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Congratulations, a Very Nice Cover!

In a book of correspondence between the great Japanese writers Yasunari Kawabata and Yukio Mishima, I discovered new information about how writers—even the greatest ones—can ask for attention, and in doing so, expose themselves. As a writer, I favor Kawabata over Mishima, but I found out that my favorite writer asked his “disciple” to write a letter from the members of PEN Japan to the Swedish academy in order to endorse Kawabata’s nomination for the Nobel, and in another letter he asked for the address of Mishima’s English translator.

Kawabata is not the first nor the last to be brazenly opportunistic, I can name dozens of Great writers who self-promoted in the same way. In fact, since Kawabata’s time, self-promotion has become stupider and more explicit.

After the Arab Spring, in 2011, people discovered a whole generation of writers and artists who lived for years in the shadows. These people started using social media not only for riots and manifestos, but also for the promotion of their work—this was especially the case in countries where there was not a strong literary or art market.

I remember a post made by the brilliant Tunisian novelist Aymen Daboussi, after he published his first novel *Black Erection*, which read: “I don’t believe that Facebook or any other platform is a bad tool for Arab writers; don’t accuse people who promote their work via their accounts, we don’t have literary agents nor a strong publishing economy; nobody will promote our work; at least we can use our accounts to announce some events and receive reactions from the probable-reader.”

I found the reasoning behind Aymen’s post to be fair, especially since he is such a quiet and talented writer—but after he made his post, I witnessed hundreds of writers and artists becoming *influencers* and playing in the territory of THE SHOW, or what we can call *La Société du Spectacle* (the society of the show). Those writers will post a paragraph to social media with the caption, “This is the last paragraph of my next novel,” or “I finished the first part of my book,” self-promoting with posts about their “work-in-progress.” They would receive the same comment 2,000 times: MABROUK MABROUK (“Congrats!”). And if they publish the cover online—I love book covers, by the way, and I publish mine—they receive: “Congrats, what a beautiful cover!” (even if it is an ugly one).

On one hand, all of it has become a boring game about “staying relevant” and “the virtual lights of the social media” played by Algerian influencers on Snapchat and Instagram who have 2 million followers, and who keep posting with each photo the same caption: “Stay in touch my dears... the new is coming...” ابقاوا معنا حبابي... راهو جاي الجديد .

On the other hand, there are really good poets who publish their poems directly on Facebook, and after few months, they collect all these post-poems or fragments of poems and they edit them together in order to publish a book. They say that they wrote these poems directly on their phones. I write many poems and fragments on Facebook, but I use the “ONLY FOR ME” post function when I

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Badis (Algeria), Cai (China), Pezuashvili (Georgia), Matur (Turkey)

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do. I don't feel the need to share raw writing with "my friends," therefore, I just use the private post as a notebook when I don't have one on me. I purposely separate my poetry posts from the satiric posts and anecdotes I write publicly to comment on current events, to joke about some stupid public personalities, or to write a diary (as I'm doing with my trips here in the US), because I believe that the POST is an independent genre with its own history that began more than a decade ago with blog-posts.

Up until this point, I've been indulging in some digital lit-world gossip. The crucial idea for me, here, is how to control my use of social media on a daily basis. Before coming to Iowa City, I told myself that I need to deactivate all my accounts so that I can focus on my writing, but I certainly have not done this for many reasons (because there is always a Reason).

Deactivating your Facebook account has become the Eternal Promise of the Modern Man. And as a writer and a translator, that platform is my daily small evil. How do I avoid using Messenger? How do I avoid the other eternal promise of REFRESHING THE TIMELINE, trying to always be CONNECTED, always HERE, trying to not miss the THING...? The promise of supreme-capitalism (to quote Haythem Al Wardany's *Book of Sleep*) turned the economy of production into an economy of consciousness where any other activity beside CONNECTING/ BEING CONNECTED is a black hole, and an unappreciated disconnection.

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