CHAPTER- IV
A CRITICAL STUDY OF AL-MANFALUTI’S SHORT STORIES

Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti was one of the early short story writers whose works are of considerable interest to those concerned with Arabic literature. His works have certain features in common, most notable among them being a romantic tendency to sentimentality. Indeed it is al-Manfaluti’s works that paved the way to romanticism in Arabic literature. In his writings, al-Manfaluti followed the conventional path of the religious reformer Shaikh Muhammad Abduh.

Despite the apparently conventional nature of his career, however, a latent rebellious streak in his nature had already become apparent when he was briefly imprisoned for publishing verses insulting the Khedive Abbas II. Although he went on to publish more verses, however, it is not for his verse that he is remembered so much as for his prose essays, articles and short stories. Al-Manfaluti published his collection of short stories al-Abarat in 1915 in the newspaper al-Mu’ayyad. It is a series of moralistic and sentimental stories in which he made use of fictional contexts as a means of discussing pressing social and moral issues.

4.1: Literary Criticism and al-Manfaluti’s Society

Before looking at the literary criticism, it is important to look at, and to know the type of society, in which a writer found himself during the period in which his/ her literature appeared. It is from the society
which a writer obtains his matter and it is the daily lives of its people from which he finds the threads to weave his stories. It would not be unbelievable to claim that the society itself and the circumstances which prevailed in the society actually gave the greatest impetus to the advancement and shaping of these literary forms. This was borne out by the works of many short story writers who used the problems in the society, including possible solutions to them, as their main themes and plots. This was also true for al-Manfaluti. They provided the background for most of the works that he composed because, as was the case with nearly all major writers of the period, he was concerned in one way or another with the political, social, religious and economic problems of his society, and his attitude towards them is reflected in his writings.

The Egyptian society during the periods preceding the emergence of short story was riddled with shortcomings. The problem of ignorance and illiteracy, for example, was widespread amongst the general population, especially in the lower class of the countryside. A common belief amongst the rulers and elite was that the peasants were good for nothing and should be left in the dark. Those who were concerned with culture and education began to discuss these issues and propagated the lifting of the peasants’ living standards and education. That would in turn raise the level of the nation as a whole. In fact, a struggle ensued between the new cultural group and those who fought to maintain the status quo. The essays and stories of the day treated these issues in detail.

Al-Manfaluti’s stories are written in a highly polished prose which at the time may have made a modern impression, although it was still very ornate. Its contents even more than its style, must have appealed to the public at large. Al-Manfaluti was an indefatigable apologist of all that
was Muslim and non-Western in Egyptian society. However, despite his criticism of the West, al-Manfaluti did not entirely reject Western civilization. He was a typical representative of the dichotomy which characterized the Egyptian intellectual of the time. Al-Manfaluti himself was convinced that he wrote in modern, i.e. simple and unlaboured, Arabic. His language is full of synonyms, repetitions and difficult words which are explained to the general public in footnotes. Although he has been regarded as a transitional figure between neo-classicism and a kind of romanticism, al-Manfaluti undoubtedly appealed to the tastes of the conservative reading public of his day and was far removed from the literary avant-garde which was emerging during the years of his greatest triumphs. In some respects his work was not entirely conservative. Thus he hardly wrote any rhyming prose which is considered a great merit. Although al-Manfaluti’s stories may not contain all the features of the short story, there can surely be no denying the concision of their expression, while the short narratives certainly reflect the nervousness and restlessness of modern life as it is impacted upon Egyptian society at the time.

*Al-Abarat* is a collection of short stories, some of which are obviously original. Others are translations, although the name of the original author is often omitted, which was a usual phenomenon in Arabic publications of the time. The stories often start with a concrete event or a conversation, which heightens their topicality and liveliness, but mostly also suffer from a great verbosity, which reduces their vividness. Al-Manfaluti’s ideas were those of an enlightened Muslim conservative. He strongly emphasizes the ethical side of the problems he points out. His social awareness was still completely of an old style. The contented poor repeatedly earns his praise. Al-Manfaluti not only defended Islam, but
also argued that Western civilization owes its existence to the influence of Islam.

If one looks at these stories from an artistic point, one finds that they actually represented the romantic movement. They also dealt a lot with self-analysis, bravery, love and other emotions, thoughts and reflections, and unexpected romantic happenings. Most translations were from works of famous French writers, e.g. Maupassant, Francois Coppee and Bordeaux.

After the brief presentation of the translation of al-Manfaluti’s stories which were printed in the newspapers and magazines or published as books, one can summarize the most salient features of those stories as follows:

1. The aim of the translations was either educational or recreational.
2. The topics, plots and themes of the majority were romantic in nature, and based on exaggeration.
3. The choice of story depended on the taste of the people. The populace had to be satisfied above all else in what was translated and written.
4. Translations were made from all the major languages such as English, French, Italian, Spanish and Russian, although most translations were done from the former two.
5. No mention was made in the translated books that they were translations. The only indications that they were translations were the names of the characters and the places where the story occurred.

In the preface to al-Manfaluti’s collection of essays *al-Nazarat* he stated that he had a preference for sad tales and in this volume he gave
free rein to his inclination. Unfortunately the sentimentality of *al-Abarat* is not offset by the liveliness that is so typical of *al-Nazarat*.

Al-Manfaluti’s work may be seen as typical of the many contrasting forces at work in Egyptian intellectual life. The patent inconsistencies in many of his political and cultural views has not endeared him to critics of later generations but it is perhaps the very candour, simplicity and idealism of his writings, and most specially his collection of vignettes entitled *al-Nazarat*, which made him so popular. In the new and powerful medium of the press, his straightforward style and uncomplex moral vision found a ready audience. Perhaps nothing can provide a more graphic illustration of the power and range of the translation movement than the fact that al-Manfaluti, who apparently new no European language himself adapted the stories for publication as romantic tales in Arabic.

Al-Manfaluti’s works are distinguished among those of the pioneers by their stylistic and emotive power. This increases the importance of his contribution for it sustained the reading public’s need for fiction. He succeeded in this because he aimed his writing not at the elite or the intellectuals, but at the public at large, the intelligent common reader. His short stories, which he called in his famous *al-Abarat* pay considerable attention to emotive language and elegant style and are particularly skilful in emotional agitation. But this stylistic gift does not save them from serious shortcomings, but disturbs the balance of the text and hampers the integration of its various components in a harmonious manner.

Despite his great popularity, al-Manfaluti’s role in Egyptian literary life itself seems to have been limited. At an early stage his colleagues
started criticizing and ridiculing him. Ibrahim Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini, for instance, taunted him in the sensational pamphlet *al-Diwan fi al-Adab wa al-Naqd* (1921) for his elaborate style and use of many synonyms and mercilessly analyzed the opening story of *al-Abarat*. Al-Mazini felt that al-Manfaluti lacked the exposure to a wide cultural experience as he did not study abroad and therefore acquired no foreign culture and that his style was confined with the use of pure words not carrying any substantial meaning and deep thought. He claimed that al-Manfaluti’s style was too ‘soft’ and ‘empty’, not containing anything but ‘tears’ (alluding to al-Manfaluti’s book, *al-Abarat*, meaning ‘The Tears’) and that only adolescents would find it fascinating. Al-Mazini did not state it explicitly, but his criticism could be attributed to the fact that the critics’ concept of the ‘ideal model’ in writing had changed. The modern writer must not only be satisfied with a beautiful, strong and pure style, but must also possess deep and expansive thought that could pave the way for and facilitate precise expression about the innermost emotions, thought, and different degrees of consciousness.

Later Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad also criticized al-Manfaluti’s style while even Taha Husain whose own prose was far from simple, had serious objections to him in 1911, when he was still a student. Al-Manfaluti’s stories published in the magazine *al-Fajr* were slated by the younger writers. Al-Manfaluti could not get the popularity among the later generation of authors too; the poet and critic Salah Abd al-Sabur, for instance, finds his stories highly sentimental.

It is easy for a critic to underestimate al-Manfaluti’s contribution to modern Arabic literature, as much of his writing, with its mood of sentimental romanticism and often moralistic tone, are not up to the

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327 Daif, op. cit., PP-189-90.
contemporary taste. However, he was widely admired and read by his contemporaries, not because of his lucid prose style, which stands at cross roads between the complexities of traditional Arabic prose and the simpler modern prose style that has since become the norm. Not the least point of interest is that the author who unlike many of his contemporaries, had not studied in the west and knew no western languages, was able to publish Arabic versions of several French literary works. Although it is clear that, for such an enterprise, al-Manfaluti must have had some sort of collaborator, the phenomenon is a graphic illustration of the difference between contemporary notions of authorship and the more relaxed standard of Arab world in the early twentieth century, in which notions of plagiarism were only just beginning to gain currency. Although the essays and stories of al-Manfaluti seem for a short time to have reflected the mood of the moment among at least a proportion of his contemporaries, they strike most of the modern readers as belonging to an earlier age.

The translated stories that gained immediate popularity in the second decade of the twentieth century were those of al-Manfaluti from French literature, also through intermediaries. His loose, highly personalized translations of famous works from French literature quickly won acclaim in the Arab world, and whole generations grew up enjoying them. This was not due simply to his fluent, lucid, vivid and pure Arabic style, nor simply to the romantic temper of the works which greatly suited the romantic temper that was gaining sway in the Arab world at that time. It was also due to the generous and humane spirit with which they were imbued, which could be felt in al-Manfaluti’s choice of words, his emphases, his preferences, his empathy with those who suffered and endured. Al-Manfaluti also tried to write his own creative work, though
with less success in the form of long short stories, which involved events that could be the basis of whole story, centering mainly on the adversities and drawbacks of Arab society at the turn of the twentieth century.

Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti in Egyptian society was completely involved in the description of the tragic aspects of the lives of the poor and the way poverty and immorality led to adversity. His collection \textit{al-Abarat} consists of eight stories four were translated and four were written directly by him. Both the translated and original stories deal with such topics as the consequences of corruption, the weakness of the flesh, the treachery of others, the detrimental influence of drink and gambling, and the cruelty and tyranny of those in power. They illustrate a grim aspect of life, touch on love’s many-sided aspects, preach the value of loyalty, chastity, generosity and self sacrifice.

Abu al-Anwar refers to what Critic Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat said concerning the change in literature which al-Manfaluti initiated and which attracted so much attention:

Our Lebanese brothers in America and Egypt opened the windows of Arabic literature to the literature of the West, and showed us a literary art unknown in Arab literature, but it was weak in structure, confusing as a literary model, and we disliked it like we disliked the \textit{maqama} style and then the style of al-Manfaluti dawned in \textit{al-Mu’ayyad} and writers and readers saw a new art which did not appear in the paragraphs of Jahiz or in newspapers or in translations. So we welcomed it as a camel would (welcome) the only drinking place, and the youth would await the appearance of \textit{al-Mu’ayyad} every Thursday in order to read al-Manfaluti’s articles five, six, seven times and all of them wished that they could physically and mentally connect to al-Manfaluti whom God had chosen as the messenger for this virgin
Al-Manfaluti occupied this position in literature when he was only thirty-one years of age. He afterwards made a great impression and travelled to the furthest horizons of fame. Abu al-Anwar quotes other opinions about al-Manfaluti – the Orientalist Brockelman described him as follows: “He was the most famous essayist of the twentieth century”; Ahmad Shakir al-Karami said: “He was more widely known than his contemporaries”. Likewise, the magazine *al-‘Irfan* related: “He was by far the most famous author of his time”\(^{329}\). Al-Manfaluti gained this unheard of fame at the time not only in Egypt, but in the whole Arab world, especially Syria and Lebanon.

Al-Manfaluti’s works captivated an Anglican priest in Lebanon so much that he recited al-Manfaluti’s ode ‘Paul and Virginia’ to his congregation who received it well. Perhaps this was the first Arabic ode recited from a church pulpit during prayers, and maybe the last too\(^{330}\).

Ahmad Hafiz Awad said that the nation regarded him as the beacon light which must guide them through the darkness of doubt, and as their refuge to whom they can run to in times of difficulty\(^{331}\). Writing about Arab poets and poetry, the words of H.A.R. Gibb might as well have applied to al-Manfaluti as well: “the man who, by skilful ordering of vivid imagery in taut, rightly nuanced phrases, could play upon the emotions of his hearers, was not merely lauded as an artist but venerated as the protector and guarantor of the honour of the tribe and a potent weapon against its enemies”\(^{332}\).

Due to his fame, al-Manfaluti was elected as a member of the

\(^{328}\) Al-Anwar, op. cit., pp.55-56.

\(^{329}\) Ibid., p.56.

\(^{330}\) Ibid., pp.56-57.


\(^{332}\) Gibb, op. cit., p.29.
Arabic Scientific Society in Damascus. On the fortieth day after al-Manfaluti’s death, this Society would commemorate his demise, and one of its members, the poet Shafiq Jabri, wrote an elegy in honour of the position which al-Manfaluti had held in society. After his death, as during his lifetime, a lot of discussion and debate around him and his literary works took place, which is evidence of the literary place that he occupied in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon.\footnote{Al-Anwar, op. cit., p.57.}

As was previously seen in his biographic details, al-Manfaluti’s relationship with especially the three mentioned personalities also influenced his writings profoundly. The dedications he wrote to them bear this out very clearly. Besides being close and sincere friends, Imam Muhammad Abduh was his religious and literary mentor, Sa’ad Pasha Zaghlul supported him politically and financially and Shaikh Ali Yusuf provided him with the opportunity to practice his writing skills and thereby made him known to the public in his newspaper. His innovative, simple writing style and sincere concern about his society and their suffering influenced and endeared him to the people across the Arab world.

\section*{4.2: An Assessment of al-Manfaluti’s Literary Works}

Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti was firstly, in the world of literature during his time, a noteworthy and phenomenal personality and, secondly, a figure worthy of honour and admiration, because he lived during a time when the writing styles were still not free from the remains of imitation and fabrication. The awakening and recovery from
that direction, namely imitation and fabrication, was represented in the poem of Ahmad Shawqi *Fi Aswaq al-dhahab* (In the Gold Markets) and Bakri’s *Saharij al-Lu’lu’* (The Tanks of Pearls), but in the case of al-Manfaluti’s style it was, as described by professor Salah Abd al-Sabur, “a far reaching step in development, which indicated the richness of al-Manfaluti’s self and his voluntary efforts for renewal. This style differed dramatically from the *maqama* style of Muhammad al-Muwaylihi in *HadithIsha ibn Hisam* and even Hafiz Ibrahim’s *Layali Satih*”\(^{334}\).

The following major writers’ and literary critics’ viewpoints about al-Manfaluti were already noted in the introduction: Dr. Muhammad Abu al-Anwar, Dr. Ahmad Haikal, Critic Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat, Shaikh Abd al-Aziz al-Bashari, Taha Hussain, Critic Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, K. Brockelman and H.A.R. Gibb. They were all constructive, favorable comments which emphasized the great stature and place al-Manfaluti occupies in modern Arabic literature. Many other prominent literary personalities also assessed and gave their carefully weighed opinions about him and his works. A contemporary scholar of al-Manfaluti, Ahmad Lutfi Sayyid, said about him:

> The best with *bayan* (eloquent and clear speech) amongst us is Sayyid Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti. I almost do not find anyone amongst our writers who is equal to him in style. He excels in giving words a kind of speciality which expresses exactly the meaning he wants to convey and which almost have no other meaning. He deals with difficult topics and makes them so easy and clear to the reader that the reader thinks they are his own compositions, while (of course) they were not\(^{335}\).

The writer of the book *Mustafa lutfi al-Manfaluti: al-Nazarat*

\(^{334}\) Quoted in Al-Anwar, p.83.  
\(^{335}\) Quoted in Al-Anwar, p.83.
Bassam Abd al-Wahab al-Jabi quotes Ahmad Hafiz Awad’s description of al-Manfaluti’s writing style:

There is seldom found someone who can satisfy the specialist (public) with his pen and (simultaneously) satisfy the general (public) with his eloquent rhetoric and clarity. If he is too elevated (in his style), he obscures his point to the general (man), and if he relegates (his style), his pen angers the specialist. As for (al-Manfaluti), he is in my opinion the rare writer who preserved and maintained his eloquent style in all his affairs and under all circumstances it shows that the Arabic disposition was one of his talents, not one of his flaws. He is also the only writer who could strike a fine balance between the understanding of his meaning and his aims that indicates that he writes with his heart and not with his pen and that he addresses the heart and not the pages and lines\(^\text{336}\).

Al-Manfaluti is considered in modern Arabic literature as the apogee of the movement towards pure Arabic prose and its liberation from the shackles of fabrication, imitation and weakness. He released himself from every kind of chain that was so characteristic of his predecessors and contemporaries. He himself said that he was highly impressed with the Arabic style during the ‘golden age’ of Arabic literature, critical of the decline of the language and the style of that period which was suffering from the ‘disease’ of fabrication. He considered all of the styles just words of the tongue, and therefore false and invalid, because the styles depended on flowery rhetoric and embellished expression, embellished sentences, or dry, rigid words. He took an interest in a type of style of which the salient feature was ‘speech from the heart’, that is, in his own words:

prose or poetry which, when you listen to it, you feel as if

its composer is at your side, speaking to you like a person talking to his companion until you see the veil of the words become thin in front of you, it is the most superior and noble speech – and this (to be eloquent and clear) should be the intention of all writers, no matter how they differ in rhetorical expression and style\textsuperscript{337}.

In the introduction to \textit{al-Nazarat} he explains his writing style, saying, “In speech, I did not care about words of the tongue or speech of the mind, that is, I only used necessary words and words with intrinsic meaning”\textsuperscript{338}.

The efforts of people like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Imam Muhammad Abduh to rid Arabic of its weaknesses and chains of \textit{saj’} and \textit{badi’} crystallized in the writing style of al-Manfaluti. He was like the link that completed the chain of these attempts and efforts, and is thus considered as a rare and precious phenomenon of his time. If one looks at his contribution in the light of what was discussed in earlier (Arab intellectual life, literature before the press, the ‘socialization’ of literature, the problems of \textit{saj’} and \textit{badi’}, and so forth), then one can realise how innovative, pioneering and significant his efforts really were, and why he deserves to be honoured and admired. Al-Aqqad says in this continuation:

\begin{quote}
Al-Manfaluti was one of those few writers who put meaning and intention into Arabic \textit{insha’} (composition) after all meaning had forsaken it. Only those who study the styles of previous generations will know the significance of this blessed stage (which al-Manfaluti brought about). Previously the style was conservative and the same in all writings. It was present in every \textit{maqama} and known before the writer even lifted his pen the aim of writing was like that of the sermons delivered from the pulpits, repeated in its texts, its topics and its tone, as if they were played from a tape
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{337} Quoted in Al-Anwar, p.84.
\textsuperscript{338} Quoted in Al-Anwar, p.84.
recorder expressions were filled with, and limited to, difficult saj’, repetitive idioms, hackneyed duplication (and thereby losing its impact and becoming dull), and Qur’anic verses quoted out of context. Writers were too scared to change the order of the words or expressions of previous works, and if one could gather all of these expressions, they would fill up (only) one book. This was the state of writing during the generations before al-Manfaluti and his contemporaries. The articles in magazines and newspapers, the translations of Western compositions, and the literature of the Arabic heritage made it essential to change the writing style. The importance of al-Manfaluti was that he did not suffer from the effects of the saj’ and badi’ styles of writing, but was able to tread a new way in which meaning and intention (simultaneously) entered Arabic compositions.

The well-known author and critic Umar al-Dasuqi says in this regard:

Al-Manfaluti was able to start a new way in literary writing, a way which was diametrically opposite to that of the writers of the nineteenth century who used different shades of saj’ and badi’ repeating its kinaya (metonymy), tashbih (analogy) and majaz (metaphor) even when they did not suit the topic or the atmosphere or the period likewise (al-Manfaluti’s) way was opposite to that of the prose in the newspapers at the time.

Al-Manfaluti’s contribution must also be seen in the light of the colonization of Egypt at that point in history. He was one of the few writers who could effectively defend the classical Arabic language with the pen against the colonizers who wanted to use the colloquial Arabic language as a means to break the unity of the different Arab and Muslim peoples. He succeeded admirably in making his people see the beauty and power of the classical language, and eloquently convinced

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339 Quoted in Al-Anwar, p.86.
340 Quoted in Al-Anwar, pp.86-87.
his fellow Arabs that the Arabic language was, and must always be, one of his objects of pride.

Dr. Ahmad Haikal describes al-Manfaluti as “the most prominent figure in the first art school of modern Arabic prose which can bear his name, that is, Madrasa al-Manfaluti (The School of al-Manfaluti) or Tariqa al-Manfaluti (The Style of al-Manfaluti)”.\(^{341}\)

Al-Manfaluti’s compositions and his influence in prose can be compared to those of Ahmad Shawqi’s in poetry, bearing in mind the differences between the two artists – Shawqi was on a higher level as an artist, more firmly grounded in Arabic poetry, and was therefore able to contribute much more in the field of poetry than al-Manfaluti in prose, but each of them was a symbol in his own right of the pioneering development in his specific art at the time\(^{342}\). The words of Mounah Khouri and Hamid Algaron poets so fittingly apply to al-Manfaluti as well:

> Nevertheless, with their relatively imposing standards of ‘good sense’, ‘refinement’, and ‘correctness’ in structure and style, and their tendency toward an emotional expression of patriotic and social themes, these poets undoubtedly revived a petrified poetic language, revitalized a dying aesthetic sensibility, reached a wider range of the general public, and achieved in a substantial part of their poetry an authentic expression of current ideas and aspirations and championed the cause of progress, national freedom and liberal thought (our emphasis)\(^{343}\).

Dr. Ahmad Haikal gives the most accurate description of al-Manfaluti when he says:

> The style which al-Manfaluti initiated was a conservative, clear and eloquent style, comparable to the style of Ahmad Shawqi

\(^{341}\) Quoted in Al-Anwar, p.87.

\(^{342}\) Ibid., p.87.

\(^{343}\) Daif, op. cit., pp.6-7.
in poetry. Al-Manfaluti was the apex of those who wrote in this way since the time when Muhammad Abduh had pioneered it during the previous period, in the same manner as Shawqi was the apex of the poets who wrote in a conservative, clear and eloquent way since the time when al-Barudi had shown the way during the previous period too.

Al-Manfaluti was a powerful answer to the needs of his time as far as style was concerned. His *maqalat* were thus accepted and welcomed in an unprecedented way. They forcefully attracted students of literature and chanters in that field. They would gather around his books in circles, reading them five, six, seven times, and would wish that they could connect physically and mentally to al-Manfaluti.

Henceforth, al-Manfaluti’s influence would be clear in the literary school that followed on his appearance, that is, the school of musical mode, salutary form and radiant style. The influence of this style could be seen in the works of the famous Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat and Taha Hussain. Abu al-Anwar quotes Dr Ahmad Haykal’s comments about the period that followed the revolt in 1919:

One of the results was that the *badi‘* style (of writing) in prose disappeared completely, and two clear artistic directions in prose could be noticed, namely the ‘style direction’ and the ‘idea direction’. As for the ‘style direction’, it appeared as an extension of al-Manfaluti’s way (of writing) which was concerned with radiant style and wonderful rhetoric, and which gave special attention to shape and form.

He continues saying:

The most prominent writers of the ‘style direction’ possessed Arabic culture as a basis, and some of them added a wide

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344 Quoted in Al-Anwar, p.87.
345 Ibid., pp.87-88.
346 Ibid., p.88.
European culture to it, like Taha Hussain, Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat. None of them stopped at al-Manfaluti’s stage, but surpassed it in proficiency and precision in both content and form.\footnote{Al-Anwar, op. cit., p.88.}

The Critic Anwar al-Jundi says: “Whatever the opinion about al-Manfaluti’s style, he definitely influenced the writing of al-Rafa’i, al-Zayyat, Abd al-Aziz al-Bashari and Taha Hussain”\footnote{Quoted in Al-Anwar, p.88.}. Dr. Mandur admits that he was one of those influenced by al-Manfaluti’s style. Actually, the whole generation that followed al-Manfaluti was influenced by him. His effect on the style of modern prose was thus far reaching, and even the critic and author, Dr. Muhammad Abu al-Anwar, remembers the effect the study of al-Manfaluti’s compositions, then al-Zayyat’s and later Dr. Taha Hussain’s literary works had on him and his fellow students, even after such a long time had elapsed.\footnote{Ibid., p.89.}

As explained earlier, the period of al-Manfaluti suffered many a weakness and deficiency due to the colonizers and their allies. Egypt experienced the oppressive rule of the Turks, then the French invasion overwhelmed them, and afterwards the rule of Muhammad Ali (d. 1849) and the viceroys who succeeded him, heaped on them the worst of problems imaginable. Furthermore, the English colonized her and took control of the country and its wealth for well over seventy years. Al-Manfaluti lived through the English colonization period and his writings were thus an answer to the spirit of the time. As also explained before, the colonialists eased the restrictions on publications and allowed the newspapers to have their say and for political parties to be established. By allowing this, they thought that in-fighting amongst the parties and arguments amongst the newspapers would wear out the Egyptians’ efforts and spirit. However, the newspapers and the political
parties were all united in their attacks on the colonialists. They campaigned vociferously for their removal from Egypt and stepped up the struggle for their independence and freedom. The role and influence of the press in this connection were discussed in quite detail.

Al-Manfaluti, as a son of that period, was one of the writers who answered the colonizers the most. He did it in a clear and civil way. He also treated the problem of the lack of social justice that, if left unattended and unaddressed, seriously threatened to split the different levels of society. Social injustice led to widespread poverty, general humiliation and oppression, and hypocrisy. Al-Manfaluti thus struggled for the sake of the poor, defended them and made them more worthy and important than the inane rich who were despicable and lacked virtue. He was very desirous of providing effective aid to the suffering poor, and sometimes, instead of criticizing the wealthy and asking for the return of the rights of the poor, he invited them to *ihsan* (goodness) and *fadila* (virtue), hoping thereby to entice them to see to the needs of the unfortunate poor. He wrote about how the ideal model of morals and goodness is eroded in a society that suffers under poverty and oppression at the hands of the colonizers. He wrote as if he was the trunk of a tree made of stone and sunk in a volcano to wipe out the widespread evils and immorality. Al-Manfaluti was well qualified to do this because he himself represented high morals, possessed subtle senses, had a firm belief in God and practised upright behaviour.

As far as literature is concerned, as mentioned before, al-Manfaluti was firstly on the side of the language of the Qur’an (that is, classical Arabic), because he wrote sound essays to confirm that the Arabic language is rich and capable and not backward and weak as some writers, who were under the influence of the colonizers and their supporters, claimed. His style thus made a big impression on the sons of
An English Orientalist, in describing al-Manfaluti’s essays says:

These essays were published under the title of *al-Nazarat*. They were composed between very lofty literature and satisfying the readers’ taste, because they were written with pure, musical language. They descended as a model of inspiration on a populace which was accustomed to difficult, artificial literature. They, therefore, spread widely amongst the Arabic readers, from Baghdad to Marrakech, which indicated that they found and loved something worthwhile in them. They were also the best representatives of the feelings which echoed throughout the Islamic world.

Al-Manfaluti thus made an invaluable contribution in the development of a new style in modern Arabic prose. The other aspect which made him great and which gave him an immortal place in Arabic literature is his topics on humanity and his treatment of urgent and earnest social issues. All of this, as was explained in various places, confirms that al-Manfaluti was ‘a teacher of *akhlaq* (manners), a caller to *fadila* (virtue), and a leader in *islah* (social reformation)’. He was a natural answer to the needs of his time, in Egypt specifically and in the entire Arab nation generally.

### 4.3: Criticism on al-Manfaluti’s Writings

Besides al-Manfaluti’s literary books receiving great fame in all parts of the Arab world, he did not escape the tongues and pens of the critics. But then the fate of every great writer, artist, politician, and so forth, is to have their supporters and detractors.

The main points which detract from the merits, worth, value and

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350 Al-Anwar, op. cit., pp.89-91.
351 Quoted in Al-Anwar, p.91.
excellence of his works and contribution are:

1. Al-Manfaluti spoiled the French stories with his arabicization of them and by changing them from the originals. Perhaps he thought that the short story was a group of essays without a specific structure\(^{352}\).

2. His stories lacked some imagination, precision in observing life’s events, accuracy in the portrayal of characters, and the novelty of *mufaja’at* (unforeseen surprises or twists) in the story\(^ {353}\). Incidents are few; characterization is two-dimensional, portraying types rather than individuals; and moral upliftment is the prime aim.

3. He was not versatile in thought because of his limited culture and thus could not expand his senses and mental faculties (compared to the generations that followed)\(^ {354}\). Majid Tarad quotes Hasan al-Zayyat who remarked:

   There are two things which prevent al-Manfaluti from having the appellation of ‘immortal’, namely weakness of device and limited culture. He did not attain Eastern sciences and had no direct connection with Western sciences. His literature thus remained superficial and naive\(^ {355}\).

4. Many writers like Ibrahim Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini, felt that al-Manfaluti’s compositions seldom satisfied the mind with plenty of food for thought and ideas\(^ {356}\). Al-Mazini said that al-Manfaluti’s style was tender and empty; it consisted of tears which only adolescents found fascinating\(^ {357}\). Al-Mazini and al-Aqqad referred to al-Manfaluti when they wrote:

   We must live our lives. We must live in the world with our

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\(^{352}\) Daif, op. cit., p.230.

\(^{353}\) Ibid., p.231.

\(^{354}\) Ibid., p.233.


\(^{356}\) Daif, op. cit., p.233.

\(^{357}\) Ibid., p.190.
minds and feel with our nerves. We must not live with our bodies in 
this period while following with our minds and nerves (feelings) 
generations which had passed with its good, bad, truth and lies\textsuperscript{358}.

5. His opinions about literary criticism in \textit{al-Nazarat} are not very 
profound and have no extensive analysis. This may be due to his 
limited culture\textsuperscript{359}.

6. He preferred books to life. The Lebanese writer Umar Fakhuri, who 
was his severest critic, believed that al-Manfaluti spent more time with 
books than he did with life (people). He also said, “His literary method 
is obscure, and his opinions about creating literature are unclear”\textsuperscript{360}.

Concerning the above-mentioned criticisms, we must of course 
remember to measure a writer with the instruments of his period, and to 
judge him according to his environment, and not to take him to the 
succeeding period and use the measuring yardsticks of that period on 
him. Therefore, if we assess al-Manfaluti according to the period that he 
lived in, then he gave Egypt as from the beginning of the twentieth 
century to the First World War, and even beyond, brilliant and skilful 
literary works that served as models for the youth of his time and the 
generations which followed.

Umar Fakhuri, mentioned in point 6 above, would himself admit 
that he (al-Manfaluti) was good at choosing words and that he had a 
good taste in rhetoric, and that his words carried music, magic, were 
easy on the ear, and could take hold of and captivate the self.

Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat also acknowledged that al-Manfaluti’s 
success was due to the combination of al-Manfalti’s wonderful stories 
in which he described people’s pain and suffering, and his lofty style,

\textsuperscript{358} Quoted in Tarad, Majid, ed. (2003). \textit{Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti: al-Majmu’ al-Kamila}. 2nd 
\textsuperscript{359} Daif, op. cit., p.233.
\textsuperscript{360} Quoted in Tarad, Majid, ed. (2003). \textit{Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti: al-Majmu’ al-Kamila}. 2nd 
sweet rhetoric and good choice of words.\textsuperscript{361}

Taha Hussain used to criticize him for the use of ‘wrong’ and ‘inappropriate’ words, but would later retract, saying: “I feel ashamed when I have to talk about this because it was an erroneous evaluation; I was actually criticizing his use of words from a linguistic point of view – and I published my explanation under the title \textit{Nazarat fi al-Nazarat} and I was only about eighteen years old”\textsuperscript{362}. On another occasion he reiterated, “I have never been so shy about what I’ve written as my attack on the deceased al-Manfaluti; what I wrote was nonsense, my only concern was whether al-Manfaluti was using his words correctly, grammatically and linguistically. In this I only relied on one dictionary and this was my mistake – so I am embarrassed about what I wrote of al-Manfaluti”\textsuperscript{363}. As far as characterization is concerned, the remarks in point 2 above are justifiable, especially if we look at one of the requirements of a successful short story: “In literary prose, the author must give expression to the thoughts of the characters and analyze them Characterization is one of the most important aspects of the short story; the writer must portray it realistically and according to the story and the development of the plot”\textsuperscript{364}.

One of the main criticisms against al-Manfaluti is his limited culture, but Ahmad Hafiz Awad contradicts this as he says:

If it is true that good Arab writers of that period derived the spirit of their writings from foreign languages, and that they invoked the sky for inspiration with the talents of French poets for their poetic imagination, then mister al-Manfaluti, who knew no other language than Arabic, and who never resorted to inspiration

\begin{itemize}
\item Quoted in Al-Dasuqi, op. cit., p.45.
\item Quoted in Al-Dasuqi, p.105.
\item Shayami, op. cit., p.28
\end{itemize}

John A. Haywood gives such a balanced, unprejudiced and objective overall assessment of al-Manfaluti and his works that some of his remarks are justifiably valuable to be reiterated here:

He had a genuine desire to avoid artificiality, and to write simply and clearly for his age (but) in practice he constantly lapses into a studied style which is anything but modern. His content seldom rises above what would be considered trite in the West. Yet this very triteness struck a new note for his readers, being not only sincere, but relevant to everyday life as they saw it. He was an idealist, but sometimes gives an impression of intolerance and a ‘holier than thou’ attitude (his style) is modern \textit{balagha} (rhetoric) at its best, full of rhyme, of balanced phrases and sentences, of simile and metaphor. These essays are as superb a display of classical Arabic prose-writing as will be found in the whole of the modern literature he could write simply but as he warms to his subject the complexities creep in – or rather burst in. Yet if the style is rather antique, the themes and attitudes are up-to-date. His essay themes run the whole gamut of current ethical and social problems. Special tribute must be paid to (his) exquisite sense of form in his essays. He often begins in a straightforward way, stating the problem under discussion, then gradually works up to a climax, and finally dies away to the end of the essay. In fact he challenges comparison with essayists in many other languages, for the wide variety of his themes and their treatment, and his command of language and form. He pulls at the heart – strings. To the European with no feeling for classical Arabic literature, he seems Victorian, with the smugness and moral attitudes of a former generation. To those immersed in the classical literature, he must have seemed to represent the best that could be hoped for in modern literature his
readers were struck to find that this style could be so effectively used to discuss current everyday problems. With him, journalism had become art\(^{366}\).

Ahmad Abid and H.A.R. Gibb the two eminent authors and critics quoted by the writer Dr. Jibrail Sulaiman Jabbur also give us a good insight into al-Manfaluti’s standing in the Arab literary world:

Ahmad Abid says:

Al-Manfaluti was an excellent writer when he wrote on literature and related issues, but poor when he wrote on social and related affairs\(^{367}\).

H.A.R. Gibb says:

Although al-Manfaluti desired and tried sincerely to keep to the original, he fell very short on Uthman Jalal’s translation of *Paul et Virginie* and stripped it of its excellence and merits despite his wonderful writing style\(^{368}\).

The other criticisms by Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat, Ibrahim Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini and Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, Taha Hussain and Umar Fakhuri have already been recorded in the introduction and above; Dr. Jibrail Sulaiman Jabbur gives more space to favourable observations especially about al-Manfaluti’s style.

Jabbur says:

His style was unique for his time, and his works played a major role in influencing the training and the writing of the youth of that period\(^{369}\).

Al-Mazini says:

Although we condemn this old style in literature, its men

\(^{366}\) Haywood, op. cit., pp.139–42.


\(^{368}\) Ibid., p.XV.

\(^{369}\) Ibid., p.XVI.
(i.e. al-Manfaluti and his like) must receive credit for the spread of the Arabic language, the development of its writing styles, and turning the people’s attention to the magnificent heritage left for us by the Arabs and which was neglected by our ancestors for many centuries.\(^{370}\)

Umar Fakhuri says:

As for his beautiful choice of words and taste in \(bayan\), he reached the uppermost limit; his compositions are pure magical music to the ears.\(^{371}\)

Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat says:

The secret of the wide spreadness of al-Manfaluti’s literature is that it dawned at a transitional period in Arabic literature, and he surprised the people with these wonderful stories that described the pain and the shortcomings in a pleasant style, sweet \(bayan\), uniform and steady context, and with choice words he is one of the greatest writers of the recent intellectual revival and the most eloquent of the modern period in as far as elegant and graceful sentences, delicacy of expression, and realistic description of incidents are concerned.\(^{372}\)

Ahmad Bek Lutfi al-Sayyid comments:

He is of our masters of \(bayan\) – in style, I can hardly find a comparable writer. He uses words in a special way – a way such that it has no other meaning but what he intended, (thereby) making difficult topics easy for his readers.\(^{373}\)

What established al-Manfaluti’s popularity firmly with Egyptian literary figures is his attachment and commitment to some social issues which prevailed during the previous periods, for example the \textit{hijab} and the belief that woman was intellectually inferior to man, and (also) his


\(^{371}\) Ibid., p.XVII.

\(^{372}\) Ibid., pp.XVII-XVIII.

\(^{373}\) Ibid., p.XIX.
condemnation of many of the West’s habits and way of life which the Egyptians began to adopt after mixing with them or after visiting Europe.

It is essential that we do not deny that al-Manfaluti, in his stories and articles, tried to fight against bad morals and for the reformation of his society. He called for social justice, and defended women – who were weak in his opinion – and the poor and destitute. He struggled for the implementation of the din (religion) and its shari’a (Muslim law) into the people for he was Shaikh Abduh’s student and faithful friend.374

Thus, by the end of the First World War and the early 1920’s an author like Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti progressed beyond the classical limitations of the previous century and produced works with a more modern character. Moreover, it was creative literature and one can safely say that al-Manfaluti was one of the major writers who contributed to laying the basis for the revival of modern Arabic literature and who helped to ultimately establish classical literary Arabic in the lofty place it occupies today in the literatures of the world. His pen possessed the ability to clearly put over his ideas in a simple way, avoiding saj‘ and badi‘, and to attract and charm the reader. He became known as the Amir al-Bayan (The Prince of Rhetoric). His writings were accepted and welcomed, not only in Egypt, but also in the Arab world as a whole. His style had a special effect on the reader’s self: it was as if he was writing with his heart and not a pen, and was addressing the heart and soul and not the lines or paper. This style became the ideal model for the youth who were studying in schools, institutes and universities, and for even his contemporary writers. His most distinguishing characteristic in the world of Arab literature at that

time was his power to present misfortune and tragedy, and his ability to describe the sadness, grief and suffering of the self. He was especially close to the poor, and fought for justice and equality on their behalf. Although he was somewhat addicted to his heroes/heroines dying of consumption or of broken hearts, one cannot read any of his works without having empathy toward and sympathy for, the victim. He was the only writer of his time who was acutely aware of the fact that that which he described with his pen was what was actually in his heart, so much so that readers could sense that what he was describing were their real feelings, virtues and personalities, nothing more, nothing less. Those who knew him bore witness that he possessed those characteristics that he was writing about in his essays and short stories.

From all that has been mentioned and discussed, it can be seen that Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti’s works were epoch-making and absolutely epitomized the Arabic literature of his time. He was an outstanding genius and, in short, fully deserves the epithets: *Nabigha al-insha’ wa al-kitaba al-nathariyya* (A Genius of Composition and Prose Writing) and *Mu’allim al-akhlāq, Da’iya al-fadila wa Qa’id al-islah fi asrih* (The Teacher of Manners, Caller to Virtue, and Leader in Social Reformation of His Time).