CHAPTER- III

THEME AND STYLE OF AL-MANFALUTI’S
SHORT STORIES

Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti’s themes have always had quite an impact on his readers and brought him recognition. It was the theme of *al-Abarat* published in 1915 that proclaimed him as a serious and capable writer. His stories simply reinforced that claim. When reading al-Manfaluti’s stories it is inevitable to sense the sociality of the characters, actions and events. The reader is quickly immersed in the world, misery and reality of the characters. The reader cannot help, but share the agony and hardship which al-Manfaluti’s characters endure.

Al-Manfaluti’s critics have been at odds as to how they should categorize him as a writer. Some positively classify him merely as a translator; others make him merely a hack adapter of western fiction. Still others regard him as a sensitive translator with a special gift translating a work so that the new version becomes his very own creation. Some consider him primarily an essayist and story writer.

Al-Manfaluti cannot properly be called a genuine translator, for he himself knew no European language. He simply reworked the literal and probably unpolished translations made for him by friends and put them into his own melancholy, sentimental style.

The subject matter of his stories themselves is extremely varied, as befits an author who needs to retain the attention and loyalty of his readers through a regular column extending over several years. Social, political and religious themes of various shorts form the author’s staple
diet, but there are also stories on purely literary themes, on the Arabic language itself and several inspired by events or situations in the writer’s own life. A few stories are based on translated material.

Al-Manfaluti’s collection of short stories entitled *al-Abarat* contains eight short stories of which four *al-Yatim* (The Orphan), *al-Hijab* (The Veil), *al-Hawiyah* (The Abyss) and *al-Iqab* (The Punishment) are described as *mawduah* (composed i.e. original), while the remaining four *al-shuhada* (The Martyrs), *al-dhikra* (The Remembrance), *al-Jaza* (The Reward) and *al-Dahiyya* (The Victim) are described as *mutarjamah* (translated). One original story *al-Iqab* is described in a footnote as having been composed in the manner of an American story, a description that rises more questions than it answers; at the very least, however, it presumably indicates an acquaintance, on the part either of al-Manfaluti himself or of one of his collaborators, with one or more collections of American short stories, either in Arabic translation or in the case of a collaborator in the English original.

Of the translated stories two derive from works by the French writer and diplomat Chateaubriand. Of these *al-Shuhada* is based on the French original *Atala* (1801), a story in which the theme of the ‘noble savage’, so beloved of the French Romanticists, plays a prominent part. While the second, *al-Dhikra*, is based on an original entitled *Les aventures du dernier Abencerage* (1826), this story with its historical setting during the period of the collapse of Islamic rule in Spain, seems to sit slightly uneasily in the collection as a whole. A third story *al-Dahiyyah* the last and longest in the collection is derived from Alexandre Dumas Fils’s *La dame aux camellias* (1848), a story that was subsequently to reappear as the libretto for Verdi’s *La Traviata*, and that
has been aptly described both as a four handkerchief tale and as exemplifying G.K. Chesterton’s category of ‘good bad books’.

Insofar as the collection possesses a unity, what links these stories together is a pervasive sentimentality and pessimism that makes the volume title *al-Abarat* a particularly apt one. The mood is set with the work’s ‘Dedication’, in which the author speaks of shedding his tears before the wretched of the world, “in the hope that they will find some comfort and solace in my weeping over them”. Scarcely a page of collection lacks some form of sadness or unhappiness. A particularly common pattern in the narrative is the descent of an individual, or individuals, into illness, death or some other form of misery, evoking the narrator’s and by implication, also the reader’s, reflections and compassion. Thus, all of the first four stories in the collection end in graveyards.

A link to some of the themes of *al-Nazarat* is provided by *al-Hijab*, which relates the progressive disintegration of a man who has spent several years in Europe to return a changed man; here al-Manfaluti casts his story in the form of a moral tale intended to represents a warning to the reader about the lax morals of the West and the dangers of their intruding into Egypt. Reflections on a period of residence in the west, either in fictional or non-fictional form, had not unnaturally provided one of the standard topic for Arab writers during the nineteenth century and they have continued to provide productive subject-matter until this day; for al-Manfaluti, however, who had not only not visited Europe but had almost certainly never left his native Egypt. The theme- far from providing the opportunity to expand intellectual horizons that it had for other writers- seems to be merely another excuse to rehearse the anti-Western and anti-feminist sentiments.
Despite its popularity with some groups of readers, it is hardly surprising that *al-Abarat* has generally found a cool reception from the critics. Although the narrative generally flows easily, the stories almost entirely lack the wit and sparkle of the best pieces of *al-Nazarat* and the range of subject matter and emotional experience to which al-Manfaluti apparently has access are so limited that the collection almost seems to reveal the limitations of the author rather than his capabilities. Most readers will probably find it hard to put the book down without the feeling that “enough is enough”.

Al-Manfaluti had a far greater influence on the literature of his day than writers on the subject have given him credit for. His work, however, must not be judged in the light of permanent artistic achievement, for he did not excel in any of the literary genres which he attempted. His translations, as such, fail drastically, being but a free interpretation of the theme and mood of the translated work. The original stories which he wrote cannot stand the test of good story writing. They are merely a pale imitation of the stories he translated. His articles on social and moral issues are now out-dated and can only appear to the modern reader as the somewhat naive writings of an old fashioned *Azhari* with a limited culture. Yet he is one of the few early twentieth century writers who won great popularity in their lifetime, and whose works are still very much alive in the Arab world. Writers on the subject seem to think that his popularity was due to his fluent, easy, lucid, vivacious and highly emotional style. Yet style alone cannot be the only reason why al-Manfaluti was able to win such immediate popularity and to keep it with the successive generations.

Al-Manfaluti’s great talent showed itself first of all in his instinctive realization of what was needed in literature at that time,
namely, reading material of a kind that could satisfy the emotional promptings of a society newly awakened to its own handicaps and disappointments, which would forge a link with the west and at the same time, keep a grasp of the best in the old traditions both in style and ideas. This came easily to him because he did not know any Western language. He had therefore to limit his fascination with Western literature to a form of indirect translation through intermediaries, which enabled him to keep to a purely Arabic style.

As was seen earlier, al-Manfaluti could skillfully use his stories and essays to spread his opinions and ideas on mainly social issues. The affairs he wrote about reflected the concerns of the writers of that period in the history of Egypt. Some of these ideas are, of course, applicable to other societies and relevant to modern times too. The focus would be on the most important and relevant issues.

Although some information was taken from al-Manfaluti’s views and opinions that he interspersed in his stories and other essays, most of which appear in this section is based on al-Nazarat because it is the main source of his ideas and opinions.

3.1: Al-Manfaluti and Politics

Al-Manfaluti’s politics was the politics of any citizen with ecstatic devotion for his country, who shed tears of sadness for the wretchedness which had befallen it and who despaired for its future. Concerning this issue he said, “Had I known that life in Egypt could only be perfect by the loss of my life, then the quest for death would have been more desirable and tastier to me than the quest for life”267.

Politically, al-Manfaluti did not belong to a specific party or a newspaper to which he was zealously devoted. It can be recalled that in those days, politics and newspapers were inseparable. The one influenced the other.

During the time which al-Manfaluti wrote (the last quarter of the nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth centuries), the main political parties were:

1. The National Party which was established by Mustafa Kamil and which strove to inculcate a feeling of Egyptian nationalism through confrontation, incitement and agitation.
2. The Party of the Nation which was led by Sa’ad Zaghlul, and which stood for collaboration and negotiating a truce with the English. It changed its name in 1919 to ‘The *Wafd* Party’.
3. The Reform Party that was led by Shaikh Ali Yusuf. The party was based on the principles of the constitution. It represented the middle road between the other two parties in its approach. However, it did not spare any effort in fighting the English with arguments, debates and discussions, and with articles in the newspapers.²⁶⁸

Al-Manfaluti felt that the proliferation of political parties was harmful for the welfare of the country. The nation must have only one party because the least political hatred and resentment that existed among the individuals of the nation would disparage and degrade its independence.

Al-Manfaluti divided newspapers, which were profusely used to spread political views and stances by all political parties, especially after independence, into two types: The first paper went to great lengths

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to satisfy its readers by simply reporting all affairs in society, whether beneficial or harmful. This type of paper, he felt, was exploiting people’s intellect and feelings in order to make business. The second one was harsh in its criticism of society and the nation consequently did not benefit from it as it should. Al-Manfaluti felt that the nation was in dire need of a leader who was totally sincere in his or her deeds and who was endowed with wisdom in his or her sayings. There was no special relationship between him and any specific newspaper, not even the one he wrote his essays for. His relationship with the newspaper was nothing more than that of any journalist who writes for a newspaper. He had the complete freedom of having his opinions and ideas published in any paper he wished. If there were any correspondence between his and the paper’s principles and policies, then it was coincidental. If they differed from those of the paper, then he did it voluntarily and out of conviction. About his political leanings, Qasim remarks, “As for al-Manfaluti, he was a follower of Imam Muhammad Abduh, a supporter of Sa’ad Zaghlul Pasha, and, by extension, a member of The Party of the Nation”.

### 3.2: Al-Manfaluti’s Understanding of Social Justice

Al-Manfaluti was of the opinion that wealth was the result of the assault of the strong on the weak, and that wealth was therefore one of the most obvious manifestations of social oppression. In the essay *al-Ghani wa al-Faqir* he says:

> The greed and selfishness of the strong become obvious when

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no rain falls from the sky and when the earth does not produce any plants. They claim whatever water and food there are for themselves. The result is that the poor become destitute, oppressed and miserable. The indulgent rich, and not the earth or the sky, are thus responsible for the misery of the poor\textsuperscript{271}.

In \textit{Ala Lisan Amil Faqir} al-Manfaluti writes about the employer who exploited the employee, an idea which perhaps no Arab writer had thought of before.

3.3: Al-Manfaluti on Western Civilization

Al-Manfaluti expressed his point of view about Western civilization in his introduction to \textit{al-Nazarat} wherein he says:

I was able to – and how the hearts are pervaded by this Western civilization – ponder about it. I looked at it from a high observation post, and I knew that the weakest way was that a person should look at the issue in a hasty and foolish way, that is, that he either has to take all of it or leave all of it. I saw its good and its bad, its virtues and its vices, and knew what must be taken from it and what must be left of it. It was my concern that the people must brace themselves for it, as I have braced myself for it, and to hold responsible those weak people for succumbing before its vices, shame, godlessness and immorality\textsuperscript{272}.

Al-Manfaluti found it puzzling how a person with reasonable knowledge and understanding could indulge in its (the Western civilization’s) vices and could, when an adversary confronted him, justify it by relying on evidence taken from this civilization “as if it was the divine law which the minds resort to when there is a difference of

opinion”273.

Al-Manfaluti was also surprised at how Arab Egyptians could feel ashamed in front of their European employees, and stupidly follow them in style of clothes and types of food. He was furthermore amazed at how a Roman youth, who indulged in the drinking of wine, could by himself and individually be able to determine that which the whole Arab nation could not determine, that is, how (the youth) could bring the Arab nation down to talk to him in his language, but the nation could not raise him up to talk to them in their language “and it is most necessary that he must try to satisfy it (the nation) and reach out to it rather than it (the nation) must try to satisfy and flatter him”274.

Al-Manfaluti was saddened by this blind imitation of the West which was the cause that the people denied their own history, nationalism and civilization “until the history of the (Arab) East and its scientists, writers, philosophers and poets become the ugliest and most loathsome of pictures in the eyes of most Easterners, and if they are ignorant (about their history), they (even feel) proud of it”275.

It thus seems clear that al-Manfaluti did not dislike Western civilization itself but disliked its lewdness and immorality, and believed that only the good and useful must be taken from it. He explained and warned that the good and the useful were mixed with a lot of evil and it is therefore vital not to be deceived when choosing. He believed that as stated in the essay al-Madina al-Gharbiyya:

Nothing prevents the conveyance of some of Western civilization’s traditions and technical terms to us (the Muslim world), but they must be reviewed with the intention of simplifying and benefiting our sciences and widening our experiences, practices and

274 Ibid., p.25.
275 Ibid., p.25.
choices, and not to imitate, plagiarise and take them as the basis for the approval or disapproval of our issues and traditions\textsuperscript{276}.

Al-Manfaluti opined that some of the Arab scholars must arabicize and investigate Western literature, but when they arabicize, it must be beneficial, and when they investigate, it must be done in a critical way, not in a weak and submissive manner\textsuperscript{277}.

3.4: Al-Manfaluti on Eastern Civilization

Al-Manfaluti was very proud of the flourishing, radiant past, and tried to revive it so that the nation could win back its true identity and original personality. He was shaken by the fact that the nation was being driven towards Western civilization’s vices and not its goodness. Therefore he urged and beseeched the Arab writers to be the group of people who could be depended on to give continuous guidance with their reflections, thoughts and opinions. He asked them to insure and protect the morals of the nation because they are a trust with them.

Al-Manfaluti considered the Egyptian nation an Eastern, Muslim nation which must, therefore, maintain its religion and Easternness. He says:

Egyptians have many faults, and it was necessary to reform them. It must be done in the name of Eastern civilization and not in the name of Western civilization if we call (the people) to civilization, we must cite to them, for example, the civilization of Baghdad, Cordova, not Paris, Rome, Switzerland and New York and when we invite them to honour, we must read to them the verses of the revealed Books, the sayings of the prophets and wise men of the East, not the verses of Roussouw, Bacon, Newton and Spencer and when we call them to

\textsuperscript{277} Al-Anwar, op. cit., p.67.
war, the history of Khalid bin Walid, Sa’ad bin Abu Waqqas, Musa bin Nasir and Salah al-Din is better for them than the history of Napoleon, Wellington, Washington, Nelson, it is disgraceful on Egyptian history that the Eastern Muslim in Egypt knows the history of Napoleon, but not that of ‘Amr bin al-‘Aas.\(^{278}\)

Al-Manfaluti’s writings showed that he did not call for the nation to be ignorant of Western personalities or Western civilization. On the contrary, he believed that knowledge was essential, but it must not be at the cost of the nation’s own thoughts, ideas, ethics, morals and civilization. Al-Manfaluti’s tone of voice in his call was high and sharp in the context of the English colonization and its control of the nation at that time.\(^{279}\)

3.5: Al-Manfaluti on Religion

As previously mentioned, Imam Muhammad Abduh was highly impressed with al-Manfaluti and used to praise him, and felt justified that he would be of the ones who would benefit the most from his knowledge and the one who would spread his principles and teachings the most. That prophecy actually materialized because al-Manfaluti was pure in his belief, perfect in his behaviour, enlightened in his understanding of the religion, defending it strongly and was severely keen, but not fanatical, about it. “Some would accuse him of religious fanaticism but all he did was to try and cleanse the religion of innovations and superstitious beliefs, his major concern (like many other thinkers and reformers) was religious reformation and through it


\(^{279}\) Al-Anwar, op. cit., pp.68-69.
to liberate his country”\textsuperscript{280}.

In \textit{al-Jami’\textquoteright a al-Islamiyya} he categorically states his beliefs and behaviour:

Had I only known that worldly needs and aims could only be achieved by forsaking the rites of religion or by mocking its compulsory duties, I would have left them (the worldly needs and aims) and avoided them and washed my hands of them, and would have told them, as Ali bin Abi Talib had said before, ‘Leave me alone, deceive other than me, I am not in need of you’. Had I only known that nationalism – which is the best thing man can have in his heart – is an obstacle in the way to my life after death or spreads a veil between me and my Lord, I would have cast it off as I cast off my garment. Then I would have gone to one of the mountain peaks where in my solitariness I would listen only to the prayer of the heart or the call of Allah, until my time had come and my life was spent\textsuperscript{281}.

Al-Manfaluti was just as steadfast in his deeds. Some tragedies befell him and he was severely tested with respect to his beloved children. When he buried his son, the fourth one whom he had laid to rest with his own hands, he raised his hands to the sky to thank and praise God and to express his satisfaction with the will of God. He said, “To Him be praise, whether one is pleased or angry, to Him be thanks, whether (He) gives or takes away, and I am satisfied with whatever He has ordained, and patient in His afflictions”\textsuperscript{282}.

Al-Manfaluti believed (and this is substantiated in Day of Judgement) that in religion the external must agree with the internal, otherwise it was deception, and that bowing and prostrating in prayer would not be of any benefit unless it was reflected in sincere deeds and


\textsuperscript{281} Tarad, Majid, ed. (2003). \textit{Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti: al-Nazarat}. Vol.-I, Beirut: Maktaba al-Ma’arif, p.120.

\textsuperscript{282} Quoted in Al-Anwar, op. cit., p.70.
upright behaviour:

The weakest of means towards God is that bowing and prostrating, standing and sitting (in prayer). Should a man spend his nights praying and his days fasting, and then he oppresses a small child, by even grabbing a morsel (of bread) from his hand, then all his good deeds will turn into bad deeds, and his religious rites will not benefit him at all\textsuperscript{283}.

In order that people did not have the wrong understanding – as some people mostly had – of the concept of the dependence, mercy and forgiveness of God when they commit sins, al-Manfaluti warned that intercession on the Day of Judgement (\textit{Yaum al-\textbf{H}isab}) is one of the manifestations of honour and respect. God chooses with honour and respect those who draw close to Him, but He (to quote again from \textit{Yaum al-\textbf{H}isab}) “does not grant intercession to anyone unless there is an accompanying deed more sincere than one of his soul’s deeds which necessitated his being soft with mercy on others, those who had sinned and those who were disobedient. God is too sublime to be mocked at and (He is) above favouritism”\textsuperscript{284}.

In an essay on \textit{Jurji Zaidan} with the same title, he makes an interesting remark about religion that is exclusively for God and which is free from blind fanaticism and dark envy:

The major difference between a pure religion and a tarnished religion is that the former widens his chest for everything, even for his transgressors and adversaries, and the latter constricts his chest for everything, even for himself. God is too wide in His mercy and too wise to close all ways to reach Him in the faces of His slaves, except the way of the sword and the fire. This lowly hatred which inflames the people’s hearts do not strengthen the religion in itself, but rather


\textsuperscript{284} Ibid., p.85.
strengthens the religious leaders who use it (religion), profit from it and trade with it in the markets of stupidity and ignorance. Those who make hatred holy, and bless it and regard it as part and parcel of religion’s essence, say without any understanding. The godlessness together with the religious chaos in the world, and the worship of the sun, moon, sand and stone are more beneficial for the human society, and it is better to return to them than to the worship of God\textsuperscript{285}.

In this essay, he also showed how these people rely on and take the religion as a means to invalidate blood or sacrosanctity, claiming that they are defending and protecting the sanctity of the religion and in doing so they ascribe lies to God, knowingly or unknowingly.

Abu al-Anwar quotes Dr. Umar Farukh’s description of al-Manfaluti: “Al-Manfaluti was a strong upholder of Islam. It (Islam) penetrated his deep inner self, and was not mixed with superstition. He undoubtedly took this from his teacher, Shaikh Muhammad Abduh\textsuperscript{286}. Like Shaikh Muhammad Abduh, he was in no doubt that Islam must form the foundation of the welfare and progress of Egyptian society\textsuperscript{287}.

He was not a rigid person who only quoted to prevent man from leading a normal life. On the contrary, when he called on people to hold on to their religion, he wanted them to do so with understanding and consciousness, without rigidity or superficiality. As proof of this, one finds in one of his \textit{maqalat} (al-Bayan) that he blames the religious leaders for their extremism and obstinacy. He says:

\begin{quote}
The learned \textit{Imams} are still extreme and obstinate in it (religion). They cut rocks from the hills of \textit{Shima’}, putting them as obstacles in the way of civilization, until they make them become a
\end{quote

\textsuperscript{286}Al-Anwar, op. cit., p.71.
heavy burden on the people’s shoulders. Consequently, many of the people get bored and fed up with it (religion), and begin to demand a good way of life in a wrong way. If they can only yield with it with the passing of time, and obey its instructions and prohibitions according to the social issues and conditions, then they will be able to strike a balance between the demands of life and the demands of religion288.

In his essay *Islam and Christianity*– an actual rebuttle of Lord Cromer’s disparaging and biased opinions about Islam – he attacked Christian missionaries for their derogatory remarks about Islam. They claim that the Prophet’s Qur’an is ungrammatical, thereby denigrating Islam absurdly. They conveniently forget that Arabic grammar was codified by reference to the Qur’an and not vice versa. Giving proofs, he observes that the glories of Western civilization are the fruit of an earlier Islam whilst the current ruin of Islam is the result of the depredations of Christianity. All humankind ultimately gained from the inspiration of Islam and, for example, the concepts of the equality of man grew and developed in the West.

He asked the Muslims (in *al-Jami’a al-Islamiyya*) to reject the wrong opinion that limits the religion between the walls of mosques, saying ‘I have not seen a weaker, a more unsubstantiated and a more misguided opinion than the one which says ‘the religion is not allowed to go beyond the steps of the mosque’ How can a Muslim practice his religion as an individual in any country while he is self-centred and selfish?’289.

3.6: Al-Manfaluti on Education


289 Ibid., p.123.
Al-Manfaluti addressed the growing children by saying: “A pure soul, a calm heart and a noble conscience are enough for your happiness” and “A student without etiquette is like a bare tree – it does not bear leaves nor fruit, it obstructs people in their meeting places, hinders the wind, blocks the traveller’s way, and people do not seek its shelter and cannot escape its evil”\textsuperscript{290}.

Al-Manfaluti was deeply concerned about maintaining high moral standards, especially in the young students because they were the symbol of the nation’s glory and the ocean of its hopes and aspirations. He advised the youth to avoid watching and not to be attracted by, plays and actors who did not care about good morals and virtues. That was about two years after the First World War. Al-Manfaluti, in a long essay by the name of \textit{al-Malaib al-Hazaliyya} (The Comedy Theatres)\textsuperscript{291}, forcefully advised students about, and gave them insight into, the successful way to education. He requested them to rise above trivialities and to focus on plays and actors with high standards of morality and virtues, for example the plays of George Abya and Abd al-Rahman Rushdi.

In the same vein, he urged the learner in \textit{al-Kalimat} to remain loyal and devoted to his family, saying:

\begin{quote}
Maybe your father or your mother or someone entrusted to care for you did not have the education that you are lucky to have. You must never attribute that to stupidity, or make fun of them or use it against them, for if you do, then you have lost double in manners what you have gained in knowledge\textsuperscript{292}.
\end{quote}

Al-Manfaluti addresses the growing child in a special essay, giving him a lot of sound advice. The most important was that the child

\textsuperscript{290}Quoted in Al-Anwar, op. cit., p.72.
\textsuperscript{292}Ibid., p.379.
must learn to rely on himself and not on inherited wealth. The latter in most cases leads to the destruction of the individual. He praises experimentation and practical experience because through them the child builds his true character and personality. He explains to the youth that extremists are wretched and perverted. Therefore, he personally did not wish his offspring to grow up rich. He feared wealth more than poverty for his child, because wealth can pull him towards stupidity and ignorance and to despise knowledge. He cautioned fathers about leaving their small children in the hands of servants and their bigger ones in the care of evil-doers.

Lastly, al-Manfaluti requests the growing child to learn from ‘the school of life’ if the opportunity to learn in an official school had passed him by. They must not be students of ‘professions’. He blames the father, the teacher and the society because they guide the child in the wrong way, that is, they glorify a certificate or a profession in the eyes of the child and not knowledge per se.\footnote{Al-Anwar, op. cit., pp.72-74.}

3.7: Al-Manfaluti and the Arts

Al-Manfaluti was very fond of the musical and theatrical arts because of his love of beauty and poetry. He says: “I visited that theatre (meaning the Arabic Acting Theatre) last night, and I visit it very often, because I love plays almost as much as I love poetry, music and beauty.”\footnote{Quoted in Al-Anwar, p.74.}

As already mentioned, al-Manfaluti participated in the revision and correction of the play al-Sha‘ir when his friend, Muhammad Abd al-Salam al-Jundi, translated it for an acting group which wanted to
perform it. In this way he came to know about the story, *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand, and would rewrite it in his customary style.

Al-Manfaluti was highly impressed with the higher arts which guided people towards virtue and which protected virtue and excellent morals. Furthermore, he was very concerned about raising the populace’s level of artistic taste. He approved of them attending acting houses and theatres, but blamed them for liking plays in which there was a lot of loud noise and despised listening to, for example, good poetry and classical music in plays.

In his essay titled *al-Malaib al-Hazaliyya*, mentioned above, he unleashed his pen against the acting groups who did not care for general morals and sacred traditions.

Al-Manfaluti’s profound understanding and perception of art can be pinpointed in the article *al-Ghina al-Arabi* (Arabic lyrics) when he said, “Music is the feelings and emotions which remain in the self when the tongue cannot express it, so the tune brings the feelings forth. Lyric is the most eloquent of orators; it is the most expansive in clarity, penetrates the heart, and is the quickest to mix with the soul, to take control of the mind and to be the meeting place of hearts. Music is one of the natural arts, nations being guided to it by their natural disposition.”

Then al-Manfaluti attacked some vulgar forms of music found in Arabic, and requested the musicians to return to the Arabic music of the former periods so that the language could be guaranteed and insured.

### 3.8: Al-Manfaluti and Peace

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296 Al-Anwar, op. cit., pp.74-75.
At the dawn of the New Year, al-Manfaluti said, “There is no happiness in life if peace does not spread its white wings over this human society, and peace will never spread unless the desires of the self are satisfied and equality and justice are established”297.

In his essay, Ayna al-Fadila (What Happened to Virtue?), he mockingly says:

I think that the worst enemy of man is man himself every nation has made preparations in its storehouses and warehouses with the equipment and tools of death (that is, ammunition and armoury for war) until a dispute over one of the borders befalls them, then man dresses in the fur of a wild predator and takes this equipment and tools, like the beast would take its sharp claws, to attack the son of his father and mother. When you ask two fighting soldiers: ‘What is your problem? And why are you fighting? And when did this argument between you start? I have observed closely that you two did not get to know each other except the hour in which you have been fighting’, then you will know that they had been betrayed and that they had not left their homes, except to put a pearl in the king’s crown or a medal on the army general298.

These texts are strong evidences about his belief in, and love for, peace. Other essays, too, bear out his love for peace, security and freedom. He was the only one at that time to take an affirmative and an active, positive stand to express his protest against and disgust with the world war when he refused to raise his pen to write anymore. He said forcefully in the introduction to his essay al-Mala’ib al-Hazaliyya, that he had promised himself not to write anymore until the war was ended and the pen had become free: “May God make war repulsive! And may

297 Quoted in Al-Anwar, op. cit., p.75.
He make repulsive everything it wrought!”299.

This same revulsion for war is found in one of his short stories al-Iqab (The Obstacles). He ridiculed the war leaders and politicians who made war for personal glory and position in Khida’ al-‘Anawin:

Many a soul between the prison walls is more pure in heart than the hearts between palace walls, and many a woman who is an outcast from human society is driven by a fate, from which she cannot escape, to stand between the pillars of a guillotine, whereas (this fate) was more deserved for the usurer or the leader who spills the blood of thousands for no other reason than to achieve artificial greatness or the politician who schemes to rule a weak nation which is secure and happy in its existence then he strips them of their most precious possessions of freedom and independence300.

It is no surprise that al-Manfaluti was a lover of peace, a believer in it and an inviter to it, for he was a man with lofty, human sensitivities. In al-Insaniyya al-‘Amma he reiterates his belief that, “the University of Humanity was the nearest university to the heart of man and more attached to his heart and soul, because it cries for the afflicted whom it does not even know. Nationalism and religious zeal, even being fanatical about them and defending them, are acceptable as long as they are for the cause of humanity”301.

3.9: Al-Manfaluti and the Female Sex

Al-Manfaluti was very respectful towards women. He believed in her, was affectionate towards her, defended her, strove in her cause, and cried for her sake. What a lofty place he gave her when he quips in

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301 Ibid., p.232.
Ihtiram al-Mar’a:

Life is joy and sadness. As for its joy, we are indebted to woman for it because she is the origin of it and the spring from which it gushes forth. As for its sadness, woman is able to change sadness into joy or to at least relieve it from the one who is sad. It is as if we are indebted to woman with all our life.\textsuperscript{302}

Al-Manfaluti stripped manhood from a man if he did not have a wife at his side who can revive the spirit of bravery and ambition in his soul. He said:

A man cannot be a man unless he has a wife next to him who can revive the spirit of bravery and ambition in his soul, and who can implant the pride and greatness of responsibility in his heart. Nothing exhorts a man more with effort in his deeds and uprightness in his worldly affairs, or with serious behaviour in his journey (through life) or urges him in the way of adventure, risks, devotion and perseverance than the profuse tears of a wife and her imploring hand!\textsuperscript{303}

Al-Manfaluti also behaved with affection towards her, whether as a girl, a mother or a sister, in the same spirit and manner as mentioned above, or maybe even more. He kindled a very important issue concerning woman, namely:

Have we rewarded her for that which she had given, and is still giving, us?! The answer is ‘no’ because if we grant her any feeling from our hearts then we do not give her more than the feelings of love and affection, and we withhold the feelings of respect and reverence, while she is actually more in need of being given respect and reverence than showering her with love and affection. We have mercy on her as a master would have mercy on a slave we entrust her to raise our children or to be a servant or a nurse, and we use her to satisfy our sexual drives. We take her as a companion but we do not render to her

\textsuperscript{303} Ibid., p.319.
sustenance and we do not grant her clothes except that which reflects a pleased and happy view in the mirror of ourselves\textsuperscript{304}.

Al-Manfaluti feels that in this way we actually oppress her because she was created for her own sake first and not for man’s sake. Consequently, we must relieve her, even if only a little, from the confinement of her prison so that she can breathe the breeze of freedom, and thereby revive her spirit which was subdued by imprisonment and confinement. “It is essential that she be respected so that she can become used to respecting herself, for he who respects himself is least prone to commit errors”\textsuperscript{305}.

Al-Manfaluti hated the notion that a woman must be the slave of man. He did not want her to “slip off her clothes, spend her nights, and wander aimlessly in men’s societies and clubs, and to remove the protective hijab”\textsuperscript{306}.

Al-Manfaluti’s concern about women did not stop at treating her problems, but he also embarked boldly on the risks and hazards which had more serious and influential consequences for her life, namely the dangers of prostitution. He defended them and called for the provision of a decent life for them. He requested the society to take her by the hand because she is like a train whose wheels had slipped from the tracks – it must be restored so that it does not derail all the carriages, and so that it can be saved from the dire consequences awaiting it. By the revival of the woman, the whole society is revived.

Abu al-Anwar quotes al-Manfaluti when he remarked, “Have mercy on the fallen woman (harlot). Do not beautify her needs, do not buy her honour from her, then may be she will be unable to find a

\textsuperscript{305} Ibid., p.320.
\textsuperscript{306} Ibid., p.320.
haggler who haggles with her and she will return honourably and safely
to the nook of her house.\textsuperscript{307}

Al-Manfaluti covered the topic of marriage in the essay \textit{al-Ihsan
fi al-Zawaj}. He urged “the good men to search for the poor amongst the
women and to marry them, and to marry them to their sons and
relatives, even if they were not beautiful or of noble lineage, because
that will be a good deed, and a good deed is not rewarded until it
reaches its place of hardship or misery.”\textsuperscript{308}

Al-Manfaluti continued and actually blamed man for the crime of
prostitution, saying:

Prostitution is a misery to the prostitute. None but man heaps
it on her. It is, therefore, only right that he pays for what he has ruined
and to repair what he has spoiled after deceiving and using her, he
throws her aside, washing his hands off her and there you see her in the
nook of her house, not knowing what to do – if she wants to live a
married life, she cannot find someone to marry, if she wants to work,
she cannot do anything well if she begs, no one gives her. It is for a
man to choose between giving her a large sum of money unlawfully
and giving her one dirham lawfully. If he opts for the latter, she will
not find it necessary to live by prostitution. We still think that man is
woman’s debtor, and that it is his duty to settle his debt, and to pay
blood money for the crime that he had committed. If man refuses to
marry the prostitute, then he must make prostitution impossible, and he
can only do that if he regards marriage to her as one of the components
of \textit{ihsan} (goodness), that is, if he marries her more for herself than for
his self. The most deserving women of goodness are those whom God
did not grant beauty, wealth, noble lineage and a means of income. If
man only wants to marry the happy (woman), then he must remember
that he is the one who took the miserable one by the hand and steered

\textsuperscript{307} Al-Anwar, op. cit., p.79.
\textsuperscript{308} Tarad, Majid, ed. (2003). \textit{Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti: al-Nazarat}. Vol.-III, Beirut:
Maktaba al-Ma’arif, p.122.
her to the place of misery, and threw her with his hands into the abyss of sin and immorality\textsuperscript{309}.

He spent all his energy in defence of woman and fighting for man to grant her her dignity and honour. He was true in his feelings, sincere with his tears and apposite in his views.

However, al-Manfaluti changed into woman’s enemy when virtue and chastity had been made easy for her, but she still resorts to disobedience and vice. He thus pardons her when appropriate, but when she turns to vice without due cause, he becomes her enemy. Some critics hold that al-Manfaluti was contradictory in his stand about woman for he some other times defended her and sometimes he attacked her. This, of course, is incorrect for the reasons outlined above.

Al-Manfaluti displayed romantic leanings in some of his stories (he, for example, rewrote the story of Alexander Dumas Lapin ‘Lady Camilla’ which treats the issue of woman) and agrees with most Romantic writers that “woman is an angel who descended from heaven, cleaning our hearts with love, ascending with our emotions, setting our feelings alight, and encouraging us to rise up with the burdens of our duties”\textsuperscript{310}.

Although al-Manfaluti was influenced by romanticism, he did not allow it to clash with the tenets and spirit of the Islamic religion when he wrote on these issues. Abu al-Anwar quotes what an unnamed English Orientalist said about al-Manfaluti in this regard, “As for his appeals for respecting woman and the poor of society, they were based on the principles of the religion”\textsuperscript{311}.

\textsuperscript{310} Quoted in Al-Anwar, op. cit., pp.80-81.
\textsuperscript{311} Ibid., p.81.
No wonder then that al-Manfaluti’s writings penetrated the “khudur (women’s quarters) of the Arab society and achieved the attention of Arab women that no other Arab writer’s compositions could” and prompted an Arab authoress like Mari Yani to exclaim: “How I felt the day I read his book! – it was as if my soul was plucked out of my body, and that which passed in front my eyes was the conspicuous truth with which hearts are pulverized, emotions are intrigued and filled with hopes, and (with which) youthfulness appeared!”312.

3.10: The Relevance of al-Manfaluti’s writings

One can deduce from al-Manfaluti’s writings, and more specifically his ideas and opinions, that he wrote on issues and problems that are found in all nations and at all times. This gives his writings a flavour of immortality and makes them relevant and applicable to all times.

A word on this relevance of al-Manfaluti’s works, especially *al-Nazarat*, may be appropriate in today’s life. Many of our contemporary communities still need to listen to this voice. The issues and aspects of life he wrote about were true and relevant for his time, still apply to today, and will be pertinent until the end of time.

As far as the Arabs see some of their situations in the Middle East reflected in al-Manfaluti’s writings, Bassam Abd al-Wahhab al-Jabi has this to say: “In *Khutba al-Harb* (Sermon of War) al-Manfaluti is almost alive amongst us. The American and Israeli and their followers’ vainglory and arrogance and the real oppression of the

Palestinians and Arabs can be seen. If one replaces the word *Burqa* (a city) with the word ‘Palestine’ or ‘Tripoli’ or *al-Quds*, then his words become alive in our time, and fits exactly what is really happening in our (Arab) nation today. Refer also to (his essay) *Wa Irhamtah* (Have Mercy on Him).

In fact, there is some *al-Nazarat* that we can apply to actual contemporary international politics. As an example, we can replace part of *al-Adab al-Kathib* (Fraudulent Literature) with international democracy and apply its contents to America. When we do that we will find that the correspondence is perfect. The rest of this essay deals with the psychology of mankind which is applicable to all times and places.

We can do the same with most of his writings, because he always wrote of human suffering and feelings, and these sufferings and feelings do not differ from time to time. So al-Manfaluti’s *al-Nazarat* is still alive, pulsating with movement and boisterous with energy.

The same can be said concerning his writings about literature and rhetoric. His words are still fresh and alive. He attacks the evil and shortcomings of the comedy plays in theatres, and what he attacks can be valid for what is known and popular today in the cinemas and theatres in most countries, Arab and non-Arab. In fact, they are relevant to today’s television programmes. What al-Manfaluti mentions about the abuses and insults of ‘Um Shula’ can be readily applied to the abuses and insults which television programmes fix into the minds of the general public read the essay *Ayna al-Fadila?* in which he talks about the merchants, the judges, the wealthy, the politicians, and the men of religion.

Also the issue concerning the essay *al-Sidq wa al-Kadhib* (Truth and Lying) where he talks about dubious men, wives and some poets. If you read *Al-Madaniyya al-Gharbiyya* (Western Civilisation), you will
see it applies perfectly to our times.

Compare his stance in *Ghurfa al-Ahzan* (The Room of Grief) and *al-Hubb wa al-Ziwa* (Love and Marriage), concerning ‘woman’ and ‘love’. One will find that he distinguishes between the fallen woman who slipped once and then repents and returns to her senses, and the sinful female who never stops. Of course, he does not forget to stand by woman when it is necessary, in order to lift oppression and injustice from her, for example in *al-Baisat* (The Wretched Women) and in *al-Rajul wa al-Mar’a* (Man and Woman). Here one will find why he accuses man of being an oppressor and throwing his weight around as far as woman is concerned. One can find the same relevance in his dealing with teaching and learning methodology, for example the essays *al-Bayan* and *Zayd wa Amru* (Zayd and Amr)”313.

Anyone sympathetic to the Arab cause will understand the depth of Arab feeling and appreciate why they relate to al-Manfaluti’s writings: some of his writings are as true now on the twin themes of Zionism and Imperialism as it was on the British occupation during the 19th and 20th centuries.

### 3.11: Thematic and Stylistic Aspects of Al-Manfaluti’s Short Stories

As was previously mentioned, Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti’s collection of short stories *al-Abarat* appeared in 1915. It was a collection of short stories, some of them were al-Manfaluti’s own compositions and some were based on translated material314. Al-Manfaluti arabicized a group of short stories of some French writers,

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314 Al-Anwar, op. cit., p.62.
added some of his own compositions, and published them under the name *al-Abarat*. All of the stories were sad and tragic.\(^{315}\) His aim was to use the *qissa* as a means to treat certain topics, to involve the reader’s feelings and sensibilities, and to spread his ideas and opinions. Therefore, the stories did not strictly follow the artistic principles of the short story.\(^{316}\)

Al-Manfaluti undoubtedly spoiled the French stories with his arabicization because he changed the original as if he thought the short story was a group of essays without structure. The stories lacked some imagination, precision in observation of life events, experience in characterization, and twists in the plots. However, what distinguishes these short stories is his purity of style, a style that made his essays popular amongst the youth of his time.\(^{317}\)

As was his custom, he included a dedication, this time to all the wretched in the world:

> The wretched in the world are many, and it is not in the power of a miserable person like me to remove even a little of their suffering and misery. The least I can do is to present them with this *al-Abarat* in the hope that they will find in my tears for them consolation, solace and comfort.\(^{318}\)

The stories which he himself wrote are *al-Yatim* (The Orphan), *al-Hijab* (The Veil), *al-Hawiya* (The Abyss) and *al-Iqab* (Obstacles). The stories he asked his friend to translate are *al-Shuhada* (The Martyrs), *al-Dhikra* (The Memoirs), *al-Jaza* (The Reward) and *al-Dahiyya* (Catastrophe).\(^{319}\) Qasim believes that *al-Iqab* was based on a

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\(^{315}\) Daif, op. cit., p.229.
\(^{316}\) Al-Anwar, op. cit., p.62.
\(^{317}\) Daif, op. cit., pp.229-30.
\(^{319}\) Ibid., p.822.
translated American story called ‘The Cry of the Grave’. As in most of his stories, these short stories also portray, as the name *al-Abarat* indicates, the sadness, grief, disappointment and wretchedness of the heroes and heroines. His magical style and skill at describing the feelings and sensibilities of the characters in poignant, distressing and heart-rending situations again comes to the fore. He excelled in winning the readers over and making them participate in liberally shedding tears for the victims of circumstances. The newspaper *al-Muqtatatf* praised these efforts of al-Manfaluti, saying “he is of our best writers, and we thank him for writing literary narratives that give the reader great enjoyment and his beneficial advice on morals and (for giving them) a glimpse of the (beauty of the Arabic) language”.

A short account of five of the stories (two originals and three translations) is given here. They illustrate his romantic leanings and his concern with the wretched and their suffering, and the empathy they elicit in the reader.

3.11.1: *Al-Yatim* (The Orphan)

This is one of al-Manfaluti’s own stories and is about a young boy whose father had passed away. He then grew up with his cousin, an only daughter, in his uncle’s house. Although they grew up like brother and sister, they actually loved each other, but without the one telling the other about it. When the uncle died, his wife asked the boy to leave the house in order to protect her daughter’s honour because she had reached the age of marriage. He left the house without greeting his

cousin and took up residence in a house next to al-Manfaluti’s. The girl soon became very ill due to the tremendous sorrow the departure of her beloved had caused. She eventually died. The boy himself was grief-stricken at the news about his cousin’s demise. This was the state in which al-Manfaluti found the boy. He related his whole life story to the author. The orphaned boy eventually succumbs to his agonies and the writer, according to the boy’s last instructions, buries him in the girl’s grave.\footnote{Tarad, Majid, ed. (2003). \textit{Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti: al-Abarat.} 2nd edition, Beirut: Maktaba al-Ma’arif, pp.826-34.}

3.11.2: \textit{Al-Shuhada} (The Martyrs)

This story is based on a translation from French. It is a narrative about a woman who lost her husband after her brother had left for America. She lived alone with her only child in poverty, suffering and misery. When the boy became a teenager he studied art, and succeeded to travel with a group of artists to America where they would display their paintings. He was successful, and made use of his presence in America to search for his uncle. He would eventually be kidnapped by some Blacks who threatened to kill him. A white girl was, however, able to help him escape from his captors. The two youths fled through the dark night. The boy fell in love with the girl, but she was unwilling to reciprocate the feeling for reasons she would not tell him. He would later discover that she was his uncle’s daughter. He was murdered by his kidnappers, and she had promised God to commit suicide by drinking poison from a little bottle which she always carried with her, if she ever fell in love and wanted to get married. She then drank the poison. The boy approached the dying girl and gave her a kiss. The
poison from her mouth entered his body and they died together. They were buried in the same grave. The boy’s mother would also soon pass away due to the yearning and pining for her son’s return.

3.11.3: *Al-Dhikra* (Memoirs)

This is also a translated story and relates the story of Abu Abd Allah, the last Arab king in *al-Andalus*. He fought his father and uncle after he had asked them for assistance against his enemy. He was attacked and defeated, and the new king of Spain ordered him to leave the country and go to *al-Maghrib* (Morocco). Arab rule of Spain had ended after eight centuries. Before Abu Abd Allah boarded the boat that would take him to *al-Maghrib*, he heard a voice rebuking him about his deed and reminding him of a poet’s words: “Cry like women (for) a kingdom lost, You did not preserve and safeguard it like men”.

Abu Abd Allah regretted fighting his father and uncle, but his remorse was in vain. He realised the big, scandalous mistake he had made. After twenty four years, King Abu Abd Allah’s son travelled to *al-Andalus* disguised in an Arab doctor’s uniform, supposedly treating patients with herbs. He met a Spanish girl from whom he learned a lot about the history of the time when his forefathers ruled Spain. He fell in love with her and declared his love. She returned his love in equal measure. The fact that they followed different religions became a barrier to their marriage. The relationship was complicated by the mayor’s son who also loved the girl, but she did not love him. Out of revenge, he reported the man to the police who arrested and jailed him. The court ruled that he be put to death for trying to encourage the

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Christian girl to forsake her religion, which was a heinous crime under Spanish law at the time.\footnote{Tarad, Majid, ed. (2003). \textit{Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti: al-Abarat}. 2nd edition, Beirut: Maktaba al-Ma’arif, pp.855-65.}

3.11.4: \textit{Al-Hawiya} (The Abyss)

\textit{Al-Hawiya} is another of al-Manfaluti’s original stories. It does not differ much from his previous \textit{qisas} in which he treats social issues of his time and in which he propagates one of his beliefs that he presents in most of his \textit{qissa} namely that the road to evil is one, and once you travel that road, there is no turning back.

The story revolves around a countryside youth who happened to grow up in the great city of Cairo. A strong friendship developed between the writer and the man. Due to circumstances, al-Manfaluti had to leave Cairo. He greeted his friend, and the two promised to keep in touch with each other by correspondence. Soon afterwards, the friend’s letters to the author gradually decreased until they totally stopped.

When the writer returned from the countryside, he rushed over to visit his old friend in his house. He was astounded to learn that his friend had become addicted to gambling and wine drinking. He had squandered all his money, and treated his family badly. Al-Manfaluti promised his friend’s wife that he would do everything in his power to save him from the tribulations he found himself in. No matter what the author did and no matter what he said, he could not convince or persuade his close friend to stop drinking and gambling. His addiction was so severe that he did not listen to any advice given.

The friend continued his drinking, neglecting the family as
always. One day, while he was away from home, his wife gave birth to a baby girl. The woman died seconds after birth due to a high fever on a very cold night. The only one with her was her baby who was sucking her breast. When the drunkard returned in the morning, he, on approaching his ‘sleeping’ wife, noticed that she had died. The baby was still crying next to her. On stepping back, bewildered by the horrible sight, he trampled unknowingly on the baby’s chest, killing it instantly. The man ended up in a mental asylum.

3.11.5: *Al-Jaza (The Reward)*

This is another short story based on a French translation. A beautiful, innocent girl, Suzanne, grew up in the same house in a village with her cousin, Gilbert. The two fell in love and agreed to get married one day. Fate decided otherwise because she would meet a man from the noble class who was on a journey to the countryside. He was attracted to her beauty when he saw her fill a bucket of water from a small lake next to her house. After repeated visits to the lake he introduced himself, and the young girl fancied him when she learned that he was the *Markiz* (army commander) Justin Rustan who owned a huge castle on the hill opposite the village. He enticed her to his castle, and she submitted to him after he promised to marry her.

Her cousin learned from his mother that his love ran away with the *Markiz*, never to return to him. The boy almost became totally mad, and tried to convince himself to forget her, but he realised that his wound was too deep to heal. He wandered around aimlessly, carrying his pain and anguish until close to death. At that moment Suzanne was

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surprised by her husband who had returned from a journey that lasted a few days. He threw a bag of money in front of her, ordering her to leave his house with her small baby. She reluctantly agreed and left the castle in the village clothes she had come with the first time, and left the bag of money behind. Suzanne wandered around aimlessly in the field next to the castle. She was astonished at a heart-rending voice which originated from somewhere nearby. She went towards the sound to find her pale, thin cousin crying farewell to her. As she knelt down, his last teardrop fell on her hand before he died. Out of great grief and regret, she covered her baby with part of her clothes, bade it farewell, and threw herself into the river beside and near the Markiz’s castle. At that moment the Markiz was sitting on his balcony with his new girlfriend. He saw the drowning person and ordered his servants to remove the body from the water. The baby also passed away at that time.

The Markiz’s girlfriend learned what he had done and left him for her family. The Markiz wandered aimlessly about his castle after the death of his wife and their baby, and the absence of his lover. He remained in this state until the people saw his body drifting in the same river where, just the day before, Suzanne had drowned.\(^3\)

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