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Book Review

TERRI DEYOUNG (2015), *MAHMUD SAMI AL-BARUDI: RECONFIGURING SOCIETY AND THE SELF*, SYRACUSE: SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY PRESS. 426 PAGES. [ISBN: 978-0-8156-3391-4; E-BOOK: 978-0-8156-5315-8]

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The history of modern Arabic literature is in process of revision, after the consolidation of a stable and delimited canon, major authors and a consistent narrative in the four modern genres: poetry, fictional prose, theatre and essay. M. M. Badawi's works have been without doubts a decisive contribution to arrange a standard historiographic model for the period. This is acknowledged in the recent *Studying Modern Arabic Literature. Mustafa Badawi, Scholar and Critic* (2015), edited by Roger Allen and Robin Ostle. It is mandatory to mention as well the role of Pedro Martínez Montávez (*Sheikh Zayed Book Award*'s Cultural Personality of the Year 2009) in exposing modern Arabic literature to the outmost visible discussion. But the continuous avalanche of Arabic publications and new authors, and the better awareness of 'peripherical' literatures, force to place the lens in other regions —for instances Eritrea or Mauritania— and the broad use of Arabic as world language for literary expression. We may say that the geography necessarily must be broader, but the chronology too.

Perhaps this is the major task of the present book, to solidly expand the modernizing discourse upon the works of Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī / محمود سامي البارودي (1839-1904). *Mahmud Sami al-Barudi. Reconfiguring Society and the Self* has the goal to place the role of this poet in a more visible space within the historiography of Arabic literature. Until now he has been considered an important yet minor poet in the modern scenario, in any case, a transitional figure between the old poetry and the new. By placing the lens in the complexities and various protagonists of the *Iṣlāḥ* movement and its failure caused by the British invasion, this book explains the decisive role of Maḥmūd Sāmī in reconfiguring modern Egypt society, which was claiming for a parliamentary State. By placing the lens in the specific features, periods and words of his poetry, this book confirms that his role is decisive and central in expressing the self, pre-Romantic aesthetics obtained during his long period of exile and isolation in Ceylon.

Accordingly, the methodology of the researcher is based on literary criticism, poetic analysis and a competent knowledge of Arabic Rhetoric and Poetics. Terri DeYoung is one of the most active voices in the revision of major themes in Arabic literature. She is the author of *Placing the Poet: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and Postcolonial Iraq* (1998), an ambitious attempt to analyze the great Iraqi poet under new literary frameworks. Similarly, but perhaps less pronounced, in the present volume we can observe an excessive attention to Pierre Bourdieu's theories —four of his books are cited in the bibliography—, with an unnecessary fixation on theoretical paradigms. This aspect does not enrich overmuch the brilliant and detailed literary analysis undertaken by the author along the more than three hundred pages of the book. In fact, and unlike many works that in the last decades have studied modern Arabic literature (more with political goals than literary tools), DeYoung methodologically relies on Literature and Philology to stimulate a reconfiguration of the literary history.

Al-Bārūdī's poetry has been reasonable attended by Arab literary criticism, especially in the Egyptian context. Even the *Madrasa al-Bārūdī* states the permanent influence of his school into the *Ḥaraka al-ba'th* / حركة البعث, the Neoclassicism. However, little attention has received in Western languages, perhaps eclipsed by Aḥmad Šawqī. He has been considered a preamble to the posterior neoclassic poets, and his poetry has been seldom translated. Interestingly this has been changing in modern times. Abdulmueen Balfas' doctoral dissertation *Al-Barudi's Poetic Revival Project* (2013) indicates the necessity to revise his literary dimension, and the narrative exposed by Terri DeYoung in the present book completes the restauration of al-Bārūdī for Western bibliography. Not only Maḥmud Sāmī has a dramatic role in modern Egypt as soldier, politician, revolutionary and exiled, but his reconfiguration

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of the self establishes subjectivity (*dhātiya* / ذاتية), sensibility (*wijdān* / وجدان) and a poetry with moral scope.

By providing fresh and numerous translations of al-Bārūdī's poems from the different periods of his life, and studying phenomena like transformation of the *nasīb*, contrafractions (*mu'āraḍa* / معارضة), new vocabulary and poetic expression, DeYoung gives us feasible elements to validate al-Bārūdī as somebody far more transcendent than the "lord of the sword and the qalam." As expected, the in-depht analysis allows to identify some limits in the modernity of the author, for instance his uneasy perception of the Other: "*The poem concludes with a very disturbing portrait of his enemies that seems to suggest that the emergence of the self requires a dehumanization of the other, especially if that other cannot communicate in a familiar language [...] This portrait of a menacing "other" is rare in al-Barudi's poetry, but it does occur and reveals him to be somewhat more solipsistic than the medieval poet Jamil*" (p. 229).

Even the colonial other is alien to the sense of the poet. In this view, DeYoung has not been tempted to apply any kind of postcolonial theory and has limited her viewpoint to locate al-Bārūdī within Arabic Poetics. In fact, British bombardment of Alexandria in July 1882 ended with the exiles to Ceylon of the Egyptian cabinet, including the former prime minister Sāmī al-Bārūdī. Egypt was then controlled by the United Kingdom and returned khedival despotism (*istibdād* / استبداد) in place of *šūrà* / شورى. Perhaps this political conundrum has been the attention of many studies, as the core of the reformist movement (*Iṣlāḥ*), with capital figures as Muḥammad 'Abduh, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghanī, 'Alī Mubārak and the first to formulate the concept of *nahḍa*, Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī. In the light of political reform and literary awakening the relations between them is appropriately elucidated along many pages of the present book (in chapter 5 and 6: 'Echoes of War, Portents of Invasion'; and 'Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down'). It is a movement that change with the time though. Being national and Islamic, after British intervention and political exiles, al-Afghani was giving form to the Pan-Islamic idea from Paris.

Al-Bārūdī dedicated poems to his friends and allies, to his daughter's dream and his wife's death, to the melancholy of his solitude in Sri Lanka. DeYoung analyses important poems of this period (in chapter 7, 'Exile, Loss, and the Recovery of Self'). But she does not relate the poems with the living place (the city of Kandy) and with the human reality of Ceylon. At the same time, the transcendence of 'the Ceyloneses' (*al-Sarandībiyyāt* / السرنديبيات) cycle conforms the most essential period in the emergence of Romantic elements in his poetry: nostalgia, subjectivity, emotions, sincerity, and musicality. In accordance, we miss a more attentive revision of this period, and the features that will prove al-Bārūdī as a pre-Romantic poet. Perhaps the author has prioritized a balance extension between the eight chapters that conform the book (being 40-50 pages each one). In any case, the undertaken analysis is enough to prove the major thesis of the volume, this is to say, the emergence of the self in Arabic poetry as a sing of al-Bārūdī's modernity.

To end, we have identified minimal errors (for instance 'Mukhtārāt al-Bārūdī' in italics, page 374; and 'cooke, miriam,' in capitals, page 375) in a well-balanced and written volume, a delightful reading for anybody interested in Islamic reformism and Arab modernity. Al-Bārūdī is a key figure to answer many questions of modern Arab writing, and now we have at last a reference to fill the vacuum.