Series Editor's Foreword

The Edinburgh Studies in Modern Arabic Literature is a new and unique series which will, it is hoped, fill in a glaring gap in scholarship in the field of modern Arabic literature. Its dedication to Arabic literature in the modern period, that is, from the nineteenth century onwards, is what makes it unique among series undertaken by academic publishers in the English-speaking world. Individual books on modern Arabic literature in general or aspects of it have been and continue to be published sporadically. Series on Islamic studies and Arab/Islamic thought and civilisation are not in short supply either in the academic world, but these are far removed from the study of Arabic literature *qua* literature, that is, imaginative, creative literature as we understand the term when, for instance, we speak of English literature or French literature, etc. Even series labelled 'Arabic/Middle Eastern Literature' make no period distinction, extending their purview from the sixth century to the present, and often including non-Arabic literatures of the region. This series aims to redress the situation by focusing on the Arabic literature and criticism of today, stretching its interest to the earliest beginnings of Arab modernity in the nineteenth century.

The need for such a dedicated series, and generally for the redoubling of scholarly endeavour in researching and introducing modern Arabic literature to the Western reader has never been stronger. The significant growth in the last decades of the translation of contemporary Arab authors from all genres, especially fiction, into English; the higher profile of Arabic literature internationally since the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Naguib Mahfouz in 1988; the growing number of Arab authors living in the Western diaspora and writing both in English and Arabic; the adoption of such authors and others by mainstream, high-circulation publishers, as opposed to the aca-

demic publishers of the past; the establishment of prestigious prizes, such as the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (the Arabic Booker), run by the Man Booker Foundation, which brings huge publicity to the shortlist and winner every year, as well as translation contracts into English and other languages – all this and very recently the events of the Arab Spring have heightened public, let alone academic, interest in all things Arab, and not least Arabic literature. It is therefore part of the ambition of this series that it will increasingly address a wider reading public beyond its natural territory of students and researchers in Arabic and world literature. Nor indeed is the academic readership of the series expected to be confined to specialists in literature in the light of the growing trend for interdisciplinarity, which increasingly sees scholars crossing field boundaries in their research tools and coming up with findings that equally cross discipline borders in their appeal.

Studies of the Arab *nahḍa* (awakening) or renaissance, as it is sometimes called to suggest comparability with the European Renaissance, its main figures, trends, influences, locations, etc. are not in short supply: the *nahḍa*, dating back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and generally associated with the beginnings of increasing contact between Europe and the Arab East, culminating in Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798, marks the region's introduction to modern times. Almost every feature of the Arab social and intellectual life of today has its root in the *nahḍa*, whether by being a continuation of a trend of thought or social or political principle that had its germination in the *nahḍa* period, or by being one that is resisted today by traditional social forces as a product of the Westernisation process that also started with the *nahḍa*.

But abundant as studies of the *nahḍa* may appear, we just cannot have enough of them: the *nahḍa* and its main figures and texts are constantly being revisited, revaluated and reinterpreted, and the present study is a new endeavour in this continuing fascination with the origins of Arab modernity. Abdulrazzak Patel argues that so much attention has been given by generations of scholars to the towering secularist figures of the *nahḍa* and to European influence in bringing about the Arab awakening, with the result that the more traditional, self-referential, but nonetheless rejuvenating, currents of

the *nahḍa* and their exponents were largely neglected. This monograph is an attempt at redressing this situation.

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