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## Locating Women's Autobiographical Writing in Colonial Egypt

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# LOCATING WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING IN COLONIAL EGYPT

**Marilyn Booth**

*This article explores the often faint strains of autobiographical writing affixed to female signatures in Egypt as feminist discourse was emerging. Rather than focusing on discrete "autobiographies" it argues that autobiographical writing was submerged in other genres; yet these fragmentary texts provided grounding for later, more overt autobiographical writing. An analytics founded in caution, flexibility, and respect is appropriate to a time when the feminine signature itself was fluid or uncertain. Authors considered are 'A'isha Taymur, Zaynab Fawwaz, and Mayy Ziyada.*

Nineteenth-century Egypt witnessed the production of a few texts that we can label autobiographical—writing proposing a narrator speaking of and from a self existing in the world, constructed as coterminous with the authorial signature.<sup>1</sup> To write autobiographically was to challenge conventional borders of (elite) lives—women's or men's. But women's autobiographical practices particularly were curtailed by their submergence in genres of writing not announced as autobiography. This article examines texts by three women: 'A'isha Taymur (1840–1902), Zaynab Fawwaz (c1850–1914), and, a generation later, Mayy Ziyada (1886–1941). These texts exhibit autobiographical practices that may be surreptitious, muted, or sketchy, yet which produce resolute portraits. They are crafted in writing modes not necessarily associated with the autobiographical.

The turn into the twentieth century was a time of enormous change in Egypt, not only politically, following Britain's 1882 occupation of the country, but also socially, economically, and technologically (all partially shaped by the fact of occupation). The 1890s were a decade of enormous upswing in book and periodical publication, facilitating emerging practices of self-writing. Two decades later, a new social landscape saw the appearance of organized feminism in Egypt following thirty years of energetic if uneven debate on shifting normative conceptions of the appropriate intersection of gender status, national society and economy, and class. The often faint strains of autobiographical writing affixed to female signatures thus emerged as feminist discourses were surfacing among Egyptian and Ottoman Syrian intellectuals, and as Arab women were becoming known as authors and activists. Discrete "autobiographies" do not exist for the period; we must look to writings identified with other generic categories,

and beneath stories, often fragmentary or discontinuous narratives, that foreground family relationships, friendship networks, and collective concerns. Late nineteenth-century texts generating fragmentary, relational, and indirect autobiographical practices provide grounding for texts of the 1920s that suggest the feminine signature's changing presence as a mark framing the text.

Fragmentary life writing is not necessarily gender-specific, though it may suit and articulate the rhythms of many women's days (and writing opportunities) particularly well. As the historians David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn note for life histories produced in colonial and postcolonial India by men and women, "the often fragmentary or allusive nature of many life-historical forms" is also a product of broader cultural notions of how to speak (or not) about a life.<sup>2</sup> But the rhetoric of the texts I trace here emphasizes *gendered* constraints and contours—and motivations and consequences—of writing the self.

The range of practices, forms, and voices that can constitute self narrative—and recognition that the term "autobiography" and its canonization stand for a culturally specific and exclusionary history of writing practices—have led scholars to propose more capacious terms to capture this complexity and variety, and to signal an inclusive rather than exclusive critical practice around histories of writing the self. The literary scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson characterize this as a "shift from genre to discourse" evident in recent autobiographical theorizing.<sup>3</sup> My approach is indebted to such work; the texts herein encompass and shift genres and embed autobiographical reflections in what are ostensibly non-autobiographical forms. Some might be seen as hybrid texts. Smith and Watson emphasize such "hybrid" texts as a particular feature of contemporary practice, but for Arab women of a century ago, reconfiguring existing genres by discreetly writing the self into them gently challenged social taboos while creating new textual practices and assembling an audience for them.<sup>4</sup> In a sense, I articulate autobiographical practice as a mode of reading as much as a mode of writing. Across genres, these writers leave the door slightly ajar for readers to enter with autobiographical intention, and they will find directional arrows—referential, constructive, and intersubjective—if not a literary form that announces itself as self-narrative. Furthermore, acts of speaking are constructed in these texts as generated by locations of speech and the constraints these locations impose. Thus the text locates itself at an experiential boundary shared by narrator, historical subject, and feminine reader. The sites of autobiographical production—"locations and occasions"—importantly shape these texts for readers: the narrator locates herself, as historical persona, within feminine home spaces, and at gendered spatial boundaries that are crossed perilously, if at all.<sup>5</sup>

## Selves on Display

The difficulty of displaying the feminine self, when narrating as an early twentieth-century Arab female subject, is itself displayed as Mayy Ziyada introduces her collection of personal essays entitled *Sawanih fatat* (A Young Woman's Musings, 1922), representing a collective subject, "we young women who write."

This boldness of ours did not surface in those women who came before us, nor is our audaciousness something [Arab] men have grown accustomed to in any [writing] women other than us. The audience scrutinizes us with a special gaze, longing to examine the woman's self as she herself describes it, not as male writers narrate it. But what is their aim?

The audience claims that its desire to relish a woman's writing does not express admiration or esteem for that composition or its affirmation of how truly keen is the discernment to be found therein. Rather, it is because [they find] in her writing one semblance among others of the female self in general. . . .

Some [male] intellectuals—and especially certain people who have convinced themselves they are intellectuals—have gone too far, detaching women from the human species and virtually narrowing it down exclusively to men. Yet every enthusiasm that moves woman arises from the same all-embracing humanity, every deficiency marring her accrues from pervasive human inability, and every trace and legacy of her intelligence is but one facet of commonly-shared human thought.<sup>6</sup>

The passage addresses real-life pitfalls of writing as a woman. Ziyada notes the familiar trap of assuming women's writing (especially in the first person) as transparent commentary on lived experiences, a tactic used across historical moments and sites of reading and writing to discredit women as speakers and social subjects.

Autobiographical writings display yet also move beyond the dilemma that Ziyada's challenge suggests for women who did wield the pen in this era of transition. These women insist on themselves as non-gendered individuals while invoking constraints and possibilities for making a feminine voice—particularly the signed and personalized voice of autobiographical inscription. Their struggle to even ask the autobiographical question becomes part of the autobiographical text, indeed becomes a textual curtain that partly obscures and partly outlines their gendered embodied subjecthood, as they draw on established and new genres to probe boundaries of body and self and to confront received and contested notions of femininity. Over a three-decade period, though, contexts of production and conditions

of possibility for speaking the self shifted markedly, remaking autobiographical practices, further transforming those conditions of possibility, and locating or fashioning new sites for writing the self. One key condition of possibility for women's public self-expression was that women and girls of the middling and upper strata became an audience, with the expansion of Arab girls' education and its extension beyond primary school in the early twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

Texts discussed here comprise, first, the *auto* in biography, that is, writing biography as a means of writing autobiographically, as the narrating I explicitly links the historical I to the biographical subject; second, the autobiographical preface-fragment in longer didactic, fictional, or biographical texts; third, neo-classical poetry; fourth, the category of "musings," a term I take from Ziyada's title. "Musings" merge a partially abstracted, intellectualizing narrating I with a strongly situated, concretely located narrator and historical subject; yet, such texts are not continuously memoiristic. Other viable categories include the emerging novel, conduct manuals, and confessional first-person texts, which put into question the very possibility of the autobiographical pact famously posited by the cultural theorist Philippe Lejeune as a contract of alignment and trust between author, narrator, and reader.<sup>8</sup>

### Late Nineteenth-Century Narratives: the *Auto* in Biography

As Egyptian intellectuals began to regroup following the 1882 British occupation and the swift introduction of a British "shadow apparatus" of rule, and in conjunction with emerging anti-imperialist nationalist discourses, intellectuals debated gender relations in a wide-ranging inquiry spilling across genres. Most authorial signatures in periodicals and on books were masculine, but from the 1880s women did publish under their names or pseudonyms (and perhaps anonymously). And they began to publish brief and collective biographies of women, drawing on a pre-modern tradition of collected exemplary biography in Arabic but putting it to new gender-political uses. This parallels similar strategies elsewhere, while use of a specifically Islamicate biographical tradition underwrote the genre's cultural authenticity. In nineteenth-century biographical collections featuring women subjects and in serial publication of biographies in Arabic women's magazines, exemplary biography explored aspects of literate women's aspirations and lives—including lives of those who wrote the biographies.<sup>9</sup> The complexity that life writing demanded, though suppressed in these brief biographies, emerges in priorities the writer's rhetoric establishes yet which (simultaneously) the life narrative may challenge. Thus even when biography is not explicitly autobiography, the intertwining

of these genres—or approaches to writing the human self—that feminist theorists of auto/biography have emphasized, was potentially productive for an emerging range of feminist outlooks in Egypt. The genre of exemplary biographical sketch, and longer biographies of women written by women that emerged starting in the 1920s with Ziyada's biographically framed studies of 'A'isha Taymur and Malak Hifni Nasif, are important contextual pathways for the gradual emergence of more explicitly autobiographical writing by Arab women.

A subset of these early collective biographies are explicitly autobiographical, allowing the author-narrator to be her own I in the text, offering autobiographical meditations through the lens of another life and therefore in a socially acceptable manner. In biographically framed profiles of female acquaintances, the writing subject who is also the narrating I is observer of or participant in a life, often as a beneficiary of that life declared explicitly as a living role model. Because these were part of the larger and more impersonal genre of collective biography—and because they privileged writing about other women—they could act as respectable autobiographical vehicles. As they invoke a notion of shared or collective experience, they summon intersubjective edges of the self as central to writing that self. Boundaries of the self are thus not clearly defined; if one is to define and declare a feminine self, it is suggested, this can only happen in the context of feminine intersubjective exchange and growth. Yet a strong, sometimes painful, sense of individual self also emerges.

Yaqut Barakat Sarruf's (d. 1937) obituary-biographies of her friends and intellectual companions Maryam Nimr Makariyus (1860?–1888) and Nasra Ilyas Ghurayyab (1862–1889), and of her teacher Eliza Everett (1843–1902), all first published in the popularizing journal *al-Muqtataf*, exemplify this point.<sup>10</sup> In these brief texts, Sarruf traces her subjects' lives in a group of Lebanese and Palestinian-origin Christian Arab women educated in a missionary school (where Everett taught) who immigrated to Egypt with parents or husbands, retaining a friendship that included meetings where they discussed gender rights. Sarruf was part of the group; and “the only autobiography Yaqut Barakat Sarruf ever published exists in her biographies of Makariyus, Ghurayyab and Everett.”<sup>11</sup> When her friend Maryam Makariyus died prematurely, Sarruf was at her bedside. The scene closes the biography.

Sarruf's own obituary, penned by a male student of her famous husband and published in his magazine, focused conventionally on her roles as wife and mother.<sup>12</sup> For her social circles and her intellectual pursuits we must go to her biographies of others. It is not a question of “public” versus “private” versions of her story: both are public in address but they sketch distinct figures: the conventional woman visible to her husband's student

in the drawing room versus the female friend as part of a collective I—an autobiographical we—as well as being an individual *autobiographer*. The *I* surfaces only when her eye and pen survey the lives of her friends. Allusions to the collective *we* allow readers to see an inscription of a life that diverges from her official obituary. Close attention to the deictics of biographer-subject relationship yields a sense that these biographies are framed autobiographically, however fragmentarily, and that this framing marks the writing of biography for the interlocutor. As Smith and Watson note, “Relatively few biographers use their personal memories of their subject as reliable evidence, unless they had a personal relationship to the subject of the biography.”<sup>13</sup> For these women, personal memories *were* the archive, linking *auto* to biography.

In her biographical collection *al-Durr al-manthur fi tabaqat rabbat al-khudur* (Pearls Scattered in Times and Places, Mistresses of Secluded Spaces, 1312 AH/1894–1895 CE), where she draws on the tradition of Arabic biographical writing to offer brief lives of famous women across the globe, Zaynab Fawwaz reproduced Sarruf’s obituary-biographies of Makariyus and Ghurayyab, but erased Sarruf’s narrating I.<sup>14</sup> In the borrowed, lightly edited biography of Ghurayyab, Sarruf remains unnamed, subsumed in *ukhriyat min al-fadilat* (other fine women)—an ironic absence, given Fawwaz’s own quiet autobiographical practice.<sup>15</sup>

Like these women, Fawwaz was an emigrant from the Ottoman Levant. Born in the predominantly Shi’i part of southern Lebanon, taken in and taught by a local feudal emir’s wife, she apparently fled her childhood home. At some point she arrived in Cairo and entered its journalistic world, writing in newspapers with Islamic-nationalist perspectives. Like Sarruf, Fawwaz left no autobiography. But Fawwaz’s collection of women’s lives exhibits its own autobiographical nimbus. First, she links herself explicitly to her objects of inquiry, calling herself a *rabbat khidr*, a “mistress of seclusion,” whose researching and writing self cannot seek materials beyond the walls of home. Her preface offers a personal glimpse of her necessarily constrained methodological map and implicitly links her to her subjects through her chosen book title and through the conditions of literary production she traces, as well as to the fragmentary nature of the material she could find:

So it was that enthusiasm and a zealous solicitude for my kind led inescapably to my writing a tome [*sifr*] that would reveal [or unveil; *yusfiru*] the countenance of the excellences of those women of excellence [*muhayya fada’il dhawwat al-fada’il*], single and married [*anisat wa-’aqa’il*], to gather the scatterings of their life stories to the extent I could in every case, and to cull their anecdotes from every time and place. Yet, as this path required following difficult routes hard on every wayfarer—especially on one like



me, secluded behind a barrier [lit, possessor of *hijab*] and fully covered [*mutanaqqaba*] by a face-veil that barred me from vigor—I have relied in this writing on what is found in general histories and scientific journals. . . . I made it a service to the daughters of my kind.<sup>16</sup>

By employing the vocabulary of revealing or unveiling to characterize her textual biographical practice, and then by using a vocabulary of veiling and seclusion as personal deterrents to “vigor” or “force” or “invincibility” (*man'a*) to describe her research and writing conditions, Fawwaz links her life circumstances to those of her subjects. The language of confined embodiment contrasts with the visibility, uniqueness, unarguable materiality, and potential travels of Fawwaz's book, which she calls “peculiar among its genre, alone of its kind, ample in its unconfinedness.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition to linking self to subjects, Fawwaz includes a few acquaintances amongst her subjects and thereby offers glimpses of herself as observer and commentator on these lives, noting that she relied on oral information—stories circulating among women she knew. This leads Fawwaz into the realm of what is often labeled “women's talk” or “gossip” which becomes a valued source, presupposing women's networks as trustworthy channels. Women's talk (often disparaged by reformist men writers of the time as a waste of time or worse) thus enters the “high literature” of exemplary biography. Subjects as various as the English traveler Hester Stanhope, the Egyptian singer Almas, and one Sharafiyya bint Sa'id Qabudan are portrayed through the eyes of local networks, resulting in sometimes quite intimate portraits hovering between autobiography and biography. A first-person narrator interrupts occasionally, sometimes noting a gap in information (“I don't know,” also the more conventional and impersonal “God alone knows”). This confession of writerly and scopic limitation paradoxically seems to bring the subject closer to narrator and audience.<sup>18</sup>

One living portrait particularly blurs auto/biography, as it brings out of obscurity a woman not in the public eye but whose life represented practices Fawwaz inveighed against elsewhere—a counter-example, perhaps, of what she wanted to see as the substance of women's lives. This life narrative came to Fawwaz through oral sources; it enacts topical issues, among them, young people's right to select life partners and the plight of abandoned women.

Sharafiyya daughter of Sa'id Qabudan:

She was born in the year 1260 of the Hijra [CE 1844] and is still living. This biographical subject has events to her name that testify to her fidelity and loyalty; she may be considered to have an odd and wondrous story. I was told of her by one of the ladies who

are trustworthy in what they report. These events are so strange that I wanted to include her in this history so that for all ages remembrance of her would remain.

There lived in Bulaq, Cairo a man . . . whom people called Sa'id Qabudan [the Captain]. He married young Mistress Makhduma, sister of Ra'if Pasha, a high naval commander in the government of Egypt. From her Sa'id Qabudan was blessed with a daughter whom he named Sharafiyya ['the Honorable']. But she remained in her father's embrace only eight years, before he passed away in 1268 AH [CE 1851/52]. . . .

This girl was of utmost delicacy and sweet grace. She was raised on fine principles, and her mother taught her reading and writing and handiwork and all of women's particular occupations, embroidery and the like, to the point where she surpassed other girls of her era.<sup>19</sup>

Sharafiyya suffers through a sad love story because of expectations for appropriate marriages. Suggesting that lives and their stories are relational, the text is autobiographical (Fawwaz knew of this woman because of her own feminine social circles); moreover, it highlights experiences Fawwaz is said to have undergone—though we have no details from her: guardians arranging marriages, difficulties of living as a single woman, the importance of women's networks, the pain of grief and unwanted solitude. If nineteenth-century Arab women could not write their own stories openly, perhaps Fawwaz wrote hers by writing those of others. Yet she frames this life as an "odd and wondrous story" and thus does not regard it as normal or normative. It honors a woman caught tragically in transitions of the era.

Fawwaz invokes her famous women—with deliberate irony?—as individuals who have in common a necessary lived association with gender-defined domestic space, *al-khidr*. This signified a specifically feminine space within the household and can connote solitude as well as seclusion. Most of her subjects—in the narratives she makes of their lives—by no means stayed within household spaces. Yet, she suggests, they were defined by such spaces.

What kind of autobiographical constraints does Fawwaz's self- and other-naming impose—or perhaps highlight and then transgress? Or, what kind of self writing might her text encourage? In her biographies, Fawwaz often emphasized motifs important in her own life history and to her outlook: the existence and importance of women's non-domestic work, women's vocality, recognition of women's intellectual production, and freedom from coerced or unwillingly continued marriages. Many subjects in her compendium are said to have refused suitors or left husbands; amongst nineteenth-century subjects these include Hester Stanhope, George Sand,

Anne Elisabeth Digby, and the aforementioned Sharafiyya. Can we see these emphases as an autobiographical element in Fawwaz's biographical writing, through the echo of her suggestive preface? Her thick description of many lives conveys repeatability in women's lives and a collective auto/biography that embraces her own experience.

In her essays for mainstream newspapers, Fawwaz often relied on "the authority of experience" that is a mainstay of autobiographical writing.<sup>20</sup> She asserted a feminized kind of authority based on a series of autobiographical moments—"autobiographical" because they involve the casting of experience descriptively into first-person discourse that explicitly recounts this experience for an announced agenda but also constructs a commentary on "experience" as it intersects with, departs from, and contests accepted social scripts for female lives.<sup>21</sup> That is, not only does the writing subject rely on life experience; she writes about it to offer proof and context for her argument and to justify the act of writing. Writing about it is the only way, from a gender-segregated social space, to bring experience and insight to a larger set of interlocutors than those women (and a few men) with whom she interacts personally. Recall that Fawwaz alludes autobiographically to herself as "secluded behind a barrier and fully covered by a face-veil that barred me from vigor." These obstacles become a spur to writing a book that addresses the very question of obstacles and experience.

Similar brief first-person allusions to life circumstances that simultaneously hinder and spur writing appear elsewhere in nineteenth-century women's writing in Arabic. Highlighting the embodied subject as ground but also hindrance to all lived experience, including writing, these first-person fragments make socially and spatially imposed gender difference a key feature of autobiographical writing. The subject is encumbered by physical markers of gender difference, and it is here that the strongest sense of self is constructed.<sup>22</sup> That these are fragmentary texts is a material reminder of constraint.

One of Fawwaz's *Scattered Pearls*, her contemporary 'A'isha Taymur, ushers in this story of the writing woman's own story (at least until such time as we unearth earlier nineteenth-century texts by women in Egypt). Taymur (1256/1840–1320/1902) was among the earliest Arab women of modern times to be published and recognized while still alive for her poetry and prose.<sup>23</sup> She composed poetry in Persian, Turkish, and Arabic, allegorical fiction, and essays on gender and social practice. Unlike Fawwaz, she was born into a prominent Turco-Egyptian bureaucratic-intellectual family. Moments of autobiographical commentary in Taymur's corpus evoke her social position and push against it, a complex if telegraphic commentary on her identity as an elite Muslim woman in an era of changing political and socioeconomic fortunes—although some of her autobiographical presence

inheres in what she did not say. Of course these telegraphic presences are elements of her literary voice as much as comments on her life. Consider the famous prefatory passage to her allegorical story, *Nata'ij al-ahwal fi al-aqwal wa-al-af'al* (Consequences of Circumstances in Words and Deeds). It evokes a moment of childhood crisis and success, a scenario of debates and conflicts governing the question of women—specifically, the issue of girls' education.

The narrator sketches herself as a young girl caught between opposing parental visions of feminine upbringing, or at least between her mother's attempts to train her in womanly arts and her own desires, represented in the girl's silent presence on the margins of her father's male gatherings to hear their literary discussions. The passage introduces a long allegorical tale which is all about education and responsibility (for a male royal).<sup>24</sup> The autobiographical scene is not unmotivated, but rather serves several rhetorical purposes. It adds a possible gender dimension to this discourse on education, saying implicitly what perhaps the text could not say explicitly: that education into public responsibility might be the province of (elite!) females as well as males. At the same time, by representing the author at a younger age, retrospectively gesturing to training that makes written depiction thinkable, it suggests a triumphant, completed educational trajectory: that young desiring girl has now been able to write the book in which her story features. Furthermore, that the author describes herself in the present, as speaker yet also as "she of the broken wing" opens up the tension between accomplishment and "the consequences of circumstances" in her own (constructed) life, for the father's permission did not give her license to soar. Her writing took place in spite of—as well as because of—the father's support. She remained subject to the usual constraints of an elite woman's life.

Another autobiographical passage, more detailed, was made available to readers of Arabic by Mayy Ziyada's research for her study of Taymur. Her friend Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib translated it from Turkish. This longer recollection appeared in the preface to Taymur's collected Turkish poetry roughly five years after *Nata'ij* appeared.

I habitually went out to our reception hall to linger near whichever writers were there and to listen to the melodious tones of their voices. But this act of mine wounded my mother—God settle her in the gardens of Paradise. She would confront me with severity, intimidation, warnings, and threats, diverging sometimes to pleasant promises and awakening my desires for pretty ornaments and clothes. My father, God's mercy upon him, said . . . "Beware of breaking this little girl's heart and sullyng its purity with harshness. As long as our daughter has a natural inclination for inkwells and paper, do not stand in the way of her preferences

and desires. Come, let us divide our daughters: take 'Affat and give me 'Ismat. And if 'Ismat emerges a writer and poet, that will bring mercy upon me after my death.<sup>25</sup>

Taymur recalls her father's supervision; as noted, though he was willing for her to learn, this certainly did not transgress accepted gender segregation practices for her era and class: "my father did not give me permission to go into the sessions of men. He himself undertook to teach me the books of Persian eloquence . . . he set aside two hours every evening when I would read to him."

Still young, Taymur began to read poetry and then to compose it "in the easy meters." She recalls reciting her first couplet—in Persian—to her father. She felt "very shy and cautious, because whenever my father saw a book of poetry in my hands he would say to me, 'If you read a lot of love poetry it will cause all your lessons to go out of your head.'" Still he promised her lessons in the poetic meters from a female teacher. "But," comments the memoirist, "after a long wait, no sooner did the coming year begin than I was bound by the tie of marriage." To juxtapose the father's threat and his reference to "love poetry" with her mention of "marriage" creates a tension that both alludes to her own life circumstances and to the constraints of women's (and men's) lives, for "love" and "marriage" were not necessarily coupled.

This is especially resonant if we listen to the silences here. If Ziyada's Arabic text is a close rendering of the Turkish, then Taymur's characterization of marriage is a loud silence. She labels marriage, conventionally, as a "tie" while her rhetoric highlights the metaphor's coercive or at least constrictive connotation. What makes this important is that it is the only first-person reference to her marriage in her known works, a silence particularly significant in that Taymur is not reticent about other life events. In her corpus of Arabic poetry no elegy for her husband appears while there are elegies for both parents, one sister, and her daughter, Tawhida.

The Turkish preface (as presented by Ziyada) suggests that 'A'isha realized in her daughter's life the balance she had struggled to find herself. "After ten years [of marriage] the first of my heart's fruits, Tawhida . . . reached age nine, and I enjoyed seeing her spend . . . from morning to noon among inkwells and pens, and work . . . until evening with her needle, crafting wondrous things. I prayed that God would grant her success, sensing my own sorrow about what had slipped from my grasp at her age, my aversion to the likes of this work. When my daughter reached the age of twelve, she was determined to serve her mother and father, and moreover assumed management of the household and servants . . . I was able to withdraw to the niches of repose." Alas, Taymur's intellectual "repose"

was cut short by Tawhida's death, the sad impetus for some of Taymur's finest poetry, evoking the autobiographical as it universalizes the pain and grief of a bereaved parent.

Taymur corresponded with other female intellectuals and praised their books in print, linking her own accomplishments to others, as in one celebrated poem. Composed conventionally as a monorhyme ode, the poem is heavy with doubly meaningful rhetoric impossible to deliver in translation but whose running thread is a proclamation of elite women's abilities and persistence in intellectual pursuits despite their formal invisibility. Taymur exploits tropes of veiling and gender-based sequestration (both of which the Arabic word *hijab* conveys) to assert women's pre-eminence—their intellectual visibility. She exploits the discourse on manly chivalry to debunk the notion of “stallion poets” whose masculinity is essential to their poetic prowess, and evokes ancient Arab female poets—al-Khansa', 'Aliya bint al-Mahdi, and Layla al-Akhyaliyya—as beacons. No wonder this poem appears in Fawwaz's biographical dictionary, following her biography of Taymur, for it asserts Taymur's personality and declares the importance of recognizing and celebrating a feminine genealogy.

“Bi-yad al-'ifaf” (With pure virtue's hand) is at once a modest disclaimer of self-revelation and a rather defiant and certainly proud gesture of collective and individual feminine writerly identity. Both the poem and its preface build on the conventional rhetorical practice of humbly seeking readers' indulgence while simultaneously announcing its status as one in a long and stellar legacy of Arab women's poetic declamations. Thus the poem uses convention and history to announce its own conditions of possibility and production, defending and asserting the poet's right to a named identity.

With pure virtue's hand I guard the might of my *hijab*  
 and with faultless self-shielding, among my peers I rise  
 With my thoughts taking fire and my gift for sharp critique  
 I have brought my poet's skills to new and perfect highs<sup>26</sup>

Taymur sets up expectations of invisibility and self-deprecation that were standard rhetorical tactics amongst the very few Arab and Turkish female poets and prose writers publishing then. But these rhetorical gestures in fact highlight alleged constrictions placed on women who attempted to construct public voices at the time. The hackneyed trope of women's diffidence as cultural producers is reversed, now marking literary worth and agency.

The narrating voice asserts a subject position rather than assuming the conventional feminine position as object of discourse or recipient of social “protection”—for it is *she* who “guards,” who maintains her feminine status through seclusion or covering (*hijab*) rather than being “the well-protected,” epithet of the respectable woman at the time (*al-masuna*). Taymur's use of

a further term with multiple epithetic resonance, *'isma*, echoes one of her given names, *'Ismat*, and invokes a constellation of cherished feminine values: chastity, virtuousness, self-guarding, and moral impeccability. But here they underwrite self-revelation. Pride and the ability to maintain *hijab* while speaking her art overturn the notion of veil as obstacle.<sup>27</sup>

Thus Taymur engages the modesty trope—often an opening strategy in autobiography, perhaps especially of socially marginalized subjects—to propose immodest goals and to flag her visibility.<sup>28</sup> She seems indeed to be disarming potential critics, quite possibly women; in another poem, she refers dismissively to such naysayers. Here she demolishes this myopic stance by invoking her “perfecting” or “completing” of *adab*—literary skills but also translatable as “refinement,” education in the broadest sense, literary, moral, and social. Perhaps she is referring to the difficulty of acquiring an education for a woman in her circumstances. After implicitly dismissing those women who would criticize the feminine signature on a poetic text, Taymur looks for support toward her feminine forbears as a chosen lineage:

I composed poetry expressing an assemblage:  
before me, women sheltered, most noble, esteemed, wise

Bringing together seclusion (“women sheltered”) and regard implies that the two go together, within the poet’s life and, as attested by their fame, in the poetic careers of earlier women. But Taymur seems again to resort to self-deprecation, registering her poetry-making as unserious play:

I uttered my verse but as a lover’s playful words  
loving bookish eloquence and logic much to prize

The poet alludes to passionate love or whimsy, invoking the thematic genre of *ghazal*, poetry of love and flirtation, by using the verb *hawwa*. But her “love” is directed at rhetoric, eloquence, logic, and the mind. She reminds the reader or listener of her impeccable antecedents, alluding to pre-modern Arab female poets ‘Aliya bint al-Mahdi, Layla al-Akhyaliyya, and, earlier, al-Khansa’, the most famous of all:

Mahdi’s daughter, Layla—these are my choice models  
as with innate acuity my best thoughts I poetize  
How superb these ladies are! A noble weave indeed  
in women and in maidens the men do recognize  
Given precious pearls of mind, a poet like Khansa’  
wanders rocky paths and for a brother, frantic, cries

The poet adopts the feminine poetic conceit, ubiquitous in the era and later, of writing as adornment but also as self-reflection. Writing rather than external adornment captures her time and attention:

From the brow of my notebooks I fashioned my mirror  
 and of ink's jet-black traces I created my dyes  
 How often my fingertip adorns my paper's cheeks  
 with script's downy touch or the skin of my youth's sighs

She then deploys the imagery of protective amulets, female solitude, and the face-veil (*khimar*), not as obstacles to writing but as productive of it. The poem is a register of visibility; allusions to the conditions of possibility for writing it offer a curtained glimpse at the self within and behind the text. In prose and poetry, and like Fawwaz, Taymur uses autobiographical allusions to gesture to the specifically gendered nature of (class-specific) experience that underlies women's rhetorical presence in the public sphere at this early moment for modern Arab women's public written expression. The autobiographical passages become significant not only as self-writing but as public testimony of the political nature of domestic behavior, the ways that parental expectations and the "bonds" of marriage act to suppress girls' and women's powers of self-articulation. In the proliferation of literary forms on which they drew, these women began to discipline readers into how to read women's life narratives through these conditions of possibility.

In her study of Arab women's memoirs (more recently composed ones than the texts discussed here), the gender studies scholar Nawar al-Hassan Golley suggests that "Arab women may use the 'harem' and the *hijab* (the veil), two concepts associated with the private world of women, to enter the public sphere without supposedly incurring the risks to be found therein."<sup>29</sup> We might view the curtained autobiographical practices elaborated here as similar discursive moves, while recognizing that harem and hijab complicate notions of private and public rather than representing them.<sup>30</sup> But these concepts also are posed for different intersubjective conversations. Most texts Golley analyzes were written with an Anglophone rather than Arabophone audience in mind; she sees them as "writing back to the west and . . . to Arab 'patriarchy.'"<sup>31</sup> The texts I analyze here take as their interlocutors other Arab women, and secondarily, Arab and Turkish men. There is a performative edge to these texts, a modeling of the struggle for a voice that signals individual self-realization and that can shift the limits of possibility for other Arab women.

### **Musings on Intellect and Affect: the *I* of the Beholder**

In the 1920s, first-person book-length personal narratives by Arab women began to appear, often compiled from essays appearing earlier in the press and thus complicated the notion of a "single" autobiographical text, for these carry multiple voices constructed at various times, though



the narrating I always corresponds to the author's name on the book cover. Packaged as essayistic ponderings (*sawanih*) rather than as autobiographies or memoirs proper, such volumes might appear to readers as sufficiently cerebral and distanced from everyday social experience to be acceptable as women's personally inflected writing. Still, as the author of one of them, Mayy Ziyadah, complained, readers tended to mine writings with feminine signatures for clues to "the female self"—one reason, no doubt, why some women writing in the press or for book publication continued to use pseudonyms.

Palestinian-Lebanese by origin and resident in Egypt, writer, speaker, and salon hostess Mayy Ziyada (1882–1941) brought out her *Sawanih fatat* (A Young Woman's Musings) in 1922. These essays appeared first in the cultural journal *al-Hilal* (*The Crescent*); some are dated to 1911–21, with the most falling in 1916. Others can be circumstantially dated to this period. The chapters appear to be organized chronologically (at least by year). Thus there is no evident autobiographically thematic logic underwriting the overall work aside from pure chronology of writing. The volume is not so different than others of Ziyada's collected essays but the title and first essay frame this book more personally, drawing attention to the repeated intervention of a first-person narrator throughout. Furthermore, at least one chapter was drawn from an unpublished manuscript entitled "Mudhakkirat al-jami'a al-misriyya" (Memoirs of the Egyptian University, 1916).<sup>32</sup>

As noted, Ziyada is also well known as the author of biographically focused studies of other Arabophone women writers. As I have argued elsewhere, these are autobiographical in that they propose life-milestone emphases that Ziyada consciously links to her own life trajectory, leitmotifs echoing her own sense of public identity laced with difficult loneliness.<sup>33</sup> Ziyada inserts herself into each text as she tells of her own intellectual and emotional linkages to these women. Her intellectual and personal formation surfaces through her biographies (of a Muslim Arab, a Christian Arab, a Muslim Turco-Egyptian, and a Christian European), in themes of shared vocation and muted outrage, connection to and isolation within one's social and familial milieu, and a writing persona that balances precariously between self-exposure and convention—a peril of which all these women were aware. In a sense Ziyada echoes the earlier generation's acts of writing women's biography as a story of semi-secluded networks and then quietly writing the self through it, whether in biographies of other women or in *Sawanih fatat*. Her biographical studies of other women are more explicitly organized around eliciting the (other) subject's "self" than was anything she wrote in an autobiographical voice.

Mayy (as she was known to readers) begins her book with a "musing" that comments on the status of women's writing amongst 1920s Arab

intellectuals while noting intellectual and emotional gains she and her peers have made: "Yes, we have begun to write, and not only in the sense of filling pages with black; rather, in the sense of being aware of emotion before we put pen to paper. For we have experienced being-aloneness with ourselves; we have opened ourselves to gaining an understanding of life's meanings . . . and we long for freedom and independence."<sup>34</sup> But she casts a sardonic eye on writers and their audiences, suggesting that audiences want simply to examine young women's intimate lives, while writers suffer from a mind-body split engendered by society's construction of gender difference. These descriptions of first-person encounters with the self and others generate further musings on collective and individual self-identities of young Arab women, in a time when feminine visibility was newly acceptable (if not new), and more domains of public work (and education) were available, while women continued to struggle with internalized as well as external constraints.

But if the voice of this opening essay is autobiographical in spirit and form, expressing a desire and a responsibility to write from individual experience and affect, it begins with a collective subject-agent, the plural first person (and ungendered) *nahnu*, which immediately is referenced to females, specifically to girls or young women, *al-fatayat*. She asks a rhetorical question—"Are we writing?"—and poses it against girls' supposed interests in appearance, in the volume's first sentence: "We young women who are prisoners of apparel, slaves to flashy appearance (*tabarruj*), and playthings of whimsy and passions—do we, the girls of today, write?"<sup>35</sup>

Ziyada can be read here as satirizing the scare-discourse on elite Arab girls as mere surfaces representative of a classed Europeanization process. She points to the body-mind split as a gendered trope which her own acts of writing break down. This opening prepares the reader for an ironic (at times satirical) mode in further essays as she revisits disjunctions between surface and interior, performance, and claims of "nature." These fissures striating her society are threatening and painful as she sees them forming—and deforming—the *fatat*'s sensibilities, her own among others, even if from a slightly older woman's vantage point.

The second "Musing" is a direct, highly personal address constructing a singular feminine interlocutor, distinct from yet standing in for an implied audience. *Ihrisi 'ala qalbiki*, "Keep watch over [or guard] your heart," she warns, launching into an affect-laden nature description.

Slowly the twilight lowered its curtain over earth,  
cloud-margins bordered, patched and yoked with threads of gold  
and silver.

Mirrored in the bowers of sunset, tiny lake-images of ruby and  
pools of emerald faded,

and a gloomy morose melancholy settled on the earth.  
 Dejection settled over your eyes.  
 Inside you what sun sets, O young woman, and why does the  
 evening distress you, that this cloudy gloom would coat your  
 eyes?  
 Guard your heart carefully, young woman!

The sun broke forth at the pinnacle, just within the firmament's portico:

sun-rays flirting with flower-petals and casting their broad gleam  
 across the waters with a colourful embrace;  
 houses glistening like enormous polished stones of light,  
 and all things joyful, breathing in their morning air, emerging  
 lighter, as though released from a seizure.  
 But you wander hungry and thirsty. You say what ought not be  
 said; you do what must not be done.  
 Then you regret word and deed, and you return to your aimlessness.  
 Behind restless boredom and ennui, an incandescence blazes in  
 you, a paroxysm of light!  
 Tell me: What ails you, young woman?<sup>36</sup>

Whom does Ziyada's narrator address here? Positioning herself as intimate observer, narrator, and addressee merged into one, divided only by the windowpane or the mirror, suggesting both the dispersal or fragmentation of the self and its inescapable presence, as does the use of second person to refer ambiguously to both other and self.

Why do I see you, at my window, keeping watch over what is not  
 there and longing for what will not appear?  
 And then, if I turn away from you and toward my mirror, why  
 do I see your face, agonized and grieving?  
 Is it a hope I have seen there, conquering your true self and  
 weighing heavily on a heart grown accustomed to your  
 rhythms of despondency?<sup>37</sup>

This acts as address to "the young woman"—that is, as description of a general condition among this group where the narrating I places herself—and as self-address. As an autobiographical act, it alludes additionally to seclusion, isolation, and loneliness as the feminine condition—even for Arab Christian women, who in this period were unlikely to be veiled and or subject to strict practices of seclusion (which anyway was an institution in transition among elite women). Physical isolation merges into an apartness of sentiment. The self's needs, remaining unmet, cannot be fully voiced. The emotional despair voiced here is perhaps sharpened by the tensions Ziyada voiced at the start, between visibility and exposure: "The

audience claims that its desire to relish a woman's writing does not express admiration or esteem for that composition . . . it is because [they find] in her writing one semblance among others of the female self."<sup>38</sup> The young woman must not seek recognition as a *writer*, only as a conduit for exhibiting the feminine self, which threatens in turn to expose her as improperly indiscreet. If young women are encouraged to think in new ways ("we" young women are "daughters of a day whose sun beams down on us; we create ourselves with our own hands, and we discover the paths through forsaken and deserted forests"), they must suffer consequences.<sup>39</sup> Young women in the sunlight, they are also beings whose every move is liable to critique on both literary and moral grounds.

As *Sawanih* progresses, it moves outward from the narrator-observer's gaze at the narrated self while continuing to engage intimate exchange. Several essays invoke the narrator's personal relationships to other women, presenting feminine friendship as a structure for relational self-formation. The narrator of the fourth "Musing," "Qatl al-nufus" (Killing of Selves/Souls), stands within the story scene, observer but also engaging as participant:

I saw her gazing at the trees, her eyes dejected and her lips pressed together as if regret's kiss were imprinted there. She was a companion from childhood: we learned together in one school for some months, studied one model and one lesson, and shared the same guidance. When we grew up that fragile bond between us had grown strong.

Why do I see you sad? I asked.

The spring saddens me, she said.

Tell me what is wrong.

The spring saddens me. It grieves me to see its lovely pageants forming and flowing through open space, yet people see it only through tiny apertures punched through the iron walls that society has erected around human selves. It saddens me that I am not independent and apart, with my own little window, and that others have rights over it: they can open it and close it however and whenever they wish, and not in accordance with what I want.<sup>40</sup>

As with the woman at the window, *I* and *you* are both separable and merged, as the text reprises some already noted themes: the right to see and experience; the question of open and closed spaces, the narrow gap between privacy and (unwanted) seclusion. The narrator modifies and repeats her question, delving further inside.

What is it that makes you sad?

The spring makes me sad, she said. These flowers—blue, red, yellow—sadden me. On the branch-tips they blossom and fill

the air with light; their beauty shows amidst the gloriousness of the cosmos. They breathe in the air with all the receptivity and enjoyment of life, with all readiness to embrace it. Why, then, was it decreed that human beings would be less free than growing plants?

Tell me the reason behind your sorrow, I said.

It's a small matter that revived my contemplation this morning. . . . I have a sister who lives in Alexandria with her husband. We adore each other and so we correspond once a week. But her letters pass across the eyes of my father, mother, brother, sister and little brother before they come to me, since I am the youngest in the family. Then my letter to her is not put into the post box until after the members of my family peruse and critique it . . . even though our correspondence is ordinary and simple. . . . I have no secret to hide but I want to preserve my right to have secrets. This treatment has pained me for months because it suggests the weak confidence they have in me. . . . Now, every time I receive a letter I ache, because it reminds me that our house harbors a systematic censorship bureau.<sup>41</sup>

Like Ziyada's introduction, one way to read the narrative is as a theorization of the possibility of public autobiographical acts for women in 1920s Egypt. The scene draws a parallel between restrictions put on physical movement and the right to write. Even in the realm of "the private"—the family—there is no personal privacy for females when it comes to expressing the self, just as there is no distinction made, by the reading public, between writerly self and private self. Ziyada highlights the politics of gender within the family and as an effect of modernity. Men who forbid daughters and sisters to write letters think nothing of taking them out on the town, she notes.<sup>42</sup> In this instance, self-writing—the women's friendship, the embedded story of the sisters' letters—launches a polemic on social hypocrisy. A friend's story sets the narrator off on her rhetorical journey but that story in a sense becomes her own.

Ziyada again theorizes self-writing in the feminine voice in "The Story of the Woman with a Story," another framed story of a woman whom she knew slightly and saw often around town. That the context is Cairo's world of sociability—"I saw her at church, in concerts, in department stores; it was rare that I walked in the streets of Isma'iliyya [Cairo's European-style nineteenth-century downtown] . . . without seeing her walk by."<sup>43</sup> As in Fawwaz's narrative on Sharafiyya, this essay highlights effects of parental privilege in choosing daughters' marriage partners, but for their own social needs: the parents choose a spouse of Italian origin who promptly takes the dowry and disappears, apparently to join his common-law wife. Because his

earlier marriage was not recognized by Catholic rites, the Church will not grant this abandoned woman an annulment and so she lives in social and emotional limbo—respected for her singing ability and beauty, but forever the target of suspicions. A critique of legally sanctified gender relations infuses the text. As Ziyada's (male, Italian) piano teacher (who tells her the story) exclaims, "How many women have been made wretched by a man, how many wrenched apart—how many hearts shattered! If a woman is not evil, she is truly in a miserable state. No matter how elevated in her own eye, no matter how liberated from her bonds and restrictions, and no matter how those women calling for her rights have exaggerated the situation by elevating her to the level of a man, her life, her entire life, remains in the grip of this man. She claims to be his peer but in reality she is nothing but whatever he wants her to be."<sup>44</sup>

"Sayyida G. B." and Mayy Ziyada were both Christian women, single, highly gifted artistically and intellectually, visible for their abilities, living in Cairo in an era when Arab women were not supposed to remain single. While clearly they lived very different experiences, they may have encountered similar tensions over the visibility-invisibility spectrum, the desire and need to live a public life yet its social and psychic cost, and also the impossibility of escaping notice, as a woman: "If I were with a female friend or companion, we would say to each other that word women exchange—and men too, with all due respect to our honorable sirs—when passing a woman who is somehow marked out from the rest by something that distinguishes her. That word is 'Look! *Unzuri! Unzur!*'"<sup>45</sup> Ziyada picks up this point: "After the word 'Look!' there is always—there must be—a 'story' about the object of the gaze. Thus, I heard many tales about that lady, leading me to think about her quite a lot."<sup>46</sup>

Ziyada suggests that so many public presuppositions govern the writing of women's lives that one can never wholly rewrite that life; as in Fawwaz's life of Qabudan, Ziyada begins with an exterior, a surface set within socially meaningful space, and then probes the narrated subject's inner experience, whether the ambiguous *you* of the self addressed, or the friend/double. Yet that experience is always already shaped by the words of others. Women "with a story" can never own that story, nor are they ever free of it. At the same time, Ziyada posits a responsibility about writing (or believing) these stories: "Who can sketch a clear and full image of the life of a person from people's talk?"<sup>47</sup> We are never the only ones to tell our story; nor can we ever tell only our own story. Writing one's story can never be isolated from others' acts of narration; but it is important, Ziyada suggests, that *fatayat* do the writing. Through these interconnected texts, Ziyada begins to theorize writing the self, at this moment in the early 1920s when she was also writing of her admired sister writers.

"The woman with a story" is perhaps for Ziyada the "typical" female auto/biographical subject: the woman as shaped by a personal story, usually a sad one, and publicly known, even perhaps notorious, for that story. All of her other qualities—her other selves—are subsumed in *that* story. Is a woman ever permitted to write her self? Is she ever allowed her own narrative? Ziyada was an object of speculation for many, as a visible and vocal woman who hosted a much-vaunted salon which many admiring men attended. Did she feel like "the woman with a story"? It was male acquaintances who wrote her story through their own memoirs.

Ziyada's "Musings," if personal, remain discreet and discontinuous. To the extent that they adduce personal-social relationships Ziyada situates these as *in memory* though that memory includes a revisiting of "yesterday's" stories in contexts of chance encounters with the other women whose stories she evokes. These stories illustrate the first essay's proposition that the woman as subject of her own writing faces an impossible dilemma. Writing the self, she is forced into representing her gender for her audience while reminding them that this demand for representation is inappropriate. (In parallel, the audience *wants* representation but also disapproves of it, seeing it as an emblem of feminine ego.) Yet if she remains emotionally distant from and in her writing, she risks not meeting the writer's responsibility to convey affect. *This* is a role Ziyada claims explicitly. Any serious writing, she suggests, proceeds from examination of the self that shapes that writing: "For we have experienced being-aloneness with ourselves; we have opened ourselves to gaining an understanding of life's meanings."<sup>48</sup>

In her study of Arab women's memoirs, Golley notes that "in the case of early Arab feminists at least . . . the sense of individualism, when visible, does not control their sense of identity."<sup>49</sup> Yet Fawwaz, Taymur, and Ziyada do construct a strong sense of individual-ness in their texts, forged from the gender-differential social practices of their society that have compelled them to struggle for their own self-realization as writers. The forms their autobiographical practices take write individual-ness into a shared predicament that gives them strength.

All these texts are relational narratives, "incorporat[ing] extensive stories of related others that are embedded within the context of an autobiographical narrative."<sup>50</sup> Through those stories the autobiographical subject forms and displays herself; others enable self-understanding. It may be that offering *autobiography*—the narrating I offering the historical I explicitly, but through focusing on the lives of others—was a necessary step to the next threshold, the visible I/eye of openly first-person personal narrative. Yet the semi-decentered self as subject or object of the life narrative remains; the female self observes and speaks but from the sidelines and of others.<sup>51</sup> If theorists of autobiographical practices are rightly more cautious than they

once were about claiming this as a peculiarly feminine autobiographical practice, and if (as noted by other contributors to this issue) relationality is also embedded in discursive practices linked to Islamic tradition, these texts use the decentered narrating and narrated self to position specifically feminine subjectivities as both constrained and agential, and as set within feminine space and community. Yet what is also powerful about them is their articulation of individual self-realization, as they announce and thereby highlight the marginal positioning of the feminized narrating and witnessing I.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I speak of the modern age. On pre-modern Arabic autobiography, Dwight Reynolds, ed., *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). This article is based on a paper delivered at "Women's autobiography in Islamic Societies: Genre and Genres," Austin, Texas, Jan. 2010.

<sup>2</sup>David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn, "Introduction: Life Histories in India," in *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History*, ed. David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>3</sup>Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading autobiography: a Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>5</sup>On spatial analysis, *Ibid.*, 42–49; on occasions and locations of narration, 69–71.

<sup>6</sup>Mayy Ziyada, *Sawanih fatat* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Hilal, 1922), 1–3. All translations are mine.

<sup>7</sup>On girls' education, Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); on discourses of reading and girls' education, Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), chap. 4.

<sup>8</sup>Philippe Lejeune, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

<sup>9</sup>Booth, *May Her Likes*.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, xv–xvii.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>12</sup>Khalil Thabit, "Yaqt Sarruf," *al-Muqtataf* 91, no 5 (Dec. 1937): 513–15; Booth, *May Her Likes*, xvi.



<sup>13</sup>Smith and Watson, *Reading autobiography*, 7.

<sup>14</sup>Zaynab Fawwaz al-'Amili, *al-Durr al-manthur fi tabaqat rabbat al-khudur*, (Cairo/Bulaq: al-Matba'a al-kubra al-amiriyya, 1312 [1894/95]), 497–500, 524.

<sup>15</sup>Fawwaz, *al-Durr*, 524; Booth, *May Her Likes*, Prologue, chap. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Fawwaz, *al-Durr*, 6.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>18</sup>E.g., Ibid., 78.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 258. "Sharafiyya daughter of Sa'id the Captain," trans. Marilyn Booth, appears in *The Arab Renaissance: Literature, Culture, Media*, ed. Tarek El-Ariss (New York: Modern Languages Association, Texts and Translations Series, 2012); and *Accessing Muslim Lives*, database compiled by Siobhan Lambert-Hurley and Marilyn Booth. [<http://www.accessingmuslimlives.org>]

<sup>20</sup>Smith and Watson, *Reading autobiography*, 33–34.

<sup>21</sup>On autobiography as rhetorical writing with persuasive aims, Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3–5.

<sup>22</sup>Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 5–7, on "unencumbered" universal subjects vs. the encumbered female subject.

<sup>23</sup>On Taymur's life, Marilyn Booth, "'A'isha 'Ismat bint Isma'il Taymur," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography 1850–1950*, ed. Roger Allen (Weisbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2010), 366–76.

<sup>24</sup>"Introduction to *The Results of Circumstances in Words and Deeds* (1888) by Aisha Ismat al-Taimuriyya," trans. Marilyn Booth, in *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*, ed. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 126–28.

<sup>25</sup>Mayy Ziyada, *'A'isha al-Taymur: Sha'irat al-tali'a* (Cairo: Dar al-Muqtataf, 1926). My translations from the Arabic translation in Ziyada. I have not located the Turkish original.

<sup>26</sup>'A'isha 'Ismat Taymur, *al-Diwan al-muhyi rifat al-adab al-baligh min funun al-balagha ghayat al-arab al-muhtawa min husn al-bara'a 'ala ma bihi imtaza al-musamma tibqan li-ma'na bi-Hilyat al-tiraz* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-'amira al-sharafiyya, 1303 [1885/86]), 3–4; Fawwaz, *al-Durr*, 309–10. Appears as "With pure virtue's hand," trans. Marilyn Booth, in El-Ariss, *The Arab Renaissance*; and *Accessing Muslim Lives*.

<sup>27</sup>For another perspective on Taymur, Mervat Hatem, "'A'isha Taymur's Tears and the Critique of the Modernist and the Feminist Discourses on Nineteenth-Century Egypt," in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. Lila Abu-Lughod (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 73–87.

<sup>28</sup>Gagnier, *Subjectivities*, 42, 142.

<sup>29</sup>Nawar al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab Women's Memoirs: Shahrazad Tells Her Story* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), xii. Golley notes that Huda Sha'rawi's memoirs "are considered one of the earliest (if not the earliest) nonfictional autobiographical works by an Arab woman to be published in modern Arab literary history" (36); they were composed in the early 1940s but not published until 1981. Much earlier autobiographical texts by Arab women exist particularly when we redefine "autobiography."

<sup>30</sup>Marilyn Booth, ed., *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>31</sup>Golley, *Reading*, 13. Golley's major focus concerns the postcolonial context of writings in English that seek to intervene in western understandings of Arab women (xiv, 3–14, 35–36).

<sup>32</sup>Ziyada, *Sawanih*, 70; chapter title: "Wasf ghurfatin fi al-maktaba," 70–81. To my knowledge this manuscript never appeared in print.

<sup>33</sup>Marilyn Booth, "Biography and Feminist Rhetoric in Early Twentieth-Century Egypt: Mayy Ziyada's Studies of Three Women's Lives," *Journal of Women's History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 38–64.

<sup>34</sup>Ziyada, *Sawanih*, 1.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 4–5. The text appears as Mayy Ziyada, "Guard your heart carefully," translated and introduced by Marilyn Booth, *Accessing Muslim Lives*.

<sup>37</sup>Ziyada, *Sawanih*, 5.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>49</sup>Golley, *Reading*, 4.

<sup>50</sup>Smith and Watson, *Reading autobiography*, 64.

<sup>51</sup>Shari Benstock, "Authorizing the Autobiographical," in *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Shari Benstock (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 10–33.