

Ibrahim Fahmy and Yihia Mukhtar
as Nubian Short Story Writers

by

Dr. Ahmed H. Khalil

*English Department, Qena Faculty of Arts,
S. V. Univ.*

IBRAHIM FAHMY AND YIHIA MUKHTAR AS NUBIAN SHORT STORY WRITERS

(i)

Regional literature rises out of a definite environment comprising a specific people, traditions, and sets of cultural and social values. To draw in his work a particular picture of his community, the writer selects common literary devices or devises new ones. Anne Tibble says that “Novelists, like dramatists and poets are (endowed) with an awareness of their environment often disturbing to themselves as well as to others” (1970 : p. 168). On this basis a few Nubian geniuses have seriously attempted to produce a literature of their own that mirrors the glorious culture, values, and folklore of Old Nubia. The last few decades in the Arab world have witnessed the production of short stories and novels by Nubian writers such as : M. Khalil Qassim, Ibrahim Fahmy, Hajaj Hassan Adoul, Yihia Mukhtar, Idris Ali, and Hassan Nour. Their works have undoubtedly played a highly influential role in the Arab world in revitalizing Nubian cultural identity, which was deeply affected by the Nubians' emigration to different areas in the Sudan and in Egypt in 1933, and established a true Nubian literature. As this regional literature presents unique settings, types of characters, values, and cultural domains, it is essential first to give a brief background about the social history of Nubia in order to comprehend the various aspects of the writers' works.

(ii)

The name “Nubia” is the result of many name changes of the area throughout history. “Nub” and “Nubo” were the first shapes of the name that later changed into “Nubia”, which meant “gold” to the ancient Egyptians. Thus the derivation of the name was from the land rich in

gold, copper, silver and other precious metals (El-Sayed Hamid : 1994, p. 12; Mohammed Awad : 1956, p. 300).

Before the construction of the Aswan Dam, Nubia was a mere community of about fifty thousands who dwelt on both banks of the Nile, from "Merowe" in northern Sudan to Aswan in Upper Egypt. More precisely, "the part of Nubia lying between the first Cataract at Aswan and the second Cataract at Wadi Halfa (north of the Sudan), a distance of approximately three hundred kilometers, was referred to as lower Nubia" (Peter Geiser : 1987, p. 1) As for population, Nubia was divided into five main tribes : "Donqola", "Mahas", "Sakkut", "Fadicca" and "Kenuz". The first three dwelt in the Sudan whereas the last two occupied the farthest areas in southern Egypt (Gamal Hemdan : 1993, p. 414). The division into tribes did not mean that the Nubians were divided along any sectarian lines; on the contrary, they were intimately related because of their common personal traits and low population density whether in the Sudan or in Egypt.

Its abundant natural resources and strategic location made Old Nubia the envy of many foreign countries. Several African and Egyptian merchants came to settle in Nubia for considerable periods of time. The early Egyptian "incursions into" the area continued from the "first-dynasty Pharaoh up to the modern time" (Jill Kamil : 1988, p. 72). However, those campaigns were not intended to take over the Nubian land. Later, things started to take a different direction. A number of Arab races invaded the land and settled there permanently, and intermarriage became quite common, so that many scholars and historians could not establish the real origins of today's Nubians. Due to the physical similarity between them and black Africans, many scholars have suggested that their roots are Negro. Others have related them to "Caucasian" races as descendants of the merchants from north Nubia. The controversy seems to have been settled by Eliot Smith's anthropological studies on Nubians. In their physical appearance, the Nubians "share several personal characteristics with the ancient Egyptians before the Pharaonic dynasties" (Gamal Hemdan : pp. 409-10).

Nubians lived on animal husbandry and agricultural produce. As a people who inhabited mountains and rocky ravines, they used to hunt land and sea animals to sell their skins to foreign merchants. A small

number of them worked as manufacturers of pottery, textiles and handicrafts which came to be very sophisticated (Saad El-Khadim : 1966, pp. 5-9).

It may seem astonishing that the hard life of Nubians did not leave any noticeable marks on their genuinely good nature. The Nubian was and is still known for his openness, honesty and seriousness. Such features were enough for rich Egyptians to appoint migrating Nubians as door-keepers and guards. Their only demerit, as seemed to one of the French scholars who remained in Nubia for some time, was their "concealment of inexpressible hostility to foreigners ..." Though they never hurt a single foreigner, Nubians could not wait to see them out of their land (Zuheir El-Shāyeb : 1978, p. 196).

(iii)

Due to particular social reconstructions and urban developments in the Sudan and in Egypt at the dawn of the twentieth century, the Nubian community experienced irreparable destruction. It has been well documented that "the completion of the Aswan Dam in 1903 and its elevations in 1912 and 1933 created a penumbra from which Old Nubia was not to emerge" (Peter Geiser : p. 31). The whole Nubian land was covered with water impounded behind the dam. Consequently, a small number of Nubians moved to the Sudan and the majority headed for Egypt. The Egyptian authorities built them houses in Kom Ombo, a city about 50 kilometers to the north of Aswan, in Aswan itself and other districts of Upper Egypt. At first it was very hard for Nubians, especially young men, to adapt themselves to these foreign habitats : far from the Nile, no palm-trees, no animals and little food. Huge numbers of them left for Cairo, Alexandria and for other Arab countries to earn money to improve their lives and support their poor families in the so-called New Nubia. In time, the trappings of modern civilization in such areas lured many Nubians into complicated circles of new social values and habits. There is no doubt that the identity of their original culture has been altered, but it is still resisting extinction. Everywhere one goes in Egypt or other Arab countries, one can easily see Nubian societies, clubs and unions. Among themselves, the members of such communities speak the Nubian language which no outsider can ever

understand. They also insist on practicing their own folklore and customs during certain festivals and on other occasions. Thus, it seems that "the Nubian bears a variety of environmental and social complications which are hard for the foreigners to break" (El-Sayed Hamid : p. 46).

Though the life of Nubians today is unquestionably better than their old one, in terms of material conditions, they do not seem to care much for that. They have deeply rooted and intimate connections, both spiritual and emotional, with their homeland which no power can break. It is more than being a piece of land where life is good or bad. It is the place where memories of childhood days, great ancestors, warm houses, highly revered values, and glorious monuments are buried. One should not wonder, therefore, why each Nubian is so eager to go back to the mother-land. It is the dream that lasts "as long as each Nubian lives" (see El-Sayed Ahmed Hamid : 1993, p. 23).

(iv)

Now the Nubian short story in the hands of both Ibrahim Fahmy and Yihia Mukhtar, the most famous Nubian writers,* is characterized by certain qualities which distinguish them from other stories, whether in Arabic or in English. Their techniques which set them apart from the established conventions of the short story present a challenge to the scholar and are therefore worthy of the following critical handling.

Fahmy's stories are most often narrated in first person. Two stories, entitled "El-Qamar Boba"* and "Dance of Geese" [Raqsat Al-Auz], are written in the third person. In both narrative forms, all situations and events are seen through the eyes of only two central characters : *Ambab* (the father), and the son. The writer's focus on only these two characters in most of his stories shows that he wants them to represent both Nubian generations : the young and the old. According to Sayed Hamid El-Nassaj, the purpose of the underlying, persistent comparison is to examine how far loyalty to the Nubian homeland takes shape and is developed (*El-Qamar Boba* : p. 1983).

* (However, none of their Arabic stories has been translated into any Foreign Languages)

* Nubian Jewel for women, and first words of a Nubian song.

This method of narration succeeds in getting the reader to sympathize with the narrator in each story. The son is often worried about the assimilation of his Nubian friends in “foreign” communities. He repeatedly calls out for them to get together and regain their homeland. For instance, in “Come Together, All Lovers !” [Ya Mjami’a El-Ushaq] he guarantees all Nubians that “it takes us only one hour from night” to dismiss strangers from the Nubian land (*Love Springs from the Village* [El-Ishiq Awalohou El-Qura] : p. 20). Even though the writer underscores his belief that young Nubians should not break their bonds with Nubia, he sometimes describes the son's inevitable change. In all the stories in the collection *The River Nile* [Bahr El-Nil] the character appears as the boy who firmly practices all Nubian customs, whereas in the stories of *El-Qamar Boba* he looks different. “Language of Lovers” [Lughat Al-Ushaq], for example, introduces him as a modern Egyptian young man who has ignored many of the Nubian habits. His father rebukes him : “You must have forgotten how to put the turban on your head, son of the tribes !” (*El-Qamar Boba* : p. 42). Feeling so irritated by his son's very long hair, which makes him look like a girl, the father swears to cut it with his own hands. On the other side, the son has no other choice but to abandon all foreign values and go back to the roots. The father's unchanging character throughout is another indication of the Nubians' constant sense of belonging to Nubia.

Fahmy's common employment of the first person method of narration could be regarded as a limitation, for the point of view in each story is conveyed only through the central character. The reader may only guess what the views of the other characters are. No character analysis is therefore accurate. The writer lets the narrator use “we” to give a hint that other persons share his thoughts and feelings. Many paragraphs are written in the third person within the first – person narrated stories. An example of this is the writer's repeated public reference to the daily lives of Nubian girls, like girls did ... girls sang ... girls danced. This device shows the feelings and thoughts of the Nubian people through characters other than the narrator himself. “*The River Nile*”, for example, seems to tell everything about the character of Osman Bashir, while it explores the world of Safia Mecky, Hanim and other Kenuzian girls. Such variation in narration gives the reader a strong impression that the writer knows everything about all his

characters. Dialogue between characters other than the narrator in most of the stories also contributes much in this respect. For all these reasons, the writer's objectivity in exposing the Nubian world is easily made manifest.

Unlike Fahmy, Mukhtar tends to use the third person method of narration. His collection of short stories, *Bride of the Nile* [Arous El-Nil] is written in this way. "Event" [Waqia], "A Tale for Oblivion" [Hikaya Lil Nissyan] and "The Parcel" [Al-Tard] show clearly that the writer has a full knowledge of all characters contained in each story. According to the criteria of E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the English Novel*, Mukhtar can be looked upon as omniscient. However in the story of "Bride of the Nile", he penetrates the minds and hearts of only two characters : Abd El-Rahman and his daughter, Farida. Nothing in detail is mentioned about the story's other characters, such as the mayor, his son or the villagers. Life in Old Nubia is thus seen through the eyes of only these two characters. Such third person method of narration is described as "limited omniscience" (Donald Hall : 1981, p. 89). In other words, it is "a way of combining third person narration with one of the opportunities offered by writing in the first." (Richard Gill : 1985, p. 82). Through the oppression and inexpressible spiritual distress of Abd El-Rahman and his daughter the reader feels how gloomy life was for the common man in Old Nubia. It was ruled by tyrannical individuals who never considered a poor man's dignity or honor. Taking these two common characters as central may indicate the writer's interest in the common man and hostility to the rich elite, who were not original Nubians, in his community.

The way Fahmy and Mukhtar narrate their stories is characterized by a feature which distinguishes them from modern story tellers : the narrators of their stories sound like folk singers, telling rapturous tales about the distant past of their nation. The narration is accompanied by a peculiar kind of rhythm, owing to the use of verse within the general framework of prose, the normal medium of expression in all the stories. Commenting on the way the stories of Fahmy's *El-Qamar Boba* are written, Sayed Hamid El-Nassaj stresses that the writer "has been conscious of the effectiveness of folk culture as a basic factor for narration which is a folk art in itself" (*El-Qamar Boba* : p. 181).

It is also quite evident that various types of speech are infused in the narration of the stories. The writers have an equal interest in letting their narrators quote the exact words uttered by characters (direct speech) and they also let them reproduce certain statements of characters (indirect speech). According to Leech and Short, such methods help the writers claim that they "report faithfully" (1981 : p. 320). Besides, a great deal of the conversation, especially in Fahmy's "Nubian Eyelashes" [Remsh El-Sabaiya] and Mukhtar's "Event", runs smoothly and sequentially with no reference to the speakers. This is what is defined in stylistics as "free direct speech" (Ibid., p. 322). Though this may affect the reader's interest in characters, it serves much to reinforce the writer's objectivity and smoothness of language.

(v)

P.G. Rama Rao (1980 : p. 120), Geoffrey Ashe (1972 : p. 40), Raymond Chapman (1983 : p. 30) and Rashad Rushdi (1970 : p. 46) agree that the short story should be built upon a single human situation comprising few characters, scenes and events. In the hands of a clever artist, the threads of the situation can be woven together at a certain point in the story so as to convey the intended meaning to the reader. This stage at which the reader catches an idea implied in a story is regarded by Rushdi as "moment of illumination". A sizable number of Nubian stories are constructed in the light of this definition. Fahmy's "A Nubian song of Emigration" [Ughnia Nubiya Lil-Hijra], chiefly focuses on the reaction of all Nubians in "Kushtamna" towards the compulsory emigration from Nubia, indicated by the arrival of the Egyptian ship to deport them against their will; Mukhtar's "Bride of the Nile" describes the deplorable situation of a poor slave in "El-Geneina and El-Shibback" who is a fugitive, forced to flee by the despotic regime of the village's mayor. These situations are surely derived from the Old Nubian communities, and they present clear images to the reader. Due to the rising suspense caused by the complicated nature of such situations, the reader's attention is held throughout from the outset of each story. This is also a marked pattern in the modern English short story (Derek Hudson; 1956, p. xiii). In one sense, the Nubian story tellers may have thus followed in the steps of modern English writers.

The plots of Fahmy's stories with the exception of a handful may not seem to be unconventional. It is difficult to determine a clear beginning, middle and end in a story despite its general shape as a folkloric tale. It seems that the writer agrees with Frank O'Connor's suggestion that : "It is a bogus notion that a few techniques and tricks in the writing of stories can be identified, categorized and then aped" (1963; p. 28). Fahmy's "A White House in Nubia" [Beit Abyyad Fi El-Noba] and "Love Springs from the Village" are examples of how a mere collection of scenes are put together to juxtapose the sites of beauty in Nubian nature with ugly townscapes. Nevertheless, all these scenes are harmoniously interwoven. This may also reveal the writer's knowledge of the art of the dramatist who is always careful to present colorful scenes on the stage (Sayed Hamid El Nassaj; 1989, p. 100). On closer examination, however, these stories often show a definite pattern or structure. Since most Fahmy's stories draw a sharp contrast between the past and the present, represented by Old and New Nubia, one can also conclude that the past stands for the beginning of the story and the present for the end. The climax of the story is represented by specific complications at some point either in the past or the present. In other words, the plot of the story can be decided if the structure is paralleled to the context of time expressed or implied within the scenes. When this works, one can say that the writer has created, either consciously or unconsciously, a close affinity between the content and the form of his stories.

All Mukhtar's stories, on the other hand, move in a straightforward line. Each story has a clear beginning, middle and end. At the beginning of "Bride of The Nile", for example, the reader is introduced to the intricate problem of the central character, Abd El-Rahman. A variety of scenes and events work together from the outset to take that problem to the climax at the middle of the story where Abd El-Rahman attempts to get rid of his disgraced daughter. With equal effectiveness, the events come to lead to the solution of the problem by the daughter's drowning at the end of the story. Such design of plot serves to establish the sequence of events throughout all the action.

The non-modernist element of surprise is one component of some of Fahmy's and Mukhtar's stories. Using suspense, the two writers hold the reader's attention throughout all their stories, involving their

central characters in situations which develop, get complicated and then are resolved in an unexpected manner. Both the reader and Nubian characters of the story "A Nubian song of Emigration" are astonished to discover that the tooting ships on the Nile are not ones for carrying parcels from Nubian laborers in Cairo but are instead for deporting the Nubians from their homeland. It is not less surprising as well to see a little Nubian girl try to throw herself into the Nile and bite the sailor's hand who tries to stop her for refusing to leave Nubia. In a more surprisingly way Fahmy makes men's turbans and women's shawls fly into the air to rest on the deserted houses of Nubia as a sign of connection with the land. The way the character Abd El-Rahman exhausts his mind and heart, waiting for the moment to kill his daughter in Mukhtar's "Bride of The Nile", raises the reader's terror and tension to a high point. One predicts the daughter will be killed by the father's hand any moment; but to the surprise of the reader, the daughter ends her own life by throwing herself into the Nile at the end of the story. Equally great is the surprise of the father. One expects her death to relieve her father of his emotional and spiritual distress, but instead he is broken hearted.

Another common aspect of plot shared by Nubian writers is their limitation to definite time and place. Both Fahmy and Mukhtar contrast Old and New Nubia. Both resurrect images of the past, without being strictly historical. The American writers, for example Willa Cather, E. Hemingway, E.E. Cummings, John Dos Passos, Ernest Boyed, Edith Warton, Lawrence Stallings are among those who have strongly used the past in their works to react against war and its influence on the community (John McCormic : 1971, pp. 14-15). Following in such writers' steps, perhaps, the Nubian writers take the event of the Aswan Dam's construction in 1933 as the crux of their stories. The influence of this event on the present and future of Nubian community occupies sizable portions in these stories as well. In this way, the Nubian story takes "the ideological form", persued a long time before in the western story (Philip Rice & Patricia Waugh : 1992, p. 62).

As the Nubian stories revolve around past events which have left their marks on the present and the future, they seem to follow the techniques of cause and effect. This is clearly revealed in the stories by the sharp contrast between the village, standing for the past or Old

Nubia, and the town, standing for the present or New Nubia. Of course, the village is portrayed in much better light than is the town. These representations show Fahmy and Mukhtar's belief that their people's suffering in the present and fear of the future are mainly caused by emigration from Nubia.

Moreover, Fahmy and Mukhtar impregnate a number of their stories with repeated scenes and situations. However, this is not needless repetition : it is, in fact, a great source of rhythm and relevance to the plot of each story. The meaning of the story is surely enhanced by the recurring music through repetition. Fahmy strikes the reader with this musical sentence : "Neither the land, nor the sun, nor the moon, are real" which is repeated several times within each of the stories. The Old Nubian community was endowed with much more beautiful land, warmer sun and moon than any other place. The fact that the moon or the sun could never change is not open to debate. The writer makes them change to indicate his boundless love and longing for Old Nubia. This same feeling is stressed through Mukhtar's repeated fine descriptions of Nubia in the stories of his collection *Bride of the Nile*. For example, in "Event" the sun is as bright and white as pure milk; the decorated houses glitter reflecting the sunlight; the sky is so clear; and trees throw their extensive shadows on many parts of the land.

(vi)

The Nubian stories can be judged as complex works of art. As they offer a wide range of human experience in the Nubian community, both old and new, it is perhaps difficult to decide their central themes. However, they can be categorized through certain dimensions. Mukhtar investigates in a number of his stories the gloomy sides of the Nubian man's life in Old Nubia. Slavery and oppression imposed upon the common Nubian man by the aristocratic heads of the tribe emerge as the central theme of these stories. In one way or another, this social oppression is singled out in a few areas in some of the stories of Fahmy as a basic, not quite as a central theme. Social changes after 1933 and their influence upon the texture of the Nubian community are supreme issues in the stories of both writers. It is realized that relations among the Nubian generations are affected by their housing in new

environments. Modern civilization seems to be in contrast with the Nubian values and both Mukhtar and Fahmy use the contrast in generating a conflict between Nubian generations especially in the clash between fathers and sons. The latter are blamed for breaking their blood and spiritual ties with Nubian society and embracing foreign cultures and social values. No better example can be mentioned here than that of the Nubian-university graduate who falls in love with a white Egyptian girl and thinks of marrying her. He is opposed by both Fahmy and all Nubian girls who shout in his face : "take the genuine girl and forget about the colour" (from "Language of Lovers" in *El-Qamar Boba* : p. 39). With an equal dramatic intensity, Mukhtar shows in "The Parcel" that several Nubians have left their families and the land that fostered them to humiliate themselves by working in Cairo and other places as hotel waiters and door-keepers. One of the characters cannot forget the time when the Egyptians used to call him and his friends "Oh, black man ... Oh, barbarian" (*Bride of The Nile* : p.58).

The two writers also trace their nostalgia for the past that is portrayed as a lost paradise. This theme is revealed through the paradise of Nubia on the one hand, and the "hell" of the town on the other. This theme is associated with others, such as the hope of return to Old Nubia. This makes their stories look like open invitations for all Nubians in the world to gather and work hard to make the dream of going back home come true. Mukhtar's collection of stories, *Bride of The Nile*, is dedicated to the soul of his dead friend, Mohammed Khalil Qassim, who wrote the first Nubian novel, *Al-Shamandoura*, and to "all emigrant Nubians as an invitation representing hope to return to homeland ... on the banks of the lake in Old Nubia" (*Bride of The Nile* : p. 9). Fahmy's treatment of this theme is much more intensive and comprehensive. The narrator of "Come Together, All Lovers", who may stand for the writer, weeps for being alone and persuades, sometimes with revolutionary words, all his countrymen to take the initiation of moving to old Nubia. Fearlessly he assures them that this action "takes no more than one hour of night" (*The River Nile* : p. 51). Such enthusiasm is sometimes weakened by the realization that the Nubian door-keepers in Cairo ignore his shouts by pulling the turbans down on their eyes and ears. It is also mentioned in his "The Curfew does not Apply to Lovers" [Hazr El-Tijwal Gheir Sari Ala El-Ushaq] that : "all of them are asleep. asleep during the day, asleep at night ..."

(*Nubian Eyelashes* : p. 18). Despite all this, the writer, along with Mukhtar, never loses faith in the Nubian individual as he stresses once again in the above story that anyone who knows Nubia can never forget her.

Political themes also find their way into the Nubian short story. Both Mukhtar and Fahmy affirm, either directly or indirectly, that the Egyptian government is behind the Nubian's misery and despair in modern time. Its building of the High Dam at Aswan has caused the Nubian's emigration to Egypt, which in its turn has left an indelible effect on Nubian integrity. The fragmentation of the society, and the decay of most Nubian social customs and values are the result of that forced emigration. It is not shocking, perhaps, to read in Fahmy's stories that Nubians now are as weak as broken-winged birds, and that they are entirely immersed in corrupt civilization. It is equally sensed in the stories of Mukhtar that the Nubians lack human sense and energy. However, the two writers do not attack their own people as much as they attack the Egyptian government. Fahmy's criticism, in this respect, is much sharper than Mukhtar's.

(vii)

From the types of characters introduced in the concerned stories, it is evident that the Nubian writers are primarily concerned with the common people. These are taken as central characters, whereas others – who are mostly mayors – are secondary. It is also quite apparent that characters are not confined to one sex or a specific tribe : male, female, Egyptians and Nubian figures are included. It should be noted here that both Fahmy and Mukhtar prefer to focus more on Nubian characters.

In the first place, Fahmy sketches his characters from both the inside and outside. Still, he concentrates much on outside appearance. The Nubian girls, who are minor characters, are given a special kind of beauty : their clothes are made of brilliant linen, they have got dark eyes and long hair locks, their waists are thin, and they always wear golden laces and ear-rings. Hanim's description in "A Nubian Song of Emigration" and Kenuzian girls in "Love Springs from the Village" are outstanding examples of original Nubian characters. This "genuine" colour of the Nubian girl stands in sharp contrast with the "false"

beauty of the northern girl (from Cairo), who is made to look like a "funfair bride", in "language of Lovers" (*El-Qamar Boba* : p. 40). The surface characters are quite often described from within, both directly and indirectly. Swearing to her lover, Osman Bashir, Hanim says : "neither you, nor your great grand-father, nor your entire people can touch a single hair of my head until the Nile comes back and see it (*The River Nile* : p. 16).

In spite of Fahmy's use of many characters in each story, not all of them are complicated, or round. The father, or "*Ambab*", and the son look to be the only central ones who appear in all the stories. Their continuous representation is most likely meant to serve the writer's idea, which is the relation between two Nubian generations : the old and the young (Sayed H. El-Nassaj : 1989), p. 183). The father always appears as the strenuous teacher who constantly trains his son, representing all young Nubians, how to maintain a sense of belonging in his homeland in spite of all allurements of modern civilization. In his turn the son proves to be faithful and loyal to the father : as he ensures in "A Nubian Song of Emigration" that : "Kushtamna, our home, is the best one all over the world" (*El-Qamar Boba* : p.30). Through the son the writer thus teaches all Nubians unforgettable lessons about the necessity of being faithful to their culture, tradition and values.

The complexity of these characters lies, perhaps, in their being put forward for the reader to judge. The richness of their thoughts and feelings enables the reader to have a deep insight into character reactions. In "Come Together, All Lovers", the narrator mentions : "I talk to myself, sing and dance alone and no one dances alone but the slaughtered birds ..." (*The River Nile* : p. 44). Fahmy here is not obliged to tell directly how the lonely narrator of his story suffers. The words of the narrator are enough. Comparing his solitude as a Nubian to the slaughtered bird whose companions leave alone to struggle against death, the narrator focuses the reader's attention on this very subtle feeling.

It should be admitted here that Fahmy's characters do not change much. "*Ambab*," for instance, remains a man of principles, the one who spiritually and physically clings to Nubian life, the genuine villager who always bears malice and hostility towards the town, and the solemn father who controls his family well throughout all the stories. In

some of the stories, the son, who is the sole narrator, changes by becoming a university graduate and talking like Egyptians. However, this minor change is soon negated by his father's reproach. The son thus becomes alert to his true Nubian origin and forgets about new traditions he has acquired from Cairo. Stability of characters here may have something to do with the writer's notion that Nubian generations should be firmly fixed to their homeland and social values.

Mukhtar's characters may look richer as protagonists than those of Fahmy. This is due to the writer's concentration on their inner life rather than their outer appearance. Abd El-Rahman and his daughter, Farida, are real examples of persons who are subjected to great social oppression in "Bride of The Nile". Their emotional and mental struggles throughout the story cause the reader to pity and feel sorry for their helplessness in a cruel world. The following diagnosis of Abd El-Rahman is a clear sign that Mukhtar is not an ordinary writer but a clever psychologist who appreciates man's spiritual tension :

While lying on a hard bed trying to sleep, he kept moving his body from side to side as though attempting to drop the painful memories out of his head : he felt their itch as if they were cemetery flies that keep buzzing and sticking to the body despite one's struggle to have them off ... (*Bride of The Nile* : p. 22).

It is the nightmare of the rape of his daughter by the mayor's son that keeps him awake day and night. What is strange about this character is his permanent silence. Nevertheless, this may seem logical and natural for two reasons. First, he suffers from a pain about which he can never complain : being the father of a disgraced daughter. Second, a slave like him dares not blame the mayor's son. There is no other choice, then, but to keep his mouth shut and get rid of his daughter. In this way the writer stresses the tyranny of lords and the silent endurance of the common man.

Unlike Fahmy, Mukhtar's characters appear more pragmatic. The poor slave at the beginning of the story becomes in the middle a resolute father determined to kill his daughter, then changes completely in the end. Despite Abd El-Rahman's silence throughout the story, he at last shouts and cries as his daughter throws herself in the Nile : "Farida ... Farida ... my daughter ... somebody help me please ..." (*Bride of the*

Nile : p. 31). He madly strikes the water with his hands and searches the dark Nile with his eyes in vain for a trace of Farida. Such a change is necessary in this case, for Abd El-Rahman is a father irrespective of anything else. The change, too, is an indicator of the writer's quite consciousness of fatherly feelings, and his full knowledge of psychology that is made manifest in drawing all the central characters of other stories. Mohamadein's spiritual and psychological distress in "Event" is a representative example.

It is noticed that Mukhtar's minor characters are represented in the stories differently. Some of them appear much in the single world of a story, while others never appear. For example, the reader is only informed that "El Geneina and El-Shibback in "Bride of the Nile" and "Event" is a Nubian district that is governed by a mayor, but who is never introduced to the reader. The writer's only accepted excuse here is most likely his main concern with the common character makes him avoid giving details about the mayor's life. But the minor characters appear in the stories to perform effective roles, apart from being used as representatives of Nubian communities.

Characters of both Fahmy and Mukhtar share common features in holding firmly certain rituals and taboos. Despite their embrace of Islam, Nubians, especially women, believe in things which look mysterious and unreasonable. For this reason a few critics look upon them as superstitious (Ibrahim Sha'rawi : 1984). However, this issue is not an open question, for Nubians, like any people, should have their own independent social beliefs and traditions. The writers' depiction of such ritual elements are meant to give the true picture of the Nubians who are different from other peoples. All female characters in Fahmy's work, for instance, have a strong belief that the Nile is anthropomorphic : a god that has human faculties as it sometimes gets angry and hurts. Therefore, they always offer it gifts to safeguard themselves against its evils. They also believe in magic as they go to sheikhs to counter magic spells cast on their boys and girls ("The Traveller" [Al-Musafir] in *El-Qamar Boba* : p. 133). Mukhtar's characters as well are portrayed standing before the tombs of sheikh "Abd Allah" and "kabeer" complain about certain problems in the hope of having them solved by these sheikhs. And even if their problems are solved only by luck, they offer these sheikhs sacrificial lambs. Partially these beliefs have a link with religion or habits of the pharaohs.

(viii)

The stories present a variety of landscapes in both Egypt and Nubia. Most of them bear real names. This does not mean that they are recorded in the stories as they really look. All Fahmy's stories take place in one single region named "Kushtamna", a Kenuzian area, while Mukhtar's stories occur in "El Geneina and El-Shibback", land of Fadiccis. This geographical division of Old Nubia leaves its marks on the dialects which both Mukhtar and Fahmy apply to the language of their stories. As a Fadicci, Mukhtar uses a dialect which is little different from that of Fahmy.

The landscape of Fahmy's stories includes various scenes of "Kushtamna". It is a part of Nubia that looks over the Nile and is well lit by the permanently shining sun during the day and the glittering moonlight at night. The writer, therefore, has every reason to describe it as a gorgeous girl wearing her finest clothes in all seasons. This enchanting atmosphere of the setting is skillfully embedded in the characters' moods. Nubian girls and boys are put in the stories in happy moods during their life in Nubia. Recalling such cheerful time, the narrator of "The River Nile" announces : "We sang, and the whole universe joined us ..." (*The River Nile* : p. 12). But, as the setting alters, the moods of characters change too. After emigration, the Nubians are distressed to realize that they must adapt themselves to the new location in the north of Aswan. This is figuratively explained in many areas in the above story and other ones. Missing the Nile, *Ambab* in "Come Together, All Lovers" tells the son : "The Nile stopped flooding, so your mother has stopped bearing any more children, like a barren young palm-tree ..." (*The River Nile* : p. 44).

All the stories of Fahmy show that the setting, mostly Old Nubia, contributes much to the formation of characters' shapes. Briefly, it is repeatedly mentioned that the Nubian girls inherit the black and brown colour of the land, and that they are as sweet as the palm-tree dates. The boys as well are inspired by the giant temples pervading their land to be strong and proud men. Osman Fakir in "A Nubian Song of Emigration" narrates : "Oh, earth, be happy for your sons who are the descendants of great kings" (*El-Qamar Boba* : p. 14). Describing the Fadicci girls, the writer mentions that their eyes are "as blue as the beautiful "River Nile", and as green as the plants of spring". (*The Rive Nile* : p. 21).

The setting of "A White House in Nubia", is magnificently painted to portray the writer's point of view. Everything in Old Nubia is, deliberately perhaps, white-coloured : houses, sails, boats, doors, sea shells, Nile's waves, walls, and even men's clothes and turbans. This peculiar landscape is meant to convey all connotations of the colour white to the reader. It is in this way a symbol of Nubian innocence and purity. The mother in the above story tells her son to always keep his "heart as white as (his) days, house, and not to have any malice against any one ..." (*El-Qamar Boba* : p. 110). Stressing the big difference between the Nubians and other people of the world, the narrator son in his turn wonders : "why doesn't the whole world become as white as our houses and boats' sails" ? (Loc. Cit). These words surely imply that places other than Nubia are corrupt. This view is sustained in Fahmy's stories through the sharp contrast between the village, standing for Nubia, and the town, referring to world towns, with the implication that the former is much more likable than the latter.

The bleak and oppressive landscape in the stories of Mukhtar reflects the grave feelings and low spirits of the characters. The "darkness of night ... the river ... the hills"; the dead silence of the village, the fast running dark water and willowing whirls in "*Bride of The Nile*" all unite to stir up the fear and dolefulness of Abd El-Rahman and Farida. It is not a mere coincidence thus that Farida starts to have the menstrual period amid such gloomy atmosphere surrounding the little boat in the Nile. There must be a link between Farida's period and the painful memories of her rape which are basically stimulated by the awful spirit of the place (*Bride of the Nile* : pp. 15-16). There is also a conformity between Abd El-Rahman's "solitary boat in the heart of dark Nile" and "burnt hut" and his feeling lonely and homeless in a hostile village.

All other stories of Mukhtar have this planned close connection among the setting, characters and the theme. For example, the opening paragraphs of "the forced" drawing of "El-Geneina and El-Shibback" as villages lying on the eastern bank of the Nile on the top of a sterile mountain which is surrounded by rocky cliffs (*Ibid.*, p. 57). This is a hint of the impoverished life of the Nubians who live there. Hence, one is not astonished to read later in the story that many men suffer from hunger and the rough cold of winter nights, waiting impatiently for the

ship coming from the Sudan or Egypt to receive supplies from their relatives who work there. The seamy side of Nubian life, an essential idea in the story, is obviously revealed in the wild nature of the setting.

In conclusion, the Nubian writers seem to have given the setting a peculiar atmosphere. It is firmly connected with characters, themes and points of view of the stories. As Arthur Nizener has said, the good atmosphere of the place helps much, though it is not a primarily essential device, in reinforcing and enriching the meaning of a story (1966; pp. 180–183). Such technique of designing and portraying each setting gives the Nubian writers a prominent position among the modern short story writers of today's world.

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