

Affaf Tobbala

**Author Nominee
Hans Christian Andersen Award 2024**



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Biography

Affaf Tobbala started writing for children in 2005 at the age of 64, drawing on the experience of a rich and productive life and career, in which she opened new doors for her creative faculties and willfully reinvented herself.

She was born in Cairo on July 12, 1941, to a middle-class family. She was married in 1960 after finishing middle school in a French missionary school. Early marriage and giving birth to two children in 1962 and 1964 did not prevent her from surmounting all obstacles in pursuit of higher education. She completed her Bachelor of Arts in French Literature in 1965, then a Master of Arts in Mass Communication (specializing in Broadcast Media) in 1987 and a PhD in Mass Communication (also in Broadcast Media) in 1997, all from the University of Cairo.

From 1966 to 2001, she worked in the Egyptian Television, the Middle East and Africa's pioneering public service television. She became a director, screenplay writer and producer of diverse types of programs, most notably groundbreaking



documentary programs. During her career, she held a variety of managerial positions in Egyptian Television, the highest being the founding Executive Director of the “Nile Drama Channel”, the first specialized thematic channel in the Arab world.

On a Parallel track, from 1987 to 2019, Tobbala taught courses on Television and Documentary Production in various academic institutions for students of journalism and broadcast media, as well as to young broadcasting professionals. She contributed to several national committees, academic and professional conferences on broadcasting in Egypt and the Arab world. She also took part in juries of several Broadcasting and Film festivals.

After retirement from Egyptian Television, Tobbala opened a new door for her creative impulses and answered a calling she had had for years: writing fiction for the young. This was not the very first time she addressed children, as she directed two children’s programs for Egyptian TV between 1967 and 1970.

It was in 2005 that she presented her first story for children to Dar Nahdet Misr, one of the biggest publishing houses in Egypt, which, from then on, became the publisher of all her books. The book was awarded a mention in the New Horizon’s category of the Ragazzi Award. Later that same year, the book was also awarded Egypt’s most important prize for children’s books.

Encouraged by the reception of her first book, Tobbala came to publish 20 titles for children since 2005, the most recent of which was published in 2021. She also published her first short story collection for adult readers, Turāb al-Sikkah (Road Dust) in 2015. She continuously and actively interacts with her young readers, educators, and other writers.

She worked as an editorial advisor for several publishers of children’s books. She also mentored several aspiring writers for children, helping them with their first works for publication.





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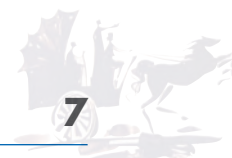
Contribution to Literature for the Young

Over seventeen years of writing for the young, Affaf Tobbala published 20 titles, including a collection of short stories and four novels for young adults. Through them she made a unique qualitative contribution to the library of children's literature that can be summed up in the following components:

1. **She elevated Arabic fiction writing for children from a pedagogic tool to a rich and complex literary form.** The cornerstone of her work is a story she is keen to narrate, rather than a lesson around which a story is weaved. In her interviews, she repeatedly defines her craft in terms of making children like what she writes for them rather than write what they usually like. She always creates a sincere, tightly structured and engaging story that becomes her most powerful message and the best means to reach her readers, touch their hearts, provoke their intellect and, thereby, influence their world.



- 2. She gave the Arabic children’s library a diverse body of writings, giving testimony to a prolific creative drive.** She seamlessly moves through different forms, addressing different age groups, and depicting diverse settings. She also deals, directly and indirectly, with a wide array of relevant themes, some of natural interest to children (friendship- sharing- loneliness - building common grounds) others that need to be introduced to them (balancing security and adventure – coexistence between adversaries – finding value in difference – finding happiness in collaboration and helping others- mustering the will to pursue personal dreams - understanding across generations - migration- family cohesion – the value of education- the role of conscience- gender equality -social justice) and others that might be more sensitive or even taboo (rethinking established opinions – violence and abuse against children – underage marriage).
- 3. Her works embody and promote overriding humanist values anchored in an Egyptian (and Arab) cultural setting.** These values most notably include reason and rationality, tolerance, equality, empowerment of girls. Such values are not preached but are an integral part of the very fabric of the story and embedded in its structure, setting and language. And in a society and a culture where old traditions continue to be put in opposition to modern values, Tobbala unashamedly espouses modern values and encourages the young to rethink tradition to suit their reality.
- 4. In many of her works, she skillfully interlaces the imaginary and the real,** transcending the dichotomy between them and intentionally embracing and nurturing the fertile imagination of her young readers, while promoting reason and rational thinking.
- 5. Her story telling delivers a powerful emotional thrill** capable of bringing tears of sorrow or joy to the eyes. This stimulates empathy and constructs a world view in which human emotions are as important as reason and can be in harmony with it.
- 6. Her works combine skillful plotting, gripping well-paced rhythm and an intriguing powerful visual component.** This characteristic of her writing attracts young readers attuned to visual entertainment, while providing them distinct values and esthetics.
- 7. She uses a beautiful literary language, that is also simple and contemporary, concerned with elevating her readers’ linguistic abilities.** This is her answer



to the growing gap between written and spoken Arabic. In the same direction, she harnessed audiovisual technologies by directing and narrating two audio-visual CDs of two of her books, that were especially designed to assist children at an early age to learn reading correctly and to increase their linguistic abilities.

8. Her works engage, attract and address adults as well, particularly parents and educators.

9. She is engaged in projects and activities to promote interest in reading among the young, considering it an integral part of her role as a writer.

She actively participates in reading events for the young, which took place in bookstores, local cultural centers, large public institutions, as well as public and private schools, addressing diverse age categories and social backgrounds, in cities all around Egypt and in different countries of the Arab world. Her books are favorites among recognized volunteer storytellers who actively tour the less privileged corners of Egypt to increase access to books, because of the degree of engagement they stimulate in their young audience. She also participated in the Libraries Committee, a national committee formed by the Minister of Education of a select group of intellectuals and experts to formulate policies related to school libraries. She presented papers to workshops in Egypt, Libya, UAE, and KSA.

10. All these components of her work were rewarded by an expanding readership in Egypt and the Arab world, evidenced by the distributional reach of her books, which are being repeatedly reprinted till today; the interest of critics and academics in her work; as well as by the outstanding recognition of her work in national, regional, and international awards for children's literature, including being the only Arab writer awarded with the three biggest Arab awards (Al-Sheikh Zayed, Etisalat (twice) and Khalifa for Education).





**Nūn Center, Tripoli
(Libya) 2009**



**Storytelling Workshop,
Amman (Jordan). 2011**



**Symposium in the Sharjah Book
Fare, Sharjah (UAE), 2014**



**Discussion with Students of the Bab El-Louq
German School, Cairo (Egypt), 2014**



**Storytelling in Maverick's Nursery, Cairo
(Egypt), 2017**



**Discussion with Students of Al-Haya
Academy, Cairo (Egypt), 2017**



**Symposium in the Graduate Course on
Creativity in Children's Literature, Faculty
of Arts in Cairo University, 2018**



**Storytelling Tour of Haytham
El-Sayyed, Awlad Zaid village
(Egypt), 2018**



**Discussion with Students of Schutz
American School, Alexandria
(Egypt), 2022**



**Symposium in the Jeddah Book Fare,
Jeddah (KSA), 2022**



مشاركة الأطفال سر نجاح أعمالى



لم أكن أحب القراءة في طفولتى



وبدايتى كانت مع الحكى

في حواره... من منظور هذه الأيام... مشاركة الأطفال سر نجاح أعمالى...



الجائزة بجائزة الشيخ زايد لأدب الطفل



د عفاف طيالة: التعليم سبب المشكلات التي تمر بها مصر



التحارب

Appreciative Article and Interview

Affaf Tobbala: The Cinderella of Arab Children's Literature(1) By Ahmad Toson(2)

At the age of sixty-five of a life full of love, adventure, and hard work, she decided to start weaving her stories, and to dust all around her, awaiting her own fairy godmother to come and turn around both her life and Arab children's literature. Arab children's literature, which was first founded on grandmothers' stories, saw its biggest leap at the hands of Kamel Al-Kilani, who is, deservedly, considered by many as the pioneer, given the many writings, translations and adaptations he

made from the Arab (cultural) heritage, with which he enriched the Arab library. Despite the important earlier beginnings at the hands of Refaa Al-Tahtawi and his translation of Children's Stories and the Little Poucet, and of Mohamad Othman Galal in Open Eyes on Proverbs and Sermons and his writings published in Rawdat Al-Madares (Engl. The Schools Garden), and the writing of Ali Fikri in Musamarat Al-Banat (Engl. Girl's Chats) and the writing of Ahmad Shawqi

(1) Toson, Ahmad. "Afaf ṭbuuālh ... syndrylā adab al-ṭifl fī al-‘ālam al-‘Arabī", Mudawwanat Aḥmad Ṭūsūn : adab wa-thaqāfat wa-fann. 14/1/2015. https://2u.pw/WMBLOH (2) Toson is a writer for children and a blogger about art and culture for children. He is a member of the Committee on Children's Culture of the Egyptian Supreme Council for Culture. He was awarded the State Appreciation Award for children's literature in 2014.



and Mohamad Al-Harawi and others, Al-Kilani is considered by critics as the founder of Arab children's literature, as he dedicated all his attention to writing for children since he wrote his first story for children *Sinbad the Sailor* in 1927 and until he died in October 9, 1959.

In the second half of the twentieth century Arab children's literature was tied closely to the names of the two great pioneers Abdel-Tawwab Youssef and Yacoub Al-Sharuni, who enriched, and continue to enrich, the Arab Children's Library with their large number of writings and the total dedication to children. This dedication to write for children only, for more than half a century, contributed to making their names synonymous to Egyptian and Arab children's literature. No ungrateful man can deny, and no researcher can overlook the technical qualitative and quantitative leap forward both writers contributed to the Arab library. They liberated Arab children's literature both from the rigidity of (traditional) form and from falling captive to western writings directed to children.

Also we cannot ignore the Arab and Egyptian names that appeared side by side with the two great writers and that played a big role in developing Arab writing for children, such as Sulyiman Al-Eissa, Zakaria Tamer, Shafik Mahdi, Ahmad Naguib, Mahmud Qasem, Fatma Al-Maadul, Al-Mesiri, and Shawqi Hijab and many others, whose writings emerged as attractive examples and

phenomena in the journey of writing to children. However, (with those writers), we will always focus on the name of the writer more than the title he produced due to the huge quantity of works produced by those writers and from others in the same era.

Arab children's literature continued to alternate between being a pedagogic means that allows children to find answers to their questions, and a means that helps them emancipate themselves from traditional ways of thinking and stimulate their imagination and innovativeness.

With the advent of the new millennium, Arab interest in writing for children increased. New big awards were dedicated to writing for children. Most important among them is the Sheikh Zayed Award in the category of children's literature. The award is to be thanked for putting the Cinderella of writing for Arab children: Dr. Affaf Tobbala, in the limelight after her novel *The House and the Palm Tree* received that award in its fifth session.

The House and the Palm Tree was not the writer's first work. It was preceded by other outstanding works that made the writer collect a number of important awards, including that of the Bologna International Book Fair for children for her first book *The Silver Fish*, and the prize of the Ana Lindh Foundation for her book *The Eye*. However, *The House and the Palm Tree*, was like the wand that carried Cinderella from the shadow to fame. And set the readers and all concerned on a journey to excavate



and search for that fairy godmother that brought them from no where one of the most beautiful Arab novels for children and young adults.

Most young adult novels tended either to focus on pedagogic aspects, such as the writings of the great pioneering pedagogue Ali Maher Eid, or to depend on adventures or detective stories to achieve the thriller effect. Affaf Tobbala's bet was on art. She created for her hereon, Bahana, her own mythology as she went on a journey to educate her grandson. She used exuberant and smooth language that she counted on for its inspirational significance and superior techniques, removing from it all excesses or unnecessary digressions. She showed keenness on displaying methodical and rational thinking in the way she built the structure of her novel and the way she conveyed its main idea to her readers.

Affaf Tobbala represents the Arab children's book of the new millennium; she is a model for a new generation that does not abide by rigid established age group divisions. It looks at children's literature mainly as art, without disregarding the pedagogical and behavioral aspects related to the different age groups addressed.

The work of Tobbala, who started writing for children at the age of 65 after retiring as an executive director of the Nile drama television channel, cannot be compared quantitatively with what many others presented to children's literature.

However, what distinguishes her writing is her seriousness and keenness to present high and distinguished quality, that becomes engraved in the imagination of her readership, whether children or adults, and her wagering first and foremost on art; her solidification of reason, methodical thinking and human values. This applies to her distinguished works, including *Old Papers*, *Hola.. Tata..Hola*, *Sika and Mokka*, *Ud El-Sanabel*, *Homecoming Song* and others.

If women are the first founder of the art of writing for children through pram hymns and grandmother stories, there comes a woman, in the third phase of the development of that literature that recaptures the leadership of a form of literature that women established. Such leadership takes place at the hands of a generation that perceives writing for children in a distinctive manner and seeks to catch up with the developments that the different literary and art forms went through; after shedding rigid straightjackets and pedagogical and educational restrictions. Affaf Tobbala and her writings are the best representative of this new writing for children.

Affaf Tobbala is the beautiful Cinderella of children's literature, who provokes the imagination of our children with her magical pen and mixes imagination and reality to hover with our children in a world of innovation.

“Dr. Affaf Tobbala:
The Literature that Appeals to Children Only is No Good”⁽¹⁾
Osama Al-Rhymi⁽²⁾

ثقافة

فازت بأهم جوائز أدب اليافعين آخرها الشيخ خليفة التربوية

د. عفاف طبّالة: الأدب الذي يعجب الأطفال فقط ليس جيدا

■ حوار - أسامة الرحيمي

عرفتها منذ شهور فقط، وأذهلتني أن عيني لم تقع على اسمها من قبل، رغم انقلامي بقراءة الألب منذ أكثر من أربعة عقود. والتهمت كل ما أتت لي من أعمالها دفعة واحدة. منها «السمة الفضية»، وأوراق قديمة، ونوم.. تاتا.. دوم، والبيت والنخلة، والعين، وعود السنايل، ورواية «فك شفرة»، الفائزة مؤخرا بجائزة الشيخ خليفة.

فوجدت نفسي أمام موهبة كبرى، عزوفة عن الأضواء، وأدبية تعرف ما تفعله بدقة. ليس تجاه الأطفال واليافعين وحسب، لكنها تملك قدرة مذهبة على التأثير في الكبار تماما مثل الصغار، وتسعى خلفها الجوائز يا طمئنان.

تزوجت في سن مبكرة، وعملت بوظيفة في التلفزيون، وحازت ليسانس آداب فرنسية وهي أم. ويعده دبلوم إعلام قسم إذاعة، ثم ماجستير في التحقيق التلفزيوني، وكثيرا من إعلام القاهرة عن «أزمة تلفزيونات الخدمة العامة بعد سقوط الاحتكار»، ومارست الإخراج وإعداد البرامج، وكتابة سيناريو تسجيلي، والتحقيقات، وأنتجت أعمالا تسجيلية وروائية قصيرة حاز بعضها جوائز من مهرجانات مصورة عربية. وتولت رئاسة الإدارة المركزية لقناة النيل للدراما، بجانب عملها بالتدريس الجامعي، والقاء المحاضرات في جامعات ومعاهد متعددة، منها «عين شمس»، وآخرها إعلام جامعة أكتوبر للعلوم الحديثة. لهذا كله، لم أستغرب حصولها على شهادات تقدير وجوائز كثيرة، من مهرجان بولونيا ٢٠٠٦، وجائزة سوزان مبارك لأدب الطفل في ٢٠٠٦، و٢٠٠٧، و٢٠٠٨.

د. عفاف طبّالة

قيمة، هذا هو الفن، أحاول تحقيق هذا مثلما فعلت في قصة «سبونك لي اصغقاء»، ليس بالسرد فقط، بل عبر الرسوم الصحاح للقصة أيضا، وهذا التذكير يدخل إلى وجدان القارئ أسرع وأسهل، ويحاطب أحاسيسه أكثر من عطف السطحي، ويجب أن يعمل الكاتب على تعاطف القارئ مع شخصياته داخل العمل، وهذه خطوة مهمة لتقبل القارئ قدم الشخصية ذاتها.

دون ترويع معلن، ومن الممكن إبراز قيم بالية وعتيقة لإدانتها، ففي رواية «فك شفرة»، الفائزة، والتي أشربت إليها في سؤالك، العم يصبر على تزويج ابنته صغيرة السن، لأن هذه قيمة عنده، والرواية تدلن تلك القيمة

ترك له فدائنا بزوعه لكفنه شر العوز، لقد مررت في هذه القصة قيمة اشتراكية أو إنسانية، أي مساندة الفقراء. احتفظ الجد بإنسانيته مع صديقه طوال عمره، وتسويت تلك القيمة إلى إحدى حفيداته. وإذا كان البيت يخص جدي فالشخص هو «حماتي»، فأحيانا يتم خلق بعض القصص بتوليفة من الواقع، مضاف إليها شخصيات خيالية لاستكمال الأحداث، والكاتب يخلق قصصه وأشخاصه وأماكنه من بازل الواقع ليكون عالما جديدا!

لذلك مبررة لأفقتة في حكاياتك، وهي تأخي الكائنات، فهناك حوار صريح بين الإنسان

وجهة نظري واحترامي للأطفال يعني ألا أستعين بهم، فيجب أن تقدم لهم ألبا حقيقيا، ويحسب مضمونة، وبناء شخصيات جيدة، واستخدام مقدرات ملائمة، وتجنب التناقض داخل القصص، وهذا يستوجب التنبه لكثافة المكان والزمان بشكل مشهدي كأنه تتحرك داخل القصة، وتراعي حركة الشمس والظلال مثلا كما يعيشها الأشخاص، ولدي مشكلة في تصنيف الكتب كما استعان بي أحد، فمن الممكن لطفل أكل عشر سنوات أن يستوعب قصصا للأطفال في سن أكبر، والعكس أيضا، فقصتي «عود السنايل» بالمفهوم العلمي للتصنيف، نص يخص لمن هم أكبر من اثنتي عشر عاما، لكن أظنلا أصغر أجيالها فنسب الحكم على قدرة الأطفال على الاستيعاب متفاوتة حسب قدراتهم الذهنية، وليست أعمارهم، ما يجعل حكيتها للصغار أمرا مشوقا ومعتادا، وهذا نوع من تشجيع الأطفال على القراءة ومثلها استمتاع الكبار بالقصص نفسها.

الرسوم أيضا مقيمة لدرجة «منافسة» النص في جماله، فأى قلب سخي هذا الذي يقبل اقتسام النجاح مع فنان آخر؟ هنادي سليطه، رسمت «عود السنايل» في عامين، وحصلت على جائزة غير جائزة «عود السنايل» والرسامون معي مجهزون لكل فكرة رسمة خاصة.

والرسوم المتعددة تشجع الرسامين على الإبداع أكثر، كما أن عملي كمتخرجة بالتلفزيون جعلني أفكر بالصورة، بلغة الصورة أكثر توصيلا، حتى مفرداتي لا تكون أحكاما بل هي وصف لما يحدث، تعتمد في نقل المعاني على علامات طبيعية أكثر مما تعتمد على الأخبار في كل أعمالك لا بد من وجود الشخص

I got to know her a few months ago, and I was stunned. I had never heard of her earlier despite being a regular reader of literature for more than 40 years. I devoured all what I could get my hands on from her literature in one go: “Decoding”, “The Silver Fish”, “Old Papers”, “Dom..Tata..Dom,” “The House

and the Palm Tree” and “The Eye”. This freshly published book, “Decoding”, was awarded the Sheikh Khalifa Prize. I recognized I had in front of me a wonderful talent that shies away from the spotlight and a writer who knows exactly what she is doing, not just for children and young adults, but also has

(1) El-Rhymi, Osama (Interviewer). “al-Adab alladhī y’jb al-atfāl faqaṭ laysa jydā.” *Al-Ahram*, April 15, 2018, p17.

Also published in:

El-Rhymi, Osama. *Bawh al-mubdi‘īn : hiwārāt Usāmah alrhymy*. Cairo: Egyptian General Book Organization, 2019, pp. 259-264

(2) Osama Al-Rhymi is a journalist specialized in culture and the editor of the cultural section of Al-Ahram daily newspaper.

an amazing ability to influence adults as well, making awards chase her.

She was young when she got married and had worked in the Radio and TV Union. She earned a bachelor's degree in French while raising her children. She subsequently went on to receive a Media Diploma in broadcasting, a Master's in TV Documentaries, and eventually a Doctorate from Cairo University's Faculty of Media. Her dissertation addressed the crisis of Public Service Television after the demise of its monopoly. She practiced directing, script writing, and produced documentaries and short movies, some of which won awards in Egyptian and Arab festivals. She founded and directed the Nile Drama Channel, in addition to her academic teaching in several universities and institutes, most notably Ain Shams University and most recently the October University for Modern Sciences.

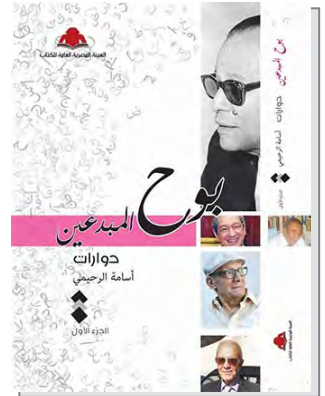
I was not surprised she received multiple awards and tributes, including the Bologna Festival in 2006, the Suzanne Mubarak Prize for Children's Literature in 2006 and 2007, her works being included in the "Arab 101 Book Project", the World Council for Children's Books (IBBY) Honor List, Sheikh Zayed Children's Literature Prize for "The House and The Palm Tree" in 2011, "Anna Lindh" Award for Children's Books in 2011 and Children's Book Etisalat Award in 2013. Most recently, she won The Khalifa Educational Award 2018 for her novel "Decoding", in a big celebration in Abu Dhabi.

She conducted research in topics such as documentary material in television programs, the future of documentary cinema, cultural programs in Arab television, the role of professional women in filmmaking. She also wrote opinion pieces in news magazines.

She is a member of the Association of Film Critics, the Writers' Union, and the Filmmaking Syndicate. She is the mother of the diplomat Amal Mourad, a former assistant minister for foreign affairs, and Amr Mourad, a consulting engineer.

Your works are loaded with values without any hint of preaching, how did you arrive at this surprising formula: conveying values while avoiding avoiding crude repugnant lecturing lecturing, as demonstrated in "Decoding," which won the Sheikh Khalifa Award, which you will soon receive?

Most authors introduce values in their works, but in my opinion, the kind of values is what matters. Extremism is a value, controlling women's presence in the public sphere is a value. These values freeze society in a static rigid state, or even set it back. We must present modern values, such as calling for education and





women's freedom; values that promote development and change for the better. Then the second step: how to convey these values within your stories? In a direct or an indirect manner? I believe I present modern principles in all of my writing, avoiding a preaching tone or directness, just as life provides values in the details, through the accumulation of experiences, scenes, and sayings. Values are implicit, without fabrication or contortion. Even information needs to be expressed in the dramatic fabric and brought to life in the storytelling, emulating life as it conveys meaningful values. This is art. I try to accomplish this as I did in the story "I Will Have Friends," not just through narration but also through illustration. This reaches the reader's deeper consciousness more quickly and easily and speaks to his emotions rather than his superficial mind. The writer must work to elicit sympathy for his characters from the reader within the work. This is a crucial step for the reader to accept the values of the character itself, without propaganda. It is also possible to highlight outdated and antiquated traditions to denounce them. In the award-winning novel "Decoding," which you mentioned, the uncle insists on marrying his young daughter, because this corresponds to a value he holds, which the narrative decries as outmoded by emphasizing the importance of education first since this is the priority. The call is for modern principles through normal events.

Is it deliberate that the location is an important contributor to events and an influence on the characters in most of your work, such as in your books "Old Papers," "The House and the Palm Tree," and "Decoding," or is this just how things are?

Geography and history are crucial factors since all works, like life, take place in a certain location and period. Sometimes the author intentionally depicts a nowhere in particular, even then the setting must have qualities that shape the characters and serve the plot. In "Decoding", the location casts a shadow over Tomader and the children. "An old, remote and secluded house" played a role in how the events unfolded. Children formerly believed that everything old was obsolete, yet their shared existence forced them to alter that idea! Simply said, the climate has created some uncertainty that allowed the children to reconsider their preconceptions and understand that not all what is old is negative, such as their attitude to the mosquito net, which doctors concluded is the best method for preventing malaria. That is how the value was transmitted. We shouldn't reject the entire Internet or stereotype all youngsters centered around their mobile devices in a negative light. The older generation, just because it had not used the Internet and is not willing to learn how to, views all digital technology negatively. I recall, for instance, how shocked my mother was when we first heard Abdul Halim Hafez's songs. Later, I was astonished by the "hard



rock” and “metal” music, that my son used to hear, before I realized that every generation has its own circumstances and preferences. It is equally true of the attitude of the new generations to all that is old. Intergenerational contact can clear that aspect.

Sometimes I draw inspiration from the locations I encountered because they had a deep impact on me. The house in “Decoding” was a product of my imagination, but in “Old Papers” it is virtually that of my grandfather.

There is also the value of friendship in the novel “Old Papers”, with the beauty of what the grandfather did for his friend when he left an acre of land to cultivate to protect him from need.

In that story I expressed socialist and humanist values by emphasizing supporting the poor. Throughout his life, the grandfather preserved a humanist empathy in the relationship with his lifelong friend, a value he indirectly passed down to one of his grandchildren.

If the house in the book simulated my grandfather’s, the character of the grandpa was inspired by my father-in-law. A writer constructs his story, combining elements from reality, adding imaginary characters to complement the plot, thereby creating a new world of his own.

You have a unique element in your stories, namely that of the fraternity among distinct beings. There is a

straightforward dialogue between humans, birds, fish, palm trees, and even objects move and take part in events. Is it a reflection of your faith in partnership among all beings or merely a clever play on young children’s curiosity and malleable imagination?

Children in general love animals. You will find an interesting dialogue in The House and Palm Tree between the boy and the palm. Objects can communicate. When I was young, I wrote an essay about the French poet Alphonse de Lamartine, who said in one of his poems: “O soulless things, do you have a soul attached to us that forces us to Love? ». Sometimes it is possible to have a spiritual relationship with non-human beings and objects, much like the donkey and “Bahana” in “The House and the Palm Tree”. Every being, regardless of what it is, has a code and language, and humans must learn it. In “Decoding,” young Shehab interpreted the tone of barking of the dog to learn that the person approaching is both a stranger to the house and one with ill intentions. Out of arrogance, one can have the illusion that he controls that code or language depending on his five senses. All my life, I developed relationships with my possessions. Kids occasionally ask me: “does the fish talk”. The role of the artist is to have the child willingly engage with the illusion. The capacity of



the writer to expand the young reader's ability to understand depends on his capacity to provoke belief in the sincerity of his story. This happened in the end of "The House and The Palm Tree," when the boys believed that "the House and the tree" walked like humans to participate in saving Fares. It is nice to have this happen in the novel!

The totality of your literature is as enjoyable to adults as it is to the young, as if it is trans-generational, and not directed to a specific age group. Is it your ability to attractively convey values or the charm of your storytelling craft?

From my perspective, literature that exclusively appeals to children is no good. My respect for children means that I never underestimate them. We must provide them with real literature, a well-planned plot, well-developed characters, proper use of vocabulary, and making sure there are no internal contradictions in the text. This requires paying close attention to transforming location and time into words in a scene-based writing that allows the reader to move inside the story. You need to take into consideration, for example, the movement of the sun and the shadow as people really experience it.

I have a problem responding to requests for assistance in the age classification of books, as it is possible for a child older than ten to absorb stories for older children, and vice versa. My story "Oud El-Sanabel", according to

established classification, is appropriate for over 12-year-olds, yet younger children enjoyed it! A child's capacity varies according to intellectual capacity more than age and recounting a story to a younger child can be exciting and enjoyable, instigating a love of reading. Adults themselves enjoying the stories can have the same effect.

Illustrations in your books are so distinguished that they compete with the text in its beauty. What generous heart accepts sharing success with another artist?

Hanadi Sileet drew "Oud El-Sanabel" in two years and she won a prize on her own separate from the prize I won for Oud El-Sanabel. Illustrators that work with me are invited to create special drawing for each paragraph. This multiplicity stimulates the artists to innovate more. Moreover, my previous work as a television director made me think in visual terms, which reaches readers more easily. My vocabulary is less judgmental and more descriptive to actions and depends on natural signs, and not telling, to convey meaning.

In all your works there is always a character that functions as a depository of values, such as the grandmother in "The House and Palm Tree," grandpa in "Old Papers," and Tomader in "Decoding". Do you feel that such characters offer depth to society, that inspire others on how to manage and



lead their lives. And do you believe in the role of micro level leadership and the guardians of morals within the family?

Sincerity in writing is what breeds great meaning and vision! Senior characters in my work may be explained by me being a senior grandmother. I promote intergenerational connection. Maybe I would not have been aware of that had I been younger. At the same time, the absence of the role models for young people is extremely dangerous. When you ask children and young people about their role models now, they refer to strange names, for nothing other than their ability to make millions. Money has become the value. Years ago, it wasn't necessary for a role model to be a celebrity; he or she might be a regular teacher if he embodies great values. Gone is the generation which says to someone who crossed their path in life, "you taught me so and so, you made me love doing something." If we realize how

important it is to set a model for future generations, we could do great things.

You started writing at a relatively old age, what enticed your creative spirit? Doesn't it seem counterintuitive? Did your storytelling to your grandchildren encourage you to transform your oral stories into writing.

Even if that delay was a bit odd, it didn't prevent me from starting! I started with writing narration for documentaries and my master's and later doctoral theses. I got married with just a middle school certificate and three months later I took an accelerated high school diploma. I completed my bachelor's degree between my two pregnancies, with all the difficulties that entailed. My delay in writing is as unusual as my biography as a whole! I didn't view life as one battle but enjoyed the details from raising my son and daughter, home making, working as a director, and finally, creative writing.



Links to some TV Interviews

<https://youtu.be/0ddqV9vPP14>

<https://youtu.be/9HIZJBQe-Ms>

<https://youtu.be/6j5Fcs4KFsl>

4



Awards and Distinctions

2006

Ragazzi Award Mention in the “New Horizons” category in the Bologna Book Fair for Children Literature for *al-Samakah al-fiddīyah* (The Silver Fish)

Suzan Mubarak Prize for Children’s Literature for *al-Samakah al-fiddīyah* (The Silver Fish)

2007

Selection of *al-Samakah al-fiddīyah* (The Silver Fish) in the US AID supported “National Book Project” for distribution in the libraries of all public primary schools in Egypt.

Suzan Mubarak Prize for Children’s Literature for *Sīkā wa mwkā* (Sika & Mokka)

Selection of *Hulm jadīd* (A New Dream) in the US AID supported “National Book Project” for distribution in the libraries of all public primary schools in Egypt.



2009 **Etisalat Prize for Arab Children's Literature Short-listing** for *Dum... tātā ... dum* (Dom... Tata... Dom)

Selection of *Dum... tātā ... dum* (Dom... Tata... Dom) for publication in Maktabat Al-Osra (The Family Library), a national program for publishing "masterpiece titles" in subsidized editions for wide distribution

Selection of *Awrāq qadīmah* (Old Papers) in the US AID supported "National Book Project" for distribution in the libraries of all public middle schools in Egypt.

2010 **IBBY List of Honor** for *Sīkā wa mwkā* (Sika & Mokka)

Anna Lindh Foundation Honor List for Children's Books in the Arab World for *Awrāq qadīmah* (Old Papers)

2011 **Sheikh Zayed Award** for Children's Literature in the Arab World for *al-Bayt wālnkhlh* (The House and the Palm Tree)

Anna Lindh Foundation Award for Arab Children's Literature for *al- 'Ayn* (The Eye)

Selected for membership in the National Committee of School Libraries of the Ministry of Education.

2012 Third story of *Awrāq qadīmah* (Old Papers) produced by the Ministry of Culture of Jordan as a play in the Children's Drama Festival in Amman

Selection of *al-Bayt wālnkhlh* (The House and the Palm Tree) as book of the month in the Readers' Club of The Arab Book Forum.

2013 *al-Bayt wālnkhlh* (*The House and the Palm Tree*) selected as curricular reading in several high schools in Egypt

Etisalat Award for Arab Children's Literature Book of the Year for *'Ūd al-Sanābil* (Oud Elsanabel)



2015 **Etisalat Award for Arab Children's Literature Short-listing** for Best Writing of *Unshūdat al-'Awdah* (Homecoming Chant)

Tribute for contribution to Art for Children by the Cairo Festival for Children's Cinema

Hans Christian Andersen Award Nomination by the Egyptian Board of Books for Young People (EBBY) in 2016

2016 Selection of *'Ūd al-Sanābil* (Oud El-sanabel) by the Toledo School of Translation (Spain) in the Program of Translation of Children and Young Adults Arab Literature to Spanish

Etisalat Award for Arab Children's Literature Short-listing for Best Writing of *Shams* (The Sun)

2018 **IBBY List of Honor for Best Writing** for *Unshūdat al-'Awdah* (Homecoming Chant)

Khalifa Award for Education Prize of Educational Authorship for *Fakk Shafrat* (Decoding)

Selection of *Unshūdat al-'Awdah* (Homecoming Chant) for the Arabic collection of the Munich Library

2019 Selection of *al-Bayt wālnkhlh* (The House and the Palm Tree) for publication in Maktabat Al-Osra (The Family Library), a national program for publishing "masterpiece titles" in subsidized editions for wide distribution

Selection of *al-Bayt wālnkhlh* (The House and the Palm Tree) for the Arabic collection of the Munich Library

Tribute by Hayat International Academy for Contribution in Enriching Arab Cultural Life.



2021

Book for Young Adults in Etisalat Award for Arab Children’s Literature for *Hurūb Ṣaghīr* (Runaway Kid)

Sawiris Award for Children’s Books Long-listing of *Riḥlat ilā nab‘ jadīd* (Journey to a New Watering Hole)

2022

Approval of a PhD Dissertation from Alexandria University by Lin Yuqian with the title: “Affaf Tobbala’s Literature for Children (Characteristics and Trends): An Analytical Critical Study”

Ongoing

A Master’s Degree Thesis from Allama Tabtaba’i University in Iran by Sanaz Sharifi under the title: Children’s Literature in Iran and Egypt between Sawsan Takdis and Affaf Tobbala: A Comparative Study with Emphasis on Cultural Roots”



**Sheikh Zayed Award,
Abu Dhabi (UAE), 2011**



**Anna Lindh Foundation
Award , Cairo (Egypt). 2011**



**Etisalat Award,
Sharjah (UAE), 2013**



**Tribute by Cairo Festival for
Children’s Cinema, Cairo (Egypt), 2015**



**Khalifa Award, Abu Dhabi
(UAE), 2018**



**Etisalat Award, Sharjah
(UAE), 2021**



Tobbala, Affaf. *al-Samakah alfidyh* (The Silver Fish); illus. by Adly Rizqallah. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2005.



Tobbala, Affaf. *Sikā wa Mwkā* (Sika & Mokka); illus. by Mohamad Nabil. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2006.



Tobbala, Affaf. '*Hulm jadīd* (A New Dream); illus. by Hanadi Sileet. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2007.



Tobbala, Affaf. *Dum... tātā... dum* (Dom...Tata...Dom); illus. (clay molding). by Samar Salahedine. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2008.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***Dum... tātā... dum*** (Dum...Tata...Dum); illus. (clay molding) by Samar Salahedine. Cairo: Maktabet El-Osra, 2009.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***Awrāq qadīmah*** (Old Papers); illus. by Hanadi Sileet. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2009.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***al-Bayt wālnkhlh*** (The House and the Palm Tree), illus. by Hanadi Sileet. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2009.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***al-Bayt wālnkhlh*** (The House and the Palm Tree), illus. by Hanadi Sileet. Cairo: Maktabat Al-Osra, 2019.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***Hanyn*** (Hanyn); illus. by Manal Rashed. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2009.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***Trāk ... tātā ... trāk*** (Trak..Tata..Trak); illus. (clay molding) by Samar Salahedine. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2010.



Tobbala, Affaf. *al-'Ayn* (The Eye); illus. Hanadi Sileet. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2010.



Tobbala, Affaf. *Hulā tātā hulā* (Hola ...Tata...Hola); illus. (clay molding) by Samar Salahedine. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2011.



Tobbala, Affaf. *'Ūd al-Sanābil* (Oud El-Sanabel); illus. Hanadi Sileet. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2013.



Tobbala, Affaf. *Unshūdat al-'Awdah* (The Homecoming Chant); illus. by Reem Heiba. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2014.



Tobbala, Affaf. *Shams* (The Sun); illus. by Hanadi Sileet. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2016.



Tobbala, Affaf. *sa-Yakūn lī Aṣḍiqā'* (I Will Have Friends); illus. by Hanadi Sileet. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2017.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***Fakk Shafrat*** (Decoding); illus. by Aya Rizq. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2018.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***Hurub Saghir*** (Runaway Kid); illus. by Mariam Hany. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2019.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***Rihlat ila nab' jadid*** (Journey to a New Watering Hole); illus. by Basma Hossam. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2020.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***al-Matāhah*** (The Maze); illus. by Lina Naddaf. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2021.



Tobbala, Affaf. ***al-Nāfidhah*** (The Window); illus. by Mohamad Taha. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2021.



Tobbala, Affaf and Hegra Elsaywy. ***Rihlat al-huruf al-'Arabīyah*** (The Journey of Arabic Letters); illus. by Wurud Mostafa. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2021.

6

List of Translations

English

The Silver Fish (al-Samakah alfiḍyḥ). Translated by Sarah Enany. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2006.

Sika & Mokka (Sīkā wa mwkā). Translated by Amina Zaineldine. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2015.

Dom...Tata...Dom (Dum tātā dum). Translated by Yasmine Motawy. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2009.

A New Dream (Ḥulm jadīd). Translated by Sally Said. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2015.

Trak..Tata..Trak (Trāk tātā trāk). Translated by Yasmine Motawy. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2015.



The Eye (al-‘Ayn). Translated by Yasmine Motawy. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2015.

Oud El-Sanabel (‘Ūd al-Sanābil). Translated by Cairo Publishing House. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2015

Homcoming Chant (Unshūdat al-‘Awdah). Translated by Amal Mostafa. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, under publication.

Runaway Kid (Hurūb Ṣaghīr). Translated by Amal Mostafa. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, under Publication.

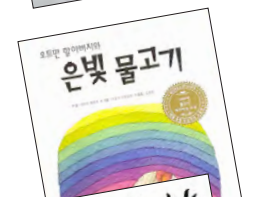
Korean 은빛 물고기 (al-Samakah alfidyih). Korea Piaget Publishing Group, 2007.

Turkish *Gümüş Balık* (al-Samakah alfidyih). Translated by Ayşe D. Taşkent. Istanbul: Mavi Ucurtma, 2006.

Spanish *Tallo de Trigo* (‘Ūd al-Sanābil). Translated by Álvaro Abella. Toldeo: Verbum, 2017.

Braille *al-Samakah alfidyih*. Transcribed by Mohamad Hassan Al-Zayyaty. Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2007.

Sīkā wa mwkā. Transcribed by Mohamad Hassan Al-Zayyaty Cairo: Nahdet Misr, 2009.





Top Ten Books



al-Samakah alfidyh (The Silver Fish)

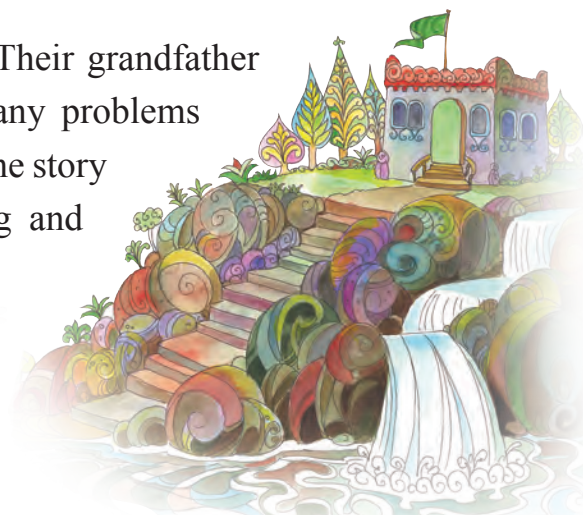
This is a story about an unusual relationship between a poor fisherman and a shining silver fish. The fish pleads the fisherman to release her from his net and in return promises him to come back with an idea to help him in his livelihood. The fisherman trusts her and releases her, she keeps her word and comes back.

The course of the story leads the fisherman to plead that the fish stays clear of fishermen's nets.

The book is accompanied by an audio-visual CD.

Sikā wa Mwkā (Sika & Mokka)

Sika and Mokka are two brothers and close friends. Their grandfather gave them a beautiful house to share. They face many problems because the house was designed for only one person. The story accompanies them through tasks of problem solving and sharing. They also face the question of how best to benefit from an inheritance from times gone by.



Ḥulm jadīd (A New Dream)



Bado the monkey, whose biggest enjoyment is eating and his dreams about food, accidentally makes two new friends: Sila the sparrow and Marmar the fish. After having had to recount his nightmare to them, Bado asks his new friends about their dreams. As their friendship strengthens, Bado's main concern changes to helping them achieve their big dreams; and through that he discovers a new source of enjoyment.

Dum... tāṭā... dum (Dom...Tata...Dom)

This is the first of a series with the title “*The Cocomba Adventures*”.

A herd of elephants goes for a walk, keeping baby elephants surrounded and protected by adult elephants. Cocomba, the little elephant, protests as this prevents him from any enjoyment during the walk.

The herd leader agrees to take Cocomba on a special walk, in which he is allowed more freedom. During this walk he enjoys the new experiences he longed for but encounters the troubles his family wanted to protect him from.

The book is accompanied by an animated audio-visual CD in Arabic and in English.

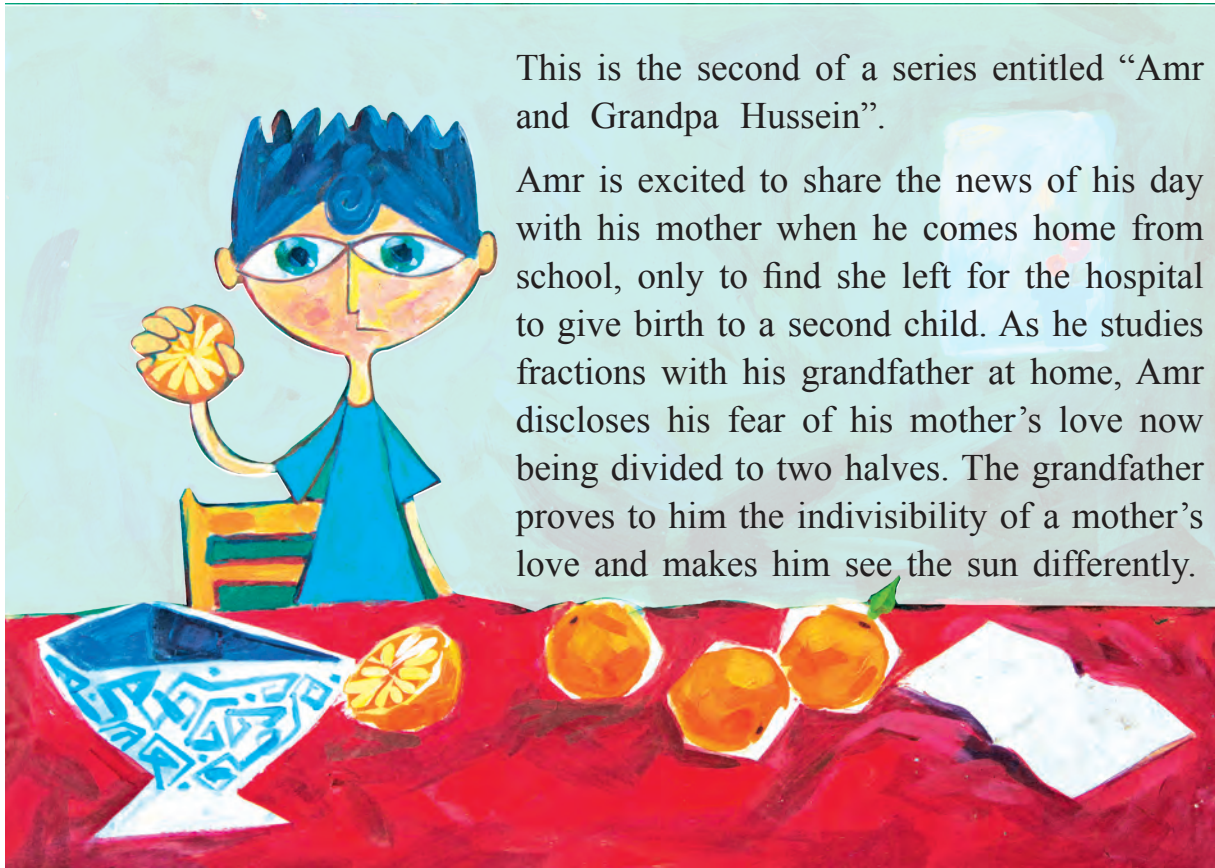


Awrāq qadīmah (Old Papers)

This book is composed of three short stories for young adults. They recount the childhood memories of the same girl from her own perspective at an older age. Her subtle stories show how time revealed to her new dimensions about the past. Her heartfelt behavior and her insistence on standing up for what she believed and felt, though partially costly at the time, was a treasure of satisfaction, opportunity and love saved for later.



Shams (The Sun)



This is the second of a series entitled “Amr and Grandpa Hussein”.

Amr is excited to share the news of his day with his mother when he comes home from school, only to find she left for the hospital to give birth to a second child. As he studies fractions with his grandfather at home, Amr discloses his fear of his mother’s love now being divided to two halves. The grandfather proves to him the indivisibility of a mother’s love and makes him see the sun differently.

Fakk Shafrat (Decoding)

This novel for middle school young readers recounts the events of the seven-day stay of Shehab, Fady and Tommy with Ms. Tomader in, what seemed to be an old and remote countryside house. To start with Tomader feels entrapped and the kids feel bored. This all changes with what every day of their stay brings. The suspenseful events help decipher the code of each character. Each character gets to understand itself and everybody else better, making their stay the most memorable experience of their lives.





Rihlat ilá nab' jadīd (Journey to a New Watering hole)

This primary school children story recounts how a young elephant experiences the migration of his herd to escape drought and food scarcity and search for a new watering hole to build a new life. The challenges, adventures and achievements of the journey make the elephant grow and value his family even more. But it does not make missing his friends any easier.



al-Nāfidhah (The Window)

This is a picture book for primary school children that traces the thoughts of Youssef in reaction to what he sees from the window of the car in the middle of crowded traffic. It shows us the different dimensions of his dream for a better existence.



al-Matāhah (The Maze)

This is a picture book for primary school children that tells the story of a lonely boy who gets lost in a maze he entered looking for his ball. In his search for the way out he finds friendship instead.



8



Five Books Sent to the Jurors

al-Bayt wālnkhlh (The House and the Palm Tree)

This young adults' novel tells the story of Bahana, a grandmother, and Fares her grandson, in Egypt of the 1930s. They leave their remote desert house, to embark on fulfilling Fares' father's wish of giving him a formal education. With minimal resources Bahana leaves the only life she knows and heads to the far away town where the school is located. She settles in a village just out of the town to fulfil her mission from there. Her will of steel, dedication to the community, and instinctive ingenuity she achieves her personal mission, helps the friends of her grandson, and transforms life in the village, even after she passes away.



Book Reviews



Novel Calls for Education for all⁽¹⁾

by Hala El-Zahed⁽²⁾

Novel calls for education for all

By Hala El Zahed

The *House and the Palm Tree* by Afaf Tobbala, winner of El-Sheikh Zayed Award for Children's Literature, is by far one of the best novels for young people on the market these days. Three cheers for Afaf!

Divided into 14 chapters, Afaf entices readers of all ages to appreciate the significance of certain values: preciseness, frankness, persistence, perseverance, diligence and wisdom. In a rhetorical manner, Afaf stresses

constraints by addressing gender inequality that finds its roots in most Egyptian villages.

The Arabic novel mainly talks about a poor old woman, Bahana, and her grandson, Fares, who embark on a long journey to create a new home in a new village.

Having almost lost her son, Abdallah, who seeks refuge from the British occupiers' tyranny in the mountains, Bahana has to undertake the journey on her own, while keeping her promise to him to educate his son.

Despite her poverty, Bahana has what it takes to win the villagers' hearts. She encourages them to educate their children, both boys and girls.

She encounters a lot of trouble with the

education, because her own son, Said, has dropped out of school. With the help of the mayor's ill-reputed entourage, Baheega appears to never run out of wicked plans to stop the determined Bahana from pursuing her dream.

The novel does not only focus on Bahana, Fares, Baheega, and Said, as there is also the young Sarhan, a pathological liar.

Then there is Warda, Fares' beloved and future wife, and Borai the daydreamer; who once fell in love with a Bedouin girl who disappeared without trace leaving him bereft and lovelorn.

Afaf keeps her feet firmly on the ground, dealing with death as a fact of life. Indeed, Bahana's own death motivates the villagers to stand up and do something to

to Baheega's cunning and encourages the villagers to speak up.

Afaf wraps up her neatly woven plot by giving life to her young characters who prove Fares' innocence, getting him released from jail, so he can sit his school's final exams.

Inspired by Bahana, the villagers stand up for what's right and fair.

In the dream that most of the village women have of Bahana's blue gown and white scarf, a walking house and a palm tree, Afaf ends her enchanting novel, giving readers hope of overcoming their problems and despair. Writing in 2009, Afaf seems to have predicted the young Egyptians' revolution.

"It's as if the village in *The House and the Palm Tree* went to Tahrir Square."

The House and the Palm Tree by Affaf Tobbala winner of the El-Sheikh Zayed Award for Children's Literature, is by far one of the best novels for young people on the market these days. Three cheers for Affaf!

Divided into 14 chapters, Affaf entices readers of all ages to appreciate the significance of certain values: preciseness, frankness, persistence, perseverance, diligence, and wisdom.

In a rhetorical manner, Affaf stresses the importance of education for all, while shedding light on societal constraints by addressing gender inequality that finds its roots in most Egyptian villages.

The Arabic novel mainly talks about a poor old woman, Bahana, and her grandson, Fares, who embark on a long journey to create a new home in a new village.

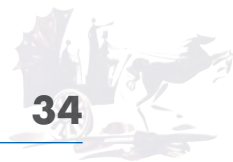
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She encounters a lot of trouble with

(1) El-Zahed, Hala. "Novel Calls for Education for all", **Egyptian Mail**, March 6 2012, p. 9.

(2) Professor of Journalism in Modern Sciences and Arts University



the mayor's wife, Baheega, who seems jealous of any child who continues his education, because her own son, Said, has dropped out of school. With the help of the mayor's ill-reputed entourage, Baheega appears to never run out of wicked plans to stop the determined Bahana from pursuing her dream.

The novel does not only focus on Bahana, Fares, Baheega and Said, as there is also the young Sarhan, a pathological liar.

Then there is Warda, Fares' beloved and future wife, and Bora'i the daydreamer, who once fell in love with a Bedouin girl who disappeared without trace leaving him bereft and lovelorn.

Affaf keeps her feet firmly on the ground, dealing with death as fact of life. Indeed, Bahana's own death motives the villagers to stand up and do something to villagers to stand up and something to save Fares from an offence he has never committed;

thus, her death spells an end to Baheega's cunning and encourages the villagers to speak up.

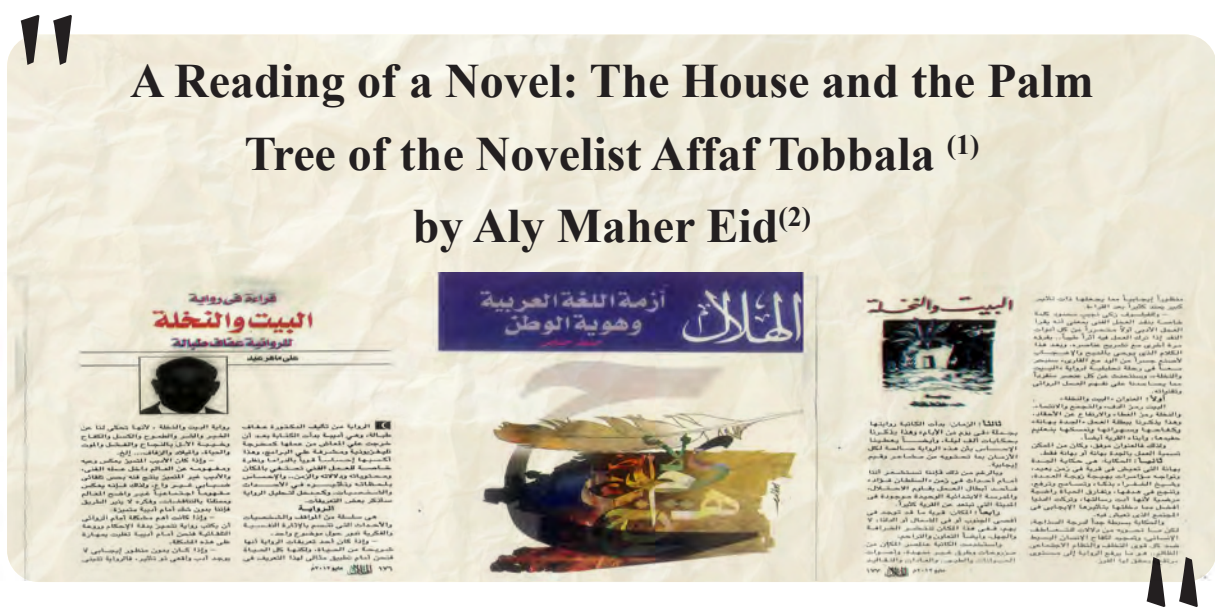
Affaf wraps up her neatly woven plot by giving life to her young characters who prove Fares' innocence, getting him released from jail, so he can sit his school's final exams.

Inspired by Bahana, the villagers stand up for what's right and fair.

In the dream that most of the village women have of Bahana's blue gown and white scarf, a walking house and a palm tree, Affaf ends her enchanting novel, giving readers hope of overcoming their problems and despair. Writing in 2009, Affaf seems to have predicted the young Egyptians' revolution.

"It's as if the village in *The House and the Palm Tree* went to Tahrir square," comments Ya'koub el-Sharouny, who writes children's books.





The novel is written by Dr. Affaf Tobbala, who started writing after retiring as a television director and producer, a profession that contributed to her strong sense of drama. It also gave her a special view of the artwork that celebrates the location, its components and its significance. It also celebrates time and senses its moments and its effect on events and characters.

- If one of the definitions of a novel is that it is a section of life, and at the same time it is life as a whole, we are in front of an ideal application of this definition in *The House and the Palm Tree*, because it tells us about good and evil, ambition and laziness, hard work and despair, success and failure, life and death, birth and wedding and similar things.

- If an outstanding writer reflects his awareness and concept of the world inside his artwork, and the mediocre writer produces his art from a foggy spontaneous lack of awareness, as he expresses an unclear social concept full of contradictions unable to light the road ahead, then we are with this novel indeed in front of an outstanding writer.
- And if the most important problem facing a novelist is writing a novel that is both tightly plotted and marvelously spontaneous, then we are here facing a novelist that cleverly overcome that problem.
- And if a positive outlook is essential for a realist literature that has a strong impact, then this novel does adopt a positive outlook that makes its impact extend long after reading the text.

(1) Maher, Aly. "Qera'a fi Rewayet Al-bayt wa Annakhlah Lerewa'yah Affaf Tobbala", **al-Hilal**. Cairo: Dar al-Hilal. May 2012. pp. 176-179. (only excerpts have been translated for length of article).
 (2) A pioneer of children's literature and critic with more than 500 titles.



Second: the story line:

It is the story of grandmother Bahana, who lives in a village in a time gone by. She faces the conspiracies of Bahiga, the wife of the mayor of the village, and the village chief of watchman, with intelligence, tolerance and keeping the higher moral ground. She succeeds in achieving her objectives and departs life satisfied because she fulfilled her duty, and she left the world better than when she entered it by her positive influence on the community she lived in.

The story line is simple to the degree of naiveté, but the human sympathy it reflects, and its exaltation of the struggle of the simple individual against the regressive forces and the unjust social system, is what elevates the novel to high levels and makes it a winner.

Fourth: the setting:

The village could be in the extreme south, the north or the delta, it does not matter. There, superstition and ignorance as well as cooperation and empathy are widespread. The writer successfully used the elements of the setting, including plants, unpaved roads, sounds of animals and birds as well as the customs and traditions that govern the behavior of those who inhabit that setting.

Seventh: the characters:

There is no better developed character in this novel than Bahana (the main character). ... I think that the writer succeeded to a certain extent in the main character Bahana, and to some extent in the character of Bora'i, but all other characters tend to be one dimensional.

Eighth: the relations between characters:

The main relationship between the grandmother and her grandson needed situations that would reveal better the emotions of the grandson, and the love and gratitude that link him to her. There is no relationship that raises admiration except that between Bahana and Rameh the donkey, which is a relationship drawn with extreme humanity and sensitivity that speaks well of the writer.

Finally, we come to the most important element of the novel, and that is suspense and the most effective element of it, and that is fighting against time.

- This fight against time happens to save an innocent person, to escape a dilemma or to clarify an opinion.
- It also happens from raising important questions for the novel and delaying the answer to a later point.
- Suspense also happens from the bewilderment of the reader and his anxiety.



- Surprises has an effect on the receiver.
- The most important element of suspense is the creation of a predicament resulting from the conflict between the characters and then saving the characters from that predicament.

The writer used suspense cleverly in the second part of the novel, which appeared in the traps set by Bahiga for Bahana, particularly selling the donkey Rameh and her conspiracy with the chief watchman to accuse Bahana of stealing it, until the truth is exposed.

And in the final scene the incarceration of Fares in the police station happened at a critical time that could have resulted in preventing him from taking his exam. The youngsters moved, led by Warda, to

save Fares, which mobilized the whole village.

It was a wonderful scene designed skillfully by the writer.

The use of the elements of suspense was central to the novel's attractiveness, to the degree that the readers are short of breath as they read the novel.

I invite all writers to study the application of the elements of suspense in the novel and apply them to their writings. And the final assessment of this novel is that it is a beautiful and strong addition that equals international novels such as *Rebecca* and *Heidi*.

This novel opens the door widely to writers to write simple beautiful deep novels that seek to implant positive values.



al-‘Ayn (The Eye)

This is the first of a series entitled “Amr and Grandpa Hussein” On his way home from school, Amr feels Hatem’s eye watching him. This eye follows him home and into his room. He fails to escape it or hide from it. His grandfather senses his fear and tries to find out the truth behind this disturbing eye. The dialogue between Amr and his grandfather reveals a blunder Amr had committed and had to set straight.



Book Review



The Eye of Affaf Tobbala between Culture and Story Telling⁽¹⁾ by Samar Ibrahim⁽²⁾

The Eye is one of the outstanding books directed both to children and their parents. On the one hand, it crystallizes for children the concept of the “Conscience”. It focuses on several important qualities that a child should acquire, such as courage, the ability to confess mistakes and to rectify them. It makes it a point to clarify the difference between children’s mischief and a moral fault like stealing and lying; the moral fault cannot be justified. It also points out to children the importance of resorting to adults whenever their thoughts are unsettled, they fall prey to confusion, or are in a

situation of danger (the grandfather in this story).

On the other hand, it is a book directed to adults. The character of the grandfather in the story is a model that embodies the right way to deal with children: in his friendship, in his kind supervision that respects the feelings and avoids intruding in affairs, in his wise handling in the case of small or large mistakes, and in his overcoming of feelings of outrage or anger to assist the child in the problems he is facing or the pain he is going through and may be hiding out of timidity or lack of confidence in others.

(1) Ibrahim, Samar. “‘Ayn Affaf Tobbala bayn Athaqafah Wasard”, Mudawanat Ahmad Toson 20/1/2015.
http://ahmedtoson.blogspot.com/2015/01/blog-post_18.html?sref=fb

(2) A critic and researcher of children’s literature and books



These points above were presented in a superb style of storytelling without any words of outright preaching; a style of storytelling that followed the outward actions of both the boy and the grandfather, as well as their internal psychological development, including emotions and reactions.

The Eye: a symbol of the conscience

The story revolves around what seems to be a simple line. There is some eye watching the boy Amr on his way home from school, which he was taking alone that day, without his friend Hatem who usually joins him every day, which makes it a day different from every day. The eye follows him home, into his room and wherever he looks. When the grandfather notices the state of disarray of Amr, he tries to find out the reason why he sees this imaginary eye. He discovers that he has taken with him the game-boy of his friend Hatem, without his permission to practice on it during the weekend and then return it to him after that. He explains that he always loses in this game because Hatem gets to practice during the weekend, which Amr considers unfair. The grandfather advises Amr to confess his mistake to his friend and to apologize to him. The eye then disappears, and the smile returns to Amr's face.

The reader should not think this is a story an ethics story; it is rather about a situation that children and parents can face in different forms, namely that a child commits a mistake and justifies it to himself in such a way that dilutes its

weight on him. The story points in implicit language to the way to handle such a situation, which we can face every day.

Why the eye in particular?

The human eye in culture, internationally as well as in the Arab world, signifies/symbolizes several things, including envy, the good or the evil as adjectives describing the eye, attention, an expression that signifies that someone is dear to us, as well as spying and other possible meanings. In this story it symbolizes the conscience.

Though Amr seems to be giving himself an excuse for taking the device without the permission of its owner, namely that he will practice with it and return it, he behaves in a way that shows he is indirectly aware of his fault, as though he is blaming himself without being aware. From the beginning, he is shown to be hiding, as words have been used before he starts seeing the eye like: "Amr ran out of school" (ran out), "sped with his way" (sped), "without waiting for his friend Hatem" (the owner of the device), all verbs monitoring Amr's actions on that special day, registering its speed and his desire not to be seen, especially by his friend Hatem, signaling an early feeling of guilt.

Numerous verbs showed up in the story related to the eye and its monitoring action: saw, glimpsed, followed, observes, peered, appeared, as well as the expressions describing the psychological state of Amr accompanying his viewing of the eye: tension and fear and others.



The voice of the narrator and his description of the escalating monitoring

The story adopts the perspective of the all-knowing narrator that moves freely between the characters, expressing external and internal reactions (Amr, the Grandfather and Hatem). The boy is presented as a main character, he is the hero of the story, whereas the grandfather is there to assist the child through his relationship and interaction with him. Here the question presents itself: why the grandfather in particular? Of course, he is a member of the family, though not the main character in it. It could be related to the age of the writer and may be to his age and wisdom and that he has more time to spare compared to other adult members of the family. The story shows how Amr returns to find only the grandfather in the house, but the text itself does not give us a full answer to that question. While it focuses on the moments of agony that Amr suffers from, the text only implicitly alludes to the special relationship between Amr and his grandfather, and quick references to Amr's previous talks with his grandfather about school and previous chats about school results or mischief and so on.

As for Hatem, he is a secondary character in that we only know of him from Amr's perspective, but it is quite principal for Amr, as he is his friend and daily companion in school, sitting beside him

in class as well as his competitor in all games. And in the text, he is the one that triggered Amr's blunder.

And finally, there is the eye itself that follows Amr. The narrator records Amr's reactions towards the eye, from ignoring it, to running from it, to trying to shut it out so it does not stare at him, finally to its victory over him and its omnipresence. His emotions escalate from worry to being terrorized, till he succeeds in getting rid of it with the help of his father.

The narrator also employed the internal dialogue to demonstrate Amr's attempts to get rid of the eye and to show the grandfather's discussion about whether Amr is playing games on him by inventing the story of the eye until he discovers his real agony. The narrator also used the external dialogue between the grandfather and Amr, founded on the former's cleverness in pulling the truth out of his grandson about what happened that school day.

The structure of the text is based on a traditional tightly built plot that is short and condensed. It carries us from Amr's desire to slip Hatem's sight, to the gradual escalation of the eye monitoring him, to the climax that witnesses the omnipresence of the eye, to the grandfather discovering his secret, to the end solving the story's dilemma and getting rid of the eye through Amr's confession of his mistake and apologizing to his friend.



It is noteworthy that the illustration contributed well to the storytelling structure. It is explanatory and interpretive, focusing on the child and the eye and on his relationship with his grandfather, as an interpretation of the text through illustrations. However, the illustrations are not interactive or stimulating to the imagination as it did not add a new sign to the text. The size of the eye in the illustration followed the text exactly, the bigger Amr's fear the bigger the size and the visibility of the eye in the illustrations. The same applies to all the details of the paintings

are the details of the text. Probably the most important painting is the painting accompanying the following text: "All through their conversation, Amr could see the eye everywhere he looked." The eye in the painting fills the whole page to embody the intensity of Amr's agony and emotions.

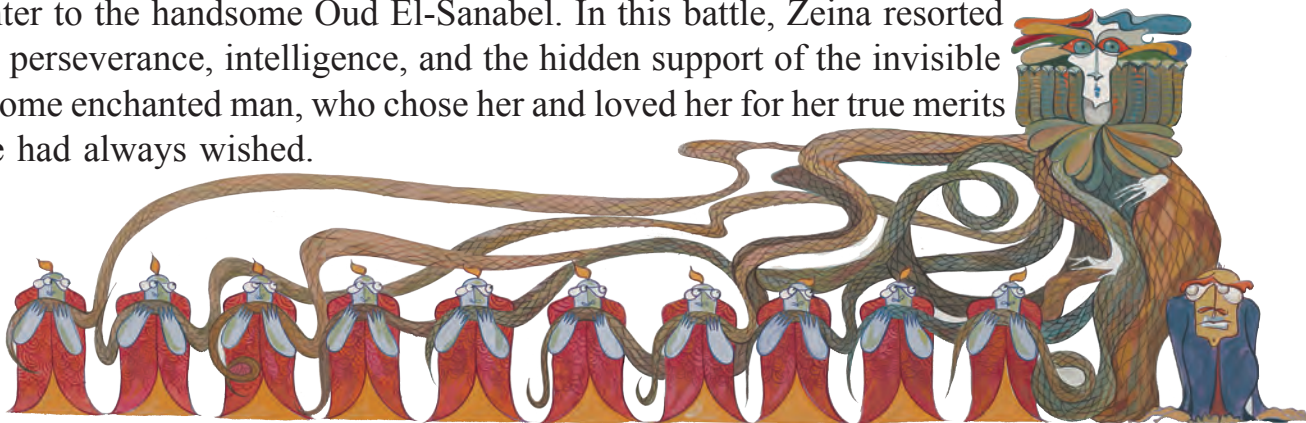
Finally, I believe the writer moved from a clear cultural and psychological concept, the conscience, to form a tightly built text that is condensed, clear and easy to read. It is suitable for children and parents alike. It can easily be transformed to an amazing and exciting performance.



‘*Ūd al-Sanābil* (Oud El-Sanabel)

This is an illustrated short novel for young people based on what the writer describes as “splinters” of a forgotten story recounted to her as a child. The way the short novel is written gives the world of traditional fairytales a modern content.

The novel tells the story of Zeina, the youngest of the three daughters of King Zein, and her rebellion against the arbitrary method determined by her father for the three of them to choose their husbands. The punishment for her rebellion takes her into an unexpected battle with Marashar, the wicked witch, who had her own objectives and wanted to use Zeina to secure the marriage of her daughter to the handsome Oud El-Sanabel. In this battle, Zeina resorted to her perseverance, intelligence, and the hidden support of the invisible handsome enchanted man, who chose her and loved her for her true merits as she had always wished.



Book Reviews

Book Review on *Oud El-Sanabel*⁽¹⁾ By Lobna Reda

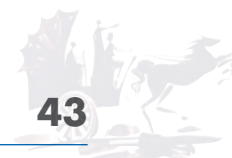
Oud El-Sanabel is a modern folktale that starts with a king with three daughters he wishes to marry off. The youngest is proud so her angry father swears to marry her off to whoever comes to the door. The rapidly unfolding story transports readers into a parallel dimension. Wonderfully written by Tobbala, an expert and gifted writer, the story engages your imagination, as well as all your senses. You breathe with the characters the heavy air of the city, you hear the racket of carriages speeding off, you taste the salty tears, and you experience the happiness of young love. The story still evokes reality and is filled with layers of

meaning. It will be experienced differently by different age brackets – from the innocence of good beating evil for the very young to the complexity of self-sacrifice and pressures of social conformity of the more mature readers.

Illustrations by Dr. Hanadi Sileet are an elegant rendering of this phantasy world. Her oil paintings are at once novel and familiar, blending fiction and reality. They work harmoniously with the text and bring the integrated work to full bloom. In short, *Oud El-Sanabel* is a must read for all ages!

(1) The Egyptian Board on Books for Young People’s Literature September 2014.

<http://ebbyegypt.weebly.com/egyptian-books-in-the-news.html>



Translation of the Applied Section from:
The Morphology of Affaf Tobbala’s “Oud Al-Sanabel”⁽¹⁾
 by Omid Izanlo, Sobhan Kawsy and Zohra Ahmadi

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Abstract:

Vladimir Propp developed a method for analyzing folktales called the “Morphological Approach”, in which he identified 31 key structural elements (or functions). According to the descriptive-analytical technique, “Oud Al-Sanabel” (Wheat Stalk) story begins with an introductory setting in which the main family members in the story are introduced. A problem arises when the heroine is informed of what she is forbidden to do, which she rejects and defies. As a result, her father, the king, decides to expel her from the palace, changing her life drastically. After leaving the palace, she meets a “donor” who helps her in defeating the evil witch. The heroine succeeds in every test the evil witch sets for her, and at the conclusion of the story, the witch is put to death, but not by the heroine. The spell is then broken, and everyone enjoys a happy ending. The writer uses the element of suspense to captivate the reader, that’s why the

function of “villainy” takes place before the emergence of the problem. The story concludes with the hero and heroine marrying.

keywords: Morphology, Function, Oud Al-Sanabel, Heroine.

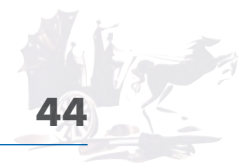
Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the questions: how did Tobbala employ the different functions in her story while keeping their succession in mind? And what are the functions depicted in the “Oud Al-Sanabel” story?

The Morphology of “Oud Al-Sanabel”

“Oud Al-Sanabel” narrates the story of princess Zeina, who is punished after defying her father’s commands to get married the way he wants. The king forced his daughter to marry the first one to knock on the palace back door. Moments later a black dog knocks on the door, nevertheless, the king insists on carrying out his decision. Zeina accompanies the

(1) Izanlo, Omid, Sobhan Kawsy and Zohra Ahmadi. “Morfolojia Qesat Oud Al-Sanabel le _Affaf Tobbala”. *Majalat ‘Ulum Allughah Al-‘Arabiya wa Adabiha*, Volume 14, No. 1, 15/3/2022-pp. 867-884.
https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/downArticle/130/14/1/182456?fbclid=IwAR1yWrYtM8iDUPxLaWCiRN8Yeejys6dnvlgIAadJCE_2gJ6ID4D8h-1ZtY



dog until they go outside the city, and then she collapses out of fear and fatigue. When she regains consciousness, she sees a handsome young man and asks him his name, but he refuses to tell her. Upon Zeina's insistence, he tells her his name and vanishes into thin air. Zeina feels bad about what she has done but is confused about what to do. She wanted to leave the palace where she saw the handsome man, but before she could put a foot outside, an evil witch barges in. When the witch sees Zeina, she orders her to clean the hall, fill a pitcher with her tears, and bring a musical band to the palace. Zeina does all these tasks with the help of men who appear whenever she utters the name "Oud Al-Sanabel." The princess knows some valuable information from Uncle Sashun and manages to put Hankal to sleep when she returns to the palace, breaking the witch's spell that turned "Oud Al-Sanabel" into a dog. Hankal accidentally kills the evil witch, so Zeina returns home with "Oud Al-Sanabel", who explains everything about the witch's spell which turned him into a dog, on the way. When Zeina returns home, her father insists on her getting married in the manner he desires, and she is compelled to accept it. When she goes to throw her scarf, on the specified day, to marry whoever catches it, she only finds "Oud Al-Sanabel" in the square below the palace. Later, she finds out that Shahoot told everyone in the city about their love story, which is why no one showed up at the city square on the appointed day, giving way to "Oud Al-Sanabel", and both eventually married. Typically, stories begin with an initial

setting in which family members are presented and the protagonist is only recognized by his name or description. Even though this setting isn't really a function, it is regarded as an important morphological aspect, and we refer to the "initial setting" element with the letter (A).

Tobbala starts her story by introducing the royal family and the king's three daughters: "King Zein Al-Din had three totally lovely and polite daughters. Zumoroda, the eldest, was thin and tall, with dazzling golden hair braided to her waist. She was calm and skilled at needlework, and she occasionally presented her father with a handcrafted gift, which the king adored. Zahra, the middle girl, was a bit short and had flowy black hair that fell on her back and was messed up by the breeze whenever she stepped out on a balcony or went to the garden. She was also witty, chatty, and enjoyed cooking. She would come up with innovative dishes that would outdo the palace cooks. The king could tell her delicious dishes apart from the rest of the food on the table. As for Zeina, the youngest, she was unsure how to style her chestnut hair; she tried a new look every day. She was so opinionated that she may have appeared stubborn at times, and she spent her time reading, lost in the book pages, or in singing, filling the royal courtyard and hallways with her beautiful voice. In the evening, her father, the king, would invite her to repeat what she had read to him in her distinctive way, enjoying her fascinating talk, or he tells her to sing with her beautiful voice which let him forget all his kingdom's troubles and sleep in peace."



Everything was great until the matter of marriage was introduced, and the heroine is “advised of the prohibited,” but she resisted her father’s request and “went beyond the forbidden”, which is a turning point “the heroine undergoes in the novel” which made the events revolve around her. “The three girls were recognized across their kingdom and the neighboring kingdoms for their beauty and good manners. Every young man desired to marry one of them, but they were all aware that if one of them asked for any girl’s hand in marriage, the other kingdoms might use it as an excuse to wage war. The king was puzzled and invited a wise man for advice, so the old man recommended that the best approach was to avoid interfering in the selection of his sons-in-law and to leave it to fate and luck. He also suggested gathering all the men who want to marry his daughters in front of the palace on a fixed day, and each girl should throw a scarf at the gathered men. Whoever catches the scarf must come before the king and introduce himself before requesting to marry the scarf’s owner! The king loved the wise man’s suggestion and viewed it as a solution to his problems, so he gave the order to carry it out. His youngest daughter, Zeina, however, refused to stand on the balcony to throw her scarf, saying: “I refuse to marry this way!” Her refusal signaled the beginning of the story—a time of difficulty (ordeal) befell and jeopardized this family’s tranquil and pleasant life: “There is a sudden appearance of ordeals in this story, albeit

they were somehow foreseen. These ordeals link the dots in the image depicted in the initial setting of unique happiness, which occasionally comes into sharp focus. It is obvious that this happiness serves as a paradoxical background to highlight the impending ordeal. The ghost of misfortune, albeit invisible, haunted the life of this happy family.”

When Zeina refused to marry according to her father’s orders, he became enraged and decided to punish her. His punishment was severe: “He commanded that she leave the palace and accompany the first one who knocks the palace back door, who shall be her husband!” Everyone held their breath and waited attentively for the first knock on the back door, praying for a miracle and for this knocker to be a proper husband for the princess. It wasn’t long before the door guard heard what appeared to be a knock on the door from within. He flung open the door allowing everyone to see the knocker. They all yelled and covered their eyes with their hands in amazement when they saw him. A black dog with a golden chain around its neck stood there! The girl’s mother was devastated and rushed to tell the king; perhaps he would change his mind when he realized that the knocker on the door was a dog. However, the king stuck to his decision and insisted stubbornly on carrying out his orders and said angrily: “Zeina shall accompany the first knocker on the door, regardless of his identity; even if he is a black dog!” This is how “the heroine departs her home” and we witness her departure, but



she is in fact kicked out, so there must be a distinction between how protagonists leave their homes in stories. “In stories, there are two kinds of heroes: 1- The one who sets off to look for a kidnapped girl who disappeared from her parents’ horizon, and we can call this type of hero the “Seeker”. 2- If a girl is kidnapped or expelled from her house, or a little boy goes missing or is expelled, and the story concentrates completely on what happens to them, then this kidnapped or expelled girl or little boy becomes the story’s hero. There are no seekers in this kind of story, and the main character can be called a ‘victim hero’.” That’s why **our heroine is a ‘victim heroine’** because **“the victim hero follows a road not seeking anything and which is full of all sorts of adventures.** We must also remember that if a female is kidnapped and the hero goes out to find her, they are both deemed to be leaving their homes, but the plot line follows the seeker hero. On the other hand, if a girl is kicked out of her home, for example, and someone sets out to find her, the plot line follows the victim hero’s departure and adventures, hence the arrow symbol indicates the hero’s departure whether or not he/she is a seeker (Propp, 55: 1996).

The ABC↑ elements symbolize the plot climax, while the action is developed subsequently. A new character, called “the donor” or “the provider”, enters the plot. Usually, the hero encounters this new character by chance in the woods or on the road, etc. And whether the hero is a seeker or a victim, meeting the donor

is often considered as a magical means of eliminating the harm that has befallen the hero. However, before obtaining this magical tool, the hero must first perform a sequence of missions that all lead to the acquisition of this tool (the source itself). Zeina met the donor, Oud Al-Sanabel, but he didn’t do any magic or offer her any magical instrument, didn’t say anything about magic, and only gave her his gift after she faced troubles.

According to Propp, when the hero overcomes a threat, the villain or aggressor character appears. **But in the story at hand, when the heroine defied a prohibition, she met the donor, not the villain.** The donor didn’t offer her any magical tool, but instead urged her not to reveal her identity, and to deny knowing him to anyone, and promised her that he would always keep an eye on her: “The dog continued strolling silently for a distance Zeina didn’t count... She also came to a halt, looked about, and discovered that she was in the middle of a wide desert. She collapsed immediately due to fear and stress, and when she regained consciousness after a long deep sleep due to extreme fatigue, she heard a voice of a handsome young man speaking to her. When she inquired about his name, he apologized, saying: “I want to tell you, but I just can’t.” But when Zeina kept asking him about his name, he relented. “He descended the first step in the fountain, where its water went up to his knees. “Now you have to choose: do you want me or my name?” he stood there looking at Zeina. “Your name!” Zeina



exclaimed without thinking. “Then don’t blame anyone but yourself, because you didn’t trust me” a desperate voice replied. “Here’s what you wanted, princess,” he remarked when she nodded. “My name is Oud Al-Sanabel.” He completely vanished as soon as he said his name as if the fountain’s water had submerged him. Zeina began blaming herself, saying: “I had to trust him because his voice sounded so genuine. Now, my stubbornness has cost me the only person who could keep me company in this deserted enchanted palace...” This way, the donor was no longer present but continued helping the heroine in her trials.

After the donor vanished, the heroine met the villain; an evil witch who didn’t want to harm the heroine’s family but the one who would marry her: “In the horizon, Zeina saw a sandstorm moving swiftly her way, and almost clouded her vision. She returned inside the palace and attempted to close the entrance door to avoid the sands, but the wind was stronger than her and pushed her and flung the door open, concealing her behind it. From behind the open door, Zeina saw what had tied her tongue and rendered her motionless. A parade dashed in, led by a chubby dwarf and a strangely dressed woman. She was exceptionally tall, and her eyes were wider than most people’s. She was dressed strangely, and Zeina initially assumed that the snakes on her garment were just fabric embellishments. Nonetheless, she was shocked to see these snakes move and wiggle, indicating they were alive. The snakes’ ten heads were

all gathered around the woman’s neck like a collar, with their tails reaching the ground and forming the dress tail. A little dwarf stood beside each snake’s tail, lifting it from the ground, like the tail of a royal gown!”

Furthermore, according to Propp: “The hero is subjected to a test, questioning, or attack... All of this prepares him to receive a magical instrument or magical assistance, which is considered the donor’s first function (D). Tobbala, on the other hand, did not supply the donor with a magical instrument or magical assistance, and he wasn’t the one who tested the heroine - the villain did. We witness the role of “villainy” referred to with the letter “A”, once the villain enters the story, where the abuser harms or hurts a family member. This function is critical since it is what drives the action in the story. The villainy function appears as a result of absentation, interdiction, violation, reconnaissance, and successful trickery; they either enable or facilitate its occurrence. So, we can regard the first seven functions to be the prelude to the story, the plot becomes more complicated when the villainy function happens. The body we chose contains a comprehensive list of evil acts. However, not all stories start with committing villainy; there are ones with varied starts typically followed by the same presentation, which predominates in stories that start with villainy function “A”. If we examine this phenomenon closely, we can see that these stories begin with a state of need or want, which



leads to a search like the one that follows the villainy function, and this, in turn, raises the prospect of viewing want as an equivalent to abduction, for example.

We see in Tobbala's story that villainy occurred before the events began, by turning "Oud Al-Sanabel" into a dog, and that the witch wanted to hurt Zeina through the tests she gave her, especially after she passed the first test successfully, which aroused Marashar, the witch, suspicions about Zeina's magical powers. However, the donor was helping her in passing every test: "the heroine reacts positively to passing every test (E)." The donor, not the tester, is then helping the heroine in passing the tests. In the first test, Marashar instructed Zeina to dust the palace hall before she returned: "She was about to leave, but came back as if she forgot something, and said: "instead of wasting your time doing nothing, you must clean the palace hall from the dust till I return. I want to see my reflection on its floor and walls as if they were mirrors. Then she pointed to some trays and added: "You'll find a broom in the cabinet, use it." Then she viciously laughed and said: "It will help you finish your work quickly." "Keep her occupied until I return," she said to Shahoot.

In the second test, Marashar asked Zeina to fill a pitcher with her tears: "Shahoot returned and placed a little pitcher of pure gold in front of Zeina. "The test of obedience this time is to fill a pitcher with your tears," Marashar commanded in a stern voice. Zeina couldn't hear the rattling sound of the dog's chain or see the

sparkling gold moving about her because of her weeping. When she took her hands off her face, she was astounded to see the men who previously cleaned the hallway and beaded the broom. While half of them stood beating ferociously with their black whips, the other half knelt before them silently in obedience. There was no sound coming from either the whips or the cries of the kneeling men. Zeina saw everything as if she were watching a silent dream. The kneeling men's tears were streaming and accumulating in cups placed on their cheeks. When these cups were full, they stood up one by one and emptied them in the gold pitcher before leaving silently just as they came." The previous two parts show that the tester was the villain, and the donor didn't provide the heroine with any magical tool; instead, he just helped her whenever she had a test.

In the third test, the witch Marashar asked Zeina to borrow a musical band and bring it to the palace: "Zeina thought the third test was much too easy compared to the previous two. According to Marashar's explanation, she simply needed to go to an old man's house called Sashun, which was two hours walk away from Mirzan's palace. She would ask the old man to lend his good friend Mekhyar's daughter his musical band, to play at her wedding tomorrow evening. She would return to the palace as soon as Sashun gives her the band, where Marashar would be waiting for her."

The donor helped her in this test as well: "Here is what you want," Sashun said,



handing her a small wooden box. Zeina stared at him reproachfully and said: “Uncle Sashun, are you making fun of me? How can this wooden box be the musical band?” Sashun denied mocking her and explained: “Believe me, the entire band is contained within this box. She held the box carefully in her hand and decided reluctantly to open it. When she opened it, small creatures jumped out of it, one after another. They would grow to the size of little dwarfs once they touched the floor. Each of them was carrying a different musical instrument, and they all lined up in order and began to play when their leader gave a signal. Zeina awoke from her dreams and began gathering the musicians and placing them back in the box, so she could resume her way back to the palace. When she held one of them, he shrank to the size he was when he came out of the box. She opened the box, returned him inside, and then closed it. The first one jumped out while she held another and opened the box to put him inside. She tried several times to put the musicians back inside the box but failed. She sat down and cried when she became tired and desperate. She began talking to Oud Al-Sanabel: “I wished to see you once more to know from you when and where you saw me.” The fifty, strong men put the musicians back inside the small box, while she was busy talking to Oud Al-Sanabel. She didn’t notice until they put the box back in her hands, then they carried her on a palanquin and ran with it quickly, making her feel as if she were flying on a magic carpet. The parade

arrived at Mirzan’s palace in minutes, and they left her in front of the outer gate, and vanished as usual.”

The abuser is defeated in the story (I) by one of the other characters, and there wasn’t a fight between the heroine and the villain (H): “In a moment of panic and despair, Hankal pushed the pot with both hands towards Marashar, causing it to spill on the floor. Marashar slipped on the sticky liquid and fell, so the liquid covered her entire body. Snakes, frogs, and rats got onto it and began licking it with their tongues. When the liquid crept onto Marashar’s body, Zeina, Oud Al-Sanabel, and Hankel were all taken back.” The conflict between the heroine and the abuser is reflected in the tests administered to the heroine by the abuser. The abuser is finally vanquished and killed, which broke the spell that turned Oud Al-Sanabel into a dog and “fixing the initial situation (K), then the heroine returned home (↓) and, in general, everyone returns.

However, the story didn’t finish with their return, as “a new villainy that led to a new setup” appeared. This villainy was her father’s punishment: “In order for him to forgive her, the king asked a physician called Radwan to urge Zeina to give up being stubborn, and to comply with his demands. She had to come to the palace on Thursday morning and, like her sisters, throw her scarf from the balcony. Later that night, a large wedding will be thrown for her and her sisters, and she will marry whoever caught her scarf...! Zeina was taken aback by the king’s condition,



which came as a complete surprise to her. The voice of the kingdom caller echoed throughout the entire kingdom, asking for anybody desiring to marry princess Zeina to come and stand in the courtyard beneath her balcony to catch her scarf. Zeina was enraged by this announcement; because it appeared to her at the time that her free will was being restricted by forcing her to accept the prerequisite of forgiveness against her will. As a result, she felt outraged and yelled in defiance of her father's order. However, Radwan, the physician, intervened and said: "Before you go too far in your rebellion, let me deliver a message your mother entrusted me to relay to you."

In her message, the queen implored her daughter to accept the king's offer of forgiveness and pity them all, as the smile faded from their faces and sadness filled their hearts since she had left the palace. The king was deprived of sleep, and his health deteriorated, but he refrained from showing his sorrow out of pride, and his fear of losing his status in front of his subjects drove him not to change his decision. The queen's message soothed Zeina's rage and woke her from her slumber. As a result, she decided to please her family over her own happiness." This time the heroine overcame her ordeal with the help of Shahoot, who entered the story unexpectedly, with an idea rather than a magical instrument. He went to the city square and told everyone about what happened to Zeina and Oud Al-Sanabel and their love story, and everyone in town was moved by it.

The next day, everyone cleared the place where Zeina was going to throw her scarf so that Oud Al-Sanabel would be the only one standing: "Zeina was astonished to see that the courtyard beneath her balcony was completely empty, and no one was allowed to enter because of a cordon made by the townspeople. The royal guards stood submissively, even sympathizing with the public. When Zeina reached the balcony's edge, the cordon carefully parted, revealing a small opening through which Oud Al-Sanabel passed! Yes, it was Oud Al-Sanabel, and the cordon was quickly and tightly closed again. He was the only one in the courtyard, with no competition! Zeina's heart almost leaped out of her chest with joy, knowing that he would undoubtedly catch her scarf... All she had to do was throw it, and all the gates of happiness would open before her."

In the end, the hero married the heroine (W): "Zeina went to the balcony's edge with trembling feet, feeling that every step she took was bringing her closer to putting her happiness to death. When she went out onto the balcony, her ears began catching some cheering words and heard her name and Oud Al-Sanabel's name. She was astonished when she saw a large crowd of people surrounding the courtyard beneath her balcony, making it completely empty and preventing anyone from going inside. The royal guards were standing submissively and even sympathized with the crowds. When Zeina reached the balcony's edge, the cordon carefully parted, revealing a small opening through which Oud Al-Sanabel



passed! Yes, it was Oud Al-Sanabel, and the cordon was quickly and tightly closed again. He was the only one in the courtyard, with no competition! Zeina's heart almost leaped out of her chest with joy, knowing that he would undoubtedly catch her scarf... In the evening, the kingdom witnessed an unprecedented wedding, when everyone in the kingdom celebrated the wedding of the three princesses."

As previously mentioned, "villainy" is regarded as the primary function which is considered indispensable. According to Propp, it is the function that generates real action in the story, because when it occurs the plot gains momentum. The preceding seven functions are considered as a precursor to the story, but when this one happens, the storyline becomes intricate and action begins. The first seven functions are considered a prelude to the story, and when villainy occurs, things get complicated. However, in the plot at hand, villainy is not evident in the sequence of functions, and neither the heroine nor the reader perceives it clearly. Instead, there are vague allusions that indicate its occurrence, and this is how the author created suspense in the story, making the reader eager to keep reading to learn the kind of villainy that occurred. Towards the conclusion of the story, the author describes the villainy through Oud Al-Sanabel: "The physician, Radwan, was summoned to the palace once to treat king Zein Al-Din, and he was accompanied by Oud Al-Sanabel. Radwan began treating

the king's wound, and Oud Al-Sanabel was completely concentrating on what the physician was doing until he heard Zeina singing in her angelic voice, which drew his attention. Everything had changed, and since the first moment he saw her, his heart belonged to her. Then one day, in the marketplace, a group of young men stopped him and they were holding a poetry-telling competition. He got excited and stood in the middle of them, telling poetry fluently, impressing everyone. After two weeks, a knock came on the door of physician Radwan, asking for Oud Al-Sanabel to come and treat a sick woman. He was eager to cure her of her condition because she was the first patient he would care for on his own. She recovered, so he assumed that he had successfully treated her, but he soon discovered the truth. Mirzan told him that she heard him from her balcony, the other day when he was telling poetry in the market, and was infatuated and wished to be his muse. Her mother, on the other hand, planned to marry her off to one of the kingdom's elites, therefore she objected to her daughter's choice. Mirzan refused to eat and grew quite weak in protest. Her mother feared for her daughter's life, so she gave in to her wish, and began planning for her wedding with him. Then, Oud Al-Sanabel realized that Mirzan wasn't actually sick but was in love with him, and the only thing that could cure her was to have him by her side, not taking the medication he prescribed. She broke down in tears when he told her he loved another girl, but she boldly told



him that she couldn't stand in the way of love. She also promised to be a good friend to him and to do everything in her power to help him get married to the girl he loves. When Marashar discovered his feelings for Zeina, he promised her that if he couldn't marry Zeina, he would marry Mirzan."

Only then does Mirzan's character enter the story, taking on the role of the donor as she helps Oud Al-Sanabel: "Mirzan wrote to Oud Al-Sanabel, telling him that her mother Marashar is a witch, and warned him of her plans to prevent him from marrying the princess he loves. That's why he should stay away from Marashar's wand, to save himself from transforming into an animal. He should also never, ever say his name because doing so could cause him to vanish forever. She gave him a golden necklace that her father, the good wizard Mekhyar, had given her so she could summon the assistance of fifty servants. She forewarned him that the servants of the golden chain would be unable to break Marashar's spell. She wished that his dream of getting married to the one he loves could come true. Zeina knew that Marashar had magically turned Oud Al-Sanabel into a dog to prevent him from grabbing her scarf, and if her magic remained -as she feared- even if Oud Al-Sanabel caught Zeina's scarf, he wouldn't be able to introduce himself to the king, since saying his name would make him disappear forever."

The Author's Vision

At the beginning of the story, the author mentioned that she only remembered

scattered bits of this story: "Only a few words and a vague image of a character called Oud Al-Sanabel remained in my memory. I took these scattered fragments and penned complementary sections and braided all of them together in a process that lost all features of the old recollections and made it impossible to specify the relationship between the original story in my memory and the new one of Oud Al-Sanabel which I narrate today." We cannot be sure what was in the original narrative and what Tobbala made up, but some of the features and the events invoke a sense of modernity, such as her portrayal of Zeina, the story's heroine, who is interested in reading and singing. The notion that underpins this vision is apparent in naming the story after a character who, unlike Zeina, scarcely appears in the events and doesn't play a significant role. "Oud Al-Sanabel" is a narrative about a girl called Zeina, however, it is not an old story, because we see people like Zeina in our daily life. **The morphology of the story lends it the appearance of a folktale, but its heroine reflects on the realities of women today.** Zeina's character symbolizes the author's and all feminists' vision; she refuses to marry according to her father's demands and wants to choose her husband freely, and she is not deterred by her father's decision to kick her out and his command for her to follow the first one to knock on the palace back door. Throughout the novel, the heroine meets a lot of challenges that she overcomes without the help



of magic or any magical instrument, but rather by using her wits, which she acquired through reading. **Tobbala saw the sections of the old story she had forgotten as an opportunity to share her views about women's current status and abilities.**

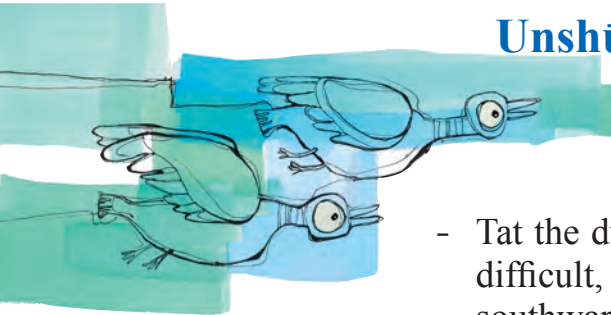
Research Results

Propp employed the morphological approach while studying folktales, breaking them down into sections, and demonstrating the mutual relationship between them, as well as the function of each character. These functions are the main pivotal point in following the functional track, and they remain constant in the narrative despite changes in acting characters. It's worth mentioning that Propp defined 31 functions.

Functions are the main building blocks of any narrative, and while they are limited in this story, they appear in their familiar order. Stories rarely have all of the functions, but this never changes the order in which they appear; in other words, the absence of some functions doesn't affect the succession of others. **When we look at the story of "Oud Al-Sanabel," it appears as if the author narrates a folktale, where we see the functions identified by Propp, but unlike folktales, she didn't follow the order of the different functions, as if she used the techniques of the novel**

in narrating a folktale. The "villainy" function, which Propp emphasizes as an important element and appears at the beginning of the story after the initial situation, appears in "Oud Al-Sanabel" to have happened before that, but the reader doesn't know what actually happened, and **the author uses the element of "suspense" to make him/her continue reading to know that.** According to Propp's morphology, the donor gives the hero a magical instrument, however, in this narrative, he doesn't give anything to the heroine and instead just helps her in overcoming various challenges. In the functions outlined by Propp, the donor is the one who tests the hero, but in "Oud Al-Sanabel" the villain is the one who does so and helps the donor. In folktales, the hero defeats the villain and kills him/her, but in our story, one of the secondary characters did this. At the end of the story, the author mentions the villainy that occurred at the beginning of the events, and the story does not conclude with the return of the heroine; instead, new villainy occurs, leading to a new course of action. This villainy is portrayed by the king's punishment of the heroine and is resolved with the assistance of another secondary character, without the use of a magical instrument from the donor. The story then concludes with the heroine marrying Oud Al-Sanabel.





Unshūdat al-‘Awdah (Homecoming Chant)

This is a story about the new relationship of love and empathy that grows between two characters

- Tat the duckling, with a defect in her wing that makes flying difficult, as she gets accidentally left out by her flock on the southward migration route,
- Naglaa the young girl with a hearing impairment, when she is temporarily left by her parents in the countryside at her grandparent’s house,

Naglaa’s empathy for Tat and her desire to fend for her stimulates her to better communicate with, and engage, her surroundings. The two main characters part more empowered and wiser.

Book Reviews

The Homecoming Song by Affaf Tobbala: When a Children’s Story welcomes you with a Magical Chant⁽¹⁾ Rania Hussein Amin⁽²⁾



I haven’t been so enchanted by a children’s story for a long time as I have been with “The Homecoming Song” by the award-winning author Affaf Tobbala. The imagery of the story is stunning,

starting with a swarm of ducks gathered around the icy lake in a European forest, and flying over changing scenery to reach an Egyptian countryside with a pond, vast farms and the country house of the

- (1) Amin, Rania Hussein. “The Homecoming Song by Affaf Tobbala: When a Children’s Story welcomes you with a Magical Chant” Al-Ahram Weekly, February 5-11, 2015, p. 21.
A scanned copy of the printed original is provided.
- (2) Rania Hussein Amin is a school psychologist, and an acclaimed writer, illustrator and translator of books and comics for the young.



wide-eyed girl, Naglaa.

The story centers around the unusual bond between a deaf and mute girl and a little duckling with an injured wing, two characters who feel incompetent and imperfect, but together they manage to help each other grow, each in her own special way.

The duck “Tat” had injured her wing while trying to escape from a fox, which resulted in a permanent disability and her inability to fly south with the other ducks and had to be carried on her parents’ backs. During the swarms’ rest beside Naglaa’s country-house, Tat loses her way & is separated from her swarm. Naglaa finds her and immediately they manage to communicate, even without words, just by eye contact and touch. For a deaf and mute girl this kind of communication comes naturally and must have helped form this unusual bond with the duck.

Next, we find out about the girl’s problem in communicating with her grandparents, without her parents’ help and guidance. The feeling of the little girl’s frustration because of her inability to communicate her thoughts and desires with her grandparents will – I’m sure – be felt by every child who finds it hard to express himself properly or deliver his feelings to adults. She still hasn’t learnt the best way to do that and refuses to resort to writing

in fear of being criticized for her bad handwriting. Her passion and great desire to keep the duck made her finally resort to writing to her grandfather to make her wishes and thoughts understood, and in fact she was rewarded with a complete understanding and acceptance of her wishes. It is then that she understands the necessity of developing her handwriting skills, in order to be able to have a better communication with others. She works hard and actually enjoys the process of learning calligraphy which her grandfather happily teaches her.

Likewise, she starts helping her duckling grow and develop by teaching her how to fly, which she realizes is a necessity for the duck to feel whole again.

The story gives the readers the power to fight in spite of any disabilities, to insist on developing their skills and continue learning new ones. For, just as Naglaa realized the value of writing and the duck realized the value of flying, the reader will realize the value of learning and building up of his character and skills.

At the end, another strong message is subtly sent through to the reader: the importance of making one’s own decisions in life trusting on your feeling of what’s right and wrong. This inner desire for doing the right thing finally overcomes the strong bond between Tat



and Naglaa, and Tat decides to join her swarm again on their way back North, and Naglaa lets her go to join her parents herself.

The duck leaves a feather behind which Naglaa keeps and treasures, leaving an everlasting happy memory of a beautiful relationship between a human and a duck, and a lesson well learned.

The farewell song at the beginning and the homecoming song at the end engulf the whole story with the sound of enchanting music which can almost be heard by the reader, who will be happily satisfied and inspired by the warm ending of two characters in love, who have finally learned to love themselves.

Affaf Tobbala Cracks the Code of Both Children and Adults⁽¹⁾ By Dr. Iman Sanad⁽²⁾

Affaf Tobbala succeeded in reaching several generations of both youngsters and adults through her different works. That's why she deserved the Khalifa Award for her young adult novel "Decoding", as well as all the other awards she received, including the Sheikh Zayed Book Award for her masterpiece "The House and the Palm Tree" and the Etisalat Award for her novel "Oud Al-Sanabel". She also composed with her words a perfect "Homecoming Chant" that was well represented by the talented illustrator Reem Heiba. It was such a harmonious

symphony that it was difficult to separate the words from the images. This novel was nominated for several awards and made the Etisalat Award shortlist in 2016.

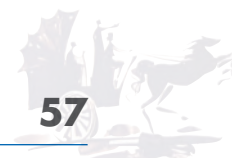
In her masterpiece "Homecoming Chant," the author portrayed two parallel, yet comparable, characters. These are Naglaa, a girl with big, beautiful eyes who had trouble speaking, and Tata, a duckling with a damaged wing. Both characters needed help, understanding, and assistance, from the society's point of view, but the author provided a different point of view, not via her storytelling

(1) Sanad, Iman. " 'Afāf ṭubbālḥ Tufakk Shafrat al-ṣiḡhār wālkḃār' ". *al-Thaqāfah al-Jadīdah* No. 338, November 2018. pp. 45-48.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BHxDV6HY11xvS-Ne9IRwktuT2OjnK-q-/view?pli=1>

This is a partial translation of a longer article that reviewed two novels written by Affaf Tobbala: Decoding and Homecoming Chant, choosing the section dedicated to the former only.

(2) A writer and critic



techniques, but through her ideas. She asserted the fact that those who don't help themselves by polishing and developing their skills shouldn't feel discouraged if others cease helping them and consider them a burden. The author confronted us with the reality of life so that we can face ourselves and others; she didn't speak of idealistic notions or wishes, nor did she speak of giving children false hope so that they are not shocked by the world around them, nor did she mention telling them what should be told. On the contrary, she took the difficult path of presenting truth and reality in a positive light, demonstrating to young people the road to achieving success.

The narrative style of this novel is rich, diverse, and age appropriate. The language flows gently to achieve the desired effect by focusing on and reminding us of the desired values, as well as the skills the protagonists should master to overcome all of their setbacks and failures. The verbs alternate between the present and past forms to provide a rich narrative that transports the reader to different eras allowing them to participate in the events that the characters live through.

Naglaa's grandparents were the most important people in her life because she lived with them after her parents and sister went abroad. As is customary in Affaf Tobbala's stories, the grandmother

embodies toughness and discipline, while the grandfather represents understanding, and conviction, that pushes his granddaughter to change. He drew his granddaughter's attention to the fact that her unclear handwriting made it hard for her to communicate with the outside world. He also told her that being skilled at writing on the computer isn't enough because her handwriting is more important in interacting with others. Having poor, unreadable handwriting, along with the fact that most people didn't understand the sign language she used, made it difficult for her to interact with them, and kept her alone all the time, whether intentionally or not, or at least contributed to her loneliness. He told her that change must begin with her since she couldn't expect others to seek her out if she made no effort on her part. This is similar to what the coach did with Tat the duckling when he confronted her with the truth that she was wrong when she gave up because of her injury and didn't attempt to learn to fly. So, confrontation and truth serve as change agents for both characters.

Naglaa wanted Tat to stay with her because she loved her, but time and her grandfather's advice taught her that each creature has his or her own world, family, and life, and that no matter how good and satisfying the alternatives were, he or she wouldn't be happy away from it. That's



why Naglaa helped Tat in healing her wing and mastering flying, after she had neglected her flying lessons, so she could cope with her world and interact with it, a lesson Naglaa herself learned.

Naglaa returned home heartbroken after helping Tat return to her world and rejoin her family's flock. But on her way back, she saw her family's car and rejoiced at their return, and her feeling of loss and sadness faded, and she felt as happy as Tat.

Finally, the author gave us a dose of overflowing emotions within a framework of responsibility, understanding, feeling, and accepting others, in addition to bearing

our circumstances and imperfections and attempting to change the world for the better, through developing ourselves and our skills, and transcending to the best with our acts.

Eventually, the statement that good art is for everyone and appeals to everybody due to its high quality and honesty is correct and accurate. We are discussing here the attempt to categorize literature into adult, young adult, youth, and children's literature. But whatever distinctions we make, the highest and most obvious is between good literature, which suits and entertains everyone, and poor literature, which appeals to no one.





Hurūb Ṣaghīr (Runaway Kid)

This thrilling novel for young adults follows the journey of an unnamed young boy away from home. He plans his journey with one objective, to stay in hiding away from his family till his father's vacation ends. Through the chapters of the novel, we learn his true motivation and we accompany him through the unforeseen challenges and new experiences he goes through on the streets of unfamiliar sections of his city. His eventful journey brings him to prematurely end his escapade and develop a better plan to deal with his original problem that entails no running away.



Book Reviews



Introducing the Novel (Runaway Kid) that Won the Etisalat Award in The Sharjah Book Fare⁽¹⁾ by Ahmad Ibrahim Al-Sherif



The novel "Runaway Kid" by Dr. Affaf Tobbala, published by Nahdet Misr Publishing House, won the Etisalat Children's Book Award for Young Adult, which was announced during the Sharjah International Book Fair. As for the novel, it deals with the themes of the escape of children and family cohesion, about which the author conducted research during her writing journey about the reasons why children flee their homes and decided to present this work as an attempt to address young people who are going through the same thing. When asked about the idea of the novel, the writer, "Affaf Tobbala," said, "The escape of the young is the

main theme. Who has not thought of escaping from his family's home when he was young?! This idea basically comes from the desire to express rejection; the rejection of the authority imposed by the parents and the desire for a new beginning of a different life. There are children who thought about it without doing it, there are those who thought and planned but did not implement it, and there are those who planned and implemented it. In this text, I developed two dimensions. The first dimension, as I said, is the escape of young children and the reasons that push them to do it. The second dimension is family cohesion,

(1) Al-Sherif, Ahmad Ibrahim. "Ta'arraf 'alā riwāyah hurūb saghīr al-fā'izah bi-Jā'izat Ittiṣālāt fī Ma'raḍ al-Shāriqah lil-Kitāb", al-Yawm al-sābi", 3 November, 2021. <https://2u.pw/WXt0Zw>



and not family problems. Some people think that family cohesion collapses in the event of the divorce of the parents, but sometimes the attempt to preserve the formal structure of the family is what causes the collapse of such cohesion, as it becomes the source of misery to the whole family.”

The writer Affaf Tobbala is one of the most prominent writers in the field of children’s literature. She began her distinguished creative career at the age of 64 with the publication of her first story, entitled “The Silver Fish” which earned the Suzan Mubarak Award for Children’s literature in 2005. With the publication of Runaway Kid for young adults this year, the number of her published works reached 18 books (children’s stories,

novels for the young adults, and one collection of short stories for adults entitled “Road Dust”). Affaf Tobbala was born in Cairo in 1941. She worked as a director on Egyptian television and held various positions until she assumed the presidency of the Nile Drama Channel. She obtained a PhD in 1996 in media. She received many Arab and international awards and honors, including Sheikh Zayed Award in 2011 for her work “The House and the Palm Tree”, Etisalat Award in 2013 for “Oud El-sanabel”, The Anna Lindh Award for “The Eye” and the Khalifa Award for Education for the novel “Decoding” in 2018. Some of her works have been translated into other languages such as: Spanish, Korean and Turkish.

“
A Small Escape from a Big World⁽¹⁾
By Effat Barakat ⁽²⁾

 ”

The world of youngsters is not easy to break into. This becomes even more difficult if one writes about the real context in which he actually lives. However, if one does, it becomes more rewarding and effective as compared to westernized works that seem alien to our world and culture. One of the most important roles of literature, in my opinion, might be

assisting young readers, in every age group, to better comprehend and be mindful of their reality, as well as to educate them about the culture and values of his world, making sure that he is not left in dark maze without



(1) Barakat, Effat. “ Hurūb Ṣaghīr min ‘Ālam Kabīr” (A Small Escape from a Big World). ‘ Ālam al-Kutub. Cairo: General Organization of Cultural Palaces. no. 33, April 2020, p. 96-98.
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1429674353883471&set=a.1429674283883478>

(2) A writer and critic



a helping hand to guide him.

“A Small Escape “ is a young-adult novel, published by Nahdet Misr Publishing House, by the great writer Affaf Tobbala who is always eager to creatively provide us what interconnects the young with their environment and enhances their understanding of its diverse aspects, as well as enable them to better understand themselves and their surroundings, discovering things they never paid attention to in the world they live in.

The novel recounts the escape of a young boy from home in rejection of the decision of his parents to separate. Each of them wanted to keep him without putting him under pressure, so, they give him the freedom to decide who to live with, which left him even more perplexed. Although the father was used to living abroad and the mother got accustomed to that, they had reached a decision of getting divorced, considering it makes maintaining family cohesion at a distance more probable.

“And he took flight” is the crucial phrase that concludes each chapter of the gripping book, which started in the Makkattam district and ended with an epilogue, taking us through seven distinct chapters. The young hero decides to stay on the street during all his father’s vacation in Egypt, so that both parents would stay busy searching for him. In so doing, the young hero confronts numerous challenges between unfinished buildings and open streets, with various events that involved encountering other children who have

turned to the streets for various reasons, that each considered worthy justification for fleeing home, taking each into an adventure of incalculable risks.

The young boy faces many difficulties to find a place to sleep and provide for his basic needs, which he previously took for granted at home. He confronts fear from running out of the money he had saved for this escape. He conceals his true identity to avoid ending up back home and ruining his escape plan. He is forced to get along with people he encounters, acting as one of them, to live among them easily. He moves from washing cars, to delivering medicines for a pharmacy, to sorting trash, till he ends up in a chase in defense of a girl working with him in garbage sorting. To save himself, he jumps from a bridge into the balcony of the retired sick judge living alone, who solicits his help. The young hero takes care of the judge overnight through fever. As the judge gains trust in him, he requests him to transmit a letter to his son, the doctor, who abandoned him. As the letter gets lost, the boy travels himself and brings the judge’s son back to him. In a conversation between the young hero and the judge’s son on their way back, the latter provides the young hero with wise answers to all his questions about what transpired with the judge’s family. In the light of that conversation, he decides to return home, face his problems, and give his parents the chance to choose the life that suits them.



Writing a novel for the young adults is a tricky task that requires us to write them wisely, humorously, and intelligently, to appeal to their taste. That is exactly what our author did in a gripping and enjoyable manner. It will be difficult for the reader to put down the book before finishing it. The writer was able to add an element of suspense at the end of each chapter that makes the reader long for knowing what happens next to this little hero, who fled home and had to conceal his identity from all who ask about it, to avoid being returned home before the completing the number of days he scribes on walls and floors wherever he sits 18... 17... 16 ... as though encouraging himself to see through his escape project, not returning until the end his father's vacation, to oblige his parents to reconsider their decision to separate and send them by his escape a message of rejection of their decision which he views as harmful from his perspective. We are left without conclusively knowing if the brilliantly selected title refers to the young hero (small boy) or to the escape itself, which ended up being "smaller" in duration than he planned⁽¹⁾.

The book offers a variety of perspectives, including one suggesting that divorce can provide a positive solution that allows a couple's relationship that reached a point of no return to evolve from a distance. It can safeguard the children's mental health more than a void marriage that only preserves the social appearance,

while leaving problems to fester, negatively influencing children. This is what happened with the judge's family, which made the son (the doctor) grow up with psychological agonies that made him part with his father, who insisted on maintaining the social order of marriage despite his wife tears and suffering, which reflected negatively on their son who could not forgive his father.

It also highlights the problem of many children fleeing home, sending a strong message to adults warning them that pay no attention to their children's feelings. The child is not at fault for being born into a dysfunctional family and does not have to carry its financial burdens. He has a right to live a life befitting a child, that allows him to grow and mature sanely. It is a disaster to ignore children's emotions or assume they must endure the consequences of grown-up problems without discussing with them and hearing their opinions to arrive at solutions that both adults and children can be happy with. Dialogue is how we prevent the flight of many, without a way back to the embrace of their families, to uncertain futures and certain damage outside the walls of the primary protecting institution: home.

It also draws the attention of the State to this catastrophe as well as the necessity of utilizing institutions to benefit from those kids' potential, harness their energy and compensate them with education and rehabilitation so they are not left

(1) The title in Arabic can equally be understood to mean "A Small Boy Escapes", or "A Small Escape".



vulnerable to theft, rape, harassment, and oppression in all its forms. It also alerts grownups as youngsters alike to the necessity of confronting, rather than escaping, difficulties. Doing the latter would only make problems worse.

The novel is rife with details that kept it thrilling and realistic, which the experienced writer easily achieved adding a rich literary dimension to the work. For instance: The young hero carefully placing his money beneath the inner sole of his shoe so as not to lose it - the little girl living with her grandmother using the cost of the medicine to purchase the chocolate she likes despite the fear from the grandma - the appearance of the father's friend that forced him to flee not to be taken back home - the porter who used the area below the back stairs to store his merchandise - the descriptive details of the Judge's apartment in which he lives alone, including the son's old clothes and one-eared toy – the details of the coffee shop and the driver's attempt to harass him - the details of the two youngsters chasing him on a motor bike with a knife and his escape by jumping. More dramatic depth was acquired using the disappearance and reappearance

game of some characters, such as Saeed's disappearance, reappearance and renewed disappearance, the return with the Judge's son who had left his father log. The abundant characters and the lively style and the powerful images attracts the young reader who will only finish a work of fiction if it grips him from the very first moment of the introduction.

The easy, yet proper classical Arabic language suits the target age group, while the colloquial Egyptian words mentioned adds an intimacy that attracts young readers that pulls him to the country where he lives (gives examples).

The illustrations in the interior by Mariam Hani were evocative and to the world of the main character and what he went through.

Finally, the novel is abundant with beautiful details. In its simplicity, it is enjoyable for both young and old readers, with its dramatic and well-crafted details, that were composed with great professionalism and consciousness.

Congratulations to the great writer Affaf Tobbala and congratulations to Nahdet Misr Publishing House for bringing this beauty to the reader.

