NATIONALISM, ISLAM AND WORLD LITERATURE

Sites of confluence in the writings of Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī

Mohamed-Salah Omri

Foreword by Tayeb Salih

NATIONALISM, ISLAM AND WORLD LITERATURE

How does the Arabic and Islamic tradition impinge on the modern Arab writer? Does the fiction of a writer under colonialism necessarily engage with the national situation? In light of the global effect of Western literary forms, is an Arabic, or a Third World text in general, necessarily a copy of a Western original?

Nationalism, Islam and World Literature questions patterns of influence in the study of world literature and suggests new pathways to approach the connections between Western and Arabic literatures. It makes close readings of the original writings of Tunisia's most important modern writer, Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī (1911–2004), combining tools from literary theory and Arabic poetics. It demonstrates that the work is embedded in the Arabic literary and spiritual heritage and deeply mindful of Western culture, hence references to Sufism and medieval Arabic literature alongside Greek tragedy, Goethe and French existentialists. The book also deals extensively with the connections between writing and political activism in the contexts of anti-colonial struggle and nation building. It addresses cultural history in a specific geographical area, Tunisia during and after French colonialism, within global trends and perspectives.

Nationalism, Islam and World Literature will be of interest to students of Tunisian culture and history, North African Studies, Arabic literature, Islamic spirituality in literature, post-colonial studies and comparative literature.

Mohamed-Salah Omri is lecturer in Arabic at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter in Britain. His research interests include the politics of representation, comparative literature and North African literatures. His recent publications include: *The Movement of People and Ideas between Britain and the Maghreb,* ed. (2003); and 'History, literature and settler colonialism in North Africa', *Modern Language Quarterly* (2005) 66:3, 273–298.

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN MIDDLE EASTERN LITERATURES

Editors

James E. Montgomery
University of Cambridge

Roger Allen
University of Pennsylvania

Philip F. Kennedy
New York University

Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures is a monograph series devoted to aspects of the literatures of the Near and Middle East and North Africa both modern and pre-modern. It is hoped that the provision of such a forum will lead to a greater emphasis on the comparative study of the literatures of this area, although studies devoted to one literary or linguistic region are warmly encouraged. It is the editors' objective to foster the comparative and multi-disciplinary investigation of the written and oral literary products of this area.

NATIONALISM, ISLAM AND WORLD LITERATURE

Sites of confluence in the writings of
Maḥmūd al-Masᶜadī

Mohamed-Salah Omri

Foreword by Tayeb Salih

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

IN MEMORY OF MY FATHER

FOR MDELLA AND HER GARDEN
OF JONQUIL AND BASIL

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Tayeb Salih

The great Tunisian writer, thinker and politician, Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī, who died in 2004 at the age of ninety-three, was truly one of the most important contemporary Arab writers and thinkers. Although he was well known in France, he remained almost totally unknown in the English-speaking world. It is therefore a great pleasure for me to welcome this lucid, learned and stimulating study by Mohamed-Salah Omri. It is, to my knowledge, the first ever extensive attempt to introduce al-Masʿadī to the English-speaking world.

Ever since I read his remarkable work *al-Sudd* (The Dam) in the early 1960s, I became captivated by al-Masʿadī's ideas and particularly by his style. He was in a class of his own as a practitioner of the Arabic language. He was both very classical and very modern. I was also lucky to have met and talked with him several times. To have met al-Masʿadī in person and listened to him talk in his characteristically husky voice, about a wide variety of topics, ranging from literature to religion to politics, was a real privilege.

Al-Masʿadī was, in my view, in the mould of the great Arab and Muslim scholars-statesmen of old, reminding me of literary and political giants of the Abbasid period; men like Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil and al-Ṣāḥib ibn ʿAbbād. These men put their scholarship in the service of their politics and politics in the service of scholarship. It is a tradition, which al-Masʿadī could be said to have established in Tunisia during the late President Bourguiba's years. His student and disciple, Moḥamad Mazālī, who went on to become Prime Minister, continued to edit and publish an important literary magazine (*Al-Fikr*) throughout his years in government.

I find the comparison that Omri draws between Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and al-Masʿadī very apt. Not only were they both scholar-statesmen, functioning in small countries with relatively no great cultural or political weight, but also they both, as Omri says '… applied their efforts and pens to make sense of modernity and forge an identity for their people.' Indeed, it is possible to make comparisons between Goethe's Weimar and al-Masʿadī's Tunisia, especially during the first twenty or thirty years of Bourguiba's rule. Both countries, thanks to the efforts of their geniuses, Goethe and al-Masʿadī, acquired influence and importance far beyond their weight.

Al-Masᶜadī expressed in his literary works complex and original ideas – some of these have been interpreted by critics as bordering on the heretical – in an uncompromisingly classical language, which is traditional, but at the same time very new and modern. Omri's book on al-Masᶜadī deserves to be widely read.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

At its widest scope, this book is about the weight of necessity and the relentless human desire to transgress it, in art as in life. By necessity, I mean tradition, fate and, to certain extent, the modern colonial condition. The life and work of the Tunisian Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī (1911–2004) are the prisms through which I explore how the past elicits a dual response: allure and resistance, almost in equal measure. By the allure of the past, I mean the seductive power of the Arabic literary heritage and the *Qurʾān* on one side, and the canon of Western literature on the other. Part of the past is also the pressures of the dogma of religion and French colonialist attempts to erase Tunisian cultural identity. In literature, this appeal is resisted through a poetics, which engages the past by means of parody, performance, an original use of the language and idiosyncratic conceptions of the spiritual and the tragic. On the ground, al-Masʿadī applied his effort and pen to resist colonialism, make sense of modernity and help forge an identity for his people.

The book also engages the issue of authenticity, as a political and cultural construction and as a philosophical position or stance in life. In modern Arabic culture the debate about 'authenticity' (*aṣāla*) in culture runs parallel to the persistent argument about modernity and, in the same way, continues unabated today. Such debate has taken numerous political colours and manifested itself in areas as varied as school curricula and dress codes (pace the continuing debate about the relationship between *aṣāla* and curriculum, *ḥijāb* and even beards and moustaches). During the colonial period, conceptions of *aṣāla* (authenticity) were closely tied to the discourses on national identity and therefore part of the argument for national liberation. In Tunisia, al-Masʿadī has been an advocate for a particular conception of *aṣāla* and a symbol for it at the same time. There is, however, a paradox here: al-Masʿadī's conception of authenticity is different from the one he came to represent, as I explain in the course of the book. The other type of authenticity pertains to the stance of al-Masʿadī's characters towards issues of conduct in life and position in the world. Ghaylān, Abū Hurayra, Madyan, Sindabād and ʿImrān approach life with consistency and determination, or rather with determined consistency, that remain unwavering until the very end of their respective journeys. They follow their paths in life with the lucidity and the sense of purpose that came to be associated, in modern times, with the existentialist heroes of a Camus or a Sartre, but which also recall the search

1

for truth and the pursuit of the ultimate fulfilment of the individual self, which marked early Muslim Sufis.

The book shows a marked concern with method, and this is where it is perhaps most experimental. It is about how better to approach the Arabic or Third World text, keeping in mind a global context and a specific linguistic situation. In other words, how to account for the specific national situation of the text, its language, its narrative repertoire and its communal concerns as well as the global perspective, both as a theoretical angle and as a pursuit by the writer; how to balance close reading and theoretical synthesis. From a methodological point of view, the study is an attempt to combine world literature and national literature or, in disciplinary terms, Area Studies and Comparative literature. Approaching the text from these two perspectives means allowing more than one entry to it while remaining aware of their intersection, even the tension between the two. The reader will find the ancient Arabic convention of *muʿāradha* (creative imitation) side by side with formal parody as understood by Bakhtin for instance, or references to Greek tragedy alongside the *Qurʾān*.[1] There will be extensive discussion of the concerns mentioned above throughout. At this point, however, and since the anthology of the study is al-Masʿadī as writer and citizen, an ample introduction of this figure is needed.

Al-Masʿadī: icon and enigma

Al-Masʿadī passed away on 16 December 2004 at age 93, having experienced one of the most dramatic centuries in the history of Tunisia and the Arab world as a whole. His death came in the aftermath of a flurry of public activities related to his work and gave further momentum to interest in his life and writings. Indeed, the year before, 2003, was marked by the publication of his complete works in Arabic and in French, national and international colloquia around this and renewed interest among translators. After his death, numerous commemorative events took place, ranging from reading his work in daily slots on state television, to colloquia around the country, interviews with those who knew him closely, special supplements in newspapers and magazines and an outpouring of expressions of admiration from writers and poets.[2] Al-Masʿadī's death was in reality the passing of an era. For some, it put an end to his dominance over Tunisian literary history, giving room for other voices to be heard. For others, it was the passing away of the last of the 'great Tunisians', an event akin to the death of the poet al-Shābbī seventy years earlier, hence calls to commemorate al-Masʿadī's achievements in a museum, a library, literary prizes and even a dedicated website (*al-Ḥurriya* 2004: 2). But unlike al-Shabbī and the pioneer of Tunisian short story, ʿAlī al-Dūʿājī, who lived in relative obscurity and were honoured only after death, by 2004 al-Masʿadī had been an icon for Tunisians for decades.[3]

Ten years earlier, an open letter addressed to the writer as a New Year greeting, which suggests how the writer fared in his own country, appeared in Tunisia's foremost daily newspaper *al-Ṣabāḥ* (*Al-Ṣabāḥ* 1993: 8). The letter also reveals how much its young writer, al-Ḥusayn Yazīd, is indebted to al-Masʿadī in his style, and betrays the emotions he experiences in writing to his idol. Al-Masʿadī's aura comes through

unambiguous and overwhelming. There are quotations from his work, a pastiche of his style, and numerous phrases familiar to his readers. For Yazīd, Tunisia and the writer are one and the same: 'Tunisia, our nation, our Tunisia, I love her and I love you. For you and she are synonyms, soul mates, twins'. But al-Masʿadī does not appeal only to the young and the less established. Here is how the novelist and critic Maḥmud Ṭarshūna describes the effect of al-Masʿadī's play al-Sudd on him personally and on his generation: 'The message of al-Sudd reached me at the age of twenty. Since then I put on Ghaylān's cloak and never took it off. I inherited it from two men: the first was Farḥāt, to whom al-Masʿadī dedicates al-Sudd. The second was Farīd Ghāzī, who wore Ghaylān's cloak until his death' (Ṭarshūna 1997: 118).[4]

If these accounts are any indication, Tunisian readers and writers hold al-Masʿadī in reverence. He commanded widespread respect among readers and within the anti-colonial movement in the 1940s and never really lost it since. Yet, until recently he has remained a private man, giving rare interviews or commentaries on his work, entertaining very few visitors and avoiding journalists. When I met him in January 1994, however, al-Masʿadī was again in the public eye. He had just been awarded the first Prix du Maghreb for cultural achievement (December 3, 1993) and everyone wanted a few words from him. In 1994 as well, a survey of intellectuals and writers voted him the most important cultural figure in the country.[5] In Tunisia, his work is studied more than any other living local writer; making a small cottage industry of at least 30 books, numerous articles and university theses. A number of writers belong to what may be called madrasat al-Masʿadī (al-Masʿadī's school).

My own first direct encounter with al-Masʿadī at his house in a suburb of Tunis in 1994 was not unlike Yazīd's, although my aim was different. I felt a mixture of admiration for the writer, curiosity about the man behind the text and a desire to look for clues to a work I was trying to know more intimately as a student. I sought answers to issues that intrigued me in my research, such as the way he handles tradition, the origins of his unique style, how did he balance political activism with writing. The writer's relationship at that time with texts he had written fifty years earlier seemed a likely key to my questions. I asked:

> You introduce al-Sudd with the following statement: 'I wrote it in a period of solitude and meditation, and then put it to the test during years of life among people. I did not find it, in essence, alien to me nor did I reject it. Therefore, I decided to publish it in its shortcomings' (al-Maʿadī 1985: 9). My question is: 'This was your opinion in 1955. Does it remain true fifty years on or has some of your writings become alien to you?'

He replied:

> I do not find anything of the sort in what I have written because I did not intend with my writings to lay out a philosophical doctrine that might become obsolete, or subject to revision, addition or deletion. What I wrote was the summary of the meaning of my experience in the world, of the

essential and related issues that occupied my mind, my heart and my imagination. These are the meaning and the responsibility, which are linked to being in the world, and which compel human beings to action, such as the duty to work and to create. Living (*wujūd*) requires us to contemplate the stages and dimensions of life, its meanings and the opening up (*tafātuḥ*) of its horizons. *Tafātuḥ* means the gradual opening up to the universe, which is an adventure like the one undertaken by Abū Hurayra.

The focus on shared human experience across time rather than specific instances of individual or communal history may be one secret behind al-Masᶜadī's durability. The other intriguing issue for me had to do with how he actually composes his work, his method and his routine, the kind of puzzle that intrigues readers when they sense craft or genius in a text. During my interview, I appealed to the writer's own repertoire of influences by quoting the masterful Arabic prose writer ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ (AD 724–759). I asked: 'When ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ was asked about the reason behind his frequent pauses when he wrote, he replied: 'Speech crowds my chest so my pen stops in order to choose.'[6] My question is: 'How do you write?' Al-Masᶜadī replied:

Writing is like birth after long gestation. A text is like an embryo. It adapts like a human being and gradually takes its living shape, then appears by a sort of necessity. The birth itself is not easy, involving suffering and requiring care. The newborn needs considerable attention. The writer's work is revision. I have always treated what inspiration offered me with strict attention until I reached a point where I was satisfied that the final shape was a true expression of what was inside me. I have not put anything out to the public in its first or second or third versions. This may be what Ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ had in mind.

Al-Masᶜadī's answer to my next question provides evidence of the care with which he approaches language and gives a striking illustration of what Ibn al-Muqaffaᶜ meant by the painstaking choice of words. I added: 'Al-Mutanabbī writes:

Restless as if riding the wind – Steering me South or North.[7]

Is this restlessness (*qalaq*) pertinent to your character Abū Hurayra?'

Al-Masᶜadī's response was not so much in what he said, rather it was in the distinction he clearly set between the way he handles tradition and the way, I (and, I am sure, many modern writers) do it. My quote was a memorized line, out of context. It added elegance and some erudition to my question. This was a case where the critic is compelled to adjust to the writer, or work within specific expectations, a gesture not unlike Yazīd's style in his birthday letter. I would not have phrased the question that way had I been interviewing Naguib Mahfuz for instance. Al-Masᶜadī's response was, in gesture and in substance, markedly different, something almost completely missing from the way the Arab contemporary writer has related to his tradition and language. First, there was the unmistakable reproach of a veteran teacher. He said:

The image is poetic. We are in the realm of poetry, imagination and imagery. I would like to point out a matter of principle. A part severed from the whole loses the meaning it acquires by being in a relationship with a whole. Taken separately, the part seems cut off, which changes its definition and meaning. The poet experiences restlessness because he does not feel stability and settlement, hence the gestures of someone moved by wind. He who is moved by wind is an object who does not have control over his movement. Restlessness means being unsettled. I apologize! I do not write without a dictionary nearby.

Al-Masʿadī then got up, looked in one dictionary and then in another, and continued: '*Qaliqa* or *Qalaqa*. *Qaliqah* means, not in its proper place, as in *ʿibāra qaliqah*, as Arab rhetoricians used to say, that is, an expression which is not in its proper place in the discourse.' He opened the dictionary and read: '*Qaliqah*, out of place, as in *ḥijāra qaliqah*, a stone which is not in its proper place in a building.' After the reproach came the answer: 'In this respect, Abū Hurayra refers to Abū al-ʿAtāhiya's line:

I sought residence in every land – But found settlement nowhere'

When the interview was completed, I realized that I had not asked any biographical or factual questions. Biographical detail seemed perhaps too mundane, if not frivolous or irrelevant after such a conversation. The writer himself did not volunteer any information. I still had to find out who Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī was, his intellectual background, and how he had come to gain the reputation he has.

Al-Masʿadī and his writings

The writer's current fame is largely due to his fictional writings, his reputation prior to the publication of extracts from his fiction in the late 1940s and *al-Sudd* in 1955 was the result of his role as writer of essays, editor of a journal, educator, and trade union and political activist. Critics provide sketchy biographical notes and the customary references to the life and times of the author. Yet, al-Masʿadī's role as a nationalist intellectual remains to be studied and information about him must be gleaned from various sources. His role as one of the instrumental figures in the emergence of a national culture in Tunisia during and after colonial occupation deserves explanation.

Al-Masʿadī was born in the small village of Tazarka in the North East of the country on 28 January 1911. His experience as a student gave him direct access to the most influential institutions of learning available at his time. He studied at the prestigious modern school al-Madrasa al-Ṣādiqiyya, founded by the reformer Khayr al-Dīn Pasha, between 1921 and 1932; the French school Lycée Carnot in 1933; the Zaytūna Islamic University and al-Khaldūniyya during his years at Ṣādiqiyya; and, in France, at the Sorbonne from 1933 to 1936, then in 1939, and in 1947.[8] These

institutions helped mould the leaders of the time and positioned al-Masʿadī to become prominent among such company. In addition, he had the opportunity and the challenge to affect these very institutions, first as a teacher at Lycée Carnot (1936– 38) then at Ṣādiqiyya (1938–48), and later as the architect of Tunisia's educational policy between 1958 and 1968. Al-Masʿadī also taught simultaneously at the Centre d'Etudes Islamiques at Paris University (1947–52) and at the Collège d'Etudes Supérieures in Tunis (1948–55) where he became Chair of the Arabic Literature Department. Among his students were Mūḥammad Mzālī, the founder of the journal *al-Fikr* and former Prime Minister of Tunisia at the time when al-Masʿadī was Speaker of Parliament; ʿIzz al-Dīn Gallūz, the translator of al-Masʿadī's book *al-Sudd* (The Dam) into French, and Ṭāhir Cherīʿa, the filmmaker and founder of Carthage International Film Festival. Al-Masʿadī's colleagues in Tunisia included André Raymond and a number of academics who contributed regularly to *al-Mabāḥith*. After independence, al-Masʿadī became the first Director of Education and then Inspector of Secondary Education before he was put in charge of the 'Tunisification' and reform of the educational system in the newly-independent country as Secretary of State for Education, Youth and Sports, which lead to the conception and implementation of 'The Project for Educational Reform of 1958'.[9] His goals were universal access to elementary education in ten years, the development of secondary education and the establishment of a modern university system. Among the most prominent aspects of this reform were integration of the Islamic institution al-Zaytūna within the university system as a college for religious studies, and maintaining bilingual education in Arabic and French, two daring moves, which continue to be debated today.[10] He was also Minister of Cultural Affairs from 1973 to 1976 and Speaker of Parliament between 1981 and 1986.

As a scholar, al-Masʿadī benefited from the tradition of Islamic studies in France during one of its most brilliant periods. His mentors and teachers, many of whom would become his future friends and colleagues, included the eminent scholars Gaudefroy-Demombyne, Levi-Provinçal and more importantly, the French specialist of Islamic mysticism Henri Massignon and the Arabist Regis Blachère. Al-Masʿadī's own academic work bears kinship to this tradition. His complementary doctoral thesis, *Essai sur le rythme dans la prose rimée en arabe* (An Essay on Rhythm in Arabic Rhymed Prose), which was written in 1939 but was published as a book only in 1981, is a path-breaking meticulous study of rhythmic patterns in Arabic prose with focus on the *Maqāmāt* of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī.[11] Other published research includes articles on the theory of knowledge of the mystic and theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), the philosophical poet Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (973– 1058), the Sufi poet Abū al-ʿAtāhiya (d. 848), several pieces on literary criticism and cultural issues, and translations from French.[12]

With such a profile, al-Masʿadī became a major player on the cultural scene before and after independence. In the colonial period, his most significant impact was during the crucial years when he was Editor in Chief of *al-Mabāḥith* (1943–47), the most important Tunisian journal of its time. The journal, which I study in more detail in Chapter 1, was the forum for a collective academic project to construct a national

culture in Tunisia. Al-Masʿadī's most involving anti-colonialist activities were in the arenas of labour unionism and politics. He was President of the Teachers Union in Tunisia and Member of the Secretariat General of the International Teachers Federation from 1951 to 1955 and Assistant Secretary General of the powerful General Union of Tunisian Workers since its foundation in 1948. When the Union leader, Farḥāt Ḥashshād, to whose memory al-Masʿadī dedicated his book *al-Sudd* (The Dam), was assassinated, the writer was put in charge of the Union. But as a result of a crackdown by the French authorities, he was exiled to the south of the country from September 1952 until May 1953. In the political field, he played an important role as member of the Neo-Constitutional Party of Tunisia from its founding in 1934. He participated in the negotiations with the French that led to self-rule in 1954 and was reportedly instrumental in keeping Tunisia out of the Axis alliance during the German occupation of the country in 1942.[13]

Outside Tunisia, al-Masʿadī is the country's best-known cultural figure. He was Tunisia's representative to the UNESCO for ten years (1958–68) before becoming a Member of its Executive Council in (1977–8) and (1980–5). In this capacity, he contributed to several UNESCO studies on education and culture including *Cultural Development: Some Regional Experiences* (1981), with the essay, 'Cultural Development in the Arabic Cultural Region'. Until his death, he was Member of *Lijnat al-Ḥukamāʾ* (Advisory Board) of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO); of the Editorial Board of the Syrian project *al-Mawsūʿa al-ʿarabiyya al-kubra* (The Great Arabic Encyclopedia) from 1978 and of the Jordanian Academy of Arabic Language from 1980.[14] Al-Masʿadī was also the spokesperson for Tunisian writers and often represented them abroad.

As far as literature is concerned, it appears that al-Masʿadī had written most of his fiction in one burst of creativity between 1938 and 1941.[15] He later added rare chapters or occasional stories such as the recently collected *Min Ayyām ʿImrān* (The Days of ʿImrān) and the aphorism in Arabic and in French published for the first time in 2003. It is, however, hard to detect a difference between earlier and later writings in outlook or in style. Al-Masʿadī's fiction will be studied in detail in the course of the book. Here, I will only point out, without analysing them at this stage, a number of striking features in his writing. His linguistic and stylistic creativity is evident in the names of gods, to cite only one instance. The writer invents names that evoke various connotations and symbols. Ṣāhabbāʾ in *al-Sudd* is a combination of barrenness and nothingness (*habāʾ*) and aridity and fire (*ṣahbāʾ*). Salhawā in *Mawlid* refers to a combination of consolation (*salwā*), obliviousness (*sahw*) and desire (*hawā*). Al-Masʿadī's metaphors and similes are both idiosyncratic and unusual. For example, he writes: 'We took to the water. The man would dive down and slither across near the bottom of the sea like a snake, then re-emerge like a memory' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 203). In *al-Sudd*, we read: 'Imagination is a cannibal' (*al-khayāl min akalati al-bashar*) (al-Masʿadī 1992: 48).

The endings of narratives are rather intriguing. *Al-Sudd* ends with the character Ghaylān ascending into the sky carried away by a storm. But it is his choice to ascend: 'We shall rise and open up for our heads a door in the sky' (149). Abū Hurayra

chooses his death in 'Ḥadīth al-baʿth al-ʾākhir' (The Last Awakening). He seeks 'The Call' and responds to it in poetry and by 'a cry like that of joy' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 232). Only Madyan in *Mawlid*, who seeks a scientific cure for transience, finds repose and unites with the universe for a brief moment before he succumbs to death. The treatment of creation in *Mawlid al-Nisyān*, where the humankind is made of beauty, is symptomatic of the writer's interest in abstract and metaphysical issues. Typical of the philosophical thinking and expression embedded in the texts are statements such as 'And I said: I have nothing left except to seek my absolute self and my identity, to shun temporariness, complementarities and attributes (*al-maḥmūl wa al-lāḥiq wa al-ʿāriḍ*)' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 202).

These examples give an indication as to why al-Masʿadī's work inhabits the memory of his readers. His unique phrases, titles of resounding effect (*Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra Qāl*, *Mawlid al-Nisyān*, 'al-Sindabād wa al-Ṭahāra'), characters that stand out (Ghaylān, Maymūna, Abū Hurayra), and carefully built texts written with remarkable conciseness, all appear to affect his readers. For a great many Tunisians who read at least one of his books at the final year of their secondary education or at the university, al-Masʿadī's words reverberate like no others, lurking in their memories, just like verses they learned as children and thought long forgotten. Such phrases are not totally comprehensible and yet are not entirely without meaning, significant phrases, cherished for their opacity as well as for their expression and rhythm, as several studies have demonstrated. Is language the reason why al-Masʿadī's work has survived the test of time, as Roger Allen suggests (Badawī: 1983, vol. 4: 190)? Has the 'Masʿadian word' managed to survive because of this very oddity, the puzzling grip of a past made relevant to the present? Does this mean that reworking tradition is the ultimate source of originality? At the same time, isn't this same attitude towards language what lies behind claims that al-Masʿadī's influence was limited?

What is al-Masʿadī's role in the development of modern Arabic literature? What does he represent? Is he responsible for the pattern of development of the novel in Tunisia as suggested by Benslama (Misaddī 1997: 16)? To what extent can he be credited with 'poeticizing' the Arabic novel, a role critics assign to Proust in the French novel? How can we account for his fame and endurance beyond the factors of distribution, networks of publication and personal influence? Does al-Masʿadī's case offer an answer to the problematic relationship the Arabic novel has entertained with the Arabic literary and cultural tradition (*turāth*)? Is he the missing link between both moments of Arabic literature, the pre-modern and the modern, as Bürgel suggests (Smart 1996: 182)? How does he tackle the controversial issues of Sufism and tragic thought in literature? What does his case tell us about the position of the *Qurʾān* in modern Arabic writing? In the course of this study, I explore some of these questions. It may not be possible to provide all the answers but these are questions the case compels the critic to ask.

Al-Masʿadī has rarely been the subject of critical consensus. Since his work tackles the sensitive issues of human will, religious doubt and the extent of human freedom in an Islamic context, there is great disparity of opinions among his critics. As Tawfīq Bakkār put it in his introduction to the 1979 edition of *Ḥaddatha*, al-Masʿadī

provokes the reader to question his or her own beliefs and challenges all sense of intellectual complacency. The absence of a clear lineage between the writer and his Arab contemporaries begs an interpretation of the Masʿadī 'phenomenon'. Students of Tunisian literature almost invariably set aside a special, and often separate, place for him. Scholars of modern Arabic literature as a whole almost as frequently pay a nod of recognition. Like his compatriot, the poet Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī, al-Masʿadī is often their token Maghrebi writer, a puzzling exception often noted but rarely analysed or interpreted.

There are numerous political readings of the writer's fiction but a remarkable lack of interest in his role as an intellectual or his cultural politics during the colonial period in particular. The writer's political career is at best used to shed light on his literary writings. Likewise, the fiction is sometimes used to justify or condemn his politics. In all cases, however, critics are at pains to reconcile both sides of al-Masʿadī. The Moroccan Francophone writer Abdelkabīr Khaṭībī notes a puzzling split between al-Masʿadī's writings and his nationalism. He observes that the relationship between the historical and the imaginary in al-Masʿadī's fiction is completely embroiled by a symbolism that rejects any systematic comparison with reality (Khaṭībī 1968: 87). He finds this surprising since the writer is known for his heavy involvement in Tunisian nationalism. Al-Masʿadī's 'Tunisianness', not to speak of his specific politics, I would like to argue, are difficult to deduce from his fiction. There is a systematic erasure of locale in his literary writing. The text does not re-present anything specifically Tunisian or particularly historical. This puzzling split bothers more than al-Masʿadī's critics. It puts to the test some of the most influential theories of and approaches to Third World literature as a whole.

Third World literature, literary theory and *Weltliteratur*

In literary scholarship, Third World literatures have been studied under the rubrics of 'world', 'general', comparative or, more recently, postcolonial literature.[16] Literary theory is not readily associated with Third World literature. No Third-World text has enjoyed the privileges theory has conferred on books such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* or writers like Marcel Proust or William Shakespeare. The theory of Third World literature is largely a Western reflection on the literatures from the area known as the Third World. And when theorized, Third World literature has been linked to ideology more closely than to literary theory. As a result, political, social, or cultural information has been the dominant areas and purposes for which Third World literature is studied. There is either a political aim or an ethnographic desire at work. At the level of discipline or field, they are linked to the limitations (and the relative potential) of Area Studies. In the case of Arabic literature, for instance, the main paradigms remain the politics and history of the region or its societies, mirroring interest in the area either as a political hotspot or as an unknown other.

Fredric Jameson's 1986 essay, 'Third-world Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism' is an influential contribution towards the formulation of a theory of

Third World literature and the elaboration of an argument for its relevance to literary studies in North America in particular. Jameson starts from the premise that there is a 'radical difference' between Third World and 'First World' literatures. The pre-occupation with the personal, which permeates the latter is almost absent from the former. He says:

> Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*. Need I add that it is precisely this very different ratio of the political to the personal which makes such texts alien to us at first approach, and consequently, resistant to our conventional western habits of reading?
>
> (Jameson 1986: 69)

Jameson argues for an overarching interpretive theory for all Third-World texts. He says: 'All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel' (Jameson 1986: 69).

Jameson's theory led to a famous intra-Marxist exchange with Aijaz Ahmad who contends that Jameson bases his conclusions exclusively on *realist* works available in *European* languages. Ahmed points out that the specific texts Jameson singles out to illustrate his point are two realist novels, one from China and the other from Senegal. Ahmad writes: 'Now, I am not sure that realism, which appears to be at the heart of Jameson's characterization of "Third World Literature" in this passage, is quite as universal in *that* literature or quite as definitively superseded in what Jameson calls "first-world cultural development" (Ahmad 1992: 112). The surrealism of the Caribbean writer Aimé Césaire and the realism that permeates contemporary North American writing are cases in point. With regard to allegorization, Ahmad points out that the advent of capitalism and the creation of an urban bourgeoisie in Third World societies can justify the focus on individual rather than communal issues in this literature. It should be expected therefore that 'there must be texts, perhaps numerous texts, that are grounded in this desolation, bereft of any capacity for the kind of allegorization and organicity that Jameson demands of them' (107). He states that in India several narratives deal with issues other than nationalism and colonialism. They address questions of femininity and propriety, for instance. Ahmad asserts: 'I cannot think of a single novel in Urdu between 1935 and 1947, the crucial year leading up to decolonization, which is in any direct or exclusive way about the experience of colonialism and imperialism' (118).

Yet Ahmad's own work on India in the chapter 'Indian Literature: Notes towards a definition of a category' confirms at least three of Jameson's main arguments. For

one, Ahmad notes in his nuanced essay, the lasting effect of the encounter between Indian literature and realist fiction. In his words: 'Most other forms came and went, but realism remained …' (270). Secondly, both essays stress the fact that concern with the self in literature is to be seen as a feature of writing born under capitalist conditions. Ahmad argues that since capitalism is 'a shaping force' within Third World formations, the separation between the public and the private, characteristic of what Jameson calls the 'first-world', must have occurred there as well. He writes: 'With this bifurcation must have come, at least for some producers of texts, the individuation and personalization of libidinal energies, the loss of access to "concrete" experience, and the subsequent experience of the self as an isolated, alienated entity incapable of real organic connection with any collectivity' (107). A third issue common to the work of Jameson and Ahmad, as well as to critics of Arabic literatures, is the privileging of the novel form over other types of narrative. This proposition leads to the replication of the history of the novel in Europe in a Third World context.[17]

Franco Moretti who attempts to chart the spread of the novel from Europe outwards and in the context of world literature, nuances the binarism of Jameson by introducing a third element in the rapport between the novel and its Third World manifestations. While Jameson sees the novel as a compromise between foreign form and local matter, Moretti adds local form to make a triangle of relations (Moretti 2000: 60). One key contribution here is to set the debate firmly in the area of form. (Ultimately, Moretti and Jameson agree since both understand forms to be, in the final analysis, abstracts of social relations.) It is through this third element that variation occurs. The most discernible manifestation of local form is related to narrative voice. For instance, Moretti points out, novels in China at some point show how the narrator is uneasy as to how to handle the novel form (Moretti 2000: 62–3). Mostly by moral prerogative, it tries to dominate the plot and often looses control of it. In the Arabic context, an example of this would be al-Muwailiḥī's *Ḥadīth ʿIsā Ibn Hishām* (1907), where the narrator is clearly anxious to keep the narrative under control, hence his framing of events, commentary on characters and even outright didactic interventions. I will say more about the book in Chapter 2. Moretti recognizes the difficulty facing Comparative literature to study this element since close reading requires linguistic and cultural competence in the specific national tradition, an expertise that is often lacking among comparatists. The relationship between the global and the local is not one-dimensional either. Using the theory of the tree employed in philology, Moretti sees national literature as a tree with branches. The novel, however, is like a wave, an idea he borrows from genetics and archaeology: 'Think of the modern novel: certainly a wave (and I've actually called it a wave a few times) – but a wave that runs into the branches of local traditions, and is always significantly transformed by them' (67).

The specific ways in which metropolitan and Third World literatures interact reveals a complex picture. Mary Layoun's *Travels of a Genre: the Modern Novel and Ideology* (1990) explores the ways the novel has, in her term, 'travelled' to countries like Japan, Greece and the Arab World. In Third World cultures, much like the concept of nation itself, the novel has emerged as the dominant narrative genre but not the only one. Layoun writes: 'While the novel was not a particularly indigenous

literary genre in the "third" or non-Western world, it quickly predominated as a privileged narrative construct. And yet *on the site* of that hegemonic narrative form, there emerged counter hegemonic opposition as well' (Layoun 1990: xii, my emphasis). Yet, in her words, 'oppositional narrative practice challenges but does not necessarily refuse the novel' (Layoun 1990: 11).

Michael Valdes Moses suggests in *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture* (1995) that the advent of modernization and the destruction of traditional communities, as a global experience, have led to a 'narrowing' of human possibilities. He writes: 'Modernity is not merely a transient or provincial Western phenomenon, but instead it has become the universal and perhaps permanent condition of humanity and therefore the inevitable subject of any literature that would represent contemporary existence' (Valdes Moses 1995: xii). Within this globalization, '[c]ontemporary postcolonial and Third World literatures are not radical alternatives to global modernity but distinctive and significant reflections of its rise and diffusion' (Valdes Moses 1995: xiii).

In the context of Arabic literature, Sabry Hafez establishes a similar link between the new conception of the self and the nation on the one hand and, on the other, the rise of the narrative (novel, short story and drama). He writes:

> The genesis of narrative discourse in Arabic culture is (…) synonymous with the genesis of a new way of rationalization and perception of both the self and the other. As a process, it is inseparable from the emergence of the new social and cultural experiences which gave rise to a new perception of national identity (Hafez 1993: 22).

Forty years earlier, Ṭāha Ḥusayn, arguably the most prominent Arab intellectual in the twentieth century, wrote with great enthusiasm in praise and appraisal of the novel in Arabic literature: 'It will be the great privilege and honour of the contemporary Arabic writers to have literally reinstated this genre by making it the most important form in the realm of modern prose' (Ḥusayn 1989: 253).

The foregoing overview demonstrates that the study of Third World literature and Third World conceptions of modernity has been guided by the determining role assigned to global phenomena, such as colonialism, nationalism, or the novel. The exclusive focus on particular manifestations of the novel in the Third World is due, not in small part, to a theory of Third World literature and a conception of Comparative literature that take Europe as their frame of reference. Scholarship on Third World literature has been subjected to the erroneous assumption that a Third World text is knowable, if not already known, since it can presumably be traced to a familiar source or because it is readily classifiable under an overarching paradigm, such as nationalism. It is perhaps convenient, but no longer tenable to think that any national literature can be accounted for exclusively in relation to the concerns of the particular nation or that the demonstrable presence of a Western intertext constitutes definitive comparative study of Third World literature in its world context. Third World literatures cannot be properly interpreted if they continue to be considered copies, minor versions, an offspring of 'First World' originals.

Third World literature challenges literary theory to be genuinely global, more flexible and more self-critical. It challenges comparative literature to live up to its own claim of being the discipline properly equipped to address literature on a global scale. It is in this new awareness that the concept of *Weltliteratur*, first proposed by Goethe in the 1820s witnessed a simultaneous revival and revision. Before looking at these revisions, I shall discuss the idea itself. The origins of *Weltliteratur* have direct bearing on the present study for two reasons. First, accounts of Goethe's idea tend to neglect or minimize the role of Islam and Arabic literature in the very genesis of his interest in world literature. The second reason has to do with the striking similarity between some of al-Masʿadī's ideas on literature and Goethe's concept, as I explain in due course.[18]

Goethe offers no shorthand definition of *Weltliteratur*. Fritz Strich, who devotes a book to the idea, draws on all the passages where Goethe mentions the word (21 in total) to define the term, which covers a set of ideas and activities in which the German poet was involved particularly in the last 20 years of his life. Goethe's practice of world literature took the form of translations, reviews of foreign literature, and turning his house into a meeting place for foreign writers. The ideas of exchange, respect of difference and the service of a common aim constitute the core of *Weltliteratur*. Goethe writes: 'We must repeat, however, that the point is not that nations should think alike, but that they should become aware of each other, and that even where there can be no mutual affection there should be tolerance' (Strich 194: 13). Dialogue and the free exchange of ideas are the foundations of world literature.[19] Strich concludes: 'This is the highest task that Goethe assigned to world literature: to foster the growth of a common humanity in its most perfect and universal form: to advance human civilization' (13).[20]

Strich, however, ignores the key role Islam and Arabic literature play in the formulation of Goethe's idea of world literature, insisting on the European dimension only. While Goethe clearly recognizes and even recommends knowledge of Arabic literature and Islam, as I note below, Strich is adamant, in his prejudiced language as in his argument, that Goethe had no more than a vague and exotic encounter with the 'Orient'.[21] Katharina Mommsen, on the other hand, argues that the German poet's relationship to Arabic literature and Islam was much deeper and more significant in his career than critics have been ready to admit.[22] It provided him with inspiration and renewal of poetic energy, and expanded his horizon beyond Europe especially during the years when he developed *Weltliteratur*. Mommsen traces the presence of themes, forms and ideas from Arabic poetry, the *Qurʾān* and other Islamic sources in Goethe's entire work. She reveals Goethe's readings and conversations, his effort to learn Arabic and a fascination with Arabic literature and the Islamic faith.[23] Goethe claims to have found in Arabic a special case where unity between language and thought or feeling can take place. He wrote in a letter dated 23 January 1815: 'There is probably no language other than Arabic where the thought, the world and the letter converge in harmony in an authentic manner' (Mommsen 1995: 50). Goethe even spoke of an Arab poetic talent: 'the global view of things; the ease in [poetic] com-position; the enjoyment; a natural inclination of the nation to symbolism and

metaphor; and the resulting capacity to solve mysteries' (Mommsen 1995: 104).[24] In sum, Goethe practiced in his work (*The East–West Divan*, in this case) as well as in his life a type of world literature based on mutual respect and recognition of the other and on dialogue. In more recent times, his ideas have been taken up most prominently by Eric Auerbach in the 1950s in philology, and later by Jameson and Armando Gnisci in the context of Comparative literature.

Auerbach is attached to the ideal of a common dialogue between cultures and writers contained in Goethe's initial elaboration of *Weltliteratur*. But he concedes that something essential has happened since Goethe's time, which warrants a revision of the term. Auerbach suggests: 'The conception of *Weltliteratur* advocated in this essay – a conception of the diverse background of a common fate – does not seek to affect or alter that which has already begun to occur, albeit contrary to expectations; the present conception accepts as an inevitable fact that world-culture is being standardized' (Auerbach 1969: 7). Globalization is now such that 'we must return, in admittedly altered circumstances, to the knowledge that pre-national medieval culture already possessed: the knowledge that the spirit [*Geist*] is not national' (17). At the level of research, Auerbach calls for a philology of *Weltliteratur*, a survey of human history made possible by changes in the world and the availability of sufficient sources. He recognized the fact that 'our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation' (17). He admits that this practice is 'less active, less practical, less political' than Goethe's project. So, where Goethe saw opportunity, Auerbach sensed danger. According to him, the triumph of standardization, whether the Euro-American model or the Russian model, would lead to a situation where the 'notion of *Weltliteratur* would be at once realized and destroyed' (3). There is a danger that the diversity, which led to the construction of our humanity, would no longer be possible.[25]

Jameson tackles the issue from the perspective of cultural studies in North America and the field of Comparative literature. His argument is that American scholarship must recognize the difference of other national cultures: 'Today the reinvention of cultural studies in the United States demands the reinvention, in a new situation, of what Goethe long ago theorized as 'world literature' (Jameson 1986: 68). Comparative literature, which for Jameson is the 'real meaning of Goethe's concept of one "world literature," is inconceivable without proper consideration of Third World literature'. He adds: 'Any conception of world literature necessarily demands some specific engagement with the question of third-world literature' (Jameson 1986: 68). It must recognize and articulate what he calls the 'radical difference' of the Third World text (65). In Jameson's argument, Third World literature, World literature and Comparative literature converge, resulting in a redefinition of the scope of the latter. He, however, takes as his point of departure the crisis of Comparative literature in North America and says nothing about the relevance of this to the discipline in the Third World. In Jameson's formulation, as was the case with Goethe, *Weltliteratur* is not merely an approach to world literature but also a politics of literary studies.

These active, practical and political aspects of *Weltliteratur* are at the core of the direction proposed by the Italian comparatist Armando Gnisci. He suggests in

'La littérature comparée comme discipline de décolonisation' a shift in Comparative literature from its focus on the study of world literature to a 'world literary discipline'. He says: 'La littérature mondiale - celle qu'en 1827 Goethe nommait *Weltliteratur* – est restée un rêve de la culture des lumières et de la culture du Romantisme. Aujourd'hui on travaille plutôt autour d'une *discipline littéraire mondiale*. Pour les raisons que je viens d'énoncer, on peut volontier continuer à nommer cette discipline "littérature comparée"' (Gnisci 1995: 23). Gnisci calls this kind of Comparative literature a '"confederative" form of knowledge and instruction which allows dialogue from the perspective of the common good' (25). For the countries in the process of decolonization, this practice represents a way of understanding, studying and bringing about decolonization. For Europeans, Comparative literature is the discipline of 'self-decolonization' (26). It is time, he claims, for 'the critique of cross images', for listening to how the others view us. Gnisci advocates a theory of Comparative literature where scholarship is directly involved in issues of mutual understanding and dialogue between cultures. Comparative literature is seen as a cultural practice with political and social agendas rather than a 'purely' academic undertaking. In this, Gnisci lives up to the ideal of his predecessor Goethe.

Measured against such ideals, scholarship on Third World literature remains seriously inadequate. There is, I agree with Ahmad, a problem of location. Ahmad's argument that Jameson is laying out a theory for a literature he does not know or that Said's work on literature and imperialism comes from someone concerned primarily with metropolitan culture and who prefers 'metropolitan location' find meaning in this.[26] Nevertheless, I suggest, Jameson and Said are important specifically because they are critics of metropolitan culture and scholarship. Their work plays a part, pioneering roles in fact, in what Gnisci calls the de-colonization of metropolitan scholarship.[27] The postcolonial factor in the metropole, first at the social level and now in theoretical discourse, participates in this on-going project.

Pivotal, and even foundational, to postcolonial theory and to the reflections by Jameson and Said on Third World culture is the work of Frantz Fanon. In fact, the study of colonialism and nationalism cannot be properly understood without reference to this intellectual who formed his ideas around French colonialism of North Africa and on whose thought rests much of postcolonial theory as a whole.[28] Fanon's conceptions of national culture and of the role of the 'native intellectual' under colonialism are key to al-Masʿadī's career and ideas. Fanon argues that national culture rests on a number of parameters, most notably inclusiveness, the process of the development of national consciousness, the national territory, freedom from colonialism and the audience of national cultural production. He defines national culture as 'the whole body of efforts made by the people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence' (Fanon, 1995: 233). (Al-Masʿadī echoes this understanding of national culture in his essays, as I argue in Chapter 1). National culture is therefore cumulative and all-encompassing, incorporating changes in culture and does not limit itself to written or 'high' cultural production. Fanon adds: 'National culture is the sum total of all these appraisals; it is the result of internal and external tensions exerted over

society as a whole and also at every level of that society' (245). Because national culture pertains to the very existence of the nation, in the colonies it is necessarily tied to freedom from colonial rule. Fanon in fact puts national culture at 'the very heart of the struggle for freedom' (233). Both are the result of a process and a struggle. For this reason, Fanon places national culture at the very last stage of development in national consciousness.

The first stage is characterized by the 'assimilation of the culture of the oppressing power'; the second is dominated by recollection of or 'immersion' into native culture, in particular the revival of its past, while the third or 'the fighting phase' is marked by the mobilization to liberate the nation from colonialism (222). The audience of national literature and art changes depending on the phase. Addressing the native people is characteristic of the last phase. Fanon explains: 'While at the beginning the native intellectual used to produce his work to be read exclusively by the oppressor, whether with the intention of charming him or of denouncing him through ethnic and subjectivist means, now the native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people. It is only from that moment that we can speak of a national culture' (240). All the efforts of the producers of culture must be channelled to one goal, the battle for independence from colonialism. For without an independent existence there can be no national culture as such. Here Fanon establishes a tie between the control of national territory through a national state and national culture. He writes: 'The condition of existence of a national culture is therefore national liberation and the renaissance of the state. The nation is not only the condition of culture, its fruitfulness, its continuous renewal and its deepening. It is also a necessity. The fight for national existence sets culture moving and opens up to it the doors of creation' (244).

The agent of national culture is the native intellectual – Fanon also uses the terms native man of culture, intellectual, writer and artist to refer to the same thing. It is perhaps within this framework that Jameson's argument for an inevitable link between the Third World text and national concerns should be understood. If the 'Third-World text is necessarily' an allegory of the nation or the community, then the writer is 'necessarily' involved in national concerns. Fanon speaks interchangeably of the writer and the 'native intellectual'. In a colonial context, then, the native writer is necessarily a native intellectual. Can a writer under colonialism be anything but 'native intellectual'? This question is key to the case of al-Masʿadī. In the course of the study I explore the writer's career as intellectual and his role in the rise of national culture in Tunisia but also show how he himself, as a writer, was aware of and rather uneasy about this 'predicament'.

Methodological considerations

How does the foregoing discussion affect methodology? Comparative and World literature are routinely accused of being dismissive of close reading, leaving this task to national literature specialists. The linkages of Comparative literature with cultural studies or literary theory have a lot to do with this, as comparatists have pointed

out.[29] Specialists of national literature are, in turn, often judged parochial and narrow in perspective. Moretti has argued for a compromise to bridge this disparity by suggesting a 'global division of labour', which would allow the study of literature in its global as well as local contexts. He argues that both disciplines need to move away from their past and open up to each other. Area Studies, which are born out of Cold War conditions, carry that baggage with them, as I mention earlier in the case of Middle East Studies. Goethe and Marx hoped for a world literature based on equality; it was an ambition, tied to a wide social project in the case of Marx, and to humanist impulse with regard to Goethe. For Auerbach in the 1950s it was time for humanist conversation again and world literature fit within that frame of mind. Close reading and theoretical perspective complement each other; the first is the pre-rogative of national literature, the second pertains to comparative and world litera-tures. On his part, al-Masʿadī understood world literature as a humanist conversation, but with an important proviso. According to him, the marginal literatures, such as Arabic, have to be part of this ambition or conversation. He contends that the centre should not remain European or American, or even socialist as other key Arab writers of the 1950s and 60s believed, as I explain in Chapter 1.

As far as methodology is concerned, then, three key observations must be borne in mind. In the first place, I believe that reliance on the paradigms of Area Studies has resulted in reductive critical approaches to the study of Arabic literature in the mod-ern period, with undue emphasis on ethnographic information, political themes and social content. On the other side, exclusive basis in Western poetics, particularly practical criticism, has severed this literature from its intellectual situation, ignoring local interpretive models and shying away from global theory. Expertise in a national literature, which I understand to mean more than knowing the national language, should bring knowledge of the national tradition to bear on the illumination of the text. In the present case, Arabic poetics is used alongside Western critical theory. (For exam-ple, I use *taqiyya*, Barthes, Aristotle, intertextuality as understood by Arabic poetics, Sufi terms, Bakhtin's formal parody). In this, I practice a form of comparatism which attempts to go beyond cataloguing and indexing influences and intertextual references. It brings in paradigms not readily available to a practitioner of comparative literature, namely, Arabic poetics. It is through this practice that the elements constitutive of al-Masʿadī's text can be accounted for, as I demonstrate in the course of the study.

A second issue, related to Area Studies as well, is the tendency to conflate text and context or writer and writing in a reading which privileges context and biography, and largely ignores literature as such. In the present study, I disentangle al-Masʿadī the 'native intellectual' from al-Masʿadī the fiction writer. The focus on cultural pol-itics as such will allow more judicious analysis of the writer's essays and political activities, which is the thrust of Chapter 1. The attention given to his fiction will, even in a limited way, free it from the politics of nationalism, in particular nation-state building, and open it up to poetics. It does so while remaining alert to ideology and politics throughout, without allowing either one to dominate or to skew the 'liter-ariness' of the literature studied, to use a term from poetics.[30] The study attempts to construct a specific poetics to articulate the difference that al-Masʿadī's text presents

us with. It heeds Jameson's call for recognizing the difference and the importance of the particular 'situation' of the Third World text. At the same time, my work on one specific case challenges Jameson's theoretical claim that the difference of Third World literature resides in the fact that it 'necessarily projects a political dimension in the form of a national allegory'. Moreover, the present project attempts to establish that al-Masʿadī's text is so imbued with the literary, linguistic, and intellectual conventions of the Arab and Islamic traditions that any approach that does not elucidate how this tradition works in the text will ultimately fail to articulate its difference. This is what Moretti terms the third element in the equation, i.e. local form. The pursuit of aesthetic goals by writers and artists is too complex and too fundamental to literature and art to be dismissed as capitulation to an existing order, betrayal of national needs, reactionary elitist obsession or nostalgia to bygone cultural glory. It may be that, ideologically interpreted; but the business of the critic, at a first level, is to express that difference, to make visible the literariness in its complexity. In this regard there is no reason why we should make a distinction between the high modernists Eliot, Joyce or Kandinsky on the one hand and Third World writers like al-Masʿadī, on the other. Cultural and literary theory, even at its most radical manifestations, has clearly privileged Western canonical writers. The present work seeks to question that privilege.

Local form is understood by Moretti, because he focuses on the novel, to mean almost exclusively narrative voice. But the construction of a narrative voice is a complex matter, which involves narrators as much as it does the language and other culturally relative devices such as irony or humour. For example, when al-Masʿadī proceeds to rearranging the order of words in his sentences, using a *Qurʾānic* technique, we hear the voice of the *Qurʾānic* authority. But inserting this style in a parodic context *inscribes* the transgression of *Qurʾānic* authority at the same time, as I suggest in Chapter 3. Local form in this case is understood in the wider sense of the term, to mean linguistic, stylistic as well as narrative devices. Chapter 2 makes the issue of form even less straightforward by focusing on the ways Arabic narrative tradition works in al-Masʿadī's fiction.

At the same time, al-Masʿadī's writings do engage Western culture in significant and profound ways, and Chapter 3 explores the confluences of these sources in his work. Instead of focusing on what influences the text is subjected to, I seek an elucidation of the confluence of all these elements and how the text mediates these differing impulses. This is analytically more challenging, but methodologically more rewarding as it addresses the ways in which all these sources – not just one of them – work in, and are worked into, the Masʿadian text. My argument is that if attention of the kind described above is given to the text, the ensuing or subsequent ideological or sociological interpretations become necessarily more complex. Within the logic of Jameson and Moretti, but reversing their point of departure, the complexity of social relations should impel us to pay attention to the complexity of the text or the form. As in the Bakhtinian model, social and political analysis would take into account the polyphony of the languages and styles as well as their orchestration in a text, rather than proceed by assigning allegorical meanings to characters and plots

mechanically and as a given. In the Third World, these social relations because they are a mixture of global and local networks and interests, are simply too complex to be accounted for by the type of allegorization described above.

A third point has to do with the reluctance on the part of critics to recognize and consider properly the spiritual elements in modern Arabic writing. This attitude in fact goes beyond Arabic literature, as Victoria Holbrook has successfully argued in her work on Ottoman poetry. She notes that 'separation of the sacred from secular literature, legion to modernity, has relegated texts categorized as "spiritual" to marginal status isolated from those deserving serious intellectual and artistic attention' (Holbrook 1994: 10). I would go even further by suggesting that such texts have been interpreted in ways designed to make them fit the nationalist paradigm and the modern 'secular' imperative in an exclusive and often dismissive manner. Sufism, for instance, as a way of thinking modernity and as a form of writing rarely gets mention. Chapter 4 of the present study brings in both elements to read al-Masʿadī's work. The various parts of the book, therefore, reflect the observations and concerns outlined above. Since none of al-Masʿadī's texts have been translated into English, I provide in the Appendices translations of key short extracts that are subject to frequent reference in the course of the study. These are also to provide the English-speaking reader with direct access to al-Masʿadī's style of writing and thought. Appendix A is a key article written in 1951, which shows in its style and in its content the writer's political thinking at a critical moment in Tunisia's history. Appendix B is a translation of the chapter from *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl*, which is analysed in detail in Chapter 2. Appendix C is the translation of a scene from *al-Sudd*, which I study in Chapter 3. At the end of the book, the reader will find a bibliography of al-Masʿadī and a complete list of works cited. The transliteration system adopted here is used in the publications of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA). North African names are usually spelled according to a French convention by which, for example, Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī is spelled Mahmoud Messadi and appears thus in official and French sources. For the sake of consistency, I have adopted a systematic transliteration of all names following MESA guidelines, unless the spelling occurs in a quotation originally in French.

1

THE COLONIAL PREDICAMENT AND THE BURDEN OF REPRESENTATION

> Far from keeping aloof from other nations, therefore, it is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history.
>
> (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*)

> [T]here is a profound contradiction between the progressive and moderating role that engagement for combat for democracy has given intellectuals in the past two centuries and the transcendental carnivorous instinct, which in his profound reaches, endows a man with the predatory and anti-natural vocation to think and write.
>
> (Pierre Nora, 'About Intellectuals')

Jacques Berque understood the deep impact of French colonial policy in Tunisia and neighbouring Algeria particularly between the two World Wars when he described it as an act, which severed the people from their historical and cultural roots and 'usurped' the very signs by which they named their world (Berque 1967: 36). The recovery of these roots was nothing short of 'restoring signs to things' (Berque 1967: 86). Al-Masʿadī confesses that he and his generation experienced this assault first hand as a 'transplanting of a foreign language and culture over the national traditional language and culture' (Al-Masʿadī 2003: 264). For Tunisian 'native' intellectuals these must have been disorienting times; for writers the pressures to put the pen at the service of the nation must have been overwhelming. Al-Masʿadī, even years after the independence of his country, insisted on titling his collected essays, *Taʾṣīl li kiyān*. The title is translated as something like, 'Affirming the Authenticity of a Being'; so much was the desire to dig deep into what makes the voice authentic and to make authenticity reach the very being, in an attempt to recover the roots or to 'restore signs to thing'.

Al-Masʿadī did not like to be defined as an essayist but he was, at least in this domain, a realist. He recognized the transience as well as the circumstantial nature of the article or the essay and made an argument for it in the introduction to the collection mentioned above: 'Since the mind, in its course, experiences states, ideas and moments, and since truth manifests itself in partial revelations and in glimpses, those

who ponder their condition and explore its depths do so in small attempts. There may be no other genre more fit to record these and pin them down than *maqāla* (the article)' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 5). He does, nonetheless, stress that articles emanate from a unity of concern and one direction of thought. It is, however, essential to recognize that al-Masʿadī's ideas were formulated during two distinct, but clearly related, moments in history, the colonial period and the post-independence era. His thinking shows differences in articulation and awareness of audience, in emphasis and in elaboration. What is al-Masʿadī's conception of culture in relation to nation? How does he view pan-Arab nationalism? What does he mean by Islam? What role does he assign to literature in the modern era?

The present section of the book studies al-Masʿadī's intervention as intellectual in Tunisian and Arab cultures. It introduces *al-Mabāḥith*, the journal he led in the 1940s, and presents a systematic review of the writer's ideas expressed in the editorials and articles he published between 1944 and 1981 in Arabic and in French. The journal's orientation and al-Masʿadī's ideas are inseparable from the colonial challenges to national cultural identity in Tunisia. I show how settler colonialism there sought to create a new community within an already existing one. Both the colonialist and the indigenous imaginings appealed to icons and symbols; both used the same media and both declared themselves Tunisian. Several plots were possible for the 'nation-ness' they both claimed and attempted to construct. But there was only one stage to enact the plots. The Tunisianness they constructed was ultimately not about race, religion or ethnicity; it was about space, about territory.[1] Here I will explore the construction of two competing versions of national culture in Tunisia with emphasis on the alternative conception of it, which emerged within al-Masʿadī's intellectual milieu and from his own non-fictional writings.

Fuqahā and intellectuals

In 1945, al-Masʿadī published an open letter addressed to one of the most celebrated writers and intellectuals at the time, the French André Malraux, who was just named Minister of Information, in order to draw his attention to the restrictions imposed by French colonial authorities on writers in Tunisia through a censorship body called Controle. The appeal is moving, but the writer of the piece is clearly mindful not to appear lacking in confidence or in erudition. The letter holds Malraux to the ideals contained in his own writings and warns him explicitly against what his French compatriot Julien Benda called 'the treason of the clerks' (*Mabāḥith* 19 new series, October 1945). The text reflects a sophisticated understanding of the role and limitations of the metropolitan intellectual. It also offers a glimpse into the internal dynamics among Tunisian intellectuals at the time.

After reviewing the main stages in Malraux's militant life and writings and welcoming his new appointment, the letter continues:

> In a country of God's land, there is a group of people of your generation whose
> freedom of writing has been severely limited by censorship, following many

years of abuse directed against the sanctity of their freedom to think. Controle was irresponsible enough to set irrational restrictions on literature in this land. We found no solution in the face of such forces other than to 'despise' them [reference to Malraux's novel *Le Temps du mépris* (Days of Wrath) 1935]. You are also aware of what became of your hero when he lost hope in the triumph of Man's fate [reference to Malraux's 1933 novel *La Condition humaine* (Man's Fate).] (…)

We did not expect that the Member of the Kuomintang and the militant in the democratic red Spain would become officially and directly in charge of the press. But, the matter is real and 'the knight of freedom' is now Minister. Yet, we are not interested in any way, dear Sir, in your current position. We only address in you the fighter for China and Indo-China, the writer of *Man's Fate* and *Days of Wrath*, hoping that you may save us, if you could, from Controle and from its mighty army and brave knights. Nevertheless, even as our tongues say this, doubt and hesitation fill our minds because experience has taught us that the novel *Topaze* has its heroes in reality, and that Julien Benda was not talking for the sake of talking when he wrote *The Treason of the Clerks* (*Khiyānat al-Fuqahā'*).

We are not asking for anything because freedom is too precious to be obtained by begging. We are simply wondering: Is it possible that Mr. André Malraux could betray his glorious past? Would he remain faithful to his hero … and remove controls on us and free our pens and thought from the restrictions imposed on them? Would the Minister fulfil what the militant and writer of *Man's Hope* has promised?

If we wondered, it is because Islam is deeply seated within us. We fear for any writer to confirm the words of God the Glorious: '… they say what they do not do … (the verse)'.

<div align="right">(al-Mabāḥith 19, 2)</div>

The mastery of discursive strategy and an intimate knowledge of Malraux's writings emerge from the letter. The position from which he is addressed reflects maturity – one even detects a sense of equality. The letter also shows al-Masʿadī's position within Tunisian intellectuals at the time. His translation of Benda's title with the deliberate and charged phrase '*khiyānat al-fuqahā*' or 'Treason of religious doctors' betrays the conflict among Tunisian intellectuals at the time. Such a veiled attack on religious leaders is made all the more poignant since the message is an open letter, which is by definition primarily addressed to the reader at large. The fact that it is written in Arabic and published in the widely read *al-Mabāḥith* would guarantee that those intended by the word *fuqahā* are aware of it. As I outline below, the phrase points to the antagonistic relationship between the traditional intellectual and a new type of intellectual represented by al-Masʿadī. In addition, his understanding of the potential as well as the limitations of French intellectuals is the result of direct experience. The letter hopes to engage part of public opinion in France in support of al-Masʿadī's cause.

What were the factors that contributed to the rise of an intellectual of such confidence? What was al-Masʿadī's relationship to the French tradition of the intellectual? What were the nature and scale of the threat to the emerging literature he is defending? To answer these questions, I will examine the local intellectual tradition to which al-Masʿadī belonged and the institution most responsible for sustaining it. Both involve the legacy of Khayr al-Dīn Pasha al-Tūnisī (circa 1820–1889). The ideas, project and persona of Khayr al-Dīn set the foundations and constituted a role model for Tunisian intellectuals, including al-Masʿadī, since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Their understanding of the relationship between Islam and the West and the key role of education in modernizing society find their roots in the writings and practice of Khayr al-Dīn. I will address this legacy first. Thereafter, I will consider the French sources of al-Masʿadī's role as intellectual.

In the footsteps of Khayr al-Dīn

Broadly speaking, the reformist movement in much of the Islamic world in the nineteenth century made a distinction between two kinds of Europe; an advanced Europe, subject of admiration and curiosity, and an imperialistic Europe, cause of fear and apprehension. At the beginning, it was the first Europe that informed the reformist spirit throughout much of the Ottoman Empire. The success of reform was uneven throughout the Empire, but in Egypt, Syria and Tunisia reformists made considerable headway. The Tunisian reformist movement was unique in that it started from within the state and brought in the ʿulamāʾ. The coalition that had been in the making at least since the beginning of the eighteenth century, according to some sources, would cluster in the 1860s and 70s around Khayr al-Dīn as a leading figure (ʿAmāyriyya 1994: 294). The minister was conscious of Europe the threatening neighbour much more than his Egyptian counterpart, al-Ṭahṭāwī (Hourani 1983: 91). His strategy was to use Ottoman power in order to avoid leaning towards one European side over another. Internally, he needed to build a strong coalition in which the ʿulamāʾ were central. And in order to appease the fears of a class of ʿulamā suspicious of a crusader Christian West, Khayr al-Dīn made a distinction between Christianity and the progress of Europe. In addition, he set out to show that his ideas were grounded in Islamic history and tradition by demonstrating how interaction between Islamic and non-Islamic cultures was neither new nor rare.

His book *Aqwam al-masālik fī maʿrifat aḥwāl al-mamālik* (The Road Most Straight to Know the Condition of the State) reveals that his sharp awareness of the globalization taking place at the time guides his belief in the urgency to partake of it.[2] Khayr al-Dīn writes:

> [I]f we consider what has been happening these days, particularly, the development of media (*wasāʾiṭ*) that made communication between bodies and minds closer, we would not be able to resist imagining the world in the image of a single town inhabited by many nations whose need for one another is sure. The individual effort of each one of them, while serving her interests,

is useful for the whole of human kind when we consider the ensuing shared
benefits.

(al-Tūnisī 1990: 120)

The global vision expressed here guided the legal, constitutional, economic and
educational reforms initiated by Khayr al-Dīn. On the ground, the reformer faced the
growing power of Europeans in Tunisia and the government of the notoriously cor-
rupt minister Muṣṭafa Khaznadār (1855–1877). Bringing the Europeans under the
control of the local state meant that the latter had to prove itself capable of running
its own affairs on the one hand and reorganize itself on the bases of modern institu-
tions, on the other. Laws governing public life had to be passed, the Bey's power had
to be regulated, and the educational system reformed.[3] Constitutional reform was in
fact an early stage of the whole movement in the country and would prove to be an
enduring feature in Tunisian nationalism, most notably for al-Masʿadī's generation.

ʿAhd al-amān (The Security Covenant), the document that guaranteed freedom
for foreigners and people of faiths other than Islam, was passed in 1857; and, in 1861,
the 'first constitution to be issued in any Moslem country in modern times' was pro-
claimed in Tunisia (Hourani 1983: 65). The historian ʿAmāyriyya gives this document
a prime position in the country's institutional history: 'The Constitution continued
to be actively mentioned by the following generations and became the most signifi-
cant reference for the nationalist movement that combined demands for individual
and public liberties with the demand to lift foreign domination' (ʿAmāyriyya 1994:
307–8). The two major political parties in colonial Tunisia would be called the Free
Constitutional Party (al-Ḥizb al-Ḥurr al-Dustūri), founded in 1919, and the Neo-
Constitutional Party (al-Ḥizb al-Dustūri al-Jadīd), founded in 1934. Al-Masʿadī was
one of the latter's founding figures and a leading member for decades (Hermassi
1972: 122).

In addition to the regulation of public life, Khayr al-Dīn set out to introduce
Tunisia into the changing global reality through the educational system. One of his
most enduring legacies is al-Madrasa al-Ṣādiqiyya, the school he founded in 1875,
and where much of the anti-colonial nationalist culture was formulated and the post-
colonial state cadre was formed. The school was free, restricted to Moslems, and
equipped with a dormitory to accommodate students from the interior of the coun-
try, like al-Masʿadī, thus ushering the state's pro-active and direct control of 'secular'
education. Under French rule, education became crucial to colonial presence in the
country in two ways: running colonial affairs and assimilating Tunisians into French
culture. The role of Ṣādiqiyya was rethought accordingly and its mission became
'preparing capable administrators and interpreters, who know both languages well
and who also have a good general education' (Sraieb 1995: 111). The French admin-
istration of the school introduced significant curricular changes, including dropping
history and literature from the Arabic programme and restricting foreign languages
options to French only. Contemporary local press interpreted the changes as an
attempt to turn the school effectively into an interpreters' college (144). The ensuing
dispute between French authorities and local leaders over the curriculum reflected two

competing visions of what nation to build. While the French sought to create a bilingual cadre loyal to the 'protective nation', local intellectuals, in line with Khayr al-Dīn's vision, had in mind an institution able to produce local specialists needed to run a modern independent state.

Ṣādiqiyya students were particularly prepared, then, to gain access to political power and to play a leadership role in the articulation of the rights of their people. Their bilingual education proved to be an asset rather than a source of alienation from their own culture.[4] Bilingualism tipped the balance in favour of Ṣādiqiyya graduates over students from the Islamic university *al-Zaytūna* and other institutions.[5] The position of this elite in society determined their role as 'a middle class, i.e. mediating between the classes they represent and the colonial power' (308). The New intellectuals were, Sraieb argues, 'organic intellectuals' linked to their milieu, formulating its alternative and representing its interests. Ṣādiqiyya produced new elites among whom we will find most leading figures in colonial and post-colonial Tunisia. Sraieb divides this 'intelligentsia' into two groups, based on social origin, the neo-*ᶜulamāʾ*, who were descendents of traditional intellectuals but differed from them by virtue of their education in Ṣādiqiyya, and the 'New Intellectuals'.[6] The latter 'belong neither to the working world nor to the peasant world, but to the intellectual strata, together with the liberal professions and professionals with heterogeneous background' (Sraieb 1995: 256.)

Al-Masᶜadī was one of these 'New Intellectuals' who would provide a crucial forum for his peers to articulate their 'conception of the world' and of national culture. This forum was the journal *al-Mabāḥith*, to which I will return. In addition, he would be closely involved in the politics as well as educational practice of Ṣādiqiyya. After independence, al-Masᶜadī would see Ṣādiqiyya not simply as *alma mater*, but more importantly as a model upon which he would help construct in 1958 the whole educational system of the country. In this project he would deal a damaging blow to the power of *fuqahāʾ*. (These *fuqahaʾ* would come to haunt him as a writer when they objected to his fiction in the late 1940s, as I argue in a later chapter.) The cultural role as well as the political outlook of the type of intellectual that al-Masᶜadī was cannot, however, be understood solely with reference to internal conditions. While the letter to Malraux points to conflict among Tunisian intellectuals, it shows that kinship between these and their French counterparts during the colonial period was too great to ignore. Paris was, after all, a rite of passage for the new elites emerging across the French colonies, not just Tunisia; and al-Masᶜadī was no exception.

Paris as a rite of passage

Claude Liauzu argues that the study of nationalism in the Third World without reference to the metropole (France in this case) and colonial presence in it reduces the picture greatly. He demonstrates how in France at the time, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and labour movements were interconnected. Likewise, metropolitan intellectuals had direct knowledge of the ideas and conditions in the colonies. Their

successes and setbacks were of immediate import to the colonized elites. Paris was in fact a training ground in political organization and leadership for students and activists converging on it from the colonies. The presence of colonized subjects of all kinds, not just students, in France led to the rise of associative life among them while putting the metropolitan public opinion in direct contact with the colony. The autobiography of the Algerian nationalist leader Meşşālī al-Ḥāj (Messali Hadj) (1982), founder of the Étoile Nord-Africaine (ENA) in 1926 and of the Parti du peuple algérien (PPA) in 1937, reveals the intensive interaction among colonial elites, particularly Tunisians and Algerians on the one hand, and their ties to the French Left, on the other throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Tunisian elites were among the first to make use of this diversity in French public opinion. Immediately after the First World War, the prominent leader Abd al-ʿAzīz al-Thaʿālibī (1874–1944) appealed to the French public with an extensive study of the effects of colonial policies in his country. His book *La Tunisie Martyre* (Tunisia the Martyr) (1920) was written in French and circulated among parliamentarians and influential figures in French society to some effect.

Anti-imperialism in its communist version, an increase in interest in the Orient in the metropole, the rise of nationalism in the colonies and the search by colonized writers for a common ground among themselves crystallized in the period between the two world wars. This was indeed a complex period in which to live and write. For al-Masʿadī, these were the years he spent in France and during which he wrote the bulk of his fiction. The intellectual scene in France in the 1930s is too complex to treat in detail here; but two elements must be stressed in the present discussion. These are, first, the strength and scope of the debate pertaining to the political role of the intellectual and, second, what may be called the 'colonial factor' in metropolitan France, including a changing conception of the Orient or East at this time. Both appear prominently in the profile of al-Masʿadī the intellectual. This latter issue is at the root of postcolonial thinking, generating the radical ideas of Fanon as well as more moderate movements such as Negritude. Other concerns involve the effects of fascism and the rise of anti-intellectualism, which would have direct bearing on the colonialist ideas and politics in Tunisia in the 1930s and 1940s in particular.

In France, intellectuals and the fate of the term 'intellectual' itself seem to be more closely linked to colonialism than European intellectual history cares to admit. In fact, a careful and scientific lexical survey of the usage of the term since the 1920s, reveals that it gained currency around two events in colonial history, the Morocco war of 1925 and the Italian war in Ethiopia in 1935. At first, the term intellectual took a 'progressive' meaning, but soon right wing colourings appeared. There are, of course, domestic concerns and local issues involved, but what interests me here are the colonial roots of the French tradition, which is perhaps the most distinguished and most influential tradition in the history of intellectuals in the twentieth century. For one of the paradoxes of French colonialism was the possibility it afforded colonized elites to make meaningful contact with a vibrant anti-colonialist tradition lead by influential intellectuals and iconic writers like Zola, the poet Louis Aragon, Malraux or Sartre. British colonialism, and American imperialism later on, did not provide this meaningful link.[7]

By the 1930s, the tradition of the writer's involvement in public politics, inaugurated by Emile Zola's famous letter 'J'accuse' of January 1898, had grown in vigour and complexity beyond the initial moral choice by a group of writers to defend a wronged man.[8] When al-Masʿadī warns Malraux against betraying his ideals and criticizes Tunisian conservative religious scholars by referring to Benda's *La Trahaison des clercs* (The Treason of the Intellectuals), he was referring to a complex argument which clustered around the publication of the book in 1927. Beyond the reference, however, Benda's ideas had an unmistakable impact on al-Masʿadī, as it will become more apparent below. Benda's main thesis is that the modern intellectual or 'clerk' (he uses the term intellectual only between quotation marks) has become realist, by which he means that 'disinterested' intellectual pursuit, be it in science, philosophy or the arts, has become subordinated to practical matters. The political interests of the race, the class or the nation, have driven morality, deviating from interest in Humanity itself. He argued that this direction was not so much a matter of personal or group choice as it was a feature of modern times. In Benda's own words: 'The political realism of the "clerks," far from being a superficial fact due to the caprice of an order of men, seems to me bound up with the very essence of the modern condition' (Benda 1928: 177).[9] An echo of Benda's position could be detected in al-Masʿadī's stance regarding the effects of Pan-Arab nationalism on the pursuit of 'true' literature, an issue to which I will return.

Who is a 'clerk'? The true intellectual must attend to universal, disinterested and transcendental issues. He or she must nurture Humanism as an intellectual pursuit, 'the attachment to the concept', 'a pure passion of the intelligence, implying no terrestrial love' (Benda 1928: 80). Benda admired Goethe's resistance to the rising nationalism of his time in a country the Frenchman accused of 'inventing' the nationalist 'clerk', and valued Proust's dedication to his art (Benda 1028: 58). According to him, both writers transcend their historical contingency in search for the eternal and the universal, something of great appeal to al-Masʿadī the writer. In historical terms, the inaugural phase of Benda's 'true clerk' is Greek thought while Enlightenment is its natural revival; the modern period threatens to bring about the end of the 'clerk'.

Benda's ideas were, however, seriously challenged by more history-conscious intellectuals at the time. Paul Nizan argued that Benda's opposition to the war in Ethiopia and to fascism in Spain could only be either a contradiction of or a break with his own notion of the intellectual. One cannot be at the same time a 'clerk' and a defender of justice during a particular historical moment. Once he does, he renounces the role of 'clerk'.[10] According to Nizan, Benda's positions are symptomatic of a wider condition, namely, a crisis in a bourgeois society.[11] This crisis touched the very bases of society and questioned its direction. Benda was also criticized for being staunchly classical in sources and Eurocentric in focus at a time when a number of his contemporaries looked beyond Europe for inspiration and models. They often shared Benda's diagnosis, but hoped to find 'spiritual depth' and 'renewal' outside what they perceived as a materialist Europe. Liauzu sums up the mood of the period thus:

> To the classical trial of a civilization 'devoid of spiritual purpose,' was added 'the abyss of hatred, struggles, ruins, revolutions' that it has become since 1914, to be followed by the 'soft years' to which it condemned the post-war generation. The Old Continent, in a word, in a world in mutation, becomes a 'geographical accident'.
>
> (Liauzu 1983: 71)[12]

This unease with modern Western culture was perhaps best articulated by a group of intellectuals who were working around the journals *Ordre Nouveau* and *Esprit* which was founded by Emmanuel Mounier. In this framework, the intellectual is akin to a prophet in the biblical sense, whose role is to lead a spiritual revolution founded on the notion of 'person' (Bonnaud-Lamotte 1989: 176). Mounier set the agenda for the group in 1932: 'The goal we seek is not the happiness, comfort and the prosperity of society, rather, it is the spiritual self-fulfillment of men… Our political action is therefore the tool of our spiritual action, not the other way around' (176). As far as Tunisia is concerned, it was through the work of this group that new terms such as *pensée vivante* (Living Thought) and *personnalité* (personality), gained currency, words that al-Masʿadī as well as the journal *al-Mabāḥith* used extensively, as I discuss below.

In the development of this intellectual debate in France, the 'Orient' would become a major factor but it would be also redefined in the process. Work by scrupulous scholars such as Louis Massignon's contributions to the journal *Esprit*, provided a better-informed discourse on the Orient; Romain Rolland's translation of Gandhi and Tagore became popular; literatures from the colonies appeared in the metropole, challenging preconceptions of colonized cultures.[13] In the 1930s, with the increase in academic studies of the colonies, 'the fortune of the word Orient would decline' (Liauzu 1983: 76). In Tunisia, as we will see below, the presence of settlements and their ensuing culture questioned metropolitan exotic literature and art about the region, while 'native' intellectuals acquired new interest in the Orient through Western scholarship on Islam. Al-Masʿadī readily confesses in an interview given in 1997 his debt to his French mentors: 'It may sound strange when I say that I learned the deepening of my faith and religion from Massignon because he revealed to me the horizons of al-Ḥallāj's experience and the greatest meaning, which is Sufism. Sufism is the summary of the human adventure' (al-Masʿadī 2003: 392).

It can be argued then that the term intellectual, as contrasted to the term 'clerk', is more tightly linked to the colonial context. The word gained currency specifically as those who would be called intellectuals began to take collective stand on issues of foreign affairs. In 1925 they spoke against the Rif war in Morocco, which the surrealist poet Louis Aragon called 'the break' and the 'the great shock' for him and for many (Bonnaud-Lamotte 1989: 113). Ten years later, and in order to mobilize intellectuals against the Ethiopian war, Aragon called these, 'défenseurs de la culture,' defining culture in broad terms as the culture of previous eras that all intellectuals inherit. Yet while colonial wars galvanized intellectuals they also split them along political lines.

On the second of July 1925 Henri Barbusse published his call: 'Appel aux travailleurs intellectuels, Oui ou Non, condamnez-vous la guerre?' (Call to intellectual

workers, Yes or No, do you condemn the war?) in the newspaper *L'Humanité*. A response was mounted in *Le Figaro* five days later, 'Les Intellectuels aux côtés de la Patrie: Adresse à nos troupes françaises qui combattent au Maroc' (Intellectuals for the homeland: a letter to our French troops fighting in Morocco). This manifesto marks the first instance of the appropriation by the Right of the term intellectual, hitherto the property of the Left (228). A decade later, the Italian attack on Ethiopia in 1935 would engender a war of manifestos from both sides in France.[14]

The foregoing discussion shows how in its own way the metropolitan experience of intellectuals from the colonies was homogenous and typical. However, the immediate conditions within which each intellectual operated were by no means the same. Al-Masʿadī and his Tunisian peers were closely connected to the intellectual environment in France; prepared through education at Ṣādiqiyya and armed with a history and legacy of reform initiated by Khayr al-Dīn. Their cultural identity came under serious threat from colonialism but they were ready to mount a vigorous response. Tunisia was a particularly complex environment during the colonial period. Students of the French colonial map consider it the most complex and instructive case with respect to labour organization, nationalism and nationalist elites. Liauzu, in agreement with Berque, sees Tunisian elites as the most advanced and most prepared group to direct mounting resistance in the 1930s. He writes: 'Protest against the Western order and against misery, an eschatological vision of liberation and a return to the fundamental values, such an immense force was exploited by the most advanced intelligentsia, the Tunisian intelligentsia' (Liauzu 1982: 161).

Africa or Ifrīqiyya? The disputed identity of Tunisia

French occupation of Tunisia may have started as a strategic move but it soon developed into permanent presence that was actively made to permeate all aspects of life. Settlement policy left no doubt as to France's real designs (Thaʿālibī 1975: 97–131 and Berque 1967: 43). The demography of Tunisia witnessed rapid and dramatic changes, causing the European population of the country to jump from 12,000 in 1881 to 184,000 in 1931 and over a quarter of a million by 1950, out of a local population of 3.5 million (Al-Sharīf: 1985: 101, 104). Italian and Maltese immigrants as well as Tunisian Jews were offered French citizenship and were thus directly linked to the metropole. As a result, in the period between the two world wars, the land and life of Tunisia 'were dominated by the conflict between those who sought to take root and those who hoped to recover their own' (Berque 1967: 36).

In the cultural sphere, French settlers in Tunisia, known as *colons*, dominated French culture on the ground, including the usage of French language in education, and provided readership for newspapers and books written in French. Despite this, reactions against French culture and literature in Tunisia were not necessarily directed against French literature or culture themselves. Sraieb notes that in the 1900s and 1910s the group 'Les Jeunes Tunisiens' and their newspaper *Le Tunisien* entered into conflict with the settlers more than with the colonial authorities (Sraieb 1995: 280). French

literature was mostly considered part of human heritage and a source of inspiration for the making of a national culture: it was part of the Europe to emulate. Local literature in French was, however, considered alien to the body of the nation and a threat that must be faced and defeated. This distinction is key to a proper understanding of al-Mas ͨadī's ideas about national culture and the role of literature. In what follows, I will focus on the rise of a self-defined Tunisian literature and art among French settlers; how this colonial literature relates to French metropolitan culture and what role, if any, was assigned to 'indigenous' culture in this new entity.

Before looking into the specific historical narrative about Tunisia constructed by colonist writers, it is worth noting that the use of history in the construction of communal identity is neither restricted to settler colonies nor peculiar to the French case. Movements of national liberation have also refashioned the histories of their territories to create narratives of rootedness in the disputed lands. These range from images of exclusive and racially 'pure' societies to multi-ethnic melting pots. Benedict Anderson has pointed out this aspect of nationalism in his reflection on the narrative nature of the nation. He draws a parallel between the nation and pre-national cultural systems of affiliation such as the 'religious community' and the 'dynastic realm' (Anderson 1991: 12). As such nation-ness is a form of communal identity. Just like personal identity, it is fashioned through narrative and language. Anderson observes:

> Nations, however, have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural. Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography cannot be written evangelically, 'down time,' through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it 'uptime' - toward Peking Man, Java Man, King Arthur, wherever the lamp of archaeology casts its fitful gleam.
>
> (Anderson 1991: 205)[15]

In Tunisia, a Mediterranean space that shares layers of history with its occupier, icons and stories would become disputed and contested in the bid to narrate the nation. Broadly speaking, these would cluster around the ancient names given to this land, namely, the Latin Africa and its Arabic counterpart Ifrīqiyya.[16]

Reviving Latin Africa

On the colonialist side, historian and novelist Louis Bertrand, promoted a 'Latinist' movement in occupied Algeria and Tunisia as early as 1899 in his novel, *Le sang des races*. The book depicts the lives of settlers from Provence, Italy, Spain and Malta, who, despite 'their meager means, rude manners and colorful costumes and language, approach their tasks of excavators and fertilizers as if they were working for glory alone' (Bertrand 1921: 7). He considered these men the embodiment of a 'Latin Africa' and the hope for its revival. Islamic civilization in North Africa was for him no more than a 'smokescreen' unable to hide the 'Africa of Apuleius and St. Augustine';

a land which was united only under Roman rule and which has tried since to keep Roman laws even under 'Oriental' Byzantine and Arab and Turkish domination (Bertrand 1921: 11).

Bertrand's work was, as he acknowledges with pride, explicitly and immediately used for political ends:

> Because I revived that idea, I gave back to our settlers their letters patent and their rights as first inhabitants. As the inheritors of Rome, our rights are older than Islam. In the face of the Arab usurper and even the native he enslaved and reshaped, we represent the descendents of the fugitives, the real masters of this land, who landed in Gaul with their reliquaries and the archives from their churches. We are at home wherever the fasces of the Proconsul and the eagle of the legions were raised. We represent the noblest and most ancient Africa.
>
> (Dunwoodie 1998: 107)

Colonization was deemed necessary to reconcile North Africa with a past it seemed to have forgotten. Western desire, in this case, was not written on a 'blank space', but sought to revive what Europeans perceived as amnesia.[17] Colonist intellectuals readily acknowledge the political significance of Bertrand's historical narrative. In fact these were used to turn settlement from an unjustifiable occupation of someone else's land to a legitimate historical right of return. Jean Pommier writes: 'The buried Latin spirit, revived in us by you [meaning Bertrand] thus becomes an honorable justification for the brutal fact of occupation. Indeed, it entirely changes the legal nature thereof by infusing it with all the strength of civil rights, analogous to the right to inherit' (Dunwoodie 1998: 170).

Viewed from the French political scene, outlined above, Bertrand and other right-wing *colon*s find in this North Africa a space to enact ideologies rejected by the more liberal approaches to colonialism in France. By 1920, he felt able to admire the achievements of *colons*: 'I thought then what I have not ceased to proclaim since, namely, that France, which is worn out by centuries of civilization, could be rejuvenated through contact with this apparent and vigorous Barbary' (Bertrand 1921: 9).[18] How was this discourse played out in the specific context of Tunisia and with relation to literature and culture?

The first literary history which attempts to chart, in a seemingly smooth and logical manner, colonist conceptions of the past, present and future of Tunisia is *La Vie littéraire et artistique en Tunisie de 1900 à 1937* (Literary and Artistic Life in Tunisia from 1900 to 1937) by Yves Chatelain. The plot, for we are dealing with a well-constructed story, stages the search, discovery, revival and appropriation of the cultural history of the country. Chatelain extrapolates from Bertrand's historiography that Tunisian literary writings 'spread their roots' into a past he considers his own and 'rejoin an Afro-Latin tradition' (Chatelain 1937: 149). Once evidence of this is unearthed, the task becomes that of revival and appropriation. One strategy of appropriation is the use of the colony's historical symbols to political ends. For instance, in

a well-calculated gesture, a French journal was named after Kahena, the famous Berber queen who resisted the Islamic conquest in North Africa; a literary group baptized itself *L'Âne d'or*, recalling the book *The Golden Ass*, by the African Latin writer Apuleius. Louis Carton (1861–1924), a military physician and amateur archaeologist, played a key role in this 'revival', by staging historical plays celebrating ancient Roman Carthage along with tragedies by Racine and Corneille. Historical links between France and 'its' Latin Tunisia were put on stage, literally and symbolically. Natives were considered to have a past but no historical memory, and these performances were part of reviving that memory, which is conceived as exclusively Latin.

The role of the colonist intelligentsia was not only to construct a convincing version of Tunisia's history but also to make certain it took hold: 'While administrators, civil servants and *colons* organized and colonized the country materially, they ensured intellectual colonization' (Chatelain 1937: 35). They formed an elite whose membership was carefully delineated. To become a 'Tunisian' writer, one had to be French, Italian born in Tunisia, native Tunisian or a long-term resident of the country; one also had to write in French. Chatelain, for example, recognizes in the aptly titled poem 'La sièste sous l'olivier' (Siesta under the Olive Tree) the prototype of what he calls 'Tunisian' literature and in the *colon* the Nietzschean hero proclaimed by Bertrand.[19] 'These natives, he [the settler Nicholas] loves them', Chatelain observes, 'despite their laziness and carefree attitude which contradict his own energy. He tastes the archaic charm of their lives and regrets that all this may disappear in the face of modern life. But we have to destroy the past and break ancient habits, take torch and iron to the sterile bushes and dark mountains to ensure that future crops germinate' (Chatelain 1937: 107). There was need to project an image of belonging and authenticity. To this end, writers adopted pennames with Arabic connotations: the geographer Charles Monchicourt published as *Rodd Balek* (Beware!) and the writer Charles Schambion as *Bulbul Bou-Said* (Bū Saʿīd's Nightingale).

Colonist literature had not to contend only with 'native' culture but also to disassociate itself from orientalist representations of the colonies and assert its difference. As a result, orientalism came under attack in these writings. A battle was waged to determine who was the most 'authentic' and least orientalist *colon*. Chatelain praises Charles Boussinot for his attempt to portray accurately local people: 'He went into huts, at the risk of catching lice, to talk to Bedouins and unveil the secret of their minds. Furthermore, he knows rural Tunisians, their life, instincts, and feelings' (Chatelain 1937: 123). 'Local' writers even acquired a 'local' behaviour that Chatelain calls 'African warmth'. He commends Pierre Hubac for launching a battle against pretenders to 'local' literature. Without a hint of irony he writes that Hubac 'waged a war to the death against false orientalisms, bazaar North Africanisms, the harmful literature of tourism practiced by certain metropolitan writers who, having spent two weeks or two months in a colony or in an exotic country, think that they have discovered a new world and write supposedly definitive works. In reality, these books contain mistakes that the French public cannot see but that are all too obvious to true colonials' (Chatelain 1937: 60). Robert Randau, writing about neighbouring Algeria, considered orientalist literature to be based on a set recipe: 'Give your hero a turban,

drape a burnoos around him, plant a palm tree in one corner, a minaret in another, add a mirage a bit farther off, sprinkle a little sand around, throw in a sunset, voice disconcerting phrases on the Arab arch and the Moorish palace' (Dunwoodie 1998: 132). There were, however, acknowledged links and similarities between the two discourses. For instance, the closed door, the space that bothered the *colon* seemed to be the one that most troubled the orientalist, namely, what they refer to as the mind of the indigenous people. Chatelain confesses: 'Nothing is more closed to a Westerner than Islam, and more particularly the life and mind of an Arab woman' (60). More crucially, the *souvenir* or 'memory' that French colonist culture finds in North Africa owed its very existence to 'French' orientalist representations of 'Africa'. Hence, Flaubert's *Salammbô* (1863) becomes at the same time a precursor to and a reference for Carthage often used by colonist historians and novelists alike. Carlton, Chatelain and Louis Bertrand find in Flaubert a genealogy and legitimacy.

Tunisia, which had been 'oriental', was somehow severed from the Orient by colonization. It was no longer available for orientalist depiction, vision, or phantasm. The former orient was no longer an Orient; it had become European. Colonist discourse dis-orientalizes the Orient by finding shared roots with – 'a past, which is our own', says Chatelain – or by creating a new identity for the colony. In the process, it redirected (dis-oriented) exotic and tourist literature into what it called 'local' knowledge. There are then these two pasts, a remote Latin one to be revived and a recent orientalist one to be rewritten. But in a complete narrative of nationhood, the revival of the past and the control of the present must be complemented by imagining the future of the nation. This future must be depicted as certain and glorious.

In this case, however, the future was already there. For the *colon*, a future Tunisia can only be imagined in relation to the metropolis. Carlton's book *La Tunisie en l'an 2000: lettres d'un touriste*, imagines the colony as a utopian land where the *mission civilisatrice* has achieved a spectacular success.[20] It reads like a guided tour through revived Roman relics and impressive French 'developments'. Carlton's utopia is at once a transformed permanent home to the second generation of French *colon*s and a popular tourist destination for metropolitan France. Tunisia has become a clone of Provence, an open museum of Roman civilization and a Club Med at the same time. French urban policy has transformed the country into Provençal villages.[21] Developments in air travel and comfortable holiday resorts beckon to metropolitan tourists and allow colonization to take root. The country is no longer a mere target of economic exploitation; it is a permanent home for the French.

French Colonist culture attempted to root itself in Tunisia by appropriating icons and symbols from the Latin presence in North Africa in order to establish a historical legitimacy. But between the Byzantine era and French occupation in 1881, there is a long period of history that had to be accounted for. Chatelain concedes that local talent did exist: 'Arabic thought in Tunisia, which has always been brilliant during the Moslem era, continued its course under the Protectorate while undergoing transformations as a result of the competition between the French and the Arabic languages and the improvements brought by the French into the life of this country'

(Chatelain 1937: 269).[22] But the new reality was such that literary Arabic was thought to be anachronistic and the vernacular inappropriate for modern culture. French was considered a unifying mode of expression of a culture in step with modern life (Chatelain 1937: 282). It was therefore the only language through which both the past and the future of the imagined colonial community must be articulated. The means to achieve this goal was education. The transformation of education in Tunisia, which I outlined above, succeeded in imposing French in the colony. Berque sums up the effect of the language policy of the French on Maghrib as a whole in these words: 'Even the vital power of describing its inner perturbations was usurped by the French language. Henceforth not only action, but also feeling and revolution must speak and think in French. (Berque 1967: 86). The systematic attempt to usurp the course of a culture, which I have been describing, constituted a threat of existential proportions to al-Masʿadī and his generation. Their response was complex and forceful.

In Search of (a new) *Ifrīqiyya*

The documentation of Tunisia is neither unique to the *colons* nor unprecedented. In fact, both in the past and in contemporary times, the life and history of this region have been documented scrupulously, almost obsessively. The systematic meticulous documentation and study may have to do with the disproportionate historical legacy of a country which includes Carthage and al-Qayrawān. Before and after the colonial period, Tunisians spent a great deal of effort to argue that Tunisia, which is known in Islamic sources as *Ifrīqiyya*, has been a distinct entity, culturally homogeneous and geographically united. The evidence presented includes the Arabization of the cities and most tribes through the Banī Hilāl and Banī Salīm invasions starting in the eleventh century; the complete domination of the Maliki Islamic code of law among the people; the long-term relative stability of borders; the common history of the region and the tolerant and open character of its people.[23] *La Tunisie martyre* (1920) was the first systematic argument for the historical existence of a Tunisian nation and a Tunisian state by 'native' intellectuals. In part a study of the effects of colonial policy on Tunisia, it also constituted a sort of 'manifesto for the nationalist movement' (al-Sharīf 1985: 116).[24] The book's influence on subsequent nationalist thought was pervasive. It would affect the content and manner in which response to the colonialist threat as well as the construction of an alternative, native, national culture were formulated in the journal *al-Mabāḥith,* especially under al-Masʿadī's leadership. The latter's work and the journal itself must be seen, at least in part, as a response to colonist claims to Tunisianness and as an effort to ascertain the right to the disputed identity of Tunisia. How was the response to the colonial challenge formulated? What are the areas in which the journal intervened? This is not the place for a thorough analysis of the entire journal but I will emphasize the construction of an alternative narrative of Tunisia in the journal under al-Masʿadī's influence. My argument is that the journal is key to any research into al-Masʿadī's contribution to this project and to the rise and development of a genre of literature that came to be readily associated with the writer.

Al-Mabāḥith started as the ambitious ideal of one man that grew into the most significant journal in Tunisia in the 1940s. There were two series; the first, launched single-handedly by Muḥammad al-Bashrūsh (pen name ʿAbd al-Khāliq) (1911–44), published only two issues, January and March 1938.[25] In April 1944, al-Bashrūsh resumed the publication of the journal with the collaboration of al-Masʿadī, Muḥammad al-Suwīsī, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Bakkīr, Ḥabīb Farḥāt, Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Talātilī, and Maḥmūd al-Muhīriṣī. The founder, however, died prematurely shortly before the appearance of the ninth issue of *al-Mabāḥith*. The journal enjoyed wide distribution in Tunisia and abroad, reaching a circulation of 7,000 in 1947 at a time when the average circulation of similar periodicals was 2,000 (Ḥamdān 1989: 112–13).[26]

Al-Masʿadī is generally considered the most significant influence on the journal's course. His impact is apparent in the style as well as the substance of the journal. Under his leadership, a particular conception of literature, a new kind of fiction, and a rigorous critical discourse emerged. Jaʿafar Mājid writes: 'Armed with a solid culture and animated by a burning militancy, al-Masʿadī succeeded in gathering around himself young teachers with a variety of specializations and in turning the journal into the forum for the committed intellectual' (Mājid 1979: 274). Yet, the journal, in turn, influenced al-Masʿadī's career greatly. *Al-Mabāḥith* and the writer are in fact inseparable. The journal is both the writer's contribution to Tunisian culture in the 1940s and the environment that sharpened his own ideas and style. It is also due to the journal that al-Masʿadī, the writer, critic and intellectual was introduced to readers in Tunisia and beyond. His writings appeared in 12 issues in addition to his 15 editorials. He started his contribution to the journal when it was re-launched in 1944 with two key articles; one is an analysis of the problem of knowledge in philosophy while the other focuses on al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge (*al-Mabāḥith* 1, April 1944, and *al-Mabāḥith* 3, June, 1944). His book *Mawlid al-Nisyān*, sections from *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl* and his major articles of literary criticism were all published first in *al-Mabāḥith*. Al-Masʿadī began writing the editorial column, 'To the Reader', in the fourth issue of the new series, effectively assuming the role of Editor-in-Chief. After a year of leave to pursue further study in France, he published in 1947 a very long and violent attack on the educational policies of the French in Tunisia as well as the short story 'Sindbad and Purity'.

The fourth issue of *al-Mabāḥith* (July, 1944) inaugurates what I call al-Masʿadī's editorial line, to seek 'truth and the common good' while recognizing variety of opinion. This diversity is governed by a unity of direction: 'Our goal must be purely intellectual; a goal to which all information, research and opinions must feed in a manner that takes one away from limited partial meanings to a general human significance and a global intellectual vision' (*al-Mabāḥith* 4, 3).[27] The guide in such an endeavour must be drawn from the past, from the ancestors 'whose culture was expanded by what they learned from Persians, Indians and Greeks' (*al-Mabāḥith* 4, 3). The editorial argues that Tunisia, due to geographical and historical reasons, was well-positioned to follow suit: 'Why should we not make it one of our aims, in emulation of our predecessors, to add to our cultural heritage kinds of literature, science, and arts taken from Western cultures – especially, from French culture, the one closest to us'

(*al-Mabāḥith* 4, 3). Like his own predecessor, Khayr al-Dīn, al-Masʿadī finds in Islamic history the legitimacy for his desire to partake of Western culture. The aims of the journal were to affirm the cultural tradition of pre-colonial Tunisia, to introduce new genres and ideas, and to draw on Western, particularly French, culture as a source. The journal has, to an extent, remained faithful to the aims of its founder, which were promoting literature regardless of creed or orientation and researching the intellectual life of Tunisia past and present.

The Issue of national culture

After 37 issues *al-Mabāḥith* takes stock of its achievements: 'We have given evidence that Tunisians are not without a sense of common heritage in all the articles published by this journal throughout the last three years' (*al-Mabāḥith* 37, 3). The journal undertook the affirmation of the historical existence of a viable national culture through editorials, research articles, the news it chose to cover and the books and events it reviewed. Documentation of national culture in the journal can be grouped into projects: histories of cities, biographies of prominent figures, general articles, theoretical or position essays, and literary history.[28]

Since the culture was being constructed, the journal tended to apply careful selectivity. There was a critical treatment of foreign cultures and a valorization of particular aspects of Islamic culture. While the first series of the journal gave room to al-Shābbī's potentially controversial critique of Arabic literature, the new series showed care in establishing a new relationship between Western and Islamic cultures.[29] The space devoted to foreign literature reveals a search for new ways to handle these traditions within the emerging national culture. For instance, attention is drawn to the relevance of the translated material to Arabic or Tunisian cultures.[30] A comparative approach to foreign literatures emerged through the numerous translations, reviews, biographies and comparative articles reveals self-confidence and a desire to establish comparison as means of engaging European literature, a search for analogues rather than an imitation of the other. In the area of translation, realist literature or culturally specific texts are ignored. Selection is based on the 'universal' appeal or application of the original as well as its possible contribution to national culture. In addition, translated material is no longer restricted to Western European texts and includes South America, India and Eastern Europe.[31] Book reviews target key Western texts and authors like Huxley's *Brave New World* and *Man and Super-man* by G.B. Shaw (*al-Mabāḥith* 15, 12 and *al-Mabāḥith* 17, 9, respectively) (Al-Masʿadī 2003: 13–18). The column 'Parallels' (*muwāzana*), presents poems by Tunisian and foreign poets on the same page, inviting the reader to compare and contrast the two. There are also biographies of famous figures like Valéry and Romain Roland, for example, in addition to occasional news items about foreign literatures (*al-Mabāḥith* 8, 17 and 10, 12).

Al-Mabāḥith promoted the Arabic language as both the vehicle of national culture and as a key component of national identity. It published literature written exclusively in standard Arabic; encouraged articles on the language and in defence of it;

organized competitions to promote writing in Arabic in the Maghreb region and demanded a rigorous style and polished language from its contributors. The journal was uncompromising in its support of Arabic in the face of both, foreign challenges and what it perceived as the 'threat' of dialects, attacking calls to adopt Latin script for Arabic and denouncing colonial attempts to valorize the vernacular (*al-Mabāḥith* 26, 42–43, respectively). The journal also promoted rigorous 'arabization' of new terminology and did not hesitate to ridicule the practice of transliterating foreign words into Arabic. It was particularly successful in the 'arabization' of the sciences, promoting a combination between exposition of the latest developments in Western science and reference to relevant Islamic texts and figures with the aim to revive and update the Arabic scientific tradition.

Al-Masᶜadī formulated the orientation of the journal into a narrative of national history and identity. In response to the colonial redefinition of Tunisia outlined above, he proposes an alternative reading of the colony's history. He rejects the metaphor of North Africa as crossroads between East and West because, he argues, it empties 'Ifriqiyya' from any meaning and denies her independent history (*al-Mabāḥith* 1945: 3). His reading of Tunisia's history, published in *al-Mabāḥith* in 1945, goes as follows: Phoenicians, 'who are Easterners,' established the first nucleus of a 'civilized society' in Carthage in the seventh century BC. During the 'Aryan' Greek dominance of the Mediterranean region, Carthage was able to preserve its Semitic roots. Romans then occupied the country, but they failed to 'Latinize' it. When Moslems arrived in the seventh century AD, they were resisted by 'the Kahina, who was Berber not Roman,' just as Berbers had opposed previous invaders of the region. But Moslems eventually won, not by force, but rather thanks to a 'return of the spirit' to its Eastern origin. Al-Masᶜadī adds, 'Thus, the Eastern and Phoenician Carthage linked up with the Eastern Islamic Qairawān, shedding off temporary appearances (Roman, Greek, Byzantine, and Vandal).' This theory leads al-Masᶜadī to conclude that French colonization was alien to the character of the Tunisian people and transient, destined to follow in the footsteps of its natural ancestors, the Roman invaders of Carthage. 'No one', he writes, 'should loose sight of a fundamental lesson drawn from history and reality. *Ifrīqiyya* was Eastern before it became Western and had been Semitic and spiritual before it became Aryan and materialist; we are Easterners, Arabs, Moslems like the Arabs, Semites like the Jews…' (*al-Mabāḥith* 1945: 3).

Al-Masᶜadī's narrative of rediscovery, revival and support of the culture is at once the expression and the outcome of a concerted effort by 'native' intellectuals to assert their national culture. It reverses Bertrand's history of North Africa by giving prominence to pre- and post-Roman 'Eastern' influences on the region. Mediterranean Tunisia is located in a cultural frame, which identifies with the southern shore of the sea and rejects everything from the North (Greek, Roman) as alien to the 'spirit' of the nation.[32] Al-Masᶜadī argues that Tunisia had a distinct national culture before occupation. The effort to revive it is better understood, therefore, when one considers pre-colonial efforts to do so. Under the leadership of the reformer, Khayr al-Dīn, the country began its journey towards modernization, mainly through the founding of the Ṣādiqiyya

School. Colonial occupation impeded this development by introducing three factors. These pertain mainly to the area of education but have wider implications. First, colonization *slowed down* the pace of education by restricting access to schools, for instance. Second, it *diverted* the goal of education, shifting to vocational, short-term education while the need of the nation was for intellectuals and highly qualified engineers. And third, the colonial power *disfigured* education by putting emphasis on French language as a medium of instruction. 'The goal was clear: to transform the cultural identity in this country into a Western French identity' (*al-Mabāḥith* 42–43). On the ground, there were two antagonistic forces: the Union of Teachers draws its legitimacy from and continues the effort initiated before colonization, while the French-run Education Administration attempts to divert such effort. (Al-Masʿadī was the president of the Teachers Union at the time.) He frames this confrontation within 'the weakness of public opinion in Tunisia and the elaborate politics of cultural assimilation carefully orchestrated by the French' (*al-Mabāḥith* 42–43).

An alternative type of assimilation was needed in order to counter attempts at assimilation into French culture carried out by the intelligentsia of the local *colons*. Al-Masʿadī argues that intellectuals must put into practice a two-pronged strategy: preservation of national culture and 'digestion' of the foreign elements necessary for its renewal (*al-Mabāḥith* 8, November 44, 1). Digesting foreign sources necessitates a firm grasp on the indigenous component of national culture, that is, a viable 'digesting force'. The Arabic language plays a key role. Foreign elements, al-Masʿadī speculates, would gradually become 'Arab, Tunisian and Islamic'. They are made 'compatible with the character of national identity' (*al-Mabāḥith* 18, 3). Tunisian culture, he asserts, will prevail despite colonial efforts to disfigure it. Examples from history confirm that 'literary forces and cultural trends are able to emerge once they reach the strength and energy necessary for their existence'. In the Islamic context, for instance, minority literatures appeared despite Arab superiority during the Abbasid period, while 'Shīʿa literature managed to survive despite continuous persecution' (*al-Mabāḥith* 8, 1).

Al-Masʿadī singles out two types of intellectuals capable of performing such a role. 'The most viable elements in the country in this area are some Ṣādiqiyya graduates or those graduates of Zaytūna who have been exposed to modern cultures', i.e. those for whom the digesting forces – Arab, Tunisian and Islamic – still prevail. Ṣādiqiyya graduates, as I suggest above, were equipped to 'lead' the renewal of the culture. Their bilingualism, although al-Masʿadī does not use the term in this instance, allows them to 'mediate' between the two cultures, as Sraieb suggests. This phenomenon is not unique to Tunisia. Bilingual intelligentsia, Anderson argues, play a crucial role in the making of nations in the former colonies. He writes:

> It is no less generally recognized that the intelligentsia has a vanguard role derived from their bilingual literacy, or rather literacy and bilingualism. Print-literacy already made possible the imagined community floating in homogeneous, empty time of which we have spoken earlier. Bilingualism meant access, through the European language-of-state, to modern Western

culture in the broadest sense, and, in particular, to the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state produced elsewhere in the course of the nineteenth century.

(Anderson 1991: 116)

Anderson rejects the idea that languages are 'emblems' of nation-ness ('Print-language is what invents nationalism, not *a* particular language per se', citing the uses of the colonial language as a *lingua franca*, in the case of French West Africa) (133–4). Yet, I suggest, language may be both an emblem and a medium in which the national narrative is conceived. The case of Tunisia demonstrates that the language of the narrative matters almost as much as the narrative itself. The French language policy in the Maghreb has rendered Arabic almost irrelevant. Hence the revival and the usage of Arabic became acts of resistance and self-definition. Because language mattered to both sides so deeply, in this particular colonial conflict, a 'battle of languages' was inevitable, but it was also inevitably, uneven. French, supported by the colonial apparatus, almost won out; and at some points, the only option seemed to be slavish imitation of the colonizer. While the colonial community was inconceivable outside the French language, al-Masʿadī and his peers could not think of Tunisia without the Arabic language.[33] Yet, al-Masʿadī did not reject French outright. In fact, he was responsible, perhaps more than any other Tunisian figure at the time, for prolonging the presence of this language in the country beyond the colonial period. Al-Masʿadī's views on the issue of French language in the education and culture of independent Tunisia explain this seeming paradox. A bilingual himself, he engineered a prominent role for Arabic in education in Tunisia in the 1958 reform. Yet French was to be allocated an important role. Al-Masʿadī maintained that, after independence, French changed meaning, from a language of domination to 'an auxiliary or subsidiary language of culture' (Grandguillaume 1983: 64). Al-Masʿadī says in an interview in 1967:

Bilingualism means double culture, i.e. a double gamut of thought, sensibility and imagination, and a double dimension of the mind as well as of being. In the face of such advantages, the difficulty of the task is faced willingly and easily overcome. One must add that, like any viable mode of learning, genuine bilingualism, one that leads to a rich synthesis of the living resources of two languages and two cultures, does not carry any danger of alienation for a national identity. To the contrary, it provides it with the opportunity to renew itself and to develop in synch with the modern world.

(Grandguillaume 1983: 64)[34]

In 1990, al-Masʿadī wrote with implicit regret about the retreat in bilingualism (particularly the one involving French) in his country and elsewhere. The subtext, it seems, was that bilingualism has been a guarantor of modernity and liberalism. Tunisia was in the late 1980s under unprecedented pressure from Islamist conservatives at home, and the liberal al-Masʿadī saw his dream and work rolling back rapidly.

He confesses, with the tone of someone who finds vindication of his views in the contemporaneous history of his country, that the Francophone element in his 1958 reform was the right choice: 'This reform appears clearly marked by an undeniable Francophone option, in so far that it maintained French as the medium of all scientific and technical education, as a privileged foreign language and as a means to access modern civilization' (al-Mas‘adī 2003: 272).[35] Recent assessments of al-Mas‘adī's legacy in modern Tunisia have been divided on the choices he made for the educational system in the country.[36] But what is pertinent here is the fact that he believed that French had a role to play in the making of a national culture.

Al-Mas‘adī's conception of culture, in a word, is deeply rooted in the Tunisian intellectual context and cannot be separated from both, the colonial factor and the European tradition which influenced him most. Benda's call for the need to resist narrow-minded nationalism, an idea based in Goethe's call for global communication and understanding, are clearly behind the writer's conception of culture. However, while his ideas may have enjoyed support within the relatively 'homogeneous' intelligentsia of his country, the complexity of nationalism in the Arab context as a whole proved to be a sizeable challenge. How do these ideas apply to issues that involve Arabs in general and Islam outside the borders of Tunisia?

The foregoing analysis shows that under al-Mas‘adī's leadership, *al-Mabāḥith* became an influential forum for Tunisia's cultural resistance to colonialism and a crucial instrument in the formation of a national culture under colonial rule. The journal set out to write national culture and history systematically from within. It represents a leap into modern academic documentation of national culture in Tunisia. Contributors such as al-Ka‘‘āk felt compelled to bear the weight of the pre-colonial past of their country. Writers also felt that this past justified a modern and timely claim to an independent existence. If *al-Mabāḥith* was both al-Mas‘adī's project and an act of organized impact on the process of formulating a national culture in Tunisia, the journal was not the only forum where the writer expressed his ideas on the issues of culture and literature. Al-Mas‘adī's essays sharpen and elaborate further the issues outlined in *al-Mabāḥith*. They also show where and how the writer departs from the contemporaneous discourse on nation, culture, Islam and literature.

'An Islamic conception of Man'

Al-Mas‘adī's first appearance on the Arab intellectual scene was perhaps his most controversial one. It was also an instance where larger issues of the time converged. Primary among these were East–West relations, the linkages between pan-Arab nationalism and state nationalism and the role of the writer in the decolonizing Arab world. His much-cited speech, 'The Protection of the Writer and Pan-Arab Nationalism', delivered on 15 December 1957 during the third Arab Writers Conference (Cairo 9–15 December 1957), followed immediately by his essay, 'Islam, nationalisme et communisme' published in French in 1958 put him on the wider map.[37] He headed the Tunisian delegation to the conference, which took up the theme 'Literature and Arab Nationalism'. In the opening statement, he prepared the ground for his main address

to the conference by pointing out that history shows how the Arab East 'has allowed each regional or local experience arising from particular social and historical circumstances to run its course until, like a stream, it flowed into the great river of Arab civilization' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 54). Therefore, any attempt to compel writers to conform must be seen as going against history. 'Our history has given us an invaluable lesson in freedom and choice. It showed that any limitation, restriction, pressure or orientating of thought could only result in the stifling and death of ideas' (55). His lecture applies this lesson to put forth a notion of literature and of nationalism already elaborated in *al-Mabāḥith*. This time, however, he faced a different audience at a time when Arab nationalism lead by Jamāl Abd al-Nāṣir was at its height, and right in the aftermath of the Suez crisis.

Al-Masʿadī points out three constitutive elements that make the Arabs one nation. First, there are affective and historical factors that make (*Kawmiyya Arabiyya*) 'a spiritual or affective bond among a group of people who unite around a common heritage preserved in the Arabic language' (56). Some of these elements are inherited from a common past while others continue to live in the present. The second factor is the economic and political interests and social conditions *specific* to each state or region. Third, there is a desire for a shared collective existence. Such instinct emerges in moments of common danger: 'All forces of the nation at that time are devoted to defending the threatened area, be it language, religion, economic interests or political independence' (57). Recent history, he argues, bears evidence of all these cases. In short, he asserts, 'Arab *Kawmiyya* is a shared cultural heritage and common intellectual orientation, material interests that may converge or diverge, and a common desire for a collective existence in a union or in a coalition' (5).

Arab nationalism, according to the writer, is legitimate but it has a number of dangers and pitfalls. First, it is not unique in modern times; and it, therefore, carries with it problems associated with similar movements. For instance, its view of the West is not nuanced. 'What characterizes the aggressive anti-colonialism of the "Arab *Kawmiyya*" today is that it tends, more and more, to mix anti-colonialism with an unnuanced anti-Occidentalism. And this is perhaps the point – let's say it in passing – where the difference between the Tunisian position and the positions of the Arab East is most sensitive' (al-Masʿadī 1958: 10). Second, pan-Arab nationalism, due to its economic and social agenda, is subject to communist influence, which threatens Islam as 'a humanism and as a particular conception of man' (al-Masʿadī 1958: 13). Most importantly, however, the main flaw of Arab nationalism resides in the position it assigns to Islam. For unlike the earlier pan-Islamist revival movements that were interested in the fate of Islamic civilization and thought, in its spiritual, intellectual and moral values, Arab nationalism is 'over-saturated with politics'. This fact opens it up to the risk of setting aside the concern with the renewal of Islamic contributions to the modern world. Al-Masʿadī says: 'If Islam, not certainly as a religion or creed but as a mode of questioning and reflection by man on himself, would not engender attempts at intellectual and spiritual creation in the East, it would be the end (forever) of one of humanity's most original, most fertile and most valuable conquests; the end of the invaluable treasures that Islam had generated' (al-Masʿadī

1958: 9–10). Arab nationalism is therefore reductive of Islam and may even hinder the development of an Islamic contribution to the modern world.

As far as writers are concerned, he points out two potential threats from Arab nationalism awaiting them. 'One is misunderstanding who they are and what their function is. The other is misunderstanding Arab nationalism and its foundations.' As an Arab citizen, the writer has national political and economic responsibilities. But as a writer, he creates with his art and thought. 'Should we burden the writer with other than that, we would utterly disfigure him' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 58). He or she may wish to write nationalist literature; but should their inspiration be otherwise, they must not be considered traitors or renegades of nationalism. 'The writer's freedom, which we must protect as we protect the most sacred of human values, does not admit any restriction or limitations because, in its essence, it can only be absolute' (59). Al-Masʿadī rejects limiting the writer within a particular ideology, nation or culture; and guards against the dangers of conformity prevalent in the nations he calls 'totalitarian' (60). He accuses Arab writers of over-valuing the community at the expense of the individual. He says: 'The new fact in the East seems to me the hasty and systematic socialization of man … Man, in his behavior, thinking and even in his customs, is determined by society. Terms such as "*mujtamaa*" (society), "*kawm*" (community), "*jamaa*" (group) in opposition to the writer – that solitary person – were the obsessive leitmotifs of the conferencee' (al-Masʿadī 1958: 4). Al-Masʿadī is clearly trying to argue for a space for what Pierre Nora has called the 'predatory and anti-natural vocation to think and write', which characterizes the artist. His commitment to the writer's freedom is uncompromising:

> A writer may find that the completeness of his humanity is in devoting his work to the contemplation of the self and meditation on its dimensions. This makes him appear to be devoted to 'Art for art's sake' or living in the 'ivory tower,' as they say. He does, despite that, attract us, through his art and life, to his completed humanity, lifting us up, as individuals and as nations, to the heights of the sublime and the noble.
>
> (al-Masʿadī 1979: 60)

In a word, the cornerstone of al-Masʿadī's reflection on Arab nationalism is the role of Islam as an original and still valid conception of man in the world. According to him, Arab '*Kawmiyya*' ignores this aspect of the religion and is, therefore, reductive of Islam. It threatens, as well, the freedom of the writer and pressures literature into conformity. Al-Masʿadī makes a distinction between the writer as writer and the writer as citizen. While the first is not to be bound by nation or specific culture, the second has civic and political responsibilities. Twenty years later al-Masʿadī would extend this concern beyond Tunisia and the Arab world when he reported on the state of Arab culture for the UNESCO, as I note below. Al-Masʿadī's staunch defence of the basic right of the writer to remain free from social and political pressures, as well as his warning against the dangers of nationalism, recall Benda's conception and defence of the 'clerk'. Yet, the Tunisian writer, unlike Benda who emphasizes the European

classical tradition, places Islam at the centre of his conception of the humanist role of the writer and of literature. But what does al-Masʿadī mean by an 'Islamic conception of man'? And what role does literature play in it?

In the 1981 essay mentioned earlier, al-Masʿadī reiterates his idea that the world is in a state of crisis and that it is through a rethinking of the conception of man in Islam that Arab culture can impact positively the current direction of a misguided globalization. He writes:

> Should the inevitable universalization, under the pretext of implying the end of regionalisms, particularisms and nation-states, result in a uniformity from which 'boredom arose one day,' it would be the end of the human adventure in the noblest and most creative sense of the word, the end of spiritual responsibility, the inexhaustible gifts of liberty and the infinite diversity of human existence.
>
> (Al-Masʿadī 1981: 313)

To this threat, he adds new dangerous developments emerging from America and China. Forces of dehumanization and totalitarianism, he argues, threaten to submerge the world 'in such a total "Americanization" or a totalitarian "cultural revolution" beside which Orwell's robot world, Marcuse's one-dimensional man and Huxley's brave new world would fade into insignificance' (Al-Masʿadī 1981: 313). Arab nationalism would not be suitable to affect this process for the better of humanity as a whole if it were to ignore Islam. 'I, on my part, firmly believe in an Arab–Islamic humanism, perfectly viable, in a conception of man in Islam, perfectly valuable; and I insist on it. Magicians' apprentices of current politics in the Middle-East seem to have put this at risk. If they loose it, they would burden the "Arab *Kawmiyya*" the real one, with the heaviest of responsibilities' (al-Masʿadī 1958: 14).[38]

Al-Masʿadī's ideas here are closely related to two intellectual movements, which I can mention only briefly. I have already noted that he knew first hand the search for alternative ways of thinking modernity and renewing European culture led by French and other intellectuals particularly during the first half of the twentieth century. More importantly, however, his critique of the modern world has parallels in other colonized cultures, more specifically in Africa. The Senegalese poet and politician L. S. Senghor is similar to al-Masʿadī in many ways: they both studied in France in the 1930s, divided their activity between politics and culture, founded major journals in the 1940s, and then went on to become important statesmen in their respective countries. They have their differences as well, most significant of which is the fact that Senghor expressed himself in French whereas al-Masʿadī chose to write his fiction in Arabic. But what interests me here is Senghor's involvement with the Negritude movement in the 1940s and 1950s. He was in fact one of the founding theoreticians of this wide-ranging artistic and intellectual movement. Senghor defines negritude as 'the sum of cultural values of the black world; that is, a certain active presence in the world, or better still, in the universe' (Williams 1994: 28). He, like al-Masʿadī, believed that his native culture has a role to play in the modern world. He says:

'Because of what it is, negritude is necessary in the world today: it is a Humanism for the twentieth century' (Williams 1994: 28). With such similar outlook, it should come as no surprise that Senghor saw al-Masʿadī's *al-Sudd* as 'a major model for the New African Literature' (al-Masʿadī 1994: 27). He notes in his introduction to the French translation of the book, that *al-Sudd* is primarily an 'Afro-Arab' work, in its rhythm, in its symbols and in the 'symbiosis' of cultures at work in it (al-Masʿadī 1994: 28).

For al-Masʿadī, however, Islamic culture, while being potentially capable of contributing to humanity as a whole, was not yet in a position to do so. This culture was still in a stage of preserving its heritage and learning from others (al-Masʿadī 1979: 50). In the past, Arab culture contributed to human civilization.[39] In the modern period, it has responded to the challenges of modernity with two equally failed ways: either a return to the past or an imitation of the other (93).[40] He describes these responses in the metaphors of the fossil and the ape, expressing alarm at either fate: 'What horror awaits a people that history compels to be dead shadows of a past or apes of a disfigured present!' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 94). He borrows the two concepts of the zealot and Herodian from Toynbee and uses them for the same purpose. 'The rare "zealot" who escapes extermination becomes the fossil of a civilization which is extinct as a living force while the rather less frequent "Herodian" who escapes submergence becomes a mimic of the living civilization to which he assimilates himself' (al-Masʿadī 1981: 320).[41] Both result in the demise of individuality and prevent presence in history (al-Masʿadī 1979: 93).

The writer identifes three challenges facing Arab culture today, namely, to be authentic, original and global. The first results from the culture's own historical legacy, the second must characterize its contribution to world culture while the third pertains to the main feature of the modern era. Al-Masʿadī defines authenticity as 'faithfulness in quality, in originality and in creative talent to the national cultural identity that you belong to and which you endeavor to renew.' To be an authentic Arab writer today means to have the capacity to make significant and original additions to the past achievements of Arab culture. It also means to be vigilant against imitation of the dominant culture since the imitation of others does not allow a culture to mark the present with its own stamp.

Arab writing, he maintains, has largely ignored a specifically Islamic conception of man. The main tenets of this conception are individuality, uniqueness and responsibility. Man is free in his essence and by definition: he is slave to no one and is free to follow God's path. Human existence is therefore a process as well as a matter of free will. Al-Masʿadī writes:

> For when God breathed of His spirit into human beings, He granted them the essential and unique attribute of His divine nature: He made them into a miniature image of His Divine Absolute Essence. He thus willed them to be an individual cause, capable of work, creation, and purposeful action due to the free will He had put in them.
>
> (Ṣammūd 1973: 63)

The human being is God's vice regent on earth (*khalīfa*), a position he or she is privileged with as a reward for accepting to bear 'the Trust (*amāna*) that the universe declined in fear and pity.' With the acceptance comes responsibility to the world: 'It is in this sense that human history is, in most of its aspects, the outcome of free human action' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 105).

Al-Masʿadī suggests that in Islamic culture this area has not been pursued by writers but rather by philosophers. These include al-Ghazālī in the early period and Muḥammad Abdū and Muḥammad Iqbāl in modern times, but only Iqbāl focused on the issue of self in detail. He viewed the human self as limited on one side and unlimited on the other. God endowed the human being with an individual will, which makes human destiny not a 'strict fate working from the outside like a ruling master' but 'the subjective purpose of something, of the possibilities that the human being can attain' and which 'can fulfil themselves without need for outside pressure' (107). The way the human self transcends its limitation lies in a 'link up with the Absolute self or God.' Such a task is 'the only path for human beings to fulfil themselves in the image of a perfected humanness' (*fī ṣūrat al-insāniyya al-kāmila*) (108).

The modern condition is in need of a 'theory of Man,' a humanism, that lifts human beings to a position 'higher and more sublime than the ones to which they have been debased by materialist capitalist culture or by communism' (110). Literature is a privileged medium for *exploring* this position and *conveying* the existential experience: 'I would like to stress that the most unique feature of literature is that it is, for the writer, an existential experience (experienced by the writer himself)' (66).[42] The existential experience is, by its very nature, personal and intimate, but it also has relevance beyond the individual. A writer *evokes* the experience and attempts to convey it to others. A literary text is therefore 'an expression of the individual manifestation of the human adventure in the world' (66). Since it is a *human* experience, it is likely to find echoes in the reader. Literature is therefore a meeting place for readers and writers; and reading is an act of 'companionship (*muʿāshara*)' (67).

Towards a definition of literature

Al-Masʿadī suggests that literature is inspired from the divine side of the human self; it recognizes no national boundaries, no specific language and no predetermined style. It is the record of 'the effort, stretching across time, that writers from different cultures and distant eras expend when they contemplate their conception of the human being, of their position in the universe, of their becoming and of their destiny in life and after death' (Ṣammūd 1973: 60). Writers and works that have contributed to the on-going endeavour to explore the unity of the existential experience are not limited to one culture or one particular era. Al-Masʿadī's canon includes *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus, the tragedies of Euripides, Shakespeare's plays, Valéry's poems 'Le cimetière marin' and 'Le philosophe et la jeune parque', Malraux's *La condition humaine*, *Voyage au bout de la nuit* by Louis-Ferdinand de Céline, *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway and *La nausée* by Jean-Paul Sartre (Ṣammūd 1973: 59). To these,

he adds Arabic and Islamic writings, such as al-Maᶜarrī's *al-Luzūmiyyāt* and the poetry of Abū Nuwās, Abū al-ᶜAtāhiya and al-Khayyām's *Quatrains*.[43]

Literature must commit itself to the investigation of existential issues. This is the sense of 'genuine existentialism' and 'genuine commitment.' Defined in this way, both are consistent features of 'authentic literature, ancient or modern, Arabic or foreign'. Literature 'explores the questions that touch the very purpose of being: who am I? What is my function in the universe? What is my responsibility in it?' (al-Masᶜadī 1979: 66). Commitment is redefined here as commitment to existential issues, meaning that literature should be the 'sum of Man's story, the summary of what they extract from the most profound depths and what they experience in the inner parts of the heart' (Ṣammūd 1973: 59).

Al-Masᶜadī redefines the term commitment (*iltizām*), or the Sartrian *engagement* prevalent among Arab writers in the 1950s and 1960s. His list of texts is clearly inspired by the idea of 'great books', although he expands the canon to include Arab and Moslem writers. Most importantly, however, these writers and texts are part of a whole, regardless of language, national origin or historical circumstances. Al-Masᶜadī's conception of literature should be understood within the context of his view of the unity of the humankind and of the need for dialogue, exchange and mutual respect among cultures. In this, his ideas may be better seen in relation to Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur*.[44] Goethe, we recall, argued for a common human role for literature: 'It is obvious that for considerable time the efforts of the best writers and authors of aesthetic worth in all nations have been directed to what is common to all mankind' (Strich 1945: 13). Al-Masᶜadī takes up the same issue in very similar terms: 'It is clear that ancient and modern writers such as these [the list mentioned above] have met in the same fields, shared the same concerns, and were brought together by the same tendency in feeling and thought. They strive to examine the reality of the human position, seek to understand human destiny and relate, describe or contemplate the existential adventure' (Ṣammūd 1973: 60). Goethe sought to revive dialogue and the free exchange of ideas among writers of the world in his time in order to keep his ideal alive. Al-Masᶜadī, on his part, attempted to reach a similar ideal by keeping Arabic literature connected to the world at large and breaking its ties to a limiting nationalism. Committed, authentic or real literature are one and the same in al-Masᶜadī's terminology; they can legitimately be considered world literature.

Has Arabic literature tried to follow in the footsteps of 'committed' literature as defined here? Al-Masᶜadī argues that two problems have plagued Arabic literature, namely, the absence of the concept of time and the lack of a global vision. Human existence is not a fixed given, but a becoming and a being (*ṣayrūra wa kaynūna*). Time, as a dimension, has not been introduced into Arabic literature: 'We have not realized that being cannot be fulfilled outside duration and becoming (*daymūma wa ṣayrūra*). The historical dimension or temporal dimension of individual and social beings is a concept that we must introduce in our thinking, our feeling and our conception of existence' (al-Masᶜadī 1979: 82). One needs to distinguish between two types of existence:

Absolute existence is in relation to God – who is called *wājib al-wujūd* (necessary being) or *ʿayn al-wujūd al-muṭlaq* (absolute being) – which is the opposite of the concept of time. At the human level and in life, there is no existence outside time and no rational conception of existence without consideration of temporal duration (*daymūma zamaniyya*). This is true of individuals and societies alike. Our fate and life as individuals and as societies are necessarily linked to time.

(83)

The fact that Arabic literature did not produce children's literature and only rare narratives about human psychology is evidence, al-Masʿadī argues, of lack of belief in the changing nature of the human self (84).[45] He takes exception of rare cases where human psychology is explored as in *al-Bukhalāʾ* by al-Jāḥiz, *Kalīla wa Dimna* by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt* (al-Masʿadī 1979: 83).[46] As far as modern times are concerned, al-Masʿadī views the renewed focus on literature and its role in Arab culture as legitimate but misguided. The stress is on 'the type of novels and stories which emphasize social problems and conditions' (101). This genre emerged alongside the desire to reform and remedy the backwardness of Arab societies where the first stage was a critique and a call for reform; the second focused on social conditions (Naguib Mafuz, Ṭāha Ḥusayn, al-Sharqāwī) (103). Such literature, he contends, lacks a philosophy of society and a conception of man's role in it. As such it remains limited since neither literature nor culture as a whole stand to have a significant impact on human destiny if writers restrict themselves to reflecting social reality.

He says: 'For us, writers, the best way to fulfil this responsibility is to base our work on the firm belief that the human role of literature is not to be a mere description, expression or reflection of individual or social conditions but, first and foremost, the crucible in which culture, which is the main pillar of civilization for individuals as well as societies, is molded' (110).[47] The literature devoted to historical figures or issues, such as the series of books called *ʿabqariyyāt,* or *The Return of the Spirit* by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, which emerged from the same intellectual need, did not seek to uncover the human features in the lives of prominent predecessors. Rather, this literature was guided by either 'an emotional tendency to overcome an inferiority complex' or 'an attempt to draw a better picture of historical figures' (104).[48] Al-Masʿadī sums up the task of the Arab writer: 'In a word, we are challenged to produce a new intelligence' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 96).

Al-Masʿadī's tendency to focus on the human condition and the global scope goes back to the colonial period. In 1945 he rejected what he calls 'nationalism in literature'. He writes: 'The foundations of intellectual life – of which literature is only a branch – are two principles without which genuine thought ceases to exist. The first is that thought and its outcomes must reach beyond restricted and limited concerns to general human issues' (*al-Mabāḥith* 5: 1). Literature must also seek 'originality (*ṭarāfa*) or strangeness (*gharāba*) and avoid stereotypes and clichés'. Originality means 'one's path in thought and feeling must be different from others, while preserving

commitment to the first principle, i.e. general human significance'. Wholesale imitation of Western ideas must be rejected if originality were to prevail and if the nation's position in history were to be regained.

With al-Masʿadī's prominent role in it, it was expected that *al-Mabāḥith* creates an environment suitable for the development of what the critic Mājid calls the 'philosophical story' (Mājid 1979: 259), illustrating his point by using al-Masʿadī's narratives published in the journal and at later dates. In *al-Mabāḥith* itself the genre is sometimes called 'symbolic literature' or 'living literature'. The texts preserve kinship to traditional Arabic narrative at the levels of style and narrative technique. The language tends to be polished, even 'pure', while narration often takes the form of *khabar* (an anecdote or story attributed to a fictional narrator), anthologies and *maqāma*, as in Māzīgh's reveries attributed to a narrator with the name ʿĀbir Ibn Lāqiṭ' (Passer-by Son of Lāqiṭ).

One of the writers who deserve special note in this regard is Sāmī (pen name of Muṣṭafa al-Fīlālī). His style is so similar to al-Masʿadī that it becomes difficult at times to tell them apart.[49] Two articles on Huxley and Nietzsche can be easily attributed to either writer, although the critic Farīd Ghāzī lists them among al-Masʿadī's writings (Ghāzī 1970: 53). The latter, however, did not claim them when he collected his articles in a book nor do they appear in his *Complete Works* published in 2003. Sāmī (Fīlālī) promotes the idea that the creative self is unique and can be even anti-social in his series of articles 'al-Shāʾir wa al-ḥayāt' (The Poet and Life) (*al-Mabāḥith* 10–12: 12). He also looks at the history of ideas as they oscillate between the limited and the absolute in human thought in the long meditative essay, 'Bayna al-muṭlaq wa al-maḥdūd' (Between the Infinite and the Finite) (*Al-Mabāḥith* 29–30: 5, 17). His work sometimes recalls the Sufi emphasis on uniqueness and individuality: 'I do not become one of the flock! I do not dissolve in the group! The system does not assimilate me, and multitude does not consume my uniqueness. Like al-Ḥallāj in his ecstasy, the poet declares: "I am the One, I am Truth"' (*al-Mabāḥith* 10, 9, 12).

Other fiction includes Abd al-ʿAzīz al-Saʿdāwī's story 'Bayna al-nafs wa al-ʾīmān!' (Between Self and Belief), a Sufi religious story in the form of *ḥadīth* (*al-Mabāḥith* 9: 9,12). But its language is more contemporary and less symbolic than al-Masʿadī's or Sāmī's. Al-Ṣādiq Māzīgh, known to the readers of *al-Mabāḥith* as a poet and translator, published a number of stories and meditations which fall within this genre.[50] Abd al-Wahhāb Bakkīr published a story where Iblīs is a character ('Yaʾkul al-dunya wa yataṣaḥḥar bi al-ākhira') (He Dines on This World and Breakfasts on the Hereafter) (*Al-Mabāḥith* 24, 8, 9). Abū Ḥātim contributed an abstract story about creation, Adam, Eve and Iblis, 'Nuskhat dhālika kadhālika' (Carbon Copy) (*Al-Mabāḥith* 41, 11). In summary, the main features of the fiction published by *al-Mabāḥith* are abstract, Sufi or philosophical themes, narrative conventions drawn from pre-modern Arabic literature and a polished language. Other aspects of the journal support and feed into the features described above.

In its literary criticism and history, *al-Mabāḥith* in fact paid ample attention to traditional Arabic fiction. *Maqāma*, the *The Nights* and *al-Aghānī* are the focus of major

studies on its pages. Aḥmad Abd al-Salām covers a long period of the history of *maqāma*, starting with the founder, al-Hamadhānī, down to al-Muwaylihī's *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā Ibn Hishām*; A. A. Bakkīr tackles *The Nights* in his series of articles 'Narrative Art Among the Arabs: *The Nights*' while al-Masʿadī writes on psychological criticism in *al-Aghānī*.[51] In painting, Islamic and Western sources are given equal importance. The painter and cartoonist, Ḥātim al-Makkī is linked to Dante, al-Maʿarrī, and al-Ghazāli (*al-Mabāḥith* 8, 7–8). Realist fiction was regarded as somewhat a lesser genre. Baudelaire, Valéry, Nietzsche and Huxley occupy a prominent place in trans-lations and reviews while Western writers from the realist movements of nineteenth and twentieth centuries are remarkable by their absence. Likewise, their counterparts in Arabic literature are rarely mentioned. There was clear preference for the philo-sophical and spiritual Mikaʿīl Nuʿayma over the social realist Maḥmūd Taymūr: Nuʿayma is thought to raise 'the reader above "objective and realist" subjects to which writers like Maḥmūd Taymūr seem to limit their stories. Nuʿayma aims at different themes, which we consider closer to the Eastern spirit and to a pure poetic vision' (*al-Mabāḥith* 27–28: 2).[52] The Egyptian Tawfīq al-Ḥakim is valorized for being faith-ful to the 'Eastern spirit' and commended for his ability to 'digest' Western culture through his own (*al-Mabāḥith* 6: 83, 92).

There appears to be a parallel between the literature of the nation and the com-munity to be rebuilt. Literature draws its narrative style from classical pre-modern Arabic literature; it is written in a polished literary Arabic; it tends to explore spiri-tual and existential issues; and draws on Islamic as well as European sources. A case may be made that this style of writing was inspired or influenced by al-Masʿadī. Evidence for this include the fact that his work was written before the journal began publication and that some of his *ḥadīth*s were the first of this kind to be published in *al-Mabāḥith*, as early as the fifth issue. My inclination is that it was perhaps too soon for a meaningful influence in style and thought to have taken place. It may be more useful here simply to point out that al-Masʿadī's ideas and writing did not appear in a vacuum. *Al-Mabāḥith* created the environment that nurtured the style of writing readers came to associate with him.

Representation and presence

Al-Masʿadī writes in 1981:

> "The era of Orientalism is over," said J. Berque recently. This saying by one of the masters of contemporary Orientalism, is in itself an extension of another famous remark by Paul Valéry, "the finished world is beginning." It betrays a consciousness that henceforth the "Oriental" world no longer offers itself to the "European" world as a field of observation, but assumes its posi-tion as an actor and even an observer. Arab culture constitutes the privileged example of a "view of the present-day world", which is regaining its intensity and impact.
>
> (al-Masʿadī 1981: 367)

The search for self-representation in the face of colonial denial and for impact in the world in the postcolonial period is at the heart of al-Masʿadī's cultural politics. Himself a student of eminent orientalists and a contemporary to blatant attempts to usurp his own culture by colonialism, al-Masʿadī knew the discourse and set out to write back. He was clearly aware of the need for his culture to *re-present* itself. His confident belief that the dominated culture can do so is fed by a past he has studied well and by the growing self-confidence of his generation. In the 1940s, *al-Mabāḥith* was his main forum. The journal was part of a cultural nationalism with specific Masʿadian edge, characterized by intellectual rigour, literariness, personal and collective confidence and philosophical and artistic depth. It tried to distinguish between modernity and the colonial threat, to inject a combination of confidence and awareness that the real challenges are self-representation and global relevance of one's culture rather than wholesale rejection of the West or the denigration of one's own tradition.

Al-Mabāḥith took as its main focus the construction of a national culture along these lines. Overtly political involvement was not absent from the journal, but it was done most often from the perspective, or for the sake of, cultural issues. The journal emphasized literary culture and nurtured a type of fiction that was polished in style and abstract in theme. This fiction constituted an aesthetic parallel to the Tunisian community being constructed. The spatial extent of the nation, its geography, was the post-colonial borders. But the Maghreb, the Arab world and the Islamic community remained spheres of belonging depending on the issue at hand. Al-Masʿadī never really emphasized Tunisianness the way a number of his close contemporaries did; and despite his rejection of pan-Arab nationalism as the only formulation of national identity, he maintained that Tunisian culture was Arab-Islamic. The writer's repeated expressions of concern (and horror) at the prospect of an Arabic culture reduced to the imitation of the West (the ape metaphor) or a shadow of its own past (the fossil image) led him to call for a new genius, a new intelligence for the modern condition of Arabs.

Both in *al-Mabāḥith* and in al-Masʿadī's essays as a whole, value is given to written culture. Writing is the criterion of cultural viability as well as the evidence of an identity. This emphasis is, to my mind, due to two factors. The first is that writing was the privileged medium of the invading culture. The second has to do with the educational background of al-Masʿadī and his peers who were steeped in literate culture in Arabic as well as in French. This may also be a case where the response is conditioned by the challenge. In this respect, Chatelain and al-Masʿadī (the voice of the colonizer and that of the colonized) agree that the vernacular should play only a marginal role in the culture and that it can be even dangerous because of its 'anti-intellectual' character.

As a writer, al-Masʿadī rejected tying literature to a national project and defended the writer's unconditional freedom to create. The central question that preoccupied him during the colonial period, on the Arab stage in the 1957 Arab Writers Conference and in the early 80s remained the same. Namely, 'is it possible to be an artist – and only an artist—in a developing society?' (Al-Masʿadī 1981: 361). Or is

such conception of freedom only possible within the period of open possibilities, i.e. the struggle for freedom from colonial rule? The writer's question to Malraux could legitimately be thrown back to him: in practice, did al-Masʿadī the statesman remain faithful to his ideals as writer? Or did the consolidation of the nation-state, which he himself helped engineer as Minister of Education and, later, as Minister of Cultural Affairs, play by different rules? It is difficult to know whether al-Masʿadī's ideas about Arab nationalism and the relationship to the West were generated by the need to be in line with the official position of the ruling party in Tunisia or simply designed to defend his own space as a writer. His colleague in *al-Mabāḥith*, Muṣṭafa Fīlālī, who published as Sami, has suggested recently that the writer was a disciplined militant and politician, who was not intellectually independent (*Renouveau* 31 March 2004). Nevertheless, it is possible to trace al-Masʿadī's position and choices after independence to his *al-Mabāḥith* years, to an influence by French ideas of freedom of thought and to Benda's theory of the clerk. However, al-Masʿadī, unlike Benda, was subjected to colonialism. For him, opposition to occupation was not so much a free choice or a call of conscience as it was for French intellectuals. It was rather the predicament of highly educated colonial subjects who find themselves in a position of leadership by virtue of their education, that is, almost by necessity. Al-Masʿadī's uneasiness with the nationalist role imposed on the writer comes through clearly particularly in his commitment to the freedom of the writer and understanding of the function of literature.

His involvement in politics and trade unionism during occupation, as well as his leading role as one of the architects of the educational and cultural policies of independent Tunisia, do not, by themselves, account for his legacy in the country and abroad. Unlike other 'popular' intellectuals of his generation, al-Masʿadī's ideas were not conducive to the 'popularization' demanded by politics. They were simply too complex, and perhaps too unsystematic, to break down to a rhetoric that appeals to a largely uneducated public. As a result of this, he never really attained political celebrity. He was too oblique and too restrained for open political propaganda, too 'elitist' to appeal to the masses. In a word, he was more akin to Benda than to Gramsci, more of an intellectual cleric than an organic or populist intellectual. Nevertheless, his commitment and record as militant for national freedom were unquestionable.

Al-Masʿadī is known, first and foremost, as a writer. His fame is not based on a political capital but rather on a 'symbolic' one. And it is for this reason that changes in political circumstances in the country have largely left his status unchallenged until his death in 2004. Despite embracing his predicament as citizen, al-Masʿadī shows lucidity and an independence in his fiction, which manifest themselves in the way it relates to tradition, in its take on issues of spirituality in a modern context, in the manner it engages Western culture, and in an original Arabic style. The remainder of the book takes up these facets of the writer in detail.

2

THE ALLURE OF *TURĀTH*

The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition.

(W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*)

To redeem the past and to transform every 'It was' into 'I wanted it thus!' – that alone would I call redemption.

(Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*)

In 1957, Ṭaha Ḥusyan (1889–1973), then at the height of his authority as intellectual and model for younger writers across the Arab lands, lent his authority to al-Masʿadī's play *al-Sudd* (The Dam) published two years earlier. In his much-cited review, he was full of praise for this 'strange story' but noted that its language was rather at odds with the times. He said, 'Language has yielded to our writer and obeyed his will with ease. In fact, I fear that it may have yielded to him more than appropriate. It seduced him and tempted him to be hard on it, and to exhaust it.'[1] Some Tunisian critics, largely for nationalistic pride, would claim that the play dazzled even the great Ḥusyan and has given evidence that Tunisia, a country largely perceived in the Arab East as Francophone, was steeped in Arab culture.[2] Ḥusyan's subtext is that the playwright fell for the allure of classical Arabic language. The blame is that he should not have; this was not the time to be lured by the past because modernity required sober and forward-looking minds.[3] The paradox is that Ḥusayn's statement affirms this seduction by the language even as it denies it. His expression, 'It seduced him and tempted him to be hard on it, and to exhaust it' (*aghrathu bi an yashuqqa ʿalayhā min amrihā ʿusran*) is formulaic and classical in rhythm and syntax. In fiction, Ḥusayn promoted a simpler and more direct style. He wrote in 1955: 'It is then imperative, if one desires that Arabic literature be read and appreciated by the greatest number, that our writing be reformed, democratized, and placed within the grasp of the masses who are in the process of overcoming illiteracy. They [Arab writers] are now looking for a way to transform this writing without being forced to break with the past or to renounce the lofty Arab-Moslem heritage' (Ḥusayn 1989: 63). In 1947–8, Ḥusayn may have thought it imprudent to express his opinion publicly about al-Masʿadī's book *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl*, let alone recommend it for publication.[4] Ḥusayn, who knew too well what it meant to be under the fire of the religious

establishment when he questioned the authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry in the 1920s, perhaps sensed that the book could embroil him in a fresh controversy.[5]

Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl, henceforth *Ḥaddatha*, tells the life and experiences of the main character, Abū Hurayra, in the form of anecdotes or stories reported by a variety of narrators, including Abū Hurayra himself, who narrates four out of the 22 tales.[6] The events take place in Mecca, Medina and other neighboring areas during the early period of Islam. Abū Hurayra's journey begins at age 20 and lasts two decades, covering a number of experiences often alluded to in the titles of *ḥadīth*s. For example, '*Ḥadīth al-baʿth al-awwal*' (The First Awakening) is an account of Abū Hurayra's awakening to the pleasures of life; '*Ḥadīth al-taʿāruf fī al-khamr*' (Acquaintance over Wine) describes his first encounter with his lover Rayḥāna; '*Ḥadīth al-ʿadad*' (Multitude) is devoted to Abū Hurayra's social experience; '*Ḥadīth al-ḥikma*' (Wisdom) describes his encounter with a philosopher.

The book was written in the late 1930s and early 1940s but was not published in full until 1973 after an eventful and telling history.[7] One significant discrepancy between sections published in 1944 and those issued in 1974 has puzzled critics. While the name of the main character in the early version is Abū Durayra, in the later one it became Abū Hurayra.[8] However, letters written in 1947–48 and revealed only in 1994 clearly indicate that the original name was Abū Hurayra. In recent interviews, al-Masʿadī has commented on the determining factors in changing the name of his main character in the 1940s to the benign Abū Durayra, a diminutive form of his daughter's name Durra (al-Masʿadī 2003: 302). In his native Tunisia, he was apparently deterred by the fate of his compatriot al-Ṭahir al-Ḥaddād, an activist for the rights of women in the 1930s, who was villified for his ideas and excluded, al-Masʿadī says, 'as if he was afflicted with leprosy' (al-Masʿadī 2003: 314). The writer explains: 'This image injected fear in me and convinced me of the need to avoid a similar fate. For how would it be possible under those circumstances to publish a book titled *Ḥaddatha abū Hurayra qāl*? and who would dare to print or fund it?' (al-Masʿadī 2003: 314). Later on, even more self-censorship was applied.

When he began publishing his books, al-Masʿadī started with *al-Sudd* (The Dam), which he considered less controversial than *Ḥaddatha*. He also published chapters from the latter book, with 'less contentious' content first; and delayed publication in full until 1973 when he himself had considerable clout as Minister of Cultural Affairs. Outside Tunisia, opposition to the book was no less vehement. The letter of 17 October 1947 notes that the prominent French scholar, Levi-Provinçal, has given Ṭaha Ḥusyan the manuscript for evaluation and set up a reading committee for the same purpose. A year later, al-Masʿadī reports that the book was rejected on the grounds that the character should not be named Abū Hurayra. He writes in a letter dated 14 December 1948:

> It [*Ḥaddatha*] has been met with various oppositions, material and
> '*imāmiyyah*' [a sarcastic reference to turbaned sheikhs]. They have objected
> to the fact that the main character is called 'Abū Hurayra.' It is as if this
> name were exclusive to the *ṣaḥābī* [the prophet's companion by the same

name]; that no grammarian had this name; that it is impossible to invent an imaginary person bearing the same name; or that no writer can put down an Arabic word without being drawn into unease (*ḥaraj*) with the turbaned ones…

(al-Masʿadī 2003: 34–35)

Under these circumstances, it is small wonder then that Ṭaha Ḥusayn appears to have withheld his endorsement. I will say more about the hazards of dialogue with tradition later. For now, I need to clarify what is meant by *turāth*.

At its most general level, the term refers to the Arabic cultural heritage. There is, however, a tendency in modern Islamic writing to assume that *turāth* is the literate culture and as such it is contained in the Arabic language. The Egyptian writer Ḥasan Ḥanafī suggests that *turāth* is the emotional repository in the people and as such an issue of national importance to Arabs (Ḥanafī 1995: 176). Discourse on *turāth* is closely tied to the debate on the development, innovation, and renewal in the culture. It is through heritage that the past impacts the present. Ḥanafī's synthesis of modern debates about *turāth* highlights three main attitudes. The first contends that *turāth* is self-sufficient, meaning that the past includes answers to all the issues of present day life; the second trend sees *turāth* as irrelevant to the present while the third is a combination of the two (*tawfīq*), arguing that renewal can be achieved by recourse to outside sources and finding equivalent in the Arabic heritage. An example of this would be finding materialist tendencies in early Islamic philosophy. In real terms, the debate centres on the idea of renewing the culture from within. Discourse on *turāth* has been coloured by approaches to the past. For instance, feminist critics have stressed its male-dominated character while those interested in popular culture often pointed out the elite nature of *turāth*. In all cases, however, *turāth* continues to be one of the most contentious and omnipresent issues in Arab Islamic cultural politics. For this reason, *turāth* for the Arab writer is really not historical in the usual sense, not a remote and irrelevant past. The power of religion and the politics of identity in the Arab world remain a pervasive reality today and both relate to and draw legitimacy from the past to a significant degree. Al-Masʿadī's cultural politics, as I suggest in Chapter 1, takes part in this debate. The way his fiction relates to *turāth* and to debate about *turāth* is my focus here.

It would not be inaccurate to say that all of al-Masʿadī's fiction is tightly linked to the Arabic narrative, linguistic and intellectual heritage. It evokes shared codes and icons, and pays particular attention to the rhythm, syntax and roots of the Arabic language. Al-Maʿadī's critics were lured by this almost overwhelming presence of tradition and attempted to catalogue his references and index his intertexts.[9] The name and the narrative formula embedded in the title, *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl*… give an indication as to how al-Masʿadī's work is virtually saturated with reference to *turāth*. This chapter looks beyond cataloguing the references and the sources. It focuses on al-Maʿadī's use of *ḥadīth* as narrative style and *taqiyya* (concealment or duplicity) as rhetorical device, through a close reading of the text. My argument is that al-Masʿadī's relationship with tradition has significant literary and ideological implications, which increase our understanding of the range of ways in which modern

Arabic culture related to the past in its various attempts to handle a legacy whose weight was almost too hard to bear and to impact an alienating and disorienting present. For this reason other seminal engagements with narrative tradition in modern Arabic literature will also be discussed. What narrative conventions are at play in al-Mas'adī's writing? By what process and to what effect? The density and economy of the texts require a reading which pays close attention to the workings of the narrative. For this reason, the patient and painstaking attention Roland Barthes has given to literary texts will be my entry into the intricately woven *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl*.[10]

'Ḥadīth al-Ṭīn' (The Clay)

A concrete instance of what conventions of narration al-Mas'adī uses and how he actually uses them can be observed in an intensive reading of a particularly significant chapter, 'Ḥadīth al-ṭīn' (The Clay). The significance of the text will become apparent in due course. To situate it, I need only to mention that it is preceded by 'Ḥadīth al-ḥāja (Necessity) and followed by 'Ḥadīth al-Kalb' (The Dog) because the chapters in the book do not follow a chronological or even narrative sequence. In 'Necessity', narrated by Abū al-Madā'in, Abū Hurayra is reported to complain of his inability to know what is inside peoples' minds and hearts. When asked for the reason, he said: 'I am not sure. It could be due to the confinement of the individual self (*ḍīqu maḥbasi al-nafsi al-fardi*) (126). In 'The Dog', Kaḥlān, a notorious rogue and highway robber, tries to rescue a man from death in the desert but the man jumps to his feet and says: 'Go on your way! My journey has ended here' (139). Six men and a dog then arrive on the scene and identify the man as Abū Hurayra. Kaḥlān says that he had heard of someone of the same name who had been preaching a strange doctrine in the area for a year or two: 'Patience and death are not human pursuits', the man used to say (139–40). Abū Hurayra is then taken to a shelter where he had hallucinations and often asked: 'Pharaoh or God?' Kaḥlān learns that the men used to be highway robbers in times of scarcity until Abū Hurayra's appearance in the aftermath of a murderous raid. He buried the dead, prayed on their souls and persuaded the men to reject violence. He then guided them to an oasis, asked them to spread his word and did the same for many others. The men said, 'Soon envy and rebellion rose in the oasis causing Abū Hurayra to leave the place; but no one cared, except us' (145). When he came to his senses, Abū Hurayra ordered his followers to leave and ordered the dog to do the same. The men left but the dog stayed behind howling for days. 'Dogs, too, are hurt by fate', comments Abū Hurayra (146).

In my analysis of 'The Clay', I isolate blocks of text, following Barthes' idea of contiguity, but I do not adhere strictly to the notion of lexias ('brief, contiguous fragments'). Likewise, I do not make any attempt at drawing up an exhaustive index of cultural or other codes. The codes are proiaretic or narrative code; hermeneutic code (enigmas); cultural code (social knowledge as source); semetic code (connotations of persons, places, objects); symbolic code (sexual and psychoanalytical) (Barthes 1974: 18–20). Of all these codes, I retain only two, which are of specific relevance to my argument. For narrative analysis, I use the Hermeneutic Code as a key to narrative

construction. The Hermeneutic Code operates through various ways of delaying the resolution. These are 'the snare (a kind of deliberate evasion of the truth), the equivocation (a mixture of truth and snare which frequently, while focusing on the enigma, thickens it), the partial answer (which only exacerbates the expectation of truth), the suspended answer (an aphasic stoppage of the disclosure), and jamming (acknowledgement of insolubility)' (Barthes 1974: 75–76). Of the numerous cultural codes which permeate the Masꜥadian text, I focus on narrative tradition as literary convention and as cultural practice. The other cultural code is the *Qurʾān* as a citation and as object of parody.

The layout of the text below makes explicit the codes and parts of the narrative in my analysis and signposts the subsequent reading. The term Narrative Sequence designates a continuous narrative reported by one narrator; Link refers to phrases linking two Narrative Sequences and said by the anonymous narrator. Narrators, Stories and Codes are inserted in the text between parentheses and in small capitals. REF indicates Cultural Codes whereas ENIGMA refers to the Hermeneutic codes. *Ḥadīth* is the entire narrative. The full text is to be found in the appendix.

Narrative Link

Abū Hurayra is reported to have said [ꜥ*an abī hurayra annahu qāla*] (NARRATOR 4: ABŪ HURAYRA; STORIES 1, 2 AND 3 BEGIN):

Narrative Sequence 1

"I left Medina taking along nothing but my cane, to lean on it and to lend it my weight (ENIGMA 1: THE JOURNEY, WHERE AND WHY?). A virgin land appeared to me and beckoned me forth. So I abandoned what I was carrying and lost interest [in my pursuit] (ENIGMA 2: REALITY OR VISION? ENIGMA 3: LOAD?). Then I set out freely to discover the land, and found it like creation or like time (REF: CONCEPTION OF TIME). I wandered around for few days there, like a groom on his wedding night, seeking unknown fruit, wishing the world were created anew and envying Adam and Eve (REF: CREATION). My solitude was complete. Night and day seemed like a meaningless game and time turned homogeneous. Like an ocean. Or like eternity" (REF: CONCEPTION OF TIME).

Narrative Link

Narrated by Abū ꜥUbayda (NARRATOR 1). Thābit al-Qaysī (NARRATOR 2) reported the same and added to it the following: (STORY 2 INTERRUPTED; STORY 3 CONTINUES)

Narrative Sequence 2

"At that time, Abū Hurayra was in Kurāꜥ al-Ghamīm (REF: PLACE NAME), a sandy river located between the two holy cities (REF: MECCA AND MEDINA. REALITY EFFECT). The river was reported to be a haunted place, rarely free of bedeviling demons and

blinding spirits (*al-muʿṣirāt al-muʿmiyyāt*). It was a hard place to be; and no one dared to enter it alone (ENIGMA 4: THE NATURE OF THE PLACE). Someone (ENIGMA 5: PERSON NOT NAMED) saw Abū Hurayra, there, and thought he was a jinni (ENIGMA 6: IS THE PERSON SEEN IN FACT ABŪ HURAYRA?). He told me the story: (NARRATOR 3: UNNAMED MAN) 'I saw him cursing ruins (*rasm*) and past times, and spitting like a devil (REF: CONCEPTION OF THE DEVIL). After a while, he started looking around as if searching for a lost friend; then went to a place nearby and lied down.'" (VERSION 1 OF EVENTS. ENIGMA 7: IS THE MAN'S BEHAVIOR RATIONAL?)

Narrative Link

Thābit said,

Narrative Sequence 3

"When I asked Abū Hurayra about the matter, he said, 'Yes. That day I felt restless and needed relief. So I composed an elegy for Adam and Eve and took it to the women of a clan in the valley (ENIGMA 7 CONTINUES: ABŪ HURAYRA'S UNCERTAIN BEHAVIOR). But they refused to use it as a wailing song and said, 'This is the dullest elegy we have ever heard. You are an idiot (*aḥmaq*)!' I said, yes; and used it in my own wailing. It was indeed the dullest of poems'. And he laughed" (ENIGMA 7: LAUGHTER. SNARE BY ABŪ HURAYRA: DOES HE CONFIRM OR DENY THE EVENT?).

Narrative Link

Thābit added,

Narrative Sequence 4

"Perhaps he meant a clan and women from the world of spirits (PARTIAL ANSWER 1 TO ENIGMA 7). It was even possible that he made up the whole story without any parallel in reality (*anshaʾa al-khabara inshāʾan dūna muṭābaqa*) (PARTIAL ANSWER 2 TO ENIGMA 7). For Abū Hurayra was a master of jest, ambiguity and deception. He always acted as if he hated to divulge his deep secrets or to reveal himself to others. So much so that people have become uncertain about him (*ishtabaha amruhu*)" (PARTIAL ANSWER 3 TO ENIGMA 7).

Narrative Link

Thābit added,

Narrative Sequence 5

"We asked him, 'Why did you want to mourn the elderly man and woman?' He replied, 'Because they almost succeeded in teaching me their ignorance of life and in

guiding me to the virgin path. So when I lost them, I found myself again on beaten paths and I returned to my old story and to my old self. I had wanted my path to be virgin (*ʿadhrāʾ*), untouched by men, but it turned out to be an old whore? (*ʿajūz fājira*)'." (RESPONSE TO ENIGMA 1: THE JOURNEY WHERE AND WHY? FORMULATION OF NEW ENIGMA: IS THIS THE END OF THE NARRATIVE? END OF STORY 3).

Narrative Link

Abū ʿUbayda said – but this was not reported by Thābit: (NARRATIVES DIVERGE. THĀBIT'S NARRATIVE ENDS HERE. STORY 2 RESUMES; END OF STORY 3)

Narrative Sequence 6

"Abū Hurayra said, 'One day, having run out of provisions the day before, I felt as if I was in the clarity of a cloudless noon or in the light of a fire, as heat spread across the land. At the time, I was in a valley whose sand was like the waves of a mirage on which sight could ride and spread until the sand appeared like thin air. I was not long in my quietude when a wind began to whisper like a human voice. The wind then became stronger and blew the sand about like the flutter of a silk cloth. It then started to blow harder and to roar like a sea storm, raising sand up in the air like snake tongues to reveal ancient ruins and a decayed skull. (ENIGMA 9: WHAT DO THE SIGNS MEAN?) This did away with my solitude and spoiled my joy. I wondered why was it that whenever someone sought solitude, an effaced sign would appear to him? It felt as if the sign was in my heart. I hated that and decided to leave the place. For I had set out to erase my story, only to discover that it was within me, before Adam and Eve, impossible to erase. (PARTIAL ANSWER TO ENIGMA 9: THE SIGN IS WITHIN HIM.) But then I got distracted, lied down and soon fell asleep. (PARTIAL RESPONSE: ABŪ HURAYRA CONFIRMS VERSION OF EVENTS BY NARRATOR 3. ANSWER OF ENIGMA 6: THE MAN SEEN IN THE VALLEY IS INDEED ABŪ HURAYRA. NARRATOR 4)

In my sleep I had the most stupid and most arrogant dream (SNARE BY ABŪ HURAYRA). I saw a strange country, whose people appeared at times like elephants and at others like ants. They were mixing clay and using it to hold together stones to erect massive walls (*sūrah*). (REF: TITLE OF THE CHAPTER, INTERNAL REFERENCE.) Some of them were singing lyrics at the rhythm of stone lifting:

> Reason is death; thinking is a disease.
> The Soul is an echo: the echo of nothingness.
> Action is everlasting; struggle is peace.
> Let us build a wall that defeats nothingness!

There was a recitor, reading in "Ḥamza's version": "Nobles, you have no other god that I know of except myself. Make me, Hāmān, bricks of clay, and build for me a tower so that I may climb up to the god of Moses. I am convinced that he is lying!" (REF: QURʾĀNIC SCIENCES: READINGS OF *THE QURʾĀN*; REF: DIRECT CITATION FROM *QURʾĀN*).[11]

They responded to the recitor inserting their own speech, which sounded like thunder shaking the sky: "He denied it [the sign] and rebelled – *baṇḍaldallam*. He quickly went away – *banhar talgham* - and, summoning all his men – *bar ānhandam*. Made to them the proclamation: 'I am your supreme Lord,' he said". (REF: CITATION FROM *QURʾĀN*; REF: DREAMS. ENIGMA 10: THE DREAM AND THE PHRASES INSERTED IN THE *QURʾĀN*). [12]

"When I woke up, I went to Bedouin clans and stayed amongst them for two years." (END OF ABŪ HURAYRA'S NARRATIVE. ENIGMA 11: WHY WAS THE DECISION MADE? IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DREAM AND THE DECISION? ANSWER DENIED OR WITHHELD; STORY 1 ENDS)

Narrative Link

Abū ʿUbayda said,

Narrative Sequence 7

"Abū Hurayra did not explain the meaning of the corruption (gibberish) inserted in the verse. (PARTIAL RESPONSE TO ENIGMA 10: PHRASES INSERTED ARE GIBBERISH) God's word is indeed free from barbarism (*raṭānat al-ʿajam*)! (REF: INTEGRITY AND SANCTITY OF *QURʾĀN*). It was the devil that, during sleep, took hold of him! (*wa innamā huwa al-Shaṭānu fī al-nawmi alam*" (ANSWER TO ENIGMA 10: THE GIBBERISH IS SATAN'S SPEECH. END OF ABŪ ʿUBAYDA'S NARRATIVE. END OF STORY 2. END OF NARRATIVE. UNRESOLVED ENIGMAS: IS ABŪ HURAYRA RELIABLE? WHY DID HE GO TO THE BEDOUIN TRIBES? HOW IS THIS RELATED TO THE DREAM? ON A MORE BASIC LEVEL, DID ABŪ HURAYRA GO TO THE VALLEY? DOES THE VALLEY EXIST?)

The narrative ends here. But a narrative which does not provide answers is incomplete. Closure is missing. The end is not logical as it does not follow from the rest of the narrative. From various *Ḥadīth*s in the book, we know something of Abū Hurayra's stay among Bedouins. We also know that the dream refers very obliquely to al-Masʿadī's play, *al-Sudd* (The Dam) where workers chant as they build a dam. But no answers are given to the other questions. Furthermore, in the presence of competing narratives, which one to believe? Is the presence of gibberish in the Qurʾānic citation explained satisfactorily or simply explained away? If so, Why? Before seeking clues, let us look at the narrative structure of 'The Clay'.

Architecture of the text

The first narrator to appear in the text is Abū Hurayra. He is telling an audience his own story, information about his audience is absent or delayed. It turns out, however, that it is Abū ʿUbayda who is reporting Abū Hurayra's discourse. The story is then confirmed and expanded by Thābit. Abū ʿUbayda and Thābit al-Qaysī are two narrators designated as such. The text gives no indication that they knew each other or were among Abū Hurayra's audience at the same time. But both appear to have easy access to him. We have, then, two narrators whose narratives overlap at the beginning

but diverge afterwards. There are also two other narrators or informants of the main narrators. Abū ʿUbayda (Narrator 1) begins and closes the story: he provides a *frame* for it. And while he does not take part in the story, he *comments* on it. Thābit al-Qaysī (Narrator 2), on the other hand, reports a story and takes part in it. The unnamed man (Narrator 3) reports Abū Hurayra's behaviour in the valley to Narrator 2. The account by Abū Hurayra (Narrator 4) is reported by Narrator 1 on the authority of an anonymous narrator (AN) who is implied in the expression ʿan (on the authority of). Abū Hurayra also converses with Narrator 2.

All these stories are reported by a narrator who is clearly aware of all the versions of the event and has collected them. But he (or she) is never named. Rather, they are implied in the phrases which report speech: 'Abū Hurayra is reported to have said', 'Narrated by Abū ʿUbayda', 'Thābit added', 'Abū ʿUbayda said, but Thābit did not report this', 'Abū ʿUbayda added.' This narrator is an omnipresent one who speaks through syntax and controls the stories. The narrator is authoritative and absolutely necessary to the reader's knowledge, in fact he is the only source of knowledge. Who is speaking? Is this the implied author, the author, al-Masʿadī? And who is speaking through him? Is it the voice of religious orthodoxy, standing against the corruption of the holy text in the story? Or the voice of transgression, eager to challenge the word of God, albeit in disguise? The interplay of the stories and narrators may provide clues to this.

Abū Hurayra's dream in which he sees builders mixing clay to hold together stones in order to erect a wall, which also refers to the title of the chapter 'The Clay', offers a guide. Indeed, 'The Clay' is made up of seven main Narrative Sequences held together by the Links, mentioned above. From the point of view of the story as a whole, the Sequences augment and expand the story by introducing new information or new versions of events. A graphic representation may elucidate the architecture of the text. The arrows indicate Links (see Table 2.1).

Story 2 is interrupted by Link 1 and Narrative Sequence 2 and resumed only in Narrative Sequence 5; Story 3 spans Narrative Sequences 1 to 5; Story 1 ends with Narrative Sequence 6. There is an obvious arranging of the stories and narrative sequences. The term Sequence could be also interchanged for 'block' to reflect the fact that these can be manipulated, and moved around, with immediate effect on the whole. The phrase 'X said' which links sequences does not change their content. It merely indicates moving to a different sequence. Yet such phrase can have a strong effect. Narrative Sequence 1 is not introduced by the phrase, which gives the impression, at the linear level or on first reading, that Abū Hurayra, the protagonist, is telling his own story, i.e. that we are dealing with a first-person narrative. Such effect is completely demolished by the phrase, 'Narrated by Abū ʿUbayda', which comes immediately after the Narrative Sequence. We are now dealing with a third-person narrative, making the focalization completely different. As transition to Narrative Sequence 2, the Anonymous Narrator says, 'Thābit al-Qaysī reported the same and added to it the following.' The first story is either completed or put on hold. Abū ʿUbayda is no longer an authority. This gives a semblance of an ending but also of a change in angle. The Anonymous Narrator returns to close the story narrated by
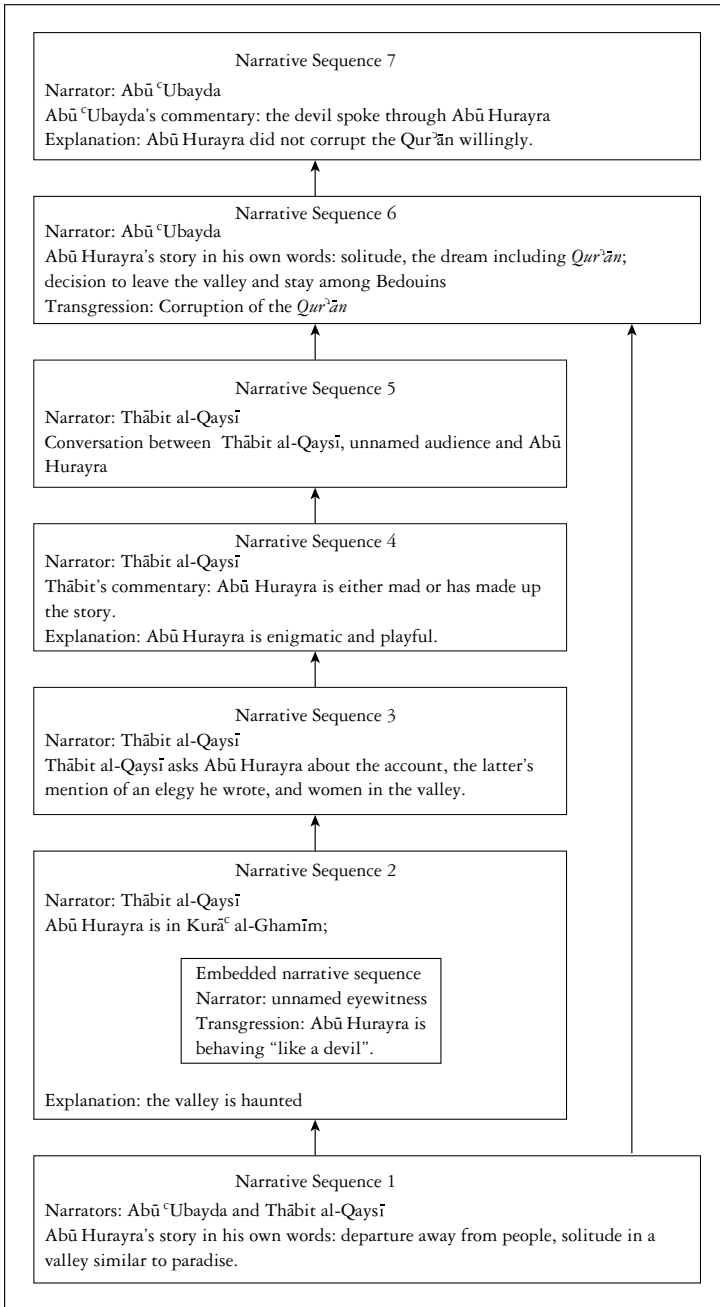
Narrative Sequence 7
Narrator: Abū ʿUbayda
Abū ʿUbayda's commentary: the devil spoke through Abū Hurayra
Explanation: Abū Hurayra did not corrupt the Qurʾān willingly.

Narrative Sequence 6
Narrator: Abū ʿUbayda
Abū Hurayra's story in his own words: solitude, the dream including *Qurʾān*;
decision to leave the valley and stay among Bedouins
Transgression: Corruption of the *Qurʾān*

Narrative Sequence 5
Narrator: Thābit al-Qaysī
Conversation between Thābit al-Qaysī, unnamed audience and Abū
Hurayra

Narrative Sequence 4
Narrator: Thābit al-Qaysī
Thābit's commentary: Abū Hurayra is either mad or has made up
the story.
Explanation: Abū Hurayra is enigmatic and playful.

Narrative Sequence 3
Narrator: Thābit al-Qaysī
Thābit al-Qaysī asks Abū Hurayra about the account, the latter's
mention of an elegy he wrote, and women in the valley.

Narrative Sequence 2
Narrator: Thābit al-Qaysī
Abū Hurayra is in Kurāʿ al-Ghamīm;

> Embedded narrative sequence
> Narrator: unnamed eyewitness
> Transgression: Abū Hurayra is
> behaving "like a devil".

Explanation: the valley is haunted

Narrative Sequence 1
Narrators: Abū ʿUbayda and Thābit al-Qaysī
Abū Hurayra's story in his own words: departure away from people, solitude in a
valley similar to paradise.

Table 2.1   The seven Narrative Sequences of 'The Clay'.

Thābit (Story 3) and to introduce Narrative Sequence 5, 'Abū ʿUbayda said but this was not reported by Thābit.' This time, Story 3 is interrupted but Story 2 resumes. This gives part of Story 3, the one contained in Narrative Sequences 2 to 5, an intermediate position in the overall narrative. The report by the Unnamed Man would be therefore unknown to Abū ʿUbayda and so would be Thābit's conversation with Abū Hurayra. There are in fact two instances of embedding here, which have significant effect on the readers' knowledge. For example, the reader clearly knows more than Abū Ubayda. In architectural terms, Narrative Sequence 2 includes a window; and like a window, it opens up on the outside as well as allows the outside in. The anonymous eyewitness, or a third party is brought in to confirm or shed light on the story. Thābit, the narrator, also looks through that window to the outside in order to verify Abū Hurayra's account. This exchange with the outside has narrative as well as ideological implications, as we will see shortly.

If we take the key event, Abū Hurayra's presence in the valley, as an example, we notice that all narrators agree to its veracity. The dream, however, is confirmed only by Abū ʿUbayda. Thābit is explicitly excluded ('Abū ʿUbayda said, but this was not reported by Thābit'). Given the importance of the event, from a religious perspective, one witness may not be sufficient to confirm the occurrence.[13] Furthermore, the source is Abū Hurayra, whose credibility is thrown in doubt by Thābit but who is trusted by Abū ʿUbayda. Thābit relies on a secondary source, the unnamed eyewitness, and further corroborates the story by asking Abū Hurayra for clarification. Abū ʿUbayda, on his part, judging by his name, can be seriously challenged. This is a mere nickname shared by many people (Father of ʿUbayda), unlike the fully named, Thābit al-Qaysī. However, Abū ʿUbayda, if we can assume he is the same person, appears in other chapters in al-Masʿadī's book, unlike Thābit al-Qaysī who is present only in this instance. Abū ʿUbayda seems to be one of Abū Hurayra's close companions and is named as the source of the chapter, 'Company and Solitude', narrated by Hishām Ibn Ḥāritha (al-Masʿadī 1979: 161–3). This gives him a textual credibility, which Thābit is lacking. In addition, Abū ʿUbayda shows some solidarity with Abū Hurayra. He lets him speak directly and when he appears in danger, the faithful Abū ʿUbayda comes to his rescue with an apology, to which I will return. Thābit, on the other hand, casts doubt on Abū Hurayra and does not apologize for his behaviour in the valley.

Uncertainty about the event is not restricted to Abū ʿUbayda's apology or Thābit's doubt. Let us begin with the place. Historically speaking, Kurāʿ al-Ghamīm may be a real place but it is a space shrouded in myth and legend.[14] In the text, it is a haunted valley, 'no one dared to enter it'; and even when an event occurs there, it is often doubtful: Thābit's informant thought that Abū Hurayra was one of the jinn which inhabit Kurāʿ al-Ghamīm. Moreover, the events of the story themselves are uncertain. Abū Hurayra casts doubt on his own story (He 'laughed'). The visions he experiences are fantastic (description of the storm and of the signs and skull which appear to him). His mental faculties could have been impaired by heat, hunger or by the supernatural beings inhabiting the valley. Did events actually take place? Was Abū Hurayra present in the valley? We do not know for certain. There is an ambiguity

which is at the heart of the composition of the story and is key to its legitimacy. It ensues from the above that in the architecture of the text, one of the building blocks is rather unreliable, which puts the whole structure at risk. This same building block, because of its unreliability, needs support and the other blocks will provide that, as I explain below. First, however, a word on the origins of *Ḥaddatha* as narrative.

Narrative genealogies

The framing of stories described above inevitably raises the question: What is the genealogy of the narrative? A full understanding of how al-Masʿadī's text works and why it is structured in this way cannot be fully appreciated without reference to narrative conventions in Arabic culture. I single out here the elements of *orality* and *adab*. Abū Hurayara *speaks* to an audience (Abū Hurayra is reported to have said -ʿan Abī Hurayra annahu qāla). His speech *(ḥadīth)* is reported by a narrator *(rāwī)*. All the stories are reported within an oral context and in an oral system of transmission. In such a context stories are not stable; they are augmented, reduced or even altered depending on the narrator as well as on the audience. The journey of *The Nights* or the epic of the pre-Islamic hero and poet ʿAntara are good examples of this. In the case of Sīrat ʿAntar, for instance, the presence of repeated structures, formulas or words are used by the storyteller to 'structure and actualize the narrative' (Heath 1996: 105). In the case of *The Nights*, the frame narrative allows the introduction of new stories without restrictions. Does al-Masʿadī's text emulate *The Nights* and its tradition? Here the Anonymous Narrator, who could be the equivalent of Shaherazad for our purposes, tells a story whose first part is told by two narrators. Their narratives then diverge. The first one closes the story but he is absent from part of it. The story is expanded by each narrator, which fits within the oral narrative tradition. One of these parts, Narrative Sequence 1, however, is crucial to the formulation and partial answers of key enigmas in the overall story. Some of these question Abū Hurayra's credibility and throw into doubt the key events of the story. In addition, there is here an interplay between stories and narrators which is not found in the *The Nights*. Moreover, the frame tale in *The Nights* assumes that the narrative chain is not interrupted: a narrator tells a story within which another narrator tells a story and so on, which is not the case in *Ḥadīth al-ṭīn*.

The Nights has in fact had very little influence on the development of fiction in the modern Arab world until recently. For complex reasons involving circulation, the relationship between orality and literacy and the impact of translation from Western literature, the novel developed largely in relation to factors, which rarely involved the oral narrative aspects of the culture. Orality was, nonetheless at the heart of transmission of knowledge in Arabic culture, particularly in the early part of Islamic history. The *Qurʾān* itself was transmitted orally and so did the prophets *ḥadīth*, as I will explain. Al-Masʿadī's book bears the stamp of oral transmission in its form but has little to do with *The Nights* or *sīra* in its language and method of composition.[15] One has to look elsewhere for antecedents. The book's kinship to *adab* is rather obvious, and has been readily pointed out by critics.[16] It mixes poetry and prose; its nucleus

of narration is *khabar*, whereby a story is told by a narrator to an audience using expressions like, 'I was told', 'so and so told me', 'I heard so and so saying,' 'a trusted person told me'. The style itself recalls key figures of *adab*, particularly al-Iṣfahānī (d. 967) and al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023) (Al-Ghābirī 1994: 110). Yet, I want to argue, this kinship is not as significant as the engagement *Ḥaddatha* entertains with more foundational conventions and styles.

Perilous intertextuality

Barthes defines Cultural Codes as 'resumés of common knowledge' or social knowledge as source in a literary text (Barthes 1974: 184). Such knowledge is indexed in the text and does not enter the making of the fabric itself. I depart from Barthes by extending his definition of cultural codes to include narrative conventions, which enter the fabric of the text. In fact they are key to the very functioning of the narrative studied here. In addition, these same conventions affect (determine, I think) the social significance and political legitimacy of the narrative. On them depend the very circulation, even the life, of the text, if not that of its author.

It should have become clear by now that 'The Clay' contains an intricacy of narrative voices and narratives. Narrators confirm, deny, modify, complete or cast doubt on events and discourse. They, in turn, see their own reliability questioned and put to the test. Thābit attempts to verify the veracity of an account he could not trust because of the circumstances surrounding the event. He goes to the source and asks the 'protagonist' of the story to confirm or deny it. But he receives only a troubling response: Abū Hurayra confirms (he says, 'yes!'), but he also laughs. Thābit interjects his own judgment about Abū Hurayra's reliability and expresses his doubt that the story ever took place. He says, 'Perhaps he [Abū Hurayra] invented a story without any basis in reality.' This is not unexpected, we are told, since Abū Hurayra is not known to be a reliable reporter of stories in general. His irony and inclination to jest preclude him from telling a believable account.

Thābit's phrase, 'He invented a story without parallel in reality' (*anshaʾa al-khabara inshāʾan dūna muṭābaqah*), strikes the informed reader with its formulaic nature. It is a traceable formula, just like the title itself, '*ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl*' as well as the name Abū Hurayra. Neither may have a referent or basis in reality, but they clearly allude to a reference. Al-Masʿadī's story is not corroborated by reality while his Abū Hurayra is clearly not the same as one of the most celebrated and most trustworthy narrator of prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) in Islamic history.[17] However, both operate through and draw their evocative power from a pervasive founding reference. I suggest that *ḥadīth* literature, the narratives of the sayings and deeds of Prophet Muḥammad, underlie al-Masʿadī's narrative. This convention is central to Islamic culture as a whole, and hence to Arabic literature. Using it as a blueprint in a work of fiction in the twentieth century involves significant implications and considerable risks.

Ḥadīth is the second most important source of Islam as discourse and as practice, at least for Sunnis. It is both the first exegesis of the *Qurʾān* and the first application

of it in Islamic history. Together with the *Qurʾān*, they make up the fundamental sources (*uṣūl*) of the religion from which all else derives. Since the Prophet's word (*ḥadīth*) was to guide the Moslem community, its veracity had to be beyond doubt. For this reason, establishing *ḥadīth* has been scrupulous and rigorous. As a result, a well-regulated academic discipline has taken shape to sift through and verify the count-less *ḥadīth*s attributed to the Prophet, covering all aspects of life, from clarification of Islamic rituals to medicine to codes of social behaviour. This branch of Islamic sciences is called, *ʿulūm al-ḥadīth* or the *ḥadīth* sciences.

The Prophet's word wielded tremendous power. It was, understandably, susceptible to manipulation, alteration or even fabrication and forgery in order to serve sectarian, political or personal motivations. The compilation of *ḥadīth*, both authentic and apoc-ryphal was taken very seriously. But in a largely oral culture, it was inevitable that the first source was the memory of those who had direct contact with the Prophet, most notably his companions and wives. It was essential, therefore, to trace every *ḥadīth* back to a direct link with the Prophet. Transmitters were subjected to intense scrutiny which often exceeded the examination of the *ḥadīth* itself. They had to satisfy a vari-ety of tests. In addition to being an adult Muslim, they had to meet stringent crite-ria; both moral, such as decency and honesty, and intellectual, such as good memory. A chain (*silsila*) of transmitters where every link had to be reliable had to be proven uninterrupted. For on this chain depends the classification of *ḥadīth*. These can be clas-sified as sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*), fair (*ḥasan*), or weak (*ḍaʿīf*). Within the latter categories *ḥadīth* scholars distinguished between suspended (*muʿallaq*), interrupted (*maqṭūʿ*), broken (*munqaṭiʿ*), incomplete (*mursal*), defective in content or in the chain (*muṣaḥḥaf*), rare (*shādhdh*) or simply forged (*mawḍūʿ*) (Ṣiddīqī 1993: 109).

These were minimum conditions to guarantee the veracity of the transmission. Each narrator or transmitter had to have heard the account personally from his or her predecessor, all the way back to the primary link and on to the Prophet. In this chain, the primary link becomes of essential importance to the tradition. In addition to being an original source, he or she also would become a venerated figure. In this system of narrative transmission, Abd al-Raḥmān Abū Hurayra (d. AD 678) holds an unparalleled place of pride. He was the transmitter of no less than 5374 *ḥadīth*s, the largest number by a single narrator by far (ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿUmar comes a distant sec-ond with only 2630) (Ṣiddīqī 1993: 118). His name has become a guarantor of verac-ity. His own life was therefore of serious interest to the tradition and it had to be scrutinized in its minutest detail. Sources tell us that Abū Hurayra kept close com-pany of the Prophet for many years and devoted himself to listening and memoriz-ing what he said. He then propagated his knowledge through the teaching of hundreds of students. His position in the tradition can hardly be exaggerated. His reliability and piety had to be beyond doubt. In fact, it is likely that doubts about him were a result of this very reputation, which encouraged others to attribute apocryphal or weak *ḥadīth*s to him.[18]

Ḥadīth investigators, for we are dealing with a veritable detective work, have not limited their examination to the personality and motivations of one or more of the transmitters. They also looked at the reported *ḥadīth* using internal evidence to

corroborate or contradict the transmission. They checked for signs of deficiency related to reason or faith. If a *ḥadīth* contradicted reason, went against the fundamentals of Islam or was found anachronistic, it was immediately dismissed as apocryphal. There was no shortage of inventors of *ḥadīth*. In addition to the heretics and well-intentioned Muslims, storytellers (*Quṣṣāṣ*) were perhaps the most prolific culprits. These appointed officials whose role was to edify the community through pious stories, quickly gave in to the demand for entertaining narratives and began to invent scores of *ḥadīth*s. Their effect was judged so damaging that they were banned in Baghdad in AD 892 (Ṣiddīqī 1993: 34).[19] From the perspective of cultural dissemination (writing and fiction) playing with *ḥadīth* has become a tool of the trade. The interface between the two domains, entertainment and edification, is clearly quite significant. Therefore, the fact that in al-Masʿadī's narrative we find a story which is made up or fabricated tales ('*anshaʾa al-khabar inshāʾan*') should not surprise. It is not without precedents.[20]

The cultural space within which al-Masʿadī operates and the imaginary to which he refers are indeed very complex. Knowing this, one begins to appreciate how the mere use of Abū Hurayra's name in a context which inspires doubt and impiety would be a significant challenge to Islamic culture, even a punishable offence.[21] The formula '*ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl*' has become, by virtue of its frequency and potency, emblematic of piety and knowledge of Islam. To use it in a fictional account involves playfulness with the reader's expectations as well as 'playing with fire'. The author himself admits that at a book fair in an Arab country people flocked to buy the book, mistaking it for a collection of the Prophet's *ḥadīth* (Omri 2001: 304). Yet without this reference, al-Masʿadī's poetics cannot be established. And it is because of this reference, and others like it, that al-Masʿadī's pathway to the narrative tradition and to *turāth* as a whole must be explored, as I show below.

Seen from the perspective of *ḥadīth* sciences, an examination of the various versions of Abū Hurayra's story in 'The Clay' shows a level of overlap and corroboration. But two key factors are missing. According to *Ḥadīth* sciences, there are two sure ways of verification. The first is that the chain of transmitters must be uninterrupted. The second is that a version is more sure if it is corroborated. A *ḥadīth* which appears the same but is transmitted by more than one reliable chain, i.e. ultimately traced to two or more different original sources, is clearly strong and reliable. In fact, the strength of a *ḥadīth* is a function of parallel authentication during the first three generations of Islam (Ṣiddīqī 1993: 110). Hence, the strongest *ḥadīth* is the one subject to the consensus or at least the majority of narrators during the same period. Such *ḥadīth* is called *mutawātir*. In 'The Clay' authentication through multiplicity of sources is guaranteed because the story is told by two separate chains of reporters. But the stories corroborate each other only partially. One can therefore say that only the first part of the story, or Narrative Sequence 1, is authenticated. The reporters, however, are enigmatic, as I have suggested.[22] Neither of the two elements (continuous chain and corroboration) is fully satisfied in 'The Clay.' Yet both are implied or assumed as reference. Al-Masʿadī's text moves within this narrative convention and tradition. It also uses its tools (critical and analytical study of *Ḥadīth*) to represent the transgression. In the

text the original narrator Abū Hurayra is proven tainted with doubt and uncertainty by a later narrator, Thābit al-Qaysī. The other narrator, Abū ʿUbayda is also questionable because of his doubtful name and due to the fact that he is an apologist for Abū Hurayra. External evidence is found wanting. Internal evidence, the uncertainty surrounding the place called Kurāʿ al-Ghamīm and the eyewitness account, is also cause for doubt. The building clearly has a number of cracks and weaknesses.

Veiling the reference

We recall that at some point in Abū Hurayra's story the audience responds to the reciter of Qurʾānic verses by inserting their own speech, '*banḍaldallam*,' '*banhar talgham*,' '*barr ānhandam*' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 134).[23] As I mention above, we never really know if the whole event, including the utterances, have actually taken place. This leads me to suggest that the parodic play on the *Qurʾān* occurs within a space where rules of discourse, as a socially determined activity, become irrelevant or at least inadequate. Transgression, is therefore, understandably, permitted. Nevertheless, the text as an Arabic text emerging from and circulating within an Islamic context, is bound by specific codes and rules. In order for it to circulate unimpeded, it must either conform to these restrictions and codes or find alternative ways around them. An Islamic convention, whose specific role is to 'protect' a discourse which may be perceived to violate these codes, is needed in order to guarantee circulation. *Taqiyya*, meaning to show the opposite of what one hides, serves as a safeguard against charges of blasphemy and transgression.

Historically speaking, *taqiyya* as a practice is inseparable from the repression of religious dissent in Islamic history. At its basic level, *taqiyya* involves a duplicity between a belief to be kept secret or private and public confession of the opposite. An early example is the practice among some of the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad to conceal their conversion to Islam while continuing to practice the religious rites of their tribes. Later on, Kharidjites, invented the idea of *Dār al-taqiyya* (the dominion of *taqiyya*) to refer to an area where they had to keep their beliefs secret because their enemies were the majority.[24] But *taqiyya* is most closely associated with Shīʿī Islam. The Imām al-Bāqir, Jaʿfar Ibn Muḥammad (d. AD 765), is quoted as saying, '*Taqiyya* is my religion and the religion of my ancestors' (al-Imām 1981: 73). *Taqiyya* is by its very nature intensely creative. It functions through indirect and covert language. It uses *ramz* (symbolism), *tawriya* (double entendre or mispointing information for secrecy), *taʿmiya* (mystification), *talghīz* (riddling), and a host of other figures of speech which may be considered forms of *ishāra* (allusion), according to the critic Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (1000–1063).[25] In short, *taqiyya* has been a weapon with which persecuted Muslims have tried to ward off repression, sceptics have protected their ideas and critics have expressed themselves in a climate of intolerance and lack of freedom. This was true of pre-modern Islamic societies and has become even more so in contemporary times. How does *taqiyya* operate in 'The Clay'?

The central enigma in 'The Clay' can be encapsulated in the following question: has Abū Hurayra actually been in the haunted valley? This generates a number of

other enigmas or uncertainties. At the cultural or social level, this doubt is a key factor. Without this ambiguity, the parody of the *Qurʾān* would not have been possible, at least not without major risk which goes beyond the life of the text –will it be published at all? – to that of the writer – would he be safe from accusations of blasphemy, which can be punishable by death? The ambiguity sanctions parody and licenses transgression. The cultural norm, which would otherwise castigate and ban the transgression, now justifies it. How so? Abū ʿUbayda apologizes for Abū Hurayra's insertion of gibberish in a Qurʾānic text by saying, 'God's word is indeed beyond barbarism (*raṭānat al-ʿajam*)! It was the devil that, during sleep, took hold of him! (*wa innamā huwa al-Shayṭānu fī al-nawmi alam*).' By attributing the transgression to an outsider or an excluded entity, namely Satan, Abū Hurayra is freed from a potentially deadly charge. The devil itself is based in ambiguity. It is defined, not by what it is, but what it does: it took hold of him during his sleep.

From a psychoanalytical point of view, this is quite telling; but I will not pursue this line of inquiry here. Suffice to say that the irreverent transgression is alleged to have taken place in a dream. It is shrouded in doubt, ambiguity and improbability. But Abū ʿUbayda is stating something he cannot possibly verify and which is not confirmed within the narrative. Abū Hurayra, the only 'credible' source about his own speech explicitly describes his vision as a dream, not as a demonic inspiration. Moreover, we are told that he did not explain the gibberish inserted in the verse. The only guarantor of validity of Abū ʿUbayda's statement resides in the socio-cultural context of the text: the belief that the devil sneaks upon unwitting souls is shared by the community of readers. They accept that Satan tempts the most pious of people. It is necessary for al-Masʿadī to couch the utterance and 'corruption' of the *Qurʾān* in such a narrative context. The transgression is banished to a realm of dreams and the belief in the devil. As a result, moral outrage and punishment are preempted, in the text at least.[26]

Al-Masʿadī's narrative conventions are drawn from the Arab-Islamic repertoire. And even when the narrative touches upon, plays with or steps outside the limits set by religious dogma or social code, a traditional (narrative) convention is called upon to sanction that very transgression. 'The Clay' finds its narrative model as well as its legitimacy in the narrative conventions of pre-modern Arabic culture. In 'The Clay', the hunt for the story in its versions walks a fine line between the sacred and sacrilege. The narrative incriminates Abū Hurayra and seeks his salvation at the same time. *Taqiyya* covers the transgression and reveals it at the same time by performing the act of transgression. The text simultaneously inscribes Abū Hurayra's doubt and protects his 'life.' One of the ways it does so is by never answering the question, 'Who is Speaking?' This question is fundamental because upon the disclosure depend the life of the narrative and perhaps that of its writer.[27] The indeterminacy in the text precludes any answer and thus averts conclusive evidence.[28]

Parallels and contemporaries

How does al-Masʿadī's use of narrative tradition and *turāth* relate to ways Arabic literature has engaged its past in the modern period? In the early part of the twentieth

century engagement with the past was neither uncommon nor devoid of controversy. A number of Arab intellectuals, known for 'secular' writings in the 1920s, shifted their attention to Islamic subjects in the following decade, prominent among them were M. Ḥ. Haykal, Ṭaha Ḥusayn, Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm and A. Ḥ. al-Zayyāt.[29] Their writings enjoyed wide circulation and appeal among a variety of readers. Haykal's book *Ḥayāt Muḥammad* (The Biography of Muhammad), published between 1935 and 1939, had unprecedented success across the reading public. It was welcomed even by orthodox leaders of al-Azhar and staunch conservatives, like Ḥasan al-Bannā. Only a few figures dared to dissent. Aḥmad Amīn, for example, thought the book was a 'capitulation to the whim of the masses' (Gershoni 1994: 267). Gershoni suggests that the biography was considered a landmark in the effort to write Islamic history by Muslims and an indication that secular Egyptians were re-establishing ties with the Islamic roots of the country (259). He argues that the shift constitutes a transformation of Islam into a 'dynamic force in the modern national culture and identity of Egypt and the Arab world' (271). Yet, it must be noted that most of these books were either scholarly studies or historical narratives centred on mainstream Muslim figures.

Ḥusayn argues that this was an expression of a return to the past from the point of view of a break with superstition and dogmatism. For him the Arabs at the time had solved the problem of modernity by espousing Western civilization and were ready to 'enjoy the past and look after renewing it and revising it' (Maḥmūdī 1997: 85). Ḥusayn is referring to rewrites in artistic form of historical accounts, such as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *Muḥammad*, or Muslim heroes as role models in al-ᶜAqqād's *ᶜAbqariyyāt*. Ḥusayn himself sought inspiration from the past in his story, *ᶜAlā hāmish al-sīra* (At the Margins of the Prophet's Life). He says: 'I did not try to narrate any historical events or confirm any religious issue whatever. Rather, I wanted to praise the heroic aspects of that glorious period. In this I wanted to address the hearts of Muslims who were thirsty for ideals and keen to preserve their great past' (Maḥmūdī 1997: 84). One of the key cases, which show both the limits and the potential of using narrative tradition in modern fiction is *Ḥadīth ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām* (The Tale of ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām) by the Egyptian Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (1858–1930). The text presents us with parameters against which al-Masᶜadī's engagement with the narrative tradition can be compared and contrasted.

Like *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayrah qāl*, the title *Ḥadīth ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām* (The Tale of ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām) strikes the reader by its formulaic nature. It establishes a direct and explicit dialogue with *al-turāth al-sardī* (narrative heritage). The explicit use of the Badīᶜ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī's fictional narrator, ᶜĪsa ibn Hishām, conjures up fiction, even announces it, and recalls (*maqāma*), considered by many the one Arabic form which bears close kinship to modern fiction. But while both titles appear to share basic features of a traditional narrative convention, their two horizons of expectations, could not be more divergent.

Ḥadīth ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām is very different from *Ḥaddatha*, with a radically different itinerary. It is a complex text that resonates the broader pattern of exchange between Arab and European cultures at the turn of the nineteenth century in Egypt.[30] It enacts

a triple fiction: it is a fictional account by a fictional character, ʿĪsā ibn Hishām, of a dream. The narrator, ʿĪsā ibn Hishām dreams that a Pasha from the time of Muḥammad ʿAlī rose from the dead. Both set out on a journey through which ʿĪsā ibn Hishām takes the resurrected Pasha from a Cairo cemetery all the way to a Parisian cinema (section on visual images). The themes depicted in *Ḥadīth* are clearly a product of the author's era: the politics and society of Egypt at the time; courts and corruption in the legal system; the Westernization of culture; morality and so on. Characters include the people encountered by ʿĪsā ibn Hishām along the journey: the Pasha, the Friend, Donkeyman, Policeman, Dancer, Merchant, ʿUmda or village head, and others.

While the study of al-Muwayliḥī's book in relation to the novel can only be applied starting with the time when the fragments were rearranged into a whole, the story of how the book itself took shape is more relevant here. Roger Allen explains that *Ḥadīth* started as a series of articles for the column titled 'Fitra min al-Zaman (A Period of Time)', which run from November 1898 until 30 June 1899 before changing to 'Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām' (Allen 1992: 30).[31] Weekly readers of the newspaper must have come to expect 'Ḥaddathanā ʿĪsā ibn Hishām'… and associate the formula with al-Muwayliḥī long before he created the figure of the Pasha (Allen 1992: 33–4).

Unlike al-Masʿadī's character names, which are recognizable as citations from classical Arabic sources, *Ḥadīth* strikes the reader of *adab* and modern fiction alike by the complete absence of proper names of characters, with the exception of ʿĪsā ibn Hishām. Reference to ʿĪsā ibn Hishām here is obvious, making the genealogy of the narrative explicit.[32] Moreover, the intent of the book is flagged as *'ibra'*, a moral, which is here conveyed through humour, i.e. edification through entertainment, or, in the language of *adab*, seriousness (*jidd*) through jest (*hazl*). Al-Muwayliḥī introduces the first edition by confirming the connection when he points out that he uses an 'imaginary and figurative form' to convey the shortcomings which 'should be avoided and the qualities which should be maintained' (Allen 1992: 103).[33]

At the ideological level, al-Muwayliḥī's artistic path appears quite safe as far as the form is concerned. (In practice, the writer was rather harassed as a result of his criticism of British rule before he wrote the *Ḥadith*, and criticized for his satirical treatment of religious Shaykhs and princes after that.) He walked in a path paved by influential predecessors (al-Hamadhānī, al-Ḥarīrī, al-Jāḥiẓ and, closer to his time, al-Shidyāq and al-Yāzijī).[34] The legitimacy of the narrative was beyond doubt. The choice of narrative form by al-Muwayliḥī is indicative of an intellectual stance towards both the West and *turāth*. His description of people's undiscriminating attitude towards the West, resulting in the scenes of degraded morality portrayed in the chapters on bars and dancing clubs provides evidence of this. He suggests that the main 'cause for all this change is the rapid penetration of Western civilization into Eastern countries and the way in which people of the East are behaving like the blind, emulating Western people in every conceivable aspect of their lives' (Allen 1992: 378).

Arab critics recognized the significance of *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* early on. In Tunisia, al-Masʿadi's colleague in the journal *al-Mabāḥith*, Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Salām, saw in the book a reflection of its time at a number of levels: 'It is a crossroad between

rhyming prose and free prose in style; the modern story and *maqāmah* in form; and the old and the new in theme. It tries to do in the literary field what al-Afghānī and ʿAbdū have done in the religious sphere: to lift off the veil which afflicted the Muslim community the way it afflicts any nation in the face of a new victorious civilization' (*al-Mabāḥith* 1946: 4). The canonical history of the Arabic novel has given *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* a prominent position. It has been seen as fulfilling a 'bridging function' (Allen 1995: 31) and as an 'an early form of the Egyptian novel' (Moosa 1983: 106). My argument here is that accounts of the rise of the novel in Arabic literature have underestimated, even de-emphasized, the role played by traditional narrative genres, such as *maqāma*, in this process. It would be more fruitful, I think, to study the change in terms of novelization.[35] In this, attention should be given to the interface between what Moretti refers to as 'local form', the European novel and local reality. The novelization of *maqāma* as a literary phenomenon and a cultural project, I want to argue, is a more productive approach to this key juncture in Arabic literary and intellectual history. On the narrative side, I must stress, that such study should be vigilant to two factors. One of these is the risk of a novel-centred approach, which would be limited by the novel as the dominant paradigm. The other risk has to do with a *maqāma*-centred approach. As the discussion of *ḥadīth* as narrative convention undertaken here hopes to have shown, form should be stretched to mean local narrative convention, of which *maqāma* is but one specific manifestation. Otherwise, literary history becomes restricted to a study of genres. I would want to stress that novelization of *maqāma* is also a cultural project. One of its features is ushering the domination of prose over poetry. It was also a move from an Arabic genre, *maqāma*, to a Western mode. Ideologically, it was natural that *nahda* used *maqāma*. The preservation and protection of Arabic language from foreign intervention was needed.[36] Al-Yāzijī did just that in his *Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn* in the middle of the nineteenth century, by focusing on the language. Al-Shidyāq would add the element of *riḥla*. He used *maqāma* but began to move away from it through parody, calling *maqāma*, in a play on the meaning of *qāma* or to stand up, *muqaʿada* (made to sit down) and *muqayyama* (made to stand up) and *mamshiyya* (made to walk). He also played with the distinctive phrase of his predecessor al-Hariri, 'ḥaddatha al-Ḥārith ibn Humam,' by changing it into 'ḥadasa al-Ḥāris Ibn Hathām.'[37] In such a context, al-Muwayliḥī's book was expected, almost inevitable: the narrative convention was alive; a combination of *maqāma*, the rising prose of journalistic reporting and *riḥla* was bound to occur.

Ḥadith ʿĪsā ibn Hishām became the text to emulate. It novelized *maqāma* by opening it up to contemporary life and to other genres. The impact and popularity of the book are difficult to overstate. What may be called novelistic order was to dominate Arabic letters from the 1930s onwards. For al-Muwayliḥī, the use of *maqāma* reflects, as a form, the dilemma expressed in his book, namely, what to take and what to reject from the invading culture of the West, the dilemma of *al-nahda* intellectual period in relationship to Western culture. Narrative convention meant a meaningful relationship with the past and a way of keeping it alive. This is the ideology of *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* as form. Its descendents or genealogy are traceable in the development of the Arabic novel away from *maqāma* and closer to the European model.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, together with this attitude, emphasis on simplification of the language and the need to focus on portraying 'reality' would dominate the critical discourse. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century *nahda* intellectuals developed a pudic look at the culture. This movement expressed itself in bowdlerizing classical works deemed 'objectionable'. Al-Muwayliḥī's friend and mentor Muḥammad ʿAbdu did not hesitate to admit that he had purged al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmat* when he edited the collection in 1889, cutting off in 'al-Maqāma al-Shāmiyya', deleting sentences from 'al-Maqāma al-Rusāfiyya' and discarding words from 'another *maqāma*'.[38] Morality is cited as his excuse. Proponents of modernity, such as Ḥusayn, despite their leading role in spreading new ideas and literary trends, may have contributed to limiting the creative engagement with narrative tradition. Ḥusayn's assessment of al-Masʿadī's *al-Sudd* bears witness to this. Such order was occasionally disturbed by individual attempts at a different narrative. The lineage of *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayrah Qāl …*, on the other hand, runs parallel to this history, intertwines with it at times, and remains largely uncharted. A better understanding of how Arabic culture has responded to modernity will remain incomplete unless the wide range of ways in which it has actively engaged its own past is better charted.

3

THE APPEAL OF THE SUBLIME: TRAGEDY AND THE *QURʾĀN*

With firm and careful calligraphy he [Averroes] added these lines to the manuscript: 'Aristu (Aristotle) gives the names of tragedy to panegyrics and that of comedy to satires and anathemas. Admirable tragedies and comedies abound in the pages of the Koran and in the *mohalacas* of the sanctuary.

<div align="right">

J. L. Borges, 'Averroes' Search'

</div>

Bewildered, searching how things stand with me,
I ask to-day, "To-morrow what shall be?"
There is no certainty: my mind but tries
Its utmost in conjecture and surmise.

<div align="right">

Al-Maʿarrī, *al-Luzūmiyyāt*

</div>

This section of the book is about intersections. At the literary level, it deals with the interface between tragedy and parody. Both involve, inevitably but in very different ways, the past. Tragedy can be about the unbridgeable gap between present and past, or the past as necessity, whereas parody inevitably engages an existing work of art, therefore a past or tradition, in ways that range from mocking to veneration. At the cultural level, this section deals with the confluence of Western and Islamic sources into al-Masʿadī's writings, particularly in the play, *al-Sudd* (The Dam). I use the term confluence, to steer away from the much-abused notion of influence and avoid a hierarchical classification of texts, whether in terms of aesthetics or in terms of culture. From a semiotic point of view, confluence highlights the dynamics of encoding as well as decoding texts. It makes possible the study of how various sources interact in a text, and are shaped by that very interaction.[1] One of my other main concerns is how al-Masʿadī engages Islamic conceptions of human fate in the construction of his play and how this relates to modern Arabic literature as a whole.

Drama in al-Masʿadī is not restricted to *al-Sudd*. In *Mawlid al-Nisyān* (Genesis of Forgetfulness), Ranjahād seduces the 'wise' physician Madyan to give up his search for a drug which would help him defeat Time, to shun his companion and the hospice he runs and to accept her lead in a journey of self-discovery.[2] When they near the ultimate goal, Ranjahād unmasks her true identity. At the gate of Salhawa, the spring

which gets its name from a plant called *salhawa*, known to give *nisyān* (forgetfulness) and *salwa* (consolation), Ranjahād 'explodes with laughter, falls apart and vanishes away' (94). Ranjahād is not a guide to Truth but a genius of illusion, a sorceress. Madyan raises his head to find himself alone in the dark forest. When he returns home, his companion Layla inquires about his trip but he says nothing. Madyan is silenced by the turn of events, struck dumb by the realization that what he thought was an epic journey through the far reaches of the soul was no more than a staged comedy of fate. Madyan the wise (*al-ḥakīm*) realizes he was merely a fool. This comedy staged by Ranjahād within the narrative offers a glimpse into al-Masʿadī's use of drama and treatment of the idea of human fate. A more ample exploration of the genre and the theme dominate the writer's most famous play, *al-Sudd*.

The play is, in part, a dramatization of the conflict between a strong-willed man, Ghaylān, and Ṣāhabbāʾ, a goddess with a fully institutionalized religion, including a gospel, a prophet, priests, worshippers and rituals.[3] Ṣāhabbāʾ's power is overwhelming. She dominates the people of the valley and controls the forces of nature. Her followers, on the other hand, live by her 'Gospel', which is designated as such in the text. She has also her skeptics, as it will become apparent below. In the opposite camp stands Ghaylān, a human with limited power but a set of strong ideas and ambitious goals. His philosophy in life is based chiefly on the autonomy of individual willpower and freedom of action. He draws his strength largely from his own determination. Ghaylān benefits from relative control over his workers and the unconditional support of a reliable 'spirit' named Mayāra. Among Ghaylān's most outspoken skeptics is his companion Maymūna. She, however, does not ally herself with Ṣāhabbāʾ but merely appreciates and even fears the power of the goddess.

The two sides live in a state of real as well as ideological conflict. They dispute the future of the valley: Ghaylān wants to build a dam and develop the land in defiance of the Ṣāhabbāʾ's religion, whose fundamental values are aridity and drought. The conflict is introduced through Voices; some of these speak on behalf of man, others represent the goddess (Scene One). The people of the valley worship the Goddess Ṣāhabbāʾ, and praise her power:

> The rock Goddess.
> Goddess of barrenness.
> Goddess of aridity.
> She dwells in the mountains.
> *Halhabā halhabbā*!
> Praise to Ṣāhabbāʾ.

<div align="right">(al-Masʿadī 1992: 53)[4]</div>

Ghaylān pokes fun at the local religion, accusing its prophet of speaking gibberish (*raṭāna*). He believes that the people of the valley are incapable of action and creativity because they are under the grip of a religion that deprives them of their will. In order to correct this, he decides to build a dam, irrigate the land and create a prosperous

life in the valley. 'You will see then,' he says to Maymūna, 'how they will shun Ṣāhabbā', the sun and the drought' (58). Rituals of Ṣāhabbā's religion in the form of incantations, songs and dance are performed by a chorus of monks (the whole of Scene Two), who are 'the guardians of the house of fire and water' (67). They dance around a water bowl and 'call for water to turn into fire, for dams to crumble and for Ghaylān's hands to be amputated' (71). Ṣāhabbā' gives a sign of her power and the water catches fire. The ritual ends with signs of gratitude to the goddess.

In Scene Three, Maymūna dreams that the dam has crumbled in a devastating quake. She says, 'I had a frightening and awesome vision of untold horror! I saw a dam completely made up of skulls arranged in the most perfect order' (79). She describes water gushing through holes previously filled up with human eyes, noses and mouths. In the dream she calls Ghaylān for help, but a voice replies: 'You're calling him but his skull has not yet arrived' (80). The awesome quake shakes the mountain and swallows the river and the entire valley. In Scene Four, we learn more about the goddess. The events take place in the absence of Ghaylān and Maymūna but are witnessed by the omnipresent Mule. Three stones are transformed into three young women (*jawārī*) who engage in a discussion of the conflict between the goddess and 'the strangers' (Ghaylān and his staff) and muse about the purpose, vanity and arrogance of human beings. The Second Stone says: 'Humans are fond of gathering and collecting, as if they were narrators or storytellers (*ruwāt aw muḥaddithūn*) (87). She claims that the real aim of their effort may be the search for themselves (88). The Stones provide information on the progress of the dam and express their belief in the futility of human effort to change reality (91). They also give a full sample of 'Ṣāhabbā's gospel', which will be explored in detail below.

As work on the dam progresses, conflicts sharpen and tensions increase. Maymūna accuses Ghaylān of uselessly trying to hide his inability to face the truth. She says: 'Only those who fear transparency (*tajarrud*) and cower in the face of naked truth need a dam' (105). A glimpse of the battle between Ghaylān and his 'enemies' emerges from Maymūna's account of the setbacks that befell the construction of the dam during the intervening months. We learn that the tools were stolen; that a fever killed half of the work force; that a flood carried away two whole months' worth of work; that a shipment of iron poles vanished; and that Ghaylān was temporarily disabled by a fever. We learn as well how Ghaylān and his men fought to overcome each setback (106–7). Maymūna now fears a further disaster and urges Ghaylān to avoid the dam for fear of death. But Ghaylān remains defiant, insisting that the 'story' is not over yet.

Nevertheless, despite being openly defiant, Ghaylān is gradually driven to impatience and anxiety. Maymūna urges him to be content with the process: 'Finishing an act means killing it. Let the dam remain incomplete' (117). But he responds that he is seeking 'the moment of perfect creation' (117). His precedent in this quest is the story of Asāl and Nā'ila where Asāl leaves his lover at the height of their love in order to seek a higher experience (119–120). Maymūna in turn responds by citing the story of Hāmān whose search for perfect existence drove him to madness (120–23). At this stage, Mayāra makes her first appearance. She sides with Ghaylān

and lends him new impetus and energy to forge ahead with the project. Ghaylān promises to subject the voices, their prophet and their goddess to human will (134). His determination appears boundless: 'Momentum (*wathba*) is within us!' (134). With this, the play reaches its climax and the conflict its height.

  With the help of Mayāra, Ghaylān forces the people of the valley, their prophet and the stones to accede to his will. He appears more defiant than ever, certain that the completion of the dam is imminent (139). But Maymūna warns against foul play by the workers and foresees destruction (140). When she senses that Ghaylān's resolve is unwavering, she resorts to sarcasm: 'Let us then have a feast! (…) And I have found the meat. Let us slaughter the Mule!' (142). The Mule reacts with alarm: 'The mule jumps up, Maymūna laughs and joins Ghaylān inside the tent' (142). Later the same afternoon, songs and voices are heard coming from the valley as a devastating storm breaks out (this is fully described in the stage directions in Scene Eight). Phrases from Ṣāhabbāʾ's gospel, first recited in Scene Four, are repeated here as if to confirm that the gospel was an oracle. However, conflicting visions of the dam remain unchanged:

> Ghaylān. (*to Maymūna*): The dam is ascending! The dam is rising up!
> Maymūna. The dam is in pieces! The dam is crumbling to the ground! (148)

Maymūna describes the approaching storm and sees in it the end of Ghaylān's project. At this stage, the dam is destroyed and Ṣāhabbāʾ seems to have the final word. Yet the play takes one more turn. Mayāra declares seeing a light amidst the chaos beckoning her and Ghaylān:

> Ghaylān and Mayāra (*embracing*). We shall rise up and open for our heads a door in the sky! (*They fly away, carried by the storm*).
>   Maymūna (*looking at them disappearing in the storm*). Now they have reached their destination and final residence.
>
> (149)

Maymūna stays on the ground while the Mule remains chained to a rock:

> Maymūna (*declares*). "Earth! I have discovered Earth!"
> (*She descends towards the valley in the dark. She thinks the valley is within reach but the ground keeps pulling away from her, as if it was being endlessly carved out. The mule brays and screams in fright, stomping the ground. But he remains tied up to his fate, chained to a stone facing the storm, thunder, lightning and earthquake.*)
>
> (150)

From a comparative perspective, the brief summary outlined above evokes some well-known antecedents in Western literature. Greek tragedy and existentialist fiction immediately come to mind. The Arab reader may find echoes of the *Qurʾān* and

references to known historical figures. Here I will be concerned with identifying the key sources from both cultures and how they enter the fabric of the text. What is the effect of this on the whole? And how does a text, which brings together these seemingly distant ideas and styles, fit within Arabic writing?

Parody between text, reader and writer

A literary text is a 'multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (Barthes 1977: 146). The writer's task is to play with all these origins and remain somewhat outside all of them. This is how Bakhtin explains the work of the writer:

> The author utilizes now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly to either of them; he makes use of this verbal give-and-take, this dialogue of languages at every point in his work, in order that he himself might remain as it were neutral with regard to language, a third party in a quarrel between two people.
>
> (Bakhtin 1981: 314)

But once these languages and speeches are in one text, they interact in ways that may go beyond any authorial intention. Bakhtin adds: 'Another's discourse, when introduced into a speech context, enters the speech that frames it not in a mechanical bond but in a chemical union (on the semantic and the emotionally expressive level); the degree of dialogized influence, one on the other, can be enormous' (340). Dialogue between speeches and languages in a literary text takes various forms.

Parody is perhaps one of the most pervasive manifestations of this dialogue. Bakhtin sees formal parody as a representation of form. In a parody, the parodied discourse becomes an 'object of representation,' an 'image' of itself (51). In other words, to take an example from the text at hand, a parody of the *Qurʾān* is by definition a representation of it. In such parody, the *Qurʾān* is not only recognizable but also represented, i.e. subject to forms and techniques of representation. Barthes asks: 'What could a parody be that did not advertise itself as such? This is the problem facing modern writing: how (to) breach the wall of utterance, the wall of origin, the wall of ownership' (Barthes 1974: 45). In Bakhtinian terms, the question is how to appropriate the word of another. In the Islamic context, the task reaches its ultimate challenge when the intertext (the word of another) is the word of God, the *Qurʾān*. Drawing on a variety of theoretical sources, from Bakhtin to Bloom, Linda Hutcheon succeeds in demonstrating that the role of the reader or decoder of texts and artefacts is necessary if parody is to work. This is a complex matter. For us to be able to talk about parody at all, the reader must recognize the parodied material as well as the process or technique of parody. In part, then, parody is a function of the receiver. (But this is true only in part since some texts 'advertise' themselves as parodies.) Hutcheon introduces an interesting perspective on Modernist texts such as Eliot's *Waste Land*, arguing that 'demand on the reader' is rather great, but is less so than in Dante's work. Is this elitism? She argues that, on the

contrary, it simply means that modernist texts put 'trust' in the reader. But the focus on the text or the reader tell only part of the story of how parody works in a literary text.

Hutcheon defines parody as 'a form of repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity' (Hutcheon 2000: xii). It can nonetheless show veneration of the parodied material. For the reader and analyst, parody is primarily, 'intensely context – and discourse – dependent' (xiv). One needs to recognize the reference as well as the parodic intent. One of Hutcheon's key contributions to this debate is to renew interest in the encoder. By focusing on what she calls *énonciation* or the 'contextualized production and reception of parodic texts' (24), she goes beyond the reader and the text. She observes: 'Although my theory of parody is intertextual in its inclusion of both the decoder and the text, its enunciative context is even broader: both the encoding and the sharing of codes between producer and receiver are central' (37). In other words, we must deal with the question of competence on the part of the reader and a presumed strategy of handling the parodied material on the part of the writer, moving 'beyond those text/reader modules of intertextuality to include encoded and then inferred intentionality and semiotic competence' (55). There is a sociology and a politics emanating from looking at texts in this way: we are faced with the question of handling the past, not only as text or style, but also as discourse. 'Through interaction with satire, through the pragmatic need for encoder and decoder to share codes, and through the paradox of authorized transgression, the parodic appropriation of the past reaches out beyond textual introversion and aesthetic narcissism to address the "text's situation in the world"' (116).

Parody is then one form of engaging the past, one of the tools used by writers to cope with the 'anxiety of influence,' of subduing the predecessor or the dominant text. It can act as a way of exercising control in the 'encoding act', of 'emancipation' from the grip of the tradition (96). Parody is one mode of 'coming to terms' with the texts of that 'rich and intimidating legacy of the past' (4). As I have suggested in my analysis of narrative convention in al-Masʿadī, parody can help fend off the allure of the past heritage (*turāth*). But while resisting the past by incorporating it into the present (the text), parody establishes connections with that very past. It manages to 'inscribe continuity while permitting critical distance and change' (102). In this paradoxical relationship, parody can destroy the 'aura' of an original text, but it can also enhance its appeal. Parody has the ability to delight and confound (xvii). It includes both 'transgressive and authorizing impulses' (xvii). If we do not 'hear the echoes' of the past, historical ironies (of both difference and continuity) will be lost (xiv). In a text like al-Masʿadī's, saturated with reference to the past, this would be a great loss indeed. Bakkār makes this wry remark about the character of the Mule in al-Masʿadi's *al-Sudd* (about whom I will say more shortly): 'Readers should be wary of the Mule because he is the reader's image in the story, if he/she were to watch life from the balcony, content with the pursuit of daily bread, as if life's tragedies were of no concern. Or if they read the pages of this book and, being unable to grasp their meaning, moved their jaws to wonder, "should I respond or not to the anguished scream (*naʿīq*) of the Mule?" 'The braying (*nahīq*) would then give way to sobbing (*shahīq*)', in despair at the loss of the message (Al-Masʿadī 1992: 24).

If the small cottage industry of Masʿadian studies is anything to go by, the writer seems to provide critics with what I call 'the pleasure of decoding', as well as with value. Here, I combine Barthes' notion of pleasure of the text and Hutcheon's insistence on the decoding aspect involved in parody and irony. Ṭarshūna, the key authority on al-Masʿadī, sums up the reception of *al-Sudd*: 'The book was considered existentialist and deeply Sufi; defeatist and precursor of a victory; embedded deep in *turāth* and anticipating modernity; the book of belief and the book of denial of all religions; opaque and crystal clear; linked to life between the two World Wars and abstract with no connection to reality; local and universal; influenced by the Muʿtazila and by Nietzsche's *Übermensch*; a novel, a play, a tragedy, an epic' (Ṭarshūna 1997: 116). Critics appear to revel in unearthing layers of meaning; discovering obscure references, expounding interpretive perspectives, finding hooks on which to hang their ideologies, politics or critical skill. Criticism can also be value-giving for both text and critic. In Tunisia, tackling al-Masʿadī has been a right of passage, a marker of achievement as well as a guarantor of circulation. Al-Masʿadī's text needs explication, introduction, interpretation; all of which gave rise to introductory readers and compendia. Whether this translated into profit or not is a different question in view of the problematic state of readership, book printing and distribution in the country. Circulation is, however, sure if only to satisfy the needs of students who have to read al-Masʿadī as part of their school curriculum. And the more the secondary literature, the explications and the interpretations, the less intelligible becomes the work itself, if not less read altogether. This creates a noise rather than discourse; and the louder the noise, the less audible the voice of the work, increasing its mystery and aura.

Decoding the work is, however, a rather taxing affair. As a hybrid text, it raises the question of interpreting hybrid texts in general. For instance, does the reader have to be hybrid? On the Arabic side, for all its apparent elitism and learned language, the allusions are rather easily accessible, at least on a first level of reading. Arab readers are likely to recognize the *Qurʾān*, *ḥadīth* and historical figures because they are part of their standard repertoire. Whether the reader recognizes the process (parody, irony, etc.) is another matter, which requires more than the memorization of the holy text or knowledge of the best known Islamic icons. This is the lure of the text. It attracts the reader back to a recognizable reference, whether it is the name (Abū Hurayra, Ghaylān), the narrative convention (*ḥadīth*, *khabar*), the rhythm of the language, or the *Qurʾān*. Things are more complicated when, for instance, the text parodies the *Qurʾān* as well as its parodies such as the one written by the false prophet, Musaylima, as I explain below. But in *al-Sudd*, echoes of the past do not come only from the Islamic tradition.

Goethe, Ibsen and the Greeks

There are some obvious parallels between al-Masʿadī's play and Greek classical tragedy; and critics have been quick to point out some of the similarities. I will return to these at some length. Less apparent, and less commented on, however, are the linkages between al-Masʿadī's text and more recent Western drama. I single out, for their strong presence in al-Masʿadī's thinking and style, Goethe's *Faust* and Ibsen's *Master Builder* (1892).[5]

Goethe occupies a privileged place in al-Masʿadī's art and ideas. Echoes of *Faust* spread throughout al-Masʿadī's fiction, and in a diffuse manner, rather not unlike Goethe's own ideas about literature and East and West, which find resonance in al-Masʿadī's non-fictional writings. There are echoes of *Faust* throughout al-Masʿadī's fiction, not just in *al-Sudd*, which makes Goethe a major source in his work. In *Mawlid*, we have the basic make up of the Faust myth. There is a physician searching for a potion; witchcraft as well as Mephistopheles are brought together in the character, Ranjahād, the sorceress and devil-figure who is Madyan's guide. The themes of limitations of reason, the power of necessity, and defiance of these limitations are played out in al-Masʿadī's work, most explicitly in *Mawlid*. Like Faust's, in the end Madyan's soul flies up to join the 'world of the dead' (al-Masʿadī 1974: 114–115). In *Ḥaddatha*, Abū Hurayra is guided by a friend out of his settled life to discover the joys and excitement of living, just like the disguised Mephisto leads Faust to 'feel released and free'. And like Faust, al-Masʿadī's characters experience what has been called 'tragic joy'.[6] Abū Hurayra laughs in joy as he disappears down the slope into the abyss while Ghaylān's last laughter resonates in the face of the storm; a laughter which is 'solitary, hysterical, verging on sobbing', to borrow Eagleton's words (Eagleton 2003: 105). It expresses the tragic realization that the experiencing of forgetfulness and freedom from the past by Madyan, Abū Hurayra, Ghaylān and Faust can only be fleeting, and at the sacrifice of life itself. But the reward and redemption are in trying: 'Whoe'er aspires unweariedly/ Is not beyond redeeming' (Goethe 1890: 365).

Ḥaddatha and *Mawlid* describe in more details journeys, which recall Faust's own. Faust like Abū Hurayra goes through experiences of love, learning and society, but remains thirsty for a higher experience. *Al-Sudd*, however, shows a concentrated instance of this journey, particularly as it is expressed through Ghaylān. He and Faust bear similarities in outlook, aims and fate. The driving idea in both is that the human being is endowed with some of God's qualities. Faust confirms:

> I, image of the Godhead, who began –
> Deeming Eternal Truth secure in nearness –
> To sun myself in heavenly light and clearness,
> And laid aside the earthly man.

<div align="right">(20)</div>

In the 'Prologue in Heaven', Mephistopheles complains to God that man would abuse the privilege:

> Life somewhat better might content him,
> But for the gleam of heavenly light which Thou hast lent him:
> He calls it Reason – thence his powers increased,
> To be far beastier than any beast.

<div align="right">(Goethe 1890: 8)</div>

Ghaylān and Faust attempt to make use of their power to control untamed forces of nature, water in both cases, pushed by the desire to reach their potential as

representatives of human will and power. Ghaylān is determined to subdue the land, the people and their goddess to his will and 'impregnate' the barren land with life (al-Masʿadī 1992: 58).

Both do also want to create fertile land for the good of the people. After amassing a wealthy estate for himself, Faust discovers the meaning of productive work for the people. His blindness at the hands of Care leads him to regain insight:

> Seize now your tools, with spade and shovel press!!
> The work traced out must be swift success.
> Quick diligence, severest ordering
> The most superb reward shall bring;
> And, that the mighty work completed stands,
> One mind suffices for a thousand hands.
>
> (Goethe 1890: 353)

Single-minded and idiosyncratic men, Faust and Ghaylān share a perception of reality, which differs radically from the people around them. Ghaylān sees his dam rising high and standing firm as it was being swept away by the storm, as Maymūna informs us (al-Masʿadī 1992: 148). Faust thought that the digging of his grave was the toil to build his grand moat:

> Faust. How I rejoice to hear the clattering spade!
> It is the crowd, for me in service moiling,
> Till Earth be reconciled to toiling,
> Till the proud waves be stayed,
> And the sea girded with a rigid zone.
>
> (Goethe 1890: 354)

Mephistopheles corrects the picture:

> When they me the information gave,
> They spake not of moat, but of – a *grave*.
>
> (354)

In the plays themselves, the atmosphere and signs of a fateful end recall each other.

> Faust. There croaks a bird: what croaks he? Evil fate!
> By Superstition constantly ensnared,
> It grows to us, and warns, and is declared.
>
> (350)

The sign shakes Faust's certainty and makes him 'agitated.' In *al-Sudd*, a black bird passes by twice as Ghaylān and Maymūna contemplate the beginning of their enterprise:

> Maymūna: Let us go inside the tent. I hate night birds, filled with darkness.
> Ghaylān: The tent? Shouldn't we pitch it first? These are superstition and
> pessimism?
>
> (al-Masʿadī 1992: 61)

Some of the imagery is strikingly similar: the three spirits in *al-Sudd* have equivalent in *Faust* in the shape of four grey women called Guilt, Want, Care and Necessity, who can metamorphose into creatures of thin air.[7] In fact, other than the absence of scenes of afterlife in *al-Sudd*, the essential elements of plot are shared by the two plays. Al-Masʿadī's writings do not concern themselves with images of purgatory and the afterlife: it is as if to say that life on earth is hell enough.[8] Tragedies are played out down here, after the Fall, a detail of significant import to any notion of history in al-Masʿadī's work. In this, he is more akin to Ibsen, particularly in *Master Builder*.

At the stylistic level, al-Masʿadī and Ibsen use undertones to convey parallel meanings. Language in both texts plays key role in conveying the metaphysical and philosophical undertones of the works, some of which are ideas both writers seem to share, as I suggest below. In addition, most events in both plays are described rather than performed. Action and violence in al-Masʿadī takes place off stage. Maymūna tells us about the setbacks, which plagued the project. She also narrates 'untold horror' of history, which she sees in a dream. Moreover, parallels between the two protagonists in aims and in outlook are rather striking. Solness is a builder aiming to erect the ultimate structure. He is urged on by the young Hilde who inspires him to defy age and regain his glory when he used to climb up churches to put in the wreath on the weathercock. He obliges at the end, despite his wife's attempt to reason him out of the perilous adventure. The linkages between the two builders are important: both want to build in defiance of higher powers and in order to ascertain human will. ('Solness: And as I stood high up there, right at the top, and placed the wreath over the weathercock, I said to Him: "Listen to me, mighty One! Henceforth I, too, want to be a free master builder. Free in my field, as You are in Yours. I never want to build churches for You again. Only homes, for people to live in"' (Ibsen 1980: 314).) Ghaylān's goal is to defy the goddess and turn arid land into fertile fields. Likewise, the 'castles in the air' built by Solness recall Ghaylān's dam, which he sees as 'ascending in the air' (Scene Eight).

Mayāra, just like Hilde, who has been nurturing the moment to see Solness since she was ten years old also has been inspired by Ghaylān and now comes to inspire him. She says, 'I waited for you since my childhood and the beginning of my life. I waited until I almost gave up. … Now the hour of the great march, of solid creation and action has come' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 133). Both Solness and Ghaylān aim at building and reaching the highest point. Solness puts the wreath at the weathercock. Ghayān looks at his creation in a similar manner: 'Do you see that summit, high like a needle. When the sun stands upon it, like a proud and stupid peacock, we will put the last stone in the dam' (145). Solness ends up falling from high but only after 'doing the impossible', climbing to the top of the building defying old age and vertigo.

82

Ghaylān's dam crumbles but he does not give up his vision. Both Ghaylān and Solness are driven to build and create. Their drive overwhelms the events of the plays. They are also inspirational leaders, although Solness is rather manipulative and Machiavellian whereas Ghaylān is a man of his own creation, self-reliant, and staunchly independent. In this he finds root not in Ibsen or Goethe but in Greek tragedy.

Bakkār draws a parallel between Greek tragedy and the conception of the fateful enterprise undertaken by Ghaylān (al-Masʿadī 1992: 22, 26). Ṭarshūna, in a chapter devoted to the arts in *al-Sudd*, sees the presence of symphony, painting, dance, and narrative in the book in part as evidence of parallels with classical tragedy. He says, 'the voices, the stones, and the monks represent the Chorus. And if we add to these the element of poetry, which we demonstrated, and the element of conflict between Ghaylān and Ṣāhabbāʾ, i.e. between two contradictory wills, we can find the components of tragedy in its Greek sense' (Ṭarshūna 1997: 100).[9] He suggests that *al-Sudd* resembles tragedy in its form but departs from the Greek model by opening up new possibilities at the end of the play (55). Al-Masʿadī himself often reiterated the 'influence' of Greek and French classical drama on his work: "I can say that one of the deepest influences which marked me are Greek thought, the Greek idea of tragedy and the conception of human destiny as lived, analysed and admirably represented by (Greek) philosophy and literature'" (Omri 2001: 304). He sees *al-Sudd* as the tragedy of the human being's rebellion against the gods and against death: 'Ghaylān wants to produce, wants to do what the gods did not want him to do. His tragedy at the end is that he is sentenced to something human, namely, death or impermanence. He does not last and what he creates does not last either' (Omri 2001: 304).

The myth of Prometheus and its dramatic representation by Aeschylus find strong and significant echoes in *al-Sudd*, perhaps more than any other non-Arabic source.[10] Affinities and differences between Ghaylān and Prometheus as he appears in the myth are particularly instructive. Both champion human causes and endeavour to teach humans the arts. They encourage them to improve their lives through the arts and constructive action. Both are independent thinkers and steadfast leaders who dare to imagine a better world and rebel against gods. Their fate is similar in that both endure harsh punishment, Ghaylān through repeated failure and Prometheus by being chained to a rock. There are other, less obvious, similarities between Ghaylān and Prometheus. The latter knew of the secret marriage of Thetis but refused to tell Zeus, who wanted to marry her himself. In *al-Sudd*, the Mule knows a secret of the gods, through the Stones, which he plans to divulge to his 'god Ghaylān'. In this particular instance, a substitution occurs by which Ghaylān replaces Zeus. But the secret is never revealed because Ghaylān and the Mule do not 'communicate' in the play. The secret itself, however, just like the one known to Prometheus, represents a threat to the god's authority and power. Finally, the end of *al-Sudd* recalls the myth: like Prometheus, the Mule remains chained to a rock.[11] Their differences are more cultural. Ghaylān is mortal whereas Prometheus is not. The nature of their action is the same but the means are different. Likewise, their end differs slightly in that Ghaylān flies away while Prometheus is freed.

Beyond Ghaylān and Prometheus themselves, there are further parallels between al-Masʿadī's play and the myth. In the Greek myth Pandora (all gifts) unleashes evils

and disease on humans but keeps Hope in the jar 'as consolation for men'. In *al-Sudd*, Ṣāhabbāʾ unleashes disease which affect the workers and Ghaylān himself (al-Masʿadī 1992: 106–7). Hope finds its equivalent in imagination (*al-khayāl*), which drives Ghaylān and guides his will (al-Masʿadī 1992: 48–9). Zeus and Ṣāhabbāʾ share few features. The Greek god, just like al-Masʿadī's goddess, commands the forces of nature. He is the 'cloud gatherer, the thunderer on high; hurler of thunderbolts' (Howatson and Chilvers 1993: 574). A Voice defines Ṣāhabbāʾ thus:

> She is scorching fire (*fa hiyya ṣayhūd*)
> Thundering thunder (*raʿdun ruʿdūd*)
> Mighty destroyer (*wa falaqun julmūd*)
> Goddess of thunderbolts (*dhāt al-rawāʿid al-rabbah*).
>
> (al-Masʿadī 1992: 52)[12]

Both gods dwell on top of the mountains; and both oppose improvements to the state of humans.

Beyond their reliance on the same myth, a comparison between the tragedy *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus (circa 525–circa 456 BC) and *al-Sudd* reveals a number of other parallels.[13] In the Greek play, we learn that Fire is the attribute of gods. The transgression committed by Prometheus is to allow humans, referred to in the play as 'the transient or temporary', to possess an attribute of the eternal, the gods. Ghaylān's transgression is that he wants to possess the power of creation, even 'perfect creation', which is an exclusive attribute of God. In addition, Maymūna recalls Oceanus who attempts to reason Prometheus into accepting his limitation in the face of Zeus. He says: 'Heed my advice and refrain from rebellion. Remember that the king (Zeus) is a fierce tyrant' (*al-Mabāḥith* 1946, 20: 13). Maymūna attempts to curb Ghaylān's defiance throughout the play, to no avail. Both act out of compassion for the rebel and show realism and contentedness with fate. Finally, the end of *Prometheus Bound* recalls the ending of *al-Sudd*. Prometheus says, 'Earth is shaking; thunder is roaring; lightning is sparking; storms are raising dust; gusting winds are blowing and twirling; the sea and the sky are becoming one. Zeus has sent me this storm to fill my heart with fright' (*al-Mabāḥith* 26, 10). In *al-Sudd*, a similar storm is unleashed by Ṣāhabbāʾ to destroy the dam and put an end to Ghaylān's transgression: 'We ordered storms, thunder, lightning, quakes and cataclysm to explode and rumble. We sent a lightning bolt which split open the center of the earth and injected life in it' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 147–8).

In summary, therefore, *al-Sudd* draws on Greek mythology and literature for its ideas and form. At the formal level, it can be seen as working loosely within Aristotle's definition of tragedy. It represents a 'serious, ample and complete action' (Aristotle 1942: 11).[14] The protagonist is an individual whose 'character' and 'thinking' stand out (12). Despite the opposing overwhelming power, he is defiant of obstacles and determined to carry out his own will. The play includes elements familiar in tragedy such as the Chorus, singing and dancing. Also echoed in *al-Sudd* is Goethe's exploration of the theme of human limitations and potential in *Faust*. Human tireless

endeavour and endless aspiration redeem Faust's soul in Goethe's play while Ghaylān, or at least the creative part of him, ascends to the sky at the end of *al-Sudd*. Yet, neither Greek mythology and classical tragedy nor Goethe's play nor Ibsen alone explains all the stylistic as well as intellectual dimensions of *al-Sudd*. They are only part of the rich confluence of sources in the play. Alone they remain insufficient to account for the texture of a play pervaded by Islamic culture and pre-modern Arabic literary conventions. There are also Arabic and Islamic ideas and texts engaged by the play as well as elements of tragic thought and practice, which do not fit easily in an Islamic context. How are they treated in the text? And what is the significance of his tragic thought and practice in the context of modern Arabic culture?

Engaging the Qurʾān

The findings pertaining to the presence of *turāth*, or pre-modern Arabic literary and cultural heritage in *Ḥaddatha* could be extended to *al-Sudd*. The range is rather too wide to cover in a comprehensive manner; and allusions to and reworking of tradition do not carry equal significance. My focus here will be the engagement of the text with the *Qurʾān*, for two reasons. The first is that the relationship between literature and the Islamic holy text has been perhaps the single most contentious issue in Arabic writing, past and present. Secondly, al-Masʿadī engages the *Qurʾān* with a subtlety and confidence rarely matched by any other Arab playwright, as I will demonstrate below. In order to put this analysis in context, however, it will be necessary to see first how *al-Sudd* relates to *turāth* as a whole.

An extensive study on the subject is Khālid al-Gharībī's book, *Jadaliyyat al-ʾaṣāla wa al-Muʿaṣara* (The dialectic of Authenticity and Modernity) mentioned earlier. The author asserts that al-Masʿadī's texts stress authenticity by adopting and rewriting 'forms of discourse, tools of composition, structure of sentences, meaning of terms, structuring of events, dimensions of characters, and the meaning of time and space' (al-Gharībī 1994: 29). Yūsuf and Khadhr use narratology to study the presence and significance of *turāth* in *al-Sudd* in their book, *Dirāsāt fī khiṭāb al-Sudd al-masraḥī* (Studies in the Dramatic Discourse of al-Sudd). *Turāth* represents 'hypotexte' while *al-Sudd* is a 'hypertexte' (Yūsuf and Khadhr 1994: 65). The relationship between the two is that of 'palimpsest' (*ṭars*), by which a first writing is erased and replaced by a second writing but where the first remains recognizable (Yūsuf and Khadhr 1994: 65). The argument proposed by Yūsuf and Khadhr prepares the ground for my subsequent reading of the play and therefore deserves to be treated at some length.

Yūsuf and Khadhr show that *turāth* is present in a number of ways. One of these appears in the form of citation (*ʾistishhād*). For instance, part of verse 4 from the *Qurʾānic* chapter titled 'Yūsuf' (Joseph) is cited *verbatim* in Scene 3 (al-Masʿadī 1992: 75). The text reads: 'Father, I dreamt of eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrate themselves before me' (*The Koran* 12: 4). A second frequent reference is based on changing the source text. This is called *muʿāradha* (imitation) and takes two forms: formal imitation and imitation in content. At the formal level, this may be imitation of

the 'rhythm of *Qur'ān*', such as *saj'* (rhymed prose) and *tarjī'* (the repetition of a refrain). An example of pattern imitation is to be found in the reworking of Qur'ānic verse 18:21, which reads: 'Some will say, "The sleepers were three: their dog was the fourth." Others, guessing at the unknown, will say: "They were five: their dog was the sixth." And yet others, "Seven: their dog was the eighth"'. The Qur'ānic story of the cave sleepers appears twice in Scene 2 of *al-Sudd*. First, at the beginning of the scene: 'Six and a torch: the drum was the seventh. Then six: a water bowl was the seventh' (al-Mas'adī 1992: 69). And then towards the end: 'They leave: Six: the drum was the seventh. Then Six: the braying of the Mule was the seventh' (72). The pattern is kept but the numbers have been altered, which makes this not a direct citation but an imitation of pattern.[15] Imitation of content (*mu'ārada madmūniyya*) includes references to ideas contained in the *Qur'ān* such as natural forces or warning and punishment. These are common in the *Qur'ān* and the gospel of *Ṣāhābbā'*.

Indirect or implied presence of *turāth* in *al-Sudd* takes the form of transposition. For instance, the voices say: 'She is a long horn, a bull's horn, an elephant's trunk' (al-Mas'adī 1992: 52–3). The statement refers to a phrase attributed to the false prophet, Musaylima al-Kadhdhāb ('The elephant. Beware of the elephant. It has a tail and a long trunk. This is a sublime creation by God') (Yūsuf and Khadhr 1994: 72). Another instance involves the transformation of a Qur'ānic text. The verse that reads, 'We opened the gates of heaven with pouring rain and caused the earth to burst with gushing springs, so that the waters met for a predestined end' (54: 11–12) is transformed into 'We will rise with our heads and open for them a gate to the sky!' (al-Mas'adī 1992: 149). Both texts share the terms 'gate' and 'open' but do not function the same way (Yūsuf and Khadhr 1994: 72). While the first alludes to the creation of rivers and seas, the second points to ascent or transcendence.

In addition to these references to the *Qur'ān* pointed out by Yūsuf and Khadhr and by others, the most substantial continuous engagement with the *Qur'ān* in form as well is in content in al-Mas'adī's writings is by far Ṣāhābbā''s gospel in Scene Four (al-Mas'adī 1992: 91–93). It is on this passage that I focus the reading undertaken in the following pages. A full translation of the Scene can be found in the appendix. This engagement with the *Qur'ān* has a far-reaching significance within the play. It is also at the heart of the parodic and ironic elements in *al-Sudd*. However, before discussing the particular ways in which parody and irony function in the play as a whole and before exploring their effect on the treatment of the *Qur'ān*, it will be necessary to identify the reference.

The Gospel of Ṣāhabbā'

Nearly the entire text of the gospel can be traced back to the *Qur'ān*. The gospel is framed by two statements that emulate the conventional opening and closing of a Qur'ānic reading but do not actually constitute part of the text itself. Traditionally, a reading begins with the phrase: 'I seek refuge in God from the cursed Satan' and closes with: 'Truthful is God the Glorious'. The variation in *al-Sudd* is minimal but poignant. It leaves the original fully recognizable while inverting its meaning

completely. In the first statement, Man is substituted for Satan whereas in the second, Ṣāhabbāʾ takes the place of God.

The atmosphere, rhythm and diction are very similar to those of the *Qur'ān*. In fact, the idea of cataclysm and storms is common in the *Qur'ān*. There are chapters (*sura*s) named as such, e.g. *al-Raʿd* (Thunder), *al-ʾinfiṭār* (Cataclysm), *al-Ghāshiya* (The Overwhelming Event), *al-Zalzala* (The Earthquake), *al-Ḥāqqah* (The Catastrophe). Likewise, the story of creation of Man and of earth is frequent in the *Qur'ān*. Below I indicate in SMALL CAPS, citations from the *Qur'ān* which show in letter, in substance, or in pattern, the correlation between al-Masʿadī's text and the *Qur'ān*.

> Second Stone. *(reciting Ṣāhabbāʾ's gospel)*:
> I seek refuge in Ṣāhabāʾ from the cursed Man!
> "I SEEK REFUGE IN GOD FROM THE CURSED SATAN"
> We hit the clouds with a stone hammer and ordered Earth to be.
> "CREATOR OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH! WHEN HE DECREES A THING, HE NEED ONLY SAY 'BE,' AND IT IS" ('The Cow' 2: 117).
>
> Clouds gave birth to Earth, which was made of stone and strength. I am the Creator, the Goddess.
> Then the angels prostrated themselves before us and said: 'Ṣāhabbāʾ, the earth is lifeless stone.'
> We ordered storms, thunder, lightning, quakes and cataclysm to explode and rumble. Then we sent a lightning bolt, which split open the center of the earth and injected life in it.
> 'God sent down water from the sky with which He quickens the earth after its death. Surely in this there is a sign for prudent men' ('The Bee' 16: 65).
> The Universe rose up and exalted my Name, for I am the Creator, the Goddess!
> "WHICH OF YOUR LORD'S BLESSINGS WOULD YOU DENY?" (The similarity lies in using a refrain as in Chapter 55, 'The Merciful').
> Then angels prostrated themselves before Us and said: 'Trees are the earth's hair and water its blood, but there is no life in it, Ṣāhabāʾ.'
> We ordered storms, thunder, lightning, quakes and cataclysm to explode and rumble. Then We sent a lightning bolt, which split open the trees and the water and inject life in them.
> "IT IS HE WHO MAKES THE LIGHTNING FLASH UPON YOU, INSPIRING YOU WITH FEAR AND HOPE, AND GATHERS UP HEAVY CLOUDS. THE THUNDER SOUNDS HIS PRAISES, AND ANGELS, TOO, FOR AWE OF HIM. HE HURLS HIS THUNDERBOLTS AT WHOM HE PLEASES. YET THE UNBELIEVERS WRANGLE ABOUT GOD. STERN IS HIS MIGHT" ('Thunder' 13: 12–13).
>
> The Universe rose up and exalted my Name, for I am the Creator, the Goddess!
> We then ordered storms of dust to rise in the world and icy winds to flog it. We stirred the Universe violently and shook its foundations (*atharnā fī*

al-*ʿālamīna naqʿan wa safaʿnāhā safʿan wa hayyajnā al-akwāna tahyījan wa hazaznāhā hazzan wa rajajnāhā rajjan*).

"NO! BUT WHEN THE EARTH IS CRUSHED TO FINE DUST ..." (*DUKKAT AL-ʾARDU DAKKAN DAKKAN*) ('Dawn' 89: 21)

"... WITH A TRAIL OF DUST (*FA ATHARNĀ BIHI NAQʿAN*)" ('The War Steeds' 100: 2).

"WHEN THE EARTH SHAKES AND QUIVERS (*RUJJAT AL-ARḌ RAJJAN*), AND THE MOUNTAINS CRUMBLE AWAY AND SCATTER ABROAD INTO DUST" ('That Which is Coming' 56: 4–6).

Thunder, storm and lightning gave birth to Man. And we said: 'Let Adam, emerge from the rib of the storm, from lightning and thunder! Let Adam be light, fire and lightning!'

The Universe rose up and exalted my Name, for I am the Creator, the Goddess!

And we declared: 'Man is the end of creation.' And we said: 'Let mountains rise up and expand!' They rose up, and we lifted them high (*aʿlaynā ʿulāhā*). We then settled on their tops (*istwaynā ʿalā dhurāhā*): permanence of solid rock.

"IT WAS GOD WHO RAISED THE HEAVENS WITHOUT VISIBLE PILLARS. HE THEN ASCENDED HIS THRONE (*ISTAWĀ ʿALĀ AL-ʿARSH*) AND FORCED THE SUN AND THE MOON INTO HIS SERVICE, EACH PURSUING AN APPOINTED COURSE" ('Thunder' 13: 3)

We controlled thunder, lightning and storms. And we gave peace to the Universe by locking violent storms inside solid rock. I am the Creator, the Goddess!

And the Angels came to us and said: 'Man has forgotten the Name of Ṣāhabbāʾ...

"WE MADE A COVENANT WITH ADAM, BUT HE FORGOT, AND WE FIND HIM LACKING IN STEADFASTNESS." ('Ṭa Ha' 20: 114).

The three stones. *(in unison)*

Truthful is Ṣāhabbāʾ.

Halhabā halhabbāʾ.

Glory to Ṣāhabbāʾ. (al-Masʿadī 1992: 91–92)

"TRUTHFUL IS GOD THE GLORIOUS."

Now that the range and types of references are established, it remains to see how this formal parody of the *Qurʾān* is worked into the fabric of the text. Since a parody of the *Qurʾān* is an 'image' of the *Qurʾān*, to use Bakhtin's term, the presence of the holy text in *al-Sudd* must be studied from the point of view of representation. In this regard, the Stones and the Mule play significant roles.

The Stones: unreliable narrators

At the level of presentation, there are two distancing devices which remove any possible identification of the Gospel of Ṣāhabbāʾ with the *Qurʾān*. First, the word of the

Goddess is called *injīl* (Gospel) not *qur'ān*. Within the Islamic tradition this distinction is quite significant. For while the Gospel is designated as a holy book, it is considered inferior to the *Qur'ān*. Unlike the *Qur'ān*, the Gospel is presumed by Muslims to have been subjected to alteration and corruption; it may have been even created by humans. By alluding to this tradition, a license to parody is granted. At the explicit level we are not dealing with a *Qur'ān* but with a Gospel. The second device has to do with the gender of Ṣāhabbā'. In Islam God is genderless, although He is referred to with the marker for masculine. The *Qur'ān* says: 'Say: "God is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him"' ('Oneness' 112: 1–4). To create a gender-specific deity distances the text (Gospel) from any identification with the deity represented in the *Qur'ān*. Yet the two distancing devices, significant as they are, do not tell the whole story. At no point in the play does Ṣāhabbā' appear. In this there is a parallel with Islam where representations of God and the prophet are strictly forbidden. The *Qur'ān* insists on the abstract nature of God and on the inability of humans to imagine Him since He takes no specific form and can take all forms. But while the goddess is not represented in a dramatic form, there are several textual representations of her. One of her key manifestations is her gospel. In a Divine revelation, the key link between humans and God is the prophet or messenger. In the Islamic tradition, the transmitters of God's word and the speech of His prophet are key figures in the religion. Their competence and integrity must be beyond doubt, as I explain above in the case of Abū Hurayra. How do the transmitters in the play measure against these criteria?

The Gospel is recited by the Second Stone and approved by all three Stones who declare 'in unison' that Ṣāhabbā''s word is the truth. But do they really believe what they say, or are they simply reproducing an inherited convention? Of the three, Second Stone is the most knowledgeable one. She is the source of information on Humans as well as the reciter of the gospel. This qualifies her for the role of reciter and transmitter. But she is also playful. She uses her erudition to poke fun at the Ṣāhabbā''s highest authority, her prophet:

> A Voice. People of the valley! People of Ṣāhabbā'! Listen to the prophet.
> *(Three Stones fall silent and listen in reverence)*
> The Prophet's order:
> You are banned from approaching the strangers
> Or talk to them,
> Or assist them.
> Second Stone. *(whispering to her sister)*
> I wonder if he decided this by a majority of votes or by consensus.
>
> (*al-Masʿadī* 1992: 93–4)

Second Stone may not be questioning the decision but she is doubtful about the workings of her religion. If she clearly does not hold the prophet in reverence, then how can she revere the Gospel? Her scepticism offers valuable advantage to Ghaylān's camp. She gives Ghaylān's most consistent supporter, the Mule, a view from inside:

First Stone. *(Rebukes Second Stone)*: Be quiet! Do not spread the secrets of gods and prophets, the secret of their wisdom, the rules of the heavens!

But the Mule is quick to pick up on this indiscretion:

The Mule. *(Talking to himself)*: As for me, I heard the secret and I will sell it to my god, Ghaylān.

The Mule's comment highlights the tenuous nature of the world of Ṣāhabbāʾ. Second Stone undermines 'her' religion even further.

A Second Voice. O! people, Listen and ponder! And do not divulge what you hear!
    Second Stone. *(whispering)*: This is undisguised plagiarism. The prophet stole this from Qiss ibn Sāʿida.[16]

Second Stone makes explicit the reference of the Voice's speech and accuses him of theft. At the narrative level, this is of course a brilliant device: the writer cites Qiss ibn Sāʿida and documents the citation. But he does so to dramatic effect. The prophet's plagiarism is unmasked while the doubt of the Second Stone is justified. By tracing the citation to a recognizable source, the narrative situation casts doubt on the veracity of Ṣāhabbāʾ's gospel. In fact, as early as Scene One, the prophet is put under suspicion. Maymūna notes his pompous but empty discourse when she reports this description by a woman from the valley: 'He has skin the color of dust stretched on his bones like a leather bucket pulled tight.' Maymūna comments: 'She described him to me in such a way that I imagined him like a drum whose leather was tightly pulled.' But she added, 'People have never seen a man this thin.' With this, she spoiled my image of the drum because, for people as well as for the fox in the fable, the drum is big and fat (al-Masʿadī 1992: 56).[17] Put differently, the prophet's word may be more noise than substance.

   Prophets and gospels as a whole are subjected to Ghaylān's merciless sarcasm. In Scene Three, he says to Maymūna:

I thought you have forgotten all Gospels, all Torahs and all *Qurʾān*s. Unless you think it funny to imitate prophets or sons of prophets at dawn. They, as you know, if they see visions, it is in order to be later thrown into wells, have a story with al-Aziz's wife and become prophets. As for you? Dawn is a serious time where jest is inappropriate.

(al-Masʿadī 1992: 75–6)[18]

Ghaylān even advises Maymūna to include her dream in a holy book, 'I have no use for your dream. I suggest you insert it in a koran or a gospel? Or, even better still, sell it to the prophet of the place' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 76). Ghaylān's statement undermines the representation of Ṣāhabbāʾ's gospel as truth. It foreshadows the realization,

later on in the play, that holy books are, somehow, porous. They admit new stories and additions.

The order of events and speeches in the scene serves an ironic purpose. At the beginning, Second Stone, with the agreement of the others, launches an attack against human arrogance. She then recites the Gospel with reverence and conventional decorum. Her remarks about the Prophet and the Voices come afterwards. They deflate the 'sacred' character of the situation and weaken the stern warning included in the gospel. She shows that there is room to believe that, first, the gospel is not subject to consensus and second, that it may not be original, i.e. it is not the word of a goddess. Intertextual evidence corroborates her claim: Ṣāhabbāʾ's gospel is carved out of the *Qurʾān*, as I show above. The gospel as a parody of the *Qurʾān* is undercut by irony.

The Mule: an *idiot savant*

So far, I have been discussing irony as it relates to Stones. It is time to return to the role of the Mule. Neglected by Ghaylān, his master, and omitted by most critics, the Mule is key to parody and irony in *al-Sudd*. Bakkār suggests in his much-cited introduction to the play that the Mule performs the role of the comic relief without ever being aware of the fate set for him by the writer (al-Masʿadī 1992: 23). Yūsuf and Khadhr, most likely guided by Bakkār's remarks, explore the role of the Mule on two levels, as part of the grid of relations in the play and as part of the study of 'dramatic space' in the book. They suggest that the Mule 'does not participate in the development of the play because it does not enter into dialogue with other characters' (Yūsuf and Khadhr 1994: 28). The Mule's statements in Scene Four, Yūsuf and Khadhr suggest, 'are devoid of meaning because they have no concrete or intellectual reference' (28). According to them, the fact that the Mule is introduced as 'Intelligent Mule' could, therefore, be no more than 'a contradiction in terms' (*kalām al-aḍḍād*) (28).[19]

I suggest that among the small cast of *al-Sudd*, the Mule plays the role of the *idiot savant*. As such, the Mule is the locus of a particular type of irony where characters often adopt 'a pose of innocence or simplicity' whose purpose is to undermine the discourse of a character or of a situation.[20] The Mule also informs us about the irony of fate at play in this drama and provides relief, as Bakkār suggests, when tension or seriousness reach unbearable levels. The element of humour is key here. For al-Masʿadī is generally seen as 'serious', even stern, in style and tone.[21] The fact is *al-Sudd* in particular is dripping with irony. Moreover, the Mule mirrors Ghaylān in telling ways and plays a significant role in the play as a whole.

The Mule's comments on the Gospel are not the first instance of his participation in the play. In fact he is omnipresent throughout *al-Sudd*: characters come and go but the Mule remains. Introduced as 'Intelligent Mule' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 41), his first appearance has nothing intelligent about it: he is carrying Ghaylān's luggage up the hill, just like any other mule (45). But the first sign of his 'intelligence' soon follows. Maymūna and Ghaylān stare at the mountain and briefly get lost in thought:

(They go to unload the Mule and find him raising his head as if staring at the horizon)
Ghaylān (*to the Mule*): 'You, too?'

(46)

But the Mule does not reply. He never does, throughout the entire play. Yet between the Mule and Ghaylān there is a complicity: Ghaylān seems to understand the Mule while the latter shows loyalty to his master. At the end of Scene One, Maymūna and Ghaylān go for a tour of the area and the Mule stays alone. Voices are heard and '*The Mule perks up his ears to listen*' (65). Throughout the play, the Mule listens to and observes everything, like a spectator. But unlike the audience, the Mule performs a role on stage and in the drama.

The Mule speaks for the first time in Scene Two. Ṣāhabbā''s priests walk in carrying a water bowl. '*The Mule thinks the water is meant for him*' (69). But they circle around the water and '*The Mule eyes the water, perplexed.*' In the Middle of the elaborate ritual performed by the priests, the Mule says to himself:

> Do Gods respond to the howling of wolves?
> I will ask my god, Ghaylān.
> But these wolves; are they really wolves?
> Or spectres from a time long gone?
> Or, are they dogs?
> Or rocks broken up by the waves?
>
> (71)

Again, there was no response. '*Priests could not care less about what mules have to say*' (71). The Mule clearly understands the scene as a religious ritual and seeks an answer from his own god, Ghaylān. But he interprets the scene (rituals for Ṣāhabbā') as a confusing vision. The seriousness of the ceremony, the trance, the incantations and the subsequent 'miraculous' change of water into fire are, from the perspective of the Mule, mere hallucinations at best. Monks are seen as a spectre of the past, if not beasts. The interjection of the Mule into the scene undercuts the seriousness of Ṣāhabbā''s religious rituals. Ghaylān may be absent from the scene but his scepticism is not. Here, the relationship between the protagonist and the Mule is that of substitution: the Mule is Ghaylān's deputy. But this is by no means the only role he plays.

The Mule observes Scene Three where Maymūna and Ghaylān articulate their differences over the dam as well as existential issues such as death and permanence but says nothing ('*The mule's head appears from behind a rock. He was moving his jaws*' (81).) The Mule is literally speechless, having lost the capacity to articulate what he 'thinks'. But he is not the only one denied speech in the play. Earlier in the same scene, his master and 'god', Ghaylān, finds himself in a similar state.

> Maymūna. That Voices listen to my dream would be wonderful indeed. Summon the Voices!
> Ghaylān. (*Ghaylān wants to call but no voice comes out of his mouth. The gesture of someone who speaks, empties his lungs, fills up his throat... But no voice is heard.*)

Maymūna. What's wrong with you? Why don't you summon the Voices?
Ghaylān. I could not. I try to call; the voice starts in my throat but then it
feels as though someone has sucked it out of my mouth.
(*He tries to call again*)
Did you hear anything?

(77)

Maymūna does not hear anything. She interprets this as 'the first limit (*ḥadd*)' drawn
by fate and foretold by the Voices. Ghaylān is incapable of communicating with the
Voices. (Maymūna says, 'You are incapable; you are incapacity itself!' (77).) His attack
against Ṣāhabbā''s power is punishable by silence, or at least, an interruption in dis-
course. The Mule's loss of speech mirrors his master's loss of words. A linguistic cas-
tration leaves both incapacitated. In a play based primarily around verbal exchange,
this is no small loss and no light punishment. Here, the Mule and the protagonist
suffer the same fate: they are identical.

In Scene Four, the Mule performs two roles. He stands for Ghaylān, who is absent
from the scene and uses his position as witty observer to undermine Ṣāhabbā' and her
Gospel. When the Second Stone divulges a secret of her faith, the Mule is quick to
seize the opportunity:

The Mule. (*talking to himself*). As for me, I heard the secret and I will sell it
to my god, Ghaylān.

(94)

We know that the Mule will not speak to Ghaylān, but as Ghaylān's double, the Mule
registers a weakness in the forces that oppose his master. The humour of the statement
is in line with Second Stone's own sarcastic comment on her faith, which I suggested
above. Both create a distance from which the Gospel is perceived as flawed, if not as
a fraudulent imitation of another's discourse. At the end of the Scene, the Mule makes
the following comment on the whole situation:

The Mule. (*As if re-emerging from deep thought.*) When stones are afflicted with
madness, they turn into women. The madness of the inanimate world is life.

(95)

The image of a mule 're-emerging from deep thought' is indeed humorous. His sup-
posedly profound idea is even more comical: the comment, taken at its face value, is a
meaningless statement disguised as serious thought. The reader can only laugh at the
wisdom of mules. But if we take the statement in the context of irony I have suggested,
the Mule's words put the final nail in the coffin of Ṣāhabbā''s gospel. After several
instances where the Stones undermine the gospel and the prophet, they are themselves
dismissed as mad. (We recall that in Scene Two the monks are equally dismissed by the
Mule as shadows of the past or disfigured beasts.) Both events are considered unreal, or
without substance, therefore without consequence on the events at hand. From Ghaylān's

perspective, the goddess, her gospel and the whole apparatus of her religion are part of a world which fears action and human will.[22] At best, they are mere diversions from the ultimate goal of building the dam and asserting human power.[23]

The Mule's role does not stop here. In addition to being Ghaylān's deputy and a mirror of his vulnerability, he can be seen as an oracle who foretells the downfall of his master as well as his own fate. In Scene Six, the mule reacts with alarm to a bad omen: '*A wolf howls twice; the Mule jumps up!*' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 115). The Mule jumps up again when Maymūna suggests, in jest, to eat him in order to celebrate the success of their efforts in Scene Seven. ('*The Mule jumps up; Maymūna laughs and she and Ghaylān go inside the tent*' (142).) In both cases, the Mule senses danger. The reaction in Scene Seven does more than inject humour. It foreshadows the fact that Maymūna and Ghaylān will abandon the Mule to the storm at the end of the play. His response in Scene Six mirrors Ghaylān's fear of the voices of doom, which he endeavours to silence and subdue.

> Ghaylān (*somewhat irritated*). 'Why doesn't this wolf shut up? Why doesn't everything shut up? Why can't the Universe fall silent for a moment?
> Maymūna. This is the temper of a defeated man. Sit or lay down like me!
>
> (116)

The Mule's compassion for, even identification with, Ghaylān in itself turns out to be ironic. The Mule is unaware that Ghaylān will not repay him in kind. Instead Ghaylān ignores the Mule and even thinks of him as one of the forces to be subdued. Ghaylān says, 'We will subdue their prophet, their men and women and even their Ṣāhabbāʾ, despite her might. We will whip them like *mules*, until gods of misery and drought bleed their hands in the building of the dam, in the service of a creation willed by man' (134, my emphasis). Upon hearing this, a touch of sadness descends upon the Mule, '*The Mule is heard shaking his ears and meditating about his fate among the mules*' (134–5). This difference between the two positions is at the heart of the *irony of fate* awaiting the Mule. His desire to participate in Ghaylān's project is in sharp contrast with the whip and neglect awaiting him at the end of the play.[24] In the last scene, the Mule's fears are realized, '*The Mule screams in terror, stamps the ground… But he is tied down to his fate, to a rock, facing the storm, wind, quake, thunder, lightning…*' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 150). Yet here again, the Mule mirrors the fate of Ghaylān's enterprise. For in the conflict over the control of the water spring, Ṣāhabbāʾ will in fact have the last word. Ghaylān's dam will collapse. Maymūna's predictions and Ṣāhabbāʾs prophetic vision come true.

In summary, Ghaylān and the Mule share more than stubbornness. The Mule substitutes for and mirrors Ghaylān in a number of ways. At the dramatic level, the Mule has an important role in the ironic playfulness of *al-Sudd*. Internally, he accentuates the comic element. At the level of the drama as a whole, he indexes the dramatic irony at play in *al-Sudd*. The affinity between the Mule and Ghaylān is significant. The Mule acts as a substitute for Ghaylān at the level of narrative (and presence on stage in a performance of the play). He replaces his master and acts on his behalf

(Scenes Two and Four). At the end of the play, the Mule performs a similar function. Ghaylān, in a sense, is split in two entities: one flies away while the other remains on the ground. The Mule (Ghaylān's unimaginative, 'mortal' side) is left to his destiny, tied to a rock. The other Ghaylān (Pandora's Hope and *al-Sudd*'s Imagination [*khayāl*]), flies away, accompanied by Mayāra, who is, let us recall, 'Shadow, vision, love and beauty' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 41).[25]

Irony and meaning

So far I have been discussing some of the manifestations of irony as it relates to the Stones and to the Mule, and making occasional references to other characters and situations. However, these are by no means the only instances of irony in the play. In fact, the text is almost saturated with it. How does this pervasive irony affect meaning? Before exploring this question, let us examine how irony operates at the level of the play as whole, in particular in relation to the protagonist. Ghaylān clearly identifies himself with the dam. It is his project at the concrete level (control of space, management of water, irrigation) as well as at the metaphysical one (defiance in the face of gods, implementation of human will, striving for 'perfect creation') (118). Ghaylān's belief, as he expresses it, is characterized by certainty; his attitude is that of unwavering determination.[26] Yet, the reader is made aware of Ghaylān's limitations and allowed to detect signs of the outcome of his quest throughout the play. The main narrative tool here is dramatic irony. Ghaylān's understanding of his own acts stands in sharp contrast to what the play as a whole portrays them to be. His portrayal is suffused with the dramatic irony common in classical tragedy. The narrative technique of foreshadowing creates a distance between what Ghaylān purports to do and what is in store for him. Maymūna's dream where she sees a dam made of skulls and an earthquake which destroys it foreshadows the ending of the play (al-Masʿadī 1992: 78–9). Likewise, Ṣāhabbāʾ's gospel foretells the destruction of Ghaylān's project (al-Masʿadī 1992: 92).

On a more subtle level, Ghaylān himself is undermined by irony. A number of instances of this have been noted in the comparison between him and the Mule. Two more cases deserve attention. Maymūna's description of the prophet of Ṣāhabbāʾ in Scene One as a drum (noise and no substance) foreshadows her image of Ghaylān in Scene Six. Here, she describes his responses to the various setbacks that plague his project. In the actual reactions as well as in the discourse, Ghaylān shows confidence and even defiance. But Maymūna detects a duality in him: Ghaylān's outside is in contrast with his inside. She says:

> Despite your courageous outside, I saw you as a ghost straight out of my childhood games, a ghost made up of a white sheet and a pillow: a scary face and frightening shape. But behind the face and the shape there was nothing, just my little brother, trying to scare me. This is true of all illusions (*zāʾifāt*). And today, I see you as an illusion, a child's ghost!
>
> (125)

Maymūna's image recalls the very first representation of Ghaylān in the play. He is introduced as 'a man, a being without substance' (*kā'in zā'if*) (41). As a person defined by falsehood, he is not reliable, his words are suspect and his actions are to be put to the test of truth.[27] Ghaylān 'hides' his weakness and doubt but exhibits resolve and determination. It is as if his outward discourse were designed to cover up the voices of doubt within him.

Yet, Ghaylān, characteristically, sees the outside world as his real enemy. We recall that he wants to shun all the signs and sounds that interfere with his goal: the oracles, warnings (black birds), and voices of doom (the howling of wolves). He is irritated by what he calls the 'noises of the universe' (116). Paradoxically, however, it is the silence of the universe which undermines Ghaylān's resolve and shakes up his will. In the struggle to win over allies and lure forces from the opposing camp, he experiences only temporary success. First, his tools were stolen, then a fever kills half of his work force, flood destroys two months of work, provisions are ruined, and finally illness puts him off work for a month (106–107). And, even when he subdues Ṣāhabbā''s supporters (Scene Seven), he is unaware that underneath their apparent obedience lurks the final revenge. His tireless and frantic efforts to keep the project going appear at times comical: the image of Ghaylān's solitary figure fighting natural elements, rebellious workers and reluctant citizens of the valley is a remote reminder of Don Quixote's battles with windmills. To Ghaylān's effort, the universe around him remains indifferent.[28]

The central conflict, the one in relation to which all other conflicts occur, is between Ṣāhabbā' and Ghaylān, whether this conflict has as its object human will, creation or God's power. Yet, through irony, Ṣāhabbā''s religion is put in doubt and Ghaylān's will is undermined. Can one, therefore, speak of a conflict at all? Is there a protagonist and an antagonist in *al-Sudd*? The play seems to question itself constantly. What emerges as a main conflict or statement at a certain moment is soon revised and abrogated. At times, what presents itself as a tempestuous tragedy turns out to be like a 'storm in a tea cup'. Ghaylān, the hero who dreams of 'impregnating' the barren land, seems at times a helpless castrato. Ṣāhabbā''s thunderous power appears awesome but quickly turns into an empty drum. Ghaylān, the 'God of the Mule,' often appears like a mule, the stubborn carrier of a burden he did not choose. Ṣāhabbā', the 'goddess of aridity and drought' drowns the dam but fails to dry up Ghaylān's thirst for creation or curb his will. In fact, irony makes the ending of the play not so much a fatal end as an apocalypse. In its intensity as well as in its predictability, the overwhelming storm is foreseen all along (by the Mule, by Stones, by Maymūna, and in the gospel). The ending is also apocalyptic in the sense that it offers a glimpse of renewal: Ghaylān is not destroyed. He flies away accompanied by imagination (Mayāra) and guided by a light in the sky.

In *al-Sudd*, the construction of meaning remains elusive by what might be termed 'saturation of irony'. In fact, at no point can we determine with any certainty who is speaking. And this is the ultimate effect of irony. Milan Kundera writes, 'Irony irritates. Not because it mocks or attacks but because it denies us our certainties by unmasking the world as an ambiguity' (Kundera 1988: 134). Barthes notes this in Flaubert's irony:

> Working with an irony impregnated with uncertainty, [he] achieves a salutary
> discomfort of writing: he does not stop the play of codes (or stops it only in
> part) *one never knows if he is responsible for what he writes* (if there is a subject *behind*
> his language); for the very being of writing (the meaning of the labor that con-
> stitutes it) is to keep the question Who is speaking? from ever being answered.
>
> <div align="right">(Barthes 1974: 164)</div>

Yet, it is these multiple voices, which, in their 'intersection,' create writing. And it
is this saturation which explains what can be called the 'dispersal of meaning', or
indeterminacy. It is this absence or ambiguity in *al-Sudd* that critics and readers alike
continue to fill. What does this indeterminacy have to do with the fact that the text
performs daring and potentially perilous transgressions, not the least of which are
Ghaylān's stubborn rejection of human fate till the end and his explicit denial of
predetermination (*qadar*)?

The foregoing study of irony and parody in *al-Sudd* demonstrates that the thrust
of the drama is not the conflict or the characters as such. For the pervasive irony
shows that there are no heroes and anti-heroes but only characters playing these roles.
Al-Masʿadī's characters are represented in such a way that they appear as actors of
their role in a dramatic scheme. They belong in a story. In Scene Five this story is
revealed. Here, as Maymūna recounts the setbacks which befell the construction of
the dam, Ghaylān counters by showing how he and his men managed to overcome
each time (al-Masʿadī 1992: 106–7). But Maymūna senses further dangers and urges
Ghaylān to avoid the dam for fear of the ultimate danger, his death. The exchange
that follows undercuts her fears and unmasks the 'wisdom' behind the events: they
are part of a narrative, a performance.

> Maymāna. And if you were to die? Death does not care about [your] promises.
> Ghaylān. An absurd question. We will die only at the end of the story.
> Maymūna. And the dam, is it also a story for you?
> Ghaylān. Certainly. Everything is a story. Think for a moment! Were we to
> die now, the thread of the story would be cut short, which would upset Fate.
> For Fate prolongs lives for the sake of the story. This is the case with
> Majnūn Layla and his family and with Layla and her family. They travelled
> around and settled down. They hated and loved. They separated between
> Layla and Majnūn. Everything they had done and said was in order to
> become a story among the stories of literature. Or consider the prophets!
> They receive revelation at age forty, not before. They die at sixty, not before.
> They are born on sheep farms, not elsewhere. They are crucified, or at least
> thought to be so, not burned. All this is done in order to create around their
> lives the stories of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*). Gods and Fate are like
> elderly men and women, fond of stories. We must remain alive until the end
> of the story. For life and death are not matters of fate and predestination.
> Rather, they are part of the story.
>
> <div align="right">(al-Masʿadī 1992: 108–9)[29]</div>

If meaning in the play is uncertain, what about the meaning of the play as whole? In other words, what does the book tell us about modern Arabic literature, particularly in a comparative context? To answer this, I must revisit the discussion of tragedy with which this chapter begins but this time by adding the Islamic dimension.

Tragedy in Islamic literary and intellectual contexts

The two intertexts, tragedy, including *Faust*, *Master Builder*, and Greek tragic mythology on the one hand and Islam's foundational text on the other are crucial to understanding the position of the play (and of its writer) within Arabic literature. The challenges to these histories and religious traditions raised by *al-Sudd* are simply too great to ignore. It is from this perspective that intellectual and literary influences on *al-Sudd* have been a key issue in al-Masʿadī studies. But reactions to the book have been dominated, above all, by interpretations of – and most often apologies for – the conception of human fate that emerges from it. I have mentioned already how *al-Sudd* gave rise to a famous exchange between the Egyptian 'Dean of Arabic literature', Ṭāha Ḥusayn and al-Masʿadī himself in 1957. Their exchange shows two divergent views on critical issues pertinent to Arabic literature and culture. For political and cultural reasons, the time of the exchange was critical; and both discourses on the book are therefore, inevitably, marked by the issues of the day, most importantly, the intersection between nation-state and pan-Arab nationalism, the building of national culture and the violent conflict in Palestine, the Suez attack in 1956 and the war of liberation in Algeria. How did the most influential Arab critic at the time view *al-Sudd*?

Ḥusayn was quick to point out, with confidence, a link between al-Masʿadī and Albert Camus: 'This Tunisian writer had cultivated an exemplary knowledge of Arabic literature and then completed his education in France where he mastered his knowledge of French literature and where he came under the influence of the famous philosophical writer, Albert Camus' (Ṣammūd 1993: 45–6).[30] Ḥusayn specifically compares Ghaylān's continuous effort and repeated failure to Sisyphus as represented in the parable by Camus. In his second article about the play, written as a reaction to comments by al-Masʿadī, Ḥusayn compares the two protagonists in more detail. He finds parallels between building the dam in *al-Sudd* and pushing the rock up the mountain in *Le mythe*, arguing that the dam and the rock are similar in that the first keeps crumbling while the second continues to roll back down the mountain. Ḥusayn, nevertheless, recognizes some differences as well: 'The Arab hero is a human being who *wants* to bring something into existence and to accomplish a goal; but he does not bring anything into existence nor does he accomplish any goal, while the Greek hero is a human being whom the gods have *punished* with this aimless perpetual suffering' (69, my emphasis). Despite the differences, however, the end result is similar. Ghaylān and Sisyphus, Ḥusayn argues, expend effort without purpose or reason, which makes both destined to achieve nothing. He explains the ending of *al-Sudd* thus: 'The Arab hero is taken by imagination. The storm carries him and his imagination away to nowhere. He is therefore destined to nothingness as are his

imagination and his dam. Only his poor obedient wife, the land, and the aridity she loves remain' (70).[31]

Al-Masʿadī's reaction was both defensive and illuminating. First he acknowledges the likelihood of parallels with Camus: 'It is possible that the sources of French literature on which I drew before writing my story, especially between 1933 and 1939, are the same ones that Camus engages with. Both of us may have been influenced by the existentialist tendency that appeared in French literature and began to colour it with its special tint at that time' (Ṣammūd 1993: 58–9).

He argues, however, that *al-Sudd* was written before the publication of *Le mythe de Sysiphe* and that he and Camus have very different world-views (57).[32] Al-Masʿadī explains:

> It may occur to readers, as it occurred to Dr. Ṭāha Ḥusayn, that there is a similarity between the failure of Ghaylān's renewed effort and the defeat of his continuous attempts, on the one hand, and the failure of Sisyphus, on the other. . . . The obvious distinction between the situation of Sisyphus and Ghaylān's is that the first represents the uselessness and absurdity of existence, an existence empty of any known goal to be reached or any wisdom to be discovered.
>
> (61–62)

Al-Masʿadī goes on to argue that Ghaylān's struggle is positive and meaningful. His plight finds its origins in a different conception of human existence, which he calls, 'Eastern and Islamic' (62). He says:

> The tragedy that Ghaylān represents through his life and action is not that of Sisyphus, but rather that of the human being compelled by life to live, act, work, build, and struggle tirelessly, without laziness, weakness, despair, cowardice, or restraint as if he were to live forever. He does so despite the fact that he carries in his heart the certainty of a believer that life is transient and that permanence belongs to God alone.
>
> (62)

I address al-Masʿadī's conception of human self earlier in the book. Here, it is worth emphasizing the implications of this theory on the conception of tragedy in *al-Sudd*.

According to al-Masʿadī, the human self is limited on one side and unlimited on the other. Therefore, while it appears powerless in the face of the universe and by comparison to God's power, this self is privileged since it is extracted from the divine Self. This origin endows the human self with attributes of the Absolute Self. Al-Masʿadī finds explanation of his theory in the idea of man as a vice regent (*khalīfa*) to God, expressed in the *Qur'ān*.[33] He says: 'When God breathed His spirit into human beings, He granted them the essential and unique attribute of His divine nature: He made them into miniature image of His divine absolute self. He thus willed him to be an individual cause, capable of work, creation, and purposeful action due to the

free will He had put in them' (63–4).[34] The responsibility was such that the whole universe declined it out of fear. Man, however, *chose* to 'carry the burden'.[35]

In an earlier study of the ascetic poet Abū al-ʿAtāhiya, al-Masʿadī formulates his much-cited 'theory' that tragedy is the stuff of any literature worthy of the name. He writes: 'Literature is, first and foremost, about tragedy: the tragedy of the human being oscillating between God and beast; enduring the pain of powerlessness or the feeling of powerlessness in the face of fate, death, life, the unknown, the gods, himself…' (al-Masʿadī, *Taʾṣīl*, 1979: 21).[36] Al-Masʿadī understands this burden as the source of human tragedy. This is al-Masʿadī's answer to a key problem of literary theory and history, which irritated Arab critics since their translations of Aristotle's poetics. Al-Masʿadī sets out to show that tragic thought and literature have been a feature of Islamic culture. According to him the problem has been a deficiency on the part of critics and modern writers rather than a gap in the literature itself.

He identifies the poets Abū al-ʿAtāhiyya and Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarri (AD 973–1057), and the Sufi and theologian al-Ghazālī as examples of tragic literature, but also as tragic figures in their own lives. They have described crises in their faith and struggled with issues of an existential nature. In this respect, they represent 'a feature of the human tragedy at large' (al-Masʿadī, *Mawlid*, 1979: 28). He asks in 'The problem of knowledge in al-Ghazālī' (1944), 'Doesn't the whole problem consist of the fact that man is a weak creature who tries to be powerful (*yataqādar*)?' (al-Masʿadī 2003: 42). Al-Ghazālī understood the problem and probed all options, looked to all manners of knowledge from science to philosophy to Sufism, and reached knowledge by what he described as a 'light, which was thrown into the heart'. Al-Masʿadī singles out the story of the poet Abū al-ʿAtāhiya as an example of deep personal anguish and tragic life. The poet asked the singer, Mukhāriq, to keep him company for a day in which he drank wine, listened to song and wept incessantly. Towards the end of the day, the poet spilled all the remaining wine, broke the jars and repented (al-Masʿadī 2003: 34). Right before his death Abū al-ʿAtāhiya sent for the singer again, but he could not bring himself to see him. Instead he sent him the message, 'If you come in, you will rekindle my sorrow. Your singing will make me long for what I have managed to subdue deep inside my self' (al-Masʿadī 2003: 35). For al-Masʿadī, the crux of the story is the depth of doubt and the extent of the struggle. He calls this fragility and struggle tragic.[37] Beyond specific figures, further light on al-Masʿadī's handling of tragedy in theory and his practice requires a look at a much earlier encounter between Greek tragedy and Islamic culture, namely the Arabic translations and commentaries on *The Poetics*.

A careful reading of Arabic commentaries and translations of Aristotle's *The Poetics* reveals that Muslim philosophers were acutely aware of parallels and differences between the Greek and Arabic literatures and intellectual contexts. In fact, they even looked beyond poetry to explicate or illustrate aspects of tragedy. The three most important commentaries of Aristotle's poetics will illustrate my point.[38] The philosophers al-Fārābī (d. AD 950), Ibn Sīnā (AD 980–1037) and Ibn Rushd (AD 1126–98) all wrote commentaries or summaries of 'The Poetics'.[39] Among these, Ibn Sīnā gives the most extensive summary while Ibn Rushd offers the most sustained attempt at a comparative poetics.

Muslim commentators agree that what interested them in the Greek book was its universal nature. In other words, they focus their commentaries or summaries on those elements that they consider common to all nations.[40] Ibn Rushd writes: 'The purpose of this [commentary] is to summarize the general rules contained in Aristotle's book on poetry, which are common to all or most nations. For a great deal of what the book contains are rules specific to their [Greeks'] poetry and their ways, and which exist in the discourse of Arabs or others only in part' (Badawī 1973: 201). Ibn Sīnā notes a radical difference between the Arabic and Greek traditions. He writes: 'Greek poetry often imitates states and actions, no more. As for beasts (*dawābb*), Greeks, unlike Arabs, did not imitate them at all. For Arabs used to compose poetry for one of two reasons: the first was to create a specific effect on the self such as an action or a feeling; the second was for wonder only' (Ibn Sīnā 1966: 34).

Ibn Rushd, on the other hand, while insisting that Greek tragedy is different from any type of Arabic poetry, notes that it is not without parallel in Islamic culture. He uses the word *madīḥ* or panegyric of 'noble deeds,' to bring the concept of tragedy closer to the Arabic reader, but clearly finds it unsatisfactory. Muslim commentators mostly transcribe the term 'tragedy' into Arabic as *ṭrāghūdhiya*. (The term, *maʾsāt*, used by al-Masʿadī, does not appear in any of these texts.) Ibn Rushd says: 'Because the poetry of the Arabs is free from praise for noble deeds and blame for evil ones, the *Qurʾān* blamed them, making exception only of those who were inclined to this direction' (Badawī 1973: 229).[41] Ibn Rushd therefore looks to the *Qurʾān* for examples of the four types of tragic poetry.[42] He says, 'Know that there are no examples of these four kinds of panegyric (*madīḥ*) that praise willful noble action in the poetry of the Arabs; but that they occur frequently in the Noble Book' (Badawī 1973: 232). He considers, for example, the story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son 'part of the discourses that evoke sorrow and fear', his rendition of Aristotle's 'catharsis' (220).[43] Linking Greek tragedy to the *Qurʾān* reveals awareness of the status of tragedy and the desire to translate the Greek genre into a comparable idiom.

Ibn Rushd has come under attack by Western as well Arab critics for 'misreading' Aristotle. Even Eagleton, for all his lucidity and wit, ignores something fundamental to his own thinking, namely history, when it comes to Ibn Rushd. He says: 'Averroes, by contrast, seems to think the word [tragedy] synonymous with 'praise' – the praise of suffering virtue. That he was also a commentator on Aristotle's *Poetics* suggests a tragicomic failure of communication between antiquity and its aftermath, as though Marx had imagined that by 'dialectic' Hegel meant a regional form of speech' (Eagleton 2003: 12). In reality, Ibn Rushd was not concerned with Greek culture; rather he was a commentator, writing with an Arabic audience in mind and within the literary conventions of Arabic commentaries on poetry and the *Qurʾān*. The examples and illustrations used in such commentary must be from the culture of the audience. Ibn Rushd's interests were scientific and utilitarian: to learn the ways of others and to use what is applicable in his own context. At the opening of his commentary on the *Poetics*, he states his intentions openly, as mentioned earlier.[44] His role was to bridge a gap between Aristotle and an Arab audience unfamiliar with Greek dramatic art. In effect, Ibn Rushd had to convey an absence: theatre was that absence, and

both him and his audience did not know what it was exactly. He and other Arab commentators on the *Poetics* transfer theatre to poetry and narrative in order to bring the concept nearer to their audience. They have read, not misread, Aristotle within their cultural frame of reference.

Regardless of whether al-Masʿadī was aware of this original insight by Ibn Rushd or not, my argument is that for him, tragedy is, so to speak, Ibn Rushdian. It is in the *Qurʾān*, God's text, or in relation to it, that examples of tragedy are to be found; and it is in the Koranic style that it must be written. This is the meaning of his aphorism, 'If being were not a tragedy, God would not have existed' (al-Masʿadī 2003: 434). His use of language must be understood from this perspective as well. In Islamic culture, the highest style is the inimitable word of God. The *Qurʾan* itself is explicit about this: 'Say: "If men and jinn combined to write the like of this *Qurʾān*, they would surely fail to compose the like, though they helped one another as best they could"' (17:88). The ultimate challenge to a writer of Arabic language is not to write poetry, but to emulate the Text and create a parallel. *Al-Sudd*'s engagement with the *Qurʾān* in theme, rhythm and diction and the writer's understanding of tragedy, appear to go against the course of Arabic literature as a whole. In this regard al-Masʿadī seems unique, both as writer and as theorist. His book, *al-Sudd*, is in part an imitation of Koranic style and a creation of a world that challenges the completions in the world. How does such tradition handle Islam's holy book?

Edward Said identifies a crucial problem facing fictional writing in Arabic. In his commentary on the Arabic novel as a genre he calls 'almost entirely of this [20th] century', he writes:

> It is significant that the desire to create an alternative world, to modify or augment the real world through the act of writing (which is one motive underlying the novelistic tradition in the West) is inimical to the Islamic world-view… Islam views the world as a plenum, capable of neither diminishment nor amplification. Consequently, stories like those in *The Arabian Nights* are ornamental, variations on the world, not completions of it.
>
> (Said 1975: 81)

The example he takes from modern literature is Ṭāha Ḥusayn's autobiography *al-Ayyām* (*Stream of Days*). He says:

> The book's narrative style bears no resemblance to Koranic Arabic, so there is no question of imitation and hence of addition as in the Christian tradition. Rather one's impression is that life is mediated by the Koran, informed by it; a gesture or an episode or a feeling in the boy's life is inevitably reduced (always in an interesting way) back to a relationship to the Koran. In other words, no action can depart from the Koran; rather each action confirms the already completed presence of the Koran and, consequently, human existence.
>
> (82)

The applicability of this insight to the wide spectrum of Arabic fiction remains doubtful.[45] But the point is valid at least in the sense that the holy text is the limit set for the Arab writer. Within this intellectual framework, it is understandable why Ḥusayn reacted to al-Masʿadī's theory of *khalq* (creation) with alarm and caution. He argues that human freedom is debatable and that human beings have no right to be 'defiant' and 'careless' with their lives and the lives of others (Ṣammūd 1993: 71). He then proceeds to warn the writer against the pitfalls of existentialism by reminding him that Sartre's Existentialism promotes Man's 'unlimited belief in himself,' and is, therefore, 'atheist, deviating from religion and denying God'. Yet Ḥusayn, ever keen to build bridges and find common ground, is quick to point out that existentialism can be reconciled with religion by pointing to the case of Gabriel Marcel whose 'Christian' Existentialism sets limits for human freedom and capacity. Ḥusayn concludes that *al-Sudd* reconciles Existentialism and Islam, and thus 'Islamicizes' this European philosophical doctrine (Ṣammūd 1993: 70).[46]

But while Ḥusayn finds a religiously 'acceptable' explanation of al-Masʿadī's views, his own interpretation of *al-Sudd* paints a very different picture. His reading is exemplary of a dominant view of literature at the time and indicative of how what I might call the 'Masʿadī challenge' was accommodated. Ḥusayn links the play to the political situation in Tunisia, specifically, to French colonial rule of the country. In this reading, the play illustrates the state of the writer and his people under French occupation. Ḥusayn says: 'He wrote his story when he was in despair or close to despair in an attempt to feel that he exists and that he is a rational and strong being who must influence life just as he is influenced by it' (Ṣammūd 1993: 71). Ghaylān's stubborn reaction to his repeated failures is interpreted as the determination of a freedom fighter. Ḥusayn adds: 'He fights despair no matter how great it is and no matter how numerous its causes. He rejects submission despite the comfort and ease it provides, and shuns obedience whatever its temptations may be. It is of no importance to him whether the storm carries him and his imagination away to nowhere' (71–72). Despite the fact that Ḥusayn was well versed in Western literature and an enthusiastic supporter of the Hellenic heritage, he ignores completely the relationship between *al-Sudd* and Greek tragedy. He ignores as well the place of the book in the dramatic literature in the Arab World at the time, except for a brief reference to a limited symbolist movement in poetry.

Ḥusayn may have good grounds for the oversight. For a cursory look at drama in Arabic society shows that although there were forms of dramatic representation in pre-modern Arabic culture nothing resembled tragedy in the Greek sense. The closest form is perhaps the enactment of the death of Ḥusayn, the prophet's grandson, in Shiʿi Islam, a type of devotional passion drama. Closer to our time, dramatic representations of religious themes have been attempted. Joseph's story was put on stage in Egypt in 1932 as *al-Lughz aw Zulaykha* (The Mystery or Zulaykha). There was also an attempt to make a film out of the same story in the 1930s. But both projects attracted strong protests, which led to stopping the play and denying permission to the film (Dardūrī 1975: 150). Adaptations and translations of Greek and classical tragedy were common in the formative decades of Arabic theatre. But it was only

with the Egyptian Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm that both tragedy and religious themes would come together and would thrive. He pioneered the 'drama of ideas' in Arabic but wrote his religious plays largely from the standpoint of faithfulness to the original sources. His play, *Ahl al-Kahf* (People of the Cave) (1933), inspired by the Koranic story about the cave sleepers, is set in a Christian environment while his most daring play, *Muḥammad* (1936), rewrites the Prophet's biography in a dramatic form. Al-Ḥakīm, however, remains close to the sources and portrays an image of the Prophet similar to the one found in his biographies (140).[47] At the formal level, al-Ḥakīm may have adhered to the poetics theory, but he did not explore what al-Masʿadī would call the tragic struggle of the Islamic figures he represented.

4

THE CALL OF THE BEYOND:
SUFISM AS POETICS AND
WORLDVIEW

There in the Simorgh radiant face they saw
Themselves as the Simorgh of the world – with awe
They gazed, and dared at last to comprehend
They were the Simorgh and the journey's end.

(Attar, *Conference*)

Faust. Listen, my friend: the ages that are past
Are now a book with seven seals protected:
What you the Spirit of the Ages call
Is nothing but the spirit of you all,
Wherein the Ages are reflected.

(Goethe, *Faust*)

In my discussion of tragedy I allude to Ḥusayn's reading of *al-Sudd* and his subsequent exchange with al-Masʿadī, highlighting the elements of foreign influences and ideas of tragedy and fate. The exchange reveals important aspects of the intellectual debate in the 1950s, provides insights into how Sufism was handled by the most important Arab intellectual of the time and shows the framework that influenced subsequent readings of al-Masʿadī's work by critics. Ḥusayn read *al-Sudd* within two intellectuals contexts, French Existentialism, specifically Camus, and Islamic philosophy. According to him, al-Masʿadī's setting and style find their predecessors in Islamic philosophical stories not in literature. He argues that the environment in the book is poetic and imaginary, which is unfamiliar in Arabic literature except perhaps in some philosophical narratives. Indeed, Muslim philosophers, notably Ibn Sīna (Avicenna) (980–1037) and Ibn Ṭufayl (d.1185) have written symbolic narratives depicting the individual search for wisdom.[1] Other examples include an epistle by the tenth century scholars, The Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ) which tackles the relationship between animals and humans from the point of view of the former.[2]

Ḥusayn suggests that al-Masʿadī's book was influenced by Camus' work on the myth of Sisyphus. When al-Masʿadī objected to the comparison, Ḥusayn issued an

assessment of the Tunisian writer's philosophy that would affect subsequent readings of the author by Tunisian as well as Western critics. He writes: 'Existentialism has become Muslim at the hands of Prof. al-Masʿadī just as it became Christian with the well-known French writer Gabriel Marcel' (Ṣammūd 1994: 70). But while Ḥusayn welcomes the moderating role of religion in philosophy, he warns rather strongly against the atheist tendencies of existentialism:

> Existentialism, which turned Christian at the hands of Gabriel Marcel or Muslim, in Tunisia, at the hands of Professor al-Masʿadī, sets limits to Man's confidence in himself. The strongest and most powerful of these boundaries is the religious limit that protects human beings from the excesses of arrogance and defiance. Religion puts in their heart the belief that they are responsible before a force that is greater and stronger than them, and more powerful than the community and its laws.
>
> (Ṣammūd 1994: 72)

Ḥusayn predicts that 'Muslim Existentialism' would enjoy only a limited appeal. He then goes on to interpret the story within contemporary Tunisian political reality, suggesting that the play is closely tied to the political condition of the writer's country. For him, this fact explains why the book is 'a mirror of Tunisian heroism in the resistance against French colonization and in the fight to win an honourable free life for himself, for his country and for all his compatriots' (72).

Ḥusayn's response illustrates the fact that the author was read within or in relation to the discourses that sought to construct what Anderson has called, 'an imagined community' with a clear identity defined along religious lines (Islamic nation), ethnic and cultural boundaries (pan-Arabism), or territory (the modern nation-state of Tunisia). Sufism does not fit the picture and does not serve such project. As a result, Ḥusayn detects the philosophical tradition behind al-Masʿadī's work but fails to see the Sufi dimension in it. At no point does he refer to Sufism. He even ignores completely al-Masʿadī's attempt to situate his work within a Sufi framework, considering it 'forced,' designed to fit a post-colonial reality and therefore unconvincing. Ḥusayn's reading, to my mind, exemplifies the status of *taṣawwuf* in modern Arab culture. Sufism, which has been often linked to subversion throughout Islamic history, has continued to be repressed in modern times albeit for new reasons. It has become tied to values considered 'anti-modern', or going against the needs of the nation. Sufism was viewed either as steeped in superstition; encouraging submissiveness and popular religious practice, such as belief in miracles and the veneration of saints; or advocating focus on the concerns of the individual rather than the community or the nation.[3]

Variety, even contradictions, in the critical assessment of Sufism in al-Masʿadī should not surprise. These interpretations touch on and are informed by views of the position of Sufism in the modern world, the role of the writer in Arab society and the role of literature in an emerging nation – should literature be tragedy or epic, a depiction of present-day reality or engagement with the past, mimesis or transcendence? It is within this climate that Ḥusayn's argument and tone found resonance as well as

rejection among Tunisian critics. Ṭarshūna suggests that al-Masᶜadī's views differ from Camus since his conception of Man is taken from the Muᶜtazilite school of Islamic thought, which considers the human being free to choose between good and evil while being responsible before God for their actions. But because freedom is given by God, not created by man, the power of God remains the limit (Ṭarshūna 1978: 45). Nevertheless, Ṭarshūna echoes Ḥusayn's wish that the final action of al-Masᶜadī's protagonists 'were a union with the earthly world of the people' (Ṭarshūna 1978: 64).

Other contemporary Tunisian critics condemn al-Masᶜadī's mystical attitude from a more political standpoint, namely, the role of the writer in society. Al-Mājirī in his damning criticism of the writer in *Al-Masᶜadī: min al-thawra ᵓilā al-hazīma fī 'Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl. . .'* (Al-Masᶜadī: From Rebellion to Defeat in *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl…*) (1980) interprets Sufism as an elitist solution and an 'aristocratic idea' available only to the select few and to those who shun reality. He considers the end of the story contrived and treats it as 'a suicide' in the face of real problems (al-Mājirī 1980: 111).[4] Al-Masᶜadī's hero would be therefore dangerous since he epitomizes the betrayal of intellectuals.[5] Al-Mājirī's ideas are informed by the conception of literature as a portrayal of human social and historical experience and a transcendence of this experience by pointing to a better future for the people. Al-Masᶜadī's celebrated phrase, 'literature is first and foremost a tragedy', must become 'literature is first and foremost an epic' (al-Mājirī 1980: 136). For a 'secularizing' criticism, Sufism is considered to be, if not dangerous, then at least dubious and should be therefore viewed with suspicion, if not vigilance. Unlike, al-Majirī, al-Gharībī suggests that al-Masᶜadī actually condemns rather than identifies with or draws on Sufism. He reads in al-Masᶜadī a rejection of Sufi orders (*tariqa*s), calling this practice legend, myth and magic (Ghābirī 1992: 238–247). He interprets Scene Two of *al-Sudd*, analysed in Chapter 3, where followers of Ṣāhabbāᵓ recite her gospel and put on a performance reminiscent of Sufi *samāᶜ*, as a critique of a society 'immersed in metaphysical pursuits, shunning progress and rational action' (Ghābirī 1992: 245). Ghaylān is seen as a man entrusted with a modernizing and anti-colonialist mission: 'Al-Masᶜadī sets Ghaylān in an environment plagued by magic and false beliefs in the hope that he may save these dervishes and imbue them with revolutionary consciousness to fight the colonizer' (al-Ghābirī 1992: 247).

Yet, more measured and more literary analyses of Sufism in al-Masᶜadī do exist. They often see Sufi presence as evidence of a link to the Islamic heritage or a sign of authenticity (*aṣāla*). An early example dates from 1955. Al-Shādhilī al-Qilībī introduces the first edition of *al-Sudd* thus: 'Creation ignites in Ghaylān an existential ecstasy (*nashwa*) similar to Sufi ecstatic sayings (*shaṭaḥāt*). In fact, Ghaylān has a Sufi conception of the world and of creation. He sees his life as an ascent towards the Absolute' (al-Masᶜadī 1992: 167).[6] Ṭarshūna, on the other hand, attributes Sufism in al-Masᶜadī to the writer's rootedness in Islamic culture, pointing out that his language is 'adapted from the lexicon of the Sufi poets', which gives his type of existentialism an Islamic content (Ṭarshūna 1978: 49). Khālid al-Gharībī synthesizes these views in a more comprehensive manner, suggesting that Sufism is present in the work in three ways. It takes the form of expressions and terms derived from the Sufi lexicon, such

as longing (ʿishq), overflowing (fayḍ), self-revelation (kashf), Truth (ḥaqq) and infusion of God in the human self (ḥulūl) (al-Gharībī 1994: 151). Sufism is also apparent in the conception of the stories, particularly in their endings. A third instance of Sufism is detectable through the intellectual development of characters, who reject reason and perceive religious practice as a hindrance. They also confront time and space as they move from one state to another and return to a starting point, in a circular movement. This movement reflects the essence of God as a circle without beginning or end (155). I will return to some of these points.

The most promising readings of Sufism in al-Masʿadī come from poets, and for a good reason. Modern Arabic poetry has in fact had fruitful and intensive engagement with Sufi ideas and poetry much more so than prose.[7] Tunisian poet, al-Munṣif al-Wahāybī reads Ḥaddatha as an illustration of the seven valleys, representing the seven Sufi stations (maqāmāt) delineated in *The Conference of Birds* (Manṭiq al-ṭayr) by Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 1220).[8] Al-Wahāybi suggests that al-Masʿadī 'reconstructs these states or stations by changing and adding depending on the state of his hero Abū Hurayra. He rewrites the journey in a way that reveals new relations and meanings. In this way he links modernity to tradition (turāth)' (al-Wahaybī 1981: 29). This promising interpretation, however, does not attempt to explore what the link means or how it is achieved nor does it explain stations properly. Maḥmūd Darwīsh views the dam in *al-Sudd* as a 'spiritual construction'. He argues that failure in the book does not point to human failure to control the spiritual world; rather, it shows that 'humanity has not yet understood that the path to spiritual elevation and perfection is not the same as the one which allowed humanity to control matter' (Darwīsh 1975: 112).

Western critics (Bürgel, von Grunebaum, Berque and Östle) read al-Masʿadī Sufism predominantly within the issue of tradition and modernity in Arabic literature. They mostly see him as an original link between Western modern ideas and the Arabic literary tradition.[9] Bürgel argues that the writer advocates a type of 'dynamic Sufism' that is incompatible with the 'broad stream of Islamic mysticism' (Smart 1996: 170). He adds that al-Masʿadī is unable to sustain this direction and turns away from dynamism in *al-Sudd* to peaceful surrender in '*al-Musāfir*'. Sharzynska-Bochenska suggests that al-Masʿadī's latest view is secular, 'full of despair and pessimism' (Sharzynska-Bochenska 1992: 120). She recognizes a mystical influence on al-Masʿadī in the idea that surrendering the self leads to fulfilment. 'In this idea one can traces [sic] the distinct influences of Moslem mysticism – the ideas of al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Suhrawardi – especially the motiv [sic] of search [sic] begging and humility towards Gods [sic] – the Being who shows grace' (Sharzynska-Bochenska 1992: 117).[10] Östle, on the other hand, is closer to Tunisian critics. He suggests in 'Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī and Tunisia's "Lost Generation"' that Ghaylān is seeking perfection through a journey, stopping short of saying whether the journey is of mystical nature. In fact, like al-Ghābirī, he finds parallels to Sufism only in the rituals that make up Scene Two of *al-Sudd*: 'The language leads one to think of the type of chanting which accompanies ceremonies at the popular level of Sufi-inspired Islamic practice, in particular the *dhikr* rituals' (Östle 1977: 160).

At the extreme end of the critical spectrum, stands Shimon Ballas who argues, more openly than any other critic, that al-Masʿadī's *al-Sudd* portrays an anti-religious, even atheist, view of the world. He takes his cue from Ṭaha Ḥusayn's allusion to atheism in existential thought and his moderating compromise, mentioned earlier (Ballas 1992: 137). Ballas suggests, 'Al-Masʿadī is, no doubt, aware of the sensitivity of his position, and that is why he avoids frank responses and strains to bestow an enlightened Islamic image on a work which emanates from a striking atheist vision' (140). Yet, Ballas recognizes a Sufi element in the play. 'He (Ghaylān) sees creation and productivity in a Sufi manner, and considers life a continuous rise towards perfection…' (127). How can one reconcile the two statements by Ballas? Does he consider Sufism an atheist doctrine? If this is the case, he would be in agreement with those orthodox Moslems who have been persecuting Sufis for heresy for centuries.

The critical reception of the Sufi aspects in al-Masʿadī's work, outlined above, provides insight into the culture within which he writes. Discourse on al-Masʿadī is a space in which ideologies are tried and tested and conceptions of the role of spirituality, including Sufism, in modern Arab culture are revealed. The author's close ties to the premodern Arabic intellectual and literary tradition (*turāth*) constitute the main frame in which Sufism is discussed. Dominant modern Arab conceptions of *turāth*, however, give little attention to Sufism, if they do not cast it as a negative current in Islamic ideas. Whether in cultural history or in religious thought, they tend to focus either on the strand of rationality or on orthodoxy in the tradition. Ḥasan Ḥanafī, one of the key proponents of a new look at *turāth*, recognizes the unique contribution of Sufism when he points out that *taṣawwuf* has allowed the appearance of the human being as 'an independent dimension' in Islamic thought. Yet, he positions himself decidedly against Sufism when it comes to its role in modernity. *Taṣawwuf*, according to him, poses great danger to what he calls 'our modern being and nationalist attitude' (Ḥanafī 1992: 178). It is a negative influence altogether, specifically because it does not stress communal destiny. In other words, while *turāth* binds together the nation by giving it a collective memory, Sufism disperses it by emphasizing the fact that destiny is first and foremost individual. Yet, it is the interest in the individual, which makes Sufism an apt framework to read al-Masʿadī's work. His characters struggle against their destinies and necessity as individuals. Whether these struggles are allegories for national concerns is a matter for interpretation. To describe their metaphysical experience as atheist (Ballas), existentialist (Ḥusayn), rational (Ṭarshūna), revolutionary (Ghābirī) or defeatist (Mājirī) is only part of the story. My argument here is that al-Masʿadī's handling of Sufism in his fiction runs against the dominant flow of modern Arabic literature at his time. Moreover, Sufism in al-Masʿadī is not only a worldview but also a style of writing, which shows the complexity and breadth of how Arabic culture responded to modernity and Western literature. From this perspective, the following is a reading of al-Masʿadī's fiction using Sufism as an interpretive code. Relying on Sufi terms, symbols and conventions developed by leading Sufis and Sufi scholars, I will explore the Sufi allusions, borrowings, citations and references in al-Masʿadī's fiction. By referring to Sufism as a textual tradition, i.e. an intertext, al-Masʿadī's work is linked to the prolific tradition

of Sufi writing. But I must note that there is a basic disagreement among critics as to what is Sufism in the first place. An apt starting point of my reading will be, therefore, an attempt to delineate what is meant by Sufism.

Sufism (taṣawwuf)

Students of the subject have noted the difficulty of providing coherent and authoritative accounts of Sufism.[11] In fact, there is no easy way to define Sufism or the meaning of the term *taṣawwuf*, nor is it possible to establish with certainty the origins of Islamic mysticism.[12] Early Sufis tied it to purity (*ṣafāʾ*) of soul and mind (al-Daqqāq), to solitude (al-Ḥallāj), to unmediated relationship with God (al-Junayd), and to the loss of human attributes (Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ṣayrafī) (al-Qushayrī 1993: 280–83). Carl Ernest defines Sufism as 'the mystical intensification of Islamic religious consciousness' (Ernest 1992: 9). It designates the development of the Muslim in his or her individual journey towards Knowledge. 'Individual gnosis' is therefore at the heart of Sufism as Ahmet Karamustafa points out (Karamustafa 1994: 31). It is this search, which I retain here. Early systematic studies of Sufism, such as *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya* (al-Qushayrī's Epistle or Treatise), and biographical works delineate stages in the development of the seeker or the wayfarer and organize them in plausible hierarchies.[13] Yet, the stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*) through which a Sufi passes vary greatly. Sufi teaching manuals devised for seekers of the right path (*ṭarīq* or *ṭarīqa*) tend to be prescriptive and programmatic.[14] Manuals often stress the master-disciple relationship, discipline and endurance.

Sufis and Sufism scholars have produced complex systems of thought and elaborate interpretations of the *Qurʾān*, as Ibn al-ʿArabī's work demonstrates. They have also left behind some of the most esoteric writings in the Arabic language, including aphorisms, dense prose and symbolic poetry. Of these mention may be made of al-Hallāj's *Ṭawāsīn*; al-Niffarī's *Mawāqif*; Ibn al-Arabī's poetry, in particular *Turjumān al-ashwāq* (The Interpreter of Desires), and Abū Madyan's aphorisms. To unlock their meanings and allusions and to interpret their cryptic utterances, Sufi writers have developed elaborate grids of technical terms.[15] Yet, the terminology is unstable, as terms coined by one Sufi are often redefined or modified at later stages.[16] Sometimes such terms serve the practical function of interpretive tools to put into intelligible discourses experiences and utterances, which are beyond normal comprehension. They are also means to explain the symbolism (*ramz*) often used by Sufis. The opacity of terms, or what al-Qushayrī calls *istibhām*, as well as the great diversity and duplication in Sufi terminology are generated in part through the element of secrecy surrounding the Sufi experience. Coinage was motivated by the desire 'to keep the secrets from spreading among those who do not belong' (i.e. to members of other religious orientations or to pretenders to Sufism) (al-Qushayrī 1992: 53).

Ibn al-Arabī, for instance, finds it necessary to write a whole interpretation of the symbols contained in his poetry collection, *Turjumān al-ʾashwāq*, reading the literal meaning as a symbol of the spiritual and the 'apparent' as a sign of 'hidden' meanings. He 'admits that in some passages of his poems the mystical import was not clear

to himself, and that various explanations were suggested to him in moments of ecstasy' (Ibn ʿArabī 1978: 7). The terms he uses are '*wārid*,' an idea or meaning which comes to the devotee like a visitation or an inspiration; and (*samāʿ*), literally, listening, a session of music and dance where trances and ecstatic expression are not uncommon.[17]

In the following reading of al-Masʿadī's fiction, I use three sets of concepts to interpret the work. The first one is resurrection or awakening. This will account for the beginnings of narratives, the setting and state of departure of the main characters. The second concept is a cluster of terms which describe the journey (*safar*) or path (*ṭarīq*) and designate the various stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*) experienced by the protagonists. The third and final set of terms, namely *fanāʾ* (passing away or annihilation of the self) and *baqāʾ* (subsistence or abiding), is used to interpret the ending of each narrative. In doing this, I am not focusing on one particular text. Likewise, no one Sufi figure or text is singled out as a privileged source. For while it is true that each one of al-Masʿadī's narratives portrays an individual journey, specific concepts may be more aptly applicable to a given text than they are to another. Methodologically this approach allows an overview of the author's work; provides a terminology with which to read it and, most significantly, focuses attention on the potential of a Sufi poetics.

My point of departure is the argument that al-Masʿadī's earliest work, 'Al-Musāfir' (The Wayfarer) is a preliminary sketch of the writer's entire exploration, in literary form, of the human existential journey towards knowledge.[18] So far, no attempt has been made to relate the story to al-Masʿadī's other work taking into account themes, style and scope. Critics may have been discouraged by the writer's own reservations about the story. Indeed, in a lecture given in 1975 and published as 'al-Masʿadī Talks about his Literature', the writer says:

> The issue exposed here [in 'al-Musāfir'], not in the form of a philosophical treatise or an analytical literary essay, but in the shape of meditations, insights and ideas, is the comparison between what I thought at the time was the Oriental (Eastern) conception of life and existence and what I thought was the Western position, or the conception of Western civilization, of the role of Man and his existential responsibilities.
>
> (al-Masʿadī 1979b: 77)

In this respect, al-Masʿadī mentions that 'Al-Musāfir' represents a submissive self, a view not reflected in his book *al-Sudd*, for instance. This reading backwards, which may have been made under the pressure to provide keys for the interpretation of an opaque text, does not detract from the importance of 'Al-Musāfir' in al-Masʿadī's work as a whole. In fact, I suggest that the main Sufi orientation of the writer's entire work is embedded in this little-studied story. The following review of the text sets the stage for my analysis of the Sufi journey in al-Masʿadī's later work.

In 'Al-Musāfir', a man who is identified only as 'Al-Musāfir' (The Traveler) stands on a mountain outside a city in a disturbed state of mind. He recalls his travels in search of 'serenity and dream'.[19] He was advised to 'interrogate the East', but two

years of search were spent to no avail.[20] The serenity he seeks is not the 'serenity of the Greek Apollo whose apparent calm hides internal pain and anguish' (al-Masʿadī 1974: 121). It is rather akin to marble 'like Eastern music and the lines in Eastern sculpture where the end meets the beginning, where there is no movement, change or transformation. Serenity is not cowardice and resignation to fate or belief in pre-determination (*al-qawl bi al-jabr*). Rather, it is the great stillness (*al-qarāru al-ʾaʿẓam*)' (al-Masʿadī 1974: 122). The Easterner, like marble, has defeated time. For time per-tains to movement: time originates in movement and movement is measured by time. 'Movement is change, corruption (*fasād*) and finitude (*zawāl*)' (123). Manifestations of the East's victory over Time are the Pyramids, Buddha, the prophets and 'even the serenity of Tunisians who remain unshaken amidst a world torn by wars and rebellions' (123).

The East does not experience the loneliness of Dionysus in his attempt to reunite with the origin from which he was severed because 'the Easterner did not lose ties to the Absolute whole' (125). This tie shields the Easterner against the pain of the limi-tation inherent in the human self:

> This is the case of al-Hallāj, al-Ghazālī and others who were saved because they shunned humanness and embraced the world of Absolute Existence: the world of God. Al-Hallāj, al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ did not fall short of others in terms of thought, wonder and wandering in major issues. They did not adopt Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) and devote themselves to absolute exis-tence out of intellectual impotence or for fear of the suffering engendered by human thought.
>
> (126–7)

Such suffering has to do with reason itself. When reason reaches its limits, the thinker experiences the vertigo of wonder (*duwār al-ḥayrah*) and the risk of falling into its abyss. Such human limitations compel the wanderer to take refuge in 'tran-scendental truths' (*ʿulwiyyāt*) (127).

The Traveller thought he had found serenity in the East but he realizes that the 'gift was deceptive' (128). He knows he has not yet attained such wisdom. He then recalls the latest stages of his journey and contemplates the town of Kisra, built on rocks from which springs clear water but where the land is barren and the sky is empty. 'The mountain [of Kisra] is the symbol of The Traveller himself: his sky is empty and deserted; he labours his soul and mind, and feels pain' (130). When The Traveller visits the town of Makthar (the Roman Maktaris), he reads the Roman arch as a 'door for ascension to the sky' (130). 'This [the arch] has nothing to do with The Traveller. It is the symbol of the East reaching for the sky (the heavens)' (130). The Traveller remembers his own ascent (*ʿurūj*) but denies that it had actually happened because the ascent appeared to be too easy, almost natural. At this point, he realizes that the serenity of the Easterner cannot be attained through reason or thought. Harmony and union with the universe can be attained only through other means: 'The self must open up to the universe, be alert and attentive to it; it must then

accept and trust it, and surrender to it' (133).[21] At this point in his journey the Traveller opens up to the city, which appears to him dormant like 'the pendulum of a still watch' (133). He then descends to it, alert and at ease. 'For the first time in two years, he finds rest and sleep. He remains in serenity and dream' (133).

Three main elements of Sufism are present explicitly and unambiguously in the text. There is a journey of discovery and knowledge (alluded to in the very name of the character). The nature of the journey is clearly Sufi (fellow Sufi travellers are mentioned by name and *taṣawwuf* is referred to explicitly). Stations and states are listed (serenity, openness to the universe, ascent, trust, contentment, surrendering, union). The method of attaining serenity and dream is debated (human reason is seen as wanting and limited). However, the nature of the text, a narrative meditation with explicit authorial commentary, allows only a description of the Sufi experience from the outside, which reduces the complexity and development of the story. 'Al-Musāfir' is clearly an early, and rather naive, exposition on a presumed dichotomy between Eastern and Western conceptions of Man whose sources may well be early Western Orientalist literature.[22] The fact that the text was originally written in French as early as 1938 may explain some of its aspects.[23] It is more explicit about setting, references to Islamic sources and ideas than the Arabic version. Al-Masʿadī's other works, all written originally in Arabic, show independence and maturity in the treatment of this complex theme. They do so in a variety of narrative genres and with a great degree of depth. Of these, *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra* is the most complete elaboration of the Sufi journey while *al-Sudd* and *Mawlid* expand on specific stages and themes. For this reason the thrust of analysis will focus on *Ḥaddatha*, in particular with regard to stations and states.

From the outset, however, a methodological problem arises. In what sequence are stations to be arranged? Should one follow one particular Sufi manual, such as al-Qushayrī's sequencing? Or should there be stations as they appear in *Ḥaddatha*? As I mention above, the sequencing of stations, in hierarchical or chronological orders, is by no means unanimous or uniform among Sufis. I suggest that what matters is that they occur within the framework of a life crisis, a struggle and a resolution. In fact, what relates Sufi journeys are not the exhaustive experience of stations in a particular order. Rather, they are defined by their idiosyncrasy and non-transferability in light of the fact that the Sufi experience is ultimately personal. In the following pages, I will read al-Masʿadī's work using the mystical experience of the main characters as a parameter and the Sufi journey as an organizing principle and reference.

The Wanderers

Al-Masʿadī's characters may appear to be solitary wanderers but in fact they are, intertextually, rather in good and well-known company. They either refer directly and explicitly to Sufi figures or allude to them in more subtle ways. They may also point to a concept or an idea familiar in Sufi history or literature. In this sense, the characters constitute an integral part of Sufism in his work. Al-Masʿadī's Abū Hurayra is a textual composite named after the Prophet's close companion, as I discuss earlier.

He recalls as well, in some of his ways and stories, al-Ghazālī's journey, al-Ḥallāj and others, as I will show below. Ghaylān, who is introduced in *al-Sudd* as 'a false being', has nevertheless generated serious speculations about his origin. I retain here the links between al-Masʿadī's character and Ghaylān al-Dimashqī who died in the first half of the eighth century.[24] He was an early proponent of human free will and a renowned writer of epistles seen favourably by prose masters such as al-Jāḥiz. No date is known for al-Dimashqī's death but it is almost certain that he was condemned to crucifixion after an inquisition, and was brutally killed sometime after AD 717. He held important administrative posts in the Umayyad government (Judd 1999: 162). Most importantly, however, al-Dimashqī is associated with Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, claimed by Sufis as one of their founding figures. He is said to be part of al-Murjiʾa, who believed that major sins are postponed to God's judgement. Ghaylān al-Dimashqī became 'a prototypical heretic' (Judd 1999: 165).

Other characters share the name of Sufi figures. Madyan in *Mawlid al-Nisyān* has a precedent in the famous North African Sufi Abū Madyan Shuʿayb ibn al-Ḥasan al-Anṣārī (AD 1115–1198), who was born in Seville and died in Tlemcen where he is buried. Rayḥāna from *Ḥaddatha* recalls Rayḥāna al-Wāliha (The God-infatuated), a devout Moslem and mystic of the ninth century who is reported to wear the following inscription around her neck:

> O You, my friend, my ecstasy and aspiration,
> Beside You, my heart spurns all other love,
> O beloved, my long-enduring ambition and yearning is to behold You.
> Among all the pleasures of Paradise
> Only union with You do I wish.

<div align="right">(Javad 1983: 117)</div>

In addition, Rayḥāna, as character and as term, carries significant connotations. In the book, she is a prostitute, a lover and the guardian of the collective myths of her people as the last living member of her tribe to know their version of the legend of Āsāf and Nāʾila. In her performance of the myth in 'The Resurrection' she falls into a trance and wants to throw herself into the fire. Abū Hurayra says that he was unable to fall in love again after her departure (al-Masʿadī 1979: 109). On the linguistic level, Rayḥāna carries a rich connotation: the name is derived from *rūḥ* (spirit or soul), refers to a fragrance and also means repose.[25] The Prophet had a wife called Rayḥāna, who was a Jewish captive who converted to Islam around AD 628. She is reported to have excellent command of literature and rhetoric (Ibn Saʿd. *Ṭabaqāt*. 8, 129).

The character Abū Rughāl refers to the legendary Abū Righāl (also known as Abū Rughāl) in more than the name (Stetkeyvich 1996: 37–48). There are several versions of his legend but most agree that he was cursed by Muslims and that his tomb is located between Mecca and al-Ṭāʾif. He may have been a ruthless tax collector who was cursed by the Prophet Ṣāliḥ of Thamūd or a guide to the Abyssinians during their march on Mecca at the year of the elephant, the year the Prophet Muḥammad was reportedly born. In all cases, his tomb is often stoned. Al-Masʿadī plays with the

stories about Abū Rughāl's multiple deaths, his tyranny and his tomb, but disassociates him from the curse and the stoning. As a result, he comes through as more revered, which prepares him to offer advice and guidance to Abū Hurayra (al-Masʿadī 1979: 205).

Maymūna, from *al-Sudd*, has been interpreted to mean belief especially in the sense of orthodox and unquestioning faith (lexically the name can be derived form *ʾāmana,* to believe). In the play she is presented simply as 'a woman'. But Maymūna has a precedent in Maymūnah Siāh, known as an ascetic and reported to be the 'wife in heaven' whom a number of Sufi masters wished to marry or were promised in their visions. One of her *karāmāt* (miracles) was that the sheep she herded mixed freely with wolves while she prayed (Javad 1983: 152). In *al-Sudd*, Maymūna's apocalyptic vision comes true while her contentment remains largely intact by the end of the play. Mayāra, who is introduced in *al-Sudd* as 'a shadow, love and beauty', is lexically related to the terms, 'vision' or 'apparition'. Al-Ḥabīb Muḥammad ʿUlwān suggests that al-Masʿadī adapted the figure of Ariel by taking out its function as 'the male God of Evil' and giving her the capacity to change Ghaylān from reason to Sufism (ʿUlwān 1994: 33).

Hāmān appears in *al-Sudd* as well as in *Ḥaddatha*. In the first book he is compared to the protagonist, Ghaylān (al-Masʿadī 1992: 120–23). He is associated with defiance and intransigence in Maymūna's mind but much admired by Ghaylān. Maymūna sees in Hāmān's fate a lesson for Ghaylān. Hāmān struggles to deny pleasure and isolates himself on an island, returns to live among the people, then back to his island and, finally, he looses his mind (al-Masʿadī 1992: 122). Maymūna draws the following comparison between Hāmān and Ghaylān: 'He was the negation of what you wanted to confirm (*ithbāt*) in your self: the spirit, reason, belief in Man and power' (123). In *Ḥaddatha*, Hāmān appears in a parodic citation of the *Qurʾān*, which I analyse in Chapter 2 (al-Masʿadī 1979: 134). In the *Qurʾān*, Hāmān is referred to as Pharaoh's army chief.[26] There are also echoes of Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān in the Hāmān of *al-Sudd*.

Despite such erudite references, al-Masʿadī's main characters strike the reader as somewhat unliterary. Some of them even despise the written word and ignore it. At best they come close to being readers. They are not bookish. Ghaylān is a practical man, a doer (*homo faber*); Abū Hurayra is an errant seeker of Truth and pleasures, a searching man who admires beauty and settles for no one pleasure; he preaches a gospel he rarely lives by; a Zarathustra, an errant philosopher whose wisdom is drawn from experience, the sensuous, the sensual and occasional intuition. His master, Abū Rughāl steers him clear of books (202). Yet, al-Masʿadī's characters refer the reader to learned, even erudite men and women, to people from books: Abū Hurayra, the compiler and repository of the Prophet's sayings; Ghaylān al-Dimashqī, scholar and advocate of free will; Madyan, the Sufi scholar and poet; Sindabād, the epitome of travel in *The Nights*; Maymūna the ascetic; Rayḥāna the God-infatuated…. Moreover, they speak like books, in erudite metaphors and learned language. At times they speak in quotes, letting other texts speak through them. Their names are solidly embedded in the tradition; but they neither reflect nor reject it outright. They tap into the Muslim reader's memory in engaging and playful ways, as allusions (*ishārat*) and codes (*rumūz*); not as guides or lessons but as companions on a journey.

Setting off

The wayfarer does not start *ex nihilo*. An event, a sight, a word, which awakens in them the urge to seek a different life and to reject the ways and bases of their present life, often inaugurate the journey. Sufi manuals call this a *wārid* (event) or *khātir* (idea or message), something which overtakes the heart by surprise. It leads to repentance (*tawba*) or a renunciation of the person's current way of life and the beginning of the journey for discovery and knowledge. Spiritual awakening is often accompanied by a crisis in belief or direction. A famous case of awakening pertains to the towering Sufi figure, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (1207–1273). It took place upon his encounter with the 'wandering dervish', Shams of Tabriz, in 1244. Shams was searching for someone who could endure his company. The question Shams asked Rūmī was 'who was greater, Bistāmī, the Sufi who reportedly said: "How great is my glory!" or Muḥammad who said to God: "We do not know you as we should?"' (Rūmī 1995: XI). Rūmī is reported to have fainted upon hearing the question and later answered that 'Muḥammad was greater, because Bistāmī has taken one gulp of the divine and stopped there, whereas for Muḥammad the way was always unfolding' (XI). From that event on, both men began a companionship (*ṣuḥba*) and became inseparable. Another example of a Sufi awakening is provided by the famous theologian al-Ghazālī who is held in high esteem by al-Masʿadī. Al-Ghazālī describes his own spiritual crisis, which occurred around 1095 and led to a period of 10 years of various experiences and travels, in his autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*.[27]

Al-Masʿadī's stories invariably begin with a crisis which sets in motion the search. I have already mentioned how 'Al-Musāfir' begins with a man in a perturbed state of mind recalling his journey in search of 'serenity and dream' (al-Masʿadī 1974: 121). In the story 'Al-Sindabād wa al-Ṭahāra' (Sindabād and Purity), the main character is at an unnamed port looking for a ship in order to continue his travels. The night is unsettling like 'nothingness which strives to be or life which struggles to end' (137).[28] *Al-Sudd* unfolds in an arid landscape at dusk as Ghaylān is about to put into action his vision of a dam erected to transform the barren valley into productive fields. *Mawlid* starts with a crisis in Madyan's effort to cure disease. He realizes that his battle against death is at a critical moment.

But among al-Masʿadī's writings, *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl...* offers the most explicit case of awakening. It begins with '*Hadīth al-baʿth al-awwal*' (The First Awakening), where a friend invites Abū Hurayra to a 'distraction' from daily life for one day. He reluctantly accepts and, at dawn the following day, the two friends journey to the outskirts of Mecca. They stop at a valley and observe from a sand dune a naked couple dancing and singing (al-Masʿadī 1979: 52–54). When the couple disappear behind the dune, the friend, who by then was sobbing, tells Abū Hurayra how he came to know them. Tracking a lost camel led him to a water spring where he found the couple. They danced and sang for him, and offered him food and drink. Apparently he was so mesmerized by the couple that he failed to realize that the meat they fed him was none other than his camel.[29] Since then he kept returning to the place to observe the couple secretly. Abū Hurayra considers the life of the couple but

decides to resume his prayer and continue his current lifestyle. But when he learns that his friend has left the city to an unknown direction in the company of a beautiful young woman, he loses his determination. 'This was the first awakening', he says (al-Masʿadī 1979: 58). Abū Hurayra would change forever. On the narrative level, the stage is set for the unfolding of a personal experience. This first awakening actually engenders another, as the first event prepares the ground for it whereas the second one completes it. (It also foreshadows a last awakening by virtue of being first. The closing chapter of the book is indeed called 'Ḥadīth al-baʿth al-ākhir' (The Last Awakening). The cycle, as I will argue in due course, is completed with a new beginning (fanāʾ and baqāʾ).

Abū Hurayra says: 'I could make out two shadows, a young man and a young woman, dressed in the manner of Adam and Eve, lying side by side and facing East' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 51). The scene is described in terms of an apparition or a dream rather than an actual event. He adds:

> The flute player was no other than the young man. He was standing like a living statue in the flaming sky. The woman would spin or stop, rise up or fall to the floor. No sooner would she kneel as if in prayer than she would rise up again, only to fall down once more. She appeared like fake smoke, a tantalizing mirage, or a bodiless light. Then the flute gradually lost its power. It became fine, like a divine revelation or a demonic whisper.
>
> (al-Masʿadī 1979: 53–4)[30]

This is an inspirational scene whose effect on the narrator is strong and overwhelming. Abū Hurayra says that he felt so light and overjoyed that he almost began to dance. In the story that follows, Abū Hurayra's friend says that the couple had told him they have answered a call (daʿwa). They explain: 'The call of life, the call of the universe. Look at the trees, water, light, space and emptiness!' He adds that the couple have given rise in him to a feeling like 'longing for heaven', which made him hate his 'life among the dead' (Ḥaddatha, 57).

There is here a double awakening, or one that leads to another, as Abū Hurayra follows the example set by his friend. The tawba or repentance (the Arabic term literally means 'return') is not, however, explicitly stated as a return to God, but a return from 'the dead'. Sufis often describe tawba as turning away from an existing state of being which made the person stray away from the right path. The expression, 'the dead', is misleading since it plays on a specific definition of death by which life in pursuit of mundane aims is seen as death. The return from the dead marks a break with this lifestyle and the adoption of another whose model is offered by the dancing couple. The couple could be seen as a catalyst or sign (wārid) pointing to a different and more fulfilling existence. The fact that they are cut off from people highlights the need to break with society and daily preoccupations if the journey is to succeed. Their nudity shows purity (ṭahāra), whereas their Eastward direction points to sunrise, or the beginning, as well as to the East. Awakening is the first station of the wayfarer.

Stations (maqāmāt) and States (aḥwāl)

The distinction between state and station is crucial. States, it is generally agreed, are transitory and involuntary whereas stations are more lasting and are acquired through discipline and individual effort. Al-Qushayrī explains that states 'originate in existence itself, whereas stations are the result of expended effort' (al-Qushayrī 1993: 56). He establishes a hierarchy of stations where ascent is strictly determined. In reality, however, there are considerable differences among Sufi scholars with regard to the number and sequence of stations. Schimmel suggests that 'the main steps are always repentance (*tawba*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), and poverty (*faqr*), which may lead to contentment (*riḍā*), to the different degrees of love (*ʿishq*), or to gnosis (*maʿrifa*), according to the mental predilection of the wayfarer' (Schimmel 1976: 100). In ʿAttār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, Schimmel sees the stations enumerated in an instructive manner. She writes: 'This epic is the most perfect poetic introduction to the mystical path, with its seven valleys, in which are described all the difficulties the soul will encounter on the road' (306). The seven valleys are, in ascending order: search (*ṭalab*) or renunciation of the world (asceticism or *zuhd*), passionate love (*ʿishq*), knowledge or gnosis (*maʿrifa*), rejection or contentedness (*istighnāʾ* or *kifāya* and *faqr*), union or arrival and unity (*tawḥīd* or *wuṣūl* and *wiḥda*), doubt or wonder (*ḥayra* or *dahsha*), and annihilation or passing away (*fanāʾ*).[31]

In *Ḥaddatha*, the journey, which begins as a direct result of the first awakening, incorporates striking similarities with, but also a number of variations on, the 'typical' journey of a Sufi wayfarer. In the fourth chapter, 'The Resurrection' (*al-Qiyāma*), Abū Hurayra severs his ties to the community and shuns daily human concerns in a ceremonial and spectacular fashion. The spectacle leads to a series of detachments, or '*qaṭʿ al-ʿalāʾiq bi al-khalāʾiq*' (Severing ties with creatures). Abū al-Madāʾin, a close friend of Abū Hurayra and a shopkeeper, tells us that the latter stopped by his shop one day, bought all his available candles and invited him for dinner at his farm, 'a barren land in Najd' (al-Masʿadī 1079: 76). Abū al-Madāʾin describes the dinner as a ritual. It includes performances of dance and singing lead by a woman named Rayḥāna, fire and trances. He reports:

> Rayḥāna says: 'The world is weighed down when it tries to be.' A voice adds: 'If the world were not heavy before its creation, it would not have been created.' Abū Hurayra replies: 'At that moment the world was like a music composition before it is played. Touching strings is indeed a most wonderful thing!
>
> Then they all fell silent. I thought I must have come to a gathering of possessed or drunken people.
>
> (al-Masʿadī 1979: 77–78)

The performance starts with music, Rayḥāna sings the legend of Asāf and Nāʾila, accompanied by a chorus of women spread around the dark farm (al-Masʿadī 1979: 78–80). About sixty torches then appear and a fire is made. Rayḥāna dances around the fire

and is soon joined by others, women and men. But the performance is interrupted by a strong wind that sweeps across the farm and spreads the fire. Rayḥāna rushes towards it, but Abū Hurayra manages to hold her back and everyone runs for their lives. Early the following morning, Abū al-Madāʾin visits Abū Hurayra in his home in the city where he finds him gazing at the ruins of his burned house. Abū Hurayra says that he took Rayḥāna back to her tavern *(ḥānūt)* in the middle of the storm, and during the journey she kept weeping and repeating: 'My fire is gone!' He then returned home where his wife has been awaiting him. As she attended to the horse, she was struck by lightning. Abū Hurayra says: 'I saw her burning like an angel of light... God's mercy on her! I wanted her to rise high and engage in the kind of struggle *(jihād)* you witnessed last night... But she fell short' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 85). He adds that he then completed the event by setting his home on fire. Abū al-Madāʾin takes his friend to his house, but the latter soon leaves him and joins Rayḥāna.

The spectacle, portrayed with some irony by Abū al-Madāʾin, is a ritualistic performance with echoes of Greek tragedy or the scenes of magic in *Faust*. But it is also akin to a *samāʿ* session or a religious ritual where song and dance combine and where trances are sought. The practice is common among Sufis although there is no consensus as to its permissibility. It is often explained as a state *(ḥāl)* during which the seekers get a glimpse of divine meanings 'beckoning them'. 'At that moment they express their joy. But when these meanings are veiled, happiness turns into sorrow. Some would tear off their clothes, others would wail, and others still would cry' (al-Qushayrī 1993: 342). During the ritual, Rayḥāna, presented here as a 'worshipper' of fire, is in a state of ecstasy while Abū Hurayra keeps his composure. Soon after that he loses what ties him to material life, when his house and farm are burned down. With the death of his wife, he also loses familial ties. (Elsewhere in the story, we learn that he has lost his only daughter to premature death.) From then on, he accompanies Rayḥāna, a prostitute and a saintly figure at once, presumably in a relationship based on mutual desire and spiritual affinity, not on social or pragmatic commitments. The medium through which he looses his material ties to the world is fire. The symbolism, embedded in the title, 'The Resurrection', is that rebirth takes place from ashes, like a Phoenix. Fire sets him free; and, without attachments to place and person, he is prepared for wandering and experiencing what he calls *jihād* (struggle), undertaken by Rayḥāna but which was beyond the reach of his contented wife. From the reports of his journeys, we learn that he goes through the states and phases of sensual pleasure; solitude; doubt; action and social purpose; disillusionment, which leads him to seek absence and forgetting; the search for wisdom and, finally, the end-beginning.

Chapters five and six show Abū Hurayra's experience of the senses. These play a significant role in his journey to knowledge. His first awakening is the revelation of a world where music and dance are tied to bodily pleasure, including food and sex. 'The Senses' ('*Hadith al-ḥiss*'), narrated by Abū Hurayra himself, describes his realization that illness makes the senses sharper. The heaviness which accompanies illness makes this a creative experience: 'During illness, I feel that my body becomes as sensitive as a string: it moans *(ʾanna)* under the slightest of touches' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 90). He acquires insight into a unique state of being which he has been searching for:

'I have long wanted to be hung up between earth and sky, or to sit on the top of a mountain severed from earth. I reached this feeling only during my illness: illness loosened my body and weakened my joints, causing blood and flesh to recede; I felt as if I was in an eternity. The best moment in life is indeed between being and nothingness' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 91). The loss of material and social ties leads almost inevitably to the next limitation, namely the body. Illness reduces the primacy of the body and frees the self to experience a state that nears a bodiless existence. (In *Mawlid*, Madyan tries to create a drug which neutralizes the body by making it eternal and free from the effects of time such as aging, decay and death.)

The body, however, cannot be forgotten or neglected. In his attempt to find meaning, Abū Hurayra tries to fulfil rather than deny the senses. In 'The Abandonment' ('*Hadith al-waḍ*'), Rayḥāna reports that during their time together, Abū Hurayra went through a phase when he enjoyed food and sex. 'He approached food with awe… He used to cleanse himself for a meal as he would for a sacred ritual (*iḥrām*)' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 96). Yet, she says, he soon began to show signs of restlessness and a longing for solitude. He would say: 'Women are like prophets, they consider solitude a cardinal sin' (99). He warns Rayḥāna not to be a 'deaf person who cannot understand or a prophet who promises a paradise' (101). He begins to see a life of food, wine and sex as a diversion from his journey. While Rayḥāna perceives immortality as her love for Abū Hurayra, in particular, their love making, he feels alienated in the confinement of the home. Rayḥāna says: 'He hated settling down. He used to visit but not reside' (104). Eventually he leaves Rayḥāna for an effeminate man (*mukhannath*) from Madīna (104). She describes his state at the time thus: 'He had an eternal longing for the sun and an eternal dread of sunrise. He used to say, "If you could, you should turn your life into an eternal dawn"' (105). Women and the body prove to be transient and limited. Abū Hurayra goes into a phase of solitude and obliviousness to the world around him.

In 'Longing and Solitude', Abū al-Madāʾin says: 'No one had more longing for a friend yet to be born than Abū Hurayra. Some days, I would say to him: Good morning Abū Hurayra! He would stare at me with eyes like absence (*ghayb*) and ask: "who are you?" Or "where do you come from?" And he would pass by like a shadow' (113). In the chapter titled 'Necessity' (*Ḥadīth al-Ḥāja*), Abū al-Madāʾin reports that Abū Hurayra used to say he wished he could know what is inside peoples' minds and hearts. And when asked for the reason, he would respond: 'I am not sure. It could be due to the confinement of the individual self (*ḍīqu maḥbasi al-nafsi al-fardi*)' (126). The individual self is limited and limiting. It appears like a prison that prevents the seeker from expanding and reaching out to other selves or to a larger and more encompassing self.[32] A more complete experience of introspection led in solitude is described in 'The Clay' (*Ḥadīth al-Ṭīn*), which I analyse in detail at the formal level in Chapter 2 above. The focus here will be on the Sufi significance of 'The Clay'.

Abū Hurayra is said to have lived for a while at Kurāʿ al-Ghamīm, a haunted valley between the two holy sites (Mecca and Madīna) where he was seen behaving like a mad man. When asked about the incident, Abū Hurayra confirmed it adding that he had written a eulogy for Adam and Eve, but mourners thought it of poor quality

and refused to sing it. The reason he wanted to mourn the 'elderly man and woman', is his hope that with their death his road would become 'virgin', un-travelled before him. But as he was seeking solitude in a valley, wind 'uncovered ancient ruins and a decayed skull'. Abū Hurayra says:

> This did away with my solitude and spoiled my joy. I wondered why was it that whenever someone sought solitude, an effaced sign would appear to him? It felt as if the sign was in my heart. I hated that and decided to leave the place. For I had set out to erase my story, only to realize it was within me, before Adam and Eve, impossible to erase.
>
> (al-Masʿadī 1979: 132)

Abū Hurayra attempts to recover a state of being which predates the original human form embodied in Adam and Eve. His means to do so is erasure (*maḥw*). Al-Qushayrī describes *maḥw* as 'the erasure of the attributes of habit' and affirmation (*ithbāt*) as the 'implantation of the rules of submission' (al-Qushayrī 1993: 75). But erasure, he adds, leaves a trace. A higher state is required in the progression towards full knowledge, namely *maḥq* (annihilation or the complete wiping out of the trace). Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī says in this regard: 'Creatures have states but the gnostic has no state. For his traces (*rusūm*) have been annihilated (*muḥiyat*), his identity is annihilated in (*faniyat fī*) someone else's and his traces are eclipsed by (*ghuyyibat bi*) the traces of someone else' (313). Abū Hurayra fails to attain annihilation (*maḥq*) through solitude.[33] But during his seclusion (*khulwa*) he would have a vision, which would lead him to a different experience, namely purposeful social action. Like his Sufi predecessors, he pursues it.[34] In the chapters titled, 'The Dog', 'Multitude' and 'Company and Solitude', Abū Hurayra experiences life among his fellow human beings and the disillusionment which ensues from it.

We learn that he lived two years in several camps inciting people to take charge of their destiny and to live together in peace. In 'The Dog', described in Chapter 2, Abū Hurayra says that during the time he spent with people he found fulfilment in the community and in action. ('I was drunk on action and thought it to be due to the number and the power of the group' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 155).) Yet, people may provide the feeling of power but they remain dependent, treacherous and envious. Abū Hurayra says that he lived among people for 30 years during which he experienced human greed, aggression and ingratitude. But he soon realized that his people were dependent on him. He says, 'I looked for a soul in people, but found them emptier than Isrāfīl's horn' (156). He then advises Kahlān: 'Take pity on human beings but do not believe in them' (157). Abū Hurayra's experience of community results in loneliness and despair (162). He reaches a state of blindness and loss of direction (168). Society represents feelings that the seeker must transcend, such as envy (*ḥasad*), or states he should transfer to higher being, like trust in God (*tawakkul*).

Thus far, Abū Hurayra's journey appears to be a solitary pursuit. But the Sufi wayfarer traditionally follows the guidance of a teacher or a master and pledges allegiance to them.[35] He (or she) also goes through a deliberate and rigorous taming of the self

(*tarwīḍ*). In 'Absence Sought but not Attained', Abū Hurayra goes through a mystical training at a Christian monastery at the hands of a female guide called Ẓulma al-Hudhaliyya.[36] *Dīr al-ʿAdhārā* (The Virgins' Monastery) is located at the top of a steep mountain, almost inaccessible. Abū Hurayra knocks on its door one day saying he is fleeing his shadow. Ẓulma thinks he was referring to his sins. She sees in him an impressive aura: 'His eyes appeared to long for what others cannot see, as if they were creating what they saw' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 177). He expresses his doubts and sets his goals: 'I want to know which is more true, God or the devil'. And adds, 'I want to know if I created God or if He created me' (177). For this he needed a guide. He asks the monks, 'Is there anyone amongst you who masters sounds that call forth the gods, shatter time and open up the limits?' (179). Ẓulma is trusted with his training. She says that he put on wool (*ṣūf*) and applied himself for six months, imposing excessive hardship on himself in a desperate effort to get rid of bodily desires. He would isolate himself in a *miḥrāb* and refuse food and drink for days on end. But when asked if he had forgotten the body, he would responds, 'pain, perhaps, but pleasure? I am not sure' (181).

Eventually, Abū Hurayra tempts Ẓulma and shakes her resolve. She gradually gives up worship, and both indulge in sex inside the monastery. She says: 'I used to ignore pleasure until Abū Hurayra said to me one day: "Those who ignore the body will be devoured by images"' (182). She discovers a new side to her self: 'I became a believer in my humanity and found in my life a fulfilment hitherto unknown to me. I expanded until I transcended my life. I used to be empty, submissive, contented and subdued' (182). However, both decide to go into seclusion once more and repent. But Ẓulma was unable to regain her faith: 'I remained empty after the fall of my God… I felt as if Abū Hurayra has possessed me and replaced God in my heart' (183). At the end, he re-emerges from his seclusion and confesses that his effort to regain faith has failed. 'Today, my struggle (*jihād*) has ended, and I have become convinced that gods do not rise from a fall' (184). He adds: 'I followed their [the monks'] ways and tried to annihilate my self; but when I sought it, I found it still present.' Abū Hurayra and Ẓulma then 'descend to earth' (189).

Formal training in the mystical way, undertaken here in a monastic setting, accentuates the depth of Abū Hurayra's doubt and emphasizes his desire to believe at the same time. The choice of setting for the enactment of this crisis may be a distancing device, as I suggest in my discussing of *taqiyya* and irony in al-Masʿadī in Chapter 3. The setting collapses Sufism and Christian mysticism together, allowing for the experience to be read as a Sufi one, but frames the expression of doubt and unbelief within a non-Islamic setting. This rhetorical move, however, does not change the Sufi nature of the experience. In addition, the interaction between monastic Christian mysticism and Islamic Sufism was not uncommon. The explicit use of the term *ṣūf* (wool), as a marker of Sufism refers to a common etymology of the word *taṣawwuf* which derives its meaning, it is argued, from the woollen dress of ascetics. Likewise, frugality, fasting and solitary meditation are all strongly advised by Sufis. 'Hunger and denial of pleasures are attributes of these people', says al-Qushayrī (al-Qushayrī 1993: 139). Poverty (*faqr*), is often used as a synonym of Sufism and a Sufi is often called *faqīr* (poor). Yet despite good intention and training, Abū Hurayra fails to find

sufficient guidance in Ẓulma and the monks. They themselves lack wisdom and certainty in their belief. He needs a radically different guide. In Abū Rughāl he would find something of himself, namely, individualism and a degree of madness. Abū Rughāl is in a way Abū Hurayra's double and master at the same time. Their companionship is described in the chapter, 'Ḥadīth al-ḥikma' (The Wisdom).

Seeking solitude and shunning what he calls 'appearances, attributes and temporary features' (*al-maḥmūl wa al-lāḥiq wa al-ʿāriḍ*) (al-Masʿadī 1979: 202), Abū Hurayra goes to the sea where he meets a swimmer with the aura of an ascetic. 'The man would dive down, slither across like a snake, then reemerge like a memory' (203). He teaches Abū Hurayra how to swim and they stay together until fall. But the man does not reveal anything about himself except that he used to be called Abū Rughāl and that he no longer has a name. Abū Hurayra says he remembers passing by the tomb of someone with the same name. 'Yes, that is my tomb. The prophet visited it', replies Abū Rughāl (205). He then tells the story of his multiple deaths. He was asked to rule a people and learned wisdom from unlikely sources but not from books: 'Books taught me what wisdom is not' (206). He ruled the people with an iron fist; his logic being if people accept tyranny, they deserve to be ruled accordingly. He 'purified the people by disposing of the weak and the disabled', but when they continued to bow to his will he decided to leave them: 'This was my first death!' (207). Abū Rughāl says that he then went away, spent some time meditating but his desire for tyranny remained alive. So he repented, asked for forgiveness and returned to his rule. He gave his people seven days of complete freedom to see what they would do with them. They carried on their lives as usual, out of habit or resignation. He says he then gave up on people and returned to his mother in despair but she failed to understand him. 'And this was my second death', he says (209).

Since then, Abū Rughāl had been living near the sea determined 'to be or not to be' after annihilating in himself the others and what relates to daily life. He thought the sea would provide him with the unity of body and soul. 'I found unity in the relationship between the body and the sea, possessing each other, playing and wrestling with each other. Water carries the body graciously, unlike the soul which limits it and kills it' (211). The man shows Abū Hurayra what he calls 'the perfect state of the self' or balance (*iʿtidāl*). He points to rocks hanging in the air, to pictures and figures in the sky. But Abū Hurayra cannot see any of that. Abū Rughāl accuses him of blindness and takes him to a cave 'narrow and dark, like an hour of sorrow' (212). He says he has chained a number of slaves whose blood he uses in renewing his soul. Abū Hurayra reports that all he could see in the cave were crickets tied down by red strings. Abū Rughāl pats them saying, 'Their blood belongs to the stars, not perceivable by the speaking self or the active intellect, except through the light emanating from primordial matter (*hayūla*)' (213). Abū Hurayra thought the man was mad and that 'he has died a third time'. He plays along but, fearing for his own sanity, he decides to leave his companion. Abū Rughāl gives him a pen and paper as a present saying, 'You may need this one day to draw lines, circles and dots with blank in the middle' (214). Abū Hurayra says: 'I took it and left, with sombre mind and heavy heart' (214).

Abū Rughāl can hardly be considered a guide or a master in the usual Sufi sense. But he seems to have undergone a journey, which includes severing relations with people and things and culminating in a state of balance. He speaks a language that Abū Hurayra is unable to comprehend and sees images he cannot perceive. In this respect, Abū Rughāl appears to have reached a stage that Abū Hurayra is yet to achieve. His opaque statements and incomprehensible actions give the impression that, like prominent Sufi masters, he has attained higher stations of knowledge. Indeed, Sufis are classified in categories (*ṭabaqāt*), which range from the *murīd* (the beginner) to the *walī* (saint).[37] Their positions reflect their ascent in knowledge and closeness to the divine. While the seeker looks for knowledge in various stations and experiences corresponding states of mind, the *walī* perceives through revelation (*mukāshafa*) and vision (*ru'yā*). The interpretation of visions and revelations is often restricted to the saint, although Sufi scholars often explain utterances and actions for the benefit of the laymen and the beginners.

Abū Rughāl's claims that he has died several times and that the Prophet visited his tomb, thus referring to his present self as a reincarnation of a famous Abū Rughāl, on whom more below. The present he offers Abū Hurayra reappears in a significant way in the last chapter of the book. The reference to a cryptic drawing alludes to the practice of talismanic drawings and the study of shapes and numbers closely associated with mystical beliefs.[38] I will revisit the drawing in the section on Sufi signs. At this stage, I will only point out Abū Hurayra's need to master the art of deciphering mystical symbols if he were to reach supreme knowledge. In the final chapter, 'The Last Awakening', he does, as I will suggest in the discussion of *fanā'* and *baqā'*. For the moment, however, the picture must be completed by turning attention to the Sufi journey in al-Mas'adī's other works, starting with *Mawlid al-Nisyān*.

Madyan's journey lacks the variety which characterizes Abū Hurayra's but has an intensity not easily matched here. I have already alluded to the crisis in belief in science that motivates Madyan to look for an alternative way to fight the decay of the human body. His search for a drug which 'rids life of time' begins with personal suffering through illness and hallucination. During his illness, he is visited by the shadow (*ṭayf*) of his deceased companion, Asmā'. She tells him how she was unable to return to a body and to regain a living form (al-Mas'adī 1974: 26). Madyan rejects medicine and seeks the help of his rival Ranjahād, the sorceress who inhabits the forest. Ranjahād holds the secret to the spring Salhawa named after a plant which brings about forgetting. The only access to the plant is through the spring whose water turns everything it touches into thin air (34). Layla, Madyan's companion, is concerned that Ranjahād would take revenge on him for 'undermining her religion by drawing her followers to his hospice and away from her magic' (34). At the beginning he was motivated by the urge to change the world around him by sheer will, just like Ghaylān in *al-Sudd*. His ultimate goal was to defeat death. Now the goal has not changed but Madyan is more interested in 'stillness' (*sukūn*) than in creative action: 'I will compel eternal stillness and immutable eternity to deliver to me their secrets. I shall annihilate death and life. This will be my ultimate goal and effort' (66). His new ally is Ranjahād. The journey he undertakes through the forest in her company,

whether it is real or the hallucinations of a feverish man, is key to his search as a whole. It takes him to various stations and he experiences a number of states of mind. The trip constitutes chapters five and six of the book.

As Madyan is setting off on his journey, Asmāʾ appears to him and throws doubt on his pursuit, 'You have been expelled from your home into the road, but you are walking with your eyes turned backward, longing for a home you left behind' (71). When he feels discouraged, Ranjahād reveals herself and invites him to what she calls her world (72). Madyan feels at one with the world around him and wonders: 'Now life has erupted in me like a tempestuous ocean, snakes slither, birds sing, fruits mature, mountains spring up, rivers run. Is this multiplicity and union with the universe (*al-kathra wa al-ittiḥādu bi al-kawn*)?' (73). Ranjahād replies that he has not reached that stage yet: 'This is merely the prelude to freedom from feeling, pain, and happiness; the prelude to stillness (*jumūd*). You cannot unite with the universe and dissipate (*tatabaddad*) until you purify yourself and free it from all filth (*aʿlāq*)' (73). Madyan may not be prepared for the station of unity with the universe but Ranjahād judges him worthy of entering the 'world of forgetting and eternity' since he conquered vertigo (*duwār*), which results from glimpsing Truth (74). Ranjahād remarks that 'the only truth is the one which renders expression useless, reason doubtful and meaning irrelevant' (*aʿjaza al-lafz wa kadhdhaba al-ʿaql wa khalā ʿan maʿnā*) (74).) They travel fast through a long road until Madyan is no longer able to cope. Ranjahād asks if he needed 'a resting place or a residence' (*mustarāḥan am mustaqarran*) (76). Determined to complete the journey, he chooses a rest. They then enter 'the cave of sleepers', or 'those who lost their soul but whose bodies remain alive', like himself since the departure of Asmāʾ (78). They have neither died and attained annihilation nor remained in the carelessness (*ghafla*) of the living.

Madyan and Ranjahād then resume their journey in slow motion, which gives Madyan the impression that time has extended (83). Then they enter 'a strange world whose essence is speed'. Things and animals are created, live and disintegrate in 'the blink of an eye' (83). Ranjahād calls this the world of 'absolute time!' (84). Madyan reaches a state of vertigo (*duwār*) and again Ranjahād offers him the choice between a resting place and a residence. During his rest, she tells him the story of creation. Of this complex myth, the functions of death and time are of particular interest to Madyan's journey. Death serves the role of revenge inflicted by earth against man for 'his exclusive monopoly of greatness, beauty and purity' (86). It releases the soul, which longs to ascend to the heavens but is unable to do so because memory (*al-dhikra*) and longing (*al-shawq*) accompany it. 'Earth has appointed Time as a reminder. It brings back memories of the past and shows possibilities in the future' (92). In their ascent, some souls may get tired and seek rest, but Time returns the body to the soul only long enough to revive memory and longing. When the journey nears its end Madyan asks Ranjahād to reveal to him Salhawa and the plant. But she accompanies him only as far as the gate and says: 'This is a door that does not allow two people in at the same time. Go through it alone!' (94).

Ranjahād plays the role of the Sufi guide, who knows the different stations along the way and knows how to attain them. Madyan is completely dependent on her

guidance, like a *murīd* (seeker) trusting his master blindly. And just like any *ṣuḥba* (company) of a master, travelling with her is plagued with riddles and hardship.[39] Ranjahād offers Madyan stops along the way and between stations. Two of these, the 'World of the Sleepers' and the 'World of the Dead' show two stages which fall short of the ultimate goal of eternal repose. Stops along the way are best described by al-Niffarī in his *Kitāb al-Mawāqif* (The Book of Standings). A.J. Arberry explains:

> As the mystic in his journey is transferred from one station in which he has experienced confirmation and presence, to another station for the same purpose, he pauses (*yaqif*) between the two stations, and during this pause (*waqfah*), emerges from the condition of the two stations, learning in this pause the practices (*adab*) proper to the station to which he is being transferred. When this has been duly made clear to him, he enters into the condition of the station to which he has been transferred.
>
> (al-Niffarī 1935: 8)

Madyan will learn from this journey the way to defeat Time. This final stage will be explored shortly. For now, it remains to complete this examination of the Sufi journey in al-Masʿadī's work by studying the experience undertaken by the writer's best known character, Ghaylān, the protagonist of *al-Sudd*.

Ghaylān's experience is not as varied as Abū Hurayra's or as overtly mystical as Madyan's. It nonetheless highlights specific instances of the Sufi journey experienced by neither character. I focus here on the will to create which drives Ghaylān and on his relentless pursuit of perfection. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that the dam Ghaylān is constructing has more to it than the declared purpose of collecting water for irrigation. The completion of the dam would be a moment 'of perfect creation' (*kamāl al-khalq*), he says (al-Masʿadī 1992: 118).[40] The transcendence of Ghaylān's 'earthly' project into a search for self-fulfillment is guided by Mayāra, who begins the story as an outsider and then lends guidance and support to Ghaylān when she judges he has earned them through his individual effort. It is through her that the dam can be interpreted as a test of Ghaylān's capacity and real aims. While Maymūna sees Ghaylān's 'heroism' as 'fear to uncover failure and admit impotence', Mayāra perceives it as strength of character and search for something beyond the dam through action. Unlike Abū Hurayra, Ghaylān does not engage in ritualistic practice: *homo faber* as he is, he focuses on making rather than meditating.[41] Ghaylān's aspiration is 'perfect creation', i.e. to seek an attribute of the Creator. And when he is unable to build his creation on the ground, Ghaylān seeks a different space at the end of the play. But reaching the aim is never really just a matter of going through stations and experiencing states; it is also about shunning temptation and vigilance against the hazards along the journey.

Affirmation and temptation (the devil)

The Sufi journey is plagued with temptations and the lure of straying from the right path. The wayfarer should be vigilant against the devil's manifestations and tricks.

The devil (*shayṭān*, *iblīs*) is, expectedly, warned against and vilified in mainstream Islamic literature as well as in Sufi instruction manuals. In al-Masʿadī's work, the devil appears most notably in four instances, twice explicitly and twice as a metaphor. In all cases the devil plays a significant role at the levels of theme as well as style. In *Ḥaddatha* (in the chapter 'Truth and Falsehood'), Abū Hurayra tells a group of friends about a sister he had when he was six to nine years old, and who was severely disabled. His mother thought she was 'a curse of fate' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 119). But he loved her 'the way the devil loves evil', he says (120). When she died he was devastated with grief and thought her death was the work of the devil. But his family said it was God's will. 'Her death taught me how to cry from Fate' (120). Abū Hurayra's friends try to console him and ask him to join them for prayer, but he refuses and says, 'Let me be! We pray or we don't, we enjoy or suffer, is there any good or evil in this?' He then adds, 'The worst thing about life is that it is absurd; or may be this is the best thing about it? I am not sure' (121). Abū Hurayra's faith is shaken, not because of temptation by the devil but due to unjust fate. The devil is disassociated from its traditional role and replaced by fate. The source of evil (here the sister's state of health, her death and the suffering of her brother) is God. Abū Hurayra sees absurdity where his mother sees divine wisdom.

The devil appears also in Abū Hurayra's vision in 'The Clay' where al-Masʿadī brings together and puts in a dialogue two separate sections of the *Qurʾān*, perhaps because both deal with Pharaoh and Moses.[42] His dramatization of the verses from the *Qurʾān* and the embedding of non-sensical phrases is a complex matter and has far-reaching implications, as I argue in the extended study of 'The Clay'. The phrases introduced between verses intervene in a text whose wholeness is sacred but the corruption is framed within an acceptable theme. And, just like he does in Abū Hurayra's experience of doubt in the Christian monastery, al-Masʿadī builds in his text a distancing device to head off religious criticism and to prevent potential censorship. The Sufi antecedent and model of this latter usage of Iblīs, I argue, is to be found in al-Hallāj's work. Al-Masʿadī omits a crucial element in the verse taken from '*al-Qaṣaṣ*', presumably for narrative purposes. The original verse reads, 'Nobles,' said Pharaoh, … (the verse)'. The writer discards the speaker in the verse (Pharaoh). The latter is omitted and therefore the integrity of the narrative is preserved – at the expense, it must be pointed out, of the textual integrity of the *Qurʾān*. Al-Ḥallāj uses the exact same verses to elaborate his original theory of unity of God (*tawḥīd*) where Pharaoh and Iblīs play key roles. In *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, a title based on the letters *ṭā* and *sīn*, which open this very Koranic chapter ('*al-Qaṣaṣ*') he develops an original theory about Iblīs. In '*Ṭāsīn al-ʾazal wa al-ʾiltibās*' (Ṭāsīn of Eternity and Confusion), Iblīs argues that by refusing to prostrate himself before Adam, he is affirming the unity of God. In a conversation with God, Iblīs explains that his refusal to obey God's order is a (*taqdīs*) (sanctification) of God, arguing that his worship and closeness to God pre-date Adam.[43]

Al-Ḥallāj describes his own debate with Iblīs and Pharaoh and how he learned from them the true meaning of unity and the determination to preserve one's servitude to others (*futuwwa*). He justifies Pharaoh's claim to divinity thus: 'Pharaoh said,

"you have no other god than me" when he could not find anyone able to distinguish between good and evil'. Al-Ḥallāj compares the two to himself, 'I said, "if you do not recognize Him, then recognize his traces (*āthāruhu*). I am that trace. I am Truth because I am Truth by the power of Truth (*bi al-ḥaqqi ḥaqqan*)"' (al-Ḥallāj 1913: 51). He concludes: 'For this reason, my friends and teachers (*ustādhī*) are Iblīs and Pharaoh. Iblīs was threatened with fire but he did not retract his claim; Pharaoh was drowned but he did not retract his assertion and refused to recognize mediation (*wāsiṭah*); and, if I were to be killed, crucified or have my arms and legs amputated, I would not retract my claim' (al-Ḥallāj 1913: 51–52).

A further reference to the devil in al-Masʿadī is even more subtle. Ranjāhad in *Mawlid*, I suggest, is a devil disguised as a Sufi master. She represents the more traditional archetype of the devil as temptation. This suggestion affects the reading of the Sufi experience undertaken by Madyan in significant ways. At the end of the book, Ranjahād declares: 'I am deception!' At the intertextual level, her statement reverses al-Hallāj's 'I am Truth!' It also reverses Madyan's own declaration, 'I am Truth in itself!' Madyan's search may well be sincere, but there is reason to argue that it is misguided. He is led to believe in the veracity of his union with the universe and in the potency of his drug. Yet, he soon discovers that he was misled, tricked into believing his success. The trickster is Ranjahād. She observes Madyan's demise and comments in a harsh voice: 'He exchanged one moment of forgetting with the life of his ancestors and with Layla, whom he left behind, dead among the living. Being is indeed an eternal curse. Forgetting will not be born. Annihilation will not take place. Time shall not be defeated. Heavens cannot be reached. I am deception *(anā al-buhtān)*!' (al-Masʿadī 1974: 114–115). The drug, a symbol of science, and by implication reason, does not bring about forgetting or a return to the primordial state of purity. Ranjahād and Madyan collaborate in the making of the drug, she with her magic power and he with his scientific know-how. But neither magic nor science can lead to salvation. It is only in this sense that Madyan can be said to have failed. His inspiration is not a higher self, like Abū Hurayra's nor is it a transcendental being like Ghaylān's. But the transience of his experience does not preclude the possibility of attaining unity; it simply questions the method and the guidance.

Arrival and abiding (wuṣūl and baqāʾ)

Fanāʾ (annihilation) and *baqāʾ* (abiding or subsistence), like other key Sufi concepts, have been subject to redefinition. Details of the development of these concepts are too complex to explore here. Bisṭāmī, who is arguably the least systematic of Sufi thinkers in his rejection of renunciation and practice, believed in the annihilation of the self as an immediate rather than the ultimate step for the Sufi. It is guided by love for God, which is preceded by God's love for Man. Such love is individual and cannot be learned, hence the individuality of the whole Sufi experience. Al-Junayd (d. AD 910), on the other hand, sees *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ* as simultaneous experiences: 'My annihilation is my subsistence. He annihilated me from the reality of my annihilation and from my subsistence. In the reality of annihilation, I became without subsistence

or annihilation' (al-Junayd 1969: 57). Unlike Bisṭāmī, Junayd thinks that God's will must be involved in order to reach this station. *Fanā'* and *baqā'* are not final stations but stages towards true existence. For the later Sufi, Ibn al-ʿArabī, *fanā'* is understood as *fanā' fī* and *ʿan* (annihilation or passing away *into* and passing away *from*), that is, *fanā'* from self (individuation) and into the higher self. The affirmation of unity with God is a result of annihilation. No trace of consciousness of self or of individuation is left. Once this stage is reached, a reconstituted self is sent back by God to lead a selfless existence (e.g. Dervish, *faqir*, *walī*…).

In *Ḥadīth al-Baʿth al-ʾākhir* (The Last Awakening), Abū al-Madāʾin is summoned urgently to Abū Hurayra's house where he finds his friend sitting down, pen and paper in hand. He shows him a drawing of 'vertical lines, circles and dots of various sizes, and in the middle there was a striking blank'. Abū al-Madāʾin asks whether this is a talisman or mere play. 'Rather, it is Time with its head cut off or a question and no meaning!' Abū Hurayra replies' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 222). He then asks his friend to return the following evening in a state of cleanliness (*ṭahāra*) to share with him 'a day out of time,' which he does. They both ride for about two hours in the direction of sunset. Along the way Abū Hurayra informs his friend that he bought a new farm and decided to give him his old one. They continue reminiscing about adventures and past experiences until they reach a steep mountain. As they were laughing, a voice is heard:

> I am Truth, calling you!
> I am Love, moving you!
> I am longing, haunting you!
>
> (al-Masʿadī 1979: 229–30)

Abū Hurayra responds: 'Truth, here I come!' and adds: 'This is what I have been waiting for' (231). He then begins to tell the story of the death of his daughter, Maryam, at a young age but suddenly interrupts the story and surges forward until he disappears in the dark night. Abū al-Madāʾin says: 'After few moments, I heard rocks falling, a horse shrieking in pain and a cry like an expression of joy but which made me shiver' (234). Then everything goes quiet. Abū al-Madāʾin's calls receive no reply. He waits in his spot until morning when he discovers that he was at the top of a mountain. There was blood on the rocks and a bottomless pit down below. Abū al-Madāʾin concludes: 'May God have mercy on Abū Hurayra! He was larger than life' (232).

Bürgel argues that this ending does not appear to flow naturally from the rest of the story. Al-Majirī suggests that the protagonist suddenly commits 'suicide' because of his inability to face life and to change his condition (al-Mājirī 1985: 110). Others interpret the ending as Abū Hurayra's sudden return to religion after a secular life. I will say more about the ending of al-Masʿadī's stories and the idea of sacrifice in the conclusion. Here, it must be pointed out that aside from the fact that in a Sufi journey, there is room for the inexplicable, the sudden and the idiosyncratic, the ending finds its meaning in a reading of *Ḥaddatha* as a complete Sufi journey. If we take the time of the end, sunset, as a symbol, Abū Hurayra's entire journey lasts one day. It

starts at dawn and ends at dusk, closing the circular movement of the character, which starts with a first awakening, and ends with a final one. This may be the meaning of Abū Hurayra's reference to Time whose head has been cut off. In the intervening period, he has changed. We recall that in 'The First Awakening' Abū Hurayra is invited to a 'day out of daily life'. By the end of the journey, he is no longer the object of an invitation, neither is he seeking to discover what lies beyond daily concerns. He is ready for the ultimate experience, 'a moment out of time'. He no longer needs a guide, instead, he offers guidance in explaining the knowledge he has reached. His drawing foreshadows the timelessness of the last station, being at one with the Absolute Being where eternity (*khulūd*) is attained. The voice beckoning Abū Hurayra, but also heard by his friend, as if to confirm the incident, is a familiar Sufi event – Sufis are defined as those who answer the call. Yet, because of its public nature, it violates the principle of 'intimacy' between caller and called, which marks such event in the Sufi experience. Nevertheless, the end of the journey has the hallmarks of the culmination of a Sufi journey in which the seeker reaches the highest stage of knowledge when Truth (*Ḥaqq*) is revealed to him. He is prepared for this moment and welcomes it with the joy of the lover meeting his beloved (*al-maḥbūb*). The wayfarer accepts death as a call to the company of God (al-Qushayrī 1993: 305ff). After much longing the lover is rewarded. Al-Qushayrī says: 'Longing is the movement of the heart to the meeting of the beloved' (329). At the end of the book, Abū Hurayra answers the call and embraces the truth revealed to him. Al-Masʿadī's other protagonists undergo a similar experience.

In *Mawlid*, Madyan says he has discovered by means of an overflowing (*fayḍ*) that there is a way to bring about 'free, absolute movement, cleansed of Time, dissipating in itself and still'. He adds, 'The secret of making the drug was then revealed to me. I made a drug which preserves the living body and renders it eternal, like a mummy' (al-Masʿadī 1974: 107). Madyan takes his drug and soon rises and walks like a 'machine powered by an engine,' saying: 'This is permanence! This is forgetting!' (108). He acquires an aura ('Layla saw in his eyes a light like revelation'). He says he has regained his original greatness, beauty and purity and that he could hear the voices of Time and memory running away from him (108). The journey culminates in a moment of ecstatic joy and self-fulfilment. He declares: 'I am truth in itself (*innī anā al-ḥaqqu fī ḥaqqiha*)' (111). Madyan witnesses a transformation of the self in the moment of revelation and describes his state and the station of union (*ittiḥād*) he has reached in the terms which link him up with a whole tradition. He recalls ecstatic expressions uttered by Sufis to put in words their elation and awe at what is unveiled to them. Al-Ḥallāj expresses his belief that he has become one with God in 'Ṭāsīn al-azal wa al-iltibās', declaring: 'I am Truth! (*ana al-ḥaqq*!)' (al-Ḥallāj 1913: 51). Al-Suhrawardī is famously reported to have said during such a moment: 'I am God, there is no God besides me, so worship me, Glory to us, how great is our Majesty!' (Huda 1996: 28). Madyan describes a similar state thus:

> Stillness has defeated Time. I do not pass or change (*lā amurru wa lā ata-ḥawwalu*). I am Being! I am permanence! I have not changed since the beginning of time! But who am I? I am reborn every hour a new creation! Watch

my horizons expand! How vast are my dimensions! Feeling has died! Union (*ḥulūl*) has come! I have become great! I have drunk all the heavens! All universes have come into me (*ḥallat fiyya al-akwānu jamīʿan*).

<div align="right">(al-Masʿadī 1974: 111)</div>

Ibn al-ʿArabī expresses this feeling of expansion of the self and the unity of the universe (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) in a much celebrated poem:

> My heart can take on
> Any form:
> A meadow for gazelles,
> A cloister of monks,
> (…)
> For the idols, sacred ground,
> Kaʿba for the circling pilgrim
> The tables of the Torah,
> The scrolls of the *Qurʾān*.

<div align="right">(Sells 1991: 9)</div>

Madyan's experience does not end here nor does it last long. The moment is fleeting and short. He feels 'filth' in the air and realizes he has lost his battle against Time. 'This is the end of the body. The body has betrayed me. The soul has betrayed me. Neither one could be permanent' (al-Masʿadī 1974: 113). Then he wonders, 'Why did I fail?' Madyan's pursuit of knowledge does not lead him to a complete annihilation of the self into a higher being. It does, nevertheless, give him the fleeting moment and sensation that he has reached that station and experienced timelessness. While denied *baqāʾ* (subsiding), he experiences a glimpse of permanence, of 'Time with its head cut off,' to quote Abū Hurayra. In *Mawlid*, truth is revealed in a moment of discovery after which Madyan's soul joins the 'world of the dead', a place for those 'who died but have not yet reached annihilation (*fanāʾ*)' (al-Masʿadī 1974: 92). Ghaylān, in *al-Sudd* reaches only a glimpse of truth, but one which is full of potential.[44] *Al-Sudd* ends with an apocalyptic scene where destruction and the promise of a resurrection combine. As the dam crumbles, 'Ghaylān stood firm, unmoved. … His face looked radiant and sublime.' Mayāra declares seeing a light amidst the storm beckoning her and Ghaylān. They answer the call:

> Ghaylān and Mayāra (*embracing*). We shall rise up and open for our heads a door in the sky! (*They fly away, carried by the storm*).
> Maymūna (*watching them disappearing in the storm*). Now they have reached their destination and final residence.

<div align="right">(al-Masʿadī 1992: 149)</div>

The light is reminiscent of al-Ghazālī's confession that his moment of revelation was a 'light thrown by God into the heart' (al-Ghazālī 1989: 32). Such light, according

<div align="center">131</div>

to him, is the key to knowledge. Ghaylān and Mayāra perceive the light as a sign (ʾishāra) of higher stage in their quest and set off towards it.

Signs (ʾishārāt)

Sufis have attempted to represent their experiences through several means, chiefly, poetry and aphorisms, but also through music and physical expression. The study of Sufi literary expression, prose and poetry, in relation to Arabic literature as a whole, and more specifically, the relationship between Islamic mysticism and Arabic pre-modern poetry is only now beginning to attract attention. This is despite the fact that several centuries ago, Ibn al-ʿArabī had argued for the incorporation and adaptation of Arabic poetic conventions into Sufi poetry. In the introduction to *Turjumān*, he explains how traditional topoi and stylistic devices are used in his own poetry and suggests that the practice of using profane themes and diction for spiritual purposes is not unique to him. He writes:

> These pages include the love-poems which I composed at Mecca, whilst visiting the holy places in the months of Rajab, Shaʿbán, and Ramaḍán. In these poems I point (allegorically) to various sorts of Divine knowledge and spiritual mysteries and intellectual sciences and religious exhortations. I have used the erotic style and form of expression because men's souls are enamored of it, so that there are many reasons why it should commend itself.
>
> (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1911: 4)

Michael Sells in his reading of Ibn al-ʿArabī's poetry has shown how Sufi terminology is grounded in the Arabic poetic tradition. The analysis he makes of the poem 'Gentle Now', mentioned earlier, reveals that the poetic vocabulary is '*an essential part of the Sufi's mystical lexicon*' (Sells 1996: 70).[45] His extensive list of the key motifs and topoi in pre-Islamic Arabic *qasīda* which found their way into Sufi poetry and theory includes:

> *the ruins* (aṭlāl) *and traces* (rusūm) *that are effaced but somehow endure, that signify but cannot answer; the phantom or apparition* (khayāl – *a term that later came to mean "imagination") and way-stops* (maḥallāt) *along the pilgrimage; the constantly changing condition or states* (aḥwāl); *remembrance* (dhikr) *of the beloved* (al-maḥbūb); *the secret* (sirr) *entrusted from lover to beloved; the sacred or "prohibited"* (ḥarām) *and profane or "allowed"* (ḥalāl); *the lightning flash of an ephemeral union; the love-mad* (majnūn) *who experiences bewilderment* (ḥayra) *in the shifting conditions of the beloved and who ends in ruin* (halāk).
>
> (Sells 1996: 70–71. Italics in the original)

Does al-Masʿadī follow in the footsteps of Sufi writers in this regard? If so, how does he rework the poetic tradition in his writings?

In 'The Clay', analysed in detail earlier, a storm 'uncovers ancient ruins and a skull', to Abū Hurayra's eyes. He interprets this as traces of his story. He also dreams of a country where a self-proclaimed prophet is building a high wall in order to rise to a position from where he can reach the 'God of Christ' and prove him to be a liar. This dream bears strong resemblance to the plot of al-Masʿadī's play, *al-Sudd* (The Dam). The sign in the sand reveals Abū Hurayra's story and announces a book, much like the way the *qaṣīd* ensues from reading *aṭlāl* or the traces of a campsite. The scene in *Ḥaddatha* recalls a familiar topos in classical Arabic poetry. Labīd's ode (*muʿallaqa*) includes the following lines:

> The rills and the runlets
> uncovered marks like the script
> of faded scrolls
> restored with pens of reed
> …
> I stopped to question them.
> How is one to question
> deaf, immutable,
> inarticulate stones?

(Sells 1989: 35–6)

Reading the trace, which takes the form of questioning (*musāʾala*) or interrogation (*istinṭāq*), leads to a recovery of the tribal as well as the personal, usually romantic, story. Through his reading of the sign the poet recovers the lost camp, the beloved, and the community, and composes the poem. Abdelfattah Kilito suggests that it is in the process of deciphering the remains of a campsite that the whole *qaṣīda* takes place: 'The campsite, the tattoo, the writing do not appear as clear drawings. Likewise, the poet is primarily a decipherer of erased or barely visible signs' (Kilito 1985: 21). The community, the beloved, and the narrative become part of the process of individual discovery.

Reading traces (*qiyāfat al-athar*), however is not limited to the *qaṣīd*; it was an art as well as a useful skill in Arab society before and after Islam. Tracking a lost herd, a camel that went astray or raiders who suddenly vanished in the desert necessitated inductive skill and talent. *Qiyāfa* is naturally related to insight (*firāsa*) in its general cultural setting but also in its Sufi meaning.[46] Al-Qushayrī describes *firāsa* as insight into people and states (al-Qushayrī 1993: 231). The stories he provides confirm that *firāsa* here has to do with the ability to look inside the mind and heart of a person. The insightful Sufi can see with the light of God. 'This is a light which shines in his heart showing him truths' (232). The origin of insight might be related to the fact stated in the Qurʾān describing God's gift to man: 'When I have fashioned him and breathed of My spirit into him, kneel down and prostrate yourselves before him' (*Koran* 15:29). Because of the required closeness to God, divination is an attribute of only the few: 'The insight of disciples (*muridūn*) is a hunch which requires

confirmation; the insight of gnostics is a confirmation which requires reality' (al-Qushayrī 1993: 235).

The ancient poet constructs his poem in the process of deciphering the sign. This may be called a poetics of re(construction). The Sufi (Abū Hurayra) probes the *qaṣīda* but does not imitate it. But, much like the way Ibn al-ʿArabī acknowledges *nasīb* in *Turjumān*, al-Masʿadī invests this traditional *topos* with a Sufi meaning.[47] Reading the sign sets in motion the discovery of the self and reveals the blueprint for a reunion with the universe. The ultimate goal is therefore the erasure (*maḥw*) of the sign. Al-Masʿadī describes Abū Hurayra's journey as *tafātuḥ* (Omri 2001: 306). The Arabic term is a coinage that includes the meanings of the gradual opening up or the unfolding of the individual self in relationship to the universe. It emphasizes the process as well as the active participation of both the self and the universe. On the intertextual level, al-Masʿadī engages the Sufi reworking of *qaṣīda*. The idea of *tajallī* or *mukāshafa* (revelation of Truth to the individual) is given an active element in the sense that revelation is an act in which both the individual and Truth take part. A further instance of erasure in *Ḥaddatha* occurs in the chapter, 'Ḥadīth al-ḥikma' (The Wisdom).

We recall that Abū Rughāl gives Abū Hurayra a pen and paper as a present saying, 'You may need these one day to draw lines, circles and dots with blank in the middle' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 214). At that time, Abū Hurayra took the present and left, rather puzzled ('with sombre mind and heavy heart') (214). In the last chapter and towards his own end, Abū Hurayra makes use of his 'master's' present. He draws on it 'vertical lines, circles and dots of various sizes, and in the middle a striking blank' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 222). The movement from the basic elements of writing (pen and paper) to drawing suggests a development in consciousness and a growth in knowledge. At the end, Abū Hurayra is inscribing, rather than erasing, the state of his knowledge of himself and of the world around him. The first inscription is uncovered by wind, revealing 'ancient ruins and a skull'. No further description of the ruins is given, but the sign is already there, a reminder of the past. The second inscription is clearly abstract, geometrical and devoid of any mimetic representation of reality. Since a story is first and foremost a function of time, or inconceivable outside time, the second drawing announces the end of the story. Time is beheaded. Erasing the personal story has been achieved. Abū Hurayra has reached an existence beyond his own story, a timeless way of being. By the same token, Abū Hurayra is now outside narrative. Henceforth, his story is beyond telling and, of course, beyond inscription.

The geometry of the drawing is complex, especially if we consider it in the light of previous representations of Sufi knowledge. The esoteric work of al-Ḥallāj bears evidence to this. He devotes some of his *Ṭawāsīn* to geometrical shapes, particularly the circle and the dots. On the latter, he says:

> The dot is the origin of all lines. The line is made up of dots linked together … Everything that we see is a dot between two dots. This is evidence that Truth (or God) (*al-Haqq*) appears in everything we see and that He is

revealed through everything we contemplate (*tarāʾīhi ʿan kulli mā yuʿāyan*).
It is in this sense that I said: 'I see nothing in which I do not see God'.

(Massignon 1936: 16)[48]

In '*Ṭāsīn al-dāʾira*' (Tasin of the Circle), we read, 'The inner circle has no door. The dot in the middle of the circle is Truth' (al-Ḥallāj 1913: 26).[49] Everything points to, designates, or is a sign (*ishāra*) of Truth. It is in this sense that Ibn al-ʿArabī implores the reader to look beyond the apparent (exoteric) (*ẓāhir*) and seek the esoteric (*bāṭin*) (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1911: 13). In Ḥaddatha death, represented by the skull in the first case, reappears in the last drawing as the death of time, in a sense the end of representation rather than the representation of the end. Ghaylān says, 'We die only at the end of the story' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 108). I will return to this point in the conclusion to the book.

CONCLUSION

It is never ideas we should speak of, only sensations and visions – for ideas do not proceed from our entrails; ideas are never truly *ours*.

<div align="right">Cioran, Anathemas and Admirations</div>

The tongue is voracious.

<div align="right">Al-Maᶜarrī, Risālat al-Ghufrān</div>

I would like to end the book by returning to the three key terms with which it started; namely, necessity, authenticity, and method. To these, I will add style or form, both as a pursuit in al-Masᶜadī's literary texts and as an issue for debate among students of Third World literature in general and Arabic literature in particular. The nexus between the writer, the nation and the world will be the starting point of these reflections. My final observations will be about the tragic in al-Masᶜadī.

The nation, the writer and the literary canon

In Tunisia today, were the 'fitful gleam' of the nation's archaeology, to use Anderson's apt phrase, to be captured, one would certainly find in it al-Masᶜadī the writer, no matter how dim the light. He has become part of the imagined community and its imagined history, an irrefutable evidence of collective identity and pride, an artefact in the museum of the nation. To discover al-Masᶜadī the intellectual, the light would have to be much brighter. The study of the construction of national culture reveals al-Masᶜadī's role in the 'making' of modern Tunisia, and explains why he has been a focal point of tunisianness. As public figure, he walked in the footsteps of his predecessor, Khayr al-Dīn, the nineteenth century reformer and statesman. He was also the product of the Ṣādiqiyya school, the institution where most of the leaders of the nationalist movement and the ensuing state were formed. Within this institution French culture was at once perpetuated and challenged. On the ground, there were two conceptions of what Tunisia was and should be. The difference between the two visions was not that of accent or outlook but an irreconcilable rift between two entities separated at their origin. While the *colons* sought to take root, native intellectuals

wanted to recover their own. Yet, both sides needed narratives of legitimization. They had to write these and to circulate them as widely as possible; the *colons* with the support of the colonial machine, al-Masʿadī and his peers by relying on local modest means. The journal, *al-Mabāḥith*, was the writer's forum and his organized intervention in the process of elaborating a 'national culture' in Tunisia in the 1940s. The concerted effort to document and publish evidence of the existence of a viable 'national' culture that predates colonialism was coupled with a deliberate effort to nurture contemporary strands of its vitality. It was through the journal that al-Masʿadī would establish himself as a writer.

Yet, while it may be obvious to locate al-Masʿadī's position in the politics of culture in Tunisia, his own cultural politics is less easy to identify. He was not defined solely by the national cause or by his role as native intellectual. While some of his essays and personal involvement show intense commitment to the constitution of a national culture, his conception of literature appears to question the very idea of nationalism. 'Genuine' literature, according to him, must focus on what is common to all people rather than the confines of one nation. He insisted that nationalism and literature were not always compatible. At the height of tensions between the Tunisians and the French in the 1940s and 50s, and during the heyday of pan-Arab nationalism, he argued for the freedom of the writer to choose whether to support nationalism or not. Al-Masʿadī's ties to the nationalist movement and his position in the nation-state might explain why his cultural politics was perhaps not easy to practice without the support of an existing state apparatus or an incipient one. So when he warned against the pitfalls of pan-Arab nationalism (an outright rejection of the West and a reductive view of the role of nationalism which sidelines the role of Islam) in the late 1950s, he was in part speaking on behalf of a nascent nation-state, eager to protect its territory and choose its allies. For the same reason, al-Masʿadī's legacy in the development of the educational system in his country is highly valued. But his role in the development of Tunisian culture after independence, particularly as Minister of Cultural Affairs, remains unstudied. While this period witnessed significant developments in theatre, cinema and literature, it was also marked by an increase in limitations on the rising political resistance and contestation, as part of the overall politics of the Tunisian state at the time. Was al-Masʿadī, the 'responsible militant' as al-Fīlālī has called him, perhaps too bound by the state line to heed and defend his own call of 1957 for the complete freedom of writers and artists (*Renouveau* 31 March 2004)?

Al-Mabāḥith stressed what it called 'genuine literature', 'pure poetry' and the pursuit of artistic achievement; all at a time when the journal itself was deeply involved in resistance and in the identity politics of the colony. The explanation for this is twofold. First, the journal (and al-Masʿadī) understood that impact on the global stage, within a globalizing modernity, required a leap in the local culture in order to position it at a par with its western counterpart. The educational background, the readings and a fascination with Western literature made al-Masʿadī and his peers canon-driven but also deeply aware of the politics of literary canon. Secondly, their reading of the heritage was likewise guided by the feeling that they needed to 'measure up' to ancestors

who impacted the world for centuries. To adopt French as the language of this positioning towards Europe was attractive. But al-Masʿadī did not take that path in any significant way. Inscribing Arabic in the modern world canon was his drive. The essays reveal the writer's desire to stretch the boundaries of world literature to include the Islamic tradition. At the same time, he attempted to construct an Arabic and Islamic canon of what he called 'genuine' or 'living' literature guided by the ideas and aesthetics learned from close knowledge of Western literature and through deep academic and personal experience of the Arabic literary and linguistic tradition.

Al-Masʿadī was also deeply influenced by the ideas of freedom and the humanism prevalent among intellectuals in France at the time. One of these was the conception of the writer as intellectual 'clerk' deeply mistrustful of narrow-minded nationalism, which was developed by Julien Benda as I note in Chapter 1. But if the seeds of the split between the two spheres of al-Masʿadī's activity, writing on the one hand and activism on the other, are found in his definition of literature and the conception of the role of the writer, such distinction becomes sharper when we study his fiction. The desire to be part of world literature and the drive to make a lasting contribution (baqāʾ) to Arabic as well as world culture marks al-Masʿadī's theory of literature and finds expressions in his fiction. Unsystematic as it was, his attempt to identify with the foundational role, which Islam and Arabic literature have played in the elaboration of the very concept of a world literature, at least in its early formulations by Goethe, reveals a search for analogues and common ground rather than models and points of divergence.

Seen from the perspective of canon construction, al-Masʿadī's theory of world literature and his own literary writings appear in harmony in so far that his work could be understood as an attempt to be part of the canon of this 'genuine literature'. But there is a serious disjunction between the canon of national literature in the Arab world and al-Masʿadī's writings. His work does not fit the mould, except perhaps through interpretive excess or coercion. On the face of it, writing seems like the sphere where he took refuge from the onslaught of politics, the pressures of trade unionism and the bureaucracy of his government positions. Intellectually, writing was a space where the inner tribulations of a public intellectual could be expressed. It was an area where he could explore the narrative tradition, the potential of the Arabic language, and world literature away from the need for representing the national struggle and social circumstances of the nation; and away from the clarity and immediacy demanded by activist discourse. Yet, in the Arab world, the communities of readers who received his work have been largely shaped by nationalism and modernization as the two dominant paradigms, hence the accusations of betrayal or the glorification of his work among his critics. The reception of al-Masʿadī's fiction is perhaps indicative of the absence of what Jauss calls a 'horizon of expectations' within which he could be read. His work frustrates ethnographic desire for local colour, facile political readings of Arabic literature and a practical literary history focused on genres and trends. In Middle East Studies, an area of research deeply tied to the confrontational politics, which has marked the region for decades, he has been of interest only to a handful of critics. And it is specifically because of the ideological

and cultural baggage tied to the study of these nations that issues of method in the study of the literatures of this region acquire more urgency and weight. But before reflecting on the methodological issues raised in this book, I want to revisit the manifestations of *turāth* and Sufism in al-Masʿadī's fiction and how these relate to the debate on authenticity.

Turāth, Sufism, authenticity

Al-Masʿadī's fiction contains a number of curious references to literature and writing. In *al-Sudd* Maymūna suggests, wryly, that Ghaylān sets up a school 'to teach the gods the art of eloquence' (57); the stones accuse Ṣāhabbāʾ's prophet of plagiarizing a famous master of rhetoric (94). *In Ḥaddatha*, Abū Hurayra depicts his own end through an abstract drawing, which he interprets as 'Time whose head has been cut off or a question and no meaning' (222); Abū Rughāl says about people of the valley: 'I realized that each one of them, even their fools, fulfil a specific function in life, like syntax in a sentence. It was as if Sībawayh [the scholar credited with systemizing medieval Arabic grammar] was their ruler' (209). These metatheatrical and metafictional references and many others are poignant reminders that we are reading a story, a textual construction aware of its own textuality; a warning that perhaps we should not take the word too seriously, or erroneously assign to it implications beyond the text. These may be further instances of concealment (*taqiyya*) designed to protect a subversive message, as I illustrate in Chapter 3. But it is clear, nevertheless, that the text does reflect on itself as text, inducing some critics, unaware of the exact dates of his writings, to even argue for 'postmodernism' in al-Masʿadī. In *al-Sudd*, Ghaylān makes explicit that 'everything is a story', adding that 'living is the Man's role in the story and age is its extent' (109). What is the story? How is it constructed? And how does it relate to history?

Traditional accounts of authenticity (*aṣāla*) and *turāth*, two issues which continue to be the source of much anguish and much thinking in the Arab World go some way to explain the complex manifestations of the debate in al-Masʿadī. They do, however, limit the discussion to textual evidence and political idiom. Critics find in al-Masʿadī references to the heritage and therefore argue for the authenticity of his work. As such he is interpreted within specific definition (construction) of authenticity and *turāth* to fit specific identity politics. Characters, for instance, carry names that compelled critics to research deep into the archive of the culture in order to unearth equivalents to Ghaylān, Madyan, Rayḥāna, Abū Rughāl, Maymūna and others. But al-Masʿadī's fictional texts are completely woven from the textual material of *turāth*. The absence of specific referent and locale disrupts the sense of representation or mimesis. Thus, al-Masʿadī's texts cannot be perceived as Tunisian *per se* or Arab in a specific way. Names, for instance, function at two levels. They are codes; for example, Ghaylān and his single mindedness in *al-Sudd* recall Ghaylān al-Dimashqī and his belief in human will. They are also instances where the 'effect of reality' is affirmed and denied at the same time. They point to historical important Islamic figures but do not re-present them. This is a key difference between al-Masʿadī and

other Arab writers in the literary uses of Islamic subjects in the 1930s and 40s. It also sets him apart from more overt attempts at recalling narrative tradition, such as Muḥammad al-Muwailiḥī's *Ḥadīth 'Īsa 'Ibn Hishām*, as I argue in Chapter 2.

In fact, when al-Masʿadī was writing his fiction in the late 1930s and early 40s, religious themes were neither new nor rare in Arabic literature. Sufis and Sufism, however, largely remained outside creative writing. During the same period, interest in Sufism as a field of study witnessed a transformation, especially at the hands of European scholars whom al-Masʿadī has known and most certainly read.[2] In his essays and lectures, he approaches Sufism in a general manner, showing interest and even fascination with al-Ghazālī and to a lesser degree the ascetic poet, Abū al-ʿAtāhiyya; but pays less attention to prominent Sufi figures such as al-Ḥallāj, Ibn al-ʿArabī or al-Niffarī. He selects from the range of Sufi terminology only such known ideas as Man's awe before God's creativity and power, revelation (*kashf*) of truth to the elected Sufi, or the limits of rational knowledge. And he does so often to explain themes in his own work. Al-Masʿadī's fiction, on the other hand, reveals a more complex affinity with Sufism than the essays suggest.

Sufism emphasizes the self and the search; it is open-ended and yet focuses on the development of individual consciousness long before the modern concern with it. Religious doubt and misgivings about the faith, which appear in al-Masʿadī's fiction are often attributed by critics to modernity, and more specifically to the existentialist influences on the writer. This can only be part of the story. In Islamic culture, scepticism runs almost as a parallel history to devotional literature and thought. In fact, doubt and crises in faith are well entrenched even among the mainstream figures of Islam. Pious men and women have openly admitted going through phases of doubt and often wrote about them. Al-Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* and al-Maʿarrī's *Luzumiyyāt* are but two such cases. Sufi figures often describe their doubt and, more importantly, show how doubt as a phase and a breaking point is the main reason why they engage in a Sufi search for truth and certainty. Al-Masʿadī tries to narrate what al-Ghazālī calls *fayẓ* or overflowing and *mukāshafa* (revealing). The variety in style and theme in his work reflects his search for apt ways to represent the Sufi experience. In this he joins the company of famous Sufis and his style is opaque only in so far that it is Sufi, like theirs.

One of the key Sufi manifestations in al-Masʿadī is Abū Hurayra's journey. Yet, his desire to 'erase' his story in 'The Clay', analysed in detail in Chapter 4, has parallels in al-Masʿadī's other work. In fact, the desire to forget and return to an original state of being haunts al-Masʿadī's main characters. Madyan sets out on a quest for forgetting in *Mawlid al-Nisyān*; Ghaylān, in *al-Sudd*, seeks to imitate gods in their capacity to create life; Sindabad longs to 'return to purity'. Is this an attempt to erase history or a desire to redeem it in a Nietzschean sense? ('*To redeem the past* and to transform every "It was" into "I wanted it thus!" – that alone would I call redemption' (Nietzsche 1979: 110).) If the aim of Abū Hurayra's journey in '*al-Ṭīn*' is to achieve a total erasure of his story, then he has failed. He declares, 'I found it [his story] there in me, before Adam and Eve, impossible to erase' (132–3). But this perceived failure, like the other 'failed' attempts by Ghaylān, Madyan, Sindabad and the Traveller, records

the fact that the story is bound by history, and occurs only in relation to it. The journey – as well as the other engagements with origins and beginnings, highlighted above – are attempts to reclaim the past, to make it the writer's own. But in al-Masʿadī's stories, the goal does not seem to be an end in itself. Even in the most extreme instance of struggle against fate and destiny, depicted in *al-Sudd*, there is no illusion about this tragic undertaking. And here lies the meaning. 'The struggle to reach the summit can alone fill the heart of a Man. We have to imagine Sisyphus happy', says Camus (Camus 1942: 168). So while the impossibility of being outside history is recorded, the human will to transcend this necessity is also inscribed. The aim is not representation but presence in a world that denies one's presence. And it is in this sense, and in this sense only, that al-Masʿadī's text can be understood as historical: it is an act of being in history, an attempt at turning the past into agency in the face of a disorientating present and a future which seemed beyond the reach and control of the Arabs, readers and writers alike.

Such story involves the questions of who we are and what is our purpose in the world. The Sufi journey as a reading code provides better understanding of how the individual experience is constructed in al-Masʿadī's literary writings within the framework of these questions. Ignoring Sufism in al-Masʿadī's is indicative of a reluctance to tackle the whole issue of Sufism in particular and spirituality in general in modern Arabic literature. It reveals the selective – and sometimes, exclusive – tendency of dominant constructions of *turāth*. Sufism allows al-Masʿadī to extricate the spiritual dimension from the specificity (even historicity) of religious ritual. His work is an early complex encounter between 'Sufism' and 'modernity' in Arabic literature. Specifically, it connects him with the metaphysical search, which characterizes High Modernism in European and American cultures in the first half of the twentieth century.[3] But this is not the only area where the writer and High Modernism meet, as the discussion of his style reveals.

Style

The settings of most of al-Masʿadī's stories, which often include an empty and merciless sky, arid land and running water, provide a context for a search and a quest. The desolate landscape sets the stage for two types of action: it invites creation at the basic human level, and inspires wonder and questioning at the metaphysical one. In a symbolic interpretation of these settings, we find the basic elements of writing: a blank page, the writer's lexicon (rocks) the horizons of meaning (sky) and the capacity to mould everything together into a living body (water and style). Ḥusayn compares al-Masʿadī's language to 'the rocks from which his dam has been constructed'. Ḥusayn has also famously suggested that he feared that the Arabic language has seduced al-Masʿadī and 'tempted him to be hard on it and to exhaust it'. How can one exhaust a language? What is the meaning and manifestation of this seduction? Why did Ḥusayn fear it?

In addition to the desire to erase the story by recovering origins, there are other acts of return to origins in al-Masʿadī, which pertain to style. In *Ḥaddatha*, these

include the choice of the main character, the language used, and the original form of narrative, *ḥadīth*. Historically, Abū Hurayra is a key narrator of the ultimate narrative, the prophet's life and statements. He is the original narrator (*rāwī*) whose words represent the basic narration (*riwāya*) and telling (*ḥadīth*). As such, he is a key figure to the history of Islam and Islamic culture whose authority relates to the very existence of the Prophetic tradition. Engagement with *Qurʾān* rather than later sources also reflects the same drive. They are all originators: *Qurʾān* is the originating text; Abū Hurayra is the first narrator and source; *ḥadīth* is the basic narrative form; the root is the origin of the word. As suggested above, al-Masʿadī's text cannot be understood by indexing its reference. Such task, as the close readings of a short segment from *al-Sudd* makes clear, becomes an incommensurable undertaking, which results in rewriting the entire text as reference. The writer's work is not there, as Hutcheon points out. Avant garde texts, she says, are 'deliberately and willingly learned, haunted by cultural memories whose tyrannical weight they must overthrow by their incorporation and inversion of them' (Hutcheon 2000: 5). For rather than accumulating references, al-Masʿadī peels off the layers of connotation. He strips the Arabic language down to its roots; his use of rhythm engages an initial quality of the language; his economy relies on the evocative rather than the expository nature of Arabic.[4] Maḥjūb ibn Mīlād has called this *zuhd* (asceticism) in style (al-Masʿadī 1992: 154). There are even instances of syntactic economy where al-Masʿadī drops particles and conjunctions in order to establish unmediated relationships among words, resulting in the accumulation of adjectives or nouns, which increases possibilities of constructing meaning through association rather than exposition. For instance, he tends to use adjectival nouns instead of adjectives, which makes the meaning wider and more allusive.[5]

Stylistically, al-Masʿadī undertakes the ultimate challenge of any writer using Arabic, to wrestle the language out of a sacred history and expository baggage. And, like his European contemporaries, most prominently the abstract impressionist painter, Kandinsky, an artist who returns to primary colours and shapes in order to express what he called the 'vibrations of the human soul' (Kandinsky and Mark 1974: 190), al-Masʿadī's writing may be understood as peeling off of cultural habitations in an attempt to uncover what might be called the primary colours of the word. At the level of language, al-Masʿadī often uses words in their root meaning (e.g. *islām* to mean surrender rather than Islam the religion; *kufr*, to mean denial or rejection; *īmān* to mean trust and *allah* for deity rather than the specific manifestation of it in Islam). It is perhaps for this reason that he, unlike most writers who tend to be suspicious of language, approaches Arabic with an attitude akin to belief: he puts his trust in it, sure that it is capable of conveying even deep doubt and disturbing scepticism.[6] By steering away from mimesis, and with it realist fiction as he understands it, he plays up the capacity of Arabic to evoke the past; and in so doing attempts to fend off the temptation to imitate this very past.[7] His evocations appeal to the memory of the Arabic reader in a teasing manner. The name, Abū Hurayra, is a lure to the memory.[8] His language is at times liturgical, a language which strives to appear untouched by history. This, I suggest, is not a romantic glorification of the past – al-Masʿadī's Abū

Hurayra or his Ghaylān do not revive, revalue or glorify their historical namesakes. In turn, there is really nothing glorious about them either. Gnawed away by doubt, they appear human, all too human.

As it is recalled, this past is reworked intensively, obsessively, and almost to the point of desperation. Like his contemporary, the philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin, who was aware that the past was under the threat of brutal amnesia in a mechanized age, al-Masʿadī sensed the danger of amnesia and sought the articulation of a fleeting presence of the past. Benjamin was convinced that 'to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it the "way it really was". It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger' (Benjamin 1985: 255). For Arab culture in the 1930s and 40s, the sense of direction was in danger. In 'Ḥadīth al-ʿamā' (Blindness), Abū Hurayra, the Easterner, is blinded by his experience of the convergence of East and West in him. He looses his *qibla* and 'the six directions' (167). But as he roams blindly, he gains insight into himself and into others. This loss and redemptive illumination are his guides in the face of what the philosopher Henri Lefebvre has called the 'brutal liquidation of history and the past' perpetrated by the modern world, a liquidation which impacts the present in an 'uneven manner' (Lefebvre 1991: 121). One instance of this unevenness is the paradoxical drive to preserve traditional representational spaces (works of art) from 'the buffeting of industrial space and industrial representations of space' (121). But while this appears to be a paradox within modernity as experienced in the industrialized metropolitan cities of the West, in cultures where modernity is understood as something which had already happened elsewhere, traditional representational spaces play a different role. They become ways of engaging modernity, adapting, resisting, embracing, or rejecting it. They are instances of local form in its complexity, as this study hopes to have shown, and in its fragility in the face of forms whose reach is global and pervasive – the novel is the key one here.

Al-Masʿadī's Sufism has the unique feature that it ties salvation to art explicitly. But in Arabic literature, Sufism does not constitute a well-defined style of thinking modernity in the way high modernism was in the European and American contexts. Arab modernity mostly excluded Sufism and marginalized Sufi literature. It was never allowed to be a worldview or interact with similar Western metaphysical thought and literature, such as Greek tragedy, Goethe's eclectic spiritual thinking and art, the metaphysical tendencies in European high modernism or existentialism.[9] Does al-Masʿadī's case demonstrate the orphan nature of high modernism in Arabic fiction? Was the encounter between Sufism and modernism doomed? Could the cultural politics of nationalism support, or afford, modernism with its opacity, pessimism and aesthetic 'indulgence'? Ḥusayn, therefore, had good grounds to fear al-Masʿadī's attitude to Arabic: for him, it went against the global current and against the needs of the nation to be represented. The thinking was that falling for the allure of Arabic was anti-modern, and so was Sufism. Al-Masʿadī's style was, like modernism, demanding on readers at a time when simplification was most needed. It was acceptable to appropriate elements of *turāth* in order to construct a confident nation but Sufism did not fit these aims. The perception was that *turāth* united

the nation by giving it a shared history and legacy while Sufism dispersed it into individualities, leaving it prone to division and vulnerability. His fiction, I suggest, could be described as Arabic rather than Arab; pertaining to language rather than to ethnicity or nationality, to the textual repertoire rather than to history. It compels us to ask: Is the retrieval of the past conceivable only in messianic terms and within the language? Does al-Masʿadī's text demonstrate the impossibility of recovering the past outside fiction, or what Ghaylān has called, 'the story'? Does it demonstrate the impossibility of narrating or representing cultural authenticity altogether?

Reflections on method

Despite the abundance of political interpretations, the study of al-Masʿadī's fiction as a social text, or abstract of social relations in the terms of Jameson and Moretti, is really a debate yet to be undertaken properly. For to read a text as an abstract of social relations means, primarily, to approach it as we do the study of social relations themselves. In the latter, we rightly assume complexity and give due attention to situation. In Third World societies, marked by the confluence of global systems and local traditional social formations, the complexity is heightened. Local form as the third component of an equation, which also includes foreign form and local content, to recall Moretti's argument, should be understood in a wide and inclusive manner. This calls for approaches and particular expertise which bring out this complexity. For 'alternate experiences demand alternate theories and methodologies' (Jusdanis 1991: 8). Establishing the elements of a poetics specific to the work requires a variety of sources. Reading al-Masʿadī in relation to literary theory, and in particular theories of Third World literature, is an attempt to take part in and put to the test a comparative literary practice where 'local expertise (and accountability) in a particular area', is combined with 'training in transnational and global perspectives' (Bernheimer 1995: 64). Or, in more recent debates, combining Area Studies and Comparative literature. My argument, however, is that 'transnational and global perspectives' are just that, transnational and global, not Western models of globalism. For this reason, the study includes reflections on and critique of some perspectives on Third World literature, most notably Jameson and Ahmed. It shows that reading Third World texts as allegories of national situations greatly reduces both the texts and the national situation. It also argues that Jameson, while being aware of the radical difference of Third World literature, takes as a given the supremacy of Western form. Moretti refines these views by putting more emphasis on local form in this interface between Western and Third World literatures and sees in this a deeper historical relevance. He says: 'the historical conditions reappear as a sort of "crack" in the form; as a faultline running between story and discourse, world and worldview: the world goes in the strange direction dictated by an outside power; the worldview tries to make sense of it, and is thrown off balance all the time' (Moretti 2000: 61). The book also introduces a revision of the idea of influence in an attempt to expand Comparative Literature beyond the dominant practice of comparing texts from one or more national or linguistic traditions in their relations to Western literature

expressed in terms of Western influences and models. The world has become one, as Abū Hurayra and long before him, Goethe have discovered during their journeys.[10] If *Weltliteratur* is to have any meaning today, it must respond to and promote the need for a de-colonization through a critique of 'cross-images', to use Gnisci's phrase.

To this end, the book introduces and tests confluence as an alternative comparative approach to the relationship between Arabic and Western literatures as well as a methodological practice in the study of texts. By bringing together Arabic poetics and Western critical terminology, even in this limited instance, I wanted to suggest that bicultural – and by extension, multi-cultural – texts require more than one set of interpretive terminology. The multiplicity of the text is better served by multiple entries, which aim at drawing out the various components and their interaction. For example, *Taqiyya* and modern conceptions of parody allow a look at 'literariness' within two different, but complementary, frameworks. While parody accounts for engagement with *Qurʾān*, *taqiyya*, as a culturally specific convention, allows a decoding of allusions and symbols. Moreover, by studying al-Masʿadī's fiction as site of confluence of Western as well as Arab and Islamic impulses, different traditions are put into dialogue rather than hierarchy, as I argue in the study of *al-Sudd*. Al-Masʿadī is a particularly conducive test case in which a more productive theory of comparative literature applied to the relationships between Arab and Western traditions could be observed. Studied from the perspective of confluence, it becomes possible to see how his work draws on and moulds together East and West in ways that recognize the national and tradition-specific scope but also give room for a variety of non-Islamic sources. Al-Masʿadī is an apt example of what Gnisci has called 'colloquium' between cultures. By changing the paradigms of analysis to approach his work, we become more aware of how he listened to voices across the shores of the Mediterranean and across time. (In fact he explicitly refused to be called one or the other: 'I am neither Western nor Eastern, I am made up of both' (al-Masʿadī 2003: 371).) Yet, while he aspired to synthesis, al-Masʿadī remained aware of the imbalances in the global order, the hegemonic tendencies of big powers and the need for local cultures to mark the global stage.

Necessity and the tragic

Al-Sudd may be the writer's only tragedy, in a formal sense, but it is by no means the only expression of the tragic in his work. The clash between human will to freedom and stubborn necessity is a marker of al-Masʿadī's fiction and could indeed be a paradigm in the study of his entire work.[11] Al-Masʿadī's characters may be diverse but they are linked by one thread. They are adamant to go on until the end preserving their individual path in life despite and in opposition to necessity.[12] Al-Masʿadī's interest in Greek tragic thought and drama stems from their focus on what is for him 'essential' shared human issues. Like Ibn Rushd, he sees in tragedy the elements, which are common to 'all nations' rather than those, which are history-specific (personal, psychological or national histories). The *Qurʾān*, in its expression as well as in the conception of human existence which al-Masʿadī derives from it, shares these

concerns. Both sources offer the writer the codes to explore human existence. Like them, *al-Sudd* tells the story of human power and powerlessness. But while the play sets limits for Ghaylān's success, it unleashes his doubt, uncertainty and defiance. It 'encloses' his transgression and performs it at the same time.[13]

But, true to fashion, there are sacrifices to be paid for such an act. When Maymūna suggests eating the mule's meat, she is of course referring to sacrifice. The mule would be an offering to forces of nature or gods in order to avert their wrath and prevent disaster. The dam was nearing completion and order had to be preserved. At the end of the play, the mule is sacrificed, a scapegoat that had to be left behind, or rather below, the part of Ghaylān which is unable to take to the skies, the untranscendental Ghaylān. In light of the serious puzzlement of critics about the endings of al-Masʿadī's main works where the protagonists almost invariably meet their death, the question arises: are al-Masʿadī's heroes sacrificed to preserve the existing (religious) order? Are they sacrificed to protect the writer himself? I want to venture a further suggestion. Al-Masʿadī's characters are sacrificed for the sake of their stories. They die so that their tales may survive; both as narratives of power and powerlessness and as performances of transgression and resistance.[14]

The heroes who set out to change the world, or at least to choose their way of being in it, have to transgress an existing state of things and overcome personal, communal as well as human pasts. 'If we cannot fashion ourselves as we choose, as Henrik Ibsen knew, it is because of the burden of history under which we stagger, not only because of the restrictions of the present' (Eagleton 2003: xvi). By seeing tragedy in Promethean terms, at least in part, al-Masʿadī dramatizes 'humanity's heroic resistance to destiny' (Eagleton 2003: 59). Such resistance is heroic specifically because it is a lonely affair.[15] Eagleton, ever aware of the politics of art, even when dealing with a 'noble' and 'elitist' genre like tragedy, sees in this resistance the revolutionary meaning of tragedy in modern times, 'a strike against destiny, not a submission to it' (104). For the individual, it is an act of challenging the limits, which go back to the very origin. 'Transgression is what makes historical beings of us, which is why the Fall is a felicitous one' (Eagleton 2003: 243). In Goethe's words:

> Whoe'er aspires unweariedly
> Is not beyond redeeming.
>
> (Goethe 1890: 365)[16]

In the end, I think a question befitting the writer's own concern about the role of the individual and the function of art must be asked. Is there something tragic about al-Masʿadī's attempt to write classical tragedy and transfigurative fiction at a time dominated by the urgency of representation as the first part of the twentieth century in Tunisia and across the Third World? As colonial subject, al-Masʿadī saw the abyss; he experienced the terror of loss of reference; and glimpsed, along with the colonial dispossession of land, the dissolution of the aura of his cultural past. So at a time when signs needed to be restored to things, as Berque put it, al-Masʿadī's art hangs on to the signs, recalling, reshaping and recasting them. He had little use, and regard for

things. His work is evocative rather than mimetic, transfigurative of the human condition of a people made irrelevant by history rather than reflective of the daily reality of its time and place. It was apt that he attempted tragedy, parody and transcendental quest. Tragic art is the 'enemy of mimesis, since the role of art is to transfigure rather than reflect' (Eagleton 56). Likewise, parody, as an engagement of the word of another, is not mimetic of reality but transfigurative of other works of art. Intellectually, just like the writer's favourite predecessors, al-Ghazālī and al-Maʿarrī, his characters experience the crucible of doubt and uncertainty. And like a tragic hero, the writer resists his 'fate' with sincerity and integrity, preferring isolation and resistance to populism and commodification. 'Loneliness is the soul of tragedy', says Lukac (Eagleton 2003: 64). Was he vindicated? Al-Masʿadī remained faithful to his style and outlook on the world for decades, unmoved by lack of popularity abroad and little interest among translators despite being selected by the UNESCO among its representative authors. In a way, he retreated into the density, conciseness, and allusive nature of a style animated by the desire to 'starve the expression and feed the meaning', in the ancient tradition of Arabic eloquence. He tried to alleviate the burden of representation by 'giving in to the allure of Arabic', to recall Ḥusayn's phrase, and the attraction of flirting with the artistic and intellectual limits imposed on the Arab writer by tradition, institutions and the colonial condition. It was perhaps expected, although this was discovered only a couple of years before his death, that al-Masʿadī had been writing aphorisms for decades. In these he expresses the workings of a mind situated somewhere between the despairing sardonic depth of Cioran's epigrams and the sincere and agonized opacity of the ecstatic sayings of the Sufis. Al-Masʿadī is a tragic figure, oscillating between the aesthetic and the ethical, the political and the poetic, the citizen and the artist, the local and the cosmopolitan, nationalist literature and *weltliteratur*, Camus and al-Ḥallāj, Goethe and al-Maʿarrī… or rather, a figure in whom all the above converge.

Appendix 1

'THE BUILDING IS CRACKING' (1951)

People take one of two positions on the issue of independence. On one side, there are those who look at it from the standpoint of thought and abstraction. They see independence as one whole, indivisible in its conception and does not allow for gradual stages in its execution. On the other hand, there are those who consider it from the point of view of practical will and see it as a construction, a reality that must be felt in everything: in people, in government and in institutions. Unless mediated by existential discipline (*istiqāma wujūdiyya*), the conflict between thought and action can be too great, for the distance that separates pure thought from the impure (messy) reality is indeed considerable.

In such a drama the opposition between thought and action, among individuals and nations alike, is of the highest kind; it is disheartening and hard to bear. For thought requires absolute necessity while action is incapable of incurring sudden radical changes in beings. Reality resists totality. However, both are inevitable. The human character of a political position is impossible without the two. Political struggle remains the hardest struggle specifically because it attempts to reconcile the two elements and unify both forces. It runs the risk of oscillating between sterile vision and betrayed action (*al-ʿuqm bi al-naẓar wa al-khiyāna bi al-fiʿl*). Since the highest form of action is the embodiment of what the mind creates and the realization of the highest ideal, the best quality thought must have, as it seeks the coming into being of necessity, is tireless and patient effort independent from others. Its determination must be pursued relentlessly. It must pursue necessity while remaining totally faithful to the ideal. The material of reality at the hands of a creator is not malleable clay but unyielding marble. The sculptor knows that the 'extent' (*madā*) of a statue is years of imagining and conception followed by years of hand-bleeding labour, draining patience and exhausting passion. Such is the statue of Galatea in Greek mythology and such is the statue of independence. Sculpture, in addition to time, involves other complexities; the statue, in addition to the unyielding marble, has a core and parts. In sculpturing Tunisian independence, we need to pay attention to all its parts and to the detail of each complicated part.

Independence is the chapter that the nation needs in order to complete the humanity it seeks. Achieving it, which means bringing it into being, depends on the nation's

daily effort and continuous labour. Real independence means the actual existence that the nation creates for itself and the identity that she constructs by erecting the structures of her national life as a nation. She does so in the areas of economy, administration, culture and society; by drawing up her plans for government and social organization and by devising her original path towards a wholesome existence.

These are areas that the nation has been working on steadily. Her national economy is fighting to build itself and shed the intruding foreign economy. Her professionals are spread out in the administration, trying to acquire the skills that allow them to take on responsibilities. Her national culture has asserted itself as a language and as a heritage. It has been protecting itself against annihilation and is now set on the road to progress and prosperity. Today, her national culture rivals the invading foreign culture and competes with it successfully in circulation. In the social domain, the nation has her intellectuals and her independent Tunisian organizations. Its people strive to find solutions to social problems, to ensure the required balance in society, equality among classes, and to address the nation's health problems.

Until recently, only government had been lagging behind. It remained an odd mix, a Tunisian stuffing in a French wrap. Weak ministers were reduced to mere shadows when Tunisian identity was under threat of assimilation. The situation remained this way until the early signs of separation when a Tunisian cabinet was erected parallel to the French administration. Conflict and uncertainty began and crises persisted. The unity that the Mandate had wanted as assimilation and repression was shattered. The building has cracked from the bottom up: a nation in opposition to intruders; a people with their lives, feelings, parties and hopes in opposition to the occupiers of their country; an administration in two factions, the competing and challenging Tunisian side and the stubborn French side; an economy in two sectors, torn between two sides; one culture opposite another; a national society against a foreign minority; and an emerging claimant government facing an accused one.

The real independence of a nation means that its will to become independent is born outside the will of others. The end of political struggle for independence is to compel law to embody reality and recognize it. If the effort towards independent national existence were to fall behind the struggle for political independence, the situation would be reversed: legal independence would be founded upon an empty reality. However, a political independence that follows an existential independence is a mere historical necessity. It depends only on a final effort whose time has come.

Appendix 2

‘ḤADĪTH AL-ṬĪN’ (THE CLAY), ḤADDATHA ABŪ HURAYRA QĀL...

I asked: What is the most perfect form of rational knowledge?
He said: That human beings know their own capacity.

<div align="right">(al-Rāhib al-Jurjānī)</div>

Abū Hurayra is reported to have said [ʿan abī hurayra annahu qāla]):
'I left Medina taking along nothing but my cane, to lean on it and to lend it my weight. A virgin land appeared to me and beckoned me forth. So I abandoned what I was carrying and lost interest [in my pursuit]. Then I set out freely to discover that land and found it like creation or like time. I wandered around for few days there, like a groom on his wedding night, seeking the unknown fruit, wishing the world were created anew and envying Adam and Eve. My solitude was complete. Night and day seemed like a meaningless game and time turned homogeneous. Like a calm sea. Or like eternity.' Narrated by Abū ʿUbayda. Thābit al-Qaysī reported the same and added to it the following:

'At that time, Abū Hurayra was in Kurāʿ al-Ghamīm, a sandy river located between the two holy cities. The river was reported to be a haunted place, rarely free of bedeviling demons and blinding spirits (al-muʿṣirāt al-muʿmiyyāt). It was a hard place to be; and no one dared to enter it alone. Someone saw Abū Hurayra there, and thought he was a jinni. He told me the story: "I saw him cursing ruins (rasm) and past times, and spitting like a devil. After a while he started looking around as if searching for a lost friend; then he went to a place nearby and lied down."

Thābit said, 'When I asked Abū Hurayra about the matter, he said, "Yes. That day I felt restless and needed relief. So I composed an elegy for Adam and Eve and took it to the women of a clan in the valley. But they refused to use it as a wailing song and said, 'This is the dullest elegy we have ever heard. You are an idiot (aḥmaq)!' I said, yes; and used the poem in my own wailing. It was indeed the dullest of poems!" And he laughed.'

Thābit added, 'perhaps he meant a clan and women from the world of spirits. It was even possible that he made up the whole story without any parallel in reality (anshaʾa al-khabara inshāʾan dūna muṭābaqa). For Abū Hurayra was a master of jest, ambiguity and deception. He always acted as if he hated to divulge his deep secrets

<div align="center">150</div>

or to reveal himself to others. So much so that people have become uncertain about him (*ishtabaha amruhu*).'

Thābit added, 'We asked him, "Why did you want to mourn the elderly man and woman?" He replied, "Because they almost succeeded in teaching me their ignorance of life and in guiding me to the virgin path. So when I lost them, I found myself again on beaten paths and I returned to my old story and to my old self. I had wanted my path to be virgin (*ʿadhrāʾ*), untouched by men, but it turned out to be an old whore? (*ʿajūz fājira*)".'

Abū ʿUbayda said – but this was not reported by Thābit, 'Abū Hurayra said, "One day, having run out of provisions the day before, I felt as if I was in the clarity of a cloudless noon or in the light of a fire as heat spread across the land. At the time, I was in a valley whose sand was like the waves of a mirage on which sight could ride and spread until the sand appeared like thin air. I was not long in my quietude when a wind began to whisper like a human voice. The wind then became stronger and blew the sand about like the flutter of a silk cloth. It then started to blow harder and roar like a sea storm, raising sand up in the air like snake tongues to reveal ancient ruins and a decayed skull. This did away with my solitude and spoiled my joy. I wondered why was it that whenever someone sought solitude, an effaced sign would appear to him? It felt as if the sign was in my heart. I hated that and decided to leave the place. For I had set out to erase my story, only to discover that it was within me, before Adam and Eve, impossible to erase. But then I got distracted, lied down and soon fell asleep.

In my sleep I had the most stupid and most arrogant dream. I saw a strange country, whose people appeared at times like elephants and at others like ants. They were mixing clay and using it to hold together stones to erect massive walls (*ṣurūḥ*). Some of them were singing lyrics at the rhythm of stone lifting:

> Reason is death; thinking is a disease.
> The Soul is an echo: the echo of nothingness.
> Action is everlasting; struggle is peace.
> Let us build a wall that defeats nothingness!

There was a reader reciting in 'Ḥamza's version: "Nobles, you have no other god that I know of except myself. Make me, Hāmān, bricks of clay, and build for me a tower that I may climb up to the god of Moses. I am convinced that he is lying!" They responded to the reader inserting their own speech, which sounded like thunder shaking the sky: "He denied it [the sign] and rebelled – *banḍaldallam*. He quickly went away – *banhar talgham* - and, summoning all his men – *bar ānhandam*. Made to them the proclamation: 'I am your supreme Lord,' he said'. When I woke up, I went to Bedouin clans and stayed amongst them for two years".'

Abū ʿUbayda said,

'Abū Hurayra did not explain the meaning of the corruption (gibberish) inserted in the verse. God's word is indeed free from barbarism (*raṭānat al-ʿajam*)! It was the devil that, during sleep, took hold of him! (*wa innamā huwa al-Shaṭānu fī al-nawmi alam.*)'

Appendix 3

AL-SUDD (THE DAM), 'SCENE FOUR'

(At the same place, shortly after Maymūna and Ghaylān had left. Three stones move slowly and gradually take the shape of three young women, like clay taking shape between the hands of a potter. They stretch out like someone shedding sleep and removing the covers. The Stones emerge from sleep and silence, yawning lazily. Coats of dust fall off. They stand up opening the doors of the sky and removing the veil of clouds. They walk a little then order their dawn drink and morning food. The mule is wondering about what stones eat for breakfast.)

First Stone. (*red, young and delicate, with hair the colour of dawn and eyes like the sky*)
   I have never seen anything more unusual than these strangers.
Second Stone. (*The one Ghaylān had been sitting on, young like the first but neither delicate nor red, rather strong and solid, a high noon {hājira} in the desert.*)
   What do we know about them? I haven't seen anything. I know only their bottoms.
Third Stone. (*The one Maymūna had been sitting on, young, delicate and red like First Stone, her older sister*)
   Adam's children do not probably know solidity and strength. I find this woman's bottom very flabby. I hate everything soft, fat or flabby.
Second Stone. Humans are like that, Dayāda. They often burden themselves with useless leftovers and trimmings, like flesh, mind, softness, fat, flabbiness, water… Solidity is not easy to achieve.
Third Stone. *(to First Stone, her sister)*
   How can they sleep with flabby bodies like that? Their sleep must be damp, heavy and sticky.
First Stone. Humans do not sleep: they think they do. Their only sleep and rest is death, and death is a long sleep which can last an eternity. They do not wake up from it until the body had turned into soil and disintegrated. When they wake up, they hate to take the ruins of a body as their home. They get angry like tenants evicted by force from their homes. So they roam around, shouting, which prevents gods from sleep. Human souls are the mosquitoes of the heavens.

Second Stone. They call this the Hereafter or the afterlife. Their mosquito souls sting the gods, disturb their sleep and afflict them with fever.

Third Stone. *(to First Stone, her sister)*

Tell us, sister! What do the strangers want?

First Stone. O, Dayāda, lover of knowledge and delicate soul! What do you want them to seek? They do not seek anything. They think they do.

Second Stone. Humans are like that. They love illusions and nothing fascinates them more. All living creatures occupy themselves with habits and whims. Gods have the habit of creating worlds and then busy themselves playing chess and backgammon to pass time. Suns have the habit of shining and the donkey that of neighing, and our prophet has the habit of collecting and storing voices. Humans are in the habit of collecting illusions and beliefs: they believe in God and in the devil, in human beings and in spirits, in ugliness and in beauty, in medicine and in death, in life and in the Hereafter, in justice and in demons [*banāt al-suʿāla*], in power and in wine, in work and in magical amulets, in their ability and in dams in the desert. They are collectors, fond of gathering and assembling as if they were narrators [*ruwāt*] or storytellers [*muḥaddithūn*].

Third Stone. (*to her sister*)

What do these strangers seek? What do they believe [*yaḥimūna*] they seek?

First Stone. It is their selves they seek.

Second Stone. That's because they are infatuated with themselves. They have no other weakness and no deeper disease. Some men become effeminate and offer themselves to other men in order to get closer to themselves and to love themselves. And no virgin would approach a man before she had fondled her herself, experienced her own body, tasted her virginity and wept from pleasure…

For this reason, humans invented the mirror.

Third Stone. (*alluding to all sorts of meanings*)

They seek themselves? Then they must have unlimited dimensions and expanses…

First Stone. Yes, Dayāda. Yes and no. For the smallest space may be a sky while the shortest line may extend very far...

Second Stone. Yes, if sight falls short of its extent; if the seer fails to perceive the end…

First Stone. Look at them, Dayāda!

(She looks towards the dam)

There they are in the valley, near the bend in the river. See how they are sweating and exerting themselves. Their energy is flying from their bodies like flames. See how their tools are smoking and turning everything black and how their engines are shaking and bouncing. See how their foreheads are strained with effort and exertion and how their hands are bleeding from stubborn rocks.

See how work begins and how the illusion of strength can be.

(All three stones look towards the dam)

This is how they are. Their minds are unable to comprehend that life requires letting go, cowardice [*jubn*] and surrender [*islām*]. They are filled up with belief, courage, and the desire to struggle. They are drunk: they want to create. They

153

want to fill land with water and produce trees and plants, lovely gardens, fertile fields, green grass, delicious fruits and flowers flowing with water…

Second Stone. Their souls are nothing like olive trees, which feed on drought and yet irrigate.

First Stone. (*continuing*)

… they want to conquer the gods and destroy impotence. But they will not be able to find a way to create storms, thunder, quakes and lightning. They are incapable of creation.

Second Stone. (*reciting Ṣāhabbāʾs gospel*)

I seek refuge in Ṣāhabbāʾ from the cursed Man:

'We hit the clouds with a stone hammer and ordered Earth to be.

Clouds gave birth to Earth, which was made of stone and strength. I am the Creator, the Goddess.

Then the angels prostrated themselves before us and said: 'Ṣāhabbāʾ, the earth is lifeless stone.'

We ordered storms, thunder, lightning, quakes and cataclysm to explode and rumble. Then we sent a lightning bolt, which split open the center of the earth and inject life in it.

The Universe rose up and exalted my Name, for I am the Creator, the Goddess!

Then angels prostrated themselves before Us and said: 'Trees are the earth's hair and water its blood, but there is no life in it, Ṣāhabbāʾ.'

We ordered storms, thunder, lightning, quakes and cataclysm to explode and rumble. Then we sent a lightning bolt, which split open the trees and the water and injected life inside them.

The Universe rose up and exalted my Name, for I am the Creator, the Goddess!

We then ordered storms of dust to rise in the world and icy winds to flog it. We stirred the Universe violently and shook its foundations [*atharna fī al-ʿālamīna naqʿan wa safaʿnāha safʿan wa hayyajna al-akwāna tahyījan wa hazaznāha hazzan wa rajajnāha rajjan*].

Thunder, storm and lightning gave birth to Man. And we said: 'Let Adam, emerge from the rib of the storm, from lightning and thunder! Let Adam be light, fire and lightning!'

The Universe rose up and exalted my Name, for I am the creator, the Goddess!

And we declared: 'Man is the end of creation.' And we said: 'Let mountains rise up and expand!' They rose up, and we lifted them high. We then settled on their tops: permanence of solid rock.

We controlled thunder, lightning and storms. And we gave peace to the Universe by locking violent storms inside solid rock. I am the Creator, the Goddess!

And the Angels came to us and said: 'Man has forgotten the Name of Ṣāhabbāʾ…'

The three Stones. (*in unison*)

Truthful is Ṣāhabbāʾ.

Halhabā halhabāʾ.

Glory to Ṣāhabbāʾ.

Third Stone. (*To her sister*)

Dear sister, you who are forgiveness and mercy, let us go and whisper to them the wisdom of solid rocks! Let us teach them our true wisdom, the immutable and unwavering truth, a truth which does not move, rest [*taskun*], end [*tafna*] or remain [*tabqa*]: eternity in soul and internal permanence!

Let us teach them! Let us offer them quietude, solidity and rest; and guide them to submissiveness [*al-daʿati al-jubni*] and solid wisdom! Let us show them how to abandon seriousness, struggle and the defiance of the goddess!

A Voice. People of the valley, Ṣāhabbāʾ's people! Listen to the prophet!

(*The three stones fall silent and listen in reverence*)

The prophet's order:

You are banned from approaching the strangers

or talk to them,

or assist them.

Second Stone. (*whispering to her sister*)

I wonder if he decided with majority of votes or by consensus.

First stone. (*whispering*)

Be quiet! Do not divulge the secret of gods and prophets, the secret of their wisdom and the secret of ruling the heavens!

The Mule. (*talking to himself*)

As for me, I heard the secret and I will sell it to my God Ghaylān.

A Second Voice. O people! Listen and ponder! And do not divulge what you hear!

Second Stone. (*whispering*)

This is undisguised theft. The prophet stole this from Qiss ibn Sāʿida.

First Stone. (*whispering*)

Be quiet lest the Voice hears you and the prophet gets angry! Remain quiet and still!

(*The three stones whisper*)

Halhabā Halhabbāʾ!

Praise to Ṣāhabbāʾ!

Then they fall silent, lie down and turn into stone again…

The Loud noise of builders and Ghaylān's men is heard coming from the river. They are moving around, lifting, struggling. Maymūna does not return for the day. All one can see in front of the cave and the tent is the Stones. Once in a while, they toss about and dust falls off. It appears as if their sleep is disturbed by the sounds of rocks, hammers, tools and engines…

The Mule. (*As if reemerging from deep thought*)

When stones are afflicted with madness, they turn into women. Indeed, the madness of the inanimate world is life.

NOTES

Notes to Introduction

1 Al-Masʿadī's work is particularly conducive to this undertaking, as it will become apparent in the course of the study.

2 The poet Jamīla Mājrī devotes her column in the cultural supplement of the ruling party's newspaper to a celebration of the writer's legacy, embedding in her text references to al-Masʿadī's characters and ideas. She writes: 'We, the generation, which has been taken by Ghaylān and Mayāra have not been blinded by the glare of the text in the writings of our master Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī. Rather, he was our teacher, the symbol which sculptured our personalities, formed our minds and taught us the values of tenacity, defiance and overcoming. He taught us how to subdue the allure of language and to discover its beauty, and its secrets' (*al-Ḥurriya*, Culture Supplement 23 December 2004: 16).

3 It was al-Dūʿājī who captured this fate in a famous couplet:

> He lived wishing for a grape
> When he died, on his grave they put a bunch.
> The miserable artist finds happiness
> Only beneath a tombstone.

4 Farḥāt Ḥashshād was the leader of the trade union movement in Tunisia, assassinated in the early 1950s; Ghāzī was a brilliant critic and university lecturer in Tunisia in the 1970s.

5 Other references to al-Masʿadī in the press at the time included articles in the weekly magazine *L'Observateur* (2–8 March, 1994: 17–21 in French and 18–19 in Arabic) and the French-language weekly newspaper *Tunis Hebdo* (3 January, 1994). Details of a coveted interview by radio host Ḥabīb Jghām are reported in the Arabic daily *al-Ṣaḥāfa* on December 17, 1993; excerpts from an interview given to the regional radio station appeared in *Al-Idhāʿa wa al-talfaza* (Radio and Television) (18–25 December 1993, 13); *La Presse* published news and a long text by al-Masʿadī on genetics on February 18, 1994 and devoted a 'Cultural Special' in 3 pages to updates, book reviews, and interviews pertaining to the writer (*La Presse,* January 14, 1994). Al-Masʿadī's public appearances may have to do with the need of a prominent public official in the Bourguiba regime to fight isolation. This, however, does not alter the reality that his name still carries tremendous weight in the cultural sphere beyond the specific political events.

6 Kīlānī suggests that among the works influenced by al-Masʿadī are the novels *Wa naṣībī mina al-ʾufuq* (And my Share of the Horizon) by ʿAbd al-Qādir Ibn al-Shaykh (Siras, 1970); *Ḥarakāt* (Vowels) by Muṣṭafa al-Fārisī (Al-Dār al-tūnisiyya li al-nashr, 1978); *N.* (N) by (Dimitir, 1983) and *aʾmidat al-junūn al-sabʿa* (The Seven Pillars of Madness) (Al-Dār al-ʿarabiyya li'l-kitāb, 1985); Hishām al-Qarwī: *al-Nafīr wa al-qiyāma* (The Trumpet and the

Resurrection) (Siras, 1985); *al-Mawt wa al-baḥr wa al-jurdh* (Death, the Sea and the Rat) by Faraj Laḥwār (Dār al-Janūb, 1985); *Mudawwanat al-ʾIʿtirāfāt wa al-ʾasrār* (The Book of Confessions and Secrets) by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Būjāh (Siras, 1985) (Kilānī 1990: 81). Farīd Ghāzī argues that al-Masʿadī's influence was felt much earlier in the stories 'Nakhlat al-majnūn' (The Madman's Palm Tree) and 'Aḥādīth Abū al-Madārik' (Abū al-Madārik's Tales), both written in the 1950s by Muḥammad Faraj al-Shādilī (Ghāzī 1970: 95). Ṭarshūna's novel *al-Muʿjiza* (The Miracle) invokes al-Masʿadī's character, Madyan from *Mawlid al-Nisyān*, the way a European novel might evoke Faust or Emma Bovary (Ṭarshūna 1996: 56).

7 Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (AD 915–965). My translation of the line:

ʿalā qalaqin kaʾanna al-rīḥa taḥtī / tuwajjihunī janūban aw shimāla. (Al-Ḥusarī 1972: 54).

8 Among his teachers in the Zaytūna Islamic university in Tunisia were scholars of great prominence, like Muḥammad ibn al-Qāḍhī, al-Ṭāhir ibn ʿAshūr and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Juʿayyiṭ.

9 'La Réforme de l'enseignement' *I.B.L.A.* (1958): 297–320.

10 See Temimi 2000: 101–122, 250–258.

11 The study looks at 'the spontaneous and unpredictable rhythm' of a style that, unlike poetry, is limited only by rhyme. Al-Masʿadī explains: 'C'est l'objet de cet essai de déterminer aussi exactement que possible la manière dont la prose se trouve rythmiquement organisée par les auteurs de sadj, particulièrement dans les oeuvres les plus remarquables du genre, les *Makamat*' (al-Masʿadī 1981: 9). The book was translated into Arabic by the author as *Al-Īqāʿ fī al-sajʿ al-ʿarabī* (1996). Gully and Hindle, apparently unaware of the earlier versions of the study still found the method published in Arabic translation in 1996, 'ground-breaking,' and 'pioneering' in their study of rhythm in medieval Arabic epistolary literature (Gully and Hindle 2003: 192).

Al-Masʿadī's doctoral thesis was planned as a study in the wine poetry of Abū Nuwās but it was never undertaken. The complementary thesis was finished but was never defended (Bouzid, *La Presse*, 14 January 1994).

12 See the bibliography at the end of the study for complete citations and a chronology of al-Masʿadī's writings.

13 Norma Salem 1984: 220, note 46, citing *Histoire du mouvement national*, Vol. 3.

14 For other UNESCO activities, see al-Masʿadī 2003, vol. 1: 15–20.

15 Al-Masʿadī writes: 'J'ai écrit mes trois premiers livres dans un laps de temps trés court, entre 1939 et 1941, en deux ans.… J'ai d'abord écrit "Haddatha Abu Huraira, qal", puis "As-Sudd," puis "Maouled An-nisian"' (*La Presse*, 14 January 1994).

16 With a number of reservations in mind, the term 'Third World' designates roughly the geographic area often referred to as the 'developing countries' or the 'South'. Other terms include 'former colonies', the 'periphery', etc.

17 The similarity between Jameson and Ahmed with regard to the novel is due, I suspect, to their reliance on the history of the European novel outlined by Georg Lukács in his *Essays on Realism* (Trans. David Fernbach, Cambridge: MITP, 1981).

18 The affinities between the two extends to fiction. Al-Masʿadī's *al-Sudd* and *Mawlid*, in particular, recall Goethe's *Faust*, as I argue in Chapter 3.

19 'It is an intellectual barter, a traffic in ideas between peoples, a literary market to which the nations bring their intellectual treasures for exchange' (Strich 1945: 5).

20 Goethe writes: 'It is obvious that for a considerable time the efforts of the best writers and authors of aesthetic worth in all nations have been directed to what is common to all mankind' (Strich 1945: 13). Al-Masʿadī would echo this in his definition of literature discussed in Chapter 1.

21 Strich writes about Goethe: 'He was the last Westerner to be affected by the East and yet to remain intact,' adding, 'But Goethe was by nature far too noble, indeed too positive,

to have betrayed the European spirit to the East. He is the best example of how one can retain one's quality and yet remain absorptive' (Strich 1945: 150).

22 *Ghūta wa al-ʿĀlam al-ʿarabī* (Goethe and the Arab World) was originally published in German in 1988.

23 Mommsen suggests that Herder's work and fascination with Arabic were very influential in this regard. Herder writes: 'No people have encouraged poetry and developed it to the level reached by Arabs in the eras of their splendor' (Mommsen 1995: 43). Mommsen also argues that Goethe's idea that every translator is a prophet among the readers of his language is based in the *Qur'ān* where it is stated that God has sent a messenger to each people in their own tongue.

24 Al-Masʿadī sees the Arabic language in a similar way, stressing its capacity to express his ideas and feelings. He also insists that Arabic is inclined to symbolism and allusion, as I explain in the course of the study. Goethe's fascination with Islam has been appropriated by Muslims in recent years. In 1995 a *fatwa* (an Islamic legal opinion) issued by Shaykh Abdalqadir al-Murabit and authorized by the Amir of the Muslim Community in Weimar declared Goethe to be a Muslim based on evidence from his writings and life. (See 'Goethe embraces Islam', Islamicweb.com/begin/newMuslims/converts_Goethe.htm).

25 Al-Masʿadī has clearly understood this movement and called for resistance against it, particularly from the platform of the UNESCO, as I will detail in Chapter 2.

26 It is almost inconceivable to see anyone other than metropolitan critics claim expertise on this culture. The same applies in creative writing where Western writers claim, appropriate and write with unquestioned authority on Third World situations. See *Public Culture* 6 (1993), a special issue devoted to a discussion of Ahmed's book, *In Theory*, with a response by the author.

27 One example of this is scholarship on Goethe. An image of Goethe without work like that of Katarina Mommsen is quite impoverished indeed.

28 It is a little known fact that Fanon was in Tunisia during the years when al-Masʿadī was the most significant cultural figure in that country. The psychiatrist and militant fled from Algeria to Tunis in 1956 where he joined the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) and the provisional government in exile. He wrote for the newspaper *al-Moudjahid* (al-Mujāhid), practiced psychiatry and joined the movement for the liberation of Africa in various capacities. Fanon and al-Masʿadī share ideas on culture and nationalism but also differ greatly, as it will become apparent in the course of the book.

29 See in particular Bernheimer (1995) *Comparative Literature in the age of multiculturalism*.

30 Poetics is 'a science of literature', which 'institutes literature itself as an object of knowledge', pursuing the goal of showing the 'literariness' of literary texts (Todorov 1981: 69).

Notes to Chapter 1

1 Fanon writes: 'I say again that no speech-making and no proclamation concerning culture will turn us from our fundamental tasks: the liberation of the national territory; a continual struggle against colonialism in its new forms; and an obstinate refusal to enter the charmed circle of mutual admiration at the summit' (Fanon 1965: 235).

2 The English translation of the title used here is Hourani's. The introduction, which is a condensed exposition of the writer's ideas, appeared in French in 1868 as 'Réformes nécessaires aux états musulmans–éssai formant la première partie de l'ouvrage politique et statistique intitulé: La plus sure direction pour connaitre l'état des nations' (Paris: Dupont, 1868, 79 pp.). An English version of the introduction was published in Athens in 1874. There were translations into Turkish and Persian as well (al-Tūnisī 1990, vol. 1: 499–500). The book was well received in Tunisia, prompting two dozen poets and *ʿulamā'* to write praise (*taqārīẓ*) of it in verse and in prose (al-Tūnisī 1990, vol. 2: 862–948). According to the editor, contemporary Tunisian writers took part in the very composition of the book.

The prose was perfected by the eminent ʿālim, Sālim Būḥājib and the poet Maḥmūd Qabādu, among others. Thus, *Aqwam al-Masālik* was, if not a collective work, at least the locus of intensive collaboration and the result of significant consensus. For a biography of the reformer, see Abū Ḥāmdān, Samīr (1993) *Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī abū al-nahḍa al-tūnisiyya* (Khayra al-Dīn al-Tūnisī, the Father of the Tunisian Renaissance), Beirut: al-sharika al-ʿālamiyya li al-kitāb.

3   The founding of the municipality of Tunis in 1858 was in part a reflection of unease with an increasingly mixed urban space due to European presence (ʿAmāyriyya 1994: 61). The tension between disputed loyalties and jurisdictions can be inferred from a court case in the 1870s in which General Ḥusayn defended the interests of the Tunisian government in an Italian court and criticized the court for considering the defendant '*kusmūpūlīt*' (cosmopolitan) when the accused held a Tunisian citizenship and therefore fell under Tunisian jurisdiction. (See al-Jīnīrāl Ḥusayn (2002).)

4   Tunisian sociologist Abd al-Wahhāb Būḥdība assesses Khayr al-Dīn's legacy in these words: '*Ṣādiqi* culture was at once national and open, oriented towards the outside and the inside without any sense of contradiction; affirming the self but aware, at the same time, that intercultural dialogue is not necessarily de-personalizing. It is in this sense that the major choices of independent Tunisia will be largely related to Khayr al-Dīn's influence' (Sraieb 1995: 308).

5   The imbalance was noticeable in the leadership of the Neo-Destour Party and was perpetuated in the post-independence government as well. Hermassi's comparative table shows an overwhelming majority of Ṣādiqiyya alumni in the Neo-Destour Party, thirty eight Ṣādiqiyya graduates to one from al-Zaytūna (Hermassi 1972: 122).

6   From a comparative perspective, what may be termed the demise of ʿ*ulamā*ʾ or traditional intellectuals in Tunisia and in Egypt followed a similar pattern. Arnold Green observes: 'The medieval ulama-state relationship was thus undermined at first by the technological reforms of the centralizing amirs and was subsequently destroyed by the nationalist elites' (Green 1980: 41).

7   Compared to the United States and Britain, anti-intellectualism in France may have been only marginal. Pascal Balmand writes: 'If therefore for the USA Richard Hofstadter has been able to diagnose anti-intellectualism as a phenomenon that is intrinsically bound up with an existing consensus and with American culture, then in France, by contrast, it has its origins amongst strands of opinion that are situated on the margins of this consensus and which challenge it' (Jennings 1993: 165).

8   Writers Anatole France, Zola and Proust were among those who took a stand in defence of Captain Dreyfus. For a concise assessment of the impact of the affair see Hollier 1989: 824–829.

9   'The systematic nationalization of the mind is undoubtedly an invention of modern times' (Benda 1928: 62). The mind is put at the service of the nation, resulting in what Benda characterizes as a feature of our age, namely, 'the *intellectual organization of political hatreds*' (Benda 1928: 27). In some respect, modern history would prove him right repeatedly.

10 Around the same time, two influential thinkers were formulating a conception of the intellectual akin to Nizan's. Leon Trotsky spoke of the 'fellow-traveler' of the revolution in his *Literature and Revolution* (1924) while Antonio Gramsci developed a typology of intellectuals in his articles of the early 20s published in the journal *Ordine Nuevo*, an idea that would dominate subsequent debates on the role of the intellectual. (See Gramsci (1991) *Selections from Cultural Writings*.)

11 More recently, Pierre Bourdieu pushed Nizan's analysis further by locating the position occupied by intellectuals within the field of power. Intellectuals 'represent a dominated fraction within the dominant class and many of the positions they adopt, in politics for example, arise from the ambiguity of their position as the dominated amongst the dominant' (Jennings 1993: 53). Yet, Bourdieu did not preclude a global role for the intellectual

and called for a new 'International' of intellectuals that would be able to intervene in the decision-making spheres at the global level.

12 References are, respectively, to Malraux's *La tentation de l'Occident* (The Temptation of the West) (1926), Romain Rolland, Sartre's *Orphée noir* (Black Orpheus) and Nizan's *Aden Arabie* (Eden of Arabia). Raymond Aron would eventually attempt to show in his *Opium des intellectuels* (1955) that these new directions were imaginary worlds.

13 'Parallel to this, emerging literatures – that of revolutionary China and of negritude – present an Orient that no longer fits previous frames' (Liauzu 1983: 76).

14 This time around, reaction was initiated by the political right in their petition of 4 October 1935, 'Un manifeste d'Intellectuels pour la défense de l'Occident' (A manifesto of intellectuals in defense of the West) published in *Le Temps*. The Left responded the following day in *Europe* (Bonnaud-Lamotte: 229). International events would become the focus of intellectuals from both sides of the political spectrum.

15 Anderson suggests that it is more fruitful to study nation-ness as a narrative because 'Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson 1991: 6). His insights usually applied to the study of local or native representations of the nation in the colonies and former colonies is, I would suggest, equally useful in the study of the formation of colonies within the occupied nations. In the case of the occupied societies, the model of the nation is taken from Europe through the educational system. Language helps transfer this concept. 'Bilingualism meant access, through the European language-of-state, to modern Western culture in the broadest sense, and, in particular, to the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation-state produced elsewhere in the course of the nineteenth century' (Anderson 1991: 116). I use the term 'Colonist' culture to refer to the literature and arts produced by, or deemed to serve the aims of, French settlers, known as *colons*.

16 I discuss the uses of Mediterranean history in the context of colonial North Africa in some detail in 'History, literature and settler colonialism in North Africa' (2005) *Modern Language Quarterly* 66:3, 273–298.

17 'De Certau argues that colonialist historical accounts articulate a vision or memory of other worlds as a blank space on which Western desire is written' (Norindr 1996: xxv).

18 Early modern European literature refers to North Africa as 'Barbary Coast', 'Barbary' or 'Barbary States,' harkening back to the ancient Greek term for North Africa. This historiography excludes the region from Mediterranean history. See Ken Parker 'Barbary in Early Modern England' in Omri and Temimi 2003: 125–150.

19 In 1915, Bertrand used Nietzsche to draw the picture of the *colon* as *Übermenschen*.

20 The book was originally published in the journal *La dépêche tunisienne* from 10 February to 1 December 1919. Originally, it looked at 1930 as the date to be imagined but when it was published in book form in 1921 the writer changed the date to 2000.

21 'The dilapidated huts of the past have given way to small stone cottages, bleached white from the inside and out and covered with tile roofs. The three valleys, which I mentioned to you before, recall in fact many a place in our mountains in France' (Carlton 1921: 119).

22 Chatelain does not hesitate to criticize one 'Westernized Moslem' for being too Western 'He [Mohamed Nomane] goes too far when he rejects totally what had made the greatness of Islam' (Chatelain 1937: 126).

23 On the issue of common history, see al-Sharīf's *Tarīkh Tūnis* (1985); on religious homogeneity, Ghurāb writes: 'There is no doubt that the Maliki School has become through the ages an essential component of the Maghribi personality or character' (Ghurāb 1990: 70). Al-Bashīr Ibn Salāma, Tunisian minister of culture (1981–86) and novelist, would put forward a comprehensive defence of Tunisianness in his *al-Shakhṣiyya al-tūnisiyya: khaṣā'iṣuhā wa muqawwimātuhā* (Tunisian Personality: Specifics and Features) (1975). For a discussion of his argument in English, see Norma Salem (1984) *Habib Bourguiba, Islam and the Creation of Tunisia*, especially pp. 179–193.

24 I must stress from the outset that the picture was more complex than one can do justice to here. Nationalist discourse, in Tunisia as elsewhere, was neither homogeneous nor harmonious. As 'native' intellectuals endeavoured to assert the concept of Tunisianness, they did not hesitate to question and redefine the terms 'nation' and 'nationalism' themselves. Tunisian historians have pointed out the elite nature of the most prominent nationalist parties and have drawn a more complex picture of the movement of national liberation as a whole. See most notably, Timoumi, Hedi (1993) *Intifādāt al-fallāḥīn fī tārīkh Tunis al-uʿāṣir* (Peasant Revolts in Modern Tunisian History), Tunis: Bayt al-Hikma.

25 For a biography of al-Bashrūsh, see *al-Shiʿr al-tūnisī al-muʿāṣir 1870–1970* (Contemporary Tunisian Poetry 1870–1970), 269–280.

26 Al-Jabirī makes the following assessment of the journal:

> *Al-Mabāḥith* is the journal of the new generation which combined solid Arabic background and a foreign culture learned at its roots. Most of its writers were graduates of French universities who were not glared by the West because they knew it closely. Their admiration for Western progress did not blind them to their authenticity. Their command of Western science and grasp on its literature did not lead them away from their heritage and language. In fact, their acquired knowledge increased their belief in the capacity to develop and progress and to revive a viable Tunisian literature in order to convince those who doubt its existence or those who may have been discouraged.
>
> (Al-Jābirī 1974: 49–50)

27 The statement echoes Benda's conception of 'universal' significance.

28 Muḥammad al-Hādī al-ʿĀmirī spearheaded the documentation of the literary history of the Maghrib region in a series of 16 articles devoted to the Islamic period. Muḥammad Zbīs, al-Talātilī and others contributed to the same area. But Uthmān al-Kaʿʿāk emerges as the leading figure in research articles. His position as Director of the National Library at the time allowed him to serve as an excellent reference in this area. He often introduced books or manuscripts and wrote documented articles on cities and biographies of important cultural figures. Al-Kaʿʿāk often presents his pieces as evidence of a thriving and undeniable history. His article, 'On Tunisian Culture' is virtually a 'who's who' catalogue for modern-day Tunisia throughout the Islamic period, based on 'the sum of information or knowledge which Tunisians have written since Tunisians began to exist as such.' He concludes: 'History demands that we resurrect an independent culture with the aim of taking it to the world stage again' (*al-Mabāḥith* 29–30, 18)

29 Al-Shabbī writes in his article 'The Arts and Arab Personality': 'The problem, in my opinion, lies in the spirit of the Arab nation. It is a simple materialist spirit, as I demonstrated in "Poetic Imagination Among the Arabs" (*al-Khayāl al-Shiʿrī ʿinda al-ʿArab*).' He adds that most imaginative input in Islamic culture, like the ideas of the unity of the universe, come from Islamic non-Arab sources (*al-Mabāḥith* 2, 11). See the text of this landmark lecture and an analysis of it in *Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī: The Complete Works*, Vol. 1 (1996).

30 In *al-Mabāḥith* 11, the translation of a piece by Buffon on style is introduced by emphasizing that the purpose of the translation was for the reader to be able to *compare* Arab rhetoricians and Europeans on this matter (my emphasis). The translator is al-Masʿadī himself.

31 Ibn Ḥamīda translated texts from Brazil, Hungary, Poland, India, and Czechoslovakia. Muwāʿada notes in his comprehensive study, *Ḥarakat al-Tarjama fī Tūnis wa ahamm mazāhiriha fī al-ʾAdab (1840–1956)* (Translation Activity in Tunisia and its Main Manifestations in Literature (1840–1956), the active period of 1938–47 which includes 69 texts half of which appeared in *al-Mabāḥith* (Muwāʿada 1986: 236).

32 Three decades later, Ben Slama suggested that there are four periods of *nahda* (renaissance or revival) in Tunisian history (the Phoenician, the Roman, the Arab, and the nineteenth

century), all of them tied to foreign invasions, rises in education and learning and the assimilation of other civilizations (Ibn Salāma 1974: 146). He argues that literary history should include pre-Islamic writers, like Saint Augustine and Apuleius (Ibn Salāma 1974: 23). Formulated in the 1970s, Ben Slama's theory is an aggressive intervention in contemporaneous debates on pan-Arab nationalism and the consolidation of the nation-sate in Tunisia. Hence, Arabness is considered one constituting feature of identity. The subtext of this theory is Hegelian, in a sense. It argues that a common spirit (*rūḥ*) ties together the entire history of the area known as Tunisia and that the leader at the time, Habib Bourguiba, was the ideal image and the realization of that spirit. 'For this reason,' Ben Slama says, 'Bourguiba can be said to have brought to fruition the hidden desire of the people of this land... He best embodies all the feelings of this people...' (Ibn Salāma 1974: 260). The historic destiny of the people is fulfilled and the leader and his people have become one. In his eagerness to legitimate the state and the leader, Ben Slama appears to proclaim the end of the history of Tunisia.

33 Berber languages, which were widely spoken in Algeria, had limited use in Tunisia, and therefore the issue of valorizing them over and against Arabic sometimes remained marginal to colonial politics.

34 Citing *Faiza*, January–February 1967: 14

35 From a lecture given at the conference, 'De Gaulle et son siècle' (De Gaulle and his century), 19–24 November 1990 in Paris. He goes on to suggest that France used its colonies as 'recourse and the starting basis towards liberation' (al-Masʿadī 2003, vol. 4: 262). In an ironic reversal of roles, it was the colonies that saved the metropolis. France was for a moment a country that occupied other territories while its own soil was occupied, an offshore empire whose fate depended on those it colonized.

36 The 1958 plan sought to create the qualified personnel as well as the intellectuals of the new state through the generalization of schooling. Its success was spectacular. The total schooled population increased from 350,000 students in 1958 to almost 950,000 in 1968 (Brondino 1994: 63). Critics, however, accuse the plan of taking as its model the French-Arab school erected during the colonial period. Aziz Krichene sees in this a failure to modernize the country because the plan ignored 'Arabization' (Brondino 1994: 64).

37 Anouar Abdel-Malek calls al-Masʿadī's speech 'very controversial' (Abd al-Mālik 1983: 145). M. M. Badawī remarks that the reaction to al-Masʿadī's views was 'vehemently hostile' (Badawī 1985: 2). Albert Hourani ends his important book, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1879–1939*, with the questions raised by al-Masʿadī's article, 'Islam, nationalisme et communisme'.

38 Al-Masʿadī observes that there is a ripe moment for Arabs and they have to cease it in order to create the impact: 'We need to understand and control our conditions in order to change them. Intellectual mastery is the key to actual control. Otherwise, we will be threatened with commodification (*tashayyuʾ*) as we become at the mercy of events and others: this is the cruellest curse of history upon human beings!' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 91).

39 Al-Masʿadī paints a picture of Islam as the religion of tolerance and freedom of choice. He adopts the outline of Islamic history prevalent among the intellectuals of his generation as well as Orientalist historiography, which divides it into a golden age and an era of obscurity. His attacks on the latter period are violent at times:

> From the thirteenth century to the end of the eighteenth, the creative era gave place to an era of sterile repetitions. Culture was left to anthologists, unimaginative compilers, short-sighted chroniclers, blinkered commentators and exegetes, narrow-minded intolerant theologians, encyclopaedists and small-time scholars – all of them people without genius or talent, reduced to ruminating endlessly on what their ancestors had bequeathed to them.
>
> (Al-Masʿadī 1981: 307)

40   Reference is to the lecture 'Our Arabic Culture in the Face of the Challenges of Modern Times,' delivered in Damascus, Syria and published in *al-Maʿārif* 164, October 1975.

41   Al-Masʿadī recalls the fourteenth century historian Ibn Khaldun, claimed by Tunisians as a national icon, who observed many instances of imitation in past North African history and called this the tendency of the vanquished to imitate the victorious (Al-Masʿadī 1979: 93–4). See Ibn Khaldūn 1967, vol. 1: 299–300. There is cultural poignancy as well as a historical relevance to this recollection of the illustrious ancestor. Al-Masʿadī (and Tunisia) at the time were experiencing deep anxiety about survival and fear of extinction. These ideas are developed in the little-known but very thorough essay, 'Cultural Development in the Arab States,' which constitutes the writer's contribution to a volume commissioned by UNESCO, *Cultural Development: Some Regional Experiences* (1981). The English version, cited here, is often confusing and badly written.

42   The source is 'A lecture by the writer about literature in general and his writings in particular' delivered in a high school in Kasserine, Tunisia on 14 February 1975 and published in *al-Ḥayāt al-Thaqāfiyya* (1976) 5, 6 and 8.

43   The list of Muslim writers was added in a lecture delivered in Tripoli, Libya in September 1977 at the 11th Congress of Arab Writers (al-Masʿadī 1979: 97–111).

44   In my interview with the author on 8 January 1994, he listed Goethe as one of the writers who marked him during his formative years.

45   His article '*fī al-fanni wa ghuṣṣatihi*' (On Art and its Agony) (1944) devoted to painting extends his definition of literature to art. Al-Masʿadī has rarely written on modern Arabic literature, and when he did, most notably as introductions to novels or collections of poetry, he stressed concepts such as rhythm or spirituality, as in his introduction to Mūsa's *Untha al-Māʾ* (1997) and Ṭarshūna's *al-Muʿjizah* (1993). His major critical contribution, which is only now gaining interest, is devoted to rhythm in Arabic prose, which is key to the relationship he has with Arabic in his own fiction. A whole book is devoted to the study of this book, with one application of al-Masʿadī's theory of rhythm in Arabic prose to the writer's own style (see Al-Misaddī, Muḥammad (1997)).

46   These writers are of particular interest to al-Masʿadī. As early as the late 1930s, he studied in depth the work of al-Hamadhānī in the dissertation project already mentioned. He published a provocative article on al-Maʿarrī in *al-Mabāḥith* as part of his interest in the question of knowledge in pre-modern Arabic culture, and explored psychological criticism in *al-Aghāni* as it pertains to Abū al-ʿAtāhiya.

47   Al-Masʿadī concedes that there has been some change in contemporary literature: 'Our modern literature has begun to understand this reality and has started to give us a picture of the character's existence in which the sense of temporal duration is tied to the sense of being' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 84). His evidence, however, is his own work, which he describes as an attempt in this direction.

48   *ʿAbqariyyāt* was pioneered by the Egyptian ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād in the early 1940s, publishing several volumes devoted to the four Caliphs and other prominent Islamic figures. Al-Masʿadī criticizes the tradition of rewriting Islamic history for failing to explore the full potential of Islam and its legacy. I will return to this issue and to the *ʿabqariyyāt* in the discussion of narrative tradition in Chapter 2.

49   Muṣṭafa al-Fīlālī (1921–) was a well known Ṣādiqiyya graduate and trade union activist. He wrote several book reviews and reported on cultural events, contributing a total of 56 pieces to the journal. Except for a number of sociological and economic studies, he appears to have given up writing. Recently, he has been involved in colloquia and interviews commemorating al-Masʿadī's work and life.

50   The series, '*Hadīth al-ghār*' (Tales from the Cave) (Issues 17 and 18); a narrative entitled '*Wafada al-kharīf*' (The Arrival of Autumn) (*Al-Mabāḥith* 19, 10, 12) and a number of *hadīths*, '*aḍghāth aḥlām*' (Dreams) spreads over seven issues in 1946–7.

51 See *al-Mabāḥith* 24–26, 27–28 and 33 and 16, respectively.
52 Aḥmad Bakkīr writes: 'Poetry is an end in itself. It should not be called such unless or until it is written for no other purpose than poetry itself' (*al-Mabāḥith* 8, November 1944).

Notes to Chapter 2

1 Ḥusayn's article appeared in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Jumhūriyyah* on 27 February 1957; al-Masʿadī responded in *al-Fikr* in May 1957 and Ḥusayn followed up in *al-Jumhū-riyya* on 29 May 1957. References are to the reprint in Ṣammūd (1973). For an English translation of the interchange, see Omri 2001: 308–40.

2 Al-Masʿadī reports that when he toured Egypt in 1957 to discuss educational and cultural policies of the new government, his interlocutors constantly asked if Tunisians spoke any Arabic (al-Masʿadī 2003: vol. 3, 316).

3 There is also a prescriptive tone about style and content. Ḥusayn expresses his wish that al-Masʿadī's language were 'easier than it is' and urges him to produce a 'less pessimistic' play to reflect hope in post-independence Tunisia (Ṣammūd 1973: 75).

4 'Rasāʾil Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī ilā Ṭaha Ḥusayn' (al-Masʿadī's Letters to Ṭaha Ḥusayn) (1994) *al-Ādāb* 42: 32–35. Al-Masʿadī would go as far as accusing Ḥusayn of conservatism (al-Masʿadī 2003: vol. 3, 314).

5 Ḥusayn's book *Fī al-Shʾr al-Jāhilī* (On Pre-Islamic Poetry), where he claimed that a lot of pre-Islamic poetry was actually written in the Islamic era gave rise to serious criticism and a court case, forcing Ḥusayn to amend the book (for reaction to this and to his work on the grammar of the *Qurʾān*, see Maḥmūdi 1997: 18–23). For Ḥusayn's position in Arab culture, see al-Jimnī, M.M. and M. Shamlī (eds) (2001) *Ṭaha Ḥusayn fī mirʾāt al-ʿaṣr* (Ṭaha Ḥusayn Viewed by his Contemporaries), Tunis: Bayt al-Hikma.

6 All references are to the 1979 edition unless specifically stated otherwise. All translation from *Ḥaddatha* are mine. The book is divided into 22 sections called *ḥadīth* that vary in length from three short sentences, like '*Ḥadīth al-shayṭān*' (The Devil) to 14 pages, '*Ḥadīth al-ghayba tuṭlab fa lā tudrak*' (Absence Sought but Never Attained). The term *ḥadīth* as used here may be translated as discourse, narrative, tale, or chronicle, but none of these words is accurate in conveying the complex cultural connotations of the term *ḥadīth*, as it will become apparent in the course of this chapter. It follows from this that the title of the book is frought with problems. It has been rendered as the heavily Nietzschean 'Thus spoke Abū Hurayra'; 'Abū Hurayra Told us'; 'The tales of Abū Hurayra'; and 'On the Authority of Abū Hurayra' as in the tradition of Prophetic litera-ture. In my translation of *ḥadīth*s I avoid these terms and keep a simple title, such as 'The Clay' for '*ḥadīth al-ṭīn*'. With regard to the title of the book, I simply keep the Arabic title but I suggest that it is best rendered as 'Abū Hurayra is reported to have said', keeping closeness to the traditional formula of *ḥadīth* but not replicating it.

7 Al-Masʿadī reveals in a letter to the Lebanese Khalīl al-Jarr in the early 1940s that he was desparate to save the book in case his ship was attacked during his journey from Marseilles to Tunis in the aftermath of the German occupation of Paris. He writes: 'This is the man-uscript of a book into which I poured my soul and committed my personal ideas about life. It is the most valuable thing I have. You can read it, if you wish; but I hope that you will take care of it as best you can' (*Ḥaddatha* 1973: 193). Al-Jarr says that he failed to locate the book's author, about whom he knew only the initials M. M. until the early 1970s. It is, however, certain that there must have been a second manuscript. For while this copy was in the possession of al-Jarr in Lebanon, several sections of the book were published in Tunisia. Bakkār notes that the only new addition was ('*Ḥadīth al-Jamʿa wa al-Wiḥsha*') (Company and Solitude), written in the early 1970s (al-Masʿadī 1979: 34–5).

8 The sections published in 1944 are: '*Ḥadīth al-Qiyāma*' (The Resurrection) (*al-Mabāḥith* August, 1944); '*Ḥadīth al-Baʿth al-Awwal*' (The First Awakening) (*al-Mabāḥith*

September, 1944); '*Ḥadīth al-Kalb*' (The Dog) and '*Ḥadīth al-ʿAdad*' (Multitude) (*al-Mabāḥith* November, 1944).

9   See in particular al-Gharībī (1994) and al-Ghābirī (1992).

10 'If we want to remain attentive to the plural of a text (however limited it may be), we must renounce structuring this text in large masses, as was done by classical rhetoric and secondary-school explications.' We need the 'step-by-step method' (Barthes 1974: 12).

11 '*Al-qaṣaṣ*' (The Story) 28: 38.

12 '*Al-Naziʿāt*' (The Soul-Snatchers) (79: 21–24).

13 Innocence and guilt hinge on this event. It has to be proven beyond doubt, and in Islamic law a minimum of two witnesses is required.

14 It is said to be a place near Mecca made famous in the epic accounts of the Prophet's battles and al-Ḥudaybiyya Treaty. Exegeses to the Qurʾānic chapter *al-Fatḥ* (The Victory), which deals with the treaty, mention the place. Ibn Hisām gives its precise location in his biography of the Prophet (Ibn Hishām n.d., vol. 3: 403)

15 Al-Masʿadī's closest engagement with *The Thousand and One Nights* appears in the story, 'Sindabad and Purity'. The name of the main character, the setting in ports, taverns and the theme of travel evoke the earlier work. The search driving Sindabad's journey is, however, spiritual and the language is appropriate to the theme.

16 *Adab* is the term given to pre-modern Arabic prose fiction. One of its key genres is *maqāma*, developed by Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 1008) in the tenth century. Al-Masʿadī has devoted his most important scholarly work to the study of rhythm in *maqāma*, as I mention earlier.

17 Al-Masʿadī explains in a prefatory note to his book: 'One tradition (*riwāyah*) states that there are three people with the name Abū Hurayra: the first is the Companion, may God be pleased with him, the second is the grammarian, and the third is this one' (15). The disclaimer is intended to dispel ambiguity and prevent misunderstanding. Yet the style of the note perpetuates the illusion that this Abū Hurayra is also grounded in Islamic history even as it attempts to establish a distance between the book and the corpus of literature associated with *Ḥadīth*. This narrative trick has given rise to intensive hunt in reference sources and chronicles in search of an obscure Abū Hurayra, who is different from the Companion, and who lived near Mecca during the early Caliphate period. The fact is that there is no other Abū Hurayra, and even the grammarian is a fiction, as the author admitted when I pressed the point in an interview (Omri 2001: 284).

18 He was also known as someone who combined piety with a good sense of humour ('Abd al-Raḥmān Abū Hurayra,' *EI*2).

19 False *ḥadīth*s, Kilito points out, did not disappear from the culture. In fact, they were gathered and disseminated widely because the best way to minimize their effect was to make them known. Yet, for this reason, an unintended result, such *ḥadīth*s became widely available, not as guidelines or norms but for public and private amusement. Ibn al-Jawzī notes that storytellers in particular have a propensity to spread apocryphal *ḥadīth*s to please their audiences (Kilito 1985: 48–49).

20 The link between *quṣṣāṣ* and the consolidation of narrative fiction in Arabic literature, long neglected by literary historians, can hardly be overemphasized. See Kilito's work on *maqāma* and the storytelling milieu in *Les Séances* (1983).

21 We recall that al-Masʿadī's book was rejected for using the name of this revered figure in fiction. The 'impiety' includes Abū Hurayra's sexual life and his inclination to pleasure and excess as, for example, in the chapter, 'Acquaintance over Wine'.

22 Al-Masʿadī works within the tradition of *isnād* (attribution), which seems to be unique to Islamic culture. It informs about the milieu in which knowledge was transmitted and circulated. 'The *isnād* system, while originating in connection with the *ḥadīth* literature, was in due course extended by the Arab authors to many other genres, including geography, history, and prose fiction' (Ṣiddīqī 1993: 83).

23 Much critical effort has gone into explaining these expressions. The likely interpretation is that they are play on words and syllables in the manner of Pig Latin in English. The effect here is on rhythm rather than any mysterious meaning. Rhythm works on two levels, one is linguistic while the other is narrative. The expressions create something akin to drum beat by repeating the rhyme (*am*), alliterating in *b* and repeating the basic structure of words. This gives the utterances the effect of a chorus, as I show in my study of *al-Sudd* in Chapter 3.

24 Kharidjites are a sect who dissented from Caliph ʿAlī's army in 657 and remained largely as a minority after that ('Khāridjites,' *EI2*).

25 Ibn Rashīq 1981: Vol. 1, 302–313. See also the term *'Tawriya'*, *EI2*.

26 *Taqiyya* is necessary but is it sufficient? In the past *taqiyya* may have lessened persecution, but it did not prevent it altogether. The repression of dissent, whether it affected sects such as Kharijites or individuals like al-Ḥallāj, went on unabated. Today censorship continues to be applied, either through the state apparatus, the religious bodies or the public. Naguib Mahfuz used a form of *taqiyya*, namely, allegory, in his novel *Awlād Ḥāratinā* (Children of Gabalawi) (1959), but was unable to avert moral outrage, outright ban, and even violent assault against his person on 14 October 1994.

27 'This is the question raised, perhaps, by every narrative. What should the narrative be exchanged for? What is the narrative worth?' (e.g. in *The Thousand and One Nights* it is worth life itself) (Barthes 1974: 89).

28 The Tunisian critic Tawfīq Bakkār detects another type of *taqiyya* in al-Masʿadī. He interprets the apparent tension between *ḥadīth* as narrative form and the ideas contained in the chapters as a unity of opposites. An element of concealment, or *taqiyya*, whereby a venerated narrative form hides a controversial content is employed. Bakkār writes about *'ḥadīth al-baʿth al-ʾawwal'* (The First Awakening):

> In this text, the narrative forms and language are, generally speaking, pre-modern and Arab while the ideas and feelings expressed are, overall, modern and Western. But this dialectical relationship, in turn, needs explanation. What is the role of this form in its relationship to the content? Does it serve a didactic purpose, to make palatable to the Arab mind the ideas of another culture in the name of the unity of the human experience? Or is it a cover, which uses a sacred form to hide the nature of this philosophy in a religious context? It can be both, in an organic relationship which makes the text a dialectical unity between the East and the West, the ancient and the modern.
>
> (Bakkār 2001: 132)

29 A review of this literature and the responses it generated at the time is offered by Israel Gershoni in 'The Reader – Another Production': The Reception of Haykal's 'Biography of Muhammad' and the 'Shift of Egyptian Intellectuals to Islamic Subjects in the 1930s' (1994). See also Badawi (1985) 'Islam in Modern Egyptian Literature'.

30 Al-Muwaylihī was a journalist and a disciple of the reformers Muḥammad ʿAbdū and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839–97). He was condemned to death for distributing anti-British leaflets (1882) but the sentence was commuted to exile, which led him to join his father in Italy then go to Paris in 1884, where he helped ʿAbdū and al-Afghānī with the publication of the influential newspaper *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā*. From there, he went to England and on to Istanbul before returning to Egypt in 1887. From 1898 he published *Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq* with his father where in November 1898, he began publishing articles under the column *'fitra min al-Zaman'* (A Period of Time). In 1907, he gathered the articles in a book, and in 1927 the text was expanded and adopted as a secondary school textbook in Egypt.

31 One can imagine a similar journey for al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmāt*. They must have been known by their individual names or themes before they were collected later. For unlike

al-Ḥarīrī who set out to write fifty pieces, al-Hamadhānī's intention to write a collection was perhaps not present at the beginning, although some reports claim that he intended to produce forty such pieces in emulation of a certain Ibn Durayd (Al-Ḥuṣarī 1958: 305).

32 The formula was by no means unusual at the time. Al-Muwayliḥī's father attributed his articles to Mūsā ibn ʿIṣām and published them in the same newspaper as his son. Thus both fictional figures alternated in the newspaper. In 1900 when the son was in France and interrupted his regular column, the father reintroduced his narrator: "ʿĪsā ibn Hishām has distracted (readers) from what Mūsā ibn ʿIṣām has been doing. Days and months went by until we reached a full year and ʿĪsā went to the fair (the Paris World Fair). Mūsā has now returned to his interrupted discourse and we have come back to see what happened between his shaykh and his imam' (ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib 1985: 219 citing the newspaper *Miṣbāḥ al-sharq* 8 June 1900). This resemblance led some critics to doubt the son's authorship of *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām*. (On the controversy see ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib 1985: 219 ff.)

33 The writer is, of course, emulating an *adab* convention traceable back to al-Jāhiz. And even al-Ḥarīrī who was clearly conscious of the fictional nature of his work adhered to edification as the ultimate goal of fiction. He writes in the introduction to his *maqāmāt*: 'The person who created anecdotes for alerting people rather than deceiving them and who intended edification rather than lying should be free of blame. In this he is comparable to those who are appointed to teach or to guide people to the straight path' (al-Ḥarīrī n.d.: 9).

34 Al-Yāziji (1800–71) in *Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn* and A. F. al-Shidyāq in his *al-Saq ʿlā al-Sāq fī mā huwwa al-Faryāq*.

35 Does the Arab reader at the turn of the nineteenth century have a horizon within which *Ḥadīth* was expected to be read? It is important to reiterate that the book was published in independent installments or episodes. It was perhaps received, or read, like individual *maqāmāt*. At the time the generic boundaries were dominated by traditional Arabic narrative convention. Most prominent of these was *maqāma*, admittedly much changed. *Ḥadīth* was received within this horizon and acted on it at the same time.

36 Al-Masʿadī's friends, Abd al-Salām, writing in 1946, reads al-Yaziji's *maqāmāt* as an attempt, not without precedent, to preserve the Arabic language in the face of the threat posed by foreign tongues while al-Shidyāq's (1804–87) work was a serious attempt at changing *maqāma* (*Al-Mabāḥith* 24, 1946, p. 2). 'He renewed the form of *maqāma* by making it into a story with wide perspective and extensive breadth. He also showed that the Arabic language is capable of conveying any theme with eloquence and precision' (*al-Mabāḥith* 25, 1945: 6). This understanding of *maqāma* reflects, of course, the cultural politics of a Tunisian intellectual writing under French occupation whereby Arabic language and Arabic literary convention were seen as tools in the struggle for national identity.

37 On the use of *maqāma* and other styles in al-Shidyāq, see Sulaymān Jubrān (1991) *Kitāb al-Fariyāq: mabnāh wa uslūbuhu wa sukhriyyatuhu* (The Book of *al-Fāriyyāq*: Structure, Style, Irony), Tel Aviv: Literary Studies and Texts.

38 Abduh 1909: 14.

Notes to Chapter 3

1 I retain here three of the five meanings of the term: 'Confluence. 1. A flowing together; the junction and union of two or more streams, etc. 1583. Also *fig.* and *transfig.* 2. The place where two or more rivers, etc. unite 1538. 4. A flocking together; concourse.' (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.)

2 'Time must be broken or its mechanisms must be disrupted in such a way that it becomes confused…' (al-Masʿadī 1974: 48).

3 In *Mawlid al-Nisyān*, Ranjāhād plays a similar role whereas Madyan can be seen as a parallel to Ghaylān.

4 All references are to the 1992 edition. All translations are mine.

5 *Faust* is actually Goethe's lifetime work since he began writing it in 1771 and did not complete it until 1831. He started the play when he was in his twenties and finished it right before his death, leaving behind instructions that Part Two of *Faust* should not be published while he was alive. All references are to *Faust: a tragedy* (1890), trans. Bayard Taylor. Of particular relevance are Part 1 (1808) and Part 2 (1832). With regard to Ibsen, all references are to Henrik Ibsen (1980) *Plays*, vol. 1, trans. Michael Meyer. There are alleged influences on al-Masʿadī like Paul Claudel's *Tete d'Or* (1959), Camus's *Le Mythe de Sysiphe* (1942) and others. But some of these are rather unlikely. Claudel's play is written 20 years after *al-Sudd*; Camus' essay appeared three years after al-Masʿadī's text was written. These texts do have parallels with *al-Sudd* but they are not sources in the confluence, or the make up of the text, which is my concern here.

6 Eagleton describes tragic joy, slyly, as a feeling, which is 'all about a conceited contempt for death, laughing nonchalantly in its face to show how little heed a gentleman pays to such squalid necessities' (Eagleton 2003: 105).

7 Part of the confluence in al-Masʿadī is the fact that his images could be traced to more than one source, in this case Eastern and Western ones. Al-Masʿadī's four stones which transform into young women bear striking similarity with Goethe's image. They also recall the three women who rise from the tree in paradise in al-Maʿarrī's allegory, *Risālat al-Ghufran* (The Epistle of Forgiveness), written in the eleventh century, as noted by Bakkār (al-Masʿadī 1992: 22). For the relevant section, see al-Maʿarrī 1969: 279.

8 Abū Hurayra declares: 'Hell, O Ibn Salmān, is an earthly matter' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 121).

9 All references are to the 5th edition of 1997.

10 The much-debated suggestion that *al-Sudd* is heavily indebted to the myth of Sisyphus, which is discussed later in the book, focuses on probable modern influences on the writer, specifically the rewriting of the classical myth by Camus.

11 In *al-Sudd*, the character of Prometheus, as intertext, is split between Ghaylān and the Mule. The relationship between Ghaylān and the Mule, and the latter's role in the play, makes this connection possible, as I will argue below.

12 These are instances of al-Masʿadī's linguistic and stylistic creativity. *Ṣayhūd* is a coinage by Masʿadī on the pattern *fáʿlūl* probably partly taken from *ṣahad*, which combines the meaning of hard rock and intense heat. The name of the goddess, *Ṣāhabbāʾ* is most likely derived from this same meaning. *Ruʿdād* is also a coinage from *ráʿd* (thunder) on the pattern *fuʿlūl*. There are many other instances of coinage in *al-Sudd*, which deserve further study. In the present example, rhyme (*ūd*) and rhythm, the repetition of 'd' sound evokes thunder, are also to be taken into account, a style used by the writer in *Ḥaddatha* as well.

13 Al-Masʿadī had a direct hand in the translation into Arabic of the Greek dramatic representation of the myth. *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus was in fact translated in *al-Mabāḥith* when al-Masʿadī was its editor (*al-Mabāḥith* 1945: 19–22 and *al-Mabāḥith* 1946: 24–26). Al-Masaʿdī's colleague at Ṣādiqiyya school and member of the journal's editorial board, A. A. Bakkir, made the translation from French. He called it *riwāya*, which was the common term for play at the time, hence al-Masʿadī description of his own book *al-Sudd* as a '*riwāya* in eight scenes'. In the introduction to the play, Bakkīr expresses fascination with Greek tragedy: 'This everlasting miracle yet unsurpassed by any other nation by which I mean *ṭrājīdiya* or *maʿsāt* (tragedy)' (*al-Mabāḥith* 1945, 19: 9). For this reason, all references to the Greek play are to this translation. May aim here is to stress connections between this version of the play and *al-Sudd*. Al-Masʿadī would have read Greek drama in French.

14 'Tragedy, then, is an imitation, through action rather than narration, of a serious, complete, and ample action, by means of language rendered pleasant at different places in the

constituent parts by each of the aids [used to make the language more delightful], in which imitation there is also effected through pity and fear its catharsis of these and similar emotions' (Aristotle 1942: 11).

15 The reference occurs elsewhere in al-Masʿadī. We read in *Ḥadīth al-Kalb* (The Dog) from *Ḥaddatha*: 'They were six: the dog was the seventh' (al-Masʿadī 1973: 140).

16 Qiss Ibn Sāʿida (d. AD 600): pre-Islamic wise man and orator of considerable distinction. He is most famous for speeches that some have considered parallels to the *Qurʾān* in style. The point here is that his speeches are founding texts in the art of oratory and what came after him are mere imitations, including the Prophet Muḥammad's own speeches, but this reference is disguised here by its attribution to a fictive prophet.

17 Reference to the fable 'The Fox and the Drum' in *Kalila wa Dimna* by A. Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (AD 724–759): 132–37.

18 The allusion is to the story of Joseph in Chapter 12 of the *Qurʾān*.

19 The Mule is personified in the play as male and will be referred to here with the personal pronoun he.

20 'Naiveté is a special form of irony half way between verbal and dramatic irony. Basically, it is a pose of innocence or simplicity.' This is similar to 'Socratic irony'. In drama, examples include Shakespeare's fools (*Encyclopedia of Poetry*, 407).

21 Fāṭima al-Akhdhar's detailed study of the writer's style, *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-ʾslūb fī adab al-Masʿadī* (The Stylistic Features of al-Masʿadī's Writing) (2002), concludes that the writer's style is rather 'extremely serious'. Its didactic element comes from the fact that action to change minds is effected through language. The writer 'uses stylistic devices to destroy the chains, limitations, myths and superstitions, and to criticize the ills of Arab society and the limitations of its tradition by means of mocking or challenging this society' (142).

22 There are other references to madness in the play. Maymūna accuses Ghaylān of madness (120); the valley is called the 'River of Madness' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 124). Echoes of this are to be found in *Ḥaddatha* when Abū Hurayra is described as afflicted with madness and in *Mawlid* where Madyan looses his common sense.

23 Ghaylān's position is based on 'denial of limits, laws and obstacles, rejection of incapacity and resignation, denial of nothingness, belief in action' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 49).

24 Irony of fate: 'contrast between the individual's conscious aspirations and what fate (or biology or psychology or society or the imminent will) eventually make of him.' This definition, which is pertinent to tragedy as a whole, in particular of the 'determinist' kind, seems to me applicable to the Mule (*Encyclopedia of Poetics*, 408).

25 Much has been made of the relationship between Maymūna and Ghaylān. In the view of critics, she represents Ghaylān's mortal side and his rational consciousness (Ṭarshūna, Bakkār and al-Masʿadī himself). Introducing this relationship between the Mule and Ghaylān makes this reading even more complex and problematizes binary oppositions in the play. At the intertextual level, the mule could have come from a number of sources. The famous philosophical treatises, by Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ (*Risālat tadāʾī al-ḥayawānāt ʿala al-ʾInsān* (An Epistle on the Claims of Animals against Humans) mentioned earlier, designates the Mule as the spokesperson of beasts when they put their case against humans in front of the king of Jinn. Al-Masʿadī's favourite poet and intellectual mentor, al-Maʿarrī includes a humorous story where a mule is sacrificed. He mentions that al-Hallāj was reported to have said to his killers, 'Do you think you are killing me? You are merely killing al-Madirānī's mule'. The following day, the said mule was found dead in its stable. The story is denied by al-Maʿarrī as a fabrication since only God can know what is hidden (Al-Maʿarrī 1969: 453). From classical Western literature, the *Golden Ass* by Apuleius could be a reference here.

26 Ghaylān says: 'No limit, no obstacle, no chain can resist human will' (*Sudd*, 119). And, 'We will build and create because power and momentum (*wathba*) are within us' (*Sudd* 134). In the Arabic text, his speech uses structures of emphasis, such as lam *al-tawkīd* and the absolute object.

27 The introduction could be interpreted as yet one more instance of *taʿmiyya* (concealment) or even *taqiyya* to license Ghaylān's transgressive and irreligious statements and behaviour in the play.

28 There are here elements of what is called 'cosmic irony' (*Encyclopedia of Poetics*, 408). In 'yawm al-Ṣamt' (The Day of Silence) in '*Ayyām ʿImrān*' (The Days of ʿImrān): we read: 'Have you forgotten the call to life? Isn't Man the ultimate horizon? Isn't the horizon dreaming, yearning, striving and longing . . . an eternal question?' ʿImrān replies, 'Yes, but the silence of the universe in the face of questions is greater and more lasting' (al-Masʿadī 2003, vol. 1: 379–80).

29 This is a recurring theme in the writer's work. There are at least two references to the idea of life as a story to be erased. I have already mentioned how Abū Hurayra sets out to 'erase his story' in 'The Clay' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 133). In *Mawlid al-Nisyān* Madyan attempts to erase his personal story through forgetting. I will return to this in the conclusion of the book. The passage cited above is loaded with allusions. Layla and Majnūn, a love story between Qays Ibn al-Mulawwaḥ al-ʿĀmirī and Layla al-ʿĀmiriyya, conventionally dated to the eighth century, is proverbial and a reference in Arabic literature, somewhat like Romeo and Juliet in the English tradition. The various ages are allusions to stages in the lives of some prophets. Stories of the prophets (*Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*), which are part of the storytelling tradition as well as religious education, are in part based on the *Qurʾān*. See, for instance, the chapter 'The Story' (*al-Qaṣaṣ*), devoted to Moses and the chapters citing the lives of Joseph, Abraham, and others. Within *al-Sudd*, the reference to stories of the prophets recalls Ghaylān's comment on Maymūna's dream that it should be part of a gospel or a koran (76).

30 Camus (1913–1961), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957 and author of many novels, plays and essays. The book in question is *Le mythe de Sisyphe: essai sur l'absurde* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1942).

31 Nowhere in the story is Maymūna referred to as Ghaylān's wife. Husayn obviously could not see the couple outside a socially and religiously acceptable union. Other stories by al-Masʿadī present unions between men and women outside marriage. In fact, marriage is rather frowned upon as a hindrance in his work. In *Ḥaddatha*, for example, Abū Hurayra's wife is seen as unable to pursue a meaningful union. For more on this see Marāsī, Muḥammad (1980) (1980), *al-Marʾa fi adab al-Masʿadī*…(Women in al-Masʿadī's Writings).

32 Al-Masʿadī says that he wrote *al-Sudd* 'between September 1939 and June 1940' (al-Masʿadī 1992: 150): two years before *Le mythe de Sysiphe*.

33 When your Lord said to the angels: "I am placing on the earth one that shall rule as My deputy [*khalīha*]", they replied, "Will You put there one that will do evil and shed blood, when we have for so long sung Your praises and sanctified Your name" (2: 30).

34 This theory is perhaps taken from the thought of Muḥammad Iqbāl (1873–1938), the poet and philosopher considered the principle figure in Pakistani nationalism. His ideas on the self are expressed in his lectures delivered in India in 1928. See *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Al-Masʿadī refers to Iqbāl's theory of the self in a lecture delivered twenty years after the exchange with Ḥusayn (1977) (al-Masʿadī, *Mawlid*, 1979: 107).

35 Reference to the *sura* of '*al-Aḥzāb*' (The Confederate of Tribes): 'We offered our trust to the heavens, to the earth, and to the mountains, but they refused the burden and were afraid to receive it. Man undertook to bear it, he has proved a sinner and a fool' (33: 72). Al-Masʿadī understands this as the source of human tragedy. He writes: 'tragic are His greatness and beneficence to humans' (or *Maʾsāt hiya ʿaẓamatuhu wa fadluhu ʿalā al-ʿālamīn*.)

36 The article appeared first as 'Abū al-ʿAtāhiya as Seen by the Writer of *al-Aghānī*' (*al-Mabāḥith* (March 1945) 12: 3, 7).

37 Echoes of both figures appear in al-Masʿadī's *Ḥaddatha*. Abū Hurayra could be arguably substituted with al-Ghazālī in his search for knowledge, exposing himself to experiences, trying various ways and pursuing routes to knowledge. Abū Hurayra also recalls Abū

al-ʿAtāhiya in some of his states. In 'Ḥadīth al-Qiyāma' (The Resurrection), he invites his close friend Abū al-Madāʾin to an orgy at his farm, which ends with Abū Hurayra burning his house and loosing his wife. And when he decides to set off on his final journey, he asks this same Abū al-Madāʾin to grant him 'a day out of time' in which he told jokes and sung in response to the call of 'Truth' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 222, 231).

38 Arabic translations of *The Poetics* are significant to the transmission of Aristotle's book in European languages. They predate the earliest known European manuscripts by four or five centuries. These Arabic translations rendered into Latin helped establish Aristotle's text. See Badawī's introduction to Ibn Sīnā's *al-Shifāʾ* (Ibn Sīnā 1966: 8–9).

39 All translations from these Arabic sources are mine.

40 Some modern-day Arab critics tend to look at this translation as a 'missed opportunity.' Their argument, stemming from a projection of modern concerns onto history, is that had Arabs translated Greek literature, the course of theatre in Arabic culture, to name just one area, would have been very different (Ibn Sīnā 1966: 6–7). At stake here is a question of the value given to tragedy in the scale of artistic achievement. Eagleton observes: 'If tragic art really does bear witness to the highest of human values, as so many of its advocates insist, then this carries one generally overlooked implication: that societies in which such art is either marginal or unknown are incapable of rising to what is most precious.' (Eagleton 2003: 72.)

41 This observation has far-reaching implications. It sheds a different light on the *Qurʾān*'s dismissal of poetry and poets. Ibn Rushd seems to imply that the *Qurʾān* dismissed Arabic poetry, not poetry as such; making the ban culture-specific. The ban may then be understood within the context of a cultural struggle to ascertain the supremacy of the *Qurʾān* in an environment dominated by poetry.

42 The four kinds of tragedy are: complex tragedy, tragedy of suffering, character tragedy and tragedy which depends on spectacle (Aristotle 1942: 36).

43 Ibn Sīnā translates 'catharsis' as pity (*raḥmah*) and fear (of God) (*taqwa*) (Ibn Sīnā 1966: 44).

44 For more on the idea of translation of the *Poetics* as assimilation into Arabic culture, see al-Yūsufī (1992) *al-Shiʿr wa al-Shiʿriyya* (Poetry and Poetics: the achievements and aspirations of Arab philosophers and critics), Tunis: al-Dar al-ʿarabiyya li al-kitāb.

45 Said's choice of examples is telling. *The Nights* does fit the idea of ornament, although recent studies have shown that it does more than that, while Ḥusayn's book is an autobiography. If one is to extend the definition and the corpus to include narratives such as al-Maʿarrī's *Risālat al-Ghufrān* (The Epistle of Forgiveness) or narrative poetry, the conclusions would have to be different, as the examples cited above by al-Masʿadī show.

46 Ballas has suggested that Ḥusayn's remark is not 'devoid of sarcasm' (Ballas 2003: 96).

47 See Shmuel Moreh (1992) *Live Theatre and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arabic World*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press). For an overview of al-Ḥakīm's entire work, see Paul Starkey (1987) *From the Ivory Tower: a critical study of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm*, London: Ithaca Press. Of note as well is a play by Bishr Fāris, *Muftaraq al-Ṭarīq* (Crossroads) (published as a supplement to the magazine, *al-Muqtaṭaf*, March 1938). Other 'symbolic' plays or 'drama of ideas' include 'ʿabd al-Shayṭān' (The Devil's Slave) by Farīd Abū Ḥadīd; *Kāhin ʾĀmūn* (Ammoun's Priest) by Aḥmad Ṣabrī.

Notes to Chapter 4

1 Reference to *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* by Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Ṭufayl, and al-Suhrawardī (d.1191).

2 Reference to Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Risālat tadāʿī al-ḥayawānāt ʿala al-ʾInsān* (An Epistle on the Claims of Animals against Humans), mentioned earlier.

3 Intellectuals who championed a positivist and progress-driven modernity often found themselves in agreement with the new nationalist and traditionalist (*salafī*) discourse on Sufism (Sirriyeh 1999: 105–6).

4 Al-Mājirī rejects in strong terms the link al-Masʿadī establishes between al-Ḥallāj's death and Abū Hurayra's experience, which may be inferred from the story. He accuses the writer of believing the 'fallacy' that al-Ḥallāj was killed because he claimed union with God when in fact he was punished for inciting people to disobey their rulers (al-Mājirī 1980: 114). Al-Ḥallāj was accused of heresy for claiming divinity, union with God and preaching anti-shariʿa practices such as pilgrimage at home. He was sentenced to death and killed in 922.

5 Al-Mājirī concludes with an unmeasured ideological diatribe: 'Abū Hurayra's discourse takes the form of speeches full of aphorisms, images and advice. In this regard, he is the best personification of the crime of thinkers against humanity' (al-Mājirī 1980: 141). On a broader level, al-Masʿadī is seen as part of the crisis of the 'Arab intellectual in the first half of the century'. Just like Nuʿayma and Jibran, he is accused of looking for 'idealist solutions to real problems' (al-Mājirī 1980: 142).

6 Al-Qilībī also suggests that the book is the expression of a generation of young Tunisians before the Second World War who were uprooted from their society because they came under the influence of Western ideas, including emphasis on the individual self rather than the community (al-Masʿadī 1992, 170). Robin Östle takes this idea further, as I suggest below.

7 See ʿAlī Aḥmad Saʿīd (Adonis) (1990) *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*, trans. Catherine Cobham, London: al-Saqi Books.

8 The approach is marred by a careless presentation of terminology and reliance on an obscure secondary source on ʿAttar, 'al-Taṣawwuf wa Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār' (Sufism and Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭar) by ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAzzām. No further details are given.

9 Von Grunebaum writes about *al-Sudd*: 'The existential anguish of a Sartre and a Camus, the aestheticism of Baudelaire and Valéry, Rilke's and Thomas Mann's concern for suffering and decomposition, come to life through a style, an imagery, an invention of detail which are purely Arab…' (Von Grunebaum 1962: 281).

10 Sharzynska-Bochenska and Bürgel erroneously reverse the chronological order of al-Masʿadī's writings. They are misled by the fact that *Mawlid*'s first edition is dated 1974, one year after the publication of *Ḥaddatha*. In reality, *Mawlid* appeared in 1944–5 in its entirety in *al-Mabāḥith*. In addition to this, 'Al-Musāfir' is al-Masʿadī's first, not latest story. The typing and stylistic errors appear in Sharzynska-Bochenska's original text.

11 In this study, the term Sufism is used to mean *taṣawwuf*. Mahjari writers, in particular Khalil Jibran and Mikhāʾīl Nuʿayma, tried a Christian-inspired spirituality in their writings. In Tunisia, al-Shābbī's poetry includes specific Sufi aspects despite the poet's violent condemnation of the Arabic literary heritage in his essays. Outside the Arab context, one can cite Muḥammad Iqbāl and the interesting Turkish figure Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), who attempted to explore Turkish nationalism in Sufism terms. (See Elizabeth Sirriyeh (1999).)

12 See, for example, Martin Lings (1993) *What is Sufism?*, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society and Julian Baldick (1989) *Mystical Islam: an Introduction to Sufism*, London: I.B Tauris.

13 There is a partial translation of the epistle in English by B. R. von Schlegell (1990) *Principles of Sufism by al-Qushayri* (Berkley: Mizān Press). All translations are mine unless specified otherwise.

14 For samples of guidelines designed for disciples, see *The Way of Abū Madyan: The works of Abū Madyan Shuʿayb* (1996).

15 See, for example, *A Glossary of Sufi Technical Terms by Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī* (d. 1330) (1991), trans. Nabīl Ṣafwat (London: Octagon Press), which contains 516 terms.

16 Junayd defines the key concepts *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ* as the stripping away of human attributes and the acquisition of God's attributes whereas Ibn al-ʿArabī would later add *fanāʾ* (annihilation) *fī* (in) and *ʿan* (from) to mean the end of individuation and unity with God.

17 *Samāʿ* is a controversial issue among Sufis, especially in so far that it involves dance and music. Some mystics such as Abū Madyan spoke in support of *samāʿ* but set clear rules for

its practice (*The Way of Abu Madyan*, 81–97). On Samāʿ, see also Annemarie Schimmel 1979, *Mystical dimensions of Islam*: 179–86.

18 'Al-Musāfir' was first written in French and published in Arabic in 1942. It was reprinted in *al-Sudd*'s first edition in 1955, under the heading '*Min rūḥ al-sharq*' (From the Spirit of the East) with a short introduction by the author and an epigraph by the tenth century prose master al-Tawḥīdī. In later editions, the epigraph is dropped from this text and inserted in 'Ḥadīth al-Ḥikma' (Wisdom) in *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl….*

19 All references are to *Mawlid al-Nisyān wa Taʾammulāt Ukhrā* (The Birth of Forgetfulness and Other Meditations) (1974).

20 The term used here is *sharqī*, which could mean Easterner or Oriental. I am translating it by Easterner to moderate the association with Orientalism as a discourse.

21 In Arabic, the text reads, '*wa innamā huwa an tanfatiḥa al-nafsu li al-kawn waʾan takūna ʾilayhi muntabihatan yaqizatan waʿanhu rāḍiyatan wa bihi wāthiqatan wa lahu muslimatan.*'

22 There is an affinity between this vision and Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's ideas in *Bird of the East* (1938). See Badawī's *Modern Arabic Literature and the West*, 94–95.

23 The French text was published in *Afrique littéraire* 2 December 1940 under the title, 'Le rêve et l'oriental ou victoire sur le temps' (Al-Masʿadī 2003, vol. 4: 435–39).

24 See 'Ghaylān b. Muslim' by Charles Pellat in *EI2*. See also Judd (1999).

25 It refers to a fragrance, like sweet basil common in the *Qurʾān*, e.g. '*fa rawḥun wa rayḥānun wa jannatu nāʿīm*', translated as 'repose and plenty, and a garden of delights' (*Koran* 56: 88).

26 'The Story' 28: 38 (*Koran*, 389).

27 The book was written between 1106 and 1109. See George Hourani (1984) 'A Revised Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings', *JAOS* 104.2: 289–302. Al-Masʿadī explored al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge in 'Mushkilat al-maʿrifa ʿind al-Ghazālī' (The Problem of Knowledge in al-Ghazālī) *al-Mabāḥith* (June 1944) (New series: 1–2).

28 'Al-Sindabād wa al-Ṭahāra' (Sindabād and Purity) was first published in *al-Mabāḥith*, (September–October 1947).

29 At the intertextual level, this scene reveals a telling relationship between al-Masʿadī and the classical poetic tradition, as I will suggest below.

30 As a sign of confluence, echoes of modern ballet are strongly present, most notably through the description of the actual dance.

31 Schimmel says: 'Attar's poems, especially the *Mantiq ut-tayr*, have become standard works of Sufi literature, from which generations of mystics and poets have taken their inspiration' (Schimmel 1976: 305). The central metaphor in the book, cited in the epigraph to Chapter 4, pertains to the Sufi journey in search of truth (Attar 1984: 219). Schimmel explains: 'The thirty birds who have undertaken the painful journey in search of the Sīmurgh, the king of birds, realize finally that they themselves – being *sī murgh*, "thirty birds" – are the Sīmurgh. This is the most ingenious pun in Persian literature, expressing so marvelously the experience of the identity of the soul with the divine essence' (307).

32 Al-Nuṣrabādhī says: 'Your prison is your lower soul (*nafs*). If you escape from it, you will reach endless peace' (Qushayrī 1993: 16).

33 Solitude (*ʿuzla*) is not an easy trial to go through and requires preparation. Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sūsī asserts: 'Only the very strong should be left alone. As for the likes of us, society is more abundant and more beneficial because awareness of each other impels us to strive harder' (al-Qushayrī 1993: 23).

34 Such visions are often the sight of a saint or even the prophet Muḥammad during sleep or meditation. The visitor often gives a cryptic sign to be interpreted and followed. Al-Qushayrī devotes a section to Sufi visions. (See '*Ruʾyā al-qawm*' (Visions of the Sufis) in al-Qushayrī 1993: 364 ff.)

35 As I mention later in Chapter 4, Sufi women were not uncommon. Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 801), to name the most famous figure, achieved a status rarely matched by Sufi men.

36 This chapter of the book is introduced by an epigraph by al-Ghazālī: 'I have come to know that the happiness and perfection of the self are achieved when the self assumes divine truths to the point that both appear to be one and the same' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 175).

37 The prophet Muḥammad is generally ranked at the summit of the pyramid of Sufis. Al-Qushayrī devotes the last section of his book to Sufi *figures (Aʿlām al-Taṣawwuf)* where he includes, in an alphabetical order, short biographical entries and selected quotes from each. His preference is clearly for Sunni pious men, with the traditional hierarchy consisting of the prophet, his companions, the followers, and the ascetics (*zuhhād*). Al-Junayd sits at the top of this Sufi hierarchy.

38 Al-Ḥallāj, to cite a famous case, has written meditations on dots, geometric shapes such as the circle, and on letters of the alphabet in his *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*. For an extensive overview of occult sciences and beliefs, see Toufic Fahd (1987) *La divination Arabe*.

39 Al-Qushayrī devotes the chapters 'Aḥkām al-Safar' (Rules of Travel) and 'al-ṣuḥba' (Companionship) to stories regarding the riddles and morals reported by *murīd*s from their travel in the company of Sufi masters (al-Qushayrī 1992: 288–298).

40 Ghaylān refers to the story of Āsāl and Nāʾila as a precedent. In the story, Āsāl leaves his lover at the height of their love in order to seek a higher experience (al-Masʿadī 1992: 119–120). In *Ḥaddatha*, the same story is presented in its other variant where Āsāl is called Āsāf. The basic narrative of the legend of Āsāf and Nāʾila is that two lovers were turned into stones for making love in the Kaʿba. Some versions have it that they became idols and were worshipped before Islam.

41 In fact ritual in the play is associated with Ghaylān's opponents, the priests and followers of Ṣahabbāʾ; and it is here that some critics have found references to Sufism, as I have suggested earlier.

42 Nobles, you have no other god that I know of except myself. Make me, Hāmān, bricks of clay, and build for me a tower that I may climb up to the god of Moses. I am convinced that he is lying!' (*Qurʾān*, 'The Story' 28: 38). They responded to the recitation inserting their own speech, which sounded like thunder shaking the sky: He denied it [the sign] and rebelled — (*banḍaldallam*) — He quickly went away — (*banhar talgham*) — and, summoning all his men — (*bar ānhandam*) — Made to them the proclamation. 'I am your supreme Lord,' he said *Qurʾān*, 'The Soul-Snatchers' 79: 21–24 (al-Masʿadī 1979: 134).

43 ʿAzāzīl, an older name for Iblīs, was a missionary in heaven and on earth. Al-Ḥallāj argues that Iblīs showed people evil on earth. In this way Iblīs directed them to goodness, as 'things are known in relation to their opposites' (al-Ḥallāj 1913: 49).

44 Al-Musāfir ends in serenity and dream which are of a lasting nature. This is the only case of *baqāʾ* in al-Masʿadī's work, a reconstructed self remains in a state of serene existence. As noted above, the story, however, was an early reflection on the theme and does not show a progression in al-Masʿadī's thought. In 'Sindabād and Purity', Sindabād sails to his end in the middle of a storm: 'The purity of the depths embraced him' (al-Masʿadī 1974: 151).

45 Sells observes:

> *Islamic mysticism is indelibly marked with the poetic heritage of the Near East....The Sufis did not borrow the poetic themes of the lost beloved, the intoxication of wine, or the "perishing" out of love for the beloved to use as a vehicle for expressing ideas and sensibility developed independently from the poetry. Rather, the refinement of theme, mood, emotion and diction within the poetry were from very early on in Sufism an integral aspect of the mystical sensibility.*

> (Sells 1996: 56–7. Italics in original text)

46 For the distinction between (*qiyāfa*) and (*firāsa*) see Fahd 1987: 370–388.

47 A similar treatment affects the sacrifice of the camel mare conventionally linked to the themes of generosity and boasting in the *qaṣida*. The pre-Islamic poet, Imruʾ al-Qays says in his *muʿallaqa*:

On that day I killed my camel, to give the virgins a feast,
And, oh! How strange was it that they should carry his trappings and furniture!
The damsels continued till evening helping one another to the roasted flesh,
and to the delicate fat, like the fringe of white silk finely woven.

(Clouston 1986: 7)

In *Ḥaddatha*, this sacrifice borders on the comical. As I mention earlier, Abū Hurayra's friend is so enchanted by a dancing couple that he fails to realize that the couple fed him the meat of his own camel. He has nothing heroic and nothing to boast about. Rather he is the victim of a spellbinding performance.

48 Arabic section in *Akhbār al-Hallāj* (1936). Translation from Arabic is mine.
49 The drawings made by al-Ḥallāj's Persian commentator Ruzbihān al-Baqlī bear some kinship to Abū Hurayra's drawings. (See in particular, *Ṭawāsīn* 58, 63, 66 in al-Ḥallāj (1913).)

Notes to Conclusion

1 Ghaylān has been linked to the eighth century rebel and champion of human free will Ghaylān al-Dimishqī; Abū Rughāl refers to the legendary Abū Righāl cursed by Muslims; Rayḥāna refers to Rayḥāna al-Wāliha the ninth century Sufi, etc.
2 The most notable is Louis Massignon (1883–1962), the pioneering French scholar of Islamic mysticism, author of *La Passion de Hallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam*. 1975 (1st edn 1922) 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard). He also edited and introduced al-Ḥallāj's *Ṭawāsīn* and *Akhbār al-Ḥallāj*. See Mary Louise Gude (1966) *Louis Massignon: The Crucible of Passion*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
3 I use the term High Modernism and modernism interchangeably here to mean the first, which has manifestations in Eliot, Pound, Joyce and even Kafka. See Nicholls 1995: 251–278).
4 Al-Misaddī suggests that what distinguishes al-Masʿadī's relationship to Arabic from other writers is his use of rhythm (al-Misaddī 2002: 40).
5 For instance, he says: '*fa raʾāhu khalaʾn wiḥshatan* (instead of *mūḥishan*) *wa ẓalāman raṣāṣan* (instead of *kathīfan*)'. Literally the phrase could be transposed as 'He saw (to mean realized, thought, felt) it (the place) emptiness desolation and darkness lead' instead of desolate emptiness and thick darkness or desolate like emptiness and dark like lead). The point is that he neither uses adjectives nor *idḥāfa* nor even simile in order to keep the meaning as wide as possible while limiting the number of words. There are other numerous examples in Al-Akhdhar 2003: 112–13.
6 Al-Masʿadī says of his connection to Arabic: 'When I write in Arabic I feel I am alive'; 'Arabic is the language of my inner depth'; 'It conveys exactly my existential experience' (Al-Masʿadī 2003, Vol. 3: 191–192).
7 In an interview for the Egyptian newspaper *Akhbār al-Adab* on 9 November 1997, he says: 'It was possible for me to write in the social trend, like Naguib Mahfuz, but I was by nature, and due to the daily threat which aimed at disfiguring our national character and cultural identity, to prove that our literary and intellectual past is no less valuable than that of others. This explains why I relied on al-Ghazālī and al-Maʿarī' (in al-Masʿadī 2003, vol. 3: 393).
8 Lure: 'a stick with feathers used to attract falcons back'.
9 Sufism in al-Masʿadī is more of an intellectual stance and an attempt to make sense of fragmentation, the loss of aura, the shock of modernity, and the severance from the past. It is a search for wholeness and hope of salvation. There is another strand in Arabic letters, which domesticates *taṣawwuf* and performs it, particularly in poetry but also in seminal prose attempts, most notable of which is the work of the Egyptian novelist Jamāl al-Ghayṭānī.

10 In 'Ḥadith al-ʿama' (Blindness), Abū Hurayra, who starts his journey towards the East, is blinded by his experience of the encounter of West and East in him. He looses his *qibla* and 'the six directions' (al-Masʿadī 1979: 167). But as he roams blindly, he gains insight into himself and into others. This loss and redemptive illumination recalls Goethe's lines:

> Whoever knows himself and the others
> Will also recognize this:
> The East and the West
> Can no longer be separated.
>
> (Khatibi 1983: 144)

Both, al-Masʿadī and Goethe, may be referring to the Koranic verse: 'To God belongs the East and the West. Whichever way you turn there is the face of God. God is omnipresent and all-knowing' (2: 215).

11 In *Mawlid*, Madyan strives to subdue and control Time and the body; in *Ḥaddatha* Abū Hurayra is hampered by social and material contingency; while in *al-Sudd* Ghaylān fights gods and nature.

12 Camus calls this lucidity while Sartre speaks of responsibility; for al-Masʿadī, the essayist, it is the destiny of conscious beings and their most complete way of living as 'vice regents' of God. Eagleton observes, rather sarcastically, 'Only the Ibsenite heroes and Sartrian existentialists of this world can go to the whole hog in this respect, defiantly embracing authenticity whatever its cost in human wreckage' (Eagleton 2003: 58).

13 Eagleton suggests that tragedy 'encloses the inexpressible but also performs it' (20).

14 They come in to perturb false calm and disturb order. And, unable to change it, they perform the change and are sacrificed. Otherwise what would be the meaning of their death? There is another possible way of looking at the endings in al-Masʿadī's fiction, as I suggest in my Sufi reading of the author. For 'Every truth that does not erase both the trace and the form of the slave (of God) is not a truth', says the Sufi Abū Madyan Shuʿayb. Eagleton says: 'The rite of the *pharmakos*, by contrast, recognizes that non-being is the only path to true identity, and that to embrace this dissolution can be life-giving rather than annihilating' (Eagleton 2003: 280).

15 'There is a gloomy existential allure about the idea of going down fighting, which is the final refutation of utilitarianism' (103).

16 For communities, nations or social classes, resistance to necessity becomes a collective undertaking. Al-Masʿadī's fellow Tunisian, the fiery rebel poet Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī (1909–1934), a tragic figure in his own right, understood tragedy as revolution destined to succeed when he writes:

> If one day the people should embrace life,
> Fate is certain to respond.
>
> (al-Shābbī 1994, vol. 1: 213)

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MAḤMUD AL-MASʿADĪ

This is a partial list of al-Masʿadī's fictional and non-fictional writings arranged in chronological order. Al-Masʿadī lists his three main fictional texts in this order: *Ḥaddatha, al-Sudd, Mawlid* (*La Presse* 14 January 1994). The writer's fictional texts, his essays and key interviews have been collected in his *Complete Works* (2003) in four volumes. The bibliography also includes translations of the writer's work.

Fiction

Original texts in Arabic

(March 1930) '*Bi dhāhir al-Qayrawān*' (On the outskirts of al-Qairawān), *al-ʿĀlam al-ʾadabī*: 22–24.
(June 1954) '*al-Musāfir': taʾammulāt fī shakl qaṣaṣī* (The Traveller: meditations in story form), *al-Nadwah*: 25–29.
(1955) Rpt. in *al-Sudd*, 1st edn: 190–198
(1974) Rpt. in *Mawlid al-Nisyān*, 2nd edn: 119–133.

Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra Qāl... (Abū Hurayra is Reported to Have Said ...) (written before June 1940).
(1974) *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra Qāl...* 1st edn, Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li al-nashr.
(1979) *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra Qāl...*, 2nd edn, Tunis: Dār al-Janūb.
(August 1944) '*Ḥadīth al-Qiyāma*' (The Resurrection), *al-Mabāḥith*.
(September 1944) '*Ḥadīth al-Baʿth al-Awwal*' (The First Awakening), *al-Mabāḥith*.
(October 1944) '*Ḥadīth al-Kalb*' (The Dog), *al-Mabāḥith*.
(November 1944) '*Ḥadīth al-ʿAdad*' (Multitude), *al-Mabāḥith*.
(March 1956) '*Ḥadīth al-Ghayba tuṭlab fa lā tudrak*' (Absence Sought but never Achieved), *al-Fikr*.

Al-Sudd (The Dam) (written between September 1939 and June 1940).
(1955) *Al-Sudd*, 1st edn, Tunis: Dār al-nashr li shamāl ifrīqiyya.
(1974) *Al-Sudd* (The Dam), 2nd edn, Tunis: al-Dār al-tūnisiyya li al-nashr.
(1992) *Al-Sudd* (The Dam), 3rd edn, Tunis: Dār al-Janūb.

(April–July 1945) *Mawlid al-Nisyān* (The Birth of Forgetfulness), *al-Mabāḥith*.
(1974) *Mawlid al-Nisyān*, 1st edn, Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li al-Nashr.

(September–October 1947) '*al-Sindabād wa al-Ṭahāra*' (Sindabād and Purity), *al-Mabāḥith*.
(1974) Rpt. in *Mawlid al-Nisyān*, 1st edn, Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li al-Nashr: 135–151.

(2002) *Min Ayyām ʿimrān wa taʾammulāt ukhrā* (Days in the Life of ʿImrān and Other Meditations), ed. *Maḥmūd Ṭarshūna*, Tunis: Dra al-Janūb li al-Nashr.

(August 1954) '*Yawm al-Qaṭīʿa*' (The Day of Parting), *al-Nadwa* 3.

(September 1976) Rpt. *al-Ḥayāt al-Thaqāfiyya*: 4.

(August 1954) '*Yawm al-Qaḥṭ*' (The Day of Drought), *al-Nadwa* 4.

(Sept–Oct 1976) Rpt. in *al-Ḥayāt al-Thaqāfiyya* 4.

(1974) Rpt. in *Taʾṣīl li kiyān*: 194–196.

(April 1957) '*Ḥadīth al-ḍaḥiyyah*' (The Victim), *al-Fikr* 2.

(Sept–Oct. 1976) Rpt. in *al-Ḥayāt al-Thaqāfiyya*: 4.

(1981) '*Yawm al-Ṣamt*' (The Day of Silence), *Taʾṣīl li kiyān*, 2nd edn: 205.

(1981) '*Yawm al-kaffāra wa al-raḥma*' (The Day of Atonement and Mercy), *Taʾṣīl li kiyān*, 2nd edn: 206.

(2003) '*Taʾammulāt*' (Meditations) in *al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmila* (Complete Works), vol. 1: 409–434.

(2003) *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmila* (The Complete Works). 4 Vols., Ed. Maḥmūd Ṭarshouna, Tunis: Dar al-Janūb li al-Nashr.

Original texts in French

(December 1940) 'Le rêve et l'oriental ou victoire sur le temps, Afrique Littéraire.

(2003) 'Le rêve et l'oriental ou victoire sur le temps', *al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmila* (Complete Works), vol. 4.: 435–439.

(2003) 'Errance d'une plume', *al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmila* (Complete Works), vol. 4: 441–468.

Translations

French

(October 1942) 'Le voyageur', *al-Tafāhum*.

(1959) 'Le Barrage, Tableaux 6 et 7' (The Dam, Scenes 6–7), trans. Farid Ghazi, *Orient*: 157–163.

(1961) 'Le barrage, Scenes 1, 5, 6, 7' in *Anthologie bilingue de la littérature arabe contemporaine*, trans. Vicent Monteil, Beyrouth: Imprimerie catholique: 252–264.

(4 Dec. 1965–Feb. 1966), 'Le barrage: quelques passages,' trans. Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī, *Carthage*: 55–63.

(1969), *Le barrage*, scenes 3 and 4,' trans. Maurice Bormanns, *IBLA* 123: 1–16.

(1981) *Le barrage*, trans. Izz al-Dīn Guellouz, UNESCO: Vega Press.

(1994) *Le barrage*, trans. Izz al-Dīn Guellouz, 2nd edn, Paris: Arcantère éditions.

(1960) 'Sindabad et la pureté', trans. Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī, *Faiza* 10: 28–30, 52–53.

(1993) *La Genèse de l'oubli*, trans. Taoufik Baccar, Tunis: Bayt al-Ḥikma.

(18 January 2003) *Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl*: introduction and chapter 1, trans. Fradj Laḥwār and Ḥāfidh Jdīdī, *Le Renouveau*.

German

(1981) '"Der Damm': Ein modernes arabisches Drama von Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī in Deutsche Ubertragen', trans. L. C. Burgel, *Die Welt des Islams: International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam* 21: 30–79.

English

(December 1966) 'The Dam', trans. Jarrow, Judith F., *Carthage* 4: 57–63.

Dutch.

(1995) *De Geboorte van het Vergeten* (The Birth of Forgetting), trans., Marcelle van de Pol, Amsterdam: In de Knipscheer.

Spanish

(n.d.) 'La presa, Scenes 1 and 6', trans. Mikel de Epalza, L.T.C.: 33–47.

(1996) *Nos lo contó Abù Hurayra*, trans. Santiago Martinez de Francisco, UNESCO.

(1978) Viguera, Naria Jesus (trans.) *'Transmitó Abù Hurayra que …'*, Literatura tunecina contemporánea, Madrid : Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura: 12–13.

Russian

(n.d.) Abdolov, N., trans. '"Plotina" Tunisskogo pisatelia Maxmuda al-Masadi'. *Vostochnaia Filologia* 1: 18–27.

Non-Fiction Books, Essays, introductions, interviews

Arabic

(December 1945) '*Abū al-ᶜAlaʾ fi mā baynaka wa bayna nafsika*' (Abu al-ᶜAlāʾ between you and your self), *al-Mabāḥith*.

(May 1957) '*Taᶜlīq ᶜalā naqd Ṭaha Ḥusayn*' (Commentary on a critique by Ṭaha Ḥusayn), *al-Fikr*: 28–36.

(March 1961) '*Ḥadīth maᶜa ʾusrat majallat* al-Tajdīd' (Interview with the editors of the journal *al-Tajdid*), *Al-Tajdīd*.

(1974) Rpt. *al-Sudd*, 2nd edn: 247–272.

(July, 1975) '*Manzilat al-ᶜilm wa al-ʾīmān fī al-Islām*' (The Position of science and faith in Islam), *al-Hidāya*: 20–23.

(1979) *Taʾsil li Kiyān*, Tunis: Muʾassasat Ibn ᶜAbd Allah.

(1996) *Al-ʾĪqāʾ fī al-saǰ al-ᶜarabī: muḥāwalat taḥdīd wa taḥlīl* (Rhythm in Arabic Rhymed Prose), Tūnis: Abd al-Karīm bin Abdallah.

(1992) 'Introduction', *Alfiyya mukarrarah fī al-amrāḍ al-nafsiyya al-muᶜtabara* (A Repeated One Thousand-Line Poem Pertaining to the Most Significant Psychological Illnesses), Slim Ammar, Tunis: al-Maṭbaᶜa al-ʾasāsiyya.

(1993) 'Introduction', *Dunyā* (Donya), Maḥmūd Ṭarshūna, Tunis: Dimitir: 9–10.

(October 1994) '*Rasāʾil al-Masᶜadī ilā Ṭaha Ḥusyan* (1948–49)' (Al-Maᶜadī's Letters to Ṭaha Ḥusayn), *Al-Ādāb* 42: 32–35.

(1997) 'Introduction', *Untha al-māʾ*, Amāl Mūsa, Tunis: *Siras*: 3–4.

(1982) 'Interview with Mājid Sāliḥ al-Sāmarrāʾī', *Al-Ḥayāt al-thaqāfiyya*: 50–61.

(1994) 'Interview with Mohamed-Salah Omri', January 8, Bardo, Tunis (Omri 2001: 300–307).

(15 March 1998) 'Interview', *Al-Wathīqa* 1.

Other languages

(Automne 1958), 'Islam, nationalisme et communisme', *Études Mediterranéennes*, 3–14.

(1970) Anouar Abdelmalik, *La pensée politique arabe contemporaine*, Paris: Seuil: 211–217.

(1981) *Essai sur le rythme dans la prose rimée en arabe*, Tunis: Ben Abdallah.

(1981) 'Cultural development in the Arab states', *Cultural Development: Some Regional Experiences*, Paris: UNESCO: 283–369.

(18 February, 1994) 'Le gène et le vivant' Leçon inaugurale de la 'Journée internationale sur le vieillissement' (Excerpts), Faculté de médecine, Tunis (9 December 1983), *La Presse*.

(14 January 1994) 'Interview with Fawziya Mezzi', *La Presse*.

(1995) 'Introduction', Dorra Bouzid, *École de Tunis*, Tunis: Éditions Alif.

(1983) 'The Idea of Arab Nationalism', Anouar Abdel-Malik *Contemporary Arab Political Thought*, trans. Michael Pallis, London: Zed Books: 145–147.

WORKS CITED

Abd al-Malik, Anouar (1983) *Contemporary Arab Political Thought*, London: Zed Books.

ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, ʿAbd al-Allah (1985) *Al-Muwayliḥī al-ṣaghīr* (Al-Muwayliḥī Junior), Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-miṣriyya al-ʿamma li al-kitāb.

ʿAbd al-Salām, Ahmad (1946) 'Manzilat Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām fi al-ʾadab al-ʿArabī al-Ḥadīth' (The Position of *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* in modern Arabic literature), *Al-Mabāḥith* 26: 2, 4 and 27–28: 3–4.

———— (1946) 'taṭawwur al-maqāma fī al-adab al-ḥadīth' (The Development of *maqama* in modern literature), *Al-Mabāḥith* 24 and 25: 2, 6.

Abū Tammām (1981) *Sharḥ dīwān Abī Tammām*, ed. Īlyā al-Ḥāwī, Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-lubnānī.

Ahmad, Aijaz (1992) *In Theory: classes, nations, literatures*, London: Verso.

Al-Akhdhar, Fāṭima (2002) *Khaṣāʾis al-Uslūb fī adab al-Masʿadī* (The Features of style in al-Masʿadī), Tunis: Hannabal Publishing.

Allen, Roger (1995) *The Arabic Novel: an historical and critical introduction*, 2nd edn, Syracuse: Syracuse UP.

———— (1992) *A Period of* Time: a study and translation of Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām by Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī), Oxford: St. Anthony's Middle East Monographs.

ʿAmayriyya, Ḥafnāwī (1994) *Al-Ṣaḥāfa wa tajdīd al-thaqāfa: Tūnis fī al-Qarn 19* (The Press and Cultural Renewal: Tunisia in the 19th c.), Tūnis: Al-Dār al-tūnisiyya li al-nashr.

Anderson, Benedict (1991) *Imagined Communities*, 2nd edn, London: Verso.

Arberry, A. J. (1938) 'Fârâbi's Canon of Poetry', *Revista degli Studi Orientali* 17: 257–278.

Aristotle (1942) *The Poetics*, trans. Preston H. Epps, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

Aristotle (1953) *Arisṭūṭālīs: fann al-shiʿr maʿa al-tarjama al-ʿarabiyya al-qadīma wa shurūḥ al-Fārābī wa Ibn Sīnā wa Ibn Rushd* (Aristotle: The Art of Poetry with the early Arabic translation and commentaries by al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd), Cairo: Matbaʿat al-nahda al-miṣriyya.

Attar, Fariduddin (1984) *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, London: Penguin.

Auerbach, Eric (Winter 1969) 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*', *The Centennial Review* 13: 1–17.

Badawī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (trans.) (1973) *Fann al-shiʿr: maʿa al-tarjamah al-ʿarabiyah al-qadīma wa shurūḥat al-Fārābī wa-Ibn Sīnā wa Ibn Rushd* (The Poetics with the old Arabic translation and commentaries by al-Fārābī wa-Ibn Sīnā wa Ibn Rushd, Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa.

Badawī, M. M. (1992) *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, vol. 4 *Modern Arabic Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———— (1992) Introduction, *Al-Sudd*, Tūnis: Dār al-Janūb.

———— (1979) Introduction, *Ḥaddathat abū Hurayra qāl…*, Tūnis: Dār al-Janūb.

———— (2001) *Qaṣaṣiyyāt ʿarabiyya* (Arabic Narratives), vol. 1, Tunis: Dār al-Janūb.

Bakhtin, Michailovich (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bakkār, Tawfīq (1980) 'Mahmoud Messadi: Une métaphysique de l'Homme et une esthétique de l'écriture', *Echanges* 2 (3): 211–227.

Ballas, Shimon (2003) *Ruwwād wa mubdi'ūn* (Pioneers and Creators), Kölon, Germany: Jamal Editions.

———— (1992) 'Mahmūd al-Masʿadī: al-ṣirāʿ bayna al-insān wa' l-Ilāh' (The Conflict between Man and God) in *al-Adab al-ʿarabī wa al-taḥdīth l-fikrī: Faraḥ Antūn, Najīb Maḥfūz, Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī, Manṣūr Fahmī* (Arabic Literature and Cultural Modernization: Faraḥ Antūn, Najīb Maḥfūz, Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī, Manṣūr Fahmī), Kölon, Germany: Jamal Editions.

Barthes, Roland (1977) *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, New York: Hill and Wand.

———— (1974) *SZ*, trans. Richard Miller, New York: The Noonday Press.

Bel-Ḥassan, Muḥammad Raʿūf and Aḥmad Jlīd (eds) (1994) *Al-Mabāḥith: al-Majmūʿa al-kāmila* (*al-Mabāḥīth*: the complete collection), Tunis: dār al-Kutub al-Waṭaniyya.

Benda, Julien (1928) *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, trans. Richard Aldington, New York: William Morrow and Co.

Benjamin, Walter (1985) *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books.

Berque, Jaques (1967) *French North Africa: the Maghreb between two World Wars*, trans. Jean Stewart, London: Faber and Faber.

———— (1994) 'Préface', *Le barrage*, trans. Izz al-Dīn Guellouz, Arcanterre Éditions.

Bernheimer, Charles (1995) *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.

Bertrand, Louis (1921) *Les Villes D'or,* Paris: Fayard.

Bonnaud-Lamotte, D. and J.-L. Rispail (1989) *Intellectuel(s) des années trente: entre le rêve et l'action*, Paris: Editions du CNRS.

Borges, J. L. (1964) *Labyrinths*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby, New York: New Directions Books.

Boullata, Issa (1983) 'Contemporary Arab writers and the literary heritage', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 15: 111–119.

Brondino, Michèle and Tahar Labib (eds) (1994) *Gramsci dans le monde arabe*, Tunis: Alif.

Bürgel, J. C. (1996) 'Tradition and modernity in the work of the Tunisian writer al-Masʿadī' in *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Language and Literature*, ed. J. R. Smart, Surrey: Curzon Press.

Camus, Albert (1942) *Le mythe de Sisyphe*, Paris: Gallimard.

Carlton, L. (1921) *La Tunisie en l'an 2000*, Tunis: Namura et Bonici.

Chatelain, Yves (1937) *La Vie littéraire et artistique en Tunisie de 1900 à 1937*, Paris: Paul Geuthner.

Clouston, W. A. (ed.) (1986) *Arabian poetry for English readers*, London: Darf.

Collective (1993) *Tārīkh al-Adab al-Tūnisī (1860–1985)* (The History of Tunisian Literature 1860–1985), Tunis: Bayt al-Ḥikma.

Cornell, Vincent (ed.) (1996) *The Way of Abū Madyan: the works of Abū Madyan Shʿayb*, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society.

Dardūrī, Ibrāhīm (1975) *Al-Qaṣaṣ al-dīnī fī masraḥ al-Ḥakīm* (Religious Stories in al-Ḥakīm's Theatre), Cairo: dār al-Shaʿb.

Darwīsh, Maḥmūd (1975) 'al-Dafq al-Rūḥī fī al-Sudd' (Spiritual Flow in *The Dam*), *Al-Fikr* 7: 104–112.

Dunwoodie, Peter (1998) *Writing French Algeria*, Oxford: Clarendon.

Eagleton, Terry (2003) *Sweet violence: the idea of the tragic*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Ernest, Carl (1992) *Eternal Garden: mysticism, history, and politics in a South Asian Sufi center*, New York: State University of New York Press.

Fahd, Toufic (1987) *La divination arabe*, Paris: Sindbad.

Fanon, Frantz (1965) *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove Press.

Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid (1989) *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error), ed. Abd al-Karīm al-Marrāq, Tunis: al-Dār al-tūnisiayya li al-nashr.

Ghāzl, Farīd (1970) *Le roman et la nouvelle en Tunisie* (The Novel and the Short Story in Tunisia), Tunis: Maison Tunisienne de diffusion.

Ghurāb, Saᶜd (1990) *Al-ᶜĀmil al-dīnī wa al-hawiyya al-tūnisiyya* (The Religious Factor and Tunisian Identity), Tunis: al-Dār al-tūnisiyya li al-nashr.

Gershoni, Israel (Summer 1994) '"The Reader – Another Production": the reception of Haykal's biography of Muhammad and the shift of Egyptian intellectuals to Islamic subjects in the1930's', *Poetics Today* 15. 2: 240–277.

Al-Ghābirī, al-Hādī (1992) *Jadaliyyat al-thawra wa al-jasad fī masraḥiyyat 'al-Sudd'* (The Dialectic Relationship between Revolution and the Body in the Play 'The Dam'), 2 vols, Tunis: Muʾassasat Abū Wijdān.

——— (1993) *al-Shakl al-fannī fī masraḥiyyat al-Sudd* (Form in the Play The Dam), Tunis: Maṭbaᶜat Ḥātim Aṣlān.

Al-Gharībī, Khālid (1994) *Jadaliyyyat al-aṣālah wa al-muᶜāṣara fī adab al-Masᶜadī* (The Dialectic Relationship between Authenticity and Contemporaneity in al-Masᶜadī's Writings), Tunis: Samid.

Gnisci, Armando, 'La littérature comparée comme discipline de décolonisation', paper presented at the International Conference on Comparative Literature in the Arab World, Cairo, 20–22 December 1995.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von (1890) *Faust: a tragedy*, trans. Bayard Taylor, London: Warne and Co.

Gramsci, Antonio (1991) *Selections from Cultural Writings*, eds. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. William Boelhower, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Grandguillaume, Gilbert (1983) *Arabisation et politique linguistique au Maghreb*, Paris: Maison neuve et Larose.

Green, Arnold (1980) 'A Comparative historical analysis of the Ulama and the state in Egypt and Tunisia', *Revue de l'Occident Musulam et de la Méditerrannée* 29: 31–54.

Gully, A. and John Hindle (2003) 'Qābūs ibn Washmagīr: a study of rhythm patterns in Arabic epistolary prose from the 4th century AH (10th century AD), *Middle East Literatures* 6:2, 177–197.

Hadj, Messali (1982) *Les mémoires de Messali Hadj*: 1898–1938, Paris: J.C. Lattes.

Hafez, Sabri (1993) *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse*, London: Saqi Books.

Al-Ḥallāj, Abū Manṣur (1936) *Akhbār al-Hallāj*, ed. and trans. Louis Massignon and Paul Kraus, Paris: Larose.

——— (1913) *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, ed. Louis Massignon, Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner.

Al-Hammadhanī, Badīᶜ al-Zamān (1908) *Maqāmāt*, ed. Muḥammad ᶜAbduh, Beirut: al-Maṭbaᶜa al-Kāthūlīkiyya.

Ḥamdān, Muḥammad (1989) *Dalīl al-dawriyyāt al-ṣādira bi al bilād al-tūnisiyya 1830–20 māris 1956* (Catalogue of Periodicals Published in Tunisia between 1830 and 20 March 1956), Carthage: Bayt al-Ḥikma.

Al-Hariri (n.d.) *Maqamāt*, Beirut: al-Maktaba ash-shaᶜbiyya.

Ḥasan Ḥanafī (1992) *Al-Turāth wa al-tajdīd*, Beirut. Al-Muʾassasah al-Jāmiʿiyya li al-dirāsāt wa al-nashr.

Heath, Peter (1996) *The Thirsty Sword.: Sīrat ʿAntar and the Arabic popular epic*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

Hermassi, Elbaki (1972) *Leadership and National Development in North Africa: a comparative study*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Holbrook, Victoria (1994) *The Unbearable Shores of Love: Turkish modernity and mystical romance*, Austin: Texas UP.

Hollier, Denis (1989) *A New History of French Literature*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hourani, Albert (1983) *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1879–1939*, Oxford: Oxford UP.

Howatson, M. C. and Ian Chilvers (eds) (1993) *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, Oxford: Oxford U.P.

Al-Ḥuṣarī, Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm Ibn ʿAlī (1972) *Zahr al-Adab*, ed. Zaki Mubarak, Beirut: Dār al-Jalīl.

Ḥusayn, Ṭaha (Spring 1989) 'The Modern Renaissance of Arabic Literature', *World Literature Today* 63: 249–256.

——— (1958) *Min ʾadabina al-muʿāṣir* (About Contemporary Literature), Beirut: Dār al-ādāb.

Ibn al-ʿArabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn (1911) *The Turjumán al-ashwáq* (1978), trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, London: Theosophical publishing house.

Ibn Hishām, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (n.d.) *Sīrat al-Nabiy* (Prophet's biography), ed. Muḥammad Khalīl Harrās, Cairo: Maktabat al-Jumhūriyya.

Ibn Khaldūn (1967) *The Muqaddima: an introduction to history*, trans. Franz Rothenthal, 3 vols., London: Routledge.

Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, Abd al-Allah (n.d.) *Kalila and Dimna*, Beirut: Maktabat al-Ḥayāt.

Ibn Salama, Bashīr (1974) *al-Shakhsiyya al-tūnisiyya: khaṣāʾiṣuha wa muqawwimātuhā* (Tunisian Personality: specificities and constituents), Tunis: ʿAbd al-Karim Bin Abdallah.

Ibn Sīnā, Abū ʿAlī (1966) *Al-Shifāʾ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī, Cairo: al-dār al-miṣriyya li al-taʾlīf wa al-tarjama.

Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Ṭufayl and al-Suhrawardī (n.d.) *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān*. (The Living Son of the Awake), ed. Aḥmad Amīn, Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif li al-Ṭibaʿa wa al-Nashr.

Ibsen, Henrik (1980) *Plays*, vol. 1, trans. Michael Meyer, London: Methuen.

Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ (n.d.) *Risālat tadāʿī al-Ḥayawānāt ʿalā al-Insān* (An Epistle on the Claims of Animals over Humans), ed. Fārūq Saʿd, Beirut: Dār al-āfāq al-jadīda.

Al-Jābiri, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ (1974) *al-Shiʿr al-Tūnisī al-Muʿāṣir 1870–1970* (Contemporary Tunisian Poetry 1870–1970), Tunis: al-Dār al-tūnisiyya li al-tawzīʿ.

Jameson, Fredric (1986) 'Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism', *Social Text* 15: 65–88.

——— (1990) 'On Contemporary Marxist Theory: an interview with Fredric Jameson', *ALIF* 10: 114–130.

Al-Jīnīrāl, Ḥusayn (2002) *Ḥasm al-īldād fī nāzilat Maḥmūd ibn ʿAyyād* (Settling the differences in the court case of Maḥmūd ibn ʿAyyād), eds. Fatḥī al-Qāsimī and al-Shībānī ibn Balghīth, Tūnisi: Prism.

Jennings, Jeremy (1993), ed. *Intellectuals in Twentieth Century France*, New York: St. Martin's Press.

Al-Junayd (1969) *Rasāʾil al-Junayd al-Baghdādī*. Ed. ʿAlī Ḥasan ʾAbd al-Qādir and Sulaymān Ātash, Istanbul: Cagaloglu.

Al-Jurjānī, Abd al-Qāhir (n.d.) *Asrār al-Balāgha*. Ed. Muḥammad Rashīd Riza, Beirut: Dar al-Maʿrifa.

Jusdanis, Gregory (1991) *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: inventing national literature*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kandinsky, Wassily and Franz Marc, eds. (1979) *The Blaue Reiter Almanac*, trans. Henning Falkenstein, London: Thames and Hudson.

Karamustafa, Ahmet T. (1994) *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1250–1550*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

Khaṭibi, Abdelkebīr (1968) *Le Roman maghrébin*, Paris: Maspéro.

——— (June 1976) 'Jacque Berque ou la saveur orientale', *Les temps modernes* 31: 2159–2181.

——— (1983) *Maghreb pluriel*, Paris: Editions Denoël.

Khurshid, Umar (1979) *Fi ar-Riwaya al-ʿArabiyya*, 2nd edn, Beyrut: dar al-ʿawda.

Al-Kīlāni, Muṣṭafa (1990) *Al-Adab al-ḥadīth wa al-muʿāsir : ʾishkāliyat al-riwāya* (Contemporary and Modern Literature: the problem of the novel), Carthage: Bayt al-Ḥikma.

Kilito, Abdelfattah (1985) *L'Auteur et ses doubles*, Paris: Editions du Seuil.

Kundera, Milan (1988) *The Art of the Novel*, trans. Linda Asher, New York: Harper and Row Publishers.

Layoun, Mary (1990) *Travels of a Genre: the modern novel and ideology*, Princeton: Princeton UP.

Lefebvre, Henri (1991) *The production of space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Liausu, Claude (1982) *Aux origines des tiers-mondismes: colonisés et anticolonialistes en France (1919–1939)*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

Al-Maʿarrī, Abū al-ʿAlāʾ (1969) *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, ed. ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, Cairo: Dār ak-Maʿārif.

Maḥmūdī, Abd al-Rāshid al-Ṣadīq (1997), trans. *Ṭaha Ḥusyan: min al-shaṭi al-ākhar* (Taha Husyan: from the other shore), Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl.

Mājid, Jaʿafar (1979) *La presse littéraire en Tunisie de 1904 à 1955*, Tunis: Université de Tunis.

Al-Majīrī, Ḥafnāwī (1985) *Al-Masʿadī: min al-thawra ilā al-hazīma* (al-Masʿadī: From Revolution to Defeat), 2nd edn, Tunis: al-dār al-tūnisiyya li al-nashr.

Marāsī, Muḥammad (1980) *Al-Marʾa fī ʾadab al-Masʿadī* (Women in al-Masʿadī's Work), Tunis: Dār al-Taqaddum.

Al-Misaddī, Abd al-Salām (1997) *Al-Masʿadī bayna al-ʾibdāʿ wa al-ʾīqāʿ*, Tunis: Abd al-Karim Ibn Abdallah.

——— (2002) '*Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī wa ʾĪqāʿ al-Lughah* (Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī and the Rhythm of the Language)', *Thaqāfat*., 25–42.

Mommsen, Katharina (1995) *Ghūta wa al-ʿālam al-ʿarabī* (Goethe and the Arab World), trans. ʿAdnān ʿAbbās ʿAli, Kuwait: Dār al-Maʿrifa.

Moosa, Matti (1983) *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, Washington: Three Continents Press.

Moretti, Franco (2000) 'Conjectures on world literature', *New Left Review* 1 (New Series): 54–68.

Al- Muwayliḥī, Muḥammad (1982) *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām*, Tunis: Dār al-Janūb.

Al-Muʿallimī, Nuwār (1996) *Jadal al-māʾ wa al-nār fī masraḥiyyat al-Sudd* (The dialectic of Water and Fire in the Play The Dam), Tunis: Maṭbaʿat al-ittiḥād al-ʾām al-tūnisī li al-shughl.

Muwāʿada, Muḥammad (1986) *Ḥarakat al-tarjama fī Tūnis wa ahamm maẓāhiriha fī al-ʾAdab (1840–1956)* (Translation Activity in Tunisia and its Main Manifestations in Literature (1840–1956), Tunis: al-dār al-ʿarabiyya li al-kitāb.

Al-Najjar, Muhammad Rajab (1981) *Hikāyāt al-shuṭṭār wa al-ʿAyyārīn fī at-turāth al-ʿArabī*, al-Kuwait: al-Majlis al-Watani li al-Thaqafa.

Nicholls, Peter (1995) *Modernisms: a literary guide*, Berkeley, UCP.

Nicholson, R.A. (1921) *Studies in Islamic Poetry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, Fredrich (1979) *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Books.

Al-Niffarī (1935) *Mawāqif and Mukhātabāt of Niffarī* , ed. and trans. A. J. Arberry, Cambridge University Press.

Nurbakhsh, Javad (1983) *Sufi Women*, New York: Kaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications.

Ollier, Claude and Anne Roche, eds. (1993) *Abdelwhab Meddeb*, Poitiers: Office du livre.

Omri, Mohamed-Salah (2001) 'Issues in World Literature: the poetics and poetics of Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī', unpublished PhD thesis, Washington University in St. Louis, USA.

——— (2003) 'History, literature and settler colonialism in North Africa', *Modern Language Quarterly* 66:3, 273–298.

——— (2003)) 'Evocation and mimesis: al-Muwayliḥī, al-Masʿadī and the narrative tradition', *Edebiyat* 14:1–2, 57–79.

——— and Abdeljalil Temimi (eds) (2002) *Britain and the Maghreb: the state of research and cultural contacts*, Zaghoan, Tunisia: FTRSI.

——— and Temimi Abdelljalīl (eds) (2003) *The Movement of People and Ideas between Britain and the Maghreb*, Zaghouan, Tunisia: FTRSI.

Östle, R.C. (1977) 'Maḥmud al-Masʿadī and Tunisia's "lost generation"', *Journal of Arabic Literature* 8: 153–166.

Pratt, Mary Louise (1995) 'Comparative Literature and global citizenship' in *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*, ed. Charles Bernheimer, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (1974), ed. Alex Preminger, New Jersey: Princeton U.P.

Qamar-ul Huda (1996) 'Reflections on Muslim Ascetics: Sufi theories on Annihilation and Subsistence', *Jusūr* 12: 17–35.

Al-Qushayrī, Abū al-Qāsim (1993) *Al-Risāla al-qushayriyya fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf*, eds. Maʿrūf Zurayq and ʿAlī Abd al-Ḥamīd Balṭa Jī, Beirut: Dār al-Kkayr.

Al-Qushayrī, Abū al-Qāsim (1992) *Principles of Sufism*, trans. B.R. von Schlegell, Berkeley: Mizan Press.

Al-Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn (1995) *The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks, New York: Harper Collins.

Salem, Norma (1984) *Habib Bourguiba, Islam and the Creation of Tunisia*, Dover, England: Croom Helm, Ltd.

Senghor, Léopold Sédard (1981) 'Préface', *Le barrage*, trans. Izz al-Dīn Guellouz. Arcanterre Éditions.

Said, Edward (1975) *Beginnings: Intentions and Method*, New York: Columbia U.P.

Ṣammūd, Nūr al-Dīn (1973) *Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī wa kitābuhu 'al-Sudd'* (Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī and His Book 'The Dam'), Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li al-Nashr.

Sells, Michael (1991) 'Ibn ʿArabī's "Gentle Now, Doves of Thornberry and Moringa Thicket"', *Journal of the Muhiddin Ibn ʿArabī Society* 10: 1–11.

——— (1996) *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qurʾān, Miʾrāj and Theological Writings*, New York: Paulist Press.

——— (1989) *Desert Tracings: six classical odes*, Middletown, Conneticut: Weslyan U.P.

Al-Shābbī, Abu al-Qāsim (1994) *Al-Aʿmāl al-Kāmila* (The Complete Works), 6 vols, Tunis: Dar al-Maghrib al-ʿArabī.

Shimmel, Annemarie (1975) *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: UNCP.

Sharzynska-Bochenska, Krystina (1992) 'Mahmud al-Mas'adi and philosophy of life and death in his existential novels', *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 10: 109–120.

Al-Sharīf, Muḥammad al-Hādī (1985) *Tārīkh Tūnis* (A history of Tunisia), Tunis: Ceres.

Siddiqi, Muhammad Zubayr (1993) *Ḥadīth Literature: its origins, development and special features*, ed. Abdal Hakim Murad, Cambridge, Islamic Texts.

Sirriyeh, Elizabeth (1999) *Sufis and Anti-sufis: the defence, rethinking and rejection of sufism in the modern world*, London: Curzon.

Sraieb, Noureddine (1995) *Le Collège Sadiki de Tunis (1875–1956): enseignement et nationalisme*, Paris: les Editions de la Méditerranée.

Stetkevych, Joroslav (1996) *Muḥammad and the Golden Bough: reconstructing Arabian myth*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Strich, Fritz (1945) *Goethe and World Literature*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Ṭarshūna, Maḥmūd (1991) 'Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī', *Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-Tūnisiyya* (Encyclopedia of Tunisia), vol. 2: 62–70.

———— (1997) *al-ʾAdab al-murīd fī muʾallafāt al-Masʿadī* (Literature of Will in al-Masʿadī's Writings), 5th edn Tunis: al-Magharibiyya.

Al-Ṭawīlī, Ahmad (1987) *Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī wa kitābuhu 'Ḥaddatha Abu Hurayrata qal...'* (Maḥmūd al-Masʿadī and his Book 'Ḥaddatha Abu Hurayrata qal...'), Tunis: Dār Būslāma.

Temimi, Abd al-Jalīl, ed. (2000) *Habib Bourguiba et l'établissement de l'état national: approches scientifiques du Bourguibisme*, Zaghouan: Fondation Temimi pour la recherche scientifique et l'information.

Al-Thʿalibi, ʿAbd al-ʿaīz (1975) *Tūnis al-Shahīda* (Tunisia the Martyr), trans and intro. Samī al-Gindi, Beirut: Dar al-Quds.

Al-Tūnisī, Kayr al-Dīn Pasha (1990) *Aqwām al-masālik fī maʿrifat aḥwāl al-mamālik* (The Road Most Straight to Know the Condition of the State), 2 vols, ed. Munṣif al-Shannūfī, Tunis: Bayt al-Ḥikma.

The Koran (1990), trans. N. J. Dawood, London: Penguin Books.

ʿUlwān, al-Ḥabīb Muḥammad (1994) *Muḥāwalah fī fahm riwāyat 'al-Sudd'* (An Attempt to Understand the Play 'The Dam'), 4th edn, Tunis: Dār Būslāma.

Valdes Moses, Michael (1995) *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Von Grunebaum, G. E. (1962) *Modern Islam: the search for cultural identity*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Al-Wahaybī, Munṣif (1981) 'Al-ʾishrāqāt al-ṣūfiyya wa al-ʾiḥtifāl bi Allah fī "Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl…"' (Sufi Illuminations and the Celebration of God in Ḥaddatha Abū Hurayra qāl..), *al-Ḥayāt al-thaqāfiyya*: 23–28.

Williams, Patrick and Laura Chrisman, eds. (1994) *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: a reader*, New York: Columbia U.P.

Yūsuf, ʾUlfa and ʿĀdil Khadhr (1994) *Buḥūth fī khiṭāb* al-Sudd *al-masraḥī* (Studies in the Dramatic Discourse of *al-Sudd*), Tunis: Maṭbaʿat al-ittiḥād.

Al-Zubayr, Muḥammad M. (1993) *Ishkāliyyat al-hayākil al-fanniyah wa dalālatuha fī al-Sudd wa qiṣaṣ al-Masʿadī* (The Issue of Artistic Forms in 'The Dam' and in al-Masʿadī's Stories), vol. 1, Tunis: Muʾassasat Abū Wijdān.

INDEX