CHAPTER: I

MODERN ARABIC POETRY: A BACKGROUND

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The Arabic language is often called the language of poets, and Arabs themselves consider poetry to be the essence of Arabic-the diwan al-Arab.[7] Compared with earlier periods of Arabic literature the Modern period, often referred to in Arabic as al-Nahdah (renaissance), requires an approach that is at once simpler and more complicated. While classical Arabic literature can safely be regarded as fundamentally a continuum, Modern literature constitutes in certain important respects an entirely new departure, even though its break with the Classical has sometimes been exaggerated, for despite its borrowing of European forms such as drama and the novel, Modern literature never really completely severed its link with its past. The Nahdah was in fact a product of a fruitful meeting two forces: the indigenous tradition, and the imported western forms. Moreover, the change from the past was an extremely slow and gradual process. However, because of the profound influence exercised by western literature on the Nahdah, it seems more natural to divide its treatment into chapters on poetry, the novel, short story, drama and literary criticism, much as one might do in a traditional survey of a western literature. But it would be wrong to be blind to the continuities in Arabic literature, Classical and Modern: continuities that have determined the

7. The encyclopedia of Arabic literature.com.

manner of the Arabs'[8] apprehension and hence adaptation of the imported genres. Equally, we would be guilty of distortion if we ignored the various important issues that seem to be peculiar to Modern Arabic literature, or at least to distinguish it from the literature of the west. By modern Arabic literature, it must be pointed out, is meant literature written exclusively in the Arabic language. The peculiarly modern phenomenon of Arab authors expressing themselves in their creative writing in a European language, be it in French or English, is no doubt both fascinating and important, and merits serious study for literary and extra-literary considerations, but strictly speaking it does not belong to Arabic literature and as such it had to be excluded from this survey. There is so much that has been and is being written in Arabic throughout the Arab world.

Modern Arabic literature is obviously the literature of the modern Arab world, and this is generally assumed to begin with the French campaign in Egypt in 1798. The date is significant, for it marks the dramatic opening of the Arab world, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire, to the west, ultimately with momentous consequences for its political, economic, social and cultural development. For various reasons the modern renaissance of Arabic literature began to make itself felt in Egypt and Syria (which then included Lebanon), from which it spread slowly to the rest of the Arab world.[9]

This attitude towards the poetic literary genre can be explained by considering the literary heritage that is bestowed on the Arabs. They have a

8. Badawi, M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 1.
9. Badawi, M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 2.

strong connection to classical poets and even today poetry is the most important and most popular literary medium in the Arab world, and the literary mode that "best reflects their sense of self-identity, history and cultural values".[10] When Arabic poetry is mentioned, the classical qasida may be the first thing that comes in mind, and the strictly structured classical poems represent the height of the classical Arabic literature (with exception of the Quran), as it has held an "acknowledge and privileged position throughout Arabic history".[11] The pre-Islamic poetry, with its fixed structure in the form of metre and rhyme, held an influence on the Arab literature up until 20th century. During the so called Dark Ages Arabic poetry, as well as literature in general, came to a stand-still with no new influences reaching the Arab world- a period that was "the least productive period" of the Arab cultural history. The major political changes in the Arab world of the 19th century had a great impact on the literature and its themes as well as on its form.

The period during which Arabic literature started to develop again is often called al-nahda- "renaissance" and is conventionally divided into three parts: neo-classic, romantic and modern. It is from the latter period that the material for this paper is gathered. Attempts to break free from the form of the qasida were made already in the 19th century, e.g. in the form of blank verse, but it was not until the 1950's and the poetic innovations of two Iraqi poets that the 'Free Verse Movement' gained ground. With it the experimentations of form and content in poetry that had begun 200 years earlier had finally started to establish as an accepted poetic from, and what we today call modern

10. Allen, Roger, The Arabic Literary Heritage, 1998, p. 217.
11. Moreh's, Shmuel, Modern Arabic Poetry 1800-1970, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976, p. ix.

Arabic poetry was introduced. This happed as a result of “a decade of revolution in the Arab” in which a part of the course of development was the literary genres.[12]

‘Modern’ poetry is often connected with free verse, as is the case also in modern Arabic poetry. There is a gap between the classical poems of Imru’l-Qays and his likes and the modern poetry of today- the former is closely associated with the ancient qasida and its division into two hemistichs, the strict metre followed through in all verses of the poem and the monorhyme at the end of each line and the latter is generally associated with complete freedom of all metrical bounds, uneven lineation and the lack of repeated end-rhyme. The development of the poem from the classical form to the diverse forms of contemporary poetry has followed a course through various attempts to break free from the old restraints. The fluctuating period during which the modernism movement in Arabic poetry developed divided into the three subdivisions mentioned above reflects the development of poetic form. It has developed from the neo-classical poets who still used the ancient forms in their poetry, to the romantic poets who wanted new modes of expressions, to the modern poets who are presented partly in this paper. In literature on modern Arabic poetry the development of the modern poem is usually outlined, form somewhat formally bound to being written in free verse. There is also much focus on the thematic development and the relationship between poetry and society. However, there are few in-depth analyses of the form and

12. Allen, Roger, The Arabic Literary Heritage, 1998, p. 210.

structure of the modern poems written in free verse. The formal features of modern Arabic poetry are thus parts of an area which is under-studied.

Poetry as an art from uses words and language not merely to express meaning or content, but to symbolize meaning and content. The point of origin of the present paper is the assumption that the form of a poem can be said to be equally important as the content. The essence of poetry is not something above or beyond the words on the page, but the words themselves in their own right and in combination with the other levels of text, i.e. the line, stanza and poem as a whole. The fact the poetry is an institution that relies heavily on sense and effect motivates the study of the actual linguistic signs that create this effect, since poetry might be the one literary genre where the sense is in the closest connection to the linguistic form. The ‘meaning’ of a poem could be said to be the form, and form is “constitutive of content and not just a reflection of it” Because of this, a close reading of a poem is prerequisite for understanding it, and reading a poem require an understanding of the structure.

I shall through a prosodic analysis of poems by poets considered representatives for modern Arabic poetry make an attempt at a description of the form of the modern Arabic poem, and its relation to the conventions of classical Arabic poetry. The term modern is here used in its chronological sense, and when referring to modern Arabic poetry it means that produced after 1950. The analysis of the poems and the resulting discussion of the form and structure are not to be taken as generalizations about all modern Arabic poetry, but merely offer an insight into a small (but important) part of it. The

focal point of the paper is the aesthetic elements of the poems, and features concerning content, diction imagery etc. will only be briefly commented upon in relation to the formal characteristics. Furthermore, much can be said about the political or ideological nature of modern Arabic poetry, for instance its role in presenting resistance to the colonialism, but this aspect is not comprised in the scope of the present paper.

In earlier modern Arabic poetry the focus has been on the development from classical poetry to the modernist movement and the poetic activity in the Arab world in the second half of the 19th century. The poetic development of the 20th century has been documented, and the new thematic features of poetry much analysed. There is a preponderance of focus on the features of content, as opposed to the features of form, in all earlier research found.[13] This could well be because the fluctuation period during which the modernist movement established was a period of great turmoil in the society, and poets found themselves challenged with new concepts of both the world and the self. This lead to a rich well of new poetic voices, grateful for study. The research on the development of the poetic language is often fragmentary, concentrating on one feature, or one period, with examples taken form a range of poets and poems. While focusing on the differentiating features of modern Arabic poetry, the features that the modern poem has in common with the classical poem may have been side-stepped.

13. Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry, II vols. Brill, 1977,

Shmuel Moreh's Modern Arabic Poetry 1800-1970 (1976) is a dissertation about modern Arabic poetry, and the book describes the development of this poetry by tracing the steps preceding it in the history of Arabic literature. In the book Moreh outlines this development by describing it through three stages: strophic verse blank verse and free verse. The book focuses on "the form of Arabic poetry" and its development from the beginning of the 19th century to the 1960's. For this investigation, the last chapter of Moreh's book, the one concerning free verse, had been a relevant reference source. The author performs some structural analyses of modern poems, with comments primarily on feet and metre, similar to the analyses of the present paper.[14]

The section about modern poetry in Roger Allen's The Arabic Literary Heritage (1988) concentrates on the differences between classical and modern Arabic poetry. In the book, Allen outlines the development and gradual change in both theme and structure of Arabic poetry, but focuses in the section in question on the features that are typically "modern" as opposed to "classical/traditional". However, Allen's focal point is predominantly the themes and imagery of modern poetry and the situation in which modern poetry developed as regards to changes in the society and culture. Allen also describes the different trends in the experimental poetry leading up to the modern poetry as it is represented in the material in this paper, by characterizing the trends in categories such as the Romantic poets, the Symbolist poets, the majhar-poets etc. The book also includes a section on

14. Moreh's, Shmuel, Modern Arabic Poetry 1800-1970, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976

“rhyme and metre” where Allen outlines the traditional system of metrical structure, and furthermore the different metres as they were applied in examples of classical poems. As the title suggest, Allen concentrates on the literary heritage and hence the traditions that comes with this heritage, and not on the consequences as they are concretely realized in modern Arabic poetry.

Terri deYoung’s book on Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and his poetry Placing the Poet provides a through mapping of the poet’s life and work, focusing on themes and recurring motifs in his life work. The book aims at making available a major Arab poet to Western readership and presenting his work both in the aspect of “its complexity, as well as its development over time”. Although the main topic of deYoung’s study is al-Sayyab, the book provides a thorough presentation of the development of modern Arabic poetry and the literary climate in which it evolved, hence the climate in which the other two poets Adunis and Darwish were active. However, again the focal point is the environment in which the poetry evolved, and the themes of poetry and their relationship to this context.

Salma Khadra Jayyusi’s Modern Arabic poetry- an anthology (1988) includes an introduction in which the author describes the formal development of modern Arabic poetry. A deeper analysis and a more thorough presentation of this literary development can be found in jayyusi’s Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry in Two volumes, of which the second contains a chapter on “the achievement of the New Poetry” including a section on formal features. Here, the author describe the changes in metrical practices, with detailed analysis of feet and variations of them, with example of excerpts from

the number of modern poets. This book however was published in 1977, and the perspective is thus narrow, and the analyses are furthermore concerning only parts of poems.[15]

Whereas many books touch upon the subject of the form of modern Arabic poetry, there are few in-depth analyses of poems in their entirety. Furthermore, the focal point of the majority of studies found is the feature of content and imagery, and how this connects to the time in which the poems were composed.[16]

1.2. CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PIONEERS OF THE RENAISSANCE

Arabic literature from pre-Islamic times to this day has its high and low periods. It reached its high watermark during the ‘Abbasid period (750-1258), touching its low period following the taking over of the Arab lands by the Turks. The years 1517-1800 denote one of the most bleak periods in Arab history when Arabic literature ceased to be creative and in fact was a mere trickle, but the foundations of the language remained unshaken.

The fact that Arabic language and literature survived the bleak period extending over three to four hundred years is due to the Qur’an which occupies central position both in the Islamic religion and Arabic literature. Arab intellectuals, by an elaborate system, preserved the Qur’an’s original form without a single change in the syllable or accent their whole emphasis

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15. Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry, II vols. Brill, 1977, p. vi.
16. Ibid.

was on the correct reading of the Qur'anic text. For this purpose they devised teaching methods, which while helping in the understanding of the Holy Book, also assisted in keeping the base of classical Arabic alive. Because of this method the Qur'an is read, understood and quoted by all who speak Arabic. In fact some of its passages from the first at school.[17]

The bleak period was followed by a renaissance (al-Nahia), which is the basis of the spurt in Arabic literature. Two developments paved the way for the renaissance. In the Levant, European influence began to be felt in the 16th century. In 1584, Pope Gregory XIII established a special school in Rome for the Lebanese missionaries called the Maronite School. Pope Gregory XIII also helped the students with lands and stipends. Subsequently, the Lebanese prince, Fakhr al-Din al-Ma'ari (1590-1635), started sending Lebanese students to study in Italy. al-Ma'ari also started schools in Lebanon so that the graduates could acquire and spread learning in their homeland.

Though the Maronite School was theological in character, the students had opportunities to learn secular science as wed as European languages, literature and philosophy. When the graduates of the Maronite School got back to the Levant, they started a wide range of activity based on what they had learnt in Rome. An idea of their scholarship can be gleaned from the works of some prominent missionaries.[18]

In 1736, the Maronite missions, instructed by the Holy Academy at Rome, began opening schools in the towns and villages of the Levant. They

17. Mahdi, Ismat., Modern Arabic Literature, Hyderabad, 1983. p.5.
18. Mahdi, Ismat., Modern Arabic Literature, Hyderabad, 1983. p.6.

undertook adult education in the monasteries and neighbouring areas and also sent students on scholarships to Rome.[19]

Other missions belonging to the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches also began working in the Levant and used education as the medium of missionary work. In 1755 the Lazarites founded a boys' school in Damascus, and the Capuchines established their centres in Antioch, Beirut and Aleppo.[20] Before the end of the 19the century, Protestant educational missions, including a training school for girls, were established by the Germans, Danes and British. The Americans founded the Syrian Protestant College in 1886, now the American University of Beirut.[21]

The modernizing trend was continued by Mahammad 'Ali who dominated Egypt's national life for half a century till 1849. Muhammad Ali stressed the need for scientific and technological education. He invited foreign experts to train his people militarily and also to educate them in science and technology. Second, he sent Egyptian scholars to Europe. The first mission was deputed to Italy. Later missions were sent to France, which was to become the main training ground for generations of Egyptians not only in the restrictive military fields but more significantly in European culture and literature.[22]

These developments contributed to the Arab renaissance – al-Nahda, which like the European renaissance of the 15th century is characterized by a

19. Ibid. p.6
20. Hitti P.K., A short History of Syria, p. 226.
21. Ibid.
22. Mahdi, Ismat., Modern Arabic Literature, Hyderabad, 1983. p.8.

return to classical literature whose masterpieces served as models for new writers. The Arab renaissance is further characterized by an interest in European literature.

From the beginning of the 19the century two currents flow into the making of the Nahda:

1) Arab
2) European

The Arabic stream was represented by Al-Azhar which preserved the Islamic and Arab literary heritage in the darkest days of decline and was the only source of learning in Egypt. The torch was carried forward by traditional scholarship in the Levant too. The base for the renaissance was provided by the artistic potential of the Arabs, known for their wit, keen powers of observation and imagination; their ability to preserve the salient features of their language and yet absorb new trends.[23]

European influence expressed itself through printing which was introduced into the Arab world by Christian missionaries in 1702 in Aleppo, Syria. The Aleppo press published mainly religious literature, but some linguistic studies were also printed to supplement the work of mission schools.[24]

In Egypt, printing was introduced by Napoleon. In 1798, the French Scientific Panel started printing a bulletin, Le Courrier de l' Egypte, once in

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23. Mahdi, Ismat., Modern Arabic Literature, Hyderabad, 1983. p.8.
24. Hitti, P.K., Syria: A Short History, p.220.

five days and later thrice a month to inform Europe about Egyptian affairs. A scientific and literary magazine, Le Decade Egyptienne was also brought out. The first journalistic activity in Egypt did not make any impact locally, as the bulletins were published in French.[25]

The early translations were weak. Arabic prose was not fully developed. It was either pompous and extravagant or contained a lot of the colloquial idiom. Translations appeared artificial when rendered in the old rhetoric fashion. Realizing the need for a plain and direct style, writers experimented with a mixture of classical and semi-classical journalistic styles including some colloquialisms. The main style to dominate was the journalistic which tends to be easy. The simplification of Arabic prose was one of the major contributions of the translators' activities.

The most important result of the translations was the impetus they gave to the birth and development of literary genres that were not prevalent in classical Arabic. The short story, novel and drama grew directly as a result of the translations and have become an integral part of modern literature.

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25. Daif. Shawqi., al-Adab al-Arai al-Mu'asir, p. 33.

Pioneers of the Renaissance

The Arab renaissance was an outcome of the contribution of the men of letters of the Levant and Egypt and the leaders of important reform movements. It would be useful to notice first the contribution of the men of letters.[26]

In the Levant, scholars were either patronized by rulers or murtured by the Church. The court of the Shihabi prince Bashir II of the Lebanon was the meeting place of the famous poets Nikula Yusuf al-Turk (1763-1828), Butrus Ibrahim Karama (1774-1861) Amin al-Jundi (1814-1878), and Nasif al-Yazigi (1800-1871); al-Yazigi, besides being a court poet, was also a prose writer who played an important role in reviving the classical idiom. Al-Yazigi's book, Majma' al-Bahrain (TheConjunction of the Two Seas), written in the traditional maqama style of al-Hariri and al-Hamadhani, shows his mastery over the Arabic language. Al-Yazigi also wrote important books on the Arabic language and grammar.[27]

Another pioneer of the renaissance, Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (1805-1887), was noted for his studies in lexicography. Al-Shidyaq called for a modern arrangement in Arabic dictionaries, i.e. in the alphabetical order, instead of the traditionally rhyme order based on the final root-letter. In his dictionary, Sirr al-Layal (Secrets of the Nights), al-Shidyaq began with the gutturals to support the theory of the onomatopoeic origin of language. In this he was reverting to the theory of bilateral origin of Arabic roots which Khalil

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26. Mahdi, Ismat., Modern Arabic Literature, Hyderabad, 1983. p.14.
27. Ibid. p.14.

ibn Ahmad had originated in the eighth century.[28] A versatile scholar, al-Shidyaq assisted in the translation of the Bible, for which he travelled to England. He wrote about his travels abroad; al-Saq-ala-al-saq fima huwa al-Fariyaq, is one of the earliest travelogues in the modern period.

Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883), the founder of the first national school in the Levant, and a school for girls, compiled a two-volume dictionary arranged in the modern order called Muhit al-Muhit. Among his writings The Life of Napoleon and Commentary on the Diwan of al-Muta-nabbi are well known. His outstanding contribution is his work on the Arabic encyclopedia Da'ira al-Maarif, later volumes of which were completed by other members of the Bustani family.

Sulaiman al-Bustani (1856-1925) translated Homer's Iliad with a preface noted for its literary value. The Iliad was the first introduction of epic verse into Arabic and the translation is a masterpiece. Sulaiman al-Bustani was also the first to employ methods of modern literary criticism in Arabic.

Ibrahim al-Yizigi (1847-1906), poet and reformer, called for a secular pan-Arab movement based on culture and language rather than on religion. His poem, Arise Ye Arabs and Awake earned him lasting fame.

Among the great reformers the role of Jamil al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1898) is significant. An Afghan by birth, as his name suggests, al-Afghani made Egypt his home. He attempted to break the hold of scholasticism which had encased Islam since medieval times. Al-Afghani first called for reform in

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28. Haywood. John., Modern Arabic Literature, p. 56.

religion, next for the arrest in economic and political deterioration and identified himself with the movement leading to the ‘Orabi revolt of 1882.[29]

In Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), a peasant’s son who rose to the eminent position of Chief Mufti, al-Afghani had an interpreter and follower. ‘Abduh maintained that there was no conflict between Islam and science. He interpreted Quar’anic verses rationally and recognized the insufficiency of Islamic scholasticism. He advocated reforms and religious awakening.[30]

Al-Afghani and ‘Abduh were both persecuted for their liberal views. But their message was carried forward by their disciples who included the great Egyptian nationalist, Sa’d Zaghlul (1857-1927), the champion of women’s rights Qasim Amin (1865-1908) and the editor of ‘Abduh’s books, Rashid Rida (1865-1935).

In Syria, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1853-1902) was another follower of al-Afghani. In his writings he lashed out at his countrymen, urged them to unite and take the initiative as the Arabs had done in the glorious period of their history. He drew attention to the vigour of Western civilization and the decadence that prevailed in the East.[31] In his famous book Umm al-Qura (The Mother of Cities, i.e. Mecca) al-Kawakibi discussed ways to introduce social reforms to restore to Islam its former cohesiveness and grandeur.

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29. Mahdi, Ismat., Modern Arabic Literature, Hyderabad, 1983. p.15.
30. Hitti. P.K., History of the Arabs. p.753.
31. Sami al-kayali., al-Adab al-Arabi al-Mu’asir fi Suriyya. P.67.

How far the scholars of the 19the century were successful liberating the Arab mind from the traditional shackles of centuries and introducing a new social milieu for creative output can best be gauged by subsequent literary effort.

1.3. THE NEO-CLASSICISM

The emergence of Neo-classical poetry in modern Arabic literature in the nineteenth century was not the outcome of the sudden incursion of a new literary model upon the established system of literature.[32]

Neo-classicism was the outcome of the revival of ancient learning through technological advancement. Newspapers and periodicals released poetry from its narrow confines and enabled it to reach out to a larger section of the people. This encouraged the incorporation of socio-political issues in Arabic poetry.

The neo-classicists are called muhafizin (conservative) by the later generation of critics. They were, however, not conservative in the negative sense but were so called because they tended to preserve the old Arabic models, especially of the ‘Abbasid period. Their poems reveal their response to the spirit of the age and an understanding of the role of art in society. The neo-classicists brought vitality to Arabic poetry and made it sufficiently capable of depicting minutely the life of the people.[33]

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32. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 36.
33. Haykal. Ahmad., Tatawwur al-Adab al-Hadith fi Misr. p. 136.

The earliest exponents of neo-classicism include al-Barudi (1838-1901), Ismail Sabri (1853-1923) and ‘Ayesha Taymuria (1840-1906) of Egypt; Ibrahim al-Yazigi (1847-1906) Khalil al-Khury (1836-1907) and Sulaiman al-Bustani (1856-1925) of the levant.[34]

Neither was it the product of a literary grouping around an innovative poet (or group of poets) endowed with revolutionary zeal. Quite the contrary. Its development was quiet, involving no visible upheavals. The main trend of this school (if school it was) was to go back to an old, venerable model, and to relive the glorious experience of ancient poets. The model is, of course, that of medieval Arabic poetry at its peak, as represented by the spirited bards of the Jahili (Pre-Islamic) and early Islamic periods and, more emphatically, by the great urbane poets of the heyday of Abbasid creativity: al-Mutanabbi, al-Buhturim Abu Tammam, Abu’l- ‘Ala’ al-Maarri and al-Sharif al-Radiyy.[35]

In point of fact, modern neo-classical poetry does not constitute a phase of literature that can be sharply separated from its immediate ancestry. Arab poets, writing in traditional fashions, never ceased operating in the Arabic-speaking regions. Even in the darkest of times, for example between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, the production of poetry in fusha (literary Arabic) and according to the traditional metres continued. Admittedly, this was generally dull poetry of uninspired literary quality and recondite language. It was composed by imitative versifiers who very rarely employed it as a means of expressing fresh human experience. The bulk of

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34. Mahdi, Ismat., Modern Arabic Literature, Hyderabad, 1983. p.19.
35. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 36.

late medieval diwans (collections of verse) are replete with rhetorical devices and puns. Rather than addressing the major issues of life and society, these works dabbled in trifling matters; and rather than demonstrating individual poetic voice, the late medieval poet was prized for his ability to display a variety of imitations, verbal tricks and chronograms. The public for whom these poems were meant was, as a rule, a select group of ulema and privileged literati who saw the poet as an entertainer and boon-companion. The poet was in the main a recite of his own poetry, since the printing press was not in general use in Arab land before the nineteenth century, and a reading public in the proper sense was virtually non-existent owing to the paucity of general education among the masses.[36]

With the rejuvenation of cultural life in Lebanon, Egypt and other Arab regions in the course of the last century, the awareness that something was radically wrong with poetry – and with literary life as a whole – began to dawn upon authors and readers alike. The exposure to European literature, directly or through translations, posed a great challenge to Arab authors. The spread of popular education, the advent of printing and the emergence of the mass press all created a set of new cultural realities and, above all, a reading public of growing numbers and of a new social background. Some basic assumptions in the realm of literature had, therefore, to be reassessed, and certain practices had to be changed to cope with the new realities.

Poetry, however, was unable to forsake its ancient moorings. Fourteen centuries of continuous tradition was at stake. It was doubly difficult for

36. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 37.

Arabic poets to adopt 'imported' literary models and concepts since that would have involved a violation of the very paradigm of cultural values. Poetry in its traditional forms and language was enshrined in the history of Arab-Islamic civilization, invoking its finest hours. Furthermore, the 'Arab ear' was so accustomed to the rhythms of that poetry, so entranced by it, that any experimentation that affected the inherited rhythmic structure was bound to alienate the reading (or auditive public)[37]

Therefore, instead of adopting a new set of operative principles, Arabic poetry in the nineteenth century opted for a 'return to the sources', and set out to bridge the gap of long centuries of immobility. The aim of the neo-classical poets was to produce verses which were reminiscent in their 'masculinity' and lucidity of al-Mutanabbi and his peers, and to refrain as much as possible from the trivial pursuits that characterized the poetry of the 'period of decline'. The idea of a radical undermining of the norms of classical poetry was not entertained by any major poet or critic of the early Nahdah (Renaissance). Such notions as deviating from the stylistic norms of medieval poetry or reforming the old metrical system were hardly ever treated seriously, and it was only in the second half of this century that they gained popularity admittedly, poets sometimes expressed a desire to diverge from the accepted poetic practices. one such expression is the famous statement of Ahmad Shawqi, in his introduction to the first volume of al-Shawqiyyat (1898), concerning his efforts to introduce new features into his poetry. Shawqi asserts that he had to employ devious means in order to make these poems

37. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 37.

palatable to his editors and mentors. But what was the nature of these innovations? Judging by the poetry he published at that early stage of his career, it is possible to assume that in spite of his familiarity with French literature, Shawqi never intended to effect a far-reaching change in the structure of the poem or in its language. The poetic text that he provides in his introduction to illustrate his point is highly indicative of a neo-classical rather than a modernizing bent. Instead of opening his panegyric with a nasib section bewailing the deserted campsite of the beloved, as in Jahili poems, he produces an amorous prelude reminiscent of Abbasid or Andalusian love poetry.[38]

The impact o western poetic concepts on nineteenth-century Arabic poetry was negligible. Translations from European poetry into Arabic were few and far between. This fact is noteworthy in view of the profusion of translated western prose (fiction, drama, history and so on) in Egypt and Lebanon in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although some of these translators (such as Najib al-Haddad [1867-1899], a Lebanese who settled in Egypt) were themselves poets, it was only on rare occasions that they translated poetry into Arabic. Admittedly, western plays in verse were translated into Arabic, but this activity was totally divorced, at least in the minds of Arab authors and readers, from the world of the 'poem' although it stimulated the rise of a local verse drama (whose most prominent practitioner in the first decades of our century was Ahmad Shawqi).

38. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 38.

It is of interest to note that those poets and intellectuals who were very much at home with European literature never dared, in the early stages of Nahdah, to urge Arabic poetry to expose itself to the influence of western poetic concepts. Najib al-Haddad once again comes to mind in this context. His work as a whole testifies to an impressive familiarity with western poetry, old and new. This familiarity is well represented by his famous article 'A comparison between Arabic and European poetry', which constitutes a systematic and illuminating analysis of the distinctive qualities of each, touching upon issues of themes, prosody, language and imagery. However, in the conclusion of his article he has these things to say:

To sum up: they [the Europeans] have excelled over us in certain things, while we excelled over them in many things. Our poetry embraces the best qualities of theirs, while their poetry embraces none of ours. This is undoubtedly due to the superior nature of the Arabic language. No other language possesses the richness of its lexicon, the abundance of its expressive devices or the grandeur of its eloquence.[39] The Europeans themselves have described it as 'the most perfect language in the world'. This acknowledgment suffices to demonstrate its superiority over all languages, as well as the superiority of our poetry over all others.

The adherence to tradition, however, was less binding when it came to the subject matter of poetic expression. True, here too the early poets and critics did not explicitly advocate a change in the topics of poetry although some of them, including Mahmud Sami al-Barudi, one of the earliest and

39. al-Manfaluti, Mustafa Lutfi., Mukhtarat al-Manfaluti, Cairo, p.138.

greatest of the neo-classicists, occasionally hinted at the need for change. Al-Barudi expressed, in his introduction to his diwan as well as in some of his poems, a new attitude concerning the function of poetry and the subject matter on which it draws.[40] However, al-Barudi and other poets went on composing poetry according to the traditional abrade (normative thematic types). The poets' exposure to the winds of change in the modern Arab world, as well as the changing nature of their audience (readers of mass circulating papers and printed diwans as opposed to listeners at private or public gatherings), brought about a greater awareness on their part that it was their duty to reflect 'modern' topics without deserting the traditional modes of expression. In the year 1900 the Lebanese-Egyptian poet Khalil Mutrant (Who was not himself a neo-classicist in the strict sense of this term) expressed this awareness as follows.

The (classical) Arab way (khitta) in poetry should not necessarily be our own. The Arabs lived in their own age, and we live in ours. They had their manners, mores and sciences, and we have ours. It is imperative, therefore, that our poetry should reflect our own conceptions and feelings rather than those of the ancients. However the expression of these should conform to the same set of formal and verbal modes as theirs.

This is one of the most lucid expressions of what may be described as the implicit ideology of modern Arabic neo-classical poetry: to be traditional in form and contemporary in content; to express the outlook and concerns of

40. Badawi, M.M., al-Barudi: Precursor of the Modern Arabic Poetic revival, Die well des Islams, 1969, pp.232-4.

our age while adhering to the compositional principles of another. Indeed, neo-classical poets went a long way in ridding themselves of trifling concerns and grappling with current issues. But the distinction between 'form' and 'content' inherent in the above formulation and in many similar ones was an impracticable course of action, for the old prosodic and stylistic constraints were every often detrimental to the poet's desire to be 'contemporary'. On the other hand, the classical model itself has not remained untouched, as we shall see, in the course of the last hundred years. Some of the basic medieval Arabic poetic norms underwent gradual but important changes at the hands of the major neo-classical poets. [41]

The main epoch of Arabic neo-classical poetry spans the last third of the nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth. The year 1932 marks the death of two of Egypt's foremost neo-classical poets, Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim, and at least in that country it signifies the end of an era. As we shall presently see, the neo-classical type continued to live after that date, and many important poets who write in that style are active in several Arab countries up to this day. However, a new type of poetry, commonly referred to as Post-classical or 'Romantic', which had its beginnings in the first and second decades of our century, occupied a central position in the world of poetry in the 1930s and 1940s, and rendered the neo-classical type outmoded. After the rise of the romantic type and even before that, we find many poets vacillating between the norms of classical and post-classical poetry.[42]

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41. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p.40.
42. Ibid.

The question now arises as to what corpus falls into the category of neo-classical poetry. The primary distinctive feature of that poetry as represented by its major practitioners may be summed up as follows:

1. The poems of the neo-classical poets are composed in the traditional metres of classical Arabic poetry, with minor derivative metres. As a rule, they are monorhyming.
2. Neo-classical poets continue to use the classical aghrad (thematic types), and most of their diwans are arranged accordingly. These aghrad often impose a pre-determined structure, and sometimes affect the choice of metres.
3. The poems are frequently impersonal, and the poet's experience is hidden beneath layers of convention. Sections of these poems which sometimes impress their reader as 'confessional' often turn out to be genre-bound rather than spontaneous.
4. The neo-classical language is essentially dependent on that of mediaeval Arab poetry, especially that of the Abbasid period. Not only the lexical inventory but the choice of figurative language is derivative in this fashion. The invocation of classical place-names, images and personages is a major feature in the art of most representative neo-classical poets.[43]

It is to be emphasized that not all these features function equally prominently in the works of the different poets who belong to this trend. Some have little recourse to the traditional aghrad (for example Jamil Sidqi al-

43. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 40.

Zahawi); others are less attuned to the language of classical poetry, drawing heavily on the modern prose style and occasionally on the vernacular (for example Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi). Moreover, there are poets who, though employing classical aghrad and language, display in some of their poems a sensitivity and structure which render their poetry in part romantic rather than strictly neo-classical. A case in point is Khalil Mutran (1872-1949), one of the most distinguished Arab poets of this century, whose poetry betrays neo-classical features but also certain elements that stand in stark contrast to the spirit of classicism. Finally, we find today a great number of poets who employ the neo-classical model only in a fraction of their poetry (mainly in poems meant to be recited at public gatherings) while the bulk of their poetry is of a blatantly post-classical, even modernistic, nature.

The major neo-classical poets have received their due share of critical appraisal in the last fifty years or so. However, Arab critics and scholars have so far not reached an accepted term by which to designate this poetic school. Several terms are in use for this purpose, two of which are fairly common: shir al-Ihya (the poetry of revival) and al-madrasah al-taqlidiyyah al-ittiba iyyab (the traditional/classical school). In recent years one frequently comes across the term al-shir al-amudi (poetry based on the norms of medieval poetics). Other current terms are al-shir al-turathi (poetry pertaining to the heritage), madras at al-Barudi wa-Shawqi (the school of al-Barudi and Shawqi): and, finally, al-madrasah al-Klasikiyyah al-jadidah (the neo-classical school).[44]

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44. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 41.

1.4. THE ROMANTICISM

Romanticism in Modern Arabic Poetry reached its momentum between the two World Wars. There were obvious signs that it was on the wane immediately after the Second World War. It is not accidental that the rise of romantic poetry coincided with a period of convulsive change which was to shape the lives of many Arab countries for most of the twentieth century. As a result of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire, which had been the most successful political system in the history of Islam no longer existed. This is not at all surprising, for the war was an important landmark in the literary no less than in the political, social and Economic history of the Arab World, the traumatic changes it had brought about, both directly and indirectly, had a powerful impact on the poetry of the time.[45]

What had been the Arab provinces of the Empire in Egypt and the Levant became new nation-states in the course of the 1920s. In spite of these new political forms, Anglo-French domination of the Nile Valley and the Levant remained very much in place, as in 1922 the League of Nations approved the mandate system for Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. While in North Africa the French colonial system had a depressingly permanent air. Yet in spite of all these deceptions these were heady days in Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad. The final downfall of the Ottoman system gave great new impetus to the forces of Arab nationalism, which had to some extent been held in check during the war years, and the appearance of these new national political forms was accompanied by waves of strong, sincere emotions on the

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45. Badawi, M.M., A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, Cambridge, 1975, p.104

part of Arab populations and their leaders.[46] On occasion, these forces of patriotic emotion and the resistance they encountered form one or other of the western powers, developed into full-scale revolution, as was the case in Egypt in 1919 and Iraq in 1920.

Yet it cannot be denied that the centre f interest in Arabic romantic poetry, just as it is in Romantic poetry in general, is the individual rather than society, and its vision of society tends to be expressed in somewhat idealized terms, in a language and diction more suited to the communication of subtle subjective and evanescent feeling sand moods, and therefore relatively incapable of conveying the shock and immediacy of harsh reality. The reaction against romanticism began to make itself felt in Egypt, but it was soon to spread in other Arab countries like Iraq, the Lebanon and Syria.[47] The idea that Arabic literature in general should reflect and help to modify social reality was not altogether new in modern Arabic thought and literary criticism.

The brave new world of the Arab nation-states that emerged from the aftermath of World War I was the culmination of political and intellectual activities which extended well back into the nineteenth century. Literature had not been slow to play its part in the challenges posed by the technology and the social and political theories which came from Western Europe. Originally inspired by translations and adaptations from English and French literature, the new genres of the novel, the drama and the short story were well established in Arabic literature in the early decades of the twentieth century,

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46. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 82.
47. Badawi, M.M., A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, Cambridge, 1975, p.104.

with Egyptian writers blazing the trail of innovation but these dramatic formal transformations in Arabic prose were not matched by similar developments in poetic form. The prosody and form of the qasidah as written so impressively by the neo-classical poets were still in their essentials the same as those used by Imru'l-Qays some thirteen centuries earlier. Since pre-Islamic times, poetry had been the supreme Arab art and was one of the few weapons of pride and distinction that the Arabs could use with self-esteem in the face of the apparent omnipotence of western Europe. Although a number of romantic poets were to experiment with form and prosody and called enthusiastically for change and innovation in literature, the greater part of the poetry produced before World War II retained the familiar monorhyme and metrical systems: in the case of modern Arabic poetry the wealth of the tradition was both a source of inspiration and a factor which inhibited too rapid change. Yet while the external façade of Arabic poetry evolved only gradually rather than dramatically between 1910 and 1940, it is to the credit of the romantic poets that in this period they achieved nothing less than a revolution in the language of poetry and in general poetic sensibility. The truly radical changes in poetic form were only to occur in the late 1940s when romanticism had lost its relevance as a mode of expression in modern Arabic literature.[48]

The major contribution of the neo-classical poets lay in their rediscovery and their recreation of the quality and the dignity of classical Arabic verse, but they were also harbingers of the new spirit which was to reach its fullest expression in the romantics. What marks off the neo-classical

48. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, pp. 82-83.

poets from their romantic successors is a crucial difference in degree of individual involvement and intensity in their respective poetic expressions. Even on the notable occasions when al-Barudi and Shawqi are at their most introspective and subjective, they write easily and masterfully within a long tradition of poetry; they are comfortable within its conventions and are not in a state of tension of potential revolt against them. The mission of the neo-classical poets was to revive and regenerate old forms and language in poetry. Their romantic counterparts sought to break the old moulds of thought and practice, and to transform poetic diction: in the former task they were at best only partially successful, but their achievements in the latter were nothing short of remarkable. The neo-classical poets were essentially conservative in their relation to the Arabic literary tradition. The romantics called for change, reform, renewal and occasionally, iconoclasm. In the final analysis, the neo-classical poets looked to the masters of classical Arabic as the yardstick by which their own talents should be measured. The vision of the romantic poets was firmly directed towards Western Europe, in common with their contemporaries in the avant grade of political and intellectual activity.[49]

Khalil Mutran (1872-1949)

Khalil Mutran was a typical member of that flowering of the intellectual and artistic life of Syria and Lebanon, many of whom in the late nineteenth century abandoned their homeland because of a combination of economic hardship and the political persecution they suffered at the hands of the Ottoman Turkish authorities. After two hectic years in Paris where he

[49]. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 83.

broadened his knowledge of French literature and was active in émigré political circles opposed to the rule of the Sultan Abd al-Hamid, in 1892 Mutran followed in the footsteps of a number of eminent Syrian and Lebanese men of letters and settled in Egypt, where he remained until his death in 1949. Not surprisingly it was as a journalist that he first rose to prominence, working for 'al-Ahram' for almost ten years. In 1900 he started producing his own twice-monthly periodical called '*al-Majallah al-Misriyyah*,' and in 1902 ad daily paper, '*al-Jawaib al-Misriyyah'*. If one glances through the pages of his periodical one can form an impression of the sort of man Mutran must have been, with his great energy and his all-embracing intellectual and scientific interests: every issue of the periodical was divided into sections on literature, politics, economics, agriculture, questions of public health and so forth. It was a truly polymathic production in keeping with the needs of the time, when the small numbers of intellectuals felt an urgent need to inform and educate their fellow citizens. The literary sections occupied an important place, and his own poems appeared alongside those of his colleagues and friends Ahmad Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim.[50]

The other significant point at which Mutran reveals himself to be interested in breaking the moulds of old poetic theory comes in the preface that he wrote to his first published volume of verse, 'Diwan al-Kalil'(Cairo, 1908). He is weary of the rigidity that stifles so much of contemporary poetry: the patterns woven by so many pens on white sheets of paper are like the prints made by feet wandering over a trackless desert. Now he wants to write

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[50]. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 83.

poetry in his own fashion, to relieve his should when in solitude and the demands of metre and rhyme will not sway him from his objective. Both in his preface and in the article on Marinetti's poetry, Mutran emphasizes the importance of the structural unity of the poem more clearly and unequivocally than any of his contemporaries or predecessors. He also places the individual in a position of primacy vis-à-vis the time-honoured rules according to which poetry had been composed since pre-Islamic days. The rhetoric of poetry will henceforth serve the emotions and the soul of the individual artist, and it is the firm declaration of belief in this principle that sets Mutran apart from his neo-classical contemporaries and makes him the genuine precursor of romantic poetry proper.[51]

An initial examination of his earliest work written in the 1890s indicates that his poetry is an intriguing combination of what very traditional style of which he complains in his preface, and something fresher and more original: 'My full moon and that in the sky' ('*badri wa badru'l-sama'*, 1894) is based on the old clichéd comparison of the poet's beloved and the full moon, which is surrounded by clouds like slave girls. Yet these rather hackneyed artificial images occur alongside lines in which nature is endowed with a spirit of its own to express all the bitter-sweet passions of the lover who is doomed to unhappiness:[52]

In the air is a longing, a sighing of love,
In the water a moaning from which melts the stone,

51. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p.85.
52. Ibid. p. 85.

In the breeze is a murmur which rolls o'er the meadows,
The flowers have fragrance which tells of their thoughts.[53]

This strong identification of the poet's inner turmoil with the surrounding natural scenery reaches a peak of intensity in 'Evening' ('*al-Masa'*), written in Alexandria in 1902. Once again the first impressions of the poem reveal little out of the ordinary as the poet suffers the debilitating physical effects of the pangs of unrequited love, a theme as old as Arabic poetry itself. It is only as the poem moves into the final three sections that the poet's personality begins to inspire and to dominate the language and the imagery. As he contemplates the setting sun, he sees reflections of his own predicament: it is a struggle between night and day not unlike that within himself; the bright certainty of the light becomes shot through with gloomy shafts of doubt as the visible tangible world is blotted out. The rays of light which play over dark hills and through clouds form glistening effects similar to the light reflected in his own tears. The whole of creation weeps with him as he watches this symbol of the ebbing of his own life and vigour.

As if the last tear in creation had joined with
the last of my tears to mourn me.
As though I had known the passing of my day, and
seen my own twilight reflected.[54]

This is the type of poem which makes Mustran such a key figure transition in the development of modern Arabic poetry. On occasion Mutran

53. Mutran. Khalil., Diwan al-Khalil (2nd Edn.), Cairo, 1949, p.24.
54. Mutran. Khalil., Diwan, I, p.146.

attempts to put into practice his own calls for innovation in the form and content of Arabic poetry:

In many ways Mutran did fulfil the claims he made in the preface to his first diwan: in wanting to write poetry that was relevant to his own time he demonstrated constantly his concern with freedom and liberty, on both a national and an individual level. The force and vitality of his personality burgeon through the normally traditional framework of his compositions as he writes simply and directly about his own emotional predicaments. Yet in his work there is a constant and unresolved tension between the post who writes 'to relieve my soul in solitude' and the poet who was the friend and contemporary of Hafiz and Shawqi.[55]

The Diwan poets

Khalil Mutran's considerable poetic talents worked largely within the parameters of neo-classical poetry, albeit in a state of creative tension. Although in his writings about poetry he expressed impatience with the restrictions imposed by the classical structures of poetic form, on the whole his voice was balanced and restrained, leaving the evidence of certain significant areas of his poetry to point the way to future developments. A very different impact was made by three Egyptians of a slightly younger generation: 'Abd al-Rahman Shukri (1886-1958), Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini (1890-1949) and 'Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad (1889-1964). They rose to literary prominence during the second decade of this century at a time when

55. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 87.

crucial transition were taking place in the political and cultural life of Egypt. They were typical representatives of the new Egyptians who came into their own after the First World War as citizens of the new nation state. Both Shukri and al-Mazini were products of the secular schools that had been established in Egypt in the late nineteenth century, and both were graduates of the Teachers' Training College in Cairo. Al-Aqqad, a native of Aswan, did not complete secondary school, but came to Cairo and began to make his living as a journalist and schoolteacher. After the war he and al-Mazini became full-time journalists and writers, and were active supporters of the Wafd party. Shukri's career was somewhat different: he spent the period 1909-1912 in England at Sheffield University, and on his return to Egypt he remained in the service of the Ministry of Education until his retirement in 1944, without ever involving himself in public life in the manner of al-Mazini and al-Aqqad.[56]

All three took it upon themselves to inaugurate a new departure. Deeply influenced by English lyrical poetry, they became passionate advocates of the romantic imagination in Arabic verse, and attacked loudly and bitterly the type of work written by the neo-classical poets, especially the master practitioner of that style, Ahmad Shawqi. The book that gives them their name as group is 'The Diwan: a book on criticism and literature' (al-Diwan kitab fi'l naqd wa'l-adab), published in two volumes in Cairo in 1921, although by that date a bitter quarrel had arisen between Shukri and al-mazini so the book appeared only under the joint authorship of al-'Aqqad and al-mazini. Al-Aqqad led the attack on Ahmad Shawqi, the figurehead of the

56. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 88.

generation of neo-classical poets which he and his colleagues were determined to discredit. His most frequent method of attacking Shawqi was to take lines at random and, without making any allowance for Shawqi's use of conceit or poetic licence.[57]

The tension between the old form and the new content in the poetry of Mutran can also be seen in the works of Mutran's younger contemporaries al-Mazini, Shukri and al-Aqqad, who, in spite of the important role they played in the development of Arabic poetry, were less gifted poets than Mutran.[58]

Ibrahim Abdul Qadir al-Mazini (1890-1949) was born in a middle-class Egyptian family, his father beings a lawyer. He received his education first in the secular schools, and then at the Teachers' Training College, from which he graduated in 1909. He started his career as a teacher of translation in a secondary school in Cairo, then as a teacher of English. He later gave up teaching to become a freelance journalist, devoting his energies to politics and literature. Mazini distinguished himself as a poet, critic, essayist, novelist and translator. He began his literary career as a poet, and he published two volumes of verse, the first in 1913 and the second in 1917. Early in his career he met 'Aqqad and shukri, and the three of them formed a distinct group of avant-grade writers, calling themselves madras at al-tajdid (the School of Innovation) and attacking traditional literary values. Although Mazini later quarreled with Shukri, his friendship 'with 'Aqqad remained un-impaired, until his death. 'Aqqad wrote the preface to his first volume of verse, and they

57. Ibid. p.89.
58. Badawi, M.M., A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, Cambridge, 1975, p.84.

collaborated in publishing two volumes of literary criticism, called al-Diwan in 1921. Prior to that Mazini had expressed his views on poetry in two long essays: poetry, its Ends and Means (1915) and Hafiz's Poetry (1915). Later Mazini turned away from the writing of poetry, and concentrated on prose: he was to become one of the most important prose writers in modern Arabic literature.[59]

'Abdul Rahman Shukri (1886-1958) was also graduate of the Tacher's Training College of Cairo. His father was an army officer who took part in the 'Urabi revolution and was jailed for some time; he was a close friend of the orator of the Revolution, 'Abdullah Nadim. When the son had finished his primary and secondary school education he entered the Law School, but was soon sent down because of his political activities on behalf of the Nationalist Party. At the Teachers' Training College, which he joined later, he developed a great interest not only in Arabic but also in English literature, and while still a student he contributed to the modernist paper of the time, al-jarida, which was edited by Lutfi al-Sayyid, who encouraged promising young authors like Muhammad Husain haikal and Taha Husain. After he had published his first volume of verse, The Light of Dawn, in 1909, he was sent on an educational mission to England, where he acquired a deeper knowledge of English literature at Sheffield University College. On his return in 1912 he was appointed teacher in a secondary school in Alexandria, and, unlike Mazin, he remained in the field of education until his retirement in 1944. His second volume of verse was published in 1912, also with an introduction by 'Aqqad.

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59. Badawi, M.M., A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, Cambridge, 1975, pp.84-85.

The rest of the volumes followed in rapid succession and by 1919 the seventh and last volume of his collected poems or Diwan called Azhar al-Khrif (Autumn Flowers), had appeared. Like Mazini, Shukri wrote most of his poetry early in his career, for form that date until his death in 1958, he published poems in literary periodicals, but never a whole volume of verse. Besides his poetry he produced a number of prose works, the most interesting of which is a short book of remarkable frankness, called 'The Book of Confessions' (1916), a book full of profound self-analysis and acute observations on art and man, life and death, and graphically expressing the malaise of the Egyptian intellectual at the beginning of the century. Shukri, however, did not acknowledge his authorship of 'The Book of Confessions' but he attributed it to an imaginary friend, M. N. It is clear, however, that the author of the confessions is none other than Shukri himself. Mazini saw the point at once, and he later made use of it in the severe attack he launched on him when he tried to prove Shukri's madness. After this attack, but not entirely because of it, Shukri gradually withdrew within himself, cutting himself off from the literary society of his time. his pessimism had the better of him, and he was driven to near silence: he spent the last years of his life in morbid seclusion – a paralyzed man whose spirit was almost completely broken. The poems published in various journals after 1919 were collected and published by his editor as the eighth volume in his collected Poems (Diwan) in 1960.[60]

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60. Badawi, M.M., A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 85-86.

Unlike Mazini and Shukri, ‘Abbas Mahmud al-‘Aqqad (1889-1964) was largely self-taught. At the age of fourteen when he was halfway through his secondary school he left his native town Aswan for Cairo, seeking employment. Having spent some time in a junior post in the Civil service, he decided to take up journalism. He also did some school teaching, which gave him the opportunity of meeting his future friend Mazini. After the First World War, both he and Mazini gave up school teaching to devote their time to journalism. He wrote many political articles for the Wafdist al-Balagha and later wrote much of his literary criticism for its weekly literary supplement. He collected this and published it later in the form of collections of essays, for instance. Reviews in Literature and Art, Reading in Books and Life, and Chapters. During the despotic rule of Sidqi (1930-4), ‘Aqqad wrote a passionate plea for democratic freedom, Autocratic Rule in the Twentieth Century. He was tried for his attack on King Fuad and sentenced to nine months’ imprisonment, and in The World of Prisons and Chains he left us an account of his imprisonment. ‘Aqqad led a full, active life, and his works, which run into more than ninety volumes, deal with practically every topic under the sun. Besides writing on politics and society, literature and philosophy, both in East and West, he wrote a novel, Sara, in powerful and sinewy prose, and a number of biographies, for instance on Muhammad, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Ali. Unlike Mazini and Shukri, ‘Aqqad continued to write and publish volumes of verse. The first volume appeared in 1916 and by 1928 he had published four volumes, which he had gathered together under the name Diwan al-Aqqad. In 1933 appeared his volume of poems about the curlew and On Attaining the Age of Forty, and in 1937 his volume on themes

and subjects from everyday life called The Wayfarer. Three more volumes were still to appear: Evening Storm, signifying old age, After the Storm, and a Sequel to after the Storm which was his last volume.

Writing of this group of poets, one of them, 'Aqqad, says the following in his well-known book Egyptian Poets and their Environment in the Last Generation. The passage is important and is quoted at length.[61]

The generation which appeared after Shauqi were not in the least influenced by him, either in their language, or in the spirit of their poetry… They read directly the Diwans of the ancients, studied them and admired in their style whatever they found agreeable…Were it not for the similarity of their general attitude, these modern poets would have differed widely the one from the other as a result of the stylistic differences between their favourite poets, who were as distinct one from another as Mutanabbi was from Ma'arri, Ibn al-Rumi, al-Sharif al-Radiyy, Ibn Hamdis or Ibn Zaidun. As it was, they only differed in their opinions on detail and in the manner of expressing them, but they were all agreed on the conception of poetry and the criteria of criticism.

1.5. THE MODERNISM

Arab poetic modernity resulted from two major forces: the influence of the western modernist movement and of the other major experiments that preceded or accompanied it, and the state of Arabic poetry itself at the midpoint of the twentieth century, which responded to intrinsic need for a

61. Badawi, M.M., A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, Cambridge, 1975, pp 86-87.

change towards a more ‘modern’ apprehension of experience, aesthetic and otherwise. Major poetic change in any language is never wholly a matter of intention; neither the result of sheer conscious adoption, nor the following of fashion. The success of a major poetic change in any direction, no matter how drastic, proves not simply that genius and cogent talents lie behind it, but also the important fact that poetry at the time was, if not absolutely and specifically in need of the kind of change in question, at least potentially receptive to it. The second of these factors, the intrinsic need for change, will be in evidence throughout this essay. However, the first factor, the influence of western modernism on the Arab movement, needs more explicit consideration before we continue further.[62]

There is a clear ambiguity in Arab writings between ‘modern’ and ‘modernism’, which is a term applied to a specific movement in art and literature in the west. Western ‘modernism’ took place within a certain period of time (c. 1910-1930) and was consequential on modern developments in the west, often a protest against them.

Western modernism itself never attained a clear definition. However, there are certain tendencies and concepts that seem to sum up the general movement. Some of these were adopted, consciously or unconsciously, by some contemporary Arab poets, while others did not come to have any connection with the Arab movement,

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62. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p. 132.

However, before describing western modernism, I would hasten to point out a basic difference between the western movement and its poets, and the Arab movement and its poets. It must be remembered that the western poets were the immediate heirs of many great ideas and transformations which took place over a considerable time as a result of such major development as the industrial revolution, the rise of technology, the spread of education and the circulation of many new ideas concerning man and his place in the universe. Indeed, it was this general cultural achievement, with its wealth of variety and nuances, its contradictions and uncertainties, its many highly multilayered interpretations of man and his universe, and its general ferment of intellectual investigation and controversy, that initially gave rise to the modernist movement. The greater stress in the western movement on the aesthetic aspects of modernism reflected the fact the attitude towards man and his universe, embodying the newly acquired knowledge and discoveries in the fields of science and technology as well as in the humanities, and assimilating them as part of the cognitive wealth of the times, was not too much in question among the modernists themselves.[63]

Several cultural events, regarded as 'the intellectual basis of Modernism', took place in Europe prior to the rise of the movement, which did much to shape the modernist tendency by completely contradicting prior beliefs and concepts and introducing new interpretations of art, history and human experience.[64]

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63. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, pp. 132-133.
64. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p 133.

European modernism was not a logical development, but an abrupt break with tradition. As it decomposed old frames of reference, violated expected continuities and broke away from familiar functions of language and conventions of form, it administered a 'shock' to literary sensibility which often involved a bleak outlook on history.[65] Trilling identifies it as 'the disenchantment of our culture with culture itself. Modernist literature occurred during large-scale industrialism and is, therefore, a literature of the city, where nature is largely abandoned and space in urban. The city is often seen by the poet as the ogre, the centre of corruption, injustice and crime. It became the specific milieu of this century and was described in antipathetic terms as the swarming, petrified, industrial wasteland of spleen and boredom. Western modernism is also linked with technology, the greatest product of the city which inspired not only the subject-matter and outlook, but the very aesthetic of the work: its form, style and diction.[66]

The modernist movement is not only divorced from artistic tradition, but also from humanism. It is elitist and focuses on 'select' individuals who are capable of pure aesthetic experience, as opposed to those whom Ortega y Gasset calls 'the vulgar'. It produces therefore a dehumanized art which has cut itself off from the natural relationship with reality, and would have no direct connection with the social or political world, but find its expression primarily in the aesthetics of the work of art where 'the forms of the visible world. In poetry, they appear primarily as a highly adventurous use of

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65. Bradhury. Macolm and McFarlane. James., Modernism, 1930-1980, London, 1987, pp. 26-30.
66. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p 134.

metaphor. The “substance” of the poem is no longer the reality which the metaphor expresses, but the metaphor itself crystallized into a curious linguistic world “distinct from human flora and fauna”. Realistic literature uses metaphor as decoration for the content of the poem.

Because the real world is felt to be fallen and suspect, the task of the modernist poet is to create a new language for poetry, redeemed and visionary.[67]

Modernist literature reflects ‘a prevailing, dominant or authentically contemporary view of the world by those artists who have most successfully intuited the quality of the human experience peculiar to their day. The importance of ‘attitude’ and ‘sensibility’ has been particularly stressed by Stephen Spender as an element of major importance in deciding whether a poet or writer is in fact modernist or not. In his article ‘Moderns and contemporaries’, Spender speaks of a new direction of sensibility away from the powers of the ‘conscious ego’, which is conditioned by the values of the modern age and has severed its communication with the values of the past. It is not subject matter itself which is the determinant, but rather the attitude of the poet towards his subject. Unlike the non-modern poets and writers, who are in control of their world, the modern poets and writers are acted upon by their world.[68]

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth witnessed a number of literary movements and trends. Some, such as

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67. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p.135.
68. Ibid. p.36.

symbolism, preceded the modernist movement, anticipating its great preoccupation with diction and obliquity. Others, such as imagism, futurism, vorticism, Dadaism and surrealism, were either part of the broader modernist movement or had pronounced affinities with some of its manifestations. All these experiments stood in opposition to naturalism and romanticism, and to direct representation and the direct use of language.[69]

'Modern' poetry in contemporary Arabic was achieved only after decades of experimentation crowded with poetic experience on the levels of both theory and practice. Poetry moved from one major school to another in an instinctive attempt to transcend the centuries of stagnation which had led to the hackneyed and benighted verse of the nineteenth century. The discussion of the Arab literary renaissance in modern time belongs elsewhere in this volume. However, a brief summary of the neo-classical movement which dominated poetic creativity form the last decade of the nineteenth century through to the 1920s, and has never really died out, must be attempted.[70]

Neo-classical poets – the greatest among whom was Ahmad Shawqi – instinctively went back to their roots, taking for their models poetry from the vast wealth of classical Arabic literature; for what was urgently needed at that time was for poetry to acquire a new vigour and terseness of expression. Moreover, involvement with classical references was in harmony with the psychological situation of Arab authors at home. This is the period which preceded the age of protest and dissent. Poets were not yet intellectually

69. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p.136.
70. Ibid.

conscious of modern ideas of revolution and social struggle, and even when these ideas did begin to enter Arab consciousness, they addressed themselves to a stable and well-ordered universe where all evil came from the outside: colonialism, the encroachment of foreign cultures and capitalist interests.[71] Neo-classical poets adopted the well-defined ethical, philosophical and aesthetic principles of their world. Their real achievement was to deliver the languid and moribund verse of the nineteenth century from its immense weaknesses and to imbue it with new strength of diction and form, securing for modern Arabic poetry a well-rooted, robust basis on which generations of avant-grade poets would operate. The task shouldered by the neo-classical poets should therefore be seen as a big step forward towards achieving modernity.

The drawbacks of neo-classicism lay in its sometimes excessive leaning towards rationality, objectivity and externality, its resort to rhetorical expressions and high tones, its rigidity of form and vision, and its inability to face the winds of change. As early as the second decade, avant-grade poets and critics, both in Egypt and in North America, began their direct attacks on neo-classicism. The émigré poets in America were led by Jibran (Gibran Khalil Gibran), the poet who was the most influential of his generation in bringing about a revolution in both the outlook and the technique of poetry, reinforced by the critical writings (and to a lesser extent the verse) of Mikhail Nuaymah and by the highly progressive and inspiring writings of Amin al-Rayhani (1876-1940). The Egyptian school, on the other hand, known later as

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[71]. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p.136.

the ‘Diwan’group, through its vociferous attacks on the neo-classical school (and on all fossilized elements in poetry) aimed at revolutionizing the stable, well-ordered world of the neo-classical poets, and emphasized the subjective elements of experience. By the third decade a new group of young poets had risen to fame in Egypt, writing about individual longings and dreams, expressing a deep desire for freedom, and concentrating on personal experience and on the imaginative aspect of the poem. from America and Egypt the Arab romantic movement spread to other Arab countries wherever there were acute feelings of deprivation, or of a discrepancy between aspiration and really, especially on the personal and social plane.[72]

Although Arab romanticism enjoyed only a short span of life, it was a bold leap away from the neo-classical drawbacks and helped to emphasize the elements of emotion and imagination in the poem, thus making the poetic tools more malleable it dislodged the neo-classical regard for the prevailing culture, and the alienation of the poet from society began in modern Arabic poetry. Most romantic poets at home reacted negatively to society’s shortcomings and its repression of individual freedom and happiness, and sank into escapism and excesses of subjectivity, writing a poetry of spleen and introversion, full of languor, infinite discontent and endless regret, or, as in the case of Egypt’s Ali Mahmud Taha, a poetry looking for the exotic and for joys and experiences as yet unattainable in their world.

Romantic weaknesses, however, quickly seeped into the poetry, and romanticism in the Arab world early embodied extreme sentimentalism,

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72. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p.137.

gloom dilution, abstractionism and formlessness, which became the focus of the attack by poets of the fifties. Despite its boldness, good romantic poetry did not involve and adventurous innovations in form. Critics of the fifties, however, showed no awareness whatsoever of the role played by romanticism in revolutionizing poetry in ways which anticipated modernity; they wrote, in fact, as though modern poetry was a phenomenon which arose automatically, without having any real back-ground in this century. They did not recognize that it was the outcome of any inner logic in the evolution of the poetic art, the result of major experiments (including, in large part, romanticism) which had, step by step, prepared the poetic tools for the advent of modernity.[73]

There are, in fact, more points of connection between the two movements than most Arab writers on modernity have ever conceded. By relinquishing the hold on inherited values and traditions, and shifting away from society, by liberating the imagination, and freeing the poetic language from classical rigidity, pedantry, archaism and restraint, by giving great value to the subjective element of experience and the importance of vision in poetry, and by going into the self, romantics sowed the seeds of modernity.[74]

An observer cannot fail to note the speed with which twentieth-century Arabic poetry developed into a modern art. Within a mere five decades or so, Arabic poetry had passed through almost all the phases of development which western poetry experienced over three centuries.

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73. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p.138.
74. Ibid.

The neo-classicists had dominated the literary scene from the last decade of the nineteenth century and continued to do so throughout the first three decades of the twentieth, at least. The Romantic Movement began before neo-classicism had reached its maximum duration, with Jibran rising to fame as early as the first decade of this century. By the second decade the Romantic Movement had already been launched in America and the Arab world, growing in the teeth of neo-classicism. By the third and fourth decades a number of different experiments in form technique and orientation were taking place simultaneously. Among these the most important was symbolism.[75]

The Arab symbolist trend, which reached its peak in the thirties with Said Aql's (b. 1912) publication of his long poem, 'al-Majdaliyyah' in 1937, was based on nineteenth-century French symbolism. The western movement had its own philosophy and doctrine, and was propounded by great figures who dominated the poetic scene in France over many decades. The poets aspired to the ideal and the beautiful proclaimed the dominance of intuitive perception, emphasizing a non-rational approach. They also saw a unity in the universe, which they tried to express in their work. They regarded language as a major element in poetry. They chose words both words both for their implicative meaning (poetry should not inform but suggest and evoke,' Mallarme said), and for their musical expressiveness. To the symbolists the

[75]. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p.138.

music of words had an intrinsic meaning which intensified their implicative significance.[76]

The Arab symbolist experiment shared few of the cause that prompted the western symbolist movement. The very few Arab poets who tried their hand at this particular type of symbolism had nothing of the political disenchantment and the revulsion against bourgeois materialism and its cult of capitalist activity and success which characterized the influential French experiment. Behind the Arab experiment, one can discern, not a social or political, but an artistic impulse. It shows the great malleability that the poetic art had already acquired and the capacity it possessed to absorb radical change, particularly in language and style, and reflects the deep and active interest Arab poets have had throughout this century in western poetic techniques. This meant a continuous change of sensibility in Arab poets, and, eventually, in their audience. This pervasive acquisitional attitude, it must be remembered, was limited in any given period by the capacity of this sensibility to move further in directions unfamiliar in the traditional poetic heritage. The symbolist orientation in Arabic, however, is a special case, for the old poetry had seen a valuable and important experiment in a similar kind of symbolism in medieval times. The principle of the correspondence and the mingling of sensations and the unity of the universe were major elements in some sufi poetry. However, it is not certain whether Arab poets, such as Said

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76. Ibid. p.139.

Aql, who led the symbolist trend in Arabic, were acquainted with this old Sufi experiment.[77]

Said Aql's best verse contribution to symbolism was his long, majestic poem, 'al-Majdaliyyah', whose subject is the meeting of Christ and Mary Magdalene, which he prefaced with an introduction based on the writings of the French symbolists Mallarme, Paul Valery and Abbe H. Bremond. His later poetry, however, failed to attain even the laxer standards of symbolist writings, although he retained a select and gem-like language and an aesthetic decorum in most of his poems, which usually revolved around unrequited love and an unreachable beloved. Experiments by other poets writing in the same vein, such as Bishr Faris (1907-1963) in Egypt and Badi Haqqi in Syria whose diwan, Sihr, appeared in 1953, had only a very modest effect.[78]

The new situation involved attitudes which marked the end of the disengagement of the symbolists and heralded poetry's exit from the ivory tower. The way the symbolists explored the suggestive elements of language led to the birth of symbolic (not symbolist) tendency which has now become a natural element in poetry. The poetry of the fifties needed to fuse the mistiness, mellowness and great pliability gained by the romantic experiment with the more sophisticated obliquity of symbolism in order to make an authentic advance towards modernity in poetry.[79]

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77. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p.139.
78. Badawi. M.M., Modern Arabic literature, Cambridge University, 1992, p.140.
79. Ibid.

Symbolism, then, intensified the influence of the romantic revolution by its exploration of the great possibilities of language, by its rejection of formal literary and social authority and by its encouragement of originality and independence. Its abhorrence of the discursive, its interest in the subconscious, its exaltation of the dream, its inwardness, its connotative and subtle way of dealing with experience (combating the high rhetoric, directness and rationality of neo-classicism), its economy of language and its emotional restraint (both of which were reactions against romantic dilution and sentimentalism), brought Arabic poetry many steps nearer to the modernist situation.[80]

[80]. Ibid.p. 140-41.