

## Neo-Classicism in Modern Arabic Poetry

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### Abstract

Modern neo-classical poetry constitutes a phase of literature that can be sharply separated from its immediate ancestry. Arab poets composed by imitative versifiers who very rarely employed it as a means of expressing fresh human experience. The bulk of late medieval Diwans (collections of verse) are replete with rhetorical devices and puns. Rather than addressing the major issues of life and society. Neo-classicism is the outcome of the revival of ancient learning through technological advancement. The purpose of the present study is to discuss the new school of thought named Neo- Classicism in modern Arabic Poetry. It also highlights its role of neo classicism to development of Modern Arabic poetry.

**Keywords:** Arabic Poetry, Literary Movements, Modernism, Trends Neo- Classicism

### ملخص البحث

يشكل الشعر الكلاسيكي الحديث مرحلة من تطور الأدب يمكن فصله بشكل حاد عن أصله المباشر. من الندرة نجد الشعراء العرب يستخدمونه كوسيلة للتعبير عن تجربة إنسانية جديدة. الجزء الأكبر من الدواوين في أواخر العصور الوسطى (مجموعات من الشعر) مليئة بالأدوات البلاغية والتورية. بدلا من معالجة القضايا الرئيسية للحياة والمجتمع. الكلاسيكية الجديدة هي نتيجة إحياء التعلم القديم من خلال التقدم التكنولوجي. الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو مناقشة المدرسة الفكرية الجديدة المسماة الكلاسيكية الجديدة في الشعر العربي الحديث. كما يسلط الضوء على دورها الكلاسيكي الجديد في تطوير الشعر العربي الحديث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر العربي، حركة الأدب، الشعر الكلاسيكي الحديث



## A. INTRODUCTION

The Arabic language is often called the language of poetry. Arabs themselves consider poetry to be the essence of Arabic - *diwan al-Arab* "Record of Arabs". This attitude towards the poetic literary genre can be explained by considering the literary heritage that is bestowed on the Arabs. They have a strong connection to classical poets and even today poetry is the most important and most popular literary medium in the Arab world.

Modern Arabic literature has been influenced by European literature more than the ancient Arabic literature, and it flourished after renewing its intellectual sources, just as the ancient Arabic literature flourished after contacting the literature of other nations, such as the ancient Greek and Latin literatures. The period during which Arabic literature started to develop again is often called *alnahda* - "renaissance" and is conventionally divided into three parts: neo-classic, romantic and modern.<sup>1</sup> The development of the poem from the classical form to the diverse forms of contemporary poetry has followed a course through various attempts to break free from the old restraints. The fluctuating period during which the modernism movement in Arabic poetry developed divided into the three subdivisions mentioned above reflects the development of poetic form.

The neo-classicists are called *Muhafizeen* 'conservatives' by the later generation of critics. They were, however, not conservative in the negative sense but were so called because they tended to preserve the old Arabic models, especially of the Abbasid period. Their poems reveal their response to the spirit of the age and an understanding of the role of art in society. The neo-classicists brought vitality to Arabic poetry and made it sufficiently capable of depicting minutely the life of the people.<sup>2</sup> The neo-classicists had dominated the literary scene from the last decade of the nineteenth century and continued to do so throughout the first three decades of the twentieth at least. The neo-Classicalists, reacting against this idealistic tendency in Renaissance poetics, might be thought of as heirs to the other major tendency in Renaissance poetics.

Neo-Classicism refers to a broad tendency in literature and art enduring from the early seventeenth century until around 1750. While the nature of this tendency inevitably varied across different cultures, it was usually marked by a number of common concerns and characteristics. The emergence of Neo-classical poetry in modern Arabic literature in the nineteenth century was not the outcome of the sudden incursion of a new literary model upon the established system of literature.<sup>3</sup> Neither was it the product of a literary grouping around an innovative poet (or group of poets) endowed with revolutionary zeal. Its development was quiet, involving no visible upheavals. The major neo-classical poets have received their due share of critical appraisal in the last fifty years or so. However, Arab critics and scholars have so far not reached an accepted term by which to designate this poetic school. Several terms are in use for this purpose, two of which are fairly common: *shir al-Ihya* (the poetry of revival) and *al-madrasah al-taqlidiyyah al-ittibaiyya* (the traditional/classical school). In recent years one frequently comes across the term *al-shir al-amudi* (poetry based on the norms of medieval poetics). Other current terms are *al-shir al-turathi* (poetry pertaining to the heritage), *madrasat al-Barudi wa-Shawqi* (the

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<sup>1</sup> Terri de Young, *Placing the Poet - Badr Shākir Al-Sayyāb and Postcolonial Iraq* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad Haykal, *Tatawwur Al-Adab Al-Hadith Fi Misr*, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), p. 36.

school of al-Barudi and Shawqi and finally, *al-madrasah al-Klasikiyyah al-jadidah* ‘the neo-classical School’.<sup>4</sup>

In earlier modern Arabic poetry the focus has been on the development from classical poetry to the modernist movement and the poetic activity in the Arab world in the second half of the 19th century. The poetic development of the 20th century has been documented, and the new thematic features of poetry much analyzed. The development of the poem from the classical form to the diverse forms of contemporary poetry has followed a course through various attempts to break free from the old restraints. The fluctuating period during which the modernism movement in Arabic poetry developed divided into the three subdivisions mentioned above reflects the development of poetic form. It has developed from the neo-classical poets who still used the ancient forms in their poetry, to the romantic poets who wanted new modes of expressions.

### Modern Arabic Poetry:

Modern Arabic literature is obviously the literature of the modern Arab world, and this is generally assumed to begin with the French campaign in Egypt in 1798. The date is significant, for it marks the dramatic opening of the Arab world, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire, to the west, ultimately with momentous consequences for its political, economic, social and cultural development. For various reasons, the modern renaissance of Arabic literature began to make itself felt in Egypt and Syria (which then included Lebanon), from which it spread slowly to the rest of the Arab world.<sup>5</sup>

Poetry as an art form uses words and language not merely to express meaning or content, but to symbolize meaning and content. The point of origin of the present paper is the assumption that the form of a poem can be said to be equally important as the content. Arabic poetry is mentioned, the classical *Qasida* may be the first thing that comes in mind, and the strictly structured classical poems represent the height of the classical Arabic literature (with exception of the Quran), as it has held an “acknowledge and privileged position throughout Arabic history.”<sup>6</sup> The Pre-Islamic poetry, with its fixed structure in the form of metre and rhyme, held an influence on the Arab literature up until 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the so called Dark Ages Arabic poetry, as well as literature in general, came to a stand-still with no new influences reaching the Arab world a period that was “the least productive period” of the Arab cultural history.

The term modern is here used in its chronological sense, and when referring to modern Arabic poetry it means that produced after 1950. The analysis of the poems and the resulting discussion of the form and structure are not to be taken as generalizations about all modern Arabic poetry.

The major political changes in the Arab world of the 19th century had a great impact on the literature and its themes as well as on its form. Modern poetry is often connected with free verse, as is the case also in modern Arabic poetry. There is a gap between the classical poems of *Imru’l-Qays* and his likes and the modern poetry of today. The development of the poem from the classical form to the diverse forms of contemporary poetry has followed a course through various attempts to break free from the old restraints. The fluctuating period during which the modernism movement in Arabic poetry developed divided into the three subdivisions mentioned above reflects the

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<sup>4</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage*, 1998, p. 217.



development of poetic form. It has developed from the neo-classical poets, who still used the ancient forms in their poetry.

### **The Concept of Modernity in Modern Arabic Poetry:**

It is known that modernity came to rebel against the classical forms of the poem, and tried to search for different forms. Modernity, in its origin and origin, is a Western ideology that was born and raised in the West, then moved to the Arab countries, and Adonis stood before this concept bewildered, and admits that it cannot be claimed that defining the essence of modernity is an easy matter. Modernity in Arab society is a complex problem, not only in terms of its relations with the West.<sup>7</sup> Modernity is not confined to one form of writing it is the status of intellectual is inseparable from the emergence of ideas and historical tendencies of evolutionary.<sup>8</sup> Modernity is an intellectual revolution and not a matter related to the weight and rhyme or the prose poem or the system of narration.

In literature on modern Arabic poetry the development of the modern poem is usually outlined, from somewhat formally bound to being written in free verse. There is also much focus on the thematic development and the relationship between poetry and society. However, there are few in-depth analyses of the form and structure of the modern poems written in free verse.

There is a clear ambiguity in Arab writings between 'modern' and 'modernism', which is a term applied to a specific movement in art and literature in the west. Western 'modernism' took place within a certain period of time (c. 1910-1930) and was consequential on modern developments in the west, often a protest against them. Western modernism itself never attained a clear definition. However, there are certain tendencies and concepts that seem to sum up the general movement. Some of these were adopted, consciously or unconsciously, by some contemporary Arab poets, while others did not come to have any connection with the Arab movement. The western poets were the immediate heirs of many great ideas and transformations which took place over a considerable time as a result of such major development as the industrial revolution, the rise of technology, the spread of education and the circulation of many new ideas concerning man and his place in the universe. Several cultural events, regarded as 'the intellectual basis of Modernism', took place in Europe prior to the rise of the movement, which did much to shape the modernist tendency by completely contradicting prior beliefs and concepts and introducing new interpretations of art, history and human experience.<sup>9</sup> The modernist movement is not only divorced from artistic tradition, but also from humanism. In poetry, they appear primarily as a highly adventurous use of metaphor. The "substance" of the poem is no longer the reality which the metaphor expresses, but the metaphor itself crystallized into a curious linguistic world "distinct from human flora and fauna". Realistic literature uses metaphor as decoration for the content of the poem.

Arab poetic modernity resulted from two major forces: the influence of the western modernist movement and of the other major experiments that preceded or accompanied it, and the state of Arabic poetry itself at the midpoint of the twentieth century, which responded to intrinsic need for a change towards a more 'modern' apprehension of experience, aesthetic and otherwise. Major poetic change in any language is never wholly

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<sup>7</sup> Fadel Thamer, *On Modernity and Dialogue of New Poetic Forms, House of General Cultural Affairs* (Baghdad, 1986), p. 156.

<sup>8</sup> felt the post - modern Beekeeper, 'Egyptian General Book Authority', 1984.

<sup>9</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, pp. 132-33.

a matter of intention; neither the result of sheer conscious adoption, nor the following of fashion. The success of a major poetic change in any direction, no matter how drastic, proves not simply that genius and cogent talents lie behind it, but also the important fact that poetry at the time was, if not absolutely and specifically in need of the kind of change in question, at least potentially receptive to it. The second of these factors, the intrinsic need for change, will be in evidence throughout this essay. However, the first factor, the influence of western modernism on the Arab movement, needs more explicit consideration before we continue further.<sup>10</sup>

### **Difference between Classicism & Neoclassicism:**

There is a thin line of separation between classicism and Neo-classicism as the neoclassicists revived the classical ideals. Classicism is a literary genre which was popular from the 16th to the 17th Centuries and is heavily inspired by Roman and Greek Culture. The genre is heavily riddled with an emphasis on society. Neo-classicism is the literary movement which directly followed classicism beginning in the 18th Century. It is popularly referred to as the 'art of the ideal and also expanded its genre into art, architecture and music.

Classic authors often riddled their works with figures of speech, highfalutin words that they often made up themselves, whereas the Neo-classic writers regularized grammar and vocabulary, the basic and less obscure became the trend. Classicists were strict or rigorous upon their view, but neoclassical writers were moderate to certain extent in terms of language, expression and idea. Classical literature is fully conventional, where as neo-classicism also welcomed invention, but it should have a valid existence.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a library approach, with data collection techniques through reviewing and searching for library materials from books and other relevant sources. The data collected was analyzed by the text study method to describe the content in detail.

## **C. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **Neo- Classicism a School of thought in Modern Arabic Poetry:**

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth witnessed a number of literary movements and trends. Modern poetry in contemporary Arabic was achieved only after decades of experimentation crowded with poetic experience on the levels of both theory and practice. Poetry moved from one major school to another in an instinctive attempt to transcend the centuries of stagnation which had led to the hackneyed and benighted verse of the nineteenth century. The discussion of the Arab literary renaissance in modern time belongs elsewhere in this volume. However, a brief summary of the neo-classical movement which dominated poetic creativity form the last decade of the nineteenth century through to the 1920s, and has never really died out, must be attempted.<sup>11</sup>

*Due to contacts with the Western cultural milieu, new concepts and ideas were adopted by many European-educated Arabic poets who had been given a chance to read and translate English and French verse. The result was new generations who, influenced*

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<sup>10</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 132.

<sup>11</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 136.



by the Western modernism, revolted against their accustomed literary traditions. Being influenced by the Western modernism implies an influence by its “Neo-classicism”.

### **Objectives of Neo- Classicism in Modern Arabic Poetry:**

The main trend of this school was to go back to an old, venerable model, and to relive the glorious experience of ancient poets. Arabic poetry represented by the spirited bards of the *Jahili* “Pre-Islamic” and early Islamic periods and, more emphatically, by the great urbane poets of the heyday of Abbasid creativity: *al-Mutanabbi*, *al- Buhturim Abu Tammam*, *Abu'l- ‘Ala’ al-Maarri* and *al-Sharif al-Radiyy*.<sup>12</sup> The aim of the neo-classical poets was to produce verses which were reminiscent in their ‘masculinity’ and lucidity of *al-Mutanabbi* and his peers, and to refrain as much as possible from the trivial pursuits that characterized the poetry of the ‘period of decline’. The idea of a radical undermining of the norms of classical poetry was not entertained by any major poet or critic of the early *Nahdah* ‘Renaissance’. Such notions as deviating from the stylistic norms of medieval poetry or reforming the old metrical system were hardly ever treated seriously, and it was only in the second half of this century that they gained popularity admittedly, poets sometimes expressed a desire to diverge from the accepted poetic practices.

### **Neo -Classicism in European Literature:**

Neoclassical is a term used to describe the writing of late 17th to 18th century authors like Alexander Pope, John Dryden, and others. This style of writing referred to a “new” form of the “classics” inspired by form, function, and theme of originals from Greek and Roman literature. This style took an attitude toward human nature and ideas, logic, structure of order, and other artistic realms which would enable the author to replicate those originals from Greek and Roman literature. Regular meter, carefully controlled rhyme, and masterful use of difficult rhetorical and figurative devices, often imitating those found in Greek and Latin poetry, characterized this work. This era of neoclassical literature was predominant until late in the 18th century. At that time the romantic era was ushered in with the works of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and others of that time period.

Fourteen centuries of continuous tradition was at stake. It was doubly difficult for Arabic poets to adopt ‘imported’ literary models and concepts since that would have involved a violation of the very paradigm of cultural values. Poetry in its traditional forms and language was enshrined in the history of Arab-Islamic civilization, invoking its finest hours. Furthermore, the Arab ear’ was so accustomed to the rhythms of that poetry.

### **Neo- classicism in Modern Arabic Poetry:**

With the rejuvenation of cultural life in Lebanon, Egypt and other Arab regions in the course of the last century, the awareness that something was radically wrong with poetry – and with literary life as a whole – began to dawn upon authors and readers alike. The exposure to European literature, directly or through translations, posed a great challenge to Arab authors.

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<sup>12</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 36.

The emergence of the mass press all created a set of new cultural realities and, above all, a reading public of growing numbers and of a new social background. Some basic assumptions in the realm of literature had, to be reassessed, and certain practices had to be changed to cope with the new realities. Arabic poetry in the nineteenth century opted for a 'return to the sources', and set out to bridge the gap of long centuries of immobility.

### **The impact of Neo- Classicism in Modern Arabic Poetry:**

The impact of *Diwan* Movement in Modern Arabic literature by Diwan group, they were critics, poets, novelists, journalists, short story writers and prose writer of Diwan Movement. They criticized poetry through *Diwan* in modern Arabic literature. Although in their writings about poetry they expressed impatience with the restrictions imposed by the classical structure of poetic form, on the whole their voice were balanced and restrained, leaving the credence of certain significant areas of their poetry to the way to future development. The impact of western poetic concepts on nineteenth-century Arabic poetry were negligible. Translations from European poetry into Arabic were few and far between. This fact is noteworthy in view of the profusion of translated western prose (fiction, drama, history and so on) in Egypt and Lebanon in the second half of the nineteenth century. Western plays in verse were translated into Arabic, but this activity was totally divorced, at least in the minds of Arab authors and readers, from the world of the 'poem' although it stimulated the rise of a local verse drama (whose most prominent practitioner in the first decades of our century was *Ahmad Shawqi*).

Arabic poetry influenced directly or indirectly by the western poetic concepts. *Najib al-Haddad* once again comes to mind in this context. His work as a whole testifies to an impressive familiarity with western poetry, old and new. The Europeans had excelled in certain things, while the Arab traditionalist poets excelled in many things. Due to this cultural contact, Arabic poetry embraces the best qualities of theirs, while the Western poetry embraces none of ours. The adherence to tradition, however, was less binding when it came to the subject matter of poetic expression.

### **The Pioneer of Neo- Classicism in Arabic Poetry:**

Discovering the healthy roots of classical Arabic poetry provided an incentive to free Arabic poetry from the artificiality of the era of decadence. This was the attempt undertaken by the revivalist poets towards the end of the nineteenth century. These were the poets who came to constitute what is described and known as the neo-classicist movement in Arabic poetry. The early poets and critics did not explicitly advocate a change in the topics of poetry although some of them, including *Mahmud Sami al-Barudi*, one of the earliest and greatest of the neo-classicists, occasionally hinted at the need for change. *Al-Barudi* expressed, in his introduction to his diwan as well as in some of his poems, a new attitude concerning the function of poetry and the subject matter on which it draws.<sup>13</sup> However, *al-Barudi* and other poets went on composing poetry according to the traditional *abrade*. The poets' exposure to the winds of change in the modern Arab world, as well as the changing nature of their audience Brought about a greater awareness on their part that it was their duty to reflect 'modern' topics without deserting the traditional modes of expression. In the year 1900 the Lebanese-Egyptian poet *Khalil*

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<sup>13</sup> M.M Badawi, 'Al-Barudi: Precursor of the Modern Arabic Poetic Revival, Die Well Des Islams', 1969, p. 232.



*Mutrant* who was not himself a neo-classicist in the strict sense of this term, expressed this awareness as follows:

*The (classical) Arab way (khitta) in poetry should not necessarily be our own. The Arabs lived in their own age, and we live in ours. They had their manners, mores and sciences, and we have ours. It is imperative, therefore, that our poetry should reflect our own conceptions and feelings rather than those of the ancients. However the expression of these should conform to the same set of formal and verbal modes as theirs. This is one of the most lucid expressions of what may be described as the implicit ideology of modern Arabic neo-classical poetry to be traditional in form and contemporary in content; to express the outlook and concerns of our age while adhering to the compositional principles of another. Indeed, neo-classical poets went a long way in ridding themselves of trifling concerns and grappling with current issues. But the distinction between 'form' and 'content' inherent in the above formulation and in many similar ones was an impracticable course of action, for the old prosodic and stylistic constraints were every often detrimental to the poet's desire to be 'contemporary'. On the other hand, the classical model itself has not remained untouched, as we shall see, in the course of the last hundred years. Some of the basic medieval Arabic poetic norms underwent gradual but important changes at the hands of the major neo-classical poets.<sup>14</sup>*

Neo-classical poets – the greatest among whom was *Ahmad Shawqi* – instinctively went back to their roots, taking for their models poetry from the vast wealth of classical Arabic literature; for what was urgently needed at that time was for poetry to acquire a new vigor and terseness of expression. Moreover, involvement with classical references was in harmony with the psychological situation of Arab authors at home. This is the period which preceded the age of protest and dissent. Poets were not yet intellectually conscious of modern ideas of revolution and social struggle, and even when these ideas did begin to enter Arab consciousness, they addressed themselves to a stable and well-ordered universe where all evil came from the outside: colonialism, the encroachment of foreign cultures and capitalist interests.<sup>15</sup>

Neo-classical poets adopted the well-defined ethical, philosophical and aesthetic principles of their world. Their real achievement was to deliver the languid and moribund verse of the nineteenth century from its immense weaknesses and to imbue it with new strength of diction and form, securing for modern Arabic poetry a well-rooted, robust basis on which generations of avant-grade poets would operate. The task shouldered by the neo-classical poets should therefore be seen as a big step forward towards achieving modernity.

### **Distinctive Features of Neo- Classicism Poetry:**

The primary distinctive feature of that poetry as represented by its major practitioners may be summed up as follows:

1. The poems of the neo-classical poets are composed in the traditional metres of classical Arabic poetry, with minor derivative metres, as a rule.

<sup>14</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 136.



2. Neo-classical poets continue to use the classical *aghrad* (thematic types), and most of their diwans are arranged accordingly. These *aghrad* often impose a pre-determined structure, and sometimes affect the choice of metres.
3. The poems are frequently impersonal, and the poet's experience is hidden beneath layers of convention. Sections of these poems which sometimes impress their reader as 'confessional' often turn out to be genre-bound rather than spontaneous.
4. The neo-classical language is essentially dependent on that of mediaeval Arab poetry, especially that of the Abbasid period. Not only the lexical inventory but the choice of figurative language is derivative in this fashion. The invocation of classical place-names, images and personages is a major feature in the art of most representative neoclassical poets.<sup>16</sup>

The main features of poetry during the neo classical age include the development of literary pieces based on prose and reason. In prose the works are developed to adhere to the normal flow of verbal communication instead of rhythm. The works contain normal sentences in paragraphs which are more focused on the message than the stylistic effect. The poet in such instances is seen to be having an ordinary conversation with no standard formula. Reason features predominantly in poetry developed during the neo classical era as a break away from the imaginative works of previous years. The poets of this age supported use of logic in developing the literary pieces and this may have been the reason that the work had to be done in prose. This is because the poets through their works presented their arguments and criticisms and thus reason and simplicity was important in forming the basis of their arguments. It is to be emphasized that not all these features function equally prominently in the works of the different poets who belong to this trend. Some have little recourse to the traditional *aghrad* (for example *Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi*, some others are less attuned to the language of classical poetry, drawing heavily on the modern prose style and occasionally on the vernacular (for example *Ahmad al-Safi al-Najafi*). Moreover, there are poets who, though employing classical *aghrad* and language, display in some of their poems sensitivity and structure which render their poetry in part romantic rather than strictly neo-classical. A case in point is *Khalil Mutran* (1872-1949), one of the most distinguished Arab poets of this century, whose poetry betrays neoclassical features but also certain elements that stand in stark contrast to the spirit of classicism.

### The Diwan Poets:

Diwan Movement is a movement in Arabic literature by a group of three Egyptian trio-poets, *Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad*, *Abdur Rahman Shukri* and *Ibrahim Adl al-Qadir al-Mazini*, these poets challenged the masters of neo-classicism during the second decade of the 20th century. The key point their attack were contained in the book which gave them their name as a group *Al-Diwan: kitab fi alAdab wa al-Naqd* published in two volumes in Cairo in 1921, joint authorship of *al-Aqqad* and *alMazini*. The work of diwan poets illustrates the extent to which English literature had become one of the major reformative influences on Arab culture. *Khalil Mutran's* considerable poetic talents worked largely within the parameters of neo-classical poetry, Although in his writings about poetry he expressed impatience with the restrictions imposed by the classical structures of poetic form, on the whole his voice was balanced and restrained, leaving the evidence of certain significant areas of his poetry to point the way to future developments.

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<sup>16</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 40.



A very different impact was made by three Egyptians of a slightly younger generation: 'Abd al-Rahman Shukri (1886-1958), Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini (1890-1949) and 'Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad (1889-1964). They rose to literary prominence during the second decade of this century at a time when crucial transition was taking place in the political and cultural life of Egypt. They were typical representatives of the new Egyptians who came into their own after the First World War as citizens of the new nation state. After the war he and *al-Mazini* became fulltime journalists and writers, and were active supporters of the Wafd party. *Shukri's* career was somewhat different: he spent the period 1909-1912 in England at Sheffield University, and on his return to Egypt he remained in the service of the Ministry of Education until his retirement in 1944, without ever involving himself in public life in the manner of *al-Mazini and al-Aqqad*.<sup>17</sup>

They became passionate advocates of the romantic imagination in Arabic verse, and attacked loudly and bitterly the type of work written by the neo-classical poets, especially the master practitioner of that style, *Ahmad Shawqi*. The book that gives them their name as group is 'The Diwan: a book on criticism and literature' "*al-Diwan kitab fi'l naqd wa'l-adab*", published in two volumes in Cairo in 1921, although by that date a bitter quarrel had arisen between Shukri and *al-mazini* so the book appeared only under the joint authorship of *al-'Aqqad and al-mazini*. *Al-Aqqad* led the attack on *Ahmad Shawqi*, the figurehead of the generation of neo-classical poets which he and his colleagues were determined to discredit. His most frequent method of attacking *Shawqi* was to take lines at random and, without making any allowance for *Shawqi's* use of conceit or poetic licence.<sup>18</sup> The tension between the old form and the new content in the poetry of *Mutran* can also be seen in the works of *Mutran's* younger contemporaries *al-Mazini*, *Shukri* and *al-Aqqad*, who, in spite of the important role they played in the development of Arabic poetry, were less gifted poets than *Mutran*.<sup>19</sup>

The Egyptian school, on the other hand, known later as the 'Diwan' group, through its vociferous attacks on the neo-classical school (and on all fossilized elements in poetry) aimed at revolutionizing the stable, well-ordered world of the neo-classical poets, and emphasized the subjective elements of experience. By the third decade a new group of young poets had risen to fame in Egypt, writing about individual longings and dreams, expressing a deep desire for freedom, and concentrating on personal experience and on the imaginative aspect of the poem. From America and Egypt the Arab romantic movement spread to other Arab countries wherever there were acute feelings of deprivation, or of a discrepancy between aspiration and reality, especially on the personal and social plane.<sup>20</sup>

## D. CONCLUSIONS

Neo-classicism is the outcome of the revival of ancient learning through technological advancement. Neo-Classicism comprised a return to the classical models, literary styles and values of ancient Greek and Roman authors. The neo-Classical writers generally saw the ancients such as Homer and Vergil as having already discovered and

<sup>17</sup> Salma Khadra Jayyusi, 'Modernist Poetry in Arabic' (Michigan: University of Michigan, Center for Near Eastern and North African Studies, 1987), p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Tarrad Al-Kubaisi, 'The Book of Manifestations, the Status of Modernity, House of Cultural Affairs' (Baghdad, 1997), p. 164.

<sup>19</sup> Yahya Haqqi, 'Fajr Al-Qissa Al-Misriyyah ("The Dawn of Egyptian Fiction")' (Cairo: Al-Hay'a '1-Misriyyah al-'ammah lil-Kitab, 1975), p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> M.M Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 137.



expressed the fundamental laws of nature. Hence, the external world, including the world of human action, could best be expressed by modern writers if they followed the path of imitation already paved by the ancients. Invention was of course allowed but only as a modification of past models, not in the form of a rupture.

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