Individuality Lost, Fun Gained: Some Recurrent Motifs in Late Twentieth-Century Arabic and Turkish Novels
Stephan Guth

Abstract

Starting from an alternative description, based mainly on German literature, of what has come to be called ‘postmodernism’, the present study re-examines Arabic and Turkish novels from the 1980s and 1990s in the light of this description. It is argued that the descriptive categories developed on the basis of European texts also make sense for texts from the Middle East and North Africa, suggesting that the way life is perceived in these regions at the end of the twentieth century does not differ fundamentally from how it is experienced in a Western country – there is a global discursive community with similar outlooks on life on both sides, rather than a ‘clash of civilizations’. The alternative description also assigns many ‘postmodern’ features their place in a ‘structure of meaning’, which sheds some new light on the inner architecture of the period in question and on the function of the parts in a complementary whole.

But the twentieth-century novels are influenced by the changes in beliefs and political ideas after the events of the First World War and the disappearance of the British Empire. This change can be noticed if we look at the works of the two writers who are not so far from other in terms of time. His novels present a picture of modern twentieth century life and its problems. But he uses the traditional form of novel. His novels contain various sorts of characters, but all of them belong to the same middle class social group. Having decided in later life that it might actually be quite nice to master another language, rather than dusting off my schoolgirl French, I opted for a clean break: Spanish. Three years of evening classes later, thanks to the enthusiastic teacher's efforts I could order in a restaurant and ask directions, but my conversational skills were limited to asking everybody how many brothers and sisters they had. The only true way to master a language is to live and breathe it for a period of time. Individuality Lost, Fun Gained: Some Recurrent Motifs in Late Twentieth-Century Arabic and Turkish Novels. Stephan Guth. Abstract. Starting from an alternative description, based mainly on German literature, of what has come to be called 'postmodernism', the present study re-examines Arabic and Turkish novels from the 1980s and 1990s in the light of this description. It is argued that the descriptive categories developed on the basis of European texts also make sense for texts from the Middle East and North Africa, suggesting that the way life is perceived in these regions at the end of the twentieth century does not differ fundamentally from how it is experienced in a Western country – there is a global discursive community with.