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A CRITICAL STUDY
OF
MUSALLAH IBRAHIM'S NOVELS
BY
NADIA A. BADRAN
1989



T.A.F. 787

A CRITICAL STUDY
OF
SUN ALLAH IBRAHIM'S NOVELS

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Thesis
1989/787

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE CENTER FOR ARABIC STUDIES
THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
NADIA A. BADRAN

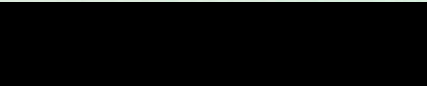
JANUARY, 1989

THIS THESIS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE

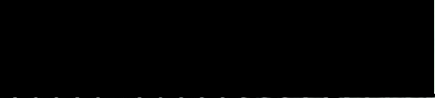
BY NADIA ABDEL WAHAB BADRAN

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PREFACE

Sun`Allah Ibrahim is one of the most prominent figures among the "Generation of the Sixties". This was a group of Egyptians who began to establish themselves as writers of short stories and novels in the 1960's.

Several critics have dealt with Sun`Allah's novels. So far however, no academic study has dealt specifically with all his novels, in order to define Sun`Allah's importance as a writer, or to evaluate the artistic qualities which distinguish his work. Therefore, I am presenting an academic critical analysis of his four novels, which represent his entire production in this genre during the past twenty years.

This thesis divided into six chapters;-

First of which is a brief introduction about the generation of the sixties to whom is Sun`Allah belongs. I try to cover briefly the following points: what is the term indicates to, what was their attitude towards the great changes which have taken place in

the late of fifties and the mid-sixties, what was the nature of their relationship with the ruling system and the official organs, what are the common features of their writings. Then there is a brief biographical section for Sun`Allah at the end of this chapter.

Chapter two contains an analytical study for the first novel written by Sun`Allah which is "Tilka al-Ra'ihah". The novel documents social conditions in the mid-sixties and expresses the downfall of Nasser's regime. It depicts the tragedy of Man's existence in a society where freedom is completely restricted, and where telling truth is threatened by punishment of exile in detention camps.

In the third chapter, I try to deal with the technical aspects of Sun`Allah's second work which is "Najmat 'Aughustus". In this novel he attempts to portray the glories of July revolution by praising one of its greatest achievements which is the High Dam. AT the same time he subtly tries to reveal the negative aspects of Nassir's regime in order to prove the contradiction in a government that constructed by one hand and destroying human rights by the other.

The fourth chapter deals with Sun`Allah's third novel "Al Lajna" which I considered it the best of his novels. whether in its theme or technique. It is an explicit expression of political and economic conditions prevailing in Egypt during the nineteen seventies, especially the open door policy, Camp David agreement and its establishment of diplomatic relation with Isreal.

In the fifth chapter I present an analytical study for the author's fourth and last novel in my research which is "Bayrut..Bayrut". It represents a codemnation of the modern age, rules and imperialism. It deals with an issue which preoccupied the whole Arab world: it is the Lebanese civil war and its impact on every Arab.

The last chapter or the six one contains a comparison and analysis of Sun`Allah's artistic elements through the previous four novels. I try to trace his development in writing by analysing each artistic element in each of his novels in order to evaluate his common characteristics and to find a relation between his use of these technical devices from one novel to another to see how far he improves.

Also I try to analysis his technique which is constant throughout the four novels.

Sun`Allah is very concerned about the political, social and the cultural changes which have taken place in Egypt and the Arab World between the Revolution of 1952 and the mid-eighties. He is also concerned about the great impact these changes have had on intellectuals. He believes that there is a mutual influence between Man and society which srrounds him. He expresses life sincerely with an extreme degree of realism, without any false projections. He conveys the truth, depending on his personal experience. Therefore, each of his four novels describes the period in which it was written and documents the social condition of the era. They all belong to the genre of political novel. Although Sun`Allah's descriptions are realistic, he also uses a special technique in portraying his themes. This makes him a leading member among his generation.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE GENERATION OF THE SIXTIES

The Generation of the Sixties

The "generation of the sixties" is a term used by some Egyptian critics to refer to young writers in poetry as well as fiction, who started writing during the sixties. Their writing was marked by certain characteristics which distinguish them from writers of the previous generation.

From the very beginning, this group found itself in a rather complex relationship with the ruling system. It was a politically - oriented generation. Having been born in that era, men of that generation were part of the political unity of that age. They witnessed the achievements of the time, and shouted out its popular slogans together. But when they developed an ideology different from the one in which the ruling system wanted them to believe, they were considered to be opponents of the regime. Furthermore, the government restricted intellectuals to a limited role in an administrative organism.

They could do no more than write pamphlets in support of those new ideas that the administration wished to spread. More than that would be exceeding permissible activities. Naturally, the relationship between the intellectuals and the government became so bad that the government accused them of opposing the regime and sent some of them to detention camps.

" The sixties was indeed a decade of confusion, a decade of numerous huge projects and the abolition of almost all political activities, massive industrialization and the absolute absence of freedom, the construction of the High Dam and the destruction of the spirit of opposition, the expansion of free education and the collective arrest of intellectuals, the reclamation of thousands of acres and the catastrophic detachment of Sinai peninsula from Egyptian territory in the defeat of 1967, severe censorship and the emergence of evasive jargon among the intellectuals the enlargement of the public sector and the pervasive growth of corruption." [1] The writers of this generation felt abandoned both by the official organs that were created to guide them, such as the Ministry of Culture, the Supreme Council for Sponsorship of the Art, and the Story Club, and by the

preceding generation of writers who, they felt, rightly or wrongly, offered little encouragement.

As soon as members of this generation were ready to talk with their own voice, they found themselves completely suppressed. That is why it was necessary for them to create a new language, a new form of expression.

Naturally, each of these writers had spent his youth in this new society. Each author depended on his cultural heritage in addition to his individual talent, experiences, culture and motives. Moreover, some of them were affected by the avant garde school, Joyce, Woolfe, Kafka and Camus.[2] Nevertheless, each lived through a period in which there was no free expression. In such a restricted atmosphere, and in an attempt to free themselves of the past and its conventional molds, they tried to set aside their heritage. They were eclectic, relying on a variety of trends - Egyptian, Arab, Islamic and Western.

The social and cultural atmosphere in which the writers of the sixties lived affected them both in thought and in writing. It created a great deal of

conflicting ideas and confusion. In spite of this confusion, these writers were inseparable from the society with which they were faced. They started their writings with the mode of short stories, but later they found that the novel, with all its various elements, was the best artistic mode by which to express this social epic.

During the sixties a large number of novels were published. These were written by both the young generation, [3] and by writers from the previous one, such as Naguib Mahfouz, Youssef Idris, Fathi Ghanem and Abdel Rahman El Sharkawi. [4] This appears to contradict the conventional wisdom about the sixties, which holds that those years were rich in short story production written by the new writers. Various degrees of maturity and talent are reflected in this large body of literature. It was undoubtedly a good expression of these new writers' outlook on reality, revealing the culture that affected their art. The novels represent the generation's documentation of the changing civilization it was witnessing. In spite of the individuality of each novelist, each novel shares common characteristics. The themes of futility, absurd, estrangement, and alienation are prevalent in

the novels of this period. Most of these novels returned to the social realistic trend. They all shared a number of general features which shaped their vision.

The most prominent feature is the concept of rebirth. The violent desire to create a new beginning serves to free either the writer or the hero from the defects and perverted values of the surrounding reality, and from the weight of the past. This enables him to reshape his present life so that he can look forward to the future.[5]

For example, one of these novels begins with the moment of the protagonist's release from prison, where he had spent bitter years behind bars for political reasons. With the first step out of the detention camp, he begins a life search for a new identity.[6] Others begin with the murder of one or both parents, with all that parricide entails. It is an act which slackens the grip of authority.[7] One begins with a villager's moment of departure from his village. He is in search for his identity, seeking a new life after the collapse of his house and hometown in the 1967 war.[8] All these are examples of the writer's

concept of the beginning or "the moment," as they called it. It reflects an attempt to ignore their historical heritage and a desperate need to achieve self-recognition by trying to find a new way of life far from old visions, concepts and values.[9]

The writers of the sixties were unique in choosing their heroes. Sometimes they seem indifferent to life and the real world. They live in a world of their own, their existence a mere illusion. Others are insecure, estranged, and alienated, totally rejecting society,[10] or indifferent, living a superficial materialistic life.[11] Moreover, this sense of alienation between man and his society does not necessarily come from man alone. Society can also be the one to reject the person.[12] In some novels, the hero is passive, unable to achieve any positive role. Furthermore, the hero's psychological inadequacy is manifested physically in the sexual impotence that he experiences in all the novels.[13] This is due to the hero's psychological state. There are no physical reasons. He is in a constant state of inner conflict, not being able to face the harsh reality in which he lives. He experiences intense failure and self-accusation at the same time.[14] Other

characters that appear in those novels are ones who do not seem to have reached maturity. They are unaware of what goes on in their surrounding world. They can almost be called naive, which is not an appropriate way to describe a character who lives in our present modern world.[15]

In addition to what has been said above, the elements of time and space occupy a limited position in the novels. Events are not limited to any logical sequence. There is a rapid transition between past, present, and future tense, and even the absence of a new social consciousness.[16] There is also an attempt to reach into the past for themes. Because the writers were unable to achieve what they wanted from the present, they tried to derive their existence from the past.[17]

All the novels written in the sixties are characterized by a grim depiction of the surrounding reality which is rugged, bleak and which offers little hope for life at all. Therefore, the newly reborn character runs smack into an unyielding wall. The world with which he has to interact is profoundly distorted. This may result from the use of

surrealistic elements, and also the use of natural elements, such as dust or fog, that obscure the clarity of vision. It may also result from the use of mythological or legendary elements that widen the scope of the narrative and embody the power that dominates the character's lives.[18]

We have briefly described the characteristics of the novel written in the sixties, indicating that it was backed up by a first degree generation of novelists, who strove diligently to achieve a better form of this art. In spite of the fact that there were almost thirty of these novels, they were not all of the same artistic standard. The young novelists tried to mirror reality as it was, giving us a genuine picture of it. Each one did so from his own perspective. Some of these novels were indeed an expression of man's suffering and what life was really like in that period. Other novels were immature expressions, perhaps because of the fact that they were the first attempts at writing for some of the authors. There are, however, five novels[19] that are be considered masterpieces and great achievements of the young writers of the sixties. This proves that the new generation of Egyptian novelists is quite

capable of carrying the responsibility of developing the Egyptian novel.[20]

By this brief survey, we have become acquainted with many names of writers from the young generation who published one or more novels during the sixties. Sun`Allah Ibrahim was one of the most prominent novelists of that period.[21] His novels are the subject of this thesis. His development in writing will be traced starting from his first novel "Tilka al-Ra'iha," until the present day. "Tilka al-Ra'iha" (That Smell), was one of the few novels that critics considered to be a genuine expression of the age. It shows a real artist, since he was successful in choosing his theme and manipulated the plot well. In so doing, the novel reveals the artist's sensitivity to the suffering of young people in their everyday reality.[22]

A brief Biography of Sun`Allah Ibrahim.

Sun`Allah Ibrahim was born in Abbasiyya, Cairo, in 1937. He came from a humble family. His father was sixty when Sun`Allah was born, and worked as a government employee. His mother, who was eighteen at the time of his birth, was the father's second wife and worked as a nurse. She gave birth to two children, Sun`Allah and a younger girl. The mother then fell ill when Sun`Allah was only five years old, and was kept in hospital. When Sun`Allah was only eight, she was divorced and later died.

In spite of his old age and poverty, Sun`Allah's father cared for the two children. The boy however, did not do well at school. He was an introvert and did not mix with other children. His entire world consisted of home, school, and his sister. Sun`Allah did not have a normal happy childhood, since his parents' relationship was a disturbed one. His father married several times in order to find someone to take care of the two children. Yet all these marriages were unsuccessful.

At the age of eleven, Sun`Allah started reading the "Jayb" novels, imitating his father who enjoyed reading a lot. When he reached secondary school age, he attempted writing for the first time. This attempt produced a detective story. He then wrote a novel in which the heroes had no names.

When he was fifteen, he joined the Faculty of Law. These university days were a new phase in Sun`Allah's life during which he developed an interest in politics. Before the great "Cairo Fire" he attended a political rally and was detained for the first time. He was released, though, on the following day.

At university, he joined many societies that had political and social goals. He was also one of the students who were responsible for the university magazines. He attended literary symposiums regularly.

Sun`Allah published his first story, called "Al 'Asl wa al Sura" (The original and its copy) in one of the popular magazines in 1953. Later on, he wrote several short stories, some of which Dr. Youssef Idris read and admired a lot. Idris particularly liked a character called "Khalil Beik," who recurs in

Sun`Allah's stories, and who, in Sun`Allah's view, represents his father.

During his university days, Sun`Allah joined a group of communists. He was sent to a detention camp in March 1954. This did not stop him from further involvement in political activities. His love for adventure, his own personal concept of justice and his need for self-realization, in addition to the fact that youth is always full of rebellious enthusiastic spirit, kept him involved with the communist movement.

His father's death in 1955 left him sad and depressed. In 1956 he participated in a student demonstration demanding the release of state prisoners, after which he himself was sent to jail. He stayed there a month, and was released on the day the Suez Cannal was nationalized.

Because he continued to fail his exams his university education came to an end. He worked as a translator to support himself. He was sent to a detention camp during the period of Abdel Nasser's anti-communist campaign because of his affiliation to communist group. He stayed behind bars from 1959 till

1964. That was the most difficult period in Sun`Allah's life. It caused many changes in his personality and way of life.

During the period of his imprisonment, Sun`Allah had the opportunity to read extensively in the camp library. This proved beneficial to him even after he was released. Realizing that he could not be a politician, he reconsidered his whole life. In 1966 he worked for the Middle East Press Agency. During that time, he began to write "Tilka al-Ra'iha", the theme of which was derived from his writings during his imprisonment.

In 1968, he worked in Germany in the Literature department of Democratic News Agency. He remained there for three years, after which he went to the Soviet Union to study Cinema on a scholarship. During that period, he tried to fulfill the dream he had had during his days behind bars. That dream was to write a novel about the High Dam. The theme of the novel was based on an actual journey he took, accompanied by some colleagues, to Aswan. The novel, "Najmat 'Aughustus," was completed in the Soviet Union in January, 1973.

Upon his return to Egypt, he worked for "Dar Al Thaqafa Al Jadida." He married in 1975. A nervous breakdown, forced him to stop writing for a while. Later, he decided to dedicate himself totally to writing.

After that his novel "Al Lajna" appeared. He has mentioned that the first chapter is based on his personal experience in an oral examination required for admission to the Academy of Cinema in the Soviet Union.

In 1980 he visited Lebanon, where he began writing his novel "Bayrut..Bayrut" in 1982. The novel was based on the events of his stay in Lebanon.

Sun`Allah Ibrahim has written four novels, all of which are included in this analysis. He has also written several short stories, including Al-Thu`ban, 'Aghani al-Masa', Arsin Lubin, Ba`da al-Zuhr `Abra Thalathat 'Asirrah and a number of science fiction stories. All these works show Sun`Allah Ibrahim's imprint on modern Egyptian Literature.[23]

Footnotes

- 1- Sabry Hāfez, "The Egyptian novel in the sixties," JAL, vol vii, 1976, p.68.
2. Personal interview with Sun`Allah Ibrahim on 20th of December, 1987. He mentioned that he was affected by reading wrots by Joyce, Woolfe, Himingway, Kafka, Yuvteshinko, George Fladimos, Upton Sinclair. He also cited a critical study about the structure of the novel which he read during his days in the detention camp.
- 3- Shawqī `Abdel Hakīm. Ahzān Nūh, (1964) & Damm Ibn Ya`qūb, (1967).
Sāleh Mursy. Al-Kadhdhāb, (1966) & Zuqāq al-Sayyid al-Bulltī (1963).
`Abū al-Ma`āṭī `Abū al-Najā. Al-`Awda ilā al manfā, (1962).
`Abdel Hakīm Kāssem. Ayyām al-insān al-sab`a, (1969).
Amīn al-`Auṭī. Al-Samt wa'l Ṣadā, (1970).
Mahmmoud Deyab. Al-Zilāl fī al-Jānib al-Ākhar, (1963).

Sun`Allah Ibrahim. Tilka al Rā`iha, (1966).

`Inayyat al Zayyat. Al-Hubb wa'l Samt (1967).

`Abdel Wahab al-Aswani. Salma al-Aswāniyya, (1970).

Yūsuf al Ka`id. Al-Hidād, (1969).

Risq `Amaar. Al-Hubb wa'l Jidār al-Aswad, (1967).

`Ali Shalash. Thaman al-Hurayyah, (1963).

Huda Jad. Al-Washm al 'Akhdar, (1966).

- 4- Mahfuz wrote six novels in the sixties. They all portray the feeling and problems associated with the new sensibility of the sixties. See, Al-Summān wa'l Kharīf, 1962, Al-Tarīq, 1964, Al Shabbādh, 1965, Tharthara fawq al Nīl, 1966, Miramār, 1967.

Fathi Ghanim wrote Al-Rajul alladhī Faqada Zillahu, 1962, Al-Jabal, 1966, and Tilka al Ayyām, 1967.

Yūsuf Idrīs wrote, Al-`Ayb, 1962, Rijāl wa Thīrān, 1964.

`Abdel Rahman al-Sharqāwī wrote, Al-Fallāh, 1968.

- 5- Sabry Hāfez, " The Egyptian novel in the sixties", op. cit., p.78.

- 6- As in Tilka al Rā`iha by Sun`Allah Ibrahim, 1966.

- 7- See Al-Hidād by Yusuf al-Ka'id, 1969.
- 8- See Hammam al-Malatili by 'Isimā'il Wali al Dīn, 197 .
- 9- Sabry Hafez, " The Egyptian novel in the sixties", op. cit., pp.78-79.
- 10- See Al Zilāl fī al Jānib al 'Ākhar.
- 11- See Tilka al Rā'ihā.
- 12- See Ahzān Nūh.
- 13- See Tilka al Rā'ihā and Raghba Siriyya.
- 14- See Salma al Aswāniyya and Damm Ibn Ya'qūb.
- 15- See Al Maghrura and Zilal fi al Jānib al 'Ākhar.
- 16- See Ayyām al insān al-Sab'a.
- 17- Sabry Hafez, "Al-Mawja al-Jadida fī al-riwāya al 'Arabiya," Al-Tali'a, August, 1977.

- 18- Peter O. Daniel, Waga'i` Harat al Za`farani, thesis, A.U.C. 1984, pp.xii-xiii.
- 19- These five novels as Sabry Hafez mentioned in his article "The Egyptian novel in the sixties" op. cit., p.84. are:
- Ahzan Nuh by Shawqi `Abdel Hakim, 1964.
- Al-Samt wa`l Sada by Amin al `Auoti, 1970.
- Ayyam al insan al Sab`a by `Abdel Hakim Kassem, 1969.
- Tilk al Ra`iha by Sun`Allah Ibrahim, 1966.
- Al-`Awda ila al manfa by Abu al Ma`ati Abu al-Naja, 1962
- 20- Sabry Hafez, " The Egyptian novel in the sixties", op. cit., p.84.
- 21- Sun`Allah Ibrahim, Tilka al Ra'iha, 1966.
- Was published in 1966 and banned from circulation and cofiscated.
- 22- Yusuf Idris, " Muqademat Tilka al Ra`iha", 1986.
- 23- Personal interviews with Sun`Allah Ibrahim on the 12th of March, 1987 and on the 20th of December, 1987. He mentioned all the biographical data.

T I L K A A L - R A ' I H A

TILKA AL RA' IHA (THAT SMELL)

Tilka al Ra'iha (That Smell) was Sun`allah's first novel. Although it was written and published in 1966, it was not published in Egypt untill 1986.

The novel is a rejection of the difficult years of the sixties. It is a candid description of the generation that lived through the crisis of freedom during the rule of President Nasser (1954-1970). Any attempt at resistance meant only fighting a mirage and was doomed to end in a futile struggle against oppression. Such political conditions prevented any sort of achievement by people living during that era, for they had neither faith in their society nor any sense of security.

The novel documents social conditions in the mid-sixties. It subtly expresses the downfall of Nasser's regime. Tilka al Ra'iha clearly depicts the tragedy of Man's exsistance in a society where freedom

is restricted and tongues are tied, where truth is turned to falsehood, and where is threatened by the punishment of exile in detention camps for the crime of expressing his mind or raising any objection.

In form, the novel is short. It is no longer than seventy pages. It is quite different from most other novels written in the forties and fifties. Dr. Youssef Idris describes it as a strong slap in the face, shocking one into a state of frightened alertness.[1] There is neither a plot in the conventional sense, nor any strongly personified characters, nor any intensity of action leading to a climax. The novel merely describes a period in the life of a young man who opposes the government, and who spent several years in a detention camp, during which time he suffered a great deal of hardships. He comes out of jail to face reality once more.

The narrative begins with the moment of the man's release from the detention camp. The more the novel develops the more it becomes clear that this man is the pivotal character in the novel. "An intellectual, facing the crisis of freedom, he has fallen into a chasm between the romanticism of revolutionary

activity and the reality of dull and mechanical life which continues, insensitive to all the sacrifices he had made"[2]. The main character has no name, nor is he described clearly. The reader can infer, however, that he is a writer when one of his relatives asks, "Are all the stories you write inspired by books?" "No," he answers, "they all come from my head".[3] During the first few days after he comes out of Jail, he is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. He just feels indifferent. The moment he leaves the jail is the moment he has been dreaming for so many years. Yet, he searches his soul at that moment, trying to feel something, happiness or joy, some emotion of any kind, but finds none[4].

The moment of release is aborted. Since he has no place to go, regulations oblige him to spend one more night in jail. The policeman says to him, as they come out of the prison, "You are a problem, I can't leave you".[5] On the next day, his sister comes and accompanies him on the journey that will lead to a new life, to the world of freedom.

Although he gets his freedom, he is still morally imprisoned, according to Dr A. al-`Allim.[6] He finds

it difficult to free himself and cope again with reality. The physical freedom he has achieved does not initiate any emotional response.[7]

The bitter years he spent behind bars and the oppression he suffered makes him indifferent. Life seems absurd. He finds no significance in his own existence, nor in his emotions. he has lost everything with which he could identify during his imprisonment. Nothing seems to be of any meaning anymore. His emotions are frozen at a certain point. He is unable to respond to anything, becoming reserved, superficial, acting in a mechanical way. He describes his daily activities with so much detail that they invoke boredom.[8] In an attempt to improve matters, he tries to prove his present existence. He is still wondering whether all the bitterness he suffered in prison for his cause was really worth it? Long bitter years have been lost. Is this the inevitable destiny of the intellectual revolutionary in a society that calls for socialism and freedom?[9] Many questions run through his mind; however, he remains silent, remembering his previous experiences. Feigning superficiality, he plunges into description of the smallest detail.

" In the morning, I went out; I bought the newspaper a bottle of milk, and some bread. I boiled the milk and added sugar, then soaked bread in it and ate. I read the paper then went out, and got onto the metro." [10]

He spends his days like a trapped frightened mouse. He moves around in a daze, with no particular purpose. He leaves home every morning, goes to irrelevant places, but does not achieve anything. Although visits relatives and old friends and meets with acquaintances, this is more indicative of his uprootedness and restlessness than of his sociability. [11] Every day at sunset, a policeman comes to sign his parole book. He must be at home, then, because he is still under observation. He is thus constantly reminded of those difficult times. Even his false freedom is threatened. He had dreamed so much of being set free, without any guards around, only to find that he is still bound to the world of prison. His emergence into the free world is a mere illusion. [12] Once when he goes out, he returns at sunset. He meets the policeman on the staircase. The policeman threatens him, saying " We could make you spend the night in jail." [13]

The protagonist cannot cope with this new reality. He is aware of the rottenness and corruption of society. This is given a concrete form and is reflected by his extraordinary interest in washing as a means of purifying himself from the filth of reality.[14]

There is a great gap between the main character's own world and reality. He was sent to the detention camp because of his commitment and belief. When he is released from prison, however, he sees people walking around, chatting naturally, as if he had been with them all the time, and as if nothing had happened.[15] Nobody cares. His view of reality is pessimistic. It is negative and materialistic. In jail he saw his roommate beaten on the head until death, because of his beliefs.[16]

In real life, on the other hand, his sister's fiancé is busy buying a refrigerator, a heater, and is looking for someone to buy him a tape recorder from abroad.[17] When the protagonist visits his relatives, one of them advises him to be more concerned with his career, as if what he had done was nothing but a useless joke. The great disparity

between his feelings and the real world leads him to emotional turmoil.

This is reflected in his behavior. He projects his sinister inner feelings on the world around him. Looking out of the window, he can see two girls kissing and hugging. Obviously they are lesbians. Getting on the metro, he sees the train-driver putting some hashish in his mouth. He says that the driver is lucky to have found something to help him face life. The wife of one of his friends calls her husband "stupid" because he does not take bribes like everyone else.

Every place he goes, even downtown, he finds the ground covered with sewage. The smell is unbearable.[18] The smell mentioned in the title is this disagreeable one. It is made real in his description of the awful smell of sewage throughout the city.

This nightmarish outlook enhances the protagonist's feelings of alienation and frustration. Deep-rooted feelings of oppression result from the bitterness of the past. Thus he clings to his world

of illusion, hiding in memories. No matter how happy or sad they are, they are better than the world of reality. The present alienates him from his surroundings.

The author depicts many seemingly superficial situations which the protagonist experiences throughout the novel in a straightforward, monotonous and descriptive manner. This gives the reader the feeling that the aim is not only to recount events, but that this technique is a device for indirectly expressing oppression and the protagonist's rejection of the rotten reality to which he is condemned.

The narrator assumes the role of a mere observer, recorder, and reporter. He restricts himself to contemplating things around him instead of taking an active part in them. He feels tied down and paralysed. He thus changes from the state of a heroic rebel into a person who is unable to perform any human action.[19]

He fails to establish any type of relationship with anyone, since he has lost his sense of security and warmth. Love and emotions no longer mean anything

to him. Life has become dry and cruel. His attempt to revive an old love relationship with his previous sweetheart, "Najwa", fails. He says, "Something has been broken, something is lost".[20] The experience is cold. He remembers how it had been with "Najwa" in the past: "Lying there, close, we made love violently to forget the world, everything else, not thinking about anything, not fearing anything".[21]

His inability to compromise between a sense of hollowness and death on the one hand, and positive emotions of love and life on the other,[22] leads the protagonist to practice everything, even sex, in an amputated manner. He has sex merely to rid himself of his immediate needs. It is nothing but proof that his manhood remains, not something done for enjoyment. In more than one instance he says, "I went to the bathroom to get rid of my desire".[23]

Generally, neither the characters in the novel nor their relationships to each other are clearly defined.[24] They do not play an active role. They appear suddenly, to initiate a situation, then disappear. The reader only gets information about the character from the descriptive narration of the

scene. Even the few characters that recur throughout the novel, and which have a role, are not well defined. They appear to be shallow because the reader does not see them from various effective angles.

For example, the hero's sister, who accompanies him throughout the novel, has a limited and very superficial relationship with her brother. The relationship is never described by warm situations which convey any emotions, not even those feelings which normally exist between brother and sister. He never mentions her name nor gives her defined features. Furthermore, he never tries to get even slightly involved, to learn anything about how she is doing, even though she is about to start a new married life. This is similar to his relationships with his brother, which is formal. There are no sentiments or family bonds. The hero has never had a normal family life. There have never been any ties to create brother - sister, father - mother relationships.

The structure of the novel is expressed by the role of the revolutionary oppressed hero. He is a victim of authority, who tries indirectly to expose

the claims authority makes, revealing its corruption. There is no major event in the novel which can be developed or accelerated by interacting artistic techniques.

One can describe the novel as being a discontinuous descriptive narration, a set of juxtaposed events in a horizontal line with no vertical movement to create a whole gross event. There is a clear sign of affectation and incohesion in the narrative. Such a disruptive style does not prevent the reader from discovering meaning in the narrative.

The author, in this novel, depends on a special technique. This is the interaction and merging of reality, illusion, and their active elements, in such a way that the world of reality lies perpendicular to that of illusion in the form of free association. Depending on the situation the hero experiences, this technique gives him deeper and more profound significance; more profound than what can be understood from the level of mere reality.

For example, when the hero meets his dead friend's wife, he tells her that he had been with him until the

very end. He does not tell her though, how those last moments were. Instead he goes on to recount, in monologue, the events as he remembers them. "We were shivering, it was cold, he was the tallest. I heard someone say: that's him. They beat him on the head, shouting, "Get your head down, dog!." Then they called out our names, and they called his name too. That was the last time I saw him".[25]

In another scene, he is with "Nagwa". In spite of the warmth of the moment, their feelings are quite tepid. He recalls the past saying, " We lay very close, making love violently, to forget the world and everything else."[26]

The description of the situation, both on the illusionary level and on that of the real, creates another dimension. In the former, it creates a sense of discrepancy. Although he knows that his friend has been killed and is now gone, he goes to reassure his wife, telling her that he is all right. In the latter, the reader feels the extreme transformation, resulting from the oppression he experienced, that deprived him of the most delicate tender feelings so that, that even his moments of love seem dry and cold.

The elements of time and place, whether on the realistic or the illusionary level, play an important role in the structure of the novel. One can deal with them on more than one level.

Time is represented by the present, without referring to the future. Time has two dimensions. The first is that of the novel, in which the novel is represented. The second is time according to the hero himself, or the persona's inner sense of time. One can see the former representation of time when the protagonist gets on the train and sees troops returning from Yemen. This implies then that the time of the novel is the mid sixties, during the Yemeni war. This is reinforced when the hero's brother says that boards of directors have become disorganized ever since laborers joined them. This was the general trend during the mid sixties as well.[27]

The other level of the element of time is seen as the main character says, at the beginning of his day, "I got up in the morning". It ends at sunset when the policeman comes to sign in his parole book. There does not seem to be anything to imply a time factor in the span of the hero's life. Whether the time factor is

chronological time, or reflects the protagonist's inner sense of time, it never points to the future. Instead, it portrays events in the present or past.

This is contrast to the interpretation of time on the imaginative or illusionary level. The novel begins at the time of the detention camp. It gradually recedes to the near past, to the memories of love, then further back to the memories of childhood.

Space is also expressed on more than one level. Reality of space is parallel to the hero's sense of time. For example, from morning until sunset, place is indefinite. After the sun goes down, though, until the next morning, the hero is confined to his room. On the level of illusion, time and space are expressed in the parallelism of his memories of love and childhood, so making space absolute.

This parallelism, on both levels of interpretation the real and the illusionary contributes to the unique structure of the novel. It makes the reader aware of the transitional movement from one level to the other, thus creating a distance between past and present and between the real and the unreal. This in turn reveals

the falseness in a society which is based on false political ideas, such as socialism, and yet conveys corruption. The tumbling down of society is the true significance of the novel.[28]

Everything in the novel, either on the level of reality or on the level of illusion, is similarly expressed in detailed descriptive style in the first person. On the real level, sentences are short and precise. They are not metaphorical, devoid of any figures of speech. Therefore, the style is dry, shallow and seemingly unconventional. It suits the protagonist's state of rebellion, frustration, and indifference.

Sun`allah's language is characterized by "a calm tone" or impersonal discrepancy. It is a style which is factual, not emotional, and free from any metaphoric usages.[29]

Language, on the level of reality, is straightforward. It is a combination of classical and colloquial Arabic. The author intentionally makes the language coarse, feeling it would help the structure of the novel. Such language makes the reader feels

directly involved in the events described in the novel.

On the other level, the illusionary or imaginative, the style is highly emotional and extremely sensitive, giving an almost poetic, deeper meaning to words. The use of such warm poetic diction in expressing illusions serves as a balance to the coldness of the detailed reality being recounted. This is an intentional evocative technique the artist uses to express the distance between the narrator and reality.

Footnotes

1. Yusuf Idris, Muqadimat Tilka Al Ra'iha, 1986, p.21
2. Sun`Allah Ibrahim, Tilka Al Rā'iha, 1986, p.39.
3. Ahmed Muhammad `Atiyah, Al Riwayah al-siyāsiyyah, Cairo: 1981, p.64.
4. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op.cit., p.25.
5. Ibid., p.25.
6. Mahmud `Amin al-`Ālim, Thulāthiyyat al-rafd w'al-hazimah, Cairo: 1985, p.36.
7. Ibid., p.36.
8. Geoffery Bowder, "Review on Tilka al-Ra'iha", Journal of Arabic Literature, Vol. XI, 1980, p. 121.
9. See Ahmad Muhammad `Atiyah, op. cit., p.73.
10. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., p. 42.
11. Alī Jad, Form and technique in the Egyptian Novel 1912-1971, London: 1983, pp. 300-301.
12. See Ahmad Muhammad `Atiyah, op. cit., p.69.
13. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., p.45.
14. Ahmad al-Zughabī, "Al-'Iqā' al-riwā'ī fi Tilka al-Rā'iha", Ibdā', Nov., 1986, pp. 7-13.
15. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., p. 25.
16. Ibid., p. 29.
17. Ibid., p. 38.
18. Ibid., p. 56.

19. Ahmad Muhammad `Atiyah, op. cit., p. 69.
20. Ibid., p. 71.
21. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., p.33.
22. Ahmad al-Zughabi, "Al'Iqā` al-riwa'i fi Tilka al-Ra'ihā", op. cit., pp. 7-13.
23. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., pp. 34.
24. See Mahmud 'Amin al-`Alim, op. cit., p.52.
25. See Sun`allah Ibrahim, op. cit., p.29.
26. Ibid., p. 33.
27. See Mahmud 'Amin al-`Alim, op. cit., p.41.
28. Ibid., p.52.
29. Sizā Qassem, "Al Mufāraqah fi al-qas al-`Arabi al Mu`āsir", Fusūl, Jan. Feb. Mar., 1982, p. 143.

CHAPTER THREE

NAJMAT 'AUGHUSTUS

Najmat 'Aughustus (August Star).

This is Sun`Allah Ibrahim`s second novel. It was written in 1973 and published in Damscus, 1974. The second edition was published in Cairo 1976. There is another edition published in Jerusalem in 1982. The novel is based upon a press report made by the author and two of his colleagues about a visit to the construction site of the High Dam and Abu Simbel during the summer of 1965. The novelist also uses various periodicals, reference books on ancient Egyptian history and a book on the famous Italian artist Michelangelo.[1]

The novel attempts to portray the glories of the July revolution by showing one of its greatest achievements . The High Dam was considered the most important accomplishment of Nasser`s government . In spite of the fact that Sun`Allah Ibrahim is here dealing with this important achievement, he subtly tries to reveal the negative aspects of Nassir`s

regime. The same government that constructed the High Dam was pulling down and destroying human rights, stripping man of his freedom and even his life.

The novel recounts the events of the main character's trip from Cairo to Aswan. He pretends to be a journalist who is required to write an article on the construction of the High Dam and Abu Simbel .

The main character in "Najmat `Aughustus" reminds us of the revolutionary intellectual in "Tilka al-Ra`iha". He still feels insecure, watched and threatened, so he insists on keeping a distance from others, but not as much as before. He tries to deal with authorities once more, but in a more daring and more cunning manner. He pretends to praise the authority for its great achievements with the High Dam, but on the other hand , he is trying to prove how false their achievements are. In doing so the reader realizes the extent of the contradictions inherent in the political system. The system that sets forth values and slogans is the same one that shackles freedom, imposing all forms of oppression. He can hardly suppress his dilemma and see the brighter face of this great achievement. His soul is heavy with

aversion to authority. He never forgets that it had once deprived him of his freedom, leaving him destroyed and deserted.

"He is not a mere eye-witness of the era, is not a mere spectator of the events, but is actually a suffering participant. Accordingly, the journey is not only that of reconnaissance, but a search for salvation as well." [2]

The first chapter represents the largest section of the novel. It is divided into four ascending sections. On reaching Aswan, the protagonist meets his old friend "Sa'id", who is also a journalist and accompanies him during his tour of the High Dam site. He meets many different persons in charge and speaks with them, pretending he is a journalist who wants to know how far the work is progressing. The protagonist gets to know a Soviet girl, "Tanya", she is one of a team of laborers from Moscow which has come in order to assist the Egyptian government in establishing this great achievement. He has a short love affair with Tanya". This chapter is full of events, characters, and places. It has a high pitched tone of enthusiasm, noisiness and vitality.

The second chapter differs in form from the first one.[3] It is therefore not a continuation of it. The events stop and the narrator ceases his realistic description, and seems to be dreaming.[4] It is characterized by the inclusion of events from both the first and the third chapters. In spite of the fact that it is the center of the novel, it contains all the novels' structural elements.

The third chapter is divided into four descending sections. The protagonist's friend "Sa'id" leaves and ends his relationship with "Tanya", the Soviet sweetheart, because she wants it to be that way. All the previous events make him frustrated. The departure of his friend, and the loss of his sweetheart leave him depressed. Accordingly he loses enthusiasm for everything, contrary to his psychological state in the first chapter. The main character takes a trip on the Nile in a boat to Abu Simbel to see another achievement of the government. During the trip he is introduced to "Zouhni", who pretends he is an employee in a company. He is actually a revolutionary wanted by the authorities, who is attempting to escape to Sudan. The main character, still playing the role of a journalist, gets

many chances to meet responsible officials with whom he has several interviews. After staying in Abu Simbol for few days, he decides to return to Cairo.

In "Najmat 'Aughustus" the author's use of parallelism serves to convey a broader and more comprehensive mode of expression. In "Tilka al-Ra'iha" this method appears in a very limited manner; however, in the former, the theme of the novel is based on the interrelation of elements, the detailed description of what the main character witnesses in his surrounding reality and documentaries of various excerpts.

In the first chapter the technique is based on a combination of the protagonist's description of surrounding reality, his memories of the detention camp's hardships and passages from the book on Michelangelo used to support his own ideas. The memories relate to situations similar to those the main character experiences in the present. The present events are thus initiated by memories of previous experiences. By comparing the past to the present, discrepancy and contradiction are thus generated. For example, while touring the High Dam, the protagonist see letters of appreciation to all who contributed by

working on the project, signed by both Abdel Nasser and Khrushchev, wishing them success in completing the second stage. He remembers the days in jail when he used to smuggle in newspapers. His colleague "Shouhdi Ateya", to whom the author dedicates the novel, was keen to know all that was being done and was looking forward to sharing in the first stage of construction, but he never did.[5] However, the authority that deprived him of his freedom and of a chance to participate in that historical moment, is the same one to extend its gratitude to laborers on that occasion. It was rather absurd that Shouhdi tries to argue, in a logical manner, that he could never rebel against the government which had built the High Dam. Yet, he is killed by one of the top men after being thrown into prison. This shows how false their claims were and the tremendous gap between truth and reality.[6]

In another scene, when "Sa'id" hears the song "The upright generation" he asks the protagonist to turn the radio off. He says, "This is a sad song". At this moment the protagonist recalls his days in jail when they used to sit silently crouched together with the guards over their heads, ready to torture them. During this oppression and humiliation, the tune of

"the upright generation" came from a megaphone in the background. They were praising "the upright generation" while it was behind bars suffering hardship. The original passages go on to reveal the other aspects of reality. The tremendous power of this great achievement fades away, to leave in its place the novelist's expression of the false attitude of the government.

The passages from the book on Michelangelo included in first chapter contain ideas which are congruent with the character's ideas. For example, he quotes the following passage from the original text: "The noblemen told him that his first theme should be taken from Greek mythology, but he definitely knew that his first theme would neither come from Athens, Egypt, nor Rome, nor even from his home town Florence. It would come from his own self; from something he knew, felt, and understood." [7] The protagonist includes this passage to stress the concept that everything one does is self-initiated and comes as a result of one's own beliefs.

The protagonist describes everything surrounding him in detail. The action is put forth logically.

with no intensity of drama leading to a climax. The feature of the narration goes no further than the style of a reporter.

The technique of the second chapter is quite different from that of the first and even the third chapter. The author writes it with one great flow of emotion, not using a single punctuation mark.[8] Events do not follow a logical sequence. The narrator's tale is a continuous flow, a mixture of illusion and reality, in which hopes are personified. Unlike the first chapter, the elements of time and space are not limited by logic. Time is almost absolute and does not have a plot or climax. The narrator is a protagonist who confuses reality with memories, with passages from history books, and with passages on Michelangelo. These elements are amalgamated intentionally to form a matrix similar to the one made in the first chapter. There, the narrator describes bulldozers digging into the soil, leaving behind long scars in the hillside.[9] His sad memories of the old jailer, the marks of the man's dirty nails on the prisoner's back, and the moment "Shouhdi `Ateya" is killed are parallel with the peak of Michelangelo's artistic achievement. Shouhdi lies

in the deep grass, whereas Christ lies comfortably in his mother's lap. No other sculptor before Michelangelo had created such a masterpiece. He also mingles the protagonist's love scene with "Tanya" with the machinery working through the rocks. Even Ramsis II's lies are included in this tight matrix; which implies that in spite of all such passive attitudes work and creation continue.[10]

The author intended to write a novel of accumulated structure made up from all its elements from the very first page until the last one.

He explained the complicated technique which he follows in this chapter. He said " The novel's structure is similar to that of the High Dam. It has to be made of three parts, the first part on the right, the second part on the left. The most important and dangerous part is in the middle. It is the kernel that contains all the machinery that built the dam".[11]

In the third chapter the author uses the same technique of parallelism that he uses in the first chapter. It is based on a combination between the main

character's description of surrounding reality, the historical excerpts which cover a limited period (the reign of Ramsis II), and the protagonist's memories of the period before his imprisonment. These include memories of his childhood and family life, of his youth and of his university days.

Evidently, the count down system of numbering the subdivisions of this chapter implies a return to old times and antiquity. His memories are related to present situations, they are as in the first chapter. For example, the failure of his love affair with "Tanya", is associated with a similar failure during his university days. He remembers how he would spend nights walking through the streets with the cold nipping his nose, and upon going home, would not be able to stop crying under his bedcovers.[12] Moreover, all the hardships he had suffered at the hands of the authorities are included. All kinds of authority caused suffering. At home there had been a strict father who would not accept any pleas for mercy.[13] At school, whenever he made a mistake he was beaten on the hands by the teacher.[14] Even at the university, when he shouted down the king in a loud voice the police arrived and everyone became

silent. like a yellow death.[15] As he passes a deserted village that hasd been drowned by the water of the Nile, he recalles his family's homestead, which is empty too. There is not even a piece of furniture left. Everything is gone and nothing will ever be the same.[16]

All these memories put together give the same explanation. That is why there is a tone of regret and sadness to his life. It is an old feeling, like the feeling of deprivation and cruelty, even a nostalgia for the old days.

The historical excerpts are taken from the reign of Ramsis II, who was known as, "the liar Pharaoh." He enslaved twenty thousand men for mant years in order to build a temple that would make his name eternal.[17] "It was seventy years of lying, immorality, false claims, killing, conceit and exploitation." [18] Some of these historical excerpts complement the previous ideas and enrich the theme. Others are similar to the history books from which the novelist took them. They do not add anything to the theme. Moreover, they are alien to the original text. Ramsis II is a symbol of what is happening in

present day history. In the same way that Ramsis exploited thousands of men to make himself immortal, Abdel Nasser, the Ramsis of modern times, is exploiting thousands of men to build the "Great Dam". This is his attempt to turn himself into an immortal figure, with no consideration for the sacrifices made or the suffering caused. History, therefore, is repeating itself.

Aversion to authority is not a new idea, but in "Najmat 'Aughustus" it springs from a local and a specific historical reality. Both time and space are designated, Abu Simbel - the site of the High Dam - the end of Stage One and the beginning of Stage Two of the construction of the High Dam during Nasser's rule. Those were days when freedom was shackled. That is the reason the novelist uses parallelism as an artistic form to express his ideas.

The novel has two levels. One deals with reality, and is similar to a press report. The second embodies the author's ideas. The overlapping of these two levels create the main theme of the novel, which is the irony of a government that builds with one hand and destroys human dignity with the other.

The author uses classical Arabic in descriptive passages, whereas for the dialogue he uses both classical and colloquial. In the first and second chapter the language is very close to the language of journalistic report. In contrast, the language in the second chapter is soft - almost poetic - and is improved by artistic touches. This contradiction gives the novel a more artistic taste. That is what distinguishes the novel from a mere journalistic report. [19]

Dialogue occupies almost half of the novel; however, the second chapter has no dialogue. In the first and the third chapters, the author employs dialogue as a descriptive device to portray everyday life realistically. In spite of the fact that the sentences are short, they are to the point and reinforce the theme. The dialogue does not go beyond the role of everyday life communication. It is not a main structural element. The author compensates for this by using memories and passages from different books. [20]

The author endows the characters of the novel with the same passive attitude, and portrays them accordingly.

"Sabry", is a fellow revolutionary. He had stopped his political activities because of fear until he was fifty, when he was not able to cope with problems any longer. The protagonist meets him at Aswan, where he works at the High Dam. He seems to be afraid of seeing the protagonist, but is eager to know why he came. Their encounter is cool and short, but it ends up with arrangements for another appointment. "Sabry" lives in submission, letting things pass as they go, and watches in humiliation. He is a victim of oppression and the authorities.

"Sa'id", one of the protagonist's university friends, had shared in his political activities. Believing that the game has ceased, he participates in the hypocrisy of society by becoming a journalist, and writing newspaper articles. He becomes one of the biggest editors, gets married, and has two children and a car. He enjoys having affairs with foreign women. Yet sometimes he feels bad about the things he does, knowing that everything around him is false. He writes superficial articles only as an excuse in which to bury his faults. He comes to the High Dam hoping to escape all that Cairo represents.[21] It is the center of false claims. Having come to Aswan with the

protagonist, he accompanies him everywhere. When he falls ill, the whole world becomes gloomy. He prepares to leave Aswan, or that damned country.[22] "Sa'id" is another example of an intellectual revolutionary. Instead of putting him in jail, the authority gives him a definite role to play. That is another form of oppression.

The protagonist meets "Zuhni" on a barge on his way to Abu Simbel. Zuhni claims that he is working in a company, but it turns out that he is a fugitive trying to escape not only from prison but from the country, by crossing the border to Sudan. He tries to make the protagonist escape with him, but the latter asks for some time to think it over.

The protagonist asks him what his crime is. He answers "Nothing" what could I do. Everybody was happy, making money and saying 'Amen' but I could not find a job. The protagonist replied, you could have said something." [23] Zuhni's words set the fate of the intellectuals who stand in the path of the authority but cannot agree. Therefore, he decides to leave his homeland. He is another example of an intellectual revolutionary who just could not take any more.

The novelist chooses the three previous characters because they are linked by one common factor. All three of them are victims of the oppressive ruling system. "Shuhdi 'Atiyyah" is also one of them. All these characters resemble the protagonist himself in many ways. Although each one has a different destiny, they all have a similar aversion to the ruling system.

"Tanya", a Russian girl who has come to work in the High Dam project, has a love affair with the protagonist. We do not know how far it goes. She tells him about herself. She is lonely, for her mother was killed by a German soldier during the war. She has never seen her father, since he was sent to a detention camp by Stalin and died there. Tanya is a passionate character who has come to the East searching for warmth and love. The protagonist gets more attached to her but she cannot continue in such a relationship because she feels it is unfulfilling. She does not want to get into problems with which she cannot cope. For a moment the narrator thinks he loves her and wants to marry her, but he is drunk at the time. When he sobers up, he forgets everything.

In the second chapter, he recounts some details of their relationship and their sexual encounter, but he is more imaginative than realistic. It is not really love that brings them together, but rather intense loneliness, emotional deprivation, and alienation. Thus, the times that they share are an escape from the gloomy dry reality in which they live. With the breaking up of their relationship, Tanya's name is not brought up again, to the very end of the novel. [29]

The author has a special style which is marked by quiet tone, and inactive situations. He does not detonate a situation, but rather creates the elements of discrepancy and contrast throughout the narrative. This is more effective than escalating situations to a climax, for after that the flare dies out. With the aid of the author's style and his quiet tone, the feeling remains unchanged throughout.

Footnotes

1. Matbu'at wa Nasharat Hi'at Al-Sadd Al-'Aly wa Sharikat Al-Muqāwilīn Al-'Arab wa Wizarat Al-Thaqāfah wa Markaz Tasgīl Al-'Athar Al-Misriyyah.

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Irving Stone, The Agony and the ecstasy, N.Y. Daubleday, 1963.

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Ni'māt Fu'ād, Al-Nīl fī al-'Adab al-Misrī, Cairo, 1962.

2. Mahmud `Amin al-`Alim, "Al-Tarikh w'al Fan w'al Dilalah fi Thalath Riwayat Misriyyah", Al-Adab, no.2.3, 1980, p. 15
3. Idem, Thulathiyyat al-rafd w'al Hazimah, Cairo, 1985, p.100.
4. Butrus al-Halaq, "Al-Da'irah wa Takhalkhuliha fi Najmat 'Aughustus, Al-Bahith, Jan., Feb., 1979, p.128.
5. Sun`Allah Ibrahim, Najmat 'Aughustus, Cairo, 1986. p.36
6. Muhammad Badawi, "Mughamarat al-Shakl `Ind Riwa'iyyi al-Sittinat: Madkhal Lijtimā'yyat al-shakl al-Riwa'i, Fusul, Jan., Feb., Mar., 1982, p.135.
7. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op.cit., p.46.

8. Nūh Huzayyin, (Hiwār m`a Sun`Allah Ibrahīm), "Muhawalah Lildukhul `ila `Ajwā` wa `Awālim Sun`Allah Ibrahīm", Al-Watan, 14.2.1984, p.4.
9. See Sun`Allah Ibrahīm, op. cit., pp. 141-142.
10. Mahmud `Amin al-`Alīm, "Al-Tārīkh w'al Fan w'al Dilālah fi Thalāth Riwayyat Misriyyah", op. cit., p.19
11. Nūh Huzayyin, (Hiwar m`a Sun`Allah Ibrahīm), "Muhawalah Lildukhul `ilā `Ajwa' wa `Awālim Sun`Allah Ibrahīm", op. cit., p.4
12. See Sun`Allah Ibrahīm, op. cit., p.162.
13. Ibid., p.191.
14. Ibid., p.202.
15. Ibid., p.226.
16. Ibid., p.195.

17. Ibid., p.218.
18. Ibid., p.218.
19. See Mahmud 'Amin Al-'Alim, op.cit., p.100.
20. Muhammad Barradah, Al-Ru'yah lil'alam fi Thalāth Namazig Riwa'iyyah, Al-'Adāb, No. 2, 3, 1980, p.49.
21. See Sun'Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., p.54.
22. Ibid., 1986.
23. Ibid., p.202
24. Faridah al-Naqqāsh, "Min Tilka al-Rā'iha 'ilā Najmat 'Augustus, 'Ālam yataqadam..raghm al-'alaam w'al-'Akhta'", Al-Tali'a, Oct., 1975, p.172.

Al-Lajna (The Committee)

Al-Lajna is Ali al-Jabiri's third novel. The first chapter of it appeared in the form of a short story published in the monthly periodical, Al-Fikr al-Hadith (The New Thought), May 1979. It was later published in its complete form in 1981. The novel is set in Baghdad during the 1970s.

CHAPTER FOUR

AL - LAJNA

The novel is an ironic reflection of reality. It belongs to neither the socialist school nor the surrealist school but rather lies in between the two categories. Unlike some of the other novels, it does have a progressive dramatic movement that leads to a climax. In order to refer to the novel, I have used the full significance of the title, which is a reference to the Committee of the Revolution. The novel gives a certain amount of political awareness of the particular period. And there is that very clear

Al-Lajna (The Committee)

Al-Lajna is Sun`Allah Ibrahim`s third novel. The first chapter of it appeared in the form of a short story published in the monthly periodical, "Al-Fikr al-Mu`asir" (Contemporary Thought), May, 1979. It was later published in its complete form, in 1981. The novel is an explicit expression of political and economic conditions prevailing in Egypt during the nineteen seventies, especially the open-door policy and the Camp David agreement that in turn led to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel.

The novel is an ironic rejection of reality. It belongs to neither the symbolist school nor the surrealist school but rather lies in between the two categories. Unlike some of Sun`Allah's other novels, it does have a progressive dramatic movement that leads to a climax . In order to the reader to understand the full significance of the novel, (s)he must have a certain amount of political awareness of the particular period. And thus, in that way, when

the reader complete the novel, he can understand the theme.

The novelist uses terminology appropriate to express the ideology of that period. This gives the novel its element of space, or place. He also uses documents and information, and even names of real characters living in the contemporary world to form the fictional setting. The author assumes that the reader knows them from his knowledge of the world around him. Those characters enrich the novel's significance and give it another dimension.

The main character in "Al-Lajna" is the narrator, speaking in the first person. He is not an onlooker who describes things in a documentary style, keeping a distance between him and others. Rather, he interacts with the events and characters with a certain degree of depth, working up to the climax. He decides to give up and become different. Fed up with his whole life, he wants to change it completely[1] in order to lead an ordinary life. He submits to everything, giving himself up to political figures, contractors, capitalists and American company clients. Moreover, he believes that he is living in a time when we are

driven to beg from our enemy and to make compromises with them.

The novel is divided into six chapters. The first begins with the main character going to the Committee in search of a job. It is not just any job, it is a task of a special nature.[2] He is already employed, but he would like to change everything, even his job. The new task he is seeking requires strange qualifications, and is provided by yet a stranger committee. As a critic describes it, it is a nightmarish committee.[3] Its nationality is not specified - we do not know if it is foreign or local. All we know is that it exists in the motherland. It does not converse in Arabic, as it has its own special language. One is not forced to appear before it, since it is informal. One goes to it of voluntarily. There is a hidden power forcing one to abide by its commands no matter how humiliating they are. Moreover, the one standing before it is always intent upon appeasing it by, providing it with information. This is formation conforms to the Committee's whims and desires, not to facts. Its members include both civilians and military men, and there are a few women. It is chaired by an old man with a pale face. Everybody is shrouded in

secrecy and mystery. The main character had been preparing to appear before that committee for one year. He had read all he could in various fields of science and knowledge, gathering all the certificates he has been awarded in his lifetime in preparation for this crucial encounter.

The protagonist arrives at the Committee's headquarters on time, but the members of the Committee are two hours late. Eventually, he is allowed to enter. He does so with his briefcase in hand. This is considered to be the external manifestation of a turning point in his life. His appearance before the Committee is a practical manifestation of that change[4].

His first steps before the Committee, present a failure. His hands are shaky and he cannot close the door properly behind him. He explains this to himself as a trick, devised by the Committee to reveal his confusion and helplessness[5]. He begins his conversation with the chairman, who along with his colleagues, seems to appreciate the fact that the Protagonist has chosen to come. They consider this decision to be wise and perceptive, something which would be taken into consideration.

The protagonist starts by giving a general background of his upbringing and the course he has taken in developing his life, taking care not to mention anything that might provoke anger. For example, he tries to explain the ordeal he has been through in previous years as a result of the wide gap between his ambitions and his actual abilities and his failure to reconcile them. That is why he decides to start all over again in a new and different direction.

The members of the Committee ask questions. One question concerns his whereabouts during a given period. The period is implied and not directly mentioned. They ask, "Where were you that year?" without saying exactly which year they have in mind. Evidently, the year must have some significance in the protagonist's life. Quietly he excludes 1948, mentioning the following dates 1956, 1958, 1961, and 1967, all of which were important years in Egyptian social history. He finally answers that he was in jail. This is not the whole truth, but only part of it.

After that, the Committee asks him to carry out some commands. He does so in spite of their

humiliating nature. For example, they ask him to do a belly dance, and then to take his trousers and underpants off. In spite of his nakedness, which is moral as well as physical, he does so just to please the Committee. As he stands there naked, displaying his manhood, they accuse him of being impotent.

Asked what the major event of the century was, he answers, after a short pause, that it was Coca-Cola. He goes to enumerate its various advantages. It is not only a widely - distributed commodity, but the Coca Cola company is influential enough to control the presidential election in the most powerful country in the world, the USA. In the developing countries, it chooses the tastes and aptitudes of kings and presidents. It even plays a role in wars and the signing of agreements.[6]

After his elaborate speech on the advantages of Coca-Cola, he is asked to talk about the Pyramids. The question is designed to test his knowledge of history, in order to see whether it is rich as is his knowledge of current affairs. He is delighted with this question, thinking that it will give him a better chance to impress the Committee. He says that he doubts

that it was the ancient Egyptians who built the Pyramids. This is because they did not have the engineering skill with which to construct such huge monuments. Furthermore, he says that Khufu might have been a Hebrew king. Perhaps it was the Jews who had set up the Pyramids. Another alternative is that Khufu was an Egyptian pharaoh who had been helped by Hebrew genius in building this Egyptian wonder. "The construction characteristics required to build the Pyramids today need more advanced knowledge of engineering than we have together with a greater degree of creativity and refinement. These are two things Egyptians do not have. That is why it is more likely that they asked the Israelis to help them." [7]

Upon saying this, the hero feels the tension in the room and the feeling of aversion towards him disappear. One of the military men looks at him with pleasure for the first time. The interrogation ends and so does the meeting. They tell him they will let him know when they arrive at a decision. The main character collects his papers and leaves. So ends the first chapter.

In chapter two, the hero receives a letter from the Committee asking him to do research on the most prominent Arab figure. He is not sure what the word 'most prominent figure' means to the Committee, nor does he know which figure to choose.

The word 'best' differs from the word 'most prominent', according to Dr. El `Allem [8] 'The best' are those people whose pictures the protagonist keeps in a corner in his house, or even locked up in his sub-conscious. All of them are people who, with the help of their ideas, practices and sacrifices set up ideals for human conduct. Among them are people like the Prophet Mohammad, El Mi`ary, Karl Marx, Freud, Taha Hussein, Castro, Lumumba, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and others[9]. 'The most Prominent', though, is something else. These are the people who personify the characteristics of the seventies[10].

In making his choice, the protagonist examines several groups in society, beginning with politicians and rulers and ending up with belly-dancers. Whatever his choice, he is apt to be condemned and ridiculed by society.

Ultimately, he reaches the point where none of those people fit the description of the "most prominent". He chooses the "Doctor" as a symbol of the prevailing values in an open-door society such as the society of the seventies. The Doctor has witnessed many events in the course of the nations history. He took part in the Palestinian war in 1948, and worked as a film producer after the revolution in July 1952. Shortly before the 1956 war, he established a soft drink factory. He also played a leading role in the Federation between Egypt and Syria, describing it as being the eternal responsibility of all Arabs living in this century. He is an anti-communist, as we learn when he gives a lecture on the Arab concept of socialism in Algeria. Furthermore, he says that the main reason for the defeat 1967 was due to the Russians. He is one of the top figures working in the public sector. Since he is known among many of the Arab kings his third marriage, to one of their daughters. His son is a director of one of the biggest firms importing French perfumes, American cigarettes and japaness audio-visual equipment.

With the beginning of chapter three, the hero starts collecting information on the "Doctor" from periodicals and newspaper cuttings. He finds an article about the Doctor while leafing through one of the editions of Newsweek, that mentions his daughter's marriage to a son of one of the Arab kings. It also refers to his patriotic sentiments, saying that during the War of Attrition he helped in providing the government with bulwarks worth millions of dollars. In the seventies, when Egypt was freed from the control of the Russians, he traded ammunition that proved a great help in the war of 1973. He also had a role in trading ammunition to other countries in the Middle East. It goes further to declare that he had gathered some men and formed a gang who were ready to help those who could pay. Finally he calls for peace and takes part in such activities as the trade of food, automobiles and aircraft, thus profiting from the open-door policy. The editor of the Newsweek article expresses his admiration for the Doctor, the millionaire, saying that he is a vivid and active character.

In gathering such information on the Doctor, the Protagonist comes face to face with many defects that

prevailed in that era. He is able to analyze many phenomena of which he had not thought before, such as depression, sexual impotence, laziness and religious fanaticism, the disappearance of Egyptian cigarettes and the return of Coca-Cola.

Such conclusions arouse the Committee's anxiety because the protagonist goes too far, farther than he should, in analyzing the various aspects of the Doctor's personality. The Committee thus decides to pay him a surprise visit at his house. The members search the house for something incriminating which would confirm the doubts they have had about him from the very beginning.

They find a poster that he has designed himself. It is made up of a newspaper clipping of the American President, Carter, showing his whole face towering above anybody. Beside him, in a small picture, is the Israeli Prime Minister Begin, who is dressed in short pants, looking like a young student standing beside his father. In front of them, the hero has spread a collection of some of the leading figures of the Arab world with their backs to the onlooker, kneeling as if praying. The members of the committee are dumbfounded

and infuriated by the protagonist's design and its implications.

They try to convince him to change the subject of his study, but in vain. They decide that one of the members will stay in the house with him. The fourth chapter ends with the protagonist murdering the member who was appointed to stay at the house with him. The protagonist does not tell us how he kills that member of the committee.

In the fifth chapter, when the protagonist goes to stand before the committee for the third time, it reads out letters of condolences. These have been sent by many important international figures, inter alia, the President of the United States and his wife, the Israeli Prime minister, other responsible Israeli citizens, and other eminent people of capitalist countries. The hero tries to clear himself of the accusation of killing one of the main members of the committee by saying that he did so in self defense. That member was carrying a hidden pistol, which frightened the hero is to killing him.

Unfortunately, he fails to prove himself not guilty. The Committee accuses him of conspiring with some organization to commit the murder. It says that it had expected as much from the beginning. Their suspicions were confirmed when they visited his house, and finally when he murdered one of their prominent members. They pass a cruel sentence against him - he is to eat himself up.

In chapter six, the last chapter, the protagonist leaves the Committee. On his way home he succumbs to his feelings of despair and projects them on the vivid scenes in the streets around him. He sees people crowding and pushing one another to buy unchilled Coca-Cola for twice its normal price. Nevertheless, he does the same. Getting on an old bus, he sees a huge man trying to rub his body against a woman's. When she protests, the man slaps her across the face. All the passengers watch passively. The protagonist himself interferes, extremely angry. The huge man responds by insulting and beating him.

With a broken arm, he goes to a public hospital but cannot find the doctor. He goes to the doctor's private clinic. There, he is asked to pay for his

first visit, and later for yet another visit. When he objects, he is thrown out in front of all the patients present, who are themselves objecting and angry. On his way home it is difficult for him to walk because there are piles of imported commodities and Coca-Cola boxes. The road is full of litter and trash, dust mounds and holes, yet nobody seems to mind. He walks on in despair.

At home, he tries to recall past events to see why he has failed. He regrets his display of weakness in his last confrontation with the Committee. He thinks that, should he ever have a chance to stand in front of it again, his attitude would be completely different. In an attempt to prove that he is capable of regaining his self-esteem, he gets a tape recorder and begins to speak into it in a loud strong voice. In contrast to his previous encounters with the Committee, he confesses that he had been wrong from the beginning in not opposing the Committee, and that he should have done everything possible to defeat it. The day would indeed come when it would be defeated, and no one will regret the consequences. After voicing his feelings, he feels relieved, clear minded, very still and calm. He experiences a rare moment of

ecstasy. He listens to music and famous radio speakers until dawn. Then he raises his broken arm to his mouth and begins to eat himself up.

Although the novel is actually divided into six chapters, some critics have divided the novel into two parts. Part one contains the first three chapters and is called "The search for knowledge". Part two contains the last three chapters and is called "The acquisition of knowledge".[11]

Sun'Allah Ibrahim commented on the division of the novel into six chapters. He said that the first five chapters were written in order to present "unreal characters who, in dealing with real things, such as Coca Cola." He described the six chapter by saying "I wanted to deal with the opposite, real characters who lived and faced incredible situations."[12]

The actual end of the narrative comes with the protagonist killing himself. Yet, Muhammad Farag a prominent critic, say that there are three ends to the novel.[13] The first occurs when the main character tries to stab the guard to death, and thus end his inner sense of besiegement. The critic explains the a

author's continuation of the novel as an expression of the tight bond between his hopes in history and his resistance of reality. The second ending, he says, occurs when the protagonist goes home, listens to recordings of music by great composers and remains sitting there until dawn. Here the author does not end the narrative but adds yet another line. "Then, I raised my injured arm to my mouth and began to eat myself up." The novel closes there. That is the third ending. Furthermore, according to Farag, by adding that line the author is reaffirming the reality of the novel, making his social document and his historical witness complete. It expresses a vague reality, tight control by an oppressive power and a generation that erodes itself.[14]

The structure of the novel is not based on conventional elements, although there certainly is a climax that implies the meeting point of reality and illusion. Events, although illusionary, occur and are expressed according to the terms of the real world. The main event occurs when the protagonist confronts the Committee. He is fed up with everything around him and is overcome with frustration, death and sickness. He tries to escape into himself

(retrogression), or in an outward direction. He goes to the extent that he changes his skin, or rather goes to confront the Committee.

The Committee, is a symbol of the concept of authority, during the specific period covered by the novel, which is Egypt in the seventies. By understanding the Committee, knowing the things that please or enrage it and by knowing the types of people with which it deals and represents in our contemporary world, we realize that it has a world of its own with its own values and philosophy. It has its own significance, on which manifests itself directly in a form that is basically capitalistic and imperialistic.[15] It is exactly this which gives 'the Doctor' his socially unique existence during the seventies and early eighties in Egypt. The Doctor is used by the Committee. They have a mutually beneficial relationship. The Doctor and the Committee are bound together. One of the Committee's main assignments, in order to continue, was to back him up. Therefore, his presence was essential for the Committee's survival and control.[16] Thus, the Committee was disturbed when it felt that the Protagonist had gathered too much information about

the Doctor, to the extent that he had found explanations to some passive social phenomena. Arriving at such conclusions, the protagonist savored a new taste to his life and was not ready to lose it to return to the hollowness in which he used to live. As he said, "Can a drowning man let go of a log that might save him?" [17]

The relationship between the Committee and the main character is stiff and oppressive. This is manifested by the fact that the protagonist had to wait, because the Committee was about two hours late for the fixed appointment. The oppression is seen also in the protagonists' compliance with the committee's humiliating commands, by doing the belly dance, standing naked in front of them all, and allowing a member to stick a finger up his rectum to test his potency. Furthermore, it is evident in the protagonist's cautiousness in presenting his general knowledge in the way the committee wanted it, not in the way it should have been presented. It is a "Molded Knowledge", that is, presented in accordance with a specific ideology.

This reveals the power that turns the protagonist

into a submissive passive character. Deep down he is in a dilemma. He is caught between a rejection of the little reality that is left, although he is not convinced of it, and an intense awareness of the humiliation he was subjected to. Wanting despite himself to coexist with a rotten reality, such an atmosphere makes him disgusted with everything.

This rejecting hidden self is sometime motivated, as we see in some of his words that are almost a monologue: "Deep down I felt glad I failed, as if one part of me was afraid I would succeed." [18] This rejection is reinforced when he kills the member of the Committee who is staying with him, who also represents the idea of siege. Even in approaching the closing pages of the novel, and after the hero knows the destiny that has been set for him by the Committee, he expresses his rejection of the Committee and all that for which it stands. He confirms this rejection in a clear concrete style, after which he feels extremely relieved.

All through the novel, he has wanted to become a quite different character, far from the revolutionary intellectual, in order to be able to adapt to this

new open-door society. Failing to do so, and in an expression of this failure, he carries out the Committee's verdict, eating himself up as a punishment. From the beginning, from the moment he first confronted the Committee, he had adapted this passive weak attitude, until he carries out the Committee's strange verdict. We see the protagonist's feeble character, and the fact that he is liable to fall back and submit to life as it may come. Neither can he remain the strong resisting revolutionary intellectual, nor can he adapt to accept the spirit of the modern era. This is the tragedy of both conscious and sub-conscious defeat, the tragedy of mediocrity. [19]

The characters in the novel do not have names, but the hero describes them all very clearly to invest them with unique characteristics. He calls one of them "The short man" and others "The ugly man" "The blond" and "The old man". Yet some characters are defined by their collective qualities. The Doctor, for example, is actually a symbol and not a real character participating in the events of the novel. The Protagonist reveals a character of a middleman a contractor and a parasitic open-door man who is

representative of active success at this stage of the open-door policy. Even the main character, in talking about himself, represents the revolutionary intellectual who has lost his sense of patriotism in this new open-door society. He tries to change to become one of those living in it, despite the fact that this new mode of life conflicts with his principles, but he fails. The character of the Doctor and the Coca-Cola man are also symbols of greed in Egyptian society at various social levels. The author drew out the characters in the novel according to an ideology appropriate to that of the theme.

Dialogue occupies almost half of the novel, especially in the first chapter when the protagonist stands before the Committee.

The style is absurd and surrealistic, and the author uses contemporary and commonly - used vocabulary to stress the theme of the period of that open-door society.

In The Committee the author uses various levels of language. He uses six interrelating levels: the narrative style, the report style, the documentary style, the ironic style, the suggestive style and the

language of numbers.[20] The use of these levels is due to the the events of the novel and the hero's participation in creating the plot.

Each of the different levels corresponds to various situations which occur in the novel. Accordingly, various levels of language must be used to express these events. In spite of the clear-cut division of the language used, the main goal of all these levels is to evoke the reader's sense of irony and discrepancy. Furthermore, the use of the documentary style tends to give the novel a more realistic tinge.

The author excels in portraying ironic situations in cold language with a serene tone, implying a sarcastic spirit. Moreover, he uses the Committee's language to express its views in such exaggerated manner that it reaches the point where it says the opposite thing altogether. This reveals the Committee's logic, making the reader realize its true aims.[21] He also uses ironic indirect terminology to express the gloomy side of society. He chooses one of the terms commonly used during that period; "diversification", as an explanation of political social and economic phenomena.[22]

All the critics who deal with language, do so according to the content of the verbal meaning of the word. As for the linguistic structure, Sun`Allah was successful in using simplified classical Arabic and very expressive vocabulary.

Footnotes

1. Sun`Allah Ibrahim, Al-Lajna, Cairo, 1981, p.13.
2. Mahmud `Amin al-`Ālim, Thulāthiyyat al-rafd w'al hazīmah, Cairo:1985, p.144.
3. Muhammad Farag, "Lajnat Sun`Allah Ibrahim", Adab al-ghad, Feb., 1984, pp.48.
4. See Mahmud `Amin al-`Ālim, op. cit., p.145.
5. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., p.10.
6. Ibid, p.24.
7. Ibid, p.27.
8. See Mahmud `Amin al-`Ālim, op. cit., pp. 150-152.
9. Ibid., pp. 150-152.
10. Ibid., pp. 150-151.

11. Sizā Qāsem, "Al Mufāraqah fi al-qas al-`Arabī al Mu`asir", Fusul, Jan. Feb. March, 1982, pp. 149-151.
12. Hussin Hamūda, (Hiwār m`a Sun`Allah Ibrahim) "Hīna tatasi` al-riwāyah li`anāsir al wugūd", Al-Yawm al-Sābi`, 12. 10. 1984, p.34.
13. Muhammad Farag, "Lajnat Sun`Allah Ibrahim", op. cit., p.62.
14. Ibid., pp.62-66
15. See Mahmud `Amīn al-`ālim, op. cit., p.185.
16. Muhammad Farag, "Lajnat Sun`Allah Ibrahim", op. cit., p.54.
17. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., p.77.
18. Ibid., p.10.
19. See Mahmud `Amīn al-`Ālim, op. cit., p.167.
20. Ibid., pp.170-174.

21. Muhammad Badwi, "Isti`adat Mashru`yyat al-qatl",
Al-aqlaam, Feb., 1983, p.46.
22. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., p.119.
23. See Mahmud `Amin al-`Alim, op. cit., p.152.

CHAPTER FIVE

BAYRUT . . . BAYRUT

"Bayrut..Bayrut" (Beirut..Beirut)

Sun`Allah's fourth novel, " Bayrut..Bayrut," was written in 1982-1983, and published in 1984. It is neither a historical novel, nor a merely autobiographical one.[1] The novel represents a condemnation of the modern age, rules, and imperialism. "I am not writing about Beirut, I am also writing about Egypt, about Libya and even about the whole era." [2]

It is similar to a diary. The events revolve about a trip which the protagonist takes from Cairo to Beirut in order to publish a book that could not be published in Cairo. because this book criticized all Arab regimes rather skeptically, it was difficult to publish in Egypt. The interaction between him and the various people he meets during his stay in Beirut comprise the action in the novel. Half of the novel is an account of the events of the Lebanese civil war. Here the main character relies on historical events

and documents. Sun`Allah has said, however, that a basic motive of the novel was an attempt to understand the inner world of a woman he met during his stay in Beirut. [3]

The author tries to combine the protagonist's daily activities in Beirut with a documentation of the actual historical occurring in Lebanon. He is convinced that a historian is a novelist, and that the author of a novel can turn his novel into history. [4] Convinced that the relationship between the two is close and interchangeable, he wrote the novel "Beirut..Beirut".

At the beginning of the novel there are two maps. The first is a map of Lebanon, divided into sections. Each section is under the control of certain sect. The other shows the division of the city of Beirut into East Beirut and West Beirut, with all the important places and streets clearly displayed on it.

In this novel the element of place is so important that it is illustrated by maps. That of Lebanon defines its important location in relation to other Arab countries. That of Beirut itself, with its illustration of alleys, streets, squares and

border-lines. illustrates the various groups and parties controlling these places.

In Beirut..Beirut conflict for time is also a conflict for place. The novel has 27 chapters. Throughout the first six chapters the main character tells of his arrival in Beirut. There he meets an old friend called "Wadi` Messeha," in whose home he stays while he is in the town. On the first day of his stay, he learns that the publishing house that was to publish his book, which is owned by "Adnan El Sabagh", has been shelled. This leaves him very frustrated. Going out in the streets he sees military vans and armed vehicles raising flags of their various parties or sects "Al Murabitun", "The Deterrence force" or "The Palestinian Armed Strife Group". In spite of the fact that bullets keep flying around and that machine gun fire and shelling never cease, daily life carries on in the streets quite normally. Peddlers sell their goods -- cigarettes, chocolate and alcohol -- on the streets. While directly facing them are a group of armed men from "Al Murabitun". People crowd around cinemas and small sandwich shops. At the same time, there are crowds around jewellery and fashion shops. Both the main character and Wadi`

go to a gallery to see a display of photographs of old Lebanese families. He describes many of these pictures in detail. Each differs in terms of style, furniture and clothing. Facial features differ as well because each clan has its distinctive features. The Druse are clothed quite differently than are the Shi'ites or those living in rural mountain areas. By going into minute detail in his description of all these photographs, the main character stresses the fact that diversities among the Lebanese clans have been known for ages. These differences exist not only with respect to religious beliefs, but in other aspects of life as well.[5]

The main character is offered a job by Wadi', who introduces him to a progressive film director called "Antoinette Khouri". She asks him to write a commentary on a documentary film about the Lebanese civil war which was produced by a group of leftist youths. The film was written and directed by Antoinette herself. She provides the main character with a pile of books, several reports and excerpts from newspapers in order to give him a comprehensive idea about the Lebanese issue.

In chapter seven, the hero tries to explain the causes of this civil war, and the real conflicting powers involved in it, using historical facts to substantiate his ideas.

The protagonist prefers to write out the script before commenting on it. The documentary sections are printed in a different type. The narrative appears in the form of the main character's diary of events in Beirut. These events are expressed in the present tense. The events of the documentary film, however, are written in the past tense. The film shots portray headlines from various Arab and foreign newspapers on the Lebanese war, press conferences with important Arab and foreign figures involved in the issue, statements by women who witnessed the war and who lost some martyrs, as well as scenes of the streets of Beirut in which churning barbaric battles take place. The last scene shows the retreat of the Israeli troops and their replacement with the United Nations force. The protagonist talks to Antoinette, suggesting that she cut out this scene. He tells her that it would be better to end with a scene showing the Israeli occupation of The Litani River, saying that this would make the film more like a vision of the future rather

than a mere documentary. It is clear that he is pessimistic. When his friend Wadi' asks about the conditions in Egypt, he answers sarcastically. Since the normalization of relations between Egypt and Israel, everything is forging ahead, and so are prices. They are soaring higher as, services collapse and the number of robberies increases. Antionette introduces him to "Walid", a young Palestinian, who shows the protagonist a map of Palestine that has a black patch in the middle representing Israel in 1948. This patch grows bigger and bigger with the course of time, until in another map, Walid shows a patch which has grown so large that it extends all the way to Baghdad, Kuwait, Dhahran, and Benghazi. Walid shows him all that, but the protagonist turns away. He leaves without uttering a word of comment on what he saw, not even making any objection.

The main character gets acquainted with "Lamia al-Sabagh," Adnan al-Sabagh's wife. She supervises her husbands' publishing business in his absence. The protagonist is attracted by her beauty. They start a business relationship, as he is trying to get his book published; however, this relationship develops to the extent of incomplete sexual intercourse. He does not

feel he needs her that much, but desires to discover Lamia's mysterious personality, which represents the different aspects of a bourgeoisie that initially developed in this period. Thus, a sexual relationship with her means revealing the unknown elements of that period in which her character was molded. The success of this relationship is closely related to his discovery that she is an Israeli spy. This makes his sexual desire equal to the desire to kill. This becomes evident when he strangles her, not knowing whether this a result of his desire to have her or his desire to kill her.[6]

The protagonist in "Beirut..Beirut" is an intellectual who rejects the local government and authority, yet in this case he goes beyond that to criticize all Arab regimes. He expresses himself openly in the book which he had gone to Beirut in order to publish. Through choosing a film documentary the protagonist reveals his own views, and all the aspects of this tragic situation.

The novel has plot, but it is not well drawn. The events move in a horizontal direction, not rising to reach a climax. It has no tight links because of the

great deal of documentary material about the Lebanese Civil War. The author tries to synthesize this with the main narration in order to turn it into a well developed novel. On the other hand, this gives the theme of the novel another dimension, since the documentary film's events are written in the past, whereas the events of the novel are written in the present tense. The reader is meant to feel that events in the present are a result of events in the past, or more specifically as a result of what we know from the documentary film about the war.[7] As for the future, the main character perceives it pessimistically. Israel is developing, expanding and swallowing up its neighbors.[8] Nothing is left for the Arab governments except to join NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) or sign a defense agreement with Israel.[9] The inclusion of historical events also reinforces the theme by providing a subtle, objective, expression of various viewpoints. This allows the author to deal with the Lebanese war, in terms of time and place, in a flexible manner.[10] It is clear that the main character wants to condemn the Arab regimes theoretically, writing this condemnation in the book he wants to publish. He supports these arguments through the film scenes about

the outbreak of the war. It was the disturbed Arab regimes that had aborted any sense of patriotism, since the proper atmosphere in which it could be developed is lacking.

The dialogue consists of much more than these descriptive parts. This narrows the gap between the main character and other ones. The author stresses situations in which dialogue is used and uses it positively to make the reader aware of the various dimensions of the novel. He does not want to express these dimensions explicitly. For example, in the conversation between the main character and Wadi` Messeha about `Adnan al-Sabagh, the dialogue gives the reader an idea about not only the main character's personality, but also that of Wadi` himself. Moreover it gives a good idea of what the situation was like in Beirut.[11] The dialogue between the protagonist and one of the Maronite kidnappers shows to what extent religious fanaticism was the cause of the Lebanese civil war.[12] The dialogue is written in classical Arabic with a few words in the Lebanese dialect.

The protagonist chooses characters in the novel whose ideologies correspond to those of the era which the novel describes. "Wadi` Messeha" is an Egyptian. He was one of the protagonist's school mates. During the leftist movement against `Abdel Nasser, he had been sent to a detention camp for a week. After that he became a prominent member of a government political organization. A Christian, he had come to Beirut as a refugee, searching for security which he could not find in Egypt. He is always looking for someone with whom he may affiliate and who will protect him in time of adversity. Yet, he believes that it would be rather difficult for anyone to belong to one group only. Everyone is establishing relationships and connections to protect him or herself against any sudden changes.[13] Wadi` is one of those characters created by the civil war.

The Palestinian progressive Maronite film director "Antionette Khouri", is the only character who does not belong to any specific organization, despite her relationship and interaction with the PLO. By directing the film she is searching for the truth behind the civil war. She is also searching for hope in her relationship with "Walid", the Palestinian

youth, who represents a Palestinian mind that is not functioning. He is the only glimmer of hope in the novel. Someday he may be able to do something positive. That is the reason why she is careful not to lose him, and to let their relationship continue.

Lamia Al-Sabbagh, the publisher's wife, comes from an old Sunni family. She takes care of her husband's business in his absence. She is a selfish and self-centered woman, who cares only about her looks. Because she lacked her mother's affection, she has a strange relationship with an older woman. A relationship based completely on sex is established between her and the hero. She associates with people only to the extent she can benefit from them, even if that means dealing with the occupation government. This is not surprising, for she tells the protagonist that the Palestinians are responsible for all the trouble they are going through.[14] When he finally discovers that she is a spy, he tries to strangle her. His desire to have sex with her is almost equal to his desire to destroy her and all that her character represents. She is able to push him away, and escape alive. She represents the continuation of the tragic situation in Lebanon. She therefore, is a symbol of Lebanon today, after its civil war.

Footnotes

1. 'Ilyas Khūry, "Al-Ramz al-Mubashir w'al 'Agz 'an al-Kitabah", al-Safir, 7.12.1984, p.12.
2. Rif'at Sallām, (Hiwār ma'a Sun'Allah Ibrahīm) "Rihlah Fī al-'Alām al-Khalfī min "Bayrut..Bayrut" Kitabāt, Nov., 1984, p.51.
3. Sārah, (Hiwār ma'a al-Kātib al-Riwa'ī Sun'Allah Ibrahīm) "'Arfuḍ Tadhīl al-Qāri' 'aw Tadhīlul" al-Dawha, 9/1985, p.107.
4. Husīn Hamūda, "Hīna Tatasi' al-Riwāyah l'anāsir al-wugūd" Al Yawm al Sābi', 12.10.1984. pp.32-34.
5. 'Abu al-Ma'ātī 'Abū al-Najah, "Qirā'ah Naqdiyyah li Kitāb Bayrut..Bayrut..", al-'Arabī Feb., 1988, pp. 139-140.
6. Ibid., p. 142.
7. Ibid., p. 142. p.142.

8. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., p.209.
9. Ibid., p.128.
10. Rif`at Sallam (Hiwar ma`a Sun`Allah Ibrahim),
"Rihlah fi al-`Alam al-Khalfi min
"Bayrut..Bayrut", op. cit., p.51.
11. "Abu al-Ma`ati 'Abu al-Najah, "Qirā'ah Naqdiyyah
li Kitāb Bayrut..Bayrut", op. cit., p.149.
12. See Sun`Allah Ibrahim, op. cit., pp.216-219.
13. Ibid., p.30.
14. Ibid., p.138.

CHAPTER SIX

A COMPARISON AND ANALYSIS OF

SUN 'ALLAH'S ARTISTIC ELEMENTS

THROUGH THE FOUR NOVELS

A Comparison and an analysis of
Sun`Allah's Artistic Elements Through
the Four Novels

This analytical study deals with four novels by Sun`Allah Ibrahim. The first of these is Tilka al-Ra`iha written in 1966, and the last is Beirut..Beirut written in 1984. Each novel is a candid expression of fundamental problems in Egyptian and Arab realism. The author finds it impossible to tolerate reality as seen in the surroundings, but also finds it impossible to escape a dry harsh reality in which human interaction only ends in conflict. Furthermore he authentically portrays the Arab intellectual who rejects his reality and revolts against it.

The themes of these four novels reflect the eras in which they were written. During the period when there was only a limited amount of freedom and people were sent to detention camps, Tilka al-Ra`iha was written. Najmat `Aughustus appeared, during the period of the revolution's great achievements and slogans. Al-Lajna was written at the time of the

open-door policy. All three novels express different social conflicts prevalent in Egyptian society during various stages. However, in the fourth novel, "Beirut..Beirut", the author deals with an issue which preoccupied the whole Arab world: the Lebanese civil war and its impact on every Arab.

Although Sun`Allah Ibrahim's novels appear to deal with general issues, they are in fact, a subjective expression of his painful personal experience. He believes that nobody can write about anything and be totally objective. Even in expressing general public issues, an author's viewpoint is liable to be subjective. His outlook is what gives the novel warmth and emotion, creating its own genuine style. Specifically, Sun`Allah considered topics of public interest inseparable from his own interests.[1] When the novelist was asked whether the four novels represented certain stages in his writing, he replied by saying that to use the term "stages" would not be a suitable way of phrasing the question, since these four novels were all he had written. Thus, the number of his novels was not sufficient to represent stages. He admitted though, that in all four novels, he concentrated on the use of the same technique namely

that of expressing everyday in a realistic fashion . However, "Al-Lajna" is an exception in which he rejects the rigid technique of realism, replacing it with the use of surrealism or the absurd form. In doing so, he radically changes his usual style, making this novel extremely different from the three others.[2]

Another theme is the author's attitude towards the government. He rejects all the various realities surrounding him, be they his own or the more general sense of the word. He attempts in his work to present reality, with all its ugliness. Although he has a sense of aversion towards this reality, he would not write anything else. This means that he would not express anything contradictory to the real world around him. The reader feels at first that the novel is not a subjective expression, because the novelist does not seem to react emotionally. There is no apparent trace of subjectivity in his style. He writes in a style that tends to be like a report, going into minute details, without emotional tone. Moreover his tone is subtle, and in describing details it bears a sense of irony and alienation. The style is also a bit cool . The author tries to keep his

distance from what he is writing so that he will not express his personal views or impose any personal comments. That is why he has been accused of being more a reporter or a research writer than a novelist. He justifies his use of crude style by saying that he does so to project the coarseness of reality. He feels the strong impact of this gloomy state of existence because of difficulties he has experienced throughout his life. When he was six, he lost his mother and with her, all his sense of security and love. This resulted in a sense of estrangement and isolation from his surroundings, the beginning of his true alienation. He then fell a victim to many diseases which left him a sick and shriveled figure.[3]

In the late fifties and early sixties, during the Nasser era, when Sun Allah was still a youth, he was sent to a detention camp with a group of communists where he spent five humiliating bitter years locked up in the Wahat Jail.[4] This imprisonment left its mark on him which, together with all his previous hardships, is mirrored in all his works. This affects his creative power and style clearly and crisply. In explanation of his crude style he says in the

introduction to his novel "Tilka al-Ra'ihah":
"Should we not use a bit of grotesqueness to express the ugliness represented in the physiology of such behavior as when a helpless person is beaten to death; or sticking of a pump up a man's anus; and giving electrical shocks in a person's genitals? All this is because he has a different opinion, or stands up in defense of his freedom or patriotism." [5]

No doubt, the novelist's involvement in political activities gave his novels access to the political genre. Sun`Allah was also influenced by the modern French novel. His style is similar to that of Hemeingway, who said that literature is like an iceberg, only part of which can be seen. The rest of which has to be reshaped in the imagination. While he was in jail, Sun`Allah read a book by Carlos Baker on Hemeingway's style and thought. [6] This was a turning point in his life as a novelist, since it helped in the development of his own individuality as an artist. [7] He believed that the artist should make art plausible and give it several levels of interpretation. Where language is concerned, it should allow accuracy of description. Sentences should be short and concise, clearly showing their relation to each other. Artists should economize on words. [8]

In each novel. Sun`Allah tries to turn an individual experience into a universally shared one. His themes therefore have a close association with his personal experience. This is why some critics consider his works to be almost autobiographic.[9]

After his release from prison he wrote Tilka al-Ra'iha, the subject matter of which was taken from his diary.

"As I read my short diary, I felt confronted with the raw material of a piece of art. All I had to do was to give it shape and also polish it. I had the feeling that at last I had found my own personal voice." [10]

The same happened when he wrote his second novel, "Najmat 'Aughustus", about the author's trip to the High Dam and Abu Simbel in 1965. Together with Kamal el Qalash and Raouf Sa`d he wrote a book called "Insan al sadd al `alli" (Man of the High Dam), published in Cairo in 1967.[11] "During that period, I had recorded memories of my impressions and the events of each day in a diary about the trip I had taken to the High Dam. I wrote about everything I saw. On analyzing what I had written, I wondered whether the structure of the novel could be similar to the structure of the High Dam itself". [12]

"Al-Lajna", however, unlike the two previous ones, is not based on the novelist's diary. Rather it is Sun`Allah's vision of the new state of reality in which he finds himself during the terrifying passive conditions in Egypt of the seventies, when there was a frightening glamor to everything. He expresses his anguish using the absurd or the surrealist form of representation. This makes it a pure novel instead of an autobiography. It was considered a criticism of the prevailing political scene in Egypt and the Arab world in the seventies. "Al-Lajna" represents a new phase in Sun`Allah's art, in which he goes beyond the direct expression of autobiography and reaches the surreal novel, thereby universalizing his personal experience. By so doing, he externalizes that which is subjective, making it an objective expression of a generally felt state of reality. Therefore we would assume that Sun`Allah would continue to write at this level. He disappoints us when, in "Bayrut..Bayrut", he regresses to his original technique of using recorded daily events changed and reformed skillfully in the manner of the two previous novels. One expected him to go beyond his subjective voice to a more universalist one. The author said that the motive of writing "Beirut..Beirut" was a personal

one. It was a voyage to discover the inner world of a Lebanese woman. He gets to know her during his stay in Beirut and has an affair with her. The reason he wrote on a subject of greater public interest was to give that character a setting. He did not intend to portray, for its own sake, the bloody civil war churning Lebanon. However, he does realize the fact that there is in fact, some sort of relationship between her and the present day Arab social and political conditions. Perhaps this is what motivates him to continue writing the novel.[13]

In each of Sun`Allah`s novels the main character controls all the other elements. The story is told and explained by the protagonist, a fact which restricts the other artistic elements. This shows the skill with which the novelist manipulates the various elements present in the novel, instead of writing spontaneously. Although he attempts to achieve a realistic and universal perspective, he is unable to make the novel free from his own subjectivity, which is represented in the figure of the narrator. The author, therefore, has the liberty of expressing his views in the main character`s voice. Although he goes into detailed descriptive documentation of everyday

events that take place in the real world, he still cannot be objective. Such a descriptive style does not make up for the lack of development of the other creative elements needed to make an integrated novel.

In all four novels Sun`Allah's main character is consistent. Unlike more traditional ones, he wants to make up for a crack in his inner world, caused by his inability to cope with reality, by absolutely rejecting the outer world and its values. In all four novels, the heroes have common characteristics. Each one of them is the same revolutionary intellectual opposing the government. Because he has independent political ideas, he is sent to detention camp with the communists in Abdel Nasser's days to be freed in the mid-sixties.[14] Although he writes, he does not work for any particular agency. He does not have a specific job. He has no name nor any specific features. Each suffers from the deprivation of family life, shares a sense of insecurity, and has no one to love him, even as children. Throughout all four novels, the main character has a struggle with the authorities. That is the cause of his feelings of aversion towards them. He is always trying to prove that all forms of authority have always been unjust.

The period he spends in jail increases his sense of alienation and oppression. Therefore, he is cautious in dealing with others, keeping his distance from them. Furthermore, he is passive and unable to achieve anything. He has no goals or aspirations. The past has been bitter and sad, and the present is full of hallucinations. He roams through life aimlessly. Having no dreams for the future, he is indifferent to his surrounding world or reality. Watching life around him, he sees only the absurdity of existence. All the previously mentioned characteristics are consistent in Sun`Allah`s novel although they appear in varying degrees in each of the four main characters which may be considered development stages.

Thus, in Tilka al-Ra'ih, the main character is an intellectual who has a passive personality. Feeling completely lost, he seems to be unstable, both in mind and in social behavior. He is unable to conceive of reality beyond his everyday life. He speaks mostly about himself, and to himself. His memories seem to be the only reality he knows of to ward off his feeling of futility. All relationships he has with others are superficial and do not last. He is always

very careful to keep his distance from other people. Although he has memories of the hard times, he had spent in the detention camp, his feelings of aversion are repressed and not referred to except in memory.

Passive emotions in "Najmat 'Aughustus" are not so accentuated, although they still exist. The main character is trying to reconcile himself with reality. He slowly regains psychological and social stability. This is evident when he goes to the High Dam under the pretense of being a journalist writing a report on the project, a great achievement of the Revolution. Although his various relations with others are on a large scale, he all the same, keeps his distance from them. In this novel, however, the separation from other people appears in a less intensive manner than it does in the previous novel. This is clearly evident in those relationships that, although seemingly shallow, serve to save him from being totally alienated from others as had been the case upon coming out of jail.

In Tilka al-Ra'ih, the hero's own views are repressed. In "Najmat 'Aughustus," however, his personal opinions are seen through the technique the

author uses of portraying the negative aspects of the ruling system in a voice similar to that of the main character. Although the apparent aim of writing the novel is to display the magnificence of the great project, his description of the negative aspects of the political system, overshadows the apparent motif. This proves that the hero is still in conflict with reality. Furthermore, he is no longer a man tied down by oppression, having suffered the bitterness of punishment, but rather is a person who reacts to it. With his own ideology, he criticizes the government, looking at it with a great deal of cynicism.

Therefore, we expect these characteristics to be reinforced. We are disappointed, however, when in his third novel, "Al-Lajna", Sun`Allah makes his typical main character reappear. Having become fed up with everything, he gives in to self-destruction, letting reality, as represented by the Committee, have the upper hand. The hero surrenders totally to the facts it has chosen. The hero is well aware of what his destiny will be, and mocks everything that happens, not being convinced of what he sees. Although his rejection is evident in some situations, it is not explicitly expressed. This is what makes members of

the Committee lose faith in him and suspect him, thus ordering him to be punished. He gives in to the Committee's verdict in total submission. It is a self-inflicted punishment because the hero has not been strong the way he usually was. It was not, therefore, a verdict issued by the Committee. From the beginning, the hero suffers from suicidal tendencies. At the final stage, he wants to put an end to his suffering. His anguish rises as a result of his constant struggle against reality. The struggle of a revolutionary intellectual begins with the first novel "Tilka al-Ra'iha" and ends up in "Al-Lajna" as the hero submits to his weakness.

In "Bayrut..Bayrut" the development of the main character takes a new course, which shows his relationships, interests, and activities. His reaction to the surrounding real world is almost normal. No longer do feelings of rejection appear as acutely as they did in the previous novels. Passive emotions are presented as the hero goes to Beirut to publish his book. These passive emotions take up only part of the novel, and appear only to inform us of their presence. Later, the main character has relationships with others, interacting with them and

reacting to surrounding events spontaneously for the first time in Sun`Allah`s novels. The author is not interested in a purely local issue, but goes further to express issues that are of interest to the whole Arab World. This makes the suffering less subjective, and leaves room for a public statement on a more universal issue, trying to reveal the various negative aspects of it. By doing this, the hero seems to have regained social and psychological integrity. By adopting this public issue, he has given up his personal revolutionary enthusiastic expression, becoming more of an objective and impersonal man who sees things with a broader scope and is able to understand them better.

The foregoing analysis demonstrates how various experiences affect the hero, giving him his own specific ideology. These are represented all through the novels, from "Tilka al-Ra'iha" to "Bayrut... Bayrut." Therefore, as this study has tried to prove, the hero has always manifested pessimism and a rejection of reality in his daily activities in the novels. Everything appears to be a projection of his repressed negative emotions, especially those related to his constant aversion to the government.

Thus, we can see that the hero's ideology, his negative emotions, his beliefs, and his way of living affect other elements in the novels. All of these serve to reinforce a particular ideology, that of the main character. Throughout the four novels, characters have many common factors. All of them are living under the same political conditions and as part of a reality, which as the hero sees it, is corrupt. He tells us of the first victim, Shouhdi Atiyya, a real character. He is a man who was in jail with the author. He is killed by the authorities, the men of slogans. Shouhdi appears in the first two novels. In the first, he appears when the hero recalls the detention camp days. He appears again when the author dedicates "Najmat 'Aughustus" to the man's soul, for "Shouhdi Atiyya" was the government's first victim. All the other characters are derived from the hero's youth which was full of hardships. These represent negative aspects he gathered as a result of his clash with unpleasant reality. He had so many dreams and aspirations, but was able to realise none. These clashes with reality are seen, for example, in "Najmat 'Aughustus". "Sa'id", an intellectual who takes part with the hero in a demonstration against the government, meets him once more by chance in Aswan.

where the dam is being built. It has been a long time since the hero last met, "Sa'id" has become the Editor-in-Chief of one of the newspapers. We are told that he has learned how to play the government's game. He now writes about the greatness of the regime and its achievements. Although he is not convinced of what he writes, he keeps on writing to prevent any conflicts with the government and to adapt to the reality in which he lives. This is the same thing that "Wadi` Misiha" does in "Beirut..Beirut". He also is a friend of the hero's, who has been involved in demonstrations and was sent to jail for having opposed the government. On being released, he is given a high position. He too has learned the game and has worked for an association that would provide security and protection both financially and socially. Both "Wadi`", and "Sa'id" give up their ideals and principles in order to cope with reality. This is not because they were convinced of it, but in order to be able to live through it. They want to fulfill all their aspirations and ambitions, of which they dreamt when they were young. These two characters represent the revolutionary intellectual, who uses words to reach his goals. Although he is not convinced with what he himself says, all the same, he grabs every

opportunity to achieve his goals. He conforms to the general trends and slogans fearing a clash with the opposing powerful government. It is men like "Sa'id" and "Wadi'" who do anything to achieve what they want, even if this means adhering to falsehood.

Unlike the aforementioned characters, we see in "Najmat 'Aughustus" people like "Sabri" and "Zuhni", both of whom had a life full of patriotic political activities. They are unable to stand up against the power of an opposing government, yet cannot adopt its policy as other men did. They escape, leaving revolutionary activities to others. Each character does so in his own way. "Sabri", does so by mingling with the thousands who work in the High Dam project. He has to hide his past, which had been rich with political activity, out of fear, as if it was something to be ashamed of. "Zuhni", on the other hand, escapes over the border, hoping to start a fresh life in a new place. He is unable to say "Amen", as others do, to the government, so he prefers to escape.

In Al Lajna the revolutionary intellectual appears in another form, the form of the Doctor, who uses his past history in political activities to hide his real

aims, which are far from patriotic. This character is typical of the open-door era. Everything he does is done to gain a particular benefit. This is so even if it means performing illegal acts, or actions that could not be considered patriotic. Thus, the Doctor is an example of a person who traded his past for gaining anything. The era of the Open-Door policy in Egypt was the age in which anything could be bought and sold, even patriotism.

The female characters in Sun`Allah Ibrahim's novels are all depicted in terms of the hero's relationship with the opposite sex. This does not go beyond the man-woman relationship, and therefore represents a very limited viewpoint.

Losing any possible human relationships, whether in his relations with the general public family bonds, friendship, acquaintances at work, or even love affairs, was what made his life dry, harsh and very realistic. This can clearly be seen in the hero's relations with women. He lost his mother when he was a child. Therefore he lost love, tenderness and all sense of security. He and his sister had a very cold and distant relationship with each other. Neither

bothers to inquire about how the other is getting on, not even knowing how he or she is leading their lives.

The beloved in "Tilka al-Ra'iha", represented by the two female figures "Samiya" and "Nagwa", is referred to as a memory, or rather as someone out of the past. The narrator tries to revive these memories or conjure them up in the present, only to discover that he cannot do so. His feelings towards "Samiya" are merely an expression of sexual desire. Nagwa also appeals to the hero, so he tries to have a relationship with her as well, but again he fails. No profound emotion exists between them. There is only the desire for sex love does not exist.

The hero's affair with "Tanya" in "Najmat 'Aughustus" is based on the fact that both are lonely and need affection. They find an way, in sex, to face a cruel reality. As soon as they cease seeing one another their relationship ends. The hero doesn't think of her any more. She is only a memory.

In "Beirut..Beirut" the main character's relationship with "Lamiya el Sabbagh" is interpreted as his quest to reveal the mysteries of her womanhood.

To him she represents a mysterious stage in the history of Lebanon. Thus, this relationship too was not a true love affair.

In "Beirut..Beirut" the hero also has a relationship with "Antoinette Khouri". He is not interested in her as a colleague, nor in all her activities and the positive role she plays. She is merely a woman to him. That is his main reason for being interested in her. The other roles come later. He is unable to establish a professional relationship with her, seeing her as a woman more than as a colleague.

The main character always deals with women on the level of his primary biological needs. These do not bear any sign of the emotion or romance appropriate to love scenes. In describing these "tender" moments, he is extremely realistic, giving us the impression that even his lovemaking is not a moment of fulfillment as it should be. He believes that the only means to affirm his personality and frustrated being is by reaching orgasm. That is why all his relationships with women end in frustration and failure.

In all four novels, the dialogue expresses the main character's ability to communicate with other people more or less normally at different stages of its development. For example, in "Tilka al-Ra'iha", where the protagonist is isolated and feels alienated from the whole world, the incidence dialogue is very rare. He is distant from the world of reality, listening, watching, and observing without actually taking part in events. This is manifested by the great extent to which he uses the verbs "He said" and "I said", which show the distance between him and other characters. The conversation on page 35, for example, uses 309 verbs. The normal rate of the use of the verb "I said": "He said" is 1:1. We see, though, that he uses "He said" 229 times, and "I said" 80 times. The rate, therefore, is 3:1. The hero listens more than he speaks.[15] In spite of the fact that there are several characters, all their relationships are superficial. "Tilka al-Ra'iha" is free from any positive dialogue.

There is a great deal of dialogue in "Najmat 'Aughustus". Though occupying almost half the novel, all these parts are written in question - answer form similar to a report. This conveys no emotional tone.

although it is significant to the structure of the novel. The same can be said about the importance of dialogue in "Al-Lajna". The dialogue is mostly made up of questions the committee asks and the hero's answers to these questions. This makes an account of everything intentionally that is free from any spontaneous emotional responses. In "Beirut..Beirut" there is a quite different type of dialogue which is, for the first time, written fluently and spontaneously. The hero has regained his psychological and social balance. This is evident in conversations between him and the other characters in the novel. This means that the main character is getting closer to others, and becoming less preoccupied with his inner self, to a higher degree in the fourth novel, than he had been in the first three novels. Excluding the documentary part of "Beirut..Beirut" dialogue takes up the majority of the book.

Sun`Allah uses language from various levels in his novels, all of which can be seen in each individual novel according to the theme, psychological and social circumstances of the main character, and the nature of the period in which the novel was written.

In "Tilka al-Ra`iha", especially in the part when he describes reality, the diction is loose and dry, without any attempted use of metaphorical language that may convey sentimentality.

A great deal of verb clauses are clearly employed, linked by a conjunction, to evoke boredom and the accumulation of events. For example, on the first page, "and" is used 36 times and on page 49, it is used 67 times. All the verbs are used in the simple past tense to imply the present. As for verbs in the future tense, they refer to events that are about to happen in the near future, in a couple of hours or so, that could also be considered the present. The parts where memories are recalled are no different linguistically than the parts concerned with current reality. The difference lies in the fact that the emotions these parts convey is expressed by the language.

The author writes the descriptive passages in "Najmat 'Aughustus" in classical Arabic, but the dialogue is written in both colloquial and classical Arabic. Although the sentences are rather long, he does not use "and" as much. Furthermore, the tale is

divided into subsequent parts. He uses some Russian words without translating them, like for example, "Baglesta. barousky. nayeet, sabaseeba mougna, and nyaeet rabouchy." The novel also contains many technical names of machinery used in construction. Part two is a descriptive, written in classical Arabic, and does not have either punctuation marks or conjunction words.

The author in "Al Lajna" chooses his vocabulary very carefully to convey a specific meaning. Both dialogue and description are written in Classical Arabic. The sentences in the descriptive passages are lengthy and fluent.

The author uses specific vocabulary for each novel. In "Tilka al-Ra'ih" he uses words like "el-Saboun", (soap) "El Hammam" (Bathroom), "El-Nazafa" (cleanliness), "El-Qazara" (Filth), and "Ma'" (water), are used a great deal. In "Najmat Aughustus" he uses "El-Ru'ya" (view), "El-Tafkeer" (thought), and the names of machinery quite frequently. The vocabulary used in "Al Lajna", consists of words like "El-Kam" (the quantity) "El -'Arqam" (Numbers), "El Tawarikh" (Dates), and "El-Nissab" (percentages). He

also uses slang idioms that were common in the novels' time period such as "El-Tatneesh" (Pay no attention to), "El Tahlib" (Grab hold of), and "El Lama'an" (dashing character).[16]

In "Beirut..Beirut" the author does not use so much sophisticated language. The parts describing conditions in Beirut are written in weak loose language. It is divided into paragraphs similar to those of a report. The dialogue in the novel contains a great deal of words from the Lebanese dialect and words of local significance, such as names of various places in Lebanon, names of political parties, religious groups and military units. The novel also contains many names of important international and Arab figures, and names of international magazines.

Language in Sun'Allah's novels can be classified as both simple classical Arabic and local colloquial Arabic, especially when speaking of his dialogue. His language is expressive of the particular time and place in which he is living, and during which the novels were written. This indicates that the author was brought up in an urban society where he lived all his life. Not a single novel implies that he ever

lived in a rural or Bedouin community. The environment has an impact on the language though, in "Beirut..Beirut", where Sun`Allah uses the Lebanese dialect because the events actually take place in Beirut itself.

Parallelism as a technique used by Sun`Allah is seen when he recounts daily events and at the same time uses memories, historical events and documents. This method is what makes him different from all the other writers of his generation. Although Sun`Allah tries to merge all these techniques together to form the matrix of the novel, he is not always successful.

The main character's wide span of memories, for example, his memories of jail, the period prior to entering jail, his university days, and those of childhood and family life, are all used as a key to his personality. The comparison between the present and his youth also evokes a sense of discrepancy.

Sometimes the level of the diction almost reaches the poetic. This happens for example, when he is expressing a stream of consciousness and emotion. This is what breaks through the dry realism of his novels.

making them more aesthetic and more literary, keeping them apart from the style of journalism.

The fact that Tilka al-Ra'iha contains a great deal of recollections that also appear, to a lesser degree, in Najmat 'Aghustus, but which do not appear in Al-Lajna and Bayrut .. Bayrut, implies that in the last two novels the hero has regained his psychological and social balance. The fewer memories the hero recounts, the more it means that he has come out of his inner world and is coming closer to reality. We see in "Beirut..Beirut" that he has completely rid himself of his memories, replacing them with dialogue. This shows his reaction to other people. He is more aware of the present.

The second artistic device Sun`Allah uses is the technique of taking excerpts from history books and weaving them into the structure of the novel to create a parallelism between historical events and present-day events. He does the same thing in "Najmat 'Aghustus", although he is not successful in the third part of the novel, making it seem separate from the other parts. It is not bound tightly to the rest of the novel in such a way as to make the action flow

smoothly and easily. Therefore, the passages here become a hinderance to the reader, blocking his involvement in the book.

The third device used by the author is the reference to documents; used in a technique varying degrees in each novel. In "Tilka al-Ra'iha" it appears on a very limited scale when "Shuhdi" sends a letter to his wife. In "Najmat 'Aughustus", however, it is used more frequently. For example, the author gets documents from various offices as publications from the High Dam Organization, The Ministry of Culture and The Registration Center for Ancient Egyptian Antiquity in order to make them part of the novel. This brings the novel down to the level of journalism making it seem like a report.

Sun`Allah is successful in using documents in "Al-Lajna", where the device reinforces the novel's plot. In "Beirut..Beirut" though, the author again fails by using the technique so much that it prevents the reader from enjoying the drama of the novel.

CONCLUSION.

Sun`Allah Ibrahim, a novelist from the generation of the sixties, is one of the few artists whose works contain all the artistic elements.

He is known to be sincere in expression and portrays life with extreme realism. He always attempts to present the truth bluntly in a spontaneous, daring manner, to the extent that some people accuse him of being banal. Moreover, he believes in constructive realism, or, in other words, that there is a certain beauty to ugliness. He always tries hard to reveal this in all his novels no matter how painful or grotesque reality is.

Among main interests are the relationship between man and the surrounding society, and the relationship between man and reality. There seems to be an interaction in this relationship, since they affect one another. This is the reason for the author's concern with the Egyptian social evolution that happened during that period. He is also concerned with the impact of these social changes on intellectuals, and whether their response was a negative or positive

one. All the novels sincerely express these viewpoints. They thus belong to the genre of the political novel, especially since they were written by an author from the generation of the sixties who himself had a past history of political activities from the early days of his literary career. He opposes the regime, although he does not admit this openly, so as to reach the extent of accusation or daring opposition. His rejection of reality is repressed in his novels, manifesting itself only in his style and in his presentation of the various themes.

The novels can be considered a documentation of social events, both in Egypt and the Arab World. Sun`Allah was intent on recording what was happening in society as accurately as possible. He wanted to present things as they were, with all their negative and positive aspects, without any false projections or slogans. His own special technique gives his works further sincerity by conveying the truth as he learned it from personal experience. He writes in a calm neutral tone and about nothing he does not know well. He makes the reader get involved by setting various assumptions before him, without imposing his views from the very beginning of the narrative.

In his novels, there is neither a hero, in the conventional sense, nor any major event. Sun`Allah's sense of the heroic is the suspended feeling of the reader, and his response to the narration, that the author so ingeniously communicates in each novel, without imposing himself on the reader or putting any restriction on his power of interpretation. The fact that he leaves the reader a great deal of liberty in interpretation is what makes Sun`Allah Ibrahim so much like Hemingway.

The events of the novel are taken from real life with no diversion or false projections, and are reinforced by documentary evidence and history.

The author always uses a technique of parallelism that allows for two levels of interpretation. The first level shows the apparent reality of the society. The second reveals the hidden aspects of it. Even his use of language is unlike others, since he uses cheap, dry and very common language to make a sincere expression of reality, thus preventing the reader from indulging in illusion, romanticism or the imaginary world.

Each novel is a detailed description of the period in which it was written. The author turns his personal subjective expression into an objective expression of the suffering that man experiences in his struggle with reality. The four novels, therefore, are a documentation of the changes in Egypt and the Arab World that took place over the past twenty years.

Thus, in the mid-sixties, "Tilka al Ra'iha" appeared as an expression of the confused period of Abdel Nasser's regime. In the mid-seventies "Najmat 'Aughustus", described the great achievement of the Revolution. Towards the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties "Al-Lajna", showed the changing political conditions under the open-door policy. In the eighties, "Bayrut..Bayrut" described Man's existence under a system that was falling to pieces. Lebanon, during the Civil War.

The above analysis demonstrates that Sun'Allah Ibrahim is one of the few writers who has talent, personal experience and a knowledge of current events, all of which are reflected directly in his works. Whether written during the sixties or later, they all

provide a unique expression of the suffering of man, whether in Egypt or in the Arab World. They provide glimpses of the defects in systems, such as the crisis of freedom, dictatorship, changing policies, the normalization of relations with the enemy, the conflicting political system in the Arab World. He is very realistic in displaying these themes and also very sincere. That is what make him unique as an author, incomparable to anyone else from that same generation.

Footnotes

1. Rif'at Salam. "Rihla fi al-'Alam al Khalfi min "Bayrut..Bayrut", Kitabat, Nov.1984, p.49.
2. Husin Hamūda, (Hiwār ma'a Sun'Allah Ibrahīm), "Hīna Tatasi' al-riwāyah li'anāsir al-wujūd", Al-Yawm al-Sābi', 12.10.1984, pp.32.34.
3. Sarah, (Hiwar ma'a al-Kātib al-riwā'ī Sun'Allah Ibrahīm), "Arfud tādīl al-qārī' 'aw tādīlīh", Al-Dawha, Sep.1985, pp.104-108.
4. Mahumud 'Amin al-'Ālim, Thulāthiyyat al rafḍ w'al hazīmah, Cairo:1985, pp.54.
5. Sun'Allah Ibrahīm, Muqademat Tilka al-Rā'iha, 1986, p.10
6. Carlos Baker, Hemingway, The writer as artist, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1952.
7. Sārah, (Hiwār ma'a al-Kātib al-riwā'ī Sun'Allah Ibrahīm), "Arfud tādīl al-qārī' 'aw tādīlīh", op. cit., p.104-108.

8. I'tidāl 'Uthmān & Muhammad Badawī (ed) "Mushkilat al-'ibda' al-riwā'i 'ind jil al sitīnat w'al sab'īnat Fusūl, Jan, Feb, Mar, 1982, p.212.
9. See Mahmud 'Amin al-Ālim, op. cit., pp.54.
10. Sun'Allah Ibrahim, Muqademat Tilka al-Rā'iha , 1986,p.11.
11. Idem, Footnotes of "Najmat 'Aughustus", Cairo, 1974.
12. I'tidāl 'Uthmān & Muhammad Badawī (ed), "Mushkilat al-'ibdac al-riwā'ī 'ind jīl al -sitīnāt w'al sab'īnāt", op. cit., pp 210-211.
13. Rif'at Salām, "Rihla fī al-Ālam al-Khalfī min "Bayrut..Bayrut", Kitabāt, Nov, 1984, p.48.
14. See Mahmud 'Amīn al-Ālim, op. cit., pp.55,111.
15. 'Abdel Mun'iem al-Bāz, (Dirasah ghayr manshūrah 'an Tilka al-Rā'iha).
16. See Mahmud 'Amin al-Ālim, op. cit., pp.174-175.

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5. Al-Aqlām, Feb.,1983.
6. Al-Bāhith, Jan.,Feb.,1979.
7. Al-Dawḥa, Sep.,1985.
8. Fusūl, Jan.,Feb., Mar.,1982.
9. 'Ibdā`, Nov.,1986.
10. JAL, Vol.XII, 1976.
11. Kitabāt, Nov.,1984.

12. Al-Safir, 7.12.1984.

13. Al-Tali'a, Aug., 1971.

14. Al-Watan, 14 Feb., 1984.

15. Al-Yawm Al-Sabi', 12 Oct., 1984.

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