

Books: Poetry and Prose

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al-Risala, 1 July 1933

I owe a heavy debt to Mr. al-Aqqad, which I have until now been kept from discharging. It appears I shall not be able to discharge it all at once, and must pay it in installments; for before me lie three books which I have read and admired, and about which I hold views I should like to make known: the master's book on Ibn al-Rumi, his book on Goethe, and his latest collection of verse, *The Revelation of the Forties*.

I do not know why I chose to discharge this debt in reverse order, beginning with the last of these three books to appear. Perhaps I chose to begin with *The Revelation of the Forties* because it is poetry, and because dwelling on poetry and poets is sweet and pleasant for writers who have no skill at composing verse themselves; they find in reading, criticizing, and analyzing it a pleasure they do not find in reading, criticizing, and analyzing prose. Or perhaps I chose to begin with this collection because criticizing it is easier than criticizing the other two books — easier for me, and easier for the great poet himself — so that there will be between us no argument, long or short, and we shall have no need to turn back to the books of literature and history to establish an opinion I hold that al-Aqqad disputes, or an opinion al-Aqqad holds that I do not accept. These are rather views and reflections stirred in me by reading this collection, which I shall set before al-Aqqad and before his readers, both those who criticized him and those who praised him, without trying to force them upon anyone, or to champion them stubbornly, or to argue for them; and without al-Aqqad, his supporters, or his opponents having any right to deny these views or dispute them, for they are views bound up with taste, with the critic's temperament and nature and his response to beautiful art, more than with settled facts or matters over which argument and contention commonly arise.

And I do not think anyone will presume to impose upon me a taste other than mine, or a nature other than mine, or a response to beautiful art other than mine — let whoever wishes be pleased, and whoever wishes be displeased. I naturally prefer people's approval to their displeasure, but preferring that approval is one thing, and winning it is another.

Perhaps, in the end, I chose to begin with this collection because people's talk about it has multiplied, their dispute over it has grown fierce, its critics have gone to excess and overshot the mark, and its champions have gone too far and strayed from the truth; so I wished to say a word about this collection — not that it will settle the matter in its proper measure and bring the disputants back to agreement, for there is no way to that — but it may represent the view of a group of fair-minded readers who neither wholly approve of al-Aqqad's work nor wholly reject it, not because they go to excess in loving al-Aqqad or in hating him, but because they view it as pure artistic work, which sometimes suits their taste, so they approve, and sometimes clashes with their taste, so they disapprove. These people have every right to have their views portrayed and their positions shown regarding the work of a writer whom, whatever his opponents may say of him, they cannot deny his skill, and a poet whom, whatever his enemies may say of him, they cannot deny his share of excellence and his success at a very great deal of original creation.

I want to pause briefly over these pages with which al-Aqqad prefaced this collection, in order to agree without reservation with what he argues in them — that among the modernizers there are those who merely imitate modernization, misunderstanding it, overstepping the right course, and falling into judgments on poetry and art that carry neither weight nor worth. And I want likewise to agree without reservation with what he argues in these pages — that the modernizing poet may take up the genres the ancients took up without this touching his modernity or diminishing his skill; indeed, it may well be incumbent upon him to take up these genres, renew them, and breathe into them a life suited to the age, the milieu, and the inclinations of the generation in which the poet lives.

Praise-poetry is not a fault merely for being praise, nor is it an art that must die; rather, it is one of the arts of poetry that must endure so long as poetry endures, so long as there remain among people those who excel and do well, and so long as there remain among people those who approve of excellence and commend the doer of good for his good deeds. And satire is one of the arts of poetry that must endure so long as there remain among people those who do ill, and so long as there remain among people those who love to censure the corrupter and correct the wrongdoer.

And say the same of the other genres, beyond praise and satire, that the ancients among the Arabs and non-Arabs took up: they ought not

vanish or be abandoned, but ought to evolve to suit the other modes of intellectual and artistic life that people live amid the diversity of milieus and ages.

But I paused to reflect somewhat on this definition, by which al-Aqqad sought to define poetry, when he says:

"Whoever seeks to confine poetry within a fixed definition is like one who seeks to confine life itself within a fixed definition; the poet ought to be bound by nothing but a single requirement, in which all other requirements are folded: namely, 'the beautiful expression of sincere feeling.' Whatever falls under this heading — the beautiful expression of sincere feeling — is poetry, be it praise, satire, or the description of camels and ruined encampments; and whatever falls outside this heading is not poetry, be it a story, a description of nature, or a modern invention."

So poetry, for al-Aqqad, is like life: there is no way to confine it or define it — or it is like life, confinable and definable, if confining or defining life is at all possible! But al-Aqqad then goes on to define poetry as the beautiful expression of sincere feeling, and by this very definition he has himself confined poetry and made it narrower than life; for not all of life is a beautiful expression of sincere feeling — there is, in life, insincere feeling expressed unbeautifully, and there is false feeling expressed beautifully, and there is sincere feeling expressed sometimes beautifully and sometimes unbeautifully.

And so poetry is not, like life, beyond confinement; nor is poetry, like life, something confined the way life is confined, and defined the way life is defined; rather, poetry is one shade of life's many shades, and defining it is neither impossible nor difficult. The proof of this is that al-Aqqad himself has attempted this very definition, defining poetry as the beautiful expression of sincere feeling, and making everything that falls under this heading poetry regardless of its substance, and everything that falls outside this heading not poetry regardless of its form, shape, or subject.

And I think al-Aqqad has not succeeded with this definition, for what did he mean by beautiful expression — is it verse, or prose? Or both verse and prose together? If the first, then things that are not poetry may enter poetry's definition; if the second, then all versified poetry may fall outside this definition; and if the third, then any beautiful speech describing sincere feeling is poetry! And if so, what then is the point of dividing

speech into poetry and prose? Al-Aqqad will say that this division is an old one, of no use; but al-Aqqad himself has not called his prose poetry, nor applied the word "collection" to anything but his verse, and The Revelation of the Forties, as far as I know, is wholly verse, with no prose in it but explanatory notes and commentary. The definition, then, on this count, is altogether far from the precision for which al-Aqqad is known.

This gap widens further if you expand a little on the meaning of beautiful expression; for painting is a beautiful expression, music is a beautiful expression, and song is a beautiful expression. So every beautiful art, then, is poetry! This is talk that writers indulge in when they speak loosely, or when they are not careful to be precise; but if they want accuracy and precision, they must define beautiful expression — and in doing so, they must take note of meter and rhyme, or meter without rhyme, or at the very least musical harmony. And this sincere feeling — what is it? What might it be? Is al-Aqqad truly confident that everything poets describe so skillfully is the result of a truly sincere feeling? Are there not poets who skillfully describe a range of emotions they do not actually feel, and do not sense with sincere feeling at all, but rather know and know well, so that their art comes to their aid and lets them describe them skillfully and express them in beautiful expression?

I think al-Aqqad would agree with me that good knowledge is one thing, and sincere feeling another. Al-Aqqad no doubt knows the example Aristotle gave for poets' skill in contradiction — the example of Pindar, who, asked to praise a mule and dissatisfied with the fee offered, scorned it and disparaged the mule; then, when the fee was doubled, he turned this mule into a winged steed! Pindar surely felt no sincere feeling, either about the mule's merits or its faults; he simply knew these merits and faults, and his art came to his aid and portrayed them marvelously.

We all know that poets and orators train themselves to praise a thing and to disparage it, excelling at both praise and disparagement, and expressing both in beautiful expression, without their feeling toward either being certainly sincere or certainly false — it is pure artistic skill. And so the sincerity of feeling may be among poetry's merits and virtues, but it will never be a pillar of poetry; for if we made sincerity of feeling a pillar of poetry, we would strike most poets from the history of literature in every language. The ancients were not mistaken when they said that the sweetest poetry is the most untruthful; and Aristotle was not mistaken when he permitted poets an excess and extravagance he did not permit orators. Al-Aqqad must therefore make good on this definition of

poetry, and make good on both of its parts together. And yet — does this definition hold true of The Revelation of the Forties, such that we may say this entire collection is a beautiful expression of sincere feeling?

As for whether al-Aqqad's feeling toward everything he describes in his collection is sincere, that is something I sense with a force admitting no doubt or suspicion. But set against certain sections — against those sections in which al-Aqqad's personality shows through with the utmost clarity, against the section of love poetry, for instance, in which al-Aqqad shows a personality remarkably light of spirit, remarkably sweet of soul, remarkably in love with life, remarkably eager for pleasure, loving it while husbanding it. Look at these verses:

What a mouth! / What a lip! / What honey on it I almost sipped! /
What a flower on it I almost plucked! / Sweet one, alas for her! / Tender,
delicate! / My sorrow after her / is a ruinous sorrow.

Do you not see in it a personality that loves life and is enamored of it, that loves pleasure and all but rushes toward it, were it not for something holding it firmly back, turning it away reluctant and regretful? And see how he has succeeded in creating, out of these simple, familiar notions, in a beautiful, sweet, thoroughly elegant diction; and how he has managed to portray, behind these easy, familiar notions that everyone finds and everyone sees, another meaning that is not easy, not familiar, not common among people, but confined rather to those who impose reason upon sensation, who make the will rule over passion, and who find a pleasure in a sharp desire held in check by severe denial. Al-Aqqad is enthralled by his beloved, enthralled by this mouth and this lip, fiercely athirst for its honey, fiercely drawn to its flower; he wishes, but does not act; he all but does, but does not bring it about; and he finds a powerful pleasure in this love and in this denial, passing beyond the stage of ordinary amorous pleasure into the stage of pure philosophical pleasure.

In these verses, al-Aqqad's personality appears exactly as it is — remarkably light, yearning for beauty and inclined toward it; remarkably composed, preferring that its enjoyment of beauty be intellectual, free of sin or blame.

In these verses, al-Aqqad's skill appears, and all the song that fills al-Aqqad's heart appears, combining sweetness with strength and tempting singers to set it to music; in these verses, al-Aqqad's definition of poetry is fulfilled, for they are a beautiful expression of sincere feeling.

Say the same of these two verses, which to me are among the most beautiful and most exalted poetry, and which to me represent al-Aqqad truly. They represent his restiveness and his rebellion, and they represent his gentleness and his serenity.

I do not see the world by the light of morning — / how lovely the world by the light of eyes! / It is like a filter for light, and there is / no clarity but its sweet, guarded clarity.

See, then, how he recoiled, broke from convention, and grew restive in the first half of the first verse, refusing to see the world by the light of morning, as everyone sees it, and refusing to grow accustomed to it by that light, as everyone grows accustomed to it. Then see how he returned, repented, calmed, settled, and came to love this world — but in the light of eyes, after it had been reduced, refined, purged of all accidents, leaving only its pure essence and the clarity cleansed of every murk: how lovely the world by the light of eyes! Then see how he explained his love for this refined world in this beautiful verse:

It is like a filter for light, and there is / no clarity but its sweet, guarded clarity.

In these two verses, al-Aqqad does not love the common world that the light of morning makes cheap and accessible to all people; he loves rather the guarded, exceptional world contained in the light of eyes, accessible only to a special class of people: the poets.

If you wish — and with al-Aqqad you must always wish — to pass beyond this surface meaning that any person with some share of letters understands, to the symbol al-Aqqad is reaching for, and if you follow — and with al-Aqqad you must always follow — the path of the symbolists, who point with the little toward the much, and with the plain toward the hidden, you will see that these two verses — for all their fewness, their brevity, their narrowness — hold everything, and portray the poet's soul and its outlook on everything; for al-Aqqad does not love commonness, but loves distinction, and there is no fault or blame in that, for the poet who deserves the name is an aristocrat by nature, even though he may be the most capable of all people at portraying democracy, understanding it, and lending it life.

I can scarcely doubt that al-Aqqad's feeling is sincere throughout this entire section of the collection, and if I set out to analyze the good in this section — and all of it is good — I would not finish the analysis in one

chapter, nor in several. How I wish I had been able to pause over that marvelous poem al-Aqqad calls "Living Meanings," or over that poetic verse he calls "Philosophical Love," or over that other piece among the muwashshahat which al-Aqqad named "The Night of the Full Moon"; for in these three poems al-Aqqad has gathered together virtues of splendid poetry that are not gathered together in the other poems of this collection. There is gathered in them sincerity and loftiness of feeling, sincerity and precision of depiction, sincerity and distinction of sensibility, and a beauty of diction beyond reproach; and there is gathered in them a success at rare meanings that our poets seldom hit upon, together with a skill in delivering these meanings such that readers and listeners are deceived, imagining they are reading or hearing something familiar, when in fact they are reading and hearing speech of the rarest, the most precious, and the loftiest kind — speech that could come only from a true poet. In these poems, beauty of expression and sincerity of feeling are gathered together, and they come near to being gathered together throughout this entire section, were it not for certain words that jar upon my ear, and which I think jar upon the ears of many others, such as the word *ma'raf* in his line:

Yours is a face like the seal of truth / upon time's weathered page.

I do not know why I dislike this word in this verse, nor why I feel it sits uneasily, settling into its place only reluctantly, nor why I feel it is small and slight set against time. And likewise the word "clay," which other critics besides myself have objected to in al-Aqqad's line on the kiss:

It is a cup from among the cups of the immortals, / unmixed by any blending of water and clay.

I do not dispute the meaning, nor do I trespass against it by trying to spoil or belittle it; but this taste of mine, shaped by our ancient Arabic literature, recoils, indeed flees, from this "clay" paired with the kiss. I understand that the poet might plead the soundness of the meaning, its precision, its distinction, and its elevation above the ordinary; but even so, I cannot feel at ease with this "clay" that is paired with the kiss, or with which the kiss is paired.

Here appears a trait of al-Aqqad's that distinguishes him from his fellow contemporary poets; for he belongs to the poets of meaning, who take the greatest care to perfect their meanings, refine them, set them apart, and raise them above the ordinary. But they do not labor over their

words as they labor over their meanings, with such careful selection and such scruple, even excessive scruple. They are followers of meaning, and claim that words must follow them and submit to them; they ask of their words nothing but that they convey their meanings and express them correctly and without ambiguity — and if, besides that, the words happen to be beautiful, joyous, delicate, and sweet, so much the better, but if not, they feel no fault or blame in it.

But al-Aqqad is bound to do one of two things: either amend his definition of poetry so that it no longer requires beauty of expression, or amend his own practice in poetry, becoming more intent on perfecting, beautifying, and adorning his diction for the ear and the heart than he is now. I would prefer the second course for him; for it is not at all true that poetry can dispense with beauty of diction by relying on beauty and splendor of meaning, though it may sometimes dispense with beauty of meaning by relying on beauty of diction; for poetry is first and foremost music, and is thus directed at the ear, and if it can deceive the ear with the beauty and harmony of its diction, it may well go on to deceive the heart and the mind, and it may well be able to make do with the ear alone. The best of all outcomes is for the poet to succeed in matching beauty of diction to beauty of meaning, and al-Aqqad often succeeds in this match, though it eludes him at times.

It eludes him when he forgets himself, turns to philosophy, and wishes to be an objective philosopher — if the expression is fair — presenting us with philosophical views in themselves and as they are, without infusing them with anything of his personality or his life, as though he were the scholar laying down a principle of science or one of its laws. In this state, al-Aqqad perfects his meanings and corrects them beyond reproach, but this perfecting and correcting consumes his effort, or most of it, and leaves him little more than what enables him to versify; and so our poet turns out to be a thinker of the first rank, but his versification comes to resemble that of Abu al-'Ala', lacking fluency, luster, and purity of style, and lacking that harmony which captivates your ear, takes possession of you, and makes you the poet's prey, so that he casts into your mind whatever he pleases.

All these reflections occur to you as you read the first section of *The Revelation of the Forties*. And I wish to be fair; for one can scarcely look into this collection, or into al-Aqqad's other collections, without admiring the poet without limit, for he has raised himself, and raised poetry with him, into a world the Arab poets have not been accustomed to inhabit — I

can scarcely except from this any but Abu al-'Ala'. The subjects al-Aqqad takes up and versifies are all lofty, elevated subjects; and even when al-Aqqad descends to where people live, and shares with them, in those genres they are accustomed to compose poetry about, he does not stay long before lifting these genres up and soaring with them into an atmosphere the eye can scarcely reach.

I can almost declare with certainty that if the words had come easily to al-Aqqad, and the language had been generous with him, no one in our time could have risen to his level; but his language does not allow him — to our great regret — to keep soaring in the air; rather, it weighs upon him and weighs upon his meanings, and forces him down, so that he descends when it is his right to remain aloft. Will al-Aqqad permit me to object to another trait in *The Revelation of the Forties*? It is these explanatory notes he prefaces to a number of his philosophical poems, which leave on the mind a somewhat heavy, painful impression, and give the reader the illusion that the poet has chosen certain philosophical subjects that others before him had taken up and mastered through research and study, and has then versified them, versified them without succeeding in making them clear; and so he has prefaced this explanation to them, making his poetry resemble a gloss-text more than it resembles true poetry!

Those who read al-Aqqad's poetry and savor it are the enlightened and cultured, who are accustomed to reading poetry and understanding it, and to reading poetry harder than al-Aqqad's, and more deeply steeped in obscurity; so al-Aqqad can think well of them, and leave them alone with his poetry, to understand it as they wish and as they are able.

There is no fault in al-Aqqad's poetry sometimes being understood otherwise than he intended; for who knows? Perhaps he himself is mistaken, and his reader is right; and who knows? Perhaps he himself might return to his poem, read it, and understand from it something other than what he had intended. This might be a flaw in prose, but it is one of the merits of splendid poetry. And if I were permitted to make a suggestion to al-Aqqad, I would ask him to omit these philosophical explanatory notes from the second edition of this collection, if it has not already been printed, for I know the first edition sold out some time ago.

I do not know why I should stop and close this discussion without raising with al-Aqqad one further observation, which I wish he would weigh and reflect upon: that modernization in poetry undoubtedly

concerns diction and meaning, but it ought to concern meter as well; for every soul has its mode of thinking, its mode of expression, and every soul has its own music too.

And if this is true of individuals, it is true of generations. Al-Aqqad knows that every renaissance in poetry deserving of that name entails a change in meter, and the invention of new rhythmic forms. That was so in our Arabic poetry, in the East and in Andalusia, and it was so in the poetry of other nations besides ours; and I would have liked it to be so in our modern poetry, and I would have liked al-Aqqad to be among the first to lead it there, and I am not without hope of that, for al-Aqqad is a man of fertile soul, strong sensibility, and precise feeling. And whoever combines these qualities, together with a powerful, far-reaching imagination, is well suited to modernize poetry successfully, and to carry modernization beyond diction and meaning into the modernization of meters and rhymes.

I confess that I have read *The Revelation of the Forties* twice, and that I should like to read it again and again, and that I am confident I shall find in reading it once more a pleasure and delight that will make me eager for it and keen upon it.

Was it mere chance that led me to speak of al-Aqqad and of Haykal in a single article, or is it some resemblance, strong or weak, between these two men of letters that led me to bring them together in this chapter, even though the difference between them is sharp, indeed extreme in its sharpness?

What I do not doubt is that the appearance of *The Revolution of Letters* is not what led me to bring these two men of letters together, for I could have devoted a separate chapter to each of them; and had I done so, I might have spared the reader and spared myself the lengthiness, and had I done so, I might have given my full attention to each of them in turn, and paid each some part of the critical praise he deserves. But I found myself driven to set them side by side, to bring them together in one chapter, and to inquire afterward into what drove me to do this. I believe it is the sensation I used to feel as I passed from al-Aqqad's poetry to Haykal's prose, and from Haykal's prose to al-Aqqad's poetry; for it seemed to me that I was moving between two men of letters utterly different from one another, when in truth I was moving from a poetry that often resembles prose to a prose that often resembles poetry, and both are marked by fertility, richness, and depth, and both are marked by a

style that often lacks clarity, and both are marked by a preference for meaning and a neglect of diction to a considerable degree.

Do I need to describe Haykal, and praise his upright heart and his powerful mind, his penetrating insight and his sound grasp of the realities of the things he examines through research and study? Do I need to describe this astonishing fertility, which leaves one at a loss how to describe or portray it, every time one considers the immense efforts Haykal expends without interruption, without flagging, without weariness, efforts that nonetheless manage to keep a consistent strength, scarcely showing variation, scarcely falling prey to weakness? For Haykal is the proprietor of a newspaper, overseeing it and managing its affairs, writing a column in it every day at the very least; he is a member of a political party, sharing in his colleagues' work, speaking with them about politics every day, morning and evening alike; and he is a man of letters who reads a great deal, and varies his reading, and varies it well. He reads Arabic literature, reads English literature, reads French literature, reads politics, reads history, and — strange to say — does not dislike reading the science of law, although he is himself a man of law!

And on top of all this, he writes on literature on various subjects within it; he writes creative literature, and when he describes, he excels at description, and when he narrates, he excels at narration; and he writes critical literature, and when he critiques poetry and critiques prose, he achieves in this criticism the best that critics can hope for.

And on top of all that, he is a father and husband who is not stingy with his family in what they are owed from him; he is a friend who is not stingy with his friends in what they are owed from him; he is a man of evident standing in our social and political life, and he discharges the rights and duties that this standing entails.

And the strange thing, with all this, is that when you meet him, you find a calm, composed man, as though he had just lately woken from a restful sleep; he is not yet fully brisk, but he is utterly far from torpor or languor, and you need only speak with him a few minutes before he captivates and astonishes you, so that it is as though you were speaking with a genie — but a genie of sweet spirit and delightful conversation.

This is Haykal: one whose capacity for continuous production — in politics, and in any politics, in literature, and in any literature — without the appearance of weakness, fatigue, or anything resembling boredom, never ceases to astonish.

One morning, I had scarcely heard my companion reading me one of the morning papers before I heard, in that same paper, an advertisement for a new book by Haykal, *The Revolution of Letters* — and the advertisement was of an American style Haykal had never been known for. Haykal is among the most energetic of people in literature and politics, but among the most lackluster when it comes to advertising; so I said to myself: Haykal must have changed — and yet my acquaintance with him is not so distant — something around him must have changed; God must have granted him a genius for advertising, just as he is a genius for production! And it was no more than an hour or two before a messenger arrived bearing me a copy of the book.

I had known Haykal to be slow in gifting copies of his books, and I had often reproached him for it, and had often pressed him insistently to secure my copy of whatever book he had brought out; so I grew only more astonished at this speed and this orderliness, and I remain astonished even now, for I still do not understand the source of this speed, and this orderliness, in both the gifting and the advertising!

Be that as it may, I hastened to announce Haykal's book to readers in al-Kawkab, as the other papers announced it, and then hastened to begin reading the book; and its title did not alarm me — either because my friend Haykal does not alarm, whatever he stirs up, or because revolution, whatever it may be, does not alarm me. Nor did I need that explanation which Haykal seemed to think he needed to give, so that people might understand this title from him; for what is strange about calling any book on literature nowadays *The Revolution of Letters*? Is the life of Arabic literature in these days anything but a continuous revolution? We are revolutionaries when we compose, revolutionaries when we describe, revolutionaries when we criticize; all our literary output is a revolution. Even those who call themselves conservatives, who insist upon conservatism, pride themselves on it, and seek through it some advantage with those who love and exploit it — even these are themselves revolutionaries, fleeing from the very old order they claim to cherish and wish to uphold, only to find themselves renewing and changing it!

It is enough to read even *Nur al-Islam*, the official journal of al-Azhar, to see in it revolution and an attempt at renewal, and a concern that the shaykhs of al-Azhar, when they think and write, should appear suited to the age they live in. Our literary life is thus wholly revolution, and every book we write on literature is a revolution of letters; and so I

did not dwell long on the title, but hastened on into reading the book.

I found nothing new in the book — and I hope Haykal will not be angry, for the whole book is new, but I already knew it! Not because I had read many of its chapters when they were published in *al-Siyasa*, daily or weekly, but because I had read it, and will go on reading it in full, in Haykal himself, every time I meet him or speak with him; for the book is the most faithful, the most truthful, and the most beautiful portrait of the writer's mind. You read the book and you see Haykal and hear him speaking, and you may dispute one or another of his views, and find yourself about to voice that disagreement to Haykal as though he were sitting beside you, as though you could see him and hear him, and wished to take up the conversation with him.

There is nothing new in the book, and for that very reason it is among the most dangerous of books, and the most treacherous and cunning toward you; you proceed through it, imagining you are proceeding through familiar talk, but no sooner do you reflect a little on what you are reading, or persist a little in reading, than this book opens doors for you and lays out before you horizons you did not know or think of before — and suddenly everything is new, and suddenly everything is curious, and suddenly the writer has deceived you and outwitted you, even though he intended neither deception nor cunning.

I want to give the readers of *al-Risala* a precise idea of this book, on condition that I neither summarize it nor analyze it — not because I have not read it, as Haykal suspected of our friend *al-Mazini*, but because summarizing it would spoil it and strip it of its beauty and its true worth. How could one summarize, in a single chapter, a book that deals with modernization and imitation in literature, deals with fiction and drama, deals with national literature, and attempts production within this national literature? How could one wish to summarize this book, given the diversity of its fruits and colors? Our friend *al-Mazini* tried to summarize it and did not succeed, and had Haykal not doubted that he had read the book, *al-Mazini* would not have troubled himself with this attempt.

I want, then, to give the readers of *al-Risala* a precise idea of this book without summarizing it, and perhaps I shall succeed if I note that this book has two aspects: it is, on the one hand, a sound and precise history of modern Egyptian Arabic literature in these recent years, and it is, on the other hand, a lofty literary philosophy whose subject is our

modern literature.

If you wish to know how the contention between the old and the new arose among us, how it developed, and where it ended up, and what various influences bore upon it, strengthening it at one time and weakening it at another; and if you wish to know how much of a strong or weak personality we have won for ourselves in the various arts of literature — in poetry and prose, in letters, in fiction, and in drama; and if you wish to know the picture we draw for ourselves of a national literature, and the truth we have managed to arrive at concerning this literature — you will find all this in this book, and you will find, together with all this, a delightful and marvelous narrative in Haykal's own hand.

And then, if you wish to make literature a subject for thought and philosophy, as philosophers make nature and metaphysics a subject for their philosophy and thought, analyzing, explaining causes, elucidating, interpreting, and prophesying, you will find all this in this book too; for Haykal has analyzed and explained causes, Haykal has elucidated and interpreted, Haykal has chronicled and prophesied, and Haykal has hit upon a very great deal of truth in all of this.

I would wrong Haykal and wrong myself if I said that my admiration for his book could be bounded; for it is a clear, pure, truthful mirror of our literary life since the Great War laid down its burdens. But I would also wrong Haykal and wrong myself if I said I was entirely satisfied with his book, acknowledging everything that appears in it; for between Haykal and myself there is an old contention that I do not see ending, because he does not wish to end it! And Haykal's language is the subject of this contention; for Haykal is among the writers who champion meaning, just as al-Aqqad is among the poets who champion meaning, and Haykal neglects his language severely, falling into various errors and a disordered style that at times brings him close to the commonplace. And the strange thing is that he is not troubled by this, finds no fault in it, and does not admit that he does harm to himself and to his literature both!

I do not wish to tally up these faults against him, nor to give examples of them; for he neither denies them nor sees them as faults, and perhaps he even takes pride in them at times, and is certainly mistaken to do so; for it is painful that his beautiful, splendid meanings should so often appear clothed in shabby, worn-out garments.

And Haykal is like a flood: when he takes up a subject, he rushes headlong into it, and brings forth much that is good, but he does not always escape debris; for he often falls into error because he hurries, and does not trouble himself to verify and ascertain certain historical matters. See him, in the introduction, wishing to mention the Odyssey, and instead mentioning the Aeneid, attributing it to the Greeks! The Aeneid is Virgil's poem, and Haykal knows this perfectly well, but he forgot, and let his book stand uncorrected, and it did not occur to him to verify what he was writing.

And see him, elsewhere, when he mentions the French liberation from the influence of the Greeks and Romans in the seventeenth century, how he cites La Bruyère and Molière, when he knows perfectly well that the first was without doubt influenced by Theophrastus, and that the second was without doubt influenced by Terence and Plautus! You could take Haykal to task for no small number of errors of this kind, whose source is carelessness and haste, and something of a disdain for the verification that careful scholars observe. And had I known that Haykal attends to critics' criticism, or counselors' counsel, I would have pressed him to adopt, for his literary chapters, a filter — if the expression may be allowed — through which to strain what he writes, removing from it linguistic error, and removing from it carelessness in certain historical facts!

Am I, after all this, in agreement with Haykal in all his views on the old and the new? I believe only that we agree on most of them and differ on the fewest, and perhaps our disagreement arises from two things: the first is this very carelessness for which I take Haykal to task, which drives him into exaggeration and forces him at times into shortfall; and the second is that Haykal is a man of letters, but his continuous engagement with politics has somewhat affected his conception of things and his judgment of them.

He goes to excess when he thinks ill of what Europeans write about us when they touch upon our literary life; for I do not think that Gibb and his like take politics and its passions as a measure for their literary studies. And he goes to excess, too, when he thinks well of us, of our share of imagination, and of our capacity for production. But he is a political man even when he writes on literature; he wants to defend Egypt and the East, as he does in politics, and he wants to please Egyptians and Easterners, as he does in politics. As for me, I want to defend Egypt and the East, and I want to please Egypt and the East, but on condition that

this does not entangle me in altering scientific facts, or touching them with any distortion, however slight; for truth is dearer to me than anything, and than any person.

In any case, whatever we take Haykal's book to task for, we shall not diminish it; and no one can deny that Haykal is the Arab historian of modern contemporary literature, and that he has thereby imposed himself — not, I would say, upon this generation alone, but upon generations to come as well; and I am fully confident that this book of his will become one of the valuable sources for those who wish to study our Egyptian literature in its present renaissance.