

## Sebastian Gadomski

Jagiellonian University  
sebastian.gadomski@uj.edu.pl  
ORCID: 0000-0002-6718-8242

### Scientific Narratives in Contemporary Egyptian Pocket Novel Series

The pocketbook series in Egypt has a long tradition which dates back to 1936 when the Egyptian writer and translator ‘Umar ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Amīn founded the publishing house which he called *Riwāyāt al-ġīb*—Pocket novels. It mainly published translations of the detective novels by Agatha Christie, but also *The Wretched* by Victor Hugo and *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas. It is worth mentioning that pocket novels published by ‘Umar ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Amīn quickly gained immense popularity, bringing significant profits to him as translator and writer. It is thanks to them that he founded three weekly magazines: *Musāmārat al-ġīb* devoted to art, *al-Istūdyū* dealing with the political issues and the typical entertainment magazine *Iḍḥak*. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Amīn’s publishing house was on the market for fifty years.<sup>1</sup>

It is noteworthy that even earlier, since 1915, popular Western detective novels published in various series had been translated to Arabic by Ḥāfiẓ Naġīb, probably the first Egyptian writer to specialise in this genre.<sup>2</sup> Maḥmūd Sālīm was another author who became involved in the project of pocketbooks. In the years 1968–1972, he translated Enid Blyton’s series

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibrāhīm ‘Ādil, *Riwāyāt mişriyya li-l-ġīb: min al-hāmiş ilā al-matn*, accessed 12 February, 2020, <https://www.ida2at.com/egyptian-novels-pocket-from-margin-to-text/>.

<sup>2</sup> Şa‘bān Yūsuf, “Ḥāfiẓ Naġīb ḍalika al-maġhūl wa-mu’assis ar-riwāya al-būlisiyya,” *Fuṣūl*, No. 76 (2009), p. 238.

of novels for children and youth entitled *The Famous Five*. Interestingly, the translator changed the names of all characters to Arabic to give the book a local touch. From 1973, Maḥmūd Sālim—in cooperation with the publishing house Dār al-Ma‘ārif—began his work on the series *Al-Muḡāmirūn al-ḥamsa* (almost 200 episodes of this series were published). Shortly afterwards, in 1978, in cooperation with the publisher Hay‘at kuttāb al-ḡīb, he began to prepare another pocket series entitled *Aš-Šayāṭīn al-13* (over 250 episodes).<sup>3</sup> A real breakthrough in the history of Egyptian pocket novels came in 1984 when the owner of the Al-Mu‘assasa al-‘Arabiyya al-Ḥadīṭa publishing house (Modern Arab Association), Ḥamdī Muṣṭafā, began publishing a new series, entitled *Riwāyāt Miṣriyya li-l-Ġīb* (*Egyptian Pocket Novels*). The originator of the series had published books supporting education at various grades of primary and secondary school for many years, and, as we can assume, the idea of educational activity, encouraging reading and self-development, was very close to him.

Ḥamdī Muṣṭafā’s another venture was called *The Cultural Project of the Century*.<sup>4</sup> Through competition, he selected writers to join his project and, over the years, formed a team of the novel series authors. The most important of them were undoubtedly Nabil Fārūq and Aḥmad Ḥālid Tawfiq, both physicians by profession. Nabil Fārūq was the first to collaborate with Ḥamdī Muṣṭafā and his first series of novels were *Raḡul al-mustaḥīl* (*The Man of the Impossible*)<sup>5</sup> and *Milaff al-mustaqbal* (*The Future File*).<sup>6</sup> The first one tells the story of a military officer working for the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate, whereas the second takes place in the futuristic science-fiction world and tells about the adventures of the Egyptian scientific unit led by Nūr ad-Dīn Maḥmūd, who works for the Egyptian Scientific Intelligence Service. Within the *Riwāyāt Miṣriyya li-l-Ġīb* project, more than twenty different series have been released, which together cover almost one thousand titles.<sup>7</sup> The series represent different styles and literary genres, but detective stories, thrillers, horrors, science fiction novels and romances dominate.

<sup>3</sup> Ibrāhīm ‘Ādil, *Riwāyāt miṣriyya li-l-ḡīb*.

<sup>4</sup> “Publisher,” *Rewayat*, accessed 12 February, 2020, <http://www.rewayat.com/publisher.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> The last of 160 episodes of this series was published in 2009.

<sup>6</sup> The last of 160 episodes of this series was published in 2010.

<sup>7</sup> “Series,” *Rewayat*, accessed 12 February, 2020, <http://www.rewayat.com/series.htm>.

Over the past four decades, Ḥamdī Muṣṭafā's series have gained immense popularity throughout the Arab world. Ibrāhīm 'Ādil even goes so far as to say that "they shaped the lives of generations."<sup>8</sup> Aḥlām az-Za'im, from the Saudi newspaper *al-Iqtisādiyya*, writes: "In fact, these books or novels may not have much literary value, but they are certainly of high behavioral importance. They promote the habit of carrying a book on a daily basis and reading every free moment."<sup>9</sup>

The importance of popular pocket series is emphasised by many Egyptian authors. Naḡīb Maḥfūz, the only Arab writer who has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, mentions that his own adventure with reading began with popular crime novel series.<sup>10</sup> Egyptian pocket series sold throughout the Arab world have left their mark on the lives of writers in other Middle East countries. The Tunisian poet aṭ-Turayyā Ramaḍān explicitly admits that pocket novels have had a great impact on her and emphasises that "this is where my artistic path began." She also adds: "I don't think any of us grew up without these novels."<sup>11</sup> The Palestinian writer Taḡrīd 'Abd al-Āl expresses himself in a similar vein: "As a teenager, I started reading pocket novels. It was a great adventure that introduced me to the world of reading and greatly expanded my imagination. It was also the beginning of my writing."<sup>12</sup>

The influence of the Arab and, above all, the most widespread Egyptian pocket novel series on the development of reading and interest in fiction was very significant in the Arab world. However, it is important to note that this type of literature has also been evaluated very critically. Iraqi scholar 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad clearly states that popular literature sold in the form of pocketbooks—or rather its popularity—has distorted "the right" view of what novel or story should be. Many writers relying on bad models have duplicated unambitious patterns, thus weakening the artistic level of

<sup>8</sup> Ibrāhīm 'Ādil, *Riwāyāt miṣriyya li-l-ḡīb*.

<sup>9</sup> Aḥlām az-Za'im, "Riwāyāt al-ḡīb... taqāfa 'amaliyya li-l-qirā'a taḥruḡ al-kutub," *Aleqt*, accessed 20 February, 2020, [https://www.aleqt.com/2009/06/09/article\\_237976.html](https://www.aleqt.com/2009/06/09/article_237976.html).

<sup>10</sup> Ḡamāl al-Ḡiṭānī ed., *Naḡīb Maḥfūz yataḍakkār* (Beirut: Dār al-Masīra, 1980), p. 25. Naḡīb Maḥfūz, spelled in English Naguib Mahfouz, (1911–2006) was an Egyptian novelist, dramatist and scriptwriter. In 1988, as the first Arabic author, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

<sup>11</sup> aṭ-Turayyā Ramaḍān, "Aḥlām," *Alriwaya*, accessed 20 February, 2020, <https://alriwaya.net/?p=6204>.

<sup>12</sup> Taḡrīd 'Abd al-Āl, "Aḥlām," *Alriwaya*, accessed 20 February, 2020, <https://alriwaya.net/?p=6204>.

published literature.<sup>13</sup> In retrospect, it should be acknowledged that the vast majority of the *Riwāyāt Miṣriyya li-l-Ġīb* series do not contribute much to the intellectual or emotional development of their readers, being primarily a kind of cheap entertainment. However, some series stand out in this respect from the rest. Although they stick to old patterns and reproduce well-known models of composition, they also bring an interesting layer of reliable information that broadens the intellectual horizons of their readers. However, similar opinions, which clearly contrast high literature with popular page-turners, have appeared less and less often in recent years. This might be connected with the observation of Ibrāhīm ‘Ādil who draws our attention to the general lack of interest in popular literature in the circle of Egyptian literary critics.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast—as this article illustrates—the series *Riwāyāt Miṣriyya li-l-Ġīb* brings a huge variety of genres and themes. Thus, it is a very interesting subject of literary, cultural and sociological studies. In my research, based on selected examples, I try to show the role and importance of science and scientific facts in the composition of novels and short stories published as part of the Egyptian pocketbook series.<sup>15</sup> I focus on the series in which, in my opinion, scientific facts and science are present in the most prominent way. As the Egyptian pocket novel series are typical examples of popular literature, I place my analyses in the broad context of studies concerning this type of literary texts.

The series that clearly stands out from the typical crime, spy or science fiction novels that dominate the *Riwāyāt Miṣriyya li-l-Ġīb* project is *Sāfārī* (*Safari*) by Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tawfiq. The writer completed medical studies at the University of Tanta and, in 1997, obtained a Ph.D. in tropical medicine. He began working with the publisher Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya al-Ḥadīṭa in 1992, as the author of the series *Mā warā’ aṭ-ṭabī’a* (*The Paranormal*). This horror/thriller series quickly gained immense popularity and a large group of readers, ensuring that the author continued his cooperation with

<sup>13</sup> ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad, *Al-adab al-qīṣaṣī fī al-‘Irāq munḍu al-ḥarb al-‘ālamīyya aṭ-ṭāniya. Ittiḡāhānuhu al-fikriyya wa- qiyāmuhu al-fanniyya*, (Damascus: Ittiḡād al-Kuttāb al-‘Arab, 2001), pp. 28–29. In this context, ‘Abd Allāh Aḥmad mentions Muḥammad Aḥmad as-Sayyid, Ṭaha aš-Šayḥ Aḥmad, Muḥammad Sulaymān Fayḍā and many other writers.

<sup>14</sup> Ibrāhīm ‘Ādil, *Riwāyāt miṣriyya li-l-ġīb*.

<sup>15</sup> All literary texts in the Egyptian series I analyse were called novels by their editors. However, some of these texts do not meet the formal criteria of a novel. It should be mentioned that the Egyptian pocket book series were written and published exclusively in Arabic. None of them have ever been translated into other languages.

the publishing house.<sup>16</sup> In 1996, the first of 53 episodes of the *Sāfārī* series was released. Its protagonist, ‘Alā’, is a young Egyptian physician. As we learn at the beginning of the first episode entitled *Al-Wabā’* (*Epidemic*), just after starting his medical career, he made a mistake that almost led to the death of a seventeen-year-old patient suffering from a heart defect. After this incident, he quits his job in Egypt and decides to go to Cameroon, where he joins an international team of doctors who try to help Africans suffering from various diseases. As we read in the short introduction that precedes each episode of the novel, “the Safari unit that we are talking about does not hunt for wild animals, but for diseases in Africa, whose suspicious inhabitants experience endless political unrest and where the surrounding nature knows no mercy.”<sup>17</sup>

Although the *Sāfārī* series is primarily intended to entertain and provide intense emotional experiences to its readers, it also carries a very clear aspect of the popularisation of knowledge and science, which cannot be ignored. In the case of Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq, who was a doctor specialising in tropical diseases, it seems to be quite obvious and natural that his story about the adventures of a physician working in Africa exhibits exceptional features. One of the basic elements of the plot of each episode is a disease or a medical phenomenon. The series begins with the episode in which ‘Alā’ and his multinational team of specialist doctors have to face the epidemic of viral haemorrhagic fever that has broken out in Cameroon. In the following episodes, malaria, cholera, HIV, African coma, BSE and many other diseases appear. In addition, many novels relate to certain scientific processes, such as genetic testing, gene multiplication, cloning or PCR testing. The problems the Safari unit doctors face become a pretext for discussing a particular medical phenomenon in its historical, social and political context. Thus, the reader learns about certain medical processes and scientific facts. Although the author of the series uses professional terminology very often, he tries to do so in a way that is accessible to the reader. He also rarely provides the reader with additional information in footnotes, being aware that it would break the flow of the narrative.

For example, in episode 41, entitled *Sayyid al-ġināt* (*The Master of Genetics*), ‘Alā’, by the orders of his supervisor, Professor Mūrīs, goes

<sup>16</sup> “Dr. Ahmad,” *Rewayat*, accessed 20 February, 2020, [http://www.rewayat.com/dr\\_ahmad.htm](http://www.rewayat.com/dr_ahmad.htm).

<sup>17</sup> Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq, *Al-Wabā’* (Cairo: Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya al-Ḥadītha, 1996), p. 4. All Arabic titles and quotations are presented in my own translation to English.

to the clinic of Dr Carrera, which is in Equatorial Guinea. Dr Carrera conducts genetic research and cloning experiments. Their purpose is to ensure longevity for the current president of the country who finances the clinic. In chapter 9 of the novel, ‘Alā’ quite accurately describes the tests and experiments carried out by the Japanese geneticist who is employed in the clinic and whom he is supposed to help: “I stared at the screen where the cell could be seen just before its breakup. Other screens showed an injector that stretches the walls of the cell. It pulls out its nucleus and then moves it to another cell. [...] Calcium penetrates and destroys the cell’s properties. Do you see these stairs-like lines? They are cell chromosomes. In this way they fall apart and the cell shrinks.”<sup>18</sup> Then, together with the Japanese geneticist, ‘Alā’ discusses the process called apoptosis which is a form of programmed cell death. During the meeting with Dr Carrera, the director of the clinic describes the cloning process, its risks and the method of obtaining tissue samples that contain genetic material. ‘Alā’ is not a specialist in genetics, so, in the laboratory, the Japanese doctor explains to him that the clones are given tryptophan which is to prevent premature ageing of cells.<sup>19</sup>

Some episodes are particularly abundant in descriptions of chemical processes and use scientific nomenclature heavily. A good example of this is the special episode of *Sāfārī* entitled *PCR*. Polymerase chain reaction becomes, in this case, a method of combating a dangerous virus. This is how Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq explains the process: “There is a specific enzyme called Taq polymerase. Under certain conditions, during cyclic heating and cooling, it extends the nucleic acid sequence on both sides. As a result of this process, the sequence gets longer. Ultimately, we get enough nucleic acid and we can subject it to the tests we want. In this way we can study genes and analyze the structure of viruses.”<sup>20</sup> Then, he discusses the structure of DNA and RNA. He uses specific terminology concerning nitrogenous bases in nucleic acid. “Adenine has the symbol A, uracil U, guanine G and cytosine C. The sequence of these properties (abbreviations) determines the characteristics of the virus.”<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq, *Sayyid al-ġmāt* (Cairo: Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya al-Ḥadīṭa, nd), p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>20</sup> Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq, *PCR* (Cairo: Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya al-Ḥadīṭa, nd), pp. 28–29.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Interestingly, the episode also contains a riddle. An attentive reader can decipher the genetic code of the virus him- or herself and “save the world” from biological destruction. The solution can be sent to the email address provided in the novel and the reader can find out if he or she managed to guess the correct solution. The “scientific” riddle contains detailed instructions and an example of a proper reading of RNA sequences. “Explanatory example. If the RNA sequence looks like this: AUCGAUAUAUAAUUUAUAUAU, then the amino acid configuration is: AUC isoleucine, then GUA aspartic acid and AUA isoleucine.”<sup>22</sup> Although the proposal to save the world is just an exciting entertainment, it has scientific foundations that the reader needs to understand to participate fully in the game proposed by Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq.

A very important fact is that the substantive content, i.e. scientific information, does not hinder the plot of the novel. It becomes its integral part. This is due to the specific composition model that the writer adopts. According to this model, the novel’s main protagonist, ‘Alā’, who is also its narrator, addresses either himself or the imaginary recipient, the reader of his story, when analysing certain cases or presenting scientific phenomena. In addition to that, we also have the context in which some characters transmit information. This formula creates the framework in which the substantive content appears. Such a formula also becomes a pretext to present an in-depth image of the protagonist because scientific content is often inscribed in his own thoughts, reflections and doubts. The presentation of factual data also becomes an instrument of establishing closer relation between ‘Alā’ and the reader because it is often the main character who directly addresses him or her. In other cases, scientific or medical information is provided casually, simply “by the way,” when reporting some events. It is thus “by the way” that a range of information appears to increase our medical awareness as a sort of health promotion and disease prevention.

For example, in episode 43 entitled *Ilā aš-šimāl (To the North)* ‘Alā’ goes to his in-laws who live in Canada. One night, he walks by the pool and finds his mother-in-law in a serious condition. It turns out, she took the sedative drug called chloral hydrate and drank some alcohol, which could lead to coma or even death. ‘Alā’ quickly induces vomiting in his mother-

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 138-139.



in-law. Later, he prepares a strong black tea and gives her bread crust toasted over the open flame. Then he explains: “The scorched bread crust acts as activated carbon, which absorbs chemicals. Strong tea contains tannic acid, which has the ability to neutralize poisons.”<sup>23</sup> Similar explanations can be found in many other novels of the series. Thus, the whole series introduces us to the hospital environment and the world of medicine.

Due to these particular aspects, the *Sāfārī* series is very specific. Interestingly, its scientific side does not completely overshadow the adventures of ‘Alā’. As has been mentioned, the scientificity of the novel is closely related to the protagonist’s profession. The fact that he is a doctor and works in a special team justifies the presence of this kind of information. In fact, in order to understand the work of ‘Alā’ better, we need to assimilate certain knowledge. This is the “reality” in which he lives, so, by familiarising ourselves with him, we also familiarise ourselves with the scientific reality that is presented. At the same time, the Egyptian doctor wins our sympathy and makes us learn the secrets of science in an easy and pleasant way. He is the one who makes us familiar with difficult nomenclature and complicated chemical processes. The world of closely guarded and mysterious laboratories is made closer and more understandable to the reader. Discovering mysteries, solving riddles, and fighting evil as typical elements of popular literature take a specific form in the series. ‘Alā’ discovers the causes of diseases based on specific knowledge. The same knowledge and science are his weapons in the fight against the deadly threats coming from the world we live in. Science is a weapon in the *Sāfārī* series, a guarantee of the success of subsequent missions and the source of hope to save human lives.

Of course, science is also displayed as a threat. Many episodes of the series show how villains misuse knowledge to achieve their political or economic goals. Already from the first episode of the series, we learn that the virus of the viral haemorrhagic fever epidemic in Cameroon was created in a laboratory operating in Europe and is to serve as a biological weapon. Episode seventeen, entitled *Dawā’ yaqtul* (*Medicine that Kills*), presents the illegal sale of Thalidomide in African countries. The drug, promoted as an aid in sleep disorders and morning sickness, is banned in many countries due to its side effects, such as causing birth defects. Still, it is sold in the

---

<sup>23</sup> Aḥmad Ḥālid Tawfiq, *Ilā aš-šimāl* (Cairo: Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya al-Hadīṭa, nd), p. 27.



African markets, carrying a huge threat to infant health.<sup>24</sup> Our guide to this vast and complicated world of science is the Egyptian physician ‘Alā’.

When analysing the basic models of the main characters in popular novels, Umberto Eco distinguishes their two types. The first is a superhero with extraordinary abilities who saves the world. The second is a positive average character who is not perfect but always becomes involved in a righteous cause.<sup>25</sup> The main character of the *Sāfārī* series embodies perfectly the features of the latter type. He has a number of weaknesses, but they authenticate his personality and bring him closer to reality and the reader. ‘Alā’ is a great companion along whom we can explore the mysterious world of science and medicine; which always arouses our curiosity. As regards the medical drama series, Małgorzata Bogunia-Borowska writes that they address our natural need to learn about the human body, its weaknesses and diseases.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in the novels of the *Sāfārī* series, our fascination with the body is clearly addressed.

There is yet another interesting aspect of the main character created by Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq. His impeccable attitude as a practising Muslim increases the credibility of his messages to his readers, who, overwhelmingly, are also followers of Islam. This element is particularly important in the context of the cultural reception of the *Sāfārī* series. ‘Alā’ combines traditional faith and religiousness with science and the latest discoveries in different areas of knowledge very harmoniously. However, the final word always belongs to God, who remains a mystery to the human being.

Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq shaped his main character ‘Alā’ very carefully, trying to escape Raymond Chandler’s accusation that popcultural novels lack emotional content and suffer from superficiality and a clear rush during their creation.<sup>27</sup> Also, all episodes of the *Sāfārī* series are very well thought-out. Science and knowledge are the basic components of their plots. Despite this, in the context of the whole series, it should be noted that the Egyptian writer fails to avoid using the composition patterns typical for popular series. Subsequent missions and adventures of ‘Alā’ appear in

<sup>24</sup> Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq, *Dawā’ yaqtul* (Cairo: Al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya al-Ḥadītha, nd.), pp. 6–7.

<sup>25</sup> Umberto Eco, *Superman w literaturze masowej. Powieść popularna między retoryką a ideologią* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1996), p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Małgorzata Bogunia-Borowska, *Fenomen telewizji. Interpretacje socjologiczne i kulturowe* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2012), p. 223.

<sup>27</sup> Raymond Chandler, *Mówi Chandler* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1983), p. 94.

a very unnatural way. The main character's life is simply too intense to be credible. Still, I think it is possible, for the reader, to accept the rules of the specific game in which he or she participates. Within one convention, he or she receives a variety of stories which is, after all, one of the basic principles of popcultural products.<sup>28</sup> The admirers of the *Sāfārī* series look for entertainment, good time with their book and also some scientific curiosities. The mentioned unnatural intensity of the adventures of their hero, and the repetition of the compositional patterns of the stories, might be perceived as natural features of this literary genre. As such, I suppose, they do not provoke questions concerning “literary quality” of the series among the majority of its readers.

Another series in which science and knowledge play a similar role is *Masrah al-ğarīma* (*Crime Scene*), written by the aforementioned Nabīl Fārūq, first published in 2007. Unfortunately, only two episodes of this series were released and it did not have such a strong impact on readers as *Sāfārī*. Novels—or, in fact, Fārūq's short stories—follow the same pattern and do not differ in any way from the popular model of the plot in the literature of this genre.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, the heroine is a woman, Nahīr Sālim, who works as a coroner. Thanks to her extensive knowledge and intelligence, she investigates seemingly perfect crimes. Like Aḥmad Ḥālid Tafwīq, Nabīl Fārūq provides readers with exciting adventures, but also with a certain amount of scientific knowledge that is a tool in the fight against criminals. For example, in the episode entitled *Ġarīma fī mağlis aš-ša'b* (*A Crime in Parliament*), during a parliamentary session, a deputy called Māzin dies suddenly. Nahīr is by chance among the guests attending the session. Only thanks to her persistence and extraordinary abilities the mystery is revealed. It turns out that Māzin suffered from coronary artery disease and had to take the medication called Isosorbide Dinitrate. A colleague sitting next to him, who wanted to dispose of him, offered him a bottle of water with dissolved Viagra.<sup>30</sup> Isosorbide Dinitrate should not be taken with erectile dysfunction medicines because it can provoke a

<sup>28</sup> Eco, *Superman w literaturze masowej*, p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> The literary texts in this series are called novels by the editor. The word “novels” appears on the front cover of the books. However, due to formal reasons, they meet the criteria of short stories and not novels.

<sup>30</sup> Nabīl Fārūq, *Ġarīma fī mağlis aš-ša'b wa-qiṣaṣ uḥrā* (Giza: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Ibdā', 2007), pp. 76–77.

sudden decrease in blood pressure which can lead to death, as it happened to Māzin.

Unlike our “old friend” ‘Alā,’ Nahīr is a typical superhero who is never wrong and fights criminals tirelessly. In this series, scientific facts are presented in a very similar way as in the series by Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq. Additionally, in the inner structure of stories, they play the same role. Some elements of scientific knowledge—although to a much lesser extent than in the mentioned novels and stories—can be found in other series such as *Mā warā’ aṭ-ṭabī’a* (*The Paranormal*) and *Fāntāsyā* (*Fantasy*) by Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq, *Milaff al-mustaqbal* (*The Future File*), *Kūktayl 2000* (*Cocktail 2000*) by Nabīl Fārūq or *Nūfā* (*Nova*) by Ra’ūf Waṣfī. However, science and knowledge do not play in these cases such an important role as they do in *Sāfārī* and *Masraḥ al-ḡarīma*.

One of the most eminent Arab writers of science fiction literature, Egyptian Nihād Šarīf, observes that one of the basic tools to stimulate the development of a society is dissemination of knowledge. He emphasises the role of culture, including literature, in the process of transferring the latest scientific discoveries to the public in an accessible and interesting way.<sup>31</sup> Undoubtedly, popular literature may play a didactic role in this case. It can become a tool for science promotion. It can inspire and encourage individual intellectual development.

As the *Sāfārī* and *Masraḥ al-ḡarīma* series show, science and knowledge can also be an interesting background and inspiration for writers. In the novels of Aḥmad Ḥālīd Tafwīq and the stories of Nabīl Fārūq, science is not just “an exotic” addition to the setting as one could think, but, in fact, is one of the key elements of the plot and a driving force of the action. In the mentioned series, finding answers to scientific puzzles has the same function as solving crime riddles in detective stories. A scientist, just like a detective, takes his reader companion not to the world of crime and mystery but to the equally interesting world of scientific secrets. The names of secret organizations and underworld gangs are replaced by the names of chemical processes or organic compounds. Although, as I have mentioned before, from the literary point of view, all these popular novels do not differ much from one another, it should be noted that the added value of the series of *Sāfārī*

<sup>31</sup> Nihād Šarīf, *Ad-Dawr al-ḡayawī li-adab al-ḡayāl al-‘ilmī fi ʿāqāfatina al-‘ilmiyya* (Cairo: Al-Maktaba al-Akādīmiyya, 1997), p. 35.

and *Masraḥ al-ḡarīma* is very clear. The science and knowledge presented in these novels and short stories in an accessible and simplified way become also, in a metaphorical sense, one of their “characters.” Scientific facts and phenomena have their specific characteristics which very often drive the story and draw our attention. Moreover, these exceptional heroes often remain closest to the real world and, in an attractive and interesting way, connect literary fiction with reality.

Sebastian Gadomski

### Scientific Narratives in Contemporary Egyptian Pocket Novel Series

Popular literature occupies a significant part of the publishing market in Egypt and has had quite a large group of admirers for many decades. It is noteworthy that, in this sector, the series of Egyptian pocket stories published by the Modern Arab Association occupy a special position. It should be noted that the authors of the stories are heavily inspired by the latest scientific discoveries in many fields. In their works, medical facts, advanced technologies and genetic engineering not only set the background for the adventures of the characters, but are often the key elements of the plot and literary composition, as shown in this article.

**Keywords:** Egyptian literature, Egyptian pocket novel series, Egyptian pocket-books

**Słowa kluczowe:** literatura egipska, egipskie serie powieściowe w wydaniu kieszonkowym, egipskie wydania kieszonkowe