to take his coat with a smile and brotherly language.

— Paltonuzu alalım ağbi...
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— Let's take your coat, brother...
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<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 309.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 307.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 308.

Of the many examples of interactions with waiters throughout this chapter, this is one of the only ones in which the waiter is allowed to display his own genuine affective stance. The use of the optative mood (*alalm*) works in tandem with the term of endearment to give a tone of welcoming and brotherliness to Kenan, who is clearly a stranger to the neighborhood and out of his element. In a novel about Marxist militants, this is the first moment in the entire novel where an actual working class person speaks of his own emotional volition. After removing his coat, Kenan tries to create alignment, attempting the same convivial and warm attitude toward the waiter by casually asking about the menu.

— Izgara ne var?..
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—What's on the grill?..
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The waiter tells him the grill has been put out, but offers him some other choices of things to eat. Kenan's inability to understand what is on the menu mirrors in many ways his inability to understand the locality's social cues and affective rituals. This scene is the emotional-pragmatic equivalent of Kenan's entire existential conundrum: he is a leftist who cannot 'speak to the masses'. So much of the problem of 'speaking to the masses' during the 1960s and 1970s was blamed on the obfuscatory nature of Marxist jargon, (as will be shown in chapter 5, since Leylâ

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

Erbil makes a similar case in *Tuhaf Bir Kadın*). But as it turns out, it is not the lexicon, but rather, the whole edifice of stancetaking which is the source of miscommunication between intellectuals and the working class. This becomes glaringly obvious when the waiter asks Kenan what he would like to drink.

— İçki alacak mısın ağbicum?..

Garson aynı sırtık yüzle bekliyordu. Kenan ne diyeceğini bilemeden baktı adama, sonra,

— İçki mi?., dedi. Ramazan değil mi?..

Takılmak için söylemişti. Kimi yerlerde içki vermezlerdi ramazanda. Hele Anadolu'da gündüzün yemek bile bulamazsın. Daha da sırttı garson:

— İdare ediyoruz, dedi. İsterseniz çılıbr yaptırayım size.

— Will you have a drink brother?

The waiter stood waiting there with the same stupid grinning face. Kenan looked at the man without knowing what to say,

Then,

— A drink? Isn't it Ramadan? ..

He had said that to play along. In some places, they wouldn't even serve drinks during Ramadan. In Anatolia you couldn't even find food during the daytime. The waiter grinned more broadly:

— We're making do, he said. If you like, I can have them make you poached eggs with yoghurt.

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In this passage we have several examples of emotional pragmatics. First is the waiter's smile, which is described by the word 'sırtık', meaning "given to grinning unpleasantly or stupidly." In

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

the context, it is not entirely clear whether this stupid grin is perceived to be so because the waiter is simpleminded, or whether the waiter himself finds the situation comical and awkward, or if Kenan is actually misinterpreting a thin veneer of cordiality for genuine, foolish enthusiasm. But this ambiguity is not due to the expressive inadequacies of the text, but rather, to an intentional recreation of the mood of the scene. There is also the interesting use of the word 'takılmak' to describe Kenan's justification for asking about Ramazan. Kenan is flustered by the offering of alcohol, assuming that a place like this wouldn't have anything to drink during Ramadan. He says that he asks in order to 'takılmak' which could mean 'to play along' or 'to crack a joke,' While the latter is more likely from the context, it should be clear how this double meaning heightens the sense of Kenan's own indecision on how to align himself, whether through piety or through humor. He seeks alignment by showing slight disbelief, and making it clear that he is, in fact, aware of the holy month, but does so in such a way that it sounds as if he is less offended himself at being offered alcohol than surprised that yokels would be offering to it outsiders. It comes off as more of a condescension than a gesture of solidarity. The waiter responds with intentional vagueness by saying, "We're making do", which can be understood to be both earnestly obliging and backhanded sarcasm. As the grinning waiter turns away, Kenan notices another smiling face: that of Adnan Menderes smiling in a portrait, looking on at another portrait of Atatürk. This is a small clue which is replete with meaning, speaking volumes about what a Turkish intellectual at the time would see as the glaring contradiction between the values represented by Kemalism on one side, and the reactionary conservatism of the DP on the other.

The rest of the interaction does not go well. Kenan will end up getting into a misunderstanding with some workers who reveal themselves to be taken in by conservative politics and they will end up robbing him and beating him up. But this misunderstanding can be traced back to the initial interaction with the waiter, with whom Kenan is unable to reach an intersubjective alignment. This scene is crucial to the novel as a whole, as it marks the moment when Kenan does try to reach past his comfortable petit-bourgeois bubble, and is roundly punished for it. His failure to bridge the political divide, determined by the pragmatics of emotion, ends up being pivotal.

In the second half of the novel, political tensions erupt as the Kenan and Günsel become first-hand witnesses to the social upheavals leading up to the 1960 military coup. In addition to these political developments, Kenan and Günsel also grapple with personal choices: Kenan must decide whether or not to leave his wife, and Günsel' must decide whether or to keep her pregnancy, Kenan's baby, a secret from him. *Bir Gün Tek Başına* makes ample use of stream of consciousness techniques, allowing the characters to work through their hesitations, doubts, desires and fears. Kenan continues to feel depressed and a sense of self-loathing for his inability to show commitment or even an authentic connection to the working class. He is ashamed at how often his selfish sexual and romantic desires take precedence over political strategizing. He is also tormented by his desire for Günsel, but also continues to compare his complicated, embarrassing feelings of revolutionary inadequacy to her more exemplary behavior and attitude. Again, the dialogism of the pair's emotional stances, in a constant state of alignment, investment,

and calibration, renders all of the emotions of the novel something the characters jointly and collectively do, rather than something they individually experience. What perhaps makes Türkali's use of free indirect discourse still firmly grounded in realism is the overwhelming use of dialogue to situate a pragmatic use of emotions, especially in the conversations between Kenan and Günsel.

Both Kenan and Günsel struggle with finding a place for their own personal desires and priorities in the face of the urgent commitment to left-wing politics. The novel examines in close detail the ways that the two navigate their own intimacy and the way it conflicts with political commitment. Günsel, thinking of all of the political intrigues and meetings she has been passing up in order to sleep with Kenan, says the following in a long stream of consciousness passage later in the novel:

Düpedüz bencillik bizim yaptığımız. Sevişmek, kitap okumak, tartışmak, hepsi güzel, tatlı şeyler. Sonuç?.. Toplumda hangi sorunun çözümüne yarıyor bu yaptıklarımız? Dört duvar arasında kalacaksan, bana ne, istersen faşist ol, demişti bir gün ağabeyi.

Outright selfishness is what we do. Making love, reading books, discussing, all beautiful, sweet things. What's the result? .. Which societal problems are we solving by doing this? One day her brother had said, "If you are going to stay inside your four walls, what difference does it make to me? You might as well be a fascist."

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<sup>278</sup> Türkali, *Bir Gün Tek Başına*, 470.

The novel often depicts this tension, sometimes challenging the patriarchal, sex-negativity of the Turkish left, but then also tacitly endorsing it for the sake of virtues such as revolutionary discipline and sacrifice.<sup>279</sup> Even the trappings and small pleasures of life are seen as antithetical to the ascetic demands of revolutionary commitment. This is why it is possible to see how these large existential and ideological themes find their way into the seemingly inconsequential emotional interactions between Kenan, Günsel, and waiters.

For example, Kenan takes Günsel to a seaside restaurant early in their affair.<sup>280</sup> The couple is flustered and lovesick. They have a few hours together and decide to go someplace to sit down. Günsel says she only has until 8pm because of a prior commitment and Kenan keeps repeating that he won't let Günsel go again. They get out of the rain into a taxi and ride to Taksim and when they arrive Kenan suddenly tells the driver to take them to Rumelihisarı. Kenan apologizes for being selfish, but he wants to spend more time with her. On the way, Günsel brings up something about politics and then asks jealously if Kenan ever went to the same restaurant with his wife Nermin. Kenan asks himself, "Duygusalılıklara düşer mi bu kız?" ("Does this girl get emotional?").<sup>281</sup> They get out before Rumelihisarı and Günsel says she isn't hungry, so they begin walking. Günsel tells them there are people waiting for her at home, Kenan says to let them wait, she finally admits that it was students who were in a police crackdown that day. But as he persists in emoting his lovesickness, asserting that his anguish is more important than

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<sup>279</sup> I am grateful to Kenan Sharpe for this insight.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 177.

politics in that moment, Günsel relents. Kenan gets her to a restaurant finally, nearly empty, and as the waiter hands him the menu, he says.

Bir şeyler getirin işte
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Just bring us something to eat.
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Read completely out of context, the waiter might just assume that Kenan is another rude customer. If he were to interpret Kenan's behavior, say, by way of the fundamental attribution bias, he would explain Kenan's waving him away as part of his general arrogant petit bourgeois disposition rather than question the external factors or context. But the reader has been traveling along with the couple and has been overwhelmed with the emotional context of their push and pull, with Kenan trying to have Günsel to himself, and Günsel trying to navigate his feelings. Kenan is, in fact, using his order as a way to underscore his lovesickness yet again. His indifference towards what the waiter actually brings stems from the fact that he wishes nothing other than to be united with his beloved at this particular moment, out of the rain. The ordering of food allows him another intersubjective surface upon which to register his affect.

The couple's emotional negotiation continues with the ordering immediately after this as well.

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid, 182.

Sonra Günsel'e baktı, yavaşça:

—İceriz değil mi?

Günsel anlamamış gibi bakındı, şaşkınlıkla, yavaşça,

—Bilmem, dedi, yine mi içeceğiz?

Then he looked at Günsel, slowly:

— We're drinking, right?

Günsel looked as if she didn't understand, with surprise, slowly,

— I don't know, she said, we're going to drink again?

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This is not actually about what to order to drink. Kenan wants to order drinks in order to further settle into their meal; to make it a “whole thing”. Günsel’s feigned incomprehension is both to demonstrate both that she has not completely acquiesced to Kenan’s puppy dog like pleading, and that she would like to remain a little more cognizant and constrained, especially in the case that she will not be making her political meeting. The issue of drinks is merely a euphemistic cover masking another opportunity for both conversation participants to negotiate their stance and establish alignment. As Kärkkäinen says, people’s conversation is often much less about events or actions, “but rather [to] display their identities, express feelings and attitudes, and check their views of the world with their community-mates.”<sup>284</sup>

This is only one of numerous interactions between Kenan and Günsel in which so much depends on the inferential processes by which individuals interpret expressive behavior and so

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Kärkkäinen, “Stance Taking in Conversation: From Subjectivity to Intersubjectivity,” 703.

little has to do with the ascription of single-word labels. Just ordering drinks is enough to allow for the work of emotional communication to take place. And this is true of the novel overall. *Bir Gün Tek Başına* is a wonderful example of a novel which not only takes emotions as seriously as it does politics, but does so in such a way as to make seem the two meaningfully integrated. This is because so much of politics is about intangible feelings, feelings which we create with others. Kenan is a portrait of the petit-bourgeois narcissist who fails at the work of 'culture' defined as a framework within which people jointly and collectively do emotions<sup>285</sup> He is instead a tragic example of the isolated and defeated intellectual described by Günsel's father:

Örgütsüz hiçbir şey olmaz... Yiğitlikler yapmışsın, dayanılmaz acılara katlanmışsın, ölmüşsün tek tek, bir örgüt içinde olmadıysa bunlar, boş... Kimsenin kimseden haberi bile olmaz. Birikim de yapamazsın. Çektiğinle kalırsın. Aydınlarımızın çilesi işte.

Nothing happens without an organization ... Say you have shown bravery, you've endured unbearable suffering, you died one by one, if these actions were not taken in an organization, it would be in vain... Nobody would know what's going on with anyone else. You couldn't build up any accumulated experience. You'd be stuck with whatever you suffer yourself. You see, this is the torment of our intellectuals.

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Kenan is ground down by masculine expectations and the cultural violence of the military state, which stifle his inner self with feelings of impotence, defeating him right before the military coup has even taken place.

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<sup>285</sup> Mesquita, De Leersnyder, and Boiger, "Cultural Psychology," 399.

<sup>286</sup> Türkali, *Bir Gün Tek Başına*, 226.

## Conclusion

The four novels which I have discussed in this chapter each showcase remarkably similar male protagonists: petit-bourgeois intellectual men who struggle with their emotions and relationships while frequenting the bars, cafes and restaurants of central Istanbul. Turgut is a married engineer with enough time on his hands to conduct an amateur investigation into the causes of his friend's suicide. Ömer may be penniless, but he still enjoys the life of ideas afforded to those who don't need to work to survive. C. enjoys all of the high culture that the city has to offer while equally enjoying a delicious disdain for the *hoi polloi*. And Kenan may have pretensions to more serious politics, but, just like the others, mainly whiles away his time by acting lovesick and loathing himself.

Seeing how specific and narrow these characters' experience actually is, it is remarkable how often their experience, like that of the Dandy before them, has been generalized to form an archetype for the fundamental state of belatedness and anxiety that supposedly dominates Turkish language and literature. This chapter has attempted to use an indexical understanding of emotions, one that moves beyond the lexicosemantic, as a way to bring these characters back down to earth, so to speak, and to recontextualize their solipsistic woes about expression into real world struggles over communication. Such an account of emotions simultaneously grounds

these characters' experiences in very specific interpersonal and political circumstances, but also works to show the commonalities between their struggles with emotions. I hope that these commonalities have helped to undermine the notion that the Turkish language has, over the decades, been on a path towards finally regaining a kind of expressiveness that was lost during the Language Reforms. Through the decades, expressing oneself in Turkish has not changed all that dramatically due to some supposed evolution of expressiveness. In four novels across three decades, two military coups, and a consistently shifting battle over of language reform, male bourgeois protagonists simply struggle to understand their love interests and express themselves in much the same way, all while ordering drinks and food.

If this chapter has worked to move away from a lexicosemantic model of emotional language, Chapter Four will offer a closer look at the ways that a belief in the power of words continues to play an important role in both Turkish and Egyptian fiction. I will examine the role of lexicographic ideology, that is the ways that a lexicon offers its own imagined world, to not just imagine the modern nation state, but to create other speculative worlds as well.

## Chapter Three: Village Voices: Indexicality and Non-standardized Dialogue in the Socialist Realist Novel

أنا قلت كلمة و كان لها معنيين  
كما بطن واحده و توأمين زين وشين  
لو دنيا شر.. التوأم الخير يموت  
لو دنيا خير.. الشرح يعيش منين  
عجبي  
-صلاح جاهين

### Introduction

In 1956 the Egyptian author Yūsuf Idrīs released his second collection, *Jumhūriyyat Farḥāt* (*Farahat's Republic*), firming up his reputation as one of Egypt's best short story writers. Being only his second published work, it was a great honor that its introduction was written by Ṭaha Hussein, the doyen of Arab letters himself. Hussein had been impressed by Idrīs's first book *'Akhaṣ Līyālī* (*The Cheapest Nights*, 1954), a collection of terse, shockingly realistic stories depicting the lives of Egypt's popular classes. Beyond their realistic grittiness and honesty, the stories were also competently composed and brilliantly structured.

However, while bestowing such an honor on Idrīs, Hussein also took the opportunity to give his august opinions about Idrīs' main shortcomings as a writer. After commending Idrīs for his eloquence and precision—saying that he was neither excessive in his expressions or acrobatic

in his words—Hussein wished that the author had used elegant Arabic when his characters spoke as well.

May it [Idrīs' work] be accompanied by the classical Arabic language and extend its authority over the characters when he writes a story just as he extends its authority over himself; for he is elegant when he himself speaks, but when his characters speak, it is in the vernacular [al-'āmmiyyah], like when they speak to each other in reality when they meet and a colorful dialogue takes place between them. What is most wrong for our young writers is when they think that in order to depict the reality of life that they are obliged to have the characters in their books use the language of the street and clubs. The most important characteristic of fine art is that it improves the reality of life by degrees without being limited in either its performance or its depictions.<sup>287</sup>

That is to say, he wished that Idrīs would avoid approximations of non-standardized forms of language while writing dialogue, and instead rewrite the speech of his colorful, down-and-out characters using a more formal Arabic, which faithfully adhered to the stylistic and grammatical dictates of respectable literature.<sup>288</sup> According to Hussein, the true man of letters is not the one who records the words of the people along with its deficiencies and weaknesses as though using a

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<sup>287</sup> أن يرفُق باللغة العربية الفصحى ويبسط سلطانها شيئاً ما على أشخاصه حين يقص كما يبسط سلطانها على نفسه؛ فهو مفصح إذا تحدث، فإذا أنطق أشخاصه أنطقهم بالعامية كما يتحدث بعضهم إلى بعض في واقع الأمر حين يلتقون ويديرون بينهم ألوان الحوار. وما أكثر ما يخطئ الشباب من أدبائنا حين يظنون أن تصوير الواقع من الحياة يفرض عليهم أن ينطقوا الناس في الكتب بما تجري به ألسنتهم في أحاديث الشوارع والأندية، فأخص ما حين يمتاز به الفن الرفيع هو أنه يرقى بالواقع من الحياة درجات دون أن يقصر في أدائه وتصويره Idrīs, Yūsuf. *Jumhūrīyat Farḥāt*. Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1981. Print.

<sup>288</sup> Throughout this chapter I have chosen to use the term 'non-standardized' to label any register of speech that is socially marked as distinct from the register commonly understood as standard. Other, more common terms for this type of speech such as 'colloquial' 'vernacular' 'informal' or 'idiomatic' all carry with them unavoidable pejorative connotations which betray the purpose of moving passed accepted assumptions and social stereotypes about divergent registers. I also use 'non-standardized' as opposed to simply 'non-standardized' to emphasize the fact that standardization is an intervention rather than a natural state. Nonetheless, even giving shorthand names for these two registers partially endorses the binary which I am trying to move past.

phonograph or a photograph. The true artist is able, rather, to create an artificial performance by recording the words of people using the formal register in which he was already addressing them.

This seems like a strange point of contention for someone who had just praised Idrīs for avoiding verbal acrobatics. One could imagine the effect of having drug addicts and petty thieves speaking like grammar teachers in Idrīs’ serious meditations on poverty and oppression in Egypt —and in fact this juxtaposition would be used to great satirical effect in Idrīs’ future stories depicting awkward class confrontations. But Idrīs’ early work was written in the spirit of socialist realism, a global literary trend which aspired to mimetic representation that could confront the lived reality of the usually invisible masses. While he certainly had his reservations about socialism, Ṭaha Hussein was not opposed to realism per se. In his introduction, rather, he was responding to the presence of non-standardized Arabic within the dialogue used in Idrīs’ stories.

Indeed, language perceived to be non-standardized within Arabic literature, to say nothing of its existence at all, has triggered the metalinguistic anxiety of countless generations of writers, critics, and readers.<sup>289</sup> ‘Āmmīyah, as it is usually referred to, is ethnopragmatically understood to be an ‘ungrammatical’ distortion of the classical language, or a degeneracy of the historical

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<sup>289</sup> A resource for an overview of the history of ‘āmmīyah within Egyptian literature, which has the added advantage of having been written from the vantage point of the mid-1960s, is, Naffūṣah Sa’id, *Tārīkh Al-Da’wah Ilā al-‘āmmīyah al-Āthārihā Fī Miṣr*. (al-Iskandarīyah: Dār nashr al-thaqāfah, 1964). In it, Sa’id describes the basic situation for novels as “أما في القصة فقد اتفقوا على أن يكون السرد بالفصحى، أما الحوار فكان موضوع الخلاف أليكون بالفصحى أم”  
”بالعامية؟ كل ما أثير من مناقشات حول موضوع لم يحسم الخلاف  
“In storytelling it has been agreed upon that the narrative should be in Fuṣḥa, but as for the dialogue the dispute has been on whether to use Fuṣḥa or ‘āmmīyah. Despite all of the debates on this subject the dispute has not been resolved.” (381).

language which existed in a standard ideal in the historical past (crucially during the revelation of the Qur'an). It has been lamented at various times as a means for undermining the project of modernity and pan-Arab solidarity, or as an unnecessary vulgarity which does nothing in the service of plot or characterization within fiction. But while betraying his language-ideological prejudices, Ṭaha Hussein is on to something in his suspicion of the claim that non-standardized speech has some objective mimetic advantage over using standard language. As Bronwen Thomas points out in her book, *Fictional Dialogue* (2012), while a reader has a certain expectation that dialogue does a qualitatively different job from narration in representing spoken language, “fictional dialogue is often highly stylized and that what passes for accurate reflection of ‘real speech’ may simply be the process of ‘linguistic hallucination’ in which the reader readily participates.<sup>290</sup>” Thomas refers to Monika Fludernik’s term “direct discourse fallacy” as a way to point to the accepted assumption that directly reported speech in fiction is free from the same limitations of mimesis that apply to other parts of the text. However natural or recognizable a dialogic exchange may appear in a novel, it is largely to the credit of the reader, who is able to imagine the tempo of awkward pauses, the fully accented pronunciation of dialectal words, and even the timbre of character voices in much the same way he/she would furnish a partially described room. Even the sociolinguist conducting linguistic fieldwork will acknowledge the conventions of transcription which simplify or merely reference what is in reality the irreducibly complex range of the human voice.

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<sup>290</sup> Bronwen. Thomas, *Fictional Dialogue : Speech and Conversation in the Modern and Postmodern Novel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 15.

Nonetheless, realist authors have used non-standardized dialogue in order to take advantage of the convincing illusion of direct discourse. Writing nearby in Turkey during the exact same period as Idrīs was Orhan Kemal, an author famous for his use of non-standardized language. He, too, faced a stream of criticism for using argots (*şive*) and spoken language (*konuşma dili*) in his dialogue. But if Thomas' argument about fictional dialogue is correct, then what was Idrīs and Kemal's purpose in weathering criticism and using conspicuously non-standardized speech in the dialogue of a novel at all? And what is the cause of so much metalinguistic scrutiny of the 'diglossia problem' in the first place? While scholars of literature in Egypt and Turkey have often attempted to answer these questions by appealing to the national context—seeing non-standardized language in novels and short stories as representing a kind of insurgent challenge to the hegemony of the national language— the question of diglossia is ultimately a question about the social meaning of variation, and so there are multiple simultaneous interpretations available.

This chapter will argue that the contrast between standard and non-standardized language acts as a highly adaptable index of different social meanings—historical, social, and even narratological—and that it is the interpretive richness of the interactional text which ensures the continuous return of the diglossia question to the literary spotlight. I am careful here to focus on the contrast between the two registers rather than on standard or non-standardized registers themselves. No register exists as a discrete and independent linguistic entity. Registers are, rather, “made perceivable or palpable by the metrical iconism of co-occurring text segments—the

likeness or unlikeness of *co-occurring chunks of text*—which motivate evaluations of sameness or difference of speaker.”<sup>291</sup> A writer does not simply switch between fully-formed registers, but instead makes a series of individual linguistic choices which add up to the perception of socially meaningful styles of language. Writers, therefore, are not caught between a great linguistic divide but create this very appearance of contrast because of the ideologies that it indexes. Rather than merely fighting against state policies, writers are active participants in the language ideology of diglossia.

Accounts of the diglossia language phenomenon in Arabic literature often frame it as a strictly political issue. The gulf between *Fuṣḥa* (“the most eloquent”) and *‘ammiyyah* (“common”) Arabic is the result of historical and political contradictions, with Egyptian literature caught in between its commitments to both national and pan-Arab politics, as well as urban and rural cultures. One of the reasons why Ṭaha Hussein was so opposed to non-standardized dialog was because he viewed it as a sign of the degeneracy of nationalist culture. He was not the only one. Nagīb Maḥfūz famously compared dialect to poverty and disease. Oftentimes *‘ammiyyah* came to be associated with political upstarts of all kinds, not just the uninitiated masses, but also nationalist freedom fighters, cultural revolutionaries and those who were “against religion.”

Amin al-Alem mentioned that in the 1950s, “many of the great *‘ammiyyah* poets like Salah Jahin, Fu’ad Haddad, Sayyid Higaab and Abdel Rahman Abnuudi emerged from inside the Marxist movement”..the association between their ideology and their choice of language became established and further resonated with the older accusation against proponents of writing in *‘ammiyyah* that they were “against religion.” Thus, *‘ammiyyah* is

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<sup>291</sup> Agha, “Voice, Footing, Enregisterment,” 38.

also historically associated with “leftist” or at any rate with nonreligious opposition groups and individuals whose views were perceived as threatening political stability in the Arab world.<sup>292</sup>

Non-standardized language in Turkish literature is also seen in the context of national politics: as representing the resistance to efforts made to homogenize and standardize the language. Non-standardized dialogue was used in fiction as linguistic costuming for unfamiliar, ignorant inhabitants of the hinterland who were unfamiliar with or had rejected the *mission civilisatrice* of Kemalism. Other authors embraced non-standardized language in the spirit of populism, albeit with the same paternalistic attitudes. In both the Egyptian and Turkish novel, the politics of language tend to appear most often in the setting that has attracted a large share of both nationalist idealism and populist disappointment: the village.

This chapter will give an indexical reading of non-standardized speech while examining Yūsuf Idrīs and Orhan Kemal’s contributions to the village novel. The genre of the village novel has served as a way to stage the “national imaginary” discourse *par excellence*, set in the place where the nation met its greatest challenge to its project of modern subjectivity, and represented by standard language, with non-standardized speech representing subaltern insurgency against it. By introducing an indexical reading of non-standardized dialogue, this chapter hopes to suggest a way to replace this manichean dynamic with the more complex dialectic of sociolinguistic life. It also hopes to see how indexicality itself can do more than merely point to social personas. By showing how the register contrast serves a number of important rhetorical and narratological

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<sup>292</sup> Niloofar Haeri, *Sacred Language, Ordinary People: Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt* (Springer, 2003), 134.

purposes within fiction, this chapter will argue that the interplay between speech styles does various kinds of aesthetic and political work. Understanding the ‘diglossia problem’ as an indexical contrast opens it up to a number of simultaneous readings, from the aesthetic agenda of socialist realist, to the narratological effects of using non-standardized speech, and finally the personal stylistic meaning that standard and non-standardized speech held for both Yūsuf Idrīs and Orhan Kemal. After discussing each of these contexts, I will provide a close reading of one of each of their novels which takes into consideration the ways that these various contexts are indexed.

## The National Imaginary and the Village Novel in Egypt and Turkey

### The Fuṣḥa/‘āmmiyyah Divide in Egypt

Being such a deeply historical and widely spoken language, containing almost unparalleled diversity and richness, it is strange that almost all of the energy that goes into speaking metalinguistically about Arabic get channeled into the Fuṣḥa/‘āmmiyyah debate. Fuṣḥa is the term in Arabic for the modern standard form of the language, based on the classical language but with revisions to its lexicon and syntax undertaken by reformers throughout the late 19th and early 20th century. ‘āmmiyyah, on the other hand, refers broadly to all ‘popular’ non-standardized registers and regional dialects of the language. This supposed crisis of ‘diglossia,’ whereby the standard form of language and the spoken varieties supposedly diverged in glaring ways, was one

of the central debates played out again and again in Arabic literary magazines, newspapers, television shows throughout the 20th century. A search of the online archive of Arabic literary and cultural magazines (alsharekh) will return dozens of articles with titles such as:

“Fuṣḥa and al-āmmiyyah and national expressions”<sup>293</sup>

“The language of dialogue between al-āmmiyyah and Fuṣḥa”<sup>294</sup>

“Our Arabic language and Fuṣḥa and al-āmmiyyah”<sup>295</sup>

This unshakable anxiety over the fundamental split in the language between its historical and literary mode, on the one hand, and its popular and regional diversity on the other, has been adapted into scholarship on Arabic, and specifically Egyptian literary history, as a seductively simplistic hermeneutic. Looking at three different histories of the Egyptian novel will show how often the ‘diglossia’ question has been incorporated into literary history.

In his book *Arab Culture and the Novel* (2007), Muhammad Siddiq casts the Fuṣḥa/‘āmmiyyah divide at the heart of Egyptians’ quest to find a sense of personal and collective identity in modernity. Siddiq is disparaging of claims toward Fuṣḥa, saying that rather than its use being justified on literary or artistic necessity, it is rather tied to a writer’s conscious political view of pan-Arab ideology and Arab nationalism, with ‘āmmiyyah then being cast as restrictive, confining, and isolationist. The political import of the diglossia choice, then, is fundamental to the thematic of identity. “Here lies the roots of two major and abiding variable opposites in modern

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<sup>293</sup> Yusuf al-Sharuni, “Al-Fuṣḥa Wal-’ammiya Wal-i’tabar al-Qawmiyya,” *Al-Adab*, no. 5 (May 1, 1963): 9.

<sup>294</sup> Yusuf al-Sharuni, Yusur, “Lughat Al-Hiwar Bayna al-’āmmiyyah Wal-Fuṣḥa,” *Al-Majalah*, no. 67 (August 1, 1962).

<sup>295</sup> Ibrahim al-Shanti, “Lughatuna Al-’arabiyyah Bayna al-Fuṣḥa Wal-’āmmiyya,” *Al-Adib*, no. 8 (August 1, 1970).

Arab identity: local/regional vs. Pan-Arab, and non-standardized, spoken dialects vs. the written Fuṣḥa.”<sup>296</sup> Siddiq specifically addresses the question of dialect for dialogue, taking the opposite position from Ṭaha Hussein that non-standardized dialogue helps to “convey content that advances the plot, and to express, color or nuance the particularity of that character,” and expresses his dismay that someone as esteemed as Naḡīb Maḥfūz would insist on using Fuṣḥa for his characters, even when they are “illiterate or semiliterate characters who are in no position to know the correct precepts of Arabic syntax or grammar,” and especially since readers often times mentally “translate” dialogue written in Fuṣḥa back to the Egyptian vernacular anyways.<sup>297</sup>

Sasson Somekh’s *Genre and Language in Modern Arabic Literature* (1991) looks even more specifically at the issue of diglossia within Arabic literature, namely the ways that different Arab authors have navigated the choice of writing in one form of the language or the other, or both. Somekh dedicates part of his book specifically to the question of dialogue, noting the increasing attempt throughout the 20th century to use ‘āmmiyyah to represent authentic local speech and “the Egyptian character and the local colour” that it stood for.<sup>298</sup> The use of dialect in dialogue would come to be the norm rather than the exception throughout the 1940s and 50s among writers of realist fiction, and especially among those claiming adherence to the cause of socialist realism such as Yūsuf Idrīs and ‘abd al-Rahman al-Sharqāwī. Somekh speaks about a certain

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<sup>296</sup> Muhammad Siddiq, *Arab Culture and the Novel: Genre, Identity and Agency in Egyptian Fiction*, vol. 16 (Routledge, 2007), 12.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Sasson Somekh, *Genre and Language in Modern Arabic Literature*, vol. 1 (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1991), 25

brand of writer who endeavored to write dialogue in accordance with the rules of Fuṣḥa to such an extent that it fooled readers and even literary critics that they were, in fact, reading spoken language in the nature of true ‘āmmiyya, with Nagīb Maḥfūz now being the best positive case of this judicious, “quasi colloquial” dialogue.<sup>299</sup> This use of the term quasi colloquial reveals the strain under which Somekh is to maintain the firewall between Fuṣḥa and ‘āmmiyyah in his schemata. His entire book is an elaborate tracing of the ways that Arab authors have grappled with the diglossia issue, which relies entirely on its own reification of the problem of diglossia. Yet, understanding this debate over dialogue as choices over indexicality, as has been the case already in other parts of this dissertation, we see instead how the choice is not variable inasmuch as it is a complex and nuanced question of stylistics.

Lastly, Samah Selim treats both dialect and nationalist ideology together in her book, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (2004). Like the two previous books, Selim is interested in questions of language. But at the same time, she aims to show language’s relationship to genre, textuality and canonicity within the context of the emergence of modern nationalism in Egypt. This leads her to sacrifice the complexity of the former in the service of the latter. Her main argument is that twentieth century Egyptian nationalism created the space for the hegemonic ideology of language, class and place, while also making inevitable its own counter-hegemonic politics as well. Selim claims that diglossia was a field of battle between the

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 27.

nationalist imagination and the dissonant cultures and voices that it attempts to suppress.<sup>300</sup> The Fuṣḥa/‘āmmiyyah divide acted as the articulation of the conflict over modernity within language, as dialect became a way to separate out the figure of the alienated modern subject and the collectivity of the rural hinterland, best evidenced in the village novel. This variable was in tension as the peasant was simultaneously seen as a romantic emblem of the Egyptian nation and a potent symbol of its historic decadence. There was a “central paradox inherent in early nationalist/reformist thought regarding the peasant: the fallah was simultaneously conceived of as noble, authentic, industrious, primordial and squalid, stupid, obsequious, cunning, lazy, archaic.”<sup>301</sup> This is not, in fact, a paradox if one understands the multifarious and oftentimes conflicting indexes of social meaning that language variation offers. However, under the nationalist configuration, the two registers, Fuṣḥa and ‘āmmiyya, are fixed linguistic voices for the modern urban narrator and the insurgent rural villagers, respectively. This is oftentimes made quite literal by the convention of the first-person narrating inspector who comes in from the city to investigate local disturbances who speak for themselves in testimony, typified by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm country prosecutor and carried on by post-1952 village novels like the engineer in Faṭḥī Ghānim’s *al-Jabal* (*The Mountain*, 1957) and ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqāwī’s *al-Ard* (*The Land*, 1952).

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<sup>300</sup> Selim, *Rural Imaginary*, 59.

<sup>301</sup> Samah Selim, “The New Pharaonism: Nationalist Thought and the Egyptian Village Novel, 1967-1977,” *The Arab Studies Journal* 8, no. 2/1 (2000): 13.

But as will be seen is the case with Yūsuf Idrīs's own inspector in *al-Ḥarām*, the Fuṣḥa/ʿammiyyah cannot always be used to neatly map out the ideological coordinates of the novel. In fact, an overemphasis on the division between standard and dialect has the effect of flattening out the other social meanings that the novel can potentially represent, especially those happening on the ground within the village itself. It orients all ideological struggles in and about language towards the national narrative, and overrides interesting and important questions of class, gender, and ethnicity, not to mention narratology and stylistics.<sup>302</sup>

All of these accounts, and many others like them, recognize the centrality of language ideology to the novel, and to the writing of dialogue in particular. However, they engage with language variation based on a certain set of well-accepted ethnopragmatics, seeing it as an analog of the national project of modernity, rather than looking more closely at its other possible indexes. A more open-ended accounting of the indexical field should hopefully help us to break out of the dead end of 'the language ideology of diglossia' and allow for more useful analysis of language ideology in the Egyptian novel.

### **Representing the Peasant in Turkish Village Novels**

While not rising to the same level of metalinguistic articulation as the diglossia issue in Arabic, there are clear parallels with the ways that dialect and socially-marked language in general has been used in Turkey to index battles over the nationalist imaginary. Whereas historical and

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<sup>302</sup> Selim does not ignore these questions, and gives Arabic language and ideology a far more nuanced treatment than it often receives, but she nevertheless centers the Fuṣḥa/ʿammiyyah divide as that which determines things in the last instance.

geopolitical conditions birthed a specific discourse about language variation in the Arab world which envisioned two discretely identifiable registers, Turkish writers and cultural critics have spoken in more general terms about the linguistic gulf between the educated, urban center and the illiterate, rural periphery.

Debates about non-standardized language and the cultures it indexes, as well as their place within the realist novel, have often come under various banners such as folk literature (*halk edebiyatı*), populism (*halkçılık*), peasantism (*köycülük*), and even Anatolianism (*Anadoluculuk*). In the years following the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the call to “go to the people” (*halka inmek*) was answered by generations of intellectuals who went to work in the countryside and in villages, first by those who worked in the people’s houses (*Halk Evleri*) in the 1930s, then by the generation of writers who came out of the village institutes system set up in the 1940s, and finally, by the 1960s, by a generation of leftist intellectuals who rediscovered folk culture.<sup>303</sup> But while the literary efforts which came from these movements paid lip service to their fellow citizens in the villages and rural areas, Erkan Irmak claims that they failed to give them their own substantial voice. In his book, *Eski Köye Yeni Roman (A New Novel for the Old Village, 2018)*, he writes:

even if village novels communicate using different languages/discourses, as Bakhtin described, these languages/discourses do not rise to the level of consciousness or are witnessed only rarely or temporarily. The main reason for this is the closure of the village to the outside. In village themed novels... we often find dialogue between individuals

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<sup>303</sup> See Asım Karaömerlioğlu, *Orada Bir Köy Var Uzakta: Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Köycü Söylem*, vol. 200 (İletişim, 2006).

(teachers, soldiers, politicians, surgeons, etc.) who come from outside the village, and bring attention to those conflicts outside the boundaries of the village's integrated life (teacher, soldier, politician, surgeon etc.) or by some returning villager themselves. And when they do return to the village (for work, out of conviction, military service, etc.) they begin to look at the village with new eyes even it is where they are originally from.<sup>304</sup>

Mehmet Samsakçı more or less agrees with this assessment. In his book, *Siyaset ve Roman (Politics and the Novel, 2014)*, he faults the village novel for being unable to incorporate larger political themes, because its characters, the villagers themselves, were only able to realistically express ancestral methods and insular ideas. There was little chance, either in reality or in fiction, that a group of untrained, ignorant and horizonless peasants could make healthy political evaluations and contribute to the intellectual debates on the issues concerning the country.<sup>305</sup> While peasant voices were indexable to this hapless population, they weren't indicative of much else.

Similar to the inspector trope in Egyptian novels, Turkish village novels often required a cosmopolitan interloper to act as a window into village life. The dialect on display in these novels, corralled into sections of dialogue, are meant to add a sense of verisimilitude and local color rather than self-representation. In Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu's pioneering village novel *Yaban (The Stranger, 1932)*, the villagers' speech is not directly represented, but it is described second hand by the narrator Ahmet Celal, who often has trouble communicating with them. He

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<sup>304</sup> Erkan Irmak, *Eski Köye Yeni Roman* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2018), 72.

<sup>305</sup> Mehmet Samsakçı, *Siyaset ve Roman : Çok Partili Türkiye ve Türk Romani / Mehmet Samsakçı*, 1 baskı. (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2014), 324.

says of one villager: “She speaks with the thickest Anatolian accent. The sentences emerge from her throat like so many handfuls of brush, hard and thorny.”<sup>306</sup> Difference in dialect acts as a metaphor for the remoteness of their way of life from the modern Turkish subjectivity coming into being. As Celal Ahmet explains:

I understand more clearly that the Turkish intellectual is a bizarre, lonely person in this vast and desolate country called Turkey... As he goes towards the deepest parts of the country that he considers his homeland, he feels that he is going away from his own roots....I do not know whether there exists the same deep gap in every country between the intelligentsia and the villagers! But the difference between a literate Istanbul young man and an Anatolian villager is greater than the one between a London Englishman and a Punjabi Indian.<sup>307</sup>

The literate Istanbulite here forms the ideal subject of the new nationalist imagination against the unruly and potentially treacherous villager. Language choice in the peasant novel is impossible to divorce from the struggle between forms of knowledge and worldviews, and early practitioners of the genre were highly cognizant of this indexical dynamic. Asım Karaömerlioğlu gives the example of the simple and unsophisticated style of writing taken up by Memduh Şevket Esendal, a style which indexes his own populist outlook.

Esendal considers it more populist and less elitist to write in a simple way. A hidden critique of elitism is at work here. He once pointed out that if we examine the way that

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<sup>306</sup> Yaban, quoted in Carole Rathbun, *The Village in the Turkish Novel and Short Story 1920 to 1955.*, Near and Middle East Monographs, 2 (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), 39.

<sup>307</sup> Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Yaban* (İstanbul: Remzi, 1968), 31. Translation by Asım Karaömerlioğlu.

peasants talk, we immediately realize that they communicate in a simple, direct instead of a complex, refined and sophisticated way.<sup>308</sup>

In the period before the full flourishing of social realist village novels in the 1950s, this type of gently patronizing attitude, which associated refined language with educated thought, was common among even the most sympathetic writers. Sabahattin Ali, the third writer cited by Karaömerlioğlu in his study on the Cult of the Peasant (1999) during the single party era (1930-1946), was suspicious of the whole enterprise:

Our most ridiculous authors are the ones who think they are writing for the people...We still have novelists who look at the villager from an American tourist's point of view, and see a dark and mysterious soul or a primitive animal in them. We have famous authors who claim to be narrating society while turning them into laughingstocks with stories of cheap and strange humor... Are these novelists the ones who will fill the gap between our literature and the masses?<sup>309</sup>

Whether using the peasants' own words served to faithfully represent them or merely to mock them was more a question of ethnoprismatic stigmas around non-standardized language than the representation itself. The Turkish writer's ability to faithfully engage with dialect in dialogue, then, was a question of a specific kind of language ideology.

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<sup>308</sup> Mehmet Asım Karaömerlioğlu, "The Cult of the Peasant: Ideology and Practice, Turkey, 1930-1946 (Populism, Kemalism)" (Uni Diss. Serv., 2000), 229.

<sup>309</sup> Quoted in Sevengül Sönmez, "Sabahattin Ali's Views on the Arts and Literature," in *The Transcultural Critic: Sabahattin Ali and Beyond* (Göttingen: Universitäts verlag Göttingen, 2017), 15.

## Standard Language Ideology and Indexicality

Indexical linguistics matures the account of language and literature because it disentangles language features from the ideologies which are projected onto them, making it possible to see 1) how language stereotypes are formed in the first place 2) how they are overdetermined (in the Althusserian sense) 3) and how they are in a constant state of change due to constant local reinterpretation and repositioning. The standard/non-standardized speech contrast seems like an innate dysfunction of Arabic. But like any other language, Arabic simply offers a choice of various stylistic registers in speech or in writing, distinct, indexically contrastive ways of saying what counts as “the same thing,” each of which are appropriate and effective depending on the context, from the pragmatic to the geopolitical.<sup>310</sup> The choice to use a particular register within a work of fiction offers a powerful and conspicuous way of signaling social meaning outside of the explicit content of the novel.

The way that this more or less works, according to linguists like Michael Silverstein, Penelope Eckert, and others is that through their repeated use in social life, linguistic features come to index social meaning at various levels of abstraction, starting with a general observation on the part of Cairene speakers, for example, such as “people from upper Egypt pronounce some ‘q’ sounds as ‘g’ at which point that pronunciation will become a first-order index of people from the south. But then that association can be built on by a related association. The second-order index will come into play when the stereotypes about people from upper Egypt as being as

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<sup>310</sup> Silverstein, “Race from Place,” 163.

uneducated become associated with the language feature itself, making the use of ‘g’ instead of ‘k’ itself an indicator of ignorance. But there is more to indexicality than region or even class. Any linguistic variable can come to index stereotypes about the ways certain social groups speak and act, but also more abstractly to values and personas, and even judgements about the quality or specific narratological purpose of a particular style of language. All of these various claims to the social meaning of a variable compete all at once in what Penelope Eckert calls an Indexical Field, a “constellation of ideologically related meanings, any one of which can be activated in the situated use of the variable.”<sup>311</sup> When a section of dialogue is written to distinguish it from the style used in the rest of a literary text, the contrast can be thought of as a marker about which established and emergent cultural meanings are being continually indexed. Eckert is careful to point out how this account differs from the traditional view of conspicuous linguistic markers and variables “as having a fixed meaning ... based in a static, non-dialectical view of language.”<sup>312</sup> Such as static view would include interpreting diglossia as corresponding to “the major and abiding variable opposites in modern Arab identity: local/regional vs. Pan-Arab” as Mohmmad Siddiq says, echoing countless others.<sup>313</sup> This type of statement is not the ultimate judgement of the meaning of diglossia, but rather a second order index inhabiting a spot in a crowded indexical field. Because a second order indexes like that of Arab identity are by their very nature metalinguistic, they are the subject of constant performance and play, often in ironic or counter-

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<sup>311</sup> Eckert, “Variation,” 453.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid, 464.

<sup>313</sup> Siddiq, *Arab Culture*, 12.

hegemonic ways. As Silverstein says in another article, “irony is the essential trope lurking always in ideologically informed contemplation of language... [it] is a consequence of the actual dialectic manner in which ideology engages with pragmatic fact through metapragmatic function.”<sup>314</sup> Each social meaning for a variable can also be used counter to expectations, further opening up the possibility for multifarious interpretations. Because the village novels of Yūsuf Idrīs and Orhan Kemal represent their own interventions into the genre, many of the ways that they use language can be understood as forms of criticism and satire.

And even if this modernist nation-state reading of diglossia could be imagined to be the conclusive index, it would still not represent a language’s destiny, since any index depends on a continual process of reconstrual for its existence.

The social is not just a set of *constraints* on variation – it is not simply a set of categories that determine what variants a speaker will use – it is a meaning-making enterprise ..... ultimately, all change unfolds in the course of day-to-day exchange, and that exchange involves constant local reinterpretation and repositioning. Ultimately, it is in this action that we can get at the meaning-making that gives life to variation. While the larger patterns of variation can profitably be seen in terms of a static social landscape, this is only a distant reflection of what is happening moment to moment on the ground.<sup>315</sup>

Why should this be any different for the language of novels? While not the language of a live interpersonal exchange, fictional language is nevertheless highly attuned to the social meanings of

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<sup>314</sup> Michael Silverstein, “The Uses and Utility of Ideology: Some Reflections,” *Pragmatics* 2, no. 3 (1992): 317.

<sup>315</sup> Eckert, “Variation,” 472.

variables and an active intervention into those meanings as well. An author will no doubt be aware of what their language choices will mean in the debate over modern national identity, but they could just as soon be responding to the aesthetics of realism, concerned as it is with mimesis and authenticity. Non-standardized speech could also relay with the emotional resonance of a particular dialect in the life history of an author. The choice of language style in a given novel, at every single instance, is the result of a whole set of ideologically related meanings, from the autobiographical to the narrative to the generic to the national, all of which interact and contradict. That a character may speak in dialect may be overdetermined, decided on based on a whole host of overlapping social indexes, but this fact can easily be overlooked. The semiotic richness of a text is, in part, based on this indexical dynamism being captured in the text, and is unpackable once register is seen as a composite of innumerable linguistic choices rather than a single selected dialect.

As a method of organization for the rest of the chapter, I have chosen four indexes from amongst a much larger and more complicated indexical field as a way to showcase the potentials for reading non-standardized dialogue. The first field, as I have already described above, is as the village novel as site of the national-modernist language project. The other three indices are more directly related to literary and narratological concerns. They are: 1) the aesthetic project of socialist realism and its claims to mimesis 2) the creation of the objective “voicing” and narrative irony in the realist novel more generally 3) the two authors’ personal associations of

standardized language with literary skill and prestige, and the ways that their own biographies are closely entwined with non-standardized language.

## Socialist Realism and Village Novels

Egypt and Turkey each experienced their own waves of socialist realist novels, set largely in the countryside or in villages, beginning in the late 1940-50s. This trend in novel writing would change not only the political coordinates of village novels, but their relationship to non-standardized language as well. It should be noted from the start that the invocation of socialist realism is meant less to connect it to the Soviet literary orbit than to a dispersed postcolonial aesthetic project. As Michael Denning says in his account of the global Proletarian novel, “if the master plot of Soviet socialist realism—the production novel with its historic militants—informed the official sanctioned literatures of the Communist states, it had little presence in the genealogies of proletarian or engaged fiction elsewhere.”<sup>316</sup> Rather than using this genealogical model, scholars like Ulka Anjaria instead group together the social realist movement according to a shared commitment to “developing an aesthetics adequate for representing the instabilities of modern life. From this perspective, social realism is significant not only for the radical content of its forms but also for the forms of its content - which theorize the possibilities and limitations of realism itself to see if it is sufficiently plastic to represent the epistemic crises of modernity.”<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (Verso, 2004), 64.

<sup>317</sup> Ulka Anjaria, “Staging Realism and the Ambivalence of Nationalism in the Colonial Novel,” in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 44 (Duke University Press, 2011), 186.

Language plays a decisive role in this theorization, with authors experimenting with non-standardized dialogue to test both its power to accurately depict reality, as well as help to overcome the pitfalls of representation by the literate, urban gaze.

In Egypt, the rise of socialist realist novels, as they were retroactively classified, meant that depictions of the village increasingly centered the experience and words of peasants themselves. Coming after the romantically idealizing and mockingly disparaging village novels of the first half of the century, the publishing of *al-Ard* by ‘abd al-Rahman al-Sharqāwī in the same year as the Officers’ Coup marked a dramatic shift in the way that dialect was treated in novels, and ushered in a new generation of socially committed writers. Samah Selim says that this generation of novelists, Yūsuf Idrīs among them, produced a dizzying universe of insurgent peasant voices and began challenging traditional notions of the nation.

Language is a central strategy through which the post-1952 village novel attempts to render the realities of peasant life, whether by directly inscribing ungrammatical vernacular peasant voices or by deploying a variety of rural narrative languages – such as the languages of Sufi tradition or of folk ballad – within the text. Again, this is a political as well as a formal strategy that underlines the necessary relationship between language and representation.<sup>318</sup>

In many of the post-1952 village novels, great effort is made to “liberate the voice of the subaltern from the tyranny of the bourgeois text,” in large part by a much more extensive use of narrative dialogue.<sup>319</sup> This is in line with the political beliefs of the left in the early years of

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<sup>318</sup> Selim, *Rural Imaginary*, 129-30.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

Nasser's rule, whereby writers were encouraged in their art by both the state and the general spirit of Third-Worldism. However, any assessment of the influence of socialist politics should also take into account the turbulent relationship that the literary left had with Nasser, who went from imprisoning Leftists from one year to offering them sinecures in his government the next.

Much the same can be said of Turkey. Erkan Irmak notices a similar transition from the earlier nationalist approach to representing peasant voices to the new political concerns of the socialist writers of the 1950s and 60s. Berna Moran summarizes the entire period of 1950-1975, and especially its village novels, as being concerned primarily with "the problems of an unjust order arising from the structure of society."<sup>320</sup> And this shift in concerns was amplified by the relative strength of the left within literary production during this period. Compared to the more clandestine and fragmented political landscape of the left in Egypt, Turkey's intellectual left, especially in the mid-1960s, had dominant control over the literary field.<sup>321</sup> With this confident position, socialist writers were able to reflect critically on the legacy of Kemalism and its approach to national culture.

Because the post-Kemalist state and the Kemalist cultural project had become hopeless... the unpopulist elements of popular culture, those which would become Turkey's hegemonic cultural structure, began to be jettisoned...At that point there was a turn "to the people," or in the words of a common expression of that time, "they went down to the people." But as this phrase "going down" indicates, the 60s generation who had begun their education as members of the Kemalist elite, but for whom the place and meaning of

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<sup>320</sup> Moran, *Türk Romanına*, 7

<sup>321</sup> Hakki Başgüneş, "Literary Production, Currents and Politics between 1960 and 1980 in Turkey" (Strasbourg, 2013), 262-3.

this elitism had lost its meaning, the relationship between them and the people was still hierarchical.<sup>322</sup>

This hierarchical attitude was reflected in the care given by authors to using the folk culture and non-standardized language of the people in their novels. Ahmet Buran finds an increase in the use of non-standardized speech in this period, pointing to the works of authors such as Yaşar Kemal, Orhan Kemal, Kemal Tahir, Ömer Polat, Mustafa Necati Sepetçioğlu, Tarık Buğra, Talip Apaydın, and M. Akif Ersoy.<sup>323</sup> But at the same time, socialist writers also imported a whole host of foreign concerns into the fictional world of the countryside: sociopolitical developments, the state, the left-workers-student movements, and even international politics and the anti-imperial struggle. Oftentimes this meant that the villagers in socialist realist novels were voicing the concerns of their leftist writers rather than the other way around. As opposed to certain graduates of the village institutes, who spoke lovingly about their own villages and understood its problems in personal terms, urban socialist writers writing novels set in villages were much more eager to use the village as an illustration of larger sociopolitical dynamics. “Rather than explaining the problem as the landlord system itself, they spoke of the problem as being caused by the local landlord.”<sup>324</sup> In this configuration, it is easy to see how non-standardized dialogue could be seen as little more than an authentic veneer for urban leftist propaganda. Nonetheless, socialist realism village novels’ use of language is seen as a positive development in terms of

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<sup>322</sup> Bülent Somay, “Hamlet Kuşağı,” *Defter* 37 (1999): 62-3.

<sup>323</sup> Ahmet Buran, “Konuşma Dili ve Yaz Dili İlişkileri ve Derleme Faaliyetleri,” *Türkbilig*, 2002, 103

<sup>324</sup> Irmak, *Eski Köye Yeni Roman*, 275.

representing the lives, thoughts, and speech patterns of local residents.<sup>325</sup>

But it is not enough to merely say that socialist realist novels were more sensitive to subaltern representation, nor to see the difference between the nationalist village novel and the socialist realist village novel as being merely generational or political. Each offers its own relationship to fictional realism, and so offers different relationships to the narratological uses of non-standardized dialogue. If we take up Lauren Goodlad's call to explore the "worlding" of these distinct approaches to realism, we should be able to use non-standardized dialogue as a way of showing "realism's aesthetic flexibility, historical variability, and irreducibility to any single genre, period, technique, or national project."<sup>326</sup> If the nationalist realist novel could draw from the experience and authority of the European tradition, the social realist novel had to establish its authority upon the vividness of its own forms of representation. In her work on realism in the twentieth-century Indian novel, Ulka Anjaria argues that the adaptation of realism in the colonial setting should not be thought of as merely a means of reflecting external realities without mediation, but as a project with an active aesthetic agenda.

The defense of social realism cannot be read apart from social realist works themselves, and thus, authors' statements that their writing is merely "a mirror of life's truths" constitute in and of themselves a mode through which their novels must be considered. For the nature and tone of these claims suggest that the aesthetic project of social realism is inseparable from an awareness of the belatedness, and thus critical insufficiency, of any aesthetic project under conditions of colonialism. In this way, social realism references

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<sup>325</sup> Gülbeyaz Göztaş, "Edebi Metinlerde Ağız Kullanımı: Bekir Yıldız Örneği," Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi, no. 42 (2017): 117.

<sup>326</sup> Lauren ME Goodlad, "Introduction: Worlding Realisms Now," *Novel* 49, no. 2 (2016): 184.

not only the external, material world but its own aspirational status. This gives rise to its dual nature: while earnestly seeking to represent, social realism under colonialism must simultaneously perform its representational authority to do so.<sup>327</sup>

Non-standardized dialogue is part and parcel of this effort. In the socialist realist novel, it is indexable as visceral, authentic, and immediate, using the direct discourse illusion to create a powerful mimetic effect. That non-standardized language had been traditionally stigmatized in fiction only adds to its appeal, being shockingly real and almost corporeal in quality. It is not just mimetic, but insistently mimetic.

At the same time, the narrative voice in the socialist realist novel benefits from the fact that standard language is still associated with discursive authority, helping to legitimize the work. Standard language is another register in which the novel performs its realism, confirming to the reader that these characters are worthy of his/her attention. But both registers perform the opposite role as well, with non-standardized language “constructed as so real that it gains materiality—it is “throbbing” with life—and is therefore no longer merely a representation,”<sup>328</sup> and standard language helping to ground the mimesis seemingly objective space-time. In both cases, the specific language choice not only describes the social world but justifies its right to do so. And so, if the register contrasts of Arabic and Turkish were used to index the national project and its discontents for the early 20th century realist novel in Egypt and Turkey, then the same contrast in socialist realist novels points to a different attitude towards the political and aesthetic

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<sup>327</sup> Anjaria, “Staging Realism,” 187.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid, 188.

stakes of representation.

It is well-documented that language lies right at the heart of socialist realism's dual concerns of realism and populism in both Egypt and Turkey. In literary and culture magazines in the Arab world, debates over the meaning of terms such as realism, commitment, and the role for the perceived registers of *Fuṣṣḥa* and *ʿāmmiyyah* formed some of the most popular subject matter. These terms represented the dueling sides in an intellectual revolt against the old guard, who lived in ivory towers, removed from the social struggles of ordinary people, and for whom literature existed merely as "art for its own sake."<sup>329</sup> For socialist writers, *Fuṣṣḥa* was the voice of the elite. Along with the pages of *al-Adab* and other magazines, proponents of various intellectual trends, such as Third-Worldism, existentialism, and socialist realism, all sought to reorganize the cultural field by changing attitudes towards language style. In her long history of realism in Egypt, Noha Radwan argues that realism had a disjunctive chronology as compared to other countries, reaching its zenith in the 1950s with Nagīb Maḥfūz, at a time when modernism was dominant elsewhere.<sup>330</sup> The most ardent promoter of the Romantic Socialist doctrine in Egypt during the 1950s and 1960s was the critic Maḥmūd Amīn ʿĀlim, whose co-authored book, *Fī al-Thaqāfah al-Miṣrīyah (On Egyptian Culture, 1955)*, was an enthusiastic pronouncement of

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<sup>329</sup> Yoav Di-Capua, "The Intellectual Revolt of the 1950s and the 'Fall of the Uḍabā'," in *Commitment and Beyond*, vol. 41 (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2015), 95-6.

<sup>330</sup> She also explains how when a local modernism did develop in the late 60s, it would be an aesthetic response to Nasserist excesses, as will be shown to be the case with Yūsuf Idrīs. Radwan also sees a return to realism along with neoliberalism during the Al-Sadāt-Mubarak era (1970–2011). This confirms the fact that socialist realism had an aesthetic and political agenda rather than serving just as a conventional approach to mimesis. Noha Radwan, "One Hundred Years of Egyptian Realism," in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 49 (Duke University Press, 2016), 262–77.

Socialist Realism as a new postcolonial aesthetic which could revolutionize literature in Egypt.<sup>331</sup>

In discussing his ideal of the new novel, al-Sharqāwī's *al-Ard*, he expresses a general astonishment at the novel's visceral realism. According to 'Ālim, al-Sharqāwī makes it seem as though you could touch the bulbs of cotton and smell the scent of the earth. He moves you with human feelings until you are laughing and crying, as though "you are in that life itself."<sup>332</sup> Non-standardized language plays a central role in this effect. 'Ālim cites an article by Muhammad Ibrahim Dakrub which speaks specifically to the powerful effect of dialogue in the novel.

If you compare the words that emerge from 'abd al-Hādī or al-'alwānī for instance, and then those words coming from Muhammad Efendi or Sheikh Hasūna, you will sense the great difference between the thoughts of the character...the characters in this novel are the ones who speak in this novel, not the author and not any other person.<sup>333</sup>

Because non-standardized language is used so forcefully in the novel, it clearly indexes rural characters in a way not seen before. Indexicality is wielded in such a believable way by al-Sharqāwī that it insists on its power of radical representation. Long before the popularization of Bakhtinian vocabulary in Egypt, 'Ālim is trying to articulate the process of enregistering voices.

The long rise of socialist realism in Turkey was marked by a seemingly endless series of

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<sup>331</sup> Di-Capua, "Revolt," 95

<sup>332</sup> 'Abd al-'Azīm. Anīs, *Fī al-Thaqāfah al-Miṣrīyah* / 'Abd al-'Azīm Anīs, Maḥmūd Amīn al-'Ālim., al-Ṭab'ah 1. (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfah al-Jadīdah, 1989), 131.

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إذا قارنت بين الكلام الذي يصدر مثلاً عن عبد الهادي أو علواني، ثم الكلام الذي يصدر عن محمد افندي أو الشيخ حسونة، لأحسست بالفرق الكبير بين تفكير شخص...فالشخصيات في هذه الرواية، كانت هي التي تتكلم، لا المؤلف ولا اي شخص آخر Anīs, Thaqāfah, 131.

debates in the pages of magazines like *Resimli Ay*, *Kadro*, *Yeni Adam*, *Yeni Ses* and *Yeni Edebiyat* by authors such as Nâzım Hikmet, Abidin Dino and Sadri Ertem about the meaning of such aspirational terms as ‘realism’ and ‘populism’. Murat Kaçıroğlu’s recent article on the literary debates surrounding socialist realism in its early years (1923-1940) show seemingly endless rounds of discussion over how to best represent reality while also being faithful to artistry, how to best represent the people while propelling them towards their own liberation.<sup>334</sup> These discussions would continue uninterrupted into the 1960s with articles in the pages of *Ant* and *Yön* about “writing for the people” and by intellectuals and writers such as Mehmet Doğan, Fethi Naci, Aziz Nesin, and Yaşar Kemal.

These writers and thinkers were also specifically interested in the merits of using non-standardized speech in literature. Most notably was a series of articles written over the course of 1952-4 in publications such as *Yeditepe*, *Yenilik*, *Akşam* and *Dünya* on the “şive taklidi” (dialect imitation) issue. The debate was tipped off by a series of articles by Memet Fuat on the harmful effects of dialect in literature. In his article “Köylü Konuşması”, Fuat argues that imitating peasant speech in novels would have long-term deleterious effects on literature, saying, “If he uses bad examples of language, saying that is how the people speak, he will help corrupt the language.” and “The writer’s language should be exemplary language.”<sup>335</sup> His articles warranted responses from

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<sup>334</sup> Murat Kaçıroğlu, “Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Edebiyatında (1923–1940) Toplumcu-Gerçekçi Edebiyat Tartışmaları,” *Erzurum Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1, no. 2 (2016): 27–71.

<sup>335</sup> “halk öyle konuşuyor diye, yapıtlarını kötü konuşma örnekleriyle doldurursa, dilin bozulmasına yardımcı olmuş olur” and “yazarındili örnek dil olmalıdır”

writers such as Can Yücel, Kemal Bilbaşar, Samim Kocagöz, and, of course, Orhan Kemal, who were in support of using dialect, and Nurullah Ataç, Tarık Buğra, and Melih Cevdet Anday, who joined Fuat in his criticism.

Writing for the journal *Kaynak Dergisi* two years before the publishing of *Fi-l-thaqāfa al-miṣriyyah*, Fethi Naci focused on Orhan Kemal's story "Kurtuluş Yolu" as a way to understand the relationship between realist vernacular dialogue and social reality. He is critical of Orhan Kemal for favoring a "five-senses realism" over the reality of the hidden mechanisms of class society.

What has the writer done? Events are looked at through the eyes of the worker, events are thought about as though they were thought by him. The worker's life, his thoughts, they're given as though they didn't even pass through the writer's head. The writer's head here goes no further than registering isolated events that have happened. Registering them like a seismograph or an earthquake detector. I mean to say it's mechanical, not creative.<sup>336</sup>

Naci faults Kemal for being *too* faithful to reality, portraying the lived experience and words of his characters without even passing them through the intermediary of his brain. There is no

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<sup>336</sup> Ne yapmış yazar? Olaylara işçinin gözüyle bakmış, olaylar karşısında onun düşündüğü gibi düşünmüş. İşçinin hayatı, düşünceleri, sanki yazarın kafasından geçmemiş gibi verilmiş. Yazarın kafası burada bütünden kopmuş gerçekleri tesbit etmekten öte geçemiyor. Sismografların yer depremini tesbit etmeleri gibi bir şey. Mekanik yani yaratıcı değil. "Yazarın Gerçeğe Bakışı" 1953 *Kaynak Dergisi* 89. Sayısında published in Fethi Naci, *İnsan Tükenmez* (İstanbul: Adam Yayınları, 1982), 31-32.

ironic distance or narrative editorializing by Kemal, but rather, only unmediated worker's consciousness and perception. Kemal's recreation of subaltern speech is so convincing that Naci claims that it looks like it hasn't even been created by the author. Both al-Alim in Egypt and Naci in Turkey seem bewitched by realistic dialogue, in both the positive and negative sense. They express a reverence for the unparalleled mimetic potential of dialogue above and beyond other modes of narrative. While the hapless acts of rural peasants or the heroic deeds of proletarian heroes imply at least some form of intervention on the part of the narratological attitude, dialogue comes at us unmediated, as though given directly, without having passed through the author's head.

The strong reaction of both of these critics do not just describe the effect of realism, but show how it advocates for itself. By the language being shocking, the social situations that it describes come off consequently as visceral. But if this is the case, then why keep standard language narration at all? The specific issue of non-standardized speech in dialogue is so interesting because it shows how, rather than working to abolish linguistic alterity, or giving it full control of the novel, socialist realist authors benefited precisely from the narrative compromise between the two. Paradoxically, both standard and non-standardization language and the moral and political values they index have an important role to play in the aesthetic project of the socialist realist novel.

## Realism, Language Ideology, and the Boundaries of Irony

In addition to providing this win-win situation whereby socialist realist authors would have both the *darstellung* of supposedly mimetic dialogue and the *vertretung* of authoritative narration, the standard/non-standardized contrast provides another, more specifically narratological, benefit: the power to draw the boundaries of irony. Recent works on realism have looked at how the special perspective offered by the realist novel is established by way of a seemingly impartial and universal voice. In his book *The Politics of Literature* (2008), Jacques Rancière traces the development of the realist novel in which the voice of literature came to speak to nobody in particular.<sup>337</sup> Whereas in the Early Modern Period the writing of authors such as Corneille were understood to be addressing officials and other elite audiences within performative belle-lettres spaces, the rise of modern prose writers like Flaubert meant that the written word was now “mute” inasmuch as it could be understood by others, even though it was not directly speaking on behalf of an identifiable, discrete voice. It was a writing that was open to infinite interpretation rather than directed at a particular elite audience. Rancière defines this fact as literariness: the “availability of the so-called ‘mute letter’ that determines a partition of the perceptible in which one can no longer contrast those who speak and those who only make noise, those who act and those who only live.”<sup>338</sup> According to Rancière, the modern novel as we know it is an anonymous view from nowhere, capable of being read by anyone.

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<sup>337</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The politics of literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

<sup>338</sup> Rancière, Jacques. "The Politics of Literature." *Substance*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2004, pp. 10.

The success of this arrangement, of course, relies on the illusion that only standard language ideology can provide.<sup>339</sup> For a register of language to be perceived to be at the absent center of society, as transparent as to be analogized as a photograph, it must be considered tantamount to a sensory modality rather than a contingent vehicle for meaning production. This is Silverstein's insight in his critique of Benedict Anderson's account of the rise of nationalist space time. As he states:

the objective realist "voicing" at issue depends on mapping across two framings so that indexed (invoked) identities of role-relational sender-receiver-referent(s) (in the framework of narrative events) can be grouped together by reference to a kind of "standard" identity—perhaps a "standard average" identity with a view from nowhere in particular that is most specifically emblemized by the speaker of a standard register of the "language".<sup>340</sup>

This is the power of standard language ideology: its ability to make some languages invisible.

But beyond the radical democratic potential of Rancière's *literariness* is the narratological potential of the illusion of standard language. Fredric Jameson also recounts the evolution of narrative voice in his recent *Antinomies of Realism* (2013), in a chapter dedicated to the character-rich novels of the Spanish author Pérez Galdós.<sup>341</sup> According to Jameson, much must be done to ensure that the protagonist or the narrative voice is not overtaken by the large cast of

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<sup>339</sup> James Milroy, "Language Ideologies and the Consequences of Standardization," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 5, no. 4 (2001): 530–55.

<sup>340</sup> Silverstein, "Whorfianism," 124.

<sup>341</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (Verso, 2013).

characters that inhabit the world of the realist novel. The element that keeps them at bay is the use of irony. Irony requires a balancing of outer and inner distance, one which allows for the reader outside of the text to judge the internal experience of the temporal present. If the narrator him or herself (or the narration itself) cannot be extracted from the gaze of this judgement, as is in the case of a *bildungsroman* or a *skaz* novel, then the illusion of indifference or a view from nowhere will not work. Whereas dialogue now has a substance and density of its own, distinct from the surrounding fabric of the prose context, the language of narration “must not be marked or personalized; they must not be allowed to become other to us or to be visible from the outside. It is our old friend the impersonal consciousness, the eternal present of an anonymous and purely formal awareness without content, that is required for them.”<sup>342</sup> Again, we can see how important the contrast of standard and non-standardized registers would be in the construction of this careful management of the ironic gaze. The focus of the reader must be turned towards the characters of a novel or short story, and what better way to attract their attention than conspicuously non-standardized speech? Just as standard language ideology helps to create a narration that is awareness without content, the accented voices of those speaking in other, non-standardized speech help even minor characters rise to a place of prominence within the work.

It is possible to now see how the standard/non-standardized contrast functions specifically as a narrative strategy: rather than the diglossia phenomenon posing an aesthetic problem for

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<sup>342</sup> Jameson, *Antimonies*, 99.

literature, it instead offers a useful form from which literature can benefit. Taken together, there are now three levels at which the standard/non-standardized contrast can be indexed: 1) as corresponding to the demands of the nationalist imagination or as a critique of it 2) as part of the effort to perform the mimetic power and representational authority of the socialist realism novel 3) and as a way to organize perspective and audience vis-a-vis dramatic irony. While Yūsuf Idrīs and Orhan Kemal were aware and responsive to all of these demands while writing their fiction, these various language ideologies were further filtered through their own life histories and personal artistic development. In the following biographical sections, special emphasis will be put on how each of their personal attitudes towards non-standardized dialogue corresponded to these larger ideologies.

### Yūsuf Idrīs

Linguistic anthropology has done much to show how variation in language styles come to be indexed to specific social groups and idealized personages. But the possible indexes are not limited to concrete social categories. They can often become linked to abstract values, such as ‘respectable,’ ‘articulate,’ or even ‘beautiful,’ and as such they come to be indexed to the perceived artistry and command of language itself. As Eckert says of the indexical field: “Ideology is at the center of stylistic practice: one way or another, every stylistic move is the result of an

interpretation of the social world and of the meanings of elements within it, as well as a positioning of the stylizer with respect to that world.”<sup>343</sup>

For this reason, beyond accounting for the ways that linguistic styles act as a map of the political and social world, it is also necessary to consider how certain linguistic registers become imbued with moral and aesthetic values. It is clear from studying the life and career of Yūsuf Idrīs (and from that of Orhan Kemal’s biography, as I will show shortly) that he had his own personal moral and aesthetic associations with both the standard language and its diverse non-standardized forms. Rather than merely ventriloquizing the language ideologies which organize modern Arab identity, Idrīs formed his own opinions about the language registers of Arabic based on his life experiences and aspirations as a writer. Idrīs’ relationship with diglossia was not simply determined by national politics or the conventions of genre, but rather was a choice he made based on a whole host of political, institutional, ideological, and biographical considerations. Both he and Orhan Kemal offer excellent examples of what Michael Silverstein refers to as the “metapragmatic unconscious: ideas about language which are shaped by an individual’s biography in society, and centrally his or her membership in and alignment with certain categories differentiated in social process and with various primary... reference groups.”<sup>344</sup>

Yūsuf Idrīs was born in the Egyptian village of Faqous in 1927, and was the son of a middle class father who spent a large part of his career helping engineer ditches in the Egyptian

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<sup>343</sup> Eckert, “Variation,” 456.

<sup>344</sup> Michael Silverstein, “Denotation and the Pragmatics of Language,” *The Cambridge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology*, 2014, 152.

countryside. Idrīs grew up in al-Bayrum, listening to oral tradition and popular legends from his uncle ‘Abd al-Salām and his great grandmother. In an autobiographical sketch written in 1983, Idrīs describes the impact of hearing these stories on his later artistic development.

She not only told me about every minute detail of family life and all the different personalities in the family group, both wicked and good, but also sang to me the old Egyptian folk songs. These included the Bedouin and Coptic songs for the dead and for marriage ceremonies, songs for working in the fields and even songs to accompany circumcision rites for male children in the family; songs, in fact, for every conceivable occasion. All these things had a profound effect on my imagination.<sup>345</sup>

All of these formative experiences of listening to storytelling, it can be safely assumed, were not conducted in standard Arabic. Yūsuf Idrīs’s long-held support for using spoken language in his fictional works began with his fascination with rural forms of storytelling and the liveliness of local language. His opinions about local language and literature can further be gleaned from his series of essays about an authentic Egyptian theatre, in which he declared:

From the scattered facts that crossed my mind, and other evidence taken from the reality of our life, as well as from the basic unchanging laws of existence according to which whenever there exists a people, that people will, of necessity, produce its own art...we can say that there exists an Egyptian theatre in our life, but we do not notice it simply because we want to resemble the Greek and European theatre we have known.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Roger Allen, *A Critical Perspective on Yūsuf Idrīs* (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1994), 12.

<sup>346</sup> Quoted in Hanita Brand, “‘Al-Farāfir’ by Yūsuf Idrīs: The Medium Is the Message,” *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 1990, 59.

Two points can be made from the above quote. First, Idrīs is working to counter the derisive stance that many other intellectuals had towards folk literature, and by extension non-standardized language. (The play that he would produce as a result of his Egyptian theater project would itself be composed in non-standardized language.) The second point is that Idrīs invokes an entirely other point of reference for the debate over standard and non-standardized language: cultural decolonization.<sup>347</sup> While not taken up in this chapter, cultural decolonization can be added as yet another point of reference in the indexical field of the standard/non-standardized contrast.

At the same time, Idrīs often expressed his ideological beliefs about the differing registers of Arabic in reference to his own skills as a writer and his personal stylistic preferences.

I personally regard the language problem as a burden on me. But I'm very content when writing in Egyptian colloquial... personally, I cannot write in the classical written language (*fuhsa*). I can do it and it may turn out fine, but at the crucial moment of composition, I am not in a position to choose between what is suitable and what is not. The writing is almost dictated to me. I am the means, not the writer himself. Introducing the force of will here impairs the entire process. Perhaps it is better to interfere later with a conscious mind and through the author himself.<sup>348</sup>

When Idrīs speaks of the unconscious forces driving his choices, he could just as well be speaking of the metapragmatic unconscious. Yūsuf Idrīs is famous for his use of dialect in Arabic fiction, and employed it at a time when it was arguably the least acceptable. The rise of state intervention

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<sup>347</sup> See Emily Sibley, "Redefining Theater: Yūsuf Idrīs's *al-Farāfir* and the Work of Cultural Decolonization," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 39 (2019).

<sup>348</sup> (Muwaqif 9 (April-June 1970), 51) quoted in Allen, *Yūsuf Idrīs*, 29.

into the standardization of the language had brought even more pressure to bear on the establishment of a standard register of the language. For Idrīs, the ultimate representatives of this were the Arabic Language Academy and the Higher Council for Arts and Literature. While Idrīs is often vague and deferential to general principles of literary independence and socialist progress, he never minces words about his opinion of the official institutional body of linguistic purism in Egypt<sup>349</sup>. While Idrīs acknowledged the “huge, strange gulf that separates our written language from the simple and fluent idiom in which we speak,” he was not confident that the problem would ever be solved, unless by “an Academy with faith in the people, and in the purity of its language, even though this language is not to be found among the sayings of the Ancients.”<sup>350</sup> It goes without saying that the Arabic Language Academy had no such faith.

It is helpful, in this case, to think of Fuṣḥa less as a discrete register of Arabic, but rather an aspirational ideal to which even the most esteemed of writers had to continue to grasp for. Many scholars, such as Sasson Somekh and P.M. Kurpershoek, have gone into detail to show the ways in which the narrative sections of Idrīs’ work strain towards conforming to the stylistics of a purified Fuṣḥa, and how often they represent a “clear departure from the “spirit” of classical Arabic syntax.”<sup>351</sup> According to them, there are frequent passages of description in which it is

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<sup>349</sup> P. Marcel Kurpershoek, *The Short Stories of Yūsuf Idrīs: A Modern Egyptian Author*, vol. 7 (Brill Archive, 1981), 115-6

<sup>350</sup> Y. Idrīs, “al-Farq bayn at-Tilfiziyyun wa-l-Idha’a al-Mar’iyyah.” *al-Gumhuriya* (2 May 1960), pg. 10. Quoted in Kurpershoek, *Yūsuf Idrīs*, 117.

<sup>351</sup> Sasson Somekh, “Language and Theme in the Short Stories of Yūsuf Idrīs,” *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 1975, 89–100, 93.

clear from the syntactic structure and the use of ‘questionable’ vocabulary that Idrīs has translated from what would be his own vernacular way of speaking into Fuṣḥa. His use of standard Arabic does not merely follow the rules to be read as standard language, but is carefully crafted in order to be, as Kristin Peterson-Ishaq says, “simple and straightforward... his use of language, while economical, is frequently striking.”<sup>352</sup> Idrīs’ use of standard Arabic can be characterized by this balance between verbal restraint and emotional effect, avoiding loquaciousness for its own sake, eschewing “the more romantic tendencies of some of his more immediate predecessors and [choosing] to present his subjects in a direct and attractive realism.”<sup>353</sup> Here is a great example of imbuing linguistic style with moral and political values: Idrīs’ standard language is authentic because it is in touch with spoken forms, which makes it realistic; and because it’s realistic it is therefore honest.

But judgements about the quality of Idrīs’ writing, based ultimately on his closeness to non-standardized language, were also negative. In Idrīs’ own self-conscious development as a writer, he thought that standard Arabic was “stagnant, that it required a revolution, and that it was no good simply adding to the past, much of which he described as being “crammed with nonsense.”<sup>354</sup> This is clearly reflected in the reception to his style. “Critics with a partiality for

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<sup>352</sup> Yūsuf Idrīs and Kristin Peterson-Ishaq, *The Sinners* (Passeggiata Pr, 1984), x.

<sup>353</sup> Roger Allen, “The Artistry of Yūsuf Idrīs,” *World Literature Today* 55, no. 1 (1981): 43–47.

<sup>354</sup> Yūsuf Idrīs, *The Essential Yūsuf Idrīs: Masterpieces of the Egyptian Short Story* (American Univ in Cairo Press, 2009), 3.

classical stylistic norms often complain that Idrīs' language is "lax" or "untidy."<sup>355</sup> Others, like 'abd al-Jabar 'Abbās, were far more sympathetic to Idrīs' continuing experiments with vulgar language, justifying his use of non-standardized expressions by saying:

The artist understands that colloquial expressions are quite vulgar and clearly absurd, and so he is choice and selective, and gives these colloquial expressions the artistic touch, which rids them of their former vulgarity. And so colloquial expressions, which obtain their specific charm from their circulation among the people, obtain it in the story only by their special placement chosen specifically by the author...Yūsuf Idrīs is an artist who is continuously experimenting... experimenting not only with the level of his style, but also with how the style helps to endorse his ideas.<sup>356</sup>

All of these assessments of Idrīs' writing style are a confirmation that language registers are deeply entwined with questions of literary style and skill, an explanation for why the two things are so often conflated by the use of the word "language." In the quest for that nebulous and unquantifiable thing called personal style, the writer is not indexing registers to social personas but rather creating his own inexact recipe, combining the beautiful and pleasing associations of both.

Lastly, while trying to understand Idrīs' stylistics, one should return to the national context to understand how his own biography interfaced with the shifting fortunes of the left

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<sup>355</sup> Sasson Somekh, "The Function of Sound in the Stories of Yūsuf Idrīs," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 1985, 95.

<sup>356</sup> الفنان يدرك ان التعابير العامية ابتداءا كثيرا وسخفا واضحا، فهو اما ان يعمد الى الانتقاء والاختيار، او يمد التعابير العامية برعشة الفن التي تعمد خلقها حتى لتبرأ من ابتدائها السابق. بل وحتى العبارة العامية التي اكتسبت جمالا معيننا من تداول الناس لها لا تكتسب جمالها في القصة الا في الوضع الخاص بها الذي يختاره لها في السرد... فان يوسف ادريس فنان يجرب بالاستمراره. انه يجرب لا على مستوى الشكل فحسب وانما في موافقة المكربة ايضا.

al-Jabar 'Abbās, "Al-Lughah 'aynd Yūsuf Idrīs," *Al-Adab* 1 (January 1967).

and its contentious relationship with Nasserism. Idrīs' own relationship with the military regime was itself deeply complicated and ambivalent, and thus, had a measurable impact on his stylistic choices. As many have noted, he began his career at a point when there was a renewed interest in the Egyptian non-standardized language, starting at the end of the forties and the beginning of the fifties.<sup>357</sup> Idrīs was himself committed to socialism, with his engagement in politics arising concurrently with his transition from medicine to literature. He helped publish a militant leaflet called *The Magazine for All* (*Majalat al-Jami'*) and joined the left wing magazine *al-Tahrir* in September 1952. Beyond his literature commitments, he was also a member of *Haditu*, Egypt's major socialist organization following the military coup in 1952. Idrīs would even be imprisoned for his political affiliations with *Haditu* from August 1954 to September 1955, after the group's relationship with the government deteriorated. Like many imprisoned intellectuals, Idrīs spent much of his time in prison in conversation with communists; but he severed his ties upon release from prison and became a major supporter of the regime in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This was certainly helped by the fact that he benefited from state employment during this time. That relationship would again deteriorate over the 1960s, as he lost his post in the Ministry of Health, and then became more critical of the government and even lampooning Nasser in his stories, "The Trick" (*al-Khud'ah*, 1969) and "The Journey" (*al-Riḥlah*, 1970).<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Kurpershoek, *Short Stories*.

<sup>358</sup> Lindley Cross, *Perspectives Behind Translating House of Flesh by Yūsuf Idrīs*, 2009, 6.

Idrīs' growing disillusionment can be seen in his use of registers to portray the down and out. "Idrīs's [stories] are not interested in showing these poor characters in their moments of transcending the limitations of their everyday lives to become social realist or nationalist heroes performing acts of resistance."<sup>359</sup> Rather than vernacular speech acting as the marker of the authentic and soon-to-be triumphant proletarian, vernacular speech helps create a sort of pitiable ironic distance: the victims of the current order.<sup>360</sup> Who these victims were would change with the political tides. The clear class divisions he perceived between the rural masses and the urban petit bourgeois in the capital, which could be easily parsed out using almost satirical contrasts in language use in his earlier, more traditionally realist work would be complicated by having his one-time political champions in the form of the Nasserist regime slowly morph into a statist yoke around the neck of society as a whole. Whereas he could easily point to the injustices of the old regime and the legacy of corruption that it left behind, as Nasserism ground on, it became harder to separate out the oppressor and the oppressed, and consequently, to conveniently label either using the markers of either Fuṣḥa or 'āmmiyyah. Somekh argues that while Idrīs made more a clear-cut distinction between dialogue and narrative in his earlier socialist realist writing, his later, more experimental and surreal fiction was made up of a more complex fabric, in which "there is no cut and dry distinction between narration and dialogue. Their fabric is far more

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<sup>359</sup> Waiel Abdelwahed, *Servants in the House of the Nation: Fictions of Truth in Twentieth Century Egyptian Literature* (Unpublished dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements ..., 2009).

<sup>360</sup> This is another important reason for why an unreflexive use of the term socialist realism to explain language choices is counterproductive.

complex, and often the dialogue is not presented naturalistically, that is to say, through an "omniscient author."<sup>361</sup> Kurpershoek agrees with this assessment, saying, "When the abstract language of stories like 'Bait min Lahm' and 'al-Martaba al-Muqa'ara' is compared with the racy directness of both the vocabulary and the phraseology of Idrīs' production in the early fifties, one cannot but be struck by the transformation his art had undergone..."<sup>362</sup> This context is important to keep in mind for the close reading of Idrīs' novel *al-Ḥarām*, which begins to show signs of this destabilizing of narration, dialogue, and the forms of language in which they are written. The question of precisely who constitutes the down and out in the novel is meant to be uncertain, a fact which is attested to by all of the innovations that Idrīs makes in how register had been customarily used.

### **al-Ḥarām**

In the late 1950s, Yūsuf Idrīs wrote his own contribution to the village novel genre. *al-Ḥarām* (*The Sinners*, 1959) is a novel which contains many of the tropes associated with the classic village novel, including the inspector as narrative vehicle, themes of sexual taboos, and the tribulations of the rural poor. But unlike the first generation of village novels, which had been the ideological medium of the urban national bourgeoisie, *al-Ḥarām* is identified by Samah Selim along with a new generation of novels as using the tropes of the village novel to respond with a critique of political power and social hegemony. Selim says of *al-Ḥarām* specifically that the novel

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<sup>361</sup> Somekh, *Genre and Language*, 91.

<sup>362</sup> Kurpershoek, *Short Stories*, 181

“organizes the trope of sexuality and sexual transgression within a rigidly patriarchal society as a way to explore the struggle for self-knowledge and individual social agency within the limits imposed by collective tradition.”<sup>363</sup> While there is nothing objectionable in Selim’s reading per se, it is incomplete in that it channels the politics of the novel back into a critique of an imagined cultural dominant, and in doing so, collapses the other important aesthetic and narratological motivations for using register contrasts.

*Al-Ḥarām* centers on the investigation to find the murderer of an infant child found dead in the canal of an agricultural estate in the Egyptian Delta in the days before the 1952 Revolution. The gruesome murder is revealed at the very beginning of the novel in an eerie way, when a pleasant morning swim by a man turns into a gruesome discovery. Idrīs builds up the macabre discovery in romantic, pastoral terms.

كانت الدنيا تمر بلحظة السكون التام حين يكون الليل وما فيه من نقيق وصرير قد ولى، وحين لا يكون النهار  
سكون جليل مهيب تتردد. سكون تام مطبق كأنما ستقوم القيامة بعده. الكامل بأصواتها وضجيجه قد أقبل بعد  
لم يكن يجروء على خدشه ألا نصف كرة أبيض كان يغوص في ماء التربة... حتى أدق الكائنات في خدشه

Night with its croaking and chirping was over, while the noisy clamour of full day was not yet near. The silence was as total, as though the Resurrection was about to take place, so awesome and sublime that even the tiniest creature seemed loathe to break it. Only one thing disturbed the silence—a white ball diving and surfacing in the canal water...

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<sup>363</sup> Selim, *Rural Imaginary*, 129

<sup>364</sup> Yūsuf Idrīs, *Al-Ḥarām* (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat Mišr, 1959), 1. Idrīs and Peterson-Ishaq, *Simmers*, 1.

This opening section is written in an ornate standard, bringing to mind the romantic idealization of classic village novels like *Zaynab* and assuring readers of Idrīs' craft as a writer. It uses syntactical 'register shibboleths' (the use of قد أقبل بعد is particularly distant from spoken phrasing) to clearly herald the text's register. While adhering to this elevated style, Idrīs then begins to describe in detail the separate parts of a body as they emerge one by one from the water.

وهذا المرة وضح أن لنصف الكرة جبهة مل لبث أن وضح أن لها عينين ثم فماً

At this time, it would have become clear to an observer that the ball was a forehead and it was not long before two eyes and a mouth appeared.

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This voice from nowhere moves from an eloquent and expansive view of the countryside to a strange sort of lack recognition of the body of the peasant swimming in the canal. As it zooms in, the voice describes two arms, and then focuses in again to see a tattoo on the right arm of a woman holding a sword. Under the woman there is a name which belongs to the swimmer: 'Abd al-Muttalib. The slow reveal, and lingering on the tattoo give the voice the impression of some straight-laced voyeur, unable to turn away from the sight of a naked man (with a tattoo nonetheless) who is leisurely swimming in an agricultural canal. While the scene itself is not at all uncommon, the lingering attention brought to it by the voice from nowhere reveals the voice from nowhere as having decidedly urban national bourgeoisie sensibilities. Without making any direct comment, its lingering acts as a comment itself.

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<sup>365</sup> Idrīs, *Al-Ḥarām*, 1 and Idrīs and Peterson-Ishaq, *Sinners*, 1

This is clearly already more than a project of straightforward, mimetic representation. This is an exaggeration of the narrative voice, not just presenting the facts of the case, but veering “into a performative mode that interrupts the narrative with the alternative register of synchronic time.”<sup>366</sup> The narration is slowing down time, examining the details with gawking precision, turning realism’s mirror into a warping magnifying glass. This is what Anjaria refers to as the referent becoming so powerful as to overshadow the referent completely.<sup>367</sup> The problem, narratologically speaking, is that the reader cannot at this point trust the mood with which the facts are being presented. If this is indeed an objective realist “voicing,” ie. our old friend the impersonal consciousness, then why does it have such a hard time recognizing a swimming body?

Mirroring the narrator’s own realization, the same process of misrecognition happens for ‘Abd al-Muttalib as well. He gets out of the water after his refreshing morning swim and walks across the bridge back towards home, but as he does he spots another formless object which is eventually revealed to be a human body.

وبينما كان ماضياً في طريقه إلى العزبة الكبيرة، فوجئ عبد المطلب بجسم أبيض غريب يرقد على جانب من الجسر.  
وفرّح عبد المطلب فهو – ككل الناس – ما يكاد يرى على الأرض شيئاً يختلف لونه عن لون الأرض إلا ويعتقد أنه  
”عثر على «لُقيّة»، ويدق قلبه بالفرح

<sup>366</sup> Anjaria, “Staging Realism,” 187.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid, 188.

As he was on his way to the big estate, Abd al-Muttalib was surprised by a strange white object lying on one side of the bridge. Abdel-Muttalib was excited by this - like all people - in that when he saw on the ground something different from the color of the earth he thought he had discovered a "finding," and his heart beat with joy."

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Here we have a moment of dramatic irony, where the character is unaware of what he has truly found. But this was just the case for the narrating voice as well. In a way, the way that 'Abd al-Muttalib process is so close to the impersonal narrator works to bring attention to the positionality of the narrator, as not having an omniscient view. But in a crucial distinction, because 'Abd al-Muttalib is allowed to actually react to his surroundings, when he finally realizes what he sees, it is through his perspective that the reader gets confirmation that the "finding" is in face a dead infant child.

غير أنه حين برّش بعينه... ما كاد يرى الشيء حتى تسمر في مكانه مذعورا ومضى يصرخ: الله حى، الله حى، الله حى.  
ذلك أن الشيء لم يكن إلا جنيناً حديث الولادة

When he peered closer...he saw what it was and stopped dead in his tracks. He was terrified and began to shout, "My God, my God, my God!" For, the thing he had caught sight of was nothing other than a newborn baby!

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The effect of this first use of direct discourse by 'abd al-Muttalib is that it confirms the sense of shock and horror of the situation within the social world of the novel. If the narration has so far

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<sup>368</sup> Idrīs, *Al-Ḥarām*, 4. Unfortunately, I have added this last quote under quarantine during the Corona Virus outbreak, and I no longer have access to Peterson-Ishaq's translation, so in this one instance it is my own.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid. and Idrīs and Peterson-Ishaq, *Sinners*, 2.

described the foundling with romantic, if prudish, detachment, ‘abd al-Muttalib’s shouting makes it tangible and immediate. Having the words of a character from within the world of the village confirms the severity of the situation by contextualizing it in a way the panoramic narration could not. In this case, the two registers help to manage ironic distancing.

Lastly, despite its object, this opening chapter it is by itself a lovely and capably written, benefitting from the expressiveness of the romantic mode to create a narrative hook. Idrīs cannot help but betray his loving feelings when writing about the countryside. In an autobiographical essay from 1982, he remembers a period of his early life when he lived on a rural estate with his inspector father, writing, “I grew up as the Ma’mour son, in other words, more or less the crown prince of a petty kingdom...I have spent the whole of my life harking back to those few months.”<sup>370</sup> The romanticism which can be detected in Idrīs’ style in this opening chapter might as well be a reflection of a deep and abiding personal nostalgia, even despite the subject matter. This is not the only time that the use of a romantic standard register echoes the romanticism of the urban national bourgeoisie, and Idrīs’ nostalgia. The epilogue of the novel features the romantic image of a willow tree, left at the side of the canal as the only remnant of the old economic order that passed away after the revolution. It is said to have grown from a stick that the mother of the dead child possessed when she herself dies in the end of the novel. In the introduction to her translation of the novel, Kristin Peterson-Ishaq claims that the willow tree is the most significant use of irony in the novel, as the narration claims that women now make

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<sup>370</sup> Allen, *Yūsuf Idrīs*, 6-7.

pilgrimages to the tree to cure them of childlessness, transforming sin into life. But the tree can also be seen as an ironizing of the pastoralism that underwrites the romanticism of the classic Egyptian pastoral novel, that which constantly evokes idyllic scenes of nature.<sup>371</sup> What seems like an idyllic symbol to close out the book is a further mocking of nationalist bourgeois values concealed in its own language.<sup>372</sup>

### Everyone's a Sinner

Idris uses his plot surrounding the death of an infant child as a way to criticize traditional social attitudes towards sexuality and sexual transgression within a rigidly patriarchal society. But the society in question isn't necessarily identical to that of the nation state as a whole. Idris is also keenly interested in exhibiting the prejudices, injustices and class conflict which are contained entirely within the world of the agricultural estate. The mother of the dead child in question turns out to be a woman named Aziza. She is a migrant worker, referred to pejoratively as the tarahil or Gharabwa, a member of the lowest social group of the entire estate. Far below the bureaucrats and landowners, tarahil are even lower than the estate cotton workers themselves.

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<sup>371</sup> For example: "Sitting in the shade of a large sycamore tree, she let her imagination drift across the deserted landscape. The wind rustled the leaves of the trees and water flowed by in the canal, its surface stirred by the breeze into small waves that followed each other with the current until they disappeared among the reeds which grew along the banks. Sometimes a sparrow descended from a nearby tree, chirping in the air and alighting close to where she sat, hopping about freely before flying to the other bank or back into the tree."

Mohammed Hussein Haikal, *Zainab* (Darf, 2017), 81.

<sup>372</sup> This coda to the book at the same time works to give a sense of omniscience to the narrative voice by giving it a piece of non-diegetic information.

The focus on this specific subgroup was not chosen casually. Idrīs had come into intimate contact with the *tarahil*, describing them in his autobiographical sketch as “the poorest stratum in Egyptian society: peasants from the very lowest echelons of the peasantry, with no original village to serve as home, no family, no name, nothing; just the residue of broken tribes and families, homeless vagabonds.”<sup>373</sup> Rather than a village novel drawing distinctions between the national bourgeois and the undifferentiated subaltern, Idrīs chooses to focus on class conflicts within the peasantry itself.

When the baby is first found, opinion in the estate is practically unanimous in assuming the perpetrator to be a member of the *tarahil*. But this has everything to do with social prejudices and nothing to do, as the novel is committed to pointing out, with actual class-based differences in behavior or morality. Interspersed with chapters on the investigation, there are numerous scenes in which the more reputable members of the estate are also involved in love plots, casual lust, and even rape. (The father of the dead child turns out to be the son of the owner of another estate, who rapes Aziza out in the fields one day.) Each character reveals his/her beliefs, actions, and hypocrisies on his/her own, while the omniscient narration treats them equally, regardless of their class. From the perspective of the reader, everyone is a sinner.

This dynamic is achieved thanks to both standard and non-standardized speech. The diglossia divide is not used to ‘separate out’ different classes from one another, or to distinguish the estate clerks and foreigners from the estate laborers and migrant workers by way of language

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

registers. Instead, we see the whole cast of characters spoken about in standard, and speaking for themselves in non-standardized. This narrative strategy places all of them within the same plane of conflict. As noted by Selim, this leveling is brought about under the thematic banner of sin in the novel, as each of the characters, regardless of class, is capable of sexual transgressions. But rather than depicting the truths revealed as striking a blow against the monolithic power of a rigidly patriarchal society (which can still be understood as synonymous with the nationalist imagination), Idrīs portrays sexual transgressions as a social commonality which is distorted, or erased altogether, by class ideology.

When the central transgression of the novel—the rape by the son of a landowner of a migrant worker— takes place between members of the extreme opposite classes, class prejudices make it seem like two separate acts. For the wealthy Ahmad, it is harmless fun; while for Aziza, it is an eventual death sentence. But *al-Harām* uses the two registers at its disposal to flip this perspective. At many points in the novel, non-standardized speech is used to undercut the seeming politeness of the upper class, making them just as rude and coarse as any other working member of the estate. We first hear an account of a rape by Ahmad Sultan, who is having a jovial conversation about all sorts of licentious topics with his friend Sawfat. While admitting casually to the rape of a worker at the estate, his own brief account of the incident is delivered in non-standardized dialogue. Beyond, describing it in terms that make it clear he doesn't even consider the rape to have been non-consensual, the non-standardized language itself gives an impression

of vulgarity.

وعارف البت دي اللي كانت بتشتغل مع الأنفار اللي بيفرزون القطن. البت الهايشة دي

:فيقول صفوت

انهى واحدة؟-

البت الطويلة الهايشة دي -

آه..-

وحياة شرفك هي اللي قالت لي بعظمة لسانها: خدني

وعملتها؟-

يعني أكسفها يعني يا سي صفوت؟-

“You know the girl who worked with the laborers separating the cotton—the silly one?”

“Which one?” asked Sawfat.

“The tall one who acted so young and stupid.”

“Oh-h-h...”

“Believe me, she told me herself to take her.”

“And did you?”

“What should I have done— embarrassed her, Mister Sawfat?!”

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The first line of dialect in the Arabic is dripping with register shibboleths, with each of the first four words being clear elements of the non-standardized register. More than any of them, however, the word for girl, (*bit* as opposed to *bint*) that Ahmad Sultan uses is heavily marked, not only as non-standardized, but as strongly indexical to a specific chauvinistic way of speaking about women, one that any Egyptian reader would have heard in real life. The word which Peterson-Ishaq has very euphemistically translated as ‘silly’ is actually هايشة (*haysa*) which has

<sup>374</sup> Idrīs, *Al-Ḥarām*, 55-6 and Idrīs and Peterson-Ishaq, *Sinners*, 45.

different connotations, from wild animal to woman with disheveled hair to sexual arousal.<sup>375</sup> The rape is also described matter of factly by Sawfat as “doing her.” Not only does the non-standardized dialogue here bring a mirror to the landowning class’ vulgarity, what it shows begins to look grotesque, like the reflection in a fun house. The particular non-standardized tone that this conversation takes is a testament to Idrīs’ skill at giving non-standardized expressions the artistic touch, although in exactly the opposite sense of what ‘abd al-Jabbar ‘Abbās had in mind. That is to say, rather than elevating them to refined speech, he recalls them in all of their former vulgarity.

Ahmad Sultan’s blustering allusion to his dalliance with an estate worker sharply contradicts the way that Aziza’s own rape will be described later in the novel. All of the events leading up to this rape, as well as the act itself, are described with evenly paced detail by the narrative voice, giving the reader the confident impression that the account represents objective reality. The narration explains how back in their home district, Aziza’s husband fell sick and pleaded with her to find him an out of season sweet potato, which she goes to look for in an old

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<sup>375</sup> I thank Radwa al-Barouni for her help untangling the meanings of this word.

field that belongs to the local landowner. Unable to find anything, Ahmad appears and helps her.

لَفَّتْ عزيزة البطاطا في طرف شالها ولسانها يردد كل ما تعرفه من كلمات الشكر وتعبيراته ودعوته، تتوجه بها إلى “  
السماء تطلب له طول العمر ونجاح المقاصد. واستدارت ملهوفة فرحانة لكي تأخذ طريقها إلى البلد، فالشمس كانت قد  
أوشكت على الغروب والدنيا تَمَسَّتْ وإلى أن تصل البلدة يكون المساء قد حل

ولكنها في لهفتها وفرحتها لم تفطن إلى الحفرة التي كانت وراءها وعلى هذا فقد فوجئت بنفسها تسقط مرة واحدة نصفها  
في الحفرة ونصفها على الأرض

”والواقع أنها لم تتبين تماماً ما حدث بعد هذا، الأمور حدثت بطريقة أسرع من أن تدركها أو تتلافها

Aziza wrapped the potato in the end of her shawl, while her tongue repeated every word, every phrase, every prayer of thanks she knew, and sent them heavenwards, wishing for a long life and continued success. Eagerly, joyfully, she turned to make her way back to the village. The sun had almost set, and it was growing late and would be dark by the time she reached home. But in her eagerness and joy, she failed to see the hole that lay behind her. Accordingly, she was startled to suddenly find she had fallen, half in the hole, half in the ground. She was not really sure what happened after that. Things began to happen faster than she was able to understand, or change them.

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The authority of the standard narrative voice dispels any doubt that the rape was not something Aziza wanted, or of which she was in any control. Rather than describing the rape directly, it intimates it with a type of chaste innuendo, again echoing the standard register of a victorian bourgeoisie. But by describing her mental experience of the rape, it frees her of any responsibility by showing the reader definitively that she was a passive victim. The unsentimental narrative

<sup>376</sup> Idris, *Al-Ḥarām*, 88-9 and Idris and Peterson-Ishaq, *The Sinners*, 70.

distance, which at one point made it difficult to understand the seriousness of finding a dead child, is now used as an objective assurance that this is not merely a case of ‘he said she said’.

In a reversal of the standard equation, the mimetic compromise of realism exposes the true coarseness of the bourgeoisie (Ahmet) using his own words, while lending the authority of the voice from nowhere to bolster the experience of the lowest member of society (Aziza). That is to say non-standardized language is used to expose the falsity of the account of a rich, entitled landowner’s son rather than to liberate the voice of the subaltern from the tyranny of the bourgeois text, and standard language is used to substantiate the experience of the lowest member of society. If the Fuṣḥa/‘ammiyyah divide seemed to offer a reassuringly clear screen upon which to project the great ideological divides between society, the actual interplay between the two registers in a novel like *al-Ḥarām* erodes the confidence of objective national perceptions in exchange for the messy reality of class society.

#### Inspecting the Inspector

The investigation of the murder of the child is headed by the novel’s protagonist, Fikri Afendi. But in important distinction to earlier village novels, which begin with inspectors and observers coming from the city to the countryside, Fikri Afendi is a local. Technically an agricultural commissioner (*ma’mur al-taftish*) in charge of security and administration of the estate, he makes routine rounds to the villages of Munufiya and Gharbiya. At the estate where the murder has taken place, he knows “almost every one of its young girls and its women

individually.”<sup>377</sup> He is himself married to a peasant woman named Umm Sawfat from the south.

Despite this intimacy, Fikri Afendi still shows disdain towards the peasant workers, and

seemingly visceral hatred for the tarahil who come to work seasonally on the cotton plantation.

قُرَى يُسَمِّيهَا هُوَ عَشُّ النَّعْلِ، فَالنَّاسُ فِيهَا كَثِيرُونَ أَكْثَرَ مِنَ اللَّازِمِ، أَكْثَرَ مِنَ الْعَمَلِ الْمَطْلُوبِ وَالطَّعَامِ الْمَوْجُودِ، وَكُلِّهِمْ  
— وَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ — فَقَرَاءٌ، فَقَرَاءٌ إِلَى الدَّرَجَةِ الَّتِي كَانَ فِكْرِي أَفْنَدِي نَفْسَهُ يَهْزُ رَأْسَهُ حَسْرَةً حِينَ يَرَاهُمْ فِي بِلَادِهِمْ، وَكَيْفَ  
يَعِيشُونَ.”

He calls the villages “anthills,” because they have so many people — more than are needed, more than the demand for work and the existing food supply. All of them are poor, too — so poor that Fikri Afendi shakes his head in sorrow when he sees them in their villages and observes the way they live.

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This type of intimate disgust is fundamentally different than that expressed in Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm’s *The Maze of Justice* (1937) because it shows the investigator as fully submerged in the world of the village rather than floating above it in ‘visionary pastures’ of European-educated idealism.<sup>379</sup>

While *The Maze of Justice* uses a jarring contrast between the protagonist’s idealistic interiority and the insurgent non-standardized of the peasants to great comedic effect, al-Ḥarām has its protagonist getting down and dirty, in the dialogic sense, with the workers underneath him.

For example, while out surveying the cotton fields by donkey, Fikri Afendi stops to interrogate the head foreman, Arafa, about the quality of the cotton crop.

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<sup>377</sup> Peterson-Ishaq, *Sinners*, 7.

<sup>378</sup> Idrīs, *Al-Ḥarām*, 15 and Idrīs and Peterson-Ishaq, *Sinners*, 12.

<sup>379</sup> Selim, *Rural Imaginary*, 123.

النضافة ازيتها؟“

ع. السنجة عشرة يا سعادة البيه -

وتجاهل فكري أفندي سروره باللقب وزغر له قائلاً: وإن لقيت لُطعة؟

فأمال عرفة رأسه ووضع كفه على عنقه وقال: برقيتي

”وقال فكري أفندي بصوت لا يعرف سامعه إن كان جاداً أم هازلاً: يلعن أبوك على أبو رقبتك

“How clean is it?”

“Clean as a whistle, your Commissionership.”

Fikri Afendi pretended to ignore his pleasure at the title and eyed him, saying, “And what if I find worm eggs on the cotton?”

Arafa bowed his head and, placing the palm of one hand on his neck, declared, “Then it’s my responsibility and my neck.”

In a tone that left the other man unsure whether he was joking or serious, Fikri Afendi then said, “To hell with your neck—and to hell with you and your father, too!”

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The narrator explains how Fikri Afendi regards his insults almost as terms of endearment, as though the workers should feel honored by and proud of such abuse. What is actually clear is that the power asymmetry of the encounter is being acted out pragmatically with each line. Fikri Afendi has the luxury of taking the encounter as a joke, whereas for Arafa, no amount of groveling will be too much to satisfy either Fikri Afendi’s ironic role-playing or his non-ironic

<sup>380</sup> Idris, *Al-Ḥarām*, 31 and Idris and Peterson-Ishaq, *Sinners*, 26.

micro-aggressions. In the quote above, it should be noted that both Arafa *and* Fikri Afendi speak in an exaggerated non-standardized style in such a way that it reflects Fikri Afendi's familiarity and casualness, while also showing Arafa's attempts to be clever while also revealing his lack of education. (He uses an idiom in Arabic - "10 on the scale" (ع سنجة عشرة) - where the translator uses 'clean as a whistle'.) In other conversations throughout the novel, Fikri Afendi continues to use this approach to speaking—which is equally demeaning and familiar—so that the reader is left with no doubt that he is fully a member of the community, albeit a rude and domineering one.

The principle dramatic irony set up by the novel is that while Fikri Afendi's own attention is turned to the classes beneath him, there are all kinds of side dalliances going on within his own home. One side plot of which he is completely unaware involves the secret feelings that his son Sawfat has for the Chief Clerk's only daughter, Linda. At the same time, there is a dramatic scene in which Fikri Afendi's own wife almost commits casual adultery with a worker named Dumyan, calling him up to her bedroom to read her horoscope. The narration of the scene actually goes quiet at the climax of the potential tryst, and the reader only sees Dumyan running away from commissioner's house, without knowing exactly what startled him.

The narrating voice of the novel is held at a distance from Fikri Afendi to help the reader clearly see how naive he is. The authority of standard is used at a distance to ironize his thoughts and behavior rather than to endorse his view of the world. Non-standardized language is used by Fikri Afendi himself, thereby grounding him in the world of the novel, rather than elevating him above it. Keeping in mind that the protagonist of the story is himself deeply implicated within the

social world he is investigating, while also oblivious to many of its secrets, it is no surprise that the standard/non-standardized divide does not separate Fikri Afendi from the rest of the rural characters. With all of the implications and indexes of speech in the novel, the “diglossia” variable never appears as a significant factor, because characters who speak do so in ‘āmmiyyah. At the same time, the thoughts and impressions of Fikri Afendi are often registered as free indirect discourse in standard in such a way as to maintain ironic distance, both when his class prejudices mislead his suspicions about the perpetrator, as well as when he expresses his own class anxiety. Fikri Afendi is an object for contemplation by the voice from nowhere, rather than a figure who joins in in expressing disdain for the village.

## Orhan Kemal

Orhan Kemal was the son of a journalist and political activist, and he spent his early life in relative comfort, encouraged by his father to pursue his studies and follow in his path towards a white-collar career. Even at this early point in his life, Kemal was resistant to education, and recounts how his father locked him in a broom cupboard under the stairs in their house until he had learned his lessons from his primer.<sup>381</sup> However, when Kemal was a teenager in the 1930s, the whole family suddenly found themselves forced to flee to Beirut due to his father’s political activities. The sudden move to Beirut interrupted Kemal’s studies and forced him to work in a series of menial jobs in his early years, many in the same professions that he would later detail in

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<sup>381</sup> Orhan Kemal, *The Idle Years* (Peter Owen Publishers, 2008), 13.

his novels. As he recounts in his memoir, *My Father's House* and *the Idle Years* (1949), Kemal was torn between his inclinations towards a normal working class life—playing football, hanging out with friends and making a simple living doing honest work—and his begrudging sense of obligation to realizing his potential as the intelligent son of a journalist.

Kemal's fraught progression from son of a privileged family, to poor day laborer, to celebrated author is mirrored by his complex attitude towards the Turkish language and those cultural institutions which it iconizes. Kemal tells the story of his own development as a writer through the lens of anxieties about his class background. His style reflects in large part his desire to use a language that would speak with the working class and not before or above them. Kemal's memoirs make this abundantly clear. In one passage, Kemal meets a mysterious character named Master Izzet at a cafe. He is described as a worker who stood up to the factory owner in an earlier scene, giving him an almost mythical status. Master Izzet gives Kemal advice to change his attitude towards the world, saying that his self-defeating behavior stems from a mixture of self-pity and rebellious feelings.<sup>382</sup> Later, Izzet gives him more advice about how to approach the working class: "You have to get used to not getting angry... People don't want anger; they want sympathy and love. Try to be like a doctor, not getting annoyed with your patients. Earn a living by an honest day's work. Buy plenty of books. Read a lot..."<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid, 180.

When he did set himself to serious study, Kemal had his first lessons about politics and literature taught to him by none other than the great communist poet, Nazım Hikmet. As detailed in his prison memoir, “In Jail with Nazım Hikmet,” Orhan Kemal received thorough literary training, learned French and received detailed feedback on his writing while in prison. At one point in the memoir, Hikmet makes a clear statement that summarizes the ideals of Socialist Realism that Kemal would work to implement: “The most important yardstick for Nazım was the ‘people’. He used to say ‘a popular artist should first and foremost be understood by the people. He must be the people’s artist.”<sup>384</sup>

What can be understood from ‘writing so as to be understood by the people’ is first and foremost an extensive use of popular ways of speaking. Becoming one of his country’s foremost writers of socialist realism, Orhan Kemal was also well known for his extensive and descriptive use of dialogue in his novels and short stories. As such, Kemal provides an exceptional example for understanding the relationship between language ideology and the realist novel in Turkey. His work demonstrates the evolution of a personal style, which aspired to an inconspicuous narrative mimesis built upon standard language and exhibited a continued reliance on dialogue as the site for registering colorful varieties of vernacular speech, meant to convey a sense of authentic familiarity with the working class. In both cases, the careful navigation between language styles can be seen as a central factor in his works’ political and aesthetic concerns.

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<sup>384</sup> Orhan Kemal, *In Jail with Nazım Hikmet* (Everest Pub., 2012), 132.

Stepping back to look the larger context of Turkish language politics in the early 1940s, Orhan Kemal's tutelage under Hikmet took place following the supposedly most disruptive and tragicomic stage of the Turkish language reforms, which began in 1932 with the founding of the Turkish Language Association (TDK). The ideological hegemony of the TDK was the supposed lens through which all writers' language choice passed. As Jale Parla claims:

Literature was affected the most, for the obvious reason that the reform interfered with the medium of expression. Moreover, adherence to purified Turkish as opposed to Ottoman Turkish came to be regarded as a sign of being for Kemalism, thus for cultural nationalist homogeneity, territorial unity and autonomy, progress, modernity, and contemporaneity.<sup>385</sup>

When asked directly about the linguistic legacy of Kemalism and the TDK in 1969, Kemal's response was that the system of Kemalism represented a potential totality of thought and a dominant ethos, but that it hadn't been fully implemented. The language reforms, too, stalled out due to a lack of popular support. "The efforts of an institution at making the necessary purifications of our language will remain inadequate unless the effort is taken up nationwide. Let the language be purified on its own accord."<sup>386</sup> This nearly simultaneous expression of ardent nationalism and laissez-faire attitude towards language makes sense when one remembers the

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<sup>385</sup> Parla, "Wounded Tongue," 28.

<sup>386</sup> "Dilimizin gereğince özleşmesini Devlet yurt çapında bir çabayla ele alıp uygulamadıkça, bir kurumun çabaları yetersiz kalacaklar. Dil dilediğince özleşsin." Güney - June 1969. Reprinted in Işık Öğütçü, *Zamana Karşı Orhan Kemal: Eleştiriler Ve Röportajlar* (İstanbul: Everest Pub., 2012), 355.

ambivalent and contradictory ways that people actually express their ‘metapragmatic unconscious’: as bound up in a complex indexical field.

Kemal’s attitudes toward and use of non-standardized language also developed over time. In some of his earliest stories, the shift in registers between the narration and the dialogue is barely decipherable, and so the mimetic illusions that the contrast provides is incomplete. This is the case in stories where the narrator is still Kemal himself (*Ekmek, Sabun ve Aşk*, 1948), or stories told in the conspicuous idiom of a first-person narrator (*Bir İnsan*, 1946), or stories in which the progression of the narration is guided by a character in a position of authority who shapes the dialogue into a form of formal interrogation (*Bir Ölüye Dair*, 1943). Dialogue still plays a major role in the majority of stories in his first collection, entitled *Ekmek Kavgası* (*The Struggle for Bread*, 1950), and is used to great effect in portraying the struggles and worries of working class people.

But increasingly over the mid 1950s, Kemal settled into his heavy use of dialogue, a style which would give him renown as “the great master of dialogue in our [Turkish] storytelling.<sup>387</sup>” According to Ülkü Eliuz, in the 7057 pages that make up Orhan Kemal’s 24 novels, a full 5933 of them contain dialogue, a remarkable 85%.<sup>388</sup> In interviews, Kemal repeatedly defended his use of dialogue, and emphasized its advantages. He was fully aware of how it could be used narratologically, and had even developed a pet theory that he repeatedly referred to as the

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<sup>387</sup> Şükran Kurdakul, *Çağdaş Türk Edebiyatı 4* (İstanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1992), 137.

<sup>388</sup> Işık Öğütçü and Ahmet Ümit, *Orhan Kemal* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 2012), 154.

dialectics of conversation (*muhaverenin diyalektiği*). He saw dialogue as a way to take the narrator out of the picture and to leave the reader face-to-face with the characters themselves, as a technique that in mere words gave volume and depth to characters that would take pages of psychological explanations to match; an index to each character's social situation and culture.<sup>389</sup> In many of the interviews in which Orhan Kemal spoke about his approach to writing and the use of dialogue, it is often as a form of defense against unnamed criticism of his choice to write using non-standardized language.

Imitating the vernacular is not something the writer does to himself, he does it for his characters. By doing this, the writer wants to say, "To the people who speak distinct dialects! You are speaking wrong. The correct way is my example. Speak like me." When it comes to the way the writer speaks... outside of the characters speaking, the writer will write and speak in the most appropriate, most advanced form of the language. Otherwise, the characters will lose their special characteristics... if students speak in the same language, if they all use the author's own developed language, that'd be a lie. It won't be plausible...<sup>390</sup>

Addressing the concerns that dialect is an inappropriate way to speak, Kemal defends it on the grounds that, if used judiciously, it can make the characters unique and more convincing; in a word more *realistic*. What is interesting about the above quote is how Kemal himself betrays his

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<sup>389</sup> Nurer Uğurlu, *Orhan Kemal'in İktal Kahvesi: Anı-Roman* (Örgün Yayınevi, 2002), 66.

<sup>390</sup> "Şive öykünmesini yazarın kendisi yapmıyor, kişileri yapıyor.. YaZâr bu davranışıyla, "Ey ayrı şiveleri konuşan insanlar! Yanlış konuşuyorsunuz. Doğrusu benim verdiğim örnektir.. Benim gibi konuşun.." demek istiyor.. Yazarın konuşmasına gelince.. Kişilerin konuşması dışında, en doğru, en ileri bir dille yazacak, konuşacaktır.. Aksi halde, kişiler arasındaki özellik kaybolur.. Bütün kişiler aynı dille, yazarın gelişmiş diliyle konuşur ki, bu yalan olur. İnandırıcı olmaz.. Ama dilini olsun doğru dürüst konuşamayan insanlara iftira olur. Gönül, halkımızın yalnız dilde değil, her şeyde uygar bir düzeye, ileriliğe kavuşmasını ister." Ibid.

own adherence to the assumptions of standard language ideology by acknowledging that the author himself should aspire to the normative standards of language. He does not defend non-standardized language on its own merits, but only as a kind of language that is actually spoken by people. Kemal even suggests that the juxtaposition between the two forms of language will help to make those who speak non-standardized language realize that they are speaking incorrectly. The narration does not scold, ridicule, or erase incorrect language usage, but rather sets a shining example of appropriate, advanced language: the ideal didactic stance for those committed to both modernism and populism.

However, this arrangement had its limits. In 1954, Kemal published what would come to be his best-known novel, *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* (*Upon Blessed Earth*). The work would bring him a new level of visibility among the Turkish literary community, as well as a good deal of criticism for his language choices. Yıldırım Keskin, for example, wrote a review upon the book's publication saying: "From the very first lines of *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* you will see that it is written in a very bad language. Orhan Kemal is not an author to use language so poorly. But it is clear, he never went back to read what he had written. Even when giving the book to be published, he didn't give it the proper attention."<sup>391</sup> Kemal would receive this type of criticism for his dialogue in many of his novels. According to Alper Akçam, Kemal received a string of

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<sup>391</sup> "Oysaki daha ilk satırlarda Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde çok kötü bir dille yazılmış olduğunu görüyorsunuz. Orhan Kemal, Türkçeyi bu kadar kötü kullanacak bir yaZâr değildir. Ama belli, bir defa yazdıktan sonra okumamış. Hatta eseri kitap halinde yayımlamak üzere verirken bile gereken dikkati göstermemiş" Keskin, Yıldırım. "Yenilik November 1954 - Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde." from Orhan Kemal, *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* / Orhan Kemal ; Hazırlayan Mazlum Vesek., Açıklamalı basım, 1. basım., Türkçe Edebiyat ; 500 (İstanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2014) Translation is my own.

criticism for his dialogue being “exaggerated and offensive to the eye.”<sup>392</sup> Kemal would not be immune to this type of criticism, and Akçam notes that Kemal would pull back on his use of non-standardized speech for future novels. There is direct evidence of this in the edits he made between the first and second edition of *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde*, the latter of which was published under a remarkably different political climate in 1964.<sup>393</sup> In his 2002 article in Cumhuriyet newspaper, Fethi Naci regards these changes, including the removal of some of the imitations of vernacular and the removal of the longer conversations which interrupt the flow of the story, to have been smart edits that made some actions and psychological states more clear.<sup>394</sup> The changes are not limited to correcting non-standardized speech, but rather, as Naci points out, making sure it works within the wider structure of the novel. While Orhan Kemal benefited greatly from the ability of dialogue to reenact a realistic depiction of interpersonal dynamics, such reliance on it still required the right stylistics to pull it off, and this could be taken to excess.

## Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde

For a work of socialist realism concerned with the daily struggles of rural migrant laborers in Turkey, the novel *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* does remarkably little soliloquizing. In fact, the narrator does very little speaking at all. Although written using an omniscient third-person perspective, the majority of the story is constructed from dialogue between the three main

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<sup>392</sup> Alper Akçam, *Dillerine Kurban: Orhan Kemal’de Diyalojik Perspektif* (Tekin Yayınevi, 2014).

<sup>393</sup> The edition that I used for my reading of the novel carefully cites many of these changes.

<sup>394</sup> Fethi Naci, “Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde,” Cumhuriyet Kitap, June 6, 2002.

protagonists and their interactions with characters representing a cross-section of Anatolian society. Rather than acting as mouthpieces for socialist ideology, Incorrigible Yusuf, Beardless Hasan, and Ali the Wrestler seemingly discuss whatever comes to their minds. Throughout the entire novel, the narrator rarely interrupts their continuous conversation, other than to identify which character is speaking. And when the villager himself speaks, Kemal seems to have made an earnest attempt to transcribe the speech patterns of rural Anatolia as authentically as possible. So authentically in fact, that they pose a challenge for the average Turkish reader due to the many phonetic and morphological changes, as well as an unfamiliar repertoire of idiomatic and cultural allusions. The villagers' conversations are also often marked by repetition, interjections, and profanity. However, despite having its narration be in the hands of such desultory protagonists, *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* has long been praised by critics as a great work of politically committed literature, which succeeds in representing the plight of Turkish rural laborers in their transition to the capitalist system.<sup>395</sup>

In his review of *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde*, published shortly after the book's publication, Turkish poet Seyfettin Başçılar begins by acknowledging that the novel is great, but not for the ways that one normally praises a book, like those written by Gide, Hemingway, T. Man, or Kafka. It doesn't try to sell its craftsmanship (*ustalık*) or try to drive at some point. "But nevertheless this book, its structure, its people and its narrative style sweeps by with the reader confronted

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<sup>395</sup> Moran, *Türk Romanına*, 36.

with humanity, and with human love.”<sup>396</sup> Başçillar’s entire review tries to articulate how exactly this narrative style is different from traditional novels, remarking on both the sparseness of narration, and the preponderance of dialogue. “Orhan Kemal appeals to the humanity and love of peace in all of his characters. There is no use of hefty words.”<sup>397</sup> This seems like a contradiction except if it were the dialogue itself that conveys such an optimistic message, which of course it is. Even given the ignorance, bad choices, and ultimate misfortune of most of the characters of the book, they still convey a sense of optimism and purity (*katkısız hal*), which shields them from either the author or reader’s opprobrium. From Başçillar’s glowing review, it seems that Kemal not only succeeded in minimizing the effect of overt irony, seemingly staying out of the way of his village characters and the reader’s judgments, but did so in a way that is still entertaining. “The book is stocked full of conversations, matching the speed of his own time; but we turn page after page without growing bored, without tiring too much.”<sup>398</sup> In the face of the homogenizing pressures of the hegemonic culture, Kemal chooses to defend the use of thick accents and dialects, refusing, in Başçillar’s words, to dress his shalwar -wearing characters in the linguistic equivalent of a fedora. And Başçillar reiterates that Kemal, in fact, does this well, not in the smarmy way that some writers do it. As a consequence, Kemal’s counter-hegemonic characters speak for themselves. Başçillar remarks on the entrancing mimesis of the dialogue—making it as though the characters’ every move is one of our own— while also being entertaining and well-written.

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<sup>396</sup> Seyfettin Başçillar, “Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde,” *Demokrat Kilis*, October 19, 1955.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*

As in other novels, Kemal keeps his use of omniscient third-person narration to a bare minimum, a move which creates the illusion that the villagers are telling their own stories and all but erases the presence of most forms of irony. Whereas Yūsuf Idrīs' *al-Ḥarām* looks on its surface to be a traditional village novel which slowly reveals multiple layers of irony, *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* is an effort to winnow out any of the ways that a paternalistic or didactic voice might spoil pure mimesis. Hoping to simultaneously overcome the literary legacy of patronizing looks at peasant life, to support the mimetic claims of social realism, to shrink the distance between outer narration and inner characters, and to follow his various mentors' commandment to be the sympathetic and loving people's artist, irony was best kept to a minimum.

#### The Awakening of the Villager

The stereotypical work of socialist realism revolves around some sort of collective and popular consciousness rising, uniting the people's interests and desires as subjects in the social world. According to Katerina Clark, the task of official socialist realism is as a:

generator of official myths [...] to provide object lessons in the working-out of the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic... the positive hero passes in stages from a state of relative "spontaneity" to a higher degree of "consciousness," which he attains by some individual revolution<sup>399</sup>

Even though not subject to the demands of Soviet censorship and cultural policy, many Turkish village novels did still portray rural consciousness as deficient, in need of radical transformation.

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<sup>399</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Indiana University Press, 2000), 16.

Many of the second generation of village novels, especially those written by leftists, “push peasants forward as positive heroes, who fight to destroy the corrupt system and defend the interests of the people. Only a few of these novels catch a dramatic balance and escape being solely an exhibit of positive forces.”<sup>400</sup> In these early works, the epistemological gap between peasants unable to understand their own interests and their urban stewards, forms the central conflict. In works such as *Bizim Köy* (Mahmut Makal, 1950) and *Yaban* (Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, 1932) the urban/enlightened vs. villager/ignorant dichotomy is established by iconic figures that stand for classes and social groupings with fixed relationships to this knowledge. Irony thrives in this arrangement, as the reader looks on at the pitiable ignorance or paternalistic anticipation, and waits for the peasant to have an awakening (or for the enlightened visitor to awaken the peasant).

In contrast, the way that Orhan Kemal addresses this theme in *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* is by letting the villagers wise up on their own once they arrive in the city of Adana. Figuring out the customs of urban life, the arrangements of wage labor, and the everyday instances of economic injustice requires a whole repertoire of habits and practices which are learned and expressed precisely through speech, types of practical knowledge that are learned during *gurbet*: the time spent working away from one’s hometown. Kemal shows us exactly how his rural characters develop and learn about the meaning of *gurbet* as both an experience and an acquiring of knowledge via a slow process of learning street smarts: adjusting their stances to people in the

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<sup>400</sup> Çimen Günay-Erkoğ, “Issues of Ideology and Identity in Turkish Literature during the Cold War,” in *Turkey in the Cold War* (London: Palgrave, 2013), 112.

streets, bosses in the factory, and women in the fields. This differs significantly from rising up to obtain the insights of formal learning already assumed to be known by the educated reader.

In the very beginning of the novel, the omniscient narrator gives the barest description of setting, explaining that Incorrigible Yusuf, Beardless Hasan, and Ali the Wrestler are on their way by train from their unnamed village to the city. After a brief physical description, the characters begin to speak themselves, and it is only then that the reader understands their lack of knowledge about the outside world. Kemal uses the figure of Yusuf's uncle, who Yusuf refers to as "Emmi", as a way to avoid the pitfalls of the enlightened-outsider trope. Like Fikri Afendi in *al-Ḥarām*, Emmi is a figure from within the community, who travelled to work in the city before the three protagonists, and shared his experience with Yusuf in the form of axioms, couched in non-standardized language, which Yusuf recalls at strategic points in the novel. In the beginning of the novel, while the three friends wait for the next train to take them into the city, Emmi's advice speaks of the emotional fortitude which the friends will have to show in order to bear the hardships of gurbet.

Emmim derdi ki, uşaklar derdi, gurbete düştünüz mü, siz siz olun, sılayı içinizden atın derdi. Atamadınız mı yandınız derdi.

Emmi (my uncle) used to say, young men, he would say, when you've left the village, be yourselves. Forget home. If you don't, you're in trouble.

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<sup>401</sup> Kemal, *Bereketli*, 2.

Yusuf's invocation also uses the second-person address, "be yourselves", allowing Emmi to speak through him and directly address the two other protagonists. This demonstrates knowledge that is neither passed down from some mythological source, nor the privileged knowledge of a returning native informant. It is merely knowledge won as a result of concrete experience by someone of the same background.

On the train to Adana, the three friends meet a man named Veli who has also apparently spent considerable time in the city, and who possesses a great deal of knowledge about its mysteries, specifically its bosses.

Lâkin ağam adam değil. Çifte çifte otomobili var, biner biner gider!

Köse Hasan:

— Nereye gider?

— Şehire, bara, orospulara... Pehlivan Ali Yusuf'a döndü:

— Otomobil ne ki?

Yusuf birden hatırlıyamadı. Sivas'ta var mıydı? Vardı herhalde ama hatırlıyamamıştı birden.

— Sen bilmezsın, dedi. Veli Yusuf'a, Ali'yi sordu:

— Şehire ilk mi iniyor?

— tik iniyor.

— Bilmez öyleyse. Otomobilin bujisi var, direksiyonu var. Marşına bastın mı, kendi kendine işler. Bir işler ki, kancık ayı gibi!

Yusuf:

— Doğru, dedi. Kancık ayı ki kancık ayı!

But my aga (landlord) is no man. He's got himself lots of automobiles, he gets in and goes!

Beardless Hasan:

—Where does he go?

—To the city, to the bar, to whores...Ali the wrestler turned to Yusuf:

—What the heck is an automobile?

Yusuf couldn't remember right away. Were there any in Sivas? There probably were but he couldn't remember right away.

—You wouldn't know, he said. Veli asked Yusuf about Ali:

—First time going to the city?

— first time going.

— Then he wouldn't know. An automobile has a spark plug, a steering wheel. You step on the starter, it's off running all by itself. Runs like crazy

Yusuf:

—It's true, he said like crazy, like crazy!

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There is a slight but important difference between what Ali and Hasan know, neither having ever been to the city, and what Yusuf, who has visited a city at least briefly, knows. When asked directly by Ali what an automobile is, Yusuf deflects by letting Veli fill in the details. After Veli's explanation, Yusuf then chimes in affirming the statement with the epistemic stance, "It is true." Yusuf's role in the conversation is crucial in acting as the bridge between the conversations' participants, who begin without knowledge of cars, and Veli, who possesses that knowledge. It is possible to imagine how the mood of this scene would be different with the stronger presence of

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<sup>402</sup> Kemal, *Bereketli*, 28-9.

an omniscient narrator, one that could possibly be equated the figure of the literate Istanbulite, to whom this ignorance about automobiles would be laughable. But instead of a narrative interjection or judgment, the conversation continues earnestly, as the other voices are eager to know how a car works as well.

Ali'nin aklına yatmamıştı:

— Nasıl işler? Veli:

— Kendi kendine işler. Benzini tükendi mi işlemez, töbe işlemez. Marşına istediğin kadar bas, hava. O zaman ne marş kâr eder, ne kolçak!

Yusuf gene karıştı:

— Doğru. Ne marş, ne kolçak..

Ali couldn't figure it out.

—How does it work? Veli:

—It works by itself. Without gas it won't run, I swear it won't work. You can press on the pedal as much as you want, air. In that case neither the pedal, nor pushing helps

Yusuf joined in again:

—True. Neither the pedal, nor pushing.. .

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It is clear how this earnest presentation of villagers learning things works to undermine the interloper arrangement of the traditional village novel and helps to give a mimetically satisfying representation of villagers in a way that is still enjoyable to read (thereby demonstrating its writerly authority to do so). Additionally, this approach minimizes narrative irony.

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<sup>403</sup> Kemal, *Bereketli*, 29.

## National Belonging

Many of those writing about the Turkish village novel express their uneasiness with the term since the novels in question do not fit the criteria of being about villagers or actually take place in the village.<sup>404</sup> Berna Moran, for one, prefers the term Anatolian novels, but still admits that rather than exclusively describing the life and people in the Anatolian villages and towns, they rather take up the common subject of an unjust order originating from the social structure.<sup>405</sup> This idealization of Anatolianism (*Anadoluculuk*), just like forms of Kemalist populism, is vague and contradictory. “Within this psychological complex, Anatolia is not the name of a piece of land...it is the name of a philosophy, or sometimes a way to summarize a sociological perspective, an ideology, a romance, a passion.”<sup>406</sup> Orhan Kemal addresses this issue in his novel by avoiding grand statements and showing instead messy examples of the actual overlaps between geography, class, and belonging. He focuses specifically on how this complexity plays out in the field of language, using the lens-like sociological details of non-standardized language.

The friends come to Adana hoping to find someone from their village who has apparently found success in the big city, and whom they can get inroads in finding work. They are

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<sup>404</sup> One of Erkan Irmak’s chapters is entitled “A village novel, or a novel which takes place in a village?” “Köy romanı mı, köyde geçen roman mı?”

<sup>405</sup> Moran, *Türk Romanına*, 7.

<sup>406</sup> Yalçın Alemdar, *Siyasal ve Sosyal Değişmeler Açısından Çağdaş Türk Romanı:(1946-2000)* (Akçağ Yayınları, 2003), 83.

accustomed to this type of patronage, and their entire initial plan on arriving in Adana depends on being able to get work from this fellow villager-turned factory-boss. However, they soon find that the culture of the city and its practices of patronage are far more impersonal and ruthless than those in the village. When they show up at the gates of the compatriot's factory and see other workers waiting at the gates, they ask what's going on.

— Siz hangi köyden olursunuz? Arkadaşlarını gösterdi:

— Dördümüz Yıldızeli'den. Bunlar da Karagöl'den. Lâkin harçlığımız da tükendi. Şaşırdık kaldık...

— Demek işe girmek çetin?

— Ne diyorsun kardaş!

Yusuf arkadaşlarına baktı, göz kırptı.

— Fabrika sahibi adamın hemşerisi olmalı ki! Yere isteksizlikle tüküren Yıldızeli'li:

— Kulak asma, dedi. Hemşerin de olsa... şehire göçüp de tüylendi mi, bırak..

—*What village are you all from? Pointing to his friends:*

—The four of us are from Yildizeli. Those guys are from Karagöl. But we ran out of our spending money. It caught us by surprise...

—So that means getting work is tough?

—What are you saying brother!

Yusuf looked at his friends, giving a wink.

—The factory boss's gotta be someone's hemşeri, (from the same hometown)! The man from Yıldızlı spat reluctantly on the ground and said:

—Don't pay him any mind. Even if he is from your hometown...he moved to the city and he's rich now, forget it...

In this brief exchange, there are two different facts which are unknown, at different points in time, to Yusuf, to the man from Yıldızlı, and to the reader. The first is that the friends are related to the boss, a fact which the man from Yıldızlı doesn't know, and which causes Yusuf to give his friends (and the reader) an ironic wink. But then there is the fact that being from the same village doesn't guarantee patronage, a fact which neither the friends nor the reader, up to this point, were aware of. This is a common occurrence in the novel, as seldom are the times when the omniscient narrator knows something before the friends do. Knowledge is almost always revealed by way of conspicuously marked non-standardized dialogue, making it seem as though the reader and the friends are the same audience.

The laborer at the factory gates, presumably now accustomed to the ways of the city and wage labor, advises the three newcomers that the bonds of place matter little in the city, where the only important relationships are economic ones. The fact that the friends' potential boss is also their fellow villager in the city immediately complicates the clear cut antagonisms of a village novel, whether it be written in the spirit of Kemalism or according to the master plot of socialist realism. Rather than a problematic local landlord or a class enemy as an archetypal villain, their potential boss is someone the friends know personally, and whose bonds they want to leverage in order to get jobs. Shortly after their conversations with the man from Yıldızlı, their acquaintance himself pulls up to the factory in a fancy car, and Yusuf immediately throws himself at his feet.

Yere diz verip kalkan Yusuf fabrika sahibine kořtu. Adam geniř kenarlı fötr řapkası, lâcivert elbiseleri, rugan iskarpinleriyle arabasından inmekteydi. Yusuf ayaklarına kapandı, az kalsın öpecekti:

— Ađam ađam, kurban ađam...

— Ne o lan? Ne istiyorsun? Sapsarı Yusuf titriyordu:

— Ç. köyünden oluruz, hemřeriyiz seninle. Allah sana uzun ömürler versin, nâminı sânını duyduk da geldik. Köylümüz deđil ya, bizim sancakta olur dedik inanmadılar ,döđdüler bizi, kovdular...

Yusuf pushed himself up off the ground with his knee and ran over to the factory owner. The man was wearing a wide-brimmed fedora hat, a purple suit, patent leather shoes, and was getting out of his car. Yusuf fell down at his feet, and almost kissed them:

— My lord, I'll sacrifice everything for you, my lord...

— What the hell is this? What do you want? Yusuf had turned completely pale and was shaking:

— We're from Ch. village, we are your compatriots. May God give you long life! We heard of your great reputation and we came here. We told them you were not from our village, but from our district, but they didn't believe us. They beat us, tried to get rid of us...

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This brief exchange features the acquaintance-boss speaking immediately with non-standardized profanity, setting him linguistically among the workers in a way similar to Fikri Afendi in al-Ĥarâm. And Orhan Kemal uses one of his signature orthographical changes ("döđdüler" as

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<sup>408</sup> Kemal, *Bereketli*, 66.

opposed to “dövdüler”) as way to represent Yusuf’s accent.<sup>409</sup> The boss himself recognizes the accent and it is proof that he and Yusuf really are from the same place.

Yusuf'un konuşmasından hemşeri köylüler olduklarını anlıyan fabrika sahibi, üzerinde durmadı. Yıllar vardı memleketten, köyünden ayrılalı. Sonra ne? Ayrılmasa bile doğduğu köye çeşme yaptırmıştı, yol yaptırmıştı, çocuk okutuyordu. Başka ne yapabilirdi?

The factory owner realized from the way Yusuf spoke that they were from the same village, but he didn't dwell on it. It had been years since he'd left his home, his village. And what of it? Even though he had left, he had funded the construction of a fountain in the village, he had made a road, he was paying for children to school. What else could he do?

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This marks one of the uncommon instances in the novel featuring free indirect discourse, revealing the attitude of the boss, who will quickly be persuaded by a sense of guilt and responsibility for his village to meet the demands of the three men by sending them to his foreman for work. The information conveyed by the use of free indirect discourse is not withheld from the three friends for long enough to build up an ironic distance from them; after all, the boss' charity in the village might already be something they know. In the end, however, it is the non-standardized dialogue which proves decisive in this scene, indexing Yusuf to the two men's shared village and creating the link between boss and worker, with Yusuf being the one to benefit. The novel is filled with instances like this where small indexical clues in language end up

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<sup>409</sup> An example of an exaggeration of non-standardized speech that was erased in subsequent editions.

<sup>410</sup> Kemal, *Bereketli*, 66.

directly impacting the relationships between bosses and workers. In another example, the three friends' accent ends up being a disadvantage. In a later scene in which the three friends are finally put to work at a cotton factory, Hasan becomes extremely cold working in an uninsulated room. A clerk stops to ask him why he is shivering and the following conversation ensues.

— Ne o? dedi. Ne oluyorsunuz?

Kaim kemikli, iriyarı ama kupkuru biri:

— Donuyok, diye tekrarladı.

Kâtibin yüzü bok koklamışçasma buruştu:

— Donuyoruz desene lan, hırt! işçinin çeneleri vuruyordu:

— Donuyok, diye tekrarladı.

— Donuyoruz de be!

— Donuyok!

— Mahsus mu yapıyorsun? Do—nu—yo—ruz!

— Do—nu—yok.

— Ayı efendim ayı. Donuyoruz!

— Diyemem kâtip evendi, dilim alışmış bir sefer, dönmüyor..

—What’s that? he said. What’s going on?

He was strong boned, a strapping guy, but lean:

—We’re froze, he repeated.

The clerk’s face scrunched up like he had just smelled shit:

—Say I’m freezing buddy, you moron! he shot at him :

—I’m froze, he repeated.

— Say I’m freezing!

— I’m froze!

—Are you doing that on purpose I’m—free—zing!

—I’m—re—fro—ze.

— You ape!. I’m freezing!

—I can’t say it Mr. Clerk, sir. My tongue is used to saying it that way; it won’t change..

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In correcting the way that Hasan, the villager, says “I’m freezing!”, the clerk is making linguistic-ideological judgments about which grammatical forms are acceptable, and by extension, deriding Hasan’s class background. The inability to utter “I’m freezing!” is at once a sign of Hasan’s lack of formal education, his geographical origin in an Anatolian village, and how little he has acclimated to urban culture. All of these facts apparently offend the clerk, who is eager to exploit all that Hasan’s “I’m froze!” reveals in order to reinforce the cultural inequalities of a relationship that is already economically asymmetrical. In response, Hasan politely replies that that’s just the way his tongue is used to saying it, thereby acceding to and internalizing these linguistic ideological assumptions as natural and fixed.

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<sup>411</sup> Ibid, 29.

This creative use of several distinct non-standardized forms of Turkish is used all throughout the novel as a way for Kemal to explore the Anatolian novel's theme of an unjust order without having to reduce it to a conflict between the national ethos and its subaltern insurgency. Instead, Kemal can explore issues of regional and ethnic tensions, gender relations and sexual violence, and the complex dynamics of class struggle, all using the built-in complexity of language ideology.

### Verbal Class Struggle

In his discussion of Orhan Kemal and his relationship to national and party politics, Mehmet Samsakçı says: "In his novels, there are no great and sublime ideas and concepts discussed by great men, and there are no idealistic and utopian high philosophies in his works. The author who himself is not above or beyond life, but rather right, in the middle of it, has dealt with practical perspectives in his works, rather than abstract, impossible or unrealizable and doubtful utopian projects."<sup>412</sup> Nothing could give Samsakçı this impression more than Kemal's use of simple, concrete (read non-standardized) language. Whereas Irmak notes the common critique of many village novels as speaking about the problems of the local landlord, rather than explaining the problem as the landlord system itself, Kemal's approach to writing seemingly erases this as a problem altogether by dismissing the register with which utopian critiques are usually made. If Erkan Irmak finds the problem with most village novels to be their failure to give villagers their own substantial representation (*vertretung*), then Kemal attempts to

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<sup>412</sup> Samsakçı, *Siyaset*, 357.

compensate through an almost total giving over of narrative to the *darstellung* of mimetic non-standardized dialogue. Kemal and others might downplay the political strategy at work by claiming that non-standardized dialogue is merely the style of “a novelist of the people”; but in fact, it makes for a radically different kind of village novel. More than just giving villagers a voice, scenes in *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* which directly portray workers talking back are remarkable. In fact, having so much of the struggle of workers and peasants be narrated through non-standardized dialogue gives the narrative a sense of being played out in real time and provides a far more fine-grained understanding of how class struggle plays out as actual interpersonal fighting than most utopian perspectives could perhaps theorize.

An example of this is the fight over work breaks, which erupts at several points in the middle section of the novel. The managers and workers constantly struggle over the pace of work, the time given for breaks, and the discrepancies between the laborers’ and management’ accommodations; and each of these struggles is acted out principally through dialogue. In the instance of this fight, a foreman argues with the head of the haymaker crew, referred to as Usta (expert), about the length of the break to be given.

Irgatbaşı gene sinirli sinirli güldü, sonra:

— Peki öyleyse, dedi. Hatırın için paydos edek!

— Benim hatırım için ne kıymeti var?

— Ne olacak ya?

— Heriflerin hakları olduğu için vereceksin paydosu. Ağır işçi bunlar. İnsafsızca, çok çalıştırmakla daha fazla mı randıman alacağını sanıyorsun?

Kara cahil ırgatbaşının anlayacağı sözler değildi.

— Ne bileyim ben?

— Bilmediğin işin başına ne geçiyorsun?

The foreman laughed anrgily, then:

—Well then okay, he said. We'll take a break for your sake.

—What's it worth if it's for my sake?

—What's wrong with that huh?

—You'll give a break because these guys have a right to it. Their work is tough... If you work them hard, mercilessly, do you think you'll be able to get a higher yield out of them?

These weren't words the stubbornly ignorant foreman would understand.

—What do I know?

—Why are you making decisions about work you don't understand?

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The Usta turns both the foreman's own words and their underlying ideological message around on him by repurposing the phrase "for the sake of" (*hatırı için*). By challenging this common-sense notion that breaks are for the sake of work, and re-centering the discourse in terms of worker's rights, the Usta immediately forces the foreman to relent for the time being; and the workers get to stay on break for the fully allotted time. What's more, the workers enjoy listening

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<sup>413</sup> Kemal, *Bereketli*, 221-222.

to a linguistic effort to redefine the very meaning of breaks, understood as a right and not a privilege that can arbitrarily be taken away. The struggle over the length of the working day, however, continues. Watching from the driver's seat of the haymaker during this first exchange is Zeynel, the strong-willed day laborer who will continue to stand up to the foreman. Shortly after the first interaction, Zeynel finds himself yet again advocating for his fellow workers when the work whistle is blown.

Her günden daha kısa süren paydos, yorgun ırgatları sinirlendirmişti. Homurtular oldu:

— Ne o be? Ne oluyor be?

— Vay kerhaneci vay... Ulan zaten doğru dürüst bir soluk aldırılmaz...

— Firaun deyyus Firaun!

Sırtüstü uzandığı yerden doğrulup, düdük sesinin geldiği yana bakan Veysel:

— İş başı mı ne? dedi.

— İş başı ya, dedi biri.

— Ne çabuk yahu?

— Bunun yaptığı çok oluyor arkadaş... Düdük daha kuvvetle yeniden öttü. Irgatlar Zeynel'in çevresini almışlardı:

— Şuna bir meram anlat Zeynel ağa, dedi içlerinden biri.

Zeynel kesti attı:

— Meramı müramı yok. Çalsın çalabildiği kadar, boş verin!

The work break, which was shorter than the one given every day, made the tired workers irritated. There was grumbling:

—What’s this man? What’s going on man?

—Ugh this ruthless dictator ugh...The jerk doesn’t give a damn if we can’t get one good breath...

—Pharoah, cuckold pharoah!

Veysel sat up from the place where he’d been stretched out and looked in the direction from which the sound of the whistle had come:

— Is it time to work? he said.

— Work time, yeah, said someone.

—Why so fast man?

—He does this a lot, brother... The whistle blew again with more force. The laborers surrounded Zeynel:

—Tell this guy something, Master Zeynel, said one of them.

Zeynel cut them off:

—There’s nothing to tell. Let him blow as hard as he can, who cares!

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This time we see the workers themselves adopting the Usta’s earlier insults, calling the foreman a pharaoh, and using a few insulting expressions of their own. The non-standardized dialogue and the use of insults work to show Zeynel as a lively and ill-mannered worker, rather than lionizing him or turning him into a pristine socialist hero. The foreman blows his whistle several more times, but the ideological spell has been broken. A boss is not a master (*ağa*) or a sergeant (*çavuş*) but now a brothel addict (*kerhaneci*) and a cuckold (*deyyus*). Zeynel continues to insist on workers’ rights and incite his fellow workers to stand up for themselves. But rather than

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<sup>414</sup> Kemal, *Bereketli*, 227.

leading to a climax in which injustices are confronted, Zeynel will be labeled a “troublemaker” and eventually fired from working on the haymaker crew. Once he is gone, the foreman’s verbal violence and abuse of power begins again. There are, in fact, many fascinating examples in the novel where Orhan Kemal illustrates some of the basic theories of Marx’ *Capital* through these verbal interactions, such as: the reserve army of labor, the increasing pace of work, and the struggle between worker and machine, worthy of its own treatment. However, rather than presenting them as lofty ideas or steps in a heroic teleology, Kemal dresses them in non-standardized language, which makes them seem firmly grounded in the drudgery and injustice referenced in daily speech. He does this so much that Nazım Hikmet, in his comments on the novel, called *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* too pessimistic to be a work of socialist realism.<sup>415</sup>

## Conclusion

Although the two village novels by Yūsuf İdrīs and Orhan Kemal use standard and non-standardized language for much the same reasons—political, narratological and aesthetic—they are remarkably different in tone. *Al-Ḥarām* is a blistering, ironic critique of the hypocrisies of the landowning class, gender politics, and the false notion that the Egyptian nation in any way constitutes some sort of syncretic whole. İdrīs uses the seemingly impartial perspective of the realist novel to expose the ideological ways of seeing which have distorted traditional perceptions

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<sup>415</sup> See Hüseyin Özçelebi, “Türk Edebiyatında Toplumcu Gerçekçi Eleştiri Anlayışının Temelleri,” Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, n.d.

of the Egyptian village. He uses the language ideologies traditionally associated with the village novel *tropically*, upsetting expectations about where and to whom various registers belong.

By contrast, Orhan Kemal in *Bereketli Topraklar Üzerinde* tries to minimize a long history of irony in the Turkish village novel, cutting out the various patronizing, didactic and lionizing perspectives that prevented rural citizens from telling their own story. Kemal does this not only by minimizing as much as possible the use of standardized language and the point of view that it indexes, but also by making those non-standardized voices of his characters serve as much more than mere stereotypical costuming. Instead, they reveal the complex sociopolitical dynamics taking place independently of the elite urban gaze.

Throughout this chapter I have tried to show the possible ways that the concept of the indexical field can be used to expand our ways of seeing how language variation creates a plethora of different social meanings. While writing, the task of trying to map out all of the ways that the indexes of the contrast between standard and non-standardized speech interact, cross-pollinate, reorder, and satirize one another has seemed at times overwhelming, and my close readings offer only a brief look at how either of the two novels use language variation. I hope at the very least that I have been able to show that the political and narratological implications of instances of contrast made between standard and non-standardized speech in these novels are practically impossible to pull apart.

While writing, I have hoped to argue that language ideology creates sociopolitical meaning out of patterns of language, and that these patterns are deeply entwined with the ways

that narrative forms also structure language for literary effects. In fact, I would go so far as to adopt Caroline Levine's advice that we expand "our usual definition of form in literary studies to include patterns of sociopolitical experience."<sup>416</sup> Levine insists that while close readings in literary studies have traditionally focused on how all of the formal techniques of a text contributed to an overarching artistic whole, or alternatively on how the social and political conditions surrounding a work's production connect the novel's forms to the social world, these two realms of form, in fact, come together within the text. I would add that there is nowhere where they come together more clearly than in the forms of the interactional text.

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<sup>416</sup> Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 2.

## Chapter Four: Speculative Lexicons: Lexicography and History in Gamāl al-Ghīṭānī and Yaşar Kemal

ey şî'r miyanında satan lafz-ı garibi, divan-ı gazel nüsha-ı kamus deġıldür

-Nâbî

### Introduction

In the fourth edition of his *Yaşar Kemal Dictionary* (*Yaşar Kemal Sözlüğü*, 1994), Turkish writer, poet, and philologist Ali Püsküllüoġlu offers a new introduction to his collection of vocabulary, idioms, and proverbs collected from the fictional work of the author, Yaşar Kemal. He uses the introduction to explain that, even when collecting words used by a single author, the work is never really done, referencing the adage: “Sözlük, un çuvalı gibidir, vurdukça tozar.” (“Dictionaries are like bags of flour: every time you smack them, they let out dust.”)<sup>417</sup> Püsküllüoġlu says that the main reason why he returned so often to this dictionary to make edits, and why the dictionary existed at all, was Kemal’s own philological voraciousness. Namely, the author used his novels as a living record of popular language, which would otherwise disappear. For both Püsküllüoġlu and Kemal, literature and lexicography are mutually constitutive.

One of the main criteria for selection in the *Yaşar Kemal Dictionary* was that its words and phrases not be found in standard Turkish dictionaries, such as *Türkçe Sözlük*, *Büyük Türk*

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<sup>417</sup> Ali Püsküllüoġlu, *Yaşar Kemal Sözlüğü* (Istanbul: Görsel Yayınlar, 1994), 11.

*Sözlüğü*, or the *Meydan Larousse Büyük Lügat ve Ansiklopedi*.<sup>418</sup> Yaşar Kemal worked in the wake of an intense period of lexical engineering in Turkey, in which the Kemalist regime had attempted to remake the entire language through an intense campaign of lexicography, discarding loan words from Arabic and Persian and attempting to build a whole new vocabulary through contrived methods of folkloric research and morphological derivation. Literary scholars praise writers like Kemal for stealthily subverting the Kemalist language regime through their own literary language. But when one looks at Kemal's own use of lexicon, it is clear that he had his own agenda as well. Straying from the official lexical standards, Kemal's fiction created a special effect through its use of hyper-localized vocabulary. Ceyhun Atuf Kansu explains in his article about the dictionary:

I say he is the master of narrative, especially in the case of his novel "Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti" where he is in his element. One of the sources which nourishes his narration is the language he draws from the land of the Çukurova... While reading I thought to myself at one point, "The materials needed for writing a novel about the land of Kadirli is a whole slew of legends, stories, and hundreds of people!" Truly, Yaşar Kemal's striking characteristic is that he has produced a shadowy, forest-like novel made up of his home region and the Akçasaz swamp.<sup>419</sup>

The use of strange and unfamiliar words facilitates the recreation of the precise details of another geography. But what about the Çukurova was so particular that it required such a special

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<sup>418</sup> Püsküllüoğlu, *Sözlüğü*, 17.

<sup>419</sup> "Anlatı ustası deyimi, hele "Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti" romanı için tam yerinde. Bu anlatıyı besleyen kaynaklardan biri, onun Çukurova toprağından çektiğı dil... Romanı okurken bir yere yazı düşmüşüm, şöyle: "Bir Kadirli toprağından bir romanlık gereç, bir sürü söylence, öykü, yüzlerce insan çıkarmak!" Gerçekten, Yaşar Kemal'deki vurucu özellik yaşantısının yöresinden, o Akçasaz bataklığından gölgeli bir roman ağaçlığı üretmesidir." Kansu, Ceyhun. "Halkın Sesi Dil İle." Barış, Mar. 1974.

vocabulary to invoke it? The Çukurova was a large rural area in southern Turkey that had undergone enormous social and politico-ecological changes during the course of Kemal's lifetime. *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* takes place in and around the wetlands in the north of the Çukurova during the rapid economic and environmental changes of the 1940s and 50s. Before this time, the area was considered to be a hostile frontier environment.<sup>420</sup> But after various drainage and anti-malarial projects were undertaken in the 1950s, the entire area was suddenly transformed by mechanized agriculture and capitalist investment. Remarkably, *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* is a novel which attempts to narrativize this very transformation itself, juxtaposing the pre-industrial feudal way of life and its political ecology to that of the capitalist agricultural economy and its modern subjects. This narrative contradiction is described by İbrahim Oluklu as the slow intrusion of objective-historical time.<sup>421</sup>

The way that Kemal separates these two distinct realms is by means of a linguistic analogy: the plenitude of regional rural life is described in lush, idiosyncratic language, while the matter of factness of modern town living is described through direct, unornamented language. This is possible because lexicon has a special ability to recreate worlds.

The Lexicon, with its many facets, is a mirror of its time, a document to be understood in sociolinguistic terms. It both describes and prescribes the lexis of a language according to

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<sup>420</sup> Christopher Gratien, "The Mountains Are Ours: Ecology and Settlement in Late Ottoman and Early Republican Cilicia, 1856-1956" (Georgetown University, 2015), 173.

<sup>421</sup> "Akçasazın Ağaları nesnel-tarihsel zaman, dikkatli bin okurca rahatlıkla görülebilecek kadar açıktır. Bu zaman feodal Türkmen beylerinin ortadan silinip yerlerini yeni yetme ağalar diye belirlenen kişilerin almaya başladığı ve onların kent yaşamına doğru yavaş yavaş uzanışlarının anlatıldığı bir zamandır." I. Oluklu, *Akçasazın Ağaları I Dizisinde Zaman*, Karşı Edebiyat, S. 11-12, Mayıs-Haziran 1987, s. 15-20.

(in Karl Jasper's phrasing) "the intellectual situation of the time". Lexicographic strategy... reflects the attitudes of a society, as expressed in the word, toward the dominant problems of the ever-changing here and now. His own milieu provides the specific motivations which guide the lexicographer.<sup>422</sup>

But the lexicon of a text can also be used to create other milieus, transporting readers to other times and places, or even creating a type of cognitive estrangement of places that are already familiar. Kemal's creative interventions into the lexicon of his novel brings the reader's attention to those objects of—and attitudes towards—the physical world which steadily faded into the background with the rise of modern development. In the novel Kemal tries to invoke a lost world by reviving its words, creating a historical translation across time by mining its cultural heritage. This unique use of vocabulary in the creation of different worlds is what I call a speculative lexicon.

This approach to manipulating lexicon in order to make visible changes in historical perspective can be found in other novels as well. Writing in Egypt at the time was another author interested in cultural heritage and especially its lexicon and stylistics. But rather than using cultural heritage as a way to revive things that have disappeared or gone extinct, Gamāl al-Ghīṭānī uses it to blur the differences between different ages, revealing in the process how the medieval city and the modern metropolis of Cairo are uncannily the same. Al-Ghīṭānī's historical and experimental novelistic output, like that of *al-Zaynī Barakāt* (1971), are famous for creating historical allegories and alternative realities by reviving classical forms of language. By doing so

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<sup>422</sup> Ladislav Zgusta, *History, Languages, and Lexicographers*, vol. 41 (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2017), 20.

he offered devastating criticisms of the police state under Nasserism. Al-Ghīṭānī's own baptism into Egypt's impaired history came in his youth when he became fascinated with books on Pharaonic and Mamluk history. "I immersed myself in reading historical sources...the Pharaonic age and in particular the Mamluk era still cast a heavy shadow over our lives, I lived in a part of town referred to in the main sources, the streets still held the same names."<sup>423</sup>

This particular fixation on the historical continuity of names, particularly those of the built environment, speaks to a desire for words to act as bulwark against the efforts to erase history. But al-Ghīṭānī eventually came to understand that words could be used to blur the boundaries between historical periods as much as to erect them in the first place. In an interview on his own literary methods, al-Ghīṭānī states that language was not merely a style that could be used in performance, but a specific mental and spiritual state, one that changes according to different ages.<sup>424</sup> His own eccentric approach to philology and use of a speculative lexicon was used to cross the wires of historic sensibilities in the service of cognitive estrangement.

This chapter will argue that Yaşar Kemal and Gamāl al-Ghīṭānī relied on the ideological nature of lexicography to create the effect of cognitive estrangement in their fiction. Moving beyond the decipherable one-to-one correspondence in the political allegories of their earlier historical novels, the authors offer strange fusions of past and present, temporal and spatial hybrids which do not offer a discrete or wholly *other* world for speculation. Instead, they achieved

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<sup>423</sup> Gamāl al-Ghīṭānī, "Interview with Alif." "Intertextual Dialectics: An Interview with Gamal al-Ghitany,," Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics 4 (1984): 75.

<sup>424</sup> al-Ghitani, "Intertextual," 79.

a critical, speculative distance between the social reality of their readers and that of their fictional characters through estranged language. The Çukurova and the city of Cairo become inexplicably distorted versions of themselves by being described in words and phrasings which are conspicuously ornamental, archaic, folkloric, and recherché. It is the real world described fantastically. By rooting their estrangement in semantic ambivalence rather than figural symbolism, allegories and satire are given their plausible deniability through equivocation rather than projection. It is a complicated illusion which the authors pull off by means of their own personal engagement with the ideology of lexicon.

Lexicography has been an important archive for tracing the cultural histories of modernization in Egypt and Turkey. By looking at 20th century dictionary campaigns in the countryside, or the re-emergence of philology in the 19th century Arab world, scholars have aimed to show how elite reformers exploited lexicography towards their modernization projects based on a notion of linguistic determinism, whereby “altering the dictionary will mean altering the language of a given community.”<sup>425</sup> However, also just like standard language ideology, lexicographic ideology does not emanate as an elite discourse, but functions as a commonplace belief which almost everyone shares:

The disparity that exists between the popular beliefs adhering to the concept of a dictionary, (which is seen as an accurate and authoritative key to the meanings of the words which comprise a language), and the actuality of lexicographic endeavor, (which necessarily results in truncated definitions which provide what is, at best, partial or merely indicative information about the way in which words are – or were – commonly

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<sup>425</sup>Philip Seargeant, “Lexicography as a Philosophy of Language,” *Language Sciences* 33, no. 1 (2011): 7-8.

used). This paradox is a form of perceptual disjuncture, whereby those using dictionaries entertain beliefs which are incompatible with the practices they actually engage in.”<sup>426</sup>

The disparity between the idealized linguistic situation on display in a dictionary, and the ever-shifting context of real world practice, is one which a literary author can take advantage of in the service of cognitive estrangement. Rather than framing battles over literary style as conflict between the nationalist episteme and subaltern dissent, we can regard ‘both sides’ as equal participants in the politics of lexicon. Literature is a contributor to language ideology in the same way that philology and state lexicography are creators of speculative fiction. Rather than seeing the politics of lexicon as necessarily coercive, the favored tool of monoglossic enforcement, we should think of interventions into lexicons as a practice to be expected from any conscious construction of language.

### The Politics of Lexicon in Turkey

Central to any project of language standardization is the erection of boundaries around a lexicon. If standardization is essentially the “imposition of uniformity upon a class of objects”, then lexicon offers a clear target for language reformers.<sup>427</sup> Whereas syntactic structures or phonetic shifts do not easily lend themselves to the exacting aspirations of standardization, individual words seemingly offer the prospect of discrete, and thereby policeable elements of

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<sup>426</sup> Seargeant, “Lexicography,” 1.

<sup>427</sup> Milroy, “Language Ideologies,” 530.

language. Indeed, official bodies in the history of Egypt and Turkey have attempted to create an approved list of 'true' lexemes by fiat, ruling which words actually constitute the semantic content of a language. This includes setting an acceptable methodology for the creation or transformation of new concepts and objects, as well as the diligent elimination of all those words which are ruled on ideological grounds to be alien. The intense political interest in lexicography is partly due the ability of dictionaries to cultivate heritage (which is linked to a mythological fascination with etymology) as well as their use "as a channel for the championing of patriotic attitudes"<sup>428</sup> and as "the basis for scheduling claims to groupness, or for their suppression."<sup>429</sup> Also given its seemingly disinterested and scholarly nature, lexicography is well suited for providing cover for and naturalizing ethnonationalist ideology.<sup>430</sup>

A central element of the Turkish language reforms, and the "revolution from above" more broadly, was lexicographical. Jacob Landau has shown how purification, reform, standardization, and lexical expansion were an essential precondition in the national project 'n Turkey.<sup>431</sup>

Purification meant, mainly, the rooting out of foreign Arabic and Persian words from the native Turkish lexicon in a process that Judith Irvine and Susan Gal name 'register stripping': "the

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<sup>428</sup> Henry Kahane and Renee Kahane, "The Dictionary as Ideology," *History, Language, and Lexicographers*, Ed. Ladislav Zgusta. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992, 20.

<sup>429</sup> Silverstein, "Whens and Wheres," 552.

<sup>430</sup> See B. B. Kachru and H. Kahane, *Cultures, Ideologies, and the Dictionary: Studies in Honor of Ladislav Zgusta* (De Gruyter, 2013).

<sup>431</sup> Jacob M. Landau, *Language Policy and Political Development in Israel and Turkey* (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the ..., 1990).

recursive application of this native/foreign distinction to the lexical stock of the region's languages."<sup>432</sup> Lexical expansion meant the creation of new words based on putatively native morphological rules, creating a stock of words referred to, sometimes pejoratively, as Öztürkçe; pejoratively because of the perceived artificiality and awkward of many of the neologisms created.

Concurrent with this language engineering was the creation of dictionaries to register and authorize the new lexicon.

The subsequent years of the Turkish reforms brought further needs concerning dictionaries... to make the Turkish society more familiar with a new Turkish language (Türkiye Türkçesi), some new dictionaries were edited which translated Ottoman Turkish into modern Turkish and vice versa. As an example of such works one can mention Türkçeden Osmanlıcaya Cep Kılavuzu (Istanbul 1935) and Osmanlıcadan Türkçeye Cep Kılavuzu (Istanbul 1935).<sup>433</sup>

Siemienieć-Gołaś is clear to point out that this effort to create dictionaries was itself a direct political intervention.

Apart from an educational role, this kind of dictionaries played also another role – the role of propaganda. In the introductory part of the afore-named dictionaries, the editors stressed the richness of the Turkish language and its deep and long lasting contacts with some other languages, even though they belonged to other linguistic groups. Paradoxically, this kind of dictionaries did not always present a real, modern or, one could say, pure Turkish. Even taking into account the above-mentioned examples, we can ascertain that

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<sup>432</sup> Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine, "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation," in *Regimes of Language*, ed. Paul Kroskrity (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 71.

<sup>433</sup> Ewa Siemienieć-Gołaś, "Some Remarks on Turkish Dictionaries Published in Constantinople/Istanbul before and Soon after Language Reform in Turkey (1928)," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 68, no. 2 (2015). 139

two of the three quoted words, viz, *abay* and *evcimen*, are not recorded in contemporary dictionaries of modern Turkish.<sup>434</sup>

Official Turkish dictionaries were attempts to dictate reality rather than merely describe it. In his attempt to taxonomize dictionaries interested in influencing standards, the famous lexicographer Ladislav Zgusta offers four types: (1) dictionaries that aim at creating a written standard (2) dictionaries that aim to make a standard more modern (3) dictionaries that try to stop any change to the standard (4) dictionaries that try to describe the existing standard<sup>435</sup>. Whether expanding, preserving, or shrinking a lexicon, a dictionary is meant to present a portrait of linguistic reality that is aspirational. In different ways, the lexicographical work of the Kemalist reformers can be seen as aiming towards all four of these goals.

The modernizing state is portrayed as the main character of the story of lexical change in Turkey, as the sole arbiter of the boundaries of standard language. However, this narrative overestimates the influence and ability of lexicography to act as a singular force in enacting sociolinguistic changes. Lexicons also require the endorsement of the public, accepting or resisting the ideological vision of a lexicon based on their own social position and motivations. Geoffrey Lewis's book on the language reforms speaks of the "period of linguistic chaos following the publication of *Tarama Dergisi* (1934)"; and indeed, the conflicting account of the language reforms as being simultaneously blundering and coercive is captured by the famous title of this

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ladislav Zgusta, "The Role of Dictionaries in the Genesis and Development of the Standard," Hausmann, FJ et al. (Eds.) 1991 (1989): 70-89.

book.<sup>436</sup> Linguistic reforms imposed from above were at all points dependent on the reception and implementation by different interest groups in society and the ways that lexical use, coupled with the institutional recognition, did or did not confirm social capital on users.<sup>437</sup> As Philip Sergeant argues, lexicographic ideology also depends on the willingness of people to disregard the linguistic reality they inhabit in order to invest belief in a dictionary as an accurate and authoritative key to meaning. In this way, lexicography actually shares with fiction the work of world building.

For these reasons, one should avoid the temptation to paint the state as a hegemonic linguistic power and those writers with differing approaches to language and lexicon as honorably disarming its ideology. Sibel Irzik summarizes the attitude by the elite toward Yaşar Kemal by saying he “entered the canon of “world literature” as a dissident author —one who “speaks for” the nation in “speaking against” it.”<sup>438</sup> This is echoed in Jale Parla’s account Yaşar Kemal’s relationship to the official lexicon in the section of her “Wounded Tongue” article entitled “Early Practitioners of Linguistic Dissent”:

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<sup>436</sup> Lewis, *Catastrophic Success*, 53.

<sup>437</sup> Lewis provides the anecdote of the professor at a conference who, in composing his opening address, wanted to couch in the most up-to-date language. “So in his own archaic and courtly Turkish he told the company what he wanted to say and we suggested the appropriate neologisms. There was much discussion about how to say ‘modern’. He knew *asrı* was too old-fashioned but he did not know the new word. One or two people suggested *çağdaş*, but we agreed that that was the neologism for *muasır* ‘contemporary’ The eventual consensus was that he should use *modern*, which he did.” Ibid, 51.

<sup>438</sup> Sibel Irzik, “Yaşar Kemal’s Island of Resistance,” in *Resistance in Contemporary Middle Eastern Cultures, Literature, Cinema and Music*, ed. Karima Laachir and Saeed Talajooy (New York: Routledge, 2013), 49.

Kemal never uttered an objection to the language reform undertaken by his namesake; in fact, his prose is rooted in the reformed language of the republican era. But he compensated for the impoverishment of that language ingeniously by enriching his style with folk vocabulary and idiom from his native district in southern Turkey. His linguistic innovations, therefore, were not perceived as a statement against the language reform; rather, they were welcomed as a skillful employment of local color, which flattered the populist, solidaristic tendencies of the Kemalists. He was embraced as the long-awaited literary genius who with his extraordinary prose would enliven the creative spirit of Anatolia.<sup>439</sup>

This analysis is typical of the rhetoric of cultural anxiety about lexical engineering in Turkey. The results of the language reform are cast as sterilizing or artificializing the Turkish language, emptying out the lexicon of its subtleties and filling it with fake words. According to this narrative, authors such as Kemal created works which fought back against the homogenizing suppression of the state's language policy and its impoverishment of the language. His work was innovative and genius in the face of the stultifying project of state modernization. Although Parla states that Kemal did not directly run afoul of the state ideology, and that his work was even taken as a form of flattery to its populist themes, it is nonetheless represented as working in a space set against and separated from standard language ideology.

However, Yaşar Kemal did, in fact, object to the language reforms, as I will show, and was himself taken in by the same cultural anxieties about lexical impoverishment. Nonetheless, I claim that his interest in lexicon was not merely as a reaction to the language reforms, an attempt to

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<sup>439</sup> Parla, "Wounded Tongue," 32.

right the wrongs and repair the language from its ideological distortions. To the contrary, he was fully aware that a dictionary is always a mirror of its time and sought to use fiction as a way to demonstrate the cultural and historical contingency of all lexicons. His fiction is not an expression of disenchantment with official lexicography, but rather, speculative fiction built from his own lexicons.

### Demirci Çarşısı Cinayeti

The work of Yaşar Kemal throughout the 1960s and 70s can be characterized as a series of related experiments with the novel form, which use lyrical language steeped in local literary traditions to create speculative narrative worlds. His early novels in the 1950s had combined lyrical descriptions, rural themes, and a mythic tone of narration to create novels which immerse readers in the feudalistic world of southern Turkey.<sup>440</sup> In each of his early novels, from *İnce Memed* (1955) to the *Dağın Öte Yüzü* Trilogy (1960-8), he experimented with different approaches to this arrangement. With the publication of his novel *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti*, he claimed to have taken one more step towards the kind of novel he wanted to write.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> This chapter maintains Kemal's own use of the concept "feudal mode of production" while acknowledging that the history of feudalism in Anatolia has been greatly complicated if not refuted in the decades since the publishing of this novel. The article aspires an epochal analysis in line with Raymond Williams' understanding of cultural processes as a complex interplay of dominant, residual and emergent cultural forms, with feudalism being used as a general term for residual cultural forms in mid-century Çukurova. Thanks to Kenan Sharpe for the insight in regards to this point.

<sup>441</sup> Ramazan Çiftlikçi, "Yaşar Kemal, Yazar, Eser, Üslup," TC Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, 1997, 328.

The novel centers around the ongoing blood feud between two feudal lords (*ağalar*), Dervish Bey and Mustafa Bey, who plot to kill one another based on a grudge whose origin is now lost to time. During the course of their struggle, the narrative slowly begins shifting focus to a group of young agricultural capitalists in town (presumably the town of Kadirli) who hope to buy up the lords' landholdings and use them towards profitable agricultural ventures. The intense interpersonal conflict between the feudal lords is shown to be an increasingly anachronistic distraction to the rapidly changing landscape of the region. While Dervish Bey, Mustafa Bey, and their ilk all speak in and are described with the mythologized language of their ancestors and traditions, the town landowners and others are quickly draining the swamp, buying up the land, and looking for ways to profit from the emerging capitalist agricultural sector. They see the feudal lords as a mere nuisance which must be eradicated, along with the mosquitos, to make the land profitable. As one town resident describes the situation to the district governor

Öyle Kaymakam Bey, bunların kökü kazınmadan hiçbir zaman, hiçbir surette bu memleket kalkınamaz. Bunlar bu memleketin yüreğindeki urlardır efendim. Haşa yüksek huzurunuzdan bunlar habis urlardır. Akçasaz bataklıklarınının kıyıları, evet Kaymakam Beyimiz, firdolayı mezarlıktır. Bunların öldürüp de gizli gizli gömdükleri fakir fıkaranın mezarlığıdır. Bunlar çok çok fakir fıkaraya, az az kendilerinden öldürürler. Tarlaların üstüne konmuşlar, ne ekip biçiyorlar, ne de bizim o güzelim toprakları işlememize izin veriyorlar.

So, Governor Bey, this country can never be developed in any way without taking these people out by the root. These people are a tumor in the heart of this country, sir. If your excellency will excuse the expression they are a malignant tumor. The shores of the Akçasaz marshes, yes, dear governor, are a cemetery all around. They are a cemetery for the destitute who have been killed and then buried there secretly. These are the down-and-out, the destitute, who kill one another over the slightest thing. They camp on their fields, they do no cultivation, nor do they allow us to cultivate those beautiful lands.

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The increasing contrast between the seemingly timeless world of the feudal lords and the empirical (and marketized) geography of the Republican-era Çukurova creates two separate narrative approaches: folktale epic being increasingly overrun by a thoroughly empirical realism. Early reviewers were critical of the seeming disjunction between the various plotlines. But Kemal was clear that his intention was to design a novel that encapsulates these contradictory levels of figuration and perspective. There is a radical incompatibility between different modes of production and their different methods of figuration, which Kemal described as narrative circles (*daireler*), as I will show. The disjunctions and cognitive estrangement that they create are exactly the point.

The distancing effect works through the contrast, by showing that the same world can be described with two radically different lexical registers. In the feudal scenes, Kemal showcases archaic and vernacular terms. By using a forgotten lexicon, Kemal brings back to life the epic world from which the vocabulary comes. In an interview with Erden Kıral, he alleged, “When the

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<sup>442</sup> Yaşar Kemal, *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2016), 245.

Ottoman language was removed, our Turkish literature was left in a bad state. Left without a lexicon, left without idioms. It was left stark naked. I said, we can't make poetry with this language, we can't write literature."<sup>443</sup> For Kemal, language was stripped bare during the emergence of the modern world, just like the natural world was. The modern sections of the novel, by contrast, contain constant references to people and concepts which connect the narrative to the modern world. Menderes, Hitler, American tractors, German Mercedes Benz, and the constant invocation of the central government in Ankara all ground the town scenes in a specific historical time and place.

The timeless world is depicted in the very beginning of the novel in the first chapter, which the jury of the 1974 Madaralı literary prize called "a great language symphony." Fethi Naci claims that Yaşar Kemal's descriptions of nature cue in all five senses like an antenna: colors, sounds, smells.<sup>444</sup> In this opening chapter, through the constant downpour of a "yellow rain", a wounded horseman arrives at the residence of Derviş Bey, having been pursued by Sultan Ağa's men. Over 33 pages, the rider slowly heals from his injuries as the bad weather persists and riders from the opposite tribe besiege the estate. During the entire drawn-out scene, intense focus is given to describing the weather and the natural environment, often re-describing or reframing descriptions of the same objects over and over again. It is as though Kemal is attempting to test the limits of synonyms offered by the enriched language of Anatolia. In detailing the rain, for

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<sup>443</sup> Erden Kıral, "YK: Halk Yalanı, Yalansız Dolansız, Uydurma Olmayan Anlar, Sever, Benimser," *Yeni Güney Mart-Nisan*, no. 3-4 (1978): 34.

<sup>444</sup> Y. Sarıbaş, "Yaşar Kemal'in Bitkileri," *Orman ve Av Dergisi* 2, no. Mart-Nisan (2013).

example, he gives the following descriptions:

Hışım gibi bir yağmur yağıyordu. Yağan yağmur sapsarıydı. Ne bir gök gürültüsü, ne bir şimşek ışığı, durmadan, bozulmadan biteviye yukardan aşağı düşen, kesintisiz sular, aydınlık, koygun sarı yağmur...

İnceden başladı yağmur. Sarı, kehribar gibi, azıcık da ışıltılı. Damla damla düşmüyor, sağılıyordu. İplik gibi. Işıktan iplikler gibi...

Yağmur dinmiş, sarı, pırıltılı bir toz tabaka tabaka ince havada uçuyordu...

It was raining furiously. The rain was pale yellow. No thunder, no lightning, uninterrupted water, constantly falling from above, uninterrupted waters, bright, biting, pale yellow rain...

The rain started lightly. Yellow, like amber, and slightly glittering. The raindrops were not falling, they were being unraveled. Like thread. Like threads of light...

The rain subsided. A yellow, glittering layer of dust was flying around in layers in the thin air...

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This attempt to narrate using as rich a lexicon as possible was tied to Yaşar Kemal's own beliefs about the Turkish language. In an interview with the leftist author Erdal Öz, he lamented, "Today you can't write a novel with Istanbul Turkish. You can't write poetry. You can't write anything. Istanbul Turkish is a language with a vocabulary of three hundred or five hundred words. Ottoman was like that, too. It is removed from life, a frozen language."<sup>446</sup> Kemal believed that only the vernacular language of a place could accurately explain its specific history and its ecology: "When one creates a novel, one must first create a language. This language is not that of

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<sup>445</sup> Kemal, *Demirciler*, 7, 11, 33.

<sup>446</sup> Erdal Öz, "Yaşar Kemal'le Yaratıcılığının Kaynakları Üzerine Söyleşi," in *Ağacın Çürüğü* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2000), 313.

the people, neither is it the language of myths, fairy tales or poetry. Written narrative is completely different... I realized this as I wrote. While writing a long novel, I realized something else: the structure of language shapes the novel and its content."<sup>447</sup>

Kemal drew on his own experiences growing up in the Çukurova, as well as his study of regional folklore traditions and lexical fieldwork, in order to create a repository of exotic words which, when used in his texts, would do a great deal of work in recreating a historical world. Ali Püsküllüoğlu says:

Yaşar Kemal took elements of vernacular language and made them part of the standard language... because when a standard language writer like Yaşar Kemal uses these vernacular words in all of his works, they should be considered to have become part of the standard language. On the other hand, these words are at present found exclusively in the work of Yaşar Kemal, and so they still have the effect of being regionalisms.<sup>448</sup>

Püsküllüoğlu's literary dictionary is organized alphabetically and includes both vernacular words as well as regional idioms, along with a definition and an example from the novel in which it appeared. For *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti*, Püsküllüoğlu records 20 remarkable lexical examples including the following:

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<sup>447</sup> Fethi Naci, "Yaşar Kemal'e Edebiyat ve Politika," *Aydınlık Mayıs* (1993).

<sup>448</sup> Ali Püsküllüoğlu Quoted by Muzaffer Uyguner, "Yaşar Kemal Sözlüğü," *Türk Dili*, February 1975.

<p>çivgın (a.) rüzgar dolayısıyla eğik yağan yağmur. Sarı yağmur çivgına varmış, eğri, uçuşarak yağıyordu. (DÇC, 36)</p>
<p>çivgın (noun) a rain that is angled because of the wind. “The yellow rain became çivgın, raining slanted, flying about.” (Murder in the Ironsmith’s Market, 36).</p>
<p>İte dalanmaktansa çalıyı dolanmak yeğdir (ata.) kavgacı bir kimseyle takışmaktansa takışmayacak bir yol aramak daha iyidir. Vazgel arkadaş...İte dalanmaktansa çalıyı dolanmak yeğdir (DÇC, 132)</p>
<p>İte dalanmaktansa çalıyı dolanmak yeğdir. (proverb) it’s better to beat through the bush than to take on the dog Forget about it, friend...İte dalanmaktansa çalıyı dolanmak yeğdir (Murder in the Ironsmith’s Market, 132).</p>
<p>kürnek (a.) otlatılıp doyurulmuş olan sürünün ikinci otlama vaktine değin topluca bulunduruldukları genellikle su kıyısı yer. Bir de sığırın, koyunların kürnekleri kaldı. (DÇC, 36)</p>
<p>kürnek (noun) A waterside location where animals will remain after having grazed to their fill until the time of a second grazing And the kürneks for the cattle and sheep were left behind. (Murder in the Ironsmith’s Market, 36).</p>

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In each of the above examples, one can see how Kemal regularly used his rare words in such a way as to include an adjoined synonym or another form of contextualization to help the uninitiated reader understand. The “çivgın rain” is immediately described as “slanted, flying rain”

<sup>449</sup> Püsküllüoğlu, *Sözlüğü*, 40, 68.

and the proverb “it’s better to beat through the bush than to take on the dog” is understood as advice appropriate to the similar situation being faced by the characters in the book.

Colloquialisms and proverbs like these are colorful and regionally specific and help to root Kemal’s characters and descriptions in the Çukurova. Much of the vocabulary refers to elements from nature or is specific to traditional agricultural techniques. Püsküllüoğlu’s dictionary does not even mention the large number of endemic plant and animal species which Kemal described with careful detail throughout the novel, as will be shown.

The extent to which these unusual words do the heavy lifting in creating the epic or mythological mood of Kemal’s work is remarkable. Sometimes, the only thing making a village seem remote or timeless or fantastical is the exotic word choice used to describe it. These localities are not merely mundane rural areas, the middle of nowhere, or nameless places in which some committed nationalist seeks out an authentic Anatolia. Instead, Kemal paints them as the vibrant center of the universe, rife with action and drama, the center of their own world. Merely attending to the rich detail of the physical world and allowing characters to speak through their own idiom makes this landscape not merely the Turkish heartland, but “the next valley” of fantastic and utopian fiction.

But how might one compare this strategy of estrangement to other subgenres of speculative fiction? The term ‘speculative fiction’ was offered in order to help arrange the border between various genres and narrative approaches such as fantasy, myth, utopianism and political allegory. While science fiction has already been mentioned as an example, Kemal’s work has often

been characterized as magical realism, although Kemal himself did not approve of the label. Both labels point towards Kemal's use of certain elements that do not exist in the real world—the general qualification for works of speculative fiction—but neither precisely captures what exactly these elements are. However, examining how the different subgenre definitions of speculative fiction fail to define *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* helps to explain what makes the novel's particular narratological approach so interesting. Rather than fantastical or speculative-scientific interventions, the determinative, other-worldly element in the novel is Kemal's lexicon.

In his famous work on science fiction, Darko Suvin claims that traditional works of fantastic and utopian fiction function as *voyages imaginaires* into “the next valley”, whereby an author shows a wholly separate realm inhabited by different creatures, who nonetheless provide a satisfying covariant mirror to our own reality.<sup>450</sup> The estrangement element in this arrangement is provided by the uncanny sensation that this other world is nevertheless recognizable as an alternative of our own. It is through the very fact of its discernible parallels that we are able to use it to step out of our normal understanding of circumstances and phenomena and perceive them freshly. As the famous dramaturg of cognitive estrangement, Bertold Brecht, said, estrangement functions within the work of art “to serve the great social task of mastering life”.<sup>451</sup> As for the cognitive aspect, it refers to the ability for even the fantastical world to be understood

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<sup>450</sup> Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

<sup>451</sup> Quoted in Bertolt Brecht, “Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic, Ed. and Trans,” John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 29 (1964), 16.

empirically. Unlike in myth or fantasy, where the world is seen as timeless or built from archetypal truths, in science fiction there is still an expectation that the world can be measured, delineated, and understood. The specificity of time is a vital aspect in this reckoning, as the world in question, in order to be subject to a cognitive view, must necessarily be unique and changeable. Suvin uses the concept of a 'novum' to describe any strange or new object or element in a work of science fiction which changes the coordinates of an otherwise empirically legible world. Whether it be a time machine or a slumbering monster, the novum is something that is scientifically plausible, but nonetheless occasions the genre's special type of speculative and fictional thinking. Science fiction, then, involves the *factual reporting of fictions* brought on by the introduction of a novum. Yaşar Kemal, however, does not use a technological novum of science fiction in his work. Although he was very much interested in setting up a cognitive view of a recognizable world free from mythic abstractions of time or place, the catalyst for his cognitive estrangement was not a technological intervention in the world of his narratives. Nor is his brand of empiricism physical or scientific inasmuch as it is historical and social. His narration seems to offer the reversal of the equation for science fiction: a fictional reporting of facts.

Another possible way to categorize Kemal's novels is as works of magical realism. Like in science fiction, magical realist works feature an empirical world which contains certain 'magical' elements which cannot be explained. But unlike in science fiction, where even the novum can be considered subject to the rules of physics, in magical realism, this conceit cannot be subsumed into the logic of the rational world. It exists instead as a phenomenon from another realm,

somehow intruding into the empirical, resulting in an empirical and fantastical universe existing in a state of near-merging.<sup>452</sup> According to Lois Zarmora and Wendy Faris (1995), it is precisely this subversive in-betweenness and all-at-onceness which provided a useful genre for postcolonial writers seeking to resist monologic political and cultural structures.<sup>453</sup> Such authors still make solid reference to actual histories, but in such a way that they are not privileged above or separate from the magical and fantastical events portrayed in the novel. Fredric Jameson (1986) says of the genre that it is “not a realism to be transfigured by the ‘supplement’ of a magical perspective, but a reality which is in and of itself magical or fantastic”.<sup>454</sup> With his propensity towards epic and mythic modes of narrative, it would be easy enough to assume that Kemal’s efforts at worlding were more or less in line with the contemporaneous trend of magical realism. But he himself explicitly rejected the label, saying that he and the Latin American writers are merely following the example set by everyone from Gogol to Gilgamesh.<sup>455</sup> Kemal skillfully skirts around the fantastical in his novels, able to plausibly deny any seemingly unreal elements as the effect of individual psychological perceptions or the metaphorical expressions of folkloric language. Franziska Stürmer (2014) summarizes this well by saying: “in some of his texts, social

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<sup>452</sup> Wendy B. Faris, “Scheherazade’s Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction,” in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 172.

<sup>453</sup> Wendy B. Faris and L. Zamora, “Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(Ie)s,” in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>454</sup> Fredric Jameson, “On Magic Realism in Film,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (1986): 311.

<sup>455</sup> Hızlan, D. (2002, September 21). Lozan Konferansı'ndan sonra tarihin en büyük göçü yaşandı. Retrieved from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/lozan-konferansindan-sonra-tarihin-en-buyuk-gocu-yasandi-38415143>.

realism and myth are presented as alternate, hierarchical modes of perception, unreal elements being identified as dreams, visions, etc. In others, they are presented as indistinguishable from each other (regarding their reality status) or become so in the course of the story.”<sup>456</sup>

Despite its epic tone, *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* contains no supernatural elements. Any of its seemingly other-worldly phenomenon are those of the natural world, closely examined in extended vignettes throughout the novel. However, the biggest reason why it would be a mistake to categorize Kemal’s work, and *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* in particular, as magical realism is that the aspect of ‘realism’ in “magical realism” refers to the narrative’s close attention to real life detail and “ a strong presence of the phenomenal world.”<sup>457</sup> In magical realism, a series of events or elements appear in the text which cannot be reconciled with the empirical and factual authority established by the style of narration, thereby undermining it. In *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti*, on the other hand, the narrative technique itself is that which is conspicuous or irreconcilable. Kemal’s words are chosen to describe the phenomenal world, but seem to come from another time and place.

And so, how can one characterize Kemal’s procedure—based on a specific employment of lexicon—to create cognitive distancing in his work? Returning to one of the original theoreticians of the estrangement effect, one can think of Kemal’s use of language as similar to that of a kind of ‘Brechtian nominalism.’ With nominalism being the exposure of universals or general ideas as

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<sup>456</sup> Franziska Stürmer, “Magical Realism and Trauma in Yaşar Kemal’s ‘The Pomegranate on the Knoll,’” *Interférences Littéraires/Littéraire Interferentia*, no. 14 (2014): 121.

<sup>457</sup> Faris, “Scheherazade,” 169.

nothing more than names and words, Brechtian nominalism is the use of literature as a way to estrange our own vocabularies. For example, Jameson writes:

If we decide to identify the V-effect [alienation effect], for example, with a nominalism that some have positioned at the very emergence of modernity itself, then this strategy confronts a situation in which the artificial categories of the various universals--so many words or names--serve to classify a host of radically distinct existents, and to obscure or occult their differentiation. To remove the names thus becomes a form of philosophical therapy which promises to lead us back to the freshness of raw experience itself.<sup>458</sup>

This is a much more satisfying definition of the strategy of estrangement at work in Kemal's novels. All of the care put into cultivating such a rich and novel lexicon is not merely for literary showmanship, but works as a kind of therapy, helping break down the emotional and cognitive barriers built up by modernity in order to approach the natural world as it was once seen, to allow the reader to learn how to understand, as Daniel Pauly puts it, verbiage that is no longer currently fashionable. The type of speculative fiction that Kemal uses in his works is based on this kind of basic nominalism, a reinvigoration of experience through a reinvigoration of words. This approach brings with it a special freshness of experience when its sights are set on the natural world, one which we inhabit but to which most of us have grown indifferent.

#### The Lost Environment and Extinct Words

In his novels Kemal often explored the theme of the 'lost paradise', drawn from local folklore, especially those myths told by the former nomadic tribes of Eastern Anatolia (Gürsel,

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<sup>458</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 2000), 42.

2000, p. 41). Kemal claimed that the forced settling of Turkomen tribes in the 1860s, including those members whose descendants would populate his native village, created an unconscious longing for the earlier ages of free migration, a longing which he used as inspiration for *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* and other works. His attitude towards the 'lost paradise', is reflected in his language because he believed, in proper Marxist fashion, that cultural forms were a reflection of changes in the mode of production exemplified by the statement "When the marshland is drained, so those legends told about the marsh also change."<sup>459</sup> He wanted to show that the traditions and narratives of Anatolia are grounded in a specific physical environment and economy, meaning that their disappearance also spelled doom for their unique forms of knowledge and storytelling, including those about the natural world itself. *Demirciler Çarşısı Cinayeti* is a reenactment, in miniature, of this dynamic. For much of the beginning of the novel, a vernacular form of narrative, marked especially by a rich tapestry of local words and idioms, tells a story about a past Çukurova which, if only separated by a few decades, appears to belong to a separate world.

As Kemal looks to the power of rare and anachronistic words to describe things that are extinct and to bring attention to their absence in the modern world, sometimes the things that these words are invoking have literally gone extinct. Kemal's lexical worlding's focus on the natural world differentiates him from other village novelists at the time.<sup>460</sup> He was explicit about

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<sup>459</sup> "Bataklık kurutulduğu vakit, o bataklığın üzerine söylenen esfaneler de değişiyor" Nedim Gürsel, *Yaşar Kemal: Bir Geçiş Dönemi Romancısı*, vol. 16 (Everest Yayınlar, 2000), 130.

<sup>460</sup> Yalçın Armağan, "Kıyamete Kadar Yaşar Kemal'i Okumak," *Moment Dergi* 2, no. 1 (2015): 357.

using his novels as a way to recreate physical environments which had disappeared, recalling the natural abundance at the edge of his own generational consciousness as an act of ecocritical witnessing. He had experienced during the course of his own life the ways in which the development of the Çukurova had led to the widespread destruction of natural habitats: “What nature went through was worse than those terrible experiences of warring men. This age did not see the tears in nature’s eyes, it viciously attacked it. Seventeen swamps were dried out in the Çukurova, and hundreds of bird species died. People will no longer be able to see those birds; they are no longer alive.”<sup>461</sup>

This destruction is in sharp contrast to the natural world of Kemal’s childhood to which he pays tribute in his novels. As Aziz Şeker has catalogued in his article on eco-sociology in Yaşar Kemal’s work, almost every novel set in the Çukurova is filled with the names that invoke its biological richness.<sup>462</sup> While most historical accounts of the Çukurova wetlands dismiss them as mere swampland, Kemal takes pains to show their great biomic diversity—ranging from marine habitats, surface running waters, marshes, reed-beds, bogs, fens, and seasonally inundated mesic grasslands. As modern environmental studies show, these various ecosystems each have their own share of unique species and interrelationships. All one has to do is pay attention. And this exactly what Kemal does. In the İnce Memed series, for example, the wetlands are filled with many species:

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<sup>461</sup> F Andaç, “Yaşar Kemal’in Sözlerinde Yaşamak,” *Adam Sanat Dergisi*, no. 197 (2003): 6–23.

<sup>462</sup> Aziz Şeker, “YAŞAR KEMAL’İN ROMANLARINDA EKOSOSYOLOJİ,” *Türkoloji Dergisi* 23, no. 1 (n.d.): 158–76.

Cloud-colored egrets, bee-eaters, divlik birds, fish, green frogs, yellow bees, red wasps, beaded bees, and blue yoz bees are in the ecosystem. Also, blackthorn, barberry tree, snow tree, water purlin flower, blue watermelon flower, gum tree, grin flowers, yellow crocus, violet, Aleppo flower, cattle, thyme, mullein flower, tamarisk trees on the coasts, chaste tree, willows, pincers, blackberries, rock flowers, vines, enamel flowering kevens, wild roses, water lilies, bedri, reeds, black snakes, water snakes, red-tailed foxes, coyotes, waterfowl, and a forest made of of various species of trees are depicted<sup>463</sup>

As Şeker observes, the wetlands are also an ornithologist's dream: "The wetlands of the Akçasaz were home to storks, migratory birds, herons, hoopoe... This situation is treated like a bird paradise in the novel."<sup>464</sup>

In interviews, Kemal explains how these invocations of biodiversity were based on his own lived experience, and how much of their loss he himself had witnessed. Beyond his leftist political agenda, he was conscientious of how his fiction could work to further the cause of environmental awareness. The mere invocation of specific animal and plant names helps to bring about an attention and awareness to the natural world of the Çukurova, which throughout history has so often been described in generic or disparaging ways.

One way to understand how lexicon functions in the novel to heighten awareness to the natural world is through a process of analogy: rare words are like rare species, and an enriched lexicon is a metaphor for biodiversity. By using such a rich and unfamiliar vocabulary, Kemal is stylistically recreating the feeling of an unknown habitat, tuning in to the variety and color of the

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<sup>463</sup> Şeker, "EKOSOSYOLOJİ", 165.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

natural world. Another way to understand how lexicon functions is more literal. Invoking the names of plants and animal species first and foremost brings the species' existence to the reader's attention. In modern times, scientists have often played this role of identifying and naming elements of the natural world. But it often turns out that local names already existed for them, but have been forgotten. There is, in fact, an important relationship between language and naming, science, and nature, as the ecological scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) explains in her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*. As a member of the Citizen Potawatomi nation, Kimmerer is in a special position to understand how scientists can use observation to recreate types of knowledge that native people once expressed through native language:

Potawatomi stories remember that all the plants and animals, including humans, used to speak the same language. We could share with one another what our lives were like. But that gift is going and we are poorer for it.

Because we can't speak the same language, our work as scientists is to piece the story together as best we can... we measure and record and analyze in ways that might seem lifeless but to us are the conduits to understanding the inscrutable lives of species not our own...Science can be a way of forming intimacy and respect with other species that is rivaled only by the observations of traditional knowledge holders. It can be a path to kinship.<sup>465</sup>

If humans' relationship to the natural world is shaped by each generation's own verbiage, then the ways that they connect individually to non-human life, and whether they do so at all, is profoundly shaped by language. Kemal was deeply aware of this fact, and was clear about how he

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<sup>465</sup> Robin Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 251-2.

had tried to capture the relationship between language and a historical culture: “While writing this novel I drew several circles. I put the events within them. Side by side, four or five circles. This one is psychology, this one nature, human relationships etc. If we must create in order to understand the world, we must create a language as well.”<sup>466</sup> Kemal’s use of language allows him to both represent shifting baselines, the ways that different generations have perceived or ignored nature, as well as to envision a relationship to nature that could emerge if the right language was trained upon it.<sup>467</sup> With Kimmerer’s insights in mind, one can see how the goals of speculative fiction and environmental science are actually not so different. Both look for ways to break past normal ways of seeing to forge a new relationship with the world. Both also have the potential to overcome the limitations of generational perspectives by increasing participants’ awareness of the limitations and pitfalls of anecdotal knowledge.

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<sup>466</sup> A Benk, “YK’le Kapalı Oturum,” *Çağdaş Edebiyat*, 1982, 22.

<sup>467</sup> First laid out by fishery studies expert Daniel Pauly, shifting baselines is the phenomenon by which each generation of scientists can only judge what is the normal or “baseline” for biodiversity and species abundance based on what they themselves happened to observe in the beginning of their careers, an abundance which imperceptibly shrinks outside of the bounds of individual human cognition. In an interview about the concept, Pauly says of the phenomenon that: “If you want to fight the loss of memory and knowledge about the past, you have to rely on past information. But past information is viewed by many...scientists as anecdotal. There is no knowledge in the past, however secure, however sound, that they are willing to consider because it is not couched in the verbiage that is currently fashionable.” Allison Guy, “Daniel Pauly and George Monbiot in Conversation about ‘Shifting Baselines Syndrome,’” *Oceana*, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://oceana.org/blog/daniel-pauly-and-george-monbiot-conversation-about-shifting-baselines-syndrome>

## Shifting Baselines and Structures of Feeling

In the novel, the natural world appears in and around the two contrasting human plotlines through a series of vignettes, which focus in on the animal life of the wetlands, briar patches, and other ecosystems of the area. As the contrasting emotional stances and narrative styles play back and forth, these nature vignettes allow Kemal to narrativize the new generation's gradual diminishing awareness from the natural world. The process is not even or clear-cut, with animal vignettes appearing all over the book rather than merely receding. Yet, these vignettes become increasingly detached from the narrative about human characters, with the capitalist landowners showing themselves to be completely oblivious to the drama of the natural world. Because of this, the reader begins to lose sense of the context in which the animal scenes are taking place. Whereas in the beginning of the novel, the descriptions of animals and the marshes are in step with the mood and style of writing, and even play a role in the unfolding of the plot itself; over the course of the book, they become increasingly incongruous to the plot, as the marsh turns from a land invested with powerful emotional meaning to just another undeveloped piece of land. This process works as a fascinating representation of the phenomenon of shifting baselines. One can see throughout the course of the book how the relationship between the human and natural world is as much epistemological and affective as it is empirical or economic.

In the feudal lord scenes, these nature vignettes are often either cued in by human perception, or take place in the context of human action. In one scene, two characters named Yel Veli and Kara Hüseyin are walking out in the heat into the seemingly deserted marsh, trying to

find a place to hide.<sup>468</sup> They look out for signs of their pursuers, mistaking dark figures for human forms. The heat is unbearable and Yel Veli laments that they have fallen into an oven of death. Rather than being a refuge from attack, the marsh quickly becomes more hostile than the attackers themselves. As the two stand in the middle of the marsh suffocating, the narrator assumes their perspective.

Ortalıkta hiçbir canlı yoktu. Onları görünce, kamışların dibinden bataklığa dökülüveren su kaplumbağalarından başka. Bir de sinekler... Bir tür lüsü, arı kadar büyüğü...seslisi sessizi... Berdiler, sazlar, bodur, kalın yapraklı ağaçlar. Bütün bataklık bitkilerinde bir ağzına kadar doymuşluk, şişmişlik vardır.

There were no living things in sight. Other than the fresh water turtles which dove into to the base of the reeds in the swamp upon seeing them. And the flies... All kinds of them, as big as bees...noisy ones, quiet ones...Cattails, reeds, and squat, thick-leaved trees. All the swamp plants seem saturated, swollen up to the brim.

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In this passage, the narrating continuously corrects itself, first modifying the statement that there was no living thing to then say that there are, in fact, turtles and flies living there as well. And given a moment to dwell on it, the narrating voice can recall all of the diversity and variety of fly species. This seemingly then extends to plant life, until the entire scene is animated, saturated, swollen. Even the infamous mosquitos of the pestilential swamp, upon closer examination, open up into a great diversity of life. The key, again, is Kemal's richness of words. He establishes

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<sup>468</sup> Kemal, *Demirciler*, 119.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

intimacy with the environment he is describing through the act of naming. To name the individual plant species of the wetland, the cattails, reeds, the scrub, and the wide-leafed trees, is to fight against the tendency to view it all as an undifferentiated, pestilential swamp.

Even more attention is given to the swamp by the two characters who lie in wait inside it in order to ambush Derviş Bey. In the moments when they are not discussing their plans, the narrator assumes their gaze looking out onto the wetland. With the patience and perceptiveness of two men with nothing else to do other than listen for the approach of their victim, the narrating voice describes the swamp.

Akçasaz bataklığından sesler geliyordu. Uzun boyunlu, uzun bacaklı, kanatlı, uzun gövdeli, som mavide, güneşte, gölgede, ıhırcık karanlıkta, yıldız ışığında mavisini bin türlü maviye dönüşen kuşları, iri, kırmızı, yanardöner mavi, sarı, başparmak büyüklüğünde kuyruklarını savurarak, binlerce, saydam, ışık damarlı kanatlarıyla uğuldayarak uçuşan arıları, kepezlerinden teller dökülen göçmen kuşları, pembe balıkçıları, iri, güneşte genişleyen kanatlarıyla, binbir renkte, benekte titreşen gözleriyle kelebekleri, çakalları, kurbağaları, yabandomuzları, okyılanları, kaplumbağalarıyla bataklar fokurduyordu.

Noises were coming from the Akçasaz swamp. The blue of thousands of blue birds, long-necked, long-legged, winged, long-bodied, waving their enormous, red, iridescent blue, or yellow thumb sized tails in the solid blue, in the sun, in the shade, in the gloaming darkness, in the starlight; thousands of, bees flying about buzzing with their transparent, light-veined wings; migratory birds with strings streaming from their crests; pink egrets with their enormous, wings spreading in the sun; butterflies in myriad colors with their eye spots trembling; jackals, frogs, wild boars, whip snakes, and turtles... the swamps were seething.

The gradual tuning in to a symphony of insect and animal life results from the boredom of the ambushing men. In a moment's pause from their endless speculations about when Derviş Bey will finally fall into their trap, they start to pay attention to the natural world, which reveals itself to them in great poetic detail. Their attention is narrated by Kemal's lyricism.

Another inhospitable environment which receives this careful treatment in the book is a blackthorn thicket. The first paragraph of chapter 15 dismisses it, just like the swampland, as extensive and impassable, so thick that a snake couldn't enter inside.<sup>471</sup> But in the following paragraphs, the thicket is opened up via attention and description. In the springtime, the thicket becomes a beautiful, bright yellow garden filled with sun-colored flowers. While no birds can find a clear branch to perch on, the thicket fills with all of the bees of the Çukurova, whose mass humming is deafening. But at this point in the novel, the landscape still serves a function within the human drama. It is into the thorn-filled thicket that Derviş Bey drives his enemy, Kamil, violently flogging him from behind on horseback. Derviş Bey uses the thicket as a way to further torture Kamil, as all of his clothes are torn from him by the combination of thorns and whip, and his whole body becomes a bloody pulp. In short, in these three scenes in the novel, the harshness of the natural environment plays a role in the violent plot of the blood feud.

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<sup>470</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid, 144.

Some critics have argued that the narrator’s perspective in the novel, especially when contemplating nature, is not synonymous with the individual characters. Mehmet Kaplan asks, “In Yaşar Kemal’s novel, who is it looking at nature?.. The person looking at nature is the author himself. From the viewpoint of social positions, no characters in the novels look at nature in the way that Yaşar Kemal describes them here. This is Yaşar Kemal, that’s how he looks.”<sup>472</sup> While certain nature vignettes are not directly narrated by the characters themselves, the juxtaposition of descriptions is clearly meant to associate the two time periods in feeling and mood. The vignettes can be better thought of as a recreation on Kemal’s part of the perspective available to older generations, whose way of life was more intimately connected to the natural world. Kemal explains his approach to the Akçasaz series of novels as follows: “In the two books, I showed how the classes determined the mark on nature. Nature takes the form of the class [of people] that lives in it. It depends on the nature of the class. Nature for the feudal order is different, and nature for the capitalist order is different.”<sup>473</sup> Through his nature vignettes, Kemal represents the sensibility, attentiveness, and language of a particular political-economic order, namely that of the feudal system dominant until the 1950s. This feudal perspective contains “affective elements of consciousness and relationships” which characterize the specific structure of feeling lived by the aghas and their followers.<sup>474</sup> The attendant animal vignettes are a reproduction of the way the

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<sup>472</sup> M Kaplan, *Nesin Vakfı Edebiyat Yıllığı* (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1976), 186.

<sup>473</sup> Velimen, V. (1975) YK’le Konuşma. *Tribuna dergisi*, 5.12.1975. Quoted in Çiftlikçi, “Kemal,” 5.

<sup>474</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, vol. 392 (Oxford Paperbacks, 1977), 132.

author imagines that humans once related to the natural world in this area, and convey their baseline for understanding nature.

This attentiveness to nature stands in sharp contrast to the indifference of the townspeople, constituting a stark example of shifting baselines. The general division in the novel between the world of the feudal lords on one hand, and various spaces in the town, where the new agricultural capitalists meet, on the other, interfaces with the animal vignettes by emphasizing the town peoples' estrangement from the natural world. For example, the nature scenes in chapters 40 and 41 followed by the dealings and bluster made at Derviş Bey's estate in chapter 42 make for a jarring transition.<sup>475</sup> Chapter 40 describes an old village inhabited by kestrel nests and oak trees, whose roots sometimes reveal tile mosaics from ancient times. Chapter 41 dramatically details the life and death struggle between an eagle and a gazelle, without involving human characters at all. It begins:

Ağınağaçları daha çiçek açmamışlardı. Çakıltaşlı çayın kıyısına sıralanmışlar, kıpkırmızı tomurcukları açtı açacak. Uzun boyunlu mavi devedikenleri çiçeğe durmuşlardı. Otlar, yoncalar diz boyuydu. Akçasazın kıyılarında büyük kara gözlü nergisler, Alıçlı koyakta kayaların arasına sıkışmış alıç ağaçları çiçeklerini sere serpe bahar güneşine açmışlardı.

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<sup>475</sup> It is true that one of the main representatives of the feudal order, Derviş Bey, has extended dealings with the young landlords. In fact, he seems to straddle the two worlds, speaking differently and being described in vastly different terms, depending on the scene. Kemal narrates him as caught between the two worlds, rather than tying his consciousness and perspective to the feudal structure of feeling. Like many aspects of the novel, there are no hard and fast rules as to where one perspective ends and the other begins, instead, subtle transitions and jolting juxtapositions abound.

The oleander trees haven't blossomed yet. They are lined up on the banks of the pebbled streamlet, their crimson buds are just about to open. Long-necked blue thistles had turned to flowers. The weeds and clovers were knee-high. Big black-eyed daffodils on the shores of the Akçasaz, and cliff trees squeezed between the rocks spread open their flowers to the spring sun.

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Here Kemal identifies a number of plants by using their regional names, such as the Ağınağacı (*Nerium oleander*) and the Devedikeni (*Carduus hamulosus*), a common practice, which Metin Sarıbaş (2013) has catalogued in detail in over 24 of Kemal's novels. What's more, these plants are the subject of these sentences, with the author describing their placement and anticipating their blossoming with narrative suspense. He also makes frequent use of the past perfect tense and an abstract time reference to the season, which makes for an indeterminate timespan of action. This intense narrative and descriptive focus on the natural world centers it as both autonomous but isolated from human drama.

In contrast to the contemplative, pastoral descriptions of these two nature-focused chapters, the beginning of Chapter 42 roars in with a Mercedes Benz automobile, described with curt ugliness:

Ala Temirin Mercedes otomobili Derviş Beyin konağının avlu kapısında durduğunda gün kuşluk oluyordu. Siyah otomobili toz örtmüş, tozdan otomobilin rengi belli olmuyordu. Tepeden tırnağa boz bir ağartı.

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<sup>476</sup> Kemal, *Demirciler*, 445.

When Ala Temir's Mercedes car stopped at the courtyard door of Derviş Bey's mansion, it was mid-morning. The black car was covered the dust, the color couldn't be made out because of the dust. Pale gray from top to bottom.

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Not only is the sight of an automobile intruding into the narrative a sign of objective-historical time, that it is a Mercedes references the new system of capitalist values centered on conspicuous consumption. Immediately after this brief visual introduction, the chapter turns to the action of characters and their appearance, offering a number of details that reference issues of power, prestige, intrigue, and conflict. Rather than a slowly built up depiction of the physical world, Kemal gives a hurried and shorthanded accounting of fast paced drama between scheming entrepreneurs. These two starkly different narrative approaches continue to switch back and forth in the book, with more of the objective-historical timed chapters coming later in the book. The contrast makes the other-worldliness of the pastoral chapters even more conspicuous.

In the modern capitalist scenes, a sense of wonderment and excitement seems reserved exclusively for modern imported equipment and technology from America. Numerous times throughout the novel, the capitalist-era characters wax poetic about the almost mythical beauty and enchantment of the tractor.

Avluda Memet Ali bir traktöre binmiş, traktörün tekerlekleri çamur içinde tarlalara gitmeğe hazırlanıyordu. Traktörün rengi masmaviydi. Avlunun ortasında masmavi, kocaman bir çiçek gibi açmıştı traktör. Mavi bir efsane böceği gibi.

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<sup>477</sup> Ibid, 452.

In the courtyard, Memet Ali mounted a tractor, its wheels covered in mud, ready to go into the fields. The color of the tractor was deep blue. In the middle of the courtyard, the tractor was deep blue like a big flower with had just bloomed. Like a mythical blue beetle.

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Memet Ali isn't the only one bewitched by tractors. In other scenes people remark on its color, sometimes orange, sometimes other colors, shining, brand new, strong, beautiful, like nothing ever seen in Turkey before. The sense of wonder for the natural world is channelled into a celebration of the fruits of capitalism. There is still an attempted use of metaphor and description, but something about seems impoverished; a cheap ersatz version of the animal vignettes.

The effect of all of this is that the natural world slowly fades from the center of narrative attention. Whenever it is seen, it is as though glimpsed through the eyes of some other generation which lacks the historical continuity of the feudal era. While one might take the presence of an eagle in chapter 41 as evidence of the continuity of birdlife in the region, there is no way to measure it against the relative abundance of birds referenced earlier in the novel. The eagle could be one of the few remaining birds of its kind, and could be desperately pursuing a gazelle because all the other forms of sustenance have been exterminated in the valley. Without generational continuity, it is impossible to say. In fact, this is similar to what actually happened to the eagle population of the Çukurova. In his lengthy series of interviews with Alain Bosquet (1999), Kemal recounted how he came back to his home village as an adult and noticed their absence:

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid, 244.

When I returned to the village [Gökçedam] in the spring of 1960, there was not a single eagle — neither in the mountain nor in the village. When I asked the people what happened, they said, "It was the fault of the horse plague." "What's the connection between the horse plague and eagles?" I asked. "Whenever the horses died from the plague, they would spray them with disinfectant," the peasants told me. "One morning we woke up and saw our fields littered with dead eagles. Even in the mountains you couldn't take a step without tripping over a dead eagle."<sup>479</sup>

Once a species has been wiped out, its rare appearance might be mistaken as a glad tidings or an interesting sighting by the next generation. The animals in the uncontextualized animal vignettes of the novel might even seem like signs of the endurance of wildlife in modern times, if not for Kemal's work to bridge two temporal-cultural orders for the reader. Although subtle, these dwindling scenes cannot but unsettle the reader, who remembers the natural world playing a larger role at other places in the book.

### Shifting Baselines

In speaking of the problem of shifting baselines, Daniel Pauly says, "We have lost sight of nature because we ignore historical change and accept the present as natural."<sup>480</sup> In order to overcome our ignorance of nature, it is necessary to identify blind spots in the historical record as well as to unsettle our normal ways of seeing nature in the present moment. Understanding historical change is crucial to developing an environmental ethics which is honest and up to the task of holding ourselves accountable for both past destruction and shaping the future. Works of

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<sup>479</sup> Alain Bosquet and Yaşar Kemal, *Yaşar Kemal on His Life and Art* (Syracuse University Press, 1999), 19.

<sup>480</sup> Jeremy BC Jackson and Karen E. Alexander, Introduction: *The Importance of Shifting Baselines* (Springer, 2011), 3.

fiction have a role to play in this along with science because of their ability to break us out of normal ways of seeing.<sup>481</sup> Kemal was compelled by both his Marxist commitments and his environmental ethics to search for ways to narrativize how structures of feeling shift imperceptibly from one historical age to another.<sup>482</sup> But beyond using speculative fiction as a way to better understand recorded history, Kemal also uses its narrative strategies to contemplate what lies beyond history: looking forward towards structures of feeling which have yet to come about, and back at those which are lost to time.

While Kemal himself lived firmly within the capitalist system, his eco-poetic sensibility towards nature belonged to a system that had yet to be fully articulated as a formal political practice: a potential ecosocialist practice of stewardship and care. I believe this ethics is best exemplified by those vignettes in the novel which caused Mehmet Kaplan to ask who was there to witness them. Rather than consider them to merely be told from Kemal's perspective, we can think of these scenes as Kemal's attempt to grapple with his own historical embeddedness, and to

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<sup>481</sup> And in fact, scholars such as Phillip R. Polefrone have identified an emerging field of speculative environmental fiction, which he defines as “speculative fiction for which the physical environment is more than a passive backdrop to human action, for which understanding or transforming the more-than-human world is central to the narrative.” <https://twitter.com/polefrone/status/1186781480342695943>

<sup>482</sup> I use Raymond Williams' term “structures of feeling” in this chapter to describe the literary effects in both Kemal and al-Ghiṭānī's work. Williams clarifies his understanding of the term by saying that “the term is difficult, but “feeling” is chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of “world view” or “ideology”. It is not only that we must go beyond formally held and systematic beliefs, though of course we have always to include them. It is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable.” Williams, *Marxism*, 132. In a similar way, I am interested in how their works try to animate the lived experiences of past ages which is nonetheless done so under highly ideological circumstances.

try to imagine a relationship to nature based on something other than instrumental reason and human interests. While the capitalist landowners in the novel might be oblivious to incidents occurring within the natural world, we the readers are still present for a fully non-human narrative, briefly exploring an environment with an emergent ethos of environmental care. This is an almost utopian vision of a world which could be, with equal attention and care granted to all non-human life, without a sense of priority or benefit.<sup>483</sup> Given that for so much of human history the Çukurova wetlands have been derided as only a “pestilential swamp”, Kemal invites us to contemplate what the complete opposite attitude towards them would be. Although an economic system has yet to emerge that regards the wetland with as much sensitivity and attentiveness as Kemal’s empathetic nature vignettes do, Kemal’s fiction allows the reader to briefly imagine how its structures would feel.

This approach to narration may seem like it goes against Kemal’s Marxist project of embedding all affective and cognitive perceptions of the environment within specific modes of production. But even while experimenting with ways to represent the non-human independent of the endorsement of human perception, he also quietly acknowledges that nature is never fully independent from humans. Just as the shifting baselines model places human society squarely

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<sup>483</sup> Recent scholarship in the field of animal studies emphasizes the diverse forms that storytelling takes to show us ‘what it’s like’ for nonhuman others. Rather than requiring the thread of a single autonomous mind, narratives can be created out of an assembly of material and phenomenological elements. In his work on narratology beyond the human, David Herman (2011) uses the concept of “*umwelt* exploration” to describe those narratives which are less interested in translating animal experiences into human ones than in recreating the phenomenal worlds of nonhuman animals themselves. These experiences, in turn, can help us to reshape and deepen our own experience and relationship to the physical world. See David Herman, “Storyworld/*Umwelt*: Nonhuman Experiences in Graphic Narratives,” *Substance* 40, no. 1 (2011): 156–81.

within nature, it also shows that much of nature is situated within human structures. This is hinted at by the looming presence of the rock field and ruins of Anavarza throughout the novel. They appear at several points in the novel, in moments of human and animal drama. At the beginning of chapter 45, they are depicted as buzzing microcosm (Kemal, 2018, p. 503). Amongst the detailed description of frenetic animal and plant life, there is one passing reference to the fact that the ruins were once themselves a human habitat. Anazarbus, (Ἀναζαβόζ) as it was known in ancient Greek, was an ancient settlement first founded by the Assyrians and served as a provincial capital in the late Roman Empire. The city flourished and was fought over, playing an important role in the Islamic Conquests and the Christian Crusades before finally being destroyed by the Mamluks in 1374. But if Anazarba was once a major city, the landscape surrounding it must have also been transformed by human; and in fact, archaeological research has determined that the city benefited from systems of hydraulic engineering. Hence, Kemal's reference to Anazarba indicates his recognition that the land wasn't an edenic paradise before the widespread drainage of the wetlands in the 1950s, unspoiled and pristine, but actually the result of complex interactions between humans and the environment going back millenia, just lost to popular consciousness.

Rather than assuming the ecological pre-history of the area to have always been marshland to appeal to some sort of naive "pristine myth," Kemal uses the ruins as a way to gesture towards a longer symbiotic history between nature and different human systems of production, a wholly different kind of lost paradise. Rather than lamenting the irreversible

destruction of the wetlands he describes in such loving detail, Kemal understands how human and natural worlds are co-constitutive. He does not take his own view of the present or the past for granted. The ruins act as a tacit acknowledgement that even Kemal's own historically informed account of shifting baselines itself runs into generational blindness, ie. unfamiliarity with histories that might have been told in Greek villages, Armenian kingdoms, or Roman provinces. This confronting of the illusions of an eternal, unchanging past are precisely what historical materialism is all about.

## The Politics of Lexicon in Egypt

Lexicography and philology are also seen as central to modernization in Arabic, with the nineteenth-century literary movement leaving behind an extensive archive of dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and lexicons. Much more than a mere academic project, Nahḍawī intellectuals are said to have aimed to reshape the Arabs' relationship to history and subjectivity. In her article, "Collecting the Nation: Lexicography and National Pedagogy in al-Nahḍa al-'arabiyya" (2016), Nadia Bou Ali argues that one of the dominant metalinguistic questions about Arabic, both during the Nahḍah and continuing until today, is how Arabic, as the mirror of those who speak it, can be both a national language and a universal one.<sup>484</sup> The answer lay at the intersection of

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<sup>484</sup> Nadia Bou Ali, "Collecting the Nation: Lexicography and National Pedagogy in al-Nahḍa al-'Arabiyya," in *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World*, vol. 2016 (Routledge, 2016), 33–56.

language and history. One of the founding fathers of the Nahḍah, Ibrahim al-Yaziji (1847–1906), maintained, “Not only is language the mirror of the nation, language is the nation.”<sup>485</sup>

In reading Bou Ali’s article, one can clearly see how much of the lexicographical work of the Nahḍawī intellectuals was concerned with a type of worlding: that of creating the imaginary nation:

The nation is enduringly co-incidental with modernity; it claims the grounds of differentiation between dreams and reality, reason and irrationality, form and meaning, and language and society. The words *al-watan* (the nation), *al-dawla* (the state), *al-hay’a al-ijtima’iyyah* (society) and *al-‘arab* (the Arabs) emerge hand in hand with the lexicon, the dictionary, and the encyclopaedia in the nineteenth century. They take on certain meanings through which the Arab – like the Greek and the Indian – becomes a ‘lexicographical replacement of the imaginary body of the king’, and begins to delineate a contentious political space that would later on be called a national body.”<sup>486</sup>

Nadia Bou Ali claims that lexicography is central to reimagining reality, to giving it a defined national space. Language is also a means to arrange time, with the Nahḍah logos tying together language and society on a journey from decay and decadence to transcendence and rebirth. For Nahḍawī intellectuals like al-Shidyāq and Buṭrus al-Bustānī, language should be reflective of the modern ordering and taxonomic efficiency [in order] to match the presence of steam and electric power, printing presses and telegraphs, missionaries, ambassadors, and traders.”<sup>487</sup> Both al-

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<sup>485</sup> Bou Ali, “Collecting,” 35.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid, 36-7.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid, 41.

Shidyāq and al-Bustānī thought a purely taxonomized Arabic language would be a way to set Arab culture straight, reforming it into a natural order which mirrors the natural history of the Arab civilization.

Jeffrey Sacks agrees with the introduction of a specific historicity into Arabic with the Nahḍah project. He says that the introduction of orientalist approaches to philology created divisions between temporal periods, because they “[understood] language in terms of succession and persistence, life and death, movement and stasis, belonging and rupture.”<sup>488</sup> Language was suddenly read as historical, and writers could begin to understand themselves and their language in historical terms. “In this philological-historical reorganization of language, the immediate, if also distant past appears as a moribund time of death and loss. It is a time of decadence and decline, of stasis and non-generative repetition.”<sup>489</sup>

Both of these accounts grant to Nahḍawī lexicography a certain novel and revolutionary power to intercede into reality by reconfiguring the national space-time.<sup>490</sup> While no doubt these new approaches to philology had important influences on a whole range of disciplines, following Silverstein’s critique of Benedict Anderson’s chronotope, one should be wary of conflating tropes with reality. Nor can it be said that the Nahḍawī intellectuals represent a uniquely political moment in the history of Arabic lexicography. Lexicographic ideology is too often seen as a

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<sup>488</sup> Sacks, *Iterations*, 171.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid*, 171.

<sup>490</sup> While lexicography is a branch philology, they come together in this discussion of speculative lexicons in the way that lexicons are used to project specific views of the passage of time and the mood of specific historical eras.

specifically modern endeavor, born out of the rise of print-capitalism and its attendant drive to standardize vernacular language. But if we reframe these types of lexicographical interventions as mainly being into and about standard language ideology, rather than reality itself, we can see almost all lexicographical work as being similarly interventionist. Lexicography as a political project is neither exclusive modern nor exclusively the purview of national language academies.

As just one example, Peter Webb offers a fascinating account of the evolution of the term *al-Jāhiliyya* (the age of ignorance before the revelation of Islam) throughout Arabic lexicography and Qur'anic exegesis between the ninth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>491</sup> Webb traces the semantic shift of the term to show how the images commonly associated with al-Jāhiliyya, that of idol worship and barbaric anarchical society, were a later invention. And beyond the mental associations, even the time period to which al-Jāhiliyyah is meant to correspond changed over the centuries. In the first Arabic dictionary by al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad's *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* (late 800s-early 900s), the word 'jah' (ignorance) is given as the opposite of 'ilm (knowledge), without explicitly connecting it to a specific epoch. Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) does, however, indicate a specific time period in his compendium of historical facts (*al-Maʿārif*), wherein he defines 'al-Jāhiliyya' as a specific period time between the lives of Jesus and Muḥammad. This subtle shift in semantics would continue for centuries, from Al-Azhari (d. 980) to Zamakhshari (d. 1143) to Ibn Manẓūr's (d. 1311) definitive *Lisān al-ʿArab*.

The shift in the emphasis of al-Jāhiliyya's interpretation from a specific chronological fatra period lacking religious guidance to a more generic idea of an Arab past suggests that by

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<sup>491</sup> Peter Webb, "Al-Jāhiliyya: Uncertain Times of Uncertain Meanings," *Der Islam* 91, no. 1 (2014): 69–94.

the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, the word “al-Jāhiliyya” had become more readily evocative of a negative stereotype about pre-Islamic Arab origins and lifestyle than it had previously been.<sup>492</sup>

Historical taxonomy can shift wildly based on even a single word, and had done so long before the Nahḍah’s philological-historical reorganization of language. As Zgusta says, lexicon is a mirror of its time and so ideological values are always cast upon lexicographical work. No amount of authoritative confidence can ensure that a lexicographical project will be able to guard against the normal process of semantic drift.

This is all to say that lexicography is and has always been an aspirational project seeking to promote ideological framings of the world, a project which is, in reality, concerned with the construction of standard language ideology, and so never fully authoritative. Rather than seeing Nahḍawī lexicography as a uniquely transformative act of epistemic violence, we should see all dictionaries as attempts not only to taxonomize words, but to order time and place. It is also in this light that we should understand this chapter’s second novel, *Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī*. Neither internalizing the Nahḍawī ideology of moribund time and static language, nor naively envisioning a return to a pre-modern past through his interest in the *turath* (cultural heritage), al-Ghīṭānī writes a novel which hacks lexicography to expose its own ideological distortions.

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<sup>492</sup> Webb, “al-Jāhiliyya,” 78. The word ‘fatra’ refers to the period before the “da‘wah” (“invitation [to Islam]”)

## Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī

As discussed in the previous chapter, the narrative power of standard language ideology rests in its ability to create powerful impressions of both narrative authority and fictional mimesis. And indeed, standard Arabic can be seen as an important index of state power under Nasser because of the ways in which the state benefited from these narrative tools in its propaganda.<sup>493</sup> While Nasser himself is famous for using non-standard language in his popular speeches, his authoritarian discourse overall rested on values shared with the Nahḍawī intellectuals, such as positivism, rationality, and a taxonomic worldview, values which were projected onto language beliefs and practice. On a more practical level, the military regime in Egypt reformed the education system by making classical Arabic literature and poetry the source for language instruction to be taught in schools in the name of pan-Arabism, elevated above both the Egyptian dialect and foreign languages in state schools.<sup>494</sup> For this reason, it is easy to see how the sensibility of Nasserism would be so closely linked to the anticipatory national space defined by the Nahḍawī philologists so as to take the latter as the direct result of the former. But just as the Nahḍah project was an aspirational ideological framing of the world, rather than its

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<sup>493</sup> I will emphasize once again the difference between saying that a state used the associations with standard language held in common by most people in order to bolster its authority and official narrative, on the one hand, and claiming that the state was itself the progenitor of this standard language which, beyond merely representing the prestige register, gave to the state the powers of ontological control.

<sup>494</sup> See Shlomit Shraybom Shvitiel, "Language and Political Change in Modern Egypt," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 137, no. 1 (1999): 131–40.

remaking, the authoritative discourse of Nasserism was only as strong as the political forces behind it.

In response to the cultural shock of the loss in the 1967 war against Israel, and the social stagnation of the Al-Sadāt-era, authoritarian discourse and the linguistic standards with which it spoke both began to lose their credibility. As the Nasserist state and its paternalistic planning and organizing of public life retreated under the growing neoliberal reforms of the al-Sadāt era, “a barrage of interpretations, counter-interpretations, accusations, and counter-accusations proliferated. This historiographical cacophony took the form of journalistic writing, memoirs, history books, films, television shows, and, perhaps more than anything else, gossip and rumors about the “true nature” of Nasserism and about “what really happened” during these years.”<sup>495</sup> Literature too played a role in this reckoning. In his article on the Sixties generation of writers in Egypt and the ‘New Sensibility’ (*al-ḥassāsiyyah al-jadīdah*) that they brought to literature, Stephen Guth writes:

The most fundamental aspect of the ḥassāsiyyah jadīdah aesthetics was its attitude towards language and reality. The ‘reality,’ spread via state-controlled media, of steady progress, a bright future lying ahead, and near victory had turned out to be a fatal lie... [L]iterature itself had until then been an authoritarian discourse that, despite all good intentions, had tried with the help of language to impose a certain—necessarily subjective, but believed to be objective—vision of reality on the reader and, by way of political extension, the Egyptian citizen. Most of the new styles and writing techniques developed

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<sup>495</sup> Yoav Di-Capua, *Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 322-3.

by the New Sensibility were acutely aware of the seductive power of language and the type of 'reality' they wrote about.<sup>496</sup>

These writers were keenly aware of the overbearing confidence shared by standard language ideology and the modern nation state. Their response was not to simply unmask ideology and return to a non-coercive relationship to language. Instead, they set about to manipulate language (and lexicon) for their own literary projects. The work of the New Sensibility in Egypt shows that mediating the relationship between language and reality is not limited to lexicography, much less that lexicography which was undertaken by those during the Nahḍah. These writers used styles and techniques that were “acutely aware of the seductive power of language” and which asserted their authority not through claims to be representing an objective outside world, but rather by conveying “their own subjective way of experiencing their surroundings.”<sup>497</sup> This is a highly metalinguistic approach to literature, one which understands that style is always already an index to claims to authority.

Chief among the writers of the New Sensibility, and one who was particularly interested in subverting the ideological power of lexicography, was Gamāl al-Ghīṭānī (b. 1945). Al-Ghīṭānī is best known for his 1974 novel *al-Zaynī Barakāt*, which represented a revelation in Egyptian literature. The novel adapted many of the stylistic and narrative elements of medieval historical

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<sup>496</sup> Stephan Guth, “Commitment and Marginalization: The ‘Generation of the Sixties,’” in *Commitment and Beyond*, vol. 41 (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2015), 89.125.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid*, 127.

chronicles to dramatize the events leading up to the 1517 invasion of Egypt by the Ottomans.<sup>498</sup> Based on real events, the novel was remarkable for how it so effectively restaged a historical event which could not help but be read as allegory. As Edward Said says in his introduction to the novel, Al-Ghīṭānī's way of describing the past associates Zaynī's rule with the "atmosphere of intrigue, conspiracy and multiple schemes that characterized Abdel Nasser's rule during the 1960s" and linked futile efforts to corral domestic Egyptian life, "even as Israel (the Ottomans) prepared for invasion and regional dominance."<sup>499</sup> While *al-Zaynī Barakāt* is Al-Ghīṭānī's best known example of historical pastiche, his novel *Waqā'i' Ḥārat al-Za'farānī* (The Zafarani Files, 1976) uses fantastical elements and satire to disguise political critique. The novel, set in 1970s Egypt as a mysterious illness causing sterility overtakes a neighborhood in Cairo, is told in part through a series of police reports collected by a member of the "Supreme Department of Eavesdropping," in yet another allusion to the Nasserist surveillance state. This time, the textual strategy for avoiding censorship or state reprisal is that of dark humor and magical realism.

But beyond his choice of allegory or fantastical conceits, al-Ghīṭānī was so successful in cloaking political critique because of the way that he adapted historical styles, seemingly resurrecting the exact tone and cadence of medieval genres and styles to the novel form. *al-Zaynī Barakāt* alone has long been celebrated as one of the best examples of intertextuality and the renewed interest in the turath that came as a consequence of the trauma of '67. Roger Allen says

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<sup>498</sup> Similar to the way that Yaşar Kemal was dismissive of efforts to label his work 'magical realism' al-Ghīṭānī avoided the term 'historical fiction' when talking about his own work.

<sup>499</sup> Gamāl al-Ghīṭānī, *Zaynī Barakat* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004).

that *al-Zaynī Barakāt* is a “representative of an emerging new and different approach to the heritage of the past and...a renewed interest in the relationship between history and narrative in the pre-modern era.”<sup>500</sup> Stephen Guth agrees with this interpretation of al-Ghīṭānī’s stylistics, saying that “his ‘neo-classicism’ was a way to search, after 1967, for ‘the authentic,’ to open up literature to aspects of Arab history and culture, i.e. an Arab identity that had been hidden, suppressed, neglected, and denied over the course of the modernization process.”<sup>501</sup> I disagree with Guth’s assessment here. At least in the novel which I will be analyzing, *Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī*, al-Ghīṭānī is not seeking to open up, reveal, or clarify Arab history and culture itself through neo-classicism, but rather, is trying to make visible the distorting effects that language and ideology have on one’s ability to contemplate it in the first place, thereby narrativizing the effects of semantic collapse in the post-67 era.

Al-Ghīṭānī spoke in various interviews and articles about the challenge of history, describing it in a 1984 interview in *Adab Magazine* as a sort of mysterious curtain: “There is no difference between the moment that has passed seconds before and those which concluded thousands or millions of years ago, for neither one of them can return.”<sup>502</sup> But this reorganization was neither authoritative or permanent, and al-Ghīṭānī’s work can be thought of as an attempt to show how easily a historical moment can be reanimated in spectral ways, namely, via the illusions

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<sup>500</sup> Luc-Willy Deheuvelds, Barbara Michalak-Pikulska, and Paul Starkey, *Intertextuality in Modern Arabic Literature since 1967*, vol. 2 (Durham Modern Languages, 2006), 5.

<sup>501</sup> Guth, “Commitment,” 133.

<sup>502</sup> al-Ghitani, “Intertextual,” 80.

created by language choice. Al-Ghīṭānī's interest in historical chronicles like those of al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Iyās was based on how they reveal details from the ordinary lives of people living in the times when they were written, bringing back the lived experience of the past in its recognizable commonality. He mined the work of medieval historians like Ibn Iyās and al-Maqrīzī not merely for historical parallels, but for syntactical and lexicographical relics as well. He claimed to have transcribed full pages of Ibn Iyās's historical chronicle, *Bada'i al-Zuhur fi Waqa'i al-Dhuhur*, as a way to assimilate its linguistic style. This stylistic tutelage created for al-Ghīṭānī the experience of a kind of historical transmigration which he speaks about in outright spiritual terms<sup>503</sup>. For *al-Zaynī Barakāt* he claims "I imitated the spirit of the developing historical languages of the 16th century, to the extent that I enacted the spirit of this style and its essence, and I put in a great deal of effort to study these works from the Middle Ages."<sup>504</sup> Imitating past styles made it possible to "use language and its guided irradiation and some of its sensibilities in order to help create and bring forward the social climate from a specific historical age."<sup>505</sup>

For this reason, it is wrong to conceive of al-Ghīṭānī's interest in the turath as merely an earnest attempt to recover the truth of the past, or even to remember it for the sake of not repeating it. I claim that he offered his own philological project and that he was fully aware that

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<sup>503</sup> "I was absorbing the spirit of the historical language belonging to the sixteenth century, and until I implemented the spirit and essence of this style, this required a great effort in reading medieval literature."

"كنت اتمصص روح اللغة التاريخية المنتمية الى القرن السادس عشر، وحتى أنفذ الى روح هذا الأسلوب وجوهره أقتضى هذا جهداً كبيراً في مطالعة مؤلفات القرون الوسطى،" al-Ghitani, "Intertextual," 79.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

it is an ideological framing of the world. This framing is meant to challenge orientalist teleologies and positivist faith in the stable transparency of words through a kind of Brechtian nominalism: showing how words can be ripped from their specific historical context and be made to be displaced, ambiguous, and speculative.<sup>506</sup> Because literature is itself an intervention into lexicography, and by extension standard language ideology, it has just as much textual power to manipulate language and use it to imagine the past.

One particularly remarkable novel in al-Ghīṭānī's career-long quest to experiment with the themes of history, language, and allegory is his novel *Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī* (the Chronicle of al-Ghitani), written in the late 1970s and published in 1980. The setting of the novel is similar to the one employed in both *al-Zaynī Barakāt* and *Waqā'i' Ḥārat al-Za'farānī*: a turbulent period in the city of Cairo in which the enigmatic leader, whose authority rests on his extensive use of surveillance, disappears and leaves the city open to invasion by the 'enemy.' But whereas the city in *al-Zaynī Barakāt* is meant to be Cairo in the 1500s, and in *Waqā'i' Ḥārat al-Za'farānī*, it is a fantastical version of modern-day (1970s) Cairo, the city in *Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī*, referenced to only as al-Khiṭaṭ, is never definitively placed in either place or time. The novel seems to exist instead in an ambivalent fictional space between historical allegory, as in *al-Zaynī Barakāt*, and magical

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<sup>506</sup> In an article entitled "The Arabic Turath: between what has preceded and what is to come", al-Ghīṭānī makes an elaborate analogy between architecture and novel writing in order to argue for the project of neo-historicism. He says that just like the vernacular architecture of Old Cairo reflects both the local cultural sensibilities and climatological realities of where it was built, the Parisian style neighborhoods of New Cairo built by Ibrahim Pasha represent an invasive and unadapted environment. In the same way, the modernist understanding of linguistic purity and standardization represents an unwelcome orientalist logic. In this article we see both how al-Ghīṭānī connected architecture and literature, and how much of his interest in neo-historicism was simultaneously posited against state power and self-orientalization. *Majalat al-doha*, November 1985

realism, like *Waqā'i' Ḥārat al-Za'farānī*. This would seemingly cancel out both strategies of estrangement. On one hand, to employ an anachronistic narrative style to talk about the present would seem to undermine the opportunity for plausible deniability, claiming that you were in fact only talking about the historical past. On the other, magical realism requires the sustaining of a realistic world in which magical elements can then become conspicuous and estranging. However *Khiṭaṭ al-Ghītānī* embraces this contradiction. It is a novel written using the tone and stylistics of a historical chronicle, but seemingly about present-day Cairo. It depicts a series of strange occurrences and alternative histories, but they do not stand apart from the otherwise sober depiction of the city. Instead, they are all folded in with the accounts given by an increasingly unreliable narrator. What results is a state of confusion and disorientation, wherein the reader cannot tell if the city depicted is supposed to be Cairo, or an alternative version of it set in another dimension, or another place entirely. Easily identifiable landmarks from the city's geography and history are described using archaic phrasing, but are also not entirely parallel to the city's real geography. As Samia Mehrez says in her essay about the novel, "al-Ghitani uses many real signs, readily decodable by any reader familiar with the history of these landmarks."<sup>507</sup> These include the High Dam, the Semiramis Hotel and groups of people, like the Israelis and leftwing groups. It is as though everything in the novel is carefully crafted so as to not permit any definitive confirmation or denial of where and when the novel takes place, or whether or not its people and places exist within our same reality.

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<sup>507</sup> Samia Mehrez, *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim, and Gamal al-Ghitani* (American Univ in Cairo Press, 1994), 64.

Written in the style of a medieval genre of Arabic historiography known as a “*Khiṭaṭ*”, the novel traces the decline of a city also named “*Khiṭaṭ*” as its powerful leader *al-Ustādh* (the professor) disappears, secret political cells try to sow chaos, all of the city’s children are poisoned, weather events spiral out of control, and enemy forces close in. The response by *al-Ustādh*’s successor (and *al-Ghīṭānī*’s stand-in for *Al-Sadāt*), *al-Tanūkhī*, to this cascade of disasters is to simply try to rewrite history. The Ministry of Propaganda, known as *Al-Anba*’, undertakes near constant campaigns to shape the narrative, translate everything into newspeak, and silence all else. Several passages in the novel describe the battles over language, with the only clearly non-standard passages of the novel being a mysterious refrain of popular poetry emanating in the streets of the city, sung in the accent of the cities to the south near a place called *al-Khilāwī*. Because of the threat to order that the seemingly benign song poses, the regime decides to outlaw all forms of folklore as a seditious plot.<sup>508</sup> In a description which exceeds even the wildest dreams of standardizing language reformers, *al-Ghīṭānī* describes what this ban entails.

وتطبيق ذلك يعني وقف نشاط المنشدين الريفيين وعدم السماح لهم بدخول الضواحي والانحاء، وحذف الأمثال الشعبية من الحوار العادي والحوار المتخصص، وإبطال الحكايات التي يقصها العجائز شفاهة.

Applying this means stopping the activity of rural singers and not allowing them to enter the suburbs and districts, and removing popular proverbs from regular dialogue and specialized dialogue, and nullifying tales told orally by the elderly.

<sup>508</sup>The seemingly benign verse is "يا إسمر يا أبو الزند صعيدي / حبك يسرى في وريدي" which, according to the memoir of Mahmud ‘abd al-Shakur, was actually the chorus to a popular song in the 1970s in praise of Nasser. see ‘Abd al-Shakūr, Maḥmūd. *Kuntu ṣabīyan fī al-sab‘īniyāt : sirah thaqāfiyah wa-ijtimā‘iyah* .al-Qāhirah: al-Karmah lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī’, 2015, 270-1.

Even the simplest of folktale stories are banned by the government because they cannot be controlled. Because it is the leftists who seem most interested in preserving the turath, the regime attempts to erase all forms of it, or strip it of all meaning. In this, one can see echoes of al-Ghīṭānī's own oppressive experience with the Al-Sadāt regime, and indeed with the writing of this very book.

It is precisely against this farcical official version of history that *Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī* militates. In writing the 'fictional account' of his city's contemporary history, al-Ghīṭānī creates a discourse on a discourse: an alternative narrative on history...beyond the linear vision...to read the reoccurring patterns in history and the dialectics between power and knowledge.<sup>510</sup>

al-Waḍ' bi-l-Majāz

Like the al-Tanūkhī regime, which tries to ban a verse of poetry emanating in the streets, al-Ghīṭānī is hyperfocused on the role that language plays in the dialectic between power and knowledge. Specifically in *Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī*, he wields the ideological power of lexicography. In his book on al-Ghīṭānī's conception of history, 'abd al-Salām Kaklī claims that in his literary works al-Ghīṭānī is trying to create a language that is a combination of two historical moments into one. "This compounded language invented by al-Ghīṭānī is not an expression of reality that exists outside of language but rather is an expression of the past which is embodied as a linguistic

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<sup>509</sup> Jamāl. al-Ghīṭānī, *Khiṭaṭ Al-Ghīṭānī : Riwāyah*, Ṭab'at Dār al-Shurūq al-1. (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Shurūq, 2009), 219.

<sup>510</sup> Mehrez, *History*, 77.

entity.”<sup>511</sup> Looking specifically at the mechanics of how al-Ghīṭānī makes his fictional world so maddeningly indeterminate, I claim that al-Ghīṭānī uses an old lexicographers tool, that of semantic extension (الوضع بالمجاز, *al-waḍʿ bi-l-majāz*).

During the Nahḍah, one particularly important task for lexicographers and reformers was to answer the questions of linguistic modernization, and in particular, to determine the proper method for deriving neologisms. The Modern Arabic Literary Language by Jaroslav Stetkevych tells the story of Arabic’s move into the 20th century mainly through the way in which “new words [were] incorporated into the language, ranging from deriving new terms from existing roots (for example, the word for “newspaper” derives from the word meaning “sheet to write on”) to downright assimilation of foreign words”.<sup>512</sup> Stetkevych brings special attention to those neologisms which were created through a process of either figurative semantic extension (*al-waḍʿ bi-l-majāz*), or reclaimed archaisms, that is the revival of disused words for new purposes only loosely related to the new lexical need (*gharīb al-lughah*).<sup>513</sup> This was not a new method, as early classic technical terminology in theology and science was created using the same process. For example, the Academy discussed for several sessions an indigenous alternative for the calque for skyscraper (*naṭīḥāt al-saḥab*) before deciding on *ṣarḥ*, which meant castle,

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<sup>511</sup> ‘Abd al-Salām. Kakkī, *Al-Zaman al-Riwāʿī : Jadalīyat al-Māḍī Wa-al-Ḥāḍir ‘inda Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī Min Khilāl al-Zaynī Barakāt Wa-Kitāb al-Tajalliyāt* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1992), 11.

<sup>512</sup> Jaroslav. Stetkevych, *The Modern Arabic Literary Language; Lexical and Stylistic Developments.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>513</sup> Stetkevych, *Arabic*, 29.

tower, or high structure. These lexical solutions arrived at through figurative semantic extension were tenuous, and more often than not were met with derision or mockery by the general public which was hesitant to call its telephones the name for the sound of rain or thunder (*irzīz*) or a toilet the name for a basket for feminine grooming objects (*qashwah*). Many of the more successful interventions were instead provided by translators, journalists, and poets, those who were able to not only coin new words, but also work them effectively into a larger written context. An outstanding example is that of Sulayman al-Bustānī who, through his poetic translation of the Iliad, created a whole host of literary terms using figurative semantic extension, including many that are still in use today. According to Stetkevych, the committed lexical interventions of writers seemed to have a more lasting and meaningful effect on the popular lexicon, at least in terms of those neologisms arrived at using this method, than the interventions of the Academy.

But rather than using semantic extension as a method for clarification, al-Ghīṭānī leverages the tenuousness of semantic extension to his advantage, using old words to describe modern things in a way that the words themselves do all the equivocating. It is as though he uses the word tower (*ṣarḥ*), clearly meaning to refer to a skyscraper, but then speaks about it in such a way that it sounds more and more medieval, so that perhaps the structure really is a castle after all. For example, when he speaks about the al-Anbā' [the ministry of information] we are not sure whether is just meant to be infamous Mogamma building in Tahrir Square, center of Egyptian bureaucracy, or something more metaphorical or sinister. One can never be

sure. In the novel itself, al-Ghīṭānī describes the very state of total semantic chaos that he is trying to create:

منذ فترة غير قليلة تم تفريغ المصطلحات والكلمات بحيث أصبحت لا تدل على ما تعنيه. كما تم الانتهاء من تنفيذ خطة فوضى المصطلحات، سمح باستخدام أية كلمة للتعبير عن أى موضع. من ذلك استخدام رموز الطب في المجال الهندسي، أى تعبيرات العجم.

Not long ago, the terms and words were emptied, indicating what they meant. As the terminology chaos plan was implemented, any word was allowed to be used to express any position, including the use of symbols of medicine in the engineering field, i.e. expressions of Ajam.

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Thinking of al-Ghīṭānī's textual strategy in *Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī* as a form of figurative semantic extension (*al-waḍ' bi-l-majāz*) instead helps us to focus on the materiality of the language itself, as something which, when recreated by al-Ghīṭānī, frees it from the identification with specific periods of history. By analyzing al-Ghīṭānī's use of four specific archaic words to describe things which are clearly modern phenomena, I will illustrate how al-Ghīṭānī uses the form of nominalism to estrange these terms, to speculate on the possible objects of their metaphors, and to cause readers to focus on the unobvious but intriguing historical parallels between them.

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<sup>514</sup> al-Ghīṭānī, *Khiṭaṭ*.

## Al-Khiṭaṭ

The word *khiṭaṭ* is the plural form of the Arabic word *khiṭah*, coming from the root kh-ṭ-t being associated with lines, drawing, and planning. In the modern Hans Wehr Arabic dictionary, *khiṭaṭ* can refer either to “pieces of land acquired for the purpose of building a house” or “a piece of real estate” or lot.<sup>515</sup> At the same time it is used to designate the plural for plan, project, design, intention, or policy. In the context of the novel, it refers more specifically to the medieval genre of historical chronicle from which al-Ghīṭānī draws inspiration in his novel. Famous historical chronicles of Cairo throughout the pre-modern period include those by Maqrīzī, Ibn Iyas, al-Jabartī, and Ali Mubarak. They were historical works which followed certain stylistic and structural formulas, (the title of the work, for example, usually being the *Khiṭaṭ* of (author) , from which al-Ghīṭānī takes the name of his novel), and which presented history chronologically in such a way as to avoid any clear notion of causality.<sup>516</sup> The connection between the topographical and historical aspects of the word *Khiṭaṭ* comes from the fact that certain neighborhoods in newly-founded early Islamic towns, (Cairo being one of them), were “laid out” and administered; and the historical-administrative concerns dealing with running these new quarters “led fairly quickly to the appearance of a literary genre which consisted of a description

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<sup>515</sup> Hans Wehr, Hans. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1979), 245.

<sup>516</sup> Mehrez, *History*, 66.

of the historical topography of these khiṭaṭ.”<sup>517</sup> And so, the word is central to the novel’s attempt to draw connections between literature and geography.

The novel begins with an invocation that closely mirrors the stylistic and structural formulas of the classic chronicle, praising God and giving Him credit for having created the city.

اما خلقه فتفنى أعمارهم كلها مرت الدقائق والثواني، هو الذى أوجد هذه الخطط، وما فيها، وإليه  
تعود، وفيه تتلاشى بعد حين ومقدار لا يدري أمده إلا هو، سبحانه، ألبأ إليه وزمان الخطط الحلوي يولي

As for His creation, their civilizations would vanish with every passing of minutes and seconds. He is the one who created these plans (khiṭaṭ), and what is within them, and to him they return, and what is within it disappears after a time and a period whose extent whose duration is known only to him, the Almighty, takes refuge in him and turns towards the time of the sweet plans (khiṭaṭ)

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The opening chapters of the novel then proceed to map out the city topographically, focusing on some of the traditional features of a medieval urban landscape, such as walls and alleyways. But as the scope of the descriptions widens, the medieval tone and geography of the description unravel. The voice of a historical chronicler pans out from the medieval Old Town (Islamic Cairo) to reveal the rest of the modern cityscape.

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<sup>517</sup> Cahen, Cl., “**Khiṭaṭ**”, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 25 March 2019

<sup>518</sup> al-Ghīṭānī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 7-8.

توجد مباني عديدة بلا حصر في الخطط ربما فاق بعضها مبنى الدار من ناحية الوظيفة، على سبيل المثال، المقر المركزي للعقل الإلكتروني، وإدارة أمن الخطط، ومصحة تسجيل الموالد

There are countless buildings in Khiṭaṭ, some of which perhaps surpass al-Anba' [the ministry of information] on a functional level. For instance, [there are] the Data Bank headquarters, the National Security headquarters, and the Birth Registry office.

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This act of figurative semantic extension is accomplished through the attempts by the narration to describe modern Cairo as though it was being experienced by a medieval chronicler. Given that this voice has not undergone the lexical renewal of the Nahḍah, it can only describe what it sees by expanding the meanings of words it already has in its repertoire. And so, Khiṭaṭ becomes the entire metropolitan area, and eventually, as the view continues to pan out, the entire nation state in which the city is located. As international intrigue and conflict with 'the enemy (العدو)', another vague label which, given the geopolitical history of Egypt in the 1970s, is most commonly assumed to be a metaphor for Israel) becomes more important to the life of the city, the word Khiṭaṭ comes to refer both to the city and the surrounding country and its borders in the way that the word 'Miṣr' is often meant to mean both Cairo and Egypt. In short, the word Khiṭaṭ, previously denoting a specific planned area of the medieval city, comes to extend out towards modern geographies.

The term Khiṭaṭ is a particularly effective example of how a single lexical item can pull a great deal of weight in creating cognitive estrangement. Rather than merely setting the novel in

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid, 12. Translation by Samia Mehrez

the city of modern Cairo, or drawing parallels to it through the closely recreated world of a work of historical fiction, the author leaves the reader in a liminal space in between. Because the word can simultaneously refer to the old city, the metropolitan area, the nation, or the fictional work which describes all of them, the word becomes polyvalent in proportion to how far the narrative has zoomed out. The term acts as a tidy metaphor for the ways in which historical approaches to mapping the world are passed down along with their own epistemic limitations and historical blindspots. If a novel like *al-Zaynī Barakāt* uses history to clarify the present, *Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī* demonstrates how it can also be used to obfuscate it. The ability of a word to conceal its own semantic shifts, allowing for retroactive fiction, like that created by the word ‘jahaliya’, and the resulting confusion it creates, is something the word *Khiṭaṭ* is used to demonstrate.

### ‘Ajam

In its most basic form, the word ‘ajam (أَجَم) refers to people whose native language is not Arabic. It comes from a root whose original meaning has to do with mumbling, speaking incoherently, or being unable to speak. But the word has a long and complicated history in the Arab world, due to its use as a pejorative against non-Arabs and especially Persians during the Islamic conquests and the Umayyad Dynasty. Later on, after a long period of struggle over cultural supremacy within the Ummah known as *al-Shu‘ūbiyyah*, the term was often used as a simple ethnic and geographical designation for non-Arab lands, specifically those of Persia.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>520</sup> C. E. Bosworth, “AJAM,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/7, pp. 700-701; an updated version is available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ajam> (accessed on 25 April 2014).

However, in the novel the term is used specifically to name a group of clandestine operatives working against the government and supposedly spreading subversive ideas among the population. It is impossible to fully know their identity, as the reader only ever hears about the group through secondhand reports by government officials, or from the perspective of the narrative voice, which endorses much of the rhetoric of the regime. The common assumption in previous analyses of the novel is that *'ajam* is used to represent underground left-wing groups which were active despite continuous crackdowns by both the Nasser and Al-Sadāt regimes. They are never shown directly in the novel, but only ever spoken about through rumor and conjecture.

نشرت مقالات توضح للقراء الطيبين أساليب العجم، وادعاءاتهم، إنهم يريدون سيادة القيم الجميلة، وخلق عالم جديد، وإنصاف الفقر من الغنى، وكيف أن مبادئهم غريبة عن تربة الطيبة للخطط، والخصال الحميدة للناس فيها.

An article was published which clarifies for the dear reader the techniques of the *'ajam*, and their claims that they want the reign of beautiful values, and the creation of a new world, and justice between the poor and the rich, and about their strange principles concerning good earth for the *Khiṭaṭ* and the praiseworthy virtues of the people that live within it.

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Sometimes, it seems as though the narrator reproduces accounts verbatim from newspapers and official government decrees.

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<sup>521</sup> al-Ghīṭānī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 59-60.

عناوين

العجم في الصيدية

أستاذ من العجم يسب الدين

سقوط شبكة جديدة من عناة العجم، أفرادها يدلون اعترافات مثيرة، أدلة تثبت اتصالهم بعواصم أجنبية، المضبوطات تضم وثائق هامة، وضع اليد على مخطط يستهدف إثارة القلاقل في الخطط

## Headlines

### The 'Ajam in the Trap

#### 'Ajam Leader Insults Religion

Fall of a new network of the impudent 'ajam, its individuals giving up through their confessions proof of their connections to foreign capitals, seizures include important documents, obtaining plans (mukhaṭiṭ) aiming to incite unrest in the Kḥiṭaṭ.

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Using the word 'ajam to refer to leftists makes for some interesting associations. Government propaganda often asserted that leftwing groups in Egypt in the 1970s were not an authentic or even native part of the nation. They were frequently decried as “foreign agitators” or “enemies of the people” by the Al-Sadāt regime. This was especially true during the so-called Bread Riots of 1977, when government officials blamed communist agents for inciting the protests. In all of the radio and television pundits' broadcasts about the event, state-sponsored media never admitted the fact of the riots and only ever referred to them using vague reports about “sabotage by leftists” and “communist-recruited elements,” with the Minister of the Interior reporting that the all of the violence seen in the protests against rising food prices and the withdrawal of subsidies

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid, 40.

was “an engineered Marxist plot aimed at damaging the country.”<sup>523</sup> In the novel, the voice of the chronicler often parrots that of official government statements, and so resorts to the same alarmist tone when speaking about the ‘ajam. Al-Ghīṭānī’s use of the term ‘ajam adeptly encapsulates the paranoid and nativist undertones of this type of rhetoric used by the regime. At the same time, it alludes to the efforts by President Al-Sadāt to reorient cultural policy towards Egypt at the expense of pan-Arabism through school curricula and public rhetoric.<sup>524</sup> These efforts can be seen as a modern echo of the original shu‘ūbiyyah debates over cultural supremacy. By using the word ‘ajam, al-Ghīṭānī emphasized the chauvinist rhetoric behind invoking the spectre of left-wing groups by making a lexical historical parallel.

Another possible reading of the use of ‘ajam could relate to its invocation of incomprehensible speech. For the few leftist groups who did survive government crackdowns and imprisonment throughout the 1960s, and the student movement, which was persistently harassed and suppressed by authorities throughout the Al-Sadāt-era, there was the added humiliation of their remoteness from the working class to which they staked their legitimacy and purpose. Working clandestinely in small cliques, left-wing groups in Egypt in the 1970 spent a larger portion of their time discussing minute theoretical points than they did actually engaging in the political field, a fact which would characterize them as strange figures speaking the

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<sup>523</sup> John K. Walton and David Seddon, *Free Markets and Food Riots: The Politics of Global Adjustment* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

<sup>524</sup> Eberhard Kienle, “Arab Unity Schemes Revisited: Interest, Identity, and Policy in Syria and Egypt,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 1 (1995): 66.

incomprehensible ‘babble’ of Marxist ideology. The memoir of Arwa Salih provides many excellent vignettes of this esoteric clique of students, in which she states:

The sixties generation didn’t have the popular base to make it a force for real change or to put its claims to the test (their militants were famous for their citation of texts; one of the bad habits we learnt from them) or, at the very least, to force them [sic] do anything else besides constantly argue! Our generation inherited this deadening appetite for endless arguing from people who had nothing but time on their hands. This habit of ours actually became a substitute for the possibility of human communication thanks to the arrogance of bloated egos.<sup>525</sup>

Al-Ghīṭānī was no stranger to these internecine arguments, having been a member of left-wing groups in the 1960s and imprisoned by the Nasser regime in 1966 for his connections. Mustapha Byumi categorizes al-Ghīṭānī as one of the Egyptian writers who were part of political groups at one time but broke away, keeping their sympathy and political leanings.<sup>526</sup> Al-Ghīṭānī was no doubt aware of the obfuscating jargon of left-wing theory and its stupefying effect on uninitiated audiences, and so naming the communists al-‘ajam in his book reflects his own ambivalence towards politics and the regime. This political ambivalence is one of the central themes in much of al-Ghīṭānī’s writing. Despite having been imprisoned by Nasser’s regime, he nonetheless considered the first president after the revolution to be the symbol of the promise of

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<sup>525</sup> Arwá Ṣāliḥ, *The Stillborn: Notebooks of a Woman from the Student-Movement Generation in Egypt* (Seagull Books, 2018), 61.

<sup>526</sup> See, Mustafa Bayyumi, *Shakhsīyat Shuyū‘īyah fī al-riwayah al-Misriyah*. (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Thaqāfah al-Jadidah, 2017).

a socialist future and a basic appreciation for the poor, whereas he unreservedly scorned the luxury-loving Al-Sadāt, who preceded him, in *Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī* and other novels.<sup>527</sup>

The term ‘ajam constitutes just one of many instances in the novel when al-Ghīṭānī seems to choose a word based on the richness of its semantic valances. Such words are productively ambiguous rather than just disassembling. Even as individual words, they function like independent allegories of the modern kind, as Jameson describes:

Allegory consists in the withdrawal of its self-sufficiency of meaning from a given representation. That withdrawal can be marked by a radical inefficiency of the representation itself: gaps, enigmatic emblems, and the like; but more often, particularly in modern times, it takes the form of a small wedge or window alongside a representation that can continue to mean itself and to seem coherent.<sup>528</sup>

Giving cryptic names for every single character and place would make the novel indecipherable. Al-Ghīṭānī instead carefully chooses key elements within the novel to give this treatment, making little wedges and windows throughout the text, which allow for passages between the fictional and the real. Whereas one single elaborate allegory at the level of the denotational text could become more or less mapped out, individual words each spin off their own semi-autonomous allegories, becoming coherent markers for a number of different maps.

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<sup>527</sup> Thus Andrei, “The Book of Illuminations (كتاب التجلیات, Le Livre Des Illuminations) by Gamal al-Ghitani.” Blog. The Untranslated (blog), March 19, 2016.

<sup>528</sup> Jameson, *Brecht*, 122.

## Al-Khilāwī

As the Khiṭaṭ continues to face corruption and decay throughout the novel, the narrator explains how the ʿajam, along with an increasing number of other residents, are fleeing to a site in the desert south of the city referred to as *al-Khilāwī* (الخلّاوى). Although it is reported by scientists that al-Khilāwī is unamenable to domestication or for any other human purpose, it continues to attract refugees from al-Khiṭaṭ, further crippling the city as it creates a sort of brain drain of poets, painters and storytellers. Al-Khilāwī also contains a series of caves and storage sites to where artworks and other cultural artifacts from al-Khiṭaṭ are being smuggled. At the same time, three mysterious figures begin to attract a following in al-Khilāwī based on their prophet-like actions, making the desert oasis into a kind of utopian or millennialist space.

Al-Khilāwī is only ever explained in indirect and cryptic ways throughout the novel, to the extent that it is unclear exactly what al-Khilāwī is. It could be a geographical area (there are references to caves and mountains in it), or an abandoned habitation, or just the name for a vague area of desert.<sup>529</sup> This mystery is compounded by the very word *khilāwī*. It is not itself a common Arabic word, but an invented one, which nevertheless suggests a myriad of possible meanings. It comes from a root which includes several concepts, many of which are translated into aspects of the desert location in the novel. The root *kh-l-w* pertains to emptiness and being devoid, but also to freedom and release from something. In one of the first instances in which it

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<sup>529</sup>The narration admits as much, calling al-Khilāwī a mysterious region (منطقة غامضة) for which no maps or pictures exist (al-Ghiṭānī, Khiṭaṭ, 291)

is mentioned, in a section entitled “khilāwi,” al-Ghīṭānī does, indeed, make use of the verb (‘خلو’ khalw’ devoid of) in reference to the mysterious place’s location.

..الخلاوي تنبيء الظروف السائدة كل هذه البقاع بهلاك مبين، سبحان خالق الحياة من الجماد، ومنبت البذرة من الحجر، صحراء.. الخطط الجنوبية جهمة، تخلو من السراب
al-Khilawī .. ... the prevailing conditions foresee all these plots of clear destruction, glory to the Creator of life from inanimate matter, and germinator of seed from stone. The desert of the southern Kḥiṭaṭ is, hell, <u>devoid of mirages</u> .

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The meaning from the context of the novel wavers between these two meanings, as being both an inhospitable place, the opposite of the civilized city, but also the refuge and utopian outpost to which the inhabitants of al-Kḥiṭaṭ eventually turn their hopes. Khilāwi also has connotations of open space and rural areas, as well as the type of isolation and seclusion related to hermitage and spiritual communion. The word itself is close in spelling to the word “خلوي” (khaluwi” cellular), as in the adjective for a secret political group, suggesting simultaneously a type of religious hermitage and a safehouse for political conspiracies. However, to the extent of my investigations, the exact word “khilāwi” is used in modern Arabic only in the Sudan to refer to a long-practiced ritual for group Qur’anic memorization. This is not likely the meaning intended by al-Ghīṭānī. I think it is the case rather than al-Ghīṭānī wants to invoke the full semantic range available by the

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<sup>530</sup> Ibid, 348. the emphasis is mine.

root kh-l-w without having to endorse any particular, fixed meaning. His semantic extension, in this case, is less historical than derivational.

As in many places throughout the novel, the narration regarding al-Khilāwī is oracular and lyrical, elusive in its metaphors and inconsistent in its geography. The southern desert is compared with the western desert, (also not clearly outlined), as being mostly composed of smooth sand, having less variety of sights than the southern desert. Both places, however, are described as being inhospitable to life. The southern desert is where, according to accounts in the novel, an army was swallowed whole by the wilderness a thousand thousand years earlier. Geologists who have studied the surface of the moon and Mars claim that the southern desert is completely impossible to cultivate, and that it has no equivalent known in existence. One specialist confirms the hostility of the landscape:

أكد انه طوال عمره لم يسمع عن مهرب اخترق هذا الجزء الجنوبي، ليس لوعورة الخلاوي، إنما لوجود حيوانات ضارية أما الثعابين فمن أخطر الأنواع، أخطرها القط الأرقط، والكباش الضخمة التي يبلغ حجم الواحد منها كالجمل. لا..مستحيل استخدام هذه الصحراء لأي غرض

He stressed that throughout his life he had not heard of any smuggler who had penetrated this southern part, not because of the ruggedness of al-khalāwī, but rather because of the presence of ferocious animals, the most dangerous among them the speckled cat and the huge rams, whose size reaches that of a camel. As for snakes, [they are] the most dangerous species. No, it is impossible to use this desert for any purpose.

With a chronicler's eye for exhaustive details, the narrator collects as much anecdotal information about this mysterious place as possible, but much of it remains hearsay. Just like the lost army from a thousand years ago, the comparison of the huge ram to a camel is a great example of how al-Ghīṭānī skirts close to details that would be magical realist, but still remain within the limits of plausibility. It is, after all, just hearsay.

Despite this inhospitality, al-Khilāwī becomes the place to which residents of al-Khiṭaṭ begin to emigrate. Many leave because of the declining state of the city and the mass poisoning of children by a defective vaccination order by the Ustādh. Others seem to follow the milleniarist vision of the three unlikely leaders: al-Khidr, who was imprisoned for being a suspected member of the 'Ajam; Ilyas who is described as the "teacher" who knows what others do not know; and Sulayman, a child who survives the poisoning. It is their presence in al-Khilawī, specifically their semblance to historical prophets, which marks its evolution from being a mere refuge from the troubles of al-Khiṭaṭ, to becoming the locus of the city's own salvation.<sup>532</sup>

It is significant that all three characters bear the names of prophets and mystical figures. In many ways, the plight of these three characters echoes messianic themes...these three figures are the saviors of Khiṭaṭ, they are the ones who leave the city for the desert and are eventually followed by others, thus constituting the nucleus for a new community, outside the boundaries of crumbling, defeated Khiṭaṭ.<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> The status of Khidr (and Ilyas) is debated within Islam. Many see them as men possessing special knowledge of God and the Unseen, but not as prophets.

<sup>533</sup> Mehrez, *Egyptian Writers*, 70-1.

In this case the actual names of characters is also productively ambiguous. While the three leaders of al-Khilawī clearly share the names with well-known prophets or mystical figures, inviting all kinds of comparisons to Quranic allegory, these are also simply common names in Arabic society. It would be perhaps too ‘on the nose’ for the characters to have been called Musa, Isa, or, of course, Muhammad. The names chosen by al-Ghīṭānī, on the other hand, retain a plausible deniability.

### Al-Maghārah

As the city continues its decline after the disappearance of al-Ustādh, and his successor al-Tanūkhī unleashes his assault on popular culture and shared memory, it becomes known to the administration of the city that a secret operation is being undertaken to smuggle artifacts (athār) into hiding, and even out of al-Khiṭaṭ. The narrator claims that the idea to do so comes from the violent ‘ajam, who speak about the necessity of preserving the turath and returning that history which has been erased from the city. These activists gather up everything, from paintings to swords and other weapons, crowns, statues, necklaces, and even mummies, and try to smuggle them to a safe place, in the heart of the Eastern Desert near al-Khilawī.<sup>534</sup> The place to which they are taken is described as a cavern (المغارة, al-Maghārah), an immense labyrinth of tunnels which branch off for kilometers.

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<sup>534</sup> Al-Khilawī is described elsewhere as being in the Southern Desert, adding to the geographical and narratological confusion.

It is important to note that another, more common term for cave/cavern exists in Arabic, 'kahf,' which is both the term used to describe caves in the Qur'an (they are the Seven Sleepers of the 'kahf'), and for which there are no widely differing alternative meanings in most Arabic dictionaries.<sup>535</sup> The word Maghārah, on the other hand, is connected by its root to concepts such as 'sinking,' 'raiding,' 'seeping away' and 'entering deeply into a thing,' as in the expressions "غار في شيء" (he examined minutely [or deeply] into an affair) or "فلان بعيد الغور" (such a one is a deep examiner).<sup>536</sup> These last two expressions use the related word "ghur," which means a "depth," in both the literal and figurative sense, especially that of thought itself.<sup>537</sup> Such connotations allow one to envision the cavern in Khiṭaṭ al-Ghīṭānī as something not entirely geographical, as perhaps also including mental realms to which, say, popular culture and shared memory might be stowed away.

Like other vaguely named locations in the novel, it is difficult to plot out exactly where the cavern is, or how far and wide it stretches. It is said to have mystical lights and places where its moist air suddenly goes dry. An entire army is said to have once hidden inside, (suggesting the other definition for the word "Maghārah": a place from which raids are launched). But none of

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<sup>535</sup> Hans Wehr has "cave, cavern, hollow," whereas Lisan al-Arab describes it as a "maghara but wider" and "like a whose carved into a mountainside."

<sup>536</sup> Lane, Edward William. *An Arabic-English Lexicon : Derived from the Best and the Most Copious Eastern Sources*. Bk. 1, Pt. 1. Bk. 1, Pt. 1. LaVergne, TN, USA: Nabu Public Domain Reprints, 2010. , 2361. Accessed from ejtaal.net 1/18/2020

<sup>537</sup> Steingrass has Gaur as "depth...cavity...depth of mind; deep thought, meditation. See Steingrass 766.

this can be confirmed because there is no definitive account. The text instead offers these descriptions:

<p>...من المستحيل الوقوف على وصف دقيق لأن الآراء تتضارب وتتناقض ...يقول المعمرون في القرى الواقعة قرب الخلاوى، إن سر هذه المغارة يورث في عائلة من الرعاة هذه المغارة، استعصت على الكشف، ولم تظهر في خرائط الاستشعار عن بعيد والوحدات والأقمار الصناعية، والأشعة ..تحت الحمراء، وأشعة جاما</p>
<p>It is impossible to get an accurate description because opinions are contradictory...</p> <p>The elders in the villages near Al-Khalawi say that the secrets of this cave were inherited by a family of shepherds ...</p> <p>This cave eluded detection, and did not appear on the maps of some sensors, units, satellites, infrared and gamma rays.</p>

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There are three different forms of knowledge of the cavern offered here, each of which can be said to represent forms of knowledge in Egypt more broadly. The first is that which suggests both professional and popular opinion, the barrage of interpretations and accusations which constitute the state of generalized disillusionment in the post-Nasserist era. The second references forms of traditional knowledge, elements of the turath which are passed down and inherited by authentic repositories of folk knowledge: the people themselves. Lastly, is the latest generation of scientific technologies, which promise to usher in a new era of positivism through ways of seeing once

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<sup>538</sup> Al-Ghiṭānī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 231.

thought impossible. But the crucial point is that none of these approaches in the end can provide a definitive map of the cave. Instead, they each offer different ways of feeling around in the dark.

Returning to the figurative associations of the root for “Maghārah,” the cavern may be functioning as a metaphor for knowledge and thought itself. These various epistemic systems attempt to plumb the depths of the human mind, or that of objective knowledge, but ultimately cannot establish authority. This would seem to offer a satisfying interpretation, given that al-Ghīṭānī, as one of the writers of the New Sensibility, understood that authority could only rest on subjective ways of experiencing one’s surroundings. After a novel in which the name for a city was also that of the plan which maps it, it makes sense that the name of a cave would also invoke the efforts to understand it.

## Conclusion

Gamāl al-Ghīṭānī and Yaşar Kemal’s two novels demonstrate the important role that lexicon plays in their creative visions and literary projects. Both authors had their own theories of history that they were trying to demonstrate through their literary works. Kemal hoped to demonstrate through his writing that the right flood of words could briefly create the impression of a specific historical structure of feeling, itself dependent on the economies and ecosystems which gave birth to it. Al-Ghīṭānī, on the other hand, approached lexicography in his work to prove the power that words wield in disorienting a person from his/her place in history and in

collapsing the differences between historical eras. In both novels, the strategic use of lexicon acts as the key for creating the literary effect, the novum which helps illustrate their ideas about history.

How should we think about these approaches to using fiction as a way to speculate on the passage of historical cultures with regards to the state and the language reforms which other literary scholars have seen as so determinative of the fate of literary language? Having looked closely at their fictional projects, I believe it is fair to say that their use of speculative lexicons were engaged with those national lexical projects without being wholly consumed by their opposition to them. First, it would be reductive to characterize Kemal and al-Ghīṭānī's novels presented here as no more than protests against hegemonic culture. Kemal saw the issue of shifting baselines as far exceeding just one government. Al-Ghīṭānī knew enough about Egypt's history to understand that the Nahḍah wasn't the first moment in which scholars had tried to shape a view of the past through their writing.

Second, these authors used lexicography for their own ends. For an author who is opposed to authoritarianism to undertake the same linguistic practices as that of modern national language reform is not necessarily contradictory or hypocritical. Nor does it imply that the author shares the same goals. This is because standard language is not inherently repressive. It is merely an ethnopragmatic idea about how language functions, and can be indexed to any number of political beliefs. But at the same time, literature cannot do without language ideology because it is a fundamental element of the novel's forms, both political and narratological. To prove this,

one must simply ask what a rebellion against cultural hegemony within literature would look like without reference to metalinguistic ideas. If a writer wanted to move away from what he/she perceives as all forms of coercive or restrictive language, to what form of language could he/she turn that would not itself invite ideological attention? Literature, whether in the form of the realist novel or in speculative fiction, is deeply implicated in the politics of language; and so, rather than just undoing the language ideology of the state, literature creates its own.

In the first chapters, I challenged the belief that the state and elite's language reforms had a unique influence on the course of the Arabic and Turkish language in the 20th century. In these previous two chapters I have also tried to criticize the idea that national language ideology was the only language ideology at play, and that literature's only response was an innocent opposition to it. In the next and last chapter, I will offer one last attempt to disassociate the subject of literature and language ideology from the context of the modern state. By reevaluating how one specific and important index, the word "we," is used in two novels that have been taken as national allegories, I hope to show that language ideology can be used to study literature outside of the shadow of the nation.

## Chapter Five: Strange Women: we-narratives and other imagined communities

“He was composed waiting for me to calm down, and then explained that all suffering was caused by the political systems to which the world and Turkey were bound. I thought I understood what he meant, but it still seemed odd to me that he always used his mind like a sharp knife, to deal with even the most delicate situations.”

-*Tuhaf Bir Kadın*<sup>539</sup>

“At first it seemed an entertaining game: the long lines they formed, the military movements, the army’s phrases and slogans...And the collective spirit, again, as if the detachment was a clique of friends organizing a plot, exactly as it had been in secondary school. Layla enjoyed every minute of the training; she began to regain the feeling she had lost at the university, that feeling of being part of a whole.”

-*al-Bāb al-Maftūh*<sup>540</sup>

In the beginning of Leylâ Erbil’s novel, *Tuhaf Bir Kadın* (A Strange Woman, 1971), the protagonist Nermin goes to a dark bar in Beyoğlu to read some of her unpublished poetry to a well-known, unnamed poet. From her nervousness and excitement at having the chance to read

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<sup>539</sup> Pg. 17 in Turkish text. English versions in this chapter from the translation by Nermin Menemencioglu which is expected to finally be published this year. There are some instances in the translation where the translator differs in small but important words, but I have chosen to use it based on a source which says that Erbil herself thought positively of the translation.

<sup>540</sup> Pg. 248 in Zayyat, Latifa. *The Open Door*. Translated by Marilyn Booth. Cairo: American Univ in Cairo Press, 2004. All English translations for al-Zayyât provided by Marilyn Booth. Please see note on my use of Kristin Peterson-Ishaq’s translation in Chapter 3 for a discussion of my use of pre-existing translations.

for him, it is obvious that he holds a great amount of authority in the poetry world. After an awkward initial conversation, she begins to read a poem that ends with the following lines:

Kimler yeraltında yaşamaya iten bizleri  
gök masmaviyken kardeşlerim  
sapsarı benizlerimiz

Who are they who force us underground,  
Brothers, the skies are deepest blue,  
And yet how pale our faces.

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The poem invokes both a nebulous ‘we’: could it be women? Artists? The queer community? There is as well another nebulous ‘they’ which oppresses them. The poet’s response is to ask Nermin if she is a worker. His question is a rhetorical assertion that the poem is political in one specific way, a metaphor for the country’s central economic struggle between oppressor and oppressed. Rather than resisting the reductive interpretation, Nermin can only reply that she has working class relatives. The poet has no response to this. She then reads another poem, called “Sonnet to Fallen Women”:

“Kızlarımız hep ağlayarak mı savaşa gidemeyecek?”  
Burnunu kaşdı, “Savaşa mı gitmek istiyorsun?” dedi bu kez. Burada savaş sözcüğünün çok geniş anlamı olduğunu açıkladım...Anlamaması tuhaftı aslında.

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<sup>541</sup> Leylâ Erbil, *Tuhaf Bir Kadın*, 9th ed. (İstanbul: Türk İş Bankası, 2009),14.

“Shall our girls keep weeping because they cannot go to war?”

He scratched his nose and this time asked, “Do you want to fight in a war?” I explained that ‘war’ was used here in a very broad sense.... Actually, it was odd that he hadn’t got the point.

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The last poem Nermin reads is a description of her emotional reaction to getting her first menstruation, using abstract imagery and references to Greek mythology. By this point, it is predictable that the poet doesn’t understand this poem either. It doesn’t fit into his preexisting symbolic toolbox for political commitment.<sup>543</sup> Nermin’s poetry is, in fact, political, but not in the readymade way that the poet recognizes. Nermin’s poetry asks questions about the politics of representation and gendered experience, issues that would not be fully articulated for decades to come. But the imagined horizon of politics in the 1950s, when the novel takes place, was significantly more limited, at least for the leftist men at the helm of the literary world. We can assume that for the average poet of that time, politics was that which interests the nation, whether political parties, international relations, or the urban/rural divide. Even class politics were understood as relating fundamentally to the direction of the nation. And so Nermin’s own

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<sup>542</sup> Ibid.

<sup>543</sup> The poet’s bewilderment echoes in some ways the reaction of critics in the 1950s to İkinci Yeni poetry, a loose movement of abstract poets that was emerging during the setting of the novel. As Kenan Sharpe says, “Marxist literati like Asım Bezirci argued that İkinci Yeni poetry was filled with meaningless imagery, nonsensical language, and a petit bourgeois emphasis on individual mental states... Similarly, critic Memet Fuat (...) asserted that even for those members of privileged classes who followed contemporary poetry, the work of Second New poets read like an unsolvable riddle. See Kenan Sharpe, “Cultural Revolutions: Turkey and the United States During the Long 1960s” (UC Santa Cruz, 2019), 114-15.

particular understanding of politics— one that includes ideas about familial violence and trauma, heterosexist patriarchy, and revolutionary agency beyond the male industrial working class— all come off as indecipherably *avant la lettre*. What these concepts of politics share is an autonomy from the ultimate horizon of national politics, an interest in developing collective identities outside of the bounds of bourgeois chauvinism and patriarchy.

Just like the poet, scholars often interpret novels about the lives of young, idealistic and rebellious women as allegories for the central struggles of the nation. This is the case in Turkey for writers like Adalet Ağaoğlu and her novel *Ölmeye Yatmak*, as it is for women novelists in Egypt such as Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt, whose book *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* (The Open Door, 1960) has been probed repeatedly to show the parallels between the life of its protagonist Layla and the story of the nation. Layla, like Nermin, seeks out political and artistic freedom and other forms of belonging, and who is also stifled by reductive male interpretations. While there are many collectives referenced in all of these novels, it has become second nature in scholarly interpretations to read the trope of we-ness as strictly pertaining to the national imagined community. But what if one were to look more closely to whom the deictics of what ‘we’ and ‘they’ are actually pointing in novels? If we allow for a more dynamic accounting of we-ness, it is possible to see how to index the multiplicity of contingent, momentary, and imagined collectives that Erbil and other ‘strange women’ intended. Such an accounting can be done according to two different approaches: the linguistic and the narratological. Linguistics helps reposition these deictics in their rhetoricity, showing that when we take ‘we’ to mean the nation, we are in fact

responding to one specific index, that which Michael Silverstein calls the ritually emblemized trope of the nation. 'We' can and does just as easily invoke other social groups in society. 'We' and 'they' in fact offer a seemingly endless potential to deictically dissect society. As for the narratological approach, a renewed focus on we-narratives, as Monika Fludernick calls them, will help to show how collective narrations create a fascinating engagement with ambiguity and differentiation, one that has political implications. Using these two approaches in tandem could overcome the opposition between the private and the public, the individual and the nation, and facilitate a more productive examination of how narrative and ideological conflict plays out between and within groups.

This chapter will perform a reading of *Tuhaf Bir Kadın* by Leylâ Erbil and *al-Bâb al-Maftūh* by Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt as two texts which benefit from collective narration to challenge dominant narratives of national belonging. As socialist feminist novels, their politics exist in an ambiguous position vis-a-vis their respective nations' modernizing projects. Leylâ Erbil was a staunch defender of Kemalism's advancement of women's rights, while also acknowledging its profound failures and Turkish society's residual dysfunctions. Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt was a fierce nationalist, but would abandon writing for 25 years out of a sense of betrayal as the project of national liberation devolved into patriarchal authoritarianism. But neither of these authors' socialist or feminist commitments are exhausted by a critique of the nation state. By looking closely at how 'we's and 'they's are invoked in both novels, it is possible to see how interested the authors are in the dynamics between classes and among women. And as nationalists, they are

invested not in broad definitions of citizenship, but in the narrow group of those who, through their sacrifices and commitments, can actually be considered ‘nationalists’. I argue that in rejecting the reductive hermeneutics of national allegory, we should resist the temptation to read the ‘we’s invoked in the novels as an embodiment of the ‘we’ of the nation, and view them rather as a fine-grained index to an almost infinite archive of collectives.

## National allegory

The nation seems inescapable in Egyptian and Turkish novels. Even in books written against its repression and chauvinism, it is assumed that “the *national* experience is central to the cognitive formation of the third-world intellectual and that the narrativity of that experience takes the form exclusively of a “national allegory.”<sup>544</sup> In Egypt, it is said that “the novelistic canon of Arabic literature has largely been constructed to reflect, indeed to comply with, a nationalist agenda, hence expressing dominant themes in nationalist discourse and excluding equally important themes expressed by more marginal voices and groups.”<sup>545</sup> In Turkey, not even dropouts and recluses can avoid being wrapped up in the nation’s agenda. Sibel Irzik says of the allegorical lives in the modern Turkish novel that even the dreamer or the isolated individual must stand for the whole Turkish nation: “In many modern Turkish novels, the characters are portrayed as having been condemned to lead allegorical lives. They are haunted, frustrated, and

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<sup>544</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory,” *Social Text*, no. 17 (1987): 3–25.

<sup>545</sup> Hoda El Sadda, *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt, 1892-2008* / Hoda Elsadda., 1st ed. (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2012), XXI.

paralyzed by the sense that they must somehow be representative of things larger than themselves, bearers of meanings and destinies imposed on them.”<sup>546</sup>

Much like Nermin’s poetry from the beginning of *Tuhaf Bir Kadın*, interpretations of Turkish novels and the meaning of their characters’ lives are folded into the national story. The identity and story of the ‘I’ is always called in to represent the ‘we’ of the nation.

But due to the flexible nature of the indexical order, one particular social meaning cannot become fully dominant over the whole of language in such a way. A ‘regime of language’ might work to enforce nationality linguistically through the use of slogans, anthems, ceremonies, pledges and other types of rituals, which Silverstein calls “dense emblamatization”, but this is precisely the opposite of the “literal, casual, and free” way that theorists of nationalism, like Benedict Anderson and others, claim that language works in the expository, everyday-vernacular mode of objective realist reporting and the novel.<sup>547</sup> It is not natural or inevitable that the fictional text will always and only reference the national cultural order. There are plenty of other contexts which also call upon the novel’s language, as I showed was the case with the standard/dialectal binary in the chapter on the village novel. The ‘we’ deictic is another example of how expansively indexical a single unit of language can be.

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<sup>546</sup> Sibel Irzik, “Allegorical Lives: The Public and the Private in the Modern Turkish Novel,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (2003): 553.

<sup>547</sup> Silverstein, “Whorfanism,” 128

In *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson explains the central role that language played in creating an imaginary 'we' in the form of the cultural order of nationality.<sup>548</sup> Print capitalism brought with it a homogenous space-time, wherein the referral 'we' could grow to include everyone using, or who had the potential to use, the same national language. Using the deictic 'we' under this new organization of space-time meant that there was a new authoritative indexical denotation for it: the nation. But in a thorough critique of this argument, Michael Silverstein reveals the whorfian assumptions underlying this account of nationality. In his article "Whorfianism and the Linguistic Imagination of Nationality" (1997), Silverstein is critical of Benedict Anderson's account of the rise of nationalism as being caused by the creation of collective subjectivity with the emergence of print-capitalism and national languages. He insists that that Anderson has misunderstood the particular phenomenon of "we-ness" that we see invoked in texts, and in particular the realist novel. Anderson believes that standardized languages create a uniform experience of time and place (a chronotope) to which all subjectivity and identity is uniformly related, his imagined community. It is the uniformity of lived experience within this chronotope, and the equal potential access to it, which creates a standard national "we." However, Silverstein claims that this functions as a type of Whorfianism, whereby a change to language (namely standardization) alters the very ontic categories of its speakers. Anderson claims that changing linguistic practices altered the concept of time and space, whereby new forms of narration created a new synchronous national ontology, which eventually came to

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<sup>548</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso books, 2006).

function independently of specific invocations of we-ness. But Silverstein reminds us that changes to languages don't actually incur radically new experiences of reality. What Anderson is seeing in novels as evidence of this new ontological state is in fact the effect of a collection of rhetorical devices. We-ness that is read in newspapers and novels is a rhetorical invocation of a national community, not evidence of its emergence as a new ontic phenomenon. The work of those such as Silverstein, Agha, Irvine, Gal, and Eckert has made it overwhelmingly clear that footing and stance are dynamic relational categories and that any deictic like 'we' is bound up in multiple, complex sociolinguistic contexts. Phenomenology does not determine who 'we' is; rather, the multiple semiotic modalities of language constantly negotiate what constitutes linguistic identities. As Silverstein explains of the nature of standardized language:

Linguistic practice (and symbolic practice more generally) under standardization is an essentially contested order of sociocultural reality. So it is a mistake for Anderson, reading from one particular resulting discursive linguistic form, objective realist reportage, with its particular deictic presuppositions, to project therefrom a whole, homogenous cultural order of subjectivity.<sup>549</sup>

According to Silverstein, the imaginary "we-ness" that is seen in the realist novel and in journalism is nothing more than a ritually emblemized trope, a rhetorical form of address that is promoted by an imagined register at the top-and-center of speech judged to be "standard language." But this order of language is contingent and contested rather than inevitable and omnipresent.

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<sup>549</sup> Silverstein, "Whorfanism," 124.

the regime of language... depends on a frequently fragile sociopolitical order, seething with contestation that emerges from actual plurilingualism, heteroglossia, and like indexes of at least potentially fundamental political economic conflict. Such a regime of language is... energized and in a sense maintained by the ritually emblemized trope of “we”-ness.<sup>550</sup>

The meaning of ‘we’, even in the exemplary linguistic form of the realist novel, plainly exhibits references to other ‘we’s, resisting the national trope by invoking others.

To return to the Egyptian and Turkish context, literary scholars have spent a great deal of time focusing on this trope of ‘we’-ness. Unfortunately, they often take the trope even more literally than Anderson. They not only take for granted that novels invoke the ‘we’ of the nation through allegorical representations (via an over-simplified version of Jameson’s arguments in “National Allegories”), but also reproduce a ‘we’-narrative that more or less endorses the official discourse of the ruling regime and its modernizing project.<sup>551</sup> The Egyptian and Turkish scholars I will explore as an example below argue that authors struggle not only against an organic sense of national belonging, but also against the current of their nation’s enveloping history. In other

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<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>551</sup> Jameson’s argument over Third-World National Allegory does not have a “heavy reliance on language in modeling the cultural phenomenology of nationalism”, and so cannot be simply folded in with Silverstein’s critique of Anderson. It works instead from the different framework of cognitive and figural representations. I will return to his argument in the conclusion of the section on *Tuhaf Bir Kadın*. For the moment, it suffices to say that, Jameson does not argue that the story of the individual is always an allegory for the narrative synonymous with a particular bourgeois-modernizing state project. Jameson instead says that private lives are “an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society,” (Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” *Social Text*, no. 15 (1986): 69) a point which, I believe, fits into the argument against opposing the individual life with state myths.

words, the oppressive collectivity against which characters struggle for their autonomy is not just a universalizing chronotope, but also includes the narratives of government propaganda.

According to Sibel Irzik, this propaganda literally haunts the characters of novels, with the father of the nation, Atatürk, returning to dreams and performances with an incessant libidinal energy. In her article “Allegorical Lives: The Public and the Private in the Modern Turkish Novel,” Irzik argues that the account of national allegory needs to be complicated through reversal and irony, what must actually be turned on is this particular emblemized “we.” Irzik claims that there is a “certain repressive conflation of the public and the private that the political allegories in several Turkish novels parody and resist even as they self-consciously reproduce it.”<sup>552</sup>

Egyptian scholar Hoda Elsadda also submits a female novel to the national allegory treatment in her book, *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt, 1892-2008* (2012). In it she explores ways in which the feminist novel can transgress the opposition between the personal and the political by “interrogate[ing] dominant, national representations of femininity and masculinity”.<sup>553</sup> She dedicates a chapter in her book to Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt, and explains how she was tortured by her relationship to nationalism, torn between the personal stakes of feminism and the public stakes of national liberation. According to Elsadda, al-Zayyāt, too, was haunted by the failures of national liberation in the form of the father of the nation. In al-Zayyāt’s last book

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<sup>552</sup> Irzik, “Allegorical,” 564.

<sup>553</sup> El Satta, *Gender*, 164.

*Ṣaḥīb al-Bayt* (*The Owner of the House*, 1994), Nasser returns, like the oedipal father, as the book's eponymous figure, and the house in question functions as a parable for the female protagonist's imprisonment within the strictures of what she called "my destiny and my heritage."<sup>554</sup> Al-Zayyāt's career, then, is supposedly a trajectory from supporting national liberation, to disappointment as that project devolves into a state modernizing project, to her eventual attempts to escape the state's confines. But by pointing instead to the other 'we's which are present in her early work, that which has been dismissed as uncritically optimistic, I argue that it is possible to see al-Zayyāt's attitude of ambivalence, as well as see her commitment to alternative collectives early on.

### Fludernick's Poetics of the Collective in Narrative

In her article, "The Many in Action and Thought: Towards a Poetics of the Collective in Narrative" (2017), narratologist Monika Fludernik argues that although first person plural narration is a relatively rare phenomenon in fictional texts, it provides very interesting consequences when activated.<sup>555</sup> Fludernick begins by showing all of the ways that collective identity actually occurs in our daily lives, whether it be with one's social class, ethnic group, party associates, or national and religious confederates. But despite this, literary studies in general have preferred to celebrate the individual and to continuously put individuals in direct confrontation

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>555</sup> Monika Fludernik, "The Many in Action and Thought: Towards a Poetics of the Collective in Narrative," *Narrative* 25, no. 2 (2017): 139–63.

with collectives (namely nationalism) that would undermine or overwhelm this individuality. In fact, other “we’s” are always imminent in texts, and can be created and employed using collective narrative. It is important to note that Fludernick is referring to the “manifestation of plural subjects in the syntax of fictional” works rather than narratives told completely using first-person plural pronouns. Oftentimes the ‘we’ in fiction is implied through the structure and perspective of a text rather than its pronouns.

One of the important ways that authors create alternative collectives in their narratives is to place groups in the foreground. Groups are opposed to individuals less often than they are to other collectives, creating a narratable conflict between polarized social groups. Fludernick writes:

While one can argue that in literature the single hero or heroine is to be seen against the foil of a variety of collectives (parents, family, village folk, the nation, etc.), the main foils for groups in factual texts [the memoir, conversational storytelling, and historical writing] are other collectives: rioters vs. peaceful citizens or the police; town folk vs. foreigners or country folk; students vs. teachers; i.e., us vs. them. The effect of this is that the opposition of us vs. them creates a polarization which helps to both to impose conformity within the we-group and to invoke the absolute alterity of the they-group.<sup>556</sup>

Fictional narratives create in-group and out-group identities based on representations of collective thought, which echo the verbalizations of the protagonists through indirect thought or free indirect thought. But because narrative perspective can be represented in fiction in ways that are not possible as collective narratives or experiences in real life, novels “[create] a we-voice that

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<sup>556</sup> Fludernick, “The Many,” 154.

could not have a real-world equivalent... at the same time, [they] manage to convey important information by means of these violations of natural storytelling scenarios.”<sup>557</sup> It is possible in a novel, for example, to present a scene as it was experienced by numerous perspectives, imagining a riot from the viewpoint of the rioters as a whole. Because of this, while the novel is often credited as being the vehicle of national allegory, it also offers a unique window onto other temporary, contingent, and as-of-yet unformed collectives. We need only to learn to recognize forms of collectives in novels which are working against the standard regime of language that would have us assume we-ness to be exclusively that of the nation.

Fludernick identifies some of the common features she notices in we-narratives. They are:

- (1) the fluctuation between communal agency of a whole group and that of several subgroups accompanied by the foregrounding of individual agency of a person within the overall collective;
- (2) inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the we (Is the addressee included in the we?); and
- (3) an alternation between collective-we and individual agency (often paired with naming the individuals selected from within the group).<sup>558</sup>

The first feature allows for interesting juxtapositions and contrasts (especially of the political and ideological kind) between collectives and individuals. Individuals may agree in part to the political project of a certain group and may identify themselves as part of that particular ‘we’, but will narratologically shift out of this identification, asserting their own independent perspective in

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<sup>557</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid, 147.

moments of disagreement or ambivalence. The second feature, namely whether ‘we’ is meant inclusively or not (as in, all of us including you, or all of us but not you) is used to other interesting narratological ends. If the we-narratives are inclusive, the you might even include the narratee with whom the story’s protagonists are attempting to call in a shared heritage, identity or experience. We-narratives that are exclusive, “are addressed to strangers or do not thematize their audience.”<sup>559</sup> This can have important implications for the political reception and local/global audience for a given fictional text. Lastly, is the issue of the blurry alteration between collective and individual agency. This use of ‘we’ leads the reader to ask questions such as who exactly is being included in the ‘we’ that is narrating the story, carrying out its actions, and experiencing its events. But this radical ambivalence is precisely what makes the novel well-equipped to disrupt the assumed trope of we-ness of the nation. It requires us to constantly reevaluate who the ‘we’ in the novel is, referencing not only the world of the novel, but the indexical order of sociolinguistic life to which it corresponds. It also works to upset the assumed one-to-one correspondence between the realist novel and nation-state space-time through its impossible cognitive window representing collective minds. Fludernick explains the great narratological advantage to the ambiguity of using ‘we’, saying:

From a pragmatic point of view, we-narration and the representation of collective minds seem contrived; one cannot read other people’s minds (especially in the collective), and communal storytelling is rare except in the circumscribed context of the co-narrating of shared experiences in conversational narrative. As a result, we-narratives, especially

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<sup>559</sup> Ibid, 150.

literary we-narratives, force readers into accepting vague or even quite un-verisimilar situations of narration.<sup>560</sup>

All three of these features that Fludernick identifies are ones which I will explore shortly in my close readings of *Tuhaf Bir Kadin* and *al-Bāb al-Maftūh*.

In a previous article entitled “Collective Minds in Fact and Fiction: Intermental Thought and Group Consciousness in Early Modern Narrative” (2014), Fludernick explored the emergence of a collective mind in fiction and how it was represented. Fludernick begins from Alan Palmer’s *Social Minds in the Novel* (2010) and his concept of “intermentality,” that is “the process of sharing thought among a variety of different-sized groups of fictional characters.”<sup>561</sup> Through close textual analysis, Fludernick argues that we can see when and how groups within collectives are singled out, at what points thought streams and mentalities are actually shared by a group (much less frequently than assumed), and for what ideological and rhetorical reasons these different configurations of collective thought are parsed out. Addressing questions such as these can help “highlight unacknowledged ambivalences in the presentation and provide access to subversive counterarguments that have been inserted into the dominant discourse,” namely the feelings of ambivalence that characters, subgroups, and the author themselves may feel towards the collective of the nation<sup>562</sup>. This is yet another reason why Fludernick’s approach helps to

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>561</sup> Monika Fludernick, “Collective Minds in Fact and Fiction: Intermental Thought and Group Consciousness in Early Modern Narrative,” *Poetics Today* 35, no. 4 (2014): 693.

<sup>562</sup> Fludernick, “Collective Minds,” 723.

break down Anderson's assumptions of the linguistic creation of a universal national chronotope. Beyond the verbal invocations of collectives through grammatical invocations of we-ness (ritual emblemization) made by characters, there is also the strange fictional phenomenon of shared mentality, which is rarely synonymous with Anderson's nationalist space-time envelope voiced in realist reportage. Novels only ever rarely make use of the plural perspective of *the entire nation* as their narrator. Alongside the supposed "voice from nowhere", which functions as a tropic invocation of national we-ness, a whole host of other collective mentalities are also at play: partial, conflated, intersecting, contradictory, and ambiguous. Whether by speech or thought, groups are represented in fiction within a wide range of collectives which do not only line up with the nation.

Having explained how national we-ness is a ritually emblemized trope, and with a narratological eye towards the ambiguities of we-narratives in fiction, I will now proceed to demonstrate how the novels by Erbil and al-Zayyāt present alternative collectives to the nation. Their linguistic rebellion consists in great part in how both use language (both speech and narration) to index alternative collectives.

## Leylâ Erbil

Descriptions of Leylâ Erbil's work are almost always accompanied by the long list of the theoretical schools and political ideologies which informed it. Marxism, Freudianism, and Existentialism are cited as often as her biographical information. Erbil used her modernist novels

and short stories as a way to work out these thinkers' various insights through fiction, and her is regarded as representing a synthesis between big ideas and the way that they manifest in lived experience. Attila Özkırmılı summarizes Erbil's trajectory as representing a development from the abstract to the concrete:

At first, with an existentialist approach, she portrayed modern individuals' conflicts with society and their crises, which (sometimes) reach the level of insurrection. Later on, she wrote stories that tried to examine the people she was interested in from a social point of view and aimed to reflect reality in different dimensions. In her works, she approached lifestyles, value judgments, marriage, family and women's sexuality with a harsh, cynical and critical attitude.<sup>563</sup>

Unlike others bothered by the split between the private and political alluded to by the phrase "Freud versus Marx", Erbil did not see a contradiction in Freud's emphasis on the individual psyche and Marx's attempt to understand the entirety of society via its political economy. Nor was she shy about the two men's influence on her work. Even in the very last interview she gave, she accepted wholesale the premise that her work's aesthetics were influenced by them, although she was defiant about having to explain precisely how. She insisted, rather, that it fell to critics and

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<sup>563</sup> Önceleri varoluşçu bir anlayışla çağdaş insanın toplumla çatışmasını, başkaldırıya varan bunalımlarını işledi. Daha sonra arayışlarını sürdürerek ele aldığı kişileri toplumsal bakış açısıyla irdelemeye çalışan, gerçekliği değişik boyutlarıyla yansıtmayı amaçlayan öyküler yazdı. Yapıtlarında yaşama biçimlerine, değer yargılarına, evlilik, aile ve kadın cinselliğine sert, alaycı ve eleştirel tutumla yaklaştı. Atilla Özkırmılı, "Leyla Erbil Öykücülüğü Üzerine," PostÖykü Dergisi, no. 3.6 (August 2017).

readers to work out how exactly how their ideas had a determining influence on her work:

“How this or that works its way in [to my work], that’s your job to explain!”<sup>564</sup>

In direct interpretations she did offer, she found rhetorically eccentric ways of running the two currents of thought together, especially when she spoke of the nation and its history, appealing to concepts of mental disorders and modes of production. An example of this is her diagnosis of Turkish society while speaking more generally about “bourgeois sicknesses” in a society that hadn’t passed through the requisite event of an industrial revolution.

I don't think we need to be a class society or [experience] an industrial revolution to be considered a mad, totally sick society! In addition to the distortions in our relations of production, our society is also full of diseases of religious origin, as I have already stated .... I don’t believe that with the disappearance of exploitation, human inner demons will disappear as if they were cut with a knife.<sup>565</sup>

This is more literary than doctrinaire, and certainly not the conclusions of someone who is repeating mere nationalist myths. Erbil’s understanding of her own nation and its struggles with modernity barely resembles the sort of positivistic teleology offered in the traditional accounts of

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<sup>564</sup> “Marx ve Freud saptamasını inandırıcı bulmayanlara iş düşüyor demek ki! yaZâr ne diye kendi metnini size yani okura didiklemeyle görevlendirilsin ki? ya da yapıtına marx’ı, şunu bunu nasıl sızdırdığını anlatsın ki,” Erkan Irmak and Yalçın Armağan, “Çerçeve Leyla Erbil,” *Yeniyazı* 11 (2011).

<sup>565</sup> “Bence deli, tümünden hasta bir toplum sayılmamız için sınıflı bir toplum olmaya da, sanayi devrimi geçirmeye de hiç gereksinimimiz yok! Bizim toplumumuz üretim ilişkilerindeki çarpıklığın dışında demin belirttiğim gibi din kökenli hastalıklarla da doludur.... Sömürünün ortadan kalkmasıyla da insanın iç ifritlerinin bıçakla kesilmişçesine ortadan kalkacağına inanıyorum.” Leylâ Erbil, “Söyleşi,” in *Zihin Kuşları: Deneme* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası, 2003), 174.

Kemalism.<sup>566</sup> She would no doubt push back against attempts to subsume the subjective experiences portrayed in her work as national allegory to the nation.<sup>567</sup> For her part, in a free-ranging interview in 1997, Erbil made some gestures towards this class-based history, saying, “It is known that M. Kemal wanted to carry out a land reform and he consulted the Kurdish aghas and the beys in the parliament. But the regime was held up by the gentry (*eşraf*) and could not afford to lose the aghas. According to some researchers, the legacies of the Committee of Union and Progress was what gave the Republic its class character.”<sup>568</sup>

To be fair, in the same interview Erbil defiantly defends Kemal’s *Kulturkampf*, going so far as to say that the problem was that Atatürk’s reforms didn’t go far enough against medieval religious fanaticism and misogyny. In her 1997 interview, she is especially defensive of the rights won by women through these reforms, refusing to refer to them, as the interviewer does, as “window dressing”. In her last public interview in 2011, she is asked to defend her

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<sup>566</sup> As Toni Alaranta says in “In the Nutuk, the plot is teleological.” Toni Alaranta, “The Enlightenment Idea of History as a Legitimation Tool of Kemalism in Turkey” (Helsingin yliopisto, 2011), as the Enlightenment-originated march towards a rational and scientific future culminates in the Turkish Revolution. In contrast, a certain Leftist reading of nationalism in Turkey exposes it as a self-serving myth, understanding the profound class divisions lying underneath the motivations of the state in a way that has been discussed in depth by scholars such as Çağlar Keyder in his book, *State and Class in Turkey* (London: Verso, 1987).

<sup>567</sup> “A political elite and a nascent bourgeoisie joined forces to isolate a national economic space for themselves in which heavy oppression of the working class and exploitation of the agricultural sector would allow for rapid accumulation— all this achieved under an ideology of national solidarity, more or less xenophobic, which denied the existence of conflicting class interests in favour of a corporatist model of the society.” Keyder, *State*, 107.

<sup>568</sup> “M. Kemal bir toprak reformu gerçekleştirmek istediği ve bunu Kürt ağalarına, beylerine meclisteki milletvekillerine danıştığı bilinir. Ama eşraf dayanışmasıyla ayakta duran rejim, ağaları kaybetmeyi göze alamazdı... kimi araştırmacılara göre daha da öncesi, İttihat ve Terakki’den kalma miraslar da Cumhuriyet’in sınıfsal karakterini veriyor.” Erbil, “Söyleşi,” 204.

understanding of the Kemalist modernity project. She says it is all too easy to judge it according to today's standards— asking why he spilled blood, why he expelled the dynasty, why he didn't bring about socialism or treat the Kurds fairly—just as it easy to condemn the Enlightenment as a western educated intellectual who has passively benefited from it. (This is directed at her interviewer Yılmaz Varol who positions himself against Kemalism.) Erbil says that she speaks as someone who doesn't take the advances of the Enlightenment for granted, whether it be with regards to Islamic despotism or women's rights. Erbil acknowledges that she, too, thought through the legacy of Kemalism herself, but had eventually realized that things need to be understood according to actual historical and geographic circumstances. Erbil remarks, "Did Mustafa Kemal bring about Socialism or didn't he? I used to make this accusation. But with which working class would he have brought it about?"<sup>569</sup>

This is all to say that Erbil's understanding of her nation was complicated, and constantly occupied by a sense of its profound divisions and internal opposition, a point which is critical to understanding the motivations for why she evoked other kinds of 'we' within her novel *Tuhaf Bir Kadın*. Her interviews provide a fascinating window into the complicated, ambiguous relationship that Erbil had with class-based analysis, feminist discourse, and national politics. It is tempting to try to rely on her more explicit pronouncements as a way to prove to what extent her work represented a challenge to the traditional narrative of the modernizing national project. But one should take Erbil's advice ("şunu bunu nasıl sızdırdığımı anlatsın ki!") and look directly to her

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<sup>569</sup> Irmak and Armağan, "Çerçeve."

works in order to examine how she depicts collectives, deconstructs them, and imagines ones that have yet to come into being.<sup>570</sup> I claim that her works, written even at the height of left-wing self-assuredness, offer a different definition of modernity than that offered by Kemalism: one that is complicated, contradictory, and not reducible to one allegory. Erbil summarizes the meaning of modernity in her own work as follows: “I disagree with the idea that we have exhausted modernism to the end. You can show elements in my works that contradict this word; They are the results of what has been birthed by modernity... the process that a writer explains is that of unending questioning. The richness of the inner world will not be exhausted.”<sup>571</sup>

#### Tuhaf Bir Kadın

*Tuhaf Bir Kadın* is Erbil’s first novel. The novel offers an examination of the transformation of a modern leftist Turkish woman over the course of twenty years. The structure of *Tuhaf Bir Kadın*, separated into the sections “The Girl,” “The Father,” “The Mother,” and “The Woman,” makes it seem ripe for both oedipal and national allegorizing. But the book is disjointed and fragmentary, with each part written in a different style and offering only a partial glimpse into its protagonist Nermin’s life. The ideological orientation, and thereby the particular collective with which each of the four sections is in conversation, changes through the course of the book. Whereas in the first section Nermin struggles to be accepted into the Istanbul

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<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> “kendi adıma ben modernizmi sonuna kadar tükettiğimiz düşüncesine katılmıyorum. yapıtlarımda bu sözümle çelişen öğeler gösterebilirsiniz; onlar da modernitenin doğurduğu sonuçlardır... yaZâr insanı anlattığı sürece sorunsallığın sonsuzluğu, iç dünyanın zenginliği tükenmeyecektir diyorum” Ibid.

intellectual circuit of the 1950s and against its patriarchal attitudes, in the final section she is seeking acceptance by her neighbors in the working class neighborhood of Taşlıtarla (current day Gaziosmanpaşa). In each section of the book, it is more instructive to ask how the characters navigate various conflicting or falsely imagined collectives than it is to analyze individual conflicts as representing a tension between the public and private spheres. While Sibel Irzık argues for an understanding of how modalities of public and private change in different social contexts, especially of the ways in which the figure of the political intellectual constructs a complex and isolated subjectivity, I am more interested in how the complex intellectual serves in Erbil's work to ask other questions about belonging. I believe that *Tuhaf Bir Kadın* is more concerned with alternative ideas of the group than it is in trying to "parody and resist" the allegorizing impulse of the national narrative, as Sibel Irzık argues.

The first section of the book details Nermin's life during the 1950s, her years in university and among the male-dominated literary circles of Istanbul. As I explained in the introduction, this involves her trying to find her own literary voice while also coming up with something palatable to the hegemonic tastes of the mostly male intellectual scene. Although she had dreams of an engaging and challenging intellectual world, the individual poets and intellectuals she meets face-to-face leave her disappointed and disillusioned. She describes how dismissive they are of her intellect, and how they mistake her interest in them in the basest way possible.

Onlara ne vakit şiirden, siyasetten söz açsam, ne vakit onlarla insanlık gereği bir dostluk kurmak istesem ya da bildiğim bir konu üzerinde ciddi olarak tartışmaya yeltensem alaylı, takılmalı bir havaya girdiler; sözleri, konuyu boğuntuya getirip işi ya sululuğa ya da kavgaya döktüler. Ne vakit iş aradığımı, yardım edip edemeyecenlerini sorsam, kaçtılar. İçlerinden hiçbirine sanat dışı, insan merakı dışı bir ilgi duymadım, açıkçası erkek oluşları hiç ilgilendirmede beni.

Whenever I've tried to discuss poetry or politics, to start a real friendship with them, they teased or mocked me, or turned sappy or aggressive. When I asked them for help in finding a job, they avoided me. Other than art and a general interest in human nature, I haven't found anything in any of them to interest me, I mean, frankly, they don't arouse me as males.

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Rather than treating her an equal and accepting her into their clique, they taunt her about being “ripe” and brag to one another about having taken her to their bachelor pads. At the same time, she has her own aesthetic judgements and ideas about the work of those artists and poets she meets. At one point, while sitting at their shard haunt Lambo's, she sees the poet M.S. and mocks his affected mannerisms and overuse of quotations from French poetry.

Son numarası toplumcu gerçekçilik. Ağzından düşmüyor bu söz, “sosyal realizm,” realist olmadan sosyal olunabilirmiş sanki. Hiç de iyi bir şiirine rastlamadım daha.

His latest number is socialist realism. He's constantly dropping the phrase. As if you could be a realist without being a socialist. I haven't come across a single good poem by him so far.

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<sup>572</sup> Erbil, *Tuhaf*, 45.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

But if she feels such disdain for the men at Lambo's, then why does she keep going back? Is there no other place where she could fit in? Her motivations decidedly cannot be explained with recourse to her private life, and in fact she is constantly fighting against a list of characters who all try to diminish her pursuits as somehow being motivated by amorous or sexual desires. But Nermin's desires aren't merely individual, they are constituted and dependent on imaginary communities: the socialist left, the Istanbul poetry scene, her liberated group of female friends. While the reality of the experience of each of these groups consistently disappoints Nermin, she keeps returning to them because of her hope that the 'we' that she longs for will somehow materialize.

This is seemingly contradicted by Nermin's appeal to the figure of Atatürk when condemning the chauvinism of the men at Lambo's.

Onlar, bizi kabul etmek istemiyor. Onlar, aralarında görmek istemiyorlar Türk kadını, bakma öyle her birinin Atatürk devrimcisiyim diye aslan kesildiğine, kendileriyle eşit olmamızı, bizim de salt sanat konuşmak için, sanatçı dostlar edinmek için oralara girip çıkmamızı yediremiyorlar erkekliklerine, zora gelince çıkarıp bilmem nerelerini göstermeleri bundan. Osmanlı bunlar daha, Osmanlı! Osmanlı'dan da beter..."

"They don't want Turkish women among them. It's a pretense, their belief in Atatürk's reforms, in equality of the sexes. They think our frequenting their haunts just to talk about art, to make friends with artists, is an insult to their manhood. They'd rather exhibit a portion of their anatomy than take part in an argument. They're Ottomans, Ottomans, worse than Ottomans..."

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid, 63.

This might seem on its face to be an endorsement of typical nationalist rhetoric, (and indeed, Erbil's real life defense of Kemalism initially seems antithetical to her other stated political commitments). But if read more closely, we see that Nermin uses the image of Atatürk not as a metonym for the national community, but rather as a rhetorical trope to establish a border between an 'us' and a 'them'. As Fludernick says, "many political and ethically inflected narratives...repair the ambivalence and indefinite borders of the collective by resorting to the imposition of an authoritative us vs. them-discourse."<sup>575</sup> Nermin does not invoke Atatürk here to say, "Look, we're all national citizens taking part in a modernizing project." Rather, she references him as a way to morally condemn those who hypocritically subscribe to modern mores while they, in reality, are worse than Ottomans, (a polarizing 'they' if there ever was one). Atatürk is not a calling in to the national community. It is a calling out of individuals whom Nermin wants to write out of her ideal collective.

#### A Plot Against We-ness

Adding to the ambiguous oedipal politics of the novel, "The Father" section immediately follows "The Girl", and almost completely shifts its focus from Nermin to her father, who is on his deathbed. The section is told from his perspective and spends a great deal of time within a

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<sup>575</sup> Fludernick, "The Many," 154.

stream-of-consciousness narrative, trying work through various documents and information about life and murder of the revolutionary communist militant leader, Mustafa Suphi. The phrase “Who killed Suphi?” is repeated numerous times throughout the chapter, in response to the mysterious assassination of the leader on the Black Sea in 1921. In her book of essays, Erbil admits that she was obsessed with researching his case while writing the novel, and so decided to devote space in her novel to this famous Turkish leftist. It constitutes an odd, collage-like addition of a non-fiction reporting element in an otherwise fictional novel. But it must have been more than just a pet project of Erbil’s, if the father refers to it so much while on his deathbed. Suphi’s case, framed by the question, “Suphi’yi kim öldürdü?” (“Who killed Suphi?”), acts as a fascinating catalyst for questioning the meaning of belonging, whether it be to a class, a nation, or to an international cause. At various points Nermin’s father asks the question, and the accused runs the gamut. In one flashback, he gets into a fight with the captain of his ship about Suphi’s murderer.

—Suphi'den ne istediniz?

—Onu öldüren sizsiniz, dedi adam.

...

—Sakın Suphi'i de öldürmesin Bolşevikler!...

—Açık konuş, Suphi'yi sen mi öldürdün?

—Bana bak, al aklını başına, bunca adam ölüyor; Romrom Anam ölüyor, babam ölüyor, oğlum ölüyor, Suphi'den ne bana! Onu bu milletin kolektif vicdanı öldürmüştür olsa olsa.

—Yalan, yalan, bu milletin kolektif vicdanı yoktur ki öldürsün Suphi'yi, bana bir tek suçlu gerek hem hi alayım hıncımı ondan...

—Hastir! İbretsiz deli!

Kutaviyi kaptı indirdi kafama:

—Çık git, çık git bu evden, hain, bir daha görünme gözümel!...

—What did you want from Suphi?

—The one who killed him was you, the man said.

...

—Calm down, the Bolsheviks wouldn't have killed Suphi.

—Tell me frankly, did you kill Suphi?

— Look here, come to your senses, so many have died, Mother Romrom has died, my father has died, my mother, my son has died. What's Suphi to me! The nation's collective conscience killed him, if you ask me.

—A lie, a lie, this nation has no collective conscience. I need a guilty man on whom to wreak vengeance...

—Go to hell, you lunatic!

He grabbed his stick and brought it down on my head:

—Get out of my house, you traitor! Let me never set eyes on you again...

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At another point, he explains his theory about Suphi's murderer to his daughter.

Hayat felsefimizden açtım Nermin'e... Suphi'yi öldüreni biliyorum dedim; Rus-İngiliz anlaşması, biraz da Yunan-Amerikan birleşmiş milletler, yani insanlık; çünkü Allah ister unutulım aslımızı hep, sadece insan olduğumuzu bilelim

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<sup>576</sup> Erbil, *Tuhaf*, 112-3.

I shared a bit of my life philosophy with Nermen...I said I knew who had killed Suphi. The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, the Greek-Americans. the United Nations, in other words, humanity; for Allah bids us to forget our origin. Let's acknowledge that we are mere human beings.

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Everyone and every group is suspect. The motivation for the man's murder is so complex, potentially caught up in everything from interpersonal grudges, to international intrigue, that one cannot even begin to say in whose hands the fate of one man's life rested. This sort of forensic questioning of belonging expands on the other questions of belonging posed in the book. This time, the issue is presented in the form of a meandering stream of consciousness. Constant questions emerge about 'we' and 'them', addressed to a changing group of audiences and groups. This is exemplary of Fludernick's point that intermentality can be represented in fiction in ways that are not possible in empirical reality.

One repeated theme the father ponders during his soliloquy is that of loyalty: what should the loyalties to class be? And how can one be a class traitor as opposed to a national traitor?

Neden hain oluyorum ihanet ediyorum sınıfıma şimdi? Bu sözler de yeni, soysuz!...eskiden hain büyüklerdi, bize düşmezdi...Şimdi? Şimdi hain herkes, herkes jurnalcı.

Why should I be a traitor to my class now? These are new-fangled, worthless words... In the old days, treason was for the great ones, not for the likes of us... And now? Now everyone's a traitor, everyone's an informer

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid, 121.

“The Father” section is an extended discussion of the meaning of loyalty to the nation vs. class, and of who deserves to be remembered as a hero or a traitor. Throughout his long soliloquies at the end of his life, the father questions the validity of every myth of belonging, asking how national citizenship does not protect one from being betrayed or becoming a traitor.

Bir elimde Yasin-i Şerif, bir elimde meç, kemence bir elimde, oy ben hangi milletten hangi sınıftanım be!..
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With the 36th verse of the Koran in my one hand, a sword and a fiddle in the other, tell me, oh tell me, to which nation, to which class do I belong!..
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Although seemingly even more disjointed than the other sections of the book, “The Father” fits seamlessly fit into the rest of the novel if one reframes an understanding of its political themes as the attempt to delineate and imagine one’s own authentic group identity. If Nermin’s only concern is to stake out “a private space for the flourishing of a complex and isolated subjectivity”<sup>580</sup> against the allegorizing impulses of the nation, then the two middle chapters of the book, and “The Father” and “The Mother”, (which I will discuss next), remain disjointed and absurd. But if one thinks instead about how every character is, in his or her own way, negotiating

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>580</sup> Irzik, “Allegorical,” 565.

the emblemization of 'we', then the novel engages a single unified theme. It helps to settle the seeming contradiction, for example, of Erbil's insistence on defending Atatürk and his reforms without having to designate her allegiance as reductively nationalistic. Her political proclamations were an abiding commitment to a kind of literary ethos which does not shy away from ambiguity. As literature can show, the richness of character's inner life is inexhaustible because of the ways that myriad collectives call upon subjectivity, and not despite them.

### **The Uncanny Crowd**

The diverse strategies of the novel come together to challenge the reduction of 'we' to the nation in the third section of the novel, titled "Anne" ("The Mother," 137-49). This short section of the book takes place in an undefined realm between fiction and reality, with certain fantastical elements intruding on an otherwise plausible scene from Nermin's life: the reception after her father's death. In this chapter, Nermin's mother demands that she invite the funeral guests over to the house for tea after the service. Nermin calls to them on their way out of the graveyard and shouts, "Durun durun, dönün, buraya gelin; önce bize gidilecek ve çay içilecek; annem öyle istedi." ("Stop, stop, turn back, come here. We have to go to my house first for some tea, my mother says so...")<sup>581</sup> But the 'we' here immediately becomes a 'they' as the guests follow behind her through the streets to their house.<sup>582</sup> The road keeps seeming longer the farther they all walk,

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<sup>581</sup> Erbil, *Tuhaf*, 137.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid. Here, the Turkish and English texts are quite different in their use of deictics. In the Turkish Nermin quotes her mother saying, "They will come to us."

and as Nermin looks back at the crowd following her, their dimensions have grown very tall, silent and upright, making a terrifying scene as they walk four or five abreast.<sup>583</sup> Then the road begins to fill with water, and eventually the whole group must continue to the house by swimming. Then it recedes and Nermin is able to walk again, but the crowd has continued on unabated behind her the whole time. They are like a dark relentless force in this dream-like scene. When they arrive, there are so many guests that Nermin barely knows what to do.

Bunlar ayakkabılarını çıkarırlarsa, soyunurlarsa, bizim evin girişindeki ufacık sahanlığa sığmayacak; annem de ortada yok. Ne yapacağım, bu insanlarla ne konuşacağım? Bu akrabalardan utanırdı annem, bizi de utandırmıştı.

If they all take off their shoes, their overcoats, there'll be no room in our tiny hallway for everything. I can't see my mother, what am I going to do with these people, what am I going to talk about with them? These are the relatives of whom she was ashamed, and she made us feel ashamed as well.

584

Even though these guests are family members, they are both terrifying and shame-inducing for both mother and daughter in their strangeness and their potential for judgement. As soon as they enter the house, they begin nitpicking Nermin and asking probing questions. In the menacing way that Nermin has described them, it is clear that these are uncanny persons coming into her house, ones who share some familial connection or similarity that cannot be named. In this way,

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<sup>583</sup> At this point in the narration, the gender makeup of the crowd is unclear, as is Nermin's exact age, two important details which are (I believe) intentionally left unclear.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid, 138.

Erbil dramatizes the experience of feeling estranged from relatives: people with whom we are meant to share a bond, with whom we supposedly form a 'we', but who, in reality, are often little more than strangers. The eerie mood of the scene, created by fantastical elements, works to emphasize the relatives' remoteness.

But more than merely being estranged relatives, the people who come to Nermin's house for the funeral reception are also unrecognizable as compatriots. As the crowd of relatives streams into the house, refusing to take off their shoes, an unidentified voice lists off their names and the towns they come from.

Onlar içeri girerken bir ses adlarını bağıyor: Muharrem İsmail Hemşinden; Mamuldan Seyfettin Abdurrahman İslam, Hacı Salih Vakfikebirden, Temel, Oruç, Meryem, Akife, Zehra; Çayelinden babanın hısımları Bilal Kaptan, Ali Reis, Hafize Hala, Bilginol boyaları kızkardeşleri, İshak oğulları, Behzat oğulları, Sabit oğulları, Kibaroğulları Zehra Yenge. Babanın dişçisi Bekir karısı - onları tanıyorum

As they enter, a voice shouts their names: from Hemshin, Muharrem Ismail; from Mamul, Seyfettin Abdurrahman Islam and Hacı Salih; from Vakfikebir, Temel, Oruch, Meryem, Akife, Zehra; my father's relatives from Chayelin, Captain Bilal, Skipper Ali, Aunt Hafize; the clan from Bilginol, their sisters, the sons of Ishak, the sons of Behzat, the sons of Sabit, the Kibaroglu family, Aunt Zehra. Bekir, my father's dentist, and his wife (I know them)

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Along with the names, Nermin does not know the towns. They are mostly the names of towns and villages on the Eastern Black Sea coast, on the opposite side of the country. Listed this way, they became a cascade of anonymous names and places, which overwhelms Nermin. Even with

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid, 140-1.

each person identified, they remain a crowd. They even wear foreign looking hats: rural looking green berets, and not felt hats. Even as blood relatives, these fellow citizens do not live in Nermin's mind, as Benedict Anderson says, in the image of their communion.<sup>586</sup>

Rather than try to make sense of the details, Nermin calls out to the kitchen to have 100 cups of tea made. Her mother is upset by this, asking if Nermin thinks she is throwing a party on the day of her father's funeral. The two of them argue and Nermin's mother yells at her, "I told you to invite our relatives!... Those who aren't relatives, leave the house!" It turns out Nermin actually couldn't distinguish between strangers and relatives after all. The mother tries to help with Nermin with crowd control, yelling at some of the guests, for which Nermin tries to apologize. But Nermin's mother becomes enraged by all of the interlopers and hypocrites coming to call on the day of her husband's death.

Bırak beni bırak içimi dökeyim şu ataşe militer karısı olacak aç kibarabir adam sanıyor  
dumbunu ben pis Lazlar demiş bizim için mahallenin kokusunu değiştirmişiz

Leave me alone! I want to give a piece of my mind to that hungry noblewoman who fancies herself the wife of the military attache. I hear she's called us 'dirty Laz' behind our backs. She says we've changed the smell of the neighborhood!

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<sup>586</sup> Anderson, *Imagined*, 6.

<sup>587</sup> Erbil, *Tuhaf*, 143.

All of the tumult and chaos is a demonstration which exposes the false premises underlying familial belonging and, by extension, national belonging. What exactly are the ties that bind this crowd of rude strangers? When Nermin is brought face-to-face with the supposed imagined community of the nation, family members no less, they do little more than talk behind her back and soil her carpet. Even when a ritualized tropic invocation of national belonging is made when Nermin's party comrade Ihsan plays the melody of the Tenth Anniversary March on the piano, the crowd is upset and proclaims 'La-İllahi-illallah' in defiance of the Kemalist legacy. Then, when the youth in the room begin to dance along to the song as the piano plays by itself, the older conservative members of the crowd cry out, "I won't forgive, I won't forgive, I won't forgive this!" in unison.<sup>588</sup> Here, the symbolic meaning of Atatürk and his cultural reforms turns the crowd into two hostile camps, with one side chanting "Led by a man the world respects" in praise of Atatürk and the other crying "La-İllahi-illallah" to proclaim that no one shall take God's place. In this instance, nationalist slogans and songs are not a unifying force invoking a universal we-ness, they are a casus belli among strangers.

In the same scene, other symbolic men go unrecognized by the crowd. One of Nermin's relatives, Abdurrahman, becomes interested in the pictures hanging on the wall and asks who they are.

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid, 144

“Kızum bu çimdir?” diye soruyor duvara asılı bir tablo göstererek tespihli eliye,  
“Kayinpederun muydur yoksa?” “Değil amca, bir yazarımızdır.” “Neyumuzdur neyumuz?”  
Hilmi yetişip, “Amca, o büyük Türk yazarıdır” diye anlatmaya koyuluyor. “Hiç duymamuşum  
adunu,” diyor Abdurrahman.

“My girl, who’s this? Is it your father-in-law, perhaps?” “No, Uncle, that’s one of our famous  
writers.” “Our what, our what?” Hilmi comes to my aid, explaining, “Uncle, that’s a great  
Turkish writer.” “Never heard his name before,” observes Abdurrahman.

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The famous writer (who is not identified) is a nobody to Abdurrahman, and certainly not ‘one of our great writers’ to him. The literary canon here is not a means for synchronizing membership in a community of potential associates and across vast orders of spatiotemporal change.<sup>590</sup> It is just another cultural signifier that serves to divide those who are supposedly related. If this wasn’t problematic enough, Nermin also has a picture of Lenin hanging in their house.

Safiye Yenge, bir başka resmin kim olduğunu soruyor. “O da büyük adamlardan biridir,”  
diyorum. “Adu nedir?” “İliç,” diyorum. “Gavur mudur?” “Evet.” “O binam neyumuz olur ki?”

Aunt Safiye asks about another picture on the wall. “That’s also a great man,” I answer.  
“What’s his name?” “Ilych.” “Is he an infidel?” “Yes.” “What’s he to us, then?”

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<sup>589</sup> Ibid. It should be noted that in the Turkish text, Abdurrahman’s dialogue is written in a way that accentuates his non-standard accent in sharp contrast to the Istanbul accent used by both Nermin and Hilmi.

<sup>590</sup> Silverstein, “Whorfianism,” 117.

<sup>591</sup> Erbil, *Tuhaf*, 145.

Aunt Safiye could care less that Lenin was a very great man who saved his country and its workers, as Nermin's other party comrade Hilmi claims. Aunt Safiye's standard for being part of 'us' is his Islamic faith, pure and simple. By this token, it should be understood that her use of 'us' here excludes many people in the room, including those with whom she is speaking.

At this point in the scene, it is clear that there is a generalized confusion about who everyone is and to which subgroups everyone belongs. What started out as a crowd unified by Nermin's father's death has come apart based on family membership, geography, manners, politics, religious, cultural tastes, and even hat choices. But among all of this division, one new collective will be formed: between Nermin, her comrades, and her mother. In the first part of the book, Nermin's relationship with her mother is contentious to say the least. Her mother is conservative and severely disapproves of her carousing with men in cafes and her seeming disregard for her own virginity, (which Nermin sarcastically calls the magic veil of her body). But when a group of strangers intrudes into their home and insults both Nermin and her mother, the two find a momentary solidarity that eludes them in normal circumstances. As one of the relatives warns the other to avoid touching anything lest they be defiled in the house of a Godless 'communis' (komonis), Nermin's mother loses her temper.

Annem "bana bakın akrepler, çeninizi kapayın, ben sağken kızıma söz söyletmem, ben hem anası, hem babasıyım onun; çakallar siz komonis nedir ne bilirsiniz, şimdi benim ağzımı açtırmayın ha!"

“Look here, scorpions”, warns my mother, “You shut your mouths! While I’m alive no one can say that about my daughter/ I’m her mother and her father both. You wouldn’t know a communis if you saw one, you jackals, don’t get me started now!”

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Nermin’s mother curses her relatives to their faces and starts attacking them. The scene becomes increasingly dreamlike, with a sack of birds being released, and Nermin proclaiming to her estranged relatives:

“Durun, beni dinleyin ey kardeşlerim, büyüklerim, durun, boşuna kan dökmeyin, sizler Tanrı’yı tanırırsınız; öfkeyi, kötülüğü bırakın, hepimiz aynı kandanız, gelin el ele verelim, gelin ben sizi kurtaracağım, sizin iyi Allahınız olacağım, arkamdan gelin..”

“Stop, listen to me, my brothers and sisters, my elders, stop! Don’t shed blood in vain, you’re believers! Give up anger and evil, we’re all the same blood. Let’s all hold hands. Come to me and I’ll save you, I’ll be your good God, follow me..”

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This nonsensical appeal to Nermin’s messianism as a way to forge a new group bond ridicules the superstitious notions of community upon which her relatives base their understanding of we-ness. But when they refuse even this, Nermin joins her mother in chasing them out of the house.

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid, 147.

As they finally round up all of the bigoted relatives and expel them from the house, Nermin's mother is uncharacteristically affectionate and loving to her daughter.

Açık kapıdan, önce kuşlar, ardından atmacalar süzülüp çıkıyor. Annem yanıma geliyor, öpüyor beni. "Ben demiştim, oğlum yok ama, bu benim hem kızımdır hem oğlumdur, hem oğlumdur hem kızımdır!" Ağlıyor.

Out the open door fly the birds, followed by the hawks. My mother comes up and kisses me. "I've said it, I have no son, but she's my son and my daughter both." She weeps as she speaks.

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Although the scene follows a dreamlike logic, one can conclude from its conclusion that the bond that eluded Nermin and her mother when it was based on a mere blood-relationship has finally come to fruition through the solidarity of common struggle. In their rejoicing, Nermin, her mother, and her friends all talk about "winning a war," making it clear that class struggle and family feuding have undergone a process of Freudian condensation. I interpret this to mean that in her dream, Nermin desires a collective that is neither patriarchal nor traditional, something that neither her political comrades nor her family life have been able to provide. It is only through an imagined self-chosen family of feminist solidarity, which happens to include her mother, that this ideal collective comes into being. Rather than being "tragicomic representations of the compulsion to allegorize" as Sibel Irzik claims of other dream scenes in novels, the dream

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<sup>594</sup> Ibid, 148.

here is not about the burden of bearing imposed destinies and meanings, but the fantasy of a new collective which Nermin would willingly join.<sup>595</sup>

Bringing together the themes of Nermin’s intellectual development in “The Girl,” the meditations on socialist politics and treachery in “The Father,” and the crowd of strangers in the “The Mother,” the final section, “The Woman”, follows Nermin many years later as an adult woman reflecting on her life choices. In it, Nermin is much older, married, and reflecting on the time when she convinced her husband to move in with her to a working-class neighborhood as part of the socialist effort to go “down to the people.”

“Halka inmek” sözünü duyunca azıcık irkilmişti ama ses çıkarmamıştı. Sadece içinden “halka varmak, halka çıkmak demek istiyorlar” diye geçirmişti.

She’d shuddered slightly when she heard the phrase ‘Go down to the people’, but had said nothing. Only, deep inside, she thought, “They mean ‘reach the people, or rise to the people’, of course.”

596

The ‘they’ in this particular instance is already a select group, that of the aloof and tone deaf Turkish leftists who are trying to relate to another idealized collective: the amorphous and imaginary solidarity known simply as *the people*. This passage is a perfect encapsulation of Nermin’s constant struggle to define we-ness, specifically through the specific topography of a socialist slogan, because it shows her own individual struggles with reconciling the imaginary

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<sup>595</sup> Irzik, “Allegorical,” 556.

<sup>596</sup> Erbil, *Tuhaf*, 154.

ideal of 'the people' with those who actually live in her working class neighborhood. This fourth section offers a fascinating self-criticism of the leftist imaginary in the way that Nermin desperately longs for the working class to act on its revolutionary agency while also recoiling at its real-life attitudes and beliefs. Nermin's colleagues try again and again to embed themselves in the people, oftentimes by going into the street and trying to join crowds, only to have their ideals shattered by a hostile public.

Konuřmalar, toplantılar, tartiřmalarla bařlayan alıřmalar, yurumeler, kovalanmalar, kamalar, tařlarla sopalarla yaralanmalar izledi..Kimi gunler, grup grup gecekodu mahallelerine gidip de, gerekleri; řimdiye dek nasıl kandırıldıklarını onlara anlatmaya bařladılar mıydı, ön saflarda kıpırtısız dinleyen insanların arasından birkaç kiři ıkıp da kafalarına irlili ufaklı tařları savunur savunmaz, demin ön sıralarda uysal, umut veren gızlerle kıpırtısızca dinleyenler birden dalgalanıyorlar, otekilerle birlikte "Moskova'ya! Moskova'ya!" diye bađrıřıyorlardı.

The party work which had begun with talks, meetings, and discussions, later involved marches, flights and pursuits, fights and bruises from sticks and stones...On certain days, when groups of members visited the shantytowns to explain to the inhabitants how they'd been hoodwinked until now, when they were made the target of rocks, great and small, hurdled by a few individuals in the back rows, those in the front rows who'd been listening would waver, join the others and shouted with them, "To Moscow, to Moscow!"

597

The slogan "To Moscow!" (Moskova) was a popular Cold War slogan used to call out the treachery of leftists in Turkey, who were thought to be working on behalf of the Soviet Union

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<sup>597</sup> Ibid, 154.

Rather than seeing the leftists as helpful compatriots who are dedicated to freeing “the people” from the yolk of local oppressors, the inhabitants of the shantytown judge the leftists themselves as under the sway of foreign oppressors, brainwashed into undermining the Turkish nation.

When Nermin herself decides to make a commitment to move to a working-class neighborhood, her individual efforts don’t pan out much better. In an apt metaphor for cultural snobbery and tone-deafness, Nermin has her piano delivered to her shanty in the slums, and when it doesn’t fit through the door, she plays Chopin for gawking residents in her yard.<sup>598</sup> Nermin tries to befriend her neighbors, who mostly look on with morbid curiosity. When she begins to help take care of the baby of a woman named Ruhsar, she is finally able to be on friendly terms with one of her neighbors. But in a false moment of intimacy, while they sit in the yard smoking cigarettes, she makes the mistake of talking too freely:

Bahçede bir öğlen sonu sıcağının gevşegiyle içindeydi. Hiçbir şey düşünmeden aklına geldiği gibi apaçık kocasıyla ya da partili bir arkadaşıyla konuşur gibi konuşuyordu. Kızcağız Bayan Nermin’in “Tanrı’nın hiçbir yoksulun bugüne kadar işine yaramadığı” hakkındaki düşüncelerini dinledikten sonra ayağa fırladı, bebeği elinden kapıp, “Tövbe de Nermin Abla, tövbe de çarpılırsın,” dedi ve gitti.

In the yard, in the warmth of a late afternoon, she was caught off guard and talked freely, as though to her husband or to some Party member. After the young woman had listened to Ms. Nermin’s thoughts on how ‘Allah has never been known to be of any help to the poor and needy’, she jumped up and grabbed her baby. “Repent, sister Nermin, repent, or He shall smite you,” she cried as she fled.

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<sup>598</sup> It is not clear if the piano arriving to the poor neighborhood is an invention of Erbil’s. The trope is also found in many Turkish films and TV shows – see for example, *Yeditepe İstanbul*. Thanks to Dr. Jeannette Okur for the insight.

Nermin believes that she and Rushar shares a momentary solidarity, and so does the reader, based on the mood of the scene, which related in free indirect discourse; but this mood is quickly disrupted by these two female characters' contrasting voices, each of which enunciates diametrically opposed worldviews— socialism and Islam. As Fludernick would say, the implied uniformity of the mother and Nermin, joined momentarily through the act of caretaking, is interrupted through direct speech, which reveals political disagreement.

In the end, Nermin's attempts to integrate her life into those of the workers in the shantytown fails and end up straining her marriage to the breaking point. Her husband Bedri had agreed to move to Tarlataşlı with her, but throughout the experience never stopped critiquing her political naivety In one particularly heated discussion, Bedri calls out Nermin and the other leftists like her for being fooled by imaginary collectives.

—Halkın ne istediğini bilen bir kişi varsa içinizde beri gelsin! Pipoşunu doldurmaya koyuldu, ağır ağır bastırıyordu tütüne. Kafaları milattan öncede, yaşamaları on üçüncü yüzyılda kalmış bir yığın yaratığın karşısına geçip “Sömürülüyorsunuz...demekle adam kandırılacağını mı sanıyorsunuz?

—If there's even one person among you who knows what the people really want, let him step forward!... He set about filling his pipe, pressing the tabacco in firmly. Do you think for a moment that you can seduce a bunch of creatures with B.C. heads and 10th century ways by telling them they've being exploited...

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<sup>599</sup> Erbil, *Tuhaf*, 168.

Nermin is furious with Bedri's choice of the word 'seduce', jumping to her feet. This is the type of word that opportunists use to undermine the unity of the Party, not one fitting of a fellow comrade, and husband no less. She defends the nobility of 'the people' and goes so far as to suggest that Bedri is just like a counter-revolutionary and an enemy of the people. Bedri is unmoved.

—Papağnılık istemez, dedi Bay Bedri, gene piposundan çekerek. Tavırlarında sanki bir akıl hastasına gösterilen büyüklük, bir hoşgörü vardı.

—Sana ne derler biliyor musun? Sana, sana hain...

-Oh, come off, less of that parrot stuff, huffed Bay Bedri, puffing on his pipe. His manner showed some of the lofty tolerance displayed toward psychopaths.

—Do you know what they'll call you? You, you traitor...

With this, Bedri loses his characteristically cool temper, shatters their window by flinging his pipe at it, and storms out of the house. After a whole spate of arguments and insults, it is the word 'traitor' that finally make Bedri snap. Nermin's zealous commitment to an idealized collective ends up costing her the one firm commitment she had in her life to her husband. But rather than lament his leaving, Nermin only becomes more resolute in her idealism. She feels revulsion at

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<sup>600</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

having dedicated so much of her life to a mediocre man, to mediocre men in general, since the time she was young. At the end of the book, Nermin stares into a mirror and asks herself:

“Yoksa ben yaşamımı heder eden biri miyim?” diye sordu aynaya içi sızıldayarak. “Yoksa ben, anamın dediğince ne kiliseye, ne camiye yarayan biri miyim? Ben yoksa, boşu boşuna başını sivri kayalara vuran, her vuruşta onulmaz yaralar alan, her yaralanışta ‘İşte, bakın beni gene bu toplumun yaraladı’ diye kanlarını akıtı akıtı dolaşan...”

“Am I wasting my life, then?” she complained to the mirror. “Or am I am of no use to the church or mosque, like my mother says? Or am I hitting my head against sharp rocks for no reason, suffering unhealable wounds each time and with each injuring saying, “Look what the social order’s done to me again.”?

602

In her concluding soliloquy, she wonders about the meaning of loyalty, just like her father had on his death bed. Why, she asks herself, had she dedicated so much to “that enemy of the people, that pipe-smoking immoralist,” as well as to other men (whom she recalls in her soliloquy) with whom she had meaningless trysts. This makes her think about the meaning of love, and whether the word is insufficient to explain her commitment to the people. In the end, she declares to herself:

İNSANLARI SEVMEK ZORUNDAYIM BEN. Zorundayım diyorum, çünkü onlar kurtulmadan ben de kurtulamayacağım.

I’M OBLIGED TO TO LOVE THE PEOPLE. Obligated, I say, because so long as they’re not free, then neither am I.

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<sup>602</sup> Ibid, 181.

And here, at the end of the book, we are finally given an answer for why Nermin has spent so much time looking for a collective, despite all of the disappointments, rudeness, and treachery she has experienced: collectives are the key to her freedom. In Fredric Jameson's much debated article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", from which the notion of national allegories originally comes, his actual purpose is to claim that Third World texts have a better grasp of the relationship between the public and the private, a relationship which is sustained through the figural strategy of allegory. Through these allegories, private lives in Third World novels offer "a possibility of grasping the social totality."<sup>604</sup> According to Robert Tally, this idea was meant to be similar to Jameson's other concept of cognitive mapping, whereby allegory offers a strategy of narrative figuration for trying to understand the world from ones' own subjective position.<sup>605</sup> Grasping the collective is the key to private liberation, because "only a collective unity—whether that of a particular class, the proletariat, or its organ of consciousness," the revolutionary party—can achieve this transparency."<sup>606</sup> According to Jameson, the individual alone cannot square the circle of ideological conditioning by sheer lucidity; the individual requires collectives in order to achieve consciousness and liberation. By explaining that her

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>604</sup> Jameson, "Third-World," 85.

<sup>605</sup> Robert T. Tally Jr and Steven Schmidt, "Fredric Jameson and the Controversy over "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.," Global South Studies: A Collective Publication with The Global South, 2017.

<sup>606</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 283.

compulsion to love the people is the prerequisite for her own freedom, Nermin suggests a commitment to a collective that, for practical purposes, hasn't yet been brought into existence. Her love is utopian in the sense that it expresses the yearning for a collectivity.<sup>607</sup>

In *Tuhaf Bir Kadın* (and in *al-Bāb al-Maftūh*, as I will soon show), the different notions of we-ness that are invoked at different points do not add up to or reach for their finality in the nation-state. They aspire, rather, for utopian notions of collectivity which are gestured at by smaller groupings which provide a glimpse of a better world. They are attempts to deliver on the utopian promises of both Marxism and feminism. That they appear in these novels through “strategies of confrontation, fusion, contradiction, differentiation, and ambiguation”<sup>608</sup> is a not a testament to their contradictions, and does not suggest that they share the same failures as state nationalism. It is rather a testament to the fact that grasping the social totality:

must always involve a painful “decentering” of the consciousness of the individual subject... It would be a mistake to think that anyone ever really learns to live with this ideological “Copernican revolution,” any more than the most lucid subjects of psychoanalysis ever really achieve the habit of lucidity and self-knowledge; the approach to the Real is at best fitful, the retreat from it into this or that form of intellectual comfort perpetual.<sup>609</sup>

It is for this reason that alternative collectives to the nation which show up in Erbil's work are my own explanation for how Marx and Freud ‘have leaked into her work.’

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<sup>607</sup> Jameson, *Unconscious*, 291.

<sup>608</sup> Fludernik, “The Many,” 156.

<sup>609</sup> Jameson, *Unconscious*, 283-4.

## Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt

Because of its fragmented and experimental nature, *Tuhaf Bir Kadın* serves as a good example of how narrative ambiguity serves to undermine the stable imaginary of the nation. Even so, other approaches to novel writing, including the classic formula of a realist Bildungsroman, can also be shown to undermine the supposedly stable deictics of national we-ness. Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt's novel *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* offers a fascinating comparison with *Tuhaf Bir Kadın* because of how it shares the story of a young socialist woman's development while diverging sharply in its aesthetics and narrative style.

*Al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* tells the sexual and political coming of age story of a young woman (Layla) in her high school and university years, which coincide with many important events in the national history of Egypt in the late 1940s and 1950s, as the country attempted to break free from British imperial control. These events include the Cairo Fires, the Officers Coup, and the beginning of the Suez Crisis. Layla is at home living with her parents while her brother Mahmoud fights the British in the Canal Zone. But while others are joining in the nationalist fight on the front lines, Layla is mainly confined to the interpersonal dramas of her family and colleagues. Her struggle in the novel is to find an 'open door' towards freedom from middle class societal expectations.

Much has been made of Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt's long creative silence between the publishing of her first novel, *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* in 1960, and the flurry of short stories and autobiographical works that were published almost 25 years later in 1986, and continued until the year after her

death in 1996. While her first novel supposedly “captures the idealism and freedom that was empowered by the Free Officers’ revolution in 1952 and confirmed in 1956”,<sup>610</sup> the moment would soon fade in the late 1960s, as an oppressive statism, military defeats, and the empty promises of Nasserist feminism made the book seem, in the words of Hilary Kilpatrick, “irremediably bathed in a positive light.”<sup>611</sup> Elsadda claims that al-Zayyāt finally corrected her earlier optimism thirty-four years later, with the novel *Owner of the House* (*Sahib al-Bayt*), “a powerful feminist critique of the ambivalence of nationalist and Third world leftist politics toward gender.”<sup>612</sup> While making this claim, Elsadda admits to echoing Magda al-Nowaihi’s conclusion that al-Zayyāt’s silence arose from “ambivalence about power and its structures.”<sup>613</sup> Both scholars imply that *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* is somehow not ambivalent about the dominant nationalist discourse, that this discourse’ presence in the text was the novel’s only rhetorical thrust. Unfortunately, this is a common way of framing literary historiography. Almost all of modern Egyptian literature gets framed by these momentous affective turning points, from the zenith of 1956 optimism to the nadir of 1967 despair. Scholars read the moods, symbolism, characters, and most importantly language of mid-century novels according to their relationship to these spots on the political timeline, smoothing out discrepancies to this narrative by appealing

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<sup>610</sup> El Sadda, *Gender*, 99.

<sup>611</sup> Hilary Kilpatrick, “The Egyptian Novel from Zaynab to 1980,” *Modern Arabic Literature*, 1992, 251.

<sup>612</sup> El Sadda, *Gender*, 100.

<sup>613</sup> Magda M. Al-Nowaihi, “Resisting Silence in Arab Women’s Autobiographies,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 4 (2001): 478

to the commonly accepted mantra that literature boils down to the national story. Even though Elsadda acknowledges the other struggles which take place in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*, such as those over the family, middle-class decorum, intimate male violence, and even Marxist class struggle, she frames these conflicts as mere phases of a journey taken together by the nation and the individual.

Yet, Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt explained her intentions in writing *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*, as trying to crystallize three levels of significance: “The first one deals with the development of the female protagonist, and it is related to the second, which deals with developments in Egypt at that period. As for the third level, it incorporates a commentary on the values of the middle class and its practices and how they prevent the country from a takeoff.”<sup>614</sup> This description is fascinating, not because it stands as direct proof of an author making the explicit link between the biographical and the national-political, but because she posits a third level: that of class. Specifically, she blames the middle class as that group which prevents the country from reaching its potential. Her novel *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* does precisely that by constantly evoking images of the nation united in struggle, only to have the invocation be interrupted and degraded into smaller social groups and classes, her own middle class being the chief disruptor.

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<sup>614</sup> Latifa Zayyat, “Introduction,” in *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Cairo: American Univ in Cairo Press, 2004).

### *Al-Bāb al-Maftūh*

In Fludernick's terms, al-Zayyāt uses various narratological approaches in order to fluctuate between the communal agency of a whole group, (the liberated nation), and that of several subgroups, (workers, students, petit-bourgeois elements, royalists), followed by the foregrounding of individual agency of a person within the overall collective, (that of the character of Layla). In various sections of the novel, the narrator shifts the deictic correspondence of 'we' and especially 'they' (which oftentimes would be the inclusive 'we' from Layla's perspective) to expose the fissures in national belonging. This shifting occurs, it should be noted, with reference to 'we's that include those who are offstage, groups of people we would imagine, according to Anderson's homogeneous space-time of distinctive, differential membership, to be part of one national collective. For example, in the very opening scene of the novel, Al-Zayyāt describes the street scene on the evening of February 21, 1946, which is completely absent of the normal hustle and bustle of a crowded evening in the capital city. There are only small groups, "knots of two, three, or four engaged in conversation."<sup>615</sup> The narrator makes note of their variety of dialects and levels of education in their speech, even though the topic of each conversation is the violent clash between the British military and a crowd of forty thousand Egyptians. The conversation is not only made up of anonymous speakers, but is also centered on invoking shifting and heterogenous collectives.

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<sup>615</sup> Zayyāt, *Al-Bāb*, 5 and Zayyat, *Open Door*, 3

"...مظاهرة من ٤٠٠٠٠ شخص، مظاهرة قائمة اساساً ضد الإنجليز، يقوم الإنجليز يخرجوا لها"  
"فوتك إنت، إحنا برضه بلد الجدعنة"  
"...انا شخصياً أعتقد إن المظاهرة دي كانت مرحلة جديدة من مراحل كفاحنا الوطني"  
"ثم اشتراك العمال مع الطلبة والشعب كله"  
"باقول لك أنا دي بلد الجدعنة، دي حتى النسوان خرجت من بيوتها"

"A demonstration of forty thousand folks, a big show of protest against the British, that's what people came out for..."

"Don't forget we Egyptians are brave—a country of tough guys..."

"Now, personally, I consider this demonstration a new stage in our national struggle..."

"Then there's the way the workers joined the students. And everybody—all the Egyptian people."

"I'm telling you, this is a nation of toughies—even the women came out of their houses."

616

As the narrator has already emphasized, this group, which uses 'we', is itself no homogenous group, but is made up of various social groups, indexable by their various ways of speaking. But in their coming together in the street to speak about the day's events, the small crowds form a momentary 'we'. Interestingly, when they speak about the protestors who fought against the British, no configuration of 'we' is exhaustive of the entire national polity. Rather, each speaker references a specific group that performed a nationalist act. In order of the conversation those performers are 1) the forty thousand *folks*, 2) and then a clarifier that they are the people who came out to protest against the British, followed by 3) we are a nation and

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<sup>616</sup> Zayyāt, *Al-Bāb*, 6 and Zayyat, *Open Door*, 3-4

that nation, as a whole, is defined as 4) a country of tough guys.<sup>617</sup> The third speaker then refers to a new stage in 5) our national struggle, meaning that the actions of others should be interpreted as belonging to a national political project. Similar to the extension from action to characteristic, this speaker takes actions and fits them into a nationalist teleology, reframing the meaning of a collective action. He is followed by the fourth speaker who remarks on the way 6) the workers joined the students, thereby qualifying and parsing out subgroups among the protestors, but paradoxically in order to show how they have come together to form 7) everybody—all the Egyptian people. This is a great example of what Fludernick terms the “management of plurals” through speech, whereby the meaning of who counts as part of the nation is not transparent and totalizing but rather discursive and improvisory. This is the same motivation behind the final speaker who 8) draws women into the collective by merit of both their personal characteristics (being toughies) and their actions (coming out of their houses).

It bears repeating that while Anderson and others imagine nationality to be a primordial aspect of selfhood, emerging out of “an ontic realm beyond the contingent one of historical circumstances and happenings,” and that this realm itself comes from linguistic and language-laden representations, Silverstein reminds us that this phenomenon is, in fact, nothing more than

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<sup>617</sup> The translation here departs from the original Arabic in a crucial way here. In Arabic it says *إحنا بروضه بلد الجدع* , literally “we are also a country of the brave.” The English has “we Egyptians are brave—a country of tough guys” which makes it sound like two different collectives being invoked. In the English, then, the second speaker user posits the quality of braveness first to those protesting, and then extends from action to characteristics to be able to include all Egyptians. There is also the question of the word ‘folks’. It translates the word *شخص* which, because of counting rules in Arabic, is in the singular. In order to convey the sense of individuation that the Arabic includes but the English does not, a more literal translation might be “persons.”

a nationalist “we-voicing” that pragmatically frames whatever is narrated in its presupposition of unity of outlook.”<sup>618</sup> That is to say, in these opening pages al-Zayyāt does not show her readers the preexisting unity between the members of a nation who “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion,”<sup>619</sup> but rather, the actual discursive process by which members of a nation figure out who ‘we’ is. As national historical events take place in the real time of the novel, the initial attempt to understand and contextualize them manifests itself through this process of establishing the boundaries of ‘we’.

This process of negotiating pivotal events happens several times where important actors in national events are kept ‘offstage’ and not depicted directly. While Layla had been initially enraptured by her love for her cousin ‘Iṣām, even agreeing to get engaged, she becomes quickly disillusioned when he does not go off to the Canal Zone to fight the British as a partisan, like her brother Mahmud. As her feelings for ‘Iṣām weaken, she feels drawn instead to Mahmud and exchanged a series of letters with him. Like the conversation at the opening of the novel, the two of them discuss who counts as ‘we’. For Mahmud, ‘we’ are those like-minded partisans and freedom fighters who don’t sit idly by, (like ‘Iṣām), but who are working to forge an independent nation through struggle. In one letter to Mahmud, Layla asks him whether he and his comrades feel lonely and isolated. He responds:

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<sup>618</sup> Silverstein, “Whorfianism,” 109, 115.

<sup>619</sup> Anderson, *Imagined*, 6.

نعم، نحن معزولون، وليس هذا شعوري أنا فقط بل شعور جميع زملائي هنا، وإن كان هذا لا يؤثر فينا ولن يمنعنا من تأدية المهمة التي جئنا من أجلها. لا، إن الخيانة لا تهم، والجاسوسية لا تهم. إن الخونة والجواسيس قلائل شواذ يمكن استئصالهم. إن الذين عزلونا ببسوا الخونة ولا الجواسيس، إنهم الملايين من الناس الطيبين الذين يحبون مصر، يحبونها طالما لم يتعارض هذا الحب مع مصالحهم النفعية.

Yes. We certainly are isolated. I'm not the only one who feels that way, everyone here does, but it does not affect us so badly that we are incapable of fulfilling our mission, for whose sake we came here. But no—and even the betrayals and the spying are not particularly important; they do not make a big difference. In fact, those who are betraying us, and those who are spying on us, are really the exception; and they can be rooted out. The ones who have truly isolated us are not the traitors and the spies, but rather the millions of good people who love Egypt, but only as long as this love does not clash with their own selfish interests.

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This passage highlights the distinction between identity and action, but this time, neither participant in the conversation is trying to define the collective of the nation; rather, they are imagining a wholly different kind of 'we'. Mahmud is not seeking to define the Egyptian nation in its entirety, but only those who are truly committed to the cause of liberation. Mahmud casts millions of fellow Egyptians as traitors, as a 'they' in opposition to the project of liberation that Layla and Mahmud support. While there is a great collective of those fighting in the Canal Zone against the British—workers, military officers, students, and peasants—their collectivity born out of struggle does not ontically extend to everyone back home based merely on linguistic mechanisms of representation, like that of newspaper or reportage. In fact, knowing of the presence of the rest of the nation does not create a sense of communion; to the contrary, it underscores Layla and Mahmud's antagonism to them. The commonalities that draw Mahmud

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<sup>620</sup> Zayyāt, *Al-Bāb*, 172 and Zayyat, *Open Door*, 138-9

and Layla together with other freedom fighters are exactly the same ones that pushes Layla away from both 'Iṣām and the rest of her family. Mahmud says explicitly that although 'they' are fellow Egyptians, 'they' are nevertheless traitors. Like in "The Father" section of *Tuhaf Bir Kadin*, the concept of treachery is crucial, because it is the criteria by which one's actions are used to disqualify individuals from a collective, the name for determining the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the 'we.' This shocking condemnation gets to the heart of the alternative vision of a collective offered by al-Zayyāt in her supposedly optimistic nationalist novel. Specifically, she is referring to her third level of significance, that of the role of the middle class in the course of the country's history.

One of the pieces of evidence for suggesting the allegorical nature of the novel is that several of the pivotal political moments of the novel are mirrored by important events in Layla's life. Following this opening crowd scene, Layla menstruates for the first time. In another coincidence, Layla's engagement to her 'Iṣām begins its process of unravelling when she find out he is cheating on her with the maid, right before finding out about the Cairo Fires, a series of riots and arson events which burned down parts of upper class Cairo and which signaled the beginning of the end of British rule in the country in 1952. Leyla comes into the sitting room where a group of her friends and relatives are talking, at which point her brother Mahmud breaks the news that "the city's burning". The identity of the arsonists and their specific motivations remain unknown until this day and represent one of the great mysteries of Egyptian

history. And at the moment in which the fires first occur, the mystery is just as great. Mahmud tries to explain:

وينتزع صوته انتزاعاً وكأنه يجد صعوبة في الكلام:  
-الناس، الناس حرقوا السينمات وشارع فؤاد، والبلد كلها نار ودخان!  
وقالت ليلى بصوت باك:  
- الناس يحرقوا البلد؟! ليه؟ ليه نحرق بلدنا؟

His voice seemed to catch on something, to have difficulty leaving his throat. “People. People burned the cinemas, and Fuad Street. The whole city is on fire, it is all flame and smoke.”  
“People burning the city?” Leyla wailed. “Why? Why would we burn our own city?”

621

Leyla’s initial shock contains within it the naive notion of national unity, as though all residents of Cairo had equal ownership of it and the same desire to preserve it. But the fires were set specifically at movie theatres, restaurants, banks and hotels frequented by the upper class, exposing the obvious class rifts broiling the country at the same time as the fight against imperialism. Husayn, Layla’s brother’s comrade-in-arms and the person who will eventually become her love interest, corrects her:

الواقع إن الناس مظلومين، الناس خرجت عشان تحتج على المذبحة بتاعة الإسماعيلية، والسراي والعناصر الرجعية انتهزوا الفرصة عشان يطعنوا الحركة الوطنية.

“The truth is, the people have been wronged. Folks went out to protest the Ismailiya massacre, and then the Palace and reactionary elements took advantage of the situation in order to discredit the nationalist movement.”

<sup>621</sup> Zayyāt, *Al-Bāb*, 189 and Zayyat, *Open Door*, 148-9

Husayn immediately dispels Leyla's invocation of 'we' to reassert two diametrically opposed 'they's, speculating on motivations and tying the fires back to the battles of the Canal Zone. Even today, conspiracy theorists pin the blame for the fires on everyone from the Muslim Brotherhood, to the Egyptian Socialist Party, to the British themselves. The Cairo Fires are not recuperable to a unitary national narrative. This reassertion of division and belonging, commitment and treachery, closely parallels Layla's discovery of 'Iṣām's deceit. But given the nature of the Cairo Fires, as well as Mahmud's and Layla's letters about who counts as a true nationalist, it seems less as though it is national events which are paralleling Layla's life, but rather it is events which underscore how the nation's claim to offering universal membership is an illusion.

### **Diglossia vs. Enregistered Voices**

While many instances of this direct framing of collectives using deictics the novel, the use of registers and their attendant social stereotypes of speech also posit sub-grouped collectives. It is often noted that Laṭīfah al-Zayyāt stood out from her contemporaries by being one of those writers who used non-standard speech in her dialogue. Marilyn Booth writes in her introduction to *Open Door*: "In its very structure and language, the novel questions the culture's consignment to the margins...her colloquial is lively, precise, female: characters emerge in their choice of expression."<sup>623</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> Zayyāt, *Al-Bāb*, 190 and Zayyat, *Open Door*, 152

<sup>623</sup> Zayyat, "Introduction," xxvii

*Al-Bāb al-Maftūh* is a great example of an Egyptian novel whose conspicuous use of dialect has been heralded as iconoclastic. ‘Colloquial’ is once again held up as the great linguistic banner under which all non-hegemonic voices can rally, everyone from the illiterate peasant to the middle-class housewife. Booth is not the only one to notice the use of non-standard language in this novel in particular. In a recent attempt to re-canonize the novel, Ismail Fayed praises the novel saying, “al-Zayyāt embraced the mid-century trend of incorporating vernacular Arabic (which still endures today) and makes bold use of it, a feature that has to do with democratizing culture and breaking the binary of classical vs. colloquial. Consisting of about 30 to 40 percent vernacular, the novel has a sense of immediacy and is naturally divided into scenes.”<sup>624</sup>

Fayed’s assessment involves another invocation of the Fuṣḥa/‘āmmiyyah divide as corresponding to abiding variable opposites in modern Arab identity. But al-Zayyāt’s use of language in the novel is not merely diglossic (i.e. interchanging between two different registers), but makes expert use of diverse enregistered voices as a way to stage the conflict between social groups other than those represented by the ‘classical vs. colloquial’. A closer look enregistering strategies and the pragmatics of exchanges in the novel should help to move past speaking of the politics of language as being a binary choice between fixed registers which map onto the central social cleavages in society, towards a more fine-grained understanding of how register is the impression created by the co-occurrence of a sufficient number of enregistered features, and

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<sup>624</sup> Ismail Fayed, “Literary Gems: Latifa al-Zayat’s The Open Door,” Mada Masr (blog), accessed January 26, 2020, <https://madamasr.com/en/2017/03/31/feature/culture/literary-gems-latifa-al-zayats-the-open-door/>.

therefore, able to create the subtle impressions of unique characters with complex relationships to one another.

Marilyn Booth points to Layla's mother as an example of al-Zayyāt's adeptness at using spoken language. Her patterns of expressions and proverbs reflect her beliefs in standards of middle class behavior; likewise, the character Gamila and her mother Samia Hanim "betray their aspirations as they hover between the French loanwords that label coveted things and their own social and linguistic antecedents."<sup>625</sup> Fayed's observation here is completely correct. But the precise way that their aspirations are betrayed makes a difference. As noted in my earlier chapter on 'Abbās al-Aswānī, even smaller text fragments can carry more of their fair share of information about different social groups through the process of enregistered voices.

In an early scene in the book, Layla is in her room when her mother enters, demanding that she come downstairs to say hello to Samia Hanim. Layla refuses, remembering what a rich snob Samia Hanim is. In a passage of free indirect discourse, al-Zayyāt portrays Samia Hanim through Layla's memory of her:

وأغمضت عينها.. رأت سامية هانم في صالونها تقفز واقفة من القوتيل اللاكيه المشغول بـ«الأويسيون» وكأن كارثة قد وقعت، ويد أمها ممدودة معلقة في الهواء والسفرجي قد أدرك أنه خالف الأصول فتراجع بعد أن اقترب من أمها بصينية الشربات، وبدأ بزینب هانم، الضيفة المهمة. وهزت لیلی رأسها وهي ما زالت مغمضة العينين.. المصيبة، المصيبة

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<sup>625</sup> Ibid.

She closed her eyes. She could envision Samia Hanim in her parlor, jumping up from the lacquered wood fauteuil with its Aubusson upholstery, as if disaster had just hit. She could see her mother's hand out, suspended in the air, while the *sufragi* who served them, suddenly realizing his blunder, stepped swiftly back from her mother with his full tray of sherberts, swinging around to offer them to Zaynab Hanim first, the guest of importance. Layla shook her head hard, her eyes still shut. What an ordeal!

626

There are several things to note about this passage. First, it is clear that this is an account told from the perspective of Layla in the form of free indirect discourse because of the way that she uses Samia Hanim's enregistered speech to describe the couch. Layla mocks Samia Hanim's penchant for French loanwords and material trappings by focusing a large part of her own reminiscence on the particular upholstery of the *fauteuil*, as well as using its French name in her mental description. The word '*sufragi*', the same in the original Arabic, is a Turkish loan word for waiter with the ring of the old upper crust to it. The phrase 'what an ordeal' (المصيبة، المصيبة) is a great example of the possibilities for indirect unnamed voicing based on metrical contrast as described by Asif Agha in his article, "Voice, Footing, Enregisterment."<sup>627</sup> Whereas most of the paragraph is assumed to be the voice of Layla (albeit narrated in thought rather than speech), 'what an ordeal' shifts in its topical referent and its represented speaker. It is clear from the context that it is not Layla who is saying "What an ordeal!"; but rather that the absurdly

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<sup>626</sup> Zayyāt, *Al-Bāb*, 42 and Zayyat, *Open Door*, 32

<sup>627</sup> Agha, "Voice." See specifically the section on 'unnamed voices' starting on pg. 40.

offended, pearl-clutching and etiquette-obsessed Samia Hanim is speaking. “What an ordeal!” is not explicitly attributed to her, but becomes distinguishable through the entextualized structure of which it is a part. Both the enregistered speech and the use of unnamed voices in this section are examples of how al-Zayyāt taps into the subtleties of the interactional text through narrative strategies in order to create her linguistically-centered portrait (but not diglossically) of middle class mores. This is complemented by the events of the denotational text, in which the simple mistaking of the order with which the sufragi passes out the sherbert rises to the level of an ordeal.

Layla is eventually forced to come downstairs, where a group of women have gathered around to listen to Samia Hanim gush over her neighbor, a famous singer. The mere fact that they are neighbors is a clue that Samia Hanim is wealthy and lives in a desirable neighborhood. Samia Hanim and the others speculate on how rich the singer must be, and how much he owns, before moving on to describe his voice. Samia Hanim asks for Layla’s compliant opinion.

انا أموت في صوتيه، صوتيه جنان، مش كده يا ليلي؟-  
وقالت ليلي  
!بس بيغنى زي ما يكون بيعيط، زي ما يكون واحدة ست-  
:وبعد فترة قصيرة قامت سامية هانم التي اعتادت أن يؤمن الجميع على أقوالها ممتعضة، وألقت بالفرو على كتفها وقالت  
:بنتك ملححة أوي يا سنية هانم-  
وهي تشد على حرفي الكلام والحاء وتمد كلمة أوي

“His voice just slays me. It’s unbelievable, don’t you think so, Layla?”

“But he sounds like he’s crying when he sings,” said Layla. “Like he’s some woman.”

It was not long before Samia Hanim rose to her feet, agitated. She was accustomed to listeners who hung wide-eyed on every word she uttered. She tossed her fur across her shoulders as she took her annoyed leave.

“Your daughter is terribly spirited, Saniya Hanim.” She spit out the consonants and drew the word “spirited” out.

628

In this passage, al-Zayyāt offers both direct descriptions (“agitated,” “annoyed leave”) as well as indirect evidence (“Samia Hanim rose to her feet,” “She tossed her fur across her shoulder.”), but nothing works as effectively to convey the sense of Samia Hanim’s barely concealed outrage like her use of the word “spirited.” As a euphemism, it does all kinds of work. The word in Egyptian Arabic is *milahlahah* (ملحاحة), which can also be translated as ‘lively,’ ‘shrewd,’ ‘enterprising,’ and even ‘streetwise.’ If the word is meant sarcastically, these words could slide into their pejorative counterparts of ‘overeager,’ ‘conniving,’ ‘uppity,’ and ‘scheming.’<sup>629</sup> Especially in the sense of being ‘streetwise,’ Samia Hanim can be referring underhandedly to Layla as being intelligent in the way of someone from the lowest rungs of society: a rogue or a pickpocket perhaps. If this is true, then there is an added class dimension to her euphemism, as if she is underscoring the ways that Layla’s speech index her lower status. None of this is confirmable, but that is exactly the

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<sup>628</sup> Zayyāt, *Al-Bāb*, 42-3 and Zayyat, *Open Door*, 35

<sup>629</sup> This exercise is done for English words, for which each of the Arabic equivalent connotations would be slightly different, but the basic idea should be clear.

point. With the unwritten rules of decorum breached by Layla, Samia Hanim skirts as close to the surface of insulting language as her own sense of etiquette will allow. If the possible connotations of the word aren't enough, al-Zayyāt emphasizes the mechanics of how Samia Hanim pronounces the word, making full use of the voiceless pharyngeal fricative (the letter 'ḥ'), like a phonological wink that she indeed means to use the word 'spirited' sarcastically.<sup>630</sup>

After Sania Hanim leaves, Layla's mother castigates her for saying "ridiculous things" and reminds her that her feelings are for own private self and not to be said in front of other people.

Layla asks in disbelief:

يعني يكذب- "دا مش كذب دي مجاملة. الواحد ضروري يلاطف الناس ويجاملهم-
"So people should just lie, you mean?" "That's not lying—that's being courteous. One has to make people feel good. Flatter them."

631

But it is Layla's mother who is being naive. She thinks that cordiality is a shared goal amongst polite society, but Layla understands how class-related power imbalances and bourgeois mores are reenforced through banal conversation. It is arguably more gauche for Sania Hanim to be bragging about her connections to the wealthy and famous and to be offering tacky opinions about music and art, but Layla is the one who suffers the social consequences of merely offering her own opinion.

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<sup>630</sup> For obvious reasons (namely 'spirited' not including the letter 'ḥ'), this is not explained precisely in the English translation.

<sup>631</sup> Zayyāt, *Al-Bāb*, 43 and Zayyat, *Open Door*, 35

I realize that there is potential for this analysis to be received as a scientific dressing up of the subtext of a conversation which any normal reader already implicitly understands. My point is not to restate the obvious with jargon, but to draw attention to the mechanics of how second order ideologies intimately inhabit interpersonal communication. If Booth and others acknowledge that the presence of socially marked registers contributes to democratizing culture, showing how much of this democracy is still marked by conflict is the contribution of indexicality. As Booth notes, there are important political implications to centering female voices, which al-Zayyāt does in many instances, like the examples above. It serves to enhance the portrayal of the seemingly mundane in order to show “the everyday as a political arena.”<sup>632</sup> Booth asserts that the dialogue bridges the relationship between the gendering of expectations and behavior with the politics of national liberation. But again, this project of national liberation is only in contradistinction to the gendering of lived experience if national liberation is reduced to a bourgeois, majoritarian project. These two phenomena are not a binary if we remain cognizant of all of the other in between groupings that al-Zayyāt, as a feminist and Marxist, narrates. Al-Zayyāt said of her own writing: “Perhaps it would have been possible for me to be a better writer, or a better fighter, or a better professor, if I had confined myself to one role. But my languages are multiple. And it is through my use of these many languages that I have enriched myself and others.”<sup>633</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> Zayyat, *Open Door*, xxvi.

<sup>633</sup> Amal Amireh, “Remembering Latifa Al-Zayyāt,” *Al Jadid* 2, no. 12 (October 1996), <https://www.aljadid.com/content/remembering-latifa-al-Zayyāt>.

Despite the novel's heavy focus on the mundane affairs of domestic life, we should not conceptualize of the focus on the family in al-Zayyāt's novel as belonging to the sphere of the personal, especially given the author's leftist political affiliations. As Selma Botman says, "Marxist women were rebelling against a backward and colonial society. But, unlike their male comrades, women were also implicitly and explicitly challenging a society in which the family was the nucleus of the community."<sup>634</sup> Al-Zayyāt became a communist not despite this focus on the family as a central institution of oppression, but precisely because of it. In a 1980 interview with Selma Botman, she spoke explicitly about communism's appeal as being its opposition to middle class hypocrisy, saying, "What appealed to me very much in Marxism...were the ethics... the absence of discrimination in religion, race, sex... I was tired of the hypocrisy, cowardice, caution, and trembling of the class I belonged to."<sup>635</sup>

This insight might not seem out of the ordinary for all of those who have argued for the unison of the private and public in al-Zayyāt's work, calling *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* a national allegory in which suppressed Layla is analogous to colonized Egypt, and liberated Layla is analogous to independent Egypt.<sup>636</sup> But again, this allegory only functions if the ultimate public collective is meant to be the nation. Silverstein gives us the linguistic critique of how an orthodoxy of thinking about nationalists' desire for independence "erases the unevenness of minority

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<sup>634</sup> Selma Botman, "The Experience of Women in the Egyptian Communist Movement, 1939–1954," in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 11 (Elsevier, 1988), 118.

<sup>635</sup> Interview with Botman, 1980. in Botman, "Experience."

<sup>636</sup> See Sandra Buijsse, "A Struggle for Independence: A Young Woman's Coming of Age as National Allegory in Latīfa al-Zayyāt's *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*" (2010)

experiences and demands in favor of simplified, majoritarian citizenship.”<sup>637</sup> Likewise, al-Zayyāt’s nationalist rhetoric is not proof of her commitment to the nationalist project as it turned out in the Nasserist-era, much less the Al-Sadāt-era. To the contrary, for al-Zayyāt, nationalism was at the same time a class project, one in which Marxism would address both the private wealth which oppressed classes and those bourgeois mores which oppressed women. Her conversations about the nation in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* at no point erase minority experiences or demand an idealized majoritarian citizenship, but rather, always maintain the ways in which various groups can potentially come together through collective struggle.

#### The Ambiguous Crowd

Similar to the novel’s opening scene, and as well as to other pivotal moments in the plot and narrated historical events, *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* concludes with a crowd scene. It is the culminating moment in the novel, when Layla finally manages to break free from the stifling expectations of her bourgeois family. After many chapters in which she envisions her brother Mahmud out on the front, fighting against British imperialism at the Canal Zone, Layla finally manages to get there herself. Abandoning the life planned for her by her family and society, she goes to Port Said after Abdel Nasser’s nationalization of the Suez Canal to participate in the resistance movement against the invading British, French, and Israeli forces. Her choice to stand

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<sup>637</sup> Snehal Shingavi, *The Mahatma Misunderstood: The Politics and Forms of Literary Nationalism in India* (Anthem Press, 2014), 5.

in defense of her nation also allows her to realize her love for Husayn, who, like her brother, had actual fought the imperialists already.

The chapter begins with an extended metaphor of the crowd as a turbulent sea.

كانت شوارع بور سعيد تزدهم بالناس، أمواج متلاطمة من الناس وكأن البيوت قد خلت من سكانها، وقذفت بهم إلى الشارع موجة إثر موجة لتختلط بجزء ما من الناس
The streets of Port Said were packed with people, colliding waves, as if all its homes had emptied themselves, tossing the inhabitants into the street, wave after wave, to blend into a turbulent sea.

638

Like a sea, the crowd is both vast and unsettled. Immediately following this description of the people as a united force, the narration separates them out.

ناس يضحكون، وناس يبكون بالدموع وهم لا يعرفون أي دموع هذه
People laughed, or wept without knowing what sort of tears these were.

639

As in the many scenes of crowds that Fludernick studies in her work on *Collective Minds*, al-Zayyāt's description quickly moves to demonstrating "the multiplicity of agency within the implied uniformity of the singular term *crowd*."<sup>640</sup> This agency mainly takes the form of uncontrollable, conflicting emotions. Some of the people in the crowd at Port Said have "hearts full of the exhilaration of victory", while others are bringing out flowers to mourn for those

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<sup>638</sup> Zayyāt, *Al-Bab*, 457 and Zayyat, *Open Door*, 361

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> Fludernik, "Collective Minds," 696.

martyrs who have died. Like in other crowd scenes in the novel, al-Zayyāt draws out the fluctuation between communal agency of a whole group and that of several subgroups as a preview or an analog of Layla’s connection to collectives.

Layla is also in this crowd, alongside Husayn. They are depicted as individuals being swallowed up in the sea.

أمسك حسين بيد ليلى حتى لا يفقدها في الزحمة التي ابتلعت محمود وسناء. ودفعت الجماهير ليلى وحسين، وانفجرا  
يضحكان يندفعان وكأن موجة عاتية تحملهما إلى الأمام

Husayn seized Layla’s hand so he would not lose her in the crowd that had swallowed up Mahmud and Sanaa. The masses pushed them forward, and they exploded into laughter as they moved, as if a huge wave carried them forward.

641

The alternation between collective and individual agency is one of the hallmarks of al-Zayyāt’s crowd scenes, and here it centers Layla’s affective relationship to the greater mass of people, as one of the sub-groups who is laughing rather than crying. But even then, the reasons for her joy might be different than that of the crowd. As they move along, Layla calls out to Husayn, telling him that she wants to show him something. She stops, lets go of his hand and holds it up to her, revealing that she has removed her engagement ring from ‘Iṣām. Her moment of personal liberation coincides with the final showdown between nationalists and the imperialists who have oppressed them. Because of this, it is not clear how much of Layla’s joy is due to the political, and how much to the personal. It also means that we cannot know the same of each of the

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<sup>641</sup> Zayyāt, *Al-Bāb*, 460 and Zayyat, *Open Door*, 363

individuals in the crowd. By alternating between collective and individual feelings of joy and sadness, al-Zayyāt disproves the notion that even in its most pivotal moments, the ‘we’ of the nation acts and feels as one.

The ambiguity of this final crowd scene is echoed in a scene from al-Zayyāt’s own life. A passage in her autobiography, *The Search: Personal Papers* (*Hamlat taftish: awraq shakhsiyyah*, 1992), which relates the emotional turmoil that took place during the 1973 war with Egypt, an experience which has been painted as a partial redemption of the defeat in 1967, illustrates how political events are experienced ambivalently, even in the moments in which they occur. Al-Zayyāt explain how she remembers the precise date as the 6th of October, and that she was standing on a bridge over the Nile River amongst a large crowd. She remembers the date because it was both the day of Taha Ḥusayn’s funeral as well as Al-Sadāt’s announcement of a ceasefire with Israel. These are two different types of announcements made by different mediums and appealing to different collectives. Because al-Zayyāt is part of both of these ‘we’s, but not only them, she expresses deep ambivalence towards deciding which group she belongs to, and consequently, how she should feel.

ولكن هذا اليوم لم يكن سوى يوم آخر من تلك الايام التي بدأت بستة أكتوبر وقذفت بي بين الناس، أعيش متوترة لحظة بلحظة مناقضة للحظة ومكحلة للحظة، لحظة ترفعي خفيفة منتشية إلى السماء ولحظة تخفضني مهبضة، مكسورة الجناح.

But this day was just another of those days, which had started with October 6 and which found me thrown among the people. I live in a state of tension each moment, one moment being contradictory, and the next moment being complementary. A moment lifted me lightly and ecstatically towards the sky, and the next moment brought me down, breaking my wings.

In the passage above, the most tangible and immediate collective of all is the crowd of people that al-Zayyāt encounters out in the streets as she attends a protest, a funeral procession, and a musical performance. Al-Zayyāt recalls singing along with hundreds of people at a theatre performance, which lifted up her sense of fatalism and apprehensive silence, and then walking on the university bridge thinking about the monumental meaning of losing Ṭaha Ḥusayn, succumbing once again to fatalism and apprehensive silence. The first uplifting moment comes from a sense of belonging to a united and seamless collective, while the second comes from this collective coming undone. She dwells for a moment on the age-defining life of Ṭaha Ḥusayn, a thinker who dared to question everything, and who dreamt of human freedom. Because he represented the earlier half of the 20th century so completely for al-Zayyāt, his passing is as monumental an occasion as the ceasefire with Israel, in terms of *her* life experience. But she realizes this is not the case for everyone in the crowd on the bridge. She turns to a friend and asks,

...ماذا يعني طه حسين لشاب أو شاب في العشرين-  
لاشيء... لا شيء على الاطلاق-

-What does Ṭaha Ḥusayn mean to a child, or to a twenty-year old?...

-Nothing, nothing at all.

<sup>642</sup> Zayyāt, *Ḥamlat*, 94-5.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

This short scene demonstrates perfectly how complex and contradictory the relationship is between affects and the different intersecting collectives with whom people experience them. As part of the 'we' of the nation at war with Israel, the 'we' mourning the loss of Ṭaha Ḥusayn, and the 'we' singing along to an Adli Fakhry song, al-Zayyāt experiences drastically different emotions within the same historical moment. This suggests that the over-reliance on national political events as a guide to the emotions of a literary work glosses over the important and genuine ambiguities of human experience, which only seem paradoxical if only one of these 'we's is presupposed.

## Conclusion

In the introduction to the dissertation I compared two writers, Radwa Ashour and Leylâ Erbil, and their assessments of how language reform affected the course of 20th century literature. I did not choose them as representatives of the narrative of rupture merely as a way to expose faults in their thinking. Each of the two authors were uniquely situated as writers and deeply engaged with politics throughout most of the time period I have covered. (Ashour was born in 1946, Erbil in 1931.) But more importantly, each author expressed her desire to break out of the restrictive frame of the nation through literature. Radwa Ashour was close friends with Laṭifah al-Zayyāt, and in many ways, her literary heir in exploring the dialectical relationship between collective and individual history.<sup>644</sup> Ashour's novels break free from the boundaries of

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<sup>644</sup> Radwa Ashour, Ferial Ghazoul, and Hasna Reda-Mekdashy, *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 136.

the nation entirely, building historical and political connections between Palestine, the Civil Rights struggles in the United States, and even Islamic Spain. Leylâ Erbil believed deeply in the creative power of the writer, caught between the struggle between a problematic Kemalism and the forces of reaction, to break out of the deadlock of Turkish culture. In the very last years of her life, she published a flurry of novels, including *Kalan* (*The Remaining*, 2011) which depicts the tragedy of Istanbul's multicultural communities in the form of a book length prose poem, and *Tuhaf bir Erkek* (*An Odd Man*, 2013), which explores the possibilities of introducing a fully feminine language into Turkish.

And so by trying to explain the ways that the language of the novel is not destined to always represent a nationalist agenda when invoking 'we' in this chapter, I aim not to disprove Ashour and Erbil's argument about the trap of the centrality of the nation and its ties to modern language, but to show how exactly how authors like them have used literature to find a way out.

## Conclusion

In this dissertation I have introduced the concept of indexicality and enregisterment to expand our understanding of how language ideology functions in the modern Egyptian and Turkish novel. My purpose in doing so has been to help move literary studies which address questions of language past the hermeneutic of the national imaginary. In each of the chapters, I have presented fictional works which offer interesting and complex examples of the politics of language which have been overlooked due to scholars' focus on a grand narrative in which the 20th century represented a struggle to reclaim literary language from the clutches of the state's repressive monologism.

Much of the pervasiveness of this grand narrative within literary histories of Egypt and Turkey can be explained by the influence of positivist Enlightenment thinking (ie. the adoption of Orientalist approaches to literary history), and, in reaction to it, the influence of postcolonial approaches in the last few decades:

Postcolonial literature/cultures are...constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices, and they offer "fields" of counter-discursive strategies to the dominant discourse...not seek[ing] to subvert the dominant discourse with a view to taking its place, but...to evolve textual strategies which continually "consume" their "own biases" at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse.<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> Helen Tiffin quoted in Divya Dwivedi, Henrik Skov Nielsen, and Richard Walsh, *Narratology and Ideology: Negotiating Context, Form, and Theory in Postcolonial Narratives* (The Ohio State University Press, 2018), 12.

Using such an analytical lens, one would naturally see the history of 20th century Middle East literatures as the Manichean struggle between those who envisioned the ethnolinguistic foundations of the nation on the one hand, and those writers of linguistic dissent who aimed to subvert it on the other. However, the field of linguistic anthropology posits that one cannot simply “expose and erode” a certain discourse related to the social meaning of language, because language ideology does not merely function as a bias. Ethnopragmatics are not merely the linguistic equivalent of authoritarian discourse or the sum total of ethnolinguistic bigotries. Language ideology is fundamental to how language makes meaning in the first place, and represents “a major vectorial force in formal linguistic change.”<sup>646</sup> Language ideology is not delivered from on high, dictated by the most powerful forces in society, but rather, is negotiated by each speaker in real-time at each interaction. The fact that language ideology is part and parcel of communication itself makes it so that “we cannot understand macro-level changes in registers without attending to micro-level processes of register use in interaction.”<sup>647</sup> For this reason, I have tried as much as possible to wed my linguistic methodology with that of narratology, which itself is attuned to the ways that “narration intrinsically implies much more than it says, and the implicit is itself a complex and contextually fraught arena of inference.”<sup>648</sup> I have attempted to use indexicality as a strategy to try to dissolve the traditionally troubling gap between the form of the literary text and its content and context, to paraphrase Caroline Levine.

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<sup>646</sup> Silverstein, *Indexical Order*, 194.

<sup>647</sup> Agha, *Voice*, 38.

<sup>648</sup> Dwivedi, Skov Nielsen, and Walsh, *Narratology*, 18.

Moving forward, it is my hope that future studies will explore the politics of language within Egyptian and Turkish literature with attention to both form and content, without feeling the need to implicate the grand narrative of national culture in their analyses. Such studies could apply the insights of indexicality to deepen readings of gender politics, religious discourse, or class conflict. Although I have mainly avoided using indexicality as a method to map out larger social categories, I do see my critique as attempting to join in with the “Marxist critique of the primacy of culture and nation over capitalism and social class [that has gained] force with each passing decade since the inception of postcolonial theory.”<sup>649</sup> Before even beginning to ask questions about capitalism or class, one must first understand that language ideology is a process which exists as more than a mere relationship between the state and the individual. It is, rather, a method of understanding and using language which determines every one of our interpersonal and collective relationships. Only when we understand this can we begin to ask exactly how language implies the complex context of the political unconscious of class society.

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<sup>649</sup> Rena Jackson, “Capitalism and Orientalism,” *Jacobin*, accessed January 30, 2020, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/03/after-edward-said-review-postcolonial-theory-imperialism>.

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