2. Beginnings as Cultural Novelties: Intertexts and Discursive Affinities

How can one locate the beginning of the particular Anglophone Arab cultural sphere that this study seeks to explore? Can one at all designate such a single point zero or point of departure for the complex representational dynamics at stake? Should one really try to isolate any particular moment in time or any individual work retrospectively? Given the many historical ruptures, suppressed histories, and counter-memories, cultural discontinuities and ahistorical absurdities, self-totalizing truth claims, non-senses, and counter-knowledges that have molested Anglophone Arab representations and that have formed and informed these representations' particular non-essentialist quality, it seems rather misleading to raise the question of originality as a beginning question. However, in order to understand these cultural articulations as decentered responses to the crisis of presumably clearly located origins, linear filiations, unquestioned authenticities, and universal authorities, one cannot thoroughly avoid re-turning to at least some semi-inaugural works, quasi-initiating starting points, or decisive stop-overs. If one seriously wants to treat Anglophone Arab representations as equally creative and critical interventions—as distinctive (re-)assemblings of texts, images, and narrative modes which are formed and performed under shifting socio-historical conditions—then one needs at least to acknowledge their plural beginnings. Without arguing for a logic of first steps from which a coherent cultural practice linearly develops and without evoking any clear transitivity or direct influence, this chapter designates selected literary beginnings as early and particularly innovative ways of making Anglophone Arab meaning. Neither does it aim at rediscovering or inventing a unique tradition nor does it claim to lay bare individual and collective agencies or to recapitulate the respective works' immediate worldly effects.

Such historical tracing of narrative directions of accomplishments in the Anglophone Arab production of difference—one might call these directions cultural novelties—will ultimately, if sometimes involuntarily, raise questions of contexts, and of by no means exclusively Anglophone inter-texts. Moreover, it will evoke considerations of authorship and authority or trigger perspectives on genres, generations, influences, translations, and disseminations. The discovery of insights with regard

to these aspects is not my primary purpose. However, since the endeavor of locating Anglophone Arab beginnings as acts of *différance* is closely related to the problem of discursivity and competing notions of criticism,[1] the following discussion necessarily involves historical, theoretical, and practical issues in equal measure. While my interest in Anglophone Arab beginnings is somehow paradoxically the result of not believing that any singular origin can be located, the rationale for the quasi-substitutional undertaking presented here derives from the attempt to place both this study's main subject matter and my own ways of reading within the historical conditions of their mutual appearance. By connecting cultural representation and its critique to the sociopolitical discourses around both practices of which they are a part, I try to unite my own critical intention with a method.[2] If the practical need of naming beginnings at the same time opens possibilities of theoretically (re-)framing and allegorically (re-)reading or even strategically misreading Anglophone Arab representations (early and contemporary ones alike) with a necessary portion of selective blindness and critical insight,[3] then this chapter has more than fulfilled its initial function.

2.1 Pulling Apart or Pushing Together: Relations of Alterity and Critical Instrumentality

Of course, there have been entextualizations of Anglo-Arab encounters long before 'Abd al-Rahman Munif set out to find a literary expression for the American-Arab oil encounter of the 20th century. And one can certainly find examples of similar textual encodings produced much earlier than the temporal setting of Munif's narrative encounters suggests. Most literary and cultural critics—Arab and Western

1 This question is at the core of Edward W. Said's still underestimated and, within postcolonial criticism, all-too-often neglected study, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia UP; Basic Books, 1975). Said's important theoretical study must surely have fed into my own approach, here and beyond, more than surreptitiously. I will elaborate on my by no means unconditional affiliation to Said's criticism in a later section of this study. For a detailed discussion of *Beginnings* and its importance for the cross-cultural genesis and impact of Said's oeuvre, see my *Kulturkritik ohne Zentrum. Edward W. Said und die Kontrapunkte kritischer Dekolonisation* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008) 98-118.

2 Said, *Beginnings* 380.

3 On the use of the concept of allegory as a reading strategy (a way of reading and interpretation that self-critically takes into consideration competing assertions of truth or falsehood linked to specific modes of figuration), see Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays on the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1971) and Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979). See also, on the notion of misreading or literary misprision related to the reader's specific location, Harald Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973).

alike—would actually argue that the emergence of modern Arab culture in general and the rise of the Arabic novel in particular are to a large extent determined by the encounter with non-Arab conceptions of (literary) modernity. According to these scholars' unidirectional teleology, early novelistic writing in Arabic was essentially a late 19th century derivative from Europe. Following their literary historiography, it was only with the 1913 publication of Muhammad Husayn Haykal's *Zaynab* that Arab writers started to produce *real* Arabic novels, thus arriving at the stage of its self-realization as a properly national genre.[4]

For the purpose of my study, I see no need to discuss the misleading question of whether the Arabic novel must be seen as an intrinsically Western genre imported into Arab narrative culture. In my view, not only does such a question risk simplifying the dynamic process of acculturation and transculturation but it is also grounded in an organizational and interpretive system of national literatures produced by writers who can be clearly identified as national subjects. The tentative questioning already takes for granted the very conventional colonial-nationalist ideology of cultural belonging, which is radically questioned in many Anglophone Arab representations and in this study.[5] As manifest, for instance, in the autobiographies of the Egyptian icon of modern Arab literature and criticism, Taha Hussein,[6] early modern literary articulations in Arabic draw directly from the simultaneous experience of discrepant modernities. However, they cannot be grasped as a one-way process of imitating incorporation. Sure, early modern Arab articulations have often been formed between competing epistemological, ideological, and linguistic worlds—worlds that seemed to pull those seeking to articulate themselves in equally different directions. However, Hussein's work illustrates how the often unbearable challenge of seemingly splitting identities within de facto increasingly overlapping worlds at the same time triggered a complex transgression of learned

4 See the influential essay by H. A. R. Gibb, "Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 7.1 (1933): 1-22. For more recent discussions, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *The Arab Rediscovery of Europe: A Study in Cultural Encounters* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1963); Issa J. Boullata, *Critical Perspectives on Modern Arab Literature* (Washington: Three Continents, 1980); Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse* (London: Saqi, 1993); Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel. An Historical and Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (1982; Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1995).

5 For an alternative poststructuralist tracing of Arab (literary) modernity and the critique of the dominant derivative thesis with a particular focus on the often neglected or devaluated popular fiction, see Samah Selim, "The Nahdah, Popular Fiction and the Politics of Translation," *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (2004): 71-89.

6 Taha Hussein, *Al-Ayam*, 1-3 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1982); *The Days*, trans. E. H. Paxton, Hilary Wayment, and Kenneth Cragg, 2nd ed. (Cairo: AUC P, 2000).

boundaries of thought and narrative practice that was decisively more than just the result of any unidirectional cultural adaptation.[7]

As Radwa Ashour's 2003 allegorical-historical novel, *Qit'a min Urubba: Riwayya* (A Part of Europe: A Novel),[8] impressively testifies by fictionally tracing Cairo and Egypt's relationship to Europe, the historical quest of Arab modernity was concerned very early on with the question of whether or not and—if so—how to emulate Western models of modernization without affirming these models' colonial-orientalist aspirations. In fact, since at least the early 19th century, such a search for a distinctive Arab modernity based on the selective appropriation of European science and technology was at the core of the Arab *Nahda*, the literary and cultural discourse of the so-called Arab renaissance in what Albert Hourani coined the *Liberal Age*.[9] Rifa'a at-Tahtawi's inaugural publication of the reformist movement, *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz*,[10] already proved the importance of educational travels to Europe and translations from European writings for Arab intellectuals. Drawing on his four-year stay in France as the religious head of a group of young Egyptian scholars sent to study in Paris by Mohammad 'Ali, the 1834 publication offers a transgeneric mix of travel account, memoir, and social anthropological treatise. The book's topical framework ranges from descriptions of everyday Parisian life and a detailed analysis of the French educational system to the critique of the host country's political (dis-)order, including the events of the revolution of July 1830. The French writers directly addressed in this seminal *Nahda*-text include Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau. After his return to Egypt, at-Tahtawi would advance to an eminent Arabic translator of French technological, historical, political, and legalistic works, including the Code Napoléon.[11]

In the context of my discussion, Jamal Ad-Din al-Afghani's later exilic voyage into the center of Western learning has quite a different and even more paradigmatic quality. His critical response to Ernest Renan's 1883 lecture, "L'Islamisme et

7 Hussein, *The Days* 232; on Hussein's autobiographical writing, see Fedwa Multi-Douglas, *Blindness & Autobiography: Al-Ayām of Tāhā Ḥussain* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988) as well as Ed de Moor, "Autobiography, Theory and Practice: the Case of Al-Ayyām," *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor, and Stefan Wild (London: Saqi, 1998) 128-38. On Hussein's criticism, see Louay M. Safi, *The Challenge of Modernity. The Quest of Authenticity in the Arab World* (Lanham, MD: UP of America 1994).

8 Radwa Ashour, *Qit'a min Urubba* (Cairo: Dar ash-Shouruq, 2003).

9 Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (London: Oxford UP, 1962).

10 Rifa'a at-Tahtawi, *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Baris aw al-Diwan al-Nafis bi-Iwan Baris* (1834; Beirut: Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirasat wal-Nashr, 2002). The title translates as: The extrication of gold in summarizing Paris, or the valuable collection in the drawing room of Paris. For an annotated English translation, see Daniel L. Newman, *Rifā'ah Rāfi' Ṭahṭāwī. An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826–1831)* (London: Saqi, 2004).

11 Muhammad Hijazi, ed., *Usul al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Hadith 'inda at-Tahtawi – Tahtawi and the Roots of Modern Arab Thought* (Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-Misriya al-'Ala lil-Kitab, 1974).

la science," appeared in Sorbonne University's prestigious *Journal des débats*.[12] The pan-Islamic modernist, anti-colonial theorist, and transnational public intellectual was particularly upset by the prominent French Orientalist's Eurocentric notion of a transhistorical *homo islamicus* who is by definition incapable of rational scientific thinking. In his short open letter, Al-Afghani frankly accused Renan of reducing the long and diverse history of Islamic thinking to a quasi-biological essence and thus constructing an image of Arabs and Muslims who, due to their intrinsic lack of rationality, are cursed to stagnate in backwardness unless they are liberated by the germ of Western reason. Afghani's broadly received refutation of Renan's colonialist-racist argument probably marks the first dissenting intervention by a Middle Eastern intellectual into the until then almost completely self-referential discourse of European Orientalism. What is significant about the Arab critic's critique in the context of my study is that Afghani intervenes from within (and in the language of) that very discourse.[13]

Given the increased prominence of the British as a major colonial power in the Middle East since the early 19th century and the growing US-American involvement in the region during the 20th and 21st centuries, it does not come as a surprise that, within the debates on Arab modernity and cross-cultural contacts, the English-speaking world, too, was (and is so to this day) a particularly important point of reference. The early modern period, when England laid the groundwork for its global empire, already offers a wide range of economic, political, and cultural contacts and forms of coexistence between Arabs and Britons. In fact, Arabs and other Muslims "represented the most widely visible non-Christian people on English soil in this period."[14] At the time of Queen Elizabeth I's government, Britain had very close relations with both the Ottoman Empire and various North African states, whether this took the form of Ottoman ambassadors visiting London and Arab merchants coming to Dover or of British privateers shipping off the coast of Tangier and English merchants held in captivity in Algiers. Although these early encounters surely must have fed into inner-Arab and diasporic Arab representations of cultural otherness and cross-cultural contact both in Arabic and the English language, the available sources consist chiefly of accounts of ambassadors and royal

12 Renan's Sorbonne lecture, *L'Islamisme et la science*, has been translated by Sally P. Ragep as *Islam and Science: A Lecture Presented at La Sorbonne 29 March 1883 by Ernest Renan, 2nd Edition* (Montréal: McGill U, 2011). For Afghani's Renan critique, see Nikki R. Keddie, "Response of Jamal al-Din to Renan," *An Islamic Response to Imperialism. Political and Religious Writings of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani*, by Nikki R. Keddie, new ed. (1968; Berkeley: U of California P, 1983) 181-89.

13 Nikki R. Keddie, "Afghānī, Jamāl al-Dīn (1838–1897)," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Science, and Technology in Islam*, Vol. 1, ed. Ibrahim Kalin (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014) 9-14.

14 Nabil I. Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999) 3.

scribes, official reports of historical events like Christian invasions or Muslim captivity in Christendom, as well as early geographical studies and travelogues. More recent microhistorical subaltern studies of Arab-European encounters show that the Arabic-speaking communities of North Africa had already formed a non-elite multi-vocal narrative of the Europeans from the late 16th century onwards. Yet, early modern Arab representations of the West remained by far narrower in scope than Western representations of the Arab world.[15]

While early modern British cultural production ranged from translations of Arabic religious, alchemic, astronomic, and philosophical texts to Christian anti-Muslim polemics and eschatological fantasy or Renaissance plays dealing with Arabs and Muslims and Euro-Arab exchanges, there is hardly any fictional representation of cross-cultural encounters by Arab writers in English before the early 20th century.[16] One would indeed have to undertake a separate archival study of Arab diplomatic history and Arab popular accounts to trace the perspectives of those who from the early 16th century onward began to be categorized as barbarians by British and other European writers alongside the natives of North America so that "by the end of the seventeenth century the Muslim 'savage' and the Indian 'savage' became completely superimposable in English thought and ideology."[17] Indeed, the records and writings of Britons who spent time in North African captivity before arriving in what they called New England have been retrospectively incorporated into early American national narratives as quasi proto-national texts.[18] Such imaginative superimposing of distant Anglo-Arab encounters onto the new world's narrative topography would be supplemented after American independence in 1776 by first hand-experiences of life in so-called Arab Barbary captivity or the related Barbary Wars, such as the Tripolitan War (1801–1805) or the war of Algiers (1815–1816), as well as by the cultural incorporation of those experiences into the national archive.[19] What is however rarely acknowledged in debates about Arab-American migrations is that Arabic-speaking Africans arrived

15 Nabil I. Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes, 1578–1727* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009) 3-28.

16 For the early modern representation of Islam and the Muslim-British encounter in English, see Nabil I. Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) as well as Geoffrey Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London: Continuum, 2012); for the representation of Europe in the Arabic letters and accounts of Arab travelers, captives, and diplomatic chroniclers, see Nabil I. Matar, ed. and trans., *In the Lands of Christians: Arabic Travel Writing in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003) and Matar, *Europe through Arab Eyes, 1578–1727*.

17 Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* 155.

18 Nicole Waller, *American Encounters with Islam in the Atlantic World* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2011) 45-130.

19 Waller, *American Encounters with Islam in the Atlantic World* 131-70.

in both Americas long before the late 19th century Arab immigration from the provinces of the Ottoman empire.[20]

My study cannot possibly cover Arab representations of Europe, the US, and Australia in the *longue durée*. It will only address the enormous corpus of 20th and 21st century literary fiction and artistic production in Arabic, dealing with the so-called East-West encounter very selectively.[21] Particularly the hidden (non-public and/or non-canonized) dispositive of this encounter is much more complex than one would expect. Recent archival discoveries demonstrate that there is still a vast archive of forgotten Arabic popular literary texts, polemics, and pamphlets on the Anglo-Arab encounter that might allow rethinking 19th century Arab literary history in its relation to Western literature and questioning the basic binary premise of the European origin of Arab modernity. Again, my study does not aim at contributing to the ongoing scholarly debate on the historical formation of modern novelistic writing in Arabic. It does not ask when the genre emerged in the Arabic language.[22] What my readings nevertheless have in common with recent attempts to critically revisit and transgress the Western-Orientalist and Arab-nationalist literary canon of Arab modernity is the interest in cultural representations that are bypassing or mutilating these canons' equally essentialist conceptualizations of subjectivity. Of course, such shared interest alone does not allow for the formulation of comparative narrative morphologies between early Arabic popular fiction and early Anglophone Arab writing. But it seems to me to be a necessary prerequisite for any transnational interpretation of Anglophone Arab/Arabic beginnings that seeks to disrupt the institutional and moral conventions of West-Eastern representational accountability. Whereas I will show that some Anglophone Arab works indeed participate in the real or fictional re-discovery and reinterpretation of lost and forgotten or excluded archives that elude simple cultural locations, I myself did not go to the national libraries of Egypt and Lebanon or to the rare books collections of the regions' universities to search for such subaltern Arabic or English documents. Nor was it my aim to comprehensively trace the flourishing of Anglophone Orientalist portrayals of Arabs and Anglo-Arab encounters in Western visual arts and litera-

20 See Michael Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005).

21 Rasheed El-Enany, *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

22 See, for instance, Samah Selim, "The Nahdah, Popular Fiction and the Politics of Translation," *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (2004): 71-89 and Rebecca C. Johnson, "Importing the novel. Arabic literature's forgotten foreign objects," *On the Ground: New Directions in Middle East and North African Studies*, ed. Brian T. Edwards (Northwestern U in Qatar, 2015) n. pag. <http://ontheground.qatar.northwestern.edu/uncategorized/chapter-7-importing-the-novel-arabic-literatures-foreign-objects/>.

ture, travel accounts, plays, ethnographies, histories, or political rhetoric since the 18th century.

While early Arab discourses of alterity and notably early Arab articulations of diasporic experiences must still be seen as a severely understudied and at best emergent field, the bi-directional nexus between modern Western representations of Arabs and the execution of imperial power has been extensively explored by scholars of diverse disciplinary backgrounds.[23] For the purpose of my study, Western Orientalist texts or images and Arab Occidentalist representations naturally make up an important, almost trans-historic matrix of overlapping (mis-)representations within and against which many of the more recent Anglophone-Arab articulations (still have to) position themselves. When directly indicated in an individual work and if necessary for my argument, the respective narrative pixels of this broader discursive formation will be selectively referred to in the following chapters.

At this point, however, my search for beginnings and intertextualities within 20th century Anglophone literary articulations of cross-cultural Arab trajectories is primarily directed at self-positionings and narrative strategies that cannot be easily classified by a clear-cut Orientalist/Occidentalist binary or exhaustively explained by the legacies of British colonialism and American imperialism or the resistance to them. Such multidirectional tracing of discursive and narrative conjunctures does not always do justice to an individual representation's explicitly proclaimed or performed referential system, and it will rarely allow organizing the discussed works according to culturally and linguistically specific traditions or the geographic spaces of their historical genesis. But it does serve my own interpretive intention. It goes without saying that the manifest language(-traditions) and the local contexts in which an Anglophone Arab work is produced are of analytical importance. And no one will seriously question the impact of the individual cultural producer's identification, both in terms of externally constructed, negated, or chosen ethnicity and with a view to her or his political location within real or imagined collectivities. It is, however, my argument that by solely focusing on these aspects, one would not only underestimate the very translocal, transhistorical, and translinguistic (or translational) correlations that these works inform but, in addition, one would also

23 For a selective overview, see Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East. The History and Politics of Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2010); Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *Literary Orientalism: A Companion* (New Delhi: Viva, 2009) and Geoffrey Nash, *Writing Muslim Identity* (London: Continuum, 2012). Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch P, 2001); Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter, eds., *Imperialism and Orientalism: A Documentary Sourcebook* (Walden, MA: Blackwell, 1999). The relevance of Said's seminal *Orientalism* (1978) as well as of his *Covering Islam* (1981) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) for this field of studies is obvious.

neglect one's own responsibility for responding by transposing their reference systems.[24]

I count it as the privilege of my own interpretive positionality, although I of course do not (fully) account for myself, that I do not feel the need to claim Anglophone Arab representation either for Arab (diasporic) culture or for Anglo-American (immigrant) culture. Nor do I see any reason to firmly place my study's subject matter as a clearly assigned and commonly recognized branch into one of the institutionalized academic fields of Middle Eastern Studies or Arab American or Arab British Studies. Yet, although I can imagine myself not to be the primarily implied reader of the cultural texts that I am reading and thus not as their primarily liable critic, I do not refuse to relate to these representations. In making sense of what is written, spoken, or performed, no one can fully escape from assuming such articulations to be destined for oneself. Hence, while I do *identify* with Anglophone Arab texts and images, I do so as an implied reader/gazer of a second order. I hope such worldly-cum-theoretically inspired self-degradation will allow for other ways of being *seduced* by Anglophone Arab representations and for other responses than the academically established ones.

While my resonating with these representations hardly contributes to their conclusive relexicalization and commodification as signs of clear belonging or definite non-belonging, it helps to transgress my own inherited interpretive reference system and to test out alternative possibilities of complicity without the complacency of clear filiation. By doing so, I hope to contribute to an amplified relational approach to Arab diasporic studies that transcends both the analytical frameworks of national culture, linguistic belonging, and ethnic identity as well as the neatly allocation of disciplinary expertise.[25]

I'd like to think that such testing out of alliances across difference and disciplines is one of the key functions of comparative literary and cultural criticism today: a critical project that is only conditionally an ethical undertaking—one that does not hesitate to question the conventional notion of a firmly located reading

24 I am referring here to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's vision of reading responsibility. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Readings* (London: Seagull, 2014).

25 Such a relational approach is directly inspired by Ella Shohat's ongoing re-conceptualization of Middle Eastern/Arab Diasporic Studies. See, for instance, Ella Shohat, "Columbus, Palestine, and Arab-Jews: Toward a Relational Approach to Community Identity," *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, eds. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Benita Parry, and Judith Squires (New York: St. Martin's P, 1997) 88-105, and her more recent "The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic. Between Orientalism and Occidentalism," *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*, eds. Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2013) 42-62. See also Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat, "The Cultural Politics of 'the Middle East' in the Americas," *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora* 3-41, here particularly 17-25.

ego and that willingly takes the risk of becoming an almost transvestite project.[26] Such a project cannot but trust in the principle human capacity of leaving behind the straightjackets of reasoning, which conventionally define us and which we are used to defining for ourselves. It necessarily presupposes an altered identity politics of cultural interpretation and maybe a new ethics of reading. It resists ending up as a self-serving dead end because it is not only contrapuntally aware of its inherited reading positionality and learned perceptional certainties but it also knows its own transitive interests, abstracting instrumentality, and inevitable contradictions. If such criticism claims to read identities without neglecting differences and particularities, it obviously risks an accusation of naïve exoticism, decadent Orientalism, or even moral hypocrisy. However, cultural critique understood in this post-moralistic way is more concerned with the practical substitution of interpretive paradigms of dominant identifications than with re-writing identities or returning to(wards) authentic origins. At the same time, to look contrapuntally at Anglophone Arab beginnings as Arabs (by choice) and Westerners (by choice)[27] necessitates the obvious: to critically watch ourselves looking while being aware of the political ambivalence of the very assertion of becoming someone else.[28] I will illustrate what I have in mind here by closely re-reading a fictional narrative that is regularly presented as marking the birth of the Anglophone Arab novel. I will read this narrative not only for the sake of fully grasping its equally innovative and paradigmatic quality for the formation of the Anglophone Arab cultural sphere but also in order to use it as a vehicle to revisit other beginnings, intertexts, and discursive precedents of importance for my study.

26 Here I refer to Kamal Abu Deeb's understanding of critical reading as an equally transitive and transvestite act; see my "Re-Reading Said in Arabic: (Other)Worldly Counterpoints," *Edward Said's Translocations: Essays in Secular Criticism*, eds. Tobias Döring and Mark Stein (London: Routledge, 2012) 101-102.

27 On the notion of (reading-)identity by choice, see Edward W. Said, "By Birth or by Choice?" *Al-Ahram Weekly* Oct. 28–Nov. 3, 1999: 13 and Schmitz, "Re-Reading Said in Arabic: (Other)Worldly Counterpoints," 101-102 and 107.

28 I do well remember being interviewed during the final stage of an application procedure for the postdoctoral fellowship of a well-known private German research foundation when one member on the selection committee suddenly asked me to elaborate on my research project's ultimate relevance for Germany and its particular Germanness. I was shocked then (call it naive if you want) by the blatantly enunciated demand of a national(ist) added value promised by any project to be founded by the Volks(Wagen)Foundation; I guess this paragraph would have been a possible strategic response, if not a responsible one.