Non-canonical Arabic Detective Fiction: The Beginnings of the Genre

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is Arabic detective fiction, which began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thanks to the broad-scope enterprise of translations, and the subsequent development of an authentic Arabic detective literature in the early 1960s. This paper traces diachronically the emergence of this popular genre at an entirely non-canonical level, in Egypt in particular, and examines its thematic characteristics. The paper also examines the causes of the lack of canonical detective literature until the early 1980s. It argues that Arabic detective literature, canonical and non-canonical alike, is a true reflection of the power relations and the social, political and cultural struggles in the Arab world. It further claims that Arabic detective literature is one of the most important literary strata in modern Arab literature, through which we can clearly discern changes in values and esthetics in modern Arab society, and examine the relations between money and ruling power in Egypt as a mirror of the entire Arab world and the connection between literature, preservation and the undermining of Arab law and social order.

Key words: Non-canonical Arabic detective writing, Arabic popular literature, Detective fiction, Crime fiction.

1. Preface

This article examines the historical development of the genre of non-canonical Arabic detective fiction, mainly in Egypt. It traces the milestones in the development of this genre from the early 20th century to the present day. This diachronic overview of most of the series through which Arabic detective fiction was published—both translations and original

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1 Non-canonical literature refers to genres that were not accepted as part of mainstream literature and remained on its margins. Works of this kind were treated with disdain and thus rarely included in academic research. Reuven Snir stresses the point that most genres that make up the popular non-canonical prose are limited, ignored and suffers from a lack of interest, as is reflected in scientific studies as in the West. Thus Snir describes the state of works belonging to genres not recognized as canonical in modern Arabic literature such as detective stories and science fiction. He also relates to their content saying that “being sub-canonical is not just a question of the language of the writing [i.e. fuṣḥa vs. ‘āmmiyā] but also of topic and content. Research and criticism in the Arab world has almost completely ignored the sub-canonical sectors, and even when it does relate to them, it is in most cases for extra-literary motives, mainly folkloristic and national, such as, for example, seeking roots or trying to mold a national identity and disprove claims that negate it” – SNIR 1994: 55. Compare also with SNIR 1998: 87-121.

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writing—paves the way for a more comprehensive examination of this genre, which has been largely ignored by academic research, despite a very extensive readership both in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world. The article focuses more on the historical aspect of this genre, as a first step in laying the foundations for a wider, macro-perspective approach, in order to reveal the tremendous quantity of Arabic detective texts that exist to this day. We believe that the lack of critical discourse, the paucity of research, and the neglect of the genre among the literary establishment are the main reasons for the terminological confusion between pure (police) detective stories, espionage and science fiction, and the lack of a methodical framework that might have contributed greatly to the shaping of this genre. Moreover, the article gives an overview of the main issues and themes conveyed to the readers of the Arabic crime fiction series. Our thematic perspective sheds light on the ensemble of social, political and nationalist messages that these series contain, and provides an opportunity to get an initial glimpse of the cultural content they disseminate.\(^2\)

As in Western literature, the genre is usually classified/dealt with under the umbrella of popular culture. This term assigns/ascribes to it the characteristics of a literature that reflects, or is supposed to reflect, a broad popular experience. This experience touches the daily lives of people who are part of a specific world order and set of values. According to theoretician Stuart Hall, popular culture includes two basic concepts, which together comprise its essence: inclusion and resistance. Literature is typically dynamic and so includes a broad range of values, types of writing and human experiences in many areas, and to the same extent, opposes the existing hegemonic values, constantly trying to establish itself parallel to that order or at its expense.\(^3\)

In light of the above, this paper proves that Arabic detective literature in its non-canonical format adopts the first principle, i.e., inclusion. However, like Western detective literature, it does not oppose the existing order, values and politics. On the contrary, this paper actually shows it to be an important tool for preserving the ruling hegemony. Hence, and based on the theories of Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School, which distinguishes between “high” and “low” culture, this paper sees non-canonical Arabic detective literature as part of what Adorno and Horkheimer call the ‘culture industry’ that reconciles with, and even preserves, existing conditions.\(^4\) In contrast, later canonical Arab detective literature adopts both principles, and indeed strives to undermine the existing order.

\(^2\) Despite the scarcity of research on this genre in modern Arabic literature, it is important to note the few studies that do exist in the Arab world and in the West. These are presented here chronologically: Patterson-Iskander 1987: 118-131; Malte-Douglas 1988a and 1988b; Cawelti 1976: 82-83; Allen 1984: 51-60; Patterson-Iskander 1993: 75-78; Snir 1994: 49-80; Snir 1998: 87-121; Gonzales-Quilano 1998; Jacquemond 2003; Selim 2010; Guth 2016: 6; Colla 2005: 417-443; Smolin 2013; Lopez 2005: 371-397. In the Arab world we found a small number of sources who had studied the genre, see Sharshar 2003; Sulayman 2008; Fusijl 2009, 76; Al-Qifila, 46 (September-October, 2012); Al-Majalla al‘Arabiyya 2011: 412. We also found that the journal al-Dawha (Doha, Qatar) devoted issue 8 in June 2008 to the question of the lack of detective novels in Arabic literature. See also the book of Halifi that collects some of the articles of Fusijl, in Halifi 2012; Sagaster 2016.

\(^3\) El-Hamamsy 2013; DiMaggio 1991: 373-397.

\(^4\) Adorno 2001; Adorno 2007: 34-43.
These Western theories anchored this paper and served as a research tool with which to analyze the non-Western detective literature. Among these theories is also Even Zohar’s Polysystem Theory, on the basis of which one can explain the process during which Arabic detective literature moved from the margins to the center. According to Even Zohar, what was considered to be at the margins of a literary system in a certain period may subsequently shift and win a place at the heart of this system. Almost the only reference to Arabic detective text was in the translation of Western detective works as part of the popular literature. This is also precisely the reason why these works were ignored by the literary establishment. The theory explains the process of the transition in that the exclusive treatment of the elements comprising the literary center might lead to extreme changes in the literary experience because it ignores the movement and interactions between margins and center. In the end, this state of affairs will yield a completely opposite result: The center element will disappear, and its place will be filled by elements thought marginal until then. For example, poetry lost its central status in the literary center, and the detective text moved towards the center.5

2. The development of non-canonical modern Arabic detective fiction

As we shall see, the writing of non-canonical modern Arabic detective fiction went through two phases: translations from Western crime fiction, and original Arabic works. The transition from translation to original writing was not a clear-cut change, but rather a gradual and parallel process. The translations often suffered from a lack of professionalism and haste and contained many errors both in content and in language. This damaged the quality of the translated work and, consequently, also the genre as a whole.

2.1 Stage 1 – Translation as a first encounter—the origins

The first encounter of Arabic literature with written detective literature, and more precisely, with the genre of detective narrative, came through translation, as was the case also with other non-canonical genres such as science fiction. On this point Snir writes: “Like canonical literature, sub-canonical translated literature constitutes a channel of contact with other literatures and is a source, albeit an indirect one, of changes to the poetics of Arabic literature.”6 This is the reason why Egyptian and other Arab writers, from Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm to Ṣu'ālāḥ 'Ibrāhīm, remember to have read in their childhood and adolescence cheap editions of Arsène Lupin, Edmond Dantes, Sherlock Holmes and Rocambole.7

The most famous character in detective fiction was that of the charming Arsène Lupin, created by French author Maurice Leblanc (1864-1941), so much so that Majdī Yūsuf, one of the few scholars to review the translations of this genre, said:

Hardly any Arab intellectual began his journey without reading the detective stories of Arsène Lupin, which gave the translations of these novels a high status that only

7  SELIM 2010.
a fool would ignore in the history of modern Arabic literature and culture, so much so that one may determine a period in the history of every Arab reader called “the Arsène Lupin phase.”

It was ʿAbd al-Qādir Hamzā who first translated the adventures of Arsène Lupin into Arabic with the adventure entitled ‘Gentleman-Cambrioleur’. The translation appeared in 1910, three years after the original edition in French (1907), in the journal Musāmarāt al-Shabāb (Youth Nightlife), which was published in Cairo between 1904 and 1911.

Also translated were Agatha Christie’s novels and the Sherlock Holmes novels of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930). Arabic readers were also familiar with the character of Simon Templar (The Saint), created by author Leslie Charteris (1907-1993) as well as the character of Mike Shine, whom Arabic readers knew particularly well thanks to several popular series of detective fiction published in Beirut, and those of the famous English detective novelist Edgar Wallace (1875-1932).

The name of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ʾAmīn is mentioned as one of the popular translators of that period. He translated and adapted many Western detective works of fiction and established the weekly Riwāyāt al-Jayb (pocket novels). The names of Ṭānyūs ʿAbduh and ʿAsʿād Dāghir are also mentioned as active translators of that time. Even as late as 1981, we still observe similarly unreliable customs on the side of the translators that led to much confusion regarding the matching of translations with the original texts. A clear example of this is the work of one of the main translators, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ʾAmīn, which was often confusing and lacking in transparency. In one of the pocket novels he published, Khātimat al-Maʾsāḥ (The End of the Tragedy), the front cover of the book says “Agatha Christie,” but the inside cover gives ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ʾAmīn not as the translator, but as the author. This is an indication of how slack and inaccurate the publishers were and how little framework there was to supervise the publishers.

ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿAbd Allāh and Ḥāfīz Najīb, who were not recognized as pioneers of Arabic detective fiction because of doubts about the originality of their work, which looked like translations that had undergone serious ‘Arabization’, published so many books that Najīb was nicknamed the “Egyptian Arsène Lupin,” or the “swindler author” (al-ʿAdīb al-muḥtaḥī) because of all the books he translated and then published with no mention of the original Western author’s name.

Al-Jundī claims that the translation process was supposed to play a positive role in transmitting great literary works into Arabic in order to strengthen Arabic literature, but
this process deviated from its path and purpose because of the colonial hegemony and cultural influence of France and Britain. It is perhaps here that we find the secret behind this deviation of the translation process from its main purpose and its change into a tool to amuse and satisfy the readers.\textsuperscript{14} We believe that this opinion is not based on objective facts or evidence showing that translations were introduced with the intention to damage Arab culture. It is al-Jundi’s personal opinion, and a deeper investigation of the cultural milieu of that period reveals that the people in charge of translation simply preferred the cheaper and economically more worthwhile. The unaesthetic format of these translated books, their linguistic level and even the type of paper they were printed on, all point to financial considerations rather than a Western colonialist plot. Furthermore, other genres considered more canonical, such as novels, short stories and drama, were translated in the same cheap manner.

Thus we see that at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Arabic literature, the Arab writer and the Arab reader all encountered detective fiction in its various forms, such as the novel, the short story, the adventure series, and so forth, where the flow was one-directional: from West to East, by way of translation, which for the most part did not adhere to our modern rules of professional translation or its ethics. Moreover, these translations were often deemed suspect both by Arab intellectuals and by the man in the street. These suspicions were mainly expressed in the notion that the colonialists were using them to impose their foreign culture and deprive the Arab and Islamic nation of its values and heritage.\textsuperscript{15} This might explain the unfavorable attitude, to put it mildly, adopted by academics of Arabic literature towards non-canonical literature in general\textsuperscript{16} and detective fiction in particular, as well as the shaky status in which this genre found itself compared to other genres of modern Arabic literature. However, these suspicions did not halt the translation industry for detective works, which continued for over six decades. The main damage caused to the genre was the lack of help in getting it accepted into official mainstream literature.

\subsection*{2.2 Stage 2 – Original Arabic detective fiction}

In his book \textit{al-Dhākira al-Mafqūda} (The Lost Memory), Iyās Khūrī says:

\begin{quote}
Arab modernism has managed to borrow from and draw on all the signs of Western modernity, from the system of governance to the police and modern art forms. But one art form has remained impossible and rebellious and couldn’t be borrowed. That is the detective story.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

He is echoed by al-Sa’dī, who, while showing the presence of crime in three Arab novels, illustrates this saying:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} Al-Jundi [n.d.]: 254.
\item \textsuperscript{15} ’Abū al-Sā’d 1994: 26-28; ‘Asāqī 2008: 41-72; Mursī 1995: 146-147; Snīr 2000: 266.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Snīr 2002; ‘Asāqī 2008; ‘Asāqī 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Khūrī 1982: 48; al-Sāwīrī 2009: 74.
\end{itemize}
When we relate to this genre of novels, it is important to mention that although they start with the crime of murder, they do not contain the essential techniques and thematic aspects that allow us to consider them detective stories. However, while translation of detective works continued to flourish, with many works from the West finding their way to the translator’s desk and from there to the readers, adolescents, for the most part, the first significant change in regard to Arabic detective fiction occurred, signaling the start of the second phase—writing and publication of original detective fiction in Arabic. Snir comments: 'thus we can mark the rise in importance of original detective fiction as opposed to translated detective fiction'.

The switch from translation to original writing in this genre took place at the non-canonical level which included mainly detective fiction intended for young readers. All the respective original series share common features and a uniform structure and amazingly similar order—they are all full of action, suspense, pursuits and violence. In this field, we may remember a number of milestones:

2.2.1 First juncture
The first appearance of original detective stories and mysteries in Arabic which were not translated from Western literature seems to have been in Egypt in 1968 in the form of a series of mysteries under the heading of Detective stories for children. The first adventure, Al-Kūkh al-Muṭūriq (The Burning Cottage), was written by Maḥmūd Sālim. Every pocket book in the series included three different descriptions of its content: on the front cover in small letters beneath the heading Detective Stories for Children (Qiṣaṣ Būlīsīyya), the title always began with: The Mystery of… (Lughz…). Then, on the inside cover it said: Adventure no. n. It is almost always noted that these were adventure stories written for youth rather than for the adult reader. At any rate, we believe that the multiple names and the parallels of the subtitles on each pocket book reflected confusion among the authors and publishers, perhaps because of the novelty of the attempt at original writing of the genre. In addition to this series, there were many others which attracted millions of Arabic readers in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world. The overview below of the plethora

18 Al-Saadi 2012: 2.
21 Cahla 1990: 172-173.
22 Prior to these adventures, there were a number of very short detective riddles by Mahmūd Sālim (see note 23). The first of these was Lughz al-Zažāj al-Maksūr (The Riddle of the Broken Glass).
23 The Egyptian writer Mahmūd Sālim (1929-2013) is considered to have played a key role in establishing the genre of original detective fiction in modern Arabic literature. He published his adapted and Arabized (mu‘arrab) detective fiction stories in 1968, in Majallat Samīr (The Entertaining Companion Magazine) with Dār al-Hilāl, Cairo, edited by Nādiyā Nash‘āt. He played a decisive role in expanding the inventory of literary devices in Arabic narrative fiction, enriching the literary experience and offering a renewed perspective on this literature and the conceptual and textual grids. – For more on the author, see Saad 2013 and Patterson-Iskander 1993:118-131.
24 See for example, Sālim [n.d.].a, [n.d.].b, [n.d.].c, [n.d.].d.
of adventure stories and mysteries that quickly emerged in the Egyptian markets uncovers for the first time the start of the writing process of the authentic Arabic detective narrative in new Arabic literature, following the long-term success of the translated series in those same markets.


The group consisted of 13 boys and girls from various Arab countries whose goal was to protect the great Arab homeland, “and they stood strong against the plots directed against the Arab homeland,” as it stated in each pocket book.

2.2.2 Second juncture

The second important juncture in the history of Arabic detective fiction (and the history of other non-canonical genres such as science fiction in modern Arabic literature) in Egypt

25 Thus we see within the series Qisṭa Būlīsiyya lil-ʾAwlād (Detective Stories for Children) a diversity in the groups of adventures themselves, and in the authors. For further reference, see Ḥamdī Muṣṭafā [n.d.].

26 The year was deduced through simple mathematical comparison: adventure #96 came out in February 1984. Each pocket book stated that 12 were published each year on the 5th of each Gregorian month (i.e. one pocket book a month). Hence, by simple calculation: 96 ÷ 12 = 8, which brings us to 1976.

27 ‘Āhmād from Egypt (the chief), ‘Uṭhām from Sudan, ‘Īḥām from Lebanon, Ḥudā from Morocco, BūʾMīr from Algeria, Miṣbāḥ from Libya, Zubayda from Tunisia, Fāh from Syria, Khālid from Kuwait, Ṭimā from Jordan, Qays from Saudia Arabia, Bāsim from Palestine, Rashīd from Iraq. In addition, there is the Number Zero, the mysterious chief whom nobody knows anything about and who is probably a member of the Egyptian security forces.

and the Arab world in general, occurred in 1984 when Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya al-Haditha (The Modern Arabic Institute) began publishing a variety of series dealing with science fiction, detective science-fiction, detective adventure stories and other series that became tremendously successful and urged/encouraged the publishers to put out more new series with many nuances and innovations.

Thus al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya al-Haditha began publishing the new series in the following chronological order:

5. *Sāfārī Mughāmarāt fī al-ʾAdgāh* (Safari Jungle Adventures), in each of which the hero ‘Ālī encountered and defeated evil forces.
6. *Fanṭazyā* (Fantasia) – adventures in imaginary places, where in each adventure ‘Abīr meets a famous detective from a well-known Western detective series and solves a mystery. This series is very interesting because it indirectly reviews Western detective series by mentioning various sleuths (mukhbirūn) such as Sherlock Holmes and Poirot.

What is noteworthy is that in one of the adventures, the heroine ‘Abīr meets up with the heroes of the series entitled *The Five Adventures*, Muḥibb, Lūzā, Nūsa, ʾĀṭif, and Takhtakh, by Maḥmūd Sālim, and thus treats them as classics of the genre of the same stature as Holmes or Poirot.

29 Hamdī MūṢṬĀFĀ, who founded it in 1960 and published reference and revision books for schoolchildren in Egypt under the odd name of *Silāḥ al-Tilmīdh* (The Student’s Weapon). In 1984 he decided to expand the fields of his publications, summoned two young authors—Nabil FĀRŪQ and Sharīf SḤAWQĪ—and asked them to start writing novels [sic] because he wanted, as he said, to publish “100% pure Egyptian novels, with no guilt of copying or quoting (from the West).” <www.rewayatnet.net>, accessed 30 March 2015.
31 On this Snīr says: “The same publisher put out two series of the same type, each of which contained dozens of novels; an indication of the broad scope of the reading circle and of tremendous monetary income.” SNĪR 2000: 270-274.
7. *Sayf al-ʿAdāla* (The Sword of Justice) – stories of resistance to evil and establishing justice, written by Nabil Fārūq.\(^{39}\)

8. *Fāris al-ʿAndalus* (The Knight of Andalusia) – stories of brave adventurers from the time of the Arabs in Andalusia, described as “acts of Arab bravery in the most difficult period the Arabs underwent in Andalusia,” written by Nabil Fārūq.\(^{40}\)

9. *ʿIdārat al-ʿAmaliyyāt al-Khāṣṣa* (Special Ops Administration – Office 19) – combining adventure, fiction and commando missions; a series of detective novels from the realm of science fiction, by Sharīf Shawqī.\(^{41}\)

10. *Oscar* – adventures in comic book format, described on the inside back cover as “Egyptian and European stories and illustrations that will remain in your hearts and minds, since these are the strongest comic adventures for youngsters in the world.”\(^{42}\) And on the inside page it says:

   A new series that offers you, for the first time in the history of Arabic literature, the art of the comic book story that contains a lightness of expression and phrasing, the beauty of pictures and the elegance of drawing. This is a pioneering series offered to you by al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabīyya al-Ḥadīthā, written by author-illustrators and Egyptian painters, and the best of world artists. The first buds of a new genre both in literature and in art that adds to the Arabic library, and to young Arabs in order to bring them the modern spirit and contemporary art in a new developed modern format that simultaneously provides both education and pleasure. It is a series of daring through which (Egyptian pocket novels) break into a new world full of action, enjoyment, stimulation and beauty. A prestigious series that raises one’s level of thinking and imagination, encouraging the Arab mind and taste in an effort to climb up a step, to move on towards the slogan that (Egyptian pocket novels) coined for its inception: ‘We publish the best books’. This series stresses the fact that you are an educated person in terms of what you read and what you see.\(^{43}\)

   In the list of editors it says the following: “With the support and assistance of Nabil Fārūq, supervision Ḥamdī Muṣṭafā.”\(^{44}\)

11. *Panorama*, a magazine with adventures and correspondence between the readers and the author Nabil Fārūq (illustrations: ʾĪsmāʿīl Diyāb; editor: Ḥamdī Muṣṭafā), described as “a book within a magazine, and a magazine within a book, a new series offering a broad digest of literature, culture and art that the publisher of Riwāyāt Miṣrīyya lil-Jayb [Egyptian pocket novels] used to present to the youth in a new and special format, in a simple, modern style, and is a comprehensive picture of everything you like and

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\(^{39}\) FĀRŪQ [n.d.]: 1h.

\(^{40}\) FĀRŪQ [n.d.]: 2.

\(^{41}\) SHAWQĪ [n.d.]: a.

\(^{42}\) MUSTAFĀ [n.d.]: a.

\(^{43}\) MUSTAFĀ [n.d.]: a.

\(^{44}\) This is how it was in the original, instead of ‘written by’ as was customary in al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabīyya al-Ḥadīthā in all its publications. Perhaps this was an effort to increase the sales power by inserting the best-known name in the series it put out—Nabil Fārūq. See FĀRŪQ [n.d.]: 2.
everything that attracts you at the end of the 20th century. It is a panorama of the future and of the youth, all youth.”

12. *Adventures of ‘Ayn x2*, described as “interesting detective mysteries for youth,” written by Nabil Fārūq and supervised by Ḥamdī Muṣṭafā.66

13. *Nova*, a series of science fiction stories from the future, by Raʿūf Waṣfī.67

14. *Flash*, a diverse series containing stories, jokes, crossword puzzles, detective mysteries, general knowledge, adventure stories, riddles and logic games. Text and illustrations by Khālid al-Ṣaftī, supported by Dr. Nabil Fārūq. The emphasis was on the mysterious ambience, and so each pocket book title in the series began with “The Secret of […]”.

15. *Zoom*, a diverse series containing detective mysteries, stories, jokes, crossword puzzles, riddles, general knowledge, a ‘wonder of numbers’ corner, science fiction and more. Illustrations by ‘Abd al-Ḥāfīn al-Ḥāṣfī, text by Dr. Nabil Fārūq.50

16. *Smash*, containing a diverse collection of comics, jokes, crosswords, general knowledge, riddles and logic games, drawings and comments on sports, plays, an ‘open your heart’ column, where readers sent the editors their stories, problems and dilemmas, and he would respond with comments and suggestions, and more. Those in charge described it as an “illustrated series,” written and drawn by Khālid al-Ṣaftī.68

17. The Series of Special Editions (Arabic title) is a collection of several unusual adventures for the heroes of the series of Ṣanaj al-Mustahīl (The Man of the Impossible) and Miṣaff al-Mustaqbal (The Future File). There were editions entitled ‘Very Special Edition’ in addition to an interactive website.53

18. *Rihālāt al-Sindibād* (Sinbad’s Travels), an adventure series that combines science fiction, a fairy tale atmosphere and a hint of history. There is mystery, action, deception and movement, written by Nabīl Fārūq. Only six issues were ever published.

19. *Al-ʿAmīl al-Sirri Ṣifr Ṣifr Ṣifr* (Secret Agent 000), a series for youth written by Nabīl Fārūq, with only seven issues.


22. *Super Oscar* series – keeping the same ambience as Oscar, but with more action.

23. ‘Ālam al-Jāsūsiyya, stories taken from Intelligence files.


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45 Fārūq [n.d.]: e.
46 Fārūq [n.d.]: f.
47 Waṣfī [n.d.]: 2.
49 See the historical review in SNIR 2000: 270-274.
50 Fārūq [n.d.]: 7.
52 Fārūq [n.d.]: 9.
25. مغامرات تيّفة (The Adventures of Tiffa), adventures for children written by a group of writers.
26. نمّيّ الـجاريّ (Daring Nimû), adventures for children written by ‘عبد الـحميد ‘عبد الله مقصود.
27. مغشومير (The Adventurer), an adventure series written by بسّم سلامة الـدين.
28. مكتب رأس 17 (Office No. 17 – Special Ops Administration), detective adventures written by محمد سلامة ‘عبد الـعالم.
29. ‘عالم غرّيب (Strange World), stories of alien visits to Earth, written by جلال ‘عبد الـفطاح.
30. ‘عالم ‘اكهار (Another World), horror stories by تامر ‘ابراهيم.
31. ميغا (Mega), a series of adventures stories written by a group of writers.
32. سرّ الكار (The Scream), horror stories written by محمد رضى ‘عبد الله.
33. ترانزيت (Transit), only one issue was published entitled Invitation for One, written by محمد سلامة ‘عبد الـعالم.
34. حائل كشّا (Special Cases), scary stories of horror and psychological battles, written by محمد رضى ‘عبد. On the cover it says: “The memoirs of a psychologist fighting for his life and his sanity.”
35. حبّ ورعب (Love and Horror), adventures integrating emotion and horror, written by سهيل ‘عبد.
36. عيسى يصبديد (The Yuspridis Files), a series that first appeared in 2011 and which had the following issues: نهر النسيان (The River of Forgetting), حساناً يصبديد (The Yuspridis Beauty), تاسيلي, written by مصريّن ‘اطال.
37. مسرح الجريمة (The Theatre of the Crime) series, by نبيل فارق, publisher مسارس للـعجائب ‘اعرب الأبنين, which had two issues: جرود في مجلس الشّارب (A Crime in the Parliament) and إغتيال (Assassination). The heroine in these two stories is نحير سليم, a pathologist who is an expert in forensic medicine.
38. مجموعة (The Group), adventures filled with suspense, action, pursuits and fighting, written by نبيل فارق. This is a very modern series, written for المصرف al-‘عربية al-الـهادثة. There have been two issues: قلب البلاء (The Heart of Hell), January 2014, and سلاب السار (Weapons of Evil), February 2014.
39. كماندوس – ناجح بم تلفيش (Dangerous Ops… Terrifying Consequences). An action thriller series with stories of well-known conflicts between nations and hawkish groups. Edited by جلال ‘عبد الفطاح and supervised by حمد مصطفى.
40. تاى, a series of “crazy adventures” as the author حسان al-الـعجائب describes them. The hero is “a controversial taxi driver” who comes across each crime adventures and sets out to solve it.
41. صلاة الربيع (The Novel Basket), a varied series containing elements from different series of different genres of suspense such as detective fiction, horror, and science fiction, written by several authors including ‘عبير ‘عبد الرزاق. The series first appeared in 2003 and is still being published today.

54 ‘عبد الله، حرات الربيع، 7.
In the writings of Nabil Faruq and ‘Aḥmad Khālid Tawfiq a revolution occurred that went beyond any commercial interest, but was connected to a transition from non-canonical to canonical writing, in other words, a transition from the margins of literature to its center, as Snir puts it.\textsuperscript{56} And that is what happened, in our opinion, with Nabil Faruq and ‘Aḥmad Khālid Tawfiq, the two most senior authors who wrote diverse materials for al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya in enormous quantities. When they slowed the pace of writing, the various better and less well-known suspense series, such as Rajul al-Mustaḥil (The Man of the Impossible), Milaff al-Mustaqbal (The Future File), Ḥarb al-Jawāsīs (War of the Spies) etc., turned to a more canonical literary style of novels and short stories, even though the content remained connected to detective and science fiction, crime, fear and horror. The new publications are defined as “novels,” have the same size as canonical novels and are displayed at the International Book Fair in Cairo which is preponderantly devoted to canonical literature. At a press conference held in the auditorium of the Faculty of Medicine at Tantū University on January 11, 2010, Faruq announced that he was going to stop writing for youth now and instead continue with special editions and novels, one of which is entitled ‘Adham, about the hero of the Rajul al-Mustaḥil series, and another one, a science fiction novel, entitled Nihāyat al-ʿĀlam (The End of the World). Moreover, the institution announced a contest among readers interested in writing to select those with a talent for writing and offer them one or two, sometimes even more new series, to be written in the setting of the stories and adventures such they had read when they were young, with variations in the topics and colourful innovations. The series were published under the above-mentioned umbrella series Sallat al-Riwaʿāyāt (The Novel Basket).

In 1987, Dar al-Jil in Beirut published the Mughāmarāt al-Jil al-Būlisiyya (Al-Jil Detective Adventures), by Rajāʾ ‘Abd Allāh.\textsuperscript{57} It seems that this was smart thinking and excellent execution by Dar al-Nashr al-Lubnāniyya since it was well aware of the reality of the innovation discovered in Egypt, and thus it called on one of the writers who had written detective mysteries for children for the Dar al-Maʿārif publishing house in Cairo, to write new adventures for them to publish. The adventurers, brothers of an Egyptian father and a Lebanese mother,\textsuperscript{58} pursue delinquents and criminals in order to uncover their crimes and wrongdoings, with the help of their uncle, Col. Imād Dīb, an officer from Interpol.

Mughāmarāt al-Jil al-Būlisiyya is one of the series published by Dar al-Jil in collaboration with writers from Egypt who had connections with the detective stories and adventures published by Dar al-Maʿārif. It was considered a pioneering step in this new genre. In addition to the above series, Dar al-Jil published the Mughāmarāt al-Jil al-Ḍāhika (Al-Jil Comic Adventures), in comic book format, i.e., with cartoon-like drawings

\textsuperscript{56} Snir 1998: 87-121. – Compare also EVEN-ZOHAR 1990 and KHOURY 2006.

\textsuperscript{57} We came across the name of the same author in the Detective Stories for Children series, published by the Egyptian Dar al-Maʿārif (Ministry of Education), and this is evidence of the close connection between these two series, both in timing and in the actual process of their appearance—once again in Cairo and Beirut—first the phase of translation and later the phase of original writing.

\textsuperscript{58} We will expand on this further in the discussion on the reasons and motives, and when referring to the current pan-Arabist orientation, sometimes quite strong, in the content of the various series and works.
and speech bubble text by Rajāʾ Abīd Allāh and illustrations by ‘Iffat Ḥusnī. There is also the Mughāmarāt al-Jīl al-ʿIlmiyya (Al-Jil Science Adventures) series, again in comic book format, written alternately by ‘Affāf Abīd al-Bārī and Rajāʾ Abīd Allāh, with illustrations by ‘Ashraf Saʿīd, Ṣafwat Qāsim, ʿIbrāhīm Samra and ‘Iffat Ḥusnī. In each adventure, the plot is devised as a conflict between two forces, good versus evil, where the goal of the forces of evil very often is to harm the world and destroy its order. The authors made sure to write on the back cover of each pocket book a succinct summary of the story’s conflict and a brief overview of the events. An example of this appears in Adventure no. 10 of the series, entitled The War of the Metals, where it says:

Surprises in scientific progress […] endless inventions that surpass imagination […] with man’s dreams of a greater future, Good fights Evil […] while that Evil tries to crush and destroy human happiness […] and this sparks unimaginable and indescribable adventures […] such as those in this story.60

Thus we see an interesting phenomenon: many Arab authors who wrote detective mysteries and adventures also wrote science fiction, an indication of a link between these two literary genres, especially at the start of original writing, and probably the result of the confusion and lack of distinction or the merging of the two.61

This also indicates the evolution in the attitude towards the genre of detective fiction as original works began to appear, expand and diversify. Likewise, there is indication of the existence of a sense of expertise in this genre that enables writers to constantly introduce innovations. Majdī Ṣābir, an author of children’s books and detective fiction born in 1960, explains the reasons that led to publication: “No one thought or dared to publish this kind of series in the past … [ellipses in the original] you might wonder […] why this new series? The answer is that the reader is no doubt tired and bored after reading dozens and hundreds of detective stories and stories of suspense and violence […] and is looking for something new.”62

As is evident from the above, the Arab writer obviously is aware, especially in the early 1990s, of the tremendous momentum of production in this area, and concerned that the readers of this genre will get fed up with the familiar format of adventure stories they are used to reading. Therefore, it seems indicated to seek a new style and a new and attractive format that will once again draw in the readers. No wonder then that authors also seek to construct new templates of adventurers/investigators, e.g. that of comedy.

Thus in 1991, Midlayt al-Maḥdūda published a new series entitled Mughāmarāt Jumʿa wa-Shurakāʾih (The Adventures of Jumʿa and his Partners), comic detective stories and adventures. In the first issue, which bore the title The Treasures of Guardian Shanabā, author Majdī Ṣābir writes to the ultimate reader: “You may be surprised and amazed once you have the first issue of this new series in your hands, and, without a doubt, the reason

59 Thus in the original. See ‘Abīd ʿAllāh 1989.
60 ‘Abīd al-Bārī [n.d.]: back cover.
for this surprise and amazement is that this is the first series of its kind—i.e., comic detective stories that you will see with your own eyes.”

It is probably safe to say that this is a clear innovation, an attempt to diversify the genre, or even to lay the groundwork for a new genre that integrates suspense and humour. It reflects the degree of success of detective fiction as evidenced by its wide dissemination.

In 1992, the London-based Midlayt al-Majdūda, published, through the Sijill al-Arbaʿ printing house in Cairo, a new series called al-Firqa al-Inthāriyya (The Suicide Unit), authored, again, by Majdī Ṣābir—a series of adventures filled with action and risk-taking. Its heroes are two men and a woman, all members of the Egyptian Intelligence Services. Likewise, the same publisher put out another new series called Disıkāvirī (Discovery)—with science fiction adventures, also written by Majdī Ṣābir.

To crown his new endeavours, Majdī Ṣābir began in 1992 writing yet another series, also for Midlayt al-Majdūda, entitled ʾIdārat al-Būlīs al-Nisāʾī–al-Kubrā (Women’s Police Administration–Cobra), in which the key roles are played by female police officers who are responsible for the safety of the public and the state in face of all the dangers that lurk.

Yet another series was launched in Amman: Qiṣṣa Būlīs iyya li ʾAwlād (Detective Stories for Children). Apparently, the name is chosen on purpose: it seems to reflect a desire to replicate the tremendous success in Egypt. However, this dream did not materialize and the author left Jordan and moved to the USA.

In Syria there was an attempt similar to the one in Jordan. A writer by the name of Suhayl ʿAyyūb wrote a series for children called al-Mughamirūn al-ʾAwba (The Four Adventurers), in analogy to al-Mughamirūn al-Khamṣa (The Five Adventurers) by Egyptian author Maḥmūd Qāsim.

In 1994, Dār al-Shurūq (Cairo and Beirut) published a new series entitled ʾAlghāz al-Shurūq (The al-Shurūq Mysteries), by Maḥmūd Qāsim. The heroes are Ḥabḥab and his falcon Rafrāf. In each adventure, or ʾriwāya’, as the author calls it, there is a plot that takes place somewhere else on the globe. It is based on real events (such as wars, combat activities, riots…) which the author uses for the setting of the mystery and the ensuing events. In 1996, the same publisher and author put out a new series entitled Khayāl fī Khayāl (Imagination x Imagination), a fantasy set in an imaginary world full of virtue.

Again in 1994, Dār al-ʾAmīn in Cairo published a new adventure series, al-Qannāṣ al-Muṭtarif (The Professional Sniper). Its hero is an Egyptian intelligence officer of a special kind, as described by author Majdī Ṣābir. The same author wrote a series called

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63 Ṣābir 1991: introduction
64 Ṣābir 1992b.
65 Ṣābir 1991b.
68 Ḥāji 2011: 21-23.
69 Qāsim 1994: 36.
70 Qāsim 1996.
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*Mughāmarāt fī 'l-Faḍā’ wa’l-Khayāl al-‘Ilmī* (Adventures in Space and Science Fiction), published by Dār al-Ma’ārif. It is worth noting that the level of linguistic and printing quality was superior to its other published series.\(^72\)

Also in 1994, Dār Nahdāt Miṣr lil-Ṭibāʿa wa’l-Nashr wa’l-Tawzīʿ in Cairo published a series called *ʿĀlam al-Jaʿrīma* (The World of Crime) which presented crime on three levels: Interpol cases, espionage, and crimes of passion. Some of these crimes were translated (from general world literature…) by Suhayr al-Bīlī, with a preface in Arabic by Māhmūd Sālim, the ground-breaking pioneer of this genre, while the second part was original—written by Māhmūd Sālim himself.\(^73\)

From that same publishing house and in that same year, there is a new series with the grandiose name of *Mughāmarāt al-Qarn al-Qādim* (Adventures of the Next Century), written by Rajāʾ ‘Abd Allāh.\(^74\) It is interesting that the name of the main character, chief scientist Nadīm Ṣabrī, is very similar to the name of the hero in *The Man of the Impossible* series, ‘Adham Ṣabrī. We believe this is no coincidence, but rather an attempt to imitate the outstanding success of al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya al-Ḥadītha. Another interesting fact is that the name of Rajāʾ ‘Abd Allāh reappears in more than one series at different times and for different publishers. Thus, it appears, the growing momentum of writing led to situations in which a writer might be writing different series for different publishers, thus actually competing with him/herself. We believe there are also reciprocal influences and a desire to emulate what has already been successful, in the interest of assuring commercial gain.

Also in 1994, Dār al-Baḥšīr in Amman published a new adventure series entitled *ʾAlghāz Būlīyya lil-Fityān wa’l-Fatayāt* (Detective Mysteries for Boys and Girls), written by ‘Amal Izz al-Ḥānī. Its heroes are five adventurers.\(^75\)

In 1996, Dār Ḥāṭyḥ published in Cairo a series called *Rajul al-Faḍā’* (The Space Man), a detective adventure and science fiction by Ḥusām al-‘Aqqād. Among the newest series we found that in 1998, al-Dār al-Miṣrīyya al-Lubnāniyya published in Cairo a science-fiction series entitled *Fursān al-Ghad* (The Knights of Tomorrow), written by Hishām al-Ṣayyād. These were more like regular books in size and volume than the familiar pocket books of similar series, with better quality paper, and a harder coloured cover. In the preface the author writes:

> with scientific progress, a group of people has appeared from all over the world, who have a tendency to exploit the dark side of science, trapped in a love of destruction, sabotage and bloodshed, using technology to attain their goals… […] so it was necessary to think about setting up a well-trained science team with exceptional skills to stop these criminals, and because of the important and active

\[\text{References}\]

\(^{72}\) Šābir 1994c, Šābir 1994d.

\(^{73}\) Al-Bīlī [n.d.], and Sālim [n.d.].

\(^{74}\) ‘Abd Allāh 1995.

\(^{75}\) Izz al-Ḥānī 1994.
role Egypt plays in safeguarding the region and the world, this team was set up in our beloved country.\textsuperscript{76}

In 2004, Dār Hāla published a new series entitled \textit{al-Fursān al-Thalātha} (The Three Knights), written by Hishām al-Ṣāyūdī. Its heroes are Nūrā, Māzin and Mukhtār, who, in each issue, try to solve a very puzzling mystery. What is special about this series is that the author does not give the reader clear answers, but rather ends each issue with one or more questions for the reader to think about until the next issue, which contains the solution. This method is reminiscent of the early days of Maḥmūd Sālim, before the series of \textit{al-Mughāmirūn al-Khamsa} (The Five Adventurers), when he used to write two pages on a regular basis for the newspaper, asking the readers to send in their answers and solutions.\textsuperscript{77}

In 2005, Dār al-ʿĪsāʾī published a series entitled \textit{Ajmāl Qīṣaṣ al-Mughāmarāt al-Khayāliyya lil-ʾAṭfāl} (The Most Beautiful Imaginary Stories for Children),\textsuperscript{78} a bi-lingual Arabic-English series with fairy tales, tales of courage, history and science fiction written by Niḍāl al-Bazm,\textsuperscript{79} who, in the introduction, writes:

\begin{quote}
    The pages of this book contain imaginary stories about the defense of the planet, or a town or a village against foreigners or aliens, in order to instill love of the country and of others in the souls of our beloved young ones.\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

In Cairo, Dār al-Ṭalāʾīʿi published an adventure series entitled \textit{al-ʿAlghāz al-ʾIlmiyya} (The Scientific Mysteries) written by Fatḥī Ṣāfbī. In this series, three young adventurers, ʿḤasan, ʿĀmīn and ʿĀdīl, solve detective mysteries related to science, similar to the first series written by Maḥmūd Sālim.\textsuperscript{81}

Another series published by Dār Laylā after 2005 was \textit{Ṣāʿāt al-Khaṭār} (The Hours of Danger), written by Muḥammad Sāmī. It had two issues called \textit{al-Taḥriba al-Malāʾina} (The Cursed Experience) and \textit{al-Ruʿb al-Qāṭil} (Murderous Horror), in addition to several issues by Dār Laylā, such as:

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textit{Virus} – a science adventure series collaboratively written by Tāmir ʿĪbrāhīm Tāmir, ʿAḥmad ʿĪbrāḥīm ʿĀtī and ʿAḥmad Ḥāsab al-Nābī.
    \item \textit{wwww}, a horror series by ʿAḥmad Khālid Tawfīq.
    \item \textit{Al-Mutakhaṣṣīn} (The Experts) by Nabil Fārūq, which had only three issues.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{76} Al-Ṣāyūdī 1988: 8.
\textsuperscript{77} Al-Ṣāyūdī 2004.
\textsuperscript{78} Al-Bazm 2005.
\textsuperscript{79} At the end of the book, and in the biography it says that the author has another series entitled \textit{Mughāmarat al-ʾAbūl lil-ʿAṭfāl} (Heroic Adventures for Children), a name which suggests that it is an adventure series for children, and might also be detective fiction, as is customary in these aeries, it seems. We were unable to actually find this series in the markets.
\textsuperscript{80} Al-Bazm 2005: 3.
\textsuperscript{81} The adventures actually bear the same name: \textit{Lughz al-Dhākira al-Mafṣūda} (The Mystery of the Lost Memory) and \textit{Lughz al-Awrāq al-Mafṣūda} (The Mystery of the Lost Papers), see Ṣāfbī [n.d.\textsuperscript{a}] and Ṣāfbī [n.d.\textsuperscript{b}]. On the back inside cover it says: ‘The series is very powerful: pleasure-culture-action,’ see Ṣāfbī [n.d.\textsuperscript{a}].
2.2.3 Series with no dates

In addition to the series bearing a publication date, there are also a number of others that show no indication as to when they were published. Among these we note the following series:

- From the Al-Jazira Library in the Egyptian city of Mansūra, a series entitled al-Shabah al-ʾAbyad (The White Shadow), described as ‘interesting detective novels’ by Dr. Ḥusām al-ʾAqqād.
- Mughāmarāt Būlīsiyya lil-ʾAwlād waʾl-Banāt (Detective Stories for Boys and Girls), by Majdī Ṣābir, who participated in the writing of several detective and mystery stories and series. Dār Gharīb, printers for the Gharīb library publishers and distributors in Cairo, presented it as ‘a monthly series for children combining entertainment, cultural enrichment and pleasure […] as well as providing ways to think about solving problems that young readers can read but older readers also don’t want to give up on.’ There were over 30 adventures.82
- 'Alghāz 'Ā'ilat Mīm (The Mīm Family Mysteries), by Rajāʾ Abd Allāh. The first pocket book is Matḥaf al-Ṣamt (The Museum of Silence), by 'Afāf 'Abd al-Bārī. Subsequent mysteries: al-Kāmīrā al-Khaṭīyya (The Hidden Camera), al-Kāmīn al-Ghāmiq (The Mysterious Ambush), al-Azhār al-Qātila (The Fatal Flowers), all published by the Gharīb library in Cairo. The stars in these adventures are the members of the Mīm family—father, mother, Hishām, Marwān, Hādiya, Muḥsin, the nanny, the driver, Inspector Murād, and Ra’d the dog. The structure and some of the names are similar to those of the earlier mystery series. Hence we assume that this series was published in the late 1970s / early 1980s.83 We can see that in this group the names of three adventurers from the series of Detective Stories for Children reappear: Hishām, Muḥsin and Hādiya, and the two last ones from the same group. It seems that this frequency is not a coincidence; rather, it demonstrates the process of copying from one series to another. It seems to indicate that it was hard to avoid such a practice, given the drive of the many publishers and the continuity at the start of every month, and the appearance of the same authors’ names (e.g. Muḥammad Qāsim, Rajāʾ Abd Allāh, ‘Afāf ‘Abd al-Bārī, Maḥmūd Sālim and Majdī Ṣābir) in other series published by various other publishers. But this quantity of momentum aimed at catering to the increasing demands of the readership, mostly children and adolescents, it seems in hindsight, was one of the main reasons and one of the drivers of innovation and diversification in the writing and the desire to seek novelty in form, style and content.

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82 ṢĀBIIR [n.d.] see also the list of publications of Dār Gharīb: 119-120.
83 'ABD al-BĀRĪ [n.d.].
The Dār Hatyāh publishers in Cairo once again published a series written by ‘Afāf Ābd al-Bārī called Farāfish. It contained detective riddles, science fiction stories, leisure games, thinking puzzles, jokes, general knowledge and many other sections.\(^84\)

*Al-Mughāmirān* (The Two Adventurers), written by Samīr Sarḥān, published and distributed by Nahdat Miṣr. On the outer cover page of the first issue, bearing the title *al-Jarīma al-ʾliktrūniyya* (The Electronic Crime), it says that this ‘is the first of a series of adventures in which the heroes are two brothers who love to help the police uncover the mystery surrounding the (police) detective puzzle, and thus help solve it’. It is worth mentioning the high level of this series, compared to other similar detective series in terms of style, language and the overall quality of the artistic product.\(^85\)

*Rambū* (Rambo), written by ‘Amr Yūsuf, was published by the Arab Center for Publication and Distribution in Alexandria, the first publishing house not located in Cairo that we have encountered so far. *Rāmbū* (Rambo) is a pocketbook adventure series revolving around the character of Rambo, inspired by the character of the American film of that name played by Sylvester Stallone, whose picture is prominently displayed on the cover of each adventure.\(^86\)

*The Safrū* (The Ambassador), an adventure series written by ‘Ashraf al-Sayyid al-ʿUqbī and published by the Unit for Children’s Education, Safrī Co., in Cairo.\(^87\)

### 2.2.4 Translated series

In addition to the series written in Arabic, there are the translated series that added to the panorama of the genre such as *The Wheat Sheaves*, published by the Global Egyptian Publisher – Longman (1992), containing a variety of adventures such as those of Sherlock Holmes and other thrillers. Some of the pocketbooks were printed by either Nūbār or Dār al-Maʿārif in Cairo, others by the Global Arab House in Beirut, all showing a high quality of production and finishing, coloured illustrations, some also a fully vowelized text.\(^88\)

Another translated series is Arabic title (Safe Road), published by Dār al-Shurūq (in Cairo and Beirut), mentioning the name of the original author and not the Arabic translator.\(^89\)

It is interesting to find that also the Jarīr library in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, published good quality translated series including:

- *Al-Mukhirūn al-Sab’a* (The Secret Seven) by Enid Blyton.

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\(^84\) ʿABD al-BĀRĪ [n.d.].

\(^85\) SARḤĀN [n.d.]: the back cover.

\(^86\) YŪSUF [n.d.].

\(^87\) Al-SAYYID al-ʿUBĪ [n.d.].

\(^88\) DĀDʾĂGHĀ and al-BARLĀSĪ 1990.

\(^89\) JIMS 1992.
Non-canonical Arabic Detective Writing

- Silsilit Nānsī Drū al-Mukhbira al-Sirriya (A Nancy Drew series), about a young girl detective who solves mysteries, authored under the pen name of Carolyn Keene.

It is possible that these publications indicate a certain literary shift in which Riyadh and cities in the Persian Gulf states began to focus non-canonical literature, while canonical literature began to develop in Cairo—a possible topic for future research.

Another comic book series in colour published in English by the Marvel Entertainment Group Inc. was translated into Arabic and published by Dār al-Shām lil-Nashr wa’l-Tawzī'. It includes:

- G.I. G.I. Jū (G.I. Joe) – “Thrilling adventures for children and young people,” as described by the author90
- Thūrmān (Thurman) – an all-powerful adventurer, a series “of children’s books—thrilling and interesting adventures for children”91
- Shāydirmān (Spiderman) – “thrilling adventures for boys and girls”92
- Banshir (Bancher) – “thrilling adventures for children and young people”93
- X mān... (X-man) – “thrilling adventures for children and young people”94

3. Main themes in the series

After examining a considerable number of the adventures in the various series written originally in Arabic, we were able to form a general picture of their contents and their main themes. Within the general framework of a struggle of the good heroes against the forces of evil, one can point in the various stories, to a number of topics common to all of them.

3.1 The presence of the régime

The political regime has a strong presence and is involved in the smallest details. It is an integral part of the detective force and the plot. Its representatives are characters who influence the chain of events and the progress of the investigation. This presence is expressed in two ways:

a. The character of a security officer (from various forces) who accompanies the young adventurers, guides them and helps them discover the truth.

b. The character of the hero himself, a security officer, is a public servant in one of the units; he pursues the forces of evil that are trying to harm the state. He carries out his missions while serving as a security officer.

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90 ‘ABŪ GHAZĀLA [n.d.]:a.
91 KAMĀL [n.d.]:a: inside cover.
92 KAMĀL [n.d.]:b: inside cover.
93 ‘ABŪ GHAZĀLA [n.d.]:b: inside cover.
94 ‘ABD al-‘ĀṯĪ [n.d.]: inside cover.

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What is interesting in these series is that they all have a happy ending. The story ends with all the adventurers or security forces safe and well, while the criminals have a bitter destiny, being caught either by the heroes or by the police. This gives rise to several points:

1. The security forces are far-reaching and get to everyone, anywhere, however smart and cunning they might be. This sends a powerful message about the image of the various security forces or anyone representing them or acting on their behalf.

2. Criminals and villains are never free forever. They might deceive the state or its people, but only for a limited period of time until order is restored. Good always comes out on top. Here, too, one can sense a message that the regime benefits from.

3. In life there is hope that injustice will be righted, justice will be seen to be done. This offers a prime social and religious message. Good vanquishes evil, the angels overcome the devil and his followers in the true spirit of religions.

4. There is no domain in which ‘big brother’/the security officer cannot intervene and get what he wants. This creates the feeling that criminals might rule, but nevertheless, they are eventually overruled and will inevitably lose their temporary high standing.

5. When you are helped by the right people, the outcome will always be good. In these series, anyone who has a connection to any kind of government body is good, kind, willing to help and knows how to do so. He has been trained for this.

Hence we see that the theme was enlisted by the writers, inspired by the regime, in order to present a good, peaceful and happy world in which the forces of good always overcome the forces of evil and the regime always cares for the wellbeing of its citizens—at least in the booklets in the hands of the next generation of the seventies of the 20th century.

3.2 Pan-Arabism and patriotism

Irrespective of series or subgenre, the hostile forces representing the Evil always come from outside the Arab world (outside Egypt, in particular). They seek to breach the security mechanisms of the local intelligence forces and spread death, destruction and panic among the public, in order to undermine national security and stability. In order to achieve optimal success the offenders use every method and means of espionage they can lay their hands on, armed with all the most sophisticated weaponry and electronic equipment in order to steal defense, military, political or scientific secrets, etc. In the texts, these forces appear in two variants:

a) external forces. These forces may be from different countries and geographical regions. By the frequency of their appearance as well as their way of operating and their aims, they can be further divided into two categories:

   – intelligence services from around the world
   – the Israeli Mossad

b) hostile forces active within the country

Even in the latter case, the adventurers are helped by agents of the local security forces, who are excellently trained to handle such missions. Thus, the heroes succeed in defeating
the attempts to spread destruction. Despite the modest means of the Egyptian and Arab security forces, and despite the sophisticated means at the disposal of the attackers, the young Egyptian/Arab adventurers are prepared to stand up against the attackers and prevent them from achieving their aims. It goes without saying that the high self-confidence of the adventurers and the Arab security forces carries the message of Arab unity and victory at any price over the enemy who is lurking inside or outside the country. The enemy thus serves the goal of highlighting the importance of unquestioned general support for the existing Arab regimes, despite all internal problems.

3.3 The character of the investigator
Among the investigators three categories can be distinguished:

a) adult investigators. These usually are police officers, detectives or intelligence officers from one of the security forces. The hero is paid by the authorities for whom he works. The motivation to unearth the crime is typically a sense of national-social duty. The task of locating the criminals, pursuing them and bringing them to justice is part of his official job, and he perceives of his activities as such. ‘Adham Safrī from the The Man of the Impossible series is a prime example of this category. 

b) The second category is that of the young amateur adventurers. The motives by which they are driven often include a sense of adventure as well as national and social zealotry and concern; some also act out of curiosity and a strong desire to behave like adults and enter into the adult world. Examples of this would be Muhibb, Lūza, Nūsa, ʿĀṭif, and Takhthak, the Five Adventurers of Maḥmūd Sālim, or ʿĀmir ʿĀlya and their cat Mūrjān, the Three Adventurers of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ḥamīd. 

c) The third category is a combination that falls somewhere between the first two categories. It is found particularly in one of the most widely read series, Majmūʿat al-Shayāṭīn al-13 lil-Shabāb (The 13 Devils Group for Youngsters). They are ʾAḥmad, ʿUthmān, ʿĪlāḥām, Hudā, Bū-ʿUmayyir, Miṣbāḥ, Zubayda, Fahd, Khālid, Rīmā, Qays, Bāsim, and Rashīd. They fall between the two other categories because they are all young people from different Arab countries, full of energy and curiosity, like those in the second category; at the same time, they work officially for a joint Arab intelligence service headed by a mysterious leader called ʿNumber X’, an adult intelligence officer, like those in the first category.

3.4 Equality—women fighting alongside the men
The girl or woman detective, as she appears in the various series, is very different from the stereotype of the Arab woman who is harnessed to her husband and cannot be an entity capable of living an independent life without the protection of her husband. Here it is a...
woman of different standards, which sends a different social message. Her anti-
stereotypical behavior provides a very obvious and prominent gender aspect. We can see 
she through a different gender lens: she thinks, she fights, she is strong and getting 
stronger; she plays a key role and is a partner in the decision-making and execution of the 
tough and dangerous missions; she is the man’s equal and committed to the values that 
were until now considered the purview of men only, such as fighting the enemy and putting 
one’self in danger for the sake of one’s country and homeland. The detective story is one of 
the domains in which the woman can act to effect gender equality, and in this story she 
advances and reaches areas that used to be a male monopoly.

4. Conclusion
In 2011, al-Majalla al-ʿArabiyya published an article summarizing the atmosphere of the 
Arab detective genre. The title—“Iḥtifāʾ al-Qurrāʾ wa-ʾIhmāl al-Nuqqād” (Well received by 
readers, neglected by the critics)—is in line with our impression that the popularity of Arab 
detective fiction among the readers was never accompanied by critical research, although 
detective fiction does indeed exist in modern Arab literature and should not be ignored, 
both quantitatively and qualitatively. This literature appears on two levels: canonical and 
non-canonical. The latter offers the broadest level of works, but receives an icy welcome 
from the academic world, where many scholars consider it to be only marginal literature. 
Thus, research fails to reflect the scope of the phenomenon.

Despite being ignored by academia and research, this literature, especially at the non-
canonic level, was extremely widespread among the youth from the 1960s to the 1990s, 
and continues on a smaller scope as a result of many factors, such as technology that has 
weakened the amount of reading in general.

In this article, we tried to shed light on the actual existence of non-canonical detective 
fiction. We traced the development of the genre from the translations of western detective 
stories through to the establishment of original Arabic detective literature.

As stated, the emphasis was on the non-canonical series, which constitute the vast 
majority of detective writing in general and the non-canonical detective literature in 
particular. Certainly, these are not all the series written and published as part of the non-
canonical detective genre, but they are the main series we have been able to find during the 
many years in which we have been monitoring the scene. While we are not the first to 
address the importance of Arabic detective fiction, we believe that our innovative 
contribution of the first comprehensive historical mapping of its development and content 
will serve future scholars as they continue to study this genre in greater depth.

We believe that detective fiction holds a treasure trove of messages and values as we 
saw in regard to the themes mentioned above. Non-canonical literature was, we believe, a 
wall of defense for the regimes in Egypt and other Arab states. It is not subversive 
literature aimed to shock the political order. On the contrary, it is literature in which the 
members of the regime are an essential part. “Justice” as a key value in society is achieved 
through the generous help of the regime and its members. In most of the detective series 
mentioned we find the government persona who plays an important part in resolving the 
mystery and punishing the perpetrators of the crime. As we saw, all the series stayed away
from any criminal activity that might lead to blaming the authorities; all the crime scenarios actually justified the existence of the current regime as an active partner in ensuring order, justice and personal safety.

The field is by no means satiated and requires further research.

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