

EDITORIAL

The Imaginaire and (Re)Shaping the World

This issue of *Cairo Studies in English (CSE)*, entitled *The Imaginaire and (Re)Shaping the World*, is divided into two sections. The first section encompasses a number of articles on linguistics and literature that were presented at the 15th International Symposium on Comparative Literature, held under the same title by the Department of English Language and Literature at Cairo University (14-16 November 2023). Propelled by the unprecedented historical moments that witness the ongoing genocide in Gaza, following October 7, 2023, the second section, entitled “Palestine and the Imaginaire,” comprises contributions by scholars who were invited by the guest editors of this issue to write about Palestinian history of resistance as depicted in different genres of Palestinian literature.

The issue begins with an interdisciplinary article entitled “Ecocritical Views on the Sculpture of Narcissus in the Botanical Garden of Rio de Janeiro,” by Cristine Fickelscherer de Mattos and Maria Cristina Cardoso Ribas. Drawing upon intermedia studies, ecocriticism, and concepts of the Anthropocene and Post-Anthropocene, the article attempts to analyze the relationships between myth, literature, sculpture, and architecture through examining Mestre Valentim’s work which is deeply anchored in its cultural, historical specificity. The researchers argue that the myth of Narcissus has been employed by various media across time, establishing synchronic intermedial dialogues. Utilized in ancient oral narratives and written literature, besides pictorial and sculptural art among others, the myth warned against the dangers of subjugating nature and destroying the environment. The researchers contend that anthropocentrism, of mostly European origin, had been transferred to colonial regions such as Brazil. However, in gazing into the past from a changing present that witnesses the gradual transformation of Mestre Valentim’s work from an iron creation mastering nature into an artefact integrating with the surrounding flora, the researchers contend that a better future where a human-non human dialogue could be possible.

The following two articles in this issue draw upon magical realism as a concept that lies at the intersections of the past, present, and future, geared towards the imaginative aim of reconstructing the world and envisioning a better future. In “Magical Realism: A Technique to Reconstruct the World from beyond the Valley of the Dead,” Amal Mazhar attempts to explore the fantastical theme of the return of the dead in three literary works that represent different times and cultures, namely, *What ‘Īsā ibn Hishām Told Us* (1907), by the Egyptian writer Muhammad Al-Muwaylihi, *Dance of the Forests* (1960), by the Nigerian Dramatist Wole Soyinka, and *The Freedom of the City*, by the Irish dramatist Brian Friel (1973). Mazhar argues that the theme, which refutes Heidegger’s notion that death is a one-way journey, offers an alternative world that is free from dysfunctional moral, social, colonial defects.

In “Re-imagining the Past to Make a Future: Afrofuturism in Rita Dove’s *Sonata Mulattica*,” Hala Darwish examines Afrofuturism as a cultural aesthetic movement. Drawing on the creative power in relation to imagination theories and magical realism, Darwish argues that in rekindling fame to the Afro-Polish violinist George Bridgetower (1778-1860) who was marginalized by Beethoven, and consequently historically forgotten by the classical music world, *Sonata Mulattica* thus liberates the black people from a racist cultural heritage of marginalization and erasure, and, hence, re-imagines a utopian world for the Africans.

In “Deconstructing Borders: Arab American Immigrants and Body Politics in Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*,” Pervine Elrefaei draws on cultural, postcolonial, gender and border studies to examine the discourses related to the Muslim woman’s body in Kahf’s novel. Elrefaei argues that in interweaving selected Western feminist perspectives with the Islamic concept of “*mujadila*,” Kahf represents a liberating discourse. As she contends, in interrogating body politics, “Kahf introduces a protagonist who embarks on a journey of consecutive conflict with all discourses of othering, silencing, negation, and appropriation through a constant process of re-visioning, deciphering, healing and re-inscribing, of Muslim women’s bodies.”

The concept of imagination as a creative faculty capable of making mental images and novel combinations, specifically in the field of poetry, is tackled by Maher Shafiq in “Imagination: Three Moments in the History of a Concept.” The article focuses on three major Symbolist poets, namely Arthur Rimbaud, T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens.

Women’s displacement and identity crisis are tackled in Mervat Mahmoud’s article, “Modality and Point of View in Presenting Cultural Displacement in Ahdaf Soueif’s “Sandpiper” and Jhumpa Lahiri’s “Mrs. Sen’s”: A Comparative Stylistic Analysis.” Utilizing Simpson’s framework in its analysis of the two female protagonists, the study attempts to find out the most prominent types of modality used to determine the narrative shade of the short stories, whether positive, negative or neutral.

Identity and human-robot interaction in the age of artificial intelligence are the subject of Amira Ekara’s article, “A Virtual Character, a Robot, or a Human Being? A Study of the (Self-) Representations of Lil Miquela.” Investigating the identity construction of Lil Miquela, a famous Instagram influencer, Ekara draws on Bucholtz and Hall’s framework for the study of identity as produced in linguistic interaction. Selected posts and user comments from Miquela’s account are examined as a sample to highlight Miquela’s different representations of herself as human/robot. Ekara also studies the audiences’ interaction with Miquela in an attempt to make sense of her identity.

The power of manipulative language in the legal and political arenas is the subject of more than one article in this issue. In her article “Representation and power in the Modern American Courtroom: An Examination of the Depp Vs Heard Trial,” Amena El-Shafie highlights the complexity of the genre of legal discourse that is not geared towards objectivity through the case of the trial hearings of the two celebrities. The

author concludes that in manipulating language, attorneys might subjectively divert from reality, control witnesses, and represent different narratives.

In “Phobic and Affective Language in Far-right, Nationalist Discourse Rhetoric in Brexit Speeches,” Amira Agameya examines the mobilizing role of affective and emotive language manipulated by British far-right politicians during Brexit (2012-2016). Using a corpus-based, discourse historical approach, the article focuses on “the seductive and accusatory strategies,” anchored in nationalist discourse, employed to trigger public fear and anxiety about the future of the UK in light of socio-political concerns like the 2016 refugee crisis and EU, driving the British public to vote to leave Brexit.

Eight speeches delivered by Biden and Putin during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, underscoring their different strategies and ideologies, are examined by Dalia Hammoud in her article “A Portrait of a President: Self-presentation of Biden Versus Putin in Times of Crisis.” Building on Goffman’s theory, impression management strategies, and Social Identity Theory, Hammoud highlights specific keywords in their speeches as clues that unmask their ideologies and the multiple personas they adopt to manipulate their audiences.

Marking a transitional period in the history of Palestine and the Middle East, besides a change in the global awareness of Palestinian reality, this issue also attempts to highlight the power of imagination as either a force that can be manipulated by the powerful to dominate and oppress, or a liberatory practice drawn upon by the oppressed and negated to revisit the past, interrogate the present, envision the future, and call for a more just and humane world. The Palestinian struggle for reclaiming identity, Right of Return, statehood and self-determination, is represented in “Palestine and the Imaginaire,” the second section in this issue. Palestinian literature is anchored in resisting settler colonialism and its mythical Zionist ideology, besides unmasking and interrogating the double standards of complicit hegemonic powers. Negation, expropriation, expulsion, exile, dehumanization, memorycide, epistemicide, and ecocide, intricately interwoven with hope, resilience, steadfastness and resistance, have always constituted the themes of Palestinian literature. The contributions in the second section thus highlight such themes as represented in the Palestinian short story, novel, poetry, memoir/autobiography, cartography, besides Facebook as a testimonial archive of Palestinian resistance that bears witness to the ongoing genocide.

Crystalizing predominant power structures which reshape the world through “reproducing spatial imaginaries,” cartography is tackled by Hoda Elhadary in her interdisciplinary study, “Cartographic Contestations in Mapping Palestine.” Elhadary examines selected Palestinian literary works as counter cartographic literature in which the protest map of Palestine constitutes a pivotal marker of epistemic and political resistance to “the Zionist propaganda maps.” Palestinian literature, she argues, challenges “borders and territorial demarcations,” foregrounding a counter-narrative to the official Zionist propaganda machine.

Translation as an important cultural production that creates awareness of the Palestinian predicament and resistance is also highlighted in this issue through a number of contributions. In “Losing Homes and Making Homes: Reflections on Jean Said Makdisi’s *Teta, Mother and Me*,” Hala Kamal sheds light on her experience of translating the book into Arabic, and on collaborative translation as a feminist, cultural practice. Examining the book as representative of “generic fusion,” Kamal argues that it falls at the intersections of memoir, biography, autobiography, and ethnography. The article tackles the issue of constant displacement and the meaning of home as a feminist concept that expands from the individual and domestic to the collective and national through the historical, multigenerational narrative of three Arab women. The book, she concludes, is “the product of history, memory, narration, and the imagination.”

Two voices of Palestinian women writers, from inside Gaza and in exile, archiving the nightmarish reality, are translated in this issue by Sarah Enany. Originally from Gaza, but now lives in Casablanca, Salma El Rayes depicts the blurred boundary between the fictional and the historical in her 2021 short story “Singapore.” Forced to leave her home during the bombardment of Gaza by the help of two young Palestinians who risk their lives to save her, Ruqaya, the old protagonist, represents the collective pain of displacement, yet the resilience and resistance of Palestinians threatened by the brutality of occupation.

Written from an insider’s perspective, Ne’ma Hassan’s Facebook diaries as testimonials, translated also into English by Sarah Enany, document her ongoing individual/collective experience of living in Gaza - now displaced to Rafah - ever since October 7. Scenes of dismembered bodies of men, women, and children buried under the rubble, the struggle for survival and for reaching targeted hospitals in the midst of unimaginable devastation, the trauma of consecutive displacement, thirst and forced starvation, are intricately intertwined in her writings with scenes of Palestinians embodying love, resilience and resistance. As the genocide continues, Ne’ma Hassan still struggles on a daily basis to document her testimony on her Facebook page for the world to bear witness. Despite the brutal reality, social media offered the guest editors an imaginary meeting ground where they successfully managed to contact the writer for permission to translate her testimony. Sincere thanks are due to the diligent efforts of Sarah Enany in translating Hassan’s testimony.

As very few Western countries, including Ireland, have lately declared their recognition of Palestine as a state, the issue encompasses a conversation with Marina Carr, the renowned Irish playwright, on Ireland, Palestine and war, conducted by Rania Khalil. Carr comments on the ongoing genocide and the turbulent times in light of her 2015 play *Hecuba* and the global history of violence, wars and myths.

The issue concludes with two book reviews by Randa Aboubakr and Faten Morsy. In her review of Fady Joudah’s English translation of Mahmoud Darwish’s *The Butterfly’s Burden* (2007), Aboubakr highlights how Joudah chooses to adopt a strategy of “‘physical’ mimesis,” to be able to provide the English-speaking reader with as close an experience of the Arabic poem as possible. Aboubakr highlights the

‘butterfly metaphor’ that generates an optimistic tone which envelops the pessimism that permeates Darwish’s collection of poetry. The metaphor, she concludes, crystallizes “hope for salvation,” “sustained by the laborious act of writing poetry.”

In her concise review of Joseph Farag's book, *Politics and Palestinian Literature in Exile: Gender, Aesthetics and Resistance in the Short Story*. Faten Morsy sheds light on Farag’s book as a contribution to “a decolonial paradigm of world literature.” Farag highlights the ways in which literature becomes a powerful tool for preserving cultural memory and identity. Divided into three main parts spanning the 1948 Nakba, the 1967 Naksa, and the first Intifada that erupted in 1987, the book traces the development of the Palestinian short story written by authors in exile. Farag’s study encompasses figures like Samīrah ‘Azzām (1927-1967), whom he compares to Ghassan Kanafani, besides Liana Badr and Sahar Khalifeh, to mention but a few. Morsy contends that Farag’s approach aligns him with Pierre Macherey’s 1966 seminal work *Towards a Theory of Literary Production*.

The editors of this special issue would like to express their genuine appreciation for the support of esteemed professors Amani Badawi, Faten Morsy, Sarah Enany and Hala Kamal. Thanks are also due to all esteemed reviewers for their insightful and constructive feedback; and all copyeditors for their hard work and commitment. We are also deeply grateful for the technical advice of Muhammad Kamal. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to *CSE* editor-in-chief, Professor Maha Elsaid, for her continued support and guidance without which this project could not have been possible.

Pervine Elrefaei, * Ahmed Elshamy, ** and Heba Embaby ***

* Professor of Cultural and Comparative Studies, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University

** Lecturer, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University

*** Associate Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University

Cairo Studies in English – 2024 (1): 1–5. <https://cse.journals.ekb.eg/>

DOI: 10.21608/cse.2024.363106