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Structuralism and Post-structuralism in Terry Eagleton  
and Abdel Aziz Hammuda

هل نُنظَر أم لا نُنظَر؟ نقد البنيوية وما بعد البنيوية في أعمال تيرى  
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### Abstract:

This paper attends to the crisis of theory in two critics: Terry Eagleton and Abdel Aziz Hammuda. Eagleton, the leading British theorist, explores vital theory-related issues in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), *The Significance of Theory* (1990), and *After Theory* (2003). Abdel Aziz Hammuda, the Egyptian critic, playwright and professor of English literature addresses the crisis of theory in a renowned trilogy: *The Convex Mirrors: From Structuralism to Deconstruction* (1998), *The Concave Mirrors: Towards an Arabic Critical Theory* (2001), and *Getting out of the Labyrinth: Scrutinizing the Authority of the Text* (2003). Both Terry Eagleton and Abdel Aziz Hammuda are critical of newer theories, particularly Structuralism and Post-structuralism, attempting to pin down reasons behind the crisis, and to map a way out. Whereas Eagleton bases his criticism on cultural grounds, Hammuda wishes that Arab history would be re-visited instead of being caught up in the entangling Western web of theories.

### Keywords:

Criticism-critical theory- crisis - Terry Eagleton- Abdel Aziz Hammuda- Structuralism- Post-structuralism

هل نُنظَر أم لا نُنظَر؟ نقد البنيوية وما بعد البنيوية في أعمال تيرى إيجلتون وعبدالعزیز حمودة

يناقش هذا البحث أزمة النظرية النقدية المعاصرة والتي بدأت تتضح على وجه الخصوص في عصر ما بعد الحداثة، رغم أنها قضية قديمة طالما كانت تطفو على السطح من حين لآخر. ويركز البحث على أعمال إثنين من النقاد: تيرى إيجلتون وعبد العزیز حمودة. يناقش الناقد البريطاني الماركسي تيرى إيجلتون أزمة النظرية في عدة كتب منها النظرية الأدبية (١٩٨٣)، ومغزى النظرية (١٩٩٠)، وبعد النظرية (٢٠٠٣). ويتناول عبد العزیز حمودة الناقد والكاتب المسرحي المصري الأزمة في ثلاثيته الشهيرة المرايا المحدبة: من البنيوية إلى التفكيك (١٩٩٨). المرايا المقعرة: نحو نظرية نقدية عربية (٢٠٠١). الخروج من التيه: دراسة في سلطة النص (٢٠٠٣). ينتقد كلٌّ من إيجلتون وحمودة النظريات النقدية الحديثة خاصة البنيوية وما بعد البنيوية في محاولة لتحليل جذور الأزمة واقتراح خارطة طريق للخروج منها. لكن بينما يبني إيجلتون إنتقاده للنظريات المعاصرة على أسس ثقافية وماركسية، يدعو حمودة الناقد العرب إلى إحياء التراث النقدي العربي بدلاً من الإنشغال بتقليد النظريات الغربية دون وعى منهم بالتحيزات التي تحملها.

## To Theorize or not to Theorize? The Critique of Structuralism and Post-structuralism in Terry Eagleton and Abdel Aziz Hammuda<sup>1</sup>

"Theory is fading fast, anyway, smiling  
at us like the Cheshire Cat. So why not  
let theory fade even if we must coax  
back the Cat someday?"<sup>2</sup>

(Ihab Hassan)

In 2018, the experiment of three researchers; James Lindsay, Helen Pluckrose, and Peter Boghossian, was made public. The three scholars, who have attempted to publish twenty fake papers in high-profile journals in different fields including gender, queer and fat studies, used trendy jargon to prove ludicrous assumptions. As their experiment was revealed, seven of their papers have been accepted for publication, six have been rejected, and seven were still going through the process of reviewing. As the researchers were indeed hoping to rerun the original "Sokal Hoax", their experiment is now referred to in the media as "Sokal Squared". In 1996, Prof. Alan Sokal, a physics professor at New York University, submitted an article entitled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" to *Social Text: an Academic Journal of Postmodern Cultural Studies*. In the article, though a realist, Sokal discussed the relativity of knowledge from a postmodern perspective. He proposed that "physical 'reality', no less than social 'reality', is at bottom a social and linguistic construct"(2). Far from being a genuine academic endeavor, the article was no more than a hoax. In fact, Sokal employed the theories of Freud, Lacan, and Derrida, and used the prevalent jargon of postmodernism, feminism and hermeneutics to test the magazine's intellectual rigor. His bet was that the editorial board of the journal, would be misled by the superficially specialized nature of the article and the loaded language, and would publish it without specialized peer review or consultation of a physicist. On the date of its publication, Sokal revealed, in *Lingua Franca*, that the article was but a hoax. His point was that postmodernist critics were markedly critical of

the objectivity of physical science and would be thrilled to publish an article by a realist proving their theories, which they did.

On being asked by *Le Monde* to comment on the "Sokal affair", Jaques Derrida referred to the experiment as pitiful. Derrida's response came as follows:

This is all rather sad, don't you think? For poor Sokal, to begin with. His name remains linked to a hoax—"the Sokal hoax", as they say in the United States—and not to scientific work. Sad too because the chance of serious reflection seems to have been ruined, at least in a broad public forum that deserves better.

Many scholars would agree with Derrida that the hoax was a pitiful act that does not prove anything. For "after all, the editors of *Social Text* had long ago come to believe in the universality of theory's vision<sup>3</sup>. And if geography and music and theology and the rest had succumbed to theory, why not mathematics and physics?" (Cunningham 33). *Le Monde* sought Derrida's reaction to the experiment since postmodernist critics, perhaps more than anyone else in the world, disdained the very idea of theory and theorizing. Postmodernists who carelessly announced the "death of the author", also implicitly proclaimed the "death of the text" and "death of the reader/critic". As they took the ideas of the reader's response theories, such as Norman Holland and Wolfgang Iser, a step further, postmodernists claimed that the role of the reader should not be limited to filling the gaps of the text. He is rather invited to participate in the discursive game of reading, likely to fall in the abyss or *aporia*.

Reaction to the Sokal affair was immense worldwide since it triggered questions about the objectivity of knowledge, the junction between social sciences and natural sciences, and the legitimacy of theory, as much as it challenged the credibility of academic journals. The Sokal Affair caused many to declare that such a hoax "cast an unforgiving eye onto the exclusive, often rarified nature of such discussions and onto the parochial framework in which they tend to be conducted, evoking a world where initiates recite in reverent tones the works of the masters, or, more simply, quote each other's work incessantly and with very little awareness of their dogged insularity" (Isenberg 86). The hoax has been often utilized in the alleged "culture wars" between the camp of physical

sciences and the camp of humanities. It has also been frequently referred to when the validity of newer disciplines like race and gender studies was at stake, or when problematics related to the new terminology associated with them arise.

It could still be argued that the "Sokal hoax" has a notable effect on the status of theory. John Guillory even disputes that "the Sokal affair has less to tell us about the politics of science, or science studies, than about the history of criticism"(470-471). More importantly, he draws attention to "the epistemic anxiety of criticism" (480). From which sources does criticism get its epistemic validity? The discussion about criticism's epistemic validity becomes even more heated in the age of globalization. Is theorizing still possible in the age of globalization? The answer Ihab Hassan gives in "Literary Theory in an Age of Globalization" (2008) is that the crisis of theory is becoming inevitable: "I know that literary theory in a time of contested globalization will not find legitimacy in sectarian politics or fundamentalist dogma, not in cultural identity or transcendental philosophy" (6). Even if the question of legitimacy is set aside for the time being, academicians could not see such hoaxes as less than alarming. In "The Fall and Rise of the House of Theory", Donald Freeman<sup>4</sup> views the "Sokal hoax" as "a wakeup call" that should alert academicians to take the crisis of theory more seriously (19). Freeman contends that the "enormous damage" that literature has been subject to for long is caused by "theory" (19). Freeman locates the roots of the current crisis of American literary theory in French literary theory: "In its contemporary form, 'theory' began when a French import solidified its presence on the shores of my country. This import was not a car, a cheese, or a perfume. It was a product of French intellectual *jouissance* called deconstruction, which became coupled to the distinctly nonjouissant Anglo-American lit-crit machine" (2). Though it manifests an over sweeping generalization, Freeman's assumption has some truth in it. With the play of signifiers, blurring of boundaries between genres, and the mess of critical terminology being introduced by French theories, the crisis of theory has been increasingly noted worldwide, let alone in Anglo-American criticism. The Derridian concept of the "text" that came to encompass almost everything and anything has revolutionized critical

practice and extended its reach to include pop culture, theatrical performance, organizational behavior, fashion and video games.

This paper attends to the crisis of theory and discusses whether it is now possible to view theory the way we used to before Structuralism and Post-structuralism. Can we still theorize while we bear in mind the "epistemic anxiety" that criticism already suffers from? Though many scholars have addressed themselves to the issue, this research will limit itself to the views of two critics: Terry Eagleton and Abdel Aziz Hammuda. Both critics attempt to diagnose the current crisis of theory, particularly linking it to Structuralism and Post-structuralism. They both suggest a disruption from the past, proposing a re-assimilation of the present paths of theory. Yet, whereas Eagleton, as a Marxist British critic, bases his criticism on cultural grounds, Hammuda discusses the issue from the perspective of an Arab intellectual, a nationalist who wishes that the genuine Arab history would be re-visited instead of being caught up in the quite entangling Western web of theories.

Terry Eagleton, a Marxist and a disciple of Raymond Williams, is the author of many significant books in criticism like *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), *Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996) and *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976). Eagleton explored many theory-related issues in his books and articles among which are *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1997) and *The Idea of Culture* (2000). However, this paper focuses on three works by Eagleton where he particularly discusses the *crisis* of theory *i.e.* *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), *The Significance of Theory* (1990), and *After Theory* (2003). Eagleton detects the crisis of theory as being rooted in formal criticism which exclusively limited its analysis of texts to intrinsic formal elements. As a cultural critic, he wishes to restore to theory its interest in cultural dynamics, and he anticipates the birth of new theories and new gurus in the new millennium. Abdel Aziz Hammuda, the Egyptian critic, playwright and professor of English literature addresses the crisis of theory in a renowned trilogy: *Al-Maraya Al-Muhadabah: Min Al-Buniawiyah ela Al-Tafkeek. (The Convex Mirrors: From Structuralism to Deconstruction)* (1998), *Al-Maraya Al-Muka`arah: Nahw Nazariyah Nakdiah Arabiah. (The Concave Mirrors: Towards an Arabic Critical Theory)* (2001), and *Al-Khurūj Min*

*Al-Tih: Derasah fi Sultat Al-nas (Getting out of the Labyrinth: Scrutinizing the Authority of the Text)* (2003). Though Hammuda dedicates a good part of his work to an explanation of the newer theories, the main objective of the three books is to address the crisis of theory east and west. The "culture wars" are not only evident in the dichotomy between physical sciences and human sciences, but also in the dichotomy between Western culture/theory and Eastern culture/theory. Hammuda complains that the conflict has often been unfortunately resolved in favor of the Western culture. It is as if Arab intellectuals perceived their traditional culture through a concave mirror that belittled and demeaned it while perceiving the western culture through a convex mirror that magnified it.

### **On "Theory" and "Theorizing":**

It could be argued that the crisis of theory has first emerged with New Criticism. New Critics thought that they figured out a good part of the problem with criticism (the term used at that time to refer both to critical theory and practice). They thought that the problem lies in allowing non-aesthetic elements to affect an aesthetic reading of the text. By insisting to examine the work of art as an autonomous entity that is extricated from the biography of the author or the socio-political forces at work, there is a presupposition here that external elements might do the text harm more than benefit. John Crowe Ransom published an article in 1937 entitled "Criticism Inc.", where he identified three types of individuals who have the potential ability to write valuable criticism: the artist, the philosopher, and the university professor of literature. He remarked that we should expect the most from the professor, as it is the professor's job to establish standards of criticism that people can benefit from. In other words, it is the professor of literature who is able to "theorize" about the "practice" of criticism.

In this respect, Ransom cited the writings of Professor Ronald S. Crane of the University of Chicago who excluded from criticism works of historical scholarship and of Neo-Humanism<sup>5</sup>. Ransom lists several other considerations which should be excluded from the study of literary criticism like personal registration, synopsis and paraphrase, historical studies, linguistic studies, moral studies and any writing which deals with

abstract content. With this being done, we are left with questions like: "What is criticism? Easier to ask, what is criticism not? It is an act now notoriously arbitrary and undefined" (Ransom 9). Ransom suggests that "criticism must become more scientific, or precise and systematic"(3). He also calls for a solidarity between critics in England and America to defend literature and criticism against the vulgarity of the capitalistic world: "Rather than occasional criticism by amateurs, I should think the whole enterprise might be seriously taken in hand by professionals. Perhaps I use a distasteful figure, but I have the idea that what we need is Criticism, Inc., or Criticism, Ltd"(3). Though the idea of establishing some sort of a "Criticism, Inc." might have been appealing to scholars, yet New Criticism had its own issues. One thing is that New Criticism proved to be "intellectually and politically sterile to those who think that literature is not separable from life but participates instead in an unbreakable whole of what we know and do, as well as what we write" (Payne "Introduction" 2).

With the rise of "formal" schools of criticism like Russian Formalism and French structuralism, the crisis of theory deepened. It goes without saying that the role of language was central in shaping the Anglo-American critical school towards the mid of the twentieth century, and that the Russian Formalism concentrates on "literariness of literature" as Jakobson designates. Nevertheless, the exaggerated concentration on language, which was fed by the advancements in "semiology" attained by Ferdinand de Saussure and others, led to a contraction of the literary text into a set of linguistic signs. French structuralism, which at first felt like a smooth development of formalistic theories, ended up as something totally different.

Around the turn of the 20th century, many theorists have remarked that the age of "high theory" has certainly passed. The discussion was the focus of a number of books like for example Thomas Docherty's *After Theory* (1996), Wendell Harris's *Beyond Post-structuralism* (1996) and Martin McQuillan's *Post-Theory* (1999). In *Life. After. Theory.* (2003), edited by Michael Payne and John Schad, the major assumptions of Post-structuralism are re-visited and the way it affected theory worldwide is re-considered. Schad contends that theory is "a notoriously loose term,

covering as it does a whole multitude of critical and intellectual sins most of which have been committed in the name of 'Post-structuralism'"(ix). He refers to a declaration by Wittgenstein that we should give up literary criticism. He remarks that "theory, of course, has in every various ways renewed this sense of crisis; at times, it too implies that there may be better things to do than literary criticism"(170)? But Schad disagrees as he believes that literary criticism is still the favorite craft for many, and that theorizing is still a possible activity even for poststructuralists themselves. Eliot, he maintains, has pointed out that "criticism is as inevitable as breathing" - and he was right (48). For Schad, "even after theory, criticism can still mean life"(171). In the book, Derrida is interviewed by Nicolas Royle, Christopher Norris and Sarah Wood. Upon being asked by Nicolas Royle about how he views life after theory, Derrida answers: "now I never use the word 'theory' in the way that you do here; I don't use the word 'theory' after you, after the American and the English speakers. So, I would translate this into French as 'life after philosophy', after deconstruction', after literature and so on and so forth" (8). Michael Payne remarks in the book that "one of the things that makes it especially difficult to reclaim truth after theory is that many of its advocates unwittingly, or with faint heart, or by hyperbole or out of ubiquitous human frailty, have tarnished theory and truth, or cheapened it, or made its name suspect"(79)<sup>6</sup>. This might have some truth in it. The crisis of theory is caused by its exponents as much as by its opponents.

Modernism and postmodernism have shaken beliefs of all kinds which have long been unshaken. In the second half of the twentieth century, and particularly during the 70s and the 80s, "Theory" branched into so many divisions and subdivisions which included, but could not be reduced to, new historicism, feminism, postcolonialism, ethnic studies, and ecocriticism. Race, class, ethnicity and gender issues have taken over the discipline, drawing attention to new inquiries, directions, and disputes. Minority literature has come to focus, raising questions about plurality and multiculturalism. For some time, post-colonial discourse dominated academic studies to the extent that it was almost impossible for the mainstream academia to ignore it. Though the new approaches have enriched both literary theory and practice, yet they offered food, not just

for thought, but for severe controversy, misjudgment, and blurring of boundaries.

It is basically with newer theories that the terms "literary theory" and "critical theory", used quite synonymously most of the time, came into use<sup>7</sup>. "Literary Theory is both a polemical defense of high theory<sup>8</sup> and a mocking debunking of its failing", argues Cobley (191). As Post-structuralism has clearly declared itself anti-logocentric, the very concept of "theory" and "theorizing" became at stake. According to Paul de Man, literature is not a reliable source of information about anything other than its own language (Makaryk 295). Confidence in theory, he argues, promotes the illusion of the possibility to specify a single interpretation for each text. Theory tends to deconstruct itself and to deconstruct any attempt at applying it to the reading of particular texts. The most common rhetorical aspect in literary texts is their resistance to theory. Phrased differently, "no theory is left standing. 'Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory is itself resistance' "(Rosenau 82).

One issue that intensified the crisis of theory, as aforementioned, was critical terminology. The critical jargon now prevailing, especially in race-gender-class criticism, make the critics less interested in analyzing literary works than in the application of theories to them (Ellis 92). Gerald Graff argues that the problem with the new terminology associated with newer theories is that "academic work becomes influential not despite but because of its obscurity, that to get ahead in the academy you must avoid sound bites, vernacular, and clarity and make your writing as difficult as possible, if not completely opaque" (153). Such obscurity was what Sokal bargained for in his famous hoax. Graff, who has to disagree with the unjustified ambiguity of the critical discourse in the post-postmodern era, refers to many prominent theorists who write smooth, accessible critical discourse. He mentions for example Roland Barthes, Terry Eagleton, Stanley Fish, Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, and Sandra Gilbert. However, in spite of the relative clarity of the writings of these critics, "theory remains synonymous with obscurity." (Graff 154). A considerable part of the problem probably lies in the huge number of theories which unexpectedly emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> C, each bringing its own set of terminology.

Objecting to the too many 'isms' that appeared in the world of literary theory back in 1995, Jay Parini claims that "nobody needs an 'ism' to appreciate or study literature" (A.52). He insists that we read literature because it contains some wisdom and because it creates some aesthetic pleasure for the reader, irrespective of the newer theories that surfaced in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>C. Though he concedes that those newer theories have situated art in the context of ideology and politics, he complains that "much of the writing published under the aegis of theory [is] badly written, embarrassingly self-conscious, and 'professional' in the worst sense: writing for a small coterie of readers steeped in a particular jargon who get a kick out of the subtle winks and nods that have become part of the game of criticism"(A.52). René Wellek, for one, disparaged the newer theories in "Destroying Literary Studies" as he warned against their destructive effect on the study of literature. He particularly aimed his criticism at the nihilism inherent in Postmodernism. Though he endorses "the need for clarification of principles and methods" as a legitimate end for criticism, he is against the unjustified ambiguity and the deconstruction of meaning (50). He insists that "some of the recent developments in their extreme skepticism and even nihilism would destroy this ideal, 'deconstruct' as they say, all literary study, interrupt tradition, dismantle an edifice built by the efforts of generations of scholars and students" (50-51).

Both Ihab Hassan and Edward Said link the problem of theory to its extreme elitisms. Hassan argues that theory should become less abstract and more concrete. It should focus on the local rather than the universal: "Perhaps theory, then, should renounce the hope of becoming a global theory, satisfied to become, instead, a set of local practices, each looking over its shoulder at other practices, all of them aware of the great world." (Hassan 9). In an interview with Tariq Ali (2006), Edward Said admits his antagonism to "theory". He states: "I feel that authorities, cannons, dogmas, orthodoxies, establishments, are really what we're up against. At last what I am up against, most of the time. They deaden thought" (104)<sup>9</sup>. Said had already suggested "secular criticism" as a possible alternative to theory. As a secularist, Said argued for a secular criticism that "eschewed jargon and engaged with the world at large, and

was not the domain of specialists" (Siddiqi 73). He sees "secular criticism" as the tool of the humanistic intellectual whose moral mission should be understood in the context of Said's understanding of "humanism" as intellectual practice aimed at concrete change in the real world of human struggles for universal justice and emancipation from oppression. Siddiqi points out that according to Said, "criticism must, if it is to maintain its commitment to non-coercive knowledge and freedom, guard against its own consecration" (73).

### **Terry Eagleton and the "Death of Criticism":**

Terry Eagleton is one of the most read and globally acknowledged literary critics<sup>10</sup>. As a Marxist and a cultural critic, Eagleton is critical of current developments in the field of theory from a social standpoint. The worth of criticism becomes subject to questioning when it loses its social function. In his books, articles and lectures addressing the crisis of theory, Eagleton "excoriated the relativism of recent theory, the vacuity of identity politics, and the inflation of culture over society" (Williams 54). In other words, Eagleton aims to restore to criticism its traditional social role and to situate it in cultural dynamics. This is evident in more than one work by Eagleton. In *The Function of Criticism*, for one, he argues that the real value of criticism lies in situating itself in the political, psychological, social, and cultural context, rather than studying the text as separate from its surroundings. The crisis of theory, or what is sometimes referred to by Eagleton as the "death of criticism" could be best traced in three books by Eagleton *i.e.* *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), *The Significance of Theory* (1990), and *After Theory* (2003).

*Literary Theory*, which sold about one million copies and was reprinted around twenty times, continued to be an indispensable reference for scholars and students of theory for long. David Rosen disputes that Eagleton's *Literary Theory* "has a place on the mental shelf just next to the Band-Aids, the multi-vitamins, and the emergency flashlight"(147)<sup>11</sup>. In *Literary Theory*, Eagleton highlights the many "alterations" criticism and literary theory has been subject to. That is why this kind of change might easily lend itself to the definition of a "theoretical revolution" (preface I.). Through surveying the history of critical approaches to literature, from Matthew Arnold to Post-structuralism, Eagleton comes to

the conclusion that theory is political. Though theory is presented sometimes as natural and objective, it is almost impossible to find a theory that does not entail a political perspective. When there is a certain political system, he argues, we could be sure that “literary theory has a most particular relevance to this political system: it has helped wittingly or not, to sustain and reinforce its assumptions” (196).

Eagleton underlines the linguistic turn in literary theory that was probably started by De Saussure and others. Such a turn initiated a novel paradigm of literary analysis which does not only focus on form rather than content, but reduces the text to its abstracted inner relationships and underscores the process of signification as the dominant discursive dynamism. Eagleton criticizes "structuralism's static ahistorical view of society, as well as its reduction of labour, sexuality, and politics to 'language'. Structuralism, moreover, ignores both literature and language as forms of social practice and production. Its anti-humanism brackets the human subject, thereby abolishing the subject's potential as a political agent"(Habib 18-19). It is obvious that Eagleton is particularly critical of post-structuralism. His persistent critique of deconstruction is based on a specific Marxist notion of "ideology" as a set of beliefs and values consummated in certain material apparatuses. Post-Structuralism is dedicated to exposing the contradictions in "metaphysical" systems which range from male-dominated power structures to religion. The Post-structuralist emphasis on language also involves them heavily in the analysis and "deconstruction" of literature to expose its hidden biases.

Some of the key questions Eagleton poses in this entertaining book are “what is the *point* of literary theory? Why bother with it in the first place? Are there not issues in the world weightier than codes, signifiers, and reading subjects?”(194). As he expounds the main premises of phenomenology, hermeneutics, structuralism, post-structuralism and psychoanalysis, Eagleton concludes that theory is significant. Though Post-structuralists are anti-theory, he insists that “without some kind of theory, however unreflective and implicit, we wouldn’t know what a ‘literary work’ was in the first place, or how we were to read it. Hostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people’s theories and an oblivion to one’s own” (preface II.). On re-

visiting the original question of defining literary theory and determining that literary theory is an arbitrary, artificial science, since literature is a social object determined by social forces. Consequently, the political nature of language should be emphasized and the purpose of rhetoric should be the deflation of the present political order and the creation of a new socialist order instead.

In *The Significance of Theory* (1990), Eagleton further explores the relation between the aesthetic and the political. He insists that theory is significant and indispensable. Though many people "see recent developments in literary theory as dangerous and anti humanistic", as it "threatens to diminish further the declining audience for literature and criticism", Eagleton still sees theory as vital (Preface viii). He has stressed the need for theory particularly in his later works. Human beings need to make their human existence significant. This is what really differentiates them from other creatures. This would not be possible without some form of effective communication; that "one reason why we have theories is in order to stabilize our signs. In this sense all theories, even revolutionary ones, have something conservative about them" (25). In other words, Eagleton sees theorizing as an inseparable part, not only of any "theory", but of any human activity. He candidly declares that his purpose in the book is "to theorize about theory" (24). In this sense, the book could be classified as a book in meta-theory. To engage in "meta-theory" is to be five steps removed from real life, maintains Eagleton. There is meta-theory, then literary theory, then literary criticism, then literature, then real life!<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Eagleton argues that "this sharp polarity between 'theory' and 'life' is misleading" because "just as all social life is theoretical, so all theory is a real social practice" (24).

Eagleton also explores how the crisis of theory was intensified by structuralism and post-structuralism, especially with the type of critical jargon they generated - a jargon that evidently hindered theory from performing its social role. Illuminating on the topic, he argues that "theory is just a practice forced into a new form of self-reflectiveness on account of certain grievous problems it has encountered" (26). One of the problems that theory encountered has to do with "the role of 'humanities' in late capitalist societies", it is what caused "the great theoretical

explosion"(28). Eagleton denotes a certain instance where a heated controversy about structuralism in Cambridge University made it into the newspapers. A newspaper published a cartoon portraying a working man reading the newspaper and asking his wife: "have they caught the Cambridge structuralist yet?" "evidently under the impression that he was a murderer on the loose"(28). Eagleton guesses why "theory" might have acquired such a reputation as an elitist, ambiguous, not-easy-to-understand discipline is the incomprehensible terminology or critical "jargon", something as common as "hermeneutical phenomenology" (34). Yet, he remarks that the obscurity of critical jargon should not stand between the audience and the appreciation of significant theories. The very concept of "jargon" is even negotiable as "one person's jargon is another person's ordinary language" (35). Though literary theory is a sophisticated science, Eagleton urges critics to move out of the isolation that academia fosters, as he promotes the notion that criticism be used to promote a more rightful society.

In *After Theory* (2003), however, Eagleton admits that the "golden age of cultural theory is long past" (1)<sup>13</sup>. He laments the decline of theory into a superficial, depoliticized preoccupation with sex and pop-culture. Eagleton bases his evaluation of the status quo of theory on religious and Marxist grounds. The purpose of *After Theory* is to trace the development of theory from the 1960s through the 1990s, highlighting its attainments and its imperfections. In the book, Eagleton also suggests an alternative theory that addresses some vital issues in the academia which have recently been overlooked by cultural theorists like truth, morality, and fundamentalism (Aoudjit 1). Eagleton points out that "the shift from the 1960s to the 1990s brought theory closer to the bone. The heady abstractions of structuralism, hermeneutics and the like had given way to the more palpable realities of postmodernism and post-colonialism"(53). During the 80s and the 90s, post-structuralists attempted to blur boundaries between reality and imagination, high culture and pop art, ethics and aesthetics, history and his/her story, etc.

In reviewing the history of recent theories, Eagleton finds that they have mostly diminished. The theories of Raymond Williams, Jacques Lacan, Levi-Strauss, Julia Kristeva, Jurgen Habermas, and Edward Said,

have been published several years earlier. Eagleton notes that Barthes died in a car accident, Foucault was afflicted with Aids, Althusser was confined to a psychiatric hospital for killing his wife. "It seemed that God was not a structuralist, teases Eagleton (1)! According to Eagleton, "If theory means a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever. But we are living now in the aftermath of what one might call high theory, in an age which, having grown rich on the insights of thinkers like Althusser, Barthes, and Derrida, has also in some ways moved beyond them"(2). In the overall, the book is "symptomatic of the confused state of theory in today's academy", as Copley maintains (189). Copley finds the title of the book quite misleading as it suggests that we have moved beyond theory while Eagleton's point is exactly the opposite "for he keeps reminding us that we are always operating within some kind of theoretical paradigm"(192). "The 'after' in Eagleton's thinking tends to be conceptualized not as a break from the past but a reorientation toward the future" (Copley 197).

In the book, Eagleton lists the losses and gains of theory in the post 9/11 world as one of his chapter headings suggests. Whereas in the first part Eagleton is critical of the current state of cultural theory, in the second part he addresses Marxism from a Christian socialist stand. He sees that one of the tasks of the intellectual is to reveal the shortcomings of capitalism. Eagleton defends Marxism against the charges that it did contribute much into the study of race, ethnicity, or colonialism. He insists that many anti-colonial campaigns were inspired by Marxism. Gandhi, Castro, Fanon, and many third world thinkers were affected by the ideas of the great Marxists. The student movement of the late 60s challenged the way humanities was functioning. The fruit of the challenge was cultural theory. Eagleton sees a sheer need for cultural theory since "the humanities had lost their innocence: they could no longer pretend to be unattained by power. If they want to stay in business, it was now vital that they paused to reflect on their purposes and assumptions. It is this critical self-reflection which we know as theory" (27).

Though he admits of the possible shortcomings of cultural theory, Eagleton urges his readers to transcend the limits of traditional literary theory and criticism. If Eagleton is critical of anything related to theory, it

is of the currently flourishing discourses on sex and sexuality: "structuralism, Marxism, post-structuralism and the like are no longer the sexy topics they were. What is sexy instead is sex" (2)<sup>14</sup>. The type of Jargon that newer theories, particularly postmodernism, initiated sometimes gives the impression that critics don't exert any effort to be understood by readers, or even that they intend to sound ambiguous. It is the kind of sentences written by prominent critics like the one quoted here: "The in-choat in-fans ab-original para-subject cannot be theorized as functionally completely frozen in a world where theology is schematized into geo-geography" (76). Eagleton argues that "It is not just that sentences like these are incomprehensible to the toiling masses; they are incomprehensible to most of the non-toiling intelligentsia as well"(76). Though some terms like "ego", "libido", "paranoia" have already become part of everyday language, other terms like "ideology", "commodity fetishism" and "mode of production" did not succeed to do so (79).

Furthermore, Eagleton complains of the emergence of a number of anti-theoretical terms in the United States after 9/11 such as "evil", "bad men" "patriot" and "anti-American". Eagleton, who claims that no literary theory is apolitical, believes that "these terms are anti-theoretical because they are invitations to shut down thought. Or indeed, in some cases, imperious commands to do so. They are well-thumbed tokens which serve in place of thought, automated reactions which make do for the labour of analysis.... Theory – which means, in this context, the taxing business of trying to grasp what is actually going on – is unpatriotic"(223)<sup>15</sup>.

#### **Abdel Aziz Hammuda and the Mirrors of "Theory"**

Abdel Aziz Hammuda, a critic and a literature professor, recycles the "mirror" metaphor, a timeworn symbol, to depict the crisis of critical theory at the threshold of the twenty first century. The deformed reality of images produced by concave mirrors or convex mirrors illustrate the current crisis of theory in Hammuda's trilogy on the crisis of theory. An image of Western critical theory, appears on the surface of the convex mirror, curved outwards as it is, bigger than what it really is. In opposition, Arabic critical theory, reflected on a concave mirror that is curved inwards, appears smaller than what it really is. In both cases what

we get is a deformed image of reality. The deformed reality of theory in both cases leaves academicians, whether in the West or in the Arab World, in the dark, perpetually wandering in the labyrinth of theory.

Like Eagleton, Hammuda essentially aims his criticism in the *Convex Mirrors* (1998) at structuralism and post-structuralism. According to Hammuda, De Saussure's exploration of the signification process in *Cours de linguistique générale* did not yield the fruits it was expected to. As they focus on the "mechanism of signification", structuralists discount the "significance of signification" (9). Hammuda complains that structuralists are so overwhelmed by the linguistic system that they overlook what the text really means. This eventually turns them into "prisoners to language", (10). Poststructuralists get even more entrapped in the web of signification as they surrender to the endless play of signifiers. Hammuda remarks that "structuralists failed to generate 'meaning' and poststructuralists succeeded in generating 'meaninglessness'" (10). Unfortunately, such endless play of signifiers, characteristic of Western Structuralism and Post-structuralism, was mechanically transferred to the Arab World. Arab structuralists not only took it upon themselves to introduce structuralism into their audience, but also magnified it beyond its true merit. Arab structuralists, like Gaber Asfour, Huda Wasfy, Hekmat Al Khatib and Kamal Abou Deeb who applied structuralism to Arabic literature, did little more than mimicking the postulations and lexes of Western structuralism without much inventiveness. Hence, Arab structuralists did not in fact add much to our understanding of the texts under analysis. Hammuda argues that over-absorption in "Western modernism opens the door to cultural subordination, and enhances it. We commit an irredeemable sin when we transfer western terms, which are philosophical terms in the first place, with all their epistemological connotations, to the Arab culture, which is a different culture, without realizing the difference" (*Convex* 9). And though some Arab structuralists, like Elias Khoury and Kamal Abou Deeb, actually advised an Arabic version of structuralism, Hammuda believes that such Arabic structuralism did not really materialize into something real. Arab critics, Hammuda remarks, are much overwhelmed by the flow of critical terminology provided by Western Structuralism,

without trying to coin their own terms. The end result is that Arab structuralists, like the structuralists and post-structuralists of the West, offer misreadings, rather than readings, of texts (23).

Hammuda walks an extra mile in his argument on the crisis of theory in *The Concave Mirrors* (2001). In the book, Hammuda highlights the argument provided by Jonathan Culler in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (1997). Culler subtly tackles the disarray of theory in the structuralist and poststructuralist age. Like in the cartoon of the structuralist on the loose in the streets of Cambridge cited by Eagleton, Culler includes a cartoon in the first chapter of the book showing a man better classified as a “terrorist” than as a “theorist”! Culler remarks that nowadays “theory” extends to cover linguistics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, anthropology, film studies, gender studies, political theory, and sociology. Needless to say, “Works that become ‘theory’ offer accounts others can use about meaning, nature and culture, the functioning of the psyche, the relations of public to private experience and of larger historical forces to individual experience”(4). Probably conjuring Ransom's question of “What is criticism?”, Culler speculates on the nature of literary theory wondering “What is theory?” He lists four main statements which could describe what theory really is:

1. Theory is interdisciplinary
2. Theory is analytical and speculative
3. Theory is a critique of common sense.
4. Theory is reflexive (14)

Ironically enough, though he seriously explores some of the facets of theory, Culler simply concludes that theory is “intimidating” (15).

But if theory is intimidating for Western intellectuals, is it as much intimidating for Arab intellectuals? Hammuda observes that many Arab intellectuals have been subjugated by “a culture of dissonance” (13), where they acutely suffered from being divided between two cultures *i.e.* the Arab culture and the Western culture. Arabic theory shares roots with Western literary theory since both theories at some point primarily derives from Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Classical Arabic literary theory, believes Hammuda, deserves more attention and appreciation. He chiefly ponders on the work of *Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī*

(400 – 471 or 474 A.H.), a prominent Arab linguist and theorist who lived in the Fifth Century A.H. (the Eleventh Century A.D.). Conducting a comparative study of al-Jurjānī's work and the work of Western theorists, Hammuda comes to the conclusion that a serious scholarly study can easily trace in al-Jurjānī work concepts that are astoundingly similar to Coleridge's "the willing suspension of disbelief", Eliot's "the objective correlative", Formalism's "literariness of literature", structuralist concept of the relation between signifier and signified, and even the Derridian "presence/absence" dichotomy (427-428).

The argument is further developed in *Getting out of the Labyrinth* (2003). The metaphor of the labyrinth was first suggested by Vincent Leitch in *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* (1983). Expounding the main premises of deconstruction and pinpointing the current crisis of theory, Leitch draws on the Greek myth of "Daedalus", the maze maker who eternally imprisons the "minotaur", a mythical creature who is part man and part bull. The captive "minotaur" woefully stands, in Leitch's book, for the literary text that became everlastingly confined in the Derridian maze of theory. Hammuda, who makes of Leitch's metaphor the central metaphor in his book, sets a purpose for himself to define the limits of the maze, the reasons leading to it, and, hopefully, to figure a way out. He insists that such a maze is primarily a product of western culture and epistemology and that it does not necessarily apply to Arab culture - which definitely has its own mazes. Hammuda reiterates what has been previously stated in *Concave Mirrors* of the need for what Abbās Al-'Aqqād<sup>16</sup> called "protective identity" (29). This translates as the necessity for developing an alternate Arabic critical theory that benefits from Western culture without being biased to it.

The question of epistemological bias was addressed by Abdelwahab Elmessiri in *The Problematic of Bias: An Epistemological Vision and a Call for Ijtihad (interpretation)* (1996). "Bias" in Elmessiri's lexis refers to the group of hidden values that are implicit in the epistemological paradigms deployed, and in the methodologies and tools of research, directing the researcher without his being aware of it. The argument of Elmessiri is that epistemological biases are implicit in all human cognitive paradigms, whether consciously or unconsciously. Bing

illuminated by the notion of "objectivity", many Arab intellectuals unconsciously adopt Western epistemological biases. "Objectivity" in contemporary Arab discourse easily translate into the adoption of ideas and concepts implicit in Western discourse, without awareness of implied biases<sup>17</sup>. Elmessiri cites some examples of epistemological bias in the Arab world and how it decides for the usage of some Western terms like "enlightenment", "renaissance", "anti-Semitism", and "crusades" in Arabic discourse. He particularly refers to the term "feminism" which is often carelessly equated in Arabic discourse with "Women's Liberation Movement". The two terms, however, refer in fact to two different, if not opposite, approaches. Another problem related to the translation of terms in the Arab world, Elmessiri pinpoints, is the problem of the "absent term" ("Two Apples" 76). Arabic discourse suffers from the lack of terminology that is much needed for studies in humanities and social sciences in particular, as Arab researchers confine themselves to the already existing terms which are imported from the West. In other words, though there is a signified, the signifier is absent. The attempt to Arabize some terms even leads to a further complication of the problem, like for example in the case of "Classicism", "Romanticism", and "Pragmatics". Though such words don't actually mean anything in Arabic, they are quite loaded with meaning in Western culture. In Western discourse, the term "Romanticism", for instance, is derived from the word "romance" which conjures up feelings of astonishment at the supernatural. However, such association is missing in Arabic discourse. That is why the word stands on its own as a self-referential term ("Two Apples" 76).

In "*Ma Waraa Al-Manhhaj: Tahauzaat Al Nakd Al Adabi Al Gharbi*" (Beyond Method: The Biases of Western Literary Criticism), Saad El- Bazei contends that Western literary approaches are biased to certain cultural patterns. El-Bazei compares the concept of the "text" in Western literary theory to the Arabic concept of "text". In English, the word "text", derived as it is from Latin, shares the same root with words like "texture and; hence, we have also "textuality", and eventually "intertextuality". In Arabic, on the other hand, the term "*nas*" نص (text) means "*isnad*" إسناد (reference or datum) and "*Tāin*" تعيين (designation or determination) (169). That is why many critics were resentful to the blind

adoption of Western theories. El Bazei refers to Hazem Al Kurtaganny (7 A. H.) who disputed long ago that Aristotle's *Poetics* is inapplicable to Arabic literature. In modern times, other critics like Mohamed Mandour, adopt the same approach of Al Kortaganny (162). El- Bazei attends to the dilemma of those Arab researchers who want to benefit from Western literary approaches. These critics are left only with two options: either to literally apply those approaches to literary texts; and hence adopting the inherent biases in those approaches. Or, to apply some changes to those approaches in a way that might render them as tangibly different from the original schools. Among others, Avicenna, Al Faraby, and Taha Hussein advocate the adoption of theories as separate from their cultural context. These scholars see in philosophical and literary approaches a little bit more than simply being a product of their cultural contexts, as they belong to humanity in general. Yet, El-Bazei contends that "to extract an approach from its context without making any subsequent changes, or with the application of few changes, is certainly an illusion" (162). A hybrid approach that attempts to situate Western theories in Arab culture wouldn't retain enough relevance to the original so as to bear the same name. El Bazei wonders whether an "Arab Marxism" can still be called a "Marxism"? Or can an "Arab structuralism" still be called "Structuralism"? (166).

### **Concluding Remarks: How to Surmount the Crisis of Theory?**

Back to the key question in this paper i.e. "to theorize or not to theorize"? Is theorizing still possible after Structuralism and Post-structuralism? In other words, it is still important in a place to decide "whether the owl of Minerva, the bird of theory, is finally shot; whether it is now worn like a dead albatross; or whether it makes one last, belated and glorious flight" (Schad "Preface" xi). In other words, could there be an escape for theory from its abyss? In spite of the skepticism that prevailed in the academia in the aftermath of the Sokal hoax (and the Sokal squared!), many scholars still believe that theorizing is a possibility, and a good one. John Ellis contends that "it would be wrong to deduce from this that theory is the source of the problem. What is wrong here is not theory but *bad* theory" (92). That is why some scholars remark that in order to revive "theory", as such, it is necessary to revive

"older theories" which place the text in the historical, social, and political context. Stephen Greenblatt, the new historicist, for one, thinks that the literary text should be situated within the historical context where it becomes at play with other cultural components. Other scholars anticipate new horizons in theory and theorizing. What Freeman is calling for is an interdisciplinary approach in English Departments between language and literature and between the English Department and other academic departments like philosophy, sociology, psychology and the like. Freeman suggests that what we need now is a "New Philology" that can help redirect literary scholarship toward insights that are rigorous, falsifiable, and humanized. He insists that: "We must present a constructive and serious alternative program to the bad ideas of 'theory'"(Freeman 19). The New Philology, according to Freeman, will help academicians practice "literary analysis and criticism whose merits do not depend on its author's politics; literary analysis and criticism that is open, explicit, and arguable; literary analysis and criticism that is, in the best sense, real literary theory" (Freeman 19). It could be argued that by "real" literary theory Freeman means theory *before* Structuralism and Post-structuralism.

As indicated *supra*, both Terry Eagleton and Abdel Aziz Hammuda are critical of newer theories, particularly Structuralism and Post-structuralism, attempting to pin down reasons behind the crisis, and to map a way out. Terry Eagleton, the leading British theorist, "re-evaluated the English literary critical tradition, redefined the critic's function and reappraised specific authors from his historical materialistic perspective"(Habib 9). He stressed the need for theory while criticizing the anti-theory tendencies inherent in post-structuralism. Eagleton predicts that a "return to an age of pre-theoretical innocence" will not be possible (1). Nevertheless, he believes that "no doubt the new century will in time give birth to its own clutch of gurus" (2). As for Abdel Aziz Hammuda, the Egyptian critic, who utilizes the mirror as a key metaphor in his trilogy on the crisis of theory, he views the issue from a nationalist standpoint. Being biased as they are to the western paradigm, Arab intellectuals are often blinded to the true merit of their own literary heritage. Elmessiri, who criticizes such unconscious internalization of biased cognitive paradigms, proposes that there are two steps to be taken:

first, we must recognise that bias is inevitable; and secondly, we must undertake a comprehensive and total critique of Western civilization. This means identifying the shortcomings and negative features of the Western cognitive paradigm, in particular, that it is an anti-humanist paradigm. We should emphasise the cultural specificity of Western civilization, so as to underscore the fact that it should never serve as an absolute point of reference. We, therefore, need to understand the historical and cultural conditions that led to Western progress and Western hegemony as specific historical events. We should also have enough flexibility and courage to carve the term when there is a need to, because "a term is no idol", as Mustafa Nassif states in *Arabic Criticism: Towards a Second Theory* (9). Hammuda aspires to have Arab critics develop theories which draw on Arab history and culture and transcend the limits of Western Structuralism and Post-structuralism. As he warns against the blind transference of these theories to the Arab world, a serious attempt at re-visiting Arab heritage would most probably yield unexpected gains.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> An earlier draft of this paper was presented at "Dissonant Discourses: An Interdisciplinary Conference", English Department, University of Oklahoma, January 2013.

<sup>2</sup> A fictional character that first appeared in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). The cat, known for its distinctive broad smile, surpassed the limits of literature to appear in media, business, science, and political cartoon. Its body disappears every once in a while leaving behind nothing but its idiosyncratic grin.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this study, the usage of the term "theory" relies on the definition provided by *Cambridge Dictionary* as "a formal statement of the rules on which a subject of study is based, or of ideas that are suggested to explain a fact or event or, more generally, an opinion or explanation". The term "literary criticism" refers to the study or practice of judging literary works. As for "literary theory", it refers to the coherent body that includes the set of principles organizing the understanding and the interpretation of literature. This is slightly different from the definition of "critical theory" as the abstract reflection or critique of culture or thought.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Freeman's research interests focus on teacher learning in the contexts of organizational and systemic reform and its influence on student learning. His books include *Doing Teacher-Research: From Inquiry to Understanding* (Heinle-Thomson; 1998) and *Teacher Learning in Language Teaching* (co-edited with Jack C. Richards; Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> In his study "History Versus Criticism in the University Study of Literature" (1935), Crane complains that critics have relied on history more than they should, though they are not well-versed in it. As for New-Humanists, they are criticized by Crane for being moralists who are always after a moral system. For New Critics, relying on history or morality distracts the reader from the aesthetic experience as such.

<sup>6</sup> As Toril Moi, the feminist critic, is asked by Michael Payne about how she sees the effect of postmodernism on feminist theory, she responds that to ask the question is to "ghettoize the question of women" (137). Moi, who is not optimistic about the state of theory in general, remarks that in the 1980s theory was flourishing and all kinds of theorists were able to participate in the same conference side by side, "But if we ask if 'theory' today is still the source of new and original work, then the answer is no" (166).

<sup>7</sup> According to Moustafa Bayoumi "critical theory is best understood as an *ansatzpunkt*, a point of beginning that incorporates Kant's notion of examining both the limits and the possibilities of rational criticism with Marx's historical critiques of ideology. Critical theory, moreover, aims for a high degree of self-consciousness, contemplating the act of thinking while the thinking occurs" (51). Moustafa Bayoumi specifically associates the term "critical theory" with Theodor Adorno and with the Institute for Social Research. Bayoumi explores the contribution of Adorno to critical theory. He believes that Adorno "added to critical theory by combining the insights of Freudian psychoanalysis with Marxism, particularly when theorizing Fascism. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in fact,

should be seen as a high point of critical theory for the way it self-reflexively critiques the concept of the Enlightenment as containing within it the possibility and the limit of both liberation and domination" (51).

<sup>8</sup>High theory is the cultural theory of Foucault, the postmodernists, Derrida, and others.

<sup>9</sup>Stathis Gourgous argues that "neither was Said ever simply 'anti-theory' nor were the so-called Post-structuralist theorists simply 'anti-humanists'" (40). Gourgous admits that "Said, of course, never hid his frustration with what he perceived to be the fetishism of theory, the specific sort of academic self-fashioning by means of a rarefied language that ultimately undercut any frame of reference other than itself (40)".

<sup>10</sup>As Payne points out, "Not only does he write extremely well, he has also forged for himself a style that is neither mannered and arcane, nor detached and uncommitted" ("introduction" 7).

<sup>11</sup>In an interview with Jonathan Derbyshire published in *New Statesman* (2010), Eagleton commented on the popularity of *Literary Theory*. On being asked by Derbyshire whether he enjoys the popularity of his book, Eagleton answers: "I enjoy popularization and I think I'm reasonably good at it. I also think it's a duty. It's just so pedagogically stupid to forget how difficult one found these ideas oneself to begin with. And I think it's dismaying how small a patch there is for public intellectuals – particularly public intellectuals of the left"(51).

<sup>12</sup>An abstract philosophical discussion and critique of theory is usually referred to as "meta-theory".

<sup>13</sup>Reviewing *After Theory*, Isenberg praises Eagleton's wit and satire: "known for his mordant wit, literary flair, and readable style, Eagleton never shies away from shaking things up, casting his opinions in a slightly polemical mold, and playing the role of intellectual funny man with a little extra relish"(Isenberg 90).

<sup>14</sup>In a visit to Cairo (2008), Eagleton delivered a lecture at the American University under the title "The Death of Criticism". Eagleton spoke of the crisis of literary theory and the role the "critic" played throughout history, and how this role differed depending on historical, political, and social variables.

<sup>15</sup>Eagleton, however, acclaims, the efforts of millions of Americans who are able to separate themselves from the domineering American discourse. Those Americans are able to stand against the world-hating discourse that the media propagates, even if this means that they are referred to as "unpatriotic".

<sup>16</sup>Abbās Al-'Aqqād (1889-1964) is a prominent Egyptian thinker, poet, and critic. He is considered a polymath in the Arab world since he extensively wrote on history, philosophy, politics and literature. He was also a candid political thinker who was jailed between 1930 and 1931 for opposing the ruling regime.

<sup>17</sup>As Elmessiri explains: "I realized that the modern Egyptian liberal's total rejection of memorization is really a blind bias against our own heritage, and in favour of a category of Western thought we had copied and learned by heart as if it were an absolute scientific category that was not to be questioned on any grounds" (*Intellectual Journey*

323).

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