INTRODUCTION

This volume of ten short stories and one play is the fourth in a series of Contemporary Arabic readers designed generally for use on the intermediate level: Vol. I, Newspaper Arabic; Vol. II, Arabic Essays; Vol. III, Formal Arabic; Vol. IV, Short Stories; and Vol. V, Modern Arabic Poetry. They may be used as a series, since each succeeding genre is more difficult than the preceding one; or they may be used independently of each other. Volume IV assumes the student's mastery of the basics of Arabic grammar and a fairly limited amount of vocabulary. The student has reached the stage where his attention is now devoted less to problems of grammar and more to matters of vocabulary and style. Instead of intensive grammatical analysis of a limited amount of text he now needs to expand his vocabulary and gain a feeling for style and idomatic expressions by reading as extensively as possible. Short Stories attempts to facilitate this by presenting a collection of interesting works by representative modern writers provided with every needed help in reading. Few grammatical notes are included, but extensive aid is given to facilitate translation.

The following features are designed to aid the student: (1) The volume is published in two parts, one with the texts and the other with annotations, so that both may be visible simultaneously; (2) words are translated in terms of the contexts in which they occur; (3) all notes, annotations, translations, etc., are included in a single listing in order of occurrence in the text; (4) a basic vocabulary of a little over 500 words is assumed for the student and excluded from glossing. These include the first 500 items from Jacob M. Landau, A Word Count of Modern Arabic Prose (American Council of Learned Societies, New York, 1959), plus pronouns, numerals, and the names of months and days of the week. However, words from this list are glossed if the particular context seems to require it; (5) every word in the text is accounted for; thus, prepositions normally occurring with verbs, nouns, etc., for certain meanings are listed with the item in question; thus, ل Planner ام "the books that he has" is listed as one item; (6) selections are "over glossed", i.e., a word normally excluded is glossed if the passage so requires; phrases and even entire sentences are translated where the structure may not be entirely clear; and (7) each selection is glossed independently of all the others, so that the student is not required to recall a word from a previous selection. Once a word is glossed in a given selection, it is not normally translated again if it occurs later in the story. The student must search for it among earlier listings, or go to a dictionary. Further, although the stories are generally graded from less to more difficult in style, independent glossing permits them to be read in any order desired.
The student interested in building his vocabulary is urged to review periodically the stories he reads. There is a fairly considerable overlapping of vocabulary from one story to the next, regardless of subject or theme, and the student will naturally tend to retain the words which so recur. Rereading stories and consciously comparing the range of contexts that a given word occurs in, relating to each other words having a common root, etc., will be an active exercise which will help the student master new vocabulary as well as acquire a feeling for word usage and idiomatic style.

II

Modern Arabic literature has seen a rebirth which breaks with classical forms and traditions and attempts to adjust to Twentieth Century ideals, problems and solutions. Poetry, which flourished in unbroken tradition from Pre-Islamic times to the Nineteenth Century, has in the Twentieth seen the development of modern schools which include free verse and existentialist themes. Literary criticism, which had grown sterile during the Ottoman period, after World War I was reborn with a vitality based on scientific principles adapted from the West, thanks to such pioneers as Sulaymān Al-Bustānī of Lebanon; Taha Ḥusayn, 'Abbās Maḥmūd Al-'Aqqād of Egypt; Muhammad Kurd 'Allī of Syria; and Mihā'īl Nuʿayma, Mārūn 'Abbūd of Lebanon. Drama, in effect a neglected area in Arabic literary tradition, became securely established after World War I with the works of Tawfīq Al-Ḥakīm of Egypt and Saʿīd Tākī Al-Deen of Lebanon. Short stories and novels too reflect this evolution: from classical forms and classical themes there developed in the Nineteenth Century a period of translations from the West; this was followed by original works showing great interest in Arab history and exhibiting Western influence; after World War I there came stories of social and political orientation, where the writer treats of matters of national or local interest, even employing varying degrees of his own variety of colloquial Arabic; and the present period includes avant-garde stories posing questions of bewilderment and searching for the nature and meaning of truth.

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Before the nineteenth century the Arab world was largely cut off from the West. The main contact with the West was through the Christians of Lebanon and Syria, who had been exposed to European culture in various forms since the sixteenth century. The Renaissance - النهضة - had its beginnings in this contact: the Christians of the Levant, led by the two Lebanese families the Yāzījī's and the Bustānī's, developed great interest and pride in Arab language and culture, and strove to evolve a new Arab culture; indeed, the founders of modern Arab nationalism were the Christians of XIX Century Syria and Lebanon.
Lebanese and Syrians migrated to Egypt and the New World (especially Brazil and the United States) where they took the lead in sparking the rebirth and modernization of Arab letters.

Napoleon's Egyptian campaigns 1798-1801 brought Egypt abruptly into contact with European culture, opening the eyes of the Egyptians to new vistas and new challenges. Mohammed Ali (reigning from 1805 to 1849) set about westernizing Egypt in earnest: printing presses, newspapers and magazines, schools, literary and scientific societies all became widespread. This was the period of soaking up of Western culture—mastering European languages, translation into Arabic of scientific and literary works, studies abroad, and assimilation of Orientalists' studies on the Arab East. Reformers like Jamāl Ad-Dīn Al-Afhānī (1838-1897), Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849-1905), and 'Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kaẕībī (1849-1902) arose to point the way to a renaissance, and patriots like Aḥmad 'Arabī Pasha resorted to force to liberate and modernize their homeland.

The literary movements fed on and fed this renaissance. The first step was widespread translation and adaption from Western languages. Novels and plays by Shakespeare, Corneille, Racine, Molière, Dumas, etc. were widely translated, e.g., by Adīb Ishāq (1856-1885) of Syria and Najīb al-Ḥaddād (1867-1899) and Jamīl Al-Mudawwar (1862-1907) of Lebanon. Drama was now discovered, and had its first beginnings when the Beirut merchant Māqūn Naqqāsh (1817-1855) translated Molière's L'Avare into Arabic and performed it with friends at his house. He then began composing his own plays and performing them for notables of the city and foreign diplomats. Shaykh Khalīl Al-Ŷāziǰī (1858-1889) composed the first play in Arabic verse ("Chivalry and Loyalty"), and performed it in 1878.

A significant step forward was taken when the Lebanese writer Aḥmad Fāris Ash-Shidyāq (1804-1887) composed his Rabelaisian ("Adventures of Faryāq") in 1855 which demonstrated conclusively that Arabic literature was capable of producing original, imaginative and compelling works.

The novel in the Nineteenth Century was traditional in form, reflecting the maqāmāt of Classical Arabic literature; and traditional in theme, dealing with long-honored Arab values and involving moralizing and preaching. It was artificial and superficial in content, with little character development or intellectual analysis, and painted pictures in black or white with no in-between shades.

The Nineteenth Century belonged to the Syro-Lebanese, who introduced Western culture to the East through translations and original works under Western influence. They treated, in general, classical themes, and tried to "purify" the language and glorify Arab traditions. The philological works of Nāṣif al-Ŷāziǰī (1800-1871) and Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819-1883) and their followers are still held in high esteem today. Political issues
were ignored: it remained for the Egyptians of the Twentieth Century to take up contemporary political and sociological issues.

The last decades of the XIX Century saw the migration of Syrians and Lebanese to Egypt, where they found greater opportunities for cultural development. The first great periodicals were founded in Egypt by Lebanese; the newspaper Al-Ahrām, founded in 1876 by Salīm and Bishāra Taqlī, and the magazine, Al-Hilāl, founded in 1892 by Jurji Ţaydān (Beirut 1861–Cairo 1914) are still flourishing today.

The first two decades of the Twentieth Century were a period of transition: the Egyptian novel was still traditional in form and theme, but now the effects of deepening Western influence were beginning to show. There were the beginnings of the liberation from techniques of the past. The romance of adventure was less apparent, and there was now an awareness of one's fellow man.

This period was to witness the culmination of the historical novel in the works of Jurji Ţaydān who, in the manner of Sir Walter Scott, wrote his ever popular heroic tales of Arab history. The Egyptian Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī (1876–1924) is perhaps the outstanding stylist of the entire renaissance. He translated and adapted many French authors such as Chateaubriand, Dumas, and Alphonse Karr, and composed original works as well. But he is best known for his narratives ("Views") 3 vols., 1910–1921 and the "Tears" (1915) with their lyrical and musical style and charming and sentimental melancholy.

The stage is set for a more complete liberation from the past by the work حديث عيسى بن هشام ("Narratives by 'Īsa bin Hishām") 1907 of Muḥammad Al-Muwayliḥī (1868–1930). A satire on contemporary Egyptian society, it is the acknowledged first important literary monument of the modern Arab renaissance; it attempted to reconcile the form of the ancient maqāma with modern themes. Its moral significance was that Egypt was now ready to take stock of itself — its strengths and shortcomings — and to tackle seriously the problem of its rebirth.

The first true Arab novel was written by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (b. 1888) in 1914 ("Zaynab: Rural Scenes and Values"). For the first time, the life of Egyptian peasants is portrayed in a novel, and there is socio-psychological analysis of the characters.

Against the background of the Egyptian nationalist movement at the end of World War I Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (b. 1898) wrote عودة الروح ("The Return of the Soul") 1924 which paints sympathetic yet realistic scenes of the Egyptian countryside in an effort to trace the continuity of Egyptian national spirit from ancient times to the present as an insight in the abortive Egyptian revolution.
Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931) also belongs to this period. He was among the first to make a direct break with tradition in spirit and theme. His strong anti-clericalism is evident in his collections "Broken Wings" and "Rebellious Spirits". Although he still tended to preach, and saw issues in sharp blacks and whites, he introduced the poetical element in his stories and developed a more artistic style. A Lebanese who migrated to the United States, he had great impact on Arab writers who followed him.

With Haykal, Ḥakīm and Gibran literary emancipation is complete. The novel has less exaggeration, more portrayal of individual character, with psychological and social analysis. It is fully contemporary and regional, even using varying amounts of colloquial speech, and treats problems of moral conflict.

In the period between the two World Wars, these trends are continued and perfected. The social and psychological dimensions of character are accounted for; there is advancement in technique, and the plot is emphasized; there is no longer direct preaching, and the characters seem more real. Contact with the West is ever-increasing, the short stories of Guy de Maupassant and O. Henry serving as models.

Perhaps the Lebanese poet Iliyya Abū Mādī (1899-1957) who settled in New York should be mentioned here for the influence he exerted on the younger generations through his spirit of scepticism as expressed in such works as the poem لست أدرّي ("I Don't Know") 1927.

The short story, like the drama, was not in the Arab tradition; the Arab short story came into its own after World War I, surpassing the novel in popularity in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Mahmūd Taymūr (b. 1894) deserves special mention in the development of the Arab short story; his narrative skill and expertness of style in such collections as الشيخ جمعه وقصص أخرى ("Shaykh Jum'a and other Stories") have earned him the title of "The Guy de Maupassant of Egypt".

Other representative Egyptian novelists and short story writers of the interbellum period are Tāhā Husayn (b. 1889) with his moving autobiography الأيام ("The Days") 1929; İbrāhīm 'Abd al-Qādir al-Māzīnī (1890-1949); 'Īsā and Shīḥāṭa 'Ubayd; Tāhīr Lāshīn (b. 1897); Al-Anīsa Mayy (1895-1941); 'Abbās Māhmūd al-'Aqqād (b. 1889) and his novel سارة ("Sara") 1938; Bint Ash-Shaṭī'ī (pseudonym of 'A'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥmān) and her concern with the status of women in Egyptian society; Yahyā Ḥaqī (b. 1906), whose stories and plays are full of symbolism, e.g. his play قنديل أَمَّ فَراش ("The Lamp of the Sanctuary") 1954; and Bishr Fāris (b. 1906), whose stories and plays are full of symbolism, e.g. his play فَرْطُ الْطَّرِيقُ ("Crossroad") 1938.

Among the important Lebanese story tellers of this period, painting vivid pictures of Lebanese village life, are Mikhā'il Nu'ayma (b. 1889),
who like Gibran belonged to the "American School" of Lebanese emigrés; Khalīl Taki ad-Deen, and his brother Said Taki ad-Deen (1904-1960) whose works were written during this period while in the Philippines, but not published until after World War II; Tawfīq al-Awād and his ʿAmmīn ʿAbbūd (1886-1962), the recorder par excellence of life in the Lebanese village; and Kārām Mīlīm Kārām. In Syria, Fuḥd Shāyib wrote stories about the impact of Western technology on Syrian Beduins in his collection ژرخ تاریخ ("The History of a Wound") 1944.

The period after World War I ushered in the drama also as an important current in Arab literature. Tawfīq al-Hakīm, the dominant figure in Arab drama, showed a predilection for symbolism and classical themes in his play ʾAḥl al-kīf ("The People of the Cave") 1933, the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, found in both Christian and Muslim tradition; ʿAllād al-Shāhrazād ("Sheherzade") 1934, and ʾAmmītāt ("Plays") 1937. Hakīm's plays of this period were "intellectual drama," more enjoyable read than acted on the stage. Said Taki ad-Deen of Lebanon, on the other hand, has produced plays which have enjoyed great success, on the stage: ʿAllād al-mašhūr 1924, ("Were It Not for the Lawyer") 1945, and ʿAllād al-shīrāzī ("The Outcast") 1953. Ahmad Shawqī (1868-1932) of Egypt, the poet laureate of the Arab world, wrote several dramas, one of them in verse, about great personages of history; Cleopatra, the warrior-hero Antar, etc. Another outstanding poet, the Lebanese Saʿīd 'Aql, composed in verse the famous play ʿQūdūs ("Cadmus") 1944.

Arab letters had come of age by World War II. Novelists, short story writers and dramatists were now not only acquainted with Western culture, they distinguished between Western schools of thought and identified themselves with them. Freudian psychology, existentialism, the "Angry Young Men"--all were a part of Arab intellectual life. Western models were Dostoyefsky, Kafka, Proust, Sartre, Camus, Faulkner, Hemingway.

A distinction in technique is made between the novel and the short story: the latter presents a psychological movement, a glimpse of insight, while the novel stresses characterization and background. The difference is not merely one of number of pages, but of manner and depth of treatment. The use of symbolism is also more apparent in the present period.

Topics concern the contemporary setting, whether sympathetic descriptions of local color, or raising of sociological, political or moral issues. For the first time in Arab literature feelings of cynicism, despair, resentment, and impatience are expressed by younger writers in their refusal to accept conditions intolerable to them; sex is treated with candor; the authority of the older generation is rejected by the younger one.
An interesting aspect of current Arab writings is the emergence in large numbers of women writers, especially in the fields of novel, short story and poetry. They participate in all aspects of the movement, but especially in existentialist probing for answers to gnawing questions.

It is not within the scope of this survey to name all the important writers in all the Arab world today. The following listing is offered as a representative sampling. Egypt: Haykal's novel "That's the Way She Is" 1955 deals with feminine psychology through its portrait of an Egyptian peasant girl. The realist Nagib Mahfouz, one of the outstanding novelists of the Arab world, is famous for his Trilogy (1956-57) in which he traces the intellectual and political evolution of a traditional Muslim family in Egypt between World War I and II. His novel "The Children on Our Block" 1959 is a rare instance of the use of allegory in modern Arab literature in which man struggles to reach a world of good, one free from evil.

Younger novelists are Yusuf Idries, a doctor whose "The Cheapest Nights" 1954 deals with the problem of over-population; 'Abd ar-Rahman Ash-Sharqawi, whose major work "Earth" 1945 is a portrait of his native village in the Delta; and the existentialist Ishan "I'm Free!" 1958.

Tawfiq Al-Hashim continues to move the drama to new dimensions: his play "The Deal" 1956 experimented with a kind of "third language" intermediate between literary and colloquial, permitting the play to be performed in any Arab country yet retaining the naturalness of the spoken language. His recent "Hey You Climbing the Tree!" 1963 is an avant-garde play dealing with the nature and meaning of existence. The scholar Bishr Farsi (b. 1906) shows a predilection for symbolism in his dramas and his short stories.


Tunisia: Bashīr Khurayfī's existentialist "Lighting of the Night" portrays the resentment of the modern generation. Muḥammad al-Mas'aḍī has produced a major play "The Dam" (1955), of Ibsen-like quality and symbolizing the conflict between illusion and reality.

Algeria: Muhammad Dhīb has been concerned with the spirit of the Algerian revolution: "The Fire" (1954) and "African Summer" (1960). 'Aṣīyā Jabbārī's works are existentialist, as her "The Impatient Ones" (1958).

Morocco: 'Abd al-Majīd bin Jallūn's "The Fisherman" (1948) is a picture of life under the French Protectorate.

The following bibliography is suggested for further study:

Reynold A. Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, New York, 1907. (From Pre-Islamic times up to XIX Century)


The selections are reproduced here in their entirety and unedited. In a very few instances, where the error was very clearly typographical errors were corrected; these were limited almost entirely to stories taken from newspapers. Deviations from grammatical norms are ignored, e.g., use of a plural verb after a dual subject; or referred to in the notes if serious enough to throw the student off the track, e.g., the use of the accusative 'his father' for the subject of the verb. No attempt was made to normalize orthographical variants. The amount of vocalization varies widely from one publication to another, ranging from none at all to a fairly liberal sprinkling. In each case the original condition is faithfully reproduced. Thus the student is presented with "live" Arabic texts just as he would find them in the original sources, as opposed to a series of standardized readings as found in a unified text book.

Some writers introduce colloquial forms in their stories, especially in dialog; these have been identified and the literary equivalents provided where pertinent. It should further be noted that many Arab writers do not inflect personal names according to the established rules of grammar, often using the colloquial rather than the literary form as the basis for the spelling. Thus in one story أَنَّ فَلَـا occurs instead of the expected أَنَّ فَلَأْ.