

## THE EVOLUTION OF A NEW LITERARY HERO IN EGYPTIAN PROSE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE XX<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the question of the evolution of a new literary hero in Egyptian prose in the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, a period which is a keen interest not only for researchers-Orientalists, literary scholars, critics, but for readers interested in the Arab world and culture. This period, which is full of political and social upheaval: the revolution of 1952 and the revolutionary-democratic reforms (1952-1967), Israel aggression and the onset of internal reaction to the revolutionary-democratic gains of the Egyptian people (since 1967), could not remain unnoticed by the writers, who were extremely worried about the fate of their Motherland. Their creative work was an answer to the numerous questions raised in the society under the given circumstances caused by tense political situations and reactions to them. The relevance of the evolution of a new literary hero in Egyptian prose is due to the fact that the modern Egyptian literature of the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century is not so extensively studied, particularly the creative work of modern Egyptian writers, who also contributed to the process of oriental (Arabic, Egyptian) modernism, therefore obviously is of great scientific interest to researchers all over the world. We analyze the problem in this paper with the relation to the cultural code of modern Egyptian society (e. g. ethnic traditions, values that characterize Egyptians and their ancestors, as well), which subsequently influenced the development of Arabic literature in general, respectively. The comparative-historical and analytical methods were applied in our research. Scientific and practical significance of the work lies in the fact that its inferences could be used for further study of the creative work of following Egyptian writers Mahmoud Taymour (محمد تيمور), Yusuf ash-Sharunie (يوسف الشاروني), Yusuf Idris (يوسف إدريس) in particular, as well as development trends of modern Egyptian literature (poetry and prose) in general.

**Keywords:** History, literature of Egypt, modern Egyptian prose, the evolution of the hero, the hero-fighter.

### INTRODUCTION

Internal changes in Egyptian society, due to economic-political and social upheavals that occurred during the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, reflected in the creative works of contemporary Arabic (Egyptian) writers [1, 37]. Thus, the question of the evolution of the hero in Egyptian prose takes on a special significance.

Despite the numerous studies, this problem, first of all in dynamics of its historical development, is not represented widely and deeply. The objective of this work is the modern Egyptian prose, the subject of the studies are the analyzed works: "The Return"/ "العودة" Mahmoud Taymour (1894-1973), "Sharbat" / "الشاربات" Yusuf ash- Sharunie (1924 - unknown) and the "Language of pain"/ "لغة الألم" by Yusuf Idris (1927-1991). All of the above writers-the Egyptians reflected on relevant issues, revealed the conflicts emerging in the society and encouraged people to the open dialogue in order to solve social, economic, political problems.

Chronological framework of this research covers the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, a period that due to the clash of Western and Eastern traditions, desire for renewal, on the one hand, and the desire to preserve centuries-old values, on the other, is of scientific interest [2, 70]. We have also paid attention to the first

half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, under analysis are the works published up to 1950-ies. Through research and comparison of two important periods, i.e., works of the first and second half of the XX<sup>th</sup>, it seems possible to analyze in more detail the previously mentioned research topic.

The main goal of this work is to trace the evolution of a new character, the process of its formation on the example of works of Egyptian prose of the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. It is important to note that the aim of our study is identified by several specific tasks. First, as the most prominent external factor influencing the process of becoming a hero, to consider the political and economic situation of Egypt, to study the development of the cultural sphere of society - Egyptian prose. Here it is necessary to investigate such important processes, like Westernization and urbanization in Egypt that influenced the formation of a fundamentally new image of the hero-fighter, the protector of citizens. Secondly, to perform the work of Egyptian prose of the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century ("The Return"/"□□□□□□" Mahmoud Taymour), to reveal the image of the hero, which is also called traditional or classical [Taymour, 1995]. Thirdly, to reveal the works of the Egyptian prose of the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century ("Sharbat" / "□□□□□□" Yusuf ash - Sharunie and "Language of pain"/ "□□□□ □□ □□□" Yusuf Idris) and describe the heroes [ash-Sharunie, 2010], [Idris, 1965]. Fourthly, to compare the images and draw the conclusions.

The question of the evolution of a new hero in Egyptian prose was not highlighted deeply. Our work is focused on examining this issue in more detail. This gives us the opportunity to examine how the process of transformation of Egyptian society occurred, and how it affected the creative work of writers. This is, as we could note, the scientific novelty of the research.

## METHODS

The methodological framework of the study is based on the comparative-historical method that allows to trace changes in Egyptian society and culture that influenced the creative work of the previously announced writers.

Also, we have used analytical technique in assessing works of Egyptian literature, identifying the process of the formation of a new character, its evolution in particular.

The following works laid fundamentals of our study:

- Gibb H.A.R. (1926). Studies in contemporary Arabic literature, "Bulletin of the Seminar of Oriental Studies", vol. IV, pp. 745–760; vol. V, pp. 311–322, 445–446; vol. VI. (p. 1-22). London: Oxford University Press.
- Jacquesmond Richard. (2008). Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt. American University in Cairo Press.

## RESULTS

In the course of our research we have drawn the following conclusions. The literature of Egypt, particularly the Egyptian prose of XX<sup>th</sup> century developed rapidly and was a kind of response to all of the political, economic, social developments and upheavals happening in the country at that period of time. Under these conditions, the Egyptian society was undergoing major changes that resulted in the fact that the process of formation of a new hero, the hero-fighter, began. His image will later be transferred to literature and contrasted with the traditional image of an Egyptian as an ordinary citizen.

The heroes of the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century were not determined to change their life. A huge role in their lives played the religious factor and associated with it prejudices of the time. They did not go against destiny, not even try to fight against it, and if difficulties arose, they took them for granted. Humility and obedience, manifested towards the destiny, was considered as the main rule, prescribed by Islam, which

contributed to the transfer of the image of a submissive person in the Egyptian literature as a traditional or classical image [Hodda, 2012].

The images of heroes of the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century - the true fighters who declare their rights, protect the country and citizens, respectively. They do not obey the fate, they make it themselves. The actions of the characters prove to everyone and especially themselves, that a man must choose his own way of life, no one can decide for him and force him into something or to do something [Gibbs, 1926].

We examined the heroes' images of different time periods. Each of them has his/her own social, cultural characteristics. If in the soul of the heroine of the story "The Return" (the first half of XX<sup>th</sup> century) Umm Zayan al-Agana the power and desire to fight and change the situation of the Egyptian society only began to emerge, in the souls of heroes from "Sharbat" and "Language of pain": Sharbat and al-Hadidi (second half of XX<sup>th</sup> century) these forces grew stronger, gained more and more power and resulted in concrete actions. New heroes-fighters of the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> were all from Egyptian society and called for progress and also for the need to save their native cultural traditions, code.

It should be noted that for many years of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, the UK managed to keep Egypt under its military and political control, but the Egyptian people strongly fought against British rule. In 1922 year, Britain formally recognized Egypt as an independent state. In fact, however, it exercised over Egypt a military-political and economic control until the middle of the XX<sup>th</sup> century. The country's economy entirely was dependent on foreign capital. The dominance of foreign monopolies enriched interlayer of Egyptian semi and the big bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and led to progressive poverty in the main mass of the peasantry and the poorest urban strata (petty artisans and merchants) - on the other, that resulted in sharp social contradictions. Here also we observe an increasing role of the city and, as a result, the huge gap between the urban and rural population [Gibbs, 1926].

It is necessary to note that the characters in the creative works of the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century experienced the conflict in society and the increasing influence from outside (the UK), but they still were not ready to open fight and defend the interests of the Egyptian people. The characters are not fully given freedom from doubt. The image of the hero of the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup> is the image of the observer, who is only prepared for the necessary changes in the future. The hero is not an active wrestler at all. Many famous writers of the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup>, such as Mahmoud Taimur, Yahya Khakie told us in their works about ordinary people, not endowed with a determination to change the situation, to deal with the difficult circumstances. They often submitted to fate that was at that time a firm rule prescribed for them by religion, and as a result, we could define their images as classical or traditional.

However, the revolution of 1952 marked the victory of the Egyptian people and instilled in the soul of every Egyptian faith in their own strength. Came in 1952 the new government headed by Gamal Abdel Nasser have clearly articulated its main objectives: the struggle against imperialism for the elimination of feudalism, national monopolies, corruption, and social injustice. Egyptian officers sought freedoms and democratic social reforms. Revolutionary-democratic government was achieved in 1954 the withdrawal of the British occupation troops, and in 1956 he announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Thus, the positions of the Anglo-French monopoly became weak unstable. For 18 years (from 1952 to 1970), a policy of strengthening state sovereignty, the elimination of the domination of foreign and big national capital, the destruction of the dominant position of the landowners in the village was led successfully [Gibbs, 1926].

Based on the foregoing, we might conclude that the image of a hero has evolved throughout the XX century. As a result of acquaintance with the Western world, the life of Egyptian society was undergoing drastic changes. On the one hand, the Egyptians were ready and sought to update progress, but on the other hand were afraid of losing their national traditions [Brugman, 1984]. The society felt the importance

of preserving their culture. In the works of second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century we meet a new hero-fighter, who is distinguished by activity, rebelliousness, a desire to change, to lead the society to progress and upgrade. Partial Westernization of culture and, as a consequence, the gradual loss of their identity, caused in the hearts of the Egyptians the rise of national consciousness. In society a hero emerges, ready to fight for the renewal and progress of society, but not by blindly imitating the West and adopting some alien traditions, only by adapting these traditions in the Egyptian culture core [6, 128].

The authors wrote about the changes in the life of the Egyptians of that time period, evidence of the emergence of a new kind of public relations in Egypt. True faith in the proximity of the radical changes in the countryside and in the city pervades these works. It is important to add that it is in the 50-ies of the XX<sup>th</sup> century the genre of the Egyptian short story (called a novella) was formed as a life, or just everyday, historical, anecdotal or sad, mundane or exceptional, but always characterized by specific length in time, and read sequentially from beginning to end. In the atmosphere of hopes and expectations associated with the revolution (1952), even the most dramatic circumstances, the image of the plight of the poor and weak were stained with optimism, gentle humor.

Genuine interest lays in the fact that in the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century the number of women writers (a notable representative is Ihsan Kemal) has increased, who raised in piece of works relevant problems of the Egyptian society regarding the position, status and rights of Muslim women [Roald, 2001]. These attempts to equal the rights of women and men was first made in Egypt and marked as the beginnings of the movement of Oriental feminism.

## **DISCUSSION**

No doubts, the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century in the history of Egypt is of scientific interest for researchers. This period is full of political and social upheaval, for instance, the 1952 revolution and the revolutionary-democratic reforms (1952-1967), Israel aggression and reaction to the revolutionary-democratic gains of the Egyptian people since the year 1967. Despite the tense situation in the country, the literature of Egypt has developed rapidly, it was a response to all the events in the country. Social, economic, political upheaval that took place in Egypt during the first and second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century was reflected in the creative works of Egyptian writers.

Their creative work was an answer to the numerous questions raised in the society under the given circumstances caused by tense political situations and reactions to them. All the changes in the life of mere citizens, their worries and even fears, were highlighted on the pages with the message to go forward to progress without abandoning cultural traditions, protesting against western imitating in general that could damage severely the unique ethnic cultural code of the modern Egyptian society.

## **CONCLUSION**

The image of the hero of the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, classical or traditional, could be characterized as full of humility, unwillingness to change anything, according to various factors (e. g. religion) of that time period that formed person's world view [Cromer, 2012].

The hero of the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, his fundamentally new image for the modern Egyptian prose, could be characterized by determination and willingness to change the tense situation in Egyptian society, desire to lead people to the progress. The new hero claimed the interests of people, defended the rights of citizens, and his image differed from the traditional image of a person that was never against his fate that so often characterizes the works of earlier period, found both in the Egyptian and Arabic literature, respectively. A strong fighter, leader from society and his fundamentally new image became the prototype of a new literary hero in the Egyptian literature in the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The article is of interest to researchers-Orientalists, literary scholars for further study of the creative work of Egyptian writers Mahmoud Taymour, Yusuf al-Sharunie, Yusuf Idris, in particular, as well as development trends of modern Egyptian literature.

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