

Orientalism and World Literature: a re-reading of cosmopolitanism in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's literary world

Wen-chin Ouyang
SOAS University of London
Thornhaugh Street
Russell Square
London WC1H 0XG
UK
Email: wo@soas.ac.uk

Abstract

Pierre Cachia's masterful literary biography of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1956) identified cultural exchange and particularly translation as the catalyst for the Egyptian cultural and literary renaissance epitomized in the person of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889-1973). This paper takes Cachia as a point of departure and pursues an understanding of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn within the framework of world literature and locates his vision of the Egyptian modernity and national identity in the circulation of ideas, concepts, bodies of knowledge and worldviews in the Mediterranean world. It focuses on the role of orientalism and European classicism in his cosmopolitanism underpinning his program of cultural and educational reform, and interrogates the conceptual category of "nation," narratives of *Nahḍah*, and theories of world literature.

Key words: Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Egypt, *Nahḍah*, national identity, educational reform, orientalism, medievalism, Hellenism, translation, world literature.

The view that the Muslim world was completely at a standstill until the forces of the West collided with it at the end of the eighteenth century is no longer tenable. The stirrings of Wahhābism in Arabia, and somewhat later, of the Sanūsiyyah in North Africa are signs of vitality. [...] The fact is, however, that such indigenous movements did not become powerful or extensive enough to direct the political and cultural history of the Near East. Particularly is this true of the one country that concerns us here, Egypt. [...] A convenient starting point for a history of the Egyptian Renaissance is the landing of Napoleon's forces in 1798. It was not merely

a military expedition: with it came some distinguished French scientists and orientalists, and they brought to Egypt its first printing press. [...] In fact, the most significant feature of the literary picture of the period was the appearance of literary translations. These soon became so popular that, unless specially commissioned to translate a scientific book, translators devoted their entire attention to fiction, so that apart from the influence they have had on style in general, translations are responsible for the appearance in Arabic literature of two genres: novels and plays.

Pierre Cachia, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn*, 3-18.

In his 1956 masterful literary biography of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889-1973)¹ typical of Orientalist scholarship at the time, Pierre Cachia situates the education and development of this famed “Dean of Arabic Letters” (*‘amīd al-adab al-‘arabī*) as a public intellectual and reformer of Egyptian culture and literature in the context of the nineteenth-century Egyptian *Nahḍah*, the beginning of which, as Cachia posits, like all historians of Arab modernity, is traceable to Napoleon’s Egyptian campaign (1798-1801). This particular encounter between the French and the Egyptians, all at once violent, shocking and fascinating, precipitated the series of events, measures, reforms and transformations in Egypt as well as the Arab world. This is how the story of *Nahḍah* has been told in cultural and literary histories of the Arab world until very recently. The military might of the French dazzled those in power. The knowledge exchange between French scientists and orientalist and local scholars incited thirst for new knowledge among the Egyptians. The delegation of students sent to receive education and training in France brought home ideas and plans for modernizing all aspects of Egyptian life, from government bureaucracy to the military, city planning, education, the status of women, dress, language and literature. And the introduction of the Būlāq printing press in 1820 gave birth to what Benedict Anderson would call “print capitalism”² in modern Arabic, particularly journalism, and generated newspapers and journals in which issues of the day were proposed and debated.

¹ Pierre Cachia, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: His Place in the Egyptian Literary Renaissance* (London: Luzac, 1956).

² See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* ([1983] London: Verso, 1991).

This gave rise to a lively and dynamic print culture that served as one of the arenas of what Jürgen Habermas would call the “public sphere”³ in which ideas, concepts, bodies of knowledge and worldviews circulated into and out of Egyptian culture and literature along multiple trajectories.

The Legacy of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in Egyptian *Nahḍah*

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889-1973), who was embroiled in one controversy after another during his lifetime, is now an iconic figure in the story of *Nahḍah*.⁴ His impact on modernizing Egyptian education,⁵ culture and literature,⁶ albeit

³ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962), tr. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

⁴ Tributes to his contributions have regularly been made even while he was alive. For examples of personal tributes, see Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Dusūqī, *Ayyām ma‘a Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Beirut: al-Mu‘assasah al-‘Arabiyyah li-al-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 1978); and Nizār Qabbānī, *Tarṣī‘ bi-al-dhahab ‘alā sayf Dimashqī* (Beirut: Manshūrāt Nizār Qabbānī, n.d.). Also, Poems and letters addressed to him by, for example, ‘Allāl Fāsī, may be found in *Rasā’il wa-qaṣā’id lam tunshar ilā Ṭāhā Ḥusayn*, ed., ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2006). For collective tributes, see *Ilā Ṭāhā Ḥusayn fī ‘id milādihī al-sab‘īn. Dirāsāt muhdāt min aṣḍiqā’ih wa-talāmīdhīh* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif bi-Miṣr, 1962); *Dhikrā Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: al-kalimāt wal-qaṣā’id wa-al-dirāsāt allatī ulqiyat fī-al-iḥtifāl bi-dhikr al-duktūr Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, 26-28 fabrāyir 1975* (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li-al-Kitāb, 1977); *Mi‘awiyat Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: waqā’i‘ nadwat Bayt al-Ḥikmah bi-Qarṭāj, 27, 28 jānifiyah 1990* (Qarṭāj: Dār al-Ḥikmah, 1993); *Nahr al-‘amid al-fayyāḍ* (Cairo: Maḥaf Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, 1996); *Iḥtifāl Kulliyyat al-Ādāb bi dhikr Ṭāhā Ḥusayn bi-munāsabat murūr 25 ‘āman ‘alā raḥīlih, 27-29 Uktūbar 1998: dirāsah wa-mukhtārāt wa-wathā’iq*, ed., Maḥmūd Fahmī Ḥijāzī (Cairo: Kulliyyat al-Ādāb, Jāmi‘at al-Qāhirah, 1998); *al-Kitāb al-tidhkārī fī dhikr murūr khamsah wa-‘ishrī ‘āman ‘alā raḥīl Ṭāhā Ḥusayn*, 3 Vols, ed., Maḥmūd Fahmī Ḥijāzī and ‘Abdallāh al-Taṭāwī (Cairo: Kulliyyat al-Ādāb, Jāmi‘at al-Qāhirah, 1998); and *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn min jadīd: ārā’ nukhbah min kibār al-muthaqqafīn*, ed., Muḥammad Nawwār (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li-al-Kitāb, 2006).

⁵ See also Muṣṭafā Rajab, *Fikr Ṭāhā Ḥusayn al-tarbawī bayn al-naḍariyyah wal-al-taṭbīq* (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li-al-Kitāb, 1995).

⁶ See, for example, Muḥammad Khalafallāh Aḥmad, *Ma‘ālim ‘alā ṭarīq al-kilāsiyyah al-‘arabiyyah al-ḥadīthah: Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wa-Maḥmūd Taymūr* (Cairo: Ma‘had al-Buḥūth al-‘Arabiyyah, 1977); Rashīdah Mahrān, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn bayna al-sīrah wa-al-tarjamah al-dhātīyyah* (Alexandria: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li-al-Kitāb, 1979); and Khālīd Karakī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn riwā’iyyan* (Amman: Maktabat al-Rā’id al-‘Imiyyah, 1992).

controversial in certain quarters,⁷ is undeniable. His standing as one of the most important architects of modern Egyptian culture is acknowledged in the stupendous efforts made to preserve his words and deeds in writing.⁸ Pieces culled from newspapers⁹ as well as his private papers and letters to other Egyptian luminaries¹⁰ are published in collected volumes. His contribution to and influence on Egyptians are subject to continuous assessment.¹¹ Generations of admirers and detractors have been responding to him, praising or taking to task the views he expressed (even those embedded in his studies of classical Arabic poetry and prose, in his reviews of the works of his contemporaries, and in his translations and summations of French poetry, novels and plays), the proposals he made for cultural rejuvenation published in the print culture,

⁷ On the iconoclastic dimensions of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, see Jamāl al-Dīn Ālūsī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn bayna anṣāriḥ wa-khuṣūmiḥ* (Baghdad, 1973); Sāmiḥ Kurayyim, *Ma‘ārik Ṭāhā Ḥusayn al-adabiyyah wa-al-fikriyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1977); ‘Alī Shalash, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn maṭlūb ḥayyan aw mayyitan* (Cairo: al-Dār al-‘Arabiyyah, 1993); *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn bayn al-shakk wa-al-i‘tiqād*, ed. Kāmil Muḥammad ‘Uwayḍah (Bairut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1994); Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Ghanī, *al-Mufakkir wa-al-amīr Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wa-al-sulṭah fī Miṣr* (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li-al-Kitāb, 1997); and Aḥmad Zakariyyā al-Shalq, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: Jadal al-fikr wa-al-siyāsah* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A‘lā li-al-Thaqāfah, 2008).

⁸ The majority of his works may be found in *al-Majmū‘ah al-kāmilah li-mu‘allafāt al-Duktūr Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1973 [1983]). In addition, his French writings are collected and translated into Arabic by ‘Abd al-Rashīd al-Ṣādiq Maḥmūdī in *Min al-shāṭi’ al-ākhar: kitābāt Ṭāhā Ḥusayn al-faransiyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1997).

⁹ *Turāth Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: al-maqālāt al-ṣuḥufiyyah min 1908 ilā 1967*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Dār al-Kutub wa-al-Wathā’iq al-Qawmiyyah, 2002-03). On his contribution to journalism, see ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sharaf, *Fann al-maqāl al-ṣuḥufi fī adab Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Cairo: GEBO, 1986).

¹⁰ *Ayyām al-‘umr: rasā’il khaṣṣah bayna Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wa-Tawfiq al-Hakīm*, ed. Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li-al-Kitāb, 1998); *Rasā’il Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Cairo: Dār Mirīt, 2000); and *Awrāq Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wa murāsālātuh*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Dār al-Kutub wa-al-Wathā’iq al-Qawmiyyah, 2005-07).

¹¹ See, for example, Sāmi al-Kayyālī, *Ma‘a Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1952); Anwar al-Jundī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: ḥayātuh wa-fikruh fī-daw’ al-islām* (Dār al-‘Itisām, 1976); Sāmiḥ Kurayyim, *Madhā yabqā min Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1977); Ḥusayn Naṣṣār, *Dirāsāt ḥawla Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Beirut: Dār Iqra’, 1981); Aḥmad ‘Ulabī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: rajul wa-fikr wa-‘aṣr* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1985); Ḥusayn Yūsuf Bakkār, *Awrāq naqdiyyah jadīdah ‘an Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Manāhil, 1991); and Mujāhid ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Mujāhid, *Riḥlah fī fikr Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Cairo: Dār al-Taqāfah li-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī‘, 2001).

broadcast on radio, and the programs he suggested for the reform of Egyptian school and university curriculae.¹²

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn is what Foucault would call “author function”¹³ and Barthes “myth”¹⁴ in that he has come to embody the ethos of the century-long enlightenment (*tanwīr*) which began with Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ al-Ṭaḥṭawī (1801-1873) and ended with him. Considered the last of the generation of the Egyptian Renaissance, his death marked the formal end of what Albert Hourani calls “the liberal age” of “Arabic thought.”¹⁵ He is most interesting as a site of the confluence of all the competing, overlapping, contradictory, dialectical, and differing positions held and perspectives taken by public intellectuals with regards to democracy, freedom of speech, secularity,¹⁶ Islamic reform, the separation between critical thinking and faith,¹⁷ the role of literature in public life, and literary innovations and fashions.¹⁸ This “towering figure of Arabic letters” is “a mirror of his times,” as Gaber Asfour (Jābir ‘Uṣfūr) puts it in his masterful study of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s literary criticism, *al-Marāyā al-mutajāwirah: dirāsah fī naqd Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (adjacent mirrors: a study in the criticism of Ṭāhā

¹² The critical responses to Ṭāhā Ḥusayn are conveniently collected in *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn fī mīzān al-‘ulamā’ wa-al-udabā’* by Maḥmūd Maḥdī al-Istānbūlī (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983).

¹³ Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué H. Harari (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 141-160.

¹⁴ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” *Mythologies*, tr. Anette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 109-158.

¹⁵ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹⁶ See, for example, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: al-‘aqlāniyyah, al-dīmuqrāṭiyyah, al-ḥadāthah* (Damascus: Mu‘assasat ‘Ībāl, 198?); and Kamāl Ḥamid Muḡhīth and Sa‘īd Ismā‘īl ‘Aī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: maṣādiruh al-fikriyyah, al-‘adālah al-ijtimā‘iyyah, al-dīmuqrāṭiyyah, al-ḥurriyyah al-akādīmiyyah, al-fikr al-tarbawī, al-huwaiyyah al-thaqāfiyyah* (Cairo: Markaz al-Dirāsāt wa-al-Mu‘lūmāt al-Qānūniyyah li-Ḥuqūq al-Insān, 1997).

¹⁷ See Anwar al-Jundī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: ḥayātuh wa-fikruh fī daw’ al-islām* (Cairo: Dār al-‘Itisām, 1976); Sāmiḡ Kurayyim, *Islāmiyyāt: Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, al-‘Aqqād, Ḥusayn Haykal, Aḡmad Amīn, Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1977); Ramaḍān Muḡammad Ramaḍān Jāriyah, *al-Ittijāh al-islāmī fī adab Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Cairo, 1996); and Ilhām Shāhīn, *al-‘Ilmāniyyah fī Miṣr wa-ashhar ma‘ārikiḥā* (Egypt: Dār Ḥārmūnī li-al-Ṭibā‘ah, 2001).

¹⁸ For the role of his autobiographies, *al-Ayyām* and *Adīb*, in shaping the modern Arabic novel, see ‘Abd al-Muḡsin Ṭāhā Badr, *Ṭaṭawwūr al-riwāyah al-‘arabiyyah al-ḥadīthdah* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1963), 302-321.

Ḥusayn, 1983).¹⁹ Through his works it is possible to reconstruct the Egyptian-French intercultural context of the development of Arabic culture, literature, literary criticism and even Egyptian society²⁰ in the first half of the twentieth century. His autobiographical works, *al-Ayyām* (1929) and *Adīb* (1935), are unsurprisingly the loci of inquiries into his life, his time, and even his blindness,²¹ in the stupendous body of research on the political, cultural and literary issues heatedly debated across the pages of the Egyptian print culture and the sound waves of radio broadcasts at the time. His writings and transcribed broadcasts are invaluable precisely because they are saturated with the material condition of his living. He continues to speak to us of his time and place, quite often repackaged in utopian idealizations, a nostalgic remembrance of an age of enlightenment, *tanwzīr*, and of the impact of *Nahḍah* on contemporary Egypt in reassessments of its achievements, missed opportunities and failures.²²

His bearing on Egyptian modernization is, however, simultaneously enduring and evanescent—he is everywhere but nowhere in particular. He is indispensable in any consideration of the legacy of the Egyptian and Arab Renaissance. At the same time, he seems either ahead of his time or out of sync with his contemporaries, for very few of his ideas have gained the kind of critical currency associated with, for example, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897), Muḥammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ al-Ṭaḥṭawī (1801-1873), Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935), and Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966) in debating Islamic reform and modernization, or Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (1805-1887), Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (1868-1930), Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987) and Najīb Maḥfūz (1911-

¹⁹ Jābir ‘Uṣfūr, *al-Marāyā al-mutajāwirah: dirāsah fī naqd Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Cairo, 1983).

²⁰ See ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sharaf, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wa-zawāl al-mujtama‘ al-taqlīdī* (Cairo: al-Hay‘ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li-al-Kitāb, 1977 [Tunis: Mu‘assasāt ‘Abd al-Karīm Ibn ‘Abdallāh li-al-Tawzī‘ wa-al-Nashr, 1988]).

²¹ See, for example, Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Blindness and Autobiography: Al-Ayyām of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

²² ‘Abd al-Majīd Muḥtasib, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn mufakkiran?* (Amman: Makbat al-Nahḍah al-Islamiyyah, 1980); ‘Umar Miqdād Jimnī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn mu‘arrikhān*, 2 Vols. (Qartāj: Bayt al-Ḥikmah, 1993); Lūsī Ya‘qūb, *al-Aṣālah wa-al-mu‘āṣarah fī fikr Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Maḥabbah, 1989); and *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wa-ta’sīl al-thaqāfah al-‘arabiyyah* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-‘Alā li-al-Thaqāfah, 2002).

2006) in setting new literary trends. His simplified but elegant language of expression is universally admired,²³ but his experiments with the novel are far from pioneering. His translation of Greek plays is well received but of unknown impact to date. And his practical criticism, of classical or modern Arabic literature,²⁴ is often referenced but rarely taken a step further as the kernel of a serious critical method, perhaps because the diverse and divergent sources of his critical thought manifest themselves in his proclamations on classical and modern Arabic and European literary works rather disparately and without much theoretical coherence or even intellectual discipline.

If in hindsight Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's thoughts on culture and literature proved too soft for new generations of theoretically more robust cultural critics and literary theorists, the main areas of his interest—literary criticism, creative writing and translation—continue to throw up ideas and issues of immediate relevance to our pursuits and practices today. Subsequent to Pierre Cachia's masterful biography (1956) and Hamdi Sakkout's magisterial bio-bibliography in 6,342 pages (1975),²⁵ and in the years since his death (1973), Ṭāhā Ḥusayn has been subject to numerous revisionist considerations which take stock of the ways in which his discourses were enmeshed in the fabric of the Egyptian *Nahḍah* and which reassess not only our understanding of what was at stake but also the continued relevance of the unresolved issues at the time. His secularism and orientalism,²⁶ usually entwined in Islamist assessment of his dismissal of pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'an as reliable sources for the history of Islam, for

²³ For a linguistic analysis of his style, see al-Badrāwī Zahrān, *Uslūb Ṭāhā Ḥusayn fī ḍaw' al-dars al-lughawī al-ḥadīth* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1982?).

²⁴ For a summation of his literary criticism, see David Semah, *Four Egyptian Literary Critics* (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

²⁵ Hamdi Sakkout (and Marsden Jones), *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 1975). There is in addition Sa'd Muḥammad al-Hajrasī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn...! Fī al-qarn al-'ishrīn. 'Aṭa'āt usrat Ṭāhā Ḥusayn al-bibliūghrāfiyyah aw Ṭāhā Ḥusayn fī al-Khālīdīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfah al-'Ilmiyyah, 2000).

²⁶ On his orientalism, see 'Abd al-Rashīd al-Ṣādiq Maḥmūdī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: bayn al-Siyāj wa-al-marāyā* (al-Haram [Giza]: 'Ayn li-al-Dirāsāt wal-al-Buḥūth al-Insāniyyah wa-al-Ijtīmā'iyah, 2005). See also Mohamed Al-Nowaihi, "Towards the Reappraisal of Classical Arabic Literature and History: Some Asepects of Taha Husayn's Use of Modern Western Criteria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11: 2 (1980), 189-207.

example, remain contentious.²⁷ But these are not the only issues that can have an afterlife in our current reassessment of the cultural and identity politics of the *Nahḍah* period. The cosmopolitanism inherent in his discourses on literature and culture, even as it is underpinned by orientalism, I will argue, suggests ideas and trajectories by which world literature may be differently theorized. More importantly, it suggests alternatives to nationalism as an imagining of community articulated around the conceptual category of “nation-state” that will have an impact on how Arab identity politics will be understood differently and modern Arabic literature read.

Cultural Encounters and Literary Worlds

In the past decade or so, since the ascendance of “world literature” as an idea for inclusion of literary works from around the world in an “international canon” and as a method of literary study, always informed by translation, Arabic literature has taken advantage of the concepts and methods proposed or assumed in “world literature” to rethink Arabic literary studies and at the same responded to its problematic theoretical underpinnings. Translation, as a means of cultural encounter, or “translation zone” as Emily Apter calls it,²⁸ has been most productive for Arabic studies. Her notions of “untranslatability” has informed many revisionist studies of *Nahḍah*, moving literary and cultural histories from equating Arab modernization with Westernization, and from postcolonial master-slave dialectics in Arab responses to the West.²⁹ Similarly,

²⁷ For a most recent discussion of this, see al-Tihāmī al-Hānī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wa-al-shiʿr al-jāhili: bayna nafahāt al-mustashriqīn wa-ẓilāl al-ʿarab* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūniyyah li-al-Kitāb, 2015). For earlier discussions, see *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wa qaḍīyyat al-shiʿr*, ed. Ṣāliḥ Jawdat (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li-al-Kitāb, 1975), and Muḥammad al-Khiḍr Ḥusayn, *Naqḍ kitāb Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhili* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.d.).

²⁸ See Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²⁹ See Kamran Rastegar, *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe: Textual Transactions in Nineteenth-Century Arabic, English and Persian Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2007); Shaden Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); and Michael Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading on Colonial Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). These

Pascal Casanova's idea of "world republic of letters" has sparked a new way of envisioning the medieval Islamic world of letters.³⁰ However, translation, as both mechanism of cultural encounter and itinerary of world literature, problematically straddles the two poles of the "nation" and "world," with "nation" serving as "local" and the "world" "global," the latter of which is more often than not located in the "West." More importantly, "nation," as sovereign territory, has come to underpin our understanding of language. Language, just like nation, is territorially sovereign. Any text constructed in a language is by extension, "nation"-like, territorially sovereign. World literature, which requires translation for its circulation, inevitably comes to be defined by the movement of "national" canons, via translation, from "local" to "global." Conversely, "nation," as defined by the language of its national canon, is necessarily monolingual.

In a post-national move to pry open the sovereignty of "nation" and "language" I want to make a concerted argument to rethink the monolingualism of the "nation," or "local," as Francesca Orsini does in "The Multilingual Local in World Literature,"³¹ and its cosmopolitanism, understood here simply as a vision of humanity as one community based on a shared morality, that is more akin to "worldliness" of a text, or to the idea that a text, as theorized by Edward Said,

studies of *Nahḍah* take place side by side with studies that expand the arena historically and geographically to cover the Eastern Mediterranean as well as seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See, for example, Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Tarek El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: scholarly currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Abdulrazzak Patel, *The Arab Nahḍah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013). See also *Authoring the Nahḍa: Writing the Arabic 19th Century*, a special issue of *Middle Eastern Literatures* 16:3 (2013), guest edited by Kamran Rastegar.

³⁰ See Muhsin al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic knowledge constructions* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015). For most responses to "world literature" from Middle Eastern perspectives, see *World Literature*, a special issue of *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20:1 (2017), guest edited by Paulo Horta.

³¹ Francesca Orsini, "The Multilingual Local in World Literature," *Comparative Literature* 67:4 (2015), 345-374.

always inheres the world and is never self-sufficient,³² and less in Michael Allan's sense of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's "provincial cosmopolitanism."³³ In Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's works this cosmopolitanism entails a vision of humanity that extends beyond the "national" to encompass all Egyptian, European and Mediterranean³⁴ civilizational values. My purpose is threefold: to move away from the linear itinerary of world literature, from "national" and "global" where global is always located in Europe and North America at present by pluralizing the temporal and spatial configurations of world literature as well as diversifying its sites around the world; to rescue narratives of *Nahḍah* from mere postcolonial identity politics; and to read modern Arabic literature more than allegories of "nation."

One way of doing this is to shift focus to the "literary world," more particularly, to its cosmopolitanism and the ways in which this cosmopolitanism takes shape in cultural encounter and its attendant, even if only inhered in the fabric of one language, multilingualism. World literature itself need not travel, but it can demand the circulation of ideas and people across multiple literary worlds, not necessarily through translation but rather through multilingualism of the world or those who inhabit it. More important, the "world" of world literature can be located anywhere in the world in the past or at present. The way in which this literary world, now seen as multilingual and cosmopolitan, can guide us to alternatives to "national" history of both the Arab world and Arabic literature. As we will see in the works of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, nationalism need not contradict cosmopolitanism. What impact will this have on the stories of *Nahḍah* we will tell in the future? If we look for different imaginings of community, will we also uncover alternative narratives of *Nahḍah* that will free us from the binaries of "nation" and "world," and more importantly, in the context of the

³² See Edward Said, *The World, The Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 31-53.

³³ Michael Allan, *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 129.

³⁴ "The Mediterranean" has been used as foil to the division of the area into North Africa, the Near East, East Europe, and West Europe, or nation-states, in cultural, historical and literary studies since the 1990s, and for the most recent response from Mediterranean Studies to "world literature," see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "Modeling Medieval World Literature," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20:1 (2017), 1-16, and Karla Mallette, "Translation in the Pre-Modern World," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20:1 (2017), 17-29.

postcolonial Arab world, of “colony” and “empire”? Can we move beyond reading Arabic literature as postcolonial identity politics?

I take orientalism and the way it underpins cosmopolitanism as a test case for my inquiries. Orientalism here means the body of knowledge about the Orient, and the disciplines in which this knowledge is produced in Europe, as well as the discourses on the Orient as the other in academia, popular culture or political institutions³⁵ but, diverging from Said, not necessarily informed by the will to power or dominate, or in Said’s words, “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,”³⁶ or by the impulse to demonize or reduce to stereotypes.³⁷ Moving away from considering it on its own as an element of the few studies of orientalism as a part of oriental discourses on modernity,³⁸ I overlap this body of knowledge about the Orient produced in and circulated from Europe, with how Europe defined her present modernity against her other within, or her past medievalism, and in line with her perceived “Golden Age” located in her ancient classicism, as John M. Ganim argues in *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (2005).³⁹ This complex orientalism, a combination of knowledge about the orient and European discourses on her modernity underpinned by a profound ambivalence towards her intimate relations with the orient, I will show, serves as the foundation of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s formulation of an at once authentic and cosmopolitan Egyptian identity, which is at once national and international.

³⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 2-3.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 4-9.

³⁸ See, for example, Joseph H. Escovitz, “Orientalists and Orientalism in the Writings of Muhammad Kurd Ali,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15: 1 (1983), 95-109; Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *American Historical Review* 107: 3 (2002), 768-796; Derek Hopwood, “Albert Hourani: Islam, Christianity and Orientalism,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 30: 2 (2003), 127-136; Lisa Lau, “Re-Orientalism: The Preparation and Development of Orientalism by Orientals,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43: 2 (2009), 571-590; and Fruma Zachs, “Under Eastern Eyes”: East on West in the Arabic Press of the Nahḍa Period,” *Studia Islamica* 106: 1 (2011), 124-143.

³⁹ See John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3-6.

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Itineraries of World Literature

I see three overlapping areas of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's legacy that can serve as loci for a productive interrogation of theories of world literature, imaginings of Egyptian nation, and narratives of Egyptian *Nahḍah* and modernity: the centrality of the exuberant print culture of the nineteenth-century and the first half of the twentieth-century in fostering innovations informed by cultural encounter in cultural practices, language developments, and literary sensibilities and trends; the role of Greek cultural heritage, or European classicism, in the cultural politics of Egyptian *Nahḍah*; and the impact of European orientalism on the identity politics of a specific educated class represented by someone like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. By mining these three areas Cachia and other Ṭāhā Ḥusayn scholars have left out, and by reading Ṭāhā Ḥusayn against world literature, it is possible to complicate and nuance theories of world literature as well as our understandings of *Nahḍah* and readings of modern Arabic literature.

In the following reading of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, I pursue two lines of inquiry. In the first I reconsider the itinerary of world literature normally understood as structured by the linear movement of a literary work from the "national" to the "international" (West), located in Paris, London and New York, and as mediated by translation of an entire literary work, particularly the novel,⁴⁰ and privilege what Eric Hayot calls "literary world"⁴¹ in thinking about world literature. As I do so, I interrogate the sovereignty not only of the "nation" conceptualised in "world literature" but also of its assumed monolingualism, and argue that "nation," even when seen as the "local site" of the circulation of literary works, can be multilingual, multicultural, cosmopolitan and worldly, and that a "literary world" that inheres this "nation" is, like the "nation," necessarily created in the circulation of ideas, concepts and bodies of knowledge across linguistic

⁴⁰ I refer to Pascal Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, tr. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004); David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003) and *How to Read World Literature* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); and Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review* 1 (January-February 2000), 54-68, "More Conjectures," *New Left Review* 20 (March-April 2003), 73-81, and ed. *The Novel*, 2 vols (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁴¹ See Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

boundaries and national borders and, more importantly, in the multilingualism of the local and its intrinsic cosmopolitanism. In the second, I look at the kind of “nationalism” Ṭāhā Ḥusayn proposes and ponder its implication in understanding *Nahḍah* and reading modern Arabic literary works.

Given the size of both the Arabic print culture and the published material by and on Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, it would be impossible to be exhaustive in coverage or thorough in analysis. It is perhaps more judicious, then, to focus on a couple of texts that would allow me to bring together the disparate strands of thought from both Arabic print culture and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s legacy in a way that is productive in how we think about world literature. I will move away from literary works typically used to theorise world literature, and look at his 1937-38 manifesto on the future of education, therefore culture, in Egypt, *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah fī Miṣr* (the future of culture in Egypt),⁴² in tandem with his essays on culture and literature, particularly those collected in *Min ḥadīth al-shi‘r wa-al-nathr* (1936) and *Alwān* (1958). These may not be works of literature, but their discourses on the role of multilingualism in the development of a worldly national literature that frames, informs and expresses a cosmopolitanism specific to Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s time and place, is in harmony with the contemporary modernist Arabic literature—poetry, fiction and drama—Ṭāhā Ḥusayn himself encouraged and promoted as a critic, and on occasions, aspired to write. That he chose to announce his vision for Egyptian culture in the print culture, particularly in the case of *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah*, rather than a report to be submitted to the government as initially intended points to the significance of print culture,⁴³ an important arena of the public sphere in the “liberal age,” not only in shaping Egyptian national community and attendant cultural identity but also in giving substance to the cosmopolitan literary worlds created in Arabic writings.

The Imagined Egyptian Nation in *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah fī Miṣr*

⁴² References are made to the second edition (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1973). *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah* was partially translated into English as *The Future of Culture in Egypt* by Sidney Glazer (Washington, DC: American Council for the Learned Societies, 1954).

⁴³ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah*, 12-13.

This manifesto epitomizes Ṭāhā Ḥusayn vision of an Egyptian identity harvested from his experience both as student and educator, knowledge of French and traditional and reformed Egyptian curriculum,⁴⁴ commitment to and understanding of literature, and conviction in a form of cosmopolitanism that is informed by his belief in the oneness of the Mediterranean and the world. This vision took shape in his encounter with modern European civilization, as seen through the prism of French and, more particularly, with orientalism and the discourses on the Orient intrinsic to the agenda and scope of orientalist scholarship as well as its adjacent discourses on European modernity. It is equally inspired by an Egyptocentric nationalism that aspires to be simultaneously “authentic,” or firmly rooted in the local, and “at home in the world,” a concept I borrow from Timothy Brennan to denote the kind of place Ṭāhā Ḥusayn envisions for Egypt, to on par with Europe in the global and ahead of other oriental nations, as well as his critical self indulgence.⁴⁵

If we wish to be on equal footing with the European nations, in particular, with their military might, so as to be able to defend ourselves against any invasion, and to be able to say to our English friends in a few years: get lost with thanks, for we are now able to defend the [Suez] Canal. Whoever seeks the end must have the means, whoever pursues power ought to possess the means to power, and whoever wishes for an army of European might should desire an European education so as to prepare the youth to form a powerful army.⁴⁶

Full independence is the future of the Egyptian nation and it begins with economic independence from Europe.

We are in need of economic independence without a doubt, and no one would dispute this. In fact, I call for it and insist upon it. [...] We do not want it in order to enjoy looking at it. We want it for the protection of our wealth and livelihood as we similarly want an army to protect the lands of

⁴⁴ A survey of his experience as a student and educator is found in Muṣṭafā Rajab, *Fikr Ṭāhā Ḥusayn al-tarbawī bayn al-naẓariyyah wal-al-taṭbīq* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li-al-Kitāb, 1995).

⁴⁵ See Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁴⁶ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah*, 40.

our nation. This economic independence must be of the European kind, for we do not want to be independent economically in relation to Hejaz, Yemen, Syria and Iraq, but in relation to Europe and America.

This is to be followed by independence of other kinds, which will eventually lead to both national and individual freedom.

We wish for scientific, artistic and literary independence. This independence will enable us to shape a young generation capable of defending our nation, its lands and wealth, and of letting the European know that we are like them and equal to them. This will allow us to speak to the Europeans in such a way as to make them understand us, and to hear the Europeans and understand them. This will let the Europeans know that we see things as they do, assess things as they do, evaluate things as they do, seek from things what they do, and rejects things as they do. We want to be their partners and allies in life, not their servants or means to life.

If we desire this intellectual and emotional independence, which may only be achieved through scientific, artistic and literary independence, then we must desire the means to it. We must then learn as a European would, feel as a European, make judgements as a European, work as a European, and live as a European.

For in the end what we desire is to be free in our homelands, free in relation to foreigners so that they cannot treat us unjustly or oppress us, and also free in relation to ourselves so that we cannot treat each other unjustly, or oppress each other.

We want an internal freedom the foundation of which is a democratic system. We also want an external freedom the foundation of which is proper, full independence, and the ability to protect this independence.⁴⁷

For such an Egyptian nation to emerge and take her place in the world, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn suggests, each and every Egyptian citizen, regardless of her religious belief and class (he makes no mention of ethnicity or gender), must be educated into a cultured “citizen of the world.” The reforms and robust new

⁴⁷ Ibid, 41.

curriculum in multilingualism and what we today call “the humanities” he proposes for the education of postcolonial Egyptian nationals, which first got aired in the print culture, were informed by the ideas of civilization and various types of knowledge about the world circulating around the Mediterranean, as well as the world, through and beyond the machinery of empire, about and in language, literature and culture, which in turn gave form and substance to the “worlds” inhabiting his literary and cultural texts.

Education and Nation-building

Written between 1937 and 1938 and published in 1938, *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah fī Miṣr*, celebrates Egypt’s nascent independence in the wake of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, by which Britain ended its military occupation and control of Egypt, and the 1937 Montreux Convention, by which the Capitulations in Egypt were abolished.⁴⁸ The future of the Kingdom of Egypt looked, in the early moments of post independence euphoria, rosy and full of possibilities. The modernization project driven by a desire for technological advancement begun by Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha (reigned as Ottoman Viceroy 1805-1848), and continued through the rule of Farouk I (reigned as King 1936-52), when Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was writing, could now twin itself with nation-building and forge ahead in full speed. The project of “imagining political community,” which started as early as al-Ṭaḥṭawī,⁴⁹ looked certain to take the form of nation-state, now that Egypt, even if in the way it was mapped the European powers, had gained her territorial sovereignty and financial independence. It was time to look ahead and plan for a future that all Egyptians could subscribe to, invest in, participate in building, and finally enjoy the fruit of their labor, living fully and happily as “authentic” Egyptians in a democratic nation-state that guaranteed individual freedom, particularly of faith and speech, and social equality. This idea is repeatedly stated, explained and related to education throughout the book.⁵⁰

“Primary education is the fundamental pillar of democracy,” Ṭāhā Ḥusayn declares in a separate chapter on the relationship between education and

⁴⁸ Ibid, 11.

⁴⁹ See Benjamin Geer, *The Priesthood of Nationalism in Egypt*. PhD Thesis, 2011. SOAS, University of London.

⁵⁰ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah*, 65-69 and 144-148.

democracy.⁵¹ “A democratic system must guarantee all members of the nation life, freedom and peace,”⁵² and as such it must guarantee “livelihood” to its people, and this can only be achieved through education (*ta’līm*).⁵³ For education will guarantee the “nation” her survival⁵⁴ and individuals their freedom and peace, for freedom cannot be founded on ignorance.⁵⁵ Education “allows an individual to know himself, his natural surroundings and his patriotism, and to harmonize his needs with these.”⁵⁶ Egyptians live in a country (on earth), *al-ard*, which is their refuge, and among a community, *ummah*, in which a language is used. They must learn this language in order to achieve a simple goal: he is a speaking social animal (*ḥayawān ijtimā’ī nāṭiq*). And as such, education will enable an individual to take responsibility for himself, removing any sense of superiority among those in charge that does not “agree with democracy, equality and freedom.”⁵⁷ This sense of superiority must be replaced by “belief in equality and justice” and “faith in the people,” which are “fundamental to national belonging” (*juz’ muqawwim li-shu‘ūrīnā al-qawmī*).⁵⁸

In Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s program the responsibility for nation-building must be shared by the state and its apparatus, the government, and the nation, or all Egyptian nationals, regardless of their faith and social background, he asserts in a chapter on “al-qawmiyyah al-islāmiyyah, al-qawmiyyah al-waṭaniyyah.”⁵⁹ While the state provides funding for education, from the four years of primary school through the five years of secondary to the four years of university, as well as play a leading role in curriculum design and reform, production of textbooks, teacher training, inspection of schools, and supervision of delivery, all nationals partake in education so as to fashion themselves into “citizens of the world” able to interact fully and on equal footing with Europeans and re-join the membership of most advanced civilization in the world. “The purpose of general

⁵¹ Ibid, 65.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 66.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 67.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 145.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 146.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 54-64.

education (*ta'lim 'āmm*) is not only to provide an individual with what he needs in order to live in a advanced society, but also to go beyond to something loftier; to reach the highest ranks of knowledge,"⁶⁰ so that the "sons of our nation" can be on par with the "foreigners."⁶¹ It would be best for Egyptian schools, private or public, religious or secular, to follow a unified general education, from which not even a single Egyptian would be excluded regardless of social or religious background.⁶² The foundation of education, or general education from which departures into highly skilled specialization could take, ought to be a fully developed curriculum in languages and the humanities, through which mastery of multiple languages may be cultivated, and in-depth knowledge of each branch of the humanities attained.

The ideal Egyptian national would be multilingual and versed in history, geography, philosophy, literature and culture of the Mediterranean, the cradle of civilization, and the world, from ancient times to the present, so as to take up her true place in the world. Arabic and Islam, the national language and religion, are to be compulsory on all Egyptian nationals regardless of their religious background, for Islam is perhaps the most important part of Egyptian history and culture, just like Pharaonic, Greek, Roman, Ottoman and colonial histories, and must be taught to Egyptians with increasing depth from the primary through secondary schools. Greek and Latin understandably became essential language requirements, and there would also be room for Coptic, especially among the Coptic population, who too are entitled to their own religious education.⁶³ In addition, pupils must learn European languages so as to be able to access European civilization, and their choice must not be limited to English and French, the languages of Egypt's former colonizers, but rather include, for example, German, Italian and Spanish. The ascendant European civilization is not confined to the achievements of the English and French, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn argued, but encompasses contributions made by other Europeans. There are also the languages of the fellow members of the Muslim community, particularly Persian and Turkish, however denunciatory Ṭāhā Ḥusayn might have felt towards the

⁶⁰ Ibid, 87.

⁶¹ Ibid, 96.

⁶² Ibid, 70-98.

⁶³ Ibid, 266-268.

Ottomans, whom he blamed for the recent backwardness of the Muslims,⁶⁴ for the Iranians and Turks are similarly architects, engineers and builder of the Muslim civilization.

Languages afford their speakers, or those fluent in them, access to the cultural heritage, of humanity at large, preserved in and circulated by them, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn asserts in a chapter on “what ought to be taught in general schools (mādhā yu‘allam fī al-madāris al-‘āammah)”. This world cultural heritage is the ultimate objective of multilingualism. A truly cultured Egyptian would be schooled in their own cultural heritage as well as the cultures of the entire humanity. A general curriculum for Egyptians must include “geography of the homeland,” which “links the past of their homeland to the past of humanity, and their mutual influence,” as well as arithmetics and foreign languages. And foreign languages will allow “the school pupil to transcend his homeland culturally to reach other homelands.”⁶⁵ The educational workers employed by the State, school teachers and inspectors, must take up their responsibility once funding, curriculum reform and design, and the structure within which a multi-lingual and –cultural educational program may be delivered have been put in place. Schoolteachers must serve as role models for their students and embody the kind of multi-lingualism and –culturalism Ṭāhā Ḥusayn hopes to see shape Egyptian national subjects. Otherwise, how can they be effective as teachers and convincing, to their students and the nation, of the curriculum they are to deliver? School inspectors must similarly personify a “citizen of the world” and at the same time take up the additional task of ensuring the delivery of the desired curriculum to the full.⁶⁶

This prescription for the school inspector and teacher is preceded by a lengthy critique of educational policies and practices followed in Egypt at the time. The disparate curricula pursued by the divergent colonial, missionary, religious and Muḥammad ‘Alī’s “modern” schools, which fulfilled the divergent agendas of their founders but no longer suited the purposes of nationalization, particularly of the Egyptian subject, and must necessarily be reformed. At the

⁶⁴ Ibid, 35.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 152.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 149-189.

heart of reform is, in addition to curriculum unification and redesign, is pedagogy. Teachers and inspectors, while called upon to perform their role seriously and responsibly, are to be trained in critical thought as well. Teachers are expected to impart critical skills to their pupils, and inspectors ensure their delivery in full.⁶⁷ The new Egyptian nationals are to be, like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn himself, worldly and autonomous thinking subjects.⁶⁸

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's adoption of Cartesian scepticism is all too well known. It is often attributed to the French influence and assessed in terms of its impact on the study of pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur'an in relation to the history of Islam. However, seen in the light of *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah fī Miṣr*, it is also relevant to his (own) imagining of the Egyptian nation. The multilingual and multicultural Egyptian nation he imagines, if it is to be founded on democracy, equality and individual freedom, very much akin to the slogans of the 1789-1799 French Revolution—liberty, equality, fraternity—it must also foster solidarity among all Egyptian nationals. Separating religion from state, and faith from thought, while allowing religious knowledge to be taught and transmitted in the religious community and even within the system of public education, is his strategy for building an all inclusive, multi-faith national community, with a distinct Egyptian identity.⁶⁹

Multilingualism and Mediterranean Cosmopolitanism of Egyptian Nation

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's ambitious multilingual program for Egyptian nationals is his recipe for the Egyptian identity. The nature of life in Egypt dictates, for example, that the Faculty of Arts (Kulliyyat al-Ādāb) teach Semitic languages, including Arabic and Eastern languages,⁷⁰ Islamic studies, including Islamic philosophy, Islamic history, modelled on what is being taught in Europe,⁷¹ and foreign languages.⁷² To be a true Egyptian is to be rooted in the Egyptian culture, which is by definition multicultural, whether one looks at it historically or

⁶⁷ Ibid, 198-231.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 269-283.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 253-268.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 257.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid, 258.

geographically. Egypt, the cradle of Pharaonic civilization, one of the most ancient civilizations in human history, has been the site of intercultural confluence since time immemorial, starting with the Pharaonic, which spread outward to the eastern Mediterranean and Europe, followed by successive waves of Greek, Roman, Islamic, and finally modern European “colonization,” which brought to Egypt their respective cultures, making Egypt multicultural for thousands of years. Egypt’s location along the southern shores of the Mediterranean has made it part of the same cultural sphere to which modern Europeans, similarly heirs to Pharaonic, Greek, Roman and Islamic civilizations, belong.⁷³ “The future of culture in Egypt is tied to its distant past,” Ṭāhā Ḥusayn announces in the titles of chapter two,⁷⁴ by which he means her Pharaonic history, then goes on to link “The Egyptian mind and the Greek mind” and explain their mutual influence,⁷⁵ as well as “Islam and Christianity have in common their heritage in philosophy,”⁷⁶ and that the “Islamic mind is like the European mind,”⁷⁷ and that “Europe learned from Islam” in the past,⁷⁸ so did Islam from other civilizations,⁷⁹ and must today from Europe.⁸⁰ Being in close contact with Europe does not present any danger to “our personality,”⁸¹ for an authentic Egyptian identity, in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s estimate, is by definition multilingual and multicultural. A multilingual and multicultural national education for Egyptians is arguably their right by birth and a timely reminder of who they are and what their rightful place in the world is.

The world Ṭāhā Ḥusayn sees is the Mediterranean. He sees the Mediterranean as one cultural block where its different parts have in common centuries of history as well as some core cultural values. He resorts to a pre-modern term, *baḥr al-rūm*, literally the Roman or Byzantine sea, to designate the region delineated by the Mediterranean sea rather than by its location in the

⁷³ Ibid, 18-48.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 18.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 21-24.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 26-28.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 29-30

⁷⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 43-48.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 49-50.

⁸¹ Ibid, 49.

African continent, reminding his readers of Egypt's Greek and Roman pasts, both subjects he taught at the Egyptian University (*al-Jāmi'ah al-Miṣriyyah*) upon his return from France between 1919 and 1925.⁸² He also borrows European division and categorization of the rest of the world, such as Near East and Far East to articulate his Eurocentric global vision for Egypt. Egypt may be a part of the Near East, *al-sharq al-qarīb*, not of the entire East, *al-sharq*, as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm would see in *Uṣfūr min al-sharq* (1938), and as such it has little to do with Far East, *al-sharq al-ba'īd*, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn asserts, notwithstanding his admiration for Japan's achievements in modernization.⁸³ Egypt has far more in common with Europe, both being parts of the same Mediterranean world. There is no escape from the European influence historically or geographically, even at the level of religion, and for that matter, no point in denying the pervasiveness of Europe in Egyptian life past and present. On the contrary, it is desirable to be a part of the same world as Europe, now that European culture, the most advanced civilization in the modern age, has indeed become an integral part of Egyptian culture.⁸⁴

This apparent eurocentrism and orientalism in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's cosmopolitanism is, however, tempered by his critical position towards both the achievements of the Far East, evidenced by his admiration for Japan, and his discomfort with the darker side of Europe, seen in its violent imperialism and self-serving imperial policies. Egyptians should not blindly imitate the English or French, however, they should engage with them critically in such a way that would lead to their own transformation into global citizens.⁸⁵ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's cosmopolitanism entails locating Egypt in the global not only in the sense of being "at home in the world," as Timothy Brennan would say, but also of engaging actively and critically with cultural others in such a way that leads to the transformation of the self. If anything, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's manifesto on the future of Egyptian education and culture is about transformation of the self, of the Egyptians, and their place in the world, that is premised on embracing Europe as

⁸² Muṣṭafā Rajab, *Fikr Ṭāhā Ḥusayn al-tarbawī bayn al-naẓariyyah wal-al-taṭbīq*, 17.

⁸³ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah*, 22 and 36.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 49-50.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 39-50.

well as what it says about Egypt. Orientalism informs and underpins Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's cosmopolitanism.

Orientalism and Egyptian National Identity

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's interpretation of pre-Islamic poetry and classical Arabic literature, as he lays out clearly in his introduction to *Fī al-adab al-jāhili* (on pre-Islamic literature, 1927), the heavily revised second edition of *Fī al-shi'r al-jāhili* (on pre-Islamic poetry, 1926), for which he was tried,⁸⁶ owe a great debt to European orientalists, chief among them are Carlo Alfonso Nallino (1872-1938), who taught Ṭāhā Ḥusayn during his tenure as professor in Cairo, and David Samuel Margoliouth (1858-1940), whose views he often borrowed and repackaged for his Arabic reading audience, thought not always without contention.⁸⁷ What he says about *adab*, for example, is a paraphrase of Nallino's views.⁸⁸ His controversial discussion of the unreliability of pre-Islamic poetry and, in fact, the Qur'an, as reliable historical sources for the reconstruction of the rise of Islam in the "authentic" historical context, which issue would become known as the question of the authenticity of pre-Islam poetry, echoed Margoliouth and what the European orientalists were debating at the time.⁸⁹ Even his commentary on contemporary Arabic literature was considerably coloured by contemporary French criticism, Paul Valéry (1871-1944) being his favourite poet and critic, and the most influential on his critical views. This self-orientalising impulse in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's is not necessarily only deconstructive of

⁸⁶ For the relevant court documents, see Khayrī Shalabī, ed., *Muḥākamat Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: naṣṣ qarār al-ittihām didda Ṭāhā Ḥusayn sanat 1927 ḥawla kitābihi "Fī al-shi'r al-jāhili"* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah li-al-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashir, 1972).

⁸⁷ See 'Abd al-Rashīd al-Ṣādiq Maḥmūdī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: bayn al-Siyāj wa-al-marāyā* (al-Haram [Giza]: 'Ayn li-al-Dirāsāt wal-al-Buḥūth al-Insāniyyah wa-al-Ijtimā'iyyah, 2005).

⁸⁸ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Fī al-adab al-jāhili* (Cairo: Mu'assasat Hindāwī li l-Ta'līm wa l-Thaqāfah, 2012), 21-29.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Meftah Tahar, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: sa critique littéraire et ses sources françaises* (Tunis: Maison Arabe de Livre, 1976); and also Muḥammad al-Khiḍr Ḥusayn, *Naqḍ kitāb "Fī al-shi'r al-jāhili"* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.); 2nd edition 1977, and al-Tihāmī al-Hānī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wa-al-shi'r al-jāhili: bayna nafahāt al-mustashriqīn wa-zilāl al-'arab* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li-al-Kitāb, 2015).

Egyptian present's relationship with the past; rather, it is part of a broader agenda of reconstruction that is in turn informed by European orientalism and its attendant discourses on European classicism and medievalism.

The scope of European orientalism goes beyond the discourses on Arabic pre-Islamic poetry and classical literature to encompass ancient civilisations of the "Near East," upon the decipherment of the hieroglyphic writing of Pharaonic Egypt and the cuneiform script of Sumerian, Akkadian and Babylonian Levant in the nineteenth century at the hands of the hands of European orientalists. The Rosetta Stone, the key to Champollion's (1790-1832) successful decoding of the Pharaonic hieroglyphs in 1820, contains a text written in three languages, Hieroglyphic, Coptic and Greek, and as such it certainly inspired Ṭāhā Ḥusayn to link Egypt's history and culture to those of Europe, and to be able to incorporate unproblematically the Copts into the Egyptian nation.⁹⁰ He was not the first or alone in reconstructing Egypt's history by drawing a much longer linear temporal line beginning with the Pharaonic and along Greek, Roman, Umayyad, Abbasid, Mamluk and Ottoman all the way to the Muhammad Ali dynasties. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1801-1873) had already done so before him in *Anwār tafwīq al-jalīl fi akhbār Miṣr wa tawthīq banī Ismā'īl* (1868).⁹¹

Such a reconstruction of Egyptian history in a linear progressive fashion from time immemorial to the present is in parallel to another process of reassessment of the past that echoes the ways in which modern Europe redefined its past as well as its relationship to its various parts. In the process, it reaffirmed its Greek heritage, or classicism, or Hellenism, as the foundation of its

⁹⁰ For the problematic role of Pharaonic civilization and antiquities in the construction of postcolonial Egyptian national identity, see Donald Reid, *Whose Pharaohs? Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). For its role in shaping Egyptian nationalist discourse in fiction, see Samah Selim, "The New Pharaonism: Nationalist Thought and the Egyptian Village Novel, 1967-1977," *The Arab Studies Journal* 8/9: 2/1 (Fall 2000/Spring 2001), 10-24.

⁹¹ See Wen-chin Ouyang, "Return or Departure?: Homecoming in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's Travelogue" in *Tropics of Travel: 4. Homecoming*, Proceedings of the International Conference Organized at the University of Liège (January 13th-15th, 2011), ed. Frédéric Bauden (Louvain.Paris.Walpole [MA]: Peeters, 2015), 89-108.

“Golden Age,” and distanced herself from the medieval, as John M. Ganim has shown, that medievalism and orientalism are two faces of the other of European modernity. “[T]he idea of the Middle Ages as it developed from its earliest formulations in the historical self-consciousness of Western Europe is part of what we used to call an identity crisis, “a site of contest over the idea of the West,” Ganim argues where an ambivalence about its Oriental contaminations, even origins, as well as the Orient, would by the nineteenth-century become connected with Orientalism as well as Romanticism. European modernity would in the end locate its roots in classicism.⁹² Modernist Egyptian intellectuals performed a similar procedure by which they identified the ‘Abbasid era as the “Golden Age” of Arabic-Islamic civilisation, in which Greek learning was a key participant, and demonised the Ottoman rule of what would become known today as “the Arab world.” Medievalism and orientalism in European modernism would collapse into Ottomanism in late, not late Egyptian *Nahḍah* discourses on modernity—and this Ottomanism in late *Nahḍah* discourses has yet to be explored fully—⁹³and European orientalism would become a key ingredient in Egyptian imaginings of national identity. More significantly, orientalism and Hellenism in European modernism would become twin(n)ed in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s cosmopolitanism. He now located the “Golden Age” of Arabic-Islamic civilization in the ‘Abbasid era, as his predecessors and contemporaries did and his successors continue to do even today, as well as in the Hellenism of this very ‘Abbasid “Golden Age.”

In a variety of lectures he gave on Arabic prose and poetry of the ninth and tenth centuries in Egypt and abroad possibly between 1930 and 1933, which were later collected and published under the title of *Min ḥadīth al-shi‘r wa l-nathr* (essays on poetry and prose) in 1936, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn identifies three cultural sources underpinning the foundation of classical Arabic literature, as evidenced by the prose and poetry of the ‘Abbasid “Golden Age”: the Arabic

⁹² See John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3-6.

⁹³ There is little on this aspect of *Nahḍah* discourses to the best of my knowledge. For an example, see Rifaat Ali Abou-el-Haj, “The Social Uses of the Past: Recent Arab Historiography of Ottoman Rule,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14: 2 (1982), 185-201.

language shaped by the Qur'an; Greek philosophy and sciences; and Persian material culture and art.⁹⁴ However, he privileges Greek philosophy and sciences over Persian material culture and art. Persian material culture and art, while limited to a few works and ideas,⁹⁵ did not have as profound an impact, particularly on knowledge and thought, as Greek philosophy and sciences. More important, the Persians lived and operated under the influence of the Greeks, in fact, even Ibn al-Muqaffa' could not escape their influence, and he purportedly translated Greek works as well.⁹⁶ The ways in which Ṭāhā Ḥusayn discusses the examples he gives all go to show the Greek underpinnings of classical Arabic thought and aesthetics. Ibn al-Muqaffa' (724-750 AD), 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib (d. 749/50 AD), al-Jāḥiẓ (776-868 AD), Qudāmah b. Ja'far (c. 873-932/948 AD), and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (932-1023) from among the prose masters, and Abū Tammām (788-845 AD), al-Buḥturī (820-897 AD), Ibn al-Rūmī (836-896 AD) and Ibn al-Mu'tazz (861-908 AD) from among the major poets, were all under the influence of the Greek cultural heritage the Arabs translated, from Logic, Politics, Ethics to Poetics and Rhetoric, preserved, embodied, and transmitted. Hellenism was at the heart of the "Golden Age" of classical Arabic civilisation. Its return to Europe gave rise to European Renaissance and modern Europe.⁹⁷

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's translation of Greek works, dramatic⁹⁸ or philosophical,⁹⁹ albeit more often than not indirectly from French, and dissemination of Greek traditions¹⁰⁰ bespeak his faith in Hellenism and in its further role as a catalyst for

⁹⁴ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Min ḥadīth al-shi'r wa al-nathr* (Cairo: Mu'assasat Hindāwī li-al-Ta'līm wa-al-Thaqāfah, 2012), 77.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 31.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 21.

⁹⁸ His translation of Sophocles, *Electra*, *Antigone*, *Ajax* and *Oedipus the King*, possibly in 1939, is found in *Min al-adab al-tamthīlī al-yūnānī: Sūfūklīs*. He also translated André Gide's (1869-1951) *Oedipus* (1931) and *Theseus* (1946) in *Ūdīb Thīsyūs* (1946).

⁹⁹ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn translated Aristotle's *Constitution of the Athenians* in 1921, *Nizām al-ātīnīyyīn*.

¹⁰⁰ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn also introduced Homer, Socrates (470/469-399 BC), Plato (428/427 or 424/423-348/347 BC), Aristotle (384-322 BC), Alexander [the Great] (356-323 BC) and Julius Caesar (100-44 BC) in *Qādat al-fīkr* (Cairo: al-Hilāl, 1925), tr. into English by Hasan Lutfi, rev. Grace Stretton, *Leaders of Thought* (Beyrouth: Khalifé, 1932). An anthology of selected texts from Greek

a second coming of the Arab “Golden Age”, a time when the Egyptian nation would stand shoulder to shoulder with Europe. Interestingly, however, Hellenism serves another twofold purpose for Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. In the lecture he delivered on “Al-adab al-‘arabī wa makānatuh bayn al-ādāb al-kubrā al-‘ālamīyah (the place of Arabic Literature among major world literatures)”¹⁰¹ at the American University in Cairo in November 1932, he deploys Hellenism inherent in classical Arabic literature to refute the Orientalist claims that pre-modern Arabic literature is as naïve as that of black Africans, as allegedly made by Carl Brockelmann (1868-1956) in the [first edition of] *Encyclopaedia of Islam*,¹⁰² and at the same time situates it in a rather sizable world in which multiple languages are used and various cultures overlap, particularly Arabic, Greek, Latin and Persian, which are now all unified by and in the Arabic language.¹⁰³ Classical Arabic literature, even if it is (only) second to Greek literature, is necessarily cosmopolitan, evidenced by its inherent multilingualism (Arabic, Greek and Persian, to say the least) and explicit multiculturalism (Greek, Persian and Arabic-Islamic, to name but a few), as we have already seen in his assertion of the multi-lingual and -cultural sources of classical Arabic prose and poetry.

Arabic Print Culture and World Literature

drama, *Ṣuḥuf mukhtārah min al-shi‘r al-tamthīlī ‘ind al-yūnān* (1920) is available in a Hindawi digital edition.

¹⁰¹ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Min ḥadīth al-shi‘r wa al-nathr*, 11-22.

¹⁰² Ibid, 13. I have found an echo of what Ṭāhā Ḥusayn alleges in the first chapter of Brockelmann’s history of Arabic literature on the Arabic language, which I accessed in Arabic, *Tārīkh al-adab al-‘arabī*, translated into Arabic by ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 4th ed., n.d.). The comparison reads as follows (in my English rendition of al-Najjār’s Arabic translation): “[...] And this is how the Bedouins describe their camels, as the Bantu Africans (*zunūj* “Bantu”) describe their cows. For this reason, Arabic is not capable of inventing words that describe general and abstract concepts (*lam taqwa al-‘arabiyyah ‘alā ikhtirā‘ alfāz tu‘abbir ‘an al-ma‘nawiyyāt al-‘āmmah wa-al-madarik al-kulliyyah*); rather, it sufficed with describing and identifying specific features (*al-ṣifāt wa-al-khaṣā’iṣ*). This is the best feature of the poetry of ancient Arabs. It does not point to an expansive awareness; on the contrary, it indicates a narrow, limited consciousness not yet capable of abstraction (*tajrīd al-ma‘ānī al-kulliyyah wa-istikhlāṣihā*)” (43).

¹⁰³ Ibid, 15.

Orientalism, simultaneously expressive of its attendant classical Greek and modern European traditions, understandably becomes an integral part of the texture of Arabic writing, just as the experience of living in intimate proximity with the Europeans. The travel of European life, culture and literature into Arabic writings pursues divergent trajectories and follows diverse itineraries not necessarily through the avenue of translation. This is not to undermine the role of translation in mutually enriching as well as transforming cultural encounters; rather, it is to point to other avenues which, fully explored, could open up current theories of world literature to new possibilities. Looking at orientalism as a body of European knowledge that inhabits the textual worlds of Arabic writing, it is possible to begin to see how circulation of ideas, even worldviews, outside the “translation zone,”¹⁰⁴ occurs through quotation, paraphrasing, summation, allusion, even critique in print culture, in newspapers, magazines and “trade” or “popular” books intended for, let us say, a “general audience,” or the public. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah fī Miṣr* is a good example.

Arabic print culture in the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century served as one of the arena of the “public sphere” on the pages of which issues relevant to modernization were formulated, debated and reformulated. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, with whom this role of Arabic print culture allegedly ended, took full advantage of the relative freedom of the press at the time and, like his predecessors and contemporaries, put forward his ideas, his own, borrowed or an amalgamation of both, to have them tested, debated and revised, as was the case with his *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhili*. The pages of the Arabic print culture are where knowledge from various sources gathered then spread. This knowledge, like orientalism in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s writing, becomes part of the fabric of Arabic writing at the time, which was by definition and necessity grounded in the kind of multilingualism and multiculturalism desired in his utopian vision of a cosmopolitan Egyptian nation.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ I borrow the term from Emily Apter in *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁵ I go against the grain of Michael Allan’s reading of the exchange between Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and André Gide that took place in person but more particularly on the site of *Adīb* as “the limits of literary experience” and the “provincialism of the

Alwān (1958), another collection of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's essays originally published in newspapers and journals, though from a later period, brings together yet again major and minor cultural and literary figures, their major works and influential ideas or practices, from classical Greek and Latin, classical and modern Arabic, modern and contemporary European and French, and contemporary American in a comparative fashion. Cicero (106-43 BC), Yazīd b. Mufarrigh (a minor poet Ṭāhā Ḥusayn picked out from *Kitāb al-Aghānī* for a discussion of the ways in which poets in the early Umayyad period were embroiled in politics), Voltaire (1694-1778), Diderot (1713-1784), August Comte (1798-1857), Paul Valéry (1871-1945), Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Franz Kafka (1883-1924), and Richard Wright (1908-1960), even the two famous Parisian salon hostesses, Jeanne Julie Éléonore de Lespinasse (1732-1772) and Marie Anne de Vichy-Champrond, known as Madame du Deffand (1697-1780), appear in parallel individual studies. Aristotle (384-322 BC), Aristophanes (c. 446- c/ 386 BC), Sophocles (c. 497/6-406/5 BC), Euripides (c. 480-c. 406 BC), Pindar (c. 522- c. 443 BC), Ibn Ḥazm (994-1064), and Stendhal (1783-1842) are on the other hand seamlessly written into the fabric of the text. Always paraphrasing and summarizing but never quoting directly or translating, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn inhabits the world of *Alwān* with characters from different historical eras and cultural spheres, who are now all engaged in dialogues through the prism of his impeccable Arabic prose, so as to shed light on issues of immediate relevance to humanity at all times, such as universal topics of war, love, freedom, and justice.

In a contemplation of artistry in literary works in “Fī al-ḥubb (on love),”¹⁰⁶ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn juxtaposes Ibn Ḥazm to Stendhal and ponders the ways in which love, as it is explored and theorized in their works (which Ṭāhā Ḥusayn does not name), goes beyond cultural, emotional, political and psychological preoccupations to explain what art is through depictions of love. Similarly, in an

literary world,” even as he acknowledges something akin to “provincial cosmopolitanism,” and argue for the cosmopolitanism of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's texts, more particularly, his critical texts. For Michael Allan's reading, see *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 115-130.

¹⁰⁶ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Alwān* (Cairo: Mu'assasat Hindāwī li l-Ta'līm wa l-Thaqāfah, 2012), 83-97.

inquiry into individual freedom and just rule in “Thawratān (two revolutions),” the slave rebellion against the Roman Republic most famously linked to Spartacus (c. 111-71 BC), known as the Third Servile War (73-71 BC), is compared with the Zanj Rebellion led by a certain ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad (869-883 AD) during the ‘Abbasid rule.¹⁰⁷ In order to adjudicate in favour of “political engagement” against “art for art’s sake,” practices in Greek, Arabic and French literary fields in the past and at present are brought to bear on a discussion of literature and politics in “Al-Adab bayn al-ittiṣāl wa-al-infiṣāl (literature between isolation and engagement.”¹⁰⁸ A panoramic survey of world literatures in “Al-Adab al-muḥlim (oppressive literature)”¹⁰⁹ and “Bayn al-‘adl wa-al-ḥurriyah (between justice and freedom)”¹¹⁰ gives a general sense of how humanity has always responded to injustice, and the perpetual tension between freedom and justice respectively.

The text of *Alwān* is worldly, so are the in-built texts, or chapters, that make up the totality of the collection. It will be worthwhile to unpack the ways in which Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s impeccable Arabic inheres, in his particular case, the French language, or, put differently, how the French language transformed his Arabic. The task will not be easy, but will not impossible either. Perhaps it suffices for now to see that the intellectual and, let us say, cultural and literary ingredients of his texts, even as they are now given a different shape and texture in the Arabic language, come from multiple extra-Arabic sources. These sources, melded into each other, give his texts a worldliness that corresponds to his Mediterranean cosmopolitanism. This inherent cosmopolitanism places Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s writing in the world, and this worldliness gives texture to his writing. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s writing, whether in *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah fī Miṣr* or elsewhere, gives us two ideas about theories of world literature: that the worldliness of literary works, what Eric Hayot calls “literary worlds” ought to be an important area of inquiry, and that circulation of ideas, concepts, bodies of knowledge and worldviews outside the machinery of translation (and this machinery yet to be

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 13-153.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 155-170.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 172-192.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 193-207.

adequately and carefully theorized) is equally significant in giving shape to worldly literary works.

Orientalism, Hellenism and Egyptian Cosmopolitanism

World literature, as it was conceived by Goethe in the late nineteenth-century and revived today, Amir Mufti points out in *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (2016),¹¹¹ has a complicated history in orientalism. Orientalism's relationship with world literature is not too different from what it has with European modernity. Equally, it has a complex relationship with Egyptian *Nahḍah* and her discourses on modernity. It is a site of competing discourses, and is often overlapped with Hellenism. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was not the first one to advocate a multilingual curriculum in schools or teach Greek and Latin literatures or histories. In al-Ṭaḥṭawī's schools, Arabic, English, French, Italian and Turkish were taught, so was a book by 'Abdallāh Ḥusayn al-Miṣrī called *Tarīkh al-falsafah al-Yūnāniyyah*.¹¹² However, Greek and Latin heritage, or Hellenism, at the hands of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn would become one of the many sides of his definition of Egyptian modernity and "national" identity, not simply a part of medieval Islam. It is overlapped with orientalism as well as Egypt's Pharaonism and Islam. As juxtaposed to Ottomanism, these would become the foundation of his vision for a Mediterranean Egyptian identity. The authenticity of this Egyptian identity is precisely its multilingualism and multiculturalism, and more importantly, its refusal to be boxed into one language, religion or culture. What other stories of *Nahḍah* can we tell through focusing our examination of the nineteenth century on Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's insistence on Egypt multilingual and multicultural heritage?

¹¹¹ See especially chapters 1 and 2, respectively "Where in the World is World Literature?" and "Orientalism and the Institutions of Indian Literature," *Forget English: Orientalisms and World Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 56-98 and 99-145.

¹¹² Daniel L. Newman, "Part I: Introduction," *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)* (London: Saqi, 2004 [2011]), 17-97, 47, 48.

It has been sixty years since the publication of Pierre Cachia's masterful literary biography of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. Literary studies within area studies, comparative literature, and world literature, having acquired novel priorities and developed new theories and methodologies, have significantly transformed orientalism. However, the cultural encounter between Egypt and Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as the attendant intercultural politics, Cachia identifies through his observations of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn remains a site of contemplation and debate on issues relevant to Egyptian cultural and literary modernity and national identity. Even Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, as one embodiment among many of this cultural encounter, can still provide us with the critical ammunition not only to theorize world literature differently but also Egyptian modernity and identity. The story of orientalism, Hellenism and Ottomanism in Egyptian discourses on modernity and identity has yet to be told.