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Foreword

TERESA PEPE and STEPHAN GUTH

This volume describes a number of tendencies that seem to crystallise in, and emerge from the study of, Arabic literary production written in the aftermath of the 2011 political uprisings. Most of the contributions included in this volume were discussed at the EURAMAL meeting that was held at the University of Oslo in May 2016, whose general theme was "Upholding Humanity in a Posthuman World." Under this title the contributors sought to explore the various ways Arab authors react to a reality that is dramatically changing since the so-called 'Arab Spring' and that seems to be characterised, on one hand, by technological and scientific advancement, and on the other, by a violent return to the primordial, the "savage" (EL-ARISS 2017).[1]

Five years after the uprisings, Arab societies have been widely transformed by the adoption of digital media and technologies and the demise of previous dictatorial regimes. However, the same tech-savvy youth who had been leading street protests in the cities of Cairo, Tunis and Damascus, are now taken to prison by the newly appointed regimes for publishing a Tweet criticizing the government, and subjected to brutal violations of human rights. The modern nation states of Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya, founded in the late 19th/early 20th century, are now disintegrating, witnessing the rise of tribal and sectarian communities and with it an abandonment of the idea of creating a better, more humane world for the larger national community. The videos showing IS fighters beheading innocent victims in the name of religion seem to take the Arab world back to a distant past, contrasting the long-standing effort of Arabic intellectuals to build progress and civilisation. Likewise, Bashar al-Assad's killings of thousands of Syrians in Ghouta in 2013 by the dropping of chemical weapons, or General El-Sisi's ordering of the Rabaa massacre in 2013, where thousands of followers of the Muslim Brotherhood were killed, evidenced the cruelty and inhumanity witnessed in these countries. The fact that the rest of the world watched without intervening added an extra layer of discomfort. It is highly significant that in 2014 the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) was awarded to Aḥmad Saʿdāwī's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, while the prize had so far privileged realist narratives. Borrowing Shelley's image of Frankenstein and staging a monstrous creature whose body is a patchwork of dead bodies collected in Baghdad, the novel displays a world wherein conflict, social instability, and political collapse all seem to be pointing to a new definition of the community where the human has lost its central place, and in which mankind no longer controls its own destiny.

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1   El-ARISS's claim is inpired by the Saudi critic ʿAbd Allāh al-GHADHDHĀMĪ's reading of Arabic literary history as outlined in his book *al-Qabīlah waʾl-qabāʾiliyyah, aw, huwiyyāt mā baʿd al-ḥadāthah* (Tribe and Tribalism: Postmodern Identities), 2nd ed. (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2009), 11.

For this reason, we have decided to analyse this literary production in terms of a new trend in Arabic literary history that could be labelled the 'posthuman'. In this way we intend to connect contemporary Arabic literary production to a global literary wave that has been widely debated in academia in recent years. At the same time, we aim to investigate the specific features that posthuman(ism) acquires in the Arabic literary realm.

Posthuman(ism) comprises responses by writers, artists and scholars to the general awareness that, following technological advancement and ecological transformations, we have transitioned in an age in which the human (as we have known it and conceptualised it for the last five hundred years) has lost its central place in the world, and is now but one life form among many (CLARKE & ROSSINI 2017: xiii). The term 'posthumanism' was first coined by the postmodern theorist Ihab Hassan in an article entitled "Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture" (HASSAN 1977). Later, scholars like Donna HARAWAY, Rosi BRAIDOTTI, Katherine HAYLES, and Bruno LATOUR have contributed to the validation of the term, making explicit the intimate relations between scientific and technological production, advanced capitalism, and human/nonhuman hybridity. So far, the discussion has remained limited mainly to Western academia, leaving open the question whether posthumanism is experienced and debated also in other parts of the world. This volume is the first to explore posthumanism in Arabic, with a focus on contemporary literary production.

The discussion concerning posthumanism takes its stance from a critique of traditional humanism, and above all, its focus on the human subject as the "image of man as a rational animal endowed with language" (BRAIDOTTI 2013: 143). Donna HARAWAY (1991) has been a key figure in exploring the limits of this definition by exploring the continuum machine–human–animal. She presented the cyborg as a contemporary cultural metaphor able to depict the ambivalent condition of contemporary human beings whose bodies are open to forms of technological modification and intervention. Katherine HAYLES (1999) has further theorised the relationship between human and technology, pointing out that machines are not just instruments, but have turned into extensions of the human body. While previous studies concerning digital technologies tended to oppose the physicality of the body *vs.* the virtuality of the Internet, Hayles pointed to the "materiality of informatics." The digital realm is material in the same ways as earlier forms of communication. A computer is an artefact with which the user interacts through various physical mediations: the keyboard, the mouse, the monitor. An example of that in the Arabic realm are the so-called "digital committees" (*lijān iliktrūniyyah*), steered by the military regime in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, constituted of real people managing fake social media accounts to spread propaganda for the regime and identify potential oppositionists (ISMĀʿĪL 2018).

Haraway and other posthumanists have also been concerned with the blurring of another boundary: the one between humans and animals, i.e., non-humans. Posthumanist writers of various backgrounds have increasingly come to treat animal rights as a serious philosophical and socio-political issue, contributing to the growing academic field of animal rights and environmental studies. The growing number of studies on environmental issues continues to occupy only a small corner of Middle East Studies, compared to the expected violent impact of climate change in the region (LAWSON 2019). Therefore, there is a pressing need to incorporate these theories in the field of Middle East Studies.

Finally, Rosi BRAIDOTTI has explored the institutional consequences of posthumanism. The practices and assumptions of humanism have governed for hundreds of years universities and the curricula of national academies and been supported by various forms of private and public funding. Thus, the future of humanism becomes a question of the future of the humanities, particularly in the contemporary university. In her book entitled *The Posthuman* (2013), Braidotti proposes a complete reconfiguration of the humanities: to privilege an interdisciplinary approach, one that can cut across the humanities and social sciences. The question of how literary studies will be transformed in a posthuman academy has already prompted some discussions. It is of importance also with regard to Arabic Studies.

In literary studies, the term 'posthuman' is usually applied to refer to "images and figurations in literary and cultural production, in various genres and periods, of status that lie before, beyond or after the human, or into which the human blurs when viewed in its essential hybridity" (CLARKE & ROSSINI 2017: xiii). In his article "The Posthuman Comedy" (2012), Mark McGurl uses the term to designate a number of literary works in which "scientific knowledge of the spatio-temporal vastness and numerousness of the non-human world becomes visible as a formal, representational and existential problem" (MCGURL 2012: 538). The authors of the *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (2017) show that literature has a long tradition of exploring the boundaries of human nature and consciousness. Images of posthumans, like premodern animals, gods, angels, or monsters, have inhabited literary production since its very beginnings, and have been increasingly expelled from humanist modernity during the Renaissance and age of Enlightenment, in order to keep the human "more human" (xv). This is true for the Arabic literary tradition as well. The *Arabian Nights*, which date back to the Middle Ages, feature a wide range of non-human figures, like djinn, mermaids, talking serpents, talking trees, as well as mummified queens, petrified inhabitants, and lifelike humanoid robots (PINAULT 1992: 217-219). However, there is no doubt that these images have undergone a boom in contemporary global cultural production, evidencing the fact that the posthuman is now fully part of our current imaginary.

Currently, it seems that the 'posthuman' is increasingly cultivated in literary forms that high humanist taste once used to deride in forms of genre fiction (science fiction, crime fiction, horror fiction, etc. – MCGURL 2012). For example, the image of the cyborg in which a cybernetic or computational technology is interwoven to form an organic body, is thriving in science fiction novels and movies or cyberpunk literature. As most of the contributions in this volume show, genre fiction has boomed in Arabic literature of the post-'Arab Spring' phase as well. Authors experiment with a writing of a new quality, breaking down codes and inventing new ones, exploiting the techniques of crime fiction and imagining future worlds in monstrous science fiction scenarios, and in this way subverting the master narratives that had governed the Arab world ever since the 19th / early 20th century Arab 'renaissance' (*nahḍah*) and the corresponding humanist project as a failed utopia.

Contemporary Arabic literature can be 'posthuman' in several ways, and it is the task of the present volume to explore what the many notions of 'posthumanism' in the Arabic context. While this exploration will take place mainly in the sections titled SUBVERSION I–IV, the volume's first section, THE PRESENT AND THE PAST, give due attention to the fact that the diagnosis of a 'posthuman' condition is often accompanied by a comparison of the present with the past (and the supposedly humanist tradition of the *Nahḍah* project). As Abulrazzak

Patel argues in his book *The Arab Nahdah: The Making of the Intellectual and Humanist Movement*, the *Nahḍah* was a period of social and cultural reform in the 19th / early 20th century in which Arab intellectuals, both secular and religious, laid the basis for a humanistic project, as a revival of *studia humanitatis*, comprising a well-defined range of disciplines such as grammar, rhetorics, poetry, history, and moral philosophy (PATEL 2013: 6). This humanist project incorporated elements from both European Renaissance and the medieval Islamic tradition of *'adab* humanism (ibid.: 7). In the first chapter of this volume, entitled "The End of the Nahḍah?", Roger ALLEN discusses whether the project of enlightenment and modernity of the *Nahḍah* has definitely come to an end, or whether it is a legacy which still can be preserved and/or reactivated. Allen explores this issue by questioning the notion of '*nahḍah*' itself as a term signifying a specific period in Arabic literary history. Within the complexities of the post-2011 context the essay asks how many '*nahḍah*s' there may have been (invoking the ideas of, among others, 'Abdallāh al-'Arwī/Laroui) before advocating a different approach to the study and categorisation of the 'modern' in the context of Arabic literary history.

Significantly, also literary texts take up the discussion, outlined above, of what remains of the modernist/humanist project. In his chapter, "The Past in the Present—and the Future!", Stephan GUTH analyses a number of novels, short- or longlisted by IPAF, to detect how the past is increasingly becoming relevant for an assessment and explanation of the present as well as for the fathoming of chances of future improvement. He shows that, at times, the past comes along as something hidden that must be revealed to overcome a trauma; at others, it continues to haunt the protagonists who are unable to get rid of it; very often, it is used to evoke the 'good old days' or simply to point out repetition and/or continuity with the present reality; most often, however, authors turn to the past as the period that produced the 'posthuman' present. In some cases, though, a 'digging' in the past also produces some elements that seem to be worth preserving, or provide a guideline for how to save the human from being dehumanised in the posthuman present.

In a similar vein, Paul STARKEY's chapter, "Resurrecting the Caliphate: Youssef Rakha and the Collapse of the Ottoman State," discusses Yūsuf Rakhā's ground-breaking novel *Kitāb al-Ṭughrā* (2011), which, in part at least, can be read as an exploration of the Ottoman contribution to the make-up of the contemporary Arab world. The chapter examines the role played by the resurrected Mehmet VI Vahdettin in Rakha's novel and discusses the contribution made by the 'Ottoman strand' to Rakha's vision of the contemporary Arab scene. The novel presents a portrait of a disintegrating city (Cairo) that mirrors the collapse of the hero's own personal life, following his divorce. This dystopic, 'posthuman' image of Cairo is linked to the aggressively secular orientation of Kemalism and its complete identification with Europe that eventually gave rise to Islamism. Significantly, the novel seems to predict the establishing of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria that took place in 2014, suggesting, ultimately, that the tensions in present day life could be a long-time consequence of fatal mistakes made in the past.

The link between the past and contemporary posthuman representations is also evident in Martina CENSI's chapter "*Ṭābiq 99* (2014) by Janā Fawwāz al-Ḥasan: Revolutionary Love, Identity and Humanity." The study explores Love as a possibility to overcome/defeat the problems connected to migration and, more generally, to uphold humanity in an un-/ posthuman world. In this novel, the author narrates a love story between a young Palestinian man

and a young Lebanese woman who met in New York in 2000. Themes of diaspora, identity, love and violence are at the core of this novel and they are analysed through two migrant protagonists. They try to escape History, which is a history of guilt (where there only are victims and culprits) and the (posthuman) logic of violence, by creating a transnational, in-between identity where only the human being matters, not its national/social/ political affiliation.

The following sections of the volume show that Arabic literature in the posthuman age not only searches for explanations of the 'posthuman' present in the past but that it also is eager to resist and/or counter the processes of de-humanisation that are observable everywhere. To do this, and in this way uphold humanity, preserve or create niches for the human being, they apply various techniques of subverting the aesthetic rules that governed previous discourses. Examples of one of these techniques are discussed in the first section, entitled SUBVERSION I: CONTESTED SPACES. The section shows that subversion may entail a contestation of those borders and margins, both physical and metaphorical, that make the world 'posthuman.' For instance, in "Changing Spaces: Space and Place in the novel *Confusing the Stork*, by Palestinian writer Akram Musallam," Dorit GOTTESFELD focuses on the novel *Iltabasa 'l-amr ʿalà 'l-laqlaq* (Confusing the Stork, 2013) by the Palestinian author Akram Musallam, while dealing with the issue of Palestinian space as a geopolitical, social, cultural, and personal space. Gottesfeld's contribution shows how, by using confused descriptions, and distortion of time, place, and space, the novel sheds light on the ongoing destructive, dehumanising effect of the shape of space on the human psyche. By using subversive writing that employs special motifs, original imagery, linguistic sophistication, and disparaging irony, the novel reveals traditional spaces that vacate the arena and make room for subversive spaces, creating a kind of liberating discourse, which may become a foundation for raising awareness and a kind of a vision of an alternative, more humane reality.

Moving to linguistic space and the hierarchies governing it, Eva Marie HÅLAND's "Voices in the novel: Ten yellow leather chairs" demonstrates how a novel can be used as a metaphorical space to experiment with subversive narrative styles that contest the traditional hegemony of *fuṣḥà* by mixing formal and informal styles of Arabic both in the narrative and dialogue. Håland analyses the rich variation of individualised language styles and voices in *ʿAsharat karāsī jild ṣafrāʾ* by Egyptian author Rashā Abū 'l-Saʿūd through Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia. It seems that the search for more 'natural' ways of speaking is part of contemporary Arab authors' quest for making more room for the human in a world in which humanity continues to be threatened by the persistence of dated hierarchical structures.

The last contribution of this section, Jonathan MORÉN's "Inverting the Stranger: Salīm Barakāt in the Land of the Living Dead," continues the discussion about contested spaces while at the same time anticipating some of the themes explored in the following section. Morén discusses the frequently recurring motif of the 'living dead' in the novels and poetry of the much-understudied Syrian-Kurdish writer Salīm Barakāt. This motif is used by Barakāt for completely different purposes in different works, sometimes to underscore an intimate connection between the (Kurdish) people and their territory, at other times serving to overthrow traditional modes of epistemology, but always expressing the author's fundamental assumption that everything in the universe harbours life and consciousness. As far as space is concerned, Morén argues that Salīm Barakāt "steals Sweden and makes it his own invention,

he colonises it and transforms it, making it seem strange and foreign to the native Swedes" (p. 126) and in this way "creating a kind of subjective geography (and anthropology)" (p. 125). Thus, he attempts to 're-humanise' Sweden by reclaiming it as a 'home' also for non-Swedes.

The following two sections address the core argument of this volume, that is, how Arabic literature explores the boundaries between human and posthuman. Section SUBVERSION II, in particular, examines the booming genres of new Arabic SCIENCE FICTION AND DYSTOPIA. It is especially in these genres that Arab authors discuss the limits of the human nature while imagining different scenarios for the future.

The section opens with Ada BARBARO's contribution entitled "You'll Be Mine for Ever: The Human Longing for Eternal Life in a Novel That Explores the Future" that focuses on the novel "Love Outside the Cold" (*Ḥubb khārij al-bard*, 2010) by the Lebanese writer Kāmil Farḥān Ṣāliḥ (b. 1969). In an imaginary 2032, Beirut is destroyed by an earthquake. After this terrible event, scientific research about the human genome is developed in order to grant the human being a possibility to reach immortality, and therefore to become posthuman. The novel combines elements of science fiction with a story of desperate search for love in a destroyed Beirut, and a discussion of the dilemmas caused by bio-ethics. In addition, the novel deals with the incompatibility of contemporary man with the present, his dissent against the political system, thus proposing an original analysis of power. In general, the piece shows that contemporary writers are eager to explore the human 'quest for eternal life' (*al-khulūd*), for instance by resorting to the *elixir vitae* as well as to hibernation and reincarnation. The theme of immortality appears in many novels which are pivotal for the emergence of science fiction in Arabic literature, argues Barbaro.

Moving to Egypt but keeping the focus on future imaginations, Stephan MILICH's chapter "The Politics of Terror and Traumatisation: State Violence and Dehumanisation in Basma 'Abd al-'Azīz's *al-Ṭābūr*" inaugurates the discussion concerning the recent booming of dystopian narratives in Arabic literature written after the 'Arab Spring'. While examples of this genre could already be found earlier in the 20th century, the genre has been enriched, and 'posthumanised', by many other texts in the aftermath of the 'Arab Spring', as several contributions to this volume demonstrate. Milich discusses Basma 'Abd al-'Azīz's novel *al-Ṭābūr* as a sharp and depressing analysis of a society living under a totalitarian regime, informed by the psychiatric expertise of its author (a psychologist herself, engaged in the treatment of victims of torture and traumatised people in general). The novel stages the Kafkaesque metaphor, or rather metonymy, of a queue in which the members of this society have to arrange their 'posthuman' lives, always waiting and left without information about further proceedings; in the background of the novel, there is the SCAF government, but Milich draws on the analysis of the fascist state by Horkheimer and shows that the analysis is even more applicable to al-Sīsī's rule.

In "*Ḍarīḥ Abī* by Ṭāriq Imām: Dystopia and Fantasy-Folklore," Maria-Elena PANICONI studies a novel that was written during the Mursī period and can serve as an example of the recent dystopian production in Arabic fiction. She highlights the major tropes of the 'radical dystopia' of *My Father's Tomb* (2013), such as the quest for eternal life, the literary device of the manuscript, and the oneiric theme. Through these themes, the author suggests, the text recovers the Sufi tradition and the hagiography discourse, in a disturbing allegory of the contemporary political scene that couples the sacred with the execrable.

Teresa PEPE's chapter "Aḥmad Nāǧī's *Istikhdām al-ḥayāh* as a 'critical dystopia'" continues the analysis of the dystopian trend. The novel *Using Life* (2014) came to the centre of global debate when, in 2016, it brought the Egyptian author a two-year imprisonment on the charge of "violation of public morality." In this study, Nāǧī's novel is read as a work of 'critical dystopia,' that is, a work that offers a pessimistic vision of the future, but also leaves some hope for humanity. The glimpse of hope present in the novel derives from the open nature of the text as well as from the main protagonist's awareness that a useful knowledge of the present is rooted in the past. In this way, the chapter reconnects to the relation between PAST AND PRESENT explored in the first section of the volume.

Walaa' SAID's "Dystopianizing the 'Revolution': Mohammed Rabie's *Otared* (2014)" focuses on another novel that was recently (2016) shortlisted for the IPAF. The contribution shows that dystopian fiction in Egypt can function as a confrontational response to the utopian narratives of the 2011 Revolution. A close reading of Muḥammad Rabī''s *'Uṭārid* provides a unique chance to grasp the dramatic effect that the increase of violent death in Egypt since the 25ᵗʰ of January uprisings has had on the human being who is faced with it as an everyday phenomenon. The article explores the discourses of "de-realizing" the living (BUTLER 2006) and martyrizing the dead. Thus, this contribution introduces the theme on which the next section centres.

SUBVERSION III: COUNTERING/RESISTING FRAGMENTATION, DISPERSAL, LOSS, OBLIVION deals with representations of death and mourning in contemporary Arabic fiction as another variant of authors' reaction to the posthuman condition in the Arab World. It addresses, in particular, the question of reincarnation and immortality, a *topos* increasingly common in recent texts (as already Ada Barbaro's contribution in the preceding section made clear), showing that the more humanity is at stake the more the wish to preserve it and save it from extinction in this world becomes virulent. Related to this topic are also martyr narratives, the reappearance of the dead (conveying a message to the living), as well as texts posing the question of survival after the recent uprisings that often were seen as a last attempt to preserve life.

These themes are first explored in Samir HAJJ's chapter "The Diasporic and the Fantastic in In'ām Kachachī's *Ṭashārī*." Hajj analyses the Iraqi author's novel as belonging to the genre of feminist Iraqi war fiction written in exile. He argues that it is a bold record of the emotional ordeals of a modern Iraqi woman facing the upheavals and the aftermath of the wars that have destroyed her homeland and scattered her family. Wardiyyah Iskandar's attempt to hold on to the memories of her country's golden past and the harmony among different religious groups, through both personal fortitude and the elusive fantasy of an electronic graveyard to gather the spirits of the victims of the war, signal a strong voice against war and its reckless consequences.

Rima SLEIMAN's contribution "Le récit de guerre féminin et l'éclatement des genres: L'exemple d'*al-Ḥafīdah al-'amrīkiyyah* d'Inaam Kachachi" analyses another novel by the same author the preceding contribution dealt with. The work that, like *Ṭashārī*, falls into the category of female war narrative presents a world that is blurred and fragmented with the help of a narrative strategy that violates conventions of genre and value codes. It dismantles the rhetoric of the grand narrative and manages, through multiple techniques and stylistic pro-

cesses, to turn the tension between narrative and reality into a tool to work against loss and forgetfulness.

Fatima SAI's "Flesh and Blood: Necropolitics of Literature" reconnects the representations of life and death discussed above in Inʿām Kachachī's work to the larger framework of contemporary Iraqi fiction. She applies the concept of 'necropolitics' by Achille Mbembe, intended as "the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (MBEMBE 2003), to the field of representation, to detect a 'posthuman' trend in Iraqi fiction obsessed with death and its imagery, analysing the narratives of ʾAḥmad Saʿdāwī, Sinān ʾAnṭūn and Ḥasan Blāsim.

Moving to Syrian literature, but keeping a similar focus, Dani NASSIF's "*al-Mawtu ʿamalun shāqq:* Death, Corpse and the Afterlife during the Syrian War" draws on the problematic relationship between the living and the dead during the recent war in Syrian. The prominent author's 'posthumanist' *Death is Hard Work* (2015) explores in particular the variations in the living's perception of the afterlife narrative under the new conditions of imminent death. The characters' constant encountering mass corpses in public spaces and their witnessing of the gradual disintegration of their fathers' corpses provide a very intricate and unusual scenario that perturbs the responsibility the living hold towards life.

Monica RUOCCO's chapter "*al-Rāwiyāt* de Mahā Ḥasan: Métamorphose et réincarnation comme dernière tentative pour préserver la vie" concludes this section by analysing the novel of a female writer from Syria as an evidence of the Syrian people's will to re-appropriate their own history. The novel shows an actual world characterised by fragmentation and the fragility of existence. However, Mahā Ḥasan offers readers an act of story-telling that is transformed into an act of collective resistance against de-humanisation.

Moving to Morocco, Paola VIVIANI's chapter "What Does Fiction Tell Us About Morocco Today? Moroccan Novels Shortlisted at IPAF" analyses a number of Moroccan novels which were shortlisted to the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) between 2011 and 2014. She shows how the novels deal with a wide range of topics that highlight the 'posthuman condition' in contemporary Morocco, among which the effect of Islamic extremism and terrorism on family life, man's experience of extraordinary rendition in an American prison and, more generally, the individual's challenge to live in a country where lives are vulnerable to exploitation. Nonetheless, the novels reveal a whole country's strength and whole-hearted desire for breaking stereotypes and silence.

The final section of this volume, SUBVERSION IV: SATIRE, shows that one form of reaction to the challenges of this changing world is to try to assert oneself and preserve one's humanity through a nonchalant, bitingly satirical, often bitterly sarcastic and/or cynical rupture with all kinds of taboos, i.e., de-humanising hegemonic discourses and practices. Taboos, the ways of countering them, and the (longing for) freedom of expression had already been in the focus of previous EURAMAL meetings.[2] Meanwhile, however, a whole new genre (*ʾadab sākhir*), perhaps best translated as 'carnivalesque' or 'subversive literature,' has begun to spread, reacting to the drawbacks of the recent years with a mode of writing that deliberately breaks

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2 See in particular the proceedings of the EURAMAL conference held in Rome in 2010: *Desire, Pleasure and the Taboo: New Voices and Freedom of Expression in Contemporary Arabic Literature*, edited by Sobhi BOUSTANI, Isabella CAMERA D'AFFLITTO, Rasheed El-ENANY, and William GRANARA, Pisa-Roma: Fabrizio Serra editore, 2014.

with all kinds of literary conventions, obviously in an attempt to assert one's wish to resist, to uphold humanity against the overall decay of human values, and to promote the idea of a right to live in dignity.

The rise of this and other new genres, such as rap music and Facebook poetry, shows that the posthuman entails also a transformation of the typology of traditional literary genres (CLARKE & ROSSINI 2017: xvii).

In "Old Characters in New Clothes: Bilāl Faḍl's Satirical Writings," Cristina DOZIO examines the main features of the new wave of Egyptian 'adab sākhir by analysing some newspaper columns and fictionalised essays published by Bilāl Faḍl, perhaps the genre's most prominent exponent so far, between 2009 and 2016. The author consciously draws on the epistolary genre, proverbial clichés and intertextual references to increase the sense of humour and make satire more biting for the Egyptian audience, highlighting among other things the process of de-humanisation in contemporary Egyptian society.

In the following chapter, titled "Egyptian Humour and Satire in Mona Prince's *The Life and Adventures of Professor M.*," Patrizia ZANELLI focuses on a 2015 composite novel written between 2008 and 2014. The article outlines the literary career of the writer of the 1990s generation, showing how her shift to satirical literature reflects the changes witnessed in Egypt in the pre-2011 years and the role of satire after the January 25 Revolution. The study also explains the novelist's perception of humour as an essential trait of Egyptian 'national identity.'

Arturo MONACO's "Comic Folk Literature in the Time of Facebook: Luqmān Dayrakī and His Posts on Facebook" shows that satirical literature thrives also in the digital sphere. Monaco's contribution explores the possibility of considering Facebook a venue of contemporary folk literature. Recalling Bakhtin's description of the marketplace and folk culture as represented in Rabelais' work, the paper analyses a corpus of posts published by the well-known Syrian poet and writer on his Facebook page. It argues that the form, the technique, the characters, the language, and the images of these posts have most of the features of comic folk literature and therefore can be representative of a view of the world (Syria in particular) which opposes and subverts the official, stern or austere narrative.

Shifting to rap music, Fernanda FISCHIONE's "From Boasting to Social Engagement: Humorous Traits in Levantine Arabic Rap" examines the ways young Levantine rappers employ the rich devices of the Arabic language in order to produce ironic effects and thus criticise the weaknesses of the societies they belong to. Through the analysis of three thematic and stylistic areas Levantine rap lyrics often deal with—the exaltation of the self, sectarianism in Lebanon and Syria, and orientalism—the paper aims to demonstrate to which extent this originally Afro-American music genre has fused with the Arabic literary tradition ('adab literature, poetry duels, etc.) and how it has been appropriated by local MCs who have made it into a sharp satiric tool.

Last but not least, Victoria KHRAICHE RUIZ-ZORRILLA's chapter "L'héritage des promoteurs de la poésie de la résistance palestinienne: des poètes de la Génération 67 au rap et la chanson engagée aujourd'hui" analyses the influence of the 1967 generation of poets on contemporary Palestinian rap, underlining once more the connection between the contemporary posthuman aesthetics and previous literary works.

Seen together, the contributions show that the posthuman condition is debated in Arabic literature mostly in terms of a process of 'de-humanisation' that pervades contemporary Arab societies. In a context marked by war, cruelty, deprivation, and the violation of basic human rights, Arab authors take a look into the past to reassess it as a shaper of the posthuman present, and they experiment with characters, places, and writing styles that subvert traditional 'humanist' (*nahḍawī*) aesthetics and themes to question the latter's notions and logic. The proliferation of science and horror fiction highlights the similarity between posthumanism in Arabic and elsewhere. At the same time, Arab(ic) posthumanism is also characterised by the experimentation with folkloric genres and/or satire to subvert de-humanisation and preserve a place for the human.

In addition, the essays assembled in this volume show that Arabic literature itself, as a corpus of texts, an institution, and a field of study, is in a moment of re-assessment and transformation. In this sense, the post-'Arab Spring' years may be interpreted not only as a posthuman period, but also as a post-*'adab* one. Many of the texts require a new understanding of literariness and of the place of the 'human' in the world, but also new epistemological tools that combine theories and methods from social science, natural science and the humanities.

Oslo, spring 2019

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