**Al-Manfalouti, Mustafa Lutfi**

**By Mahmoud AA Ibrahim**

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Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfalouti (1876-1924) is one of Egypt’s greatest modern prose writers and poets. He was born in the Upper Egyptian city of Manfalout to an Egyptian father and Turkish mother. He belonged to a noble family and his father and forefathers served as Sharia judges and heads of the Sufi Syndicates. He followed the steps of his fathers and memorized the entire Quran at a young age, and joined al-Azhar University in Cairo where he was taught by renowned scholars such as Sheikh Muhammad Abduh. His love of literature made him always inclined to reading literary works, especially those of al-Jahiz, al-Mutanabi and Abu al-`Ala’ al-Ma`arri. This granted him a unique and eloquent style of writing that relies largely on his feelings, emotions and sensibilities. This style later came to be known as al-Tariqa al-Manfaloutiyya fi al-Kitaba (The Manfalouti style of writing).

As a poet, he is not as prolific or distinguished as other great poets of the age, such as Ahmad Shawqi, Hafiz Ibrahim, and Mahmoud Sami al-Baroudi. All that he left in this regard was his anthology *Mukhtarat al-Manfalouti* in which he published some poems together with some prose.

Al-Manfalouti mastered no other language except Arabic. Though he quoted and adapted some French literary works, his French was not strong, so he had to refer to some of his friends for help in translation. That done, al-Manfalouti would rephrase and redraft the translation in eloquent ear-catching Arabic literary style. As al-Manfalouti never travelled outside Egypt or mastered any foreign language, his language and style was pure and uninvaded by foreign idioms and expressions. Also, the translations ascribed to him were actually adaptations of pre-existing translations or translations made by his friends as per his request. Thus his adaptation and molding of these translations in his own style make them very much like original works.

Al-Manfalouti’s two books *al-Nazarat* (*Sketches)* (1910)and *al-`Abarat* (*Tears*)(1916) are among the most eloquently written and widely read books in Modern Arabic literature. His three-volume book *al-Nazarat* was originally a collection of edifying essays that he had published serially in *al-Mu’ayyad* magazine under the same title since 1907. The essays cover topics like social literature, criticism, politics, and Islam. *Al-Nazarat* also includes a number of short stories either written by the author or adapted and redrafted by him from translations of literary works in other languages. Tears, calamity, and death are the main themes of these articles.

*Al-`Abarat* includes nine short stories of which three were written by al-Manfalouti himself. These are ‘al-Yatim’ (‘The Orphan’), ‘al-Hijab’ (‘Hijab’) and ‘al-Hawiyah’ (‘The Abyss’). The fourth story, ‘al-`Iqab’ (‘The Punishment’) is derived from an American story, and the remaining five were adapted and redrafted by al-Manfalouiti from French fictions. These are: ‘al-Jaza’(‘The Recompense’), ‘al-Intiqam’ (‘Revenge’), ‘al-Shuhada*’* (‘The Martyrs’), ‘al-Zikra*’* (‘Memories’) and ‘al-Dahiyyah’(‘The Victim’).

Al-Manfalouti’s fiction *Fi Sabil al-Taj* (*For the Sake of the Crown*), which he adapted and redrafted from French, was published in 1916. Al-Manfalouti also published the following translated works: Majdolin *(*this is the nameof the hero)(1912) (1917), *al-Fadilah* (*The Virtue*), and *al-Sha`ir* (*The Poet*)(1921). Finally, his *Mukhtarat al-Manfalouti* (*al-Manfalouti’s Selections*) (1922) includes pieces of poetry and prose which he selected from the works of different Arab poets and writers in different ages.

Due to their rhetoric, unique yet easy style and true sentiment, al-Manfalouti’s writings were well received by audiences from different ages in different Arab countries, and were reprinted several times. Nonetheless Al-Manfalouti’s writings are generally characterized by tragedy, sadness, and a pessimistic worldview, even when he writes or translates romantic stories, to such an extent that he was described as ‘the writer of Sorrow and Crying.’ And his works were described as ‘Works of calamities, disasters and horrifying ends.’

However, he does this in a very engaging and appealing manner. He places his heroes in a tragic position, which he skillfully turns into a theme that moves his readers. Together with his ability to sketch the situation in a unique literary style, this pathos explains his excellence in appealing to the emotions. Moreover, His writings show he was influenced by the religious reform movement, pan-Islamism, and the rise of Egyptian nationalism.

His works appealed for Arab readers because such shocking yet effervescent style did not exist before in Arabic literature. The style, the subjects, the manner of presentation, all possessed an immediate appeal to the Arab audience. Therefore, despite the harsh critiques he received from conservatives and modernists alike, his *al-Nazarat* has survived all attacks and remained the most widely read work in modern Arabic literature.

The harshest critics of al-Manfalouti were the Lebanese writer Umar Fakhouri and the Egyptian critic Ibrahim `Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini. However, other great writers and poets such as Taha Hussein, Mahmoud `Abbas al-`Aqaad, Ahmad Shawqi, and Hafiz Ibrahim greatly admired and lauded his works. His supporters describe him as the most eloquent writer of the modern age in terms of the eloquence and articulateness of his statements, and his ability to produce a realistic image of the events he describes so that it appeals to and maintains an influence on the souls of his readers.

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