



# Arabisch-Islamische Welt in Tradition und Moderne

Herausgegeben von  
Raif Georges Khoury

Band 11

2015

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Mahmud Ghanayim

# The Lure of the Title

Text and Context in Palestinian Fiction  
1948–2012

2015

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Volumes 1–4 of the series have been published by Martin Schmidt, Neckarhausen.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek  
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen  
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet  
über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche  
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet  
at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

For further information about our publishing program consult our  
website <http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

© Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden 2015

This work, including all of its parts, is protected by copyright.

Any use beyond the limits of copyright law without the permission  
of the publisher is forbidden and subject to penalty. This applies  
particularly to reproductions, translations, microfilms and storage  
and processing in electronic systems.

Printed on permanent/durable paper.

Printing and binding: Hubert & Co., Göttingen

Printed in Germany

ISSN 1864-8002

ISBN 978-3-447-10494-4

*For Sasson Somekh*



## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .....	ix
Preface .....	xi
0. Prolegomena .....	1
1. Between Classicism and Romanticism .....	9
1.1 To Whom Does Spring Belong? Nostalgia and Coloring Reality .....	9
1.2 Via Dolorosa and Other Stories: The Impotence of the Classical Heritage .....	18
1.3 Wild Flowers: A Revolution in Beautiful Time .....	34
2. The Road to Realism .....	55
2.1 The Hexad of the Six Days and Other Stories: Reality versus Legend .....	55
2.2 The Noble Mare: Ideology from the Summit of Mt. Jarmaq .....	68
3. In the Ocean of Realism .....	81
3.1 'Ā'id al-Mī'ārī Sells Manāqīsh in Tall al-Za'tar: Two Knights from Palestine .....	81
3.2 Fragrance of the Homeland: Scent Has a Language .....	90
4. Immersion in Folk Culture .....	99
4.1 A Sin: Crime and Punishment The Palestinian Version .....	99
4.2 The String and the Cicada: A Woman Leaks Blood .....	107
4.3 Illicit Talk: Scheherazade Still Speaks .....	120
4.4 Carla Bruni, My Secret Lover: Rejection of the Traditional Lexicon .....	129
5. Commitment and Modernism .....	147
5.1 Mt. Sikh and Other Stories: Place as Protagonist .....	147

5.2 The Silent Dialogue of the Balconies: Human Concerns at Last .....	149
5.3 Beneath the Surface of the Ink: Issues of Creativity and the Agony of Writing .....	154
6. Afterword .....	159
7. Bibliography .....	163
8. Index .....	177



## Acknowledgments

Several people have earned my gratitude for help proffered during the preparation of this study. I am first and foremost deeply indebted to Mr. Maḥmūd Muṣṭafā, the general director of the Arabic Language Academy in Israel (ALAI) for his scholarly comments on the Arabic version of this book. Thanks are also due to Mrs. Amīna Ḥasan, ALAI's scientific manager, and its assistant researchers, Miss Hiba Fāhūm and Mrs. Sukayna Na'ran Ṣāliḥ. They have contributed considerably to this book.

Mr. Michael Guggenheimer helped me in preparing the English translation of the Arabic text. Dr. Helene Furani made clever suggestions of a stylistic nature. I thank these individuals for their practical assistance. I also thank my mentors and colleagues for their patience during the slow gestation of this study. Needless to say, any remaining faults are my own.

At the institutional level, I acknowledge with gratitude the financial support provided by ALAI to carry out this study, and to Tel Aviv University for defraying a significant part of the costs incurred in publishing this book.

Many thanks go to Dr. Barbara Krauss, the director of Harrassowitz Verlag, for her professional and persevering work. Thanks are also due to Professor Emeritus R. Georges Khoury from Heidelberg University, the editor of the series *Arabisch-Islamische Welt in Tradition und Moderne*, who provided constant encouragement at the publication stage. I would also like to express my appreciation to Mr. Reinhard Friedrich and Mr. Michael Fröhlich who devoted professional attention in the production of this work.

Last but not least, special thanks go to my wife Sihām, who has stood beside me all these years with genuine love and support, and to my children, Ṭayyib and Nahāwand, who have always encouraged me with love and respect. Without them, none of my book is possible.

M. Gh.



## Preface

The value of research on Palestinian literature in general, and Palestinian literature inside Israel in particular, is derived from an important principle of literary theory, which depends greatly on the process whereby literature is driven from the margin to the center, and on the reverse process whereby it is driven from the center to the margin. The theory that observes these constant up-and-down movements among writers and literary movements and systems, and uses them to derive laws of emergence, ascendancy, exhaustion, and corrosion, must of necessity be of interest to students of Palestinian literature, which is driven in fits and starts towards the center of cultural life in an attempt to hold a position on the map of contemporary Arabic literature.

One may ask what benefit can accrue from a study of titles in Palestinian literature written in Israel and whether these differ in any way from other Arab or Palestinian stories and novels. This question rises to the surface, and is answered by the distinctive features of Palestinian literature, which stem from the specific cultural, political, and social context of a minority clinging to its separate identity with every available means, in order to affirm and preserve its existence. It does so by way of literary texts that take into account the constraints and effects of context.

However, the present study does not emanate from a theory, nor was the theory of titles taken into account, when the texts were perused according to a firm belief in domination of the text, which receives its strength from the predominance of creative writing over criticism, and of action over theory. So despite what appears on this book's binding, titles in and of themselves were not the initial objects of this study, although they certainly dazzled and enticed as I viewed the texts. Rather, the texts and their vast concepts were the object for my search into the way meaning is produced.

This linguistic-stylistic study is thus fundamentally based on the linguistic notion that continues to accompany my effort to understand the function of language in literature. This seemingly limited aspect takes on a broader dimension for understanding the meaning of language in a more complete sense, as will be made clear in this book. The concept of text, too, which is usually taken to con-

sist only of the main body of a work of literature, is transformed in the present study into the dialectical semiotic triad of title, text, and context, which together create meaning.

Perhaps those occupied with documenting reality will have a pretext, when they find something arousing their appetite in this study of titles, to apprehend the ideology which the text expresses. However, I must convey a warning against too much optimism or too free a dialogue with the text, for the ideology it communicates is not necessarily that which the author intends or which exists in reality. Rather, in every case, we encounter the mind of the implied author, who depicts an imaginary reality we read through literature.

Mahmud Ghanayim  
Tel-Aviv University  
August, 2015

## Abstract

*The Lure of the Title* is a study of novels and short stories, written by members of the Palestinian minority in Israel between the years 1948-2012. The study attempts to trace the position of the Palestinian dialect: its presence and absence in the titles of works of literature, chapters, etc. Based on a semiotic perspective; it examines the social, cultural and political role of dialect in the formation of this literature. The focus in this study is on the semiotic triangle of title, text and context, in order to clarify the position, role and tendencies of this literature in the Arab and local literary sphere, from the synchronic and diachronic perspectives alike.

This is a pioneering study in Palestinian literature, undertaken with contemporary literary-linguistic tools to define key thematic issues in Palestinian literature at the present time. It is hoped that the emerging tapestry of ethnic history, literary poetics, and ethno-politics evoked by the recent Palestinian experience brings into view certain deep-rooted tensions in the region thereby breaking fresh ground in the complementary realms of literature and politics in a Middle Eastern modality.

Professor Ghanayim relies on a fairly large corpus of novels and short stories written by Najwā Qa'wār Farah, Emile Ḥabībī, Muṣṭafā Murrār, Ḥannā Ibrāhīm, Muḥammad Naffā', Muḥammad 'Alī Tāhā, Nājī Zāhir, Fāṭima Dhiyāb, Riyād Baydas, Suhayl Kīwān, Maysūn Asadī, and 'Alā' Ḥlēḥil. This group of *littérateurs* represents various periods, genders and religions, here approached from the vantage point of a broad referential space comprising *inter alia* a nuanced spectrum of ideological, literary and cultural concepts.

Professor Ghanayim is associate professor in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Tel Aviv University, and he is the President of the Arabic Language Academy in Israel, since 2008 the highest institution for issues concerning the Arabic language in the country.