
Muṣṭafā Muṣarrafah a Pioneer of Narrative Techniques
in his *Qanṭarah alladī kafara*,
the First Novel Entirely Written in Egyptian Dialect

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Intellectuals and writers like Ibrāhīm Aṣlān and Yūsuf Idrīs have maintained that Qanṭarah alladī kafara, by Muṣṭafā Muṣarrafah's, is one of the most wonderful novels ever written about the 1919 revolution. The peculiarity of Qanṭarah alladī kafara is that it is entirely written in the Egyptian dialect, and the author's choice of the Egyptian patois is revolutionary for Egyptian literature if we consider that patois was used only in certain types of satirical literary production, jokes, and caricatures. Muṣarrafah's work appears even more revolutionary if we consider that he used certain literary techniques such as stream of consciousness and interior monologue at a time when these techniques were far from being widespread in Arabic literature.

We do not have much information about Muṣṭafā Muṣarrafah. What we do know about his life is deduced from the passages written by some authors for *Iḍā'āt naqdiyyah* (Critical Highlights) which was published in 1991¹ as an introduction to his novel *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* (Qanṭarah who Became an Infidel) or from some of his short stories included in a collection entitled *Haḍayān wa qīṣaṣ uḥrā* (Delirium and Other Stories)².

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¹ The above-mentioned 1991 edition is the second one, by "Mağallat Adab wa Naqd", al-Qāhirah. The first edition was published by Markaz Kutub al-Šarq al-Awsaṭ, al-Qāhirah 1966. In this article I will refer to the second edition.

² *Haḍayān wa qīṣaṣ uḥrā* is a collection of fourteen short stories: eight in Egyptian dialect and six in Modern Standard Arabic. It has been published by Markaz Kutub al-Šarq al-Awsaṭ, al-Qāhirah, without a date. For further information, see: F. De Angelis, *La letteratura egiziana in dialetto nel primo novecento*, Jouvence, Roma 2007, pp. 210-215.

Yūsuf Idrīs (1927-1991) writes that Mušarrafah belonged to an aristocratic family from Damietta³, and Muḥammad ‘Awdah adds that he worked and lived in Great Britain⁴ for a long time, and before leaving he became involved in socialism. When he returned to Egypt he tried to spread it among the Egyptians. His battle in favour of socialism then became a lifelong commitment.

The author recounts the circumstances of his homecoming, and how socialist theories were received by the Egyptians:

I returned to Egypt and won a post as English Teacher at University. Despite the fact that my position in England, and the income from my books and stories surpassed my salary in Egypt, I gladly chose to live in my own country and talk to the people I came in contact with about socialism and what it means. I found that they grasped it quickly and realised that this was because of prevailing poverty. It was beyond me to improve the condition of the working class, but from the discussions we had I understood that they were defiant towards poverty, indignant at the overthrown regimes, and I felt it was a good start. This is because the people's discontent ultimately always leads to the overthrowing of governments⁵.

Qanṭarah allaḍī kafara is the first novel entirely written in Egyptian dialect. It was written in 1940 but it was published only in the Sixties. The title of the novel is the result of a rather brainy “linguistic operation”. Qanṭarah is the nickname of what can be considered the main character of the novel. But *qanṭarah* also means “arched bridge”. In one of the working class districts of Cairo, al-‘Ābidīn, there used to be a little bridge connecting al-Ḥalīḡ Street to Darb al-Ġamāmīz, that bridge was called *qanṭarat Kafārillī*, that is “the bridge of Caffarelli”⁶. The local inhabitants though, would usually invert the position of the syllables of the French General’s surname, changing it into *Qanṭarah illī kafar*, a vernacular expression that can be translated in “Qanṭarah becomes an unbeliever”. Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah then changed, in turn, the dialect expression into classical Arabic, thus obtaining the title for the novel, *Qanṭarah allaḍī kafara*.

The novel’s events take place at the time of the 1919 revolution. The area of Rab’ Šayḡ al-‘Aṭṭārīn, where the story unfolds, is home to a complex society, stricken by poverty but at the same time imbued with a strong vital spirit. The inhabitants of Taḥt al-Rab’ have to face difficulties and even personal tragedies, but their participation in the ’19 revolution will restore them to a new sense of dignity. The *rab’* is much more than an excuse to tell the story of the revolution, because its inhabitants have more urgent things to do than joining a demonstration. They must necessarily eat, hate, love, sleep and generally struggle to make ends meet. This is possibly why Iman Farag maintains that the way Mušarrafah depicts the lower urban classes and imagines their attitude toward issues of national import to be somewhat slacker and not as unambiguous as the image offered by nationalist propaganda⁷.

³ Yūsuf Idrīs, *‘Ālam ḥāṣṣ mashūr*, in *bi-Šarāḥah ḡayr muṭlaqah*, Maktabat Miṣr, al-Qāhirah 1982, cited in *Iḍā’āt naqdiyyah*, introduction to Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah, *Qanṭarah allaḍī kafara*, cit., 1991, p. 11.

⁴ Muḥammad ‘Awdah, *Qanṭarah wa ‘l-ayyām al-ḥawālī*, in *Iḍā’āt naqdiyyah*, cit., p. 24.

⁵ Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah, *Naḡwà*, in ID., *Haḍayān wa qiṣaṣ uḡrā*, cit., p. 33.

⁶ It is Louis-Marie-Joseph Maximilian Caffarelli du Falga (1756-1799), a French General who took part in the Campaign of Egypt (1798-1801). He was also a member of the political economy section of the Institut d’Égypte.

⁷ Iman Farag, *Qanṭara perd la foi*, in “Egypt/Monde Arabe”, n. 14, 2e trimestre, 1993, p. 201.

The heroes of the novel are the residents of a small quarter situated in an area called Taḥt al-Rab'. They are a peddler from Upper Egypt, a maidservant and her blind mother, the chief scavenger, a carpenter, a pasha and a *Dār al-'ulūm* graduate who cannot find a job: that is to say all those who triggered the revolution or contributed to its first stirrings⁸. In other words, all the ones that Mušarrāfah named «the most important unknown warriors»⁹.

'Abd al-Salām, known as Qanṭarah, is the character that emerges above all others. He has graduated at *Dār al-'ulūm*, but is still without a job. He lives out of dodges and the occasional flattery poem he writes for a pasha; his goal is to obtain, through the pasha's intercession, a grant enabling him to pursue his studies in France. Qanṭarah is an opportunist and a man without any scruples, so much so that he will get to the point of selling the young and wretched Sayyidah to the pasha. Because of this last service in favour of the powerful pasha, 'Abd al-Salām will succeed in leaving for France. Here Qanṭarah will be strongly influenced by new acquaintances, as if going abroad should imply questioning all certainties possessed before leaving, or going to Europe should result in a moral regeneration. Thus the author explains:

In Europe *šayḥ* Qanṭarah had a strange experience that would change his personality. Before going there he used to be an exploiter, which is why he managed to be sent to France. Once there though, he began to be doubtful about religion, influenced by the students of his faculty, and by the family he was staying with. He made a peculiar discovery, that the majority of students believed religion to be an absurdity, and so he would not be taken for a fool he began behaving as an atheist. After brooding over it awhile, he started feeling sceptical about all religions. He made friends with some socialists and began reading books about socialism. This gave him the deepest understanding he had ever experienced. He stopped lying, or being distrustful of the people around him, be they Egyptians or foreigners; he vowed to no longer resort to flattery or fail to give back the money he borrowed, like he had done with Fāṭimah. Or be late in paying his debts, like with Baḥlaq the grocer. He even stopped writing to the man who had sent him to France¹⁰.

Once back in Egypt Qanṭarah is a totally different man. He lives in regret of his behaviour toward his unfortunate fellow citizens. And so, it is in the hope of doing something for them that he becomes involved in the terrorist operations of the *Wafd* Party, and meets the revolution leader Sa'd Zaḡlūl (1859-1927). Notwithstanding his metamorphosis, Qanṭarah will be unable to bear the burden of remorse and shall finally commit suicide.

Besides the episodes involving 'Abd al-Salām, there are other lesser stories in the novel, that are centred on other characters. In *Qanṭarah allaḍī kafara* there is a story of love and exploitation between a couple of beggars, and another of social ascent and descent about a peddler. And as Yūsuf Idrīs put it, the novel includes one of the greatest love stories ever to be read in folktales. The story revolves around Sayyidah and Aḥmad, the son of the carpenter, who dies of an epidemic¹¹.

The revolution in itself is the driving force of the events in the novel, and it

⁸ 'Abdallāh Ḥayrat, *Maḍā fī Qanṭarah allaḍī kafara?*, in "al-Fikr al-mu'ašīr", n. 17, Yūliyyū 1966, cited in *Iḍā'āt naqdiyyah*, cit., pp. 51.

⁹ Mušafā Mušarrāfah, *Qanṭarah allaḍī kafara*, cit., p. 173.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

¹¹ Yūsuf Idrīs, *'Ālam ḥāšš mashhūr*, cit., pp. 9-10.

has a cathartic function. This is what causes an inner change in the characters, especially in Qanṭarah himself. Qanṭarah is transformed from being a selfish opportunist and morally debased person, into becoming a member of the secret apparatus of the *Wafd* Party.

The actual hero of the novel is no character but rather the revolution itself, which is not presented as a succession of events, yet is a constant presence throughout the entire novel, as it serves as the background against which the stories of the characters are staged¹². The revolution is more than a mere general context, it is part of the everyday life of the characters.

The novel is somehow divided in two sections. The first part of *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* could be called the literary part, as it does not provide any explicit reference to the revolution. The reader relives the daily lives of the residents of *al-rab'*; the revolution seeps into the texture of these lives, lays the foundation for new values, modifies the concerns of ordinary citizens and shapes their destinies. Muṣarrāfah achieves all this smoothly and with ease and simplicity. He skilfully blends in daily events with the historical events of his homeland. If the first part helps the reader gain an insight of human nature¹³, then the second part, that could be said to be the political part, helps raise political awareness and investigates class consciousness¹⁴. In this part of the novel the dialect acquires an abundance of nationalist expressions.

It is obvious though, that the last part of the novel has not been written with the same thorough care, formal and of contents, as the first part. From the sixth chapter on, the feeling is that of reading notes taken down by the writer to be developed, later on, in a future more ample and complex narration. Šukrī 'Ayyād believes that, had the novel been written entirely, that is with the same method as the first part, it would have probably numbered 400 if not 500 pages. Despite this, 'Ayyād continues, those hundred pages are still the best ever written in a novel about the 1919 revolution, whether in dialect or standard Arabic¹⁵.

Šukrī 'Ayyād's thesis is supported by the fact that Qanṭarah undergoes a metamorphosis which takes place way too rapidly. The moral transfiguration involving one of the main characters of *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* is not very likely, not that narrative must necessarily be so, but, like 'Abdallāh Ḥayrat maintains, the sudden change of Qanṭarah from negative into positive character recalls what happens in legends and fairy tales for children, where the reasons generating the metamorphosis of the hero are not adequately explained¹⁶. And it is precisely to articulate the profound change that takes place in Qanṭarah that Muṣarrāfah should have written more, as Šukrī 'Ayyād believes. But, as said previously, Muṣarrāfah did not have the time to complete the novel as he should have done, and probably would have wanted to do. Indeed, Muḥammad Rūmīš believes that

¹² Fārūq 'Abd al-Qādir, *Fī 'l-riwāyah al-miṣriyyah al-ḡadīdah*, in "Wiḡhāt al-naẓar", n. XLIII, Aḡuṣṭus 2002, p. 67.

¹³ What is here defined as the first part of the novel ends with the suicide of Sayyidah (page 166). The young woman is in fact unable to come to cope with the death of her fiancée Aḥmad.

¹⁴ Muḥammad Rūmīš, *Iltiqāt al-rūḥ al-miṣrī*, in *Iḏā'āt naqdiyyah*, cit., p. 41.

¹⁵ Šukrī 'Ayyād, *Dars al-Ustād*, in *Ṭaḡārib fī 'l-adab wa 'l-naqd*, Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī li 'l-Ṭibā'ah wa 'l-Naṣr, al-Qāhirah 1986, in *Iḏā'āt naqdiyyah*, cit., p. 16.

¹⁶ 'Abdallāh Ḥayrat, *Maḏā fī Qanṭarah alladī kafara?*, cit., p. 55.

the last pages of *Qanṭarah allaḍī kafara* were written by Muḥammad ‘Awdah¹⁷, at all times very close to Mušarrāfah, and especially so when the latter was too ill to complete his work.

In going back to the characters in the more traditional sense, it appears that, once the reader has finished the novel, the best remembered character is ‘Abd al-Salām. As Mušarrāfah himself reveals, ‘Abd al-Salām represents all those Egyptians that have at times lost faith in their country and people, have left Egypt both intellectually and geographically¹⁸, but have later found hope again.

Mušarrāfah succeeds in showing the inner world of his characters, especially those of Qanṭarah and Sayyidah, displaying their concerns, thoughts and fantasies. Their inner world seems to flow directly out of their souls, free from any rational restraint. This is why their behaviour and conduct often appear to be split into different directions and trains of thought. For instance, when Qanṭarah prays he thinks of several things at a time, so that the reader can see him both praying and daydreaming. On one occasion, he thinks of the bosom of a girl whom he has seen in the street. Another time he remembers a joke he has heard in the café. On a third occasion he thinks of how he should repair his shoe by replacing its sole. At the same time Mušarrāfah sheds light on the most obscure aspects of the revolution and its influence over society. All characters are presented to us in their strength and weakness, in their psychological complexity and shallowness, emerging from the hand of the writer, who has been planning to set them free all along, their personality finally unleashed¹⁹.

As for the style and narrative techniques, the critic Farīdah al-Naqqāš maintains that *Qanṭarah allaḍī kafara* is a realistic novel which cuts all ties with the romantic tendencies of the preceding novels, considering the time when it was written (the Forties) rather than when it was published (1966). This becomes more important when comparing it to the historical novels by Ğūrġī Zaydān (1861-1914), or to the novel *‘Awdat al-rūḥ* (The Return of the Spirit, 1933) by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987) which is also about the 1919 revolution²⁰.

In Mušarrāfah’s work we find that almost all the characters are ordinary people, none of whom have an ideal or heroic role. As for Zaydān, he has chosen his characters among kings and leaders [...] and we do not hear a single word about people’s souls [...], as is the case in the romantic-realistic work of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm²¹.

In addition to what stated by the Egyptian critic in the previous excerpt, it should be stressed that the realism of *Qanṭarah allaḍī kafara* is the result of use of patois, since the Standard Arabic Language (*Fuṣṣḥā*) is not what people would use in daily life whether they be farmers or physicians. *Fuṣṣḥā* is a language which writers deceitfully and improperly give to their characters²². Restoring them to their own language (dialect) means restoring them to their humanity/cruelty²³.

¹⁷ Muḥammad Rūmīš, *Iltiqāt al-rūḥ al-miṣrī*, cit., p. 41.

¹⁸ Muḥammad ‘Awdah, *Qanṭarah wa ‘l-ayyām al-ḥawālī*, cit., p. 29.

¹⁹ Farīdah al-Naqqāš, *Hādīhi ‘l-riwāyah: ta’rīḥiyyah, wa wāqi‘iyyah, wa ġadīdah*, in *Iḍā‘āt naqdiyyah*, cit., p. 61.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²² Muḥammad Rūmīš, *Iltiqāt al-rūḥ al-miṣrī*, cit., p. 42.

²³ Iman Farag, *Qantara perd la foi*, cit., p. 198.

It is my opinion that *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* shares many of the features of the literary production called “social realism”. Among the most famous pioneers of this literary trend is ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Šarqāwī (1920-1987) and his novel *al-Ard* (The Land, 1954). In spite of the striking resemblance between the two novels – their heroes are both from the lower classes; and the notion that a man has a chief role in orienting his future is equally present in both novels – the two writers portray people in different ways. Whilst al-Šarqāwī idealises his rural characters, often exaggerating the description of the love of the peasants for their land, Mušarrafah writes with no affectation about the people living in the city, and describes them more realistically as he displays both their negative and positive qualities with no excess of emphasis.

The use of certain literary techniques such as the stream of consciousness and the interior monologue, is very interesting, particularly at a time when these techniques were not yet widespread in Arabic literature. The first novel in which we can fully appreciate the use of the stream of consciousness is *al-Sāḥin wa ’l-bārid* (The Hot and the Cold, 1960) by Faṭḥī Ġānim (1924-1999). Mušarrafah also uses iteration, multiple points of view and other literary techniques.

It is important to recall how Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah used the stream of consciousness much sooner than Faṭḥī Ġānim, if we consider when *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* was written, the Forties, and not when it was published, the year 1966. This is surely because Mušarrafah had a deep knowledge of English Literature²⁴ and was able to read authors like James Joyce or William Faulkner. It is certain, however, that Mušarrafah uses that literary technique effectively and with full mastery. Through the stream of consciousness he is able to give events a dramatic charge, forcing the reader to face the tragedy trapped deep down in every character’s inner self.

The peculiarity of *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* is that it is entirely written in the Egyptian dialect, and the author’s choice of the Egyptian patois is revolutionary for Egyptian literature if we consider that patois was used only in certain types of satirical literary production, jokes, and caricatures.

Muḥammad ‘Awdah is in complete agreement with the linguistic choice made by Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah, as in his opinion writing in dialect means using the language spoken by ordinary people; because that is the language in which they express their feelings, their soul’s longings. That is why Egyptian dialect must be the language of literature or at least it should be the language of a single literary genre, above all whenever it deals with a topic that is purely Egyptian. Because the populace of alleys and neighborhoods belong to the lower classes, and they are the ones who did not have the chance to learn Standard Arabic. They are also those who felt powerless and suffered and revolted. They are those who carried the burden of revolution on their shoulders. The Egyptians who screamed and shouted «long live the homeland». They are the ones who took part in all the demonstrations, they are those who died as martyrs for independence²⁵.

According to Muḥammad Rūmīš the novel’s language is not actually patois,

²⁴ Muḥammad ‘Awdah writes: «[Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah] knew the English Language, History and Literature far better than most English people and like no Egyptian before him.» See Muḥammad ‘Awdah, *Qanṭarah wa ’l-ayyām al-ḥawālī*, cit., p. 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

which would be in contrast with Standard Arabic, rather the language of *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* is an eloquent and articulate idiom. It is the language of the people, purified and filtered. Yet it is not the commonplace language of ordinary talk. It has the musicality of poetry, it is an Arabic linguistic system with an Egyptian dialect structure, therefore very effective in expressing the Egyptian spirit²⁶.

Mušarrafah could have written the novel in standard Arabic but he would have never achieved the same effect. In my opinion the writer succeeds in giving the vernacular a literary dignity and in showing its vitality. In the words of Iman Farag, in *Qanṭarah alladī kafara, al-‘ammiyyah* (the dialect) is reconstruction, aesthetics, boundless creation, resourcefulness, in which even onomatopoeia has an important role²⁷.

Through the works of Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah, reading and writing in patois has become a form of psychological analysis and social, philosophical, political investigation. He has shown how Egyptian dialect can be employed for any topic. He had no qualms about using the vernacular, but rather, he did so like other writers use Classic Arabic, and no difficulty prevented him from writing about all sorts of topics. Actually it was his opinion that Arabic Literature in general and Egyptian Literature in particular should use patois because:

There is no great resemblance in the templates, traditions, vocabulary, and syntax of 14th century French Literature and 20th century literature. Yet 19th century literature has a strong connection with 20th century literature [...]. That is the situation in western literature. On the contrary, there is a great uniformity, in terms of style, syntax and narrative techniques, between contemporary Arabic Literature and Literature of the 16th century! I wonder whether anyone knows any modern western literature similar in style to that of the writers who preceded it by three centuries. Amongst us it is quite the opposite, and there are writers whose styles could be mistaken for those from the literature written thirteen centuries before them!²⁸

Perhaps for the first time in the history of Egyptian literature, passing through the experiences of ‘Abdallāh al-Nadīm (1842-1896)²⁹, Bayram al-Tūnisī (1893-1961)³⁰, Luwīs ‘Awaḍ (1915-1990)³¹, *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* has proved how the language of the people holds the ability to establish a literary work of thorough completeness in terms of form and content³².

The logics on which Mušarrafah’s ideas about language are based can be retraced from his own words: «Just like we do not inherit our spirit from our predecessors [...], so does language fail to inherit its spirit from bygone generations. [...], but it does live on in the mouths of people and thus it lives on in

²⁶ Muḥammad Rūmīš, *Iltiqāt al-rūḥ al-miṣrī*, cit., pp. 42-43.

²⁷ Iman Farag, *Qantara perd la foi*, cit., p. 198.

²⁸ Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah, *Muqāranah bayna uslūbayn*, in “al-Ṭaqāfah”, n. 380, Abrīl 1946, cited in ID., *Namādiḡ min maqālāt al-duktūr Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah*, in ID., *Haḡayān wa qīṣaṣ uḡrā*, cit., pp. 65-77.

²⁹ ‘Abdallāh al-Nadīm is the author of what he called *fuṣūl taḡhībīyyah* (moral tales), which are kinds of narrative sketches in Egyptian dialect, published on “al-Tankīt wa ’l-tabkīt” (The Irony and the Reproach, 1881), and “al-Uṣṭād” (The Master, 1892). On the journalistic activity of ‘Abdallāh al-Nadīm see F. De Angelis, *La letteratura egiziana in dialetto nel primo novecento*, cit., pp. 101-108; on *fuṣūl taḡhībīyyah* see, *Ibid.*, pp. 151-186.

³⁰ Bayram al-Tūnisī, apart from many *zaḡal*, wrote in Egyptian dialect two “narrative dialogues” (*ḡiwār sardī*): *al-Sayyid wa mara’uḡ ḡī Baariis* (The Man and his Wife in Paris, 1925) and *al-Sayyid wa mara’uḡ ḡī Miṣr* (The Man and his wife in Cairo, without date).

³¹ Luwīs ‘Awaḍ wrote in Egyptian dialect *Muḡakkirāt ṭālib ba’ṭa* (Memories of Student in Mission), Mu’assasat Rūz al-Yūsuf, al-Qāhirah 1965.

³² Muḥammad Rūmīš, *Iltiqāt al-rūḥ al-miṣrī*, cit., p. 42.

their literature, whether acknowledged by dictionaries or not.»³³

From an orthographic point of view Mušarrafah seems to be hesitating, as if unable to write down the pronunciation of a few letters; for instance he seems torn between *maḍūl* (astonished) or *mazūl*, *ḍalīl* (ignoble) or *zalīl*, and he finally ends up choosing both! One of the reasons for his being so hesitant is that there is no fixed spelling system in the field of patois. Nowhere in the Arab world did the writing of 'āmmiyyah texts reach such proportions, as to bring about the need, or the desire, to produce a standard orthography for it. In particular, orthography for Egyptian 'āmmiyyah is still fluid and has not yet reached a fixed form. Anyway, a fluid orthography and the possibility of multiple spellings for one word are a widespread phenomenon in 'āmmiyyah³⁴.

Finally, it is worth mentioning how *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* was received by the public and the criticism. Firstly, it must be said that the novel did not cause a great sensation in Egypt, either among intellectual circle, or the less learned public. There are few criticism articles about the first novel written entirely in Egyptian dialect. Although these articles, as has been acknowledged in the first part this paper, bear the signatures of authoritative writers such as Yūsuf Idrīs and Ibrāhīm Aṣlān (1935-2012).

According to Yūsuf Idrīs, in his novel Mušarrafah recreates a strange and wonderful world, crafted with genuine mastery. Mušarrafah, Idrīs goes on to say, is the author of a unique novel, which has wrought ground-breaking changes in literature. The writer conjures up quaint images as if from an enchanted world, and is able to achieve this in patois. One does not feel for a single moment that this vernacular does not belong, or is estranged to, the overall atmosphere and artistic images of the novel. Rather one perceives it to be the most accurate and wonderful language a writer's pen could record. Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah, Idrīs adds, writes about common people, about the lower classes of our struggling people, using words that a peasant or a labourer would be unable to utter, even if they were given the culture of Maxim Gorky or Lev Nikolāevič Tolstoj³⁵. He maintains that *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* is a unique novel in Arabic literature, because it is the most wonderful novel ever written about the 1919 revolution, setting aside 'Awdat al-rūḥ, by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, and the part pertaining to the revolution in the trilogy of Naḡīb Maḥfūz (1911-2006)³⁶.

Ibrāhīm Aṣlān also seems favourably impressed by Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah's first novel. He states that in *Qanṭarah alladī kafara* there are pages of beautiful and imposing art. If it had been circulated at that time and spread among readers and writers, as it would have deserved to, and had not been obscured by a curtain of indifference, or purposefully hindered, the entire Egyptian Literary World would have changed³⁷.

³³ Muṣṭafā Mušarrafah, *Muqāranah bayna uslūbayn*, cit., pp. 77-78.

³⁴ G.M. Rosenbaum, *Egyptian Arabic as a Written Language*, in "Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam", 29 (2004), pp. 282-285. On the question of orthography of dialect, see also: Sasson Somekh, *Colloquialized fuṣḥā in Modern Prose Fiction*, in "Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam", n. 16, 1993, pp. 176-194; ID., *Genre and Language in Modern Arabic Literature*, in *Studies in Arabic Language and Literature*, vol. 1, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1991.

³⁵ Yūsuf Idrīs, 'Ālam ḥāṣṣ mashhūr, cit., pp. 10-11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

³⁷ Ibrāhīm Aṣlān, 'Adābāt al-rūḥ wa 'l-badan, in *Idā'āt naqdiyyah*, cit., p. 47.

In conclusion, it can be stated that, despite the positive opinions of illustrious intellectuals, the novel by Mušarrafah seems to be scarcely known to Egyptian readers. Its author is still unappreciated, unheard of and not read by those who should have recognized their own image in the characters, and also by the more wealthy social classes. Even if in recent years, shortly before and after the revolts leading to the end of Mubarak's era, literary productions in dialect have increase, as is often the case when the nationalist sentiment becomes more intense³⁸, the literary establishment and the Egyptian public do not seem to be ready for a literature written in their own mother tongue: the Egyptian dialect.

³⁸ On the relation between nationalism and literary production in dialect, see F. De Angelis, *La letteratura egiziana in dialetto nel primo novecento*, cit.