

# MÎZÂN

Studien zur Literatur in der islamischen Welt

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# From New Values to New Aesthetics

## Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature

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### 2. Postmodernism and Thereafter

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Das von Anwārī al Ḥusaynī entworfene Signet auf dem Umschlag symbolisiert eine Waage.

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## Contents – Table des matières

### VOLUME II *Postmodernism and Thereafter*

STEPHAN GUTH & GAIL RAMSAY	
Preface.....	9
RANDA ABOU-BAKR	
Egyptian Colloquial Poetry: A Neglected ‘Genre’? .....	13
MARIA AVINO	
Iraqi Female Fictional Literature and the Construction of a New National Identity.....	33
SOBHI BOUSTANI	
L’écriture intime et les nouvelles formes d’expression dans le roman arabe moderne: Le cas de <i>Maryam al-ḥakāyā</i> de ‘Alawiyah Ṣubḥ.....	45
ISABELLA CAMERA D’AFFLITTO	
Deux écrivains yéménites devant l’impasse de la modernité: Wajdī al-Ahdal et Samīr ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ .....	57
PETER DOVÉ	
Esthétique du paysage dans <i>Il était une fois un vieux couple heureux</i> et <i>Légende et vie d’Agoun’chich</i> de Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine .....	65
GONZALO FERNÁNDEZ PARRILLA	
Breaking the Canon: Zafzaf, Laroui and the Moroccan Novel .....	75
KATIA GHOSN BADDOURA	
Déconstruction des grands récits chez Elias Khoury .....	85
STEPHAN GUTH	
Between <i>‘Awdat al-rūḥ</i> and <i>‘Imārat Ya‘qūbiyān</i> : What Has Changed in Community Narratives? .....	95
SABRY HAFEZ	
The Aesthetics of the Closed Horizon: The Transformation of the City and the Novel in Egypt since 1990 .....	109

CHRISTIAN JUNGE	
Emotion in Postmodernism and Beyond: Autobiographic Metafiction in Two Egyptian Novels of the 1990s (Nūrā Amīn and Muṣṭafā Dhikrī) .....	139
STEPHAN MILICH	
Conceptions and Representations of History in Modern Iraqi Fiction .....	167
ASTRID OTTOSSON AL-BITAR	
Narratives from a Transnational Community: Representations of the Other and the Self in two Iraqi novels in Sweden .....	187
TETZ ROOKE	
The Emergence of the Arabic Bestseller: Arabic Fiction and World Literature .....	201
PAOLA VIVIANI	
A First Approach to <i>Dafātir al-qurbāṭ</i> by Khālīd Khalīfah .....	215
BATOUL WELLNITZ	
Le désordre des “sens”: les je(ux) des instances énonciatives: A propos de la trilogie de Aḥlām Mustaghānimī ( <i>Dhākīrat al-jasad, Fawḍā al-ḥawāss</i> et <i>‘Ābir sarīr</i> ) .....	229
Notes on Contributors .....	243



VOLUME I *From Modernism to the 1980s*

GAIL RAMSAY &amp; STEPHAN GUTH

Preface ..... 9

DOUNIA ABOURACHID BADINI

*Shi'r* (1957-1970): une revue charnière ..... 13

ROGER ALLEN

Najīb Maḥfūẓ's *Awlād Ḥāratinā*: A History and Interpretation ..... 33

LORENZO CASINI

The Nation, the Narrative Subject, and the European Theme in the  
Development of the Egyptian Novel ..... 59

FRANCESCA MARIA CORRAO

Muḥammad Bannīs and the Value of the Doubt ..... 71

RASHEED EL-ENANY

A Master Rupturer with Form: Mahfouz as a Post-Mahfouzian  
Novelist Par Excellence ..... 79

STEPHAN GUTH

Literary Currents in Egypt since the Beginning/Mid-1960s..... 85

MOUSA M. KHOURY

The Micro that Extensively Becomes Macro:  
The “Personal” in Palestinian Literature ..... 113

MONICA RUOCCO

“I Tell the People”: New Values and New Aesthetics  
in Najīb Surūr's Theory of Drama ..... 121

TANIA AL-SAADİ

Techniques of Beginning in Arabic Novels after the 1960s:  
*Thartharah fawq al-Nīl* by Najīb Maḥfūẓ ..... 135

FRODE SAUGESTAD

The Modern Novel and its Aesthetic and Textual Transformations:  
The Arabic Novel and its Western Counterpart ..... 147

ULRIKE STEHLI

The Egyptian Magazine *Gālīrī 68*: ‘Truth’, Innovation, and Diversity ..... 159

# Emotion in Postmodernism and Beyond

## *Autobiographic metafiction in two Egyptian novels of the 1990s* (*Nūrā Amīn and Muṣṭafā Dhikrī*)<sup>1</sup>

CHRISTIAN JUNGE

These writings are not an autobiography, nor anything like; the flights of fancy, the artifice herein, bear them far beyond such bounds.

They are illusions—incidents and visions—figures; the kernels of events which are but dreams; the clouds of memories which should have taken place, but never did.

More, perhaps, a ‘Becoming’ than a ‘Life’; not *my* life.  
Idwār al-Kharrāt, *City of Saffron*<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Emotion, postmodernism, and autobiographic metafiction

In his seminal *Turābuhā za’farān* (*City of Saffron*, 1985), Egyptian author Idwār al-Kharrāt refuses the generic notion of autobiography. Instead, he provides a postmodernist “novel-autobiography” that, as Stephan Guth elaborates, “stresses the fictional and fantastic character of his autobiography”.<sup>3</sup> One decade later, in the 1990s, a new generation of young Egyptian writers seems to have followed al-Kharrāt, radicalizing his fictional approach of ‘writing the self’ by using metafictional techniques at large. Nūrā Amīn’s *Qamīš wardī fārigh* (*An Empty Pink Shirt*, 1997) and Muṣṭafā Dhikrī’s *Hurā’ matāhah qūṭiyyah* (*Much Ado About a Gothic Labyrinth*, 1997)<sup>4</sup> both feature a first-person narrator who is not only an author but an author who *writes about the act of writing about herself or himself*—a technique here referred to as “autobiographic metafiction”.

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1 This essay is based on the paper “Alles nur Fiktion? Metafiktion im ägyptischen Roman der 90er” [“Everything Just Fiction? Metafiction in the Egyptian Novel of the 90s”], presented at the 30<sup>th</sup> *Deutscher Orientalistentag* in Freiburg, Germany (October, 2007).

2 Kharrāt 1989: xiv.

3 Guth 1998: 147.

4 This essay eschews the literal translation—“Idle Talk of a Gothic Labyrinth”—in favour of a more allusive title in accordance with the authorized German translation (see Dhikrī 2004). *Much Ado About a Gothic Labyrinth* does not refer to William Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* so much as it playfully alludes to a plethora of works and authors such as *The Arabian Nights*, *Orlando Furioso*, Idwār al-Kharrāt, and Jorge Luis Borges.

This essay has two general objectives: (1) It discusses the phenomenon of autobiographic metafiction and reflects on the complex interplay between writing fiction and writing the self. In this regard, it offers a close reading of the two novels in question, while tracing the phenomenon within the broader context of the Egyptian novel of the 1990s. (2) Within the framework of postmodernist “novel-autobiography”, the essay pays particular attention to *emotion* in order to question such postmodernist paradigms as “radical constructivism” and the “death of the subject”. By analyzing narrated emotion, it retraces its impact on writing as experienced within the metafictional account.

The close reading formulates three major theses: (1) In writing fiction related to his/her life, the narrator self-consciously uncovers autobiographical traces, a phenomenon that may be called the ‘autobiographication’ of fiction. Consequently, fiction becomes both a legitimate and interpretable expression of the narrator’s self. (2) Insofar as the narrator regards identity as equivalent to narration, he/she tends to overestimate his or her ability to “author” the self, often going so far as to posit him or herself as the self’s exclusive author. The resulting narrative focalization of the socially decentered self produces both a text and a self that are either idealist (in the case of Amīn) or rationalist (in the case of Dhikrī). (3) In contrast, emotion and body appear as corrective challenges to such idealist constructions—affirming, as a consequence, the authenticity of emotion. By way of departure into the close reading of Amīn’s and Dhikrī’s novels, this essay will first discuss autobiographic metafiction in the literature of the 1990s, then widen its focus to explore the status of the subject and emotion in postmodernist literature.

## 1.2 Egyptian literature of the 1990s and autobiographic metafiction

The so-called “generation of the 90s” (*jīl al-tisʿīnāt*)<sup>5</sup> is a generation of young writers in Egypt that published their first works during the 1990s, mostly through the two small Cairene publishing houses, Dār Sharqīyyāt and Dār Mīrīt. These writers can be considered as the second generation of the so-called “New Sensibility” (*al-ḥassāsiyyah al-jadīdah*),<sup>6</sup> a term coined by Idwār al-Kharrāt. In the aftermath of the political and ideological disillusionments of the 1960s, especially the 1967 defeat, literature underwent a crisis of representation; writers turned away from realism and romanticism and their established aesthetic and poetic norms. The New Sensibility thus resulted in a literature “breaking the preordained order of narration [...] plunging into the interiority of the character [...] or incorporating or re-incorporating dreams, legends, and implicit poetry”,<sup>7</sup> as al-Kharrāt has put it himself.

The literature of the 1990s allows for greater artistic freedom and radicalizes the renouncement of the collective. Nevertheless, one should not consider the literature of the 1990s as a homogenous school or movement. It includes various tendencies and such diverse writers as Mīrāl al-Ṭahāwī, Sumayyah Ramaḍān, Mayy al-Tilmisānī, Ibrāhīm Farghālī, ʿAdīl ʿIṣmat, Munṭaṣir al-Qaffāsh, Nūrā Amīn, and Muṣṭafā Dhikrī. One of the major characteristics of this group of writers is an intense occupation with both the self

5 Richard Jacquemond also mentions the term “génération Sharqīyyāt” for “la génération des années 1990”, Jacquemond 2003: 101.

6 Kharrāt 1993: 7-33. For a discussion of this term see Pflitsch 2000a: 15-51.

7 Kharrāt 1991: 187-188.



and the narration of the self.<sup>8</sup> Muṣṭafā Dhikrī even stated that *they all* use autobiography as “raw material”,<sup>9</sup> though differing in their approaches. One rarely finds matter-of-fact-autobiographies<sup>10</sup> or traditional confessions; instead, their works tend to resemble autobiographical novels, as, e.g., al-Kharrāṭ’s influential *City of Saffron*, which Guth has described as a postmodernist variant of autobiography:

Reality, or even truth, is no longer believed to exist independently from human intervention; it is a mental, i.e. fictional concept and therefore not qualitatively different from fiction itself, and consequently fiction comes to embrace reality, or even be equal to it—and *vice versa*. This insight, which produced the so-called post-modern novel, also affects the relationship between autobiography and novel. Because of the fact that there cannot be an autobiographical ‘reality account’ anymore, al-Kharrāṭ stresses the fictional and fantastic character of his autobiography, *Turābuhā za’farān*. Writing an autobiography means producing a fictional account. It gives life a meaning which is not inherent in this life itself. In this respect it does not differ from novelistic interpretation of reality: in both cases, the result is a written text, a *naṣṣ*.<sup>11</sup>

The aforementioned postmodernist conviction (related to the linguistic turn) forms the basis for the so-called “narrative turn” in both the Social Sciences and Psychology. This latter “turn” highlights narration’s importance for identity, asserting that language does not carry the inner life outside, but produces it. Therefore, identity is no longer prior to language and narration, but emerges through it—and keeps transforming. The “narrative self” organizes its multifaceted experience through narrations anchored in and influenced by the individual and social context, with the narrative possibilities and constraints attached to it.<sup>12</sup> As this essay suggests, the importance of both narration and language for identity presumes the intertwining of “writing the self” with the issue of “writing about writing”, namely, metafiction.

The term metafiction was first used simultaneously and independently by William Gass and Robert Scholes in 1970.<sup>13</sup> Linda Hutcheon has defined it as “fiction about fiction—that is, fiction that provides within itself a commentary on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its own processes of production and reception”.<sup>14</sup> Although metafiction is common in postmodernist literature, it is by no means an exclusively postmodernist phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> According to Werner Wolf, the postmodernist variant is characterized by a

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8 This phenomenon is in line with what Idwār al-Kharrāṭ has described as New Sensibility’s “inner-oriented trend” (*al-tayyār al-dākhilī*). See Kharrāṭ 1993: 17-18; Pflitsch 2000a: 18.

9 Dhikrī 2006, *ka-māddah khāmah*.

10 See for this term Enderwitz 1998: 5-6.

11 Guth 1998: 147. For further discussion of “radical constructivism” in the work of al-Kharrāṭ, see Pflitsch 2000b.

12 See Kraus 2002: 161-162. For a critique of the postmodernist equation of life and narrative, see Strawson 2004.

13 See Wolf 1993: 5.

14 Hutcheon 1984: xxi.

15 For historical types of non-postmodernist metafiction, see Wolf 1993: 477-661.

radical anti-illusionism that resists the ‘temptation’ of creating a narrative illusion.<sup>16</sup> It entails not only a refusal but also offers the reader a postmodernist insight. As Patricia Waugh has it:

In showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand, how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly ‘written’.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, when the self is constructed through narration, a preoccupation with the text equals a preoccupation with the textually constructed self. When the self is the text and the text is the self, metafiction is more than fiction about fiction: it is fiction about the fiction(s) of the self; it turns into ‘writing about writing the self’, a phenomenon that could be called “autobiographic metafiction”.<sup>18</sup> According to Philippe Lejeune, the “autobiographical contract” is based on the identity between author, narrator and protagonist.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, this essay proposes to apply the term “autobiographic metafiction” to a broader range of texts than merely to those which treat the historical author ‘outside’ the text. Rather, it might also be useful to apply it to texts where the “self-conscious narrator”<sup>20</sup> (as literary figure) composes an autobiography, autobiographic novel, or life-writing,<sup>21</sup> while simultaneously discussing the text’s narrativity and fictionality<sup>22</sup>—that is, to a kind of meta-autobiography.<sup>23</sup> By this generic extension, the narrator’s narrative self can be discussed in relation to its narration, insofar as it claims or refuses its contractual identity therewith. This essay analyzes the emotional and physical consequences of such affirmation or denial, in the text.

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16 See Wolf 1993: 665-667. Although metafiction tends to be anti-illusionist, there are also illusionist types, as Wolf points out. One might cite the so-called “secondary illusion”, i.e. metafiction that deals with, for example, an embedded fictional story, while asserting the “reality” of the frame story. See Wolf 1993: 233-234.

17 Waugh 1995: 53.

18 This term is analogous to Linda Hutcheon’s term “historiographic metafiction”, which she uses to refer to fiction that reveals how history is fictionally constructed and ‘written’. See Hutcheon 1995: 90. Historiographic metafiction is a generative narrative in Arabic literature, see Musawi 2003: 337-373 and Caiani 2007: 96-119. The term “autobiographic metafiction” was, to the best of my knowledge, first used by Choi (as a variant to Hutcheon’s historiographic metafiction) in order to differentiate between the authorial and the narratorial self. See Choi 2008:10-14. While he calls it “autobiographical metafiction”, this essay prefers the term “autobiographic metafiction”, relying on Hutcheon’s original term and highlighting the different objectives of this phenomenon.

19 Lejeune 1994: 28-29.

20 “[The self-conscious narrator] intrudes into his novel to comment on himself as writer, and on his book, not simply as a series of events with moral implications, but as a created literary product.” Booth 1952: 156.

21 The term life-writing covers all variants of writing a life, though not necessarily one own’s life (e.g. the biography). See Mittermayer 2009: 69-73.

22 Wolf differentiates between metafiction dealing with the narrativity of the text (*fictio-thematisierende Metafiktion*) and metafiction dealing with the fictionality of the text (*fictum-orientierte Metafiktion*). See Wolf 1993: 247-249.

23 For the related meta-biography, see Nadj 2006.

### 1.3 Postmodernism and emotion

Postmodernism<sup>24</sup> is an extremely vague concept that acts as an umbrella, covering a variety of understandings and convictions. Moreover, in recent years, it has been challenged (and, in some fields, superseded) by new terms and concepts.<sup>25</sup> In dealing with postmodernism, this essay is particularly concerned with that term's relation to 1) "radical constructivism" (the assumption that reality as we know it is just the product of various cognitive processes)<sup>26</sup> and 2) the postmodernist "death of the subject." For Peter Bürger, this metaphorical notion expresses distrust in a subject capable of rationally appropriating the world<sup>27</sup>—a subject embodied nowhere better than in the Cartesian subject *par excellence*. Postmodernists often assert a heterogeneity and plurality of the subject that fractures the image of a single subject with a closed identity.<sup>28</sup> Language and writing no longer serve as means to achieve self-assertion but turn against the subject, revealing its incoherence.<sup>29</sup> Western postmodernist literature therefore often depicts the 'dead subject' as impersonal, unemotional, and flat, lacking psychological depth and individuality, playing with its different figurations<sup>30</sup>—or being reduced to mere physicality.<sup>31</sup>

Emotion<sup>32</sup> has historically been regarded as intrinsically tied to the subject.<sup>33</sup> As a consequence, the death of the subject results in a "waning of affect",<sup>34</sup> as Fredric Jameson postulates:

As for expression and feelings or emotion, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older *anomie* of the centred subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings [...] are now free-floating and impersonal.<sup>35</sup>

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24 Peter V. Zima distinguishes between *postmodernity*: a philosophical and socio-political period following modernity (which began in the West in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century) and *postmodernism*: the set of artistic and literary reactions to modernism (a period that began in the West at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>/beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century); see Zima 2003: 13. This essay will deal exclusively with literary and aesthetic phenomena and, therefore, with postmodernism.

25 See, for example, Ihab Hassan's "Aesthetic of Trust" (Hassan 2003), or Patricia Lipina-Berezkina's "Return of the Subject" (Lipina-Berezkina 2003). The latter discovers a "trans-personal" character in the 'dead subject' (Lipina-Berezkina 2003: 280): "How to create man without reproducing his *emotions* and perceptions, but only his voice that never tells himself, but deals only with the 'not-I world'?" (Lipina-Berezkina 2003: 286, my italics). For a survey of new studies, see Stierstorfer 2003: 2, footnote.

26 Schmidt 1992: 21-30.

27 See Bürger 1998: 12-16.

28 See Zima 2001: 22-32, 195-199.

29 See Zima 2001: 22, 30-32.

30 See Lipina-Berezkina 2003: 273-277 and *passim*.

31 See Zima 2001: 233-240.

32 This essay distinguishes terminologically between 'feeling', the physiological sensation of bodily arousals, and 'emotion', the interpretive experience of bodily sensation elicited by one's appraisal of a situation.

33 See Terada 2001: 8.

34 Jameson 1991: 15, see also 10.

35 Jameson 1991: 15-16.

For Jameson, postmodernist art no longer externalizes inward emotion, but rather provides emotional figurations that cannot be traced back to individual subjects. The assumption that postmodernism results in an unemotional state of being has been criticized.<sup>36</sup> In dealing with emotion in postmodernism, this essay relies on the so-called appraisal theory, “the claim that emotions are elicited by evaluations (*appraisals*) of events and situations.”<sup>37</sup> As a consequence, emotions are not self-evident and immediate causes of events, but products of intervening processes of evaluation.<sup>38</sup> Appraisal theory, therefore, when applied to autobiography, allows us to see narration<sup>39</sup> as one means of evaluation that simultaneously describes and evaluates situations while eliciting distinct emotions—if not uncovering the very mechanism by which emotions are produced. Insofar as it deals with processes of narrative evaluations that generate emotion, appraisal theory may help to bridge the (assumed) gap between emotion and the fractured subject of postmodernist literature.

Applying the western concept of postmodernism to modern Arabic literature raises the issue of its relevance in the Arabic context, with respect to both Arabic literature itself<sup>40</sup> and its socio-historical framework. Perhaps dealing exclusively with Arabic concepts like the New Sensibility, or with theories designed more explicitly for the region (such as Postcolonial Studies), might seem more appropriate. However, rejecting the concept of postmodernism might lead one to neglect the various interactions between postmodernism and *mā ba’d al-ḥadāthah*. Postmodernist questions instead open the door to different issues and answers, allowing us, for example, to investigate the status of the self, the body, and emotion *beyond* the dichotomy of the self and the other as discussed by Postcolonial Studies.

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36 For an analysis of emotion in postmodernist literature, see Hoffmann 1997. For a poststructuralist interpretation and concept of emotion, see Terada 2001. Rei Terada argues that *only* the dead subject is capable of having emotions, since passion (for example) challenges the sovereignty of the modern, i.e. rational Cartesian subject. See Terada 2001: 4, 152-157.

37 Roseman/Smith 2001: 3, italics in the original.

38 According to the appraisal theory, the primary cause of emotion is neither the situation itself, nor bodily arousals, but one’s appraisal of a situation. When, for example, a relationship ends, some may feel sadness elicited by the appraisal that something valuable has been lost, while others may feel relief elicited by the appraisal that a troubling period of life is over. The appraisal processes are not exclusively voluntary and rational, but may also happen involuntarily and irrationally. See Roseman/Smith 2001: 1-11.

39 Taking a philosophical perspective on emotion, Christoph Demmerling and Hilge Landweer emphasize the difference between the experience and the description of an emotion, aiming to undermine the view that emotions are freely shapeable. They do not, however, deny the close tie between narration and emotion. See Demmerling/Landweer 2007: 24.

40 For a discussion of Arabic postmodernism, see Meyer 2001: 255-279 and Pflitsch 2004.

## 2. Nūrā Amīn's *An Empty Pink Shirt*—Writing love is all you need?

### 2.1 Introduction

Nūrā Amīn's<sup>41</sup> first novel, *Qamīs wardī fārigh* (*An Empty Pink Shirt*, 1997), tells the multi-layered love story of a woman and a man. At the same time, it documents the female protagonist's various attempts to write about both her romantic relationship as well as her attempts to write about it. The first-person narrator, Nūrā Amīn (henceforth Nora<sup>42</sup>), is in her mid-twenties and (after a short, disappointing marriage) falls in love with a young, dynamic movie director who reciprocates her feelings. Nevertheless, Nora is, for many reasons, afraid to live out her love and so begins to experience and invest in it more 'on the paper' than 'in reality'.

She first writes a story called "An Empty Pink Shirt"<sup>43</sup> and, throughout the following year, pens many other stories that she considers to be rewritings of the opening story. Lacking an authoritative frame story,<sup>44</sup> these various stories make up a palimpsest of the different appraisals of her love. In the course of the novel, additional layers tell the story of a young woman who gradually becomes a writer and learns to make use of her feelings to write a novel about love, but who nevertheless undergoes a kind of emotional apprenticeship, recognizing that she becomes more and more a victim of her literary love fantasies—just like Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, as her boyfriend, at one point, remarks.

Although *An Empty Pink Shirt* is labelled a novel, it nevertheless offers the reader an autobiographical contract.<sup>45</sup> The author, the narrator, and the protagonist all have the same name.<sup>46</sup> And in the course of events, the narrator labels the text within the novel as autobiography: "I dedicate these pages to our emerging biography. So we turn from the genre of a short story to a novel to an autobiography."<sup>47</sup>

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41 Born in 1970 in Cairo, Nūrā Amīn studied French and Comparative Literature in Cairo. She is an internationally renowned theatre and video performer, actor, and dancer, and has founded the troupe "La Musica". As an author she has published four collections of short stories, most recently *al-Nisf al-thālith* (*The Third Half*, 2003) and three novels, most recently *Qabla 'l-mawt* (*Before Death*, 2010). In 2000, *An Empty Pink Shirt* was awarded the prize for *The Best Novel by an Egyptian Writer under 40 Years Old* by the Andalousia Foundation for Culture and Sciences in Alexandria. Recently, she has staged the reading performance and lecture *Intimacy Under Construction* (September 2009; with Gesine Danckwart) in Berlin. For a full bibliography see [www.noraamin.tk](http://www.noraamin.tk) (accessed 20Sep2009).

42 To avoid confusion between the historical author and the self-conscious narrator, I will call the former "Nūrā Amīn" (or "Amīn") and the latter "Nora."

43 In order to differentiate between the novel's stories and the novel itself, the former will be put in quotation marks, the latter in italics.

44 So far as it lacks a frame story, the metafictional speech does not construct a secondary illusion of a 'real story' that frames 'fictional stories', but instead applies to the whole text. For Werner Wolf's differentiation between partial metafiction and total metafiction, see Wolf 1993: 250.

45 Thus, Muḥammad Birayrī reads Amīn's novel as an autobiography. See Birayrī 2002: 96.

46 They also share common ground, e.g. they all have a daughter of the same age.

47 Amīn 1997: 53: *Ukarrisu hādhihi 'l-ṣaḡahāt li-sīratinā al-walīdah, fa-nantaqilu min jins al-qīṣṣah ilā 'l-rivāyah ilā 'l-sīrah al-dhātīyah*. Henceforth, all quotations from this source will be marked "A"; all translations are mine.

## 2.2 Writing and rewriting: many different shirts

The opening story, “An Empty Pink Shirt”, starts with both an ending and a beginning: the couple parts company and Nora begins to write:

في لحظات كهذه نفترق. تطوي يدي الباكية في رقة وتكثّم، وتصنع لحظة وحيدة من السكون. يسكت كل شيء. يعترض سكوننا في بعضنا العالم الذي يشوشنا عن بعضنا. تنماهى في السكون. نتعارف من جديد. وتبدأ قصة. أصارع نفسي حتى أكتبها. عوضاً عن أن أبكيها. وقبل أن تلامسني مرة أخرى وتؤكد اللحظة: نفترق هكذا. (A 11)

In moments like these we part. You fold my crying hand gently and discreetly, creating a single moment of silence. Everything keeps silent now. Our inner silence resists the world that disturbs us. In silence we melt together. We get to know each other again. A story begins. I struggle with myself to write it, instead of crying it out. Before you touch me again, before the moment is confirmed, we part, just like this.

Though Nora’s beloved often travels abroad, she stays in Egypt writing about her love. His absence and her loss of self-confidence after the divorce lead her to appraise their relationship as an impossible love. The lovers find each other only in “stolen moments” (A 11, *lahazāt masrūqah*) in the realm of fantasy where they share these scenes in “that beautiful cinema” (A 21, *tilka 'l-sīnamā al-jamīlah*) “behind our eyes” (A 21, *warā'a 'uyūnīnā*). Making full use of her dramaturgical, cinematic, and literary imagination, Nora often describes the love story from the meta-perspective of a writer rather than from the inner perspective of a protagonist in love: “Then the eyes go astray as in the traditional ending for such an event.”<sup>48</sup> Or as when she lists “the details” (A 22, *al-tafāṣīl*) that they failed to achieve, “like donning our pink shirt to receive colourful shadows projected upon it by an enormous screen, which encloses us. Its warmth penetrates our skin.”<sup>49</sup> In her choreographic imagination, the pink shirt, as metaphor for ideal love, becomes an enormous projection screen; the couple *in* the shirt will be *in* the screened film. By wearing the pink shirt, they can cross the boundary dividing reality and fiction—and then feel completely comfortable, thanks to the warm shadows of the movie on their skin. By using literary techniques at large, Amīn turns the focus away from the so-called ‘experiencing-I’ (*erlebendes Ich*, or that which the protagonist undergoes), toward the ‘narrating-I’ (*erzählendes Ich*, or the narrator’s writing, itself).<sup>50</sup> This narrating-I begins to design the “cinema” only after the

48 A 21: *Thumma tashruḍu 'l-'uyūn ka-nihāyah taqlīdiyyah li-hādha 'l-ḥadath.*

49 A 22: *ka-an nartadiya qamiṣanā al-wardī wa-natalaaqā 'alayhi zīlālan mulawwanatan li-shāshah 'imlāqah taḥtawīnā fa-yanfudhu difuhā ilā jildīnā.*

50 In his famous study on Proust, Leo Spitzer distinguishes between *erlebendes Ich* (experiencing-I, or narrated self) and *erzählendes Ich* (narrating-I), to highlight the temporal difference between the experience of an event and its narration. Through this double-string narration, the first-person narrator can stress the difference between the younger and the elder self. See Spitzer 1961: 447-448.

fact—from the writing desk. The rendezvous' dénouement follows a literary *topos*; the detail missing in reality is staged in fiction. It could only be experienced on the page.

The opening story, "An Empty Pink Shirt", is rewritten several times in different ways, as Nora states,<sup>51</sup> and as the various titles indicate: "An Empty Pink Shirt That Doesn't Want To Be Empty", "An Empty Pink Shirt like Everything Else", "A Pink Feature Film", "A Long Black Shirt".<sup>52</sup> These stories are separated by three intermezzi. The rewritings employ the artistic repertoire of the opening story, e.g. the "enormous screen",<sup>53</sup> or the screen as a leitmotiv for a place where an idealistic projection can take place.<sup>54</sup> They do not offer different formulations of a single plot, but rather Nora's different formulations of her 'impossible' love in different situations. These various love stories reveal an underlying "pathological formula" (38, *ṣīghah maraḍiyyah*), Nora's appraisal pattern, or her particular way of generating emotions. By virtue of this appraisal pattern, Nora evaluates different situations similarly, and therefore elicits similar emotions.<sup>55</sup> She struggles, however, to change the pattern, so that she may alter the emotions thus elicited. Nora's appraisal pattern is a paradoxical combination of utmost desire for love and utmost fear of living it. The more she plunges into fiction, the more she feels desire and love; the more she dwells in reality, the more she feels fear and grief—hence Nora's inclination toward romantic fiction. While the lover in literature often ends up as a prisoner of fantasy and fiction—as embodied in the legend of Majnūn Laylā—Nūrā Amīn's novel stands out for describing the winding path out of this prison—a path that leads her, at first, deeper into fiction.<sup>56</sup>

Nora wants to change the formula "so that the novel that I live now by writing becomes my apprenticeship novel, for writing and for love alike".<sup>57</sup> The twofold task of the text—to improve *both* art and love—highlights the crucial relationship between fiction and reality. As in the opening story, the rewritings shift from the love story to the writing of the love story. "I love you in this writing and cannot embrace you beyond it. [...] I love you on these sheets of paper, because I'm fragile."<sup>58</sup> Moreover, writing about writing the love story becomes the privileged—and secure—way to live the love story. In this regard, the act of writing is not subsequent to experience but simultaneous to it, as indicated by Nora's frequent use of the *mudāri'* tense: "the novel I live now". Merging the genres of the educational novel (*Bildungsroman*) and the artist's novel (*Künstlerroman*),<sup>59</sup> writing and rewrit-

51 See A 38 and A 69.

52 A 27: *Qamīṣ wardī fārigh lā yurīdu an takūna fārighan*; A 41: *Qamīṣ wardī fārigh mithla kulli shayʿ*; A 56: *Film "riwāʿī" wardī* (this is typographically set like a subchapter); A 62: *Qamīṣ aswad ṭawīl*.

53 See A 29, A 44 and A 89.

54 See A 48, A 70, A 88, and A 91. This leitmotiv is expressed in very different figures; for example, the appearance of "the white screen" (A 91: *al-shāshah al-bayḍāʿ*) in the final story may signify the end of the narrator's idealistic projections.

55 See Roseman/Smith 2001: 6-7.

56 For a modern adaptation of this legend, see e.g. Junge 2010a: 293-297.

57 A 38: *li-tuṣbiḥa hādhihi 'l-riwāyah allatī ahyāhā al-ān bi'l-kitābah hiya riwāyat ta'allumī 'l-kitābah, wa'l-ḥubb*.

58 A 66: *Uḥibbuka fī hādhihi 'l-kitābah wa-lā astaṭī'u an u'āniqaka khārijahā. [...] Uḥibbuka 'alā hādhihi 'l-awraq li-annanī hashshah*.

59 Usually the artist's novel is considered as a subtype of the educational novel, a novel focussing on the protagonist's education and cultivation (in the latter case, the focus being on the protagonist's becoming an artist). But in *An Empty Pink Shirt*, the education is twofold: romantic and literary.

ing become the primary means by which Nora achieves her desired *éducation sentimentale*, allowing herself to break with the “pathological formula” and its appraisal pattern.

Small details play a major role in achieving this break. By subtle variations, Nora tries to aestheticize her impossible *love* until it becomes a well-made *love story*, on paper.<sup>60</sup> For example, she stages the perfect rendezvous as a movie,<sup>61</sup> using cinematic terms like “long shot” (A 48, *lūnj shūt*) or “close up” (A 48, *klūz ab*). The romantic words of her beloved allows her to “plunge deeper into the fantasy of writing.”<sup>62</sup> On the street, dancers suddenly surround the couple who are now dancing a waltz. But it is not the cinematography of a conventional Egyptian romantic movie for which Nora strives; rather, it is individual aesthetics. She refuses to repair one lens of her glasses because in one of her beloved movies the heroine loses a contact lens and therefore sees the world—like Nora herself—half in reality and half in fantasy:

فهل يتفق هذا مع البنية المحكمة التي نتحدث عنها؟  
البنية المحكمة هي بنية الواقع الذي أستميت لتغييره، أكافح كي أخلق لنا هامشاً خارج التشابهات  
والتكرار، [...] وأصبحنا كلنا نتبع خطة واحدة محكمة للحصول على علاقة حب ملائمة لهذا  
العصر. (A 54)

Is this in line with the well-made structure that you are talking about?

The well made-structure is the structure of the reality that I aspire to change. I struggle to create for us a margin outside the similarities and reiterations. [...] And we all began to follow one well-made plan to achieve a loving relationship suitable for this era.

She refuses to dress like a Barbie doll and to listen to love songs with her beloved, as average Egyptian lovers tend to do.<sup>63</sup> Instead, she highlights more unique details of love, like the lovers’ intuitive understanding of one another—which she calls “sync” (54, *sink*; as derived from the cinematic term ‘synchronisation’). By staging unique details, Nora can step “outside the similarities and reiterations” and surpass both societal (e.g. the Barbie doll) and artistic (e.g. the Egyptian romantic movie) constraints.<sup>64</sup> In the course of the novel, she develops these details by subtle variations, as best illustrated by the various metamorphoses of the “shirt”, which changes from pink to black, from empty to long, and from a story to a feature film.

60 In discussing this scene, Birayrī observes that, in Amīn’s novel, reality is in the service of writing, not the other way round. See Birayrī 2002: 95.

61 See A 48-51.

62 A 49: *aghraqu akthara fī khayāl al-kitābah*.

63 See A 54.

64 In his feminist reading of *An Empty Pink Shirt*, Ibrahim Taha calls “writing an ideological means and tool with which [Nūrā Amīn] wishes to replace the rejected reality. However, if the unchangeable reality keeps functioning as an oppressive patriarchal system, writing becomes for Amīn the *reality* she longs for. [...] In this sense, the text does not serve as a tool, but as a reality which she wants to improve so that she can *live in it*.” Taha 2007: 208, italics in the original. For a similar but more detailed feminist reading of *An Empty Pink Shirt* see Qutb/Šālīh/Salīm 2000: 167-74.



In *An Empty Pink Shirt*, writing and rewriting are the sole means of overcoming impossible love. Such writing attempts to produce an idealized self through an ideal text. Dealing with the appraisal pattern as a textual procedure raises the question as to whether writing can change the appraisal pattern and the resulting emotions as ‘easily’ as it can challenge and deconstruct a given narrative.

### 2.3 Writing and feeling: Madame Bovary wears pink

Nora is lost in fiction. As in an epistolary novel, she addresses herself directly to her boyfriend, though seeking neither a literal nor allegorical ‘exchange of letters’,<sup>65</sup> so that the novel at times resembles a *journal intime*—the contemplative prose of a narrator who is linguistically addressing the real beloved but intentionally addressing only herself and her forged beloved. As a consequence, Nora produces “existentialist meditations on [her] own loneliness” (A 86, *ta’ammulāt wujūdiyyah ḥawla waḥdatī*). Nora is also seduced by fiction. She claims that “all moments of [her] ecstasy are moments of writing.”<sup>66</sup> She fears that “[her] passion for writing” (A 32, *walaṭ bi’l-kitābah*) might even exceed her love, so that the couple might become “slaves” (A 32, *abīdan*) to writing. Indeed, writing and even reading<sup>67</sup> the *Pink Shirt* encourages Nora to retreat into literature to such a degree that she actually fears leaving “the literary text that I have designed for us”.<sup>68</sup>

At the end of the novel, Nora’s boyfriend finally does speak for himself, or, to be more precise, he writes to her.<sup>69</sup> He turns against her “illusions of the ideal world ... the ideal woman ... the ideal man ... and perhaps the ideal love.”<sup>70</sup> He considers these illusions as writing games, as a deferment of both life and love,<sup>71</sup> asking provocatively: “Do you really know me? Or are you satisfied with the literary image that pleases you—and fits with your profession?”<sup>72</sup> And he wants to free her from this idealistic writing: “How long will you write merely to remove your sense of reality and transform yourself into another Madame Bovary, for our times?”<sup>73</sup>

In Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856), Emma Bovary reads romances and tries unsuccessfully to relive the ideal love of fiction in real life. Likewise, Nūrā Amīn’s *An*

65 The epistolary novel is generally characterized by its dialogic structure, although it may consist exclusively of unanswered letters (a mono-perspective). Nora gives her beloved the opening story to read (see A 24), and he refers to it occasionally (see e.g. A 30, A 32-33) shifting the novel to a poly-perspective. But in the end, when the boyfriend fully addresses himself to her (see A 82-82), he accuses her of not dealing with him, but with her imaginary beloved. The resulting monologue resembles the soliloquy of a *journal intime*.

66 A 32: *jamī’ laḥaḥāt nashwatī kitābiyyah*.

67 See A 30.

68 A 30: *al-matn al-adabī alladhī ṣammamtuhu lanā*. At another passage she tells her boyfriend that “you will indeed become a mouse for a writing experiment, not more.” (A 32, *fa-tuṣbiḥu bi’l-ḥi’l fa’ran li-tajribah kitābiyyah*. *Laysa akthara*.)

69 See A 82-84; “I can write to you here” (A 83: *Aṣṭatī’u an aktuba laki hunā*).

70 A 83: *awḥām al-‘ālam al-mithālī.. al-mar’ah al-mithāliyyah.. al-rajul al-mithālī... wa-rubbamā ‘l-ḥubb al-mithālī*.

71 See A 83.

72 A 83: *Fa-hal ta’rifinanī ḥaqqan am iktafayti bi’l-ṣūrah al-adabiyyah allatī tarīqu laki? Wa-li-ṣinā’atiki?*

73 A 84: *Wa-ilā matā taktubīna li-tughayyibī shu’uraki bi’l-wāqi’ fa-tataḥawwalīna ilā “Madām Būwārī” ukhrā min ṭirāz ‘aṣrī?*

*Empty Pink Shirt* tells the story of a woman seduced by fiction: by writing her love, Nora plunges headlong into romantic fantasies. But the differences between the modernist and postmodernist *Bovary* are striking. Unlike Emma *Bovary*, Nora is seduced by her own writing; she is the author of her fantasies.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, to change things, one must change neither how one behaves nor what one reads; instead, one must change the writing. Thus, Nūrā Amīn's novel is not about adopting or emulating literary love in 'reality' but about constructing literary love in autobiographical writing. Given Nora's awareness of the narrativity and fictionality of love, *An Empty Pink Shirt* may be called a postmodernist novel; it depicts the subject's loss of solid ground. But this loss is not the result of a post-modern *conditio humana*; it is, rather, the result of "the game of pain, remorse, and grief with the aid of writing."<sup>75</sup> Nora loses herself in the funhouse of fiction, but this fiction expresses her appraisal pattern and her emotions. Nora's autobiographical metafiction dismisses reality, producing instead an account of emotions—fiction as emotional expression and confession. Unlike in most postmodernist novels,<sup>76</sup> the writing of emotions in *An Empty Pink Shirt* tells the story of regained truth, subjective authenticity, and a longing for hard evidence, as we shall see now.

In the course of the different "pink shirts", Nora 'flashes back' (68, *flāsh bāk*) to the days of her divorce, and is pulled away from the fictional love story she is writing into the writing of "A Long Black Shirt".

فأنا لا أكتب هنا إلا الحقيقة [...]. لذلك لا يجب أن ألوث هذه "الكتابة" الوحيدة بالإخفاء والتراجع وإذا كان الثمن أنني هويت بالتعبيرات الجمالية وبالخيال الرومانسي إلى قاع الواقع، والقهر الذي أعيشه وشعوري بالعجز عن الرغبة والحياة، فإن ذلك جزء من الحقيقة ومن مسار الكتابة التي أفعلها هنا. (A 68)

I only write the truth here [...]. Therefore, I mustn't soil this unique 'writing' by hiding or retreat. If the price is that I fall, with aesthetic expressions and romantic fantasy, upon the ground of reality—the sorrow that I live and my feeling of being incapable of desire and of life—then this is part of the truth and part of the path of writing that I here undertake.

Nora's path of writing leads, as quoted above, from the genre of the story to the novel and finally, to autobiography;<sup>77</sup> it is an increasing 'autobiographication' of her fiction.<sup>78</sup> Writing

74 The novel avoids the concept of originality or the aesthetic of the genius (*Genieästhetik*); instead, newness enters the world through rewriting. Thus, the novel deals self-referentially with its intertextuality and intermediality, referring e.g. to Marguerite Duras' autobiographic novel, *L'amant* (1984), to Duras' concept of writing (A 24, 30) and to the "lover" (A 7, 81); as well as to Clint Eastwood's romantic film, *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995), to which "A Pink Feature Film" refers.

75 A 83: *la'bat al-alam wa'l-nadam wa'l-asaf bi-musā'adat al-kitābah*.

76 See Ibsch 1997.

77 See A 53.

78 Birayrī claims that Amīn's autobiography begins with the scene in which the narrator, Nora, embraces "Nora" and soars in the "wide being" (A 68, *al-kawn al-wāsi'*; this scene immediately precedes the pas-

the various shirt stories debunks their underlying formula and emotional appraisal pattern, unmasking her rose coloured love story as retreat and deferment. Nevertheless, she does not refuse the result or treat it with irony but claims truth for that refusal: The revealed emotions are truthful or, to put it in other words, they are authentic.<sup>79</sup> Nora states that she does not want to hide or retreat from these emotions and is willing to pay a price for it—namely, the deconstruction of her rose coloured love story at the hands of negative emotions. This is an elaborate performance of subjective authenticity: she is only willing to pay the high price because she considers her emotions to be authentic. She appears, as Theodor W. Adorno has put it in regard to New Music,<sup>80</sup> “so and not able to be differently” (*So und nicht anders sein Können*); she has “the character of being confirmed from the outside”,<sup>81</sup> from the realm of emotions and the body. At the same time it is striking that Nora does not refuse her ‘pink writing’ as inauthentic but rather calls the ‘black writing’ just “a part of my truth”, thereby suggesting that the ‘pink writing’ is the other part. The romantic fantasy is a major part of Nora’s subjective authenticity since it is the expression and product of her emotional appraisal pattern. In this regard, the resulting subject is authentic and *self-differentiating*; it discovers different, paradoxical selves within the self—like Nora in both the pink and black shirt, loving and grieving, and writing in order to simultaneously obtain and defer love.

While narrative appraisal processes are discussed in detail in *An Empty Pink Shirt*, the body becomes the ‘vanishing point’ of the textual canvas. It is multilaterally embodied in the shirt itself: as a cloth that covers and hides the body; as a cloth that is empty; as a cloth that Nora buys and wears for her lover to ensure that it fits him and therefore also as the place where she first believes that she feels his body,<sup>82</sup> as a shirt for both of them to feel the warmth of a movie which is projected on to it and which penetrates their skin; as a shirt that does not want to be empty anymore; and finally, as a long, heavy black shirt that paralyzes Nora.<sup>83</sup> The modification of the appraisal pattern, or, emotional texture, also produces a new shirt: “But perhaps I succeed in weaving a shirt of new cloth, one that fits [...] and it will be suitable for my new size, now, after the dimensions of my body changed by knowing your longings and your facts.”<sup>84</sup>

In *An Empty Pink Shirt*, writing the self means writing the emotions and, consequently, writing the body. The autobiographic metafiction deals with writing as a form of constructivism inherent to the novel. Though emotions are narratively elicited (and therefore generated or constructed), they are neither voluntarily nor rationally designed by “Central Meaners”<sup>85</sup> or “rational homunculi”.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, writing the emotions produces neither ideal

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sage quoted above); here, Birayrī argues, the text turns from writing about writing to writing about the self. See Birayrī 2002: 96.

79 For the definition and discussion of authentic as truthful, see Knaller/Müller 2005: 43–47.

80 Adorno 1949: 89.

81 Adorno 1949: 89.

82 See A 19.

83 See A 68.

84 A 70: *Bal rubbamā anjaḥu fī ḥiyākat qamiṣ ākhar min qumāshihi, yaṣluḥu [...]. Wa-yakūnu munāsiban li-maqāsī 'l-āna ba'da an taghayyarat ab'ād jasadī bi-ma'rifat ashwāqika wa-ḥaqā'iqika.*

85 Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, Boston: Little Brown, 1991: 238; quoted after Terada 2001: 156.

texts nor ideal emotions, as Nora's flashback illustrates. Through this contemplative, albeit non-rationalist, writing process, the homogenous self becomes a self-differentiating self; whether its results—the self-differential selves—may be collectively labelled a “dead subject”, seems to be a moot question.<sup>87</sup> Nora states that all her living appears to her as writing<sup>88</sup> and therefore lives a kind of *je de papier* (paper self), as Barthes calls the subject that fails to express itself, because it is trapped in the “carousel of language”.<sup>89</sup> But her writing is more than a *jeu de papier* (paper game), because she has to pay a price for it. On the contrary, the writing uncovers both meaningful emotions and, decisively, the body. When her boyfriend reproaches her for plunging into existential meditations for lack of a suitable literary subject, she replies that her writing is not, as he suggests, a bourgeois luxury and that “my loneliness, my darling, is as deep as the depths of history and my strangeness in the world has no end (except on your chest?).”<sup>90</sup>

The poetics of Nora's autobiographical text become the poetics of her emotional texture. As a postmodern Madame Bovary, she is seduced into writing the perfect love, but, like her modern analogue, fails. In the poetic ending of the novel, writing fades out,<sup>91</sup> just like a movie that leaves only the whiteness of the screen (and the paper) behind. And in the epilogue, the educational artist's novel finds a telling dénouement:

بالأمس وقفت أنتظر سيارة أجرة بصحبة ابنتي. كان الشارع مزدحماً ولافتات النيون الصيفية تحاصره  
من كل مكان. نظرت إلى الوراء في الهامش الضيق بين إعلان الشريط الجديد اللطيفة وإعلان إحدى  
المسرحيات الاستعراضية. وحدث القمر مكتملاً وجميلاً. ولم تكن صورتك منطبعة عليه. (A 92, )

(italics in the original)

Yesterday, I stood waiting for the taxi together with my daughter. The street was crowded and the neon signs of summer everywhere encircled it. I was

86 Ronald de Sousa, “Rational Homunculi”, in: *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976: 217-238, here 218; quoted after Terada 2001: 156. Also the appraisal theory emphasizes that the appraisal processes are not controlled by these rationalist homunculi or central meaners, see Kappas 2001: 162-163.

87 “Self-differential selves are dead as subjects; they are not dead as self-differential selves.” Terada 2001: 155, italics in the original. Bürger, on the contrary, works with the “modern field of subjectivity”, allowing him to appreciate the different conceptions of the subject (as formulated e.g. by Montaigne, Pascale and Descartes) as one discourse highlighting differences of subjectivity, and therefore to avoid reducing the subject to the Cartesian subject by stressing how non-Cartesian concepts integrate rational limitations (like angst or *ennui*) in the notion of the subject. Consequently, the death of the subject is not a postmodern (or, as far it regards the literature, postmodernist) *fait accompli*, but rather a dynamic process between its appearance and disappearance, taking place in all periods of time. See Bürger 1998: 217-248. In the case of *An Empty Pink Shirt*, Quṭb et al. claim that the dominant self in the text undergoes the ‘death of the author’, see Quṭb/Şālih/Salīm 2000: 168-9.

88 See A 85.

89 Roland Barthes, *Essais critiques IV: Le Bruissement de la langue*, Paris: Seuil 1984: 46; quoted after Bürger 1998: 204. For discussion of this concept, see Bürger 1998: 203-216.

90 A 86: *fa-wahdati yā ‘azīzī ‘amīqah bi-‘umq al-tārīkh wa-ghurbāī fī ‘l-‘ālam tabdū bi-lā nihāyah (siwā ‘alā ṣadrika?)*.

91 For the typographic staging of this fading out, see A 91.

looking back through the narrow margin between a commercial for Laṭīfa's new album and a commercial for one of those revue plays. I found the moon full and beautiful. And your picture was not printed on it.

The result of this artist's novel is a moon that signifies neither love nor the artistic possibility of imagining the beloved, nor the ability to coin aesthetic expressions. Between the commercials of arts—but strikingly unaffected by these arts—Nora can appreciate the moon. And this is exactly the quantum leap of her appraisal; at the end, the moon is just the moon. It is no longer a metaphor for love, and love itself is decoupled from romantic fiction. This evidently blank moon subtly evokes the protagonist's longing for evidence of love outside the realm of writing—outside the seductive lure of fiction.<sup>92</sup>

### 3. Muṣṭafā Dhikrī's *Much Ado About A Gothic Labyrinth*— The return of lust<sup>93</sup>

#### 3.1 Introduction

Muṣṭafā Dhikrī's<sup>94</sup> second prose publication, *Hurā' matāhah qūṭiyyah* (Much Ado About a Gothic Labyrinth, 1997), contains two novels. The first, *Mā ya'rīfuhu Amīn* (What Amīn Knows), recounts one day of Amīn's life in Helwan, a suburb of Cairo. Written first as a screenplay, the reader observes the intellectual's misfortune through the dispassionate lens of a third person narrator. By contrast, in the second novel, *Hurā' matāhah qūṭiyyah* (Much Ado About a Gothic Labyrinth),<sup>95</sup> to which this analysis exclusively refers, the reader plunges deep into the interior life of the first person narrator, discovering the tricky self-assertions of a marginalized intellectual who also lives in Helwan. He tells of his painful encounter with an attractive nurse in the hospital and intertwines, as a witty self-conscious narrator, digressions, anecdotes, day-dreams, reflections, stories, and stories-within-stories, so that the text becomes a confusing labyrinth of plot and time.

In the midst of this "chaos of art without opinions and illusions",<sup>96</sup> as al-Tilmisānī describes the novel, the narrator of *Much Ado About a Gothic Labyrinth* produces a telling narrative of the self: the narrator's various autobiographic appraisals and reflections on the crucial anecdote in the hospital merge with his recent literary projects. As a result, he stresses the fictional and fantastic aspects of his life-writing, while finding a form of auto-

92 For a critique of the postmodernist claim of inescapable narrativity, see Strawson 2004.

93 This chapter is based in passages on Junge 2010b.

94 Muṣṭafā Dhikrī was born in 1966 in Cairo. He studied Philosophy and received a degree from the Cairo Film and Television Academy in 1992. As a screenwriter, he has written two feature films. As an author, he has published two collections of short stories and five novels; his novel *Touch From a Strange World* (2000, *Lamsah min 'ālam gharīb*) was awarded a State Encouragement Prize in 2004. Most recently, he has published a kind of literary diary called *On the Tips of the Fingers* (2009, *Alā aṭrāf al-aṣābi*). His literary work is marked by its keen eye for detail, its playfulness, its artfulness, and also its metafictionality. Of the latter, the short story collection *Mir'āh 202* (2003, *Mirror 202*) is a good example.

95 Henceforth, the title *Much Ado About a Gothic Labyrinth* will always refer to Dhikrī's second novel and not to his two novels with the same title.

96 Tilmisānī (2004); *fawḍā 'l-fann lā ra'y fi-hā wa-lā awḥām*.

biographic expression in his fictional texts: the ‘autobiographication’ of fiction. By intermingling facts and fictions throughout the novel, the narrator’s autobiographic metafiction reveals and self-consciously discusses the various possibilities and limitations of writing the self.

### 3.2 Documentation versus writing: the artist’s novel

As a writer in an unsophisticated social surrounding, the narrator lives the binary dichotomy between life and art, which is a classical *topos* of the artist’s novel:

اللجنة على الأدب ومن يحترفونه. هل مقدر عليّ دائماً أن أعرف كل الأمور لاحقاً، هذه المعرفة الباردة  
المحايدة التي لا تتفع في شيء سوى التدوين والتسجيل، أم أن التدوين والتسجيل وهو اجس الكتابة هي  
بطبيعتها أشياء لاحقة.<sup>97</sup>

Cursed should be literature and all who practice it. Is it always my fate to know everything later—a cold, neutral knowledge only suitable to be written down and to be documented? Or are writing down, documenting, and the ideas of writing things that, by nature, only occur afterwards?

Feeling estranged from life, he worries that his profession handicaps him by preventing him from taking part in the world. This fear leads to humiliation when he meets with sexual rejection: while witnessing a street-fight, he is accidentally injured and taken to the hospital, where he encounters the frivolous and mocking nurse, Rajāwāt. She strongly arouses his lust, but he gets the impression that she rejects him because he is an author. This impression results in both intellectual and emotional turmoil, which propel the novel forward—and which constitute the subject of the present analysis. On the one side, the narrator writes *about* this crucial scene; on the other side, he writes *against* it. Writing *about* means documenting (*tadwīn*, *tasjīl*) the facts of his life, as quoted above. The narrator disregards this mimetic documentation as a pale imitation of real life that he—an author by fate—can never achieve. The only possible way towards life, or towards participation in life, is to write it down. Writing *against* the facts means presenting himself as a “tricky author” (Dh 71, *kātib murāwigh*), who considers writing neither as documentation nor as substitute for life, but who modifies facts by writing, overtly or covertly, in order to (mis-) use them for his very own purposes. This kind of poetic<sup>98</sup> writing offers him a stage for himself:

ستقول أيها القارئ إنني كاتب مراوغ وإن لي قدم تيه وزيف، أقول لك نعم، أنا مولع بالمناهات والدهاليز  
العميقة المعقدة التي لا تفضي إلى شيء (...) (Dh 71).

97 Dhikrī 1997: 74. Henceforth, all quotations from this source will be indicated by Dh, all translations are mine.

98 Based on Aristotle’s *Poetics* (c. 335 BC), the term ‘mimesis’ refers to the imitation of the world; in contrast, constructivist literary criticism uses ‘poiesis’ in order to emphasize the creation of the world. See Bunia 2007: 596.

Now you will say, dear reader, that I'm a tricky author and that I pursue a labyrinthine and digressive way. And I say: Yes! I'm crazy about labyrinths and deep, complicated corridors that lead to nothing (...).

These two modes of writing do not remain separate and distinct, but are intertwined throughout the novel, shaping its narrative maze. During a nocturnal fight, both the protagonist and the very sportive Nunna start in pursuit of a friend. But when the protagonist catches Wafdiyyah's mocking and scornful glance, he gives up the pursuit, feeling stigmatized as an author who cannot stand his ground. The narrator recounts this scene twice. The first time, he depicts it very concisely in a neutral tone, without mentioning his role in the event;<sup>99</sup> the second time he changes his tune, depicting his misfortune and subtly making fun of his rival, Nunna. Using an "as-if" (Dh 75, *ka-anna*) construction, he compares him to a runner on a treadmill who does not get anywhere, no matter how fast he runs. This detailed comparison does not rely on the eyewitness account of the experiencing-I,<sup>100</sup> instead it consists of an ironic addition from the narrating-I, which turns the story's screw against his rival, Nunna. This supplement offers the humiliated protagonist a whiff of clandestine revenge. By narrating this single scene twice—without and with the comparison—the narrator implicitly<sup>101</sup> foregrounds both the fictional *and* autobiographical nature of this supplement to his life-writing; he expresses himself by writing 'autobiographicized' fiction. Though fiction and irony help the narrator to reach a subtle self-assertion, they cannot ultimately change the course of events: Nunna keeps running, while the protagonist stays behind.

Unlike in many traditional autobiographies, the elder self (narrating-I) is not superior to the younger self (experiencing-I) because of its wisdom, knowledge and life experience. It is superior because writing offers it the extended freedom to act. To write means to rewrite the story of the self and to provide supplementary narratives. As consequence, the story consists of minimal narratives that leave room for a sparkling narrative intellectualism which—as in Nūrā Amīn's *An Empty Pink Shirt*—fully exploits the power of small details. The narrator's particular usage of details is well expressed in the rewriting of "The Story of 'Alī, the Persian in front of Hārūn al-Rashīd" (*Hikāyat 'Alī al-'ajamī quddāma Hārūn al-Rashīd*), from the *Arabian Nights*.<sup>102</sup> This story deals with two persons who claim ownership of the same bag. To find out who is the legitimate owner, the judge orders each of them to describe the contents of 'his' bag. Both exaggerate to such a degree that the bag could not possibly hold everything that they have described; therefore, neither could be the true owner. When the bag is finally opened, it contains only bread, a lemon, cheese, and olives. In *Much Ado About a Gothic Labyrinth*, the protagonists enumerate 250 items that the bag supposedly contains, whereas they find in it only a witch's curse that condemns them to repeat themselves almost *ad infinitum*, or until the witch dies. Through this quasi-

99 See Dh 64-65.

100 Additionally, the narrator compares Nunna to an overeager mother, who in defending her child against an aggressor, harms more the child than the aggressor.

101 Wolf differentiates between implicit and explicit metafiction; implicit metafiction is mediated by showing, explicit metafiction by telling, see Wolf 1993: 226.

102 In the Calcutta manuscript of 1839, edited by William Hay Macnaghten, it is the story of the 295<sup>th</sup> night.

infinite writing, the narrator proves that his narrative is “a rousing speech whose only goal is to increase the number of pages so that the author—that is me—is convinced that he is able to narrate, to narrate truth and untruth.”<sup>103</sup> The details no longer depict the bag’s contents but enable the narrator to assert himself as an author of value. Through this explicitly metafictional speech, the narrator reveals his personal motivation for writing the story while demonstrating that the story’s narrator and author are identical. To put it another way, he ‘autobiographicizes’ his fictional story by stressing its autobiographical intent: the writing of the author’s self through the infinite writing of fiction.

As in *Nūrā Amīn*’s novel, reflection on the text’s poetics leads to the poetics of the self. As a consequence, the narrator tends to believe that he can write and rewrite the text (and therefore the socially marginalised self) *ad libitum*. The recentered authorial subject intends to produce an ideal text—an infinite text—through which an ideal self may appear (as was the case with Nora’s ideal shirt). The idealistic inclination is however challenged by the emotions and the body—contingencies that cannot be as easily written and rewritten as details can be used and abused.

### 3.3 Body, lust and emotions: limitations and supplements

A never ending story might be considered an author’s masterpiece. But in *Much Ado About a Gothic Labyrinth*, the automatising of the narrative that would transform the narrator into a narrative machine is short-lived. Suddenly and out of nowhere, the narrator’s friend, ‘Amm Diyāb, appears as a *deus ex machina*. With parental care, he pulls the narrator’s arm and stops the story “like a father, who, at the last moment, protects the disobedient daughter from harm.”<sup>104</sup> Driven by parental emotion, he stops the narrative mechanicalisation, makes the narrator responsible for his writing<sup>105</sup> and challenges the ultimate freedom of the narrator’s fictional life account.

By focussing on the narrator’s emotions, this chapter discusses the limitations and supplements with which emotions confront ‘the writing of the self’. As mentioned, the novel’s crucial scene takes place in a deserted hospital where the narrator encounters the attractive nurse, Rajāwāt, and plunges into “the traditional and eastern automatic way of thinking.”<sup>106</sup> That means, he wishes to take the opportunity to sleep with the woman in this lonely setting. However, he soon feels rejected by her mocking commentaries.<sup>107</sup> Her physical appearance arouses a number of feelings in him, first and foremost—though not exclusively—lust. As a consequence, the narrator is driven into intellectual and emotional turmoil, which explains the ‘narrative turmoil’ of his labyrinthine digressions and embedded stories. Thus, the thread of the novel is woven through narrative appraisals and the resulting sexual and emotional arousals. Though lust itself is not considered an emotion,<sup>108</sup> it is accompanied by various paradoxical emotions, such as sympathy and hatred. In discussing the rea-

103 Dh 78: *ḥadīthan jārifan ḥadaḥfuhu 'l-waḥīd ziyādat 'adad al-ṣafahāt ḥattā yu'mīna 'l-kātib alladhī huwa anā anna lahu qadam sard aw anna lahu qadam ṣidq aw anna lahu qadam kidhb.*

104 Dh 85: *ka-ab yadfa'u 'l-adhā 'an ibnat al-'āqq fī ākhir laḥzah.*

105 ‘Amm Diyāb apologizes for the narrator’s actions to ‘Abdallāh al-Ṭaḥāwī (to whom the narrator addresses his story). See Dh 77-78 and Dh 85.

106 Dh 69: *al-tafkīr al-awtūmālikī al-taqīdī wa'l-sharqī.*

107 See Dh 85-88.

108 See Demmerling/Landweer 2007: 31, 127-128.



sons for which one may reject sexuality and lust, the narrator differentiates between two types of people. The first type disdains sexuality as abnormal but when he finally has sexual intercourse the abnormal becomes the normal. In contrast, the second type treats those who live their emotions and their sexuality “with regret and sympathy” (Dh 70, *bi-rithā’ wa-ʿatf*). “[I]f there is a way out of such a hateful thing as emotions and human feelings then it lies in another place—*ʿudhrīte* and pure—as if physicality and purity had nothing to do with each other.”<sup>109</sup>

As a consequence of his appraised sexual rejection by both Wafdiyyah<sup>110</sup> and Rajāwāt, the narrator imagines his emotional revenge; *if they had really rejected him because he is an author, then he himself will listen to their life-stories ad infinitum*, though no longer with sexual desire but like a priest taking someone’s confession. This revenge story expresses his longing for coolness—the affective control of not only lust but also of the emotions; it portrays the narrator neither as a hateful avenging angel nor as a yearning beloved but as a cool, prudish priest.

But coolness fails. While the priest, the narrator’s alter ego, hears the confession of Rajāwāt’s and Wafdiyyah’s attractive alter ego, the beautiful lady, he is suddenly aroused by the details perceived through the confessional’s opening:

شفتين مصبوغتين جميلتين ورتلاً من الأسنان النضيدة شديدة البياض، أخذت السنتان العلويتان  
المربعتان شيئاً من صبغة الشفتين، وأصبحت الصبغة العالقة بسنتين فاتحة اللون عنها في الشفتين  
القائمتين [...] (Dh 88).

two beautiful, painted lips and a perfect row of blinding white teeth. The two upper teeth had something from the lipstick, so that the lipstick-colour on the teeth became lighter than on the darker lips.

Consequently, he betrays the beautiful lady to a Nazi who suddenly appears and orders her immediate execution. Thus, by intending to write a cool allegory, the narrator’s lust and his desire for revenge re-emerge in the allegorical figure of a priest who behaves in a quite unpriestly manner. Ultimately, the narrator cannot deny his feelings, not even as a priest. Based on the ‘autobiographication’ of fiction, the author writes himself through his fiction. Like Nora, he is neither willing nor able to deal with his emotions differently; he is simultaneously limited *and* rendered authentic by the aforementioned “so and not able to be differently” of Adorno.

But this unintended alteration of the imagined revenge has a supplementary by-product. The execution scene allows the narrator to add a shocking detail. When the bullets strike the woman, she farts loudly:<sup>111</sup>

109 Dh 70: *wa-in kāna hunāka budd min shay’ karīh ismihu al-ʿawāṭif aw al-mashāʾir al-insāniyyah, fa-fi makān ākhar ʿudhrī wa-ʾāhir, wa-ka-anna al-jusdāniyyah wa-l-ṭuhrāniyyah laysa hunāka wisāṭah baynahumā.*

110 See Dh 86-87.

111 The obscenity is even bigger because the fart is accompanied by stool.

قد يُفسر البعض أسباب الضراط على أنه خوف وجبن من الموت، وقد يُفسر البعض الآخر أسباب الضراط على أنه ضراط خيالي دفعه الكاتب عنوة كي يقول إن هواء الضراط المضغوط نثر برادة حديد كانت بالقرب من إست السيدة الجميلة وهذا ما يجعل القس والنازي والجندي المكلف بإطلاق الرصاص جادين وصارمين بل أكاد أقول إنهم أبرياء من دم السيدة الجميلة. (Dh 88)

Some will perhaps ascribe the fart to fear or cowardice in the face of death, others will interpret it as a fictional fart inserted from the author by force to suggest that the fart's pressurized air is the prose of the iron filings near the buttocks of the beautiful lady. This fact made the priest, the Nazi and the executioner serious and stern. Yet I almost want to say that they are innocent of the beautiful lady's blood.

The "iron filings" are, as the narrator elaborates in another passage,<sup>112</sup> an allegory of sexual desire. As iron filings are attracted by a magnet, sexual desire—in the form of glances, for example—may be attracted by a woman's bottom. Rather than compose a prudish, endless revenge, the author (driven by desire) pens the prose of his sexual longings. While the failure of the cool allegory may be seen as a narrative limitation set by emotion and the body, the un-cool allegory offers the narrator-author the chance to assert the details of *both* the story (e.g. the iron filings) and his narrative self (e.g. as avenging author). This modified allegory of vengeance is a telling example of the paradox of autobiographication, as discussed in this essay: by asserting the fictionality of a detail, the narrator simultaneously asserts the authenticity of the narrative self written through this detail. Both his sexual longings and his rage lead him to use and abuse such details. He weaves himself *into* the text, so that the fictional text heralds the narrative as the authentic expression of the self.

The revenge fantasy is prefaced by the conditional clause, "if" (Dh 87, *law*); the self-conscious narrator's speech requires the reader to decide whether the farts are fictional; and even the author's claims regarding the agents responsible for the execution lack certainty. While this might also be interpreted as the author's attempt to place an ironic distance between himself and his fiction, this potential irony remains incapable of deconstructing the narrator's body and emotions, as they appear in his life-writing (e.g. as lust and rage). On the contrary, the potential irony turns not against the narrator's lust, but against his attempt to control his lust and rage. While the tricky, self-conscious narrator seems capable of his writing *ad libitum*, writing is nonetheless framed and limited by emotion and lust. The fictional trickeries refer to an emotional and corporeal self that do matter for the narrator and, consequently, for his fiction.

In the end, the narrator imagines that he one day will sit in the lap of a statue of Buddha while Rajāwāt sits in his lap and that the streetlamp's light will hit them "as if we were three copied images of the god, Buddha."<sup>113</sup> The narrator thereby achieves his bodily and sexual fusion with Rajāwāt. While a statue of Buddha, who preaches chastity, might first appear to be *the* clean and *'udhrite* place, the statue in the Japanese Garden is the place where clients waiting to enter a brothel (located in the public toilet) practice having sexual

112 See Dh 86.

113 Dh 92: *ka-annanā thalāthat namādhij mansūkhah min Būdāh 'l-ilāh.*

intercourse.<sup>114</sup> By referring to this particular statue, the narrator deconstructs the anti-emotional and anti-bodily approach to sexuality that his social surrounding imposes on him as an ‘author’. Consequently, there seems to be no “way out of such a hateful thing called emotions and humans feelings” —neither on a statue of the god Buddha, nor as a prudish priest in an allegory. Just like Amīn’s Nora, Dhikrī’s narrator seems to long (after the adventures of writing) for evidence beyond the page: in the Japanese Garden, they *will* sit together on a statue of Buddha.

#### 4. Daring authenticity: writing emotion and body that matter

The two novels of Amīn and Dhikrī, though very different,<sup>115</sup> both employ the narrative formula of autobiographic metafiction. In both novels, writing the self is less about documenting the experiencing-I than about creating the narrating-I; less about writing about a “life” (or a life-span) than writing a “becoming” (as Idwār al-Kharrāṭ expresses it in *City of Saffron*), which highlights the transitory aspects of both identity and life. Fathoming out the possibilities of life as a contemporaneous, narrative process of becoming, they are, as Nūrā Amīn has stated, “trapped in the present”.<sup>116</sup> Leaving the socio-political situation aside,<sup>117</sup> and instead focussing on the self, such writing regards itself not as an historical expression, but rather as a series of existential contemplations.<sup>118</sup>

Both novels self-consciously intertwine facts and fiction; fusing the “kernel of events” to the “flight of fancy” (in the words of al-Kharrāṭ). On the one hand, these texts extend the boundaries of autobiography in the direction of the autobiographical novel. On the other hand, they deal with fiction as an authentic expression of the writing self: as an ‘autobiographical’ and fictional writing. While al-Kharrāṭ refuses the notion of autobiography (because of its fictionality), the autobiographic metafiction of the 1990s stresses the autobiographical traces that appear in fictional life-writing.<sup>119</sup> Even so, these approaches represent two sides

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114 See Dh 89-91.

115 They differ mostly in structure, setting, and the use of irony. While Dhikrī’s novel has a labyrinthine time structure (see Tilmisānī 2004), Amīn’s novel follows a chronological order. While Amīn’s novel takes place in the ‘center’ of Egypt, and therefore deals with middle to upper class society, Dhikrī’s novel focuses on the ‘periphery’ and describes mostly underclass society. Finally, while Amīn’s novel mostly eschews irony, Dhikrī’s novel endorses it—to a certain degree. For an ironic reading of *An Empty Pink Shirt* see Qutb/Şāliḥ/Salīm 2000: 168-9. While they interpret the differential selves as an ironic challenge of the dominant self, the present essay highlights the emotional appraisal process that claims authenticity for the differential selves and, thus, leads to a regained self.

116 See Ḥāfiẓ 2001: 197.

117 More precisely, the literature of the 1990s does not take the socio-political situation as the overt subject of its narratives. Nevertheless, it remains a product of this situation (see Ḥāfiẓ 2001: 186-213), which it may depict through small details (see Fāhndrich 1999: 91-92) and/or narrative choices (see Ḥāfiẓ 2001:208-213).

118 See Tilmisānī 2004.

119 For al-Tilmisānī see Fāhndrich 1999: 92-94.

of the same coin: the fusion of fiction and autobiography.<sup>120</sup> And while *City of Saffron*, as Susanne Enderwitz states, is an “example of the postmodernist proclamation of the ‘death of the subject’” focussing on the “disappearance of the self”,<sup>121</sup> the two novels of the 90s, as I have tried to outline, witness the reappearance of the self.

One finds the narrative formula of autobiographic metafiction at work (in various forms) in many novels of the Egyptian literature of the 1990s, such as Sumayyah Ramaḍān’s *Awraq al-Narjis* (Leaves of Narcissus, 2001) or Mayy al-Tilmisānī’s *Dunyāzād* (Dunyazad, 1997). Influenced by poststructuralist ideas, such novels highlight the act of writing as an act of living,<sup>122</sup> as expressed in the final paragraph of Ramaḍān’s novel:

I write, I erase. I write. What if someone reads these leaves of paper before they’re... complete? Writing is never complete [...]. Not being is more merciful surely. For being demands that we never end... never. Being demands that we erase and return to writing and life once again, a writing and life that might be.<sup>123</sup>

As a result of this tight symbiosis between writing and life, the poetics of the text become the poetics of the self. Consequently, such autobiographic metafiction sometimes claims to produce a ‘reborn author’,<sup>124</sup> who aims to sculpt idealistic texts and selves<sup>125</sup> exclusively on the page, beyond societal constraints. The failure of such idealistic attempts reveals an emotional—and corporeal—self that is not so much depicted *in* the text but expressed *through* it. Emotions are neither soundly described nor neatly labelled, but fictionally written and aesthetically interpreted.<sup>126</sup> Thus, autobiographic metafiction focuses less on the final product than on the various processes of becoming (here, the narrative appraisal processes that produce emotions); the resulting contemplative prose is like a kind of open-heart surgery, which highlights the text/self/emotion in transition. As Martha Nussbaum suggests, emotions are the “upheavals of thought [...] suffused with intelligence and discernment, and thus a source of deep awareness and understanding”;<sup>127</sup> emotions, therefore, are an integral part of contemplative autobiographic metafiction.

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120 These two approaches differ in their respective emphases on either fiction or autobiography. One’s choice of approach might also be interpreted as a measure of the extent to which one agrees with postmodernist assumptions regarding the refusal of autobiography.

121 Enderwitz 1998: 19. For further discussions of a lost or destructed self in Arabic literature see Guth 2007 and Klemm 2010.

122 For a study of the relationship between writing and living in Ramaḍān’s novel, see Birayrī 2002.

123 Ramaḍān 2002: 111.

124 According to the critic and author John Barth, the authorial self in postmodernist literature does not disappear, but, on the contrary, reaches an incomparable height, despite the assumed death of the subject. See Lipina-Berezkina 2003: 270-271 and *passim*. For literary theory’s new interest in the historical author, see Jannidis/Lauer/Martinez/Winko 1999.

125 This utopian aspect of writing is already inherent in al-Kharrāt’s concept of *kitābah*, as Andreas Pflitsch elaborates. See Pflitsch 2000a: 47-51.

126 As a result, emotions cannot always be clearly categorized, but often appear as ‘cross-emotions’. In Amīn, Nora’s love suffers grief at the hands of societal constraints, even while she takes joy in writing. In Dhikrī, the narrator-author feels hatred and rage for Rajāwāt, as well as fondness and sexual desire.

127 Nussbaum 2001: i. For a discussion of Nussbaum, see Demmerling/Landweer 2007: 11-15.

While these texts uncover ambiguous, different selves, they challenge the postmodernist parole of “anything goes”,<sup>128</sup> by exposing emotions that limit the narrator’s freedom to write. The self is, in principle, “always able to be differently”,<sup>129</sup> but at some points of writing it appears “to be so and not able to be differently”. This narrowing of life-possibilities generates, or stages, the authenticity of emotion in the texts. Consequently, emotions and their underlying appraisal patterns challenge the arbitrariness of postmodernism, giving rise to something more than “a text, a *nass*”.

The Cartesian subject may be dead, but decentered subjects that are anything but flat appear within the field of subjectivity. On the contrary, their struggles with marginalisation, ineptitude, loneliness, and strangeness (as deep as the depth of history) endow them with psychological and emotional complexity. They also experience the sometimes joyful, but often bitter, existential *Geworfenheit* into narrativity: they are thrown into writing the self. While writing, at first glance, seems to offer the authorial selves the best means of achieving self-assertion, its shortcomings eventually become clear. In the end, they do not accept the formula of “individuality lost, fun gained”<sup>130</sup> (Guth) anymore, but long for evidence beyond the page—beyond narrativity and radical constructivism.

The resulting text is neither a “machine for irony” (*Ironisierungsmaschine*)<sup>131</sup> nor an eclectic word-game. Although it employs poststructuralist and postmodernist strategies, it uncovers a constructed, emotional and corporeal self that is no longer simultaneously, indefinitely, and completely deconstructed. This refusal of deconstruction might be called ‘the risky venture of authenticity’. It results in emotions and a body that matter. By daring authenticity, these texts focus on a ‘vanishing point’ beyond the ironic horizon of postmodernism.

This fading away of irony reflects, perhaps, the contemporary state of the arts.<sup>132</sup> In reference to the exhaustion of recent postmodernist American fiction, David Foster Wallace (1962-2008) suggests (in his essay, *E Unibus Pluram—Television and U.S. Fiction*):

The next real literary “rebels” in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of “antirebels,” born oglers who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse single-entendre values. Who treat old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-consciousness and fatigue.<sup>133</sup>

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128 “Exposure to the idea that no final legitimation is available anymore, however, did in practice *not* lead to the conclusion that all literary conventions are in principle arbitrary—that ‘anything goes,’ whatever one wishes to write.” Fokkema 1997: 22; italics in the original. The postmodernist “anything goes” eschews, for example, authenticity and truth claims. For (post-)postmodernist literature that challenges the postmodernist “anything goes”, see Fokkema 1997: 33.

129 Meyer 2000: 74.

130 See Guth 2007.

131 Helmuth Lethen uses this expression in his interview with Ludwig Jäger. See Jäger 2009: 89.

132 Andreas Pflitsch (following the German author Benjamin von Stuckrad-Barre) suggests in his study of al-Ḍaʿīf that irony in recent times has become omnipresent and inevitable. As a result, the intensity of (post-) irony is reduced and its signs fade away to such a degree that it sometimes seems impossible to decide whether irony is intended or not. See Pflitsch 2009: 362-365.

133 Wallace 1993: 192-193.

The autobiographic metafiction of the 1990s does not back away from self-consciousness, but it certainly does back away from ironic watching. To be more precise: the texts might be ironic, as Dhikrī's novel certainly is, but not exclusively and often not with regard to emotions and bodies; on the contrary, they sometimes dare to be authentic and long for concrete, emotional and physical evidence.

One might already call this phenomenon post-postmodernist—for lack of a better term—since it challenges the refutation of truth claims. Then again, one might call it post-modernist, since the recent phenomenon of Arabic best-sellers (and their new style of writing) certainly has less in common with postmodernism than the literature of the 1990s.<sup>134</sup> One might also call it a crossing of the postmodernist and postcolonial imperatives, in which the artistic playfulness of the former merges with the self-assertive sincerity of the latter. Or one might simply call it an Arabic, or even Egyptian, variety of postmodernism.<sup>135</sup> Finally, it may even be ascribed to a misreading of deconstructionist texts, or an attempt to brush against their grain by focussing on lasting constructions. Depending on one's emphasis and approach, one may rightly consider this phenomenon a paradigm shift, a new mode, a crossing-over, a particular shaping, or a different reading. In any case, we can assert that the Egyptian autobiographic metafiction of the 1990s quite successfully combines radical metafiction with emotional authenticity.

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134 For this phenomenon, see Allen 2009.

135 For a different cultural reading of postmodernism, see Bertens/Fokkema 1997.

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