



# ARAB WOMEN IN INK

Exploring Gender Perspectives in  
Modern Arabic Literature

Esat AYYILDIZ



LIVRE DE LYON

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Philology

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## **Arab Women in Ink: Exploring Gender Perspectives in Modern Arabic Literature**

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## **ETHICAL STATEMENT**

I assert, in no uncertain terms, that the entirety of the information featured in this research complies with the strict guidelines dictated by both academic regulations and the tenets of ethical behavior. Following the mandates of these regulations and tenets, I also attest that I have dutifully acknowledged and cited all sources for any data, concepts, and conclusions incorporated into this study that do not originate from my own intellectual efforts.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Ethical Statement</i>	I
<i>Abbreviations and Transcriptions</i>	V
<i>Introduction</i>	VII
Context and Background	VII
Scope of the Book	VIII
Methodology	IX
Overview of Chapters	X
<b>Chapter 1: Historical Background</b>	1
1.1. Pre-Modern Arabic Literature: Women’s Role and Representation	1
1.2. The Emergence of Modern Arabic Literature	27
1.3. The Evolution of Female Characters	41
<b>Chapter 2: Female Voices in Modern Arabic Literature</b>	63
2.1. Women’s Literary Movements	63
2.2. Key Female Authors and Their Works	69
2.3. Themes and Styles in Women’s Writing	84
<b>Chapter 3: Male Perspectives on Women in Arabic Literature</b>	111
3.1. Key Male Authors and Their Female Characters	111
3.2. How Men Write Women: Themes and Motifs	121
3.3. Analyzing Male Gaze in Arabic Literature	139
<b>Chapter 4: Case Studies</b>	147
4.1. Detailed Analysis of Selected Works by Women	147
4.2. Detailed Analysis of Selected Works by Men About Women	159
<i>Conclusion</i>	173
<i>Bibliography</i>	177
<i>Abstract</i>	183





## **ABBREVIATIONS AND TRANSCRIPTIONS**

The construction of this book adheres to the principles of the ISNAD Citation Style (specifically the ISNAD II Footnote Version). In line with these guidelines, abbreviations and transcriptions have been systematically arranged.



# INTRODUCTION

## Context and Background

In the vast and multifaceted corpus of Arabic literature, the representation and depiction of women have been subjects of intricate dynamism, reflecting transformations that have transpired in tandem with the broader sociopolitical, cultural, and historical currents. Providing a well-rounded historical backdrop is quintessential to comprehend the evolution and diversity of female characters in Arabic literary works, as it helps elucidate the complex interplay between literary forms and the cultural ethos of various epochs. Arabic literature, with its rich heritage, encompasses a plethora of oral and written traditions that have been in existence for over one and a half millennia. Throughout this extensive period, female characters in Arabic literature have often been portrayed through a kaleidoscope of themes and motifs, influenced heavily by cultural mores, religious dictums, tribal customs, and overarching patriarchal frameworks.

In the pre-modern era, the literary landscape was marked by classical Arabic poetry and prose, where women's characters were often either idealized or constrained within certain archetypal roles such as devoted mothers, alluring damsels, or tragic heroines. This period's literary output was characterized by its ornate and eloquent style, with an emphasis on valor, chivalry, and romantic idealization. The representations of women were, to a significant extent, reflective of the gender norms and social values that were prevalent during this time. It is also essential to recognize that female authorship was notably scarce in this era, as the literary domain was largely monopolized by men. The dawn of the Nahda, the Arabic Renaissance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, heralded a sea change in Arabic literary traditions. This era, punctuated by an influx of Western influences, the disintegration of Ottoman rule, and the nascent stirrings of nationalism across the Arab world, witnessed a metamorphosis in literary expression. Modernity made its imprint on literary forms and themes, and this period was hallmarked by the emergence of novel, short story, and dramatic forms. Notably, this was also the era where female literacy rates began to surge, and women began to gradually permeate the public sphere, both as participants and contributors. This pivotal shift augured a change in how women were represented in literature. No longer just passive subjects, women started being depicted as active agents with their aspirations, tribulations, and complexities.

As we navigate through the contemporary period, Arabic literature has come to encompass an even more diverse array of female voices and experiences. Women's roles are portrayed in multifaceted ways – they are individuals with agency, capable of navigating social, political, emotional, and even spiritual domains. Women writers have carved out a space for themselves, being vociferous and innovative in their literary creations, frequently experimenting with new forms, engaging in intertextuality, and confronting once-taboo topics such as gender politics, sexuality, autonomy, and empowerment. In essence, the context and background to women's portrayal in Arabic literature provide an indispensable foundation for this study. It is the bedrock that supports a more detailed and nuanced analysis of gender representation and the myriad voices that have emerged over time. It allows the reader to discern the tapestry of forces - historical, cultural, and social - that have woven together to shape the representation of women in Arabic literature. This scholarly venture aims to build upon this rich historical background, delving deeper into the multifaceted representations of women, through the lenses of both male and female authors, and scrutinizing the symbolic, thematic, and stylistic elements that define modern Arabic literary works.

### **Scope of the Book**

In “Arab Women in Ink: Exploring Gender Perspectives in Modern Arabic Literature”, the scope of the book is encompassing, as it seeks to provide an extensive and incisive exploration of the portrayal of women in Modern Arabic literature. The scope is delineated both temporally and thematically, focusing on literary works produced during the 20th and 21st centuries, a period which epitomizes the maturation of Modern Arabic literature. One of the foundational aims of this scholarly endeavor is to investigate and analyze the multifarious ways in which female characters have been depicted in literary creations. This encompasses the gamut from novels and short stories to poetry and drama. The book will not only peruse the works penned by women, but also take into account how women are portrayed in the oeuvre of male authors, thereby facilitating a holistic and multifaceted analysis.

Thematically, the book aims to scrutinize an array of themes that pertain to women's lives, experiences, and identities within the literary canon. This includes, but is not limited to, themes of gender roles, sexuality, empowerment, resistance, autonomy, familial relations, social expectations, and cultural traditions. The exploration of these themes will be set within the framework

of the socio-cultural and political contexts in which these literary works were crafted, with particular emphasis on historical milestones, movements, and events that have had a significant impact on the lives of women in the Arab world. Additionally, the book seeks to investigate the narrative techniques and stylistic devices employed by authors in the portrayal of women. This will encompass an analysis of symbolism, characterization, narrative voice, intertextuality, and the use of metaphor and allegory. The study aims to discern how these literary devices and techniques serve to construct and convey the complexities of female characters and experiences.

Furthermore, the scope extends to examining the broader gender dynamics and relations within literary texts, scrutinizing the portrayal of interactions between female and male characters, and assessing how this reflects or critiques real-world gender norms and expectations. Attention will be accorded to the ways in which literature either upholds or challenges traditional gender hierarchies and power structures. Moreover, “Arab Women in Ink” takes on an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating perspectives from gender studies, cultural studies, literary theory, and social history to provide a comprehensive and layered analysis. Such an approach enables the book to transcend a unidimensional analysis and instead present a nuanced understanding of gender representations.

It is also crucial to note that the book places emphasis on the heterogeneity of the Arab world. Recognizing that the Arab world is not monolithic, the book takes into consideration regional variations, examining literary works from different parts of the Arab world, including the Levant and North Africa. This geographic diversity enables the study to appreciate the distinctions and convergences in the portrayal of women across various Arab cultures. In summation, the scope of “Arab Women in Ink” is ambitious in its breadth and depth. Through a thorough and multidisciplinary approach, it aims to shed light on the richness and complexity of gender representations in Modern Arabic literature, offering invaluable insights for scholars, students, and readers with an interest in literature, gender studies, and Arab culture.

### **Methodology**

In the Methodology section, it is imperative to elucidate the systematic approaches and analytical frameworks that have been employed in this study to explore gender perspectives in modern Arabic literature. At the outset, a comprehensive literature review is undertaken to form a foundation for the

research. This involves a meticulous examination of existing scholarly works, encompassing historical texts, critical essays, literary analyses, and pertinent theories on gender, which pave the way for a richer contextualization of the subject matter. In addition to the literature review, textual analysis forms a significant part of the methodology. Through close reading and interpretative analysis of primary texts, this study aims to discern the themes, motifs, and character development pertinent to gender representations. It is noteworthy that the texts are analyzed not in isolation but in relation to the sociopolitical and historical contexts in which they were conceived. This necessitates employing an interdisciplinary lens, incorporating insights from sociology, history, and feminist theory, which adds layers of depth and complexity to the analysis.

Moreover, a comparative approach is integrated into the study, allowing for the juxtaposition of works by female authors with those by male authors, and analyzing how gender perspectives are constructed and conveyed through these different voices. This comparative methodology is instrumental in highlighting contrasts and similarities, as well as uncovering the nuances and subtleties that inform the portrayal of women in modern Arabic literature. Another crucial aspect of the methodology is the consideration of reader reception and cultural discourse. By evaluating critical responses and public reception of the literary works, the study is able to gauge the broader cultural implications and societal impact of gender representations within the texts. Furthermore, in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, this research is grounded in transparency and reflexivity. This entails acknowledging the limitations of the study, the potential biases of the researcher, and being conscious of the cultural sensitivities that are intrinsic to the subject matter. In summation, the methodology employed in this book is characterized by a multi-faceted and interdisciplinary approach, combining textual analysis, comparative study, historical contextualization, and an evaluation of cultural discourse.

### **Overview of Chapters**

In this section, an overview of the chapters is presented to furnish readers with a synoptic understanding of the structure and content of the book, thereby facilitating a cogent navigation through the themes and analyses that compose the study.

Chapter 1, entitled “Historical Background”, lays the groundwork by furnishing the reader with an understanding of the historical milieu that has shaped modern Arabic literature. The chapter begins by probing the role and representation of women in pre-modern Arabic literature, offering a discerning

examination of literary tropes, characterizations, and cultural contexts. The chapter then transitions into an exploration of the emergence of modern Arabic literature, focusing on pivotal moments, movements, and changes in literary style and form. The concluding section of this chapter delves into the evolution of female characters, tracing the trajectories of their representation from pre-modern to modern times.

Proceeding to Chapter 2, “Female Voices in Modern Arabic Literature”, the focus is on the literary contributions made by women writers. The chapter commences with an exposition of women’s literary movements and how these movements have been instrumental in carving out space for female voices. It then provides an in-depth examination of key female authors, their seminal works, and the distinctive thematic and stylistic features that permeate their writing. The chapter culminates by analyzing recurrent themes and styles in women’s writing, elucidating how these elements reflect and engage with broader gender issues.

Chapter 3, titled “Male Perspectives on Women in Arabic Literature”, shifts the lens to explore how male authors depict women in their literary creations. The chapter opens by introducing readers to prominent male authors and the female characters they have crafted. The subsequent section, “How Men Write Women: Themes and Motifs”, engages in a critical examination of the narratives, themes, and motifs employed by male writers in portraying female characters. The chapter concludes with an incisive analysis of the male gaze within Arabic literature, scrutinizing the ways in which this gaze shapes and informs the representation of women.

The final section, Chapter 4, is delineated as “Case Studies” and constitutes an exhaustive analysis of selected literary works. Divided into two main sections, the first, “Detailed Analysis of Selected Works by Women”, undertakes an intensive, text-specific examination of literary works penned by female authors. The second section, “Detailed Analysis of Selected Works by Men About Women”, mirrors this approach, but with a focus on works authored by men. In both sections, the analyses delve into the thematic, stylistic, and symbolic aspects of the selected works, employing the critical lenses and methodologies elucidated in previous chapters to generate nuanced and textured readings. In summary, the book is meticulously structured to guide the reader from a broad historical overview through to the analytical depths of individual texts. It engages critically and thoughtfully with gender perspectives in modern Arabic literature, weaving together historical context, authorial voices, and literary analysis into a coherent and insightful tapestry.





# CHAPTER 1

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 1.1. Pre-Modern Arabic Literature: Women's Role and Representation

In any thorough examination of women's roles and representations in literature, it is necessary to trace the historical underpinnings that have defined the female literary space. In the case of Arabic literature, the contributions of women can be discerned in the very genesis of its poetic tradition, even before the advent of Islam. Although the societal fabric of pre-Islamic Arabia, often referred to as the Jāhiliyya period, was predominantly patriarchal, women exhibited their intellectual prowess and creative genius by engaging in the production of poetry. The significant influence they wielded in this sphere provides a fascinating counterpoint to the broader cultural norms of their time. The Jāhiliyya period, characterized by tribal warfare, shifting alliances, and a nomadic lifestyle, nonetheless had a rich oral tradition wherein poetry was the principal form of expression. The profound importance of poetry lay in its ability to capture the ethos of the time, portraying virtues such as bravery, honor, hospitality, and love. It was within this cultural milieu that several women emerged as distinguished poets. Women poets of Jāhiliyya such as al-Khansā' (d. 24/645), al-Khirniq bint Badr (d. BH 50/574 [?]), and Hind bint 'Utba (d. 14/635), among others, are notable for their insightful and deeply expressive verses. Their poetry often dealt with themes such as loss, tribal conflict, and the intricate dynamics of honor in their society. The works of these women not only enrich our understanding of female subjectivity during that era but also underscore the literary potential that was inherent and vibrant among women in a society often presumed to have stifled female expression (al-Rāfi'ī, 2013, 681-688).

The idea that women were active participants in the literary discourse of their time significantly disputes the common narrative of women's marginal involvement in societal matters. It highlights the essential need to recognize the historical presence and influence of women in shaping Arabic literary tradition. By asserting their voices in the realm of poetry, these women countered societal constraints, carving out a critical space in the literary landscape of the era. This

active engagement underscores that their roles were far from being secondary or subsidiary; instead, they were integral contributors to the literary and cultural life of their societies. Furthermore, the works of these women poets of Jāhiliyya not only provide us with valuable insights into their social and emotional landscapes but also serve as an important foundation upon which later women writers built. This genesis of women's contribution to Arabic literature sets the stage for a more nuanced understanding of their roles and representations in the literary space. The poetic contributions of Arab women in the pre-Islamic era demonstrate their intellectual capabilities and creative talents. Despite living in a predominantly patriarchal society, these women harnessed the power of poetry to express their perspectives, thereby creating a space for female voice and representation in the annals of Arabic literature. Recognizing their contributions allows for a more comprehensive understanding of women's historical and ongoing involvement in Arabic literary traditions.

In the realm of Arabic literature, the propensity of women poets to craft elegies emerges as a noteworthy pattern. This phenomenon is substantiated by the conspicuous presence of female-authored elegies in poetry anthologies, often dominating sections reserved for this particular genre. War, while serving as a means of subsistence through practices such as plundering, simultaneously functions as a conduit for power, authority, and renown. Crucially, it represents an inexhaustible wellspring of sorrow and affliction for women. Arab women, compelled to endure the incessant presence of their male relatives on the battlefield, utilize poetry as a poignant medium to give voice to their anguish, yearning, and desolation. These emotions find a resonant echo in the elegy, a genre that enjoys a marked preference among female poets in the Arab world. Consequently, the elegy-themed sections of several poetry anthologies predominantly spotlight the creative outputs of these female poets. The predilection of women poets in Arabic literature to compose elegies is perhaps best understood in light of historical antecedents. The relentless intra-tribal power struggles of the pre-Islamic period, coupled with the post-Islamic absorption of concepts like Jihad and martyrdom, resulted in the transformation of warfare into a persistent occupation. The inevitable outcome was that males, forever armed, were perpetually engaged in battlefronts. Under such circumstances, women were left in a state of chronic mourning, their grief finding expression in the elegies they penned. Moreover, the complexity of female representation in Arabic literature is accentuated by the contrasting depictions found in poetry anthologies. These collections occasionally feature separate sections exclusively

devoted to poems that either laud women or critique them through satire, thereby further underscoring the nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of women in this literary tradition (Kızıltunç, 2012, 42-43).

In the realm of pre-Islamic women's poetry, verses often resonate with profound sadness, a characteristic inherently manifest in the genre of the elegy, an area in which women feature prominently. al-Khansā' stands as an illustrative example in this context, a Bedouin woman of notable valor, whose poetry celebrated her warrior brothers' accomplishments and mourned their passing. However, the melancholic tone interwoven into these verses does not invariably imply resignation; rather, it frequently serves as an impetus for demanding justice for the lost individuals (Hanania, 2010, 51). al-Khansā', undeniably the most celebrated female poet of the classical period, made an indelible mark in Arabic literature through her prodigious contributions, particularly to the genre of the elegy. A salient factor for her widespread influence, either direct or indirect, over a multitude of successors is attributable to her comparatively early chronological existence. A notable trend, initiated by the chroniclers of early Arab history, is the persistent emphasis on her gender. Contemporary researchers, in particular, appear profoundly intrigued by al-Khansā's agency as a woman, or more accurately, her capacity to challenge and transcend the restrictive societal norms in a predominantly patriarchal society. In this milieu, al-Khansā's resistance to undesired matrimony, her assertive stance in offering counsel to her husband, and her ability to contest esteemed male contemporaries like al-A'shā (d. 7/629 [?]) and Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. 60/680 [?]) in poetry duels, offer abundant material for scholars intent on scrutinizing her role and responsibilities as a woman. Nonetheless, as these explorations delve deeper, it is incumbent to recall al-Khansā's trailblazing endeavors in fostering literary pursuits among women, specifically within the sphere of elegiac poetry. The considerable respect attributed to al-Khansā', a figure who cannot be considered marginal, is not a result of her opposition to societal norms. Contrarily, her steadfast commitment to composing elegies, a role traditionally assigned to women by society, serves as a fundamental resource in this regard. Accordingly, al-Khansā's accomplishments are intrinsically connected to the endorsement she received from society. This harmonious equilibrium she orchestrated does not undermine her formidable character and resolute will. In fact, whenever faced with authoritative demands that clashed with her personal aspirations, al-Khansā' consistently demonstrated the fortitude to dissent (Ayyıldız, 2020, 201-224).

In the pre-Islamic era, a time deeply marred by conflict and strife, the literature and poetry of the period serve as powerful windows into the emotional realities of those who lived through such tumultuous times. One such voice emerged from the depths of this period is al-Fāri‘a bint Mu‘āwiya al-Qushayriyya, a female poet whose verses bear witness to the personal toll of the pervasive warfare. Her poignant lines were not merely an expression of her own bereavement, but also a reflection of the collective psychological state of women who endured the devastating aftermath of incessant battles. After the brutal death of her brother, she crafted a lamentation in verse that not only expressed her profound grief but also encapsulated the emotional landscape of her era:

أَصَاعُوا قُدَامَةَ يَوْمِ النَّسَارِ	1. شَفَى اللهُ نَفْسِي مِنْ مَعْشَرٍ
طَوِيلِ النَّجَادِ بَعِيدِ الْمَغَارِ	2. أَصَاعُوا فَتَى غَيْرِ جَنَامَةِ
بِطَعْنِ كَافِرَاهِ كُحْبِ الْمَطَارِ	3. بَيْنَ الْفَوَارِسِ عَنْ رُجْحِهِ
خَلَا جَعْفَرٌ قَبْلَ وَجْهِ النَّهَارِ	4. وَفَرَّتْ كِلَابٌ عَلَى وَجْهَهَا

“1. May God alleviate my soul from the torment inflicted by those who annihilated Qudāma on the day of al-Nisār.

2. They extinguished the life of a youthful warrior, fearless, brandishing a long sword, venturing far on his plundering pursuits.

3. Foe’s cavalry recoiled from the searing blows of his spear, wounds gushing forth as if blood was a bountiful spring.

4. The dogs scrambled in disarray, leaving Ja‘far alone under the yet unbroken veil of dawn (Cheikho, 1897, 1/101).”

This lamentation by al-Fāri‘a bint Mu‘āwiya al-Qushayriyya is a powerful elegy that stands as a testament to the turbulent socio-political atmosphere of pre-Islamic times. With profound pathos, it provides a poignant depiction of the loss experienced by a sister for her fallen brother, while also casting a critical eye on the violence and chaos that characterized the era. The first verse serves as an invocation, seeking divine solace for the poet’s distress induced by the killing of Qudāma. The day of al-Nisār, presumably the day of the fatal battle, is memorialized, thereby marking the precise moment of tragedy and loss. This opening line sets a somber tone for the poem, emphasizing the personal and communal anguish inflicted by war. The second verse focuses on the character of the fallen warrior, depicting him as a brave young man, venturesome, who bore

a long sword and was known for his far-reaching exploits. The description serves both to glorify the fallen and express profound regret at his untimely demise. This not only personalizes the tragedy but also imbues the poem with a sense of youthful energy, courage, and ambition cut short by violence. In the third verse, the poet describes the prowess of her brother in combat, evoking the image of enemy cavalry retreating before his spear. The vivid metaphor of wounds gushing blood like a bountiful spring underscores the brutal reality of battle. It is a testament to the deceased's bravery, reinforcing his valor even as it underscores the tragedy of his death. The final verse pivots to depict the aftermath of the battle. Overall, the poem is a compelling portrayal of the human cost of war, focusing on the personal tragedy of a single warrior as a microcosm of the broader societal toll. It is a deeply moving lament that gives voice to the typically marginalized perspectives of women in the conflict-ridden environment of the pre-Islamic era. This gendered viewpoint adds a layer of emotional depth and complexity to the poem, enriching our understanding of the historical context and the lived experiences of the era's inhabitants.

Prior to the advent of Islam, historical civilizations were commonly marked by the systemic mistreatment of women, a pattern characterized by widespread scorn and extreme harshness. Legal systems such as the Manusmriti in ancient India and the Code of Hammurabi in Babylon played crucial roles in codifying this maltreatment. Regrettably, even the canonical laws within Christianity and Judaism did not ensure adequate protection for women (Shahzad – Farah – Ullah, 2021, 203). In the era of Jāhiliyya, women took on a significant share of the familial and societal burden, performing various duties alongside domestic chores and child upbringing. However, it is evident that despite these considerable contributions, women were typically denied their due respect, save for a few extraordinary historical figures. Prevalent practices, such as segregation during menstrual cycles, exclusion from inheritance rights, non-acceptance into the family unless childbirth occurs, and the live burial of female infants, exemplify this patriarchal mentality. Jāhiliyya poetry, often revered as the Arabs' archive, persists as a crucial historical resource due to its distinguished lexicon, profound meanings, potent expression, and the socio-cultural insight it offers into the pre-Islamic era. This literary corpus illuminates the period's perception of women, their moral and physical attributes, and the prevailing archetype of femininity in Arab imagination (Fidan, 2016, 316-317).

Jāhiliyya poets underscored chastity as the paramount virtue in a woman, delineating an ideal female figure embodying this attribute while concurrently

portraying a rather unflattering image of a Jāhiliyya woman typified by stinginess, avarice, disloyalty, ingratitude, and hostility. In addition to moral characteristics, Jāhiliyya poets elucidated aspects of feminine beauty, crafting vivid images of a woman's skin, eyes, lips, teeth, hair, physique, and demeanor within their ghazal verses (love poems). According to these depictions, a beautiful woman possesses a complexion as white as a pearl or an egg, her radiant countenance illuminated by sunlight, reminiscent of a moon casting its light upon the darkness. The lips of the beloved, blessed with eyes as captivating and large as a gazelle's, are strikingly red, with teeth likened to a daisy. Further, she is characterized by coal-black, long hair, a slender waist, and a gracefulness akin to a gazelle. As these poets explored the behaviors that complemented a woman's beauty, they drew comparisons between the lover's shy gaze and a gazelle, her potentially harmful glances and an arrow, her pleasant conversation and nourishing food, her walk and a horse with a tender hoof, and her gentle progress and the slow movement of clouds across the sky. The Jāhiliyya poems speaking to a woman's moral qualities commonly uphold modesty and chastity, while those focusing on elements of beauty frequently extol a white complexion and eyes as large as a gazelle's. Concurrently, in Qur'anic verses describing the women of Paradise, five principal characteristics are enumerated, two of which resonate with these commonly lauded traits: exclusive devotion to their spouses and a white complexion with gazelle-like eyes. Hence, the portrayal of women in Jāhiliyya poetry coincides with two features attributed to the women of Paradise in the Qur'an. This overlap suggests that the depictions in Jāhiliyya poetry, while unique to the poets, also reflect the sentiments of the contemporary Arab society to a certain degree (Fidan, 2016, 316-317).

The corpus of Jāhiliyya poetry presents the figure of the mother as a guardian, who safeguards her offspring and endeavors to alleviate any adversities that descend upon them. In the event of a loss, she is portrayed in a state of mourning, expressing lamentations. Indeed, these poems draw a compelling parallel between the role of female singers, who persistently lengthen and repeat melodies, and that of grieving mothers who mourn for their suffering or deceased children. An analysis of Jāhiliyya poetry suggests that kinship bonds on the maternal side typically resulted in a network of support for children throughout their lives. During the Jāhiliyya period, women of high social standing showcased remarkable self-confidence and a strong sense of self-worth. This assertiveness and dignity were expressed outwardly through their clothing choices. They wore luxurious and valuable attire, which not only

reflected their elevated social status but also symbolized their inherent self-esteem and honor. Conventionally, fidelity towards husbands was considered a significant virtue among wives. However, certain poets articulated their intent to terminate relationships with their beloveds should these women exhibit disloyalty. Interestingly, there existed a minority of women who partook in trade during this period. Women captured in intertribal conflicts and invasions were repurposed as domestic help and concubines for various reasons. These women often assumed significant roles in communal feasts, where they were responsible for the preparation and serving of meals, commonly featuring meat from camels or cows. In instances of warfare, Arab tribes frequently brought along a subset of their women, who observed the battles from a distance. This practice was intended to bolster the combat effectiveness of the men, driven by their fear of their women being captured, subsequently shared as concubines, and the associated potential for humiliation. The women, in their role, implored their husbands to safeguard them from enemy capture, explicitly asserting that they would cease to remain their wives under such circumstances. The institution of marriage was formalized subsequent to the payment of a monetary or material gift, termed “mahr”, from the groom’s side to the bride’s side—a custom corroborated by the poems. This tradition bears resemblance to the modern practice of dowry, which is infrequently observed today, hinting at the likelihood of the dowry system tracing its roots back to the Jāhiliyya era. An exploration of the status of women in Jāhiliyya, as inferred from the extant poems, reveals a woman as a lover, a mother, a domestic worker, and a concubine. She was an essential participant in festive assemblies, motivating their husbands in warfare, and cautioning that they would become captives of the enemy in the event of defeat. The elite women of the period exuded self-confidence, occupied positions of authority, and held status. They exhibited loyalty to their husbands and shouldered the burden of mourning during times of distress (Kazan, 2021, 112-113).

In order to understand the representation of women in Islamic literature, it is crucial to undertake a comprehensive study of the socio-economic milieu of the Meccan and Medinan societies. Such an investigation will shed light on the societal roles and status of women in the Arabian Peninsula. During the Jāhiliyya era, the era preceding Islam, the predicament of women was further intensified by societal stratification. The institution of class-based marriages, devoid of any restricting stipulations, resulted in the potential exploitation of vulnerable individuals. For example, a female slave could be arbitrarily given in marriage to a fellow slave or a freeman. It was an exceptional occurrence



for free women to enter matrimonial unions with mawla men, and reciprocally, men of servile status were not typically betrothed to free women. Women bore the brunt of military invasions, often ending up as prisoners of the victorious side; while men met their end in battle, women were subjected to captivity. Nevertheless, with the progressive evolution of economic structures that reshaped the traditional nomadic way of life, and the emergence of Islam, a more nuanced class hierarchy came into existence. This evolution catalyzed the gradual dissolution of the tribal collective identity, fostering the categorization of tribal members into distinct groups, namely the affluent, the impoverished, the free, and the enslaved. Owing to its religious significance, Mecca achieved a dominant economic status, emerging as a central locus for the production of weapons, pottery, and agricultural implements. This in turn attracted a thriving barter economy. The Quraysh tribe constituted the most affluent and populous tribe in Mecca. This economic advancement was accompanied by the entrenchment of patriarchal and male-centric societal structures (Shahzad – Farah – Ullah, 2021, 203).

During the *Sadr al-Islam* period, encompassing the prophetic mission of Muhammad and the rule of the initial four caliphs, it is noteworthy to highlight the continuous poetic contributions of women. This epoch was characterized by considerable military activity and frequent conflict, which in turn, influenced the socio-cultural dynamics of the Islamic society, including literary traditions. Notwithstanding the pervasive atmosphere of strife, women poets remained active, utilizing their verses as an expressive medium to mirror their lived experiences and the socio-political changes unfolding around them. Their poetry became a tool for social commentary, a reflection of their personal courage, and a means of eulogizing the valiant deeds of warriors. The endurance of poetic traditions among women during this period provides insight into the multifaceted roles women occupied within these societies, extending beyond the domestic sphere to the realms of cultural expression and social influence. By articulating their perspectives on warfare and its associated hardships through poetry, these women not only contributed to the literary richness of the era but also served as integral members of a society in transition, capturing and immortalizing the era's historical and emotional essence in their verse.

The *Şadr al-Islām* period, bearing similarities to the *Jāhiliyya* era, witnessed the substantial affliction endured by female poets, predominantly driven by the atrocities of war. Women, irrespective of their affiliations in the combat, were constrained to mourn their deceased kin. An exemplar of this scenario

is provided by Qutayla bint al-Ḥārith (d. 20/640 [?]), a scion of the Quraish tribal confederation. She was consumed by sorrow for her brother, al-Nadr ibn al-Ḥārith (d. 2/624), who was put to death by opponents subsequent to his capture during the Battle of Badr in 624 CE. The elegy she crafted in his memory is widely acknowledged as a masterpiece in its subtle, yet profound expression of grief. This stands as a seminal instance of impromptu verse, composed by an Arab woman, encapsulating the sorrow elicited by the demise of a close relative (Khawam, 1995, 67-68):

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| مِنْ صُبْحِ خَامِسَةٍ وَأَنْتَ مُوَفَّقٌ     | 1. يَا رَاكِبًا إِنَّ الْأَثِيلَ مَطْنَةٌ          |
| مَا إِنْ تَزَالَ بِهَا النَّجَائِبُ تَخْفِقُ | 2. أَبْلَغَ بِهِ مَيَّنًا بِأَنَّ تَحِيَّةً        |
| جَادَتْ بِدِرَّتِهَا وَأُخْرَى تَخْنُقُ      | 3. مِنِّي إِلَيْكَ وَعَبْرَةٌ مَسْفُوحَةٌ          |
| إِنْ كَانَ يَسْمَعُ هَالِكٌ لَا يَنْطِقُ     | 4. هَلْ يَسْمَعَنَّ النَّضْرُ إِنْ نَادَيْتُهُ     |
| لَهُ أَرْحَامٌ هُنَاكَ تُشَقِّقُ             | 5. ظَلَّتْ سُبُوفُ بَنِي أَبِيهِ تَنْوِشُهُ        |
| رَسَفَ الْمَقِيدَ وَهُوَ عَانٍ مُوْتَقٌ      | 6. صَبْرًا يُفَادُ إِلَى الْمَنِيَّةِ مُتَعَبًا    |
| فِي قَوْمِهَا وَالْفَحْلُ فَحْلٌ مُعْرَقٌ    | 7. أَمَحَمَّدٌ يَا وَلَأَنْتَ نَسْلُ نَجِيبَةٍ     |
| مَنْ الْفَتَى وَهُوَ الْمَغِيظُ الْمُخْنَقُ  | 8. مَا كَانَ ضُرْكَ لَوْ مَنَّتَ وَرَبَّمَا        |
| بِأَعَزَّ مَا يَغْلُو لَدَيْكَ يَنْفُقُ      | 9. أَوْ كُنْتَ قَابِلَ فِدْيَةٍ فَلَنَاتَيْنُ      |
| وَأَحَقُّهُمْ إِنْ كَانَ عَتَقَ يُعْتَقُ     | 10. فَالْنَّضْرُ أَقْرَبُ مَنْ أَخَذْتَ بِرِزْلَةٍ |

“1. O Knight! If fortune is with you, you will likely arrive at al-Uthayl by the dawn of the fifth day.

2. Carry to a deceased man, an unending salutation, ferried by the swift strides of the dromedaries,

3. From me to him, accompanied by a flood of tears, some pouring freely, others choking in the throat.

4. May al-Nadr perceive my call, if the departed can indeed perceive or utter a word.

5. Alas! His paternal brethren struck him with their swords there, steadfastly shattering the bonds of kinship.

6. He was dragged, burdened under chains with which he was laden, and led to death in bonds, like a prisoner shackled.

7. O Muḥammad, the progeny of a noble matron among her people,  
and whose patriarch was a sire of esteemed lineage,
8. Pardon could have been your choice, inflicting no harm on you.  
Often, one pardons even amidst fury.
9. Had you sought a ransom, we would have sent you precious gifts,  
the rarest one could find in these parts.
10. al-Naḍr, being the closest kin you held accountable for his slip,  
was indeed the most worthy of liberation, if liberation was to be  
considered (al-Iṣfahānī, 1429/2008, 1/35).”

This remarkable poem, an elegant and emotionally-charged composition, reflects the power and agency of women poets during the Ṣadr al-Islām period. The female author emerges from the text as a poignant voice of her clan, taking upon herself the duty to commemorate and mourn her kin, despite the prevailing societal norms that might limit her public expression of grief. The opening verse positions the reader within a journey that spans time and space, carried by the “swift strides of the dromedaries”, a symbol of endurance and perseverance, towards the mourning ground at al-Uthayl. This journey, in essence, captures the perpetual nature of remembrance and sorrow in the face of death. In the second verse, the poet expresses her profound grief. The evocative imagery of tears “pouring freely” and others “choking in the throat” vividly encapsulates the intensity of her bereavement, further cementing the emotive depth of the composition. Verse four introduces al-Naḍr, a figure of familial connection to the poet, thus personalizing the lament and bringing to the fore the intimate scale of the loss the poet is suffering. This personal loss forms the backbone of the elegy, inspiring the emotional and poignant exploration of sorrow throughout the text. In the fifth and sixth verses, the tragic end of al-Naḍr is portrayed. The heart-rending image of al-Naḍr “led to death in bonds, like a prisoner shackled” evokes profound empathy and lends a tragic realism to the poem. The subsequent verses reflect on the possibilities of mercy and reprieve that could have changed al-Naḍr’s fate. The tone is both resigned and subtly reproachful, underscoring the potential for forgiveness and mercy that was not embraced. The closing verses express a deep longing for a world where al-Naḍr’s life might have been saved, perhaps through ransom, encapsulating the poet’s desperate wish to rewrite the past. In its entirety, this elegy beautifully encapsulates the resilience, sensitivity, and eloquence of women poets during the Ṣadr al-Islām

period. They deftly used the art of poetry as an instrument of commemoration, personal expression, and subtle critique, thus ensuring their voices resonated in a world that often sought to silence them. The strength and courage embedded in this poem affirm the significant role women played in the cultural and emotional tapestry of their time.

During the Umayyad period, the tradition of poetic composition by Arab women not only persisted but flourished and diversified, reflecting the shifting cultural, social, and political landscape of the time. Poetry in this era played a significant role as a medium of social commentary, personal expression, and political critique. It also served as an essential mechanism for the preservation and transmission of cultural values and collective memories. Arab women poets during the Umayyad era crafted their works within a complex socio-political context that was significantly influenced by the expansion of the Islamic Empire and the associated cultural exchanges. Their poetry provides unique insights into the female experience of this transformative period, articulating personal emotions, reflecting on societal changes, lamenting losses, celebrating victories, and even expressing political sentiments. The diversity in themes and styles during this period can be attributed to the wider societal changes and the burgeoning cultural milieu. The Umayyad dynasty, which championed the cause of Arabic culture and language, provided an enabling environment for the development of poetic forms and themes. This cultural patronage, combined with the political stability of the period, paved the way for a vibrant literary scene where poetry thrived. Moreover, the role of women in Umayyad society was multidimensional, and their active participation in the cultural life of the period is reflected in their contributions to poetry (Zaydān, 2013, 245-367).

In this era of cultural efflorescence, women showed remarkable courage, particularly within the domain of poetry. Not only were they creators of insightful and artistically acclaimed compositions, but they also boldly interacted with their male counterparts. A striking illustration of this is their satirical engagement with established poets like al-Farazdaq (d. 114/732). Despite the social barriers and gender norms of the time, they did not shy away from utilizing their creative talent and intellectual prowess to critique, and even mock, these revered figures. Their verses, sharp with satire and clever wordplay, challenged the patriarchal status quo and reflected their intellectual independence. Furthermore, their audacity to satirize a poet of al-Farazdaq's stature, who was renowned for his bravery, is testament to their own courage and spirit of defiance. These female

poets contributed significantly to the diversification and enrichment of the poetic tradition during the Umayyad period (Ibn Abī Ṭāhir, h. 1361, 212).

Laylā al-Akhyaliyya (ö. 86/705 [?]), one of the most distinguished female poets during the epoch of the Umayyad Caliphate, achieved renown for her deeply emotive elegies composed in the aftermath of her lover Tawba's (d. 55/675 [?]) demise. The structure and aesthetic of these elegies adhered to long-established norms and practices of mourning, rooted deeply in the poetic traditions of the pre-Islamic era. The profound emotional scope of her verse, coupled with her ability to harness traditional techniques, underscores her significance within the annals of Umayyad poetry. Yet, beyond their intrinsic artistic value, these elegies offer an intriguing, multi-dimensional perspective into the life and emotions of women during the period, thereby providing a rich trove of information for the field of women's studies. Intriguingly, despite Laylā's status as a married woman, these poems were dedicated not to her husband but to another man, her former lover, with whom she was never able to consummate her relationship. This nuanced aspect of her personal narrative, discernible within the subtext of her poems, challenges conventional perceptions of female conduct and emotional expression in the context of marital and extramarital relations during the Umayyad period. Consequently, Laylā al-Akhyaliyya's elegies not only cement her position within the pantheon of Umayyad poets but also underscore the complexity of the female experience during this historical period:

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| وَأَحْفَلُ مَنْ دَارَتْ عَلَيْهِ الدَّوَابُّ         | 1. أَفْسَمْتُ أَرْضِي بَعْدَ تَوْبَةِ هَالِكَا          |
| إِذَا لَمْ تُصِبْهُ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الْمَعَايِرُ      | 2. لَعَمْرُكَ مَا بِالْمَوْتِ عَارٌ عَلَى الْفَتَى      |
| بِأَخْلَدُ مِمَّنْ غَيَّبَتْهُ الْمَقَابِرُ          | 3. وَمَا أَحَدٌ حَيٌّ وَإِنْ عَاشَ سَالِمَا             |
| فَلَا بَدَّ يَوْمًا أَنْ يُرَى وَهُوَ صَابِرُ        | 4. وَمَنْ كَانَ مِمَّا يُحَدِّثُ الدَّهْرُ جَارِعَا     |
| وَلَيْسَ عَلَى الْأَيَّامِ وَالدَّهْرُ غَابِرُ       | 5. وَلَيْسَ لِدَيْ عَيْشٍ عَنِ الْمَوْتِ مَقْصَرُ       |
| وَلَا الْمَيِّتُ إِنْ لَمْ يَصْبِرِ الْحَيُّ نَاشِرُ | 6. وَلَا الْحَيُّ مِمَّا يُحَدِّثُ الدَّهْرُ مُعْتَبَرُ |
| وَكُلُّ أَمْرٍ يَوْمًا إِلَى اللَّهِ صَائِرُ         | 7. وَكُلُّ شَبَابٍ أَوْ جَدِيدٍ إِلَى بَلَى             |
| شَتَاتَا وَإِنْ صَنَّا وَطَالَ التَّعَاشُرُ          | 8. وَكُلُّ قَرِينَتِي الْفَهْ لِنَفْرَتِي               |
| أَخَا الْحَرْبِ إِنْ دَارَتْ عَلَيْكَ الدَّوَابُّ    | 9. فَلَا يُبْعِدُنكَ اللَّهُ حَيًّا وَمَيِّتَا          |
| عَلَى فَنٍّ وَرَفَاءٍ أَوْ طَارٍ طَائِرُ             | 10. فَالَيْتُ لَا أَنْفَكُ أَبْكَيكَ مَا دَعَتْ         |
| وَمَا كُنْتُ إِيَّاهُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَحَازِرُ           | 11. فَنَيْلُ بَنِي عَوْفٍ فَيَا لَهْفَتَا لَهُ          |
| لَهَا بَدْرُوبِ الرُّومِ بَادٍ وَحَاضِرُ             | 12. وَلَكِنَّمَا أَخْشَى عَلَيْهِ قَبِيلَةَ             |

- “1. I solemnly pledge to grieve for no other deceased than Tawba, nor to concern myself with another soul ensnared by calamity.
2. Upon your life, I swear—if no disgraceful events found him in life, then death carries no shame for a young man.
3. Even living in the safety of life’s embrace, no one will outlast the dead concealed by the tomb’s shroud.
4. Any soul impatient with the hardships fate bestows will, in time, undoubtedly be seen as a paragon of patience.
5. There is no sanctuary from death for the living, nor any who can slip from the grasp of destiny and fate.
6. Neither is the living soul reproached for the trials fate lays upon them, nor can the deceased be roused because the living did not endure.
7. Each newborn and every youth is destined to age, and all will inevitably meet Allah at journey’s end.
8. Two souls bound together will inevitably drift apart one day, even if they mature together and share a long life’s journey.
9. O warrior! Should calamities fall upon you, may Allah not cast you aside, in death or in life, from His mercy.
10. As sure as a dove coos on a branch, or a bird takes flight, my tears for you will never cease.
11. Woe unto the one slain by Banū ‘Awf! Fear of their causing him harm never took root within me.
12. Yet, I harboured a fear that a foreign tribe might harm him as he journeyed upon the pathways of the Greeks (al-Akhyaliyya, 1424/2003, 40-43).”

The elegy, comprised of twelve verses, elucidates profound reflections on loss, life, death, fate, and enduring love. The use of the first-person narrative perspective and the consistently elegiac tone emphasize the deeply personal nature of this work, underscoring the author’s emotional investment in the subject—the deceased lover Tawba. Verses 1 and 2 set the primary focus of the elegy, marking the speaker’s grieving process and commitment to Tawba’s memory. This selective grieving illustrates the depth of affection for the deceased and establishes a hierarchy of emotions in the speaker’s psyche, in which Tawba

stands unparalleled. Verses 3 to 6 venture into broader existential contemplations, expounding on death's inevitability and fate's impartiality. These verses adopt a stoic perspective on life, subtly emphasizing transient worldly afflictions and the value of patience. The metaphorical language, such as "no one will outlast the dead concealed by the tomb's shroud" and "no sanctuary from death for the living," powerfully conveys shared human mortality. Verse 7 forges a connection between aging's inevitability and the universality of meeting Allah, aligning the individual human experience with larger cosmological patterns. This verse situates personal grief within the wider existential framework, subtly illuminating life and death's cyclical nature. Verse 8 delves into the theme of separation, expressing the inevitability of parting even among closely bound individuals. This sentiment is particularly poignant, considering the poem's context—a lament for a lost lover—and further emphasizes worldly relationships' transitory nature.

Verse 9, in actuality, is a direct address to Tawba, who is perceived as a warrior. This heartfelt appeal for divine mercy upon him, in life or death, is a testament to the depth of the poet's enduring affection and concern for Tawba. By invoking such an appeal, the poet not only commemorates Tawba's bravery but also implicitly acknowledges the dangers he faced—a contextual revelation that underscores the harsh realities of their sociopolitical environment. Furthermore, this verse arguably acts as a microcosm of the entire elegy's primary themes: enduring love, the human confrontation with mortality, and the reliance on divine mercy in the face of life's adversities. Thus, by contextualizing Tawba within these universal human experiences, the poet amplifies the emotional resonance of her personal lamentations. Verses 10 to 12 return to the personal realm, resuming the mourning for Tawba with evocative imagery such as "a dove coos on a branch, or a bird takes flight". In essence, the elegy successfully weaves personal lamentation with broader existential reflections. It displays the poet's ability to amalgamate personal grief and wider contemplations on life, death, and destiny. The result is a philosophically profound and emotionally rich elegy that offers readers insight into the poet's emotional landscape and her era's broader cultural realities.

In the context of the Umayyad epoch, women emerged as distinctive figures, asserting their identities not merely as poets but also as literary critics. An in-depth analysis of the period's literary critique, with an emphasis on poetry criticism, unveils the considerable significance ascribed to critical discourse across all demographics in the Hijaz region, without regard to

gender. This evaluative perspective unquestionably stimulated the unearthing of fresh perspectives in academic and literary domains throughout the Islamic world, thus cultivating a diversity of thought among the Muslim populace. Given this context, it becomes indispensable to recognize Sukayna bint al-Husayn (d. 117/735), a woman hailing from the lineage of the Prophet, as a figure of considerable religious, political, social, and literary significance. Having grown up in the environs of the Prophet's family by virtue of her ancestry, Sukayna selected her grandmother Fāṭima, the Prophet's daughter, and her aunt Zaynab as exemplars, zealously emulating their paths. In addition to her piety, she held a prominent position and garnered respect among her contemporary poets and scholars. Her residence served as a significant cultural nexus for poets and authors, who would recite their compositions for her critical evaluation from linguistic, grammatical, and literary artistic viewpoints. She would subsequently adjudicate the aesthetic appeal and authorial supremacy among the presented poems. Despite her own poetic endeavors, only a handful of verses from the elegies she penned for her father and other martyrs of Karbala have survived till the present day. Despite the societal impediments dictated by her era, Sukayna successfully established herself as a recognized authority in poetry through a dignified struggle for identity. She underscored the importance of poetry and its critique and was a proactive participant in high-level poetry assemblies, expressing her personal perspectives in environments conducive to poetry critique. Beyond her poetic interests, her foresightedness in political and social matters was particularly noteworthy (Yılmaz, 2021, 1-9).

During the Abbasid period, often hailed as the golden age of classical Arabic poetry, the poetic contributions of women continued to be a vital element of the literary landscape. This period, notable for its intense cultural and intellectual activity, allowed female poets to flourish, exploring diverse themes and demonstrating profound artistic prowess. The poems created by these women were characterized by intricate language, nuanced emotion, and complex symbolism, embodying the stylistic richness of Arabic poetry of this epoch. Their works delved into topics ranging from love and passion to loss and despair, offering a multi-dimensional portrayal of their experiences and emotions. Moreover, their artistic contributions during this period were not restricted to personal narratives. They also critically engaged with socio-political issues of the era, reflecting the societal changes that were underway. Hence, the female poets of the Abbasid period not only actively participated



in the poetic tradition, but they also played an instrumental role in shaping the literary discourse, enhancing the depth and diversity of classical Arabic poetry.

In the Abbasid era, the traditionally male-dominated genre of panegyric poetry witnessed the remarkable participation of women poets, thereby broadening the scope of this literary form. al-Hajnā' bint Nuṣayb, the daughter of the poet al-Aṣghar al-Ḥabashī (d. 175/791 [?]), who was a *mawlā* (client) of the Caliph al-Mahdī, composed panegyrics in honor of Caliph al-Mahdī.

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| كَأَنَّا مِنْ سَوَادِ اللَّيْلِ فَيُرُ | 1. أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلَا تَرَانَا  |
| خَنَافِسَ بَيْنَنَا جَعَلَ كَبِيرُ     | 2. أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلَا تَرَانَا  |
| فَقِيرَاتٍ وَوَالِدَنَا فَقِيرُ        | 3. أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلَا تَرَانَا  |
| فَلَيْسَ يَمِيرُنَا فِيمَنْ يَمِيرُ    | 4. أَضَرَ بِنَا شِفَاءَ الْجَدِّ مِنْهُ   |
| لَهَا عَرْفٌ وَمَعْرُوفٌ كَبِيرُ       | 5. وَأَحْوَاضِ الْخَلِيفَةِ مِثْرَعَاتِ   |
| يُعْمُ النَّاسَ وَابِلُهُ غَزِيرُ      | 6. أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَنْتَ غَيْثُ |
| إِذَا عَالُوا وَيَنْجِبِرُ الْكَسِيرُ  | 7. يِعَاشُ بِفَضْلِ جُودِكَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِ |

“1. O leader of the believers! We have been engulfed in darkness due to the night, don't you see?

2. O leader of the believers! Among us, the insects with vibrant wings are as prominent as a dung beetle, don't you see?

3. O leader of the believers! We are impoverished women, and our father is destitute, don't you see?

4. The trials of fortune have inflicted pain upon us. None of those who earn are providing for our sustenance.

5. The Caliph's pools brim with abundance. They exude a beautiful fragrance and embody immense generosity.

6. O leader of the believers! You are like a plentiful rain, enveloping all of humanity.

7. Through your generosity, one can find life after death. With proper care, the fractures of those with broken bones can heal (Muhannā, 1995, 52).”

This poem is a compelling plea for recognition and aid, crafted in the intricate traditions of classical Arabic verse. Each line is a deft blend of vivid imagery and sociopolitical commentary, directed towards the “leader of the believers”, an influential figure within the societal context, the Caliph himself. The opening verse introduces the theme of darkness engulfing the speaker and their companions, a metaphorical depiction of their desperate plight. The repetition of the interrogative “don’t you see?” creates an appeal to the leader’s conscience and humanity, urging acknowledgment of their suffering. The second line continues this metaphorical exposition, comparing their plight to beetles—often regarded as insignificant or bothersome—in the presence of more vibrant insects, reflecting their marginalized status within society. The third verse emphasizes the economic hardship of the speaker and her family, highlighting their gender and familial status as impoverished women with a destitute father. This stark image serves to further underline their vulnerability and need for aid. In the fourth line, the speaker criticizes those who, despite having the means, fail to assist in their sustenance, exposing the societal neglect and apathy towards their condition. The fifth verse juxtaposes the opulence of the Caliph’s pools—fragrant, generous, and brimming with abundance—against their impoverished circumstance, subtly criticizing the wealth disparity and suggesting an unequal distribution of resources. The sixth line is an appeal to the leader’s nobler qualities, comparing him to “plentiful rain” that has the capacity to envelop all of humanity—inferring his potential to provide widespread support and relief. The final verse holds an appeal to the leader’s capacity for generosity, which the speaker regards as a power strong enough to give life after death and heal fractures, further emphasizing the transformative potential of the leader’s benevolence. In sum, the poem serves as an evocative call to the “leader of the believers”, contrasting vivid imagery of their deprivation and societal neglect with the potential for the leader’s generosity to alleviate their suffering. It is a poignant critique of the prevailing socio-economic disparities and a plea for compassionate, equitable leadership.

In the Abbasid epoch, an augmentation of affluence was observed among Muslim men who had amassed wealth through military victories, thereby fostering a predilection for a lifestyle steeped in luxury and indulgence. It is pertinent to underscore that this penchant for opulence often applied to men who sought pleasure not in the company of free women, but rather with concubines. As the Abbasid state transitioned through its initial phase, the status of women in the Islamic community began to surface as an issue, stemming from various

administrative, social, economic, and cultural metamorphoses. Amidst these conjectural conditions, where free women were increasingly relegated to the confines of harems, the prominence of concubines in Abbasid society can be attributed to Islamic tenets which cultivated a demarcation of status between free women and concubines. It is salient to note that enslaved women were accorded a greater degree of liberty in sartorial choices and social privileges as compared to their free counterparts. The allure towards concubines, chiefly originating from diverse ethnic backgrounds such as Abyssinian, Greek, Georgian, Egyptian, Medinan, and Ṭā'ifian, and imported to Baghdad via the slave markets peppered throughout the nation, was a sentiment shared by the caliphs and common populace alike. The fundamental impetus of this appeal lay in their perceived physical attractiveness. In addition, the ease of accessing this allure within the purview of concubine law presented a far less complex task compared to the challenges of interacting with free women. This was largely due to the fact that a prospective buyer had the opportunity to garner substantial information about a concubine and visually assess her prior to any transaction. Conversely, the strict and austere regulations of Islamic family law associated with marriages to free women rendered the prospect of interactions with concubine women more enticing to free men. The adage, “A concubine is purchased with the eyes and dismissed with her flaws; a free woman is a shackle on the neck of her possessor”, serves not only to highlight the socio-economic characteristics of concubines, evaluated as commodities in the slave markets, but also to attenuate the social visibility of free women by presenting them within the constraints of Islamic law (Çınar, 2020, 295-296).

Upon scrutinizing the portrayal of women in Arab literature during the Abbasid epoch, it becomes evident that free women, predominantly consigned to domestic responsibilities, generally remained distant from the literary sphere. In stark contrast, non-free women, encompassing servants, concubines, singers, and other such individuals who were intrinsic to the Abbasid societal structure, had their accounts and poems recurrently referenced in literary compilations. It can thus be inferred that the contributions of enslaved female poets, along with their wide-ranging activities, held significant prominence during the First Abbasid Era (132/750-232/842), a period recognized for its exceptional output of these types of literary compositions. The institution of slavery saw a substantial increase during the Abbasid reign, propelled by a series of consecutive wars, resulting in a higher proportion of female slaves in

comparison to males. During this era, concubines began to play a more active role in social life relative to earlier periods, with some achieving prestigious and esteemed positions within the palaces of caliphs and alongside the era's distinguished personalities. Notably, al-Jāhīz made intriguing observations about the diversity among concubines during this period, analogizing the variances among Indian, African, Anatolian, and Moroccan concubines to different shades of pigeons. He drew comparisons between Slavic concubines and white pigeons, and African concubines to their black counterparts. Entities involved in the buying and selling of concubines, as well as those who employed them in entertainment establishments, began to invest considerably more in their education, predicting enhanced financial returns due to their increasing societal involvement. Merchants, upon identifying concubines who displayed both beauty and intelligence, enlisted the aid of linguistic scholars to instruct them in the intricacies, eloquence, and rhetoric of the Arabic language. They also engaged musicians to impart lessons in verse recitation and singing. These concubines, apart from their remarkable intellect, were personable, empathetic, charismatic, quick-witted, and attractive. Some engaged in poetic discourse with poets, rivaling them in expressiveness and creative thought. At times, they delivered poems of such emotional intensity and beauty that they surpassed those produced by some professional poets. Collectively, these elements underscore the presence of a significant cohort of female poets who emerged from a poetic tradition primarily established by concubines. While we possess information and poetry from certain poet-concubines, it is postulated that a significant number of their counterparts, about whom we currently lack detailed knowledge, also existed (Koçak, 2006, 36-38).

In the era of the Abbasid Caliphate, the representation of women prominently features in the body of work composed by male poets. The depiction of women in this corpus of poetry tends not to align with traditional religious paradigms. It has been postulated that those who converted these poems into lyrical compositions might have exhibited deficiencies in their religious convictions. A number of poets from this historical period, capitalizing on the latitude of intellectual autonomy, were forthright about their intentional disaffiliation from religious observances. These poets garnered a degree of notoriety, largely attributable to their predilection for amusement, alcohol, and women. Several ghazals from this era are unabashedly profane, emphasizing the physical attributes of the female form and orienting towards the fulfillment of carnal desires. The feminine figure has been subjected to

extensive examination within the genre of the ghazal. Yet, such portrayals are more likely to be denigrating than elevating, with women often depicted in derogatory light. Particularly in ghazals concerning concubines, the inherent beauty of a woman's spirit is not underlined; instead, emphasis is laid on her sexual attributes. This perspective leads to the objectification of women, treating them as marketable commodities subject to purchase and sale (Polat, 2018, 637-648). Abbasid literature presents gender-based pictures of different groups and identities, essentially trying to control and unify their distinct characteristics. The texts mostly show other groups in a negative light, which served as a powerful tool in creating a shared Muslim identity. This literature reflected the dominant beliefs of the time, and through limited portrayals of women, gender, and sexuality, shaped societal norms and thinking patterns (El Cheikh, 2015, 120-121).

Preeminent within the corpus of Arabic literature, wherein women are pivotal figures in prose, stands the illustrious narrative of *The Thousand and One Nights*. This compilation penetrated Arabic literature during a period preceding the evolution of written entertainment and the appreciation for aesthetic prose, initially through translation and later via adaptation. Narrated utilizing a distinct technique and singular opening sentences, the stories were relayed by Scheherazade. Her narration served two primary objectives. Firstly, it was a tactical maneuver to preserve her life and those of other women. Through the demonstration of her resourcefulness and intellectual prowess via the tales, she achieved this objective. Scheherazade's secondary aspiration was to attenuate the stain of promiscuity, immorality, and treachery affixed upon the female gender. This conundrum emerged from the framing narrative that initiated the tales, where both King Shahriyār and his brother Shāhzamān fell victim to their respective wives' duplicity. Scheherazade embarked on this endeavor by exemplifying her own fidelity and rectitude. However, in her concerted attempt to sustain her husband's interest across the span of a thousand and one nights, she bequeathed diverse roles to the female characters within multiple narratives she narrated. This strategy, albeit unintentionally, exacerbated the complexities surrounding the female condition within these tales (Sarıkaya, 2016, 133-153).

Academic research on these stories goes beyond just retelling them in a scholarly fashion. It mainly focuses on the images, characters, and stereotypes found in the tales. Readers found both male and female characters equally intriguing. Mirroring the narratives, women were often

seen as objects, while men were the focus of attention. This trend is widely supported by academic studies. There's a significant number of studies looking at how women are portrayed in *The Thousand and One Nights*, yet discussions about men are noticeably missing. Men appear, as they do in the stories themselves, only in their various stereotypical roles. The idea of a typical man is hard to find, both in *The Thousand and One Nights* and in academic writings. On the other hand, women are stereotyped in both the stories and academic discussions. They are shown in opposition to a fragmented image of masculinity, and their depictions do not change based on their roles in society into different types of characters (Schulze, 1988, 341-342; See Valbuena de la Fuente, 2000, 99-140).

*The Thousand and One Nights* is predicated on the concept of "female infidelity". Within the narrative's pantheon of characters, a woman who exhibits loyalty and harbors no hidden intentions towards her husband is practically nonexistent. The overall theme and primary focus of the narratives are centered around female betrayal, with the woman initiating this act that is deeply entrenched in her psyche. Women's personalities and psychologies are demonstrated as mutable, their appearances as illusory. Their physical attributes and behaviors, subjected to character analysis, often contradict each other. On the surface, the tales grapple with the power dynamics between men and women. Intelligent and potent women retaliate in this struggle by undermining their husbands' physicality, wealth, honor, or reputation. In scenarios where women find themselves incapable of asserting authority over their husbands, they resort to inflicting harm on the secondary female figure who jeopardizes their matrimonial union, the descendants resulting from their spouse's illicit liaisons, or even his extended familial ties. Love-struck women in these tales emerge as the most perilous and merciless characters. From this perspective, the violence men inflict upon women is eclipsed by the physical and psychological violence women impose upon each other. Men are essentially instruments for women held captive by their desires to satisfy those desires. The narratives primarily explore the power dynamics among women and the oppression they exert on one another. Scheherazade stands as the most notable exemplar of powerful women in *The Thousand and One Nights*. At every stage of the narratives, from the introduction to the concluding phrase, Scheherazade asserts her presence with her intellectual acumen, cultural awareness, and literary craftsmanship. In these tales, Scheherazade conveys a message to her fellow women: a woman devoid of a strong personality, who is uneducated

and unable to govern herself, mirrors the women in these tales – immoral, envious, unhappy, deceptive, wreaking havoc on herself and her surroundings, utilizing her intellect and wisdom for nefarious purposes. However, if a woman is resolute, autonomous in her actions, knowledgeable, moral, and cultured, she could aspire to be a model woman akin to Scheherazade, a woman versed in a thousand and one books spanning history, poetry, literature, religious studies, and the biographies of kings. In accordance with the narratives, such a woman could restrain a tyrant like Shahryar, who has lost his direction, guided by her innate intelligence and affection (Sarıkaya, 2016, 133-153; For a comprehensive scholarly examination of Scheherazade, please refer to Zaki, 2001, 99-114).

Within the narrative structure of *The Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade also conveys a message to men. As the royal siblings, Shāhzamān and Shahryār, engage in a hunting expedition in the forest, they encounter a genie. The genie bears a box atop his head, and within the box resides a human woman, whom the genie has abducted and wedded. As disclosed in subsequent parts of the story, this woman, who has repeatedly deceived her husband (570 times, to be precise), entices both brothers into betraying her husband once more. In this context, Scheherazade, manifested in the form of the two kings who execute their unfaithful wives without a second thought, poses a pertinent question to men: why is it that you, the royal siblings, condemn your adulterous wives to death, whereas a genie, despite enduring his wife's recurrent betrayal, cherishes her and literally carries her on his head (Sarıkaya, 2016, 133-153)?

Andalusia, assimilated into Islamic geography through Muslim conquests and acting as a nexus for the development of Arabic literature, bears an essential legacy necessitating scholarly scrutiny, especially concerning literature produced by women. It was not solely male poets but also their female counterparts that played a significant role in shaping the Arabic literature that originated in Andalusia. These female poets found more prominence and opportunities for engagement in Andalusian literature, which evolved in the West, in contrast to the traditional Arabic literature of the East. Such female poets, vocal across the political, social, economic, and cultural landscapes, expressed their sentiments unabashedly and with profound liberty. Indeed, some of their verses have attained an esteemed place among the celebrated verses of preeminent Arab poets. The era of stability in Andalusia was ushered in during the reign of the Andalusian Umayyads, a period hallmarked by tranquility, security, and prosperity. Women,



during this period, found a space for themselves in all facets of life. Among these women were not only practitioners of medicine and educators, but also poets, some of whom had migrated from the East. As per one historical account, Caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Dākhil (d. 172/788) reportedly facilitated the migration of certain female artists from Medina, providing them with accommodations and ensuring their artistic pursuits in Andalusia. Another account suggests that in the city of Granada alone, there existed sixty thousand female poets, drawn from both noble lineage and servitude. Regrettably, numerous poems penned by these female poets, typically overshadowed in the annals of Arabic literature, have not been preserved into contemporary times. This unfortunate circumstance could be attributed to the more vociferous and prominent male figures in society, or the devastation of intellectual and literary works brought about by warfare and calamities, with only a scant few making their way to our times. Nevertheless, despite such adverse conditions, it is still feasible to encounter both female poets and instances of their verses in scholarly works exploring Arab literature, Andalusian history and culture, and biographies of women (İshakoğlu, 2017, 149-153).

Buthayna bint al-Mu‘tamid b. ‘Abbād constitutes a notable figure among the female poets who flourished in Andalusia, an important center of Arabic literature during the period of Islamic rule. Her lineage itself was steeped in poetic tradition, with her mother, al-Rumeykiyya, not only being the spouse of Seville’s ruler, al-Mu‘tamid, but also a distinguished poetess in her own right. Inheriting her mother’s physical grace and literary proficiency, Buthayna exhibited an adeptness in the art of poetic composition. In the unfortunate aftermath of her father’s dethronement, she found herself ensnared by the ensuing raids and was subsequently acquired by a Seville-based merchant. This individual intended to arrange a matrimonial alliance between Buthayna and his son. During this tumultuous period, Buthayna’s father was uninformed of her precarious situation. Prior to her impending nuptial agreement with the merchant’s son, Buthayna took the initiative to compose a poignant poem, articulating her personal predicament and seeking paternal consent for the union. This literary piece, penned in her own hand, managed to reach her parents. The content of the poem not only informed them about Buthayna’s survival but also made them aware of her intended marital alliance. Relieved and reassured by Buthayna’s verses, her parents provided their blessings for the forthcoming marriage. The aforementioned poem, which resonated deeply with her parents



and ultimately swayed their decision, is composed of eleven verses (Fawwāz, 2015, 155):

- ”1. اِسْمَعْ كَلَامِي وَاسْتَمِعْ لِمَقَالَتِي  
 2. لَا تُنْكِرُوا أَنِّي سُبَيْتٌ وَأَنَّنِي  
 3. مَلِكٌ عَظِيمٌ قَدْ تَوَلَّى عَصْرُهُ  
 4. لَمَّا أَرَادَ اللهُ فِرَاقَهُ شَمَلِنَا  
 5. قَامَ النِّفَاقُ عَلَيَّ أَبِي فِي مَلِكِهِ  
 6. فَخَرَجْتُ هَارِبَةً فَأَعَجَزَنِي امْرُؤٌ  
 7. إِذَا بَاعَنِي بَيْعَ الْعَبِيدِ فَصَمَّنِي  
 8. وَأَرَادَنِي لِنِكَاحِ نَجْلِ طَاهِرٍ  
 9. وَمَضَى إِلَيْكَ بِسُومٍ رَأَيْكَ فِي الرِّضَا  
 10. فَعَسَاكَ يَا أَبَتِي تَعَرَّفَنِي بِهِ  
 11. وَعَسَى رَمِيكِيَّةُ الْمُلُوكِ بِفَضْلِهَا
- فَهِيَ السُّلُوكُ بَدَتْ مِنَ الْأَجْيَادِ  
 بِنْتُ لِمَلِكٍ مِنْ بَنِي عَبَادِ  
 وَكَذَا الزَّمَانُ يُوُولُ لِلْإِفْسَادِ  
 وَأَذَاقْنَا طَعْمَ الْأَسَى عَنِ زَادِ  
 فَدَنَا الْفِرَاقُ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ بِمُرَادِي  
 لَمْ يَأْتِ فِي إِعْجَازِهِ بِسَدَادِ  
 مَنْ صَانَتْنِي إِلَّا مِنَ الْأَنْكَادِ  
 حُسْنِ الْخَلَائِقِ مِنْ بَنِي الْأَنْجَادِ  
 وَلَأَنْتَ تَنْظُرُ فِي طَرِيقِ رَشَادِي  
 إِنَّ كَانَ مِمَّنْ يُرْتَجَى لِيُودَادِ  
 تَدْعُو لَنَا بِالْيَمِينِ وَالْإِسْعَادِ“

“1. Heed my speech, and attend to what I utter! These utterances have originated from the conduct of individuals of high standing.

2. Refrain from disputing my captivity and my lineage as the offspring of a monarch from the Banū ‘Abbād.

3. He is a sovereign of significant stature. However, his reign is now a chapter of the past. A period where time is showing signs of decay.

4. Upon God’s intention to distance us, He compelled us to experience the sustenance of sorrow.

5. Discord infiltrated my father’s dominion, and the shadow of estrangement loomed, an outcome that was never my desire.

6. I made my escape from the theatre of conflict, but was seized by a man. His act of taking me prisoner was devoid of justice.

7. He conducted my sale akin to that of enslaved individuals. The purchaser, however, has assumed my safeguarding, excluding the unavoidable tribulations inherent to human existence.

8. His intent then emerged to betroth me to his offspring, a product of a lineage known for their generosity, imbued with morality and purity.

9. Now, the predicament is presented to you. Your standpoint on this matter of agreement is of utmost importance. You shall safeguard the principles of righteousness on my behalf.

10. Dear father! If this young man qualifies as a suitable prospect for matrimony, kindly convey your endorsement.

11. I implore the favor of the magnificent Rumaykiyya, seeking her prayers for our continued prosperity and joy (Fawwāz, 2015, 155).”

This compelling poem by Buthayna bint al-Mu‘tamid b. ‘Abbād serves as a rich exploration of personal turmoil, societal norms, and cultural dynamics in the context of Islamic Andalusia. Evidently, the poem’s emotional depth, use of metaphor, and sociopolitical undertones contribute significantly to its broader literary and historical significance. Commencing with an appeal for attention and understanding, the poem establishes a tone of sincerity and urgency. This acts as a tool to captivate the intended audience and emphasizes the gravity of the poet’s predicament. The opening lines implicitly insist on the recognition and acceptance of her words as derived from the conduct of noble individuals, adding credibility to her narrative. Following this, Buthayna reveals her lineage, thereby affirming her identity as a captive daughter of a Banū ‘Abbād monarch. This explicit depiction of her circumstances serves as a plea for respect due to her royal lineage. Furthermore, the poet delves into historical context, reflecting on the transience of power and subtly hinting at the decline in her family’s fortune. In the ensuing lines, a religious element is introduced as Buthayna attributes her present state to divine will. A sense of resignation and acceptance emerges, further humanizing her situation. Progressing with her narrative, she vividly describes the discord in her father’s dominion, her futile escape from conflict, and the ensuing capture and sale. These elements cumulatively add to the narrative of her vulnerability. However, a tone shift occurs when the buyer, initially perceived as another oppressor, is described as a protector, offering a measure of safety. This nuanced portrayal offers an insight into the intricate realities of life in this historical period. The narrative evolves to detail her potential betrothal to the son of her buyer, who is characterized as moral and pure. This contributes to a broader understanding of societal norms where marriage could serve as a form of social mobility and protection. As the poem advances, Buthayna repositions the responsibility onto her father, underscoring the crucial role of paternal consent in marriage arrangements of the period. This poignant

reminder of her dependence on patriarchal structures also subtly indicates her compromised position. A direct appeal to her father follows, seeking approval of the prospective groom. This demonstrates her deep respect for her father's judgment and reliance on his approval. Lastly, the poem concludes with an invocation to al-Rumaykiyya, her mother, seeking blessings and prayers for their prosperity and joy. This not only reinforces the bond with her mother but also reflects the spiritual dimensions of her experience. In summary, this poem serves as a significant historical document, a personal narrative, and a rich literary artifact. By offering a lens into personal strife and resilience, it provides valuable insights into societal norms, gender dynamics, power structures, and religious beliefs during a key period in Andalusian history.

In Andalusian literature, the ghazal theme provides a rich data resource that should not be overlooked within the scope of women's studies. During the Andalusian period, the ghazal, intertwined with nature depictions, found a broader scope for development compared to other Arab countries. This was due in part to the mesmerizing beauty of this new homeland and the emergence of social and cultural advancements within the society, notably the proliferation of gatherings focused on wine, entertainment, and music. An unprecedented development in Arab literature was the increasing number of female poets in Andalusian literature and their composition of ghazals to men, which is considered a significant factor in the evolution of the ghazal in Andalusia. Like other poetry genres, Andalusian ghazal poetry, which bears the traces of the East, has appeared in both traditional and risqué forms. It would not be inaccurate to suggest that in Andalusian love poetry, some male poets did not view women merely as sexual objects. Poets, who typically portrayed women primarily as sexual objects in the pre-Islamic period and the subsequent eras, did not neglect to compose more emotional poems and give importance to their feelings in Andalusia. Some poets refrained from depicting the lover's body in ways that would constantly evoke sexuality, as was common during the Jāhiliyya and Umayyad periods. Instead, they knew their boundaries and elevated the beauty of women by comparing it to sublime celestial bodies like the moon, stars, and sun. Of course, this refined understanding cannot be generalized to all poets and periods. In fact, it is well-documented that poets in Andalusia were active participants in sophisticated social gatherings, characterized by the presence of alcoholic beverages, musical performances, and the company of women. This situation eventually influenced ghazal poems, and risqué elements found their place in the ghazal once again. The male poets' ability to poetize their material and spiritual emotions, their

sentiments towards women, and the attitudes of women towards these feelings, by using natural descriptions, is considered one of the primary characteristics of the Andalusian ghazal. Indeed, poets have extensively used elements of nature even while expressing their love and longing for women. Indeed, this innovative approach to leveraging natural elements in verse has substantially bolstered the poets' capacity for evocative description and imaginative expression, thereby endowing the Andalusian ghazal with a uniquely profound dimension (Akin, 2020, 115-117).

In conclusion, the role of women in classical Arabic literature demands an extensive, multifaceted investigation as it has borne significant influence over the literary discourse of the time. Women have not been mere passive recipients of poetic expressions but have actively engaged as producers and influencers of literature, contributing to the richness and diversity of the corpus. Their prominence as authors and subjects of literature, notably in the ghazal form in Andalusian context, denotes their integral role within the social fabric of the society, and the evolution of its literary heritage. It is indeed their influence, whether as muses or creators, that has added depth and dimension to the literature, particularly through their ability to introduce elements of emotionality, subtlety, and inherent grace into the narrative. It is also crucial to acknowledge the evolution in the depiction of women in literature, from primarily being sexual objects to figures of admiration and respect, signifying a shift in cultural and social attitudes. The ongoing research into women's contribution to classical Arabic literature will continue to shed light on their pivotal role and further underscore the importance of acknowledging this contribution in comprehending the literary legacy of the Arabic world. A comprehensive understanding of classical Arabic literature cannot be achieved without the inclusion and appreciation of the remarkable role women have played in shaping and enriching its narrative.

## **1.2. The Emergence of Modern Arabic Literature**

Commencing in the latter half of the nineteenth century, both modern Arabic poetry and prose embarked upon a trajectory of gradual revitalization and development. This progression was influenced by a confluence of potent factors, such as internal reforms and the persistence of resistance and defiance towards the encroaching Western influence. It is noteworthy that the genesis of Modern Arabic Literature is often pinpointed to the year 1798, which was marked by Napoleon's incursion into Egypt. Even though the intrinsic dynamics and trends

within the literature should ostensibly play a determining role in delineating literary history into distinct periods, the acceptance of 1798 as a seminal epoch in Arabic literary history is not unjustified. This assertion is predicated on the consideration of the irrefutable influence exerted by the external world on the literary genius. As an integral part of their milieu, the literary genius is inevitably influenced by their surroundings, which permeates into their creative works. Interestingly, the vanguard of the movements of change observed in both the poetry and prose sectors of 19th and 20th-century Arabic Literature predominantly arose from Egypt. This could be attributed to Egypt's relatively early initiation of the process of exposure to Western influence, a process which commenced earlier than in other Arabic-speaking countries. Undeniably, Napoleon's invasion of Egypt served as a catalyst for the inception of the modernization process in the Arab world, a process that was characterized by both its triumphs and tribulations. This interaction with the West, which at times has been regarded as a threat and vilified, and at other times idolized as a model, has perpetually occupied the collective consciousness of the Arab people. As a result, this interaction has instigated a series of profound transformations in the political, social, and cultural landscape of the Arab world. Throughout this period, the Arabic mentality, confronted with the "other", learned to acknowledge it, and at times was influenced by it or conflicted with it. The literature was thus imbued with a diversity of influences emanating from this interaction. This intricate process lays bare the profound influence of sociocultural dynamics on the molding and evolution of modern Arabic literature (Er, 2012, 11).

The prevailing academic consensus proposes that following a protracted epoch of stagnation, a resurgence of political, economic, and cultural dynamism emerged within the Arab world, most prominently in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, commencing from the 19th century. This renaissance reached its apogee during the latter half of the same century. The impetus for this revitalization can be linked to the heightened engagement of industrially advanced capitalist nations in the Arab world, the transformative initiatives enacted during the reign of Muḥammad 'Alī Pasha (1805-1848), and the operations of Western missionaries, with a particular emphasis on Syria and Lebanon. This period of reawakening is typically denoted as the "Nahḍa". Eminent figures from the enlightenment movement occupied pivotal roles during this transformative era. The propagation of this enlightenment movement extended into the later stages of the 19th century, permeating nearly all facets of Arab society. The acme of this enlightenment movement manifested at disparate times across

varied geographical locations. For example, in Syria-Lebanon, it materialized around the 1850s-1870s, specifically from the establishment of the inaugural enlightenment organization until the termination of the 1870s. In contrast, it surfaced in Egypt during the 1880s-1890s. A constellation of leading luminaries from the enlightenment movement in Syria-Lebanon, including but not limited to Adīb Ishāq (1856-1884), Faraḥ Anṭūn (1874-1922), and Jurjī Zaydān (1861-1914), elected to emigrate from their homelands to Egypt. Although Egypt was incorporated within the ambit of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish influence was ostensibly nominal due to the considerable geographical distance. These transplanted Syrian and Lebanese intellectual figures continued to vigorously pursue their educational endeavors in Egypt. Concerning other Arab nations, the onset of political, economic, and cultural revitalization materialized later, chiefly towards the culmination of the 19th century and the onset of the 20th century. Within the parameters of the enlightenment movement in Egypt and the wider Arab world, Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1801-1873) occupies a uniquely prestigious position. Alongside ‘Alī Pasha Mubārak (1822/4-1893), he is regarded as one of the trailblazers of enlightenment in Egypt (Kutelia, 2011, 84).

Throughout the course of the 19th century, the profound European influence on the Eastern Arab World instigated a sequence of identity crises from both cultural and linguistic standpoints. Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha, the Egyptian ruler from 1805 to 1848, embarked upon a mission to bolster the educational foundations of his country, a strategy that involved sending cohorts of students to Western nations such as Italy, Austria, and France for scholastic and technical education in their renowned institutions. At the same time, within Egypt, he instituted schools that delivered instruction in Western languages, sponsored the translation of scientific resources from Italian and French first into Turkish, and later into Arabic. This initiative thereby expedited the introduction of novel disciplines spanning a range of fields, including engineering, military science, and agriculture. In a landmark move in 1822, he instituted a printing press within Cairo’s Boulaq district. Subsequent to these developments, the assimilation of contemporary terminologies from European languages into Arabic marked the advent of Western institutional frameworks and technological advancements within Arabic-speaking nations. These terms gradually found their way into the written works of authors. The multitude of transformations in cultural, political, military, and technological domains, which arose due to Europe’s engagement with the Eastern Arab world, along with the resulting institutional modifications, significantly influenced the Arabic language. This influence was especially

pronounced in the realm of lexicology, marking a critical milestone in the language's evolution. In tandem with these developments, the consideration of linguistic issues was deemed of paramount importance for the Arab renaissance movement in the 19th century. Prominent Arab writers, intellectuals, and translators such as Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāk (1804-1887), Nāṣif al-Yāzījī (1800-1871), and Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819-1883) began to immerse themselves in deliberations regarding the intricacies of the Arabic language, by probing into their literary and linguistic heritages. These esteemed authors, including those who have not achieved widespread recognition, embraced the responsibility of not only acting as mediators of Western cultures, but also of exploring and addressing the unique issues inherent in the Arabic language. They composed grammar books and amassed other literary texts with the explicit intention of streamlining the process of Arabic language acquisition, eliminating the hindrances associated with traditional language learning methodologies, and instilling a fresh consciousness within the tradition of Arabic literature. Furthermore, this intellectual environment engaged in the compilation of dictionaries, both abridged and comprehensive, in a concerted effort to cater to the lexical requirements of their communities (Sawaie, 2005, 162-163).

From the perspective of those living under French dominion in Egypt, Western influence was seen as an all-encompassing and overwhelming power, poised to absorb their indigenous culture. In contrast, those Arabs who had the opportunity to travel to Europe found the West providing approaches that could help revive the splendor they believed was suppressed during the Mamluk rule. Such a viewpoint is echoed in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's work, *Takhlīṣ al-ibriz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz*, which discusses his sojourn in France and articulates Egyptian sentiments towards the wonders of modern literature, thereby endorsing the value of present-day research. Much like 'Abd al-Raḥman al-Jabartī (1753-1822), al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was educated at the prestigious al-Azhar University in Cairo. However, unlike al-Jabartī, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī managed to avoid much of the political unrest brought about by the French invasion of Egypt by relocating to Upper Egypt during the occupation. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī did not see an intrinsic discord between Eastern and Western cultures; rather, he suggested that the Middle East should adopt certain advancements from 19th-century Western medicine and science to revitalize Arab culture after the Mamluk rule. In his seminal work, *Takhlīṣ*, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī wrestled with how to find the right Arabic phrases to encapsulate and translate the mysteries of Paris, considered the queen of all nations, to his Arab peers. *Takhlīṣ*



also included summaries of the Aristotelian arts and sciences that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī had been exposed to in France, such as geography, astronomy, history, writing, rhetoric, and logic. This work, along with his later academic translations, was published and disseminated through the renowned Boulaq Printing Press in Cairo. Even though al-Ṭaḥṭāwī acknowledged the advancements of Western science, it would not be accurate to label him a “westernizer”. He held steadfast to the cultural traditions and values of his Islamic roots, viewing the study of European science as a way to enhance and re-energize the already extensive and knowledgeable Arabic academic culture. Interestingly, while his accounts of his time in Paris were generally celebratory, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was also openly critical of French culture. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s deep understanding of rhetoric, refined through his examination of French and Arabic languages, gave him a nuanced grasp of the art of refining expression and speech. In his view, language was a highly powerful tool, useful not only for communication and persuasion, but also for expressing beauty and deceit. In his *Takhlīṣ*, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī explored the idea of the power of language in capturing truth (Keuss, 2021, 4-5).

In the sphere of Arab culture, art, and literature, an intriguing synthesis has been forged by integrating the repository of knowledge gathered from antiquity through to the modern period with select Western values, thereby engendering notable exemplars of literature. The palpable imprint of Western culture on Arab nations has been conspicuously observable within two particular demographics: the Christian minorities residing in Syria and Cairo. A considerable fraction of youth within Syria’s Christian minority have acquired proficiency in European languages and, consequent to the cultural endeavours of Christian missionaries, have been swayed by Western ideologies. In Cairo, as has been alluded to earlier, the proportion of Egyptians journeying to Europe for the express purpose of acquiring Western scientific knowledge or being tutored in recently established Western-styled educational institutions in Egypt was in a state of consistent escalation. A majority of these young individuals were motivated by the aspiration to instigate a cultural renaissance in their homeland. The genesis of contemporary Arab literature can, in part, be ascribed to the endeavours of these individuals. This literary renaissance in Egypt received a significant impetus with the influx of a multitude of Christian Syrians, also known as Syrian-Lebanese writers, into Egypt. This migration led to an enrichment of Egypt’s literary milieu in terms of the range of talent and cultural interests. It merits mentioning that Egypt unmistakably holds a preeminent position in the domains of art, culture, and literature within the Arab world, a status quo that persists to



this day. Factors contributing to Egypt's avant-garde role in numerous literary pursuits include its entrenched civilizational heritage and its geographically strategic positioning. It is a widely acknowledged fact that literary endeavours thrive most vibrantly and intensively in environments conducive to freedom. Egypt and Cairo in particular, emerged as a primary literary hub with the Syrian-Lebanese writers augmenting the vanguard collective that initiated the translation movement, availing the relative indulgence of the Egyptian khedives. The emergence of Egypt's inaugural newspapers, theater plays, and literary and scientific societies can be traced back to this period. A multitude of translations, primarily of a historical and educational nature, were carried out during this era. al-Ṭaḥṭāwī merits commendation for his trailblazing role in initiating translation activities in the contemporary sense. His most notable translation is that of French author François Fénelon's (1651-1715) opus, *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, which offers exemplars of how a nation can prosper under the governance of leaders characterized by integrity, justice, and non-repressiveness, thus serving as an instructive guide for political leaders. During this identical time span, comparable didactic translations, particularly from French literature, were undertaken within the Ottoman intellectual milieu. This trend serves as an indicative marker of the significant influence exerted by French culture and literature on both nations. It is plausible that Yūsuf Kāmil Pasha (1808-1876), who carried out the translation of the aforementioned French work in 1859, drew upon al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's Arabic rendition (Ürün, 2015, 13-15).

Fundamentally, the nineteenth century epitomized the epoch of the Arab re-engagement with Europe. This period did not only illuminate the economic, technological, and military deficits of the Ottoman Empire and Arab societies vis-à-vis Europe, but it concurrently delineated potential avenues for bridging these disparities through adaptations inspired by European models. Yet, these transformations, while commendably purposed, presented inherent pitfalls. Such societal shifts could engender a dichotomized society, one part favoring modernity and European direction, while the other firmly adhering to traditional norms and fostering skepticism towards foreign introductions. This paradigm had the potential to destabilize the societal fabric in its totality. A critical question then emerges: Should Arab societies maintain their traditional bearings, rejecting modern introductions to safeguard their identity, or should they opt for a paradigm of modernity, thereby conforming to a European archetype at the risk of relinquishing components that uniquely define them? Perhaps a third trajectory could be conceived: the resurgence of Arab societies through their

modernization, guided by European concepts, following a prolonged period of Ottoman hegemony? It was this exploratory trajectory that was delved into by the avant-garde writers of this era. Even though similar quandaries might have emerged in societies that were either under European sway or colonized by European states, these issues prompted notably intense debates within the Arab world (Tresilian, 2012, 36).

During the 19th century, Egyptian scholars who undertook educational expeditions to Western nations returned to their homeland, their perspectives transformed by novel global outlooks and a burgeoning sense of nationalism. This newfound sentiment precipitated a shift in literary attention towards the once radiant classical Arab poetry, initiating the replication of classical epoch poets in an endeavor to rejuvenate this form of expression. Consequently, the Neo-classical movement surfaced in Egypt, a phenomenon characterized primarily by the imitation of poets from the classical era, devoid of a philosophical underpinning in contrast to its European equivalent. This inclination, echoing the renaissance initiative originating from the scrutiny of works from antiquity, infused Arab literature with fresh impetus. In the latter quarter of the 19th century, the commencement of literary translations and book authorship marked a significant development. Education assumed a central role, fostering an augmentation in the literate populace. Concurrently, daily newspapers emerged, serving as platforms for the publication of literary compositions and poetic works. Authors and poets capitalized on these platforms, disseminating their contributions through these media. In this historical context, the sweeping wave of global nationalism profoundly influenced Egyptian intellectuals. As a consequence, they redirected their attention towards their cultural heritage, instigating the publication of classical Arabic works. The zeitgeist of nationalism during this era incited a surge of linguistic nationalism. Arab poets and writers, re-embracing their cultural legacy, curated extensive compilations of poetry. Concurrently, the poet Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī (1839-1904) authored his anthology *al-Mukhtārāt*, predominantly featuring verses from Abbasid poets. al-Bārūdī's literary contributions exerted a significant influence on succeeding poets, including Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm (1871-1932) and Aḥmad Shawqī (1868-1932). The anthologies that surfaced during this period foregrounded the classical poetry of the Abbasid era and earlier epochs. Prior to the emergence of this movement, poets placed an undue emphasis on literary aesthetics over semantic content in poetry. This long-established methodology significantly constricted the

scope of poetry in terms of theme and meaning, ensnaring it in a stagnant cycle. To overcome this impasse, poets resorted to various linguistic games, employing abjad numerals to encode dates in their verses, and composing verses that retained their meaning irrespective of reading direction or initiated with the same letter. This practice constituted nothing more than the emulation of the post-classical, or post-Abbasid, era. The decline and deterioration of poetry commenced during this period. Thus, the stagnant cycle was disrupted at the culmination of the 19th century, with poets, inspired by the nationalism movement, embarking on the emulation of the resplendent periods of the Abbasids, the Umayyad, and Jāhiliyya poetry. Consequently, Neo-Classicism emerged as a defining trend in Arab literature (Tuzcu, 2002, 108-109).

Khalīl Muṭrān (1869-1949), originating from Lebanon, is esteemed as a seminal influence in the metamorphosis of modern Arab poetry. The emergence of his romantic literary character first materialized within his familial context, which subsequently experienced accelerated evolution due to the trajectory of his personal life and inherent emotional sensitivity. This precipitated his development into a poet of substantial profundity by the tender age of sixteen. His formal educational background, coupled with his strenuous life encounters and European exposure, marked a critical juncture in the manifestation of romanticism within Arabic literature. The romantic literary identity of Muṭrān, forged under diverse influences, resoundingly permeates his body of work, with particular emphasis on his poetry, exerting a profound influence on successive authors. This notably facilitated the expeditious progression of Arab literature, with specific reference to the modernization of Arab poetry. The impact of Muṭrān's romantic literary character transcended its embodiment in his poetry and prose, affecting a broad spectrum of literary personalities and ideological schools. In this milieu, notwithstanding occasional dissenting voices, the dominant scholarly consensus accords the poet the status of a principal advocate for, broadly, romantic Arab literature, and, specifically, romantic Arab poetry. His influence is so profound that he is regarded as a harbinger for the eminent romantics of his epoch, including 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād (1889-1964), 'Abd al-Raḥman Shukrī (1886-1958), and Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Qādir al-Māzinī (1890-1949), who were the founding poets of the Dīwān group, a pivotal literary collective of the romantic movement during that era. In addition, he paved the way for Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī (1892-1955), the originator of the Apollo group, and Ibrāhīm Nājī (1898-1953) and 'Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā (1901-1949), who shared a similar literary trajectory and actively contributed to the

Apollo journal's publications. His appointment as successor to Aḥmad Shawqī, who unfortunately demised four days post his election as the president of the Apollo group, further attests to Muṭrān's trailblazing role in this field (Yalar, 2008, 65-66).

In the aftermath of Khalīl Muṭrān's groundbreaking contributions to modern Arabic poetry, propelled by the influence of French romanticism, a novel intellectual movement surfaced in Egypt: the Dīwān School. Drawing upon Western, particularly English, sources for theoretical inspiration, this School, touched by the musings of English romantic poets, sought to inaugurate pivotal shifts within poetry and simultaneously pioneer the bedrock of modern literary criticism. This emergent intellectual movement, born under the auspices of English romanticism, was originally designated the English School in Egypt. Nevertheless, the school's nomenclature evolved to the Dīwān School as a result of a seminal two-volume work titled *al-Dīwān fī al-adab wa al-naqd*, authored by 'Abbās Maḥmūd 'Aqqād and Ibrāhīm 'Abd al-Qādir al-Māzinī. Subsequent to the English colonization of Egypt, a proliferation of English language instruction in schools fostered a significant cultural shift, steering Egypt towards a period of assimilation with and exploration of English literature. More generally, students were introduced to well-established English literary works, a prospect made possible through high-quality English instruction in advanced educational institutions. This exposure prompted a swift and profound resonance with English romanticism among the students. Following this literary immersion, a cadre of poets and intellectuals in Egypt forged a distinctive appreciation for Arabic poetry, with their perspective on poetry diverging from that of the previous generation, conditioned by their engagement with English literature. After delving into Arab and English poetic traditions, the poets of the Dīwān School postulated perceived deficiencies in Arab poetry and identified ingrained taboos that warranted urgent dismantling. The poets of the Dīwān School, viewing themselves as poets of the modern era, consistently voiced their disapproval of neo-classical poets, critiquing their poetic style as antiquated and entrenched in tradition. In the preface of his 1913 publication, 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād proposed that a poem composed in a conventional style seldom exceeded the value of the paper it was inscribed upon. He underscored an excessive reliance on rhetorical devices and a focus on the formal characteristics of poetry, all to the detriment of the poem's intrinsic essence. Hence, he advocated for sweeping modifications in both the content and form of poetry. The intent was to dismantle the inflexible conventions

of neo-classical poetry, rendering it compatible with human sensibility and comprehension. Within this milieu, the assertion that Khalīl Muṭrān spearheaded the inaugural wave of transformation in modern Arabic poetry is reconfirmed. In the wake of this literary movement, and under the influence of English literature, it expanded and permeated societal strata through the works of ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād, Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Māzinī, and ‘Abd al-Raḥman Shukrī (Direkler, 2018, 45-46).

The Mahjar movement constitutes a noteworthy development within the domain of modern Arabic literature. The term “Mahjar” originates from the Arabic language, denoting “the place to which migration has occurred”. This nomenclature has been ascribed to the areas within North and South America where the Arabic diaspora, chiefly from Lebanon, but also Syria, Palestine, and Jordan, have taken residence. Consequently, the appellation Mahjar literature (*adab al-mahjar*) has come into use, delineating the literary contributions of the Arab populace within the American continent. In the 19th century, the Middle East encountered a multitude of economic and political challenges, a prominent one being the weakening of the silk trade - a vital source of revenue for Syria - following the penetration of Japanese silk into the global market. Further exacerbating factors included the paucity of cultivable land, agricultural calamities, insufficiency of energy resources, and an inability to proportionately capitalize on income sources due to the hegemony of the feudal structure. Concurrently, contact with Western culture was initiated following the establishment of various scientific institutions in Egypt under Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha, along with the American and Saint Joseph universities (established in 1866 and 1879, respectively). The proliferation of missionary activities during the tenure of Syrian Governor Ibrāhīm Pasha amplified this trend, eventually leading to a notable reverence for America and the West. The initial wave of migration from the Middle East to North America is speculated to have transpired in 1854, with a similar movement towards South America materializing approximately two decades later. The Maronite-Druze conflicts of 1860 precipitated a more pronounced migratory trend. From 1899 to 1910, the Arab immigrant population on the American continent swelled to 60,000. The burgeoning immigrant populace in North America by 1913 served as the catalyst for the formulation of an immigration law in 1920, instigating a rapid redirection of migration to the South. The Lebanese constituted the majority within the immigrant community, attributable largely to the concentrated missionary activities in Lebanon, in comparison to its neighboring nations,

coupled with the significant Christian demographic. The migratory trend primarily gravitated towards North American cities such as New York, Detroit, and Boston, and in South America towards Sao Paulo in Brazil, as well as Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires in Argentina. Notably, there was also an influx of immigrants to Venezuela, Mexico, Canada, and Chile. Despite initial engagements in humble occupations, these migrants, over time, ascended the socio-economic ladder, achieving commercial success, and subsequently establishing themselves as distinguished traders within these regions (Yazıcı, 2003, 364-367).

The Arab population that embarked on migration to the American continent initially faced substantial hardships, often viewed as an unavoidable consequence of their migratory circumstances. Nevertheless, these adversities progressively diminished over time. Capitalizing on the fluidity of the political environment, they endeavored to institute a multitude of literary societies, largely grounded on the foundation of several newspapers and periodicals. The genesis of these literary societies owes a significant debt to the influential role of these diverse publications. Among the foremost were: *Kawkab Amrīkā* (1892), *al-‘Aṣr* (1894), *al-Ayyām* (1897), *el-Hudā* (1898), *Mir’āt al-Gharb* (1899), *al-Sā’ih* (1912), *al-Samīr* (1929) in New York, and *al-Fayḥā’* (1895), *al-Raqīb* (1897), *al-Manāẓir* (1899) in Brazil. The pioneer Arab immigrant newspaper to be circulated in South America was *al-Fayḥā’*, with objectives to instigate literary activities in the New World, promote influential writers, and most critically, preserve a liaison with their homeland. Its lifespan, however, was restricted to a brief two-year period. In spite of its limited publication duration, a multitude of articles were disseminated within this timeframe, consequently drawing attention to several noteworthy figures. In this manner, the groundwork for a novel literary paradigm, suffused with a rejuvenated spirit, commenced. The newspaper *al-Fayḥā’* holds a distinct position among its contemporaries, given that it acted as the harbinger to an array of other newspapers. These diverse publications, totaling approximately 250, initially congregated numerous literary personas, thereby facilitating the rapid emergence of multiple literary societies. As time progressed, these periodicals and newspapers fostered a conducive literary atmosphere that precipitated the emergence of *Mahjar* literature within the diaspora. The burgeoning of these publications underscored the necessity to create literary societies that would cater to the immigrant populace, consolidate their literary contributions, appraise them, and offer support to their social institutions. Remarkably, the emergence of several literary personalities within North and South America became evident

from the commencement of the 20th century. This would precipitate the birth of a literary movement that would reinvigorate Arab literature in the Middle East. The vanguards of this literary movement, or more precisely, three individuals who etched their mark in the intellectual milieu of that era through their literary personas, constructed the foundations of Mahjar literature. These pioneers are Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān (1883-1931), Mīkhā'il Nu'ayma (1889-1988), and Amīn al-Rīḥānī (1876-1940). Despite their divergent backgrounds and influences, the writings and ideologies of these three literary figures laid the groundwork that would inspire the endeavors of subsequent generations. Among them, Jubrān emerged as an undeniable trailblazer; everything began with his initiation. The initial philosophical and literary movements were instigated by him, and notably, the inaugural literary society within Mahjar was established under his auspices (Yazıcı, 2002, 107-108).

The Apollo group, acclaimed for its groundbreaking role in catapulting free verse into the spotlight of Arabic literature and for promulgating critical analysis on Arab poetry, holds a pivotal position in the progression of Arabic literature. This group emerged as a preeminent force within the sphere of Arabic poetry during the 1930s, embodying a critical juncture in the modernization trajectory of Arabic poetry. Incepted under the auspices of an Egyptian poet and critic, Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī, this consortium cultivated a romantic literary sensibility influenced by the immigrant poets of North America. The assembly included, along with Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī, Ibrāhīm Nājī, 'Alī Maḥmūd Ṭāhā, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mu'ṭī al-Hamsharī (1908–1938), and a cadre of emerging poets and intellectuals of the era. In September 1932, they issued the inaugural edition of the Apollo journal, a platform which facilitated the publication of works by a multitude of poets and literary scholars. The maiden issue also encompassed the charter delineating the objectives of the Apollo Group. Intriguingly, the magazine, while debuted as an Apollo association publication in September, was preceded by the association's initial formal meeting held at a subsequent date. This assembly was convened on October 12, 1932, at Aḥmad Shawqī's residence, with him presiding. Unfortunately, as alluded to previously, Aḥmad Shawqī passed away unexpectedly just days after the meeting, plunging the group members into a state of deep grief. The group convened again a week later, on October 22, 1932, and elected Khalīl Muṭrān as their new president. The principles and objectives established during Shawqī's presided meeting were unequivocally ratified at this assembly as well, encapsulating the enhancement of Arab poetry, guidance for poets in this regard, advocacy for artistic reform



in the realm of poetry, and elevation of the poets' social and literary standing. The association remained accessible to poets, literary scholars, and aficionados of literature alike. The Apollo journal was published with unwavering monthly regularity. This publication holds considerable literary merit in the context of the evolution of modern Arabic poetry, given its distinction as the pioneer magazine in the Arab world to concentrate on poetry and poetry critique, disseminating works towards this end. While Shawqī advocated for the poems published in this journal to invoke reminiscences of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, the critics of the magazine, primarily Abū Shādī, championed the cause of free verse (Adalar, 2007, 62-63).

In the realm of contemporary Arabic literature, the inception of the Tammūzī movement constitutes a noteworthy inflection point. The terminologies, Tammūzī poetry (al-shi'r al-tammūzī) and Tammūzī poets (al-shu'arā' al-tammūzīyyūn), have incrementally assumed the status of universally recognized literary terms within scholarly circles (Khalīl et al., 2009, 39). A modernist comprehension, imbibed from European influences, has characterized the evolution of Arabic literature. The convergence of this modernist comprehension with symbolism in the 1930s, augmented by the successful application of symbolism during this period, provided a distinctive lens for the Arabian poets transitioning towards social-realism. This shift comes in the wake of World War II and the ensuing complexities of the geopolitical reconfiguration in 1948, which saw the establishment of the State of Israel, a momentous event that profoundly influenced the region and its literature. The Tammūzī poets, through their assimilation of insights derived from antecedent literary movements and their experiences stemming from social, political, and cultural shifts, have exerted a substantial influence on the Arabic poetry landscape, particularly in the span from 1950 to 1970. Prominent among the Tammūzī poets are Khalīl Ḥāvi (1919-1982), 'Alī Aḥmad Sa'īd (Adūnīs), Badr Shākīr al-Sayyāb (1926-1964), Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā (1919-1994), and Yūsuf al-Khāl (1917-1987). These poets, who have harmoniously merged their innovative poetic interpretations with the universal ideal of freedom, amidst challenging geopolitical landscapes and transitional periods, have effectively stripped their poetry of all superfluous rhetoric, ornate language, and verbosity. Their efforts extend beyond mere modifications in form, instilling innovative elements in the realm of content, thereby charting a new trajectory for Arabic poetry in the modern era. Influenced by numerous Western modernists, including luminaries such as T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), Edith Sitwell (1887-1964), and Ezra



Pound (1885-1972), they have contributed original works to the canon of Arabic poetry. Stylistically, their accentuation of musicality in poetry, employment of recurring concepts and dramatic monologues, and the integration of colloquial language into poetic parlance signify their innovative approach. While they place a premium on language, some grammatical errors may be observed in the works of Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā and Yūsuf al-Khāl. Nonetheless, an examination of the poets' stylistic preferences in their other literary compositions, as well as their chosen language, manifests their accomplishment. Consequently, one may even conjecture that the linguistic discrepancies in their poems may have been intentionally created to provoke grammatical deviations (Ceylan, 2019, 375-376).

In the extensive corpus of publications providing an overview of the evolution of modern Arabic literature, a conspicuous gap exists in the form of a noticeable lack of emphasis on the contributions of women to this development. This oversight, widely accepted within academic circles, highlights a persisting bias in the historical narrative that undermines the inclusivity and balance of literary scholarship. A comprehensive understanding of the modernization process of Arabic literature necessitates a nuanced exploration of diverse perspectives, including those of women writers, who have contributed significantly to the richness and complexity of Arabic literature. Their narratives, often offering unique insights into the sociocultural dynamics and challenges of their times, can enrich the fabric of Arabic literature by adding layers of depth and meaning that extend beyond the confines of the traditional male-dominated discourse. The study of women's contributions is not only critical for the progression of academic research, but it is also instrumental in challenging prevailing norms, fostering an inclusive literary environment, and promoting gender parity in the field of literary criticism. While this argument should not be misconstrued as an appeal for a militant feminist approach, it undeniably underscores the need for a more balanced and gender-inclusive representation in literary studies. The stories, perspectives, and experiences of women are an integral part of the rich tapestry of Arabic literature, and a thorough investigation of their contributions can not only augment our understanding of Arabic literature but also serve as a beacon for academic, social, and cultural progress. To this end, it is essential to embark on rigorous scholarly endeavors that highlight women's literary contributions and enable their voices to be heard within the wider discourse of modern Arabic literature.

### 1.3. The Evolution of Female Characters

In literary discourse, it is vital to acknowledge and unpack the dynamic transformation of the portrayal of women throughout various periods. The evolution of the female character transcends the confines of plot development and narrative structure. It serves as an intriguing reflection of society's shifting perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of femininity, gender roles, and female agency. From their earlier portrayals as passive entities, existing merely to further the narrative or reflect the perspective of the male gaze, female characters in literature have undergone a metamorphosis. Over time, they have emerged as complex, multi-dimensional beings, capable of asserting agency and possessing a multitude of nuances that are reflective of the broad spectrum of the human experience. The exploration and understanding of these shifts in characterization provide a rich vein of academic enquiry. The transformation of the female character does not just represent a change in narrative style or authorial preference, but also maps onto broader societal and cultural shifts, marking key moments of change in the perception of women's roles and identities. Therefore, the investigation of these transformations, from one-dimensional figures to multifaceted personas, is a critical area of study. It not only expands our understanding of literary history but also offers a nuanced view of the socio-cultural changes that literature so often mirrors.

In the pre-Islamic era, often referred to as the *Jāhiliyya* period, the depiction of Arabian women in literature was predominantly superficial, failing to fully capture the complexities of their lives and experiences. The pre-Islamic Arabian society was largely patriarchal, and the entrenched socio-cultural norms were primarily centered on male experiences and perspectives. As a consequence, women were largely relegated to the periphery, their narratives often oversimplified and presented through the lens of the dominant male discourse. Women's roles were largely confined to the private sphere, they were often reduced to rudimentary figures serving as extensions of their male counterparts, as daughters, wives, or mothers. Their identities were largely constructed in relation to their male counterparts, rarely viewed as autonomous beings with their own desires, aspirations, and challenges. Literary works from this period seldom broached the realities of women's lives beyond the cursory depiction of their roles within the family or society. The complexities of their experiences, their aspirations, their struggles, and their triumphs remained largely unexplored.

Furthermore, the depictions of women were often imbued with gendered stereotypes and assumptions that mirrored the patriarchal societal structure of the time. The agency of women, their intellectual capabilities, their resilience, and their contributions to society were frequently overlooked or trivialized. The nuanced understanding of their lives and experiences was conspicuously absent in the pre-Islamic literature. This lack of in-depth portrayal not only underscored the marginalized position of women in society but also limited the scope of the literary landscape itself. In essence, the portrayal of Arabian women during the pre-Islamic era reflected the socio-cultural dynamics of the time, providing us with critical insights into the gender ideologies and patriarchal structures of that era. However, it also calls for a nuanced reading, recognizing the inherent limitations of these depictions and the need for comprehensive and inclusive narratives that transcend the boundaries of gendered stereotypes.

Imru al-Qays (d. 540 [?]), a prominent poet in pre-Islamic Arabic literature, occupies an important position in the literary domain due to his significant contributions to *mu'allaqa* poetry. The *Mu'allaqāt*, a compilation of seven pre-Islamic Arabic odes, has often been regarded as the epitome of Jahili poetry, with Imru al-Qays' contribution to this compilation being the most celebrated. His verses, wrought with vivid imagery and emotive language, have profoundly influenced a myriad of Arab poets across succeeding generations. However, within the broader scope of women's studies, the treatment of female characters in the poetry of Imru al-Qays calls for critical scrutiny. A common theme in his verses is a detailed focus on the male protagonist's interactions and experiences with women, especially his romantic and sexual encounters. Yet, in these narratives, the depiction of women often lacks depth and complexity, with the female characters typically serving as mere backdrops to the poet's exploits. They are, for the most part, objectified, existing only as the objects of the male protagonist's desire, rather than fully-fledged individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and agency. This pervasive superficial portrayal of women is indicative of a broader issue within the literary tradition of this era, reflecting the socio-cultural norms and gender dynamics prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabian society. While these depictions might have served to augment the persona of the male protagonist – a motif that would resonate with the audience of the time – they provide little insight into the lived experiences of women:

- بِسْفِطِ اللَّوَى بَيْنَ النَّخُولِ فَحَوْمِلِ  
لِمَا نَسَجَتْهَا مِنْ جَنُوبٍ وَشَمَالِ  
وَقِيَعَانِهَا كَأَنَّهُ حَبُّ قُلْفَلِ  
لَدَى سَمَرَاتِ الْحَيِّ نَاقِفُ حَنْظَلِ  
يَقُولُونَ لَا تَهْلِكِ أَسَى وَتَجَمَّلِ  
فَهَلْ عِنْدَ رَسْمِ دَارِسٍ مِنْ مُعَوَّلِ  
وَجَارَتِهَا أُمُّ الرَّبَابِ بِمَأْسَلِ  
نَسِيمِ الصَّبَا جَاءَتْ بِرَيَا الْقَرْنُفَلِ  
عَلَى النَّخْرِ حَتَّى بَلَّ دَمْعِي مَحْمَلِي
- ”1. فَمَا نَبْكَ مِنْ ذِكْرِي حَبِيبٍ وَمَنْزِلِ  
2. فَنُوضِحَ فَالْمِقْرَاهُ لَمْ يَعْفُ رَسْمُهَا  
3. تَرَى بَعَرَ الْأَرَامِ فِي عَرَصَاتِهَا  
4. كَأَنِّي عِدَاةَ الْبَيْنِ يَوْمَ تَحْمَلُوا  
5. وَتُوقِفَا بِهَا صَحْبِي عَلَيَّ مَطِيئَهُمْ  
6. وَإِنَّ شِفَائِي عَيْرَةٌ مَهْرَاقَةٌ  
7. كَدَأْبِكَ مِنْ أُمِّ الْخُوَيْرِثِ قَبْلَهَا  
8. إِذَا قَامَتَا تَصَوَّعَ الْمِسْكَ مِنْهُمَا  
9. فَفَاضَتْ دُمُوعُ الْعَيْنِ مِنِّي صَبَابَةٌ

“1. Halt, both of you! Let us mourn the memory of the beloved and her abode in Siq̄ al-Liwā, positioned between al-Dakhūl and Ḥawmal.

2. It lies between the regions known as Tūḍiḥ and al-Miqrāt. The imprints of her presence have not yet been erased due to the intertwining of the south and north winds.

3. In the beloved’s homeland, on her lands and valleys, you may observe droppings of white gazelles, akin to grains of black pepper.

4. On the sorrowful morning of departure, when they loaded their migrations, I was weeping, as if hollowing out a colocynth beside the thorny trees.

5. My companions, there on their mounts, surrounded me, advising, ‘Do not destroy yourself with sorrow, be resilient!’

6. My solace is to shed tears abundantly. Yet, what good does weeping bring beside the erased footprints?

7. Your weeping for this beloved has become akin to the fate you suffered when you loved Ummu al-Ḥuwayrith and her neighbor Ummu al-Rabāb on Ma’sal Mountain.

8. When they arose, a musk fragrance, like that carried by the breeze that brings the scent of carnations, wafted from both of them.

9. Due to my love for them both, tears flooded down to my chest, even wetting the strap of my sword (al-Zawzanī, 1413/1992, 13-24).”

Imru al-Qays' elegantly poignant pre-Islamic Arabic poem captures a rich tableau of literary themes. Prominent among these themes is the nuanced representation of women, which, when observed through a gender-centric analytical lens, offers invaluable insights into the cultural and societal nuances of the era. The commencement of the poem is characterized by a plea to pause and grieve. This sets a tone of melancholy and nostalgia that suffuses the ensuing verses. Nestled within this emotional landscape, the dwelling place of the beloved woman is vividly depicted, situated between specific landmarks. This spatial illustration carries an implied femininity, considering the historical literary associations of women with domestic spaces and landscapes.

As the poem progresses, the narrative is punctuated with the introduction of a significant thematic element, that of departure. The intensity of the associated sorrow is palpable, manifesting in the description of the mourner's anguish. The ensuing verses carry forward this emotional theme, with the narrative weaving in the sage counsel of the speaker's companions who advocate resilience. This interjection serves as a subtle commentary on the gendered expectations surrounding the display of emotions. Moreover, the speaker's apparent emotional reliance on the women unveils an intricate layer of gender dynamics deeply ingrained in the society of the time. In the middle of the poem, the narrative transitions to a poignant reminiscence of past loves, Ummu al-Ḥuwayrith and Ummu al-Rabāb. The lingering scent of musk associated with these women underscores the sensual and aesthetic dimensions of the relationships. Yet, the resurfacing of sorrow, evident in the outpouring of tears evoked by their memory, exposes the superficial and ephemeral nature of these connections. Women, in this context, are remembered predominantly for their sensual attributes, thus subordinating their individual personalities to a largely physical domain. In its entirety, the poem paints a rich and multifaceted portrait of the female motif. The depiction captures varied facets of gender dynamics in the society of that era, presenting women as objects of both value and objectification, invoking memories yet forgotten, omnipresent yet absent. This intricate duality of portrayal echoes the complex realities of women's societal roles of the time.

Proceeding in the narrative structure of the poem, Imru al-Qays expands upon his verses as follows:

- ”10. أَلَا رَبُّ يَوْمٍ لَكَ مِنْهُنَّ صَالِحٍ  
 11. وَيَوْمَ عَقَرْتُ لِلْعَدَارَى مَطِيئِي  
 12. فَظَلَّ الْعَدَارَى يَرُدُّنَّ بِلِحْمِهَا  
 13. وَيَوْمَ دَخَلْتُ الْخَدْرَ خَدْرَ عُنْبِرَةَ  
 14. تَقُولُ وَقَدْ مَالَ الْعَبِيبُ بِنَا مَعَا  
 15. فَقُلْتُ لَهَا سِيرِي وَأَرْجِي زِمَامَهُ  
 16. فَمِثْلِكَ حُبْلَى قَدْ طَرَفْتُ وَمُرْضِعِ  
 17. إِذَا مَا بَكَى مِنْ خَلْفِهَا أَنْصَرَفْتُ لَهُ  
 18. وَيَوْمًا عَلَى ظَهْرِ الْكَنْيَبِ تَعَدَّرْتُ  
 19. أَفَاطِمَ مَهْلًا بَعْضَ هَذَا النَّدْلِ  
 20. أَعْرَكَ مِنِّي أَنْ حُبَّكَ قَاتِلِي  
 21. وَإِنْ نَكَّ قَدْ سَاءَتْكَ مِنِّي خَلِيقَةٌ  
 22. وَمَا ذَرَفْتُ عَيْنَاكَ إِلَّا لِتَضْرِبِي  
 23. وَيَبِضَّةَ خَدْرٍ لَا يُرَامُ خَبَاؤُهَا  
 24. تَجَاوَزْتُ أَحْرَاسًا إِلَيْهَا مَعْشَرًا  
 25. إِذَا مَا التَّرْيَا فِي السَّمَاءِ تَعَرَّضْتُ  
 26. فَجِنْتُ وَقَدْ نَضْتُ لِنَوْمِ ثِيَابِهَا  
 27. فَقَالَتْ: يَمِينُ اللَّهِ مَا لَكَ حَبِيلَةٌ  
 28. خَرَجْتُ بِهَا أُمِّي تَجْرُ وَرَاءَنَا  
 29. فَلَمَّا أَجْرْنَا سَاحَةَ الْحَيِّ وَانْتَحَى  
 30. هَمَّصْتُ بِفَوْدَى رَأْسِهَا فَتَمَائِلْتُ  
 31. مُهْفَهَفَةً بِيضَاءَ عَيْرٍ مُفَاضَةٍ
- وَلَا سِيَّمَا يَوْمَ بَدَارَةِ جُلْجُلٍ  
 فَيَا عَجَبًا مِنْ كورِهَا الْمُتَحَمَّلِ  
 وَشَحْمِ كَهْدَابِ الدِّمْقَسِ الْمُفْتَلِ  
 فَقَالَتْ لَكَ الْوَيْلَاتُ إِنَّكَ مُرْجَلِي  
 عَقَرْتُ بَعِيرِي يَا امْرَأَ الْقَيْسِ فَأَنْزِلِ  
 وَلَا تُعِدِّبْنِي مِنْ جَنَّاكَ الْمُعَلِّ  
 فَالْهَيْئَةُ عَنْ ذِي تَمَانِمِ مُحُولِ  
 بِشِقِّ وَشَفُهَا لَمْ يُحَوَّلِ  
 عَلَيَّ وَالَّتْ حَلْفَةٌ لَمْ تَحَلَّلِ  
 وَإِنْ كُنْتُ قَدْ أَرْمَعْتُ صَرْمِي فَأَجْمَلِي  
 وَأَنْكَ مَهْمَا تَأْمُرِي الْقَلْبُ يُفْعَلِ  
 فَسَلِّي ثِيَابِي مِنْ ثِيَابِكَ تَنْسَلِ  
 بِسَهْمِيكَ فِي أَعْسَارِ قَلْبٍ مُقْتَلِ  
 تَمَتَّعْتُ مِنْ لَهْرِ بِهَا غَيْرَ مُعْجَلِ  
 عَلَيَّ حِرَاصًا لَوْ يُسْرُونَ مَقْتَلِي  
 تَعَرَّضُ أَنْتَاءَ الْوَشَاحِ الْمُفْصَلِ  
 لَدَى السِّنْرِ إِلَّا لِنَيْسَةِ الْمُتَفْصَلِ  
 وَمَا إِنْ أَرَى عَنْكَ الْغَوَايَةَ تَنْجَلِي  
 عَلَيَّ أَثْرِينَا ذَيْلَ مُرْطِ مُرْحَلِ  
 بِنَا بَطْنُ خُبَيْتِ ذِي جِقَافِ عَقْنَقَلِ  
 عَلَيَّ هَضِيمِ الْكَشْحِ رَبِّيَا الْمُخْلَخَلِ  
 تَرَاثِبُهَا مَصْقُولَةٌ كَالسَّجْجَلِ“

“10. Oh! You have spent many joyful days with those beloveds, especially that day in Dāra Juljul.

11. Oh, that day when I slaughtered my mount for virgin girls! How pleasant it was to load the remaining luggage onto their camels after slaughtering my camel!

12. The virgin girls kept offering each other the roasted meat of the camel. Its fat resembled well-spun white silk.
13. The day I entered the howdah, 'Unayza's howdah, she said to me, 'Woe to you! You will leave me on foot.'
14. When the howdah tilted, throwing both of us to one side, she exclaimed, 'Oh Imru al-Qays! You have injured my camel, dismount at once!'
15. I said to her, 'Walk on, loosen the camel's halter; do not deprive me of the pleasure of plucking the fruits of your kisses!'
16. Much like you, I have knocked on the doors of many pregnant and nursing women, depriving them of their amulet-protected infants, who were not yet a year old.
17. That nursing woman, while one half of her body did not turn under me, turned with the other half and nursed her crying child left behind.
18. One day that beloved swore a decisive oath that she would not favour me and would separate from me on the sandy hill.
19. Oh Fāṭima! Abandon this coyness! If you are determined to leave me, do it gracefully.
20. Your spoiling resulted from my readiness to die for your love and from my heart fulfilling whatever you command, didn't it?
21. If any of my behaviours displeased you, take your heart out of mine so that you can be free!
22. Your eyes shed tears only to shoot arrows into my heart, torn apart by your love.
23. I have taken advantage of many women, whose tents are not expected to be entered and whose skin has not tanned under the scorching sun, and amused myself without panic.
24. I have bypassed many guards and communities determined to kill me if they could ambush me.
25. At a moment when the Pleiades stood in the middle of the sky, like a sash studded with precious stones appearing,
26. I reached her; beside the curtain, having removed all her clothes except her nightgown, she waited.

27. Seeing me, she said, ‘By Allah, there is no escape from you! I do not believe this wildness of yours will ever pass.’

28. I took her out; she walked behind me, dragging the hems of her embroidered dress over our footprints.

29. When we crossed the borders of the tribe’s settlement and the undulating sand dunes, which would make us feel safe, embraced us,

30. I pulled her towards me by the hair on the sides of her head; she bent towards me with her slender waist and full thighs.

31. She was slender, fair-skinned, and not with a large sagging abdomen; her neck shone like a mirror (al-Zawzanī, 1413/1992, 13-24).”

Further engaging with the narrative, Imru al-Qays continues his exploration of the theme of women, deepening the reader’s understanding of the complex portrayal of femininity in pre-Islamic Arabic literature. In his recollection of joyful days spent with his beloveds, Imru al-Qays employs the imagery of a shared feast. This highlights the communal aspect of their relationship, as well as the physicality associated with the act of consuming meat. This conveys a sense of intimacy and shared experience, yet the focus remains on the action rather than on the women’s individual personalities or experiences. Subsequently, an episode is recounted where Imru al-Qays and ‘Unayza are in the howdah of a camel together. The dramatic tilting of the howdah leading to a tumble brings an element of humour and intimacy to their interaction. The subsequent dialogue reveals ‘Unayza’s assertiveness and concern for her camel, thus offering a glimpse into her character beyond the role of a beloved.

The portrayal of women takes a darker turn with the subsequent lines, where Imru al-Qays admits to exploiting women. He appears indifferent to the fact that these women are in delicate conditions of pregnancy and motherhood. This reveals a disturbing side of his character, as well as a disregard for the responsibilities associated with these roles. The motif of the nursing woman who simultaneously attends to the poet and her child, exposes an interesting dichotomy. Here, the poet seems to simultaneously respect and disregard the woman’s maternal role. This could potentially symbolize the conflicting societal expectations of women during this period.

The verses concerning Fāṭima reveal a unique dynamic in the poet’s relationship with her. Imru al-Qays implores Fāṭima to abandon her coyness,



indicating his desire for a more genuine or open interaction. This desire for authenticity reflects the poet's acknowledgment of Fāṭima's autonomy and individuality. The subsequent mention of her tears, metaphorically likened to arrows, once again positions women as powerful but destructive forces in the poet's life. Moreover, the description of his encounters with women in their private spaces sheds light on the power dynamics at play. Imru al-Qays' audacious trespassing into guarded territories is indicative of his power and privilege, while also revealing the societal constraints women lived within.

Finally, the closing lines of this portion of the poem return to the aesthetic appreciation of the female figure. The woman he describes is fair-skinned, slender, and has a shining neck, reflecting the poet's superficial gaze that values physical attributes over personal characteristics. In conclusion, through this narrative journey, Imru al-Qays delves into the complexities of his relationships with women, revealing a range of interactions that oscillate between admiration, exploitation, and emotional dependency. These relationships are characterized by power dynamics, fleeting sensual pleasures, and a disregard for women's personal identities, revealing a nuanced portrait of women in pre-Islamic Arab society.

The advent of Islam instigated transformative shifts in pre-existing Arab conceptions of women, reframing a narrative that had traditionally relegated them to the margins of society. Drawing directly from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, the principles of Islam significantly advanced the societal position and perception of women. This is a testament to the progressive nature of Islam, a characteristic often overlooked due to pervasive misconceptions in Western societies. It is, therefore, crucial to underscore that Islam imparts to women a status marked by respect and honor, holistically encompassing both spiritual and social spheres. In the spiritual realm, Islam unequivocally advocates for gender equality. On the social plane, it codifies women's rights and protections, thereby disrupting established structures of female subordination. Islam precipitated a sociocultural transition from a patriarchal family structure, within which women were bereft of rights, to a conjugal model, recognizing women as integral counterparts within the marital dyad. This revolutionary perspective is encapsulated in the words of 'Umar, the second caliph of the Rāshidūn Caliphate, who proclaimed, "Prior to the emergence of Islam, we lacked reverence for women. However, with the advent of Islam and the divine invocation of their rights, we discerned their rightful claim over us." From the Islamic standpoint, men and women stand on an equal footing before God,

serving as His representatives on earth in equal measure. The Quranic edicts pertaining to the rights and obligations of men apply equally to women, often expressed as “believing men and believing women” to underscore this parity. The divine revelation is inclusive, addressing all individuals irrespective of their race, gender, or social standing. When scrutinizing religious precepts, the Quran does not confer any precedence of men over women. Rather, conduct and piety emerge as the sole metrics of evaluation, constituting the basis on which individuals are valued and ultimately judged in the sight of God (el Tibi, 2014, 60).

Despite the transformative role of Islam in advocating for and elevating the societal status of women, thereby confronting the entrenched misogynistic mindsets dominant during the Jāhiliyya period, the entirety of this progressive mandate was not universally adopted across societal strata. This resistance to Islam’s radical reformation of gender relations and the status of women was particularly palpable during the Umayyad era. During this historical period, the realm of poetry served as a bastion for outdated and objectifying perceptions of women, reverting to their portrayal as mere sexual objects rather than individuals with their distinct identities and worth. This tendency towards objectification within poetry, seemingly at odds with the egalitarian tenets of Islam, underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of cultural and societal transformation. It is a stark reminder that changes in religious doctrine and legislation do not immediately or uniformly translate into shifts in societal attitudes or the nuances of cultural expression. It is essential to underscore the fact that the representation of women in poetry was not monolithic and underwent significant shifts and fluctuations both before and after the inception of Islam. These poetic portrayals traversed a broad spectrum, ranging from the affirmative and respectful to the disparaging and derogatory. This dynamic is reflective of the broader complexities and contradictions inherent within societal attitudes and cultural discourses pertaining to gender roles and relations.

One striking example of this heterogeneity within poetic discourse is the work of al-Ḥuṭay’a (d. 59/678 [?]), a poet whose life straddled the eras of pre-Islamic Arabia and the formative years of Islam. Notably, al-Ḥuṭay’a employed severe satire in his poetic depiction of his mother, an approach that starkly contrasts with the otherwise respectful portrayal of women espoused by the Islamic doctrine (al-Ḥuṭay’a, 1413/1993, 9). However, such instances of derogatory representations of women in Islamic era poetry should not be taken as representative of the norm. Instead, they serve as intriguing exceptions that

highlight the enduring contestations and negotiations within the cultural fabric of Islamic societies. These exceptions underscore the resilience of pre-existing cultural attitudes and the complexities of societal transformation, even in the face of sweeping religious and legislative changes.

Throughout the course of classical Arabic literature's history, attitudes towards women have shown a remarkable constancy, thus preserving their significance as a pressing issue within both Arab society and its literary corpus. However, a diametric shift can be discerned in contemporary Arabic literature, where authors championing modernist and humanist ideologies are progressively defying the entrenched injustices imposed upon women over the course of history. One such resolute voice is that of Nizār Qabbānī (1923-1998), an eminent luminary within the literary landscape of contemporary Arab writing. Qabbānī has articulated a dissenting stance against the flawed interpretations of women's roles that have become deeply ingrained within Eastern cultural paradigms. This critique, issued with due respect and circumspection, seeks to dismantle the enduring endorsement of harmful aspects of traditional thought prevalent within Eastern societies. Despite the advancements heralded by Islam's teachings and the enlightening influence of Western modernity, Qabbānī casts a critical gaze upon the Arab world's continued failure to engage with women in a manner reflective of due respect and equality. As an embodiment of this critique, the following poem by Qabbānī serves as a poignant commentary on the existing state of affairs:

1. يَا سَيِّدِي الْعَزِيزِ  
 2. هَذَا خُطَابُ امْرَأَةٍ حَمَقَاءَ  
 3. هَلْ كَتَبْتَ إِلَيْكَ قَبْلِي امْرَأَةً حَمَقَاءَ؟  
 4. إِسْمِي أَنَا؟ دَعْنَا مِنَ الْأَسْمَاءِ  
 5. رَانِيَّةً.. أُمَّ زَيْنَبُ  
 6. أُمَّ هِنْدُ.. أُمَّ هَيْفَاءَ  
 7. أَسْخَفُ مَا نَحْمِلُهُ يَا سَيِّدِي الْأَسْمَاءِ

“1. Esteemed Sir,

2. This is the letter of a foolish woman,

3. Has a foolish woman ever written to you before?

4. My name? Let us leave names aside.
5. Rāniya.. or Zaynab,
6. Or Hind.. or Hayfā’,
7. The most absurd things we carry, oh sir, are names (Qabbānī, n.d., 1/575-579).”

The poem presents an engaging intersection between gender, cultural context, and the dynamics of communication. It commences with an address to an “Esteemed Sir”, which denotes a male recipient of higher status, suggesting an unequal power dynamic. This premise paves the way for the exploration of the speaker’s identity and role as a woman within her cultural context. The poem’s speaker identifies herself as a “foolish woman”, a term laced with self-deprecation, but also a critique of societal perception and expectations of women. By preemptively labeling herself as “foolish”, the speaker reclaims the power to define her own identity. This characterization also serves to challenge the reader’s expectations, as the term “foolish” is subjective and largely dependent on societal norms and expectations. Intriguingly, the speaker poses a rhetorical question, “Has a foolish woman ever written to you before?”. This question subtly confronts the male recipient, and perhaps society at large, about their preconceived notions of women’s intellectual capabilities and their right to express themselves. It prompts introspection on the part of the reader, questioning societal norms and expectations.

The speaker’s decision to “leave names aside” further underlines her defiance of societal norms. The act of name-giving is a significant exercise of power, often controlled by patriarchal societies, which the speaker chooses to disregard, thereby defying an integral aspect of identity definition. In providing potential names – Rāniya, Zaynab, Hind, Hayfā’ – the speaker underscores the interchangeability and thus, the absurdity of these labels, as these names do not reflect her personal identity or experiences. The culmination of the given section of the poem sees the speaker assert that “The most absurd things we carry, oh sir, are names.” This statement affirms the speaker’s critique of societal norms and power dynamics. The critique operates on two levels: firstly, the act of carrying a name is positioned as a burden, suggesting the societal expectations and assumptions associated with feminine names. Secondly, the speaker labels these names as “absurd”, further underlining her resistance against the societal constraints imposed by the patriarchal society. In sum, this excerpt from the

poem is a potent commentary on the gendered power dynamics in society, with the speaker challenging these conventions through her self-definition and critique of societal norms.

The narrative progression of the poem by Nizār Qabbānī unfolds as follows:

8. يَا سَيِّدِي  
 9. أَخَافُ أَنْ أَقُولَ مَا لَدَيَّ مِنْ أَشْيَاءَ  
 10. أَخَافُ لَوْ فَعَلْتُ  
 11. أَنْ تَحْتَرِقَ السَّمَاءُ  
 12. فَشَرُّكُمْ يَا سَيِّدِي الْعَزِيزُ  
 13. يُصَادِرُ الرَّسَائِلَ الرَّزْءَاءَ  
 14. يُصَادِرُ الْأَحْلَامَ مِنْ خَزَائِنِ النِّسَاءِ  
 15. يُمَارِسُ الْحَجَرَ عَلَى عَوَاطِفِ النِّسَاءِ  
 16. يَسْنَعُمُ السَّكِينِ  
 17. وَالسَّاطُورَ  
 18. كَيْ يُخَاطِبَ النِّسَاءَ  
 19. وَيَدْبُحَ الرَّبِيعَ، وَالْأَشْوَاقَ  
 20. وَالضَّفَائِرَ السُّودَاءَ  
 21. وَشَرُّكُمْ يَا سَيِّدِي الْعَزِيزُ  
 22. يَصْنَعُ تَاجَ الشَّرَفِ الرَّبِيعِ  
 23. مِنْ جَمَاجِمِ النِّسَاءِ“

“8. Esteemed Sir,

9. I am apprehensive about revealing what I have.

10. I fear, if I dare,

11. The sky might burst into flames.

12. For your east, my respected Sir,

13. Confiscates the blue letters,

14. Seizes the dreams from women’s hope chests,

15. Imposes an embargo on women’s emotions,

16. Wields the knife,

17. And the cleaver,

18. To address women,
19. And slaughters the spring, the yearnings,
20. And the black plaits.
21. And your east, oh respected Sir,
22. Constructs the crown of honor
23. From women's skulls (Qabbānī, n.d., 1/575-579)."

In the subsequent passage of the poem by Nizār Qabbānī, the narrative presents the persona's apprehensions, weaving a tapestry of imagery that communicates the precarious and vulnerable position of women in a society strongly defined by patriarchal norms. Beginning with an explicit expression of apprehension and fear, the persona effectively underscores the existing danger and volatility of her situation. The hyperbolic image of the sky bursting into flames upon her daring to reveal her inner thoughts and emotions communicates the profound consequences of transgressing socially sanctioned female boundaries. This fear of retribution for self-expression paints a powerful image of stifled female agency, reflecting the societal pressures and limitations imposed upon women.

The recurring mention of "your east" employs geographical imagery to symbolize the culture and society the persona is a part of. This east is characterized by a strong control over female expression and autonomy, as exemplified by its confiscation of "blue letters", seizure of dreams from women's "hope chests", and imposition of an embargo on women's emotions. The color blue often symbolizes freedom, depth, trust, and wisdom in literary works, thus its confiscation signifies the curtailing of these aspects of a woman's life. In a more explicit critique of patriarchal power, Qabbānī's persona asserts that "your east" wields violent tools like a "knife" and a "cleaver" to interact with women. This metaphorically implies an aggressive, even violent, patriarchal authority that not only inhibits but also physically harms and mutilates the lives and aspirations of women.

Furthering this metaphorical narrative, the persona asserts that this societal structure "slaughters the spring, the yearnings, and the black plaits", indicating a complete obliteration of women's desires, their vitality, and their feminine identities. The imagery of slaughtering spring implies the murder of renewal, hope, and the potential for growth, which are often associated with the season. The most stark imagery in this segment of the poem is that of the "crown of

honor” being constructed from women’s skulls. This ghastly visual serves as a potent symbol for the dire consequences of extreme patriarchal control. The “crown of honor” ironically constructed from women’s skulls implies the societal reverence for patriarchal dominance that comes at the cost of female life and dignity. Through the continued exploration of the female motif, Qabbānī incisively critiques a culture that represses and destroys feminine identity and agency, demonstrating the perilous reality for women within these societal structures. His powerful imagery and potent metaphors serve to amplify the resonating call for the recognition of the female struggle, autonomy, and empowerment.

The narrative progression of the poem by Nizār Qabbānī unfolds as follows:

24. لَا تَنْقِذْنِي سَيِّدِي  
 25. إِنْ كَانَ خَطِّي سَيِّئاً  
 26. فَإِنِّي أَكْتُبُ وَالسَّيْفُ خَلْفَ بَابِي  
 27. وَخَارِجَ الْحُجْرَةِ صَوْتُ الرِّيحِ وَالْكَلابِ  
 28. يَا سَيِّدِي  
 29. عَنْتَرَةُ الْعَبْسِيِّ خَلْفَ بَابِي  
 30. يَذْبَحُنِي  
 31. إِذَا رَأَى خَطَابِي  
 32. يَقَطِّعُ رَأْسِي  
 33. لَوْ رَأَى الشَّفَافَ مِنْ ثِيَابِي  
 34. يَقَطِّعُ رَأْسِي  
 35. لَوْ أَنَا عَبْرْتُ عَنْ عَذَابِي  
 36. فَسَرُّكُمْ يَا سَيِّدِي الْعَزِيزِ  
 37. يُحَاصِرُ الْمَرْأَةَ بِالْجَرَابِ  
 38. فَسَرُّكُمْ يَا سَيِّدِي الْعَزِيزِ  
 39. يُبَايِعُ الرِّجَالَ أَنْبِيَاءَ  
 40. وَيَطْمُرُ النِّسَاءَ فِي التُّرَابِ“

“24. Do not critique me, Sir,

25. If my writing is poor.

26. For I write with a swordsman behind my door,

27. And outside the room, the sounds of wind and dogs.
28. Esteemed Sir,
29. ‘Antara al-‘Absī is behind my door,
30. He will slay me,
31. If he sees my letter,
32. He will decapitate me,
33. If he sees the transparency of my clothes,
34. He will decapitate me,
35. If I express my torment.
36. For your east, oh respected Sir,
37. Besieges the woman with spears,
38. For your east, oh respected Sir,
39. Treats men as prophets,
40. And buries women in the soil (Qabbānī, n.d., 1/575-579).”

As the narrative by Nizār Qabbānī progresses, the persona presents a more explicit examination of the constraints imposed upon women and the precarious nature of female expression in patriarchal societies. The persona initiates this segment by addressing a hypothetical critique of her writing. She provides the explanation that she writes with a metaphorical “swordsmen behind my door”, thereby implying the sense of constant threat and the pervasive fear of retribution that accompanies her act of self-expression. This speaks to the broader social reality where women’s voices are often silenced or critiqued harshly, especially when they challenge patriarchal norms. This sense of danger is further amplified with the mention of ‘Antara b. Shaddād al-‘Absī (ö. 614 [?]), a pre-Islamic Arab hero and poet, often considered a symbol of bravery and defiance. His presence “behind my door” symbolizes the omnipresent male gaze and the power dynamics entrenched in their society. The persona acknowledges the extreme consequences she may face for transgressing societal norms, such as expressing her torment or allowing the transparency of her clothes, both metaphorically representing the visibility of her voice and individuality.

The repeated reference to “your east”, continues to personify the sociocultural environment that represses women. This time, it is portrayed as besieging women with spears, an explicit image of aggressive and violent



repression. It presents a stark contrast to the image of men who are treated as prophets - revered, respected, and given authority. The phrase “buries women in the soil” is a potent metaphor. This could be interpreted as the marginalization and obliteration of women’s identities, their forced invisibility, and their metaphorical death in society. In this passage, Qabbānī intensifies his critique of patriarchal power structures, juxtaposing the reverence and respect accorded to men with the brutal suppression of women. The female motif is explored in a more overt and unflinching manner, as the persona fearlessly lays bare the brutal realities faced by women within her societal context. The persona’s resilience in the face of these circumstances serves to underscore the strength and resilience inherent in the female motif.

The narrative progression of the poem by Nizār Qabbānī unfolds as follows:

41. لَا تَنْزَعْجِ!
42. يَا سَيِّدِي الْعَزِيزِ.. مِنْ سَطُورِي
43. لَا تَنْزَعْجِ!
44. إِذَا كَسَرْتُ الْقُمَّمَ الْمَسْدُودَ مِنْ عُصُورِ..
45. إِذَا نَزَعْتُ خَاتَمَ الرَّصَاصِ عَنْ ضَمِيرِي
46. إِذَا أَنَا هَرَبْتُ
47. مِنْ أَقْبِيَّةِ الْحَرِيمِ فِي الْقُصُورِ..
48. إِذَا تَمَرَّدْتُ، عَلَى مَوْتِي..
49. عَلَى قَبْرِي، عَلَى جُدُورِي
50. وَالْمَسْلُخِ الْكَبِيرِ
51. لَا تَنْزَعْجِ، يَا سَيِّدِي!
52. إِذَا أَنَا كَشَفْتُ عَنْ شُعُورِي
53. فَالرَّجُلُ الشَّرْقِيُّ
54. لَا يَهْتَمُّ بِالشَّعْرِ وَ لَا الشُّعُورِ..
55. الرَّجُلُ الشَّرْقِيُّ
56. – وَأَغْفِرُ جُرْأَتِي–
57. لَا يَفْهَمُ الْمَرْأَةَ إِلَّا دَاخِلَ السَّرِيرِ..“

“41. Do not fret!

42. Esteemed Sir, about my lines.

43. Do not fret!
44. If I shatter the pot sealed for ages..
45. If I pull off the lead seal from my conscience,
46. If I flee,
47. From the recesses of the harem in the palaces...
48. If I rebel against my death,
49. Against my grave, against my roots,
50. And the big slaughterhouse,
51. Do not fret, Sir!
52. If I reveal my feelings,
53. For the eastern man,
54. Does not care for poetry nor feelings.
55. The eastern man,
56. - Pardon my audacity -,
57. Does not understand a woman except within the bed... (Qabbānī, n.d., 1/575-579)”

As Qabbānī’s narrative further unfurls, the persona exhibits a pronounced resolve, pleading with her interlocutor not to worry about her act of literary rebellion, her emancipation from long-held traditions, and her audacious assertion of selfhood. This passage magnifies the female motif by turning from the observation of repression towards the articulation of resistance and self-assertion. The persona repeatedly insists, “Do not fret!” as she prepares to transgress the limitations imposed upon her. The recurring plea might be perceived as simultaneously dismissive and defiant, demonstrating the persona’s decision to prioritize her own self-expression over societal apprehensions and the status quo.

The metaphor of shattering the “pot sealed for ages” is strikingly potent, symbolizing the persona’s defiance against antiquated customs and practices. Pulling off the “lead seal from my conscience” furthers this motif of liberation, implying a courageous act of self-emancipation from internalized societal norms that have silenced her. The act of fleeing “from the recesses of the harem in the palaces” implies a physical escape from the confines of traditional female roles, a potent image of the female motif seeking liberation. Similarly, her

rebellion against her “death”, “grave”, “roots”, and the “big slaughterhouse” can be interpreted as a metaphoric rejection of her predetermined fate, societal constraints, and the violent suppression that threatens her existence.

Yet, the persona insists that her interlocutor should not worry if she reveals her feelings, emphasizing the widespread apathy and lack of understanding towards women’s emotional expression. She boldly states that “the eastern man... does not understand a woman except within the bed”, a biting critique of the objectification of women and the reduction of their existence to sexual objects within patriarchal societies. In this segment, Qabbānī’s persona transitions from acknowledging her oppressive circumstances to actively challenging them. Through the motif of a woman’s voice, she demonstrates the strength, resilience, and rebellion of the female spirit. Her defiance underscores the possibility of women reclaiming their power and breaking free from societal constraints, marking a shift in the female motif from victimhood to agency.

The narrative progression of the poem by Nizār Qabbānī unfolds as follows:

- ”58. مَعْذِرَةٌ يَا سَيِّدِي
59. إِذَا تَطَاوَلْتُ عَلَى مَمْلَكَةِ الرَّجَالِ
60. فَالْأَدَبُ الْكَبِيرُ - طَبْعًا أَدَبُ الرَّجَالِ
61. وَالْحُبُّ كَانَ دَائِمًا
62. مِنْ جِصَّةِ الرَّجَالِ..
63. وَالْجِنْسُ كَانَ دَائِمًا
64. مُخَدَّرًا يُبَاعُ لِلرَّجَالِ..
65. خُرَافَةٌ حُرِّيَّةِ النِّسَاءِ فِي بِلَادِنَا
66. فَلَيْسَ مِنْ حُرِّيَّةِ
67. أُخْرَى، سِوَى حُرِّيَّةِ الرَّجَالِ..
68. يَا سَيِّدِي
69. قُلْ كُلَّ مَا تُرِيدُهُ عَنِّي. فَلَنْ أُبَالِي
70. سَطْحِيَّةً. عَيْبَةً. مَجْنُونَةً. بِلَهَاءِ.
71. فَلَمْ أَعُدْ أُبَالِي
72. لِأَنَّ مَنْ تَكْتُمُ عَنْ هُمُومِهَا..
73. فِي مَنْطِقِ الرَّجَالِ امْرَأَةٌ حَمَقَاءِ
74. أَلَمْ أَقُلْ فِي أَوَّلِ الْخِطَابِ إِنِّي امْرَأَةٌ حَمَقَاءِ....“

- “58. Apologies, Sir,  
 59. If I overstepped into the kingdom of men,  
 60. For great literature, naturally, is men’s literature,  
 61. And love has always been,  
 62. From the share of men.  
 63. And sex has always been,  
 64. An anesthetic sold to men.  
 65. The notion of women’s freedom in our country is a myth,  
 66. For there is no freedom,  
 67. Other than the freedom of men.  
 68. Esteemed Sir,  
 69. Say whatever you want about me. I will not care,  
 70. Superficial. Stupid. Insane. Foolish.  
 71. I no longer care,  
 72. For whoever writes about her woes,  
 73. In the language of men, is a foolish woman,  
 74. Didn’t I mention at the beginning of the letter that I am a foolish  
 woman... (Qabbānī, n.d., 1/575-579)”

As Qabbānī’s verse advances, the speaker’s boldness continues to amplify, pushing her audacity to a crescendo as she defiantly challenges the patriarchal paradigm that has marginalized her. Her further exploration of the gender imbalance within society, art, love, and sexuality sharpens the poem’s emphasis on the female motif, exploring the woman’s fight for self-definition and recognition within an overwhelmingly male-centric world. The persona’s expression of regret, “Apologies, Sir, If I overstepped into the kingdom of men”, is marked with a profound irony. By invoking the “kingdom of men”, the speaker is not only commenting on the societal and cultural domains but also on the world of literature and artistic expression, which she sees as dominated by men. The phrase “For great literature, naturally, is men’s literature”, reveals the persona’s critique of the gendered power dynamics that pervade the literary canon. Continuing with her critique, she asserts that “love has always been from the share of men”, thereby alluding to the gendered control over romantic and emotional narratives. The assertion that “sex has always been an anesthetic

sold to men” might be interpreted as a bold critique of the commodification and objectification of women’s bodies and sexuality within patriarchal structures.

The persona’s declaration that “the notion of women’s freedom in our country is a myth” illuminates the false narratives surrounding female emancipation in societies that still perpetuate gender inequality. This perspective reiterates that any semblance of freedom that women enjoy is merely an illusion in the face of pervasive male privilege and power. Concluding her discourse, the speaker returns to the self-derogatory label of being a “foolish woman”, asserting that she does not care about the judgment or disdain that her audacious revelations might provoke. The reiteration of her “foolishness” provides a counterpoint to the conventional wisdom of the male-centric society, emphasizing her defiance and rejection of these societal norms. In sum, the poet, through the voice of a daring female persona, foregrounds the struggle for gender parity and the reclamation of female autonomy in a patriarchal society.

In our thorough examination of Nizār Qabbānī’s poem, it is apparent that the text provides a powerful critique of the pervasive misogyny that permeates different levels of Arab society. The depiction of the female character in the poem is a testament to Qabbānī’s intentional endeavor to challenge patriarchal norms and hegemony, serving as a critique of societal structures that marginalize and suppress women’s voices and agency.

In the broader context of Arabic literature and cultural production, Qabbānī is not alone in his effort to better represent women and challenge the societal structures that confine them. Contemporary Arab poets and writers have been increasingly attentive to the representation of women in their works, positioning female characters in roles that challenge stereotypical depictions and break away from traditional narratives. The literature produced by these writers plays a crucial role in highlighting the diversity and complexity of female experiences, resisting reductive portrayals, and pushing against the constraints of a patriarchal society. Moreover, these endeavors do not exist in isolation but are part of a broader and increasingly vibrant movement for gender equality in Arab society. This movement extends beyond literature and art to engage in political, social, and legal realms, calling for reforms to address deeply entrenched gender biases and discrimination. While these initiatives are still in progress and face considerable resistance in some quarters, their existence and the changes they have already effected are heartening. They serve as an encouraging indication that a transformative discourse is underway, challenging age-old norms and inspiring new understanding and appreciation for the role and rights of women

in Arab societies. The burgeoning efforts to contest and reconfigure gendered power dynamics signal a promising trajectory toward achieving a more egalitarian society, an aspiration that is eloquently and evocatively expressed in Qabbānī's thought-provoking poem.



## CHAPTER 2

# FEMALE VOICES IN MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

### 2.1. Women's Literary Movements

The Arab world represents a constellation of nations, home to a heterogeneous mix of racial, religious, and sectarian communities. Notably, it can be asserted that a preponderance of its residents, despite diverse racial origins, have embraced Arabization and currently self-identify as Arabs. Predominantly, the Arab world's population follows the Islamic faith, notwithstanding the significant presence of a Christian demographic. Concurrently, among the Muslim community, theological or jurisprudential homogeneity remains elusive, notwithstanding Sunni dominance. Considering the Middle East's cultural and ethnic diversity, it would be a simplification to categorize Middle Eastern women as a homogenous entity. Thus, any discourse pertaining to women's movements in these regions must duly account for the disparate socio-economic and cultural milieus from which these women emerge. The evolution of the women's movement in the Middle East throughout the 20th century can be segmented into three distinct epochs, each shaped by a confluence of regional and global dynamics: 1. The genesis of the women's movement in the colonial era, characterized by a united front in the national struggle. 2. The rise of a state-driven women's movement in the aftermath of 1950. 3. The emergence of a women's movement sculpted by independent women's organizations in the post-1980 era (Öncel, 2013, 131-133).

The socio-political dynamics that unfolded in the Middle East prior to the inception of the women's movement during the national struggle era were instrumental in determining the prerequisites for its emergence. Salient developments during this period encompass radical approaches to women's issues, championed by male modernists educated in the West. These advocates propagated political and ideological constructs designed to expedite their countries' Westernization process. Subsequent to this, women belonging to the upper echelons of society, predominantly in urban locales, initiated various



philanthropic and educational initiatives. Concurrently, the publication of treatises on women's issues by modernist males significantly catalyzed discourse on women's issues in Middle Eastern nations. The modernization of the publishing sector in the Middle East post-1876, coupled with the dissemination of modernist nationalist rhetoric through these publications, engendered a novel intellectual landscape. A substantial majority of those engaged in these publishing endeavors were progeny of Christian families, alumni of the Christian missionary schools inaugurated during this period, most notably the Lebanese American University. A publishing policy centered around Arab nationalism served to assuage Muslim groups' apprehensions regarding the identity of these publishers. At the same time, it fostered the diffusion of contemporary Western ideologies in the Middle East, thus ushering in the era colloquially referred to as the Arab Renaissance (Öncel, 2013, 131-133). In the wake of this Arab Renaissance, the region experienced a profound cultural and intellectual shift. As the Arab world absorbed and integrated western ideologies, it concurrently nurtured its own unique synthesis of traditions and perspectives. This cultural fusion, blending traditional Arab norms with Western intellectual thought, has provided a fertile ground for robust dialogues and transformative shifts in various societal norms, particularly regarding gender roles and women's rights. Indeed, the impact of this cultural cross-pollination has been instrumental in shaping the contours of contemporary debates on women's movements in the Middle East. It has allowed for a re-evaluation of traditional roles and an exploration of new avenues for women's empowerment, fostering an environment conducive to further growth and progress.

Feminist literature, an indispensable and profoundly influential branch within the overarching canopy of world literature, serves as a potent platform that solicits a comprehensive exploration and cognizance of entrenched gender constructs and power dynamics that shape society's core frameworks. Originating from the compelling drive and visionary ambitions of the feminist movement, this genre of literature positions itself firmly in the arena of contesting ingrained norms and biases, accentuating the lived experiences and unique voices of women, while delving into the often overlooked or misconstrued complexities of female identities, which other literary genres may tend to marginalize. The significance of feminist literature cannot be downplayed or dismissed, given that it maintains an unbreakable bond with the more extensive objectives of endorsing gender equality and disassembling the ubiquitous patriarchal systems that weave through the social fabric of societies across the globe. Its historical

inception was rooted in the crucial need to bring women's issues, concerns, and struggles to the forefront of public consciousness, thereby positioning feminist literature as a conduit for social transformation. It shines a much-needed spotlight on subjects pertaining to gender inequities and acts as a staunch advocate for the revisiting and reassessment of societal conventions and norms that may perpetuate such disparities (See al-Bassām, 2017, 1807-1856).

Noted for its adept narrative prowess, feminist literature demonstrates a masterful capability to interlace stories that harmonize individual experiences with the larger societal context, thereby providing its readers with distinct insights into the real-world experiences of women. The thematic range of feminist literature is impressively expansive, probing into a myriad of areas including relationships, personal autonomy, self-identity, sexual orientation, various forms of oppression, and the concept of liberation, among numerous other topics. Functioning as a dynamic and thriving literary sphere, feminist literature instigates crucial discourse on subjects such as gender roles, societal anticipations, and the politics of identity, thus rendering it an integral part of the literary canon. Its enduring influence manifests in the manner it molds our understanding of gender and societal dynamics, and how it enriches the ongoing conversations and debates revolving around equality and justice. Feminist literature continues to stand as a formidable instrument for raising consciousness, shattering the silence that shrouds uncomfortable truths, and contesting various forms of oppression. It thereby plays an indispensable role in the comprehension and restructuring of societal frameworks, further solidifying its importance within the world of literature (See Rāfi', 2022, 20-37).

While art has been posited as a crucible of unadulterated freedom within the feminist theoretical framework, women have historically found themselves bereft of the agency to manifest this freedom due to the multifarious societal restrictions imposed on them. The creative output they produced was often met with a dearth of recognition, particularly when compared to the acknowledgments received by their male counterparts. Such was the level of this disproportionate acknowledgement, that a number of female artists resorted to the adoption of male monikers in their pursuit of acceptance. Moreover, the symbolic domain - a pivotal arena that fosters the development of forms and representations that undergird our understanding of meaning - had been overwhelmingly claimed by men. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, researchers have painstakingly charted the course through which notions such as "women", "men", and "gender roles" have crystallized into the collective

societal consciousness, drawing on a wealth of empirical evidence accrued through extensive feminist research. Concurrently, the locus of authors, the social purpose imbued in their works, the content of the works themselves, and the characteristics of their characters have all been subjected to rigorous scrutiny from the perspective of feminist literary criticism. In this vein, it is worth noting that academic focus has largely gravitated towards novels as the primary object of study. This tendency is informed by the genre's historical evolution and its conspicuous capacity to illuminate the status of women within society, a theme recurrent in works spanning the annals of literary history. The role of women, viewed as bearers of individual personality and broader cultural identity, has long been acknowledged as a cardinal component of societal structures. This recognition, however, has been obscured for a significant period by the pervasive lens of gender bias, which, arising from entrenched patriarchal traditions, associated women primarily with gender norms and reproductive functions (Şeker, 2019, 348-349).

The advent and subsequent evolution of feminist theory, encompassing a plethora of philosophical perspectives, have given rise to an intellectual milieu conducive to the critique of these gendered roles and expectations. Additionally, the extension of rights previously exclusive to men, encompassing women through the enactment of a series of social reforms in economic, societal, and educational spheres, has ushered in new vistas of public engagement for women. Yet, it must be acknowledged that the patriarchal gaze has not been entirely dismantled, as the discourse on this subject continues to orbit around entrenched patriarchal ideologies. In spite of this, women have emerged with the empowering realization that they can assert their agency, even in confrontation with the restrictive boundaries established by male hegemony in both private and public realms, and that the edifice of history that privileges men has, in fact, been erected on the foundation of women's labor. In the words of a critical viewpoint, the cyclical dynamics of social pressure in the construction of gender identity persist throughout the life span of an individual. The individual is not allowed to exist in the singularity of "I", but is necessitated to inhabit the collectivity of "we". Within the feminist purview, the notions of being a man or a woman are understood not merely as innate characteristics but as identities intricately crafted by societal constructs (Şeker, 2019, 348-349). As such, the feminist perspective invites us to critically analyze these societal constructs and renegotiate the boundaries of identity. It underscores the importance of transcending the limiting gender binaries and fostering a more inclusive,

equitable society where individual identities can flourish beyond prescribed gender roles. In essence, the power of feminist literature and thought lies in its transformative potential to reshape societal narratives and open up new avenues for understanding and discussing gender, identity, and power.

Feminist stylistics serves as a potent instrument for literary analysis, delving into the intricate usage of language in various written works. This analytical approach takes into consideration the context in which the author conceived the work and the interpretive strategies employed by readers. Feminist stylistics endeavors to elucidate why authors choose specific words or phrases over others, and how such linguistic choices can profoundly influence the narrative. Feminist stylistics does not restrict its analysis to the basic constituents of language, such as phonetics, lexicon, sentence structures, and rhetorical devices such as metaphors and irony. Instead, it expands its investigative scope to include how these linguistic elements coalesce to form a coherent narrative. Furthermore, it takes into account the sociocultural milieu in which the literary work was both created and interpreted (Golubov, 2012, 30). The application of feminist stylistics within the realm of Arabic literature can unearth unique insights into the gendered nuances of its narratives. Arabic literature, with its rich historical tapestry and complex sociocultural contexts, presents a fertile ground for such analyses. Literary works penned in Arabic often reflect intricate power dynamics, societal norms, and the multifaceted representations of femininity and masculinity. Feminist stylistics can be instrumental in discerning the subtle undertones of gender, power, and resistance in these narratives. Furthermore, it can contribute to the understanding of how the Arabic language itself, in its lexicon, syntax, and rhetorical devices, can serve as a medium for both perpetuating and challenging patriarchal ideologies. Therefore, the exploration of feminist stylistics in the context of Arabic literature can serve as a critical tool for deeper, more nuanced understanding of the cultural, social, and political realities it encapsulates.

In emerging economies, societal evolution often accelerates under the influence of Western imperialistic interventions, a phenomenon observable in the Arab world as well. In response to Western colonization, national consciousness started to surface from the 18th century onwards. Following this, the initiation of movements seeking national liberation led to substantial alterations in both the political arena and socioeconomic dynamics of the entire Arab region, profoundly affecting Arab women's status and way of life. The development of feminist consciousness within the Arab society has paralleled

the rise of national awareness from the onset of the 19th century. However, a faction of critics postulate that feminism, surfacing simultaneously with national consciousness and as a resistance to Western imperialism, can be likened to an external disruption, deemed inappropriate and incongruous within the Arab context. These critics maintain that feminism, perceived as an alien concept in the region, bears scant relevance to the indigenous culture and populace. Such a standpoint is predominantly championed by those exhibiting resistance to the concept of women's liberation and who view feminism as being inconsistent with established Arab cultural norms (Golley, 2004, 521).

The transformation of the Arab society, catalyzed by Western influences and nationalistic movements, has not been devoid of contention, particularly in the realm of gender roles and women's rights. As feminist ideals started permeating the societal fabric, conflicts arose between traditional cultural norms and the push for gender equity. While critics argue that feminism clashes with Arab cultural values, proponents of gender equality contend that the drive towards women's emancipation is a crucial step towards modernization and social progress. An objective examination of the Arab world reveals a diverse and complex sociocultural landscape. It is imperative to delve deeper into the different layers of societal evolution and dynamics of power relations within this context. This includes acknowledging the voices of Arab women and the challenges they face in navigating the dichotomies between tradition and modernity, local and global influences. Furthermore, to understand the full spectrum of the feminist movement within the Arab world, a holistic approach is required, one that considers historical, political, and cultural contexts and the interplay between them.

The condition of Arab women, beginning from the advent of the Arab Renaissance to contemporary times, is frequently posited to maintain notable parallels with those from bygone epochs. The inaugural period, persisting up until the 1950s, portrayed the Arab woman in reality and in literary works as an individual ensnared in the interstices of fate and desolation, yielding to a multitude of adversities she faced. Commencing from the mid-1950s through to the late 1970s, the second phase witnessed a transformation in this representation. The Arab woman was depicted as an individual who comprehends that the subjugation she experiences is not her predestined fate. She metamorphoses into a figure who resists conventional norms, embodying an unwavering resolve and defiance. The third stage, stretching from the early 1980s to the current era, exhibits an image of a woman who has partially triumphed in her struggle

but perpetually pursues comprehensive victory. She is characterized as an emancipated and victorious entity. However, it is noteworthy that even during the first phase, co-existing with the traditional portrayal of women, there were narratives presenting a modern woman's image. In the ensuing periods, despite the depiction of the modern woman, there persist narratives sketched by authors who advocate for tradition. The portrayal of traditional female images in modern literature primarily serves not to endorse the traditional female persona, but to highlight the dichotomy between traditional and modern societal roles. This is achieved by juxtaposing both images to incite a cognitive discord in the reader between traditionalism and modernism. Although infrequent, female authors who champion traditional values predominantly strive to represent prominent historical women and distinguished female personalities from the Islamic epoch as praiseworthy models for Arab women to draw inspiration from (Köşeli, 2016, 14-15).

It is essential to comprehend the continued transformation of female representation in Arab society, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of women's evolution within cultural, political, and social spheres. While various depictions of Arab women continue to permeate literature and popular discourse, it is necessary to appreciate the dialectic that exists between tradition and modernity, with both paradigms having their own intrinsic value. Recognizing these complexities can help illuminate the diverse range of experiences faced by Arab women, rather than relegating them to simplistic stereotypes. Moreover, it assists in unraveling the interplay between societal pressures, cultural norms, and individual agency, which shape the course of women's lives in the Arab world. It is also worth noting that the incorporation of historical and Islamic female figures by authors advocating for tradition underscores the importance of role models in reshaping societal perceptions and inspiring future generations of Arab women. Such figures offer a counter-narrative to the image of the subjugated woman, demonstrating the potential for female empowerment and autonomy within the bounds of tradition and religion. The exploration of these divergent paths – a resolute embrace of modernity or a selective return to traditional values – can provide a nuanced understanding of the lived realities of Arab women and their enduring struggle for emancipation and recognition.

## **2.2. Key Female Authors and Their Works**

This examination of the Arab world's literary landscape would not be complete without acknowledging the indelible contributions of its female

authors. Their richly diverse and influential works often encapsulate both the multifaceted identities and lived experiences of Arab women. Several key female authors have illuminated the tension between traditional norms and modern ideals, expertly navigating the intersectionality of cultural, societal, and gender issues within their narratives. These authors have used their works as platforms to engage with and challenge preconceived notions of gender roles and femininity within the Arab world, thereby fostering a more nuanced and complex understanding of these issues. The myriad works produced by these authors span genres, encompassing novels, short stories, essays, and poetry. They often highlight the transformation of women's roles over time, their struggles and achievements in asserting their individuality, and their evolving relationships with societal and cultural norms. Their narratives collectively underscore the undeniable influence of Arab women on their societies and, in turn, the profound impact of these societies on women's identities. Notably, they evoke a sense of the profound resilience and strength of Arab women, even amidst significant challenges and societal constraints. These works thus serve as invaluable windows into the nuanced complexities of Arab womanhood, encapsulating its vibrancy, strength, diversity, and continuous evolution. They form a critical component of the broader Arab cultural and literary canon, enriching it with their distinct and powerful voices.

The opportunity for girls to attain education marked a crucial milestone in the heightened visibility of Arab women within the literary domain, a perk ushered in by the advent of modernization. This development coincided with the publication of works by reform-minded male scholars who had garnered their education in Europe and subsequently shaped the trajectory of their respective nations' westernization. Their discourses frequently delved into women's issues, providing essential insights into the conditions of women in their societies. Additionally, Arab Christians and Jews held a significant role during this time. These groups, due to their earlier connections with their European counterparts compared to Muslim Arabs, were instrumental in setting up missionary schools in various regions of the Arab world, including Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt. Alongside this, the philanthropic efforts of upper-class women facilitated educational activities, collectively ensuring that the importance of girls' education and women's affairs remained a critical focus within the 19th-century Arab discourse. During this era, girls from elite families, including those from the lineage of Muḥammad 'Alī Pasha, had access to education via private tutors. On the other hand, girls from middle and lower-class backgrounds largely



utilized traditional education, engaging predominantly in Quran and Hadith memorization. However, as modern education permeated society, a steady rise was noted in the number of girls from middle and lower-class families attending missionary schools, institutions that had their genesis in the 1830s and 1840s. By 1875, the enrolment stood at 5570, with Egyptians making up more than half of this number at 3000. This figure rose further to 6160 by 1887, with 4000 of these students being Egyptian. Among these pupils, the majority were Egyptian Coptic girls, with a comparatively smaller presence of Muslim girls. In the span from 1863 to 1879, Egypt saw the establishment of a total of 129 private schools, with a significant portion being Catholic or Presbyterian missionary schools (Korkmaz, 2014, 65).

The repercussions of this educational influx became apparent in the subsequent years, as women began to carve out a niche for themselves within various professional and creative sectors, not least of all in the literary field. The seeds sown by the reformist intellectuals, the efforts of missionary schools, and the increased access to education for girls from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, culminated in an unprecedented wave of female literary voices. These educated women, utilizing their newfound literacy and awareness, started to challenge the traditional narratives surrounding Arab women and began to contribute significantly to literary, cultural, and socio-political discourse. They found themselves in unique positions to shed light on the experiences and challenges faced by Arab women and bring these conversations to the fore. Their literary contributions served dual purposes: not only did they provide an outlet for expression, but they also helped shape societal perspectives, slowly challenging and shifting long-held beliefs. These female literary voices were not just reflective but were instrumental in promoting change, and they paved the way for subsequent generations of Arab women to continue to write, speak, and fight for their place in society. The extent of this impact underscores the significance of the educational progress made during this period, underscoring how critical these strides were, not just for individual women, but for the collective progress of the Arab world.

Egypt holds the distinction of being the inaugural country where women's publishing became apparent. It was on November 20, 1892, in Alexandria, that *al-Fatāt*, the earliest women's magazine within the Arab world, was launched by Lebanese-born Hind Nawfal (1875-1957). Consequently, Nawfal holds the pioneering status of being the first Arab woman to introduce a women's magazine. Preceding the inception of women's magazines, women's involvement



in writing for diverse publications was noted. As an illustration, Jalīla Tamrhān, who is celebrated as the first female journalist in the Arab world and an alumna of the midwifery school established by Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha, embarked on the path of authoring scientific articles for *Ya ‘sūb al-ṭibb* magazine, a considerable twenty-seven years before the maiden issue of a women’s magazine in 1865. In her role as the editor of *al-Fatāt*, Nawfal acquainted her readership with the magazine, characterizing it as a repository of scientific knowledge, historical insights, and witticisms. She underscored that their editorial intentions did not encompass areas such as delving into political affairs, engaging in religious discourses, or pursuing research on topics lacking relevance to women. The magazine brought together a significant number of male and female writers under its umbrella, among whom Zaynap Fawwāz (1860-1914) is regarded as a forerunner. *al-Fatāt*, having secured widespread recognition within the Arab world and being issued with roughly forty pages per edition, led to Nawfal earning the sobriquet of “Ummu al-Ṣaḥāfiyyāt”, translating to “The Mother of Female Journalists”. The magazine consistently disseminated articles delineating women’s status in the historical past and during the Middle Ages, drawing comparisons between the conditions of women in its own era and those of earlier periods. For familial considerations, Nawfal had to impose an interruption on the magazine’s publication post the sixth issue, and by the outset of 1894, it concluded its publishing journey. This marked the commencement of a flurry of subsequent women’s magazines making their appearance one after another (Öncel, 2020, 197-199). The termination of *al-Fatāt* was by no means the end of female publishing in the Arab world; rather, it served as a catalyst that stimulated a cascade of subsequent ventures in women’s journalism. These pioneering publications fostered a shift in the representation and participation of women in the public discourse, breaking new ground and challenging conventional societal norms. The tireless efforts of trailblazers like Nawfal did not merely alter the landscape of Arab journalism, but significantly contributed to the transformation of societal attitudes towards gender roles and women’s intellectual contributions. As a result, the legacy of this period extends far beyond the realm of publishing, leaving an indelible mark on Arab history and culture.

In the aftermath of the cessation of *al-Fatāt* magazine, the year 1896 saw the emergence of *al-Firdaws*, a monthly, familial, and scholarly periodical initiated in Cairo by Lūyizā Ḥabbālīn. Concurrently, the Lebanese publisher Salīm Sarkīs launched *Mir ‘āt al-ḥasnā*, a fortnightly publication that sustained

for approximately a year. On the cusp of the 20th century, specifically on January 31, 1898, *Anīs al-jalīs*, a scientific and literary periodical, began its publication run in Alexandria under the proprietorship of Alaxandrā Afīnū (1872-1927), a figure known for her diverse interests in sports, equestrianism, and hunting. Marketed as a “scientific, literary, and entertaining women’s magazine”, *Anīs al-jalīs* included research articles exploring diverse subjects such as matrimony, female education, dissolution of marriage, polygamy, and the role of women in political spheres. In 1898, a statistical piece published in the magazine presented the population of Egypt as ten million, including four million children and three million women, mirroring the number of men. Of these three million women, thirty-one thousand were students, thus accounting for one percent of the population. Once foreign women were excluded, the percentage of literate women fell to five in a thousand. The magazine *Anīs al-jalīs* exhibited its endorsement of Qāsim Amīn’s book, *Tahrīr al-mar’a* (The Liberation of Women) when it was published in 1899. The publication upheld its existence for a decade, operating consistently from 1898 to 1908 (Öncel, 2020, 197-199). Following the cessation of *Anīs al-jalīs* in 1908, the early 20th century experienced a proliferation of women’s magazines in the Arab world. These publications reflected a growing consciousness about women’s rights and the necessity for gender equality. It is important to underscore the broader social, political, and cultural contexts in which these publications operated, as they were instrumental in carving out a space for women’s voices and ideas in public discourse. Their exploration of varied topics related to women’s lives and societal roles, and their commitment to women’s education, emancipation, and empowerment, had a profound influence on shaping societal attitudes and transforming traditional norms. Therefore, the advent and development of women’s periodicals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries served as a catalyst for the feminist movement in the Arab world, paving the way for future advancements in women’s rights.

‘Ā’isha al-Taymūriyya (1840-1902) is recognized as one of the initial female literary figures to make significant contributions to Arabic prose and poetry. As I have authored an independent scholarly article concerning this inspiring figure in Turkish, the objective here is to offer a succinct synopsis of her life and achievements. al-Taymūriyya, a Turkish origin author of prose and verse, was born in Egypt. Her importance within modern Arab literature is primarily attributed to her status as a pioneering feminist and a leading figure among Egyptian female writers and poets. Within the context of the modern era, al-Taymūriyya is referenced as one of the inaugural female authors to

compose works in Arabic, making it plausible to view her as a harbinger of the initial women's movement within the Arab world. Hailing from an aristocratic lineage, 'Ā'isha was the offspring of bureaucrat Ismā'īl Pasha Taymūr (d. 1289/1872), whose role could be compared to the contemporary position of a Minister of Foreign Affairs. She was the sibling of esteemed scholar, researcher, and historian Aḥmad Taymūr Pasha (d. 1371/1930) and the maternal aunt of Maḥmūd Taymūr (d. 1393/1973) and Muḥammad Taymūr (d. 1339/1921), both acknowledged as forerunners in the realm of modern Egyptian short story composition. Exhibiting a fervent affinity for literature from her early years, al-Taymūriyya commenced benefiting from the literary works housed within her father's personal library. In accordance with the societal norms of the time, she pursued her education within the seclusion of the harem, occasionally partaking in assemblies overseen by her father. al-Taymūriyya is identified as one of the first poets to advocate for gender equality. Towards the final phase of her life, she engaged in correspondence with various female intellectuals and acted as a source of inspiration for the advent of Egyptian feminism (Ayyıldız, 2023, 183).

al-Taymūriyya's writings were a testament to her profound understanding and appreciation of Arab heritage and culture. Her literary style and thematic concerns significantly influenced the trajectories of feminist thought and literary creation in the Arab world. Her tireless advocacy for gender equality not only challenged prevailing societal norms but also catalyzed a more inclusive discourse concerning the role of women within Arabic literature and society. Her pioneering efforts represent a remarkable testament to the power of the written word to effect change and inspire generations. The influence of al-Taymūriyya's work extended beyond her lifetime, with her writings continuing to be a significant source of inspiration and study in contemporary feminist and literary research. Her life and work exemplify the potential of literature to question and challenge societal norms, offering a significant case study for the understanding of the evolution of feminist thought within the Arab world. As scholars continue to investigate the historical development of women's movements, figures like al-Taymūriyya are essential, reminding us of the powerful voices that initiated these transformative dialogues.

Originating from Lebanese lineage, Warda al-Yāzījī (1838–1924) distinguishes herself as another key figure amongst the trailblazing female literati. Born in the coastal town of Kafrushimā, Lebanon, in 1838, al-Yāzījī's familial line emanates from a scholarly and literary heritage that made significant contributions to the Arab literary resurgence during the period of Ottoman rule.

Her father, Shaykh Nāṣif al-Yāzījī (1800-1871), a distinguished Arabic linguist, journalist, and poet, has bequeathed three dīwāns and a linguistic dictionary. He held prestigious teaching positions for Arabic language instruction at the Greek Catholic Patriarchal School, Bustānī State School, and the American College in Beirut. Demonstrating prodigious aptitudes for memorization and calligraphy, Nāṣif fulfilled the role of scribe for Amīr Bashīr al-Shihābī (1789-1840), offering twelve years of service until the conclusion of al-Shihābī's reign in 1840. The profound influence of the patriarch significantly sculpted the family's literary tradition. Warda al-Yāzījī's sibling, Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī (1848-1906), emerged as the most prominent among his brothers and sisters. Emulating his father, he not only completed many unfinished works but also served as an Arabic teacher at the Greek Catholic Patriarchal School and penned two linguistic dictionaries. Noteworthy is Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī's pioneering work in the field of criticism within modern Arabic literature, even if these explorations did not extend beyond the emulation of classical era critique. The youngest sibling, Khalīl al-Yāzījī (1856-1889), despite not attending formal education during his formative years, learned literacy skills from Warda. He mirrored his father and elder brother's path, serving as an Arabic instructor and compiling a dictionary. Numerous additional notable figures can be found within Warda's lineage. Initial instruction in Arabic, imparted by her father, ignited Warda al-Yāzījī's predilection for poetry. During his periods of absence from the city, he facilitated her poetic development through epistolary exchanges in verse, contributing to Warda's initiation into writing poetry by the tender age of thirteen. Her childhood witnessed a familial relocation to Beirut, where she pursued education at the American Girls' Mission School. The rudimentary principles of French were instilled in her by a Christian woman of Jewish descent. Nestled within a large family, Warda al-Yāzījī played an instrumental role in her younger siblings' education, alongside a stint as an instructor at a private academic institution (Yüçetürk Kurtulmuş, 2019, 15-16).

In spite of the societal constraints of her era, Warda al-Yāzījī's contributions to Arabic literature are exemplary. Her literary works bear the mark of her extensive education and deep understanding of both Arabic and French, demonstrating an intricate interplay between the two languages. Not only did she creatively contribute to the literary scene, but she also facilitated the intellectual growth of her siblings, thus perpetuating the family's scholarly tradition. Moreover, as an educator at a private institution, she played a significant role in shaping the minds of a generation. The legacy of al-Yāzījī's life and work serves as a testament to the profound impact of women in the literary field,

thereby adding to the scholarly conversations around female empowerment and intellectual contributions during her time. al-Yāzījī's multifaceted life offers numerous directions for further scholarly investigation. Understanding her role as a pioneering female writer, a devoted educator, and an influential figure in her family and wider community would provide deeper insight into the Arab literary scene of the 19th century. The socio-cultural dynamics of her era, the impact of her familial lineage, and her personal journey to becoming a literary figure could be subjects of great interest for those exploring the intersection of gender, literature, and history in the Arab world.

Hailing from Lebanon, Zaynab Fawwāz (1860-1914) holds a distinctive position as an emblematic figure among female authors in the sphere of Arab literature. The pivotal influence of Fawwāz on the evolution of modern Arab literature encapsulates the transitional period from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. In her era, her recognition was not as pronounced as that of her contemporaries such as Mayy Ziyāda (1886-1941), Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif (1886-1918), 'Ā'isha al-Taymūriyya, and Nabawiyya Mūsā (1886-1951). Nevertheless, Fawwāz's contributions have been posthumously acknowledged, solidifying her position as one of the innovative, yet under-recognized authors in the annals of literary history. This relative obscurity is, in part, a reflection of her socio-economic origins. Fawwāz was neither a product of an aristocratic lineage nor a privileged household; rather, her upbringing was marked by humble beginnings in a rural locale, akin to the predominant farming communities of that era. In recognition of her literary prowess and her assertive character, Fawwāz was revered by her contemporaries, who bestowed upon her the title "Ḥujja al-Nisā'", underscoring her integral role as a female spokesperson. She also earned the epithet "Durr al-Sharq", or "Pearl of the East". Fawwāz was born in a modest village located in Jabal 'Āmil, a southern region of Lebanon. Constrained by her family's economic circumstances, her early years were spent serving in the palace of 'Alī Bak al-Es'ad al-Ṣaghīr (1821-1865), the ruler of Tabnīn Castle in South Lebanon. This palace served as the initial milieu for her scholarly pursuits and literary aspirations. Throughout her tenure at the palace, Fawwāz piqued the interest of Fāṭima al-Khalīl, the consort of the palace owner, Ali Bey, who was renowned for her deep-seated passion for knowledge, literature, poetry, and prose. Fāṭima al-Khalīl took Fawwāz under her wing, imparting her with literacy skills and nurturing her intellectual curiosity. Inspired by her mentor, Fawwāz committed the Quran to memory and garnered a comprehensive understanding of the nuances of the Arabic language, thereby setting the stage for her to make

a valuable contribution to the literary domain (Duran Gürbüz, 2022, 123-124). Fawwāz's progression in the literary field, it should be noted, was not an ordinary feat, especially considering the socio-cultural constraints of her time. Being a woman in a society predominantly characterized by patriarchal norms, her ascension in the domain of literature posed a testament to her relentless determination and tenacity. Fawwāz's journey, from her humble beginnings to her status as a revered literary figure, epitomizes the power of resilience and perseverance in overcoming societal barriers.

Historical records substantiate that Zaynab Fawwāz eventually relocated to Beirut, in which she entered the employ of an Egyptian family. This move resulted in her subsequent journey to Egypt with them. Upon her arrival in Egypt, Fawwāz intrigued intellectual communities, particularly drawing the attention of Ḥasan Ḥusnī Pasha al-Ṭuwayrānī (1850-1897), a newspaper owner of Turkish descent who ran al-Nīl. Fawwāz sought knowledge from al-Ṭuwayrānī in *ṣarf* (morphology), *bayān* (expression), and *'arūḍ* (metrical science), while she obtained lessons in *naḥw* (syntax) and *inshā'* (composition) from Saykh Muḥy al-Dīn al-Nabhānī. Fawwāz's intellectual pursuits and continuous refining of her talent culminated in the publication of her work in newspapers like *al-Nīl*, *Lisān al-ḥāl*, *al-Mu'ayyad*, *al-Livā'*, and *al-Ittiḥād al-Miṣrī*. She ventured into audacious writing on societal issues and gender-specific problems in magazines such as *al-Fatāt* and *Anīs al-Jalīs*. These pieces, fervently advocating for women's rights and gender equality, arguably represent some of the inaugural writings on women in the Egyptian media. Her emphasis in these works was particularly on women's education, accentuating the irreparable nature of mistakes made by women during child-rearing, a task no teacher could subsequently correct. Nevertheless, she distinguished herself from other writers by underscoring the importance for women to adhere to religious standards and the edict on veiling. The religious, cultural, and social investigation and essays authored by Zaynab were later published under the collection, *al-Rasā'il al-Zaynabiyya*. While all assessments, whether they be positive or negative, are put into perspective, it is clear that Fawwāz's contributions have been instrumental in the genesis and evolution of modern Arab literature. It can be asserted that her ability to assimilate the rich Arab cultural heritage within her works, derive inspiration from its themes and styles, and integrate this heritage with the novel literature arising from the West is a distinct hallmark of her contribution to the literary sphere (Fazlıoğlu, 2013, 44/359-360).



Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif was an influential figure in the advancement of contemporary Arab women's literature and feminist consciousness. Her role extended beyond a participant in Egypt's social and cultural history; she emerged as a symbol for women owing to the dynamic role she embraced during her relatively short life. Nāṣif catalyzed modern thought and served as an archetype during a crucial stage of enlightenment and intellectual transformations in the annals of modern Egyptian history. Nāṣif was widely recognized in the Arab world under the sobriquet Bāḥitha al-Bādiya, signifying a "researcher of the desert". She was born into a prominent family in Cairo in 1886, as the progeny of Ḥifnī Nāṣif, a distinguished scholar, poet, and literary savant of Egypt. She was not only a writer, poet, and orator but also a vehement advocate for women's rights. Her initial mentorship was under the tutelage of her father, contributing to her growing prominence, as she published articles under the pen name Bāḥitha al-Bādiya in various newspapers. From her childhood, Bāḥitha al-Bādiya committed numerous chapters of the Quran to memory, testament to her father's commitment to her literary and poetic education. Nāṣif embarked on her journey of poetry writing at the precocious age of thirteen. Her academic journey began at home, progressed to a French school, and eventually led her to the girls' division of the 'Abbās Primary School, established in 1895. She obtained her primary school diploma at the age of fourteen in 1900, and completed her education at a school for female teachers. Her teaching career led her back to the girls' division of the 'Abbās Primary School (Çiçek, 2021, 8-9; 'Alī, 2022, 74).

Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif distinguished herself through her extraordinary intellect, unwavering diligence, and profound seriousness. Despite receiving a marriage proposal arranged by her father's friend, 'Abd al-'Azīz Fahmī, she chose not to accept it. Instead, in 1907, she decided to marry 'Abd al-Sattār al-Bāsil. Following her marriage, Nāṣif discovered that 'Abd al-Sattār had a prior marriage and a daughter. Despite the subsequent heartache, she chose to preserve her husband's honor by refraining from disclosing the situation. Within a short span, she ascended to a leadership position among advocates for women's rights. Nāṣif contributed articles in Arabic, Turkish, French, German, and English newspapers, advocating for women's rights, emphasizing the importance of girls receiving an education equivalent to boys, critiquing the deleterious effects of polygamy, and cautioning against the pitfalls of Egyptian men marrying foreign women. She is remembered as one of the pioneering Egyptian Muslim women who championed women's rights and wrote extensively on the subject

in Egypt. She delivered numerous lectures at the headquarters of the *Jarīda* newspaper, the official publication of the Ḥizb al-Umma party. Her writings and lectures epitomized her virtuous spirit, elevated moral standards, innate intelligence, solid religious comprehension, and unwavering commitment to societal reform. Through her life and work, Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif continues to be an enduring beacon in the struggle for women's rights (Çiçek, 2021, 8-9; 'Alī, 2022, 74). Following her transition, the legacy of Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif continues to reverberate profoundly in contemporary discourse on women's rights and literature. As a testament to her influence and far-reaching impact, her life and contributions are commemorated and studied in academic institutions, both within the Arab world and globally. Her writings remain crucial texts in the exploration and understanding of feminist consciousness within the Arab literary canon.

Nabawiyya Mūsā (1886-1951) stands as a significant figure within the panorama of women's movements in Arab literature. Recognized as one of the preeminent women educators and feminists in Egypt, her work in these spheres has garnered critical attention. Along with Hūdā Sha'rāwī (1879-1947), she established the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923. This organization, under Mūsā's strategic guidance, affirmed its commitment to the belief that the emancipation of women could be facilitated primarily through the transformative power of education. A collection of her essays, principally composed of substantiated arguments for the appropriate employment of women, were subsequently published under the title *al-Mar'a wa al-'amal*. It should be noted that within this volume, Mūsā presents certain restrictions on the fields in which she deemed suitable for women's employment. Mūsā's ideology posits the primary role of women in the workplace as being committed to enhancing the welfare of their female counterparts. In her capacity as a nationalist, she was unequivocally in favor of Egyptians, with a particular emphasis on women, receiving vocational training, over reliance on skilled foreigners and colonial administrators (Korkmaz, 2014, 73-74)."

Born in 1886 into a middle-class family in the district of Zagazig, Mūsā's familial background did not confer the same privileges enjoyed by some of her feminist contemporaries. Following her father's death at her birth, Mūsā was raised by her illiterate mother. Her educational journey began at home, where she independently learned Arabic through her brother's books and committed the Quran to memory. Despite resistance from her mother and wider community to pursue high school for teacher training, Mūsā remained unwavering in her



ambition to become an educator. By 1906, she achieved this goal and returned to the ‘Abbās primary school as a teacher, working alongside her contemporary, Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif. Her impassioned disposition was instrumental in her critique of the discriminatory wage practices that resulted in female teachers earning significantly less than their male counterparts, a critique which did not elicit amiable responses from British officials. In 1907, she found herself in the midst of controversy once more when she applied to the British Ministry of Education to undertake the French baccalaureate exam, an opportunity traditionally reserved for men. Despite being granted permission to sit the exam in a separate classroom—an act seen as a form of humiliation—it has been argued that her achievement of passing the exam did not constitute a significant accomplishment for women, given that no other Egyptian woman managed to pass this exam until 1928. Mūsā’s academic achievements, coupled with her ranking as thirty-fourth among three hundred candidates, attracted considerable media attention. Despite receiving numerous marriage proposals as a direct consequence of her academic success, she declined all offers. This decision was largely due to prevailing societal norms that prohibited married women from teaching. Above all, it is apparent that Mūsā harbored a distinct aversion towards the institution of marriage, and, more pointedly, sexuality, which she perceived as bestial and disagreeable. This sentiment is captured in her words: “I would prefer to live as his master instead of being a man’s servant (Korkmaz, 2014, 73-74).” In retrospect, Mūsā’s life and work provide a rich tapestry of insights about the evolution of feminism in Arab literature and culture. Her unrelenting commitment to women’s education, professional advancement, and overall welfare embodies the spirit of her time and significantly contributes to our understanding of the feminist movements within this particular milieu. Navigating the nuanced interplay of cultural, societal, and personal factors, she effectively challenged prevailing norms and left an indelible mark on the feminist discourse.

Mūsā’s memoirs, characterized by their incisive humor, traverse an expansive scope of themes. This includes recollections of her childhood, experiences of navigating gender inequalities, detailed criticisms and insights regarding the Egyptian educational system, as well as subtle and pronounced forms of activism against entrenched gender bias. A testament to the latter is her silent decision to cease wearing the face veil and her overt refusal to marry and enduring struggle for wage parity. Her narratives recount interactions with Egyptian and British authorities within the realm of education, delivered in an

unadorned, frequently dryly ironic, and sometimes brazenly sarcastic tone. The events she describes encompass a significant historical timeline, from the era of British colonial rule in Egypt, persisting through the final years of Ottoman influence, and extending into the initial phases of Egyptian independence. It is noteworthy that Mūsā's narratives began to emerge publicly during a critical juncture of transformation in Egyptian society (Civantos, 2013, 6).

The enduring relevance of women's narratives within the realm of literature finds particular resonance in the writings of influential women authors, such as Nabawiyya Mūsā, a stalwart in the history of Arab literature and feminism. Her pioneering contributions extend beyond the sphere of education into the world of literary arts, where her powerful words have served to enlighten, challenge, and inspire. One such example is encapsulated in the subsequent poem composed by Mūsā, which unveils the everyday experiences of women through the metaphor of a pot vendor in the marketplace. As we engage with the verses, we are invited to navigate the intricate interplay of societal norms, gender roles, and women's agency as captured by Mūsā's evocative poetry.

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|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. هل تَعْرِفِينَ بلا تواني | في السُّوقِ بائعةَ الأواني |
| 2. لا شكَّ أعرِفُ شكَلَهَا  | تقني الأواني كلَّها        |
| 3. ثنَّتانِ مَنَّا تعرفانِ  | في السوقِ بائعةَ الأواني   |
| 4. ثنَّتانِ مَنَّا واثنتانِ | يَعْرِفْنَ بائعةَ الأواني  |
| 5. مِن بَيْنِنا أضحى ثمانِي | يَعْرِفْنَ بائعةَ الأواني  |
| 6. مَنَّا ثمانِ وثمانِي     | يعرفنَّ بائعةَ الأواني     |
| 7. نحنُ الجَمِيعُ بلا تواني | نَعْرِفُ من باعِ الأواني“  |

“1. Do you know, without hesitation, the pot vendor in the marketplace?

2. No doubt, I know her shape, she shapes all pots skillfully.

3. Two of us know the seller of pots in the market.

4. Two of us, and two more, recognize the seller of pots.

5. Among us, eight have come to know the seller of pots.

6. From among us, countless know the pot-seller.

7. All of us, without hesitation, know the one who sells the pots (Mūsā, 2019, 84).”

The poem in consideration serves as a compelling exploration of women's identity, visibility, and the shared communal knowledge of their existence and their roles in society. It employs the metaphor of the pot vendor, a figure traditionally associated with the marketplace and often, women's labor in societies where women are the purveyors of such domestic goods. The opening verse initiates an inquiry about the recognition of the pot vendor, a woman operating in the public sphere. The reference to the pot vendor is poignant as it subtly interrogates the social invisibility of women in the public domain, while also alluding to the essential role they play in the everyday life of the community. Despite her visibility in the marketplace, she remains largely unrecognized and unappreciated, highlighting the paradox of women's visibility and invisibility in society. The subsequent verses see an increase in the number of individuals who acknowledge the existence and the role of the pot vendor. What begins as an individual recognition gradually extends to a collective acknowledgement, demonstrating the power of communal knowledge and shared experiences. This reflects the process through which the visibility of women and their roles in society are often acknowledged - beginning with individual recognition and gradually expanding to broader societal recognition.

The poem makes a significant statement about the recognition of women's work, skill, and their crucial role in the market economy. The pot vendor's skills are acknowledged explicitly, as she shapes all pots skillfully, signifying women's critical contributions to craftsmanship and the marketplace, often overlooked or undervalued in patriarchal societies. Furthermore, the progression from a singular person knowing the pot vendor to the recognition of her existence by the entire community suggests the expanding consciousness of women's roles and their visibility in the public sphere. The shift from "two of us" to "all of us" highlights the necessity of collective recognition and the validation of women's roles in public and professional spaces. Finally, the concluding verse unequivocally states that all, without hesitation, know the one who sells the pots, suggesting an eventual and undeniable acknowledgment of women's visibility and contribution to society. This can be read as a call for universal recognition and appreciation of women and their significant roles in all spheres of life. Overall, the poem can be perceived as a nuanced critique of societal attitudes towards women and their work, serving as an ardent call for the wider recognition of women's roles and contributions in public and private spheres.

Mayy Ziyāda stands out as an instrumental figure in the evolution of feminine consciousness within the sphere of Arabic literature (al-Tūnjī, 2001,

170). Mayy Ziyāda, whose original name was Mārī Ilyās Ziyāda, was born in the city of Nazareth in 1886. Ziyāda, a poet, prose writer, and translator of Syro-Lebanese origin, migrated to Egypt during the early 1900s, a period when a significant number of intellectuals from the same region made the same journey. Her father hailed from Lebanon, while her mother was from Palestine. Like her mother, Ziyāda was raised in an Orthodox family, with her father being a Maronite. As a result, she attended religiously-led institutions for her education, beginning in Nazareth and continuing in ‘Ayn Ṭūra (Lebanon) and Beirut after her family relocated there in 1899. The family returned to Nazareth in 1903 when Ziyāda was 17, which marked the beginning of her independent and sensitive character, a trait that was soon reflected in her poems that she wrote in French when she preferred to be alone with her thoughts and dreams. Mayy Ziyāda’s initial forays into publication involved contributing essays and translated works of fiction to *al-Maḥrūsa*, a journal that her father edited. Additionally, she anonymously published a collection of poems in the French language. Ziyāda’s association with Aḥmad Luṭṭī al-Sayyid and Ya‘qūb Ṣarrūf led her to complement her education in English and French with a deep immersion in Arabic heritage. Her interests in women’s status and roles were deepened by her association with feminist leader Hudā Sha‘rāwī and writer Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif. Ziyāda delivered numerous speeches, essays, and biographical-literary studies on women writers, exploring the topic extensively (Malina, 1991, 187; Booth, 1998, 2/826-827).

During the 1920s and 1930s, Mayy Ziyāda produced the bulk of her literary output. She pursued her higher education at the newly established Egyptian University in Cairo. Ziyāda’s debut poetry collection, “Fleurs de rêve,” was written in French. In addition, she composed biographies of three prominent female writers of her era: Warda al-Yāzījī, ‘A’isha Taymūr, and Bāḥitha al-Bādiya. Ziyāda played an active role in the Women’s Refinement Union (al-Ittiḥād al-Nisā’ī al-Taḥdhībī) and the Ladies Literary Improvement Society (Jam‘iyya al-Raḡy al-Adabī lil-Sayyidāt), both of which were established in 1914 and included figures such as Hudā Sha‘rāwī, Nabawiyya Mūsā, and Bāḥitha al-Bādiya. Ziyāda founded a literary salon at her father’s home in Cairo in 1914, where men and women could engage in literary discussions together for the first time (Aytaç, 2002, 72). Mayy Ziyāda’s salon was a notable activity that attracted the intelligentsia of her era on a weekly basis. The salon was attended by prominent figures such as Ya‘qūb Ṣarrūf, a Syrian-Lebanese immigrant

who held a significant role in the Egyptian press, the previously mentioned Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid, the poet al-‘Aqqād who held a leading position in the Dīwān school, as well as the poet al-Māzinī, who was also a member of the Dīwān school. The poet Khalīl Muṭrān, whose work falls between neoclassicism and neoromanticism, and the renowned writer Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, as well as foreign visitors such as the American-English storyteller Henry James were also among the guests. Mayy Ziyāda’s diplomatic skills played a significant role in ensuring that her guests, who belonged to diverse cultures and often held contrasting political views, got along well with each other (Malina, 1991, 190).

Mayy Ziyāda is recognized as the first female poet to provide a distinct feminine voice in poetic expression while simultaneously breaking away from the constraints of traditional forms. Due to her Western-style education, she was proficient in several European languages and possessed a general familiarity with Western literature, philosophy, and social thought. As her familiarity and proficiency in the Arabic language deepened, Mayy Ziyāda acknowledged its aptness as a more fitting mode for conveying Arab cultural identity. Her fascination with the philosophical and aesthetic concepts advanced by the Mahjari poets, who were Arab exiles that settled in North America during the early 20th century, proved to be highly influential. Notably, she drew inspiration from the preeminent and prolific member of the group, Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān, whose romantic and mystical ideas resonated with her own artistic sensibilities (Benson, 1989, 104). Mayy Ziyāda was a writer who aimed to bring about societal reform through her works. Her writings were characterized by their consistent focus on social issues. While her ideas were typically moderate and transparent, the presence of a depth not easily comprehended in her writings suggests the influence of her introverted and melancholic nature. Emotions played a significant role in her works, as she sought to effect change through emotional and aesthetic impact, even while appealing to the intellect of her readers (Ayyıldız, 2004, 29/498-499).

### **2.3. Themes and Styles in Women’s Writing**

In the historical trajectory of Arabic literature, women writers and poets have carved their own distinct niche, contributing significantly to the richness and diversity of the corpus. Their roles have extended beyond the conventional boundaries, delving into an expansive array of genres and forms that have broadened the literary landscape. From the lyrical verses of classical poetry

to the thought-provoking narratives of modern prose, women authors have demonstrated their literary prowess and creative versatility. Furthermore, women have also made significant strides in prose, contributing to genres such as novels, short stories, and essays. Their narratives often provide insights into the lived realities of women, challenging societal norms and inspiring discussions on women's roles and rights.

In the nascent stages of modern Arabic literature, female voices emerged, drawing heavily upon the aesthetic principles and thematic motifs of the classical period. This embrace of the classical literary tradition signaled a desire to connect with a rich literary history, even as these women poets sought to carve out spaces for their unique perspectives within that tradition. The poetic output during this period saw an intermingling of gendered voices, reflecting a concerted endeavor towards a literary renaissance and the development of an Arabic literary modernity. The classical tradition provided a repository of models, genres, and stylistic devices from which these women could draw. This connection with the past was not a mere replication of traditional forms; rather, it was a re-interpretation, a dynamic dialogue with the literary heritage. By aligning themselves with the classical poetic form, women poets were able to negotiate their poetic authority within the traditionally male-dominated literary canon.

The neoclassical approach, as it has been termed, played a pivotal role in shaping the poetry of women during this early modern period. The profundity of this influence is evident in the way it mirrored the stylistic preferences of their male counterparts, who themselves were in the throes of this literary renaissance. Imbuing their verses with elements from the classical period, these women skillfully adapted the established literary conventions, deftly weaving their distinct perspectives into the traditional poetic structure. The impact of the neoclassical movement extended beyond merely stylistic choices, informing the thematic concerns and the ideological underpinnings of their works. Women poets employed the established themes from the classical period – love, beauty, longing, and nature, among others – but introduced subtle shifts in perspective, often subverting the traditional narrative to articulate their lived experiences and assert their presence in the poetic discourse.

Moreover, in adapting to the neoclassical approach, women poets reimagined and reinvented the aesthetic parameters of the poetic form, contributing to the evolution of Arabic poetry. Their poetic works exhibit a sophisticated blend of the classical ethos and their contemporary sensibilities,

marking a departure from the strictly male lens that had largely dominated the Arabic literary canon until then. As these women poets deftly navigated the poetic landscape, their verses became sites of both continuity and change, interweaving the old with the new in a resplendent tapestry of thought and expression. Through their engagement with the classical and neoclassical traditions, these poets advanced the progress of Arabic literature, shaping its trajectory and enriching its repertoire. Indeed, the early period of modern Arabic literature, marked by a rekindled interest in the classical tradition and the rise of the neoclassical approach, served as a critical juncture for women poets. The period witnessed the emergence of a vibrant, dynamic feminine poetic voice, imbuing the literary landscape with renewed vitality and a wealth of diverse perspectives.

Warda al-Yāzījī's engagement with the Neoclassical Arabic tradition is a fascinating study in the fusion of classical form and innovative content. One of her more striking applications of this tradition is the creation of a *mu'āraḍa* or *poetic contrast*. This form of poetry demonstrates a skillful interplay between maintaining the metrical and rhyme structure of a chosen classical piece while introducing fresh and often provocative imagery. al-Yāzījī, as part of her unique poetic composition, has chosen an exemplary *qaṣīda*—a form of classical Arabic poetry—as her template. This was originally penned by the renowned Abbasid poet, Ibn Zurayq al-Baghdādī (d. 420/1029). By consciously selecting such an influential piece of the classical Arabic canon as her model, al-Yāzījī not only illustrates her respect for the past masters but also engages in a dialogue with this tradition. This engagement, however, is far from a mere mimicry. al-Yāzījī, true to her innovative spirit, infuses the classical form with her distinctive imagery, thereby making the form her own. This allows her to weave a rich tapestry of emotion and thought that resonates with the reader on multiple levels. This approach of blending tradition with innovation typifies the spirit of the neoclassical movement in Arabic literature. It is a testament to a nuanced understanding of the rich literary past, and its reinterpretation in light of the contemporary aesthetic sensibilities and thematic concerns. Further, al-Yāzījī's decision to utilize such a classical form underscores her place within the wider Arab literary tradition and her contribution to its ongoing evolution. Her poetry thus becomes a bridge between the past and the present, connecting the echoes of the Abbasid era with the voices of today. This embodies the core essence of the Neoclassical movement—revering the past, recognizing its influence, and simultaneously shaping the contours of the present literary



landscape. Through her poetry, al-Yāzījī exemplifies this dynamic interplay of tradition and innovation, thereby cementing her place in the annals of Arabic literature.

The composition of Warda, articulated in an array of nine meticulously crafted verses, is presented herein:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| وَجِدَاً وَدَابَّتْ مِنَ الْأَشْوَاقِ أَضْلَعُهُ     | 1. صَبُّ جَرَتْ كَغَوَادِي السَّحْبِ أَدْمَعُهُ       |
| أَضْحَى غَرِيقاً وَتَارَ الْخُبِّ تَلْدَعُهُ         | 2. لَهُ مِنَ الدَّمْعِ بَحْرٌ وَالْفُؤَادُ بِهِ       |
| قَلْبٌ لَهُ سَاقَهُ شَوْقٌ يُشِيعُهُ                 | 3. مَا زَالَ يَصْبُو إِلَى رَبِيعِ أَقَامَ بِهِ       |
| مِنَ اللَّقَاءِ وَلَكِنْ خَابَ مَطْمَعُهُ            | 4. يُعَلُّ النَّفْسَ فِي آمَالِهِ طَمَعاً             |
| لِلْخُبِّ فِي الْقَلْبِ لَا فِي التُّرْبِ يَزْرَعُهُ | 5. يَخْنِي ثِمَارَ الْبُكَاءِ وَالشَّهْدِ مِنْ شَجَرٍ |
| عَلَى غَلِيلِ فُؤَادٍ لَيْسَ تَنْفَعُهُ              | 6. عَجِبْتُ مِنْ أَدْمَعٍ كَالسَّحْبِ هَاطِلَةٍ       |
| يَشْكُو نَوَى شَادِنٍ فِي الْقَلْبِ مَرْتَعُهُ       | 7. وَاعْجَبَ لِصَبِّ مَشُوقٍ لَمْ يَزَلْ أَبَداً      |
| فَسُورَةُ النُّورِ فِيهَا جِلٌّ مُبْدَعُهُ           | 8. حَدِيثٌ وَلَا حَرَجٌ عَنْ حُسْنِ طَلْعَتِهِ        |
| بِالْكَرْخِ مِنْ فَلَكَ الْأَزْرَارِ مَطْلَعُهُ      | 9. يَمِيسُ غُصْنًا وَيَبْدُو وَجْهَهُ قَمَراً         |

“1. A passionate young man, his tears flow like clouds, and his ribs melt from longing.

2. He has a sea of tears, and with it, his heart becomes a drowning victim, and the fire of love scorches him.

3. He continues to yearn for a place where his heart resides, a longing that guides him.

4. He feeds his soul with hopeful greed of reunion, but his expectation is in vain.

5. He reaps the fruits of crying and sleeplessness from a tree of love in the heart, not in the soil.

6. I was astonished by the tears like clouds of pelting rain on the heart’s heat, which the rain could not extinguish.

7. Be amazed at the constant outpouring of desires that lament the absence of a gazelle cub living in the heart.



8. Speak what you will about the beauty of his appearance; the Surah of Light (i.e., *Nūr*) glorifies his Creator.
9. He shakes a branch, and his face appears like the moon rising over al-Karkh from the celestial sphere of stars (al-Yāzījī, 1887, 32-33)."

Warda al-Yāzījī's poem elegantly navigates through a labyrinth of complex emotions and intricate metaphorical imagery, presenting a profound exploration of unfulfilled longing and its subsequent distress. The verse is a tour de force of the expression of desire, detailing the interior landscape of a passionate young man and his journey of love and longing. The poem commences with a poignant depiction of the protagonist, whose overwhelming passion is visually likened to "tears flow[ing] like clouds", and a corporeal dissolution that manifests as his "ribs melt[ing] from longing". The imagery here serves to illustrate the magnitude of the young man's emotional affliction, effectively situating his experience within a cosmic, even celestial context. The sea of tears, a recurrent trope in the realm of love poetry, underscores the protagonist's emotional inundation. His heart is characterized as a "drowning victim", evoking a sense of tragic, unpreventable succumbing to his fervor. This sentiment is further amplified by the trope of the "fire of love" that "scorches" him, simultaneously illuminating the agony and ecstasy that his passion engenders.

The protagonist's ceaseless yearning for a place "where his heart resides" intimates a profound emotional displacement. The poetic persona's existential quest is driven by a desire for emotional anchoring, embodied by the place of his heart's residency. This "longing" is not simply a passive state but is personified as an active guide, leading him in his pursuit of emotional fulfillment. As the poem proceeds, the unattained desire for reunion is given tangible form. The protagonist "feeds his soul with hopeful greed of reunion", yet his expectation remains unfulfilled, echoing the frustrating dichotomy of desire and its fulfillment. The "fruits of crying and sleeplessness" are not culled from an earthly tree but from the tree of love within the heart, further reiterating the internalization of his emotional experience.

al-Yāzījī skillfully invokes the meteorological metaphor of "tears like clouds of pelting rain", which cannot extinguish the heart's heat. This metaphor serves to underline the intensity of his passion, which remains undeterred despite the torrent of his tears. Moreover, the ceaseless "outpouring of desires" that lament the absence of a "gazelle cub living in the heart"

encapsulates the paradox of love – an entity both present and absent in the heart, simultaneously yearned for and yet lamented. In the subsequent verse, the exploration of the protagonist’s external appearance unfolds, couched within the Islamic framework of the Surah of Light (Nūr) as a testament to the Creator’s glory. This verse resonates with a sense of transcendent beauty, as the Creator’s glorification is reflected in the protagonist’s physical allure. The poem culminates with a final, visually compelling metaphor – the protagonist’s face, appearing “like the moon rising over al-Karkh from the celestial sphere of stars”. The moon, a ubiquitous symbol of beauty in Arabic literature, is invoked here, implying an ethereal beauty that graces the night sky. This celestial metaphor not only crowns the protagonist’s attractiveness but also situates his persona within a larger cosmic context, thus evoking a sense of timelessness and transcendence.

While this *mu‘āraḍa* may appear as an isolated component within Warda al-Yāzījī’s *dīwān*, it indeed encapsulates a significant aspect of her literary contribution. This compositional work stands out, not merely due to its occasional verses, but rather because it houses elements that can be traced back to the most intriguing facets of the neoclassical tradition. These elements range from the deliberate decision to embark on creating a *mu‘āraḍa*, the discerning employment of meter and rhyme, to the intricate layering of intertextual references. al-Yāzījī, in a noteworthy manner, imparts her personal touch to the text, crafting it as a feminine counterpoint to a male poem. This stylistic maneuver aligns her with the tradition of Abbasid *jawāri* and Andalusian female poets, of which she possesses an intimate understanding. Consequently, she embarks on the resurrection of a female literary tradition — a path less trodden during that era but invaluable to the authors of the *nahḍa*, who sought inspiration and affirmation. al-Yāzījī thus emerges as a beacon of this movement (Masullo, 2014, 331).

The fabric of modern Arabic literature is complex and multifaceted, woven with threads of diverse influences and genres. One prominent strand in this tapestry is the neoclassical movement, a resurgence of the classical style that has undeniably influenced numerous literary works. However, it is crucial to underscore that this influence is by no means exclusively exhibited in the writings of female poets. Rather, the essence of the neoclassical movement permeates a broader spectrum of literary contributions, engaging writers of various backgrounds and orientations. This wider reach is especially evident in the ways traditional poetic structures have been subjected to rigorous scrutiny

and reformulation. These exploratory endeavors resonate with the spirit of artistic innovation and inquiry, as they challenge and redefine the accepted norms and parameters of poetic forms. An avant-garde of female poets stands at the forefront of this transformative shift. They have boldly diverged from conventional norms, transcending established poetic forms to create new paradigms in the literary landscape.

The evolution of the free verse movement in contemporary Arabic literature can be significantly attributed to the influence of an eminent female poet from Iraq. Nāzik al-Malā'ika (1923-2007) is acknowledged as a pioneering figurehead within this literary revolution, having conceptualized and established the theoretical underpinnings integral to this avant-garde poetic form. Predominantly constructed in the *qasida* form, conventional Arabic poetry relied heavily upon the establishment of unity and coherence through the implementation of a singular rhyme and metrical scheme. This inevitable primacy of form over substance frequently resulted in the poetry being deprived of essential semantic vigor. In an ambitious endeavor to emancipate Arabic poetry from its traditionally constrictive structure, which often led to a semantical deficit, Nāzik al-Malā'ika ushered in a fresh understanding of free verse. Building on the unifying principle of *taf'ila* in meter, she proposed a flexible approach that empowered poets to diversify the *taf'ila* element and adapt the length of verses as dictated by semantic requirements. Consequently, the *taf'ila* structure of a verse was preserved uniformly, while maintaining the potential to modify from verse to verse in a binary, ternary, or quaternary manner. This implied that the poets adopting free verse were restricted to the utilization of merely seven out of the sixteen traditional *baḥrs*, each of which shared a common *taf'ila* element. These specific *baḥrs* - specifically, *kāmil*, *ramal*, *hazaj*, *rajaz*, *mutaqārib*, *khafīf*, and *wāfir* - were composed of recurrent *taf'ilas*. Other *baḥrs* characterized by varying *taf'ilas* were considered incompatible with this particular style of poetry. Furthermore, Nāzik al-Malā'ika consistently championed the preservation of rhyme within the framework of free verse, positing that it served as an indispensable harmonic and structural component within the poetic construct. Despite the progressive principles proposed by Nāzik al-Malā'ika, they were met with considerable resistance and rejection from an array of poets and critics. The basis for such objections was primarily rooted in the perception that these principles were no less rigid than the tenets of al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad's (d. 175/791) prosody system (Er, 2012, 26). Nevertheless,

such opposition should not detract from acknowledging Nāzik al-Malā'ika's trailblazing initiative in this domain.

Nāzik al-Malā'ika stands as an emblematic figure in the evolution of modern Arabic poetry. She has markedly deviated from the classical poetic traditions, pioneering a novel approach that revolutionized the landscape of Arabic literature. al-Malā'ika masterfully navigated the confines of traditional poetics, challenging their constraints to embrace a modern understanding of literary expression. Her work transcends the normative structures of meter and rhyme, demonstrating a dynamic interplay between form and content, thereby breathing a contemporary spirit into Arabic verse. This modernist perspective was not only innovative but also deeply influential, serving as a touchstone for subsequent generations of poets. It is in the following verses that one can truly witness her remarkable departure from tradition, as al-Malā'ika beautifully intertwines the present with the timeless, carving her own niche within the rich tapestry of Arabic literature:

1. "الَلَّيْلُ يَسْأَلُ مَنْ أَنَا"

2. أَنَا سِرُّهُ الْقَلْبُ الْعَمِيقُ الْأَسْوَدُ

3. أَنَا صَمْتُهُ الْمْتَمَرْدُ

4. قَنَعْتُ كُنْهِي بِالسُّكُونِ

5. وَلَفَفْتُ قَلْبِي بِالظُّنُونِ

6. وَبَقِيتُ سَاهِمَةً هُنَا

7. أَرْنُو وَتَسْأَلْنِي الْقُرُونُ

8. أَنَا مَنْ أَكُونُ؟"

- “1. The night asks, who am I  
 2. I am its deep, troubled, dark secret  
 3. I am its rebellious silence  
 4. I concealed my essence in tranquility  
 5. I enveloped my heart in doubts  
 6. And I remained here, with a pallid face.  
 7. I fix my gaze, and the centuries ask me  
 8. Who am I (al-Malā'ika, 1997, 2/114-117)?”

The poem under discussion offers a profound exploration of identity, specifically as it relates to a woman's experience within a patriarchal context. It employs potent symbolism and metaphorical language to evoke emotional complexity and depth of self-reflection, marking a departure from the conventional portrayal of female characters in classical literature. Commencing with the opening line, "The night asks, who am I", the poem sets a contemplative tone, emblematic of the introspective exploration of identity that permeates the entire piece. The night, traditionally a symbol of mystery and unknowability, is personified, casting a specter of enigma over the ensuing exploration of the self. The subsequent lines, "I am its deep, troubled, dark secret / I am its rebellious silence", amplify the depth of the speaker's internal conflict and underscore her marginalized position within a predominantly patriarchal society. The "troubled, dark secret" indicates an element of concealment, suggesting the suppression of the female voice and identity. Simultaneously, the "rebellious silence" paradoxically alludes to resistance, a refusal to adhere to prescribed social norms.

Further, the notion of self-concealment and uncertainty surfaces again as the speaker declares, "I concealed my essence in tranquility / I enveloped my heart in doubts". These lines exhibit a profound introspection that, while demonstrating a deep yearning for self-understanding, also grapples with the turmoil that accompanies such an endeavor. The act of enveloping the "heart in doubts" elucidates the internal conflicts and dilemmas plaguing the speaker, reflecting her struggle to navigate the expectations of her gender role while seeking her individuality. The lines "And I remained here, with a pallid face. / I fix my gaze, and the centuries ask me / Who am I" build on this contemplative introspection. Here, the speaker seems anchored in a temporal and existential limbo, where the passage of "centuries" underlines a timeless struggle with identity. The "pallid face" serves as a metaphor for emotional exhaustion and the erasure of identity, a consequence of her ceaseless quest for self-definition in a societal structure that consistently undermines her efforts. This poem captures a profound journey of self-discovery and resistance, illustrating a woman's struggle for identity within a system that attempts to silence and marginalize her. It portrays her battle against the constraints of societal expectations while revealing the poignant reality of her existential dilemma.

Nāzik al-Malā'ika proceeds with her poem in this manner:

9. الرِّيحُ تَسْأَلُ مَنْ أَنَا

10. أَنَا رُوحُهَا الْحَيْرَانُ أَنْكَرَيْي الزَّمَانُ

11. أَنَا مِثْلُهَا فِي لَأ مَكَانُ

12. نَبَقَى نَسِيرُ وَلَا انْتِهَاءُ

13. نَبَقَى نَمْرُ وَلَا بَقَاءُ

14. فَإِذَا بَلَّغْنَا الْمُحْنَى

15. جَلْنَا خَاتِمَةَ الشَّقَاءِ

16. فَإِذَا فَضَاءُ!

17. وَالذَّهْرُ يَسْأَلُ مَنْ أَنَا

18. أَنَا مِثْلُهُ جَبَّارَةٌ أَطْوِي عُصُورُ

19. وَأَعُودُ أَمْنَحُهَا النُّشُورُ

20. أَنَا أَخْلُقُ الْمَاضِيَّ الْبَعِيدُ

21. مِنْ فِتْنَةِ الْأَمَلِ الرَّغِيدُ

22. وَأَعُودُ أَدْفُنُهُ أَنَا

23. لِأَصُوعَ لِي أَمْسًا جَدِيدُ

24. عَدُهُ جَلِيدُ“

- “9. The wind asks, who am I  
 10. I am its bewildered spirit, disowned by time  
 11. I am like it, in no place  
 12. We continue to travel, without end  
 13. We continue to pass, with no permanence  
 14. When we reach the bend,  
 15. We deem it the termination of torment,  
 16. Yet [what we encounter is] a void.  
 17. Time asks, who am I

18. I am like it, mighty, folding epochs
19. And I return, granting them resurrection
20. I create the distant past
21. From the allure of gentle hope
22. And I return to bury it, I
23. So that I may reconstruct yesterday anew
24. Its tomorrow is ice (al-Malā'ika, 1997, 2/114-117)"

In the poem by Nāzik al-Malā'ika, the poet personifies elements of the natural world and abstract concepts such as time and space to construct an intimate self-dialogue that grapples with the existential questions of identity and existence. Within the context of women's studies, this poem could be interpreted as a symbolic representation of women's shifting roles and identities within society, particularly within cultural contexts that enforce a strong sense of tradition and conformity. The wind questioning the speaker's identity and the speaker's subsequent identification with the wind's "bewildered spirit" can be seen as an exploration of the fleeting nature of identity. The wind, a symbol of change and impermanence, mirrors the speaker's existential experience, trapped in the ephemeral nature of time and existence. The phrase "disowned by time" hints at feelings of dislocation, of not belonging, which can be understood as a metaphor for women's struggle for recognition and place within societal structures.

When the speaker considers her relationship with time, it resonates with a sense of empowerment. This verse might be interpreted as a commentary on women's roles as creators and preservers of culture and history. The speaker "folds epochs", hinting at an ability to influence and shape history. By resurrecting and recreating the past, the poet underscores the transformative power that women possess. However, this power is not without its burdens as represented by the "allure of gentle hope" that has to be buried to "reconstruct yesterday anew". Finally, the projection of the future as "ice" suggests a confrontation with an uncertain, potentially cold and unwelcoming, future. This could signify the challenges and barriers that women face as they attempt to forge new paths, break away from traditional roles, and create their own identities. The poem thus, through its exploration of self and time, can be viewed as an introspective examination of women's evolving identities and their complex navigation through societal norms and expectations.

The subsequent lines of Nāzik al-Malā'ika's poem read as follows:

25. وَالذَّاتُ تَسْأَلُ مَنْ أَنَا  
 26. أَنَا مِثْلَهَا حَيْرَى أُحْدِقُ فِي الظَّلَامِ  
 27. لَا شَيْءَ يَمْتَحِنِي السَّلَامُ  
 28. أَبْقَى أَسْأَلُ وَالْجَوَابُ  
 29. سَيَظِلُّ يَحْجُبُهُ سَرَابُ  
 30. وَأَظَلُّ أَحْسِبُهُ دَنَا  
 31. فَإِذَا وَصَلْتُ إِلَيْهِ ذَابُ  
 32. وَحَبَا وَغَابُ“

- “25. The Self asks, who am I  
 26. I am like it, lost, staring into the darkness  
 27. Nothing grants me peace  
 28. I remain asking, and the answer  
 29. Will always be obscured by a mirage  
 30. I continue to think it is near  
 31. When I reach it, it melts  
 32. And it hides and disappears (al-Malā'ika, 1997, 2/114-117).”

In this final segment of Nāzik al-Malā'ika's poem, the reader is presented with a profound exploration of selfhood and identity, one that is remarkably resonant within the realm of women's studies. This introspective journey is underscored by a deep yearning for understanding and self-realization, facets often overlooked in traditional societal constructs that tend to circumscribe women's roles and identities. The questioning by the Self is a clear indication of an existential quest for self-knowledge and self-definition. The speaker confesses to being “lost, staring into the darkness”, which could suggest the uncertainty, confusion, and perhaps fear, that accompany the pursuit of self-identity, especially in societies that maintain patriarchal structures or restrictions on female autonomy.

The persistent struggle for peace and the seemingly unattainable answer to her self-query underscore the difficulty and frustration inherent in this journey of self-discovery. This may mirror the struggles women face in asserting their individuality and autonomy within oppressive societal frameworks. The



“mirage” that obscures the answer serves as a poignant metaphor for the elusive nature of self-understanding and, by extension, the complexities faced by women in their pursuit of self-fulfillment against societal norms and expectations. As the speaker gets closer to what she believes to be the answer, the mirage “melts” and “disappears”, suggesting that the journey towards self-knowledge is not a linear process but a dynamic, ongoing exploration. This continual seeking and reshaping of self-identity can be viewed as a reflection of the evolving roles and identities of women in society. The poem, thus, articulates the multifaceted experiences of women’s self-discovery and personal development, offering a rich tapestry of emotions and thoughts that contribute to the discourse on women’s experiences and feminist studies.

In the following verses penned by Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif, one encounters a profound exploration of the female identity and its attributes through the language of metaphor and allegory. Nāṣif’s skillful characterization of a woman as a garden serves as a significant symbol that allows the reader to delve into various dimensions of womanhood, including their inner strength, spirituality, intellectual potential, and their inherent ability to foster life and growth. The poem seamlessly blends aesthetic appreciation with a critical examination of societal expectations, embodying a compelling discourse on the roles, responsibilities, and aspirations of women. Thus, the ensuing analysis of the verses, punctuated by the haunting questions they raise, offers an enriching lens to examine the dynamics of female agency and empowerment:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| كَلَّمَاءٍ مَوْقُوفًا عَلَيْهِ بَقَاؤُهَا   | ”1. إِنَّ الْفَتَاةَ حَدِيقَةً وَحَيَاؤُهَا      |
| حُلَلًا يَرُوقُ النَّاطِرَاتِ رَوَاؤُهَا    | 2. بِفُرُوعِهَا تَجْرِي الْحَيَاةُ فَتَكْتَسِبِي |
| فِيهَا فِيمَا ضَاعَ ضَاعَ بِهَاؤُهَا        | 3. إِيمَانُهَا بِاللَّهِ أَحْسَنُ حُلِيِّةٍ      |
| إِنْ كَانَ فِي غَيْرِ الصَّلَاحِ رِضَاؤُهَا | 4. لَا خَيْرَ فِي حُسْنِ الْفَتَاةِ وَعِلْمِهَا  |
| لِلنَّاسِ مِنْهَا دِينُهَا وَوَقَاؤُهَا“    | 5. فَجَمَالُهَا وَقَفَّ عَلَيْهَا إِنَّمَا       |

“1. Indeed, a girl is a garden, her existence is dependent on her chastity, akin to water.

2. Life courses through her branches (i.e., grandchildren), adorning herself in garments pleasing to observers in their perception.

3. Her faith in God is the finest adornment within her. If lost, her splendor would be lost.

4. There is no merit in a girl's beauty or knowledge if her satisfaction is not in righteousness.
5. Her beauty is granted to her only as a trust, her religion and loyalty to people are her true attributes (Kaḥḥāla, n.d., 5/79)."

Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif's eloquent verse offers a vivid exploration of the female persona through a compelling lens of metaphorical interpretations, deeply embedded in cultural and societal norms. The verse instigates its analysis with the comparison of a young woman to a garden, signifying not just her fertility and life-giving potential, but also hinting towards a sense of protection and nurturing she needs. The imagery of a garden is not only symbolic of beauty and lushness, but also underscores the role of women as life-bearers, just as a garden bears fruit. This initial characterization sets the tone for the rest of the poem, anchoring the reader's understanding of the female identity as a source of life, growth, and vitality. Nāṣif further embroiders this metaphorical portrayal with an emphasis on chastity, positing it as a central element to a woman's existence. This highlights societal norms that intimately tie a woman's value to her purity, presenting an examination of gendered expectations prevalent within the society. Concurrently, the poet's depiction of life coursing through the woman's branches, transforming her into an aesthetically pleasing entity to the observer's eye, underscores societal tendencies to perceive women through the lens of external beauty and their capacity to bear and nurture generations.

Moreover, the poet elevates the discourse to a spiritual level by identifying a woman's faith as her finest adornment. This underscores the importance of spiritual piety and inner beauty in the societal perception of women, hinting towards an internalized conflict between appearance and essence. Similarly, the verse underscores the inherent futility of physical beauty and intellect if not accompanied by righteousness, indicating a societal preference for moral and ethical character over superficial attributes. Lastly, Nāṣif considers a woman's beauty as a bestowed trust, which she should utilize with care. Her true worth lies not in her physical attributes, but rather in her religious devotion and loyalty to her people, reflecting the dominant societal views that seek to imbue women with particular values and behaviors. In a broader context, the poem echoes themes related to women's studies, opening a dialogue about societal expectations, the juxtaposition of external beauty and internal virtues, and the role of women in perpetuating life and culture. By employing the metaphor

of a garden, Nāṣif explores the complex and multifaceted identity of women, blending the physical, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of their existence.

In examining the historical use of literature as a medium of response, it is notable that female poets often employed this art form to counter and address the opinions posited by their male contemporaries. A case in point is the exchange between the celebrated Egyptian poet Aḥmad Shawqī, who composed a poem concerning women, and Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif, a distinguished feminist figure of her time. Nāṣif, in turn, crafted the ensuing verses as a rejoinder to Shawqī's work. Prior to analyzing the content and nuances of Nāṣif's poem, it is imperative to contextualize the literary and societal backdrop against which it was penned. Historically, women have often borne the brunt of stringent critiques and judgments, predominantly originating from male interlocutors. Confronted with discourse that undermines or marginalizes their worth, women have frequently sought solace and expression through the written word. In this regard, literature serves as both a haven and a conduit, enabling the articulation of personal experiences, reflections, and sentiments. Nāṣif's composition exemplifies this phenomenon. Her adept manipulation of verse facilitates the construction of a counterpoint, wherein she not only challenges Shawqī's assertions but also posits a potent affirmation of women's dignity, diversity of roles, and value within society. Her diction and imagery craft a vivid tapestry of the female experience, elucidating the aspirations and cultural intricacies that underpin their lives (Nāṣif, 2014, 111-114):

- |                    |                        |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| وإذا أبيت فقللي    | 1. يا هذه لا تعذلي     |
| أنصفيني لم تفعلي   | 2. أفرطت في لومي ولو   |
| ر روية وتعقل       | 3. لا خير في نجوى بغي  |
| ر ومن حديث البلبلي | 4. ماذا فهمت من الكنا  |
| شنة في ظلال المنزل | 5. حتى سخطت على المعيد |
| مأ بالعرء فتنزلي   | 6. وودت أن تجدي مقاً   |
| بين الدخول فحومل   | 7. أو دمنة عند اللوى   |

“1. O maiden, do not blame me, and if you persist, minimize it.

2. You have excessively criticized me, if you were fair, you would not have done so.

3. No good comes from whispers without insight and reason.

4. What have you understood from the song of the canary and the nightingale's talk?
5. That you became angry about living in the shadows of the house,
6. And you wanted to find a place in the open, so you settle,
7. Or a remnant near al-Liwā, 'twixt al-Dakhūl and Ḥawmal's sprawl (Nāṣif, 2014, 111-114)."

In the given excerpt from the poem by Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif, one observes a poignant exchange that appears to be directed towards a female figure, who is addressed as "maiden" (i.e., *hadhihi*). Through a careful examination of the text, certain themes and rhetorical techniques emerge which merit scholarly attention. Foremost, the poem commences with an appeal to moderation in criticism. This opening salvo conveys an atmosphere of dialogue and serves as an entreaty for understanding and empathy. It can be interpreted as the poet's plea for a more balanced and fair approach to discourse, thereby laying the groundwork for an exploration of gender dynamics. This plea may be seen as reflective of the social context in which Nāṣif was writing, where women's voices and perspectives were often marginalized.

Furthermore, the poem engages with the theme of criticism and its consequences. The reference to "whispers without insight and reason" in the third line alludes to the detrimental impact of unsubstantiated criticisms, potentially reflecting the wider issue of how women's actions and choices were scrutinized in society. The introduction of avian metaphors, particularly the canary and the nightingale, in Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif's poem, can be understood as a literary response to a similar usage in Aḥmad Shawqī's work. It is interesting to note how Nāṣif repurposes this imagery as a means of dialogue with, or a counterpoint to, Shawqī's representations. Aḥmad Shawqī employed avian metaphors in his poetry to convey a variety of emotions and reflections. For instance, in one of his poems, Shawqī uses the imagery of a canary in a cage to symbolize various facets such as beauty, captivity, and longing. The canary, with its melodious voice, represents grace and elegance but is confined to a cage, reflecting the restrictions it faces.

When Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif employs similar avian metaphors, it can be interpreted as her engaging in a dialogue with Shawqī's work. By employing the song of the canary and the nightingale's talk, she seems to be not just echoing but also expanding and challenging the metaphor. In Nāṣif's rendition, the voices of

these birds can be seen as representing the voices of women. This can be seen as an attempt to reclaim or reframe the imagery used by Shawqī; she seems to be suggesting that the voices of women, like the songs of birds, have an intrinsic beauty and wisdom that should be celebrated and not confined. In this literary exchange, Nāṣif is effectively participating in a conversation with Shawqī through the medium of poetry. She is using a shared cultural and literary symbol to communicate an alternative perspective on the themes Shawqī touched upon. This reflects a rich tradition in Arabic literature where poets engage with one another's work, often using shared symbols and metaphors to build upon or challenge each other's ideas.

Furthermore, there is a clear expression of frustration and longing in the text. When the poem references anger about "living in the shadows of the house", it taps into a historical context in which women's roles were largely confined to the domestic sphere. This anger and the desire to find "a place in the open" symbolize a longing for freedom and autonomy, which, within the historical context, can be seen as a representation of women's desire for social emancipation. Additionally, Nāṣif's use of geographical references such as al-Liwā, al-Dakhūl, and Ḥawmal, which are reminiscent of the place names employed in the classical poetry of Imru al-Qays, may symbolize places of refuge or aspiration for the woman. These references could underscore the theme of women's quest for spaces, either tangible or abstract, where they can articulate themselves unrestrained. In conclusion, the excerpt from Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif's poem provides an intricate tapestry of themes, ranging from the quest for fairness in dialogue to the symbolic representation of women's voices and their longing for freedom. The poem skillfully combines rhetorical devices and symbolic language to provide insight into the complex gender dynamics and aspirations of women during Nāṣif's era.

Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif proceeds to develop her composition through the ensuing lines:

عما زعت بمعزل	8. ربُّ الكنار أظنه
والشعر حسن تخيل	9. خالَ الكنانةَ طائراً
قفص النحاس المقفل	10. فحنا على مثواه في
بين الربا والجدول	11. ونعى زمانَ مراحه
ن خلاخلاً في الأرجل	12. والقيد ذلُّ لو يكو
مره بحسن تجمّل	13. وغدا يعزيه ويأ
ز من تقصّى الأجدل	14. ويقول: إن الحبس حر
دة لي هدية مفضل	15. أهدي القصيدة في الجريد
ب إلى سري أمثل	16. كمؤلف يهدي الكتا
ويخصه بتطول	17. يرمي إلى تشريفه
في الناس منذ الأول	18. هي عادة مألوفة
قابلتها بتقبُّل	19. فشكرت مهديها وقد

- “8. The Lord of the Canaries, I believe, is far from what you claim.  
 9. He saw Egypt as a bird’s home, and poetry as a beautiful imagination  
 10. He sympathized with the canary in its locked brass cage.  
 11. And mourned the times of its freedom between the meadows and streams.  
 12. And chains are a humiliation, even if they are mere anklets on the legs.  
 13. But then he comforts it and commands it to beautify itself.  
 14. He says: ‘The cage is a protection from the prowling hawk’.  
 15. He gifted the poem in the newspaper to me as a favored present.  
 16. Like an author presenting a book to a private peer.  
 17. He aims to honor and bestows generosity upon him.  
 18. It’s a common custom among people since ancient times.  
 19. I thanked the presenter, and I accepted it gratefully (Nāṣif, 2014, 111-114).”

In this segment of Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif's poem, there is a reference to "The Lord of the Canaries", which is a suggestive and multifaceted epithet. It could imply a person of literary significance, or it may be symbolic in nature. The poet creates an intricate allegory by comparing the confinement of canaries to the sociocultural restrictions imposed upon women. The canary, often caged and prized for its song, here becomes a potent symbol for the constraints placed on women's voices and freedoms. The poem further explores the duality of captivity by suggesting that the enclosure, which curtails the canary's freedom, is perceived by some as a means of protection against greater dangers. This mirrors a prevalent argument used to justify the confinement of women to the domestic sphere - that it serves as protection against the perceived perils of the outside world. However, the poet seems to criticize this notion by invoking the image of chains as a form of humiliation, highlighting the negative impact of such constraints even if they are disguised as adornments or protective measures.

Moreover, Nāṣif portrays an element of reverence and generosity associated with the act of giving a poem as a gift. She might be alluding to the common practice of literary exchange among intellectuals and poets. This giving of the poem is likened to an author presenting a book to a select peer. This can be seen as an acknowledgment of her own position within the literary community and possibly an affirmation of her rightful place there. This section appears to be inextricably linked to the poem that was presented to Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif by Aḥmad Shawqī as a token of literary exchange. However, Nāṣif exhibits a measured restraint in articulating her reflections, possibly opting for a more nuanced and subtle approach. This could be indicative of a conscious decision to engage in a thoughtful literary discourse without being overtly confrontational, thus maintaining a level of decorum and respect within the intellectual exchange.

Nāṣif graciously acknowledges the gesture of presenting the poem, and by doing so, she further affirms the importance of respectful literary discourse. This acknowledgement might also be seen as a subtle assertion of her stance, taking the poem as a starting point for dialogue, especially concerning the status and representation of women. In this segment, the poet adeptly engages with broader themes of freedom, protection, literary tradition, and the role of women within these contexts, employing the allegory of the canary as a central motif for her critique and reflection.

The literary tapestry woven by Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif is further enriched in the subsequent verses:

ةٌ تلوح للمتأمل	20. هذي الحقيقة يا فتا
معهود أن لا تجهلي	21. لكن جهلت الأمر والـ
في البيت لا في المعمل	22. مجد الفتاة مقامها
ل وعرسه في المنزل	23. والمرء يعمل في الحقو
م البيت إن لم تعمل	24. كم خدمة يقضي نظا
في لبسه والمأكِل	25. من للوليد يعينه
بتلطف وتحيل	26. ويميط عنه أذى الهوى
نة والفظام وما يلي	27. من للرضاعة والحضا
أبدأ بدون تملل	28. من للمريض يحوطه
ب على الطريق الأفضل	29. يجرى على وصف الطيب
من للذخائر والحلي	30. من للآثا يصونه
متزود وموصل	31. من يطعم الغرثان من
رَ تموت إن لم تأكل	32. إن الدواجن والطيو
الحال والمستقبل	33. من يقسم المذخور بين
ت البيت فعل الأكمل	34. من ذا يعلم خادما
رة للخروج فحيهل	35. لكن إذا دعت الضرو
تأتي ولا تتعجلي	36. سيرى كسير السحب لا
م وفضلى النهج الخلي	37. وتنكبي نهج الزحا
تتبرجي أو ترفلي	38. لا تخضعي بالقول أو
رع بالإزار المسبل	39. لا تكنسي أرض الشوا

- “20. This is the truth, O maiden, it is clear to the contemplative.  
 21. But you have misunderstood, and it is unusual for you to misunderstand.  
 22. The glory of a maiden is in her house, not in the factory.  
 23. The man labors in the fields, and his spouse does the work in the house.  
 24. How many household chores would be fulfilled if she does not work?  
 25. Who helps the infant in his clothes and meals?  
 26. And who removes the harm of whim with kindness and trick?”



27. Who is there for breastfeeding, and cradling, and weaning and what follows?
28. Who attends to the patient consistently without irritation?
29. Follows the doctor's instructions on the best path.
30. Who safeguards the furniture, the supplies, and the jewelry?
31. Who will feed the hungry with the provisions and supplies?
32. Indeed, poultry and birds die if not fed.
33. Who divides the saved between the present and the future?
34. Who will instruct the housemaids in perfect actions?
35. But if necessity calls for going out, then be prepared.
36. Proceed slowly, like the moving clouds, don't hurry nor delay.
37. Avoid crowded paths and prefer empty ones.
38. Do not submit to words, or adorn yourself, or be ostentatious.
39. Do not sweep the streets' ground with a long dress (Nāṣif, 2014, 111-114)."

In this section of the poem, Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif engages in a profound discourse that encompasses gender roles, domesticity, and the dignity of women within their societal framework. It is evident that Nāṣif is inviting the reader, particularly women, to engage in introspection and critical thinking. Her address to the "maiden" suggests that her message is aimed primarily at younger women, who may be in the process of forming their perspectives on their roles in society. She begins by alluding to some level of misunderstanding on the part of the maiden, indicating that a more discerning approach is required to comprehend the essence of her message. This sets the stage for the subsequent verses, which delve into the domains of household and family, traditionally associated with women. Nāṣif paints an evocative picture of the household as a sphere in which the woman plays an indispensable role. She highlights the myriad responsibilities that women shoulder, from tending to infants to managing household chores and taking care of the sick. Each of these elements is depicted with an intricate level of detail, indicating the significance and complexity of the tasks that women undertake within the domestic realm. The mention of breastfeeding, for instance, underlines the physical and emotional investment involved in motherhood, while the

management of household goods and provisions speaks to the economic and organizational skills required.

Additionally, there is an undertone of empowerment in her depiction. Rather than portraying these roles as mundane or subservient, she elevates them to a level of critical importance. This can be seen as an effort to reassert the dignity and value of women's work within the home, challenging any notion that it is secondary or inferior to pursuits outside the domestic sphere. As the poem progresses, Nāṣif also acknowledges the possibilities of a woman's presence beyond the household. She advises caution and dignity in such instances, illustrating that the woman's comportment should be characterized by grace and poise. The imagery of moving slowly "like the clouds" conveys a sense of majesty and steadiness. She also counsels against ostentation and submission to external influences, possibly alluding to societal pressures or judgments. This segment of the poem can be analyzed within the broader context of women's studies as an early expression of feminist thought in Arab literature. Through her lyrical and nuanced discourse, Nāṣif engages with the gender norms of her time, giving voice to the intricacies of women's experiences and asserting their dignity. Rather than a simple endorsement or rejection of traditional roles, her work can be seen as an invitation to recognize and honor the complexity and value inherent in women's contributions, both within the household and beyond.

The poem composed by Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif advances with additional depth and complexity in the ensuing lines:

- |                     |                          |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| في الشرع ليس بمعضلٍ | 40. أما السفور فحكمه     |
| من محرم ومحلٍ       | 41. ذهب الأئمة فيه بيّ   |
| هم عند قصد تأهلٍ    | 42. ويجوز بالإجماع منـ   |
| ب فقصرى أو طولي     | 43. ليس النقاب هو الحجا  |
| نهما فدونك فاسألِي  | 44. فإذا جهلتِ الفرق بيـ |
| ة لا مجال لمقولي    | 45. من بعد أقوال الأئمـ  |
| مة وانضمت لعذلي     | 46. فعلام أكثرت الملا    |
| لك مثل نقع الحنظلِ  | 47. وسقبتني من مرّ قو    |
| هب قاسم وأبى علي    | 48. ونسبتني حيناً لمذ    |
| أمارة بتبدلِ        | 49. تعنين ويك أنني       |

50. أدعو النساء للعب با  
ريس ولهو بروكسلِ
51. ونسبتني حيناً إلى  
تحميل ما لم يحمل
52. جعل الحرائر كالإما  
ء خوادمًا للمنزل
53. ليس الكلام بمبهم  
فتفسري وتؤولي
54. لا ينفع التشكيك والتَّ  
أويل في الأمر الجلي
55. قلت: النقاب سكت عند  
ه نعم بدأت فكملّي
56. ولأبي شيء يا تُرب  
ن بغيره لم تحفلي
57. كم مبحث ما جلت في  
ه وجلّ من لم يغفلِ
58. من ذا الذي جاءت مقا  
لته بكل مؤملي
59. لا أبتغي غير الفضب  
لة للنساء فأجملي
60. إن لم تري رأيي فيا  
«ويل الشجي من الخلي»

40. As for the face veil, its ruling in the Shariah is not complicated.
41. The scholars have differed between it being forbidden and permissible.
42. And by consensus among them, it is permissible when intending for marriage.
43. The face veil is not the same as the Hijab, so shorten or lengthen.
44. So, if you are unaware of the difference between them, come on, ask someone.
45. After the scholars' statements, there's no place for my words.
46. So why did you increase your blame and joined in blaming me?
47. And fed me with the bitterness of your words, like the bitterness of colocynth.
48. And at times, you attributed me to the school of thought of Qāsim and 'Abū 'Alī.
49. Accusing me of inciting a change.
50. I call on women for the play of Paris and the frivolity of Brussels.
51. And at times, you ascribed to me the burden of what has not been borne.
52. Making free women like slaves, servants to the house.

53. The speech is not ambiguous for you to interpret and construe.
54. Doubt and interpretation are useless in clear matters.
55. I said: ‘The veil’, indeed silent about it, you have started, now complete.
56. And why, I wonder, you were not careful with other matters?
57. A multitude of times, I have been prominent in discussions, as have those who remained attentive.
58. Who is the one whose article came with all hope?
59. I seek nothing but virtue for women, so do not worry.
60. If you do not see the merit in my opinion, then “Woe to the sorrowful from the indifferent (Nāṣif, 2014, 111-114).”

In this section of the poem, Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif turns her attention to the intricate topic of veiling and the broader questions surrounding women’s roles and autonomy. Notably, Nāṣif demonstrates a profound awareness of the theological and cultural nuances surrounding the face veil and the hijab, and she navigates these nuances with thoughtful consideration. Nāṣif begins by addressing the Shariah perspective on face veiling, acknowledging that scholars have held divergent views on the matter. In doing so, she is engaging with the intellectual and religious discourse that has often been an area of male dominance. By articulating that there is scholarly disagreement regarding the veiling, she underscores that it is not a monolithic or unambiguous practice, but one that is multifaceted and open to interpretation. Furthermore, she makes a clear distinction between the face veil and the hijab, indicating a nuanced understanding of the different elements of modest dress, and invites those who are unaware to seek knowledge.

The poet then shifts to a more personal tone as she questions why she has been subjected to criticism and harsh words. This highlights a recurring theme of women’s voices being marginalized or criticized when they engage in public discourse, especially on sensitive matters. The poet’s mention of being “fed with the bitterness” of words reflects the emotional toll this criticism takes. Moreover, Nāṣif is critical of being mischaracterized and falsely attributed to particular schools of thought. This reflects a common challenge faced by women intellectuals and activists, where their ideas are often misunderstood or misrepresented, and they are unfairly aligned with various ideologies or

movements. In an empowering turn, Nāṣif reasserts her own voice and intention. She declares that her aim is the pursuit of virtue for women. This aligns with a long history of women's advocacy for social justice and gender equity. She implies that her engagement in this discourse is rooted in genuine concern and advocacy for women's well-being.

Lastly, Nāṣif leaves her audience with a poignant message that is as much a challenge as it is an invitation. She encourages critical thinking and a discerning approach to issues, emphasizing that one should see the merit in opinions even if they diverge from traditional perspectives. This concluding statement is a clarion call for openness, reflection, and the pursuit of justice, particularly as it relates to women's roles and rights. In sum, this section of the poem is an exemplary piece of feminist literature in its historical context. Through her engagement with theological nuances, her reflection on personal experiences, and her call to justice and equity, Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif demonstrates the complex interplay between gender, culture, and religion, and underscores the importance of women's voices in shaping discourse and social change.

In examining the historical trajectory of modern Arabic literature, it is imperative to consider the invaluable contributions of women poets. Throughout diverse epochs and literary movements, women poets have been instrumental in exploring a rich tapestry of themes, employing varied stylistic approaches, and consequently shaping the very fabric of Arabic literary culture. Their engagement with an array of subjects - from the personal to the political, the spiritual to the social - reveals not only the depth of their insights but also the breadth of their creative prowess. One aspect worth highlighting is the multiplicity of themes that women poets have engaged with. Their literary compositions have often transcended conventional boundaries, delving into topics such as gender roles, social justice, love, and spirituality. In a context where women's voices were often marginalized, poetry emerged as a powerful medium through which they could articulate their experiences, hopes, and aspirations. Furthermore, the stylistic diversity exhibited by women poets in modern Arabic literature is noteworthy. From classical forms such as *qaṣīdas* and *ghazals* to more contemporary free verse and prose poetry, their adoption and adaptation of various styles have been indicative of their innovative spirit. This stylistic versatility not only enriched Arabic literary forms but also facilitated the expression of nuanced emotions and ideas.

Moreover, the talent exhibited by these poets must not be underestimated. Their acute sensibilities and literary dexterity were often evidenced in their

adept use of language, imagery, and metaphor. Their ability to weave words into evocative and poignant compositions, often imbued with layers of meaning, reveals the calibre of their creative intellects. Additionally, it is essential to acknowledge the socio-cultural impact of their contributions. By articulating alternative narratives and perspectives, often challenging societal norms and expectations, they have played a pivotal role in initiating dialogues and reflections on critical issues. This, in turn, has had profound implications for cultural, social, and even political dimensions of Arab societies. In conclusion, women poets have been an integral and vital component of modern Arabic literature. Through their exploration of diverse subjects, their innovative stylistic approaches, and their unparalleled literary talents, they have indelibly impacted and enriched Arabic literary tradition. Furthermore, their contributions must be recognized not merely as artistic achievements but as an enduring legacy that reflects the resilience, creativity, and depth of women's voices in shaping culture and society. Their works stand as testaments to the transformative power of literature and the pivotal role that women have played in the evolution of Arabic literary discourse.



## CHAPTER 3

# MALE PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN IN ARABIC LITERATURE

### 3.1. Key Male Authors and Their Female Characters

In the ever-evolving landscape of contemporary Arabic literature, the voices of male poets have continued to play a significant role in articulating diverse perspectives and narratives concerning women. It is noteworthy that the scope and depth of these expressions are influenced by a plethora of factors including, but not limited to, cultural, historical, religious, and socio-political contexts. A striking attribute of contemporary Arabic poetry is the plurality of voices. Various male poets, both established and emerging, have approached the subject of women with different intentions and methodologies. For some, the exploration of feminine experiences, aspirations, and identities becomes a conduit to challenge prevailing societal norms or engage in dialogue with historical texts. For others, it serves as a lens through which broader questions of morality, politics, and human relationships can be explored. One of the hallmarks of contemporary Arabic poetry's engagement with the female subject is the tendency to move beyond traditional roles and stereotypes. This shift is partially a reflection of changing societal dynamics and the influence of global feminism. Poets such as Nizār Qabbānī have been at the forefront of this movement, with works that have celebrated female strength and independence. Qabbānī's poems have been lauded for their raw emotional honesty and for challenging taboos (Anṭūn, 1996, 40-48).

Yet, alongside these progressive voices, there are poets who hold a more traditional perspective, reflecting a commitment to conservative values and norms. This is not to be dismissed as mere regressive thinking; in many cases, such poetry reflects a genuine attempt to engage with a tradition that is seen as a repository of wisdom and identity. The contrast between these traditionalist and more progressive voices can be viewed as a microcosm of the larger dialogue within Arab societies regarding the role of women. Furthermore, contemporary Arabic literature has also seen an increase in male poets who



are actively involved in feminist movements. These poets often employ their craft as a form of advocacy, seeking to contribute to ongoing conversations about gender equality and women's rights. They tend to focus on issues such as domestic violence, patriarchal structures, and women's access to education and employment. Another notable aspect is the intertextual dialogues that these poets sometimes engage in with female writers, both contemporary and historical. Such intertextual exchanges often serve to broaden the conversation and foster deeper understanding of gender dynamics.

Moreover, the male poets who venture into this thematic domain often find themselves having to negotiate a fine line between representation and appropriation. While the intention to explore female experiences is often well-meaning, there is an inherent challenge in authentically capturing the female voice without imposing a male perspective. This has led to critiques from women's advocates and scholars who argue the importance of fostering spaces for women's voices to be heard directly (Nāṣif, 2014, 111-114). Contemporary Arabic literature presents a rich and varied tapestry of male poets engaging with the subject of women. Through diverse approaches and themes, these poets contribute to the ongoing evolution of literary and cultural discourse pertaining to gender in the Arab world. Whether through advocacy, celebration, critical engagement, or dialogue, these poets are an integral part of a broader literary movement that reflects the complexities and nuances of gender relations in contemporary Arab societies.

Qāsim Amīn (1863-1908) is heralded as a trailblazer within the annals of Egyptian literature, with a distinguished reputation for championing the cause of women's rights. Born in the historically rich city of Cairo, his heritage comprised a confluence of cultures, with paternal roots of Turkey and maternal ancestry of Arab descent. His educational pursuits led him to Madrasa al-Ḥuqūq wa al-Idāra, where, during his higher education tenure, he associated himself with the burgeoning intellectual movement under the stewardship of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897). In 1881, having achieved scholarly distinction in legal studies, Amīn embarked on a professional trajectory in law under the tutelage of the esteemed legal practitioner Muṣṭafā Fahmī Pasha (1840-1914). Interestingly, during the period of British colonial domination, Amīn's legal career took an interim shift when Muṣṭafā Fahmī Pasha was designated as Prime Minister, necessitating Amīn to assume his legal responsibilities. Concurrently, Amīn was the beneficiary of an academic scholarship to France, where he became an alumnus of the Faculty of Law at the prestigious Montpellier University.

This sojourn exposed him to the intellectual oeuvre of luminary philosophers and thinkers including Nietzsche, Darwin, and Marx. Additionally, while in the Parisian milieu, he collaborated with Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammed ‘Abduh (1849-1905) in contributing to the publication of *al-‘Urwa al-wuthqā*. Upon the culmination of his studies in 1885, Amīn repatriated to Egypt and entered the judicial sector, eventually attaining the esteemed position of a judge within the Court of Appeals. His professional and social circles encompassed a distinguished coterie of intellectuals and political luminaries, including, but not limited to, Muḥammed ‘Abduh, Sa‘d Zaghlūl (1857-1927), ‘Alī Yūsuf, and Aḥmed Luṭfī al-Sayyid. Of personal significance, in the year 1894, subsequent to marrying Zaynab, the offspring of Admiral Amīn Tawfīq, he spent the halcyon days of summer in Turkey. Qāsim Amīn’s contributions to academia were profound, particularly in the inception of what is now known as Cairo University, but was then christened as the Egyptian University. Serving on a commission piloted by Sa‘d Zaghlūl, Amīn’s involvement was instrumental, and following Zaghlūl’s ascendancy to the position of Minister of Education, Amīn was anointed as the chairman of the commission. Moreover, Amīn played an integral role in al-Jam‘iyya al-Khayriyya al-Islāmiyya, a benevolent institution established with the primary aim of instituting educational facilities and fostering educational opportunities for indigent children. Qāsim Amīn’s mortal sojourn concluded on April 23, 1908. His indelible legacy, particularly in the realms of women’s emancipation and educational reform, continues to occupy an eminent position in both the intellectual and social tapestry of Egyptian history (en-Neklāwī, 2001, 24/541-542; Siyaḥa, 2019, 456-470).

Qāsim Amīn posited that the fundamental nature of women is indistinguishable from that of men in terms of physiological constitution, cognitive faculties, and sensibility. Amīn cogently argued that the apparent disparities in physical and intellectual strengths are not an innate consequence of gender but rather the result of historically imbalanced opportunities and social constructions that have favored males. In his view, generations of male engagement in labor and intellectual endeavors have culminated in their advancements, while concurrently women have been relegated to marginal roles, devoid of opportunities to harness and hone their capacities. This relegation, he observed, varies in intensity depending on historical and cultural contexts. Amīn expressed consternation regarding the prevailing beliefs within certain cultural spheres that underestimated the imperative nature of women’s education and nurturing. His views were not merely an exposition but a clarion call to

transform societal perceptions and to invest in the human capital that women represent (Qāsim, 2010, 17).

Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, an eminent figure who wielded considerable sway over a wide array of authors and poets within the domain of Arabic literature, is deserving of scholarly attention in the context of gender studies. His extensive travels, spanning the Western hemisphere from the United States to the United Kingdom and the Eastern regions from Egypt to India, the diverse array of individuals and groups with which he interacted, the manifold events and movements in which he was actively engaged, as well as the lasting legacy of his scholarly contributions and the intellectual progeny he fostered, collectively accentuate al-Afghānī's conspicuous position in the annals of intellectual and political discourse within the 19th-century Islamic world. Nonetheless, elements of his life narrative remain shrouded in ambiguity, attributed in part to his itinerant lifestyle and the discrepancies extant in the historical sources documenting his life. The sources, with a consensus, pinpoint November 1838 as the month of al-Afghānī's birth; however, the geographical location of his birth remains the epicenter of enduring contention, raising questions concerning both his national identity and sectarian allegiance. Until attaining the age of eighteen, al-Afghānī was domiciled in Kabul, where he received his foundational education under the aegis of his learned father. Moreover, he was the beneficiary of education from a host of distinguished scholars within his country, covering a broad spectrum of disciplines encompassing linguistics, history, religious studies, philosophy, mathematics, medicine, and political science. To further cultivate his education, al-Afghānī undertook a journey to India. According to those advocating the premise of al-Afghānī's Iranian lineage and Shi'ite affiliation, subsequent to his initial educational phase, his father escorted him to Najaf, where he received instruction under the esteemed Shi'ite scholar, Shaykh Murtaḍā al-Anṣārī. Following a residence in Iraq that spanned an estimated four years, al-Afghānī proceeded to India. During his sojourn in India, al-Afghānī immersed himself in European scientific and literary paradigms, which served as a catalyst, honing and fortifying the reformist ideals that had germinated within his intellect. With the objective of fulfilling the pilgrimage of Hajj, al-Afghānī embarked upon a journey, during which he traversed an array of countries, engaging in dialogues with individuals from various social echelons. Upon reaching Mecca in 1857, he fulfilled his pilgrimage. Throughout his lifespan, al-Afghānī's interlocutions with influential personages were not only copious but also profoundly impactful (Karaman, 1994, 10/456-466). Subsequent to this analysis, it is apparent that

Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī's multifaceted life was inextricably intertwined with the global dynamics of his era.

In al-Afghānī's discourse, he posits that the innate variances in the dispositions of males and females render the aspiration for gender egalitarianism a Sisyphean endeavor. The fundamental distinctions in their constitution do not insinuate any hierarchy or dichotomy in terms of wholeness or inadequacy for either gender. It can be deduced from this elucidation that al-Afghānī refrained from espousing a gender hierarchy. He attributed existing divergences to the corpus of knowledge and cultural proficiencies acquired commensurate with one's intrinsic capabilities. al-Afghānī did not support the idea of women leaving behind their traditional roles in managing the household and caring for children in order to take on the physically demanding jobs that are usually associated with men. Moreover, al-Afghānī expounded upon his stance concerning the usage of veils by Muslim women. He repudiated the premise that the precedent established by 'Ā'isha, the consort of Prophet Muḥammad, during the Battle of Camel, and the auxiliary roles undertaken by female Companions during military engagements should be inexorably adopted as a prescriptive paradigm. He postulated that nature has demarcated discrete domains for both genders. Predicated on this assertion, al-Afghānī advanced the supposition that the duties entrusted to women assume an exigent import, potentially transcending those of men, and he engaged in introspection regarding the concomitant consequences of women's non-participation in domestic undertakings and the likely complications emanating from their inattention to familial obligations. Furthermore, al-Afghānī manifested a predilection for the institution of marriage, notwithstanding his personal abstention from matrimonial commitments. He was an advocate for monogamy and exhorted that individuals bereft of the aptitude for impartiality, even within the confines of a single conjugal relationship, should exercise circumspection by eschewing marital engagements (Öncel, 2013, 207). In light of this stance, it is evident that al-Afghānī held a nuanced perspective on gender roles and responsibilities, underscoring the importance of recognizing and respecting the distinct contributions of both sexes within the societal fabric.

Khalīl Mardam Bik stands as a distinguished poet who exhibits a commitment to bolstering the status of women through his poetic works. Khalīl Mardam Bik, a Syrian poet and writer, has been recognized for over a century for his notable contributions to Arabic literature. He was born in Damascus in 1313/1895 and was a prominent figure in the Arab Renaissance (*al-Nahḍa*) movement of the early 20th century. This cultural and intellectual movement

aimed to rejuvenate Arabic literature and thought, which had suffered from colonialism and cultural stagnation. As a leading member of the Syrian literary scene, Mardam Bik played a key role in the development of modern Arabic poetry and prose. His works continue to inspire and challenge readers today. Mardam Bik's success surpassed many of his contemporaries, as he chaired the al-Rābiṭa al-Adabiyya, a literary society founded in Syria in 1339/1921 by a group of literary figures and scholars. His pioneering role in this context contributed to the development of a strong literary spirit in Arabic literature. He also served as president of the Lajna al-Nashr, which was established in Damascus in 1363/1944. Through this organization, he made significant contributions to Arab intellectual and cultural life. Mardam Bik's literary works, including poetry and prose, have been widely studied and celebrated. He was a master of the Arabic language and used it to convey powerful messages and emotions. His works reflect his deep understanding of the Arab world and its complex history, culture, and society. His contributions to Arabic literature have left a lasting impact and continue to inspire future generations of writers and scholars (al-Sayyid, 1432/2011, 8).

One of the most significant aspects of Mardam Bik's literary legacy is his portrayal of women in his poetry. Throughout his career, Mardam Bik wrote extensively about women, exploring their experiences, perspectives, and roles in society. His works are notable for their nuanced depictions of women as complex, multifaceted individuals, rather than one-dimensional stereotypes or objects of desire. In particular, Mardam Bik's praise poem for Mayy Ziyāda, composed in 1922 to honor the pioneering poet and feminist, showcases his vision of women's empowerment and the possibilities for female agency in Arab society (See Mardam Bik, n.d., 246-249).

Khalīl b. Aḥmad Mukhtār Mardam Bik, who passed away in 1959, was a Syrian writer and poet of Turkish origin, renowned for his contributions to Arabic literature, particularly for his composition of the Syrian national anthem. Born in 1895 in Damascus, Khalīl was the son of Aḥmad Mukhtār Mardam, a respected member of the Damascene aristocracy, who had served as the mayor of Damascus on multiple occasions and was esteemed for his integrity and eloquence. The Mardam Bik family is regarded as one of the venerable Turkmen families in Damascus, with a lineage stretching back to Lala Mustafa Pasha, who lived during the 16th century. The family has been widely recognized for their reputation for honor and philanthropy over the course of several generations. Mardam Bik's mother, Fāṭima al-Zahrā, who passed away in 1913, was believed

to be a descendant of Prophet Muhammad. She was the daughter of Maḥmūd al-Ḥamzāwī, a Hanafi jurist who served as the Mufti of Damascus under the Ottoman Empire (al-Ziriklī, 2002, 2/315; Köklüdağ, 2014, 21).

Khalīl Mardam suffered the loss of his father at the tender age of fifteen, followed by the demise of his mother when he was merely nineteen. The untimely death of his parents had a profound impact on him, as he was left to cope with the harsh realities of orphanhood. Notwithstanding this adversarial turn of events, Khalīl Mardam was fortunate enough to have been born into a wealthy family, which precluded him from encountering financial hardship. He pursued his education under the tutelage of distinguished scholars in the disciplines of hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, and grammar. The knowledge that he acquired from these learned men allowed him to develop a comprehensive understanding of Arabic literature (al-Raḥīm, 1420/2000, 1/165).

Khalīl Mardam Bik was inspired by the Arab nationalist ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-‘Urayyisī (d. 1334/1916), a key figure in the opposition to the Ottoman Empire during World War I. In 1913, Mardam Bik was among the signatories of a well-known declaration, presented at the first Arab Congress in Paris, that called for the liberation of Arab nations from Ottoman rule. During his youth, Mardam Bik was arrested for his association with al-‘Urayyisī in 1914. He began composing nationalist poetry early in life, after al-‘Urayyisī and his colleagues were executed by the Ottoman Turks in May 1916. Mardam Bik supported the Arab underground movement that initiated an uprising against the Ottomans in June 1916, ultimately leading to the Ottoman defeat in October 1918 (Moubayed, 2006, 557-558).

After the conclusion of World War I, one of the foremost tasks of the newly established administration in Syria, which had broken away from Ottoman control, was to elevate Arabic to the status of an official language. To this end, the Dīwān al-Rasā’il al-‘Āmma institution was founded in 1918 with the aim of training personnel capable of converting official records in Turkish to Arabic, as well as carrying out correspondence in Arabic. Khalīl Mardam Bik, who possessed a proficiency in Turkish, was entrusted with a role at this institution. Moreover, he devoted himself to the instruction of Arabic to officials who would be serving in the newly established government, offering lessons at the Madrasa al-Kuttāb wa al-Munshi’īn, a government-sponsored institution established for this purpose (İshakoğlu, 2010, 141-142).

Following the announcement of Syria’s independence and the coronation of Faisal I as king, Khalīl Mardam Bik was appointed as the secretary of the first



ministry in Syria. After the French army entered Damascus, he resigned from his position in the government. In 1921, along with some of the prominent intellectual figures of the time, Mardam Bik co-founded the “al-Rābiṭa al-Adabiyya” society, which was modeled after the “al-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya” association in New York, and was subsequently elected as its president. In March of the same year, the society began publishing a magazine with the same title. The magazine, which featured poetry and articles that called on the Syrian people to resist the French occupiers, was terminated by the French authorities, who had been occupying the country since 1920, after the release of its ninth issue. An order was issued for the arrest of the poet due to his stance in the magazine, which called on the Syrian people to resist the French occupiers with the poems and articles published in it. As a result, Mardam Bik took refuge in Lebanon first, and then with his son-in-law, Dr. Ahmed Qadrī, in Alexandria. After an amnesty was declared in 1929, he returned to Damascus and assumed the role of a professor of Arabic literature at the al-Kulliyya al-‘Ilmiyya al-Wataniyya for a period of nine years (Usta, 2018, 46).

Khalīl Mardam Bik suffered a tragic loss in his life in 1942, as his son Haytham, who was in the prime of his youth and known to have received philosophical education, passed away. In the face of this heartbreaking event, the poet sought solace in his art of poetry. He was widely recognized for his patience and perseverance (Jundī, 1957, 1/401). During the aforementioned year, there were positive developments in Mardam Bik’s life, including his appointment as the Minister of Education. While occupied with his official duties, he had to forego the time he passionately devoted to his academic pursuits. Nevertheless, after a period of time had elapsed, he was able to allocate ample time once again to his scholarly undertakings (al-Dahhān, 1959, 688).

Despite his busy schedule in public service, Mardam Bik continued to pursue his literary studies without interruption. From 1946 to 1958, he conducted the editing and examination of works such as *Dīwān Ibn ‘Unayn al-Dimashqī*, *Dīwān ‘Alī b. al-Jahm*, *Dīwān Ibn Ḥayyūs*, and *Dīwān Ibn Khayyāt*, and published them in Damascus. For each of these works, he wrote introductions and critiques of the poets, which were around fifty pages long. Through these literary works, Mardam Bik continued his earlier project of *Shu‘arā’ al-Shām fī al-qarn al-thālith* by providing a detailed account of the lives of poets who lived in the Damascus region from the third century AH onwards. As such, he contributed significantly to the literary history of Damascus. Mardam Bik passed away on July 21, 1959, in Damascus. His

funeral prayer was held at the Umayyad Mosque, and he was buried in the family cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr (Can – Kırıcı, 2022, 59-60). Khalīl Mardam Bik left behind not only a legacy of literary works for Arab readers but also a distinguished reputation among his contemporaries for his virtuous character, which is still remembered alongside his academic achievements (Ṣalībā, 1960, 2).

Khalīl Mardam Bik's literary character is a blend of conservative and innovative elements. While the conservative literary aspect exerted a greater influence on him, traditional Arab culture remained dominant, with few exceptions. He was inclined towards reading ancient Arab literary works and aimed to infuse innovative literary elements into the traditional literary heritage. In his opinion, excessive tolerance towards innovation in Arab literature would lead to the death of the Arabic language, severing ties with its past and traditions. Therefore, he believed that there should be limits to innovation in Arabic literature, and that writers should never cross these boundaries, always mindful of preserving the foundations of the language. Mardam Bik believed that poets must be conscious of the limits of literary innovation and refrain from disturbing the form of poetry, while respecting the creativity of the Arabic language in terms of poetic structure and meter. As for innovation in meanings and themes, there were no limitations. Mardam Bik's understanding of linguistic innovation was rooted in the principle of avoiding arbitrary changes to language and style (Can - Karataş, 2022, 345).

Mardam Bik, a member of the affluent class, was influenced by the Kurd 'Alī school's linguistic and scholarly focus, as evident in both his life and literary works. Despite his traditional style, he was engaged in the nationalist struggle against the French mandate and was an advocate of pan-Arab unity, which exposed him to progressive Arab ideas and European literature. English literature and culture played a significant role in shaping Mardam Bik's thinking, with William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw being two particular sources of inspiration. He believed that Arabic literature's revival could only be achieved by eliminating the corrupt styles that emerged during its decline and restoring it to its former glory. In addition, Mardam Bik suggested that Western writers' beautiful themes could be used to create a more pleasant literary style. Mardam Bik's better poems possess sensuousness and irony, in addition to their neo-classical characteristics. His influence extended even to poets with disparate worldviews, such as Nizār al-Qabbānī (Nourallah, 1998, 2/509-510; Can, 2022, 61).



Khalīl Mardam Bik, who possessed a strong understanding of modern scholarly research methods, focused predominantly on classical Arabic culture. Through his published classical collections and monographs, he made great contributions to the history of Arabic literature, serving as a bridge between the old and the new. Additionally, he wrote poems and essays on national issues to stir up the public, as well as to fight against oppression and injustice. Khalīl Mardam Bik's scholarly and literary activities were well-received by orientalists, earning him membership in numerous national and international academic organizations (el-Ferfūr, 1997, 15/320-321).

Mardam Bik's poems mostly revolve around themes of love and nature, and are characterized by their highly introspective nature. They feature delicate harmonies of voice, light, color, and shadow in their depictions. In addition to these works, he also composed patriotic and heroic poems that encouraged resistance and unity against the French occupiers. Mardam Bik was also known for his humanitarian poems that opposed the death penalty. He abstained from producing obscene art, and with the exception of a few poems he wrote in his youth, he did not write ghazals. Praise and boasting themes are also rarely found in his poetry. Furthermore, he translated poems from English, German, and Persian (İshakoğlu, 2021, 136).

Within the domain of contemporary Arabic literature, there exists an abundant assemblage of writers and poets, encompassing esteemed figures such as Muḥammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935), Muṣṭafā Luṭfī al-Manfalūṭī (1876-1924), Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877-1938), Aḥmad Shawqī, and Jamīl Ṣıdqī al-Zahāwī (1863-1936), to name but a few. These literary savants have been instrumental in shaping the intellectual and cultural fabric of their milieu. As a scholarly endeavor, attempting to methodically enumerate every poet who has ventured to articulate views relating to women within their literary corpus appears to be a herculean task, verging on impracticability. This is compounded by the vast and diverse range of voices, themes, and historical contexts in which these works have been situated. The difficulty in comprehensively cataloging these literary figures is emblematic of the richness and complexity of Arabic literature itself.

Similarly, capturing the entirety of perspectives concerning the status of women that have been depicted in this literary tradition is an equally daunting challenge. This is due, in part, to the extensive gamut of nuanced beliefs, attitudes, and cultural norms that have evolved over time, and have found expression through the literary medium. Furthermore, it is worthy of note that a significant

contingent of male poets within the ambit of Arabic literature has demonstrated a proclivity for engaging with themes relating to women and gender. This proclivity can be attributed to the intrinsic characteristics of literature, which, by its very nature, serves as a conduit for exploring the human condition, including the dynamics of gender relations. In summation, the wealth of contributions in contemporary Arabic literature from an array of illustrious writers and poets, along with the multifaceted representations concerning women therein, exemplifies the depth and dynamism that characterize this literary tradition. This also highlights the necessitation for assiduous, nuanced scholarship to adequately discern and analyze the patterns and themes that emerge from such a rich tapestry of literary works.

### **3.2. How Men Write Women: Themes and Motifs**

Arab literature, steeped in a rich and diverse history, provides ample material to analyze the themes and motifs associated with representations of women as crafted by male writers. A central observation in Arab literature is the recurring motif of femininity as a metaphor for beauty, desire, and the exotic. The classical ghazal, a poetic form often employed to express romantic longing, frequently features women as objects of admiration and desire. Here, one may discern an idealization of female beauty, sometimes to the extent of abstraction where women become ethereal entities rather than human characters with agency and depth. Furthermore, in the classical period, literature was often employed as a means to preserve and promote cultural norms and values. The portrayal of women by male authors, therefore, reflected and perpetuated the prevailing social norms, particularly those pertaining to gender roles and expectations. Consequently, women were often depicted within the domestic sphere, as symbols of honor, and custodians of familial and societal values.

However, as Arab literature evolved, particularly during the Nahḍa or the Arab Renaissance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a noticeable shift. The evolving socio-political climate, exposure to Western thought, and increasing calls for gender equality and women's rights influenced the ways male authors began to write about women. There was an emergence of more complex female characters who exhibited intellectual depth, autonomy, and resilience. The representation of women in social reform, education, and nationalist movements started to find expression within literary works. The tragic heroine is a motif that finds frequent representation in Arab literature penned by men. This figure often exemplifies sacrifice, unrequited love, or

the constraints of societal norms, serving both as a vehicle for empathy and a critique of societal restrictions on women. An important consideration in analyzing how men write women is the interplay of power dynamics and the male gaze. The latter, a concept borrowed from feminist theory, refers to the way women are often depicted from a masculine and heteronormative perspective. In Arab literature, as in other literary traditions, the male gaze often informs the portrayal of women, shaping characters and narratives through a lens that can sometimes be limiting or objectifying. The representation of women in Arabic literature by male authors is multi-faceted, evolving, and reflective of broader cultural and social currents. From idealization and allegory to the exploration of complex female characters, these representations are embedded with themes and motifs that warrant critical analysis. Additionally, engaging with feminist literary criticism can provide valuable insights into the gender dynamics at play and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the representation of women in Arabic literature.

In contemporary Arabic literature, it is noteworthy that male poets who articulate their perspectives on women have occasionally been met with criticism and censure from proponents of women's rights, despite ostensible undertones of support for female empowerment in their work. This phenomenon can be largely attributed to the inherent male-centric viewpoint that shapes the portrayal and conceptualization of women within their literary compositions.

A salient exemplar that encapsulates this dynamic is the poem penned by the distinguished poet Aḥmad Shawqī, which was subsequently disseminated through a publication in a magazine and graciously presented as a gift to the esteemed female poet and advocate, Malak Ḥifnī Nāṣif (See Nāṣif, 2014, 111-114). This gesture, though seemingly generous and indicative of literary camaraderie, illustrates the intricate nuances that characterize the portrayal of women in literature authored by men. Shawqī's poem, replete with eloquent verse and rich imagery, embodies an ostensibly sympathetic stance toward women's rights. However, a critical and discerning analysis reveals that the poem is tinged with a male-centric lens, which inadvertently shapes the way women are depicted and understood within the literary landscape. This imbues the poem with a certain degree of dissonance, as it purports to uphold the cause of female empowerment while simultaneously echoing patriarchal tropes.

Furthermore, Shawqī's literary engagement with themes related to women, particularly in this poem, is emblematic of the wider trends and challenges that permeate the representation of women in literature. The poem's reception,

particularly amongst advocates of women's rights, is indicative of a growing awareness and critical engagement with the necessity for authentic and diverse female voices and representations. This poem serves not only as a representation of Shawqī's individual work but also as a catalyst for a broader discourse on the portrayal of women in modern Arabic literature, particularly by male authors. It beckons a critical reflection on the imperative for literary works to transcend traditional confines and engage deeply and authentically with the experiences and perspectives of women.

The text of Shawqī's poem is as follows:

رِ يَا أَمِيرَ الْبُلْبُلِ	1. صَدَّاحَ يَا مَلِكَ الْكَنَا
وَرَزَقْتُ قُرْبَ «الْمَوْصِلِي»	2. قَدْ فُزْتُ مِنْكَ «بِمَعْبِدٍ»
مَاراً وَحُسْنَ تَرْتُلِ	3. وَأَتِيحَ لِي «دَاوُودُ» مِزْ
بِرِ قَطُّ لَمْ تَنْرَجَلِ	4. فَوْقَ الْأَسِرَّةِ وَالْمَنَا
مُرْتَجِّ لِحِظِ الْأَحْوَلِ	5. تَهْتَزُّ كَالدِينَارِ فِي
عِبِ لَمْ تَدْعَ لِمُمْتَلِ	6. وَإِذَا خَطَرْتَ عَلَى الْمَلَا
دَقِ» فِي مَقَاطِعِ «جَرَوْلِ»	7. وَلَكَ ابْتِدَاءَاتُ «الْفَرْزِ
صُفْرَ الْعَلَائِلِ وَالْحَلِي	8. وَلَقَدْ تَخَذْتَ مِنَ الضُّحَى
نِسِ عَنِ عَدَارَى الْهَيْكَلِ	9. وَرَوَيْتَ فِي بَيْضِ الْقَلَا

- “1. O loud voice, O king of canaries and prince of nightingales  
 2. I have won from you [a voice like] Ma‘bad and have been granted nearness to [the talent of] al-Mawṣilī  
 3. And to me, a flute like Dāwūd’s was granted and a beautiful recitation  
 4. Above the seats and pulpits where you have never dismounted  
 5. You quiver like a dinar in the grasp of someone with cross-eyes  
 6. And when you wander in the playgrounds, you leave no room for any performer  
 7. You have the beginnings of al-Farazdaq in the segments of Jarwal  
 8. You have certainly taken the yellowness of adornments from the early morning light

9. And you reflect in your white headgear the purity of the maidens in the sanctuary (Shawqī, 2012, 209-213)”

In this opulent lyrical composition, the poet employs a panoply of rich metaphors and allusions, meticulously interwoven to convey his multifaceted engagement with artistic expression and the historical lineage of Arabic poetry. The poem opens with a sonorous invocation addressed to a figure characterized as the “king of canaries and prince of nightingales”. It is possible to argue that the person referred to here is Malak Ḥifnī, a noted figure. This evocative appellation conjures the image of a singer or poet, imbued with grace and mastery in their craft. In this context, it is also notable that canaries and nightingales, in particular, have been historically associated with mellifluous vocalizations. The reference to the individual as the “king of canaries and prince of nightingales” might symbolize an exalted status within the realms of poetic or musical artistry. Moreover, by attributing both “king” and “prince” designations to the figure, the poet seems to be conveying a sense of majesty and nobility that transcends temporal distinctions.

The allusion to canaries and nightingales is also particularly poignant, as these birds are not only esteemed for their enchanting songs but have also been used traditionally in literature to represent beauty. Associating Malak Ḥifnī with such creatures could be a tribute to her poetic prowess, as well as possibly a commentary on the elegance that her words embody. Furthermore, the poem exudes a rich tapestry of historical and literary references. The allusions to the heritage of Arabic poetic tradition and the invocation of natural imagery to describe the figure’s attributes reflect an amalgamation of reverence for the past and a romantic idealization of artistic creativity.

This poem represents an elaborate and artfully constructed ode, laden with metaphors and allusions that serve to portray the figure in question as a paragon of artistic excellence and elegance. The carefully chosen avian metaphors also add layers of symbolism that evoke themes of beauty and creativity, and may be a homage to the individual’s poetic acumen and contribution to Arabic literature. As the poem progresses, the narrative voice claims to have derived inspiration and prowess akin to renowned figures in Arabic musical and literary history. The reference to Ma‘bad and al-Mawṣilī, both illustrious figures in their respective domains, serves to establish the poet’s lineage within a tradition of artistic excellence. This sense of belonging and shared heritage can be interpreted as a representation of the aspiration and realization of contributing to the historical

tapestry of Arabic artistic expressions. The allusion to the legendary poet al-Farazdaq is a striking element within the poem. al-Farazdaq is a revered figure in Arabic literature, known for his eloquence and wit. By evoking his name, the poet aligns himself within a lineage of literary luminaries and asserts his place within this esteemed tradition.

Moreover, the latter part of the poem embarks upon a ruminative exploration of the aesthetic attributes possessed by the figure to whom the poem is addressed. The poet employs natural imagery, likening the person's qualities to the "yellowness of adornments from the early morning light" and their "white headgear" to purity. Here, the subtle juxtaposition of light and purity may be indicative of the poet's broader rumination on the theme of innocence and sanctity. In essence, this poem is a lavish tapestry of intertextual references, vivid metaphors, and historical allusions. Through his dexterous poetic craft, the poet navigates the contours of artistic expression and historical lineage, in a manner that reflects both homage to the tradition and a subtle challenge to established paradigms. Through the imagery of birds, light, and adornments, the poet endeavors to evoke both the ethereal and the grounded aspects of artistic expression, heritage, and human character.

Subsequent verses in Aḥmad Shawqī's poetic composition read as follows:

- |                                  |                                     |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| رُ شَجِّ فُؤَادِكَ أَمْ خَلِي    | 10. يَا لَيْتَ شِعْرِي يَا أَسِيدَ  |
| مُ اللَّيْلِ حَتَّى يَنْجَلِي    | 11. وَخَلِيفَ سُهَيْدٍ أَمْ تَنَا   |
| لِحْ فِي النُّحَاسِ الْمُتَقَلِّ | 12. بِالرُّغَمِ مَيِّ مَا تُعَا     |
| يُحْرِزُ تَمِينًا يَبْخَلِ       | 13. جِرْصِي عَلَيْكَ هَوَى وَمَنْ   |
| رَةً فِي الْجَوَادِ الْمُجْزِلِ  | 14. وَالشُّحُّ تُحْدِثُهُ الضَّرْو  |
| رٍ بِالْحَرِيرِ مُجَلَّلِ        | 15. أَنَا إِنْ جَعَلْتِكَ فِي نُضَا |
| وَخَفَقْتُهُ بِقَرْنِفَلِ        | 16. وَلَفَقْتُهُ فِي سَوْسِنِ       |
| لَيْهِ وَأَعْلَى الصَّدَلِ       | 17. وَحَرَقْتُ أَرْكَى الْعُودِ حَو |
| نِ وَفَوْقَ رَأْسِ الْجَدَلِ     | 18. وَحَمَلْتُهُ فَوْقَ الْعُيُ     |
| مُلْكِ الطَّيُورِ مُجَلَّلِ      | 19. وَدَعَوْتُ كُلَّ أَعْرَ فِي     |
| وَمُحَبَّبِ وَمُدَلَّلِ          | 20. فَاتَّكَ بَيْنَ مُطَارِحِ       |
| كَ بَوَجْهِهِ الْمُتَهَلَّلِ     | 21. وَأَمَرْتُ بِابْنِي فَالْتَقَا  |
| لَمْ يُهَدِ «لِلْمُنَوَّكِلِ»    | 22. بِيَمِينِهِ فَالْوَدَّجِ        |

23. وَرُجَابَةٌ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ  
مَمْلُوءَةٌ مِنْ سَلْسَلٍ
24. مَا كُنْتُ يَا «صَدَّاحُ» عِنْدَ  
ذَكَ بِالكَرِيمِ الْمُفْضِلِ
25. شُهُدُ الْحَيَاةِ مَشْوَبَةٌ  
بِالرَّقِّ مِثْلُ الْخَنْظَلِ
26. وَالْقَيْدُ لَوْ كَانَ الْجُمَا  
نَ مُنْظَمًا لَمْ يُحْمَلِ
27. يَا طَيْرُ لَوْلَا أَنْ يَقُورَ  
لُؤَا جُنٌّ قُلْتُ تَعَقَلِ
28. إِسْمَعِ فَرَبِّ مُفْصَلٍ  
لَكَ لَمْ يُبْدِكَ كَمَجْمَلِ
29. صَبْرًا لِمَا تَشْقَى بِهِ  
أَوْ مَا بَدَا لَكَ فَاغْفَلِ
30. أَنْتَ ابْنُ رَأْيٍ لِلطَّبِيحِ  
عَةِ فَيْكَ غَيْرِ مُبَدَّلِ
31. أَبَدًا مَرُوعٌ بِالْإِسَا  
رِ مُهَدَّدٌ بِالْمَقْتَلِ
32. إِنْ طَرَّتْ عَن كَنَفِي وَقَعَتْ  
تَ عَلَى النَّسُورِ الْجُهْلِ

“10. Oh, how I wish I knew, O captive of busyness, is your heart engaged or free?

11. Are you bound to sleeplessness or do you sleep until dawn breaks?

12. Despite my reluctance, you do not engage with the closed brass

13. My eagerness for you is passion, and whoever secures a treasure is stingy

14. And stinginess is brought by necessity in the generous lavish giver

15. If I were to place you amidst gold, adorned in silk

16. And wrapped it in lilies and surrounded it with cloves

17. And burned the purest oud around it and the most expensive sandalwood

18. And carried it above water springs and above the head of a small river

19. And called every proud bird in the kingdom of birds

20. They came to you among the sociable, the affirmed, and the pampered

21. And you commanded for my son to meet you with his shining face

22. In his right hand is a sweet treat that was not gifted to al-Mutawakkil

23. And a glass bottle made of silver filled with smooth wine
24. I was not, O loud voice, in your presence the generous one
25. The honey of life is mixed with hardship, like colocynth
26. And the chains, even if made of pearls, cannot be tolerated
27. O bird, had it not been said that you are mad, I would have said,  
be rational
28. Listen, many detailed words have not benefitted you as much as  
concise ones
29. Be patient with the hardships you face, or do whatever you see fit
30. You are the son of reason, nature in you is never changed
31. Always intimidated by captivity, threatened with killing
32. If you fly away from my side, you will fall prey to ignorant hawks  
(Shawqī, 2012, 209-213)”

In this lyrically rich and evocative piece, the poet deftly utilizes metaphors and imagery to delve into themes of confinement, yearning, and the dichotomy between material opulence and emotional barrenness. The poem embarks on an expressive journey through an intricate dialogue that ostensibly takes place between the poet and an emblematic figure, alluded to as “captive of busyness.” The deployment of the term “captive” intimates themes of confinement and limitations, which can be extrapolated as a commentary on societal restrictions and possibly gendered constraints. The poem demonstrates a keen awareness of the incongruity between external adornment and inner turmoil. The poet invokes lush and opulent imagery, encompassing gold, silk, lilies, cloves, and the purest oud and sandalwood. This portrayal of a luxurious milieu serves to juxtapose the subsequent revelation of the captive’s internal strife. The poet seems to suggest that material splendor and superficial adornments can scarcely veil the pain borne out of confinement and limitations, especially when these limitations impede emotional or creative expression. The line “And the chains, even if made of pearls, cannot be tolerated” is particularly poignant in underscoring this theme.

Additionally, the invocation of a bird in this context is symbolic. Birds have historically been used as symbols of freedom and transcendence in literature. However, in this poem, the bird appears to represent an entangled entity, yearning for liberation yet shackled by constraints. This could metaphorically



represent the plight of individuals, particularly women, in societies where their voices are suppressed, and their aspirations tethered. Furthermore, the reference to “ignorant hawks” serves as a metaphor for oppressive forces that pose threats to those who dare to seek freedom or defy conventional mores. The poet’s reference to the “loud voice” can be construed as a yearning for recognition and understanding, which may be emblematic of women’s search for a voice within societal structures that may often stifle their expression. Additionally, the mention of the “son of reason” and the call for rationality can be viewed as an appeal to recognize the intrinsic human desire for freedom and self-expression, transcending gender norms. Interestingly, the poet engages in a subtle yet striking dichotomy between verbosity and conciseness. The assertion that “many detailed words have not benefitted you as much as concise ones” serves as a commentary on the potency of succinct expression. This may be extrapolated to suggest that the strength of a voice or a stance does not necessarily derive from volume or abundance, but rather from the depth and poignancy of the message conveyed.

The latter portion of Aḥmad Shawqī’s versified composition can be perused below:

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| رَبِّ لِلْبَيْبِ الْأَمْتَلِ   | 33. يَا طَيْرُ وَالْأَمْتَالُ تُضد     |
| أَلَّا تَكُونَ لِأَعَزَلِ      | 34. دُنْيَاكَ مِنْ عَادَاتِهَا         |
| لِ بِالرَّامَانِ الْمُقْبِلِ   | 35. أَوْ لِلْغَيْبِيِّ وَإِنْ تَعَلَّ  |
| فِي ذِي الْحَيَاةِ وَيَبْتَلِي | 36. جُعِلَتْ لِحُرِّ يُبْتَلَى         |
| دِ الْعَيْشِ غَيْرِ مُغْفَلِ   | 37. يَرْمِي وَيُرْمَى فِي جِهَا        |
| يُجْهَلُ عَلَيْهِ يَجْهَلِ     | 38. مُسْتَجْمِعِ كَاللَّيْثِ إِنْ      |
| إِسْلَامِ يَوْمِ الْجَنْدَلِ   | 39. أَسْمِعَتْ بِالْحَكَمَيْنِ فِي الـ |
| لَا حِكْمَةً لَمْ تُشْعَلِ     | 40. فِي الْفِتْنَةِ الْكُبْرَى وَلَوْ  |
| لِكَ بِالْكِتَابِ الْمُنْزَلِ  | 41. رَضِيَ الصَّحَابَةُ يَوْمَ دَ      |
| هُ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ الْمُرْسَلِ | 42. وَهُمْ الْمَصَابِيحُ الرُّوَا      |
| مُفَسِّرٍ وَمُؤَوَّلِ          | 43. قَالُوا الْكِتَابُ وَقَامَ كُلُّ   |
| وَيْهٍ» وَضَاقَ بِهَا «عَلِي»  | 44. حَتَّى إِذَا وَسِعَتْ «مُعَا       |

نُعِ فِي النُّفُوسِ مُؤَصَّلِ	45. رَجَعُوا لُظْمِ كَالطَّبَا
وَعِنْدَ رَأْيِ الْأَحِيلِ	46. نَزَلُوا عَلَى حُكْمِ الْقَوِيِّ
لُ حَفَلَتْ أَم لَمْ تَحْفَلِ	47. صَدَّاحُ حَقُّ مَا أَقْو
وَحَلَلَتْ أَكْرَمَ مَنْزِلِ	48. جَاوَرَتْ أُنْدَى رَوْضَةِ
نِ « وَالرِّعَايَةَ مِنْ عَلِي	49. بَيْنَ الْحَفَاوَةِ مِنْ «حُسَيْبِ
لِكَ فِي صِبَاكَ الْأَوَّلِ	50. وَحَنَانِ «أَمْنَةٍ» كَأَمُّ
أَبْنَاءِ بِالْمُسْتَقْبَلِ	51. صَبَحَ بِالصَّبَاحِ وَبَشَّرَ أَلْ
تَأْتِي وَتَهْبُطُ مِنْ عَلِ	52. وَإِسْأَلَ لِمِصْرَ عِنَايَةَ
وَالْخَيْرِ مِنْكَ فَارْسِلِ	53. قُلْ رَبَّنَا افْتَحْ رَحْمَةً
مَةَ رَبَّنَا وَتَقَبَّلِ	54. أَدْرِكَ كِنَانَتَكَ الْكَرْبِ

“33. O bird, and proverbs are said for the one who is the best among the wise

34. Your world, by its nature, is not for the unarmed

35. Or for the foolish, even if they waste time in anticipation of the future

36. It is made for the free who are tested in this life and who test

37. They aim and are aimed at in the struggle of life, never negligent

38. Gathering his strength like a lion, if someone acts aggressively against him, he responds in kind

39. Have you heard about the two judges [i.e., Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī and al-‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ] in Islam during the day of al-Jandal

40. In the great tribulation, and had it not been for wisdom, it would not have been kindled

41. The Companions [al-Ṣaḥāba] agreed on that day on the revealed book

42. And they are the lamps, the narrators from the sent Prophet

43. They said, ‘The Book’, and every interpreter and allegorist stood

44. Until Mu‘āwiya was able to expand and ‘Alī was constrained

45. They returned to oppression, like the inherent natures in the souls

46. They relied on the judgment of the strong and the opinion of the cunning
47. Indeed, O loud voice, what I'm saying is true, whether you heed it or not
48. You have neighbored the most delightful garden and entered the most honorable dwelling
49. Between the hospitality of Ḥusayn and the guardianship of 'Alī
50. And the tenderness of Āmina, like your mother in your early youth
51. Rise in the morning and bring good tidings to the children of the future
52. And ask for Egypt's care that comes and descends from above
53. Say, 'Our Lord, open the floodgates of mercy, and send forth goodness from You'
54. Reach out to Your bounteous Egypt, O Lord, and accept our prayers (Shawqī, 2012, 209-213)''

In this eloquent segment of the poem, the poet deftly navigates through a labyrinthine path of historical allusion, wisdom, and allegory, drawing upon the rich tapestry of the Islamic tradition to craft a narrative that is at once personal and universal. The section begins with an address to the bird, a recurrent motif that has been employed earlier in the poem. As the lines progress, the poet brings into focus the harsh realities and challenges of life, alluding to the importance of wisdom, strength, and determination. The phrase "Your world, by its nature, is not for the unarmed" is particularly telling, as it evokes a sense of the necessity for fortitude and preparedness in navigating the turbulent waters of existence. This can also be interpreted as a reflection on the position of women in society, who often have to arm themselves with wisdom and resilience to thrive in spaces that are not always welcoming or just. One of the most intriguing aspects of this section is the poet's adroit use of historical allusion, particularly referencing Islamic history. Mention is made of two judges and the Companions, connecting the narrative to a particular epoch and grounding it in a tapestry of tradition and historical significance. This is notable as it can also be seen as a subtle nod to the importance of roots, tradition, and historical consciousness in shaping one's identity and worldview. In the ensuing lines, the poet's tone becomes more

reflective and even admonishing, as if conveying a solemn truth that must be heeded.

As the poem reaches its zenith, the poet employs a tender and nurturing tone. The reference to the “most delightful garden” and “the most honorable dwelling” evokes images of sanctuary and nurturance. The mention of “the tenderness of Āmina” is particularly noteworthy, as it brings a maternal figure into focus, highlighting the significance of maternal nurturance and the sacredness of the mother-child bond. The final lines of this section are imbued with a sense of hope and supplication. The poet invokes divine mercy and blessings, with specific reference to Egypt. This could be interpreted as a prayer not only for geographic Egypt but also as a metaphor for fertile ground where hope can grow and prosper. In summation, this poem is a rich and complex mosaic of themes ranging from wisdom, history, strength, tradition, nurturance, and hope. Through expertly crafted language and allegory, the poet not only pays homage to a rich historical tradition but also subtly evokes themes that resonate with the struggles and triumphs of women through the ages. The poem is an invitation to the reader to engage with the past, be resilient in the present, and hopeful for a future that is nurturing and just.

Within the sphere of modern Arabic literature, a substantial cadre of poets have endeavored to embolden female authors either through direct advocacy or indirectly by crafting verse that inherently supports this mission. Khalīl Mardam Bik emerges as a noteworthy figure amongst this assemblage. His oeuvre is particularly significant for its well-documented veneration of the distinguished Syrian poet, Mayy Ziyāda. In fact, he dedicated one of his most significant works, a praise poem, to her. This poem not only highlights Ziyāda’s literary talent but also her contributions to Arabian society as a woman. Through his poetry, Mardam Bik praised Ziyāda’s courage, intelligence, and determination, portraying her as a role model for future generations of women in the Arab world. Moreover, the poem reflects Mardam Bik’s own progressive views on women’s rights and their role in society. As such, his praise poem for Mayy Ziyāda serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of both poets in the literary and cultural history of the Arab world.

During the celebratory event held in October of 1922 to pay tribute to Mayy Ziyāda, Khalīl Mardam Bik composed a poem, the excerpt of which is provided below. Mardam Bik utilized a superior literary language to praise Ziyāda’s literary accomplishments and her contributions to Arab literature (See Mardam Bik, n.d., 246-249):

- |                               |                                     |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| إِلَى النُّبُوغِ الْعَرَبِيِّ | 1. تَحِيَّةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ              |
| إِلَىٰ بَهَائِ الْأَدَبِ      | 2. وَنَظْرَةٌ خَاشِعَةٌ             |
| (مَيِّ) بِأُمِّي وَأَبِي      | 3. فَذُ جَمَعَتْ بَيْنَهُمَا        |
| حَمَلًا بِبَطْنِ الْكُتُبِ    | 4. كَانَ النُّبُوغُ قَبْلَهَا       |
| بِالِصَدِّ وَالتَّجَنُّبِ     | 5. يَا طَالَمَا عَامَلْنَا          |
| مَنْى بِوَادِ مَجْدِ          | 6. فَذُ زُرْعَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهَا الـ |
| تِ أَعْصُرُ لَمْ تَتَّجِبِ    | 7. مَضَتْ عَلَىٰ أُمِّ اللُّغَا     |
| فِي يَوْمِهَا الْعَصِيبِ      | 8. حَتَّىٰ إِذَا مَا جَهَدْتُ       |
| تَرَوْنَهَا عَنْ كُتُبِ       | 9. تَفَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِمَنْ         |
| بِنَثْرِهَا وَالْخَطْبِ“      | 10. فَبَشَّرْتُ وَأَنْذَرْتُ        |

“1. A sincere greeting to the Arab genius...

2. ...And a reverent glance at the splendor of literature...

3. ...Mayy bridged the divide between the unlearned and the haughty.

4. Before her, genius was merely a burden confined within books.  
[This verse can perhaps be understood as follows: As for the genius before her, it was a burden carried in the womb of books.]

5. For so long we evaded and shunned.

6. Prior to her, aspirations were planted in a desolate valley.

7. Centuries elapsed for the mother of languages, bearing no offspring...

8. ...Until she persevered through challenging times.

9. Allah graced her with those who observe her closely.

10. Through her prose and discourses, she conveyed both glad tidings and warnings (See Mardam Bik, n.d., 246-249).”

In Khalīl Mardam Bik’s praise poem for Mayy Ziyāda, we find an exemplar of women’s empowerment in Arab literature. The poem serves as a tribute to Mayy Ilyās Ziyāda, an influential and pioneering Arab feminist writer and journalist from the early 20th century. Mardam Bik’s verses not only celebrate Ziyāda’s

contributions to Arab literature but also emphasize her role in advancing social change and fostering intellectual growth. The poem commences with a sincere greeting to Mayy as an embodiment of Arab genius, acknowledging the vital role of literature in shaping the cultural heritage of the Arab world. In the third verse, Mardam Bik lauds Mayy's ability to bridge the chasm between distinct social classes, specifically the uneducated and the conceited. This highlights her indispensable role in fostering social cohesion and understanding among diverse groups within the Arab society.

In the fourth verse, Mardam Bik illuminates Mayy's transformative impact on the concept of genius. Prior to her, genius was perceived as a mere burden confined within the pages of books. However, through her literary prowess and insightful intellect, Mayy redefined and elevated the value of genius, liberating it from its textual constraints. The fifth verse poignantly captures the initial reluctance of people to embrace Mayy and her groundbreaking ideas. Nevertheless, as her influence and significance grew over time, so too did the recognition of her essential role in the intellectual and cultural development of Arab society. Her perseverance in the face of skepticism and resistance ultimately facilitated the acceptance and appreciation of her contributions.

The sixth verse speaks to Mayy's remarkable ability to inspire hope and aspiration amidst adversity. She transformed desolate valleys into fertile lands, metaphorically representing her impact on the collective imagination and dreams of her contemporaries. Through her work and influence, she encouraged others to pursue their aspirations even in the most challenging circumstances. The seventh and eighth verses contemplate the centuries-long history of the Arabic language and the arduous journey to produce outstanding literary works. Mardam Bik underscores the significance of Mayy's arrival as a turning point in the development of Arab literature. She persevered through trying times, demonstrating her resilience and unwavering dedication to her craft. In the ninth verse, Mardam Bik acknowledges the divine favor bestowed upon Mayy. As she struggled to break barriers and forge new paths, she was graced with the support of those who observed her value up close. These individuals recognized her talents and contributions, championing her work and amplifying her message.

The tenth verse extols Mayy's ability to convey critical messages through her writing and speeches. She skillfully balanced both warnings and glad tidings, capturing the nuances of the human experience and the complexity of the world. Through her eloquent prose and compelling discourses, Mayy Ziyāda became a beacon of enlightenment, sparking intellectual curiosity and

inspiring generations of writers, thinkers, and activists to follow in her footsteps. Her work transcended the realm of literature, serving as a catalyst for social change and paving the way for the empowerment of women in Arab society. In conclusion, the first part of Khalīl Mardam Bik's praise poem for Mayy Ziyāda is a testament to her indelible impact on Arab literature and culture. Through this part, Mardam Bik not only commemorates Mayy's literary achievements but also underscores her transformative role in promoting social cohesion, fostering intellectual growth, and empowering women within the Arab world. Mayy Ziyāda's legacy continues to resonate today, inspiring new generations to challenge societal norms, harness the power of the written word, and strive for a more inclusive and equitable future.

The second part of the poem is as follows:

طَوْتُ ظِلَالَ الْعَيْهَبِ	11. يَا آيَةً سَاطِعَةً
وَإِنْ تَكُنْ لَمْ تَحْجَبْ	12. وَدَرَّةً مَصُونَةً
فِي شَرْقِهَا وَالْمَغْرِبِ	13. وَنَجْمَةً لَامِعَةً
لُ عَنْ رَفِيعِ الْمَنْصَبِ	14. تَنَازَلْتَ لِكَ الرَّجَا
عَسَاكَ لَنْ تَخِيَّبِي	15. قَدْ أَخْفَقُوا فِي سَعِيهِمْ

“11. O shining sign, which has surpassed the shadows of darkness!

12. O protected pearl, even if it is not veiled.

13. O shining star in the east and west!

14. The elites have left their high positions for you.

15. They failed in their efforts, but hopefully, you won't disappoint  
(See Mardam Bik, n.d., 246-249).”

The second part of Khalīl Mardam Bik's praise poem for Mayy Ziyāda highlights her exceptional qualities and contributions to Arab society. The eleventh verse describes Mayy as a shining sign that has surpassed the shadows of darkness. Here, the poet employs a metaphorical language to express Mayy's brilliance and the transformative impact of her work. The following two verses, twelfth and thirteenth, further emphasize Mayy's value as a protected pearl and a shining star in the east and west. These metaphors signify Mayy's unique position as a revered figure in Arab literature and culture, whose contributions have transcended regional and national boundaries.

The fourteenth verse indicates that Mayy's accomplishments have attracted the attention of the elites of society, who have recognized her significance and have left their high positions to join her cause. This line reflects the far-reaching impact of Mayy's work, which has garnered the admiration and support of the most influential members of Arab society. Moreover, it highlights the transformative potential of Mayy's ideas, which have the power to inspire even the most privileged and entrenched members of society.

Finally, in the fifteenth verse, the poet expresses his hope that Mayy will not disappoint those who have placed their trust in her. This line reflects the high expectations and hopes placed on Mayy as a trailblazer for women's empowerment and social change in the Arab world. It also underscores the urgency and importance of Mayy's work, which has the potential to transform Arab society by challenging patriarchal norms and promoting women's rights.

Overall, the second part of Khalīl Mardam Bik's praise poem for Mayy Ziyāda highlights Mayy's exceptional qualities as a literary figure and social activist, whose work has transcended regional and national boundaries. Through his metaphors and vivid imagery, Mardam Bik portrays Mayy as a shining sign, a protected pearl, and a shining star in the east and west, who has garnered the admiration and support of the most influential members of Arab society. By expressing his hope that Mayy will not disappoint, the poet underscores the transformative potential of her ideas and their relevance to contemporary debates on women's empowerment and social change in the Arab world.

The third part of the poem is as follows:

وَلَوْكَ مُلْكُ الْأَدَبِ	16. وُلَاةُ أَمْرِ الْأَدَبِ
وَذَاكَ أَعْلَى الرَّتَبِ	17. وَقَلْدُوكِ أَمْرَهُمْ
عَزَّتْ عَلَى الْمَطْلَبِ	18. وَبَايَعُوكِ بِالْتِي
كُلُّ عَصِيٍّ أَوْ أَبِي	19. وَانْقَادَ فِي بَيْعَتِهِ
الْأَمْرُ بَعْدَ الشَّعْبِ	20. فَانْتَفَتِ الْفَوْضَى وَقَرَّ
دَوْدَ الْعَرَى وَالطَّنْبِ	21. وَبَاتَ مَلِكُ الْعِلْمِ مَشْدُ
أَعْدَلُ بِهَا وَأَحْبَبُ	22. أَعْظَمُ بِهَا مَلِيكَةً
بِالْغَضَبِ وَالتَّغْلِبِ	23. إِذْ لَمْ تَكُنْ بَيْعَتُهَا

“16. The governors of literary authority made you the monarchess of literature.



17. They have appointed you as their leader. It is the highest rank.
18. They pledged their allegiance to you for a task that was too heavy for the one who undertook it temporarily.
19. All rebels and the haughty acquiesced to her rule.
20. The chaos subsided, and order was restored after the turmoil.
21. The reign of knowledge was firmly established like a tightly tied tent rope.
22. How noble a queen she is, how fair, and how loveable.
23. Because her authority was not established by usurpation or coercion (See Mardam Bik, n.d., 246-249).”

In the third part of Khalīl Mardam Bik’s praise poem for Mayy Ziyāda, he pays homage to her ascendancy as a respected and influential figure within the Arab literary community. By exploring the verses in this section, we can further appreciate the significance of Mayy’s contributions to literature and her role as a trailblazer for women’s empowerment in Arab society. In the sixteenth verse, Mardam Bik emphasizes the recognition Mayy receives from the governors of literary authority, who appoint her as the monarchess of literature. This appointment highlights the high esteem in which she is held among her contemporaries and underscores her substantial impact on Arab literature. Her authority is acknowledged as the highest rank, an honor conferred upon her by the very custodians of literary tradition.

The eighteenth verse elaborates on the magnitude of Mayy’s responsibilities, as even those who temporarily assumed the onerous task of literary leadership defer to her and pledge their allegiance. This act of deference further accentuates Mayy’s importance in the literary realm, demonstrating the faith that the literary community has in her ability to guide and inspire. The nineteenth and twentieth verses underscore Mayy’s power and authority in uniting disparate factions. Her rule brings together both rebels and the haughty, resulting in the restoration of order and harmony following a period of turbulence and upheaval. This accomplishment testifies to Mayy’s exceptional leadership and her capacity to foster unity and cooperation among diverse groups.

In the twenty-first verse, Mardam Bik employs a vivid metaphor comparing the firmly established reign of knowledge under Mayy’s leadership to a tightly tied tent rope. This imagery emphasizes the strength and stability that she brings to the literary community, highlighting her unwavering dedication to intellectual

growth and the dissemination of knowledge. The twenty-second verse extols Mayy's noble, fair, and loveable qualities, further emphasizing her status as a revered literary figure. Through these attributes, she earns the admiration and respect of her peers and readers, consolidating her position as an exemplar of women's empowerment in Arab literature.

Finally, the twenty-third verse notes that Mayy's authority is not established through coercion or usurpation but rather through her own merit and accomplishments. This distinction underscores the legitimacy of her position as a leader in the literary community and serves as a testament to her extraordinary talents and contributions. In summary, the third part of Khalil Mardam Bik's praise poem for Mayy Ziyāda celebrates her meteoric rise to prominence within the Arab literary community. Through his verses, Mardam Bik acknowledges her exceptional leadership, her unifying influence, and her dedication to knowledge and intellectual growth. In this way, Mayy Ziyāda emerges as a powerful symbol of women's empowerment in Arab literature, inspiring generations of female writers and thinkers to follow in her footsteps.

The fourth part of the poem is as follows:

ديارنا من معجب	24. يا (مئي) ما رأيت في
ذرعِ طولِ السببِ	25. قطعتِ عرضَ البحرِ إذْ
من بعدِ طولِ التعبِ	26. عسى ترينِ راحةً
نَ مِنْ أُمُورٍ عَجَبِ	27. بل ما عساك تذكرِ
في عيشنا من أرب	28. لا أكذب الله فما
تُ والمنى في هرب	29. إن الرزايا مقبلا
أعيت على المطيب	30. ضمامةً خبيثةً
بِ والفتى المهذب	31. يا حسرة على الأديب
أمسى ببيت النصب	32. مضيعاً كمصحفٍ
وسعده في صيب	33. فنحسه في صعدٍ
بوجهه المقطب	34. رنا إليه دهره
صدرُ الفضاء الأرحب	35. ضاق عليه وحده
في سهرٍ ونصب	36. نهاره وليله
مدمعه المنسكب	37. فكفني يا مئي من

“24. O Mayy, what wonders have you seen in our lands?

25. You surpassed the vastness of the sea and the length of the desert.

26. May you find peace after this long fatigue.
27. But do you remember the extraordinary situations?
28. Allah knows that our lives are full of struggles.
29. Calamities approach, and hopes flee.
30. A malignant atmosphere weakened the sick person.
31. How tragic for a youthful and virtuous literary soul...
32. ...To be lost like a book in a pagan temple.
33. His misfortune is in its ascent, and his happiness is in its descent.
34. His fate looked at him with a gloomy face.
35. The vast sky was narrow for him alone.
36. His nights and days are spent in sleeplessness and wakefulness.
37. O Mayy! Dry his tears that are falling! (See Mardam Bik, n.d., 246-249)”

In the fourth part of Khalīl Mardam Bik’s praise poem for Mayy Ziyāda, the poet explores the emotional depth and resonance of Mayy’s literary works, emphasizing her ability to connect with the experiences and emotions of her readers. By analyzing these verses in greater detail, we can further appreciate Mayy’s role as an exemplar of women’s empowerment in Arab literature and her profound impact on the lives of her contemporaries. The twenty-fourth verse invites Mayy to reflect on the wonders she has witnessed throughout her life in their shared land. The twenty-fifth verse then emphasizes the extraordinary nature of Mayy’s achievements, likening her accomplishments to surpassing the vastness of the sea and the length of the desert. This imagery serves to underscore the magnitude of her contributions to Arab literature.

In the twenty-sixth verse, the poet expresses a heartfelt wish for Mayy to find peace and rest after her long and eventful life. However, the twenty-seventh verse introduces a more somber tone, inviting Mayy to remember the extraordinary situations and struggles that have shaped their lives. The twenty-eighth verse emphasizes that life is replete with difficulties and adversity, which are known only to Allah. The twenty-ninth verse continues this theme, illustrating the fragile nature of hope in the face of life’s calamities. In the thirtieth verse, the poet takes a more specific turn, describing the plight of a sick person weakened by a malignant atmosphere. The thirty-first and thirty-second verses express a

profound sense of tragedy for a young and virtuous literary soul, who is lost and forgotten like a book in a pagan temple.

The thirty-third and thirty-fourth verses further convey the misfortune faced by the unnamed literary soul, whose fate looks down upon them with a gloomy face. This imagery serves to emphasize the deep sense of sorrow and despair that can befall individuals, even those with great talent and potential. The thirty-fifth verse captures the isolation and despair experienced by the unnamed literary soul, noting that even the vast sky seems narrow for them alone. This metaphor powerfully conveys the feeling of confinement and loneliness that can accompany those struggling in life.

The final three verses of the poem focus on the emotional state of the unnamed literary soul mentioned in the preceding verses. The thirty-sixth verse describes the psychological toll that this individual has undergone, with their nights and days characterized by a state of constant restlessness and anxiety. The final verse, addressed directly to Mayy, implores her to ease the suffering of this individual and to offer them solace in the face of their struggles. This plea highlights Mayy's capacity for empathy and compassion, which were hallmarks of her literary style, and her ability to connect with the experiences and emotions of her audience.

Overall, these verses in Khalīl Mardam Bik's praise poem for Mayy Ziyāda emphasize the emotional resonance of Mayy's writing and the deep impact that her work had on the lives of those who read it. They also serve to underscore the empathy and compassion that were hallmarks of Mayy's literary style, and her ability to connect with the experiences and emotions of her audience. Through this, Mayy Ziyāda emerges as an exemplar of women's empowerment in Arab literature, demonstrating the transformative power of her writing and her lasting influence on the literary community.

### **3.3. Analyzing Male Gaze in Arabic Literature**

In the rich tapestry of literary criticism, discerning the underlying currents that shape the portrayal of characters and narratives is of paramount importance. Amongst the plethora of critical perspectives, the concept of the "Male Gaze" has emerged as an indispensable tool in unraveling the complex interplay of gender dynamics within literary works. Though initially conceptualized in the realm of film theory, the Male Gaze has since garnered a broader applicability, extending its analytical reach to encompass literature (See Mulvey, 2001,

5-14). In this section, entitled “Analyzing Male Gaze in Arabic Literature”, we shall navigate the labyrinthine corridors of Arabic literary heritage through the prism of the Male Gaze. It is essential to recognize that this endeavor not only necessitates an analytical scrutiny of the texts themselves but also requires an immersion into the cultural, historical, and social contexts from which these literary creations have sprung. By doing so, this analysis aspires to unfurl the multifarious ways in which the Male Gaze has possibly informed and influenced the characterization and representation of female entities within Arabic literary tradition. Furthermore, as we sift through the pages of history, an appreciation of the changing cultural tapestries and the evolving perceptions of gender roles will be indispensable in delineating the contours of the Male Gaze in Arabic literature. Through this rigorous and multifaceted inquiry, this section seeks to contribute to a more profound understanding of not just the literary aspects, but also the sociocultural undercurrents that are inextricably interwoven within the storied annals of Arabic literary history.

Nizār Qabbānī’s oeuvre is renowned for its poignant expressions of love, sensuality, and social issues. One particular poem, which we shall now analyze, serves as an illustrative example of the delicate interplay between admiration of the feminine form and the reverential undertone that characterizes much of the male gaze in Arabic poetry. Through intricate metaphors and evocative imagery, Qabbānī’s poem navigates the multifarious aspects of the feminine mystique. This dissection will shed light on how the poem adheres to, or deviates from, traditional mores and the general respect towards women that is characteristic of Arab male poets. With a lens attuned to critical inquiry, let us delve into this poetic composition and the manner in which it engages with the portrayal of women:

1. ”مراهقة النهدي.. لا تربطيه
2. فقد أبدعت ريشة الله رسمه
3. وخليه.. زوبعة من عبير
4. تهلّ على الأرض رزقاً ونعمه
5. هو الدفء.. لا تُذعري إن رأيت
6. قميصك.. يزهو بأروع قمه
7. فما عدت يا طفلاتي طفلة

8. سَيِّهَمِي الشَّنَا.. غَيْمَةً بَعْدَ غَيْمَةٍ

9. وَيَخْرُجُ مِنْ فَجْوَةِ الثَّوْبِ نَهْدٌ

10. لِيَأْكُلَ مِنْ مَسِيحِ الضَّوِّءِ.. نَجْمَةً

11. كَبُرَتْ.. فَحَوْضُ اغْتَسَالِكَ جُنٌّ

12. بِتِلْكَ الْمَجْرَدَةِ الْمَسْتَحَمَّةِ“

- “1. In the adolescence of the bosom, do not restrain it,
2. For the divine brush of God has perfected its sketch.
3. Leave it as a whirlwind of fragrance,
4. That bestows upon the earth sustenance and grace.
5. It is warmth; do not be alarmed if you see
6. Your blouse embellished with its splendid peak.
7. No longer, my child, are you a little girl,
8. Winter will assail with a cloud following a cloud,
9. And from the aperture of the garment, a breast will emerge,
10. To partake of the radiant starlight.
11. You have grown, your bathing pool is concealed,
12. With that ethereal, immersed purification (Qabbānī, n.d., 1/167-168).”

In the provided excerpt of the poem, the poet navigates through the themes of burgeoning femininity and the natural beauty associated with it, employing lyrical language and vivid imagery to evoke a sense of awe and reverence toward the process of maturation. The poem is suffused with an aura of mysticism and sacredness as it draws a parallel between the divine and the natural transformation of a young girl into womanhood. In the opening lines, the poet makes an earnest entreaty to not restrain the budding bosom, characterizing it as an artistic creation perfected by the “divine brush of God”. This portrayal not only underlines the sanctity attached to the human form but also suggests that the natural progression of the female body is an act of divine will. Consequently, the poet implies that any attempt to hinder or contain this growth would be in contravention of its innate purity and splendor.

As the poem progresses, the bosom is likened to “a whirlwind of fragrance”, an evocative metaphor that conjures up an image of an enchanting and vibrant force. This element is depicted as being generous, showering the earth with sustenance and grace. Through this representation, the poet emphasizes the nurturing aspect associated with femininity and alludes to the potential for fertility and motherhood that accompanies the maturation of the female body. The mention of “warmth” and the visualization of a blouse adorned by the bosom’s “splendid peak” serve to exemplify the comforting and alluring facets of femininity. Furthermore, this imagery can be perceived as a commentary on societal reactions to the physical changes in an adolescent girl. The poet encourages the embracing of these changes as natural and beautiful, rather than viewing them with consternation or trepidation.

One may observe a subtle reference to the male gaze in the lines concerning the onset of winter, wherein the poet speaks of the bosom emerging through the garment. The imagery conjures a scene where the cold attempts to penetrate, but the warmth and the life-affirming qualities of the maturing body act as a counterforce. Taking into consideration the perspective that the reference to the bosom partaking in “radiant starlight” may be an allusion to its paleness, the verse can be interpreted as a portrayal of the bosom’s physical attributes, emphasizing its fairness and delicacy. The use of “radiant starlight” as a metaphor might be employed to convey the purity and luminosity associated with the paleness, which, within the context of the poem, can be indicative of youth and beauty. This analogy to starlight possibly serves to elevate the subject’s features to an almost ethereal status, reflecting a sense of awe and admiration. Moreover, in the context of the male gaze, the description can be seen as an example of idealizing and objectifying the female body, particularly emphasizing certain attributes as symbols of beauty and desire. This provided excerpt of the poem is a poignant homage to the blossoming of femininity, depicting it as an interplay between the divine and the corporeal. The poet’s diction and metaphors serve to both venerate the natural changes occurring in the female body and to advocate for an unshackled acceptance of these transformations. Through the lens of male gaze, the poem entwines admiration with a hint of possession, as it articulates an observation of feminine maturation, but does so with a sacred reverence.

In the subsequent stanzas, Qabbānī perpetuates the poetic narrative with the following verses:

13. ”وَصَدْرُكَ مَزْرَعَةُ الْيَاسْمِينِ  
 14. تَفْتَقُّ عَنْ حَلْمَةٍ.. بَعْدَ حَلْمَةٍ..  
 15. أَشْقَرَاءُ. يَا سَحَابَاتِ الْحَرِيرِ  
 16. زَرَعْتَ الرَّمَالَ.. اِشْتَهَاءً وَعُلْمَةً..  
 17. تَمَدِّينَ لِلْمَاءِ.. إصْبِعَ طِفْلٍ  
 18. فَيَنْسَحِبُ الْبَحْرُ.. حُبًّا وَرَحْمَةً..  
 19. تَلَاشِي عَلَى مَضْجِعِ أَرْزَقِ  
 20. وَكُونِي لِأَمْوَاجِ الْهَوْجِ لُقْمَةً  
 21. أَخَافُ عَلَى الْبَحْرِ أَنْ تُحْرِقِيهِ  
 22. فَلَا تَجْرَحِي يَا جَمِيلَةَ حُلْمَةٍ..  
 23. صَبِيئَةً.. إِنِّي احْتِرَاقٌ كَنِيْبٌ  
 24. فَمَرِّي بِدِفْءِ جُرُوحِي نَسْمَةً  
 25. أَنَا دَخْنَةٌ مِنْكَ.. لَا تَطْمُنُّ  
 26. فَلَا تَطْعَمِينِي لِنَهْدِيكَ.. فَحْمَةً“

- “13. Your chest is a plantation of jasmine,  
 14. Unfolding dreams one after another.  
 15. Fair-haired one, oh silken clouds,  
 16. You have sown the sands with desire and youthfulness.  
 17. You extend a child’s finger towards the water,  
 18. And the sea recedes, out of love and compassion.  
 19. Efface yourself upon a cerulean divan,  
 20. And be a morsel for its raging waves.  
 21. I fear for the sea that you might set it ablaze,  
 22. So do not wound it, oh beautiful one.  
 23. Young maiden, I am a somber conflagration,  
 24. So, pass a gentle breeze over the warmth of my wounds.



25. I am the smoke from you, that finds no peace,  
 26. So, do not feed me the charcoal of your bosom (Qabbānī, n.d.,  
 1/167-168).”

In this excerpt from Nizār Qabbānī’s poem, an astute reader may discern an intriguing exploration of femininity through the lens of the male gaze. The diction and imagery employed by Qabbānī manifest an enchanting portrayal of a female subject. Through the narrative, he meticulously renders the corporeality of the female form as both a site of natural abundance and a source of potent allure. One of the principal motifs evident in this section of the poem is the connection between femininity and nature. The mention of the chest being likened to “a plantation of jasmine” epitomizes this motif. The metaphor not only evokes a sense of freshness and fertility but also serves to represent the female bosom as a place that is teeming with life and beauty, akin to a lush garden. The poet thus renders the female form as something organic, fertile, and inherently associated with the nurturing aspect of nature.

Furthermore, Qabbānī’s portrayal of the subject as “Fair-haired... silken clouds” and her act of sowing “the sands with desire and youthfulness” highlights the ethereal, almost otherworldly aspects of femininity. The juxtaposition of delicacy, represented by the silken clouds, with the vast, rugged terrain of the sands suggests a delicate yet profound influence that the female exerts upon the world. Another arresting aspect is the depiction of the interplay between the female form and the elements. This is evident in the portrayal of the subject extending “a child’s finger towards the water”, resulting in the sea receding “out of love and compassion”. The illustration not only underscores the perceived innocence and purity of the female subject but also imbues her with an almost mythical power over the natural elements. This can be interpreted as the poet’s way of enunciating the magnetic and transformative power of femininity.

Moreover, the poet’s use of the sea as a motif is dually representative. While on one level it symbolizes the vastness and depth of emotions, on another it serves as a metaphor for the tempestuous nature of desire. The call to the female subject to “efface herself upon a cerulean divan” and be “a morsel for its raging waves” can be seen as an entreaty to surrender to the tumultuous ebb and flow of passions. Additionally, the poem portrays the female as a source of both nurturing and potential peril, particularly through the male gaze. This is evidenced in the lines “I fear for the sea that you might set it ablaze” and

“do not feed me the charcoal of your bosom”. These lines portray the female as possessing a dangerous, fiery aspect that is as captivating as it is perilous. This may also signify the male anxiety over the overwhelming power of female sexuality. In summary, through a rich tapestry of metaphors and vivid imagery, Qabbānī’s poem delves into a complex and poetic exploration of femininity as perceived through the male gaze, encompassing themes of natural abundance, allure, power, and duality.

In closing, it is imperative to recognize the multifaceted nature of the male gaze in Arab poetry. While there exists a historical thread influenced by pre-Islamic perceptions, contemporary Arab male poets often exhibit a deferential attitude towards women. This respect is inherently interwoven with the cultural fabric that holds social and religious norms in high regard. The corpus of Arab poetry reflects an amalgamation of traditional values, societal conventions, and religious tenets that shape the poets’ perspectives on femininity. Consequently, the male gaze in Arab poetry can be considered as a dynamic construct that, while sometimes drawing on ancient motifs, largely reveres and respects the female form and persona within the parameters set by societal norms and religious doctrines. The interplay of tradition and contemporary sensibilities contribute to the richness and depth of female portrayals in Arabic poetic literature.



## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDIES

#### 4.1. Detailed Analysis of Selected Works by Women

As we embark upon an in-depth exploration of literary contributions from female authors, it is imperative to recognize the diversity and richness that they bring to the world of literature. These compositions, often reflecting unique perspectives, imbue the literary tapestry with shades of emotions, socio-cultural narratives, and varied life experiences. The detailed analysis that follows focuses on an assortment of works, investigating their themes, stylistic elements, and motifs. By scrutinizing these pieces through a critical lens, we aim to appreciate the finesse, depth, and diversity that women have infused into the literary sphere. Furthermore, the dissection of these texts will serve as a window into the vast spectrum of emotions, social settings, and experiences that have shaped and been shaped by the powerful pens of female authors.

In this exquisite piece of Arabic poetry, Nāzik al-Malā'ika, a venerated figure in the Arab literary world, explores the profound themes of mortality, solitude, and societal indifference. The poem is notable for its poignant imagery and evocative language, which create an aura of melancholy and isolation. al-Malā'ika's mastery of symbolism and metaphors brings to life the narrative of an unacknowledged demise. The haunting images of a figure departing this world unnoticed, her passing without the common expressions of grief, and the inevitable passage of time, culminate in a reflection on human indifference and the transience of existence. Through her eloquent verse, al-Malā'ika also hints at the yearning for remembrance and the somber reality of oblivion. Before delving into the translation, it is important to immerse oneself in the emotional depth and artistic finesse that the poem embodies. Through this lens, the reader is invited to experience the bitter resonance and the ephemerality that define this stirring composition:

1. ”ذَهَبَتْ وَلَمْ يَشْحَبْ لَهَا خَدٌّ وَلَمْ تَرَ تَجْفُ شِفَاهُ

2. لَمْ تَسْمَعْ الْأَبْوَابُ قِصَّةَ مَوْتِهَا تُرَوَى وَتُرَوَى

3. لَمْ تَرْتَفِعْ أَسْتَارَ نَافِذَةٍ تَسِيلُ أَسَىٰ وَشُجْوَا  
 4. لِتَتَابَعَ النَّابُوتَ بِالتَّحْدِيقِ حَتَّى لَا تَرَاهُ  
 5. إِلَّا بَقِيَّةَ هَيْكَلٍ فِي الدَّرْبِ تُرْعِشُهُ الذِّكْرُ  
 6. نَبَأًا تَعْتَرُّ فِي الدُّرُوبِ فَلَمْ يَجِدْ مَأْوَىٰ صَدَاهُ  
 7. فَأَوَىٰ إِلَى النَّسْيَانِ فِي بَعْضِ الْحُفْرِ  
 8. يَرِثِي كَابِتَهُ الْقَمَرُ.”

- “1. She departed this world, yet no cheek lost its color, no lips trembled  
 2. The doors remained unaware, as the tale of her passing was recounted time and again  
 3. No curtains of a window were raised, dripping with grief and sorrow  
 4. To follow the coffin with a gaze until it was out of sight  
 5. Only the remnant of a skeleton in the path, shivering at the mention  
 6. A piece of news stumbled in the paths, finding no place for its resonance  
 7. And sought refuge in oblivion, in some pits  
 8. With the moon mourning its melancholy (al-Malā’ika, 1997, 2/273-274)”

In the poem under analysis, the poet deftly crafts a poignant and somber reflection on the tragic anonymity and societal indifference that shrouds a woman’s departure from this world. Through evocative imagery and metaphor, the poem laments the ephemerality of life and the isolation of death, particularly for women whose existence may often go unacknowledged or unvalued. The initial lines paint a picture of an indifferent world where the passing of a woman does not incite visible signs of grief. The use of the words “cheek” and “lips”, both often associated with beauty and femininity, underline the physical absence of a response to her death. The imagery of the “doors” being “unaware” and not hearing the “tale of her passing” serves as a poignant metaphor for the closed-off nature of society, which fails to recognize or acknowledge the loss.

As the poem progresses, it continues to employ vivid and emotive imagery to underscore the desolation and neglect surrounding her death. The mention of “curtains of a window” not being “raised, dripping with grief and sorrow”, captures the absence of human sentiment and connection, and the lack of a community in mourning. This resonates deeply within the context of women’s studies, as it reflects the invisibility and marginalization that women have historically faced. The haunting image of the “remnant of a skeleton in the path, shivering at the mention”, conjures the skeletal remains of what was once a living, breathing person. This line evokes the chilling realization that this woman, who might have been a repository of stories, experiences, and emotions, has been reduced to a mere object, bereft of identity and reverence.

Furthermore, the poet cleverly personifies the news of her death as stumbling through paths, searching for a place to resonate but ultimately finding refuge in oblivion. This element of personification speaks volumes about the fleeting nature of human life and the ease with which an individual, particularly a woman, can be forgotten in the vast sea of human existence. The concluding imagery of the moon mourning with melancholy serves as a stark contrast to the earlier depiction of human indifference. The moon, a celestial object often associated with femininity and the cycles of life, is portrayed as the only witness to the sorrow and loss that accompany her passing. This further accentuates the notion that, in her death, she finds kinship not among the living, but with the ethereal elements of nature that share her silent grief.

Subsequent verses in Nāzik al-Malā’ika’s poetic composition read as follows:

9. وَاللَّيْلُ أَسْلَمَ نَفْسَهُ دُونَ اهْتِمَامٍ، لِلصَّبَاخِ  
 10. وَأَتَى الضِّيَاءُ بِصَوْتِ بَائِعَةِ الحَلِيبِ وَبِالصِّيَامِ،  
 11. بِمُؤَاةٍ قَطِّ جَائِعٍ لَمْ تَبْقَ مِنْهُ سِوَى عِظَامِ،  
 12. بِمُشَاجِرَاتِ النَّبَاعِيِّنَ، وَبِالمَرَارَةِ وَالكِفَاحِ،  
 13. بِتَرَأَشِقِ الصَّبِيَانِ بِالأَحْجَارِ فِي عَرْضِ الطَّرِيقِ،  
 14. بِمَسَارِبِ المَاءِ المُلَوَّثِ فِي الأَرْقَةِ، بِالرِّيَاحِ،  
 15. تَلْهُو بِأَبْوَابِ السُّطُوحِ بِلَا رَفِيقِ  
 16. فِي شِبْهِ نَسِيَانٍ عَمِيقِ“

- “9. The night submitted itself, without concern, to the morning  
 10. And the light came with the voice of the milk seller woman and fasting  
 11. With the meowing of a starving cat, of which only bones remained  
 12. With the quarreling of vendors, and with bitterness and struggle  
 13. With children pelting each other with stones in the middle of the road  
 14. With polluted waters flowing through the alleyways, with winds  
 15. That toyed with the doors of the rooftops, companionless  
 16. In a semblance of deep oblivion (al-Malā’ika, 1997, 2/273-274)”

In this poetic excerpt, the author constructs an intricately woven tapestry of life, juxtaposing elements of everyday existence with the indifference of the night that yields to the day. Through vivid imagery and meticulous attention to detail, the poet captures the relentless forward march of time, the resilience of the marginalized, and the silent desolation that accompanies the mundane. The opening line, in which the night is depicted as submitting itself “without concern, to the morning”, elucidates the inexorable cycle of time. This image also serves as a poignant metaphor for the societal structures that perpetuate themselves with disregard for the individual lives within them. The indifferent passage from night to morning epitomizes the transient and often unacknowledged nature of human life, particularly the lives of women.

As dawn breaks, the poet introduces the reader to the multifaceted, lived experiences of individuals in this setting. The mention of a “milk seller woman” holds particular significance within the women’s studies framework. Her voice symbolizes the labor of women, which often goes unnoticed but is integral to the sustenance of communities. Moreover, the fact that her voice is associated with the light of morning hints at the often-unsung role of women in nurturing and supporting society. Additionally, the portrayal of “a starving cat, of which only bones remained”, resonates deeply as an allegorical representation of the marginalized and neglected, particularly women who, like the cat, may find themselves emaciated and devoid of sustenance in various forms – be it emotional, financial, or social.

The “quarreling of vendors” and the “children pelting each other with stones” evoke a sense of chaos and strife, possibly indicative of the

tumultuous societal struggles that individuals endure. Within the context of women's studies, this can be interpreted as the representation of the daily battles that women face in a patriarchal society, where their voices and concerns are often drowned out amidst the cacophony of conflicting interests. The "polluted waters flowing through the alleyways" and winds "toying with the doors of the rooftops, companionless", convey both physical and metaphorical pollution and isolation. The polluted waters can symbolize the tainted and oppressive societal norms that constrain women, while the "companionless" winds are evocative of the loneliness and lack of support that women may experience.

The concluding phrase "in a semblance of deep oblivion" encapsulates the essence of the poem. This portrays a society seemingly desensitized and oblivious to the struggles of its most vulnerable members. In the context of women's studies, it suggests that the trials and tribulations of women are often consigned to oblivion, with their voices and histories marginalized. In sum, this evocative poem is a microcosm of society's complexities, daily rituals, and struggles. Through the keenly observed details and vivid imagery, the poet challenges the reader to reflect on the often-overlooked experiences of women, the cyclical nature of time and societal indifference, and the relentless strength and resilience that characterizes human existence. The poem serves as a haunting reminder of the necessity for empathy, understanding, and recognition of the integral role played by women in the tapestry of life.

The following piece is a vivid exploration of perception and individuality by renowned poet Mayy Ziyāda. Her work, known for its depth and complexity, often reflects on the struggles and triumphs of women, offering a unique insight into the intricacies of the female experience. This particular poem, focused on the motif of eyes, underscores the diversity of women's experiences and voices, illuminating their unique narratives often overlooked or misunderstood in the broader societal discourse. It encapsulates the subtleties of femininity, identity, and perception, skillfully interwoven into the profound imagery of eyes. As you engage with this emotive piece, allow it to serve as a reflection of the multifaceted nature of womanhood, a celebration of diversity, and a call to self-introspection and discovery:

1. تلك الأحداق القائمة في الوجوه كتعاويذ من حلك ولجين.

2. تلك المياه الجائلة بين الأشجار والأهداب كبحيرات تنطقن بالشواطيء وأشجار الحور.



3. العيون، ألا تدهشك العيون؟

4. العيون الرمادية بأحلامها.

5. والعيون الزرقاء بتنوعها.

6. والعيون العسلية بحلاوتها.

7. والعيون البنية بجاذبيتها.

8. والعيون القاتمة بما يتناوبها من قوة وعذوبة.“

“1. Those irises standing in the faces, like talismans of jet and lustrous silver.

2. Those waters rolling between lashes and eyelids, like lakes that speak through the murmur of waves and the surrounding poplars.

3. The eyes, don't they astound you?

4. The gray eyes with their dreams.

5. The blue eyes with their variety.

6. The honey-colored eyes with their sweetness.

7. The brown eyes with their attractiveness.

8. The intense eyes with their alternating strength and tenderness (Ziyāda, 2011, 39-41).”

The presented poem is a vivid exploration of the human experience as reflected through the lens of the eyes. The poet's rich and evocative language invites the reader to consider the nuances of perception, emotion, and connection. Starting with the first verse, the poet presents the human eye as a significant entity, a “talisman of jet and lustrous silver”. The eye is painted as an amulet, possessing magical properties, creating an imagery that immediately captures the readers' imagination. This comparison suggests that eyes are more than merely windows to the soul—they are the protectors, gatekeepers, holding a certain mystical power. The use of “jet and lustrous silver” emphasizes the spectrum of human emotion and experience that eyes can portray, from the depths of darkness to the brilliance of light. In the second verse, the poet uses the metaphor of “waters rolling between lashes and eyelids, like lakes that speak through the murmur of waves and the surrounding poplars”. This simile deepens

the symbolic representation of the eye by relating it to nature, specifically the calm and introspective quality of a murmuring lake, surrounded by poplars. This portrays eyes as entities possessing depth and resonance, akin to nature's profound tranquility. The third verse poses a rhetorical question, "The eyes, don't they astound you?" This verse compels readers to reflect on the previous stanzas, pushing them to reconsider their perception of the eyes. The question serves to emphasize the poet's awe and admiration for the complex nature of eyes. Verses four to eight are an eloquent exploration of the variety of eyes, each associated with a distinct color and characteristic. The gray eyes are connected with dreams, blue with variety, honey-colored with sweetness, brown with attractiveness, and intense eyes with alternating strength and tenderness. This personification provides a colorful palette of human experiences and emotions, offering an intricate depiction of the diverse nature of individuals.

Mayy Ziyāda's poem proceeds with the subsequent verses:

9. جميع العيون.
10. تلك التي تذكرك بصفاء السماء.
11. وتلك التي يركد فيها عمق اليوم.
12. وتلك التي تريك مفاوز الصحراء وسرابها.
13. وتلك التي تعرج بخيالك في ملكوت أنيري كل بهاء.
14. وتلك التي تمر فيها سحائب مبرقة مهضبة.
15. وتلك التي لا يتحول عنها بصرك إلا لبيحث عن شامة في الوجنة.
16. العيون الضيقة المستديرة، والعيون اللوزية المستطيلة.
17. وتلك الغائرة في محارها لشدة ما تتمعن وتتبصر.
18. وتلك الرحيبة اللواظ البطيئة الحركات.
19. وتلك التي تطفو عليها الأجنان العليا بهدوء كما ترفرف أسراب الطيور البيضاء على بحيرات الشمال.
20. وتلك الأخرى ذات اللهب الأخضر التي تلوّى شعاعها كعقافة كلاب على القلب فتحتجنه، وغيرها، وغيرها، وغيرها.
21. العيون التي تشعر.
22. والعيون التي تفكر.

23. والعيون التي تتمتع.

24. والعيون التي تترنم.

25. وتلك التي عسكرت فيها الأحقاد والحفاظ.

26. وتلك التي غرزت في شعابها الأسرار.“

“9. All eyes.

10. Those that remind you of the purity of the sky.

11. Those in which the depth of the ocean settles.

12. Those that show you the vast deserts and their mirages.

13. Those that carry your dreams to a heavenly kingdom full of glory.

14. Those through which scurrying, lightning-laden clouds pass.

15. Those from which your gaze can't deviate except to search for a mole on the cheek.

16. The narrow, round eyes, and the almond-shaped rectangular eyes.

17. Those deep in their sockets due to their intense contemplation and observation.

18. Those wide ones with slow-moving glances.

19. Those over which the upper eyelids float peacefully, as flocks of white birds flutter over northern lakes.

20. And those others with the green flame that twists like a hook on the heart, and others, and others, and others.

21. The eyes that feel.

22. The eyes that think.

23. The eyes that enjoy.

24. The eyes that sing.

25. Those where grudges and resentments have camped.

26. And those in whose crevices secrets have been embedded (Ziyāda, 2011, 39-41).”

Through her poetic vision, Ziyāda invokes elements of the natural world to elucidate the characteristics of different eyes, highlighting the poetic kinship

between the human condition and our environment. For instance, the eyes are portrayed as mirrors of the sky's purity, the ocean's depth, and the vastness of the desert with its mirages. In essence, the eyes become an embodiment of nature's grandeur, thus reinforcing the age-old notion of microcosm and macrocosm, suggesting that the cosmos is reflected within each individual. In addition, the poet alludes to the mystical capacity of eyes to transport us into otherworldly realms. The eyes serve as portals to a heavenly kingdom full of glory, underscoring the transcendental power of vision that goes beyond the mere physical plane. Ziyāda's mastery lies in creating a rich, multilayered, and immersive visual experience for the reader, inviting us to perceive reality through diverse optical lenses.

Furthermore, the poem highlights the dynamic range of emotions and mental states that eyes can express. The eyes are depicted as entities capable of feeling, thinking, enjoying, and even singing, encapsulating a wide spectrum of human emotions from joy and contemplation to bitterness and resentment. The eyes become an embodiment of the internal emotional world, presenting a stark contrast to their external physical form. Ziyāda's artful depiction of the eyes as vessels holding secrets further underscores the theme of the hidden depths and complexities within individuals. The eyes become repositories of unspoken emotions, grudges, resentments, and mysteries, revealing that there is much more beneath the surface that meets the eye. The reader is thus reminded of the need for deeper understanding and empathy in interpersonal relationships.

The ensuing part of Mayy Ziyāda's poem reads as follows:

27. جميع العيون وجميع أسرار العيون.  
 28. تلك التي يظل فيها الوحي طُلعة خبأة.  
 29. وتلك التي تكاثفت عليها أغشية الخمول.  
 30. وتلك التي يتسع سوادها أمام من تحب وينكمش لدى من تكره.  
 31. وتلك التي لا تفتأ سائلة: « من أنت؟ » وكلما أحببتها زادت استفهاماً.  
 32. وتلك التي تقرر بلحظة « أنت عبيدي! »  
 33. وتلك التي تصرخ: « بي احتياج إلى الألم، أليس بين الناس من يتقن تعذبي؟ »  
 34. وتلك التي تقول: « بي حاجة إلى الاستبداد، فأين ضحيتي؟ »  
 35. وتلك التي تبتسم وتتوسل.

36. وتلك التي يشخص فيها انجذاب الصلاة وانخراط المصلي.
37. وتلك التي تظل مستطلعة خفاياك وهي تقول: «ألا تعرفني؟»
38. وتلك التي يتعاقب في مياهها كل استخبار، وكل انجذاب، وكل نفي، وكل إثبات.
39. العيون، جميع العيون، ألا تدهشك العيون؟”
- “27. All eyes and all secrets of eyes.
28. Those in which inspiration remains a hidden sprout.
29. Those where veils of lethargy have thickened upon them.
30. Those whose blackness expands in front of the one they love and shrinks before the one they hate.
31. Those that never stop asking: “Who are you?” And the more you answer them, the more they question.
32. Those that decide in a moment “You are my servant!”
33. Those that scream: “I need pain, isn’t there someone among people who masters torturing me?”
34. Those that say: “I need to dominate, so where is my victim?”
35. Those that smile and plead.
36. Those in which the attraction of prayer and the captivation of the one praying is personified.
37. Those that keep exploring your secrets and say: “Don’t you know me?”
38. Those in which every revelation, every attraction, every denial, every affirmation takes turns in their waters.
39. The eyes, all eyes, don’t they astonish you (Ziyāda, 2011, 39-41)?”

In this continuation of Mayy Ziyāda’s captivating poem, the poet’s astute observations turn the eyes into a comprehensive canvas upon which the entire spectrum of human experience is painted. The poet embraces a sense of universality, through the phrase “All eyes and all secrets of eyes”, indicating that this is not a singular journey but one shared across the human condition. As she delves into an array of emotions and states of being, Ziyāda captures the intricacy and diversity of human experiences. The eyes, as she presents them, are not merely organs of vision; they become repositories of experiences, embodying

inspiration, lethargy, love, hate, and a plethora of other emotions. The shifting nature of the eyes, which she captures in “those whose blackness expands in front of the one they love and shrinks before the one they hate”, emphasizes the dynamic, mutable nature of human emotions. Ziyāda’s treatment of the eyes as active agents of interaction further deepens the multi-dimensionality of her symbolism. The eyes that demand, plead, assert their dominion, or seek torture underscore the vast expanse of human wants and needs. They also signify the multitude of roles we assume in our interpersonal relationships, be it a master, a servant, a torturer, or a victim.

Notably, Ziyāda extends her metaphor of eyes to highlight the spiritual dimension of human existence, as seen in “Those in which the attraction of prayer and the captivation of the one praying is personified”. This serves to remind the reader of the profound spiritual potential of human beings. Moreover, the poet highlights the inquisitive nature of the eyes that persistently probe for answers and explore secrets. This interrogative gaze of the eyes signifies our inherent desire for understanding and discovery, both of ourselves and others. Such exploration and quest for understanding are fundamental to our intellectual and emotional growth. Finally, Ziyāda’s recurring question, “The eyes, all eyes, don’t they astonish you?” underscores the poem’s central theme: the awe-inspiring complexity and profundity of human existence as reflected in our eyes. Through her creative and meticulous rendering of eyes, she compels the reader to acknowledge and marvel at the intricacies and depth of our individual and collective experiences.

Mayy Ziyāda extends her poetic exploration in the following manner:

40. وأنت ما لون عينيك، وما معناهما، وإلى أي نقطة بين المرئيات أو وراءها ترميان؟

41. قم إلى مرأتك!

42. وانظر إلى طلسميك السحريين، هل درستهما قبل اليوم؟

43. تفرس في عمق أعماقهما تتبين الذات العلمية التي ترصد حركات الأنام، وتسايير دورة الأفلاك والأزمنة.

44. في أعماق أعماقهما ترى كل مشهد وكل وجه وكل شيء.

45. وإذا شئت أن تعرفني، أنا المجهولة، تفرس في حدقتيك يجذني نظرك في نظرك على رغم منك.

“40. And you, what color are your eyes, and what do they mean, and to which point among visible things or beyond do they aim?

41. Stand up to your mirror!
42. Look at your magical talismans (i.e., eyes), have you studied them before today?
43. Look deeply into their depths, you will discern the learned self, the one observing the motions of mankind, keeping pace with the cycle of the heavenly bodies and times.
44. In the depths of their depths, you see every scene, every face, and everything.
45. And if you wish to know me, the unknown, peer into your pupils and your gaze will find me in your gaze, despite yourself (Ziyāda, 2011, 39-41).”

In this striking portion of Mayy Ziyāda’s masterpiece, the poet transitions from the observational to the interrogative, turning the poem’s gaze onto the reader. In doing so, Ziyāda ushers us into a realm of introspection and self-exploration, a testament to her acuity in understanding the reflective and receptive capabilities of her audience. The poet posits a series of direct questions, asking the reader about the color and meaning of their eyes, and where they focus their gaze. By asking about the color of the eyes, Ziyāda underscores the importance of individual perspective, reminding the reader that everyone possesses a unique view of the world. This theme of uniqueness and individuality is further reinforced when she prompts the reader to contemplate the meaning of their eyes and the direction of their gaze, suggesting that each person’s perspective is influenced by their distinct experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Ziyāda’s invitation to “Stand up to your mirror!” connotes more than a literal self-examination. It signifies a call to introspection, to delve deeper into oneself to understand one’s perceptions and perspectives. The poet’s reference to eyes as “magical talismans” metaphorically expresses their power to capture, reflect, and transform our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

The subsequent exhortation to look deeply into the eyes and discern the “learned self” reiterates the theme of introspection. Here, the eyes are presented as a portal to self-awareness and self-realization, capable of reflecting the complexity of human existence. Ziyāda underlines the richness of the human experience by linking it with the vastness of cosmic events, suggesting an interconnection between the individual, society, and the universe at large. In the closing lines, Ziyāda establishes a connection between the reader and

herself, by suggesting that the reader's gaze into their pupils could reveal the poet, the "unknown". This powerful sentiment creates an intimate bond between the reader and the poet, suggesting that our connections with others are often mirrored within ourselves. By shifting her focus towards the reader, Ziyāda successfully shifts the realm of her exploration from the outward world to the inward self. Through this inward journey, she opens up avenues for introspection, self-awareness, and a deeper understanding of the human condition. The power of this segment of the poem lies in its ability to provoke thought, challenge perceptions, and promote self-discovery, making it a compelling piece of literature that continues to resonate with readers.

In the realm of women's literature, Ziyāda's piece offers a potent exploration of individuality and introspection. Her evocative depiction of the eyes as communicative instruments serves as a metaphor for women's voices and their myriad expressions. The poem's emphasis on individual perception and inherent subjectivity may symbolize the diverse experiences and perspectives of women, often unvoiced or undervalued in broader society. As the reader is invited to look deeply into their own eyes, Ziyāda encourages a profound self-discovery, a theme that resonates powerfully in an era where women's identities are continually evolving and challenging conventional norms. It subtly raises questions around gender perception, identity formation, and the role of the observer in defining these constructs. Ultimately, through her skillful portrayal of eyes in their multifaceted roles, Ziyāda underscores the richness and complexity of women's experiences, establishing a compelling dialogue on the importance of visibility and representation in the narrative of women's identity.

#### **4.2. Detailed Analysis of Selected Works by Men About Women**

As we move forward in our scholarly exploration, we will now immerse ourselves into the realm of detailed textual analysis, focusing on a selection of remarkable literary pieces authored by men about women. This intricate mesh of perceptions, interpretations, and relationships yields an incredibly rich canvas, one that is primed for an in-depth dissection. This section is not just about underlining the obvious; it seeks to dive beneath the surface to unearth subtleties and nuances that lie within these works. These works have been meticulously selected from a wide chronological and cultural spectrum, providing a panoramic view of the multifaceted representations of womanhood as perceived through the lens of male authors. By doing so, we aim to offer a captivating peek into the fluid and manifold constructions of femininity. Our exploration will not only



illuminate the diverse depictions of women but also delve into the motivations, ideologies, and potential biases that might have influenced these portrayals. By adopting such an approach, we hope to draw a more comprehensive picture of the male perspective on women in literature and its impacts. By taking into account this wide range of elements, we strive to enrich our understanding of the gender dynamics that have influenced and been reflected through these texts.

A comprehensive review of modern Arabic poetry addressing the subject of femininity reveals an emphatic representation of distinct attributes associated with women. Notably, Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī, in one of his compositions, accentuates the facet of motherhood. His work, *Qalb al-Umm*, or the *Heart of the Mother*, illustrates the harrowing experience of a mother bereft of her child. The poet's verses create a profound depiction of a mourning mother's anguish. The poem could be interpreted as embodying elements evocative of the elegiac mode common in classical Arabic literature. The poetic narrative of al-Shābbī unfolds as follows:

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| فَدَّ كَانَ كَاللَّحْنِ الْجَمِيلِ  | ”1. يَا أَيُّهَا الطُّفْلُ الَّذِي     |
| بُقُ فِي غِيَابَاتِ الْأَصِيلِ      | 2. وَالْوَرْدَةِ الْبَيْضَاءِ، تَعُدُّ |
| فَدَّ كَانَ فِي هَذَا الْوُجُودِ    | 3. يَا أَيُّهَا الطُّفْلُ الَّذِي      |
| حُدُنِيَا بِمَعْسُولِ النَّشِيدِ    | 4. فَرِحًا، يُنَاجِي فَنَنَّةَ الـ     |
| جَفْنِيكَ أَحْلَامَ الْمُنُونِ      | 5. هَا أَنْتَ ذَا قَدْ أَطْبَقْتَ      |
| نُكِّ حَوْلَ مَضْجَعِكَ الْأَمِينِ  | 6. وَتَطَايَرْتَ زُمُرَ الْمَلَا       |
| هَاءِ عَرَائِسِ النُّورِ الْحَبِيبِ | 7. وَمَضَّتْ بِرُوحِكَ لِلْسَمِّ       |
| بِيَّةً، مِنْ الزَّهْرِ الْعَرِيبِ  | 8. يَحْمِلُنَ تَيْجَانًا، مُذَهَّبَةً  |
| لِكَ سَكِينَةَ الْأَيْدِ الْكَبِيرِ | 9. هَا أَنْتَ ذَا قَدْ جَلَلْتَ        |
| بُ، وَضَمَّكَ الْقَبْرُ الصَّغِيرِ  | 10. وَبَكَتَكَ هَاتِيكَ الْقُلُوبُ     |
| نَ إِلَى الْمَقَابِرِ شَيْعُوكُ —   | 11. وَفَرَّقَ النَّاسُ الَّذِي         |
| حَتَّى كَأَنَّ لَمْ يُعْرِفُوكُ،    | 12. وَنَسُواكَ مِنْ دُنْيَاهُمْ،       |

“1. O child, who was once akin to a beautiful melody

2. And a white rose, blooming in the shadows of twilight

3. O child, who in this existence was once

4. Joyful, conversing with the world's allure through the honeyed

hymn

5. Behold, dreams of slumber have sealed your eyelids
6. And bands of angels flutter around your peaceful resting place
7. And with your soul, to the heavens ascend the brides of beloved light
8. Carrying crowns, gilded with strange blossoms
9. Behold, you are now enveloped by the tranquility of the great eternity
10. While hearts weep for you, and a small grave embraces you
11. And the people who escorted you to the graves have dispersed
12. And they have forgotten you in their world, as though they never knew you (al-Shābbī, 1426/2005, 114-118)”

The poem commences a compelling exploration of themes including the innocence of boyhood, mortality, and human oblivion. It offers a complex blend of exquisite imagery, melancholic undertones, and touching reflections. The initial lines of the poem portray the boy as a precious and delightful figure - likened to “a beautiful melody” and “a white rose, blooming in the shadows of twilight”. These metaphors invoke the attributes of purity and innocence often associated with childhood, crafting an aura of peace and joy around the image of the boy. This enchanting representation also emphasizes the fleeting nature of childhood and, more broadly, human life.

The shift from the joyful depiction of the boy to the stark reality of his demise is introduced in a tender and subtle manner. The dream-like imagery of the “dreams of slumber” sealing the boy’s eyelids and the “bands of angels” fluttering around his resting place integrates elements of spiritual and divine symbolism. This presents death as a transcendental journey, mitigating its grim realities and providing a hopeful, comforting view of the afterlife. Moreover, the line “with your soul, to the heavens ascend the brides of beloved light” utilizes the metaphor of a wedding to illustrate the soul’s union with the divine, furthering the theme of death as a transformative, rather than terminal, experience. The use of “brides” and “beloved light” highlights the celebratory and positive aspects of this celestial journey, offering solace amidst loss.

In contrast to the ethereal beauty of the previous verses, the lines concerning the aftermath of the boy’s death offer a more somber image. The “small grave” that embraces the boy, the “hearts” that weep, and the mourners who eventually

“disperse” and “forget” starkly underline the fleeting nature of human memory and communal mourning. This portion of the poem employs the theme of human forgetfulness to comment on the often brief and superficial nature of societal grief. The individuals who escorted the boy to his gravesite might have dispersed and forgotten him, but their oblivion is portrayed not with bitterness but as an inherent aspect of human nature, a coping mechanism for the harsh realities of mortality. In conclusion, this part invites readers on an emotional journey through joy, loss, and acceptance, prompting them to reflect on the transient nature of life and the human reaction to death. The poet’s exquisite imagery and profound metaphors present a touching exploration of these universal themes, delivering a poignant critique of human transience and oblivion.

The verse of Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī proceeds:

- |   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| وَحَرْبُ هَذِي الْكَانِنَاتِ              | ”13. شَعَلَتْهُمُ عَنْكَ الْحَيَاةُ،  |
| حَتَّ قَبِيلَ مَعْرِفَةِ الْحَيَاةِ       | 14. إِنَّ الْحَيَاةَ وَقَدْ قَصَبِي   |
| وَنَشِيدُ لُجَّتِهِ شَكَاةُ               | 15. بَحْرٌ، قَرَارَتُهُ الرَّدَى      |
| بُ تَنْنُ دَامِيَةً عَرَاةُ               | 16. وَعَلَى شَوَاطِينِهِ الْقُلُوبُ   |
| صِفُ فِي الْعَشِيَّةِ وَالْعَدَاةِ        | 17. بَحْرٌ، تَجِيشُ بِهِ الْعَوَا     |
| فَلَا سُكُونٌ وَلَا إِيَاةُ               | 18. وَتُظَلُّهُ سُحُبُ الظَّلَامِ     |
| رَةِ، وَالنُّجُومُ اللَّامِعَةُ           | 19. نَسِيْبَتِكَ أَمْوَاجُ البُحَيِّ  |
| لِكَ الْمُرُوجِ الشَّاسِعَةُ              | 20. وَالْبُلْبُلُ الشَّادِي، وَهَاتِي |
| رِ بِرُقُصِيهَا وَخَرِيرِهَا              | 21. وَجَدَاوِلُ الوَادِي النَّضِي     |
| رِ بِعُشْبِيهَا وَزُهُورِهَا              | 22. وَمَسَالِكُ الْجَبَلِ الصَّغِي    |
| لَيْثُوا مَدَى يَنْسَاءُلُونَ             | 23. حَتَّى الرَّفَاقُ...، فَانَّهُمْ  |
| أَيَّنْ اخْتَفَى هَذَا الْأَمِينُ         | 24. فِي حَيْرَةٍ مَشْبُوبِيَّةٍ:      |
| لِكَ فِي اللَّيَالِي الدَّاجِيَةِ         | 25. لِكَنَّهُمْ عِلْمُوا بِأَنَّ      |
| إِلَى الْجِبَالِ النَّائِيَةِ             | 26. حَمَلْتِكَ غِيْلَانُ الظَّلَامِ   |
| وَأَنْصَرَفُوا إِلَى اللَّهْوِ الْجَمِيلِ | 27. فَتَسُوكُ مِثْلَ النَّاسِ...،     |
| وَلِ، وَالرَّوَابِي، وَالسُّهُولِ         | 28. بَيْنَ الحَمَائِلِ وَالْجَدَا     |
| هَادِي، وَمَنْظَرِكَ الوَسِيمِ            | 29. وَنَسُوا وَدَاعَةَ وَجْهِكَ الـ   |

30. وَنَسُوا تَغْنِيكَ الْجَمِيمِ  
لِ بِصَوْتِكَ الْخُلُو الرَّخِيمِ
31. وَمَضُوا إِلَى الْمَرْجِ الْبُهْبِ  
حج، يُطَارِدُونَ طُيُورَهُ
32. وَيَزْحَضُونَ صُخُورَهُ  
وَيُعَابِثُونَ زُهُورَهُ
33. وَيُسَيِّدُونَ مِنَ الرَّمَالِ  
الْبَيْضِ وَالْخَصْبِ النَّضِيرِ
34. غَرَفَاءَ، وَأَكْوَاخًا تَكَلَّ  
لُهَا الْحَشَائِشُ وَالزُّهُورُ
35. وَيُنْضُدُونَ مِنَ الرَّبِيِّ  
بَيْنَ التَّضَاكِكِ وَالْحُبُورِ
36. طَاقَاتٍ وَرَدٍ، آبِدٍ  
تُزْرِي بِأَوْرَادِ الْقُصُورِ
37. يُلْفُونَهَا فِي النَّهْرِ قُرُ  
بَانَا لِآلِهَةِ السُّرُورِ
38. فَتَسِيرُ فِي النَّيَّارِ، رَا  
قِصَّةً عَلَى نَعَمِ الْخَرِيرِ
39. كُلُّ نَسُوكٍ، وَلَمْ يَعُودُوا  
بِذِكْرُوكَ فِي الْحَيَاةِ،

- “13. Life and the war of existence have distracted them from you  
14. Indeed, life, which you left just before truly knowing life  
15. Is an ocean, whose dwelling is misery, and the anthem of its depths is lament  
16. And upon its shores, hearts moan, forever wounded and bare  
17. An ocean, tempests rage within it by evening and morning  
18. And it is shaded by clouds of darkness, with neither calm nor repose  
19. The waves of the lake have forgotten you, and the shining stars  
20. And the nightingale in full song, and those sprawling meadows  
21. And the rippling brooks of the valley with their dance and murmur  
22. And the pathways of the small mountain with its grass and flowers  
23. Even friends... for they remained awhile, wondering  
24. In bewildered confusion: where has this trusty one vanished  
25. But they knew that in the dark nights  
26. Shadows of darkness carried you to the distant mountains  
27. So they forgot you like the rest... and turned to beautiful amusements  
28. Among the vines and brooks, the plains, and the open fields

29. And they forgot the gentle glow of your guiding face, and your handsome visage
30. And they forgot your beautiful singing, in your sweet, tender voice
31. And they went to the delightful meadow, chasing its birds
32. And they moved its rocks and played with its flowers
33. And they built from the white sands and the gleaming pebbles
34. Rooms, and huts crowned with grass and flowers
35. And they made, from the clay, amid laughter and joy
36. Amidst the roses of the palaces, the eternal bouquets are deemed insignificant
37. They threw them in the river as a sacrifice to the gods of pleasure
38. So they move in the current, dancing to the rhythm of the stream
39. All have forgotten you, and no longer do they remember you in life (al-Shābbī, 1426/2005, 114-118)”

In the poem presented, the poet masterfully continues the narrative established in the previous verses. The focus remains on the temporality of human existence, and the distractions that life often presents. The poet describes life as an ocean, a recurring metaphor that signifies the depth and the vastness of human existence, as well as the turbulence that one experiences in their lifetime. The ocean is depicted as a dwelling place for misery, with the echoes of lament resonating from its depths. This metaphor illuminates the poet's perspective on the human condition and life's inherent struggles. Further, the poet conveys the sense of collective amnesia that society has towards the departed. This societal forgetfulness is highlighted through vivid imagery; the waves of the lake, the shining stars, the melodious nightingale, the sprawling meadows, and the rippling brooks of the valley have all forgotten the child, illustrating that the world moves on, indifferent to individual losses.

This theme continues as the poem progresses, illustrating the friends who initially linger, confused and lost, pondering the sudden disappearance of their companion. The poet paints a stark picture of the ephemerality of memory and the ease with which the living move on from the memory of the deceased, focusing instead on the pursuits of life. Their former companion's guiding glow, handsome visage, and sweet song have been forgotten, replaced by the

pleasures of nature and the joy of play. The poet's use of imagery and metaphor becomes even more prominent in the subsequent verses. The act of building from white sands and gleaming pebbles, making eternal bouquets from palace roses, and throwing them into the river as sacrifices to the gods of pleasure further underlines the fleetingness of human memory and the relentless pursuit of pleasure. This also brings to the forefront the inherent human trait of seeking comfort in forgetfulness and distraction.

Through the poem, the poet encapsulates the human tendency to forget and move forward, suggesting that this is an inherent survival mechanism. The child, who was once the center of attention and love, is gradually forgotten as life's distractions take over, representing the ultimate irony of human existence. This analysis underscores the intricate interplay of themes and emotions that the poem explores, demonstrating the depth and complexity of the poet's reflections on life, death, memory, and the fleeting nature of human existence.

We proceed now with the ensuing verses of Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī's poem:

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| الموتِ حَتَّى الذِّكْرِيَّاتِ     | 40. وَالذَّهْرُ يَدْفُنُ فِي ظَلَامٍ       |
| الْوُجُودِ إِلَى لِقَاكَ          | 41. إِلَّا فُؤَادًا، ظَلَّ يَخْفُقُ فِي    |
| ةَ إِلَى الْمَنِيِّ، وَافْتَدَاكَ | 42. وَيُودُّ لَوْ بَدَلَ الْحَيَا          |
| وَإِنْ رَأَى شَبَحًا دَعَاكَ      | 43. فَإِذَا رَأَى طِفْلًا بَكَكَ           |
| وَدِّ، وَلَا يَرَى إِلَّا بَهَاكَ | 44. يُضْغِي لِصَوْتِكَ فِي الْوُجْدِ       |
| لَمَّةً فِي خَرِيرِ السَّاقِيَّةِ | 45. يُضْغِي لِنَعْمَتِكَ الْحَمِيدِ        |
| لَغْوِ الطُّيُورِ الشَّادِيَّةِ   | 46. فِي رَنَّةِ الْمَزْمَارِ فِي           |
| فِي هَدِيرِ الْعَاصِفَةِ          | 47. فِي ضَجَّةِ الْبَحْرِ الْمُجَلْجِلِ    |
| صَوْتِ الرُّعُودِ الْقَاصِفَةِ    | 48. فِي لُجَّةِ الْغَابَاتِ، فِي           |
| وَفِي أَنَاثِيدِ الرَّعَاةِ       | 49. فِي نُغْيَةِ الْحَمَلِ الْوَدِيعِ      |
| فُحِّ الْمَجَلَّلِ بِالنَّبَاتِ   | 50. بَيْنَ الْمُرُوجِ الْخُضِرِ وَالسَّدِّ |
| ضَاءِ الْجُمُوعِ الصَّاخِبَةِ     | 51. فِي آهَةِ الشَّاكِي، وَضَوْ            |
| جُهَا نُوَاحِ النَّادِيَةِ        | 52. فِي شَهَقَةِ الْبَاكِي يُوجِّدُ        |
| د: طَرُوبَهَا وَكَنِيْبَهَا       | 53. فِي كُلِّ أَصْوَاتِ الْوُجُو           |

54. وَرَحِيمَهَا، وَعَنيفَهَا  
وَبَغِيضِهَا، وَحَبِيبِهَا
55. وَيَرَآكَ فِي صُورِ الطَّيِّبِ  
عَاةً: حُلُوهَا، وَذَمِيمِهَا
56. وَحَزِينَهَا وَبَهِيحَهَا  
وَحَقِيرَهَا وَعَظِيمَهَا
57. فِي رَفَّةِ الْفَجْرِ الْوَدِيعِ  
وَفِي اللَّيَالِي الْحَالِمَةِ
58. فِي فِتْنَةِ الشَّفَقِ الْبَدِيعِ  
وَفِي النُّجُومِ الْبَاسِمَةِ
59. فِي رَفْصِ أَمْوَاجِ الْبُحَيْرِ  
رَبْرَةً، تَحْتَ أَضْوَاءِ النُّجُومِ
60. فِي سِحْرِ أَزْهَارِ الرَّبِيعِ  
وَفِي تَهَاوِيلِ الْغُيُومِ
61. فِي لَمَعَةِ الْبَرْقِ الْخَفُوقِ  
وَفِي هُوِيِّ الصَّاعِقَةِ
62. فِي ذِلَّةِ الْوَادِي، وَفِي  
كِبْرِ الْجِبَالِ الشَّاهِقَةِ
63. فِي مَشْهَدِ الْغَابِ الْكَنِيبِ  
وَفِي الْوُرُودِ الْعَاوِيَةِ
64. فِي ظُلْمَةِ اللَّيْلِ الْحَزِينِ،  
وَفِي الْكُهُوفِ الْعَارِيَةِ،

- “40. And time buries in the darkness of death, even the memories  
41. Except for a heart, that continues to pulsate in existence awaiting  
your reunion  
42. And wishes it could sacrifice life to the grave to redeem you  
43. If it sees a child, it weeps for you. If it sees a ghost, it calls for you  
44. It hearkens to your voice in existence, and sees nothing but your  
splendor  
45. It listens to your beautiful melody in the babbling of the water  
wheel  
46. In the sound of the flute, in the playful songs of the birds  
47. In the tumultuous roar of the sea, in the howling of the storm  
48. In the dense forests, in the voice of the thunder that strikes  
49. In the bleating of the gentle lamb and in the songs of the shepherds  
50. Between the green meadows and the slopes adorned with  
vegetation  
51. In the sigh of the complainant, and the clamor of the noisy crowds  
52. In the sobbing of the crying, exacerbated by the wailing of the  
mourners

53. In all the voices of existence: their ecstatic and sorrowful
54. Their tender and harsh, their odious and beloved
55. And sees you in the forms of nature: its sweet and blighted
56. Its sad and delightful, its lowly and magnificent
57. In the gentleness of the tender dawn and in the dreamy nights
58. In the charm of the exquisite twilight and in the smiling stars
59. In the dance of the lake's waves, beneath the lights of the stars
60. In the magic of spring flowers and in the formations of the clouds
61. In the gleam of the throbbing lightning and in the fury of the thunderbolt
62. In the shadow of the valley, and in the grandeur of the towering mountains
63. In the somber scene of the forest and in the howling of lions
64. In the darkness of the sad night, and in the barren caves (al-Shābbī, 1426/2005, 114-118)"

In this portion of Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī's poem, the persistent sense of sorrow and the longing for a lost beloved are unmistakable. The poet's exploration of memory and grief is profoundly connected to the imagery of the natural world, which underscores the ephemerality and the raw intensity of human emotions. The poem initially acknowledges the inexorable passage of time, with its ability to bury even memories within the darkness of death. This poignant acknowledgement of the limitations of human remembrance introduces a profound contemplation of mourning and longing. The following lines articulate a steadfast heart, waiting for a reunion and yearning to sacrifice itself to reclaim the lost one. The heart, symbolic of the seat of emotions and life, is willing to sacrifice its very existence, amplifying the depth of loss and the longing to reclaim what was taken by death. This line imbues the poem with an added layer of emotionality, as it resonates with any reader who has experienced profound loss.

The poet employs evocative images to describe the heart's response to reminders of the lost beloved. Every experience becomes a trigger for the memory of the lost one, whether it is the sight of a child, the call of a ghost, or the various sounds and forms of nature. The echo of the lost one is found



in the babbling of the water wheel, the song of birds, the howl of the storm, and even in the tumultuous roar of the sea. It's a poignant exploration of how memory pervades every aspect of existence, imbuing even mundane moments with significance. The poet's nuanced portrayal of nature captures its various forms - the sweet and blighted, the sad and delightful, the lowly and magnificent - serving as an allegory for the spectrum of human emotions. The gleam of lightning, the grandeur of mountains, the somber scene of the forest, all are metaphorical landscapes mirroring the heart's emotional turmoil. The poet's skillful intertwining of personal grief with universal natural elements underscores the depth of loss while subtly hinting at the shared experience of human suffering.

Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī's profound verses carry on as follows:

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| ظَلَمَاءِ هَاتِيكَ اللُّهُودِ         | 65. أَعْرَفْتَ هَذَا الْقَلْبَ فِي        |
| السُّكْرَى بِأُخْرَانِ الْوُجُودِ     | 66. هُوَ قَلْبُ أُمَّكَ، أُمَّكَ          |
| سَيَعِيشُ كَالشَّادِي الضَّرِيرِ      | 67. هُوَ ذَلِكَ الْقَلْبُ الَّذِي         |
| جِي إِلَى النَّفْسِ الْأَخِيرِ        | 68. يَشْدُو بِشَكْوَى حُرْنِهِ الدَّا     |
| حُرْنَهُ وَتَرَى شَفَاةَ              | 69. لَا رَبَّةَ النَّسِيَانِ تَرْحَمُ     |
| فِي أَنَامِلِهَا أَسَاهُ              | 70. كَلَا! وَلَا الْأَيَّامُ تُبْلِي      |
| دَارُ إِكْلِيلِ الْجُنُونِ            | 71. إِلَّا إِذَا صَفَرَتْ لَهُ الْأَقْد   |
| تَلْهُو بِمَرَاهِ السُّنُونِ          | 72. وَعَدَا شَقِيًّا صَاحِكًا             |
| مَهْمَا تَقَلَّبَتِ الْحَيَاةُ        | 73. هُوَ ذَلِكَ الْقَلْبُ الَّذِي         |
| فِي شِعَابِ الْكَائِنَاتِ             | 74. وَتَدْفَعُ الزَّمْنَ الْمُدْمِدِمِ    |
| دُ بُلْبُلِ الْعَابِ الْجَمِيلِ       | 75. وَتَعْنَتِ الدُّنْيَا وَعَرَّ         |
| تِكَ: لَا يَمَلُّ، وَلَا يَمِيلُ      | 76. سَيَطُلُّ يَعْبُدُ ذِكْرِيَا          |
| بَيْتِهَا الْمَسْرَّةُ، وَالشَّبَابُ  | 77. كَالْأَرْضِ: تَمْشِي فَوْقَ تُر       |
| وَالْعَوَاصِفُ وَالسَّحَابُ           | 78. وَاللَّيْلُ، وَالْفَجْرُ الْمُجَنِّحُ |
| طِنِهِ السَّقَائِقُ، وَالْوُرُودُ     | 79. وَالْحُبُّ تَنْبُتُ فِي مَوَا         |
| يَخْطُو الْمَقَابِرِ وَاللُّهُودِ     | 80. وَالْمَوْتُ تُحْفَرُ أَيْنَمَا        |
| اللَّذَاتُ، حَالِمَةٌ، تَمِيدُ        | 81. وَتَمُرُّ بَيْنَ فِجَاجِهَا           |
| تَرْنُو إِلَى الْأُفُقِ الْبَعِيدِ... | 82. سَكْرَى، وَأَسْوَاقُ الْوَرَى         |
| لِلْهُوِ أَشْبَاحُ الدُّهُورِ         | 83. وَتَظَلُّ تَرْفُصُ لِأَسَى            |

بُ الْمَوْتِ فِي وَايِ الدُّنُورِ	84. حَتَّى يُوَارِيهَا صَبَا
ثُمَّ يَنْشُرُهَا الصَّبَاحُ	85. وَتَظَلُّ تُورِقُ، ثُمَّ تُزْهِرُ
لِلْحَدَاوِلِ، لِلرِّيَّاحِ	86. لِلْمَوْتِ، لِلشَّوْكِ الْمُمَزَّقِ
يَفْتَرُ فِي سَهْوِ السُّرُورِ	87. بِسَمَاتٍ تُعْرَى، حَالِمِ
يُصْغِي لِأَلْحَانِ الطُّيُورِ	88. وَوُرُودِ رَوْضِ، بِأَسِيمِ
ثُمَّ يَطْوِيهَا التُّرَابُ	89. وَتَظَلُّ تَخْفِقُ، ثُمَّ تَشْدُو
لِلْحَيَاةِ وَالشَّبَابِ	90. قُبْلُ، وَأَطْيَارٍ، تُعْرَدُ
الْمَوْتِ أَفْرَاحِ الْحَيَاةِ!...	91. وَتَظَلُّ تَمْشِي فِي جَوَارِ
بِنِ الْجَمَاحِمِ وَالرَّفَاتِ	92. وَتُعْرَدُ الشُّحُرُورُ مَا بَيْنَ
بَيْنِ أَسْرَابِ النُّجُومِ	93. وَالْأَرْضِ حَالِمَةً: تُغْنِي
وَسُورَةَ الْأَزَلِ الْقَدِيمِ“	94. أَنْسُودَةَ الْمَاضِي الْبَعِيدِ

“65. Have you recognized this heart in the shadows of those graves?

66. It is the heart of your mother, your mother intoxicated with the sorrows of existence

67. It is that heart that will live like a singing nightingale, though blind

68. Singing the lament of its tormented sorrow until the final breath

69. No goddess of oblivion pities its grief or sees its agony

70. No! Nor do the days wear out its worries in their grasp

71. Except if fate weaves for it a wreath of madness

72. And it becomes an unhappy yet laughing, with whom the years toy in its course

73. It is that heart which, no matter how life churns

74. And time, ever tumultuous, wrestles in the ravines of beings

75. And the world sings, and the nightingale of the beautiful forest chirrups

76. Yet a heart persists, remaining enthralled by your memories, unwavering and untiring

77. Like the earth, where joy and youth tread upon its soil

78. Where night and dawn with outstretched wings, storms and clouds roam
79. Where love sprouts anemones and roses in its paths
80. And where death etches tombs and graves in its every step
81. Where the pleasures pass through the wide paths between its mountains, dreamily swaying
82. Intoxicated, and the longings of mortals stretch toward the distant horizon...
83. And it continues to dance, for sorrow and merriment, like specters of time
84. Until the mists of death conceal them in the valley of graves
85. And it continues to burgeon, then bloom, before dawn spreads it anew
86. To death, to piercing thorns, to storms, to winds
87. Smiles of lips, in a dreamy state, gleefully indulging in the carelessness of joy
88. And the roses of a cheerful garden, attuned to the melodies of birds
89. And it continues to pulse, then sing, before the earth envelops it
90. With kisses, and birds, singing to life and youth
91. And the joys of life continue to walk near death
92. And birds chirp amongst the skulls and remains
93. And the earth, dreamy, sings amongst the swarms of stars
94. A song of the distant past and the chapters of eternal antiquity (al-Shābbī, 1426/2005, 114-118)”

In the following segment of Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī’s poem, the focus shifts to a mother’s heart grappling with the pain of losing a child. The poet’s poignant illustration of the human condition —the suffering, resilience, and ceaseless longing— manifests through the evocative language and vivid imagery. The heart is identified as the mother’s, who is intoxicated with the sorrows of existence. This metaphor juxtaposes intoxication, typically associated with pleasure or oblivion, with sorrow, resulting in a compelling representation of overwhelming grief. Despite the pain, the heart lives on like a singing

nightingale, singing its lament until the very end. This comparison reinforces the motif of nature symbolizing human emotions, and introduces a note of resilience and defiance against despair.

The poem further expounds the heart's suffering, emphasizing its desolation and the indifference of the outside world. Despite the passage of time and the world's incessant transformation, the heart remains loyal to the memory of the lost child, portraying a tenacious adherence to love and memory. This portion of the poem paints a vibrant, dynamic picture of life and death coexisting, of joy walking hand in hand with sorrow, reinforcing the cyclicity and duality of existence. The poem further juxtaposes cheerful images of birds chirping amidst skulls, an earth that sings amidst stars, and the pulsing of life that continues even as death looms, all emphasizing the inherent contradictions and complexities of existence. al-Shābbī's ability to articulate profound sorrow, while still appreciating the transient beauty of life, is remarkable. His keen observations of the human condition, woven with timeless themes of love, loss, and the passage of time, make his poetry universally relevant and deeply moving. The analysis of these lines gives insight into the depth of his thought and his mastery over the medium of poetry.

In the context of women's studies, Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī's poem offers a nuanced exploration of the female experience, specifically a mother's love and grief. This intimate portrayal of maternal bereavement, encapsulated in the sustained metaphor of a mother's heart intoxicated by sorrow, serves as an emblem of female strength and resilience. The femininity, represented in the heart, persists despite adversity, embodying an unwavering capacity for love and memory. This motherly figure remains at the core of the poem, even as it traverses the existential terrain of life, death, and the cyclical nature of existence. Thus, in the larger tapestry of women's lived experiences, al-Shābbī's poem underscores the role of women as embodiments of endurance and life force. The figure of the grieving mother also serves to highlight the interplay of personal sorrow and broader social structures, encapsulating the pervasive influence of the feminine in both the private and public domains. Consequently, this reading contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate intersections of gender, emotion, and existential realities in Arabic literature, thereby underscoring the relevance and complexity of women's experiences in literary discourse.



## CONCLUSION

As the denouement of this scholarly endeavor is reached, it is apposite to provide a cohesive synthesis of the insights gleaned and to articulate the key findings. This tome has undertaken a comprehensive and meticulous exploration of gender perspectives in modern Arabic literature, a domain that is replete with rich textures and nuances. The historical trajectory has been elucidated, affording readers with the contextual scaffolding necessary to comprehend the development of female characters, as well as the interplay between male and female literary voices. One of the cardinal insights emerging from this study pertains to the metamorphosis of female characters and their representation within the literary sphere. It has been observed that these characters have traversed a continuum, evolving from passive and ancillary entities to multifaceted individuals often at the center of narrative discourse. This evolution signifies not only a change in literary practices but also reflects broader sociocultural metamorphoses within the Arab world.

Furthermore, the literary works produced by female authors exhibited an astonishing range in themes, motifs, and stylistic expressions. Female authors, through their prose and poetry, have wielded the written word as a vehicle for self-expression, socio-political commentary, and exploration of personal and collective identity. The importance of this cannot be overstated as it heralds a literary corpus that adds dimensions to the understanding of the female experience in Arab societies. In tandem with the examination of female authorship, the book scrutinizes the portrayal of women by their male counterparts in the Arab literary realm. There emerges a fascinating landscape where a significant number of male authors align with feminist perspectives and contribute substantively to the gender discourse. These male authors, often advocates of gender equality, employ their literary acumen to craft female characters with depth, agency, and authenticity. They challenge and sometimes dismantle preconceived notions and societal constraints through their characterizations and plotlines. The positive representation of women by these male authors plays an indispensable role in fostering a dialogue about gender equity and social change within Arab societies.

The geocultural diversity within the Arab world has also emerged as a significant consideration. The examination of literary texts from various regions illuminated the cultural specificities that inform the portrayals of women. This regional analysis has highlighted the importance of avoiding monolithic

characterizations and appreciating the rich diversity within Arab literary traditions. Moreover, the meticulously analyzed case studies have provided granular insights into the interplay of gender perspectives in individual works, offering valuable exemplars that enriched the broader narrative. In summation, this scholarly work has cast illumination upon the rich tapestry of modern Arabic literature through the prism of gender. The critical analysis undertaken here is hoped to contribute to the broader corpus of literary studies and serve as a fulcrum for further academic inquiries into the ever-evolving landscape of Arabic literature.

The investigation conducted throughout this work opens a myriad of avenues for future research, underlining the vast scope and dynamism within the domain of gender studies in Arabic literature. A focal point that warrants further exploration is the trajectory of contemporary women authors and how they negotiate rapidly evolving socio-political landscapes. Delving into the emerging voices, especially those of the younger generation, would furnish insights into the ways in which gender perceptions and expressions are being redefined in Arabic literature. Furthermore, the role of digital media and online platforms in shaping and disseminating the narratives of Arab women merits a comprehensive examination. The influence of social media, blogs, and other online spaces on the literary practices of both male and female authors could be a fertile ground for research. Analyzing the intersections between digital media and gender representation could elucidate the role of new technologies in empowering voices and fostering change.

Another dimension of potential significance is comparative analysis. By contrasting the representation of women in Arabic literature with that in other literary traditions, scholars can gain broader contextual insights. This comparative lens could encompass not only textual analysis but also the historical and socio-cultural environments that shape literary production. Moreover, studies that critically evaluate the translation of Arabic literary works into other languages, and the consequential impacts on gender representation, can be particularly illuminating. The translational aspect may reveal shifts in meaning, cultural nuances, and receptions in different contexts, offering a multi-faceted understanding of the global reach and influence of Arabic literature.

Investigating the influence of diaspora on the portrayal of women in Arabic literature would also prove advantageous. The experiences of Arab authors living outside the Arab world and how their hybrid identities shape their portrayals of gender and culture could reveal the complexity and richness

of diasporic narratives. Finally, the interface between Arabic literature and pedagogy warrants attention. Investigating how Arabic literature, particularly with respect to gender themes, is being integrated into educational curricula, and its potential role in shaping attitudes and perspectives among students, could have far-reaching implications for societal development and gender relations. The kaleidoscope of topics and approaches that can be embraced in future research is indicative of the richness of Arabic literature and its capacity to serve as a vibrant site for interrogating, understanding, and engaging with gender-related issues in a continuously evolving world.





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## ABSTRACT

“Arab Women in Ink: Exploring Gender Perspectives in Modern Arabic Literature” constitutes a critical exploration of the portrayal and representation of female figures in modern Arabic literature. This work transcends conventional literary analyses by scrutinizing gender dynamics, the influence of sociocultural constructs on women’s identities, and the nuanced articulation of female experiences in the literary realm. The text offers an in-depth analysis of a diverse range of Arabic narratives, poems, and prose, tracing the evolution of female characters and the complexities of their roles across different eras and geographies. It emphasizes the integration of feminist theory within the Arab literary context, expanding the existing understanding of Arab women’s roles in literature, and establishing the interplay between the personal and the political within these narratives. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, the book fuses elements of literary analysis, gender studies, and cultural studies to deliver a well-rounded exploration of women’s presence and influence in Arabic literature. This critical examination promises to enrich the discourse surrounding gender, power, and representation, ultimately enhancing readers’ comprehension of the complex socio-cultural landscapes that influence and are reflected in modern Arabic literature.

**Keywords:** Arabic Language and Literature, Modern Arabic Literature, Modern Arabic Poetry, Women’s Studies, Gender.



