INTRODUCTION: THE SHORT-STORY GENRE

Each of the principal genres that we subsume today under the heading "fiction"—the novel, the short story, and the novella—brings with it a separate process of historical development and a different set of expectations. If the novella appears to be the oldest genre and the novel the longest, relatively speaking, then the short story is both the youngest and shortest of the three. In assigning names to each of these literary genres, English, among the European languages, seems to have emerged with the most confusing set of terms. Unlike German and French, both of which have separate etymological terms for each genre (thus, in French, *roman, conte,* and *nouvelle,* respectively), English uses two terms that encourage the mistaken belief that one is a smaller version of the other—even though the novella antecedes the novel, while the short story appears to be characterized primarily by its lack of length. As I note later in this introduction, the terms adopted for fictional genres in Arabic are not yet firmly established, but it seems clear that the preferred term for short story is *qiṣṣah qaṣīrah,* a direct translation of the English.[1]

This notion of "shortness" has led the general reading public to form impressions that short-story writers are anxious to dispel: that the short story is the quintessential literary genre for the modern world, with its weekly and monthly magazines—a primary publication opportunity for the genre—compiled for busy people with too little time to read more lengthy genres; that it is an ephemeral, throw-away genre; or else that the short story serves as a practice-ground for the novel, which, within this scenario, is regarded as the more demanding genre in terms of both time and creative talent. Needless to say, short-story writers and people writing about the short story vigorously reject such notions, and in this context it is

useful to take note of the extent to which the roles of creative writer and critic are often combined. Alberto Moravia notes that "among other things, the short story has an even wider sweep than the novel,"[2] while V. S. Pritchett notes that while novelists can afford to expatiate on their subject matter, "the writer of short stories has to catch our attention at once not only by the novelty of his people and scene but by the distinctiveness of his voice, and to hold us by the ingenuity of his design."[3] H. E. Bates waxes indignant on the subject, suggesting that "because a short story is short it is not therefore easier to write than a novel, ten, twenty, or even thirty times its length—the exact reverse being in fact the truth."[4]

While the short story in its Western and Arab contexts shares similar generic expectations and modes of reception, they differ significantly in one way. In both environments a short story will normally be initially published through a multitude of outlets, in the form of general and specialized journals and magazines. The process of gathering a collection of such works by a single author is a privilege reserved for only the most famous and distinguished exponents of the art in the Western world; readers of contemporary Arabic literature, however, find themselves confronted with a huge number of collections, bewilderingly varied in theme and accomplishment, that are published in every country within the Arab world. In such a context, anthologies of the best examples, selected by those with the access and expertise to assess such a gigantic output, become an invaluable resource. Hence the great value of this particular collection, which is culled from the works of short-story writers from across the Arab world by the doyen of translators of modern Arabic literature into English.

The short story is perhaps the most artificial of the fictional genres—artificial not in the sense of falsehood, but rather in the sense of "artifice," the process of making art. Whereas the novel, for example, is intended to create a world of its own and to fill it with places, events, and attitudes, life does not present us with any short stories that can be conveniently transferred to the realm of fiction. Whether it takes as its topic a particular character in the form of a vignette à la de Maupassant, or consists of a segment from a larger context or series of events,

the short story's encapsulation of scene, character, and mood will require the craft of a writer whose powers of observation are of a very particular kind and whose ability with words is akin to that of the poet. Indeed, some of the most finely crafted short stories may be considered as prose poems in their own right.

Rather than dwelling on the relative and only marginally useful criterion of shortness, recent critics have chosen to devote their attention to the way in which the short story is especially concerned about its structure, and most notably the various devices that it can employ for opening and closing the narrative. Many exponents of the short-story craft have noted that the first sentences are of crucial importance in drawing the reader into the narrative, leading to the citation of the anonymous Eton schoolboy's effort, "'Hell,' said the Duchess as she lit another cigar," as the clear winner of any competition for the worst example. I have also explored the creative relationship between the title given to the story and the way in which it begins.[5] Within the concentrated environment of the short story, where the author is aware of the ending even as writing begins, such issues of structure assume considerable importance. It is Chekov's advice that the writer of the short story, having completed the task, should lop off the beginning and ending and regard the "middle" as the finished product. While many of the more traditional categories of short-story writing have endeavored to bring their taut narratives to some kind of conclusion, the unreality of such endings—a point upon which Henry James was so insistent—is reflected by many more recent exemplars of the genre that have chosen to remain open-ended and, in certain cases, circular. The very process of reading them to a conclusion invites, and sometimes requires, a rereading.

The Development of the Short Story in Arabic

I described the short story as the youngest of the fictional genres in the Western tradition. It may well be for that reason that, of all the literary genres imported to the Middle East in the nineteenth century as part of the process of intercultural

contact and intellectual revival known in Arabic as *al-nahḍah,* it was the short story that was adopted and came to maturity most quickly. Whether or not one gives credence to the idea that the short story tended to flourish first in societies that had gone through processes of revolution—Russia, France, and the United States before Germany and Britain—the fact remains that the genre became a readily available vehicle through which Arab littérateurs could explore aspects of their daily life during a period of social and political upheaval.

The Arabic literary tradition is, of course, replete with story-telling traditions. There is presumably little need to emphasize that fact in a Western cultural environment that adopted the *1001 Nights* collection with such enthusiasm following the publication of its initial translation by Galland in 1707. Alongside these tales of adventure and romance, of magic and fantasy, one can also place a number of other narrative genres, of which one of the most interesting is the *maqāmah,* an indigenous genre of which the progenitor appears to have been al-Hamadhānī (d. 1008), who was justifiably accorded the nickname of "*Badīᶜ al-zamān*" (the wonder of the age). These narratives consisted of short, picaresque vignettes in which a pair of men—a rogue and narrator—tour the Middle East region (the travel itself being mostly implicit) exposing the foibles of mankind. For all their fascination, however, these story-types are completely different from the short-story tradition as it developed within Western cultures; different, among other things, in audience (for in the Middle East the *1001 Nights* was predominantly an oral performance tradition), in generic purpose, and in style. In every subregion of the larger Arab world the emergence of the short-story genre is intimately connected with the beginnings of the press tradition. As newspapers began to be founded and to reflect in their columns the social and political aspirations of their readership, so did some of the early pioneers with an awareness of Western genres begin to publish short vignettes in which they criticized the rapid pace of change and the moral and cultural dilemmas that it created.

In a period of social turmoil, of a clash in values between the imported Western and the traditional Islamic and Middle East-

ern, there was no shortage of material. Among the earliest pioneers were ᶜAbdallāh Nadīm (1854–96) and Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī (1876–1924) in Egypt and Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān (1883–1931) in the United States (a country to which many Lebanese Christian families had immigrated following inter-community fighting in the Ottoman province of Syria during the mid-nineteenth century). While Nadīm couched his comic vignettes in the colloquial language of Cairo and poked fun at the attempts of Egyptians to emulate the habits of their occupiers, the narratives of al-Manfalūṭī and Jubrān were, more often than not, didactic in tone and excessively romantic in sensibility. A shift within the realm of fiction from homilist to perceptive observer was clearly needed, and the writers credited with achieving such a move are Mīkhāʾīl Nuᶜaymah (1889–1988) in the United States and Lebanon and Muḥammad Taymūr (1891–1921) in Egypt. Until his tragically early death Taymūr made important contributions to the development of both the short story and drama in Egypt. His work was carried on by his younger brother, Maḥmūd (1894–1973), who spent a good deal of his lengthy career as a writer of short stories honing his craft by continually rewriting earlier works. Maḥmūd Taymūr and the members of a group of young writers who called themselves "*Jamāᶜat al-madrasah al-ḥadīthah*" (the "New School")—including Maḥmūd Ṭāhir Lāshīn (1894–1954) and Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī (1905–93)—brought the Egyptian short story to a high level of accomplishment during the 1920s.

The pattern and pace of the development of the Arabic short story varied in other parts of the Arab world in accordance with a number of factors. Among the most significant were the prevalence of traditional cultural values, the freedom of the press in the context of Ottoman censorship practices, and the tensions that arose in the context of political confrontation with the colonial occupying powers on the one hand and aspirations for modernity—mostly symbolized by the cultures of those very same powers—on the other. Each region had its pioneer figures in the adoption of the new genre: for example, Maḥmūd al-Sayyid (1903–37) and Dhū al-nūn Ayyūb (1908–88) in Iraq, Khalīl Baydas (1875–1949) in Palestine, ᶜAlī al-Duᶜājī (1909–49) in Tunisia, and Tawfīq Yūsuf ᶜAwwād (1911–89) in

Lebanon. The careers of Ayyūb and ʿAwwād rival that of Maḥmūd Taymūr in Egypt in their longevity and devotion to the development of the short story's "artifice," but in all cases these writers provided the groundwork for a second generation that refined the structure and language of the genre into a concise and evocative medium capable of addressing many of the issues that confronted their own society.

At the turn of the century the novel and short story presented themselves to Arab writers as different modes of writing that at the time aspired primarily to reflect observed reality within their fictional confines. Prominent among the burning societal issues addressed by these genres was the status of women within the contexts of the traditional family structure, of new educational opportunities, and of society at large. In a largely unseen process, women themselves were heavily involved in the promulgation of new genres through journals circulated via the private medium of the household. On the basis of research thus far, it seems clear that, as was the case within Western literary traditions, female readership of fiction was numerically predominant. In the public arena however, the prominent figure of Qāsim Amīn (1865–1908) vigorously advocated women's right to an education. While an early attempt at novel-writing such as Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's *Zaynab* (1913) may have addressed itself to this topic, a longer period of development was needed before the longer fictional genre could be ready to take on contemporary issues successfully. National aspirations for change on a larger scale were focused in the subgenre of the historical novel. It was primarily through the genre of the short story that Arab writers were able to use depictions of family life and the role of women within it to reflect the larger debate within society. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that family relationships were the predominant theme as the genre continued its development (as will be illustrated below by the discussion of several examples from this collection).

Family life and the struggle for survival, the many possible variations in the relationship between husband and wife, the upbringing of children, the role of the members of the larger family—mother-in-law, grandmother, and so on—these were all favorite topics of those authors who began the process of

refining the craft of the short story in Arabic: Maḥmūd Taymūr, Dhū al-nūn Ayyūb, Tawfīq Yūsuf ᶜAwwād, and others. Their models were mostly drawn from the French and Russian traditions, and took the form of either the "slice of life" or an unusual character, both of them, needless to say, ideal vehicles for creative, if romanticized, explorations of the social questions of the day. Thus, Nuᶜaymah's story "Al-Bankarūliyā" (The Bankarolia) tells the story of a sheepherder in Lebanon whose son is "studying" in the United States in order to obtain a strange piece of paper called something like a "bankarolia" (*baccalauréat*). The man has to sell more and more of his property in order to support his obviously spendthrift son; finally, when he has virtually nothing left, he covers the framed piece of paper that he has received with the droppings of the animals he has lost. Maḥmūd Taymūr's early stories include many notable portraits that follow the European model: the (often unusual) character is described within his environment and then, following a phrase such as "one day," or "there came a time when . . . ," a single incident that illustrates or confronts the character's traits is described. "Abū ᶜArab" is one such example: the character who gives his name to the title is head of a family that lives close to the animals he supervises. They live on the estate of a wealthy landowner who has a thoroughly spoiled young son. Most unusually, the family also owns a dog that is treated as a member of the family. Inevitably, the spoiled son of the owner has a confrontation with the dog and kills it. Abū ᶜArab plots vengeance against the boy, but is prevented from carrying out his deadly plan when he sees the boy's mother putting him to bed. Many of Dhū al-nūn Ayyūb's collections concern themselves with the struggles of the poor: the titles of some of them—*Al-Ḍaḥāyā* (Victims, 1937) and *Al-Kadiḥūna* (Strivers, 1939)—are indication enough of that. His story "Zawjatuhu" (His Wife, 1938) describes a rather curious marital arrangement. Two friends walking down the street bump into a woman (who, we are obligingly told, is "unusual"). It emerges that she is the wife of one of the two and has married him on a bet with a girlfriend. He has released her in disgust, but she has grown to love him. They remain married, but only in name. A more typical picture

of the exploitation of marriage is found in Maḥmūd Taymūr's early story "al-Ḥājj Shalabī," in which the eponymous character regularly resorts to the local marriage-arranger after he has divorced his junior wife.

The efforts of these pioneer writers (and many like them in other parts of the Arab world and within different time frames) provided a firm basis on which a second generation could take the Arabic short story in new directions. The aftermath of the Second World War, the creation of the Arab League in Cairo in 1945, the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, and increasing civil unrest in many countries of the region that turned the 1950s into a decade of revolutions—all these external factors led to a new societal framework that changed the mandate for the short story. In a move away from romanticism, a more naturalistic approach to realism was now a clearly stated goal of commitment, the rallying cry of literary activity during the 1950s and beyond. The creative efforts of this "second generation" initially made the short story a powerful weapon for reform; the wealth of publication opportunities that the regimes made available to those authors who adhered to carefully established political and social agenda helped to turn the short story into the most popular and widespread of all literary genres. As the Arab world entered the 1960s, however, it became clear to intellectuals that independence and the new revolutionary systems had failed to produce the results so eagerly anticipated, and instead were resorting increasingly to the use of physical and psychological oppression in advocating their goals and suppressing any writers who opposed them. In such a context the short story was again on hand to reflect the increasing sense of alienation that was the inevitable result of such measures. Many aspects of this period of initial optimism and subsequent alienation are clearly reflected in the stories of this collection.

Since the 1950s, then, the short story has become the most popular literary genre in the Arab world, the favorite fictional resort of readers and the readiest form available for littérateurs to use as a vehicle for their opinions, fears, and aspirations. Such has been the flood of productivity during the last forty years or so that attempts at a summary, and especially critical

attempts such as anthologies, cannot hope to give anything like a full picture of either the sheer variety or the critical value of the tradition. I suggested above that, during the earlier phases of the modern literary renaissance, particular confluences of historical events resulted in the development of certain national traditions at an earlier stage than others. But by the 1950s such differentials had largely disappeared, with the exception of the Gulf States where a combination of factors—notably the relatively recent creation of a system of education—have meant that the development of a modern literary tradition is yet more recent. Significantly these countries are not represented in this anthology.

While many of these changing generic imperatives were evident in the short stories of Arab writers published in the 1930s and 1940s—for example, in the works of Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, Tawfīq Yūsuf ʿAwwād, and the early Najīb Maḥfūẓ (b. 1911)—there can be no doubt that the major political and societal transformations that began in the 1950s provided a powerful impetus to the short story. A new generation of writers took up the challenge. Most prolific among them was clearly Yusuf Idris (1927–1991), whose temperament and upbringing were ideally suited to the genre and its new role. In a stream of short-story collections published in the 1950s, Idris provided vignettes of life in the poorer quarters of the city and the countryside that served not only to provide new insights into the pressing need for social reform but also illustrated how limited the experience and thus the vision of his predecessors had been. In his choice of subject matter Idris had many imitators throughout the Arab world, but none was able to match either the variety of his output or the innate genius with which he drew his readers into the creative process of his stories. While Idris and others tended to concentrate on situations within a single region, the Arab world was confronted with an issue that transcended national boundaries: the tragedy of the Palestinians. Many Arab short-story writers, Palestinian and otherwise, have addressed themselves to the situation, but none with the emotional power of Ghassan Kanafani (1936–72), who, in a series of novels, novellas, and short stories, succeeded in encapsulating the continuing misery of his people. When he was

killed in a booby-trapped car in Beirut in 1972, Arabic fiction lost one of its most powerful exponents and significant experimenters.

This same period also witnessed another significant trend as women began to appear in the workplace and in educational institutions in increasing numbers. Pioneer women writers of fiction had been working for several decades, but now the rate of their contributions increased. Educated women had shared their fictional output with each other from a very early stage in the modern renaissance. In Egypt, Suhayr al-Qalamāwī (b. 1911) had become the first woman to obtain a doctoral degree, working on the *1001 Nights* collection under the supervision of Ṭāhā Husayn. In 1935 she published *Aḥādīth jaddatī* (My Grandmother's Tales), a collection of short stories that, as the title implies, tend to be retrospective musings rather than calls for change. Pride of place in the advocacy of women's rights and changes in social attitudes belongs to the Lebanese writer Laylā Baʿalbakkī (b. 1938); having earned a reputation with her defiant novel *Anā aḥyā* (I Am Alive, 1958), she went on to publish her famous story, "Safīnat ḥinān ilā al-qamar" (Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon), about a couple who discuss their decision to have no children while acknowledging the sexual attraction they feel for each other. Such public expression of the innermost sensitivities of a woman was unprecedented, and in 1964 Baʿalbakkī found herself under arrest on a charge of public obscenity.[6] This somewhat strident challenge to societal norms was taken up by a number of women writers, in particular Colette Khūrī (b. 1937) and Ghādah al-Sammān (b. 1942). The title of al-Sammān's collection of short stories, *ʿAynāka qadarī* (Your Eyes Are My Fate, 1962), sufficiently indicates the challenges these writers were offering to social norms. As Halim Barakat notes, the goal of these writers was "to shock and defy society."[7] In more literary terms, while few of the stories in these collections can be considered as major contributions to the short-story genre per se, they served to open up a substantial place in Arabic fiction within which both women and men could discuss the emotional and sensual aspects of their characters' motivations with considerably greater freedom than had been the case in the past.

During the last two decades in particular, women have used the short-story genre as a vehicle for entirely new and different insights into life in the Arab world, on the real and symbolic levels and in the contexts of the individual, family, and nation. Perhaps no situation during this period has prompted such a forceful response from women as the Lebanese civil war of the 1970s and 1980s, and the stories of Emily Naṣrallāh (b. 1938), Ḥanan Shaykh (b. 1945), and Ghādah al-Sammān (to mention just a few) are eloquent testimony to their success.

As the regimes of the Arab world began to adopt increasingly oppressive methods to implement their political and social agenda, the short-story writer was constrained to adjust his or her technique. The naturalistic depiction that we have just described, viewed in the wrong way by the censorship authorities, could prove at least unfortunate and potentially fatal. Many of the more forthright authors of the genre have noted that the shift to more symbolic and allusive narratives that became prominent during the 1960s had behind it severely practical as well as artistic motivations. This shift is particularly noticeable with a writer such as Yusuf Idris, whose earlier essays in the genre had been praised for their absolute authenticity. His stories of the 1960s, such as "Al-Aurṭā" (The Aorta) and "Lughat al-Āy-Āy" (The Language of Groans), are gruesome, symbolic depictions of contemporary alienation; with miniature masterpieces such as "Al-ᶜuṣfūr ᶜalā al-silk" (Little Bird on the Telephone Wire) and "Al-Martabah al-muqaᶜᶜarah" (The Concave Mattress) they become, to all intents and purposes, parables of modern life. In this type of writing Idris is joined by another instinctive master of the short story, the Syrian writer Zakaria Tamer (b. 1931). Self-educated and possessing a useful wealth of experience in television and film, Tamer manages in story after story to create allegories of oppression and alienation, as man, the social being, finds himself alone in confronting the callous indifference of authority, be it military or civilian, and on a local, national, or international scale. His story "Al-Aᶜdāᵓ" (The Enemies) is a withering criticism of the role played by the media in the Arab world during the June War of 1967; the Arabic language itself is awarded a medal for bravery, for turning a defeat into a victory.

The 1970s began with attempts to explain what had happened to the Arab world during the 1950s and 1960s as a prelude to the debacle of June 1967. Answers were sought in the past as well as the present; in the former case this involved questions concerning both the "authenticity" (*aṣālah*) of the Arab way of life and its link to the great heritage of the past (*turāth*). Continuing Western support for the state of Israel, the disastrous effects of economically based experiments in social engineering as the "opening-up" (*infitāḥ*) movement in Egypt, and the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975—these and other situations suggested to many Arab writers that any explanations they might come up with would do little to ameliorate the situation for most of their readers. As Edward El-Kharrat (b. 1926), one of the authors represented in this anthology, notes, when one was presented with such a set of events, "the very precept of reality came to be questioned in Arabic literature."[8] The varying degrees of symbolism and surrealism that characterize so much recent short-story writing become for many writers the only possible way to reflect their view of such a fragmented consciousness.

Within the context of such a prevalent and pervasive mood of pessimism the Arabic short story has continued to develop in new and interesting ways. The tradition is now too widespread and variegated to be contained within the confines of this introduction or this anthology, now ten years old. This collection is in every way an anthology, a choice of "flowers." It has been preceded by other collections organized around the genre as a whole and individual masters of it. We must assume that it will be followed by many others, in which the disturbing creativity of more recent writers will be represented.

This Anthology

Originally published in 1983, this anthology reflects not only the Arabic short-story tradition itself but also the emphases that have tended to characterize the study of Arabic literature among Western specialists. Thus, of the twenty-four stories, fully half are by Egyptian writers. Denys Johnson-Davies, the compiler, has lived in Cairo for many years and knows many of

the writers personally. His selection of some of their stories is thus to be expected, added to which, given the size of the Egyptian population vis-à-vis other Arab nations, it is not surprising that the large number of their littérateurs should make full use of the many available outlets for publication. However, Lebanon and Iraq have also been centers of a large amount of publication, to which has been added more recently a significant increase in the Maghrib and the Gulf States. While a balance in favor of Egyptian writers is a reasonable one, a more current reflection of the true variety of the Arabic short story would require a somewhat different apportionment in terms of region. A more contemporary anthology project would also differ in another aspect of balance, that between male and female writers. In addition to the increase of the publication of fiction by women, the last two decades have seen more research on such writings among Arab and Western scholars. Johnson-Davies is clearly aware of this trend, in that he has also devoted anthologies to the stories of two of Egypt's female writers, Alifa Rifaat (b. c. 1930) and Salwā Bakr (b. c. 1950).[9]

I mentioned above the clear differentiation that writers of short stories in the West insist on making between the demands of their craft and that of the novelist. With that in mind, it is interesting to note that, of the stories included in this anthology, well over half are the work of authors who are also novelists. In explaining this apparent difference between the two cultures, I would point to two situations that involve the more practical aspects of authorship. First, the writing of fiction is not a profession by which one can earn a living in the Arab world; that applies as much to the Nobel Laureate Najīb Maḥfūẓ, who until his retirement worked as a civil servant in the Ministry of Culture, as to less famous writers. For many Arab authors, fiction may constitute a full-time preoccupation, but the process of finding the time to put pen to paper can be extremely frustrating. The career of the brilliant young Egyptian short-story writer Yaḥyā al-ṭāhir ᶜAbdallāh (1940–81) is a case in point: for much of his tragically short life he was unemployed.[10] Needless to say, planning and writing a novel in such circumstances is the work of years, and many younger

writers have managed to produce just one novel during their career. The second factor in this situation is the mode of publication. Novels are habitually serialized in the Arab press; at certain stages in Najīb Maḥfūẓ's career, the text of his most recently completed novel was on its way to the cinema studio even before its appearance in book form. However, whatever the virtues of serialization may be, it clearly tends to overemphasize the link between the two genres and the superficial element of length, rather than pointing up the essential generic contrasts. The ready availability of publication outlets has made the short story genuinely popular, a situation often rued by the more sophisticated critics of the genre. The very abundance of stories published renders the task of identifying the real jewels of the craft that much more demanding.

I will now turn to a consideration of the stories themselves, considering their settings and themes before looking in more detail at questions of technique. The great Arab social historian Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) first suggested that a cyclic view of history involved the ever-changing relationship between the settled communities of cities and the nomadic tribes of the deserts. Since that time social scientists have refined his model. As Halim Barakat points out in a recent work, a number of different types of livelihood exist between these two poles, the most significant of which is the settled farmer, the village-dwelling peasant of the provinces.[11]

Of these three venues—city, village, and desert—surely the latter would appear the most unpromising as a setting for a work of modern fiction. However, a few writers have chosen to set their stories there. In particular, Ghassan Kanafani uses the desert and its searing heat as an apt symbol for the plight of the Palestinian people; and ᶜAbd al-raḥmān Munīf uses the desert and all the traditional imagery it evokes in the minds of Arab readers as a focal point for a series of studies about modern people destroying the environment. The Libyan writer Ibrahim Al-Kouni, however, takes his fascination with the desert to the lengths of living in it for a portion of the year; his writings—in novel and short-story form—convey the effect of the desert setting in a tangible way unrivaled by any other author. The very title of his story "The Drumming Sands"

introduces the reader to both the exotic and the inimical elements of the environment. The story—of heat, thirst, danger, defiance, and the imminence of death—replicates the life cycles depicted in the earliest of Arabic poems from the sixth century onward, the traditional camel being here replaced by the modern Land-Rover. Al-Kouni has a very individual voice in modern Arabic literature, and the other stories in this collection place their scenes in more familiar venues, most notably the cities of the Middle East. These venues serve, of course, as a focus for all the external aspects of modernity within the region—technology, communications, and consumerism, for example—but frequently writers of literature also view them as sinister, cruel environments that are destructive of traditional values. The graveyards of Yusuf Abu Rayya and the alleyways of Zakaria Tamer are gloomy haunts reflecting the ambivalent attitude of modern Arabic literature toward the urban environment. By contrast, village life has often been portrayed in a more romantic vein as the locus of hard work, honest living, and clearly established moral guidelines. Such a vision has been challenged by a generation of writers—of whom Yusuf Idris was prominent—and the stories in this collection that are set in a provincial environment, those of Ibrahim Ishaq Ibrahim, Mohamed El-Bisatie, and Abdel-Hakim Kassem, show us a more realistic and often darker side of life outside the bounds of the metropolis.

From the earliest phases of its development, the Arabic short story has taken upon itself a strong social didactic function, and no more so than in the discussion of women's role in society. While the stories in this collection are more subtle in their methods of depiction and persuasion than the earliest pioneers and thus reflect the fruits of the developmental process, the theme of the relationship between the sexes continues to provide a widely variegated source of inspiration. The institution of marriage itself provides the backdrop for Alifa Rifaat's "Another Evening at the Club," in which a pampered young bride, married off to a man much older than herself, sits at home anxiously awaiting her husband's return from the club; she has to confess to him that, after accusing their maid of the theft of a valuable ring and having her arrested, she has

found it behind her dressing-table. Gamil Atia Ibrahim's story, "The Old Man," also has a marriage as its primary focus, but here an old man who is about to "be retired" from his civil service job uses the early death of his wife (significantly, in 1956—the year of the Tripartite Suez invasion) as a catalyst for a brief survey of his life and career. Yusuf Sharouni's story, "Glimpses from the Life of Maugoud Abdul Maugoud and Two Postscripts," one of the most accomplished in this collection, uses the narrative of a mentally tortured protagonist to introduce the reader to a considerably less orthodox scenario, in that he has undertaken to marry a widow's daughter in order to continue his primary role as the mother's lover. The nature of the relationships in which the drug-chewing narrator of Mohammed Ahmed Abdul Wali's story, "At a Woman's House," finds himself involved is yet more ambiguous. As he watches the baby of one woman, he mouths his resentment of the fact that prying eyes stand in the way of his tryst with another; until, that is, the mother of the baby returns. Mohammed Chukri, a Moroccan writer whose personal experiences of the squalor of poverty have furnished him with an almost unique repertoire of stories and images for his fiction, uses "Flower Crazy" to write a naturalistically vivid picture of the gruesome existence of a woman of the night, interspersed with the sexual musings of a crippled poet. In such a context, Hanan Shaykh's story, "The Persian Carpet," operates on a more genteel plane. It consists of a subtle portrait of the effect of divorce on the children of the family. Sneaking out of the house of their father (who has been awarded custody of them, as is common in such cases), the narrator and her sister eagerly rush to visit their remarried mother (who "had come up from the South," implying that the family, like that of Shaykh herself, belongs to the Shiite community in Southern Lebanon). However, the impact of the visit is completely transformed when the narrator notices a Persian carpet on the floor of the new home. It had been a favorite spot for her in the old family house; when it disappeared, her mother had not only claimed it had been stolen but even accused a blind old man of perpetrating the crime. With the image of the blameless blind man in her eyes, the