



Romanticism is an Important Movement in Arabic Literature: A Historical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Romanticism is a movement in art and literature in the 18th century and it is a revolt against neo-classicism of the previous centuries. It is generally defined as “literature depicting emotional matter in an imaginative form”. Imagination, feeling, and independence are undoubtedly romanticism's main focuses. Romanticism is typified by subjectivity and an emphasis on individualism. In Arabic literature, we find a fully developed romantic movement by the early 20th century only. In the years between the two World Wars, Arabic romantic poetry flourished due to a combination of indigenous socio-political situations and western cultural influences. Romanticism is an expression of one's feelings and imaginations than a literary school with rules. It is a revolt in art and literature of the previous centuries. The poetry of romanticist was based on their imaginations rather than on direct statement. The feelings were often sorrow, a vague yearning or nostalgia for lost innocence unattainable ideals or of metaphysical owe. In short, it is a prime movement in art and literature against the rigid rules of the previous centuries.

The Background

Decades of experimenting with poetical experience at the measure of theory and application culminated in the Modern period of Arabic poetry. Poetry naturally shifted from one major school to another major school in an effort to break free from the decades of stasis that had produced the trite and denigrated

verse of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, it is necessary to try a short overview of the neo-classical movement, which from the last decade of the nineteenth century through the 1920s, dominated lyrical production and has never really disappeared.

The greatest among neo-classical poets, Ahmed Shawqi returned to their roots, drawing inspiration for their poetry from the best of traditional Arabic literature, as at the time poetry was badly lacking in a newfound capacity for expressive power. Furthermore, the utilization of classical references aligned with the psychological state of Arab writers. This was the time which proceeded the period of objection and disapproval. Basically, bards were not aware of modern concepts of revolt and social conflicts and even at the moment these concepts did start to pass into Arab alertness, they directed themselves to make a steady and organized world where the invasion of other cultures and the goals of capitalism were the source of all evil. Neo-classical bards accepted the well-explained ethical and philosophical rules of their universe. Their true contributions were to give the droopy and stagnant poem of the 19th century fresh strength in form and wordings, so giving contemporary Arabic poetry a valid foundation upon which succeeding generations of common poets would run. One should see the work done by the neo-classical poets as an important step towards modernity.

However, the excessive emphasis of rationalism, objectivity, and externality, the use of rhetorical expression and high voice, the inflexibility of form and observation, and the incapacity to adapt to changing circumstances were some of the drawbacks of neo-classicism. As early as the second decade, a group of innovatory bards and critics both in Egypt and in North America start their straight strike on neo-classicism. The emigrant poets in America were guided by Jibran Khalil Jibran and the poets who were the most prominent of his cohort in conducting about a revolt in both the viewpoint and the method of poetry, strengthen by the fruitful writing of Mikhail Nu'ayamah and by the high quality and encouraging writing of Amin al-Rayhani. Besides, the Egyptian School well known later as the 'Diwan' group, through its outspoken attacks on the neo-classical school focused at the transforming the stable, well-organized universe of the neo-classical bards and highlighted the subjective components of past knowledge. By the third decade some influential group of young bards had sprung up to renown in Egypt, writing about individual yearning and dreams, communicating a deep aspiration for freedom and noticing on personal knowledge and on the imaginative subjects of the poem. The Arab Romantic movement extends to other Arab countries from America and Egypt, wherever there were severe feelings of distress or of a deviation between desire and reality, especially on the personal and social plane.

Despite its brief existence, Arab romanticism was a daring departure from the shortcomings of neo-classicism and contributed to highlighting the poem's imaginative and emotive qualities, which made the poetical devices more flexible. It removed the neo-classical view for the persuading culture and the isolation of the poet from community started in modern Arabic poetry. More romantic poets reacted negatively to society's shortcomings and its suppression of personal freedom and happiness, giving in to their imagination and an excess of subjectivity. These poets wrote poems that expressed their annoyance and introspection, their limitless misery, and their never-ending repentance, or, in the case of Egypt's Ali Mahmud Taha, their search for the foreign and for pleasures and experiences that were still unattainable in their world.

However, romanticism in the Arab world at the time represented extreme sentimentalism, gloom, dilution, abstractionism, and formlessness, all of which became the main points of contention for 1950s poets. Romantic faults, however, swiftly crept into the poetry. Good romantic poetry was audacious without being daring in its formal developments. However, romanticism's role in revolutionizing poetry in ways that foreshadowed modernity was completely overlooked by critics of the 1950s, who instead wrote as though modern poetry just happened to happen on its own and had no real historical context. They failed to see that it was the product of internal dialects in the development of poetical art, the results of significant investigation that had gradually prepared the way through poetic devices for the arrival of modernity.

Actually, there are more similarities between the two revolutions than most modernity-focused Arab intellectuals have ever acknowledged. By letting go of traditional norms and customs, distancing themselves from society, liberating the imagination, and freeing the poetic language from classical rigidity, pedantry, archaism, and restriction, romantics sowed the seeds of modernity. They also sowed the seeds of modernity by emphasizing the value of vision in poetry and the subjective aspect of experience.

Objectives of the study-

- To study romanticism is a more important movement and school among the others towards modernity.
- To focus romanticism is an important movement against the rigid rules of classicism of the previous centuries.

- To establish romanticism is a new entry and bears an immense importance and significance in the domain of modern Arabic poetry.

Discussion

The school of pre-romanticism emerged in Modern Arabic Poetry as a consequence of the influence of European literature, especially the French romanticists and the English lyrical poets like; Wordsworth, Coleridge and Byron. It grew also a reaction to neo-classicism which was really an extension of classical poetry. Romanticism is a revolt against the rigid rules of classicism and against Greek and Latin domination. It is derived from the '*Romanus*' which was colloquially spoken in Rome as against classical Latin.

Romanticism is an expression of one's feelings and imaginations than a literary school with rules. Romantic poetry is like a song of a bird, a rustle of wind or the stroke of lightening, and not the outcome of some vigorous effort or premeditated work. The poetry of romanticist was based on their imaginations rather than on direct statement. The feelings were often sorrow, a vague yearning or nostalgia for lost innocence unattainable ideals or of metaphysical owe.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the early experimenters of romanticism began with Khalil Mutrân, who introduced the concept of unity of structure in the poem. They regarded the poem is a unite whole and as a collection of individual verses as was the case with the Qasida of the two hemstitched verse, where each verse gave a perfect meaning. According to Shukri an eminent precursor of romanticism says as:

“.....the value of single verse is in relationship to its meaning and the subject matter of the poem, because it is a supplementary part of the whole poem and should neither be irrelevant to the poem's theme, nor misplaced within the poem”.

The pre-romanticists attempted to change the monorhyme which had dominated Arabic poetry for centuries. For example, in Labid's mu'allaha, the amuha in muqamuha runs throughout the ninety lines of the mu'allaha. It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that Arab poets were able to break literary convention of the monorhyme. Abd al-Rahman Shukri innovated mixed verse where the rhyme was changed in each hemistich. Shukri also tried to introduced blank verse where the meter is maintained but not necessarily the rhyme.

Abd al-Rahman Shukri, Ibrahim Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini, and Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad were the three principal Egyptian exponents of pre-romanticism. Following the publication of their combined book on criticism, the "Diwan of poetry and criticism," in which they presented their fresh viewpoints and ideas while evaluating both their own new movement and the classic poetry, they came to be known

as the Diwan poets. However, the poems of the pre romanticists rarely achieved the musical richness of traditional poetry. Their importance lies in the influence, they exerted on the style and thinking of the new age of poets all over the Arab World.

Romanticism

Romanticism is an important movement in art and literature in the 18th century and it was a movement against neo-classicism of the previous centuries. It is generally defined as “*literature depicting emotional matter in an imaginative form*”. Imagination, feeling and freedom are the chief points of romanticism. Subjectivity and stress on individualism are chief quality of romanticism.

Romanticism is a literary, artistic and logical movement in Europe in the 18th century and continued approximately until the mid19th century. Romanticism is categorized mainly by a response against the illumination and neo-classicism with their emphasize on reason, order, impartiality, harmony, nationality and wisdom. Romanticism stressed the personal, the subjective, the illogical, the creative, the personal, the voluntary, the spritual, the imaginative and the supernatural.

From the mid18th century Romanticism was preceded by several related developments that can be called pre-romanticism. Such movements were new recognition of the middle age (early) romance, from which the Romantic movement drives its name. The romance with its stress on personal bravery and on the exotic and the strange was in clear distinction to the graceful courtesy and artificiality of persuading classical forms of literature, like the heroic couplet in English poetry or the French neo-classical tragedy. Romanticism was to be ruled by this newfound fascination in somewhat unworldly yet publicly impassioned literary statements of the past.

In English literature, Romanticism began in the late 1790s with the publishing of renowned lyrical ballads of William Wordsworth and Samuel Tailor Coleridge. Wordsworth’s “*preface*” to the second edition of lyrical poems, in which he describes poems as “*the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*”, became the platform of the English Romantic movement in poetry. William Blake was the third most important poets of the movement of early phase in England.

However in Arabic literature, a fully developed romantic movement was pursued by the early 20th century. Cultural impacts from the West and indigenous socio-political conditions in the Arab World collaborated to make the environment for rise of Arabic romantic ballads during the period between the two great World Wars.

Definition of Romanticism

Romanticism is a revolt against the rigid rules of classicism and against Greek and Latin domination. It is derived from the '*Romanus*' which was colloquially spoken in Rome.

In general, the term 'Romanticism' has been used to describe a variety of late 18th- and early to mid-19th-century political, intellectual, and social thinkers as well as specific artists, poets, writers, composers, and thinkers. It has been applied to numerous intellectual, artistic, and social movements during that time.

According to historical observations, the Romantic movement originated in Europe and was inspired by a backlash against the Neoclassical movement. It emerged in European literature as a result of a number of conceptual and technological advancements. These changes had paved the way for victory of Romanticism. In Germany, during the 1790s and 1730s, the Romantic movement became a self-aware literary trend. After that, it gradually moved from one European nation to the next. It was not introduced to France until the latter part of the 1800s, as seen by the lyrical poems of Lamartine, Hugo, and Vigny, which were written between 1822 and 1826. Romanticism arrived in England at the close of the 18th and the start of the 19th centuries. It might be argued that the Romantic era in England came to an end with the passing of Byron in 1824, Keats in 1821, and Shelley in 1822.

In *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Harvey gives an approximate date for the movement:

"It began in the late 18th century (though there are earlier isolated examples of the romantic spirit) and lasted into the 19th century in literature and art. The classical, intellectual attitude gave way to a wider outlook, which recognized the claims of passion and emotion, and in which the critical was replaced by the imaginative spirit, and wit by Humor and athos."

Margaret Sherwood describes the Romantic Movement as-

".... a period of fundamental upheaval in every department of life, political, social, and in the world of thought.... This was the time of the birth of our modern world: of changing thought, political, social, philosophic; of changing forms of government; the depth and energy of the revolutionary movement springing from fresh apprehension of the rights, the powers, the possibilities of man, can hardly be overestimated."

The Arab writers admit that Romanticism is a literary movement of European origin. In an Interview, in Baghdad University, 1984, *Salūm* defined Romanticism as:

"An extension of the European Romantic Movement is the reaction against social and political conditions. It is the conclusion of the Arab renaissance, whereas English romanticism is the



result of the French Revolution." *JihānRa'ūf, Shīlīfī 'l-adab al-'ArabīfīMisr*, describes Romanticism as "*the most Important literary movement in Europe*".

Besides, we may say that Arabic romanticism is a literary movement, emerged in Classical Arabic and European poetry, and it was influenced by English in particular and Europe in general as a human propensity.

Trends and schools of Romanticism

The various trends and movements and many schools of thought emerged in Modern Arabic poetry like: *Neo-classicism, Pre-romanticism, Romanticism, Symbolism, Schools of Diwan, Mahjar Literature and Apollo group* and so on. Among the trends and schools of Modern Arabic poetry, Romanticism was considered more important movement towards the period closer to World War- II. The precursors of this movement were Khalīl Mutrān of Lebanon and Abbas Mahmud al 'Aqqad of Egypt.

Precursors of Romanticism

Among the distinguished Romantic poets, the Lebanese poet Khalīl Mutrān is the first to tread fresh ground in Arabic poetry, paving the way for its modernization. Taha Hussain, the distinguished author and critic described him as "*the leader of the modern Arabic poetry and the leader of the all contemporary poets without exception*".

Besides, the other Arab Romantic poets are- Ahmed Zaki Abu Shadi (1894-1953), the founder of Apollo magazine (1932) the first Arabic magazine dedicated solely to poetry of the Romantic school: Ali Muhammad Taha (1902-1949) of Egypt; Illiyas Abu Shabaka (1902-1947) of Lebanon; Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi (1909-1934) of Tunisia; Al-TijaniYusuf Bashir (1910-1937) of the Sudan.

English and Arabic Romanticism

Romanticism is a generic phrase used to represent a variety of attitudes and concepts, not all of which are connected to one another. It is not a single cohesive aesthetic system.

Paul Harvey defines Romanticism as "a word for which, in connection with literature, there is no generally accepted definition" in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

Francois Jost supports Harvey: "The multiple meanings of the word romantic are one of the main sources of difficulty in defining the Romantic Movement."

Like the English critics, the Arab critics concede that characterizing Romanticism is a challenge. (In *Encyclopedia of Critical Idioms*), 'Abd al-WāhidLu'lu'ah starts his argument with a warning as: "he who tries to define Romanticism will face a dangerous task whose victims are numerous." Mustafā Badawī was asked to define the term Romanticism at a discussion at Oxford University. "Oh Gosh!" was his

joke in response, and it might have been a big one. You want me to explain the nature of God! It is confirmed by Jihān Ra'ūf that attempting to define Romanticism is a waste of effort.

“All critics agree that definition of Romanticism is a kind of nonsense because of the multiplicity of its aspects and tendencies.... Some try to define Romanticism by comparing it to Classicism, which precedes it, and others define it by comparing it to Realism, which follows it. There are wide definitions as well as narrow ones, yet none of them help the subject of literary criticism very much.”

The definitions can be divided under two general headings- one of them acknowledges Romanticism as a universal human intellectual inclination, while the other is adamant that Romanticism is a historical movement.

Conclusion

After going through the study I am on the view that romanticism is considered more important movement towards the modern period among the other movements and schools of Arabic poetry literature. In fact, romanticism was a revolt against the rigid rules of classicism and established new trends and movements by discarding the traditional styles. Apart from introducing the unity of the structure of poem, the romanticists changed the monorhyme of the earlier centuries. Accordingly, we find a fully developed romantic movement by the early twentieth century i.e. between the two great World Wars. After all, Romanticism is a movement in art and literature and to create new trends to modern Arabic poetry. Hence, it might be considered that romanticism is the new entry and bears an immense importance and significance towards Modern period in Arabic poetry.

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