

# Baraza

*Critical Collaboration on the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa*

## Cross-Pollination

© November 24, 2014    Arabic, Arabic Literature, Dust to Digital, Egypt, English, Poetry, Text    Joy Garnett



*Fig. 1: Original caricature of Abushâdy by M. Fridon (1928)*

I've spent the past few years organizing materials that were left behind by my late grandfather, Ahmed Zaky Abushâdy (1892-1955), the well-known Egyptian Romantic poet—and physician, inventor, and **bee scientist**. Early on in my research, I became aware of two distinct narratives in the biographical literature: Abushâdy the Romantic Poet and Abushâdy the Bee Scientist. The former narrative is enshrined in the field of Modern Arabic Literature, while the latter weaves between the history and science of beekeeping in 20<sup>th</sup> century England and Egypt. Each tells a story that portrays important aspects of Abushâdy's life and work. But as I continue to examine the materials in the archive, it strikes me that the logic that gives rise to separate, non-intersecting narratives runs counter to the spirit of my grandfather, who dedicated his life to working across disci-

plines and bringing together a wide array of traditions and cultures.

One remedy may be to develop a new narrative that emphasizes the hybridization that shot through all of Abushâdy's activities. As a scientist, he understood the concept of hybrid vigor in both theoretical and practi-

cal terms, bringing it to fruition by breeding honeybees on a grand scale. He also applied the concept as a poet, for instance, by welcoming the influences of European Modernism, particularly English poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, and Keats. Likewise, he developed his own brand of proto-multiculturalism in his academic writing on politics and social issues.

Central to all of Abushâdy's activities was his role as publisher. In the early 1930s, he bought a used printing press, and started his cottage industry in private publishing. As publisher, editor, typesetter, and printer, Abushâdy promoted his own writings and those of his friends and associates. He called his publishing venture *Maṭba'at al-Ta'āwun*—"The Co-operation Press"—and he ran it singlehandedly for over a decade, first in Cairo and later when he moved his home base to Alexandria, where he continued to produce journals and monographs across far-flung disciplines. The press draws its name from the 19<sup>th</sup> century English co-operative movement, which Abushâdy learned about through his English paramour and wife-to-be, Annie Bamford, a self-described freemason descended from radical labor organizers and cotton weavers. "The Movement" provided him with practical strategies with which to launch co-operative societies and their associated publications.



Fig. 2: L: Cover of *Apollo* (February 1934); R: *Apollo's Society* (1935)

Although Abushâdy produced two long-lived bee journals—the first, *Bee World*, founded in 1919 in Benson, England, remains in print to this day—he is remembered for his short-lived, controversial poetry journal *Apollo* (Jam'iyat Apūllū), which he published in Cairo between 1932 and 1934, and whose influence persisted long after it ceased publication. *Apollo* provided a much-needed platform for experimentation at a moment when poets from across the Arab world were transforming Arabic poetry. Associated with *Apollo* was "Apollo's Society," a group of poets that spanned several generations, yet who shared a desire to modernize Arabic poetry, which they agreed had fallen into a decline. The *Apollo* poets carved out a position for themselves among the warring literary factions of the day (fig. 2).

In 1930, two years before the first issue of *Apollo* appeared, Abushâdy launched a second bee journal, *The Bee*



*Kingdom* (*Mamlakat al-naḥl*, 1930-40), which attracted contributions in both Arabic and English and took in advertisements from around the world. He also founded an Egyptian bee organization called “The Bee Kingdom League,” which continued the educational and co-operative work he started a decade earlier in England. “Bee culture” had long since seeped into Abushâdy’s life and work, at once providing a literary metaphor and a model for his research.



*The Bee Kingdom masthead by Paul Beer (Vol.2, no.12, December 1931)*

Among the many visual emblems of hybridity that Abushâdy employed as a publisher is the illustration on the masthead of *The Bee Kingdom*. Created by an artist named Paul Beer (described on the back of one sketch as “al-Nimsawi”—The Austrian), it depicts a crowned queen bee astride a throne, her arms embracing the two hemispheres of the globe—East and West (Fig. 3). This logo appears on ephemera and objects in the archive, on variations of letterheads, in the form of gummed pyramid-shaped labels and enamel-inlaid medallions (Fig.4).

The variety of the illustrations contained in Abushâdy’s publications, as well as the artworks preserved in his archive, indicate an interchangeability of roles and the blurring of genres for artists working in Egypt in the 1930s and 40s. As I thumb through *Apollo*, I am struck by the eclectic nature of the illustrations, which include reproductions of fine drawings, caricatures, cartoons, and color plates. Likewise, in the pages of *The Bee Kingdom*, we find numerous small line drawings. When I first discovered these drawings, which are remarkably stylized, I assumed they were unsigned elements of graphic design produced by the same anonymous hand. On closer inspection, I found each piece to contain the minuscule signature of the celebrated Egyptian calligrapher Sayed Ibrahim (1897-1994) (Fig.5). Ibrahim was a member of *Apollo’s Society*, producing copious illustrations for Abushâdy’s many publications, including *Apollo*, as well as poetry.



*Fig. 4: Top L: Cover of The Bee Kingdom (June 1930); Top R: Medallion, Mappin & Webb, Ltd. (London, n.d.); Bottom L: Sticker; Bottom R: Medallion (Egypt, n.d.)*

Other well-known artists who contributed regularly to The Co-operation Press include the painter Mohamed Hassan (1892-1961), who doubled as a political cartoonist, and the brothers Seif Wanly (1906-1979) and Edham Wanly (1908-1959), who were Abushâdy’s close cousins in Alexandria. Like Hassan, the Wanly brothers were prolific painters as well as cartoonists (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5: Drawing by Sayed Ibrahim (n.d.)

Another frequent contributor was the self-taught painter Shaaban Zaky (1899-1968), who wrote articles for *Apollo* while advertising his services as a commercial artist in its back pages. This straddling of different styles and genres seems to have been commonplace, just as it was conventional for poets to also work as journalists.

I have come to realize my grandfather's personal quest for hybridity was emblematic of his time, and the contents of his archive preserve for us a particular moment of experimentation and co-operation across mid-century Egyptian urban culture. Abushâdy's hybridity is elegantly portrayed in a widely-reproduced caricature by the Alexandrian Persian cartoonist Mohamed Fridon (Ostle, 1994). It portrays Abushâdy at the top of his game: a many-armed human with a microscope for a body, grounded by his bare feet even as his mind takes off in several lofty directions at once (see figure 1, above). The portrait serves to remind us that neither poetry nor art nor science develops in isolation, and that creativity, harmony, and growth all thrive and benefit from cross-pollination.



Fig. 6: L: Gouache by Seif Wanly (1950); R: Cartoon by Edham Wanly (1945); Bottom: Atelier, Seif and Edham Wanly, colleagues (n.d.)

## *About Joy Garnett*

Joy Garnett is a multidisciplinary artist and writer who works with archives as both subject and medium.

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