

Original Paper

My Sister

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Abstract

As aspects of objectivity, emphasis on accuracy and ethical neutrality are the foundation for any credible “scientific” research. In the fields of social sciences, the altering, hiding, or mistaking of facts would lead only to confusion and diminished ability in addressing problems that beset the wellness of a social group. Consequently, all aspects of the present study are based on original Arabic texts.

One ignored (sometimes deliberately concealed) aspect of the social life of Arab peoples is the “Brother-Sister Syndrome”. Its core component is the love between a brother and his sister and hostility between husband and wife. The syndrome is portrayed in a myriad of forms of traditional expressions including folktales, songs and jokes, as well as actual patterns of social interaction within the family.

The present short story by a prominent novelist represents a case of elite literary creativity. Yet, it conforms to the attributes of the Brother-Sister Syndrome. In this respect, it shares the same narrative core of the Trilogy by Nigeeb Mahfouz, a Nobel Laureate novelist. The affective core of the Trilogy is the love of a young boy for his beautiful sister, and the fact that he is traumatized by her marriage and moving away.

Having spied on her during the consummation of her marriage, he later in life associates this mental image of his sister in bed during that event with the consummation of marriage of an unattainable aristocrat maiden, ^CAydah Shaddad. A recent report deceptively ignores these salient facts. Thus, the Brother-Sister bond was totally missed and any opportunity to explore this critical psychosocial phenomenon was lost.

Keywords

objectivity, genre, folkloric behavior, brother-sister syndrome, westernization, demographic Composition, Ihsân ^CAbd al-Quddûs, Nageeb Mahfûz

[Cover page, see drawing] (Note 2)



Figure 1. Recurrent Erotic Notion

1. Introduction

The Social and Cultural Contexts for “My Sister”

Of the multiple themes addressed in the present anthology of short stories (*Lâ! laysa gasaduk* by Ihsan^C Abd Al-Quddûs; abbreviated here as: “*La! ...*”), two units present events occurring within the same milieu/context of social life in small rural towns in Upper Egypt. In both cases the name of the town is withheld (presumably to avoid potential regional or ethnic conflict the deriding story may seem to suggest). (Note 3) The first (1) “A Government employee in Upper-Egypt”, (Note 4) (No. 18, pp. 199-217), may serve as an introduction to the second:

2) “My Sister,” (No. 35), pp. 387-395, which is the focal point of the present translation.

In the first (No. 18, pp. 199-217), the protagonist is an educated urban young man with a law degree appointed as “District Attorney”: a replica of his counterpart in the second (No. 35, pp. 387-395). He was transferred from Tanta, a major town in Egypt’s Nile Delta, with lax less conservative social norms, to al-Sa^Cid/ (“es-Si^Cid”/Southern Egypt) where such norms are fiercely maintained. (Note 5)

In Tanta, Alexandria and similar major cities, although personal sins are publicly condemned they are still tolerated; these include such personal practices as failure to perform the required daily prayers and ignoring going to the mosque on Fridays (*Lâ!*, p. 212), using prostitutes’ services (*Lâ!*, p. 200/implicit), gazing openly at women in public, drinking liquor, and the like.

Thus, an appointment in or a transfer to a job that requires residing in one of Egypt’s small towns, especially in Upper Egypt, is viewed as punitive.

However, in the first literary account (No. 18), the female lover (sex-partner) is a beautiful local young wife married to a repulsive, but well to do, older husband (p. 201). As the wife of the local landlord whose house the urban outsider rented, she served as the overseer of the property. She initiated the sexual liaison with the effendi (westernized) tenant. She began by performing some basic household chores for him, such as floors sweeping, dish washing, bed making, etc. (initially in a clandestine manner reminiscent of a recurrent episode in a *haddûtah*/fairytale, (Note 6) then, developing into a full adulterous liaison.

In our main text, “My Sister” [No. 35], this ultra conservative demographic context is not overtly specified but is presented implicitly through the story’s plot.

The Text

“My Sister”

After having acquired the Baccalaureate [degree] in law, (Note 7) I was appointed *mu^Câwin niyâbah* (Assistant District Attorney) at the administrative *markaz*-town of “...”—excuse me from mentioning the name of the town, for my story/(experience) there is still known; *al-’ahâlî* (local folks) (Note 8) still use it as a jest and perhaps [still] snicker [at it] in spite of the fact that I left the *markaz*-town ten years ago.

I approached my job after having drawn for myself a certain [public] image in which I would be seen in the eyes of the local folks of the *markaz*-town: an image that bears all the awe-evoking/(*haybah*) attributes of the men filling the District Attorney’s Office and their sobriety of conduct/(*waqâr*) (Note 9) [Yet], neither awe-evoking nor sobriety were characteristic of me, for I am a simple *’insân* (human): fun-loving, looking

forward to [enjoying] life and [I] laugh a lot. (Note 10) But it was obligatory that I generate that image for myself: the image of awe-evoking and sobriety—in spite of its being contradictory to my nature—so that I would be able to fill with my [new] character the chair that I [was] occupying: the Chair of the *baih* (Bey/'his honor'), (Note 11) the District Attorney!

Time passed, and the image of awe-evoking and sobriety began to shake and its borderlines crumble. I began to feel boredom, idleness, and [sexual] deprivation: deprivation while I am in the Twenty-fifth year of my lifespan. (p. 389)

I used to spend my spare times at the club of the administrative offices, in the company of the chief of police (*ma' mûr*), the agricultural engineer, the headmaster of the school and the rest of the prominent and sobriety-bound [white collar government] employees. We used to tear up hours [(i.e., waste time)] through boring, trivial and repeated talk, old jokes and playing *Konkân/Concân*. (Note 12) At ten o'clock [p.m.] all would leave for their homes; each one of them had a wife with whom he would keep himself warm, amid children who would preoccupy his heart with love and [burden it] with troubles. As for me, I would return solitary: neither a wife with whom I would keep myself warm, nor love, nor troubles; [just] emptiness! [and] boredom! [with] my soul on the verge of expiration. I would sleep restlessly (*nawm`ariq*) awaiting the [rustic] face of Sergeant ^CAwadain to appear so as to report to me a case of a murder or theft, [a crime scene] to which I would have to move in order to investigate.

I thought about getting married.

For government employees [residing] in *marâkiz*-towns, marriage becomes an inevitable necessity, rather than [being] a desire. It becomes something like the employee's need for food and water, but not due to his need for love. (Note 13)

But I cannot get married.

It is not possible for a wife, whom I can accept, to live with me in this [backward] *markaz*-town. Moreover, I hate marriage. It would be a sin if I were to attach myself lifelong to a woman, merely due to my being bored.

And days pass [lit., "time goes on" i.e., time passed].

I no longer could maintain the [airs of] awe-evoking and sobriety, [amidst] boredom, emptiness, and deprivation: cruel deprivation. (Note 14) <p. 390>

I though with a feverish, confused mind. Suddenly, during a cruel night of deprivation, I made my decision. I traveled to Alexandria; there, I used to know a *fatâh* (young woman) [by the mundane name of Sa^Cdiyyah]. She was not a young woman, [but] she was [actually] a woman (*`imra'ah*). (Note 15) A strong relation tied me to her for years. She loved [(i.e., liked)] me and I loved/(liked) her. We were in agreement on the type of that love: love that did not exceed our enjoyment of one night we would spend together. Perhaps she had plenty of men in her life, but she always preferred my night over the other nights. (Note 16)

I agreed with Sa^Cdiyyah: she will come to live with me in the *markaz*-town and [that] I will tell my government employee colleagues and *al-'ahâlî* (the local folks) that she is [(i.e., you are)] my sister! (Note 17)

She consented.

I felt sure about [the appropriateness of] her appearance: she always looked like an elegant (*'aniqah*) respectable lady, in spite of her daring [i.e., immodest] stares. (Note 18) I was also sure about her faithfulness, for I was confident that she preferred my night over the other nights, otherwise she would not have agreed to come with me. (Note 19)

And I returned to the *markaz*-town with her. And I announced there that my sister has come to live with me.

And boredom dissipated, [along with] idleness and deprivation. [Thus,] I was able to restore the image I had designed for myself for appearing before *al-'ahâlî* (the local folks): the image of awe-evoking and sobriety.

I congratulated myself on my smartness (intelligence) (p. 391).

And days passed: a month, two months and it was no longer possible for me to imagine that I can live in the *markaz*-town without “my sister!” (Note 20) She is [(i.e., has become)] the only thing in the *markaz*-town that helped me survive.

Then, it happened that my servant quarreled with the *markaz*-town’s grocer; unexpectedly, the grocer screamed in his face:

Why don’t you go *limm* [(i.e., curtail the shameful activities)] of your Bey’s sister who is making the rounds from a man to another man. She has not left a man without having a ‘scandalous affair with him!’ (Note 21)

My servant *thâr* (was revolted, infuriated) and threatened the grocer that he will report to me what he said about “my sister” so that I would ‘ruin his home’ [(i.e., punish him severely)]. (Note 22)

The servant came and reported to me.

I [was] revolted. But before unleashing my anger in the face of the grocer, I began to think.

Is it possible that Sa^Cdiyyah could have done that[?] I realize that deep inside her there is a *la^Cûb*-woman (i.e., flirtatious), (Note 23) but I have always been able to satisfy that *la^Cûb*-woman. I was confident that she preferred my night over the other[‘s] nights; I was spending every night with her. For what [end] did she need other nights, or other men! (Note 24)

Then I began to recall things that used not to draw my attention: the glances that the Chief of Police cast at me, the excessive friendliness of the Investigation Officer towards me, the glances of disgust and contempt that the School Master fires at me, <p. 392>.

then the strong interest shown by all in visiting me at my home—while “my sister” would be sitting with us, and the day [when] I returned [i.e., was returning home] from work and ran into the Investigation Officer coming out of the street on which my home residence was located. I was surprised that day but I did not suspect[,] and ..., and ..., and ..., I suddenly discovered that I was living in the middle of a deluge of

whispers, poisoned whispers to which my ears did not open up except now: [that is] the time the grocer opened my eyes to ‘the world of suspicions/(*al-shukūk*)’. (Note 25)

I sensed a strange feeling.

I did not feel jealous over Sa^Cdiyyah.

But I felt jealousy over my [actual] sister.

It is impossible that my sister would do [something like] that.

My sister is not a *mūmis* (prostitute). (Note 26) My sister is not Sa^Cdiyyah!!

I suppressed my revolt, my jealousy, and the fire that was raging in my head. I had to act calmly.

I cannot go out to the people and tell them that Sa^Cdiyyah is not my sister, and that she is merely a *mūmis* (prostitute) whom I brought so that she would keep me company during my loneliness and lighten my deprivation[!] I cannot[!] [If I were to say so,] I would be submitted to a disciplinary tribunal, (Note 27) and be expelled from the ranks of the Public Prosecutor’s Office.

All I can [i.e., could] do is to get rid of Sa^Cdiyyah: quietly!

I gave her no opportunity to defend herself, but I sneaked out [along] with her one morning and returned her to Alexandria. <p. 393>

Then I returned to the *markaz*-town while trying to pretend that nothing had happened.

But the sudden disappearance of Sa^Cdiyyah released the whispers much sharper and noisier [than before]: The Bey, the District Attorney, has discovered the scandalous conduct of his sister; so, he returned her to Alexandria.

[I screamed]:

She is not my sister[!]

You must understand that she is not my sister[!]

She is [just] a woman I brought to keep me company during my loneliness[!]

But the whispers were getting stronger: I was almost able to hear them with my own ears--hear them from people’s eyes and from their tongues. (Note 28)

My servant went out and did not return; he cannot [(i.e., could not)] bear facing the local *markaz*-folks as they spoke of my sister.

[I screamed to myself]:

She is not my sister.

You must understand; she is not my sister[!]

I could no longer bear the stabs that were aimed at my sister[:] at my *sharaf*/(honor), at my *kiyân*/(very being). [Thus, finally,] I leaned over my friend the Chief of Police and whispered in his ear, as I was trying to convince him that I happened to be a young man with [amorous] adventures, (Note 29)

Do you know that Sa^Cdiyyah is not my sister. She is someone I used to know in Alexandria and brought to live with me here. Actually, between you and me, I am not used to living alone.

The Chief of Police looked at me, while concealing a smile underneath his tongue, and said: (p. 394)

O Maḥmūd Bey, (Note 30) don't say that. What is wrong with Sa^Cdiyyah *hānem* [(i.e., lady Sa^Cdiyyah)]. She is a *sitt kuwayyisah*/ (fine lady), but perhaps she was not used to the [type of boring] life in a *markaz*-town.

He did not want to believe that Sa^Cdiyyah was not my sister.

And I moved to the investigation officer, the school master, and the agricultural engineer to whisper in their ear[s]. But no one of them wants/ [(i.e., wanted)] to believe. All of them were confirmed in their belief that Sa^Cdiyyah is my sister. They were sometimes courteous and put on airs of believing, but I could detect sarcasm in their eyes.

You “sons of a dog”, (Note 31) I told you that she is not my sister[!].

And I began to scream instead of whisper. I would swear the mightiest oaths, that she was not my sister. My shouting would echo throughout the entire province, causing the local-inhabitants to laugh and use the story of my sister as a [deriding] anecdote.

I could not bear [the matter] any longer.

I sat down and wrote a memorandum about the entire affair, with all its details, I confessed everything. Then I submitted the memorandum to the Chief Prosecutor with the request that I be transferred out of the Province, or be dismissed from the Public Prosecutor's Office.

The Chief Prosecutor summoned me.

I went to him trembling due to the awesomeness of the situation.

But he received me with a big smile and said to me in a tone revealing heavy contrived sympathy: (p. 395) *O ‘ustādh*(Master/Mentor) Maḥmūd, what is [the meaning of] this stuff that you have written[!]? The entire story has [already] reached me. And, O dear “pal” (*yā sīdī*), (Note 32) suppose that your sister made a mistake. So what[!] All girls make mistakes. Is there anyone nowadays who is able to properly raise his daughter or his sister[!]? I am going to tear up your memorandum and I want you to go back to the *markaz*-town and forget this matter completely. (Note 33)

He also does not believe.

He does not believe that she is not my sister.

I went out of his office without responding to him. I went out like a whirlwind and wrote up my resignation: my resignation from *al-niyābah*/(Public Prosecution).

And today I practice lawyering (*al-muḥāmāh*) [(i.e., I am an attorney-at-law)].

And reject every case that comes to me from that *markaz*[-town].

And [there is] something else[:] Until today, I cannot lift up my eye to the face of my sister!!

Appendixes

Appendix 1. Problems with Identification of Narrative Genres: The Elite Literary Short Story and the Folktale's Memorata

These “elite” literary accounts of “personal experience” may be compared to the folk genre labeled “*Memorata*” (in German). A “memorate” (in English) is a special genre which folk narrative scholars did

not consider as part of “folk narratives” until the 1930s when the Swedish folklorist C.W. Von Sydow introduced it as such. (Note 34)

Many literary creations by novelists and short story authors tell their writer’s own experiences, real or fictitious, in life. Regardless of gender, the author of the “novel” or the “short story” assumes the persona of the work’s protagonist, and speaks as if he/she and the protagonist happened to be one and the same. From a psychological viewpoint the process is essentially a form of vicarious instigation or, more specifically, “identification”. In this respect, the occurrences of the “novel” genre were typically “autobiographies”. Examples are: M. H. Haykal’s *Zaynab*, Tâhâ Husain’s *al-Ayyâm*, Nagîb Mahfouz’s *Trilogy*, and Hamzah Bouqaî’s *Saqîfat al-safâ*. (Note 35)

In other stories in the same anthology the author speaks as a female:

[No. 5]. “A Girl Looking for a Husband,” *Lâ! ...*, pp. 64-76; and

[No. 32]. “I Will Not Marry My Colleague,” *Lâ! ...*, pp. 350-363.

Meanwhile an example of the “short story” genre is Ihsan^C Abd Al-Quddûs, ‘*Lâ! ...*, “My Sister,” (No. 35. pp. 387-395) presented above in the English language. In this story the author speaks as a young male, of a supposedly personal experience mirroring another story in the same anthology titled, “A Government Employee/[*awâtîf/Sentiments/Feelings, Lâ! ...*, p. 456/“table of Contents”] in Upper-Egypt, ([No. 18], pp. 199-217).

In the field of exploring the relations between folklore and elite literature, the absence of a systematic approach for identifying the genre to which a folk narrative belongs has been demonstrated in a number of publications by the present writer (Note 36) Many Western scholars ignore, or are simply unaware of, the data that may disagree with their own academic convictions.

A situation of special relevance to the present work is a translation titled: “A Fairy Tale’ by Ihsân `Abd al-Quddûs”. (Note 37)

The Translator, Asma Afsaruddin, an eminent scholar of Islam and its literatures, labels her work as “[A ...] short story `ustura (‘A fairy tale’)”. Yet, from both a folkloristic and elite literature perspectives on the genres, there are neither formal nor content attributes that may qualify this elite literary “`ustura (‘A fairy tale’)” creation as an “`ustûrah (legend) [sometimes erroneously labeled ‘myth’]” or “a fairytale’ (*haddûtah/ hujwah/ hikâyah*, etc.)”.

Actually, the story treats current psychosocial issues generated by the rapid social change associated with the emergence and spread of the urban middle class, the rise of the secularly educated female and her quest for power (equality). These factors are characteristic themes of ^CAbd al-Quddûs’ creative, yet realistic, writings.

Afsaruddin sums up the essence of the short story as addressing:

[T]he influence of a strong, independent-minded girl on a young, impressionable boy [named Fathî]. [...].

The girl is prone to whimsical fights of fancy and fashions, a world of illusion for them which the boy is compelled to enter. She even renames him in the story despite his (feeble) protests so that he can fit better into her imagery world and the fancy role she had created for him. Even when their romantic interlude is

over, the adult Fathî remain in the girls shadow haunted by her wilful, mercurial nature and domineering personality. [...].

He does not, however, try too hard to shake off her emotional stronghold on him [...]” (p. 179). (Note 38)

Although the literary ‘terms’ may have been used allegorically, this application indicates the wide gulf between folkloristic and elite literary designations. Unlike a “fairytale” (or an “ustura” if one wills), there are no unrealistic or supernatural elements that violate the laws of nature in the Afsaruddin’s translated short story by ^CAbd al-Quddûs.

Appendix 2. How Pervasive is the Brother-Sister Theme In the *Lâ! ... Anthology*?

The answer to this question may be revealed by the following situations in that work:

In “My Wife’s Dignity,” [No. 1], pp. 5-21.

An unfaithful husband arrives home with lipstick smudges on his shirt from his adulterous adventure. He tries to explain to his wife the reason for the smudges:

“I stopped by my mother’s [home]—*my sister* was there As you know, as soon as *my sister* sees me she keeps on kissing me.” (p. 14)

In “Wife and Servant,” [No. 2], pp. 22-35.

A young workman loves a frail young woman, named ^CA zîzah, from his neighborhood.

“[It was] love that lives with him as does his love for his mother and his sister. He did not even consider marrying her until he started thinking of marriage.”

“Suddenly he discovered that ^CAzîzah is not *his sister* and that it is possible for him to marry her.” (p. 24)

His attraction to ^CAzîzah is explained as brother-sister-like because she was raised with him/(*mitrabbiyyah mi^Câyâ*) [*ishrah/ta^Cawwud*., as if brother-and-sister] (p. 25). (Note 39)

In “A Girl Looking for a Husband,” [No. 5], pp. 64-76.

A young middle class woman emphasizes her independence and career that spare her the need to become economically dependent on her family or a future husband. She ends up living with her “little brother”.

“I always knew what I wanted”; (p. 65)

“my sister is a weak person”

“I love enjoying life”, (p. 67)

“So, I lived by myself—I and *my little brother*. In my home there are a radio, a ‘pick up’ and a telephone, (p. 68)

The young woman concludes her story in apparent regret:

“I went to my elegant home which I furnished out of my own bank account ... and I sat down and cried ... I am looking for the husband that I want.”

[Unstated fin: *My younger brother is with me*]. (p. 76) (Note 40)

In “I Will Not Marry My Colleague,” [No. 32], pp. 350-363

A young career-oriented woman declares a fact of life:

Al-ta^cawwud/(getting accustomed to/familiarity with) renders a person into [becoming] a *brother* of you. I became sister to four colleagues at work. (p. 355). See n. 39.

Ibrâhîm, one of her office friends, proposed marriage to her. She stated:

I looked into his eyes; perhaps he was joking. But his eyes were serious! I don't know why I, with a swift movement, distanced myself from him. I felt *dîq* [i.e., annoyance, or depression; literally, "tightness"], strong annoyance. I felt as if he were offering something deviant, which should not take place between a *brother and his sister*. [...]. (p. 357).

I resolutely said to him, "O Ibrâhîm, you are like my brother. I need you as a brother, and I prefer that we remain [as] siblings/('ikhwât)." (p. 358).

In *Pride and Marriage*," [No. 34], pp. 374-386.

A young woman declares:

"My brother is three years older than me." (Note 41).

"You don't realize how [much] I love my brother or how much I have confidence in him. He is the most handsome of the young men, the strongest of the young men, the wisest of the young men. I had no one—until [I was] sixteen—except him.

I would boast of him, be jealous over him and tell him my secrets; and he would tell me his secrets. He is *my brother, my friend, and my man*." (p. 375)

In "The Second Wife," [No. 39], pp. 425-435 (there is a drawing depicting the story's theme): (p. 435).



Figure 2. Brother-Sister-Like

Another situation of the “*brother-sister-like*” sexual attraction is introduced. The son of a deserted wife becomes a successful barber thanks to his mother’s care and sacrifices; she did not ask for divorce, but she “deprived” her husband of herself. (Note 42) The son loved his mother, but grew up to “hate” his father. He presents his experience as follows:

“My father deserted my mother” (p. 426)

“[He] did not divorce her.”

“But he deserted her.”

The father had two other wives living in separate apartments. Each of the wives had a daughter. The protagonist of this story, the son of the deserted mother, reports how he got even with his father:

“After I grew up, I got to avenge myself over him through another way. Whenever I went to spend [a few days] at his place, I would seduce the two daughters of his two [other] wives, and attain them [i.e., succeed in my seduction]. I would satisfy [the needs of] my youthful age [(i.e., sexual deprivation)] through them.” (pp. 428-429)

“It is [i.e., was] delicious revenge, but it is [i.e., was] revenge.” (Note 43)

From the above examples, it is clear that the brother-sister theme in our main text “My Sister” [No. 35] resonates throughout the entire anthology. In this respect, its pervasiveness is a match to its ubiquitous, but concealed presence in Arab cultures and societies.

Appendix 3. Objectivity, Ethical Neutrality and Social Sciences

Objectivity, especially its ethical neutrality component, is the foundation for any reliance on the outcome of “scientific” research. In the field of social science, alteration or hiding of socio-cultural facts can lead to confusion and loss of ability to treat social, cultural, and psychological problems effectively. Scholars in the Arab World follow Western-trained psychologists and adopt their Oedipal (Freudian) argument presumably because it is thought to establish desirable common ground between Arabs and the West. Meanwhile they totally ignore the “Brother-Sister” argument presumably because it applies to them and be thought of as disgraceful.

The compelling nature of an a priori held theory and its perceived dominance over social and cultural realities is vividly presented in a psychiatric report: A psychotherapist (Fareed, 1964, p. 38) stated that during a period of seventeen years of practice in Egypt “not once has he arrived at what may substantiate the Oedipal doctrine.” Nonetheless, he insisted that: “*never will he let Freud's idea escape him.*” (El-Shamy 1981, p. 321. *Ital. Added*).

Recently (in 2018), the present writer reported a case of deceptive reporting within the context of brother-sister association, under the title, “A contemporary Psycho-political Case.” The report appeared in, *Al-Ahram* daily published in its web version (2/9/2014). (See, El-Shamy, 2018).

A more recent case of the deceptive reporting that hides the brother-sister relation is given in:

Almisrialyoum.Com, 12/11/2019 “Al-ḥashīsh wa al-nisā’”. *gawānīb khafīyah fi ḥayāt ḥadrat al-muḥtaram Nagīb Maḥfūz*/(Hashish and Women... “Clandestine Sides in the Life” of his Honor the Respectable “Nagīb Maḥfūz”). <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1451234>

Relying on the original Arabic texts, El-Shamy (1976) defined the network of relations in Kamal’s family as follows:

Kamal had one full brother and another half brother (from the father), he also had two sisters, the younger of whom (^CAishah) was of remarkable beauty. He vied with his two male siblings over her “love”.

Thus Mahfouz registers Kamal’s awareness of the fact that “indeed Yaseen talks *love* at her openly and

whenever Fahmy speaks to her about one matter or another, he does not lack stares of *admiration* [for her].” (p. 51 n. 31).

Kamal also had a tyrannical, hypocritical father and a loving, docile browbeaten mother.

Of the other women in his life, the name of ‘Aydah (i.e., Aida) Shaddad is given in the report as a beautiful upper class young woman with whom Mahfouz/Kamal fell in unfulfilled love. Yet she left profound influence on his entire life.

However, to understand the implications of this factor in the report, it is essential to establish what Mahfouz the novelist (as Kamal the novel’s protagonist) reported in his autobiography, *The Trilogy*. According to El-Shamy. (1976):

“In view of the fact that Kamal represents Nageeb Mahfouz, the novel is an expression of Mahfouz’s experiences, real or fictitious, and will be so treated. (p. 52 n. 13).

“The basic motivating force to which Kamal (i.e., Mahfouz) is responding throughout the entire work is a powerful affectionate tie to his sister ^CAishah.” (p. 54 n. 15).

“As a boy, he even fantasized himself sharing romantic life with his beautiful sister. (p. 58 n. 35)”.

“One experience in particular seems to have been traumatic for Kamal. On ^CAishah’s wedding night Kamal informed his mother that he had spied through the keyhole on ^CAishah and her groom, Khaleel (whom he despised), as they were about to consummate the physical act of marriage.” (p. 60 n. 46).

“He was “suspicious” and “ashamed” to ask about what he saw through the keyhole on her wedding night.” (p. 61 n. 49). “Kamal ceased to ask about the incident, but what he experienced on the night of the wedding of his beloved sister never ceased to haunt him for the rest of his life” (p. 60 n. 47).

“The extent to which ^CAishah, the sister, influenced Kamal’s life becomes evident when ^CAydah [Shaddad]’s physical characteristics are always correlated in Kamal’s mind with those of his sister ^CAishah ... ,” (p. 63 n. 66).

“On the night of ^CAydah’s wedding, Kamal recalls the traumatic experience which he suffered during the night of ^CAishah’s wedding. He roams around ^CAydah’s villa and converses with himself: “... do you remember that which you saw through the keyhole? Alas over the deities who roll themselves in the dust.” Kamal has a compulsion to go through his earlier experience. “He would contently surrender what remains of his life for one glance through this window! It is not a trivial matter to see the worshipped-one during the privacy of her wedding [night].” (p. 63 n. 69).

“Just as Kamal during his childhood refused to think of his sister as a sex object, he viewed ^CAydah in the same manner; for him both girls were deities. The fair, plump body of a prostitute leads him to wonder: “... how is [?]Ayah’s body ... frequently she appears in his memory as if she had no body. Even what he [can] recall of her slenderness, tan complexion, and elegance rests in his soul like abstract meanings. (p. 63 n. 71).

“He considered her [i.e., ^CAydah] to be ‘... above marriage.” (p. 63 n. 72).

Failure to perceive these startling links between Mahfouz’s/Kamal’s beloved sister and his unattainable choice for love/marriage cannot be due to mere oversight. There are only two patterns of human

behavior: defensive and problem-solving. When “unimproved” by editorial alterations and individualistic wants, folkloric behavior, like elite literature, can accurately depict cardinal problems in a society. The Internet is crowded with news from the Arab World about husbands abandoning their wives in order to live with beloved sisters (e.g., El-Shamy, 2018), and wives of royalty who flee their husbands for the affection of a loving brother (e.g., “Jordan Princess Haya receives brother’s support on Twitter after fleeing from Dubai ruler”).

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Notes

Note 1. Ihsân ^CAbd al-Quddûs (1919-1990) is one of the leading Egyptian and other Arab novelists and short story authors. He became known for his daring social and cultural views critical of life in Egypt, especially among the middle class, during the mid twentieth Century. However, he forsook these views toward the end of his life and reverted to fundamental Islamic ways.

“My Sister/('ukhtī)” is a unit in the anthology titled, *La! laysa gasaduki* (No! Not Your Body) containing forty-one stories. (Beirut: Dâr al-Nashr al-Hadîth, 1962), [No. 35], pp. 387-395. (All story numbers are added). Page numbers in the original Arabic text are indicated by <000>.

Note 2. The drawing introducing “My Sister” conveys a recurrent erotic notion, Motif: P605.5.2\$, “A boy’s (man’s) sister in bed (scene, image).” The reader/viewer will perceive the image as depicting a brother-sister incestuous act. But the plot will reveal that this perception is not true: Motifs: K1872.9.5.4\$, “Statement intended to generate erotic mental image deceptively camouflaged to seem decent. (The pseudo-erotic);” and K1872.9.5.4.1\$, “Drawing (picture, sculpture, etc.) intended to generate erotic mental image deceptively camouflaged to seem decent”; and Z13.0.1.1\$, “riddle (joke)”. (See also the drawing introducing “The Second Wife,” where stepsisters are involved, Note. 42). However, it should be pointed out that the “Pseudo-erotic” is behaviorally actually “erotic”. See Hasan El-Shamy, *Folkloric Behavior: A Theory for the Study of the Dynamics of Traditional Culture*. Ph.D. Thesis, Indiana University, Bloomington 1967/2010, p. x. (As stated by John B. Watson: “speaking overtly or to ourselves (thinking) is just as objective a type of behavior as baseball”). (IUScholarWorks): <http://hdl.handle.net/2022/8959>.

On the absence from websites (Internet) of the “Brother-Sister” theme in Arab expressive culture, see n.n. 35, 38, below.

Note: All motifs cited are from Hasan El-Shamy, *Folk Traditions of the Arab World: A Guide to Motif Classification*, 2 vols. (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1995), and Hasan El-Shamy, *Motivic Constituents of Arab-Islamic Folk Traditions: A Cognitive Systemic Approach*. (IUScholarWorks: 2016) <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/handle/2022/20938>. The sign “\$” designates a motif or tale-type created by El-Shamy.

Note 3. Motifs, X681, “Blason populaire. Despitiful names used by one city for another”; and W163\$, “Infamy (notoriety)”.

Note 4. Appears as “Cawâtif”, (i.e., Sentiments/Feelings), p. 456 [Table of] “Contents”].

Note 5. For further information on the demographic factors involved in such a situation, especially the duality between “Government employees” and “local-inhabitants,” see: H. El-Shamy, *Religion Among the Folk in Egypt*. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2008/9). App. no. 19 “Detective divination by mândâl: A Successful Case,” pp. 243-244.

Note 6. The novelist’s reference here is to themes recurrent in a widely known folktale: Tale-type 465, *The Man Persecuted Because of his Beautiful Wife*. [Supernatural wife helps husband perform impossible tasks]. See: Hasan El-Shamy, *Types of the Folktale in the Arab World: A Demographically Oriented Tale-Type Index*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 205-207. The tale contains the themes (Motifs): N831.1, Mysterious housekeeper; N815.1.1\$, Fairy woman (female genie) as helper; and N831.1.1, Mysterious housekeeper is fairy mistress.

For a full text from Egypt for this tale, see H. El Shamy, *Folktales of Egypt: Collected, Translated and Edited with Middle Eastern and [sub Saharan] African Parallels* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1980), No. 3, pp. 25-28, 244-45.

Also, compare the reference to Motif: U87.4.5.1\$, “Western costume (effendi) vs. native attire (baladi) complex. (Trousers vs. gilbâb/street-gown)”: western has more appeal to country girls (p. 216).

Note 7. As the context of the event will reveal later, it may be assumed that the degree was from Alexandria University (formerly, “Fârûq University”). Like Cairo and a few other cities in Egypt, Alexandria was a major metropolis with diverse western-like activities.

Note 8. In daily usage, the word *markaz*: lit., center; (henceforth: *markaz-town*), refers to a relatively small town with central governmental functions such as police, law courts, governmental schools, hospital, post office and similar “modern” facilities lacking in villages, hamlets and similar residential locations (usually referred to as “not-a-*markaz*”). These services required officials with western-style education typically hailing from other regions of the country and appointed by the government in Cairo. Thus: the basic demographic composition of such towns was the ‘ahâlî (the local inhabitants/town folks) and members of the new middleclass governmental employees (the effendis) and their families. The effendi class wore western-style suits at work but dress in traditional *galabiyyah* at home (see: No. 18, “Government employee”/[which appears as ‘*awâtif*’/Sentiments/Feelings, p. 456/’Contents’] in Upper-Egypt,” pp. 199-217, esp. p. 216.

Note 9. Motifs: F580\$, Person of awe-inspiring appearance--(*haybah*, *waqâr*); P421.5\$, Requirements for being a judge (e.g., honor, piety, wisdom, learning, descent, etc.).

Note 10. According to local traditional values, these personal qualities are considered incongruent with the public image of awe-evoking/solemnity and sobriety. Thus, manifesting any of these qualities is inadvisable. Cf. Motif: C3.4.1\$, “Near-tabu: immersion in fun (frolic, worldly amusements)”.

Note 11. Honorific title (of Ottoman Turkish origins) used in a variety of situations especially addressing or referring to the elite, the rich and the socially powerful. Feminine form: “hânem”/ “hânim” (i.e., lady, gentlewoman, etc.). Cf. Motif: Q136.1.1\$, “Secular title as reward (e.g., ‘Pasha’, ‘Bey’, ‘Lord’, ‘Knight’, ‘Lady’, or the like)”.

Note 12. Gambling card game; comparable to GinRummy. Cf. Motif: P804\$, Competitive games of chance and luck (usually involving dice or nutshells, plying-cards, etc.).

Note 13. Cf. Motif: U311.0.1\$, Biological drives (primary drives/*al-gharâ’iz*) motivate everyone. (They are universal).

Note 14. Motif: T9.0.1\$, “Sexual frustration (deprivation)”.

Note 15. Such “a woman” is typically referred to in vernacular as “marâh”, i.e., a “broad”, hooker. etc. Motif: T450.0.1\$, “Prostitute (whore, etc.)”.

Note 16. I.e., nights spent with others; Motif: P665, Custom: boasting of sexual prowess.

Note 17. Motif: T40\$, Lovers mentioned as brother and sister so as to escape detection.

Note 18. Motifs: Z94.5.1.3\$, “Rude stare”; and W170.1\$, Lack of bashfulness (‘*qillat hayâ*’).

Note 19. Motif: T450.4, “Prostitute has favorite lover”.

Note 20. (Emphasis added). It is worth noting that this is one of rare situations where the author/^Cabd al-Quddûs applied quotation marks. Also, the speaker (the protagonist) chose to refer to his sex partner as “sister”, rather than as “she” or “Sa^Cdiyyah”.

An identical situation occurs in a Palestinian ‘fairy tale’ where the main character tells of his own experience as a brother to his loving sister on one hand, and to his faithless wives on the other. The editors of the tale, presumably unwittingly, included the brother among his “wives’ lovers”. See: H. El-Shamy, *Beyond Oedipus: The Brother-Sister Syndrome as Depicted By Tale-Type 872**: A cognitive Behavioristic, demographically oriented, Text Analysis of An Arab Oikotype. (Bloomington: The Trickster Press, 2013); pp. 41-42.

Note 21. “mâ ‘itmaskharitch mi^Câh”. Motif: P783.0.1\$, “Person whose public behavior brings disgrace upon relatives—(^Cirrah, [maskharah])”.

Note 22. Cf. Motifs: M443.3\$, “Curse: ruined home”, and Q585, “Fitting destruction of property as punishment”.

Note 23. Motif: T55.6.3\$, “Coquette: exhibitionist from vanity). (la^Cûb /’mul^Cab’).”.

Note 24. Motifs: W256.6.1.1.1\$, “Stereotyping: women are sex-crazed (nymphomaniacs)”; and U129.2, “Prostitute will deceive new lovers as always”.

Note 25. Motifs: K2297.0.3\$, “Man seduces or is seduced by member of his friend’s family (e.g., sister, wife, mother, etc.)”; and P318.0.1.2\$, “Danger to friendship: a woman”.

Note 26. Motif: T450.0.1\$, “Prostitute (whore, etc.)”.

Note 27. “muhâkamah ta’dibiyyah”: i.e., an official governmental hearing.

Note 28. Motif: Z0137.0.1\$, “The tongue of someone’s condition (situation): *lisân al-hâl*”.

Note 29. Motif: P666\$, Custom: males’ boasting of sexual conquests.

Note 30. Compare the recurrence of the name Mahmûd throughout the anthology in ‘brother-sister’ contexts with that of the protagonist in this story (No. 35: “My Sister”). The speaker is a career oriented young woman: In No. 5. “A Girl Looking for a Husband.”

I did not admit to myself during these two years that what was between <p. 73> me and Mahmûd is over. Not at all. It is merely a relationship which is comfortable [and] healthy [i.e., health-promoting]. Two persons each one of them is comfortable with the other. And each one of them needs the other.

In No. 9. “The Notions of an Emancipated/Liberal Girl.”

“We started arguing. And..., Mahmûd began dictating his conditions to me. I felt that he was humiliating me. He wanted me to resign from my job” and to dedicate my full-time to the home. “<p. 122>” I tried to resist but my yearning for being a mother overcame me.

“I surrendered.”

In: No. 32. “I Will Not Marry My Colleague”

Mahmūd said to me once, "Listen, I have left my girl. What do you think. Let us [fall in] love with each other! "And Wafiq said to me once", Listen, No one can inspire me in writing a story except you. Let us write a story together. <p. 356> [...].

Note 31. Motif: Z84.0.1.1.1\$, "Insult: Son/daughter of a dog (bitch)".

Note 32. Literally: "my master": an informal expression denoting endearment. Motif: Z66.3\$, "Endearment: to be addressed as if a loved relative (without social distance)".

Note 33. Going "back to the administrative-town" suggests that Mahmūd had to travel to the main city in the province in order to meet

Note 34. Motif: Z201.1\$, Story told by tale-character(s) as an account of own personal experience—"I"-tale, "We"-tale.

See: El-Shamy, *Folktales of Egypt*, p. xlvi, and "Local Belief Legends and Personal Memorates," Nos. 40-46; C.W. Von Sydow, *Selected Papers on Folklore* (Copenhagen, 1948.), p. 73. See, El-Shamy, *Folkloric Behavior* (p. 170)/123.

Note 35. Mohammad Husayn Haykal. *Zaynab: manâdhir wa 'akhlâq rîfiyyah* (Zaynab: Rural scenes and morals). (Cairo: 1914,1967 3rd ed.), The first novel in modern Arabic narrative literature presented to his sister: "the first I loved of Egypt's youth. (p. 3). Motif: P253.10.1\$, "Sister as her brother's 'first love'."

Note 36. El-Shamy, Hasan M. (1980) *Folktales of Egypt*, see Text No. 54, p. 297, for how Tawfiq al-Hakim created a short story from a traditional "merry" folktale (Tale-type 1537, Series of Clever Unjust Decisions).

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Note 37. In: *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literature*, Vol. 1 no. 2, 1998, pp. 179-181. (Published on line 28/March/2007). The short story is from an anthology titled, *Sâni^cal-Hubb Bâⁱc^cal-Hubb* (Creator of Love, Vendor of Love) (Cairo: Maktabt Misr, 1968), pp. 179-181.

Note 38. Note: It should be pointed out that although the Internet lists a score of "sister quotes" (134 times) including some from Ihsân Abd al-Quddus' works, references to his "My Sister" and the anthology that contains it seem to be totally absent. Similarly, H. El-Shamy's multiple works on "'The Brother-Sister-Syndrome,'" including the analysis of the magnum opus of Egypt's Nobel laureate Nagib

Mahfouz, “The Traditional Structure of Sentiments in Mahfouz’s Trilogy: A Behavioristic Text Analysis,” (see n. 35, above), fail to appear anywhere on the Internet. In the academic field, only a few scholars recognized the Brother-Sister Syndrome: e.g., Le Gassick (1991), Multi-Douglas (1995), Lundell (2015),

Note 39. Cf. Motif: P605.0.1\$, “Togetherness-in-life (Cⁱshrah): attraction (familiarity, trust, etc.) due to sharing of living quarters”. (Also see, “I Will Not Marry My Colleague,” [No. 32]).

Note 40. Cf. Motif: P254.0.1\$, Household composed of only brother and sister(s). They live alone in palace (house, cave, etc.).

Note 41. Motif : P253.13\$, A sister’s favorite brother (usually the one closest in age).

Note 42. Motifs: Q489.2\$, Wife withhold conjugal relations from husband as punishment; T607.2\$, Abandoned wife chooses to remain unwed for the sake of her child(ren).

Note 43. It may be noted that the stepsisters are not designated as sisters. Motifs: T491.3\$, “Lecherous stepbrother: seduces stepsister(s)”.

P0522.1.7\$, “Violating sexually as revenge. Malicious act done by coaxing (seduction) or violence (assault, rape)”.

Z63.3.1.1\$, “External indicators signifying humiliation: to be subjected to sexual aggression”.

T416.6\$, Adultery or sexual liaison between foster siblings (brother-sister-like, sociological siblings).

Cf. P274.1, “Love between foster sister and foster brother’. Unlike the situation described above (pp. 1-2, n. 2), the drawing here is not deceptive.

See Hasan El-Shamy, “Siblings in the Arabian Nights.” In: *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*. Special Issue: The Arabian Nights: Past and Present, Ulrich Marzolph, Guest ed. (Wayne University Press), Vol. 18, No. 2 (2004), pp. 170-86.