CHAPTER-3

Nazik as an Exponent of Free Verse Poetry in Arabic Literature

CHAPTER-3

Nazik as an Exponent of Free Verse Poetry in Arabic Literature

One of Arab world's most famous poets, al-Malaika was an early exponent of the free verse movement in Arabic. She was one of a small group of Iraqi poets who broke away from classical Arab poetry, with rigid metric and rhyme schemes, and took up modern topic and used lyrical language that spoke with the immediacy of life on the Arab street.

In 1949, al-Malaika published her first volume of free-verse poetry, "Ashes and Shrapenl" and gradually become a celebrated figure, and her poems the subject of academic studies.

Much of al-Malaika work dealt with alienation and the fear of fading into oblivion. Her poem "Lament of a Worthless Women" (1952) suggests the universel fear of being forgotten after death. Her collections of poetry included Ashiqat Al-layl, Shadaya Wa Ramad, Qararat Al Mawjah and Shahrul-Ul-Qamar.

She also wrote essays on the constraints imposed on women in Arab society and as an early feminist questioned the patriarchal structure that deprived many women of choices in marriage and career In a country in al Malaika's life and work as a poet and a literary critic were poignant reminders of Iraq's cultural renaissance in mid 20-th century .Baghdad then was considered the rendezvous of poets and artistes. [1]

---

1. Internet sources by Alissa J. Rubin, 27th June, 2007

Born in Baghdad to a mother who was also a poet, al- Malaika wrote her poems, in classical Arabic form, when she was 10.she learned English and French.Later in her life she studied at the University of Wisconsin,earning a Master master's degree in comparative literature. She passed away in Cairo.

Exponent. Nazik al-Malaika, one of the Arab world's most famous poets. An early exponent of the free verse movement in Arabic. Died last Wednesday in Cairo. She was 83.

She had Parkinson's disease for many years but died of unspecified natural causes related to old age, Nizar Marjan, the Iraqi concul in Cairo, told. The Associated Press. In a country riven by sectarian strife her life and work as a port and a literary critic were poignant reminders of Iraq's cultural renaissance in the mid-20th century. Bagadad was then considered the Paris of the Middle East and poets and artists flocked here to work.

Ms. Malaika was one of a small group of Iraqi poets who broke away from classical Arab poetry, with its rigid metric and rhymes. Influenced by the writing of Shakespeare. Byron and Shelley as well as by classical Arabic poet, these poet took up modern topics and used lyrical language that spoke with the immediacy of life on the Arab Street. [1]

In a searing poem about honor killing, "To Wash Disgrace," in which a women is killed by her father or brother for having dishonored the family by

---

1. Badawi M. M. : A critical introduction of modern Arbic Poetry, page 25 – 40.

having a love affair before marriage, Ms. Malaika used simple language to convey the loneliness of such a death.

Oh mother, a rattle, tears and darkness

Blood gushed out and the stabbed body trembled

"Oh mother!" Heard only by the executioner

Tomorrow the dawn will cone and roses will wake up

Youth and enchanted hopes will ask for her

The meadows and the flowers will answer

She left to wash the disgrace.

The brutal executioner returns

And meets people

"Disgrace!" He wipes his knife

"We've torn it apart."

And returned virtuous with a white reputation.

She also wrote essays on the constraints imposed on women in Arab society and as an early feminist questioned the patriarchal structure that deprived many women of choices in marriage and career. [1]

1. Mehdi Ismat : Modern Arabic Literature, page : 227 - 229

Arabic literature

Arabic literature, literary works written in the Arabic language. The great body of Arabic literature includes works by Arabic speaking Turks, Persuans, Syrians, Egyptians, Indians, Jews, and other Africans and Asians, as well as the Arabs themselves.

The first significant Arabic literature was produced diring the medieval golden age of lyric poetry, from the 4th to the 7th cent. The poems are strongly personal qasida, or odes, often very short, with some longer then 100 lines. They treat the life of the tribe and themes of love, fighting courage. And the chase. The poet speaks directly, not romantically, of nature and the power of God. The qasida survive only through collections, chiefly the Muallaqat, Hamase, Mufaddaliyat and Kitab al-Aghani. The most esteemed of these poets are Amru al-Kais, Antara and Zuhair. [1]

With the advent of Islam. The Qura'an became the central work of study and recitation, Extra-Qur'anic poetry underwent a decline from which it recovered in a far different from. The Qur'an supplanted poetry by becoming the chief object of study of the Muslim world. Poetry regained some prestige under the Umayyads, when al-Akhtal (c.640-c.720) and al-Farazdaq (c.640-732) wrote their lyric works.

Under the Addasids (750-1258). Hellenic, Syrian, Pahlavi, and Sanskrit works became available in translation. And the Arabic Language further developed as a vehicle of science and philosophy. Among the pioneers of Arabic prose were Ibn al-Muqaffa, the translator of the Indian fables of Kalila ws Dimna, and al-Jahiz

1. Farhana siddiqi : Nazik al –Malaika, Page no. 243-247.

(d.868). And influential figure in the establishment of the belles-letters compendia as a dominant literary theme.

The next great period of Arabic literature was a result of the rise of the new Arabic-Persian culture of Baghdad the new capital of the Addasids, in the 8th and 9th cent. Philosophy, mathematics, low, Qur'nic interpretation and criticism, history, and science were cultivated, and the collections of yearly Arabic poetry were compiled during this period.

At the end of the 8th cent. In Baghdad a group of young poets arose who established a new court poetry. A prominent court poet was Abu Nuwas. Asceticism, not yet developed into Sufism. Evolved into a poetic genre with Abu al-Atahiya. Among the most popular of Arabic Poets. Mutanabbi (915-65) worte some of the most complex and most eloquent, Arabic poems. The poet Hariri sought to combine "refinement with dignity of style and brilliancies with jewels of eloquence "Abu al-Ala al-Maarri was on outstanding Syrian poet of great originality. The greatest mystic poet of the age was Omar Ibn al-Faridh (1181-1235). [1]

The influence of India and Persia is seen in Arabic prose romance, which became the principal literary from. The greatest collection is the thousand and One Nights. The major writes of historical and geographical works in Arabic include Bukhari, Tabari, Masudi, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn al-Athir (d. 1234) and Ibn Batuta. The foremost Arab Theologian was al-Ghazali, Avicenna, The Great Physician, wrote on medicine. The central Asian scholar al-Farasi, wrote fundamental works on philosophical and musical theory, in the field of belles-lettres essays and epistles of

---

1. Amin Qasim : Al – Marah al Zadidah, Mubiat at Marif , Egypt, 1900
Page – 235-200

great wit and erudition, known as risalas were composed on subject a as diverase science mysticism. And politics, Chief practitioners of the genre include Ibn al-Muqaffa (d. 757) the unsurpassed al-jahiz, and Ibn Qutayba (d.889).

The Western center of Arab culture was Spain. Especially Cordoba under the Umayyads. The Spanish Arabs produced fine poets and scholars, but they are less important then the great

Poetry

In contrast to newly imported genres. Arabic poetry has a long and rich tradition. In the first theree-quarters of the nineteenth century, poets perpetuated the highly ornate style of their immediate predecessors. When the times called for a less ornamental and more purposeful poetry, the practice of the most talented turened not to European models but to the example of early poets from an equally dynamic age. By the turn of the century, a school now know as the neoclassical quickly attained a high level of accoplishment, emulating the grandiloquent odes of Abbasid poets but addressing the public issues of the day. Its leading exponents were Ahmad Shawqi (1868-1932) and Muhammad Hafiz Ibrahim (c. 1872 – 1932).

Resonant as they were, their voices were not the only ones to be heard. Others favored more radical initiatives and the expression of more personal emotions. From outside the Arab heartlands, Syrian Christian emigers to the Americas headed by Khalil Gibran (1883 – 1931) echoed a type of poetry. [1]

1. Internet sources : by Abdul Moneim, June 27, 2007, issue no. 851, Al-Ahram

Long accepted in the West. Not least influential were the leading critics' al-Aqqad and Taha Husayn, who harried the neoclassicists for not eualing the subtleties of the British poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) or the French poet Alphonse de Lamartine (1790 – 1869). The leanings of these various groups were unmistakable, and after the death of Ahmad Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim, the romanticism already evident in prose became evident in poetry as well.

Another new note was sounded in 1949 when two Iraqis, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964) and Nazik al-Mala'ika (b.1923), almost simultaneously published their first experiments with free verse. The adoption of lines of uneven length with muted rhymes irregularly arranged, or with no rhymes at all, was the most radical departure ever from classical Arabic poetry. No less significant is that the movement grew – and has continued to grow – out of perceptions shared with Western poets of international stature, especially T.S. Eliot (1888-1965). Most revolutionary of all has been its purpose; for it has given rise to a host of committed poets often able to give voice to their predicaments as individuals and, at the same time, as Arabs and as human-ists.

All Genres

All along, Arab writers have given expression to the fervor and then to the disappointments and antagonisms generated by the succession of Western ideologies embraced by the elite. This expression has to some extent been tinged by the prestige of the world power most closely associated with each ism. In the second half of the twentieth century, following growing disappointment in the way the liberalism and secularism associated with Western Europe had worked out, the

dominant doctrine has been socialism, but the collapse of the Soviet Union undermined confidence in its forthcoming triumph. Very few carry their disillusion to the extent implied in a short story by Mahmud al-Rimawi (b. 1948) titled "The Train" and included in his *Liqa lam vatimm* (2002). In it, a train running to an unknown destination and stopping only at deserted stations is packed with people who have been on it long enough for a baby girl to be born to one of them, and the name she is given is Palestine. More confidently, contributors to all literary genres view themselves as individuals sharing a distinctive experience but informed by a universal consciousness, and dealing with issues that have a humanistic as well as an Arab dimension. [1]

Arabic literature emerged in the 5th century with only fragments of the written language appearing before then. The Qur'an, widely regarded as the finest piece of literature work in the Arabic language, [1] would have the greatest lasting effect on Arabic culture and its literature Arabic literature flourished during the Islamic Golden Age, but has remained vibrant to the present day, with poets and prose-writers across the Arab world achieving increasing success.

1. Internet sources by Alissa J. Rubin, 27th June, 2007

Pre-Islamic literature

Further information: pre-Islamic poetry

Antara Ibn Shadad, a slave who loved Abla, a wealthy woman.

The period before the writing of the Qur'an and the rise of Islam is known to Muslims as *Jahiliyyah* or period of ignorance. While this ignorance refers mainly to religious ignorance, there is little literature before this time, although significant oral tradition is postulated. Tales like those about Sinbad and Antar bin Shaddad were probably current, but were recorded later. The final decades of the 6th century, however, begin to show the flowering of a lively written tradition. This tradition was captured over two centuries later with two important compilations of the *Mu'allaqat and the Mufaddaliyat.*

The Qur'an

The exemplar of classical literature

The Qur'an was one of the first major works of Arabic literature and definitely the most influential. [1]

The Qur'an had a significant influence on the Arab language. The language used in it is called classical Arabic, and while modern Arabic is very similar, the classical is still the style to be admired. Not only is the Qur'an the first work of any

1. Amin Qasim : Al – Marah al Zadidah, Mubiat at Marif , Egypt, 1900
Page – 235-200

significant length written in the language it also has a far more complicated structure that the earlier literary works with its 114 suras (chapters) which contain 6,236 ayat (verses). It contains injunctions, narratives, homilies, parables, direct address from God. instructions and even comments on itself on how it will be received and understood, it is also, paradoxically, admired for its layers of metaphor as well as its clarity, a feature it mentions itself in sura 16:103.

Although it contains elements of both prose and poetry, and therefore is closest to *Saj* or rhymed prose, the Qur'an is regarded as entirely apart from these classifications. The text is believed to be divine revelation and is seen by Muslims as being eternal or 'uncreated'. This leads to the doctrine of *i'jaz* or inimitability of the Qur'an which implies that nobody can copy the work's style.

This doctrine of i'jaz possibly had a slight limiting effect on Arabic literature: proscibing exactly what could be written. The Qur'an itself ciricises poets in the 26th sura, actually called Ash-Shu'ara or the Poets:

And as to the poets, those who go astray follow them.

This may have exerted dominance over the pre-Islamic poets of the 6th century whose popularity may have vied with the Qur'an amongst the people. There were a marked lack of significant poets until the 8th century. One notable exception was Hassan ibn Thabit who wrote poems in praise of Muhammad and was known as the "prophet's poet". Just as the Bible has held an important place in the literature of other languages. The Qur'an is important to Arabic. It is the source of many ideas, allusions and quotes and its moral message informs may works. [1]

---

1. Amin Qasim : Al – Marah al Zadidah, Mubiat at Marif , Egypt, 1900
Page – 235-200

Aside from the Qur'an the *hadith* or tradition of what Muhammed is supposed to have said and done are important literature. The entire body of these acts and words are called *sunnah* or way and the ones regarded as *Shih* or genuine of them are collected into hadith. Some of the most significant collections of hadith include those by Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj and Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari.

The other important genre of work in Qur'anic study is the *tafsir* or commentaries Arab writings relating to religion also includes many sermons and devotional pieces as well as the sayings of Ali which were collected in the 10th century as Nahj al-Balaghah or The peak of Eloquence.

Islamic Scholarship

The research into the life times of Muhammad, and determining the genuine parts of the Sunnah, was an important early reason for scholarship in or about the Arabic language. It was also the reason for the collecting of pre-Islamic poetry; as some of these poets were close to the prophet – Labid actually meeting Muhammad and converting to Islam – and their writings illuminated the times when these event occured. Muhammad also inspired the first Arabic biographies, known as al-sirah al-nabawiyyah; the earliest was by Wahb ibn Munabbih, but Muhammad ibn Ishaq wrote the best known. Whilst covering the life of the prophet they also told of the battles and events of early Islam and have numerous digressions on older biblical traditions.

Some of the earliest work studying the Arabic language was started in the name of Islam, Tradition has it that the caliph Ali, after reading a copy of Qur'an with errors in it, asked Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali to write a work codifying Arabic grammer, Khalil ibn Ahmad would later write *Kitab al-Ayn*, the first dictionary of Arabic, along with works on prosody and music, and his Persian pupil Sibawayh would produce the most respected work of Arabic grammar known simply as *al-Kitab* or *The Book.*

Other caliphs exerted their influence on Arabic with 'Abd al-Malik making it the official language for administration of the new empire, and al-Ma'mun setting up the *Bayt al-Hikma* or House of Wisdom in Baghdad for research and translations. Basrah and Kufah were two other important seats of learning in the early Arab world, between which there was a strong rivalry.

The institutions set up mainly to investigate more fully the Islamic religion were invaluable in studying many other subjects. Caliph Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik was instrumental in enriching the literature by instructing scholars to translate works into Arabic. The first was probably Aristotle's correspondence with Alexander the Great translated by Salm Abu al-'Ala'. From the east, and in a very different literary genre, the Persian scholar Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa translated the animal fables of the *Panchatantra.* These translations would keep alive scholarship and learning particularly that of ancient Greece, during the Dark Ages in Europe and the works would often be first re-introduced to Europe from the Arabic versions. [1]

---

1. Mehdi Ismat : Modern Arabic Literature, page : 227 - 229

Classical Arabic literature

Arabic poetry

A large proportion of Arabic literature before the 20th century is in the form of poetry, and even prose from this period is either filled with snippets of poetry or is in the form of *saj* or rhymed rpose. The themes of the poetry range from high-flown hymns of praise to bitter personal attacks and from religious and mystical ideas to poems on sex and wine. An important feature of the poetry which would be applied to all of the literature was the idea that it must be pleasing to the ear. The poetry and much of the prose was written with the design that it would be spoken aloud and great care was taken to make all writing as mellifluous as possible.

Non-fiction literature

Compilations and manuals

In the late 9th century Ibn al-Nadim, a Baghdadi bookseller, compiled a crucial work in the study of Arabic literature. Kitab al-Fihrist is a catalogue of all books available for sale in Baghdad and it gives a facinating overview of the state of the literature at that time. [1]

One of the most common forms of literature during the Abbasid period was the compilation. These were collections of facts, ideas, instructive stories and poems

1. Internet sources : by Abdul Moneim, June 27, 2007, issue no. 851, Al-Ahram

on a single topic and covers subjects as diverse as house and garden, women, gate-crashers, blind people, envy, animals and misers. These last three compilations were written by a al-Jahiz the acknowledged master of the form. These collections were important for any nadim, a companion to a ruler or noble whose role was often involved regaling the ruler with stories and information to entertain or advice.

In the late 9th century Ibn al-Nadim, a Baghdadi bookseller, compiled a crucial work in the study of Arabic literature. Kitab al-Fihrist is a catalogure of all books available for sale in Baghdad and it gives a fascinating overview of the state of the literature at that time.

One of the most common forms of literature during the Abbasid period was the compilation. These were collections of facts, ideas, instructive stories and poems on a single topic and covers subjects as diverse as house and garden, women, gate-crashers, blind people, envy, animals and misers. These last three compilations were written by al-Jahiz the acknowledge master of the form. These collections were important for any nadim, a companion to a ruler or noble whose role was often involved regaling the ruler with stories and information to entertain or advice.

A type of work closely allied to the collection was the manual in which writers like ibn Qutaybah offered instruction in subjects like etiquette, how to rule, how to be a bureaucrat and even how to write. Ibn Qutaybah also wrote one of the earliest histories of the Arabs, drawing together biblical stories, Arabic folk tales and more historical events. [1]

1. Internet sources by Alissa J. Rubin, 27th June, 2007

The subject of sex was frequently investigated in Arabic literature. The *ghazal* or love poem had a long history being at times tender and chaste and at other times rather explicit. In the Sufi tradition the love poem would take on a wider, mystical and religious importance. Sex manuals were also written such as *The perfumed Garden, Tawq al-Hamamah* or *The Dove's Neckring* by ibn Hazm and *Nuzhat al-albab fi-ma la yujad fi kitab* or *Delight of Hearts concering What will Never Be Found in a Book* by Ahmad al-Tifashi. Countering such works are one like *Rawdat al-muhibbin wa-nuzhat al-mushtaqin or Medow* of Lovers and Diversion of the Infatuated by ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah who advises on how to separate love and lust and avod sin. [1]

Biography, history, and geography

Aside from the early biographies of Muhammad, the first major biographer to weight character rather than just producing a hymn of praise was the Persian scholar al-Baladhuri with his *Kitab ansab al-ashraf or Book of the Genealogies of the Noble*, a collection of biographies. Another important biographical dictionary was begun by ibn Khallikan and expanded by al-Safadi and one of the first significant autobiographies was *Kitab al-I'tibar* which told of Usamah ibn Munqidh and his experiences in fighting in the Crusades. This time period saw the emergence of the genre of *tabaqat* (biographical dictionaries or biographical compendia).

1. Farhana Siddiqei : Durul Marah Fi Atiwai al-Lughar al-Arabiya wa Abadiha Abara al-usur. Page – 128-12

Ibn Khurdadhbih, apparently an official in the postal service wrote one of the first travel books and the form remained a popular one in Arabic literature with books by ibn Hawqal, ibn Fadlan, al-Istakhri, al-Muqaddasi, al-Idrisi and most famously the travels of ibn Battutah. These give a perspectives on the non-Muslim peoples on the edges of the empire. They also indicated just how great a trading power the Muslim peoples had become. These were often sprawling accounts that included details of both geography and history.

Sorme writiers concentrated solely on history like al-Ya'qubi and al-Tabari, whilst others focused on a small portion of history such as ibn al-Azraq, with a history of Mecca, and ibn Abi Tahir Tayfur, writing a history of Baghdad. The historian regarded as the greatest of all Arabic historians though is ibn Khaldun whose history Muqaddimah focuses on society and is a founding text in sociology and economics. [1]

Diaries

In the medieval Near East. Arabic diaries were first being written from before the 10th century, though the medieval diary which most resembles the modern diary was that of Ibn Banna in the 11th century. His diary was the earliest to be arranged in order of date (*ta'rikh* in Arabic), very much like modern diaries.

Literary theory and criticism

1. Badawi M. M. : A critical introduction of modern Arbic Poetry, page 25 – 40.

Literary criticism in Arabic literature often focused on religious texts, and the several long religious traditions of hermeneutics and textual exegesis have had a profound influence on the study of secular texts. This was particularly the case for the literary traditions of Islamic literature.

Literary criticism was also employed in other forms of medieval Arabic poetry and literature from the 9th century, notably by *Al-Jahiz* in his *al-Bayan wa-l'tabyin* and *al-Hayawan*, and by Abdullah ibn al-Mu'tazz in his *Kitab al-Badi*.

Fiction literature

In the Arab world, there was a great distinction between *al-fusha* (quality language) and *al-ammiyyah* (language of the common people). Not many writers would write works in this *al-ammiyyah* or common language and it was felt that literature had to be improving, educational and with purpose rather that just entertainment. This did not stop the common role of the *hakawati* or story-teller who would retell the entertaining parts of more educational works or one of the many Arabic fables or folk-tales, which were often not written down in many cases. Nevertheless, some of the earliest novels, including the first philosophical novels, were written by Arabic authors. [1]

Epic literature

Main article: Arabic epic literature

1. Farhana siddiqi : Nazik al –Malaika, Page no. 243-247.

The most famous example of Arabic fiction is the *One Thousand and One Nights (Arabian Nights),* easily the best known of all Arabic literature and which still affects many of the ideas non-Arabs have about Arabic culture. A good example of the lack of popular Arabic prose fiction is that the stories of Aladdin and Ali Baba, usually regarded as part of the Tales from *One Thousand and One Nights*, were not actually part of the *Tales*. They were first included in French translation of the *Tales* by Antoine Galland who heard them being told by a traditional storyteller and only existed in incomplete Arabic manuscripts before that. The other great character from Arabic literature Sinbad is from the Tales.

The *One Thousand and One Nights* is usually placed in the genre of Arabic epic literature along with several other works. They are usually, like the *Tales*, collections of short stories or episodes strung together into a long tale. The extant versions were mostly written down relatively late on, after the 14th century, although many were undoubtedly collected earlier and many of the original stories are probably pre-Islamic. Types of stories in these collections include animal fables, proverbs, stories of *jihad* or propagation of the faith, humorous tales, moral tales, tales about the wily con-man Ali Zaybaq and tales about the prankster Juha.

Maqama

Maqama not only straddles the divide between prose and poetry, being instead a form of rhymed prose, it is also part way between fiction and non-fiction. Over a series of short narratives, which are fictionalized versions of real life situations, different ideas are contemplated. A good example of this is a maqama on musk,

which purports to compare the feature of different perfumes but is in fact a work of political satire comparing several competing rulers. Maqama also makes use of the doctrine of *badi* or deliberately adding complexity to display the writer's dexterity with language. Al-Hamadhani is regarded as the originator of the maqama and his work was taken up by Abu Muhammad al-Qasim al-Hariri with one of al-Hariri's maqama a study of al-Hamadhani own work. Maqama was an incredibly popular form of Arabic literature, being one of the few forms which continued to be written during the decline of Arabic in the 17th and 18th centuries. [1]

Romantic literature

A famous example of romantic Arabic poetry is *Layla and Majnun,* dating back to the Umayyad era in the 7th century. It is a tragic story of undying love much like the later *Romeo and Juliet,* which was itself said to have been inspired by a Latin version of *Layla and Majnun* to an extent. *Layla and Majnun* is considered part of the platonic Love genre, so-called because the couple never marry or consummate their relationship that is prominent in Arabic literature, though the literary motif is found throughout the world. Other famous Virgin Love stories include *Qays and Lubna, Kuthair and Azza, Marwa and al-Majnun al-Faransi* and *Antara and Abla*.

The 10th century *Encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity* features a fictional anecdote of a "prince who strays from his palace during his wedding feast and, drunk, spends the night in a cemetery, confusing a corpse with his bride. The story

1. Internet sources by Alissa J. Rubin, 27th June, 2007

is used as a Gnostic parable of the soul's pre-existence and return from its terrestrial sojourn". [1]

Another medieval Arabic love story was *Hadith Bayad wa Riywad (The Story of Bayad and Riyad)*, a 13th-century Arabic love story. The main characters of the tale are Bayad, a merchant's son and a foreigner from Damascus, and Riyad, a well educated girl in the court of an unnamed Hajib (vizier or minister) of 'Iraq which is referred to as the lady. The *Hadith Bayad wa Riyad* manuscript is believed to be the only illustrated manuscript known to have survived from more than eight centuries of Muslim and Arab presence in Spain.

Many of the tales in the *One Thousand and One Nights* are also love stories or involve romantic love as a central theme. This includes the frame story of Scheherazade herself, and many of the stories she narrates, including "Aladdin", "The Ebony Horse", "The Three Apples", "Tale of Taj al-Muluk and the Princess Dunya: The Lover and the Loved". "Adi bin Zayed and the Princess Hind", "Di'ibil al-Khuza'I with the Lady and Muslim bin al-Walid", "The Three Unfortunate Lovers", and others.

There were several elements of courtly love which were developed in Arabic literature, namely the notions of "Love for love's sake" and "exaltation of the beloved lady" which have been traced back to Arabic literature of the 9th and 10th centuries. The notion of the "ennobling power" of love was developed in the early 11th century by the Persian psychologist and philosopher, Ibn Sina (known as "Avicenna" in Europe), in his Arabic treatise Risala fi'l-Ishq (Treatise on Love).

---

1. Mehdi Ismat : Modern Arabic Literature, page : 227 - 229

The final element of courtly love, the concept of "love as desire never to be fulfilled", was also at times implicit in Arabic poetry. [1]

Murder mystery

The earliest known example of a whodunit murder mystery was "The Three Apples", one of the tales narrated by Scheherazade in the *One Thousand and One Nights (Arabian Nights)*. In this tale, a fisherman discovers a heavy locked chest along the Tigris River and he sells it to the Abbasid Caliph, Harun al-Rashid, who then has the chest broken open only to find inside it the dead body of a young woman who was cut into pieces. Harun orders his vizier, Ja'far ibn Yahya, to solve the crime and find the murderer within three days, or be executed if he fails his assignment. Suspense is generated through multiple plot twist that occur as the story progress. This may thus be considered an archetype for detective fiction.

Satire and comedy

In Arabic poetry, the genre of satirical poetry was known as *hija*. Satire was introduced into prose literature by the Afro-Arab author al-Jahiz in the 9th century. While dealing with serious topics in what are now known as anthropology, sociology and psychology, he introduced a satirical approach, "based on the premise that, however serious the subject under review, it could be made more interesting and thus achieve greater effect, if only one leavened the lump of solemnity by the insertion of a few amusing anecdotes or by the throwing out of some witty or paradoxical observations. He was well aware that, in treating of new

1. Internet sources : by Abdul Moneim, June 27, 2007, issue no. 851, Al-Ahram

themes in his prose works, he would have to employ a vocabulary of a nature more familiar in *hija*, satirical poetry". For example, in one of his zoological works, he satirized the preference for longer human penis size. Writing: "If the length of the penis were a sign of honor. Then the mule would belong to the (honorable tribe of) Qurays". Another satirical story based on this preference was an *Arabian Nights* tale called "Ali with the Large Member". [1]

In the 10th century the writer Tha'alibi recorded satirical poetry written by the poets As-Salami and Abu Dulaf, with As-Salami praising Abu Dulaf's wide breadth of knowledge and then mocking his ability in all these subjects, and with Abu Dulaf responding back and satirizing As-Salami in return.[13] An example of Arabic political satire included another 10th century poet Jarir satirizing Farazdaq as "a transgressor of the Sharia" and later Arabic poets in turn using the term "Farazdaq-like" as a form of political satire.

The terms "comedy" and "satire" became synonymous after Aristotle's *poetics* was translated into Arabic in the medieval Islamic world, where it was elaborated upon by Arabic writers and Islamic philosophers, such as Abu Bischr, his pupil al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes. Due to cultural differences, they disassociated comedy from Greek dramatic representation and instead identified it with Arabic poetic themes and forms, such as *hija* (satirical poetry). They viewed comedy as simply the "art of reprehension", and made no reference to light and cheerful events, or troublous beginnings and happy endings, associated with classical Greek comedy. After the Latin translations of the 12th century, the term "comedy" thus gained a new semantic meaning in Medieval literature.

---

1. Farhana siddiqi : Nazik al –Malaika, Page no. 243-247.

Theatre

While puppet theatre and passion plays were popular in the medieval Islamic world. live theatre and drama has only been a visible part of Arabic literature in the modern era. There may have been a much longer theatrical tradition but it was probably not regarded as legitimate literature and mostly went unrecorded. There is an ancient tradition of public performance amongst Shi'I Muslims of a play depicting the life and death of al-Husayn at the battle of Karbala in 680 CE. There are also several plays composed by Shams al-din Muhammad ibn Daniyal in the 13th century when he mentions that older plays are getting stale and offers his new works as fresh material.

The most popular forms of theater in the medieval Islamic world were puppet theatre (which included hand puppets, shadow plays and marionette productions) and live passion plays known as *ta'ziya*, where actors re-enact episodes from Muslim history. In particular, Shia Islamic plays revolved around the *shaheed* (martyrdom) of Ali's son Hasan ibn Ali and Husayn ibn Ali. Live secular plays were known as *akhraja*, recorded in medieval *adab* literature, though they were less common than puppetry and *Ta'ziya Theater*. [1]

The Moors had a noticeable influence on the works of George Peels and William Shakespeare. Some of their works featured Moorish characters, such as Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Othello*, which as its title character. These works are said to have been inspired by several Moorish delegations from Morocco to Elizabethan England at the beginning of the 17th century.

---

1. Internet sources by Alissa J. Rubin, 27th June, 2007

Philosophical novels

The Arab Islamic philosophers, Ibn Tufail (Abubacer) and Ibn al-Nafis, were pioneers of the philosophical novel as they wrote the earliest novels dealing with philosophical fiction. Ibn Tufail wrote the first Arabic novel *Philosophus Autodidactus* as a response to al-Ghazali's *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. This was followed by Ibn al-Nfiz who wrote a fictional narrative *Theologus Autodidactus* as a response to Ibn Tufail's *Philosophus Autodidactus*. Bothof these narratives had protagonists (Hayy in *Philosophus Autodidactus* and Kamil in *Theologus Autodidactus*) who were autodidactic individuals spontaneously generated in a cave and living in seclusion on a desert island, both being the earliest examples of a desert island story. However, while Hayy lives alone on the desert island for most of the story in *Philosophus Autodidactus* (until he meets a castaway named Absal), the story of Kamil extends beyond the desert island setting in *Theologus Autodidactus* (when castaways take him back to civilization with them). Developing into the earliest known coming of age plot and eventually becoming the first example of a science fiction novel. [1]

Ibn al-Nafis described his book *Theologus Autodidactus* as a defense of "the system of Islam and the Muslims' doctrines on the missions of Prophets, the religious laws, the resurrection of the body, and the transitoriness of the world." He presents rational arguments for bodily resurrection and the immortality of the human soul, using both demonstrative reasoning and material from the hadith corpus to prove his case. Later Islamic scholars viewed this work as a response to the metaphysical claim of Avicenna and Ibn Tufail that bodily resurrection cannot be proven through reason, a view that was earlier criticized by al-Ghazali. Ibn al-

1. Internet sources : by Abdul Moneim, June 27, 2007, issue no. 851, Al-Ahram

Nafis' work was later translated into Latin and English as *Theologus Autodidactus* in the early 20th century. [1]

A Latin translation of Ibn Tufail's work, entitled Philosophus Autodidactus, first appeared in 1671, and prepared by Edward Pococke the Younger. The first English translation by Simon Ockley was published in 1708, and German and Dutch translations were also published at the time. These translations later inspired Daniel Defoe to write *Robinson Crusoe*, which also featured a desert island narrative and was regarded as the first novel in English. *Philosophus Autodidactus* also inspired Robert Boyle, an acquaintance of peococke, to write his own philosophical novel set on an island, *The Aspiring Naturalist*, in the late 17th century. The story also anticipated Rousseau's *Emile* in some ways, and is also similar to the later story of Mowgli in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* as well the character of Tarzan, in that a baby is abandoned in a deserted tropical island where he is taken care of and fed by a mother wolf. Other European writers influenced by Philosophus Autodidatus include John Locke. Gottfried Leibniz, Melchisedech Thevenot, Jhon Wallis, Christiaan Huygens, George Keith, Robert Barclay, the Quakers, and Samuel Hartlib.

---

1. Badawi M. M. : A critical introduction of modern Arbic Poetry, page 25 – 40.

Science fiction

Al-Risalah al-Kamiliyyah fil Siera al-Nabawiyya (The Treatise of Kamil on the Prophet's Biography), known in English as *Theologus Autodidactus* (which is a phonetic transliteration of the Greek name meaning self-taught theologian), written by the Arabian polymath Ibn al-Nafis (1213-1288), is the earliest known science fiction novel. While also being an early desert island story and coming of age story, the novel deals with various science fiction elements such as spontaneous generation, futurology, apocalyptic themes, the end of the world and doomsday, resurrection and the afterlife. Rather than giving supernatural or mythological explanations for these events. Ibn al-Nafis attempted to explain these plot elements using his own extensive scientific knowledge in anatomy, biology, physiology, astronomy, cosmology and geology. [1]

His main purpose behind this science fiction work was to explain Islamic religious teachings in terms of science and philosophy. For example, it was through this novel that Ibn al-Nafis introduces his scientific theory of metabolism, and he makes references to his own scientific discovery of the pulmonary circulation in order to explain bodily resurrection. The novel was later translated into English as *Theologus Autodidctus* in the early 20th century.

A number of stories within the *One Thousand and One Nights (Arabian Nights)* also feature science fiction elements. One example is "The Adventures of Bulukiya", where the protagonist Bulukiya's quest for the herb of immortality leads him to explore the seas, journey to the Garden of Eden and to Jahannam, and travel across the cosmos to different worlds much larger than his own world,

1. Farhana Siddiqei : Durul Marah Fi Atiwai al-Lughar al-Arabiya wa Abadiha Abara al-usur. Page – 128-12

anticipating elements of galactic science fiction; along the way, he encounters societies of jinns, mermaids, talking serpents, talking trees, and other forms of life. In another *Arabian Nights* tale, the protagonist Abdullah the Fisherman gains the ability to breathe underwater and discovers an underwater submarine society that is portrayed as an inverted reflection of society on land, in that the underwater society follows a form of primitive communism where concepts like money and clothing do not exist. Other *Arabian Nights* tales deal with lost ancient technologies, advanced ancient civilizations that went astray, and catastrophes which overwhelmed them. "*The City of Brass*" features a group of travelers on an archeological expedition across the Sahara to find an ancient lost city and attempt to recover a brass vessel that Solomon once used to trap a jinn. and, along the way, encounter a mummified queen, petrified inhabitants, lifelike humanoid robots and automata, seductive marionettes dancing without strings, and a brass horseman robot who directs the party towards the ancient city.

"The Ebony Horse" features a robot in the form of a flying mechanical horse controlled using keys that could fly into outer space and towards the Sun,[41] while the "Third Qalandar's Tale" also features a robot in the form of an uncanny boatman. "The City of Brass" and "The Ebony Horse" can be considered early examples of proto-science fiction.

Other examples of early Arabic proto-science fiction include al-Farabi's *Opinions of the residents of a splendid city* about a utopian society, al-Qazwini's futuristic tale of *Awaj bin Anfaq* about a man who travelled to Earth from a distant planet, and elements such as the flying carpet.

---

1. Badawi M. M. : A critical introduction of modern Arbic Poetry, page 25 – 40.

The decline of Arabic literature

The expansion of the Arab people in the 7th and 8th century brought them into contact with a variety of different peoples who would affect their culture. Most significant for literature was the ancient civilization of Persia. Shu'ubiyya is the name of the conflict between the Arabs and Non-Arabs. Although producing heated debate amongst scholars and varying styles of literature, this was not a damaging conflict and had more to do with forging a single Islamic cultural identity. Bashsar ibn Burd, of Persian heritage, summed up his own stance in a few lines of poetry:

Never did he sing camel songs behind a scabby beast,

Nor pierce the bitter colocynth out of sheer hunger

nor dig a lizard out of the ground and eat it ……

The cultural heritage of the desert dwelling Arabs continued to show its influence even though many scholars and writers were living in the large Arab cities. When Khalil ibn Ahmad enumerated the parts of poetry he called the line of verse a *bayt* or tent and *sabah* or tent-rope for a foot. Even during the 20th century this nostalgia for the simple desert life would appear or at least be consciously revived. [1]

A slow resurgence of the Persian language and a re-location of the government and main seat of learning to Baghdad, reduced the production of Arabic literature. Many Arabic themes and styles were taken up in Persian with Omar Khayyam,

1. Internet sources by Alissa J. Rubin, 27th June, 2007

Attar and Rumi all clearly influenced by the earlier work. The Arabic language still initially retained its importance in politics and administration, although the rise of the Ottoman Empire confined it solely to religion. Alongside Persian, the many variants of the Turkie languages would dominate the literature of the Arab region until the 20th century. Nevertheless, some Arabic influences remained visible.

Modern literature

During the 19th century, a revival took place in Arabic literature, along with much of Arabic culture, and is referred to in Arabic as "*al-Nahda*", which means "the Renaissance". This resurgence of writing in Arabic was confined mainly to Egypt and Lebanon until the 20th century when it spread to other countries in the region. This Renaissance was not only felt within the Arab world but also beyond, with a great interest in the translating of Arabic works into European languages. Although the use of the Arabic language was revived, particularly in poetry, many of the tropes of the previous literature which served to make it so ornate and complicated were dropped. [1]

Just as in the 8th century, when a movement to translate ancient Greek and other literature had helped vitalize Arabic literature, another translation movement would offer new ideas and material for Arabic. An early popular success was *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which spurred a host of historical novels on Arabic subjects. Two important translators were Rifa'a al-Tahtawi and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra.

---

1. Farhana Siddiqei : Durul Marah Fi Atiwai al-Lughar al-Arabiya wa Abadiha Abara al-usur. Page – 128-12

Throughout the 20th century, Arabic writers in both poetry and prose have reflected the changing political and social climate of the Arab world in their work. Anti-colonial themes were prominent early in the 20th century, with writers continuing to explore the region's relationship with the West until the present day. Internal political upheaval has also been a challenge, with some writers suffering censorship. There are many contemporary Arabic writers, such as Mahmoud saeed (Iraq) who wrote *Bin Bakra Ally*, and *I Am The One Who Saw (Saddam City)*. Other contemporary writers include Sonallah Ibrahim and Abdul Rahman Munif, who were imprisoned by the state for their anti-government work. At the same time, others who had written works supporting or praising governments were promoted to positions of authority within cultural bodies. Non-fiction writers and academics have also produced political polemics and criticisms aiming to re-shape Arabic politics. Some of the best known are Taha Hussain's *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, which was an important work of Egyptian nationalism, and the works of Nawal el-Saadawi who campaigns for women's rights. [1]

Poetry

Main article modern poetry

Mention no longer the driver on his night journey and the wide striding camels, and give up talk of morning dew and ruins.

I no longer have any taste for love songs on dwellings which already went down in seas of [too many] odes. So, too, the *ghada*, whose fire, fanned by the sighs of those enamored of it, cries out to the poets: "Alas for my burning!"

---

1. Internet sources : by Abdul Moneim, June 27, 2007, issue no. 851, Al-Ahram

If a steamer leaves with my friends on sea or land, why should I direct my complaints to the camels?

---Excerpt from Francis Marrash's Mashhad al-ahwal (1870), translated by Shmuel Moreh.

Beginning in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as part of what is now called the renaissance or al-Nahda, poets like Francis Marrash, Ahmad Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim began to explore the possibility of developing the classical poetic forms. These earliest neoclassical poets were acquainted with Western literature, but mostly continued to write in classical forms. However, many poets denounced blind imitation of classical poetry and its recurring themes.

The next generation of poets, the so-called romantic poets, had begun to experiment with more modernist styles and themes. Perhaps one of the most well known, seen as being the originator of "free verse" in Arabic, is the Iraqi poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab. More recently, poets such as Adunis have pushed the boundaries of stylistic experimentation even further. [1]

Poetry retains a very important status in the Arab world. Mahmoud Darwish was regarded as the Palestinian national poet, and his funeral was attended by thousand of mourners. Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani addressed less political themes, but was regarded as a cultural icon, and his poems provide the lyrics for many popular songs.

---

1. Mehdi Ismat : Modern Arabic Literature, page : 227 - 229

Novels

Two distinct trends can be found in the *nahda* period of revival. The first was a neo-classical movement which sought to rediscover the literary traditions of the past, and was influenced by traditional literary genres – such as the *maqama* – and works like *One Thousand and One Nights*. In contrast, a modernist movement began by translating Western modernist works – primarily novels – into Arabic. [1]

In the 19th century, individual authors in Syria, Lebanon and Egypt created original works by imitating classical narrative genres: Ahmad Faris Shidyaq with *Leg upon Leg* (1855), Khalil Khoury with *Yes…so I am not a Frank* (1859), Francis Marrash with *The Forest of Truth* (1865), Salim al-Bustani with A*t a Loss in the Levantine Gardens* (1870) and Muhammad al-Muwaylihi with *Isa ibn Hisham's Tale* (1907). This trend was furthered by Jurji Zaydan (author of many historical novels), Khalil Gibran, Mikha'il Na'ima and Muhammad Husayn Haykal (author of *Zaynab*).

According to the authors of the *Encyclopedia of the Novel*:

Almost each of the above [works] have been claimed as the first Arabic novel, which goes to suggest that the Arabic novel emerged from several rehearsals and multiple beginnings rather than from one single origin. Given that the very Arabic word "*riwaya*", which is now used exclusibely in reference to the "novel", has traditionally conjured up a tangle of narrative genres, it might not be unfair to contend that the Arabic novel owes its early formation not only to the appropriation of the novel genre from Europe but also, and more importantly, to

1. Farhana Siddiqei : Durul Marah Fi Atiwai al-Lughar al-Arabiya wa Abadiha Abara al-usur. Page – 128-12

the revival and transformation of traditional narrative genres in the wake of Napoleon's 1798 expedition into Egypt and the Arab world's firsthand encounter with industrialized imperial Europe. [1]

A common theme in the modern Arabic novel is the study of family life with obvious resonances of the wider family of the Arabic world. Many of the novels have been unable to avoid the politics and conflicts of the region with war often acting as background to intimate family dramas. The works of Naguib Mahfuz depict life in Cairo, and his Cairo Trilogy, describing the struggles of a modern Cairene family across three generations, won him a Nobel Prize for literature in 1988. He was the first Arabic writer to win the prize.

Plays

The musical plays of Maroun Naccache from the mid-1800s are considered the birth of not only theatre in Lebanon, but also modern Arab theater.[49] Modern Arabic drama began to be written in the 19th century chiefly in Egypt and mainly influenced and in imitation of French works. It was not until the 20th century that it began to develop a distinctly Arab flavour and be seen elsewhere. The most important Arab play wright was Tawfiq al-Hakim whose first play was a re-telling of the Qur'anic story of the Seven sleepers and the second an epilogue for the Thousand and One Nights. Other important dramatists of the region include Yusuf al-Ani from Iraq and Saadallah Wannous from Syria.

---

1. Internet sources by Alissa J. Rubin, 27th June, 2007

Women in Arabic literature

Whilst not playing a major part in Arabic literature, women have had a continuing role. The earliest poetesses were al-Khansa and Layla al-Akhyaliyyah of the 7th century. Their concentration on the *ritha*' or elegy suggests that this was a form deemed acceptable for women to work with. A later poetess Walladah, Umawi princess of al-Andulus, wrote Sufi poetry and was the lover of fellow poet ibn Zaydun. These and other women writers suggest a hidden world of female literature. Despite their lack of prominence among the literary elite, women still played an important part as characters in Arabic literature. Sirat al-amirah Dhat al Himmah, for example, is an Arabic epic with a female warrior as protagonist, and Scheherazade cunningly telling stories in the *Thousand and One Nights* to save her life. [1]

Modern Arabic literature has seen a greater number of female writers' works published: May Ziade, Fadwa Touqan, Suhayr al-Qalamawi, Ulfat Idlibi, Layla Ba'albakki, Zuhrabi Mattummal, Hoda Barakat and Alifa Riffat are just some of the novelists and prose writers. There has also been a number of significant female academics, such as Zaynab al-Ghazali, Nawal el-Saadawi and Fatema Mernissi who, amongst other subjects, wrote of the place of women in Muslim society. Women writers in Arabic world have unavoidably courted controversy. Layla Ba'albakki, for instance, was charged with insulting public decency with her collection of short stories entitled *A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon.*

---

1. Badawi M. M. : A critical introduction of modern Arbic Poetry, page 25 – 40.

Literary criticism

Early on the Arabic literary world, there has been a culture of academic criticism. The poetry festivals of the pre-Islamic period often pitched two poets against each other in a war of verse in which one would be deemed winner by the audience. Literary criticism also grew into theology, and thus gained a more official status with Islamic study of the Qur'an. Although nothing which might be termed 'literary criticism', in the modern sense, was applied to a work held to be *I'jaz* or inimitable and divinely inspired, analysis was permitted. This study allowed for better understanding of the message and facilitated interpretation for practical use, all of which help the development of a critical method important for later work on other literature. A clear distinction regularly drawn between works in literary language and popular works has meant that only part of the literature in Arabic was usually considered worthy of study and criticism. [1]

Some of the first studies of the poetry are Q*awa'id al-shi'r or The Rules of Poetry* by Tha'lab and *Naqd al-shi'r Poetic Criticism* by Qudamah ibn Ja'far. Other works tendered to continue the tradition of contrasting two poets in order to determine which one best follows the rule of classical poetic structure. Plagiarism also became a significant idea exercising the critics' concerns. The works of al-Muanabbi were particularly studied with this concern. He was considered by many the greatest of all Arab poets but his own arrogant self-regard for his abilities did not endear him to other writers and they looked for a source for his verse. Just as there were collection of facts written about many different subjects, numerous collections detailing every possible rhetorical figure used in literature emerged as well as how to write guides.

---

1. Farhana Siddiqei : Durul Marah Fi Atiwai al-Lughar al-Arabiya wa Abadiha Abara al-usur. Page – 128-12

Modern criticism at first compared the new works unfavorably with the classical ideals of the past but these standards were soon rejected as too artificial. The adoption of the forms of European romantic poetry dictated the introduction of corresponding critical standards. Taha Hussayan, himself keen on European thought, would even dare to challenge the Qur'an with modern critical analysis in which he pointed out the ideas and stories borrowed from pre-Islamic poetry. [1]

Outside views of Arabic literature

Literature in Arabic has been largely influential outside the Islamic world. One of the first important translations of Arabic literature was Robert of Ketton's translation of the Qur'an in the 12th century but it would not be until the early 18th century that much of Arabic's diverse literature would be recognized, largely due to Arabists such as Forster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot and his books such as Arabic Authors: A Manual of Arabian History and Literature.

Antonie Gallan'ds translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* was the first major work in Arabic which found great success outside the Muslim world. Other significant translators were Friedrich Riickert and Richard Burton, along with many working at Fort William, India. The Arabic works and many more in other eastern languages fuelled a fascination in Orientalism within Europe. Works of dubious 'foreign' morals were particularly popular but even these were censored for content, such as homosexual references, which were not permitted in Victorian society. Most of the works chosen for translation helped confirm the stereotypes of

1. Farhana siddiqi : Nazik al –Malaika, Page no. 243-247.

the audiences with many more still un translated. Few modern Arabic works have been translated into other languages.

However, towards the end of the twentieth century, there was an increase of translations of Arabic books into other languages, and Arabic authors began to receive acclaim, Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz has most if not all of his works translated after he won the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature, Several other writers, including Abdul Rahman Munif and Tayeb Salih have been taken quite seriously by Western scholars, and both Alaa Al Aswany's The Yacoubian Building and Rajaa al-Sanea's Girls of Riyadh attracted significant Western media attention in the first decade of the 21st century. [1]

See also

- Arabian mythology
- Literary Arabic
- List of Islamic texts

Arabic poetry (Arabic: ALA-LC: *ash-shi 'ru al-'Arabiyu*) is the earliest form of Arabic literature. Present knowledge of poetry in Arabic dates from the 6th century, but oral poetry is believed to predate that.

---

1. Internet sources by Alissa J. Rubin, 27th June, 2007

Arabic poetry is categorized into two main types, rhymed or measured, and prose, with the former greatly preceding the latter. The rhymed poetry falls within fifteen different meters collected and explained by al-Farahidi in *The Science of* '*Arud*. Al-Akhfash, a student of al Farahidi, later added one more meter to make them sixteen. The meters of the rhythmical poetry are known in Arabic as "seas". The measuring unit of seas is known as "fafilah", and every sea contains a certain number of taf'ilas which the poet has to observe in every verse (*bayt*) of the poem. The measuring producer of a poem is very rigorous. Sometimes adding or removing a consonant or a vowel can shift the *bayt* from one meter to another. Also, in rhymed poetry, every bayt has to end with the same rhyme (qafiyah) throughout the poem. [1]

Researchers and critics of Arabic poetry usually classify it in two categories: classical and modern poetry. Classical poetry was written before the Arabic renaissance (*al-Nahdah*). Thus all poetry that was written in the classical style is called "classical" or "traditional poetry" since it follows the traditional style and structure. It is also known as "horizontal poetry" in reference to its horizontal parallel structure. Modern poetry, on the other hand, deviated from classical poetry in its content, style, structure, rhyme and topics.

Pre-Islamic poetry

The first major poet in the pre-Islamic era is Imru' al-Qais, the last king of the kingdom of Kindah. Although most of the poetry of the era was not preserved, what remains is well regarded as the finest of Arabic poetry to date. In addition to

1. Farhana Siddiqei : Durul Marah Fi Atiwai al-Lughar al-Arabiya wa Abadiha Abara al-usur. Page – 128-12

the eloquence and artistic value, pre-Islamic poetry constitutes as a major source for classical Arabic language both in grammar and vocabulary, and as a reliable historical record of the political and cultural life of the time.

Poetry held an important position in pre-Islamic society with the poet or *sha'ir* filling the role of historian, soothsayer and propagandist. Words in praise of the tribe (*qit'ah*) and lampoons denigrating other tribes (*hija'*) seem to have been some of the most popular forms of early poetry. The *sha'ir* represented an individual tribe's prestige and importance in the Arabian Peninsula, and mock battles in poetry or *zajal* would stand in lieu of real wars. 'Ukaz, a market town not far from Mecca, would play host to a regular poetry festival where the craft of the *sha'irs* would be exhibited. [1]

Alongside the *sha'ir*, and often as his poetic apprentice, was the *rawi* or recite. The job of the rawi was to learn the poems by heart and to recite them with explanations and probably often with embellishments. This tradition allowed the transmission of these poetic works and the practice was later adopted by the *huffaz* for their memorization of the Qur'an. At some periods there have been unbroken chains of illustrious poets, each one training a *rawi* as a bard to promote his verse, and then to take over from them and continue the poetic tradition. For example, Tufayl trained 'Awas ibn Hajar, 'Awas trained Zuhayr, Zuhayr trained his son Ka'b, Ka'b trained al-Hutay'ah, al-Hutay'ah trained Jamil Buthaynah and Jamil trained Kuthayyir 'Azza.

Among the most famous poets of the pre-Islamic era are Imru'-al-Qais, Samaw'al

---

1. Internet sources : by Abdul Moneim, June 27, 2007, issue no. 851, Al-Ahram

ibn ‘Adiya, al-Nabigha, Tarafa, Zuhayr, and Antar. Other poets, such as Ta’abbata Sharran, al-Shanfara, ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward, were known as *su’luk* or vagabond poets, much of whose works consisted of attacjs on the rigidity of tribal life and praise of solitude. Some of these attacks on the values of the clan and of the tribe were meant to be ironic, teasing the listeners only in order finally to endorse all that the members of the audience held most dear about their communal values and way of life. While such poets were identified closely with their own tribes, others, such as al-A’sha, were known for their wanderings in search of work from whoever needed poetry. [1]

The very best of these early poems were collected in the 8th century as the *Mu’allaqat* meaning “the hung poems” (because they were hung on or in the Kaaba) and the *Mufaddaliyat* meaning al-Mufaddal’s examination or anthology. The Mu’allaqat also aimed to be the definitive source of the era’s output with only a single example of the work of each of the so-called, ”seven renowned ones”, although different versions differ in which “renowned ones” they chose. The *Mufaddaliyat* on the other had contains rather a random collection.

There are several characteristics that distinguish pre-Islamic poetry from the poetry of later times. One of these characteristics is that in pre-Islamic poetry more attention was given to the eloquence and the wording of the verse than to the poem as whole. This resulted in poems characterized by strong vocabulary and short ideas but with loosely connected verses. A second characteristic is the romantic or nostalgic prelude with which pre-Islamic poems would often start. In these preludes, a thematic unit called “*nasib*”, the poet would remember his beloved and her deserted home and its ruins. This concept in Arabic poetry is referred to as “*al-*

1. Farhana Siddiqei : Durul Marah Fi Atiwai al-Lughar al-Arabiya wa Abadiha Abara al-usur. Page – 128-12

waqfa 'ala al-atal" (standing by the ruins) because the poet would often start his poem by saying that he stood at the ruins of his beloved; it is a kind of *ubi sunt*.

Poetry under Islam

Illustration from Kitab al-Aghani (Book of Songs), 1216-20, by Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, a collection of songs by famous musicians and Arab poets. [1]

These early poems were to some extent considered a threat to the newly emerging faith of Islam and if not actually suppressed, fell into disuse for some year. The *sha'ir* and their pronouncements were too closely associated with the religion practiced before Islam, and the role of the poet was singled out for criticism in the Qur'an. They also praised subjects of dubious merit such as wine, sex and gambling, which clashed with the new ideology. Satirical poems attacking an idea or leader were less censured. While some poets were early converts, poetry about or in praise of Islam took some time to develop.

It was the early poems' importance to Islamic scholarship, though, which would lead to their preservation. Not only did the poems illuminate life in the early years of Islam and its antecedents but they would also prove the basis for the study of linguistics of which the Qur'an was regarded as the pinnacle.

Many of the pre-Islamic forms of verse were retained and improved upon. *Naqa'id* or flytings, where two poets exchange creative insults, were popular with al-Farazdaq and Jarir swapping a great deal of invective. The tradition continued in a

1. Mehdi Ismat : Modern Arabic Literature, page : 227 - 229

slightly modified form as *Zajal*, in which two group 'joust' in verse, and remains a common style in Lebanon.

Court poets

Ghaylan ibn 'Uqbah (c.696-c. 735), nicknamed Dhu al-Rummah, is usually regarded as the last of Bedouin poets. His works had continued the themes and style of the pre-Islamic poets particularly eulogizing the harsh but simple desert life, traditionally recited round a campfire. [1]

Although such themes continued and were returned to by many modern, urban poets, this poetic life was giving way to court poets. The more settled comfortable and luxurious life in Umayyad courts led to a greater emphasis on the *ghazal* or love poem. Chief amongst this new breed of poet was Abu Nuwas. Not only did Abu Nuwas spoof the traditional poetic form of the qasida and write many poems in praise of wine, his main occupation was the writing of ever more ribald ghazal many of them openly homosexual.

While Nuwas produced risqué but beautiful poems, many of which pushed to the limit what was acceptable under Islam, others produced more religiously themed poetry. It is said that Nuwas struck a bargain with his contemporary Abu al-Alahijah: Abu Nuwas would concentrate on wine and love poems whilst al-Alahijah would write homilies. These homilies expressed views on religion, sin and the afterlife, but occasionally strayed into unorthodox territory. While the work of al-Alahijah was acceptable, others such as the poet Salih ibn 'Abd al-Quddus were executed for heresy. Waddah al-Yaman, now the national poet of Yemen,

1. Farhana siddiqi : Nazik al –Malaika, Page no. 243-247.

was also executed for his verse, but this was probably due to his over-familiarity with the wife of the caliph Al-Walid.

Court poets were joined with court singers who simply performed works included Ibrahim al-Mawsili, his son Ishaq al-Mawsili and Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi son of caliph al-Mahdi. Many stories about these early singers were retold in the *Kitab al-Aghani* or Book of songs by Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani. [1]

The Sufi tradition also produced poetry closely linked to religion. Sufism is a mystical interpretation of Islam and it emphasized the allegorical nature of language and writing. Many of the works of Sufi poets appear to be simple *ghazal* or *Khamriyyah*. Under the guise of the love or wine poem they would contemplate the mortal flesh and attempt to achieve transcendence. Rabia al-Adawiyya. Abd Yazid al-Bistami and Mansur al-Hallaj are some of the most significant Sufi poets, but their poetry and doctrine were considered dangerous, and al-Hallaj was eventually crucified for heresy.

The caliph himself could take on the role of court poet with al-Walid II a notable example, but he was widely disliked for his immorality and was deposed after only a year.

An important doctrine of Arabic poetry from the start was its complexity, but during the period of court poetry this became an art form in itself known as *badi*'. There were features such as metaphor, pun, juxtaposing opposites and tricky theological allusions. Bashar ibn Burd was instrumental in developing these complexities which later poets felt they had to surpass. Although not all writers

---

1. Internet sources by Alissa J. Rubin, 27th June, 2007

enjoyed the baroque style, with argumentative letters on the matter being sent by Ibn Burd and Ibn Miskawayh, the poetic brinkmanship of *badi* led to a certain formality in poetic art, with only the greatest poets' words shining through the complex structures and wordplay. This can make Arabic poetry even more difficult to translate than poetry from other languages, with much of a poet's skill often lost in translation.

Arabic poetry declined after the 13th century along with much of the literature due to the rise of Persian and Turkish literature. It flowered for a little longer in al-Andalus (Islamic Spain) but ended with the expulsion of the Arabs in 1492. The corpus suffered large-scale destruction by fire in 1499 when Cardinal Jimenez de Cisneros made a public auto-da-fe in Granada, burning 1,025,000 Arabic volumes.

Poetic genres

Romantic poetry

A famous example of Arabic poetry on romance is Layla and Majmun, dating back to the Umayyad era in the 7th century. It is a tragic story of undying love much like the later *Romeo and Juliet*.

Another medieval of Arabic love story was *Hadith Bayad wa Riyad* (*The Story of Bayad and Riyad*), a 13th century Arabic love story written in al-Andalus. The main characters of the tale are Bayad, a merchant's son and a foreigner from Damascus, and Riyad, a well educated girl in the court of an unnamed Hajib of al-Andalus

(vizier or minister), whose equally unnamed daughter, whose retinue includes Riyad, is referred to as the Lady. The *Hadith Bayad wa Riyad* manuscript is believed to be the only illustrated manuscript known to have survived from more than eight centuries of Muslim and Arab presence in Spain.[1]

There were several elements of courtly love which were developed in Arabic poetry, namely the notions of "love for love's sake" and "exaltation of the beloved lady" which have been traced back to Arabic literature of the 9th and 10th centuries. The notion of the "ennobling power" of love was developed in the early 11th century by the Persian psychologist and philosopher, Ibn Sina (known as "Avicenna" in English), in his Arabic treatise *Risala fi'l-Ishq* (*Treatise on Love*). The final element of courtly love, the concept of "love as desire never to be fulfilled", was also at times implicit in Arabic poetry.

The 10th century *Encyclopedia of the Brethren of Purity* features a fictional anecdote of a "prince who strays from his place during his wedding feast and, drunk, spends the night in a cemetery, confusing a corpse with his bride. The story is used as a Gnostic parable of the soul's pre-existence and return from its terrestrial sojourn".

Many of the tales in the *One Thousand and One Nights* are also love stories or involve romantic love as a central theme, including the frame story of Scheherazade, and many of the stories she narrates, such as "Aladdin", "Ali Baba", "The Ebnoy Horse" and "The Three Apples". From A Ninth Century Fragment of the Thousand Nights Arif Al-Majdhub The Travels of Hakim Kohl' in al-Din al-Salik

---

1. Farhana siddiqi : Nazik al –Malaika, Page no. 243-247.

Satirical poetry

"Hija" redirects here. For the village in Iran, see Hija, Iran.

The genre of Arabic satirical poetry was known as *hija*. Satire was introduced into Arabic prose literature by the Afro-Arab author al-Jahiz in the 9th century. While dealing with serious topics in what are now known as anthropology, sociology and psychology, he introduced a satirical approach, "based on the premise that, however serious the subject under review, it could be made more interesting and thus achieve greater effect, if only one leavened the lump of solemnity by the insertion of a few amusing anecdotes or by the throwing out of some witty or paradoxical observations. He was well aware that, in treating of new themes in his prose works, he would have to employ a vocabulary of a nature ore familiar in *hija*, satirical poetry."[4] For example, in one of his Zoological works, he satirized the preference for longer human penis size, writing: "If the length of the penis were a sign of honor, then the mule would belong to the (honorable tribe of) Quraysh". Another satirical story based on this preference was an *Arabian Nights* tale called "Ali with the Large Member". [1]

In the 10th century, the writer Tha'alibi recorded satirical poetry written by the poets as-Salami and Abu Dulaf, with as-Salami praising Abu Dulaf's wide breadth of knowledge and then mocking his ability in all these subjects, and with Abu Dulaf responding back and satirizing as-Salami in return. An example of Arabic political satire included another 10th-century poet Jarir satirizing Farazdaq as "a transgressor of Sharia" and later Arabic poets in turn using the term "Farazdaq-like" as a form of political satire.

---

1. Mehdi Ismat : Modern Arabic Literature, page : 227 - 229

Poetic themes

- *Madih*, a eulogy panegyric
- *Hija,* a lampoon or insult poem
- *Ritha,* an elegy
- *Wasf,* a descriptive poem
- *Ghazal,* a love poem, sometimes expressing love of home
- *Khamriyyah,* wine poetry
- *Tardiyyah,* hunt poetry
- *Zuhdiyyah,* homiletic poetry
- *Fakhr,* boasting
- *Hamasa,* war poetry[1]

Poetic forms

Poetry in Arabic is traditionally grouped in a *diwan* or collection of poems. These can be arranged by poet, tribe, topic or the name of the compiler such as the *Asma'iyyat* of al-Asma'i. Most poems did not have titles and they were usually named from their first lines. Sometimes they were arranged alphabetically by their rhymes. The role of the poet in Arabic developed in a similar way to poets elsewhere. The safe and easy patronage in royal courts was no longer available but

1. Mehdi Ismat : Modern Arabic Literature, page : 227 - 229

a successful poet such as Nizar Qabbani was able to set up his own publishing house.

A large proportion of all Arabic poetry is written using the monorhyme, *Qasidah*. This is simply the same rhyme used in every line of poem. While this may seem a poor rhyme scheme for people used to western literature it makes sense in a language like Arabic which has only three vowels which can be either long or short.

Mu'rabbah, literary Arabic

- Qarid
    - *Qit'ah*, an elegy or short poem about an event
    - *Qasidah*, an ode, designed to convey a message. A longer version of qit'ah.

- *Muwashshah*, meaning "girdled", courtly love poetry

- *Ruba'I* or *dubayt,* a quatrain

- *Rajaz,* a discourse in rhyme, used to push the limits of lexicography[1]

Malhunnah, vernacular poetry

- *Kan ya ma kan*, meaning "once upon a time"

1. Internet sources : by Abdul Moneim, June 27, 2007, issue no. 851, Al-Ahram

- *Quma*
- *Zajal*, meaning “shout”
- *Mawwal* or *Mawaliya*, folk poetry in four rhyming lines
- *Nabati,* the vernacular poetry of the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula and the Syrian Deser.
- *Humayni*, the vernacular poetry of Yemen.

Literary theory and criticism

Literary criticism in Arabic literature often focused on religious texts, and the several long religious traditions of hermeneutics and textual exegesis have a profound influence on the study of secular texts. This was particularly the case for the literary traditions of Islamic literature. [1]

Literary criticism was also employed in other forms of medieval Arabic literature and poetry from the 9th century, notably by al-Jahiz in his *al-Bayan wa-‘I-tabyin* and *al-Hayawan*, and by Abdullah ibn al-Mu’tazz in his *Kitab al-Badi*

Modern poetry

Mention no longer the driver on his night journey and the wide striding camels, and give up talk of morning dew and ruins.

---

1. Mehdi Ismat : Modern Arabic Literature, page : 227 - 229

I no longer have any taste for love songs on dwellings which already went down in seas of [too many] odes.

So, too, the ghada, whose fire, fanned by the sighs of those enamored of it, cries out to the poets: "Alas for my burning!"

If a steamer leaves with my friends on sea or land, why should I direct my complaints to the camels?

--- Excerpt from Francis Marrash's Mashhad al-ahwal (1870), translated by Shmuel Moreh. [1]

Beginning in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as part of what is now called "the Arabic renaissance" or "*al-Nahda*", poets like Francis Marrash, Ahmad Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim began to explore the possibility of developing the classical poetic forms. Some of these neoclassical poets were acquainted with Western literature but mostly continued to write in classical forms, while others, denouncing blind imitation of classical poetry and its recurring themes, sought inspiration from French or English romanticism.

A common theme in much of the new poetry was the use of the *ghazal* or love poem in praise of the poet's homeland. This was manifested either as a nationalism for the newly emerging nation states of the region or in a wider sense as an Arab nationalism emphasizing the unity of all Arab people. The poems of praise (*madih*), and the lampoon (*hija*) also returned. Shawqi produced several works

1. Badawi M. M. : A critical introduction of modern Arbic Poetry, page 25 – 40.

praising the reforming Turkish leader Kemal Ataturk, but when Ataturk abolished the caliphate, Shawqi was not slow in attacking him in verse. Political views in poetry were often more unwelcome in the 20th century than they had been in the 7th, and several poets faced censorship or, I the case of Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayyati, exile.

After World War II, there was a largely unsuccessful movement by several poets to write poems in free verse (shi'r hurr). Most of these experiments were abandoned in favour of prose poetry, of which the first examples in modern Arabic literature are to be found in the writings of Francis Marrash, and of which one of two of the most influential proponents were Nazik al-Malaika and Iman Mersal. The development of modernist poetry also influenced poetry in Arabic. Iraqi poet Badr Shakir al-Sayyab is considered to be the originator of free verse in Arabic poetry. More recently, poets such as Adunis have pushed the boundaries of stylistic experimentation even further.[1]

Poetry retains a very important status in the Arab world. Mahmoud Darwish was regarded as the Palestinian national poet, and his funeral was attended by thousand of mourners. Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani addressed less political themes, but was regarded as a cultural icon, and his poems provide the lyrics for many popular songs.

---

1. Mehdi Ismat : Modern Arabic Literature, page : 227 - 229