

MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE
AND ISLAMIST DISCOURSE
“DO NOT BE COOLNESS, DO NOT
FLUTTER SAFETY”

Reuven Snir

HAIFA

With the rise of Islam, Arab civilization was given a defined ideological and cultural framework within which it could develop. Islam, as a system of symbols, represents the most significant factor in the explanation of Arab cultural, intellectual, and literary history since the seventh century. Arabic literature was never wholly a religious one, but since the revelation of the Qurʾān, the various activities in the literary system generally occurred within the borders defined by Islam and were guided by a cultural heritage that seemed nearly as sacred as the religious law. Islam and, more specifically, the Qurʾān, was also predominant in consolidating principles that ensured, according to most Arab intellectuals in the twentieth century, that modern Arabic literature could only be a direct extension of the classical literature. The dominance of Islamist discourse in the literary system during the last century was reflected through censorship and banning of books for religious considerations and for the harm they might do to public morality. Nevertheless, Arabic literature witnessed during the second half of the previous century a strong trend towards separation from its strict Islamic moorings in order to follow its course as a completely secularized literature. This trend has found its manifestation in both the interrelations of the literary system with other extra-literary systems as well as on the level of the texts themselves. (The term “Islamist” is used here to refer to the cultural activities and the discourse of the religious circles; conversely, the terms “Muslim” or “Islamic” are applied to general religious and traditional cultural phenomena).

1. Introduction

The nature of Arabic literature since the seventh century A.D. was largely determined by its interaction with Islam, the religion that the overwhelming majority of Arabs adhere to. With the rise of Islam, Arabic literature, as Arab civilization in general,¹ was given a defined

¹ Not seldom Arab intellectuals refer to Arab civilization prior to Islam as deficient; see, for example, Muḥammad Jalāl Kishk, *al-Ghazw al-fikrī* (Cairo:

ideological and cultural framework within which it could develop. With time it admitted, as did Islamic civilization, such contributions from outside as would help it to keep its identity under changed conditions and at the same time broaden “its base beyond the limitations inherent in the Koranic text.” This meant, as Gustave E. von Grunebaum said, that “while Islam for many a century continued liberal in accepting information, techniques, objects, and customs from all quarters, it was careful to eliminate or neutralize any element endangering its religious foundation, and it endeavored consistently to obscure the foreign character of important borrowings and to reject what could not be thus adjusted to its style of thinking and feeling.”²

Islam and, more specifically, the Qur³ān, were also prominent in consolidating the principles that ensured, at least according to some Arab intellectuals, that modern Arabic literature could only be a direct extension of classical literature. Thus the way we view the relationship between classical and modern literature is essential to our understanding of the nature of the Arabic literary system in the twentieth century and its relationship with the religious discourse.³ The question is whether modern literature is an extension of classical literature or a new creation that has hardly any relationship at all with its medieval predecessor. It is no coincidence that Arab, especially Muslim, scholars tend to the first view, whereas the second view has been mainly adopted by Western scholars.

al-Dār al-Qawmiyya li-l-Ṭibā⁴a wa-l-Nashr, 1966), 18–19:

عندما نتحدث عن حضارتنا نعني الإسلام، حتى ولو كان لنا امتداد عربي قبل الإسلام، ورغم اعتراضنا بأطلال الحضارة الفرعونية أو الفينيقية، وبذلك الشعب الذي عاش على نفس الأرض من آلاف السنين، إلا أن الأمر لا يخرج عن دائرة الاعتزاز . . . لم يكن للعرب حضارة متكاملة إلا بظهور الإسلام، ولم تمتحن حضارتنا إلا بعد أن خرجت من الجزيرة إلى ميدان التطبيق بين كافة الأجناس البشرية المعروفة، واجتازت التجربة بنجاح.

² Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 321. Cf. idem, “The Spirit of Islam as Shown in its Literature,” *Studia islamica* 1 (1953), 101–19.

³ On the system theory and for a particular model for the study of modern Arabic literature, see R. Snir, “Synchronic and Diachronic Dynamics in Modern Arabic Literature,” in *Studies in Canonical and Popular Arabic Literature*, ed. S. Ballas and R. Snir (Toronto: York Press, 1998), 87–121; idem, *Modern Arabic Literature: A Functional Dynamic Historical Model* (Toronto: York Press, 2001).

In his article “Arabic Literature between its Past and Future,”⁴ which opened in October 1945 the first issue of his journal *al-Kātib al-miṣrī*, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889–1973) asserts the continuity of Arabic literature. Unlike Greek and Latin literature, which have no direct contemporary extension, modern Arabic literature, according to Ḥusayn, is a direct linear extension of classical literature:

The historical existence of Arabic literature has never been cut off, and it seems that it will never be cut off. The connection between this literature and contemporary generations in the lands of the Arab East, from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean, and in various Arab lands here and there, is still strong and fertile, like the connection between Arabic literature and the Arab nation during the period of al-Mutannabī and Abū al-°Alā°. ... Arabic literature is very traditional and at the same time very modern. *Its ancient past has been directly mingled with its modern present without any break or bend.* ... Our Arabic literature is a living being and resembles, more than anything else, a huge tree, the roots of which have been consolidated and extended into the depths of earth, while its branches have risen and spread out in space. The water of life is still ample and running in its steady roots and its high branches. ... Our Arabic literature is definitely a traditional one, possessing an old Arab-Bedouin character that it never relinquished, nor will it ever do so. ... The way in which we see things might change as ages, regions and circumstances change. But our way of portraying things, even if it takes different shapes, will always go back to a set of traditional principles that cannot possibly be avoided, because such avoidance means killing this literature and breaking the connection between it and the new time, as well as deterring it from the road of the continuous life of the living literatures into the road of cut-off life that the Greek and Latin literatures took.⁵

This direct extension of classical into modern literature has been guaranteed, according to Ḥusayn, by the continuous equilibrium Arabic literature retained until modern times between the factors of continuity and change:

The revival of ancient Arabic literature⁶ was, and still is, turning modern Arab minds towards the past, highlighting elements of stability and steadfastness. On the other hand, the contact with modern European literature has been pushing

⁴ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, “al-Adab al-°arabī bayna amsihi wa-ghadihi,” *al-Kātib al-miṣrī* 1,1 (October 1945): 4–27; The article was also incorporated in Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Alwān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma°arif, n.d. [1958]), 5–32.

⁵ Ḥusayn 1945, 10–11; Ḥusayn n.d. [1958], 11–13 (emphasis added, R.S.).

⁶ That is, through the editing and disseminating of classical texts since the mid-nineteenth century.

Arabic literature in a different direction, stressing elements of mobility and change. It is surprising that the Arab mind has maintained its equilibrium in spite of this fierce conflict. Indeed, it has benefited from it immensely.⁷

By preserving some traditional principles to ensure its distinctive identity and at the same time incorporating a variety of innovations both in form and content, Arabic literature, according to Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, has proved its vitality through the ages.⁸

The contrary view we find neatly summarized by Hamilton Gibb, one of the first Western scholars to study modern Arabic literature systematically,⁹ in an article published in 1928:

It may be asked ... by what right Arabic literature is called a young literature. To all appearances, it is entitled to claim a history of thirteen centuries, a longer period of continuous literary activity than any living European language can boast. But beneath the apparent linguistic continuity, Arabic literature is undergoing an evolution comparable, in some respects, to the substitution of Patristic for Classical Greek literature and idiom. Neo-Arabic literature is only to a limited extent the heir of the old "classical" Arabic literature, and even shows a tendency to repudiate its inheritance entirely. Its leaders are, for the most part, men who have drunk from other springs and look at the world with different eyes. Yet the past still plays a part in their intellectual background, and there is a section among them upon whom that past retains a hold scarcely shaken by newer influences. For many decades, the partisans of the "old" and the "new" have engaged in a struggle for the soul of the Arabic world, a struggle in which the victory of one side over the other is even yet not assured. The protagonists are (to classify them roughly for practical purposes) the European-educated classes of Egyptians and Syrians on the one hand, and those in Egypt and the less advanced Arabic lands whose education has followed traditional lines, on the other. Whatever the ultimate result may be, however, there can be no question that the conflict has torn the Arabic world from its ancient moorings, and that *the contemporary literature of Egypt and Syria breathes, in its more recent developments, a spirit foreign to the old traditions.*¹⁰

⁷ Ḥusayn 1945, 17; Ḥusayn n.d. [1958], 20.

⁸ Cf. David Semah, *Four Egyptian Literary Critics* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 122.

⁹ See "Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature," in Hamilton A. R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1962), 245–319, which is based upon a series of articles first published in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies (BSOAS)* 4,4 [1928]: 745–60; 5,2 [1929]: 311–22; 5,3 [1929]: 445–66; 7,1 [1933]: 1–22.

¹⁰ Gibb 1962, 246–47 (emphasis added, R.S.).

At least from one aspect, that is, the Islamic framework, modern Arabic literature produced during most of the twentieth century was largely perceived as an extension of the classical one. As numerous episodes attest,¹¹ most modern Arabic literary production adhered to the principles of the Islamic discourse, and Arabic literature, including that written in the modern period, has even been described as Islamic literature.¹² According to this view Islam, as a system of symbols, represents the most significant factor in the explanation of Arab cultural, intellectual, and literary history. It is an ideological generalizing approach that sees Arabic literature as a cultural product of Islam, and at the same time overlooks the interactions between literary texts and the discursive contexts within which they were produced and the diverse literary and social movements that emerged over time. The dominance of Islamic discourse in the literary system was also reflected through censorship of books and their being banned for religious considerations and for the harm they might do to public morality.¹³

¹¹ See, for example, Shimon Ballas, *al-Adab al-‘arabī wa-l-tahdīth al-fikrī* (Cologne: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 1993).

¹² E.g., Najib Ullah, *Islamic Literature* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), 172–211; James Kritzeck, *Anthology of Islamic Literature* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964); *A Rosary of Islamic Readings*, ed. G. Allana (Karachi; Rawalpindi: National Publishing House, 1973).

¹³ On censorship in the Arab world, see Kanan Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World* (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1993), 281; *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York: Routledge), 1: 171–72; *Mass Media, Politics, and Society in the Middle East*, ed. Kai Hafez (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2001), 10. The journal *al-Ādāb* published a series of dossiers about the intricacies of censorship and cultural production in the Arab world. The first of them, in vol. 50, 7–8 (July–August 2002), presents the case of censorship in Syria. The second, in vol. 50, 11–12 (November–December 2002), concerns Egypt. The third, in vol. 51, 9–10 (October–November 2003), deals with Morocco. On censorship of the press in the Arab world in general, see Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 79–80, 115–17 (Egypt), 84–87, 121–22 (Syria); 90–91 (Lebanon); 98–100 (Palestine). See also William A. Rugh, *The Arab Press: News Media and Political Process in the Arab World* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1979), index. For the history of censorship in Islamic societies, see Trevor Mostyn, *A History of Censorship in Islamic Societies* (London: Saqi Books, 2001). On freedom of speech in Egypt under ‘Abd al-Nāṣir and al-Sādāt, in addition to thirteen case studies on censorship of prose works, see

2. *Censorship of Scholarly and Literary Texts*

Cases of censorship on moral grounds have been very frequent and publishers have generally avoided publishing classical works considered as harmful to public morality without censoring them. For example, because it is sometimes considered as belonging to pornographic literature,¹⁴ *al-Rawḍ al-‘āṭir fī nuzhat al-khāṭir* (The perfumed garden in the promenade of the mind) by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Nafzāwī from the 15th century has never been published unabridged by any major publisher in the Arab world. The only printed versions existing are popular editions or partial ones such as that by Maktabat Usāma in Damascus, which also includes several articles about the book and its reception.¹⁵ An unabridged edition was published by the London based publisher Riyāḍ al-Rayyis.¹⁶

One famous instance of censorship on moral grounds in Lebanon was the case of Laylā Ba‘labakkī (b. 1936) and her collection of short stories *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar* (A space ship of tenderness to the moon) first published in 1963.¹⁷ The public prosecutor of the Court of Appeals,

Marina Stagh, *The Limits of Freedom of Speech: Prose Literature and Prose Writers in Egypt under Nasser and Sadat* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1993). In the first five months of 1989, for example, fifty-five books were banned in Egypt (*al-Ahālī*, [7 June 1989], 11). Censorship has even included classical books, such those of the Ṣūfīs, e.g., Annemarie Schimmel, *As Through a Veil, Mystical Poetry in Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 39; Ghālī Shukrī, *al-Khurūj ‘alā al-naṣṣ: Taḥaddiyāt al-thaqāfa wa-l-dīmuqrāṭīyya* (Cairo: Sīnā li-l-Nashr, 1994), 68, n. 19. On censorship of theatrical productions in Egypt between 1923 and 1988, see Sayyid ‘Alī Ismā‘īl, *al-Raqāba wa-l-masraḥ al-marfūḍ 1923–1988* (Cairo: al-Hay‘a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1997). On the theoretical dimensions of censorship in Muslim societies, see Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books & The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2002), esp. 9–36.

¹⁴ In Arabic such literature is variously called *adab al-jins* (sex literature), *adab al-ithāra al-jinsiyya* (literature of sexual stimulation), *al-adab al-khalā‘ī* (shameless literature), *al-adab al-makshūf* (brazen literature), *al-adab al-fāḥish* (dirty literature) or *al-adab al-ibāḥī* (licentious literature).

¹⁵ See Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Nafzāwī, *Shahādāt wa-mukhtārāt min al-Rawḍ al-‘āṭir fī nuzhat al-khāṭir*, ed. Hānī al-Khayyir (Damascus: Maktabat Usāma, 1983).

¹⁶ Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr al-Nafzāwī, *al-Rawḍ al-‘āṭir fī nuzhat al-khāṭir*, ed. Jamāl Jum‘a (London: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis, 1990).

¹⁷ Laylā Ba‘labakkī, *Safīnat ḥanān ilā al-qamar* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī

Saʿīd al-Barjawi, summoned the writer, in accordance with item 532 of the Lebanese criminal law, and accused her of harming public morality demanding a prison sentence of one to six months plus an apparently symbolic fine of ten to one hundred liras. At the same time members of the Beirut vice squad confiscated the remaining copies of the book from the bookstores. On 23 August 1964, the Court's unanimous verdict was to cease procedures against Baʿlabakkī, to abrogate the payment of any fine, to overturn the original decision to confiscate the copies of the book, and to return the confiscated books to their owners.¹⁸

Not a few literary works were described as pornography and banned in various Arab countries. Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs (1919–1990), for example, was accused of provoking “sexual disturbances” (*shaghab jinsī*), and even President ʿAbd al-Nāṣir expressed his reservations on the novel *al-Banāt wa-l-ṣayf* (The girls and the summer)¹⁹ for its explicit descriptions.²⁰ *Ḥikāyat Zahra* (The story of Zahra) (1980) by the Lebanese Ḥanān al-Shaykh (b. 1945), which nine publishers in Beirut had turned down before the author decided to publish it herself, was dismissed as pornography and banned in some countries.²¹ *Ḥadīqat al-ḥawāss* (The garden of the senses) (1993) by the Lebanese ʿAbduh

li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 1964 [1963]). For an English translation of the title story, see Denys Johnson-Davies, *Modern Arabic Short Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1981 [1967]), 128–34; *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*, ed. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Basima Qattan Bezirgan (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1977), 274–79.

¹⁸ For an account of the trial and the court decision, see Fernea and Bezirgan 1977, 280–90; Roger Allen, *Modern Arabic Literature* (New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1987), 72–73. Copies of the Hebrew translation of Baʿlabakkī's novel *Anā aḥyā* (I am alive) (1958), published in 1961, were confiscated from the bookstores in Israel for harming public morality and for the allegedly anti-Jewish sentiments expressed in the novel (Hannah Amit-Kochavi, “Translations of Arabic Literature into Hebrew: Their Historical and Cultural Background and Their Reception by the Target Culture” [Ph.D. thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1999], 269–72).

¹⁹ Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs, *al-Banāt wa-l-ṣayf*, Beirut: Dār al-Qalam and al-Maktaba al-Ḥadītha, 1973.

²⁰ See Maḥmūd Fawzī, *Iḥsān ʿAbd al-Quddūs bayna al-ighṭiyāl al-siyāsī wa-l-shaghab al-jinsī* (Cairo: Madbūlī, 1988), 169–72.

²¹ The novel was translated into English by P. Ford as *The Story of Zahra* (London: Readers International, 1986). On the banning of the novel, see the *Manchester Guardian*, 7 July 2001.

Wāzin (b. 1957)²² was also banned in most of the Arab world.²³

However, censorship in the Arab world during the twentieth century often focused on works by intellectuals who “resorted to rationalism in their examination of the Muslim Canon.”²⁴ The most notorious case of scholarly censorship may well have been that of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s controversial study of pre-Islamic poetry, *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* (On Jāhilī poetry) (1926). Claiming that the major portion of pre-Islamic poetry was spurious and being skeptical about the historical truth of some sections in the Qurʾān, Ḥusayn states, for example, that the Qurʾānic reference to Ibrāhīm in itself did not prove that he had indeed been in Mecca.²⁵ The book raised a storm of protests and al-Azhar, Egypt’s supreme Muslim authority, brought legal charges against the author, who then the following year published a toned-down version entitled *Fī al-adab al-jāhilī* (On Jāhilī literature).²⁶ It is significant that as late as 1980

²² °Abduh Wāzin, *Ḥadīqat al-ḥawāss* (Beirut: Dār al-Jadīd, 1993).

²³ On the novel and the sensuality of the text, see Stefan G. Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 213–22.

²⁴ Aziz al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London & New York: Verso, 1996), 44.

²⁵ See Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1926), 26. On the intellectual and philosophical sources from which Ḥusayn derived his skepticism, see Abdelrashid Mahmoudi, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn’s Education: From the Azhar to the Sorbonne* (Surrey: Curzon, 1998), 56–57, 120–24, 171–73, 198–202.

²⁶ Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Fī al-adab al-jāhilī* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Iʿtimād, 1927). On this issue, see Pierre Cachia, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: His Place in the Egyptian Literary Renaissance* (London: Luzac & Company, 1956), 145–49; *Anthologie de la littérature arabe contemporaine: Les essais*, tr. Anouar Abdel-Malek (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965), 136–39; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986 [1962]), 327; J. Brugman, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 363; Haggai Erlich, *Students and Universities in 20th Century Egyptian Politics* (London: Frank Cass, 1989), 78–79; Adūnīs, *Hā anta, ayyuhā al-waqt* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1993), 57–59; Nissim Rejwan, *Arabs Face the Modern World: Religious, Cultural, and Political Responses to the West* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1998), 43–53; °Abd Allāh Ibrāhīm, *al-Thaqāfa al-ʿarabiyya wa-l-marjiʿiyyāt al-mustaʿāra: Tadākhul al-ansāq wa-l-mafāhīm wa-rihānāt al-ʿawlama* (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 1999), 13–51. The text of the prosecution decision against Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was published in *Fuṣūl* 1–2 (1990). On the place of Ṭāhā

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was still described in certain circles in the Arab world as “aiming at destroying Islam.”²⁷

Similar cases involved several other outstanding Egyptian writers and intellectuals. One of them was ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rāziq (1888–1966), who in 1925 published a book entitled *al-Islām wa-uṣūl al-ḥukm* (Islam and the principles of authority).²⁸ The book aroused a violent reaction in religious circles; consequently it was denounced by a council of the leading scholars of al-Azhar, which pronounced the author unfit to hold any public function.²⁹ About sixty years later, *Muqaddima fī fiqh al-luġha al-ʿarabiyya* (An introduction to the philology of the Arabic language) (1980) by Luwīs ʿAwaḍ (1915–1990) was banned. Under the pressure of Muḥammad Mutawallī Shaʿrāwī (1911–1998), even Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898–1987) was forced to change the title for his series of *munājayāt* published in 1983 in *al-Ahrām*, from “Aḥādīth maʿa Allāh” (Conversations with Allāh) into “Aḥādīth maʿa nafsi” (Conversations with myself).³⁰ That some of the cases are quite recent illustrates how influential the religious circles have remained until today.

One striking recent case was that of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (b. 1943), an Egyptian professor of Arabic literature at Cairo University. He was declared a heretic, while his wife, Professor Ibtihāl Kamāl Yūnus (b. 1958), was directed in June 1995 by a religious court to divorce him. The

Ḥusayn’s book within the framework of Egyptian intellectual history, see Israel Gershoni, “Egyptian Intellectual History and Egyptian Intellectuals in the Interwar Period,” *Asian and African Studies* 19 (1985): 333–64, esp. 345–50.

²⁷ Ghālī Shukrī, *Aqniʿat al-irhāb: al-Baḥth ʿan ʿalmāniyya jadīda* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿamma li-l-Kitāb, 1992), 297–98. Cf. Anwar al-Jundī, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: Ḥayātuhu wa-fikruhu fī mizān al-Islām* (Cairo: Dār al-Iʿtiṣām; Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, 1977); idem, *Ukdhūbatān fī taʾrīkh al-adab al-ḥadīth: Aḥmad Luṭfī al-Sayyid, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, 1979); ʿAbd al-Majīd ʿAbd al-Salām al-Muḥtasib, *Ṭāhā Ḥusayn mufakkiran* (n.p.: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1978).

²⁸ ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *al-Islām wa-uṣūl al-ḥukm* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Miṣr, 1925).

²⁹ For the text of the judgment, see also *al-Manār* 26,5 (September 1925): 363–83. For a new edition of the book, as well as the judgment of the council and related documents, see ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rāziq, *al-Islām wa-uṣūl al-ḥukm* (Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1988). On the case, see also Abdel-Malek 1965, 81–86; Hourani 1986 [1962], 183–92; Meisami and Starkey 1998, 1: 18; Rejwan 1998, 43–53.

³⁰ On these cases, see Shukrī, *al-Khurūj ʿalā al-naṣṣ*, 68–69.

court accepted a claim, brought by Muslim fundamentalists, that Abū Zayd's writings³¹ proved that he was an apostate from Islam and therefore unqualified to be married to a Muslim woman. In Egypt the Islamic concept of *ḥisba* allowed any Muslim to sue another for beliefs thought to harm society. Only following Abū Zayd's case did the Egyptian government restrict the use of *ḥisba* to state prosecutors only. The arguments against Abū Zayd were reminiscent of those voiced against Ṭāhā Ḥusayn.³² However, unlike the latter, Abū Zayd enjoyed support from many Arab intellectuals; his situation was even compared to that of the philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1126–98) and the astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564–1643).³³ °Azīz al-°Azma (Aziz al-Azmeh), for example, reacted by saying that “the reality of modern Arab history guides in the direction of secularism, which has been responsible for the progress of our societies, cultures and lives in general.”³⁴

³¹ Especially Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Maḥmūd al-naṣṣ: Dirāsa fī °ulūm al-Qur°ān* (Beirut & Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-°Arabī, 1990); idem, *al-Khiṭāb al-dīnī: Ru°ya naqdiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Muntakhab al-°Arabī li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Naṣr wa-l-Tawzī°, 1992); idem, *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī* (Cairo: Madbūlī, 1995).

³² E.g., °Abd al-Laṭīf Fāyid, “Qiṣṣat Abī Zayd,” *Minbar al-Islām* 54,2 (July 1995): 2–7.

³³ Navid Kermani, “Die Affäre Abu Zayd: Eine Kritik am Religiösen Diskurs und ihre Folgen,” *Orient* 35 (1994): 42; Stefan Wild, “Islamic Enlightenment and the Paradox of Averroes,” *Die Welt des Islams* 36,3 (1996): 390.

³⁴ °Azīz al-°Azma, “Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd fīmā warā° al-idāna wa-mā qablahā,” *Dirāsāt °arabiyya* 11–12 (September–October 1995): 3–7. Cf. Taslima Nasreen's speech in front of the sixty-third international congress of the Poets', Essayists' and Novelists' Club (PEN) in Mexico on 8 November 1996, in which she said: “Secularism is a must for democracy. Religious law and democracy are totally contradictory. ... If we want to enjoy democracy, we have to separate religion and state” (according to *al-Akḥbār* Muslim World News list—“I.A.P.” <iapinfo@IAP.ORG> [10 November 1996]). Nasreen, a practicing gynecologist and writer, fled Bangladesh in August 1994 for Sweden after receiving death threats for allegedly insulting Islam in her novel *Lajja* (Shame) (1993). On the “Nasreen affair,” see Bishnupryia Ghosh, “An Affair to Remember: Scripted Performances in the ‘Nasreen Affair,’” in Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj, *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc.), 39–83. On the religious and the secular in contemporary Arab life, see al-Azmeh 1996, 41–58.

In August 1996 two Egyptian civil rights groups warned that the court's decision against Abū Zayd in effect constituted a license for Muslim extremists to murder the couple. According to the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), it was a "death sentence," making Abū Zayd and his wife targets "for armed violent groups trying to carry out Islamic sentences." The Center for Human Rights Legal Aid (CHRLA) warned that the ruling could be perceived by radicals as "a green light to practice lethal intellectual terrorism." Both groups cited the case of Faraj Fawda (Foda), who was assassinated by Muslim extremists in 1993 just days after al-Azhar had described him as being "full of animosity against whatever is Islamic."³⁵ On 23 September 1996, a coalition of international organizations³⁶ condemned the court-ordered divorce as "a flagrant violation of one of the most cherished of human rights—the right of a legally married couple to remain married so long as both parties so desire—as well as the basic right of free expression, including academic freedom." The coalition called on President Ḥusnī Mubārak to speak up publicly for the rights of Abū Zayd and his wife and to support the application by their lawyers to the Court of Cessation to nullify the ruling. "By upholding the right of a civil court to declare an Egyptian citizen an apostate," the coalition asserts, "the ruling has a severe chilling effect on freedom of expression."³⁷ Only in December

³⁵ According to a news-wire report on adabiyat@listhost.uchicago.edu (15 August 1996). On Fawda, see *Arab Studies Journal* 1 (Spring 1993): 16–19.

³⁶ The coalition includes twenty-two human rights, Arab-American, women's rights, academic and other organizations, among them the National Association of Arab Americans, the Arab-American University Graduates, the Muslim Public Affairs Council, the Arab American Institute and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC).

³⁷ According to adabiyat@listhost.uchicago.edu (22 September 1996). On the Abū Zayd affair, see also Kermani 1994, 25–49; °Alī Ḥarb, "Ḥaql al-alghām," in *al-°Unf al-uṣūlī: Muwājahāt al-sayf wa-l-qalam* (London & Beirut: Riyād al-Rayyis, 1995), 234–39; Elie Chalala, "'Apostasy' Charges Threaten Cairo University Professor's Marriage," *AlJadid* (Los Angeles) 2,10 (August 1996): 8; Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd, *Ziyāra li-l-janna wa-l-nār* (Cairo: Dār Akhbār al-Yawm, 1996), 107–9; Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 212–21; Ami Ayalon, *Egypt's Quest for Cultural Orientation, Data and Analysis* (The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1999), 3–6, and the bibliographical references at 43, n. 2. Abū Zayd himself published a book that includes various documents relating to the affair (*al-Taḥkīr fī zaman al-taḥkīr: Ḍidd al-jahl wa-l-zīf wa-l-khurāfa* [Cairo: Sīnā li-l-Nashr, 1995]) as

1996 did an appeals court indefinitely suspend the ruling that Abū Zayd and his wife must divorce.³⁸

Nawāl al-Sa^cdāwī (b. 1931), the Arab world's leading feminist, and her husband Sharīf Ḥitāta (b. 1923) faced the same threat to their marriage as Abū Zayd and his wife. Following an interview given in March 2001 to the Egyptian weekly *al-Maydān*, in which al-Sa^cdāwī said that the rituals in the *hajj* pilgrimage had pre-Islamic origins and in which she also called for sexual equality in Muslim inheritance laws, the Egyptian Mufti issued a statement that her opinions were beyond the bounds of Islam. The Islamist lawyer Nabīh al-Waḥsh filed a case against her calling for a divorce from her husband in accordance with the concept of *hisba*.³⁹ Based on the previously mentioned decision to restrict the use of *hisba* to state prosecutors, on 30 July 2001 a Cairo court threw out the petition, ruling that no individual could petition a court to forcibly divorce another person.⁴⁰ The "danger" al-Sa^cdāwī's feminist writings pose to traditional society has nevertheless not escaped the vigilance of the Islamist campaign in Egypt, and her name was included on the death lists of radical Islamist groups.⁴¹ Al-Sa^cdāwī's novel *Suqūṭ al-imām* (The fall of the Imam) (1987) was seen as a condemnation of ideological religious circles for taking part in the oppression of Arab woman.⁴² Her novel *Jannāt wa-Iblīs* (Jannāt and Iblīs [the names of the two protago-

well as a collection of articles and essays by writers and intellectuals supporting his case (*al-Qawl al-mufīd fī qaḍīyyat Abū* (sic!) *Zayd* [Cairo: Madbūlī, 1995]).

³⁸ *The Washington Post*, 20 December 1996, A49.

³⁹ According to e-mail messages from Sherifa Zuhur on 5, 11, and 17 May 2001. Zuhur and Sondra Hale launched a campaign over the Internet in support of al-Sa^cdāwī against the attempt to force her separation from her husband on the grounds of her apostasy. On the case, see also the *Daily Telegraph*, 25 April 2001; *al-Ādāb*, May–June 2001. See also the news release issued on 27 July 2001 by the International Secretariat of Amnesty International (according to ainews@amnesty.org).

⁴⁰ According to *Reuters*, 30 July 2001.

⁴¹ Cf. Judith Miller, *God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 70.

⁴² Nawāl al-Sa^cdāwī, *Suqūṭ al-imām* (Cairo: Dār al-Mustaqbal al-^cArabī, 1987). For an English translation, see Nawal El Saadawi, *The Fall of the Imam* (tr. Sherif Hetata) (London: Minerva, 1995). On the novel, see Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Men, Women, and God(s)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 91–117 (for a review of Malti-Douglas's book, see *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 43 [1995]: 175–77).

nists]) (1992) was seen as a sequel to *Suqūṭ al-imām*.⁴³ Its setting is an insane asylum where God and Satan are confined together as patients, and Muslim radicals have been quick to brand the book as blasphemy.⁴⁴

Part of the protest against al-Sa^cdawī was the outcome of her views regarding homosexuality and lesbianism. Although Islam guarantees male homosexuals a place in Hell,⁴⁵ and although, contrary to the past, in

⁴³ Nawāl al-Sa^cdawī, *Jannāt wa-Iblīs* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1992). For the English translation, see Nawal El Saadawi, *The Innocence of the Devil* (tr. Sherif Hetata; introduction by Fedwa Malti-Douglas), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. On the novel, see Malti-Douglas 1995, 118–41 as well as Malti-Douglas' introduction to El Saadawi 1994, xi–xiv.

⁴⁴ Cf. Malti-Douglas 1995, 6, 95. On al-Sa^cdawī's attitude to the Islamist discourse, see her essay about al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm's book *al-Islām fī al-asr* (London & Limassol: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis, 1991) published in al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *Islām ḍidda al-Islām* (London & Beirut: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis, 1994), 297–301 (originally published in *al-Nāqid* 49 [July 1992]). Nawāl al-Sa^cdawī is mentioned as one of the principal sources from whom Rosalind Miles in her *The Women's History of the World* (London: Michael Joseph, 1988) and Salman Rushdie in his *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking, 1988) got the feminist diatribes against Islam (Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Wyn Davies, *Distorted Imagination: Lessons from the Rushdie Affair* [London: Grey Seal; Kuala Lumpur: Berita, 1990], 168). Miles sees monotheistic religions as conspiracies and plots against women: "The result of divine inspiration transmitted from a male power to males empowered for this purpose, thereby enshrining maleness itself as power" (Miles 1988, 59; cf. Sardar and Davies 1990, 165–76). On the Rushdie affair, see below.

⁴⁵ See Charles Pellat, "Liwāṭ," in *Sexuality and Eroticism among Males in Moslem Societies*, ed. Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1992), 152. On homosexuality in Islam in general, see al-Ghazzālī, *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam: A translation of al-Ghazālī's Book on the Etiquette of Marriage from the Iḥyā*, tr. Madelain Farah (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah Press, 1984), 37–39; Ch. Pellat, "Liwāṭ," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, 5 (1986): 776–79 (see an enlarged version in Pellat 1992, 151–67); and Arno Schmitt, "Liwāṭ im Fiqh: Männliche Homosexualität?" *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 4 (2001–2002): 49–110. On lesbianism in Muslim societies, see G. H. A. Juynboll, "Siḥāk," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, 9 (1997): 565–67, including the detailed bibliography. On the study of homosexuality in Arab/Islamic civilization, see Asad AbuKhalil, "A Note on the Study of Homosexuality in the Arab/Islamic Civilization," *Arab Studies Journal* 1 (Fall 1993): 32–34; Mohamed Sadek, Letter to the Editor: Response to "A Note on the Study of Homosexuality in the Arab/Islamic Civilization," *Arab Studies Journal* 2 (Spring 1994): 65. On

the modern period it has never been easy to be homosexual in Egypt,⁴⁶ the subject has frequently appeared in highbrow Arabic fiction, and several novels and films portray homosexual characters living normally in society and causing no public outcry.⁴⁷

In May 2000 the Islamist-oriented opposition Labor Party and its newspaper *al-Sha'b* led a public campaign against the novel *Walīma li-a^cshāb al-baḥr* (A banquet for seaweed) (1983) by the Syrian writer Ḥaydar Ḥaydar (b. 1938), saying it defamed Islam and denigrated the Prophet Muḥammad and the Qur^ʿān. They demanded the resignation of the Culture Minister because his ministry had reprinted the novel.⁴⁸ Fol-

Western attitudes to homosexuality in the Middle East, see Derek Hopwood, *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East: The British, the French and the Arabs* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1999), 175–82. On effeminate in medieval Arabic literature, see Everett K. Rowson, “The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York & London: Routledge, 1991), 50–79; idem, “The Effeminate of Early Medina,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111.4 (1991): 671–93; Shirley Guthrie, *Arab Women in the Middle Ages: Private Lives and Public Roles* (London: Saqi Books, 2001), 196–199. On the role of the *mukhannathūn* in semi-dramatic scenes in medieval times, see Shmuel Moreh, *Live Theatre and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arabic World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 25–27. For homosexual and lesbian love as among the *ashrāt al-sā^ca*, that is, the signs of the end of time and resurrection, see Abū [°]Uthmān al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasā^ʿil*, ed. [°]Alī Abū Milḥim (Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1991), 1: 151; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Isbāl al-kisā^ʿ [°]alā [°]awrāt al-nisā^ʿ*, ed. Khālīd [°]Abd al-Karīm Jum^ʿa and [°]Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad [°]Abd al-Qādir (Kuwait: Dār al-[°]Urūba li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī^ʿ, 1990), 70.

⁴⁶ See Brian Whitaker, “Homosexuality on Trial in Egypt,” *The Guardian*, 19 November 2001.

⁴⁷ E.g., the character of Kirsha in Najīb Maḥfūẓ’s *Zuqāq al-Midaqq* (Cairo: Dār Miṣr, n.d. [1947]); the short story “Abū al-Rijāl” by Yūsuf Idrīs from the collection *al-[°]Atab [°]alā al-naẓar* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahrām li-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1987), 69–99. For an English translation, see Youssef Idris, *A Leader of Men* (Fredericton: York Press, 1988). On the story, see P. J. Vatikiotis, “Vanishing Cultural Bridges between East and West,” *Asian and African Studies* 25 [1991]: 182. See also [°]Abd al-Qādir al-Janābī, *Tarbiyat [°]Abd al-Qādir al-Janābī* (Beirut: Dār al-Jadīd), 61. For homosexuality in Egyptian films, see Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 254–55, n. 44.

⁴⁸ Ḥaydar Ḥaydar, *Walīma li-a^cshāb al-baḥr* (Cairo: al-Hay^ʿa al-[°]Āmma li-

lowing clashes with the police, in which dozens of students were wounded, the Egyptian authorities effectively froze for a time the activities of the Labor Party and closed *al-Sha‘b*.⁴⁹ Ḥaydar himself said that the campaign against the novel was based on passages taken out of context.⁵⁰ In a press release on 9 May 2000, EOHR expressed its alarm over the apostatizing campaign against Ḥaydar as well as against the Egyptian writer Idwār (Edward) al-Kharrāt (b. 1926). Warning that judgment of creative works on other than artistic considerations threatened to impose religious or political custodianship on human thought, the organization mentioned that past experience had proved the intensity of the discourse could erupt into bloody violence.⁵¹

Similar cases were not rare even in Arab states known for their openness. In Lebanon, which has long been regarded as “the most liberal state in the Arab world,”⁵² the Ba‘labakkī case described above was not the only instance of the kind. Thus intellectuals who resorted to rationalism in their writings were exposed to legal proceedings here as well. In December 1969 Ṣādiq Jalāl al-‘Aẓm (b. 1934) was jailed for several days following the publication of his book *Naqd al-fikr al-dīnī* (The criticism of religious thought) (1969). A multi-sectarian society, Lebanon has laws prohibiting the slander of religion and religious figures. Al-‘Aẓm and the publisher Bashīr Dā‘ūq, owner of the Lebanese Dār al-Ṭalī‘a, were accused of offending Christian, but especially Muslim religion. In July

Quṣūr al-Thaqāfa, 2000). The first edition of the novel, which had been written between 1974 and 1983 in Algeria, Beirut and Cyprus, appeared in Beirut in 1983 at the author’s expense after publishers had refused to publish it. A second edition was published by Dār Amwāj in Beirut in 1988. On the novel, see *Adab wa-naqd* 21 (April–May 1986): 25–54.

⁴⁹ According to *Reuters*, 20 May 2000. Muḥammad Salamāwī (b. 1945), foreign editor of *al-Ahrām*, explained that the demonstrations should be seen as an attempt by the Muslim extremists to strengthen their position in the internal political arena (*BBC World Service*, 9 May 2000). On the controversy surrounding Ḥaydar Ḥaydar’s novel and the political protest the novel ignited, see also the *New York Times*, 9 May 2000, A5; *Al-Jadid* (Los Angeles), 31. In *al-Ādāb*, July–August 2000, ‘Abd al-Razzāq ‘Īd argues against a “secular” interpretation that “kills” the novel while “protecting” the writer from possible death. On the case, see also Muḥammad ‘Abbās, *al-Wa‘y yanzifu min thuqūb al-dhākira* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2001).

⁵⁰ According to *Associated Press*, 13 May 2000.

⁵¹ According to EOHR’s Webpage (<http://www.eohr.org.eg>).

⁵² Hafez 2001, 27.

1970 both of them were found not guilty.⁵³ In September 1996 the Lebanese composer, *ūd* (oud) player and singer Marcel Khalīfa (Khalife) (b. 1940) was charged with blasphemy when he included a verse from the Qurʾān about the Biblical figure Joseph in his song “Anā Yūsuf yā abī” (O my father, I am Yūsuf) released in 1995 on the album *Rakwat ʿarab* (Arabic coffeepot). Khalīfa, who won a cult following in the Arab world and the Arab diaspora through his nationalistic songs during the Lebanese civil war, and who draws thousands of people to his concerts, was alleged to have “insulted Islam.” The music of the song is Khalīfa’s while the lyrics are based upon a poem by the Palestinian poet Maḥmūd Darwīsh (b. 1941), from his collection *Ward aqall* (Fewer roses), the poems in which were inspired by the Lebanese war of 1982 and its after-effects:

أنا يوسف يا أبي. يا أبي، إخوتي لا يحبونني، لا يريدونني بينهم يا
أبي. يعتدون عليّ ويرمونني بالحصى والكلام يريدونني أن أموت لكي
يمدحوني. وهم أوصدوا باب بيتك دوني. وهم طردوني من الحقل. هم
سمّموا عذبي يا أبي. وهم حطّموا لعبي يا أبي. حين مر النسيم ولاعب
شعري غاروا وثاروا عليّ وثاروا عليك، فماذا صنعتُ لهم يا أبي؟
الفراشات حطّت عليّ كتفيّ، ومالت عليّ السنابل، والطير حلّق فوق
يديّ. فماذا فعلت أنا يا أبي، ولماذا أنا؟ أنت سمّيتني يوسفًا، وهو
أوقعوني في الجبّ، واتّهموا الذئب؛ والذئب أرحم من إخوتي، أبت!
هل جنيت عليّ أحد عندما قلت إنني رأيت أحد عشر كوكبا، والشمس
والقمر، رأيتهم لي ساجدين

O my father, I am Joseph. O father, my brothers neither love me nor want me in
their midst, O my
Father, they assault me and cast stones and words at me. They want me to die so
They can eulogize me. They closed the door of your house and left me outside.
They expelled me from the field. They
Poisoned my grapes, O my father. They destroyed my toys, O my father. When

⁵³ For the book, see Ṣādiq Jalāl al-ʿAẓm, *Naqd al-fikr al-dīnī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa, 1988 [1969]). Some documents of the trial of the writer and the publisher appear in the appendix attached to the book (146–60).

the passing gentle wind played with
 My hair they were jealous, they flamed up with rage against me and you. What
 did I do to them, O my father?
 The butterflies stopped on my shoulder, the ears of grain bent down to me and
 the birds hovered over
 My hands. What have *I* done, O my father? And why me? You named me
 Joseph and they
 Threw me into the well and accused the wolf, though the wolf is more merciful
 than my brothers, O my father!
 Did I wrong anyone when I said that I saw eleven stars, and the sun
 And the moon, I saw them bowing down before me.⁵⁴

The last lines use the fourth verse from *Sūrat Yūsuf*, in which Joseph addresses his father Jacob (both revered in Islam as prophets):

إِذْ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا، وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ لِي سَاجِدِينَ

When Joseph said to his father, “Father, I saw eleven stars, and the sun and the moon; I saw them bowing down before me.”

As in other poems included in *Ward aqall*, Darwīsh describes in the poem the suffering of the Palestinian Joseph at the hands of his brothers. A similar theme appears in “Yu‘āniqu qātilahu” (Embracing his murderer) from the same collection, in which the story of Cain and Abel is used to illustrate how the Palestinian Abel embraces his brother Cain who is about to slay him. With Cain unwilling to relent, Abel strives desperately to gain his brother’s mercy.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Abd Allāh Bīṭār (Bayṭār), the chief prosecutor of Beirut, charged Khalīfa with blasphemy, even though the singer had obtained permission from Lebanon’s General Security Censorship Bureau to release the song.⁵⁶ Under article 473 of Lebanon’s penal code, blasphemy in public

⁵⁴ Maḥmūd Darwīsh, *Ward aqall* (Acre: Dār al-Aswār, 1987), 77. For another translation by Manal Swairjo, see *alJadid* 28 (Summer 1999): 16.

⁵⁵ Darwīsh 1987, 33. For another poem, by Mūsā Ḥawāmida, that employs the story of Joseph, see Ṣalāḥ Faḍl, *Taḥawwulāt al-shi‘riyya al-‘arabiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2002), 165–67.

⁵⁶ A similar charge was brought against the Lebanese writer André Ḥaddād for his book *The Entry to Arab Union*, which allegedly questioned the relevance of Islam because of a passage that says: “Islam is not qualified to accompany the development that the world is witnessing and does not give room to those of other religions to hold public office.” Both Khalīfa and Ḥaddād are Maronite Christians.

is punishable by one month to one year in prison. Article 474 of the penal code authorizes imprisonment of six months to three years for publicly insulting a religion.⁵⁷ Khalīfa's was an interesting test case because, while some Muslim clerics maintain that all singing of the Qur^ʿān is forbidden, other clerics have had no qualms about making such lyrical recordings. Also, of course, Qur^ʿānic verses, whether in the original Arabic, or translated Persian, have routinely been used in Iranian revolutionary songs since 1978.⁵⁸ Perhaps that was the reason why the Higher Shiite Council in Lebanon, while issuing a statement that Islamic law does not allow verses from the Qur^ʿān to be included in popular songs, was at variance with the drive to try Khalīfa.⁵⁹

Muslim and Christian poets, writers, scholars and journalists said they were disgusted by the charges against Khalīfa, calling them bizarre and reminiscent of campaigns waged against intellectuals in some Islamic countries. Reacting to the charges against Khalīfa, Professor Stephen P. Sheehi, an American intellectual and scholar of Lebanese descent, said that this was a politically motivated witch hunt by Prime Minister Ḥarīrī in order "to intimidate, if not silence, his critics."⁶⁰ Addressing the prosecutor, the Lebanese poet Paul Shā^ʿūl (b. 1942) put it: "Sir, you were preceded in your edict by those who issued edicts in Egypt, Sudan, India and Pakistan and before them the Inquisition courts of the dark Middle Ages." Another poet, Shawqī Bazīgh (b. 1951), said that the charges against Khalīfa as well as against the writer al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm (1937–1994), and the confiscation in 1991 of his books that were considered an offense to Islam⁶¹ "falsify Beirut's spirit and role" as a cultural center.⁶²

⁵⁷ Based upon a *United Press International* news-wire report from Beirut, 19 September 1996 (according to adabiyat@listhost.uchicago.edu [distributed same date]).

⁵⁸ Based on early Islamic tradition, listening to the recital of the *Qurʿān* accompanied by music is considered by certain scholars to be a sin of disobedience to God (M. J. Kister, "Exert Yourselves, O Banū Arfida!": Some Notes on Entertainment in the Islamic Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 23 [1999]: 61). On the issue of setting verses of the *Qurʿān* to music, see Ḍiyā^ʿ al-Dīn Baybars, "Talḥīn al-Qurʿān bayna ahl al-fann wa-rijāl al-dīn," *al-Hilāl*, December 1970, 118–27.

⁵⁹ Elie Chalala, "Marcel Khalife Faces Charge over Darwish Poem: Arab Intellectuals Rally to Defend Creative Freedom," *AlJadid* (Los Angeles) 28 (Summer 1999): 7.

⁶⁰ According to adabiyat@listhost.uchicago.edu (20 September 1996).

⁶¹ On al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm's outlooks and the reactions to them, see al-

“It is as if we face a new version of the saga of Youssef Chahine [Yūsuf Shāhīn, b. 1926] and his film *The Emigrant* [*al-Muhājir*],”⁶³ wrote another poet.⁶⁴

Darwīsh himself criticized the legal proceedings in an interview with the Lebanese newspaper *al-Diyār* on 10 October 1999 stating that fundamentalism is in the process of stifling culture and creation in the Arab world: “We should all be ashamed. If Khalīfa is found guilty, it will be an insult to culture.”⁶⁵ On 2 October 1999, the newly appointed investigating judge, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Shihāb, recommended that prosecutors

Nayhūm 1991 and al-Nayhūm 1994.

⁶² Cf. *AlJadid* (Los Angeles) 28 (Summer 1999): 8–9.

⁶³ On how Shāhīn’s controversial film narrowly escaped being banned for allegedly depicting Joseph, see Wild 1996, 389–90 and the references in nn. 21, 22; Ayalon 1999, 33. During the fiftieth annual Cannes Film Festival (May 1997), a special lifetime achievement award was presented to Shāhīn. On Shāhīn in general, see Claude Michel Cluny, *Dictionnaire des nouveaux cinémas arabes* (Paris: Sindbad, 1978), 161–72; Muḥammad al-Ṣāwī, *Sīnimā Yūsuf Shāhīn: Riḥla Aydiyūlijīyya* (Alexandria: Dār al-Maṭbū‘āt al-Jadīda, 1990); Hind Rassam Culhane, *East/West, an Ambiguous State of Being: The Construction and Representation of Egyptian Cultural Identity in Egyptian Film* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 49–56, 71–75; Mustafa Darwish, *Dream Makers on the Nile: A Portrait of Egyptian Cinema* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1998), 43; Sharon A. Russell, *Guide to African Cinema* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 47–50. On the attempt to ban Umm Kulthūm’s singing of *Rubā‘īyyāt al-Khayyām* translated by Aḥmad Rāmī (Beirut: Dār al-‘Awda, 1977), see Sélim Nassib, *Oum* (Paris: Balland, 1994), 193–96 (=Salīm Turkiyya, *Kāna ṣarḥan min khayāl*, tr. Bassām Ḥajjār [Beirut: al-Masār, 1999], 208–11).

⁶⁴ Based upon a *Reuters* news-wire report from Beirut, 21 September 1996 (according to adabiyat@listhost.uchicago.edu [22 September 1996]). Following Khalīfa’s case the journal *AlJadid* (Los Angeles) dedicated an issue to the freedom of artists, intellectuals and media in Lebanon (2.11 [September 1996]). Among the articles published in this issue “Arab Artists, Intellectuals, Condemn Charges Against Khalife as Attack on Liberty, Civil Freedom,” by Elie Chalala; a special article by Marcel Khalīfa in which he reflects on his American tour and other issues, “We Turn the Page from City to City”; “Marcel Khalife and the Modern Inquisition,” by Paul Sha’ūl; “Lebanese Media Restrictions Stir Broad Opposition,” by Michelle A. Marzahn. On the case, see also *AlJadid* (Los Angeles) 28 (1999). On the general issue of freedom of expression in Lebanon, see Samāḥ Idrīs’s editorial in *al-Ādāb* 11–12 (1999).

⁶⁵ According to Human Rights Watch <hrwatchnyc@igc.org> (1 November 1999).

bring criminal charges against Khalīfa for “insulting religious values,” and the next day senior Sunnī Muslim clerics in Lebanon ruled that singing verses from the Koran was “absolutely banned and not accepted.” The highest Sunnī Muslim religious authority in Lebanon, Grand Mufti Muḥammad Rāshid Qabbānī, maintained that “there is a limit to freedom of expression. One limit is that it should not infringe on people’s religious beliefs.” In reply, Hanny Megally, executive director of Human Rights Watch’s Middle East and North Africa division, said that this case is a direct legal challenge to the right to freedom of expression in Lebanon.⁶⁶ In another move the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) encouraged intellectuals throughout the world to sign a petition on behalf of the singer, saying that the charges against him are a “flagrant violation of intellectual freedoms which should be guaranteed to artists in all countries. ... In fact, the song is dedicated to the people of Lebanon and Palestine, referring symbolically to their suffering, using the narrative of the Prophet Joseph’s famous story.”⁶⁷ In the middle of December 1999 Khalīfa was cleared by the court of any guilt.⁶⁸

This was not the first time charges of blasphemy had been leveled against singers in the Arab world. For example, in two previous cases, poems that the Egyptian musician and singer Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1901–1991) set to music and sang were involved: “al-Talāsīm” (The talismans), written by the Mahjarī poet Īliyyā Abū Māḍī (1889–1957),⁶⁹ and “Min ghayr leh” (Without asking why), written by the singer himself.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ According to Human Rights Watch <hrwatchnyc@igc.org> (1 November 1999).

⁶⁷ According to msanews@msanews.mynet.net (MSANEWS) (19 October 1999).

⁶⁸ According to *Ha’aretz* (Tel Aviv), 19 December 1999, A3.

⁶⁹ For the original poem, known for its repeated phrase *lastu adrī* (I do not know), see Īliyyā Abū Māḍī, *Dīwān* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Awda, n.d.), 191–214.

⁷⁰ On the poem and the attempt to ban it, see Karin van Nieuwkerk, “A Trade Like Any Other”: *Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 65. The Jewish writer of Iraqi origin Mnashshī Za‘rūr (1897–1972) mentioned in an interview (*al-Sharq*, May–June 1977, 63) that Abū Māḍī’s poem is similar to an Iraqi popular song in which the concluding words are:

أنا منسين وأنت منسين
تايه دلوني والطريق منسين

Also in Kuwait, which used to be an island of relative openness in the Middle East, Islamists, basing themselves on Kuwait's Press and Publications Law, brought a series of cases against journalists, writers, and academics for expressing controversial views on religious and political themes. The law makes it a criminal offense to publish materials that abuse "by allusion, slander, sarcasm, or disparagement, God or the prophets or the companions of the prophet Muḥammad," or that "sully public morals." A similarly vague article in the Criminal Code mandates prison sentences for the dissemination of "opinions that include sarcasm, contempt, or belittling of religion or a religious school of thought." For example, University professor Aḥmad al-Baghdādī was sentenced to one month in prison in October 1999 after the court found that an article by him in a student newspaper defamed Islam by contending that the Prophet Muḥammad had failed to convert non-believers during his time in Mecca. He was later pardoned due to his poor health. Other rulings in 1999 have resulted in journalists being fined and publication of their magazines and newspapers ordered suspended. On 22 January 2000 a Kuwaiti court sentenced ʿĀliya Shuʿayb, a Kuwait University professor of philosophy, her publisher Yaḥyā al-Rubaʿyān, and the short story writer and novelist Laylā al-ʿUthmān (b. 1944) to two months in prison for writings that the court said "included expressions that defy God, and indecent and shameless expressions." In addition to the prison sentences, Shuʿayb and al-Rubaʿyān were each fined 100 dinars for the publication and distribution without a permit of Shuʿayb's book of poetry *ʿAnākib tarthī jurḥan* (Spiders bemoan a wound).⁷¹ Hanny Megally, mentioned earlier, from Human Rights Watch remarked that "this kind of legislation provides an opening for the arbitrary prosecution of almost any kind of speech or writing."⁷²

The above-mentioned cases of censorship and the struggle for freedom of expression that accompanied each of them shed light on the fact that Arab culture since the nineteenth century has gradually been detaching itself from subjection to the religious factor alone. Signs highlighting the acceleration of this development have been both organizational and social, important examples being the establishment in Berlin in 1998 of the non-governmental Ibn Rushd Fund for Freedom of Thought and the thorny Rushdie affair and its implications in the Arab world.

⁷¹ On the collection, in light of the case, see Faḍl 2002, 153–59.

⁷² According to "Human Rights Watch <hrwatchnyc@igc.org>" (25 January 2000). See also *AlJadid* (Los Angeles) 29 (1999).

3. Signs of Gradual Change

Often considered the supreme mediator between the Arab world and the West, Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), known as Averroes in Europe, was celebrated for his efforts to reconcile philosophy and religion. In the spirit of the man whose name it took, the Ibn Rushd Fund for Freedom of Thought, established on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of Ibn Rushd's death, was dedicated to the support of the right to free speech and democracy in the Arab World. The Fund established a prize to be awarded annually to organizations or persons having rendered outstanding service to the right of free speech and democracy. The Ibn Rushd Prize was awarded for the first time in Berlin on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Fund's foundation on 10 December 1999 to the private TV station *al-Jazīra* (The Island [Peninsula]) *Satellite Channel* (Qatar), in order "to support the existence of this medium so important to democracy and freedom of speech in Arab countries." Founded only in 1996, the station had soon become a source for information for Arabs throughout the world, a role that took on special significance after 11 September 2001.

Unlike other Arab mass media, which are subject to their respective heads of state, who use them as instruments to achieve legitimacy and channels to convey their politics, *al-Jazīra* has become a forum for democratic discourse about current topics and events, whether of a political nature, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, or of a social nature, such as the emancipation of women and the defense of human rights, or even religious themes, such as Islam and democracy and political Islam. According to Muḥammad Jāsim al-^cAlī, *al-Jazīra*'s chief editor, "Other TV stations hold too many taboos. We do not know any taboos. Our audience have a right to the truth." According to the station's owner Shaykh Ḥamad ibn Thāmir al-Thānī, "the neighboring oil countries seem to fear a cultural revolution, because Al Jazeera is like a virus, a contagious virus exercising a positive influence on freedom of speech in other Arab countries." Described after its name, by the awarders of the prize, as "an island of freedom of speech," the station has been the target of criticism from all quarters. For example, the station's office in Kuwait was closed after the Emir felt insulted by one of the programs the channel broadcasted. "On another occasion," the awarders note, "US diplomats tried to keep the station from broadcasting an interview with Osama Bin Laden."⁷³ Similar incidents occurred following the commencement of

⁷³ The citations relating to the Ibn Rushd prizes, here and below, and other details are contained in the English press releases concerning the prizes for the

the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁷⁴

The second Ibn Rushd Prize for Freedom of Thought (2000) was awarded to the Palestinian Women's Rights Activist ʿIṣām ʿAbd al-Ghanī ʿAbd al-Hādī (b. 1928), President of the General Union of Palestinian Women, for her “outstanding services to women's rights in the Arab World.” The Egyptian scholar and thinker Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlim (b. 1922) received the third Ibn Rushd Prize (2001). He was honored “for his struggle for freedom and democracy, for his critical thinking and his political commitment, for his writings and analyses, his engagement in support of open dialogue and services to a culture of rational dispute and enlightenment.” The fourth Ibn Rushd Prize (2002) was awarded to Dr. ʿAzmī Bishāra, an Arab member of the Israeli Knesset “for special contributions to freedom of speech and democracy in the Arab World.” The fifth went to the Algerian-born scholar Mohammed Arkoun (b. 1928) for his championing a dialogue between cultures—“his comparative approach to religions and cultures make him a modern-time Ibn Rushd.” The sixth was given to the Egyptian writer Ṣunʿ Allāh Ibrāhīm (b. 1937) for encouraging “the reader to resist and not to tolerate the deplorable state of affairs, but to fight them.”

Against the background of the activities of the Ibn Rushd Fund for Freedom of Thought in Berlin, which are admittedly marginal from the point of view of culture inside the Arab world, the Rushdie affair and its implications reflect, retrospectively, a more gradual change in the relationship between religion and literature inside the Arab world, especially if we compare it with a previous similar affair involving the Egyptian writer Najīb Maḥfūz (b. 1911). Although an interval of 30 years separates the two cases, both of them intersect to uncover the fact that a significant change took place during the period. The international furor surrounding *The Satanic Verses* (1988) by Salman Rushdie (b. 1947)⁷⁵ was

relevant year at <http://www.ibn-rushd.org> (27 April 2005).

⁷⁴ On *al-Jazīra's* coverage following the events of 11 September 2001, see the biannual electronic journal *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* (the Adham Center for Television Journalism at the American University in Cairo) (www.tbsjournal.com), Fall/Winter 2001 issue.

⁷⁵ Rushdie 1988. On the novel against the background of the Rushdie Affair, see Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1989), esp. 143–66; John Erickson, *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 129–60; Minou Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 271–300. On the Rushdie Affair in general, see *The Rushdie File*, ed. Lisa Appig-

engendered by the death sentence hurled at him in the *fatwā* given by Āyatullāh Rūḥullah Khumaynī (1902?–1989), the spiritual head of Iran after the Revolution of 1979:

I inform the proud Muslim People of the world that the author of *The Satanic Verses*, which is against Islam, the Prophet and the Qur'an, and all involved in its publication who are aware of its content are sentenced to death. I request brave Muslims to quickly kill them wherever they find them so that no one ever again would dare to insult the sanctions of Muslims. Anyone killed in trying to execute Rushdie would, God willing, be a *shaheed* (martyr). In addition, anyone who has access to the author of the book but does not have the strength to execute him should introduce him to the people so that he receives punishment for his action.⁷⁶

This *fatwā* was prompted in particular by a description, in a chapter entitled "Return to Jahilia," of a popular brothel given the name *Hijab* in the city of Jahilia, where the whores had each assumed the identity of one of the Prophet Muḥammad's wives:

The fifteen-year-old whore 'Ayesha' was the most popular with the paying public. ... The oldest, fattest whore, who had taken the name of 'Sawdah' ... The whore 'Hafsah' grew as hot-tempered as her namesake. ... 'Umm Salamah the Makhzumite' and, snootiest of all, 'Ramlah' ... And there was a 'Zainab bint Jahsh', and a 'Juwairyah' ... and a 'Rehana the Jew', a 'Safia' and 'Maimunah', and, most erotic of all whores, who knew tricks she refused to teach to competitive 'Ayesha': the glamorous Egyptian, 'Mary the Copt'. Strangest of all was the whore who had taken the name of 'Zainab bint Khuzaimah'.⁷⁷

nanesi and Sara Maitland (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990); Malise Ruthven, *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Rage of Islam* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990); Sardar and Davies 1990; "Eine Chronik des Falls Salman Rushdie," *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch*, no. 4 (1992): 539–88; John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 190–93; John C. Hawley, *Postcolonial Crescent: Islam's Impact on Contemporary Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 1–31, 84–92. On the affair with regard to Orientalism and postcolonial discourse, see Anouar Majid, *Unveiling Traditions: Postcolonial Islam in a Polycentric World* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000), 22–49.

⁷⁶ Sardar and Davies 1990, 193–94; Ruthven 1990, 112.

⁷⁷ Rushdie 1988, 381–82. Cf. *M to the Nth Degree* by the Greek author Mimis Androulakis, in which a couple of pages give a steamy account of Mary Magdalene's imaginary relationship with Christ. Consequently the novel was denounced by religious groups such as the Greek Orthodox Salvation Movement as "insulting the religious conscience and personality of every Greek

Another stimulus for the *fatwā* was the *riwāyat al-gharānīq* (the narration of the cranes), on which the title of the novel is based—verses that were allegedly transmitted by the Prophet Muḥammad as part of the Qurʾānic revelation. In these verses Satan inspired Muḥammad to praise the idols al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā and Manāt, calling them *al-gharānīq al-ʿulā* (the lofty cranes). However, the Prophet later realized that he had been tricked by Satan and withdrew the verses,⁷⁸ transmitting others in their place.⁷⁹ Rushdie deals with this story in the second chapter of the novel, entitled “Mahound,” which concludes with the following words:

Mahound has reached his oasis: Gibreel is not so lucky. Often, now, he finds himself alone on the summit of Mount Cone, washed by the cold, falling stars, and then they fall upon him from the night sky, the three winged creatures, Lat Uzza Manat, flapping around his head, clawing at his eyes, biting, whipping him with their hair, their wings. He puts up his hands to protect himself, but their revenge is tireless, continuing whenever he rests, whenever he drops his guard. He struggles against them, but they are faster, nimbler, winged. He has no devil to repudiate. Dreaming, he cannot wish them away.⁸⁰

Khumaynī’s *fatwā* reawakened the radical religious circles in Egypt against Najīb Maḥfūz, whom they accused, together with Rushdie, of apostasy.⁸¹ Surprisingly enough, the accusation against Maḥfūz was due to a novel he had published almost 30 years before *The Satanic Verses*, namely, *Awlād ḥāratinā* (Children of our alley) (1959),⁸² which was

Christian” (*Times* [London], 20 may 2000, 16).

⁷⁸ *Sūrat al-ḥajj* (22):52: “Allāh abrogates that which Satan proposes.”

⁷⁹ *Sūrat al-najm* (53):19–23.

⁸⁰ Rushdie 1988, 126. On the story of this *naskh* (abrogation), see *Taʾrīkh al-Ṭabarī*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1961), 338–40; al-Azmeh 1996, 115, as well as 125, n. 54. For an analysis of the early traditions on this incident, see Mohammed Shahab Ahmed, “The Satanic Verses Incident in the Memory of the Early Muslim Community: An Analysis of the Early *Riwāyahs* and their *Isnāds*” (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 1999); Alan Jones, “The Real Satanic Verses?” *The Arabist: Budapest Studies in Arabic* 23 (2001): 125–33. For an analysis of the story in relation to Rushdie’s novel, see Ṣādiq Jalāl al-ʿAzm, *Dihniyyat al-taḥrīm: Salmān Rushdī wa-ḥaqīqat al-adab* (London & Limassol: Riyād al-Rayyis, 1992), 276–83. See also Ian Richard Netton, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam* (London: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1992), 226.

⁸¹ E.g., *al-Iʿtiṣām*, April 1989, 5–7.

⁸² Serialized in *al-Ahrām* between 21 September and 25 December 1959. First published as a book in 1967 by Dār al-Ādāb in Beirut. The novel was

condemned at the time on the pretext that it did not treat the sacred beliefs of Islam with the appropriate reverence. Consequently, the novel was never published in book form in Egypt.⁸³ Among typical books published since the late 1980s in the Islamic world to defend Islam against Rushdie and Maḥfūz,⁸⁴ one opens with the following Qurʾānic verse:

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ مُتِمُّ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

They desire to extinguish with their mouths the light of God; but God will perfect his light, though the unbelievers be averse.⁸⁵

Inspired by remarks made by the late Syrian president Ḥāfīz al-Asad,⁸⁶ and convinced that Zionists were behind the publication of Rushdie's book,⁸⁷ the writer Ṣāʿib Saʿūd addresses Maḥfūz with the following words:⁸⁸

translated by Philip J. Stewart under the title *Children of Gebelawi* (London: Heinemann, 1981).

⁸³ Cf. Najīb Maḥfūz, "al-Adab, al-ḥurriyya, al-thawra," *Mawāqif* 1 (October–November 1968): 85–86. On the novel and its various interpretations, see R. Snir, "The Arab-Israeli Conflict as Reflected in the Writing of Najīb Maḥfūz," *Abr-Nahrain* 27 (1989): 127; idem, "The 'World Upsidedown' in Modern Arabic Literature: New Literary Renditions of an Antique Religious Topos," *Edebiyāt* n.s. 5,1 (Spring 1994): 51–75. On the religious objections and recent attacks on the banned novel, see Stagh 1993, 157–70. The argument that the novel was written "purely to curry favor with the Nasser regime in Egypt" (Ruthven 1990, 123) is very odd, since scholars have accepted that Maḥfūz's novel was intended to be mainly a manifest against ʿAbd al-Nāṣir's regime (see Snir 1994, 61. Cf. Ghālī Shukrī's interpretation in Ḥazīn ʿUmar, *al-Mughtarib Ghālī Shukrī* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 2000), 90–91).

⁸⁴ Similar books were written in various languages in addition to Arabic. For example, Iran's Ministry of Islamic guidance published in 1996 a book by Ahmad Zomorodian entitled "Who is The Satan," written according to its introduction, in order to expose "anti-Islamic propaganda" in Rushdie's novel and "stop spiteful nonsense from being spread against the pillars of our religion" (according to adabiyat@listhost.uchicag.edu [7 September 1996]).

⁸⁵ *Al-Ṣaff* 8; translation according to Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979 [1964]), 581.

⁸⁶ E.g. Ṣāʿib Saʿūd, *al-Radd ʿalā al-murtadd Salmān Rushdī shayṭān al-ṣahāyina* (Tripoli [Lebanon]: Jarrūs Press, 1991), 9, 37–38.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 40–42, 67–77.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 77–78.

Was it not enough for you to allude to and slander the son of the Alley?⁸⁹ ... Islam is not a field of experiments for your literary projects ... its sanctities are not symbols of your vulgar desires and filthy tendencies. Islam is elevated human spirit and fragrant holy firebrands which your filthy bodies and spirits do not encompass, just as with the wicked [writer], the son of the damned, in his novel *Laylat al-Qadr*. He does not even know what *Laylat al-Qadr* means!⁹⁰

Another book, by Nabīl al-Sammān, sums up the campaign against Rushdie and his supporters with the following call to Arab writers:

Arab writers are earnestly called upon to write about Arabs and Muslims in living international languages in a style that Westerners will understand, and to develop these Islamic and Arabic studies in their homelands based upon their own heritage, instead of on Orientalists' writings about Islam and Arabs, which they infused with their hostile desires and tendencies against everything that is Arabic and Muslim, beginning with the crusades and until the modern period.⁹¹

Wanting to show that among Westerners and Christian writers there are also other images of Islam, the Egyptian writer Sayyid Ḥāfiẓ Abū al-Futūḥ (b. 1952), published, in 1989, a book entitled "They said about Islam: letters to Salman Rushdie from the greatest intellectuals and philosophers of the Christian world," which opens with the following Qur'ānic verse:

وَأَمَّا الرَّيْدُ فَيَذْهَبُ جُفَاءً

As for the scum, it vanishes as jetsam.⁹²

The book's first section presents sayings about Islam by such writers as Goethe (1749–1832), A. M. L. de Lamartine (1790–1869), Karl Marx (1818–83), G. B. Shaw (1856–1950) and Tolstoy (1828–1910).⁹³ The second section presents sayings about Islam by Christian Arab writers such as Shiblī Shumayyil (1860–1917), Rashīd Salīm al-Khūrī (1887–1984), Mīkhā'il Nu'ayma (1889–1988) and Jūrjī Zaydān (1861–1914).⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Writer's note: "an allusion to his novel *Abnā'* (sic!) *ḥāratinā*."

⁹⁰ Writer's note: "an allusion to the writer al-Ṭāhir ibn Jallūn."

⁹¹ Nabīl al-Sammān, *Hamazāt shayṭāniyya wa-Salmān Rushdī* (Amman: Jam'iyat A'cām al-Maṭābi' al-Ta'āwuniyya, 1989), 117.

⁹² *Al-Ra'd* 17; translation according to Arberry 1979 [1964], 241.

⁹³ Sayyid Ḥāfiẓ Abū al-Futūḥ, *Qālū 'an al-Islām: Rasā'il ilā Salmān Rushdī min kibār mufakkirī wa-falāsifat al-'ālam al-masīhī* (Cairo: Madbūlī, 1989), 23–139.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141–61.

Another book, by Rif^{at} Sayyid Aḥmad, opens with the following Qur^ānic verse:

وَلَنْ تَرْضَىٰ عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ وَلَتَهُمْ

Never will the Jews be satisfied with thee, neither the Christians, not till thou followest their religion.⁹⁵

In an appendix the author lists the names of “the most famous of Western Orientalists, the majority of whom offended Islam, did not understand Islamic civilization and distorted its various symbols.” The more than 380 scholars are divided into seven sections according to their nationality—France, Germany, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, USA, and USSR.⁹⁶ As for the attitude of Muslim writers and intellectuals to Rushdie’s novel, the author argues that “the reactions of the Muslim collective mind (which is comprised of the nation’s writers, intellectuals and scholars) were varying between full rejection of the novel (this is the dominant characteristic of the reactions) and rejection with caution and reservations.”⁹⁷ However, he mentions three Muslim writers who supported Rushdie’s novel “without any reservations,” namely, Najīb Maḥfūz, Waḍḍāḥ Sharāra from the Lebanese University, and Ḥamīd al-

⁹⁵ *Al-Baqara* 120; translation according to Arberry 1979 [1964], 15.

⁹⁶ Rif^{at} Sayyid Aḥmad, *Āyāt shayṭāniyya: Jadaliyyat al-ṣirā^c bayna al-Islām wa-l-gharb* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Sharqiyya, 1989), 187–93. For other books and articles attacking Rushdie, see Shams al-Dīn al-Fāsī, *Āyāt samāwiyya fī al-radd ‘alā kitāb Āyāt shayṭāniyya* (Cairo: Dār Māyū al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Nashr, 1989); Sa[‘]īd Ayyūb, *Shayṭān al-gharb: Salmān Rushdī al-rajul al-māriq* (Cairo: Dār al-I[‘]tiṣām, 1989); Aḥmad Dayḍāt, *Shayṭāniyyat al-Āyāt al-shayṭāniyya wa-kayfa khada^a Salmān Rushdī al-gharb* (Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīla, 1990); ‘Aṭā Allāh al-Mahājarānī, *Mu’āmarat al-Āyāt al-shayṭāniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Wasīla, 1993); ‘Abd al-Qādir Yūsuf, “Naqd li-riwāyat al-Āyāt al-shayṭāniyya li-Salmān Rushdī,” in Fawwāz Maṣṣūr, *Dirāsāt fī al-ḥaqāra al-islāmiyya wa-l-‘arabiyya* (al-Ṭayba: n.p., 1999), 9–25. For one of the few books in Arabic which acknowledges the writer’s right to create his own independent fictional world, see ‘Ādil Darwīsh and ‘Imād ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *al-Āyāt al-shayṭāniyya bayna al-qalam wa-l-sayf* (London: n.p., 1989). Ghālī Shukrī argues that most of the Muslim intellectuals who have attacked Rushdie never read the novel (*al-Waṭan al-‘arabī*, 17 March 1989, 22–27. Cf. al-‘Azm 1992, 230).

⁹⁷ Aḥmad 1989, 150.

Azrī.⁹⁸ Alluding to Najīb Maḥfūz's 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature, he describes the prize as "controlled by Jews who are hostile to Islam." Still, unlike most Islamist writers commenting on the Rushdie affair, the author presents Maḥfūz's full outlook regarding Rushdie's novel, which, although supportive of Rushdie's right to free expression, does not agree with its content.⁹⁹

Although he personally rejected any similarity between *Awlād ḥāratinā* and *The Satanic Verses*,¹⁰⁰ it was probably Maḥfūz's decision to denounce the death sentence pronounced against Rushdie that prompted radical Islamist circles to react. Following in the footsteps of Khumaynī, the blind Mufti of the radical Egyptian group *al-Jihād*, ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (b. 1938),¹⁰¹ delivered in April 1989 a *fatwā*

⁹⁸ Aḥmad 1989, 174–75 (Ḥamīd al-Azrī, according to the author, became an apostate from Islam following the death sentence against Rushdie). For a full presentation of Sharāra's outlook, see Waḍḍāḥ Sharāra, "Ḥarb ʿalā al-riwāya," in *al-ʿUnf al-uṣūlī: Muwājahāt al-sayf wa-l-qalam*, 59–80.

⁹⁹ Aḥmad 1989, 174–75.

¹⁰⁰ *Al-Ahrām*, 2 March 1989, 7. Cf. Maḥfūz's interview in *Der Spiegel*, no. 9, 1989 (according to Appignanesi and Maitland 1990, 140–42); Samia Mehrez, "Respected Sir," in *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, ed. Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 67; Samia Mehrez, *Egyptian Writers Between History and Fiction* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994), 23–24. On the reaction of Islamist writers to Maḥfūz's argument, see also al-Sammān 1989, 23. P. J. Stewart, who wrote the first thesis on the novel (P. J. Stewart, "Awlad Haretna: Its Value as Literature and the Public Reaction" [M.Litt. thesis, University of Oxford, 1963]) and published an English translation of it (Mahfouz 1981) argues that Maḥfūz had been influenced by George Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954). Based upon personal communication with Maḥfūz in 1962, Stewart says that Maḥfūz considered this play his favorite work by Shaw and that there are important similarities between the two works: each is a history of mankind in five parts, each includes the theme of immense longevity, and most important, both of them protest against the tyranny of a false God and contain a plea for the revival of true religion (P. J. Stewart, "An Arabic Nobodaddy: The Gebelawi of Naguib Mahfouz," in *Arabicus Felix, Luminosus Britannicus: Essays in Honour of A. F. L. Beeston on his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Alan Jones (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1991), 213–20).

¹⁰¹ On ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, see *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. J. L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1: 10–11.

calling for the death sentence against Maḥfūz himself.¹⁰² He argued that if such a *fatwā* had been published when Maḥfūz's *Awlād ḥāratinā* had first come out, Rushdie would never have dared to publish his blasphemies.¹⁰³ The *fatwā* of ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Raḥmān is believed to be behind the assassination attempt against Maḥfūz in Cairo on 14 October 1994.¹⁰⁴ ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, whose name has been associated with calls for violence and terrorism in the name of religion, left Egypt in 1990 and was able to take up residence in the United States, thanks to what American officials admitted were a series of administrative errors. In 1994 he was tried in Egypt in absentia, convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison. However, by then he was about to stand trial in New York on a twenty-count indictment for his role in the plot to blow up the United Nations and other New York monuments.¹⁰⁵

Yet, in total contrast to the reactions in the late 1950s, following the outcry of the Islamist circles against Maḥfūz's novel, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's *fatwā* aroused many protests in the Arab world,¹⁰⁶ as did Khumaynī's *fatwā* against Rushdie. Many of these protests were incorporated later in *For Rushdie: Essays by Arab and Muslim Writers in Defense of Free Speech*,¹⁰⁷ among them the Syrian Adūnīs (b. 1930), the Palestinians Maḥmūd Darwīsh (b. 1941), Imīl Ḥabībī (1921–1996), Anton Shammās (b. 1950), and Liyāna Badr (b. 1952), the Saudi ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf (1933–2004), the Egyptian Ṣunʿ Allāh Ibrāhīm (b. 1937), the Lebanese Ḥanān al-Shaykh (b. 1945) and Amin Maalouf (Amīn Maʿlūf) (b. 1949), and the Moroccans Mohamed Berrada (Muḥammad Barrāda) (b. 1938) and Tahar Ben Jelloun (al-Ṭāhir ibn Jallūn) (b. 1944). Moreover, stating that no Muslim could be killed without a full and fair trial, Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī, then the Grand Mufti of Egypt (and subsequently the

¹⁰² *Al-Aḥālī*, 12 April 1989, 13.

¹⁰³ Ruthven 1990, 116; Miller 1996, 53. In an interview with the *New Yorker*, 30 January 1995, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān denied that he had issued a *fatwā*, asserting that his comments had been misunderstood (according to Miller 1996, 481, n. 41).

¹⁰⁴ See *al-Kifāḥ al-ʿarabī*, 24 October 1994, 51–52.

¹⁰⁵ Miller 1996, 53.

¹⁰⁶ E.g., *al-Akḥbār*, 17 May 1989, 9; *al-Wafd*, 30 May 1989, 9; *al-Aḥālī*, 7 June 1989, 11; *al-Shirāʿ*, 15 May 1989, 52; *al-Hadaḥ*, 9 April 1989, 40–43.

¹⁰⁷ Translated by Kenneth Whitehead and Kelvin Anderson (New York: George Braziller, 1994).

president of al-Azhar), rejected the *fatwā* against Maḥfūz out of hand.¹⁰⁸

Awlād ḥāratinā, as of this writing, has still not been published in Egypt in book form and does not appear on the lists of Maḥfūz's works habitually given in the back of his books.¹⁰⁹ It is significant to mention Judith Miller's observations, after meeting Maḥfūz in early 1994:

Now the silence of intellectuals was not officially enforced; it was voluntary. Some intellectuals had been terrified into passivity. ... Even before Mahfouz was attacked, he had softened his own defense of fellow writer Salman Rushdie to avoid antagonizing the militants. ... Mahfouz had told me that Rushdie's work, which he said he had not read, was "very disturbing." Rushdie had "insulted Islam," and insults had "consequences." ... I was saddened by Mahfouz's retreat on such a critical principle of free expression. His revised position was not all that different from that of the Muslim brotherhood or, for that matter, from that of Sheikh Abdel Rahman in jail in New York.¹¹⁰

A good illustration of the way the Islamist literary discourse takes on the secular canonical center of the Arabic literary system as seen against the background of the Rushdie and Maḥfūz affair is given by Ṣādiq Jalāl al-ʿAẓm in his book *Dihniyyat al-taḥrīm* (The proscribing mentality) (1992):

Actually, if we lead Islamist logic to its utmost boundaries, it would be better if the Arab world had not known phenomena such as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn or Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm or Najīb Maḥfūz or Adūnīs or Khalīl Ḥāwī, since each of them represents a mode of intellectual and artistic expression which is imported from the West: criticism, theater, novel, and modern poetry.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ *Al-Aḥālī*, 3 May 1989, 3; Ruthven 1990, 115–16.

¹⁰⁹ On the connection between the Rushdie and Maḥfūz affairs, see also Shukrī 1992, 307–346; Netton 1996. On the controversy surrounding Maḥfūz's book, see also Muḥammad Jalāl Kishk, *Awlād ḥāratinā fihā qawlān*, Cairo: al-Zahrāʾ li-l-ʿIlām wa-l-Nashr, 1989.

¹¹⁰ Miller 1996, 71. On the other hand, we find Maḥfūz saying on 3 June 1999: "It is absolutely inadmissible that a book or a painting be banned because it is supposedly base. If we were to start condemning works on moral grounds, we would be unable to stop. We can, at most, give our opinion: it is not our right to prevent others from doing the same" (Naguib Mahfouz, *Naguib Mahfouz at Sidi Gaber: Reflections of a Nobel Laureate 1994–2001* [Cairo & New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001], 71).

¹¹¹ Al-ʿAẓm 1992, 82. In a note al-ʿAẓm quotes the Lebanese writer Ilyās Khūrī (b. 1948), in the Lebanese newspaper *al-Safīr* (26 November 1990), accusing the Islamist groups of attempting to return, from the literary point of

Al-^cAẓm's major argument is that all attacks against Rushdie have been based upon the assumption that literature, and art in general, must be submitted to Islamic concepts, that is, the literary discourse is not independent but has to remain within the limits of the religious discourse. Al-^cAẓm quotes a review, entitled "Nihilistic, Negative, Satanic," that Professor Syed Ali Ashraf, Director-General of the Islamic Academy in Cambridge, wrote about Rushdie's novel in which he typically asks such questions as "How could the two characters Gibreel (Gabriel) and Saladin fall from the sky and still be alive? How could they get transformed and how could they become normal again? How could they have the normal human body and how could they at the same time move about and influence people across space and time?"¹¹²

The clash between religious and secular discourses by no means entails that all advocates in either camp support the conclusions expected of them. Even religious notables are sometimes found to oppose the conclusions generally derived from the religious discourse. The collection of articles entitled *al-^cUnf al-uṣūlī: Muwājahāt al-sayf wa-l-qalam* (Fundamentalist violence: the clash of the sword and the pen) (1995) consists mainly of articles about the Rushdie affair by secular intellectuals denouncing the Islamist position regarding the affair.¹¹³ One article, by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh (b. 1935), the Lebanese Shiite spiritual

view, to the pre-modern genres, such as the *qaṣīda*, with al-Khalīl prosody. For a critical response to several of al-^cAẓm's views, see Aḥmad Barqāwī, "Asīr al-wahm," in *al-^cUnf al-uṣūlī: Muwājahāt al-sayf wa-l-qalam*, 81–114. For subsequent arguments by al-^cAẓm, see his *Mā ba^cda Dhihniyyat al-taḥrīm: Qirā^cat al-Āyāt al-shayṭāniyya, radd wa-ta^cqīb* (Beyond the proscribing mentality: reading *The Satanic Verses*, reply and commentary) (London & Limassol: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis). The original title of the book, according to the author, was shorter, *Qirā^cat al-Āyāt al-shayṭāniyya*, but the publisher changed it to the present title alluding to its relationship to the first book (Saqr Abū Fakhr, *Ṣādiq Jalāl al-^cAẓm: Ḥiwār bi-lā ḍifāf* [Beirut: al-Mu^cassasa al-^cArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1998], 46), and indeed, the book includes articles written in reply to al-^cAẓm's *Dhihniyyat al-taḥrīm* as well as his comments. For al-^cAẓm's views on the topic, see also Abū Fakhr 1998, 67–78.

¹¹² Al-^cAẓm 1992, 237–38. Ashraf's article was originally published in *Impact International* (London), 28 October–10 November 1988 and published again in Appignanesi and Maitland 1990, 18–21.

¹¹³ The book, published by Riyāḍ al-Rayyis in London, is a selection of articles that appeared after the outbreak of the Rushdie affair in the journal *al-Nāqid* (London).

leader of Ḥizb Allāh (Party of God), entitled “Love of East and identity of Islam,” is the sole contribution in a section entitled “Islamiyyūn ḍidda al-ta^ʿṣṣub” (Islamists against fanaticism). Faḍl Allāh does not adopt the usual religious stance vis-à-vis Rusdhi¹¹⁴ and states that there is no topic that is not open to discussion, that Islamic history has been culturally diverse, and that “this diversity has made Islam a civilization and the Muslim a rich human being.”¹¹⁵ The collection opens with an article by ^ʿAzīz al-^ʿAẓma (Aziz al-Azmeh) entitled “Riwāya kāfira” (Novel of unbelief) attacking the Islamist view with respect to the Rushdie affair.¹¹⁶ Al-^ʿAẓma ironically points out that the Islamist radicals base their attitude to the novel, “as they are accustomed to do,” on the “formula” that “ignorance is a sign of piety.”¹¹⁷ He concludes with the following lines:

The claim of the Islamists that they are speaking in the name of “the people” and that they are representing the majority is nothing but an imaginary expression of an indomitable political desire. The claim that Salman Rushdie and others that do not agree with the Islamists are rising against their history, nobility, and heritage and are propagandists for the West against Islam, is nothing but proof of the conflict the Islamists are living in, not with the West—since the Islamist political regimes are in harmony with it—but with modernity and progress in their own countries. We should emphasize that their illusion of totally representing the heritage, and their attempt to confiscate every important saying, point to a craze to confiscate the future in order to lay down foundations of comprehensive dictatorship in the name of a pure past devoid of any history.

¹¹⁴ See Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh, “Hawā al-sharq wa-huwiyyat al-Islām,” in *al-ʿUnf al-uṣūlī: Muwājahāt al-sayf wa-l-qalam*, 197–213. On Faḍl Allāh’s outlook in that domain, see also Aḥmad 1989, 166. On Faḍl Allāh’s general conceptions, see Esposito 1995, 1: 453–56.

¹¹⁵ Faḍl Allāh 1995, 213

¹¹⁶ ^ʿAzīz al-^ʿAẓma, “Riwāya kāfira,” in *al-ʿUnf al-uṣūlī: Muwājahāt al-sayf wa-l-qalam*, 13–21. For a critical approach to al-^ʿAẓma’s article, see Anīs al-Jazāʿirī, “Ḥadātha salafiyya!?” in *al-ʿUnf al-uṣūlī: Muwājahāt al-sayf wa-l-qalam*, 23–38. Al-Jazāʿirī rejects the analogy made by al-^ʿAẓma between *The Satanic Verses* and *Awlād ḥāratinā* (35):

(أولاد حارتنا) تشخيص إنساني – تاريخي، بضمن خطاب روائي جديد، أما (الآيات الشيطانية) فمحاولة اغتيال، محاولة قتل، مع سبق الإصرار والترصد لتراث إنساني عريق، فيه ما في كل الأفعال الإنسانية، من سمو وانحطاط.

¹¹⁷ Al-^ʿAẓma, “Riwāya kāfira,” 17.

This is a program that anyone desiring any poor backward [form of] fascism could be proud of.¹¹⁸

Al-^cAzma explains elsewhere that “in many third-world countries, *The Satanic Verses* is characterized as the work of a self-hater eager to ingratiate himself with the coloniser simply because the novel challenges the most conservative instincts of those groups claiming Muslim ‘nativism.’”¹¹⁹

The clash outlined in the foregoing between the Islamist and the modernist discourses illustrates that Arabic literature is still fettered by religious restrictions. In this respect, as we have seen above, there is no difference between the various genres. Thus, Homi K. Bhabha’s reading of Rushdie’s blasphemy, following Yunus Samad’s analysis,¹²⁰ seems to be without solid ground, at least not from the point of view of Arabic literature. Bhabha says:

It is the medium Rushdie uses to reinterpret the Koran that constitutes the crime. ... By casting his revisionary narrative in the form of the novel—largely unknown to traditional Islamic literature—Rushdie violates the poetic license granted to critics of the Islamic establishment. ... Rushdie’s sin lies in opening up a space of discursive contestation that places the authority of the Koran within a perspective of historical and cultural relativism. It is not that the “content” of the Koran is directly disputed; rather, by revealing other enunciatory positions and possibilities within the framework of the Koranic reading, Rushdie performs the subversion of its authenticity through the act of cultural translation—he relocates the Koran’s “intentionality” by repeating and reinscribing it in the locale of the novel of postwar cultural migrations and diasporas.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 21. Cf. al-^cAzm 1992, 74–75. Cf. the argument of Riyāḍ Najīb al-Rayyis (b. 1937) in *Aktubu ilaykum bi-ghaḍab* (London: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis, 1996), 27–28:

قضية سلمان رشدي . . . قضية إيرانية داخلية تتعلق بالصراع على السلطة . . . هي قضية سياسية استخدم الإسلام فيها سلاحاً من أسلحة المعركة المستمرة بين إيران والغرب . . . فهي ليست قضية أدبية أو فكرية تحسم بالجدال بين المثقفين.

¹¹⁹ Aziz al-Azmeh, “The Satanic Flame,” *New Statesman and Society* 20 (January 1989): 16–17. Cf. Brennan 1989, 145.

¹²⁰ Y. Samad, “Book Burning and Race Relations: Political Mobilisation of Bradford Muslims,” *New Community* 18, 4 (1991): 507–19.

¹²¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York:

If one should look at all for any generic differentiation, the matter touches on the popularity of the genre: the more popular the literary work, the stronger the demand to see it bound in traditional religious fetters. Thus, Darwīsh's poem cited above, "O My Father, I Am Yūsuf" had not provoked any public storm before Khalīfa sang it. The same could be said about Maḥfūz's novel *Children of Our Alley*, the "danger" of which increased only in the light of the popularity of *The Satanic Verses*.

Nevertheless, especially from the view point of the intellectuals who expressed their unlimited support for Rushdie and Maḥfūz, what happened in the 1980s is totally different from what happened 30 years before; and seems to be from another planet compared to the Arab literary arena of the 1920s. Significantly enough, the same change has occurred during the same period on the level of the literary texts themselves. Canonical Arabic literature has witnessed during the twentieth century a strong trend aiming at gradually separating it from its strict Islamic moorings in order to let it follow its course as secularized literature.¹²²

4. *Linear versus Ironic Intertextuality*

In order to illustrate the nature of the "secularized" trend in Arabic literature and the revolutionary attitude to traditional religious and literary texts it introduced into the literary system, one can point to the dialectical cultural and poetic tension between the conceptions of the Egyptian poet and prose writer Muḥammad Tawfīq al-Bakrī (1870–1932) and the Syrian poet Adūnīs (b. 1930), both of whom are Muslims.¹²³ Considered to be pillars of Arabic literature, each of them in his own time, the short temporal span between them reveals the great changes that occurred in Arabic literature during the twentieth century.

Routledge, 1994), 226.

¹²² This trend, supported mainly by Arab writers and intellectuals living in the West, has been represented by avant-garde journals like *Mawāqif* (Paris & Beirut) edited by Adūnīs (b. 1930) (1st issue: January–February 1969) and *Farādīs* (Cologne & Paris) edited by ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Janābī (b. 1944) (1st issue: July 1990). For an illustration of the main conceptions of this trend, see Nadīm al-Bīṭār (Bayṭār), "Naḥwa ʿalmana inqilābiyya," *Mawāqif* 2 (1969): 34–50.

¹²³ The history of Arab literature has provided many examples that, although the Christian contributions were significant in changing literary norms, the actual changes took place only after the participation of Muslim writers in the reformist efforts (Shmuel Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry 1800–1970* [Leiden: Brill, 1976], 57–58).

Al-Bakrī was a typical representative of neoclassicist rhetorical Egyptian prose and the author of *Ṣahārīj al-lu'lu'* (The reservoirs of pearls),¹²⁴ in which he said he had been striving to achieve the eloquence of al-Ḥarīrī (1054–1122) and the language of Ru'ba b. al-°Ajjāj (685–762). This work, which is by no means religious, contains three travel impressions (two from France and one from Constantinople), an ode to solitude, a description of a ball in Vienna, a glorification of Saladin, and finally the announcement of the birth of the author's son. In his travel impressions, al-Bakrī tried his skills at imitating French poetic prose—for example, when describing the *Bois de Boulogne* and the battle of Austerlitz—but the result is full of allusions to Arabic proverbs and Arab history. Since he was especially fond of employing *gharīb* (rare words), frequent similes and classical poetic diction, sometimes even for romantic themes, the author's style is hardly reminiscent of the spirit of modern times. Al-Bakrī's poetry and prose were considered canonical by the literary establishment of his time. According to °Abbās Maḥmūd al-°Aqqād (1889–1964), his love poem “Dhāt al-Qawāfī” was the first to use *shi'ṛ mursal* (blank verse).¹²⁵ Al-Bakrī was not only a distinguished poet from the very canonical center of the Arabic literary system, but also a religious notable who belonged to the Bakriyya Ṣūfī brotherhood (*ṭarīqa*). He was later to be appointed Sheikh of this brotherhood, and he was likewise appointed to the leadership of all Ṣūfī brotherhoods (*Mashyakhat al-Mashā'ikh*) and to that of the organization that registered the descendants of the Prophet (*Niqābat al-Ashrāf*).¹²⁶

Significantly, since the 1950s, no poet has been able to be simultaneously a central figure in the Arabic literary system and a traditional religious notable; literary modernism has not been able to live in harmony

¹²⁴ See Muḥammad Tawfīq al-Bakrī, *Ṣahārīj al-lu'lu'* (Cairo: Maḥmūd Dajjāj al-Kutubī, 1907).

¹²⁵ On al-Bakrī and his literary activities, see C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden: Brill, 1937–49), Suppl., 3: 81–82; °Umar al-Dasūqī, *Fī al-adab al-ḥadīth* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-°Arabī, 1959), 2: 401–436; °Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Mu°jam al-mu°allifīn* (Damascus: Maṭba°at al-Taraqqī, 1960), 9: 141; Moreh 1976, 130–33; Māhir Ḥasan Fahmī, *Muḥammad Tawfīq al-Bakrī* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1982); Brugman 1984, 80–82; Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-A°lām* (Beirut: Dār al-°Ilm li-l-Malāyīn, 1984), 6: 65–66; Meisami and Starkey 1998, 1: 131.

¹²⁶ Among al-Bakrī's works is also *Bayt al-Ṣiddīq*, in which he outlined his autobiography, as well as his religious and literary career (*Bayt al-Ṣiddīq* [Cairo: Maṭba°at al-Mu°ayyad, 1905], 11–26).

with traditional religious concepts. The literary vision of Adūnīs differs radically from that of al-Bakrī, whose death two years after Adūnīs's birth represents metaphorically the revolutionary change in Arabic literature, which comes to differ in nature from the whole canonical Arabic literature of the first half of the twentieth century. The "Arabic-Islamic concept," as Adūnīs himself states in his comments on the poetry of Aḥmad Shawqī (1868–1932),¹²⁷ has been supplanted by a new concept that holds that Islam is not only a religion but also a literary and cultural heritage.¹²⁸ Adūnīs sees two major trends in the 1950s in the field of Arabic poetic modernism, one stressing the national Arab identity of poetry and the other inspired by Marxist-Communism. There is, however, a third trend that reads the Arabic heritage in a different way, that is, to include not only pre-Islamic poetry, but also other cultures that have interacted with Arab culture, so that, for example, the Sumarian, Babylonian, and Canaanite cultures, are seen as part of the Arab cultural heritage:

¹²⁷ See Adūnīs, "Aḥmad Shawqī: Shā'ir al-bayān al-awwal," *Fuṣūl* 3, 1 (October–December 1982): 18–22.

¹²⁸ Adūnīs's conceptions are presented here only from the literary point of view. As to his world view, his opinions have gone through several stages since the late 1940s. Ṣādiq Jalāl al-°Aẓm refers to Adūnīs in his last intellectual stage as *dā'iya min du'āt al-istishrāq al-islāmānī al-ma'kūs* (one of the propagandists of reversed Islamist Orientalism) (al-°Aẓm 1992, 67). This stage is illustrated, for example, in his arguments following the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 (e.g., *Mawāqif* 34 [Winter 1979]: 158), which contradict his outlook ten years before (e.g., *Mawāqif* 6 [October–December 1969]: 3). Adūnīs's new stage is summarized by al-°Aẓm as follows (al-°Aẓm 1992, 71):

وعند المقارنة والمفاضلة بين الشرق والغرب وخصائص كل منهما يتعصب أدونيس لشرقه تماما كما يتعصب السواد الأعظم من المستشرقين لغربهم فيرى أن الفكر الغربي يرسى الواقع في أفق المادّة في حين يرسيه الفكر الشرقي في أفق الوحي ومن يتجرأ عندنا في هذه الأيام على تفضيل المادّة على الوحي؟

Al-°Aẓm also ridiculed Adūnīs's frequent ideological transformations and mentions that his current rejection of nationalism, secularism, socialism, Marxism, communism and capitalism should be viewed against the background of his previous nationalism, secularism, Nasserist socialism and radical leftism (al-°Aẓm 1992, 70). On the new intellectual stage of Adūnīs and his "reversed Orientalism" against the background of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1985 [1978]), see Sadiq Jalal al-°Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," *Khamsin* 8 (1981): 5–26; al-°Aẓm 1992, 49–85.

According to this conception Arabism took on another dimension. It is not Arabism of race and nation, but Arabism of language and culture, in the sense that in linguistic and cultural Arabism all ancient heritages mingled together. In other words, this view considered the Arabic cultural poetic heritage not as a separate independent bloc, but a living continuity of a civilized heritage of about five thousand years. Hence, the Arabic language does not take its individuality and particularity only from its containing the whole of the pre-Islamic and Islamic heritage, but also from its richness and continuing capacity to revive and widen, that is, from its genius to absorb the ancient heritage that preceded it, and from its being the historical continuity of this heritage and its creative completion.¹²⁹

In order to illustrate this new concept of modernism, suffice it to compare the attitude towards the Qur^ānic text of neoclassical poetry and the new poetry advocated by Adūnīs. Shawqī's poem, "al-Jāmi'a al-Miṣriyya" (The Egyptian University),¹³⁰ recited during the inauguration of the University's institutions in 1931, includes a clear allusion to the Qur^ān:

إسكندرية، عاد كنزك سالماً حتى كأن لم يلتهمه ضرام
لته من لهب الحريق أنامل برد على ما لامست، وسلام

Alexandria, your treasure has returned safe,
As if the fire never swallowed it up,
It was gathered from the flames by fingertips,
Coolness be with what they have touched, and safety.

These verses indicate that the city, which in antiquity had been one of the greatest cultural centers, is regaining its glory in modern Egypt. Mentioning the fire that is said to have destroyed Alexandria's Royal Library, Shawqī alludes to a Qur^ānic verse:

قُلْنَا: يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ

¹²⁹ Adūnīs 1993, 101–102. Jihād Fāḍil, who does not hide his disagreement with Adūnīs, distorts this conception when speaking of Adūnīs's attempt to "fragment Arab Islamic heritage and divide it into different 'heritages' (*shardhamat al-turāth al-‘arabī al-islāmī wa-tafkīkuhu ilā turāthāt*)" (*al-Adab al-ḥadīth fī Lubnān: Naẓra mughāyira* [London & Beirut: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis, 1996], 334).

¹³⁰ *Al-Shawqiyyāt*, (Cairo: n.p., n.d.), 4: 10–13.

We said: “O fire, be coolness and safety for Abraham!”¹³¹

This allusion is considered to be entirely within the linear mode of intertextuality,¹³² that is, it draws on the Qur^ānic image in full agreement with the religious discourse. That same discourse is totally rejected by Adūnīs in his poem, “al-Mawt” (Death), subtitled “Thalāth marthiyāt ilā abī” (Three elegies for my father), from the collection *Qaṣā'id Ūlā* (First poems) (1957). In the second elegy, he writes:

يا لهب النار الذي ضمّه
لا تك بردا، لا ترفرف سلام
في صدره النار التي كُورت
أرضا عبدناها وصيغت أنام.
لم يفنَ بالنار ولكنه
عاد بها للمنشأ الأول
للزمن المقبل
كالشمس في خطورها الأول
تأفل عن أجفاننا بغتة

¹³¹ *Al-Anbiyā'* 69; translation according to Arberry 1979 [1964], 328.

¹³² Cf. Sasson Somekh, *Genre and Language in Modern Arabic Literature*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991), 53. See also this linear use in translated prose: Salīm Turkiyya (1999; cf.n. 63): 36, 245 (the original French appears in Nassib 1994, 34, 226). We find such intertextual linear allusion to the above Qur^ānic verse in poetry by non-Muslims, such as the Jewish Iraqi poet Shmuel Moreh (b. 1933) in his poem “Ḍaḥkat al-qadar” (The laugh of destiny) (*al-Sharq*, March 1972, 8; Shmuel Moreh, *Tilka ayyām al-ṣibā* (Jerusalem: Rābiṭat al-Jāmi'īyyīn al-Yahūd al-Nāziḥīn min al-ʿIrāq, 1998), 111–12). The Jewish writer Samīr Naqqāsh (1938–2004) in his novel *Nzūla wa-Khayṭ al-Shayṭān* (Tenants and cobwebs) (Jerusalem: Rābiṭat al-Jāmi'īyyīn al-Yahūd al-Nāziḥīn min al-ʿIrāq, 1986) used the same allusion in an explicit sexual context (p. 21):

أنت الساعة يا صبرية في حزن افرام، مشتعل الجمش والخمش والحزن والتقبيل، وبلا آخر ينهال على
بدنك، يمطر بردا وسلاما. يطفئ جمره مستعرة في أعطافك.

Cf. Samīr Naqqāsh, *al-Khaṭā'* (Jerusalem: Maṭba'at al-Ma'ārif, 1971), 104.

وهي وراء الأفق لم تأفل

O flames of the fire that embraced him
Do not be coolness, do not flutter safety
In his heart is the fire that was rolled up
Into a land we worshipped and that was shaped as men.
He did not die in the fire but
Took it back to the first source
To the coming time
As the sun in its first rising
Goes down suddenly from our eyelids
But over the horizon it has not gone down.¹³³

The ironic mode of the intertextuality¹³⁴ is evident: while God commands fire to “be coolness and safety for Abraham,” Adūnīs demands the very opposite. Not only does the Qurʾānic allusion function in a radically different way from what we find in the original, it might be seen as implying a sarcastic comment on it.¹³⁵ Adūnīs here assumes the role of

¹³³ Adūnīs, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyya al-kāmila* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwda, 1988), 1: 39–40. This version of the elegy omits four lines of the first version (Adūnīs, *al-Āthār al-kāmila* [Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwda, 1971], 1: 117). On Adūnīs’s attitude in the 1990s to the Qurʾānic text, see Adūnīs, *al-Naṣṣ al-qurʾānī wa-āfāq al-kitāba* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1993), 19–37. For the aesthetic justifications regarding the issue of the changing versions of his poems and his concept of “final version” (*ṣiḡha nihāʾiyya*), see Adūnīs 1988, 1: 5–7. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that several of his poems, especially from the early 1950s, were revised in subsequent editions since they reflected the Syrian ideology that he later abandoned. Adūnīs’s first collection *Qālat al-ard* (The Earth says) (Damascus: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Hāshimiyya, 1954), for example, was changed in its subsequent editions to the point that it became “not revised poetry but new poetry” (Sharbal Dāghir, “*Qālat al-Ard* li-Adūnīs: Ayy zaman li-l-qaṣīda,” *al-Ḥayāt*, 7 September 1996, 16). Dār al-Jadīd in Beirut described the new edition it published in 1996 of *Qālat al-ard*, which is a faithful copy of the 1954 edition, as “pirated edition” (*ṭabʿa muqarṣana*) since it appeared without Adūnīs’s approval. See also Bāsiliyūs Ḥannā Bawārdī, “Bayna al-ṣaḥrāʾ wa-l-baḥr: Baḥṭh fī taʾthīr al-qawmiyyatayn al-lubnāniyya al-fīnīqiyya wa-l-sūriyya ʿalā al-adab al-ʿarabī al-muʿāṣir” (M.A. thesis, University of Haifa, 1998), 180–211.

¹³⁴ Cf. Somekh 1991, 61.

¹³⁵ Cf. the following lines by al-Bayyātī from his poem “Qamar Shīrāz” from the collection bearing the same title (1979) (al-Bayyātī, *Dīwān* [Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwda, 1979], 517; idem, *Qamar Shīrāz* [Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1984], 105):

the omnipotent almighty power who can guarantee eternal life for his dead father. This experience of being parallel to or one with God appears in many of Adūnīs' poems since the 1950s. In a poem entitled "Asrār" (Secrets), the poet says:

يضمّن الموت إلى صدره
مغامرا زاهدا
يحملنا سرّاً على سرّه
يجعل من كثرتنا واحداً.

Death embraces us
Risking His life, abstaining
Bearing us as a secret on His secret
Making from our plurality One.¹³⁶

If, against this background, it is little wonder that radical religious circles consider Adūnīs to be a *mulhid* (heretic) or *mukharrib* (saboteur),¹³⁷ interestingly, in contrast to other Muslim writers who in their writings deal with the Prophet,¹³⁸ Adūnīs has never been under a death threat.

أخفي فاجعة تحت قناع الكلمات. أقول لجرحي:
«لاتبرأ» ولحزني «لا تبرد» وأقول «اغتسلوا
بدمي» للعشاق

¹³⁶ Adūnīs 1988, 1: 37. For the last line, compare Adūnīs's collection *Mufrad bi-ṣiḡhat jam'* (Singular in the form of plural) (1975).

¹³⁷ E.g., the Muslim Egyptian journal *al-I'tiṣām*, April 1989, 6, in which the poet is described as *al-muslim al-murtadd wa-l-mutanaṣṣir* (the Christianized apostate Muslim). When the Yemeni poet and scholar °Abd al-°Azīz al-Maqālīḥ (b. 1939) was considered as *mulhid* by a Saudi journal following the publication of one of his poems (*al-Majalla al-°arabiyya*, 5,91 [May 1985], as quoted in Adūnīs, *al-Naṣṣ al-qur'ānī*, p. 191). Adūnīs wrote a few comments on the issue of poetry and blasphemy that can be considered as a defense on his part against the accusations leveled against him (Adūnīs, *al-Naṣṣ al-qur'ānī*, 183–90). For Adūnīs's views regarding the traditional Islamic framework of Arabic culture, see his introduction to Aḥmad Shawqī, *Dīwān al-nahḍa* (Beirut: Dār al-°Ilm li-l-Malāyīn, 1982), 5–19; Adūnīs, "al-Shar' wa-l-shi'r," *Fuṣūl* (Autumn 1992): 66–70; Adūnīs 1993, 154–59.

¹³⁸ See above the cases of Salman Rushdie and Najīb Maḥfūz.

Timothy Brennan states that “there has traditionally been less tolerance towards attempts to humanize Muhammad or historicize the Quran than to attack God himself.”¹³⁹ The outstanding example is the Urdu poem “*Shikwah*” (Complaint) by Muḥammad Iqbāl (1875–1938), in which he accuses God of infidelity. He catalogues all that Muslims have done for God over the centuries, and points out that nevertheless God has neglected them and allowed the Muslim world to be destroyed. In one of the more startling passages of the poem, Iqbāl exclaims: “At times You have pleased us, at other times / (it is not to be said), You are a whore.”¹⁴⁰ Iqbāl was angrily denounced as a blasphemer, but his life was never in danger.

Adūnīs’s new poetic vision has gradually penetrated into the center of the Arabic literary system. There is no better proof of this development than the sharp reactions to that vision from both marginal edges of the present literary system: on the one hand, the conservative, especially religious circles, who consider it as a heresy and a great danger,¹⁴¹ and on the other hand, the modernist circles who refer to Adūnīs’s revolutionary vision not only as traditional but also as a “disgrace.”¹⁴² Still, his vision has never gained much popularity among the Arab masses, and Adūnīs himself, not to mention representatives of modernist circles opposing his vision, is mainly active in the West.

5. Conclusion

From the seventh century the activity in the Arabic literary system generally occurred within the borders defined by Islam, as well as by a cultural heritage that had become nearly as sacred as the religious laws, although Arabic literature was never wholly a religious one.¹⁴³ Yet, most contemporary literary endeavors have carefully avoided any infringement of the basic Islamic conceptions. At the same time, the growing number of

¹³⁹ Brennan 1989, 146.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 143.

¹⁴¹ E.g., Anwar al-Jundī, *Matā ya‘ūdu al-adab al-mu‘āṣir ilā aṣālatihi* (Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, n.d.).

¹⁴² E.g., ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Janābī, *Risāla maftūḥa ilā Adūnīs* (Paris: Manshūrāt Farādīs, 1994), published as the first work of a series entitled *Fadh al-sā’id* (The disgrace of the prevailing situation). Cf. also the above-mentioned journal *Farādīs*, as well as *al-Laḥza al-shi‘riyya* edited by Fawzī Karīm (b. 1945) (London, 1st issue, Summer 1992).

¹⁴³ Cf. Ghālī Shukrī, *Shi‘runā al-ḥadīth . . . ilā ayna?* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1978 [1968]), 19.

cases in which attempts at censorship have been challenged by human rights organizations and have produced protests from intellectuals throughout the Arab world and outside it is one of the indications that Arabic culture since the nineteenth century has been gradually detaching itself from subjection to the religious factor alone. In addition, contemporary Arabic literary output is no longer, as it was in medieval times, the production so-to-speak of an international cultural community. It has been gradually becoming again, as it was in the pre-Islamic period, a literature of the Arabs alone. In the Abbasid period, many of the central literary figures were of non-Arab descent, Persians being particularly numerous. From about the tenth century onwards, Muslim Persia began to replace Arabic with Persian as the predominant literary medium, a process that was continued elsewhere outside the Arabic speaking countries. Even in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Arab poets of non-Arab descent could become part of the center of the literary canon.¹⁴⁴ Today the three major peoples of the Middle East, Arabs, Turks and Iranians, have become intellectually isolated from one another. Arabic is still taught as a classical and scriptural language in Iranian schools and it has also been reintroduced into Turkish religious seminaries, but in effect Cairo, Teheran and Istanbul are culturally very remote from each other.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, although the literary production of Islamist circles in the Arab world is considered to be an integral part of the discourse that brings together also the Islamist Persian and Turkish literary writings, this discourse is by no means part of the contemporary literary canon.

Also worth mentioning are the minor, but sometimes important, exceptions of Christian and Jewish contributions to Arabic literature.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ For example, the Egyptian Aḥmad Shawqī, *Amīr al-Shu‘arā’* (The Prince of Poets), was of Kurdish and Arab descent on his paternal side and of Turkish and Greek descent on his maternal side (cf. Brugman 1984, 35–36).

¹⁴⁵ See Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968), 73. Cf. the rationale behind the study of Islamic popular literature and the literary relationship between the Arabs, Turks and Persians, as alluded to respectively in Ḥusayn Muḥib al-Miṣrī, *Fī al-adab al-sha‘bī al-islāmī al-muqāran* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Thaqāfiyya li-l-Nashr, 2001), esp. 5–9, 229–40; idem, *Ṣilāt bayna al-‘arab wa-l-furs wa-l-turk: Dirāsa ta’rīkhīyya adabiyya* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Thaqāfiyya li-l-Nashr, 2001), esp. 5–7; idem, *Bayna al-adab al-‘arabī wa-l-turkī: Dirāsa fī al-adab al-islāmī al-muqāran* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Thaqāfiyya li-l-Nashr, 2003), esp. 7–28.

¹⁴⁶ On the contribution of Christian and Jewish poets to Arabic poetry after

That the contribution of Christian Arab writers and intellectuals to modern literature in its formative stage in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was highly significant is not in any doubt. However, it is instructive to recall I. I. Krachkovskii's remark that the literary work of the Christian writer Nāṣīf al-Yāzījī (1800–1871) was the first to violate the Muslim principal *al-ʿArabiyya lā tatanaṣṣaru* (Arabic language cannot become Christian), which means that “Arabic literature cannot grant recognition to Christian writers.”¹⁴⁷ It also goes without saying that a contributory factor in the lead taken by Egypt in the Arab renaissance was the influx into that country, since the nineteenth century, of Christian Syrian men of letters, who pioneered free journalism and various cultural activities there. Christian Syrian writers also comprised the major nucleus of the intensive Arabic literary activities in the Mahjar, especially in North and South America. Still, Arab Christianity has never been disconnected from Arabic-Islamic social and cultural systems, and Christian writers in Arabic have never entered the canonical center of the literary system without adopting the Arabic-Islamic literary heritage.¹⁴⁸ It is interesting, especially against this background, that the writing of Arabic literature by Christians has never been

the rise of Islam, see Louis Cheikho, *Shuʿarāʾ al-naṣrāniyya baʿda al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1967); S. M. Stern, “Arabic Poems by Spanish-Hebrew Poets,” in *Romanica et occidentalia: Etudes dédiées à la mémoire de Hiram Peri (Pflaum)*, ed. M. Lazar (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1963), 254–63; R. Brann, “The Arabized Jews,” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. M. R. Menocal, R. P. Scheindlin, and M. Sells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 435–54.

¹⁴⁷ I. I. Krachkovskii, *al-Riwāya al-taʾrīkhīyya fī al-adab al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth wa-dirāsāt ukhrā* (tr. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-ʿAṭāwī) (Rabat: Dār al-Kalām li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1989), 24. Cf. Ajami 1998, 42–43.

¹⁴⁸ See the Christian writers mentioned in Hilary Kilpatrick, “Brockelmann, Kaḥḥāla & Co: Reference Works on the Arabic Literature of Early Ottoman Syria,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 7.1 (2004): 33–51. Kilpatrick shows, for example, how Carl Brockelmann omits in his *GAL* all texts by Jews and Christians intended only for their co-religionists: “Arabic literature is essentially Islamic” (ibid., 34). Cf. Ilyās Khūrī’s statement in his introduction to a collection of articles dealing with the Arab Christians (*al-Masīḥīyyūn al-ʿarab: Dirāsāt wa-munāqashāt* [Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Abḥāth al-ʿArabiyya, 1981], 9):

إن المسيحية العربية هي جزء عضوي من الواقع الاجتماعي والثقافي العربي والإسلامي، وهي بالتالي لا تستطيع الانفصال عنه، وإلا فقدت هويتها وتميزها.

totally confined to secular intellectuals who accept the Muslim framework of Arabic culture. Even today we find Christian religious notables who are engaged in composing traditional Arabic poetry. One outstanding example is the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, Shanūda the Third, who has written poems in the *qaṣīda* form and even recited some in public gatherings.¹⁴⁹ In any case, in contrast to the formative stage of modern Arabic literature, the number of Christian writers has become constantly fewer, and Christians were the first to adopt other languages as a new medium for literary creation.

The phenomenon of Arabic literary production by Jews was similarly rare under the rule of Islam. We know of the existence of Jewish poets writing in Arabic in pre-Islamic Arabia, but after the rise of Islam in the seventh century A.D. it was only during the era of Muslim rule in Spain that Jewish poets became well versed in literary Arabic and even won fame.¹⁵⁰ One interesting phenomenon that can help shed light on the interaction between literature, ethnicity and religion is the short and marginal episode of Jewish-Arabic literary writing in the twentieth century, specifically, the production of Arabic belles-lettres by Jewish Iraqi writers beginning in the early 1920s:¹⁵¹ when this activity flowered in Iraq in the 1920s and 1930s, the authors showed obvious signs of Islamization.¹⁵²

Contemporary Arabic literature by writers of other religions, such as

¹⁴⁹ See *al-Ahrām*, 8 February 1994, 14.

¹⁵⁰ On the linguistic situation in al-Andalus, see David J. Wasserstein, "The Language Situation in al-Andalus," in *Studies on the Muwašṣaḥ and the Kharja*, ed. Alan Jones and Richard Hitchcock (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1991), 1–15.

¹⁵¹ On the writing of Arabic literature by Jews, see R. Snir, "Cultural Changes as Reflected in Literature: The Beginning of the Arabic Short Story by Jewish Authors in Iraq" (Hebrew), *Pe'amim* (1988): 108–29; idem, "'We Were Like Those Who Dream': Iraqi-Jewish Writers in Israel in the 1950's," *Prooftexts* 11 (1991): 153–73; idem, "Arabic Literature of Iraqi Jews: The Dynamics of the Jewish Cultural System and the Relationship with the Arabic Cultural System" (Hebrew), *Miqqedem Umiyyam* 6 (1995): 255–88; idem, "'My Heart Beats with Love of the Arabs': Iraqi Jews Writing in Arabic in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 1,2 (2002): 182–203.

¹⁵² See R. Snir, "'Under the Patronage of Muḥammad': Islamic Motifs in the Poetry of Jewish Writers from Iraq" (Hebrew), in *Yetsirah ve-toladot bi-kehilot Yisra'el bi-Sefarad ve-ha-Mizrah (History and Creativity in the Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Communities)*, ed. Tamar Alexander et. al. (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1994), 161–93.

Druze¹⁵³ and Bahai authors,¹⁵⁴ is also very minor and remains remote from the canonical literary center. Again, as we saw above, the religious constraints on the literary system by no means imply that Arabic literature is traditional or inclined towards religious themes. A poet or writer may exploit religious themes and at the same time attempt to break through the Islamic framework of Arabic literature, as we find, for example, in the Neo-Şūfī trend in Arabic poetry. Unlike the marginal status of Islamist literature in the Arabic literary system, religious, and especially mystical motifs in secular literature are very popular. Authors dealing with such motifs and whose works are imbued with them are perceived to be an integral part of the canon.¹⁵⁵

INTERNET
FINAL

¹⁵³ E.g., the Druze authors writing in Israel mentioned in Shmuel Moreh and Maḥmūd ʿAbbāsī, *Tarājim wa-āthār fī al-adab al-ʿarabī fī Isrāʾīl 1948–1986* (Shafā ʿAmrū: Dār al-Mashriq, 1987).

¹⁵⁴ E.g., Moreh and ʿAbbāsī 1987, 9–10 (about Muʿayyad Ibrāhīm); Suhayl Badī ʿBushrūʿī, *Sirrī maʿa Allāh* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1979).

¹⁵⁵ See R. Snir, “Human Existence According to Kafka and Şalāḥ ʿAbd al-Şabūr,” *Jusūr* 5 (1989): 31–43; idem, “A Study of *Elegy for al-Ḥallāj* by Adūnīs,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25,2 (1994): 245–56; idem, “Mysticism and Poetry in Arabic Literature,” *Orientalia suecana* 43–44 (1994–95): 165–75; idem, *Rakʿatātān fī al-ʿishq: Dirāsa fī shiʿr ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī* (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2002).