Arab Women Writers

A Critical Reference Guide 1873–1999

Edited by
Radwa Ashour
Ferial J. Ghazoul
Hasna Reda-Mekdashi

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Translated by Mandy McClure

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Introduction

Radwa Ashour, Mohammed Berrada,
Ferial J. Ghazoul, and Amina Rachid

Unlike many other women writers, Arab women writers draw on a rich, ancient heritage, which stretches back to civilizations that flourished in the region before the Islamic conquest. As for the Arabic heritage, it takes us back to a venerable ancestor, al-Khansa', whose poems and recorded exploits give her a secure position in the canon. Among the anecdotes related about her is this enlightening story: it is said that al-Khansa' went to al-Nabigha while he was sitting in 'Ukaz and recited her famous ra'iya poem to him.[1] Al-Nabigha told her, "If Abu Basir [al-A'sha] had not already recited to me, I would have said that you are the greatest poet of the Arabs. Go, for you are the greatest poet among those with breasts." Al-Khansa' replied, "I'm the greatest poet among those with testicles, too."

There is no need to comment here on the verbal pluckiness of al-Khansa', which many European and feminist critics might well envy.

Al-Khansa' emerges positively in the culture; others were ostracized and held up as the epitome of wickedness and depravity. In later periods—the 'Abbasid, Umayyad, and Andalusian eras—biographical dictionaries and literary encyclopedias are filled with the names of hundreds of women, including female poets. One researcher counted 242 female poets, from al-Khansa' to Wallada Bint al-Mustakfi, and in her study of women in the 'Abbasid period, Wajda al-Atraqji counts forty-five female poets in the first hundred years of the 'Abbasid period.[2] Some of these women, like Wallada Bint al-Mustakfi,[3] belonged to the ruling elite. Two lines of poetry attributed to her were said to have been embroidered on her clothing in gold:

I was made for the high things in life, by God
When I walk, I swagger with pride.
I give my cheek to my lover
And my kiss to the one who craves it.

The names also included devout believers who composed Sufi poetry, most prominently Rabi'a al-'Adawiya,[4] as well as singing slave girls who were poets. The tenth-century scholar Abu-l-Faraj al-Isfahani composed a book entitled *Rayy al-zama fi man qal al-shi'r min al-ima* (Thirst-quenching Excerpts from Lives of Slave Girl Poets) which contains the biographies of thirty-one slave girls and excerpts from their poetry.[5] Perhaps some women researchers will examine the lives of this third group of poets, reading their poetry and analyzing their portrayal in the medieval biographical dictionaries, truncated or imprisoned as they are under the rubric of "slave girl." So far no researchers have looked closely at these talented poets, caught in their existential dilemma as owned women, yet whose pre-established role required a perpetual exploitation of wit, cunning, and deception. These were women who combined two odd functions: they were to serve, submit, and pleasure, but at the same time, they were peers and rivals in poetry, who might win the upper hand with a unique thought or an eloquent turn of phrase.

Contemporary Arab women writers draw on a rich, complex tradition that encompasses the believer who recites poetry about divine love; the princess who possesses knowledge, power, and standing; the slave girl trained in the lute and pleasuring her master; the strong, free woman capable of public, eloquent speech, at times bold or even obscene; and the shy woman who speaks in a low voice from behind the curtain. The mother of them all is, of course, Sheherazade, the mistress of speech, who tells stories upon stories. Her tales go beyond time and place, and through them, she takes leave of the king's bedchamber and steps into the wider world.

The purpose of this reference guide to Arab women writers in the twentieth century is not to extol women or their texts. It is rather to document a phenomenon and present it to readers, allowing them to gain a better knowledge of this influential cultural presence in Arab societies. Perhaps it can be a mirror to women writers themselves, allowing them a space for self-reflection as they view the sum total of their efforts, accomplished in a little over one hundred years. Certainly, no matter what our evaluation of the corpus of contemporary Arab women writers, their texts—the entirety of the texts they have produced—have added something, be it a different perspective, a new tone of voice, or a distinct sensibility formed over centuries of silence and oppression in a world long ruled by patriarchy. This sensibility has also been shaped by the

multiplicity of roles that women play and perform, even after they were sufficiently emancipated to go out and work as writers.

*

The French historian Clot Bey says that Napoleon spoke to him of General Menou's treatment of his Egyptian wife and how it influenced Egyptian women's ambitions to change their circumstances. General Menou, a leader of the French expedition in Egypt (1798–1801), married a woman from Rosetta and, so the story goes, treated her like Frenchmen treated their women (that is, Frenchmen of the aristocracy and middle class). Clot Bey relates a story told by Napoleon, that General Menou took his wife with him to various functions, walking next to her and offering his arm to her. He would choose a seat for her at the head of the dinner table and bring her whatever food she desired. When she told this to the women at the public bath, their faces are said to have filled with hope, and they thought it a sign that their circumstances would change. They sent a letter to "Sultan" Bonaparte asking him to force their husbands to treat them the way Menou treated his wife.[6]

Despite its peculiarity, the anecdote is significant. It is difficult to ignore the proposed source of change (France/Europe, represented by General Menou and Bonaparte). We are adding nothing new if we note that women's liberation, like other aspects of the renaissance in the Arab world, raised a problematic contradiction between a liberation enterprise motivated by a desire for modernization and advancement and a viewpoint that saw the colonizer as the primary source of this modernization. Napoleon's story about the woman of Rosetta and her French husband is highly suggestive. The Frenchman is a general who came by force of arms to execute his mission of plunder and control; the woman was from Rosetta, the site of one of the most prominent chapters of the popular resistance to the French campaign. The men of Rosetta, none of whom took their wives to public functions—indeed, they would not condemn one of their own for beating his wife—stood up to face the invasion and gave their lives in the process.

The dilemma encapsulated so simply and clearly by the anecdote would set the issue of women's liberation on two divergent paths: the first would follow the road laid out by the story of General Menou highlighting the part while ignoring the whole. The second would be aware of its link to national and social liberation movements. This latent contradiction may explain why Lord Cromer—the most prominent figure in the history of the British occupation of Egypt—and pro-occupation Egyptian newspapers, such as *al-Nil* and *al-Muqattam*, were so enthusiastic about women's liberation, and also why women and men who took up the call of women's emancipation also contributed to the nationalist movement and why their names are linked with the opposition to colonialism.

This reference guide is not about the history of the Arab women's movement and women's liberation. It is rather an effort to delineate the literary output of Arab women in the modern period, from the last two decades of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. But needless to say, Arab women would not have contributed to literature without the call to escape the bonds of the enclosed home and enter the public sphere, even shape it to a certain degree. The beginning of women's education in schools, and later in universities, was a basic step on this road, and it could not have continued without the efforts of pioneering women in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, followed by Iraq and Palestine, and later Jordan, Arab North Africa, Sudan, and the Arabian Peninsula.

These efforts began in the last two decades of the nineteenth century in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, and they continued until the First World War. Women's associations were founded, starting with Bakurat Suriya (Syrian Dawn), founded by Maryam Nimr Makariyus in Beirut in 1880, and Zahrat al-Ihsan (Flower of Charity), established the same year. The tradition of literary salons began with the salon of Maryana Marrash in Aleppo, Princess Nazli Fadil's salon in Cairo,[7] and Alexandra Khuri Averino's salon in Alexandria. This was followed by the emergence of newspapers and magazines: in 1892, Hind Nawfal's *al-Fatah* appeared in Alexandria, the same year that Jurji Zaydan started *al-Hilal*. The next year, a monthly women's magazine appeared in Aleppo, *al-Mar'a*, published by Madiha al-Sabuni. In the four decades from 1892 to 1939, the eve of the Second World War, twenty-four women's periodicals were published and circulated in the cities of the Arab East. In addition to Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, and Baghdad, periodicals founded by women were published in Alexandria, Mansura, and Fayyum in Egypt; Tripoli in Lebanon; and Hums, Hama, and Aleppo in Syria.[8] Lebanese Maronite women, many of whom settled in Egypt, played a prominent role in establishing most of these journals. They in turn helped lay the groundwork for the publication of Qasim Amin's *Tahrir al-mar'a* (The Liberation of Women).[9] This period also saw the publication of encyclopedias about the lives of famous women, the most well-known being Zaynab Fawwaz's *al-Durr al-manthur fi-l-tabaqat rabbat al-khudur* (Scattered Pearls in the Lives of the Harem Dwellers), published in 1894. Fifteen years earlier, in 1879, *Ma'rid al-hasna' fi tarajim mashahir al-nisa'* (An Excellent Exposition on the Biographies of Famous Women), by Maryam Nasr Allah al-Nahhas, a Syrian from Tripoli, was printed at al-Misr newspaper press in Alexandria. From 1892 to 1939, Egypt alone saw the publication of 571 biographies of women (written by both men and women) in eighteen periodicals.[10] These biographies were the product of a fruitful conjunction of two traditions: the rich Arabic tradition of biography and biographical dictionaries, and the European tradition of writing about famous women.[11]

With only two female voices—Warda al-Yaziji (1838–1924) in Lebanon and ʻA'isha al-Taymuriya (1840–1902) in Egypt—the 1880s gave no hint that a multitude of women writers were preparing to emerge into the public eye. These writers boldly chose two outlets: journalism, which gave immediate access to the reading public and allowed them to shape public opinion, and the novel, the most malleable literary genre and the newcomer to Arabic culture. In journalism, women did not limit their articles to women's magazines, and they did not write only about the status of women and their demands. Some wrote under their own names (Warda al-Yaziji and ʻA'isha al-Taymuriya, the most prominent examples), and some wrote under a pseudonym. Zaynab Fawwaz (1846–1914) published her first novel under the soubriquet "an Egyptian woman," although the second edition was printed under her name. Malak Hifni Nasif (1886–1918) published all her articles under the name Bahithat al-Badiya (Seeker in the Desert). Her book *Nisa'iyat* (Women's Things), 1910, was published using the same name. The use of pseudonyms was so widespread that in 1908 the Association for the Advancement of Women in Egypt launched a campaign to defend the right of women to use their names, arguing that Islamic law allowed, and even enjoined, it. Although the head of the association, Fatima Rashid, declared a year later that in response to the association's campaign women had started to publish under their own names in newspapers and magazines, it was not so simple.[12] The custom of women using pseudonyms or signing their works with initials—or not at all—has remained widespread in many Arab countries until recently.

As for the second outlet, novels by women were issued at a brisk, indeed astonishing pace, given women's recent return to writing after such a long hiatus, and the novelty of the literary form itself. Alice Butrus al-Bustani published the novel *Sa'iba* (Correct) in 1891. Zaynab Fawwaz published *Husn al-ʻawaqib aw Ghada al-zahira* (Fine Consequences, or Radiant Ghada) in 1899 and *al-Malik Qurush aw malik al-Furs* (King Cyrus or the King of the Persians) in 1905 (she published a play, *al-Hawa wa-l-wafa'* [Love and Fidelity] in 1893). Next came ʻAfifa Karam's novel *Badiʻa wa Fu'ad* (Badiʻa and Fu'ad) in 1906, followed by *Fatima al-badawiya* (Bedouin Fatima) and *Ghadat ʻAmshit* (The Beauty of ʻAmshit) in 1914. In 1904, Labiba Hashim wrote a novel, *Qalb al-rajul* (A Man's Heart), followed by Labiba Mikha'il Sawaya's novel *Hasna' Salunik* (The Beauty of Salonica) in 1909 and Farida Yusuf ʻAtiya's *Bayn al-ʻarshayn* (Between the Two Thrones) in 1912. These novelists were all from Lebanon; some of them, like Zaynab Fawwaz and Labiba Hashim, settled in Egypt while others, like ʻAfifa Karam, settled in the United States.

The intensive presence of women constituted a native incubator for ideas about women's liberation, pushing the issue into the public sphere,

where it became a topic of debate among the greatest writers of the nation. Butrus al-Bustani (1819–1883) in Lebanon was the first to talk about women's right to education, advocating the idea in 1847. Rifaʻa al-Tahtawi (1801–1878) in Egypt wrote *al-Murshid al-amin li-l-banat wa-l-banin* (The Faithful Guide for Girls and Boys) in response to a request from the Egyptian Ministry of Education to "compose a book on the humanities and pedagogy that can be used for the education of both boys and girls."[13] In his introduction, al-Tahtawi praises Khedive Ismaʻil for opening up education so that "girls, like boys, can compete to come up with the most novel ideas. He made the acquisition of knowledge the same for both groups; he did not make knowledge like inheritance, in which men enjoy double the share of women."[14] In 1895, Muhammad ibn Mustafa ibn Khuja al-Jaza'iri published his book, *al-Iktirath fi huquq al-inath* (On the Rights of Women), followed by Qasim Amin's *Tahrir al-mar'a* (The Liberation of Women) in 1899 and *al-Mar'a al-jadida* (The New Woman) in 1901.[15] Next came *Imra'atuna fi-l-shariʻa wa-l-mujtamaʻ* (Our Women in Law and Society) in 1929, by Tahir Haddad al-Tunsi, who a year earlier had released a book about Tunisian workers and the rise of the trade union movement. Prominent writers took a position on the women's issue and stepped up to defend their rights, most prominently Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid in Egypt, Amin al-Rayhani in Lebanon, and the poets Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi and Maʻruf al-Rasafi in Iraq.

These were the beginnings of Arab women's writings in the modern period. The writing styles and genres chosen by women showed that they drew on the classical Arabic heritage while at the same time they benefited from and imitated available European writings. Significantly, women writers ignored the popular, folkloric tradition, seeing what they wrote as part of "high" culture that had no relation to the songs and popular stories of oral tradition produced by women in the vernaculars.[16] Why? The writers' social status might not offer a full explanation. There is another element that cannot be denied: their rebellion against traditional women's roles and their desire to prove their ability to write, an activity linked with the educated elite, particularly since many men belittled their intellectual capacities. Whether this explanation is sound or not, the fact remains that the pioneering generation and the generations that followed ignored women's oral tradition, thus neglecting a rich cultural vein. Arab women as creators of oral text have a continuous, rich, and varied story that stretches over hundreds of years of history and culture.

At the end of the nineteenth century, women—both as writers and critics—helped to disseminate women's achievements. Mayy Ziyada (1886–1941) continued this tradition in the first half of the next century, writing biographies of three women writers: Warda al-Yaziji, 'A'isha al-Taymuriya, and Malak Hifni Nasif. In doing so, she bequeathed to

herself and later generations of writers a legacy of modern Arab women's writing. Ziyada wrote and a later generation of women writers read and drew inspiration—and not only in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, for the circle widened beyond these three countries. In the 1930s and 1940s, women writers from Iraq and Palestine emerged, in addition to Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. They wrote articles for the press and radio, short stories, and poetry. The 1950s witnessed the start of a creative surge of female writers in all types of literary genres. The decade opened with the publication of the novel *al-Jamiha* (The Defiant Woman) by Amina al-Sa'id in Egypt and *Arwa bint al-khutub* (Arwa, Daughter of Woe) by Widad Sakakini from Syria; it closed with three novels, considered even then significant milestones in the evolution of Arab women's writing. In 1958, Layla Ba'labakki published *Ana ahya* (I Live), followed a year later by Collette Khuri's *Ayyam ma'ah* (Days with Him). The next year, Latifa al-Zayyat in Egypt published *al-Bab al-maftuh (The Open Door)*. Two years later, Layla 'Ussayran released *Lan namut ghadan* (We Will Not Die Tomorrow), followed by Emily Nasrallah's *Tuyur Aylul* (The Birds of September). Despite their differences, these novels presented a new voice that explored women's relations with themselves and with men, with fathers and mothers, and with the surrounding political and social environment. In the same decade, Palestine offered one of the most mature experiments in the short story, in the writings of Samira 'Azzam. In poetry, there was Nazik al-Mala'ika in Iraq, whose poem "al-Kulira" (Cholera), published in 1947, was a pioneering work in modern free verse, as well as Fadwa Tuqan and Salma Khadra Jayyusi in Palestine, the first of whom started with the classical Arabic ode, or *qasida*, before moving to free verse and the second of whom chose the new form for her poems from the beginning.

The texts produced from the end of the 1940s through the early 1960s are the link between the old and new generations across the Arab world, from Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia in the west, to the Gulf countries in the east, from Sudan and Yemen in the south, to Iraq and the Levant in the north.

Nawal al-Sa'dawi was another pioneer who raised several issues related to women's freedom and drew attention to the possibilities offered by the methodologies of the feminist movement in Europe and the U.S. in the early 1960s. In many books—including sociological studies, stories, novels, and journal articles—Nawal al-Sa'dawi put forth a new, bold, influential discourse picked up by later generations of women writers, who reproduced it, developed it, and used it as a starting point for a path that sometimes converged with that discourse and sometimes parted ways with it.

In the last third of the twentieth century, Arab women's writing evolved along divergent paths. While women from older generations

continued to write, new generations worked to steep themselves in their own time, place, and experience, and to develop the craft of writing. In poetry, women went beyond the classical *qasida* form to free verse and prose poetry, at times managing to overcome sentimentality and the tropes of romantic expression. In contrast to the first half of the twentieth century, the short story and the novel received the largest share of women's creative attention. Women wrote texts trying to capture a complex, complicated reality burdened by contradictions and anxieties. Women wrote about national struggle, civil war, political and social oppression, and corruption as much as they wrote about relations with men and their status in a male-dominated society, trying to express themselves as both women and citizens. In their attempts to capture their own experience, women chose various forms of writing. They produced realistic novels with a clear chronological order and an omniscient narrator, depicting some aspect of Arab life in Beirut, Cairo, Tunis, or Baghdad, or they turned to a small town or far-flung village to depict the lives of its inhabitants. They produced modernist texts in which the collapse of all assumptions, the fragmentation of time, and the isolation of the individual come together to impose a different novelistic form. They wrote historical novels in which they address their own reality through writing about former ages. In autobiographies, women documented their life stories or some part of their lives, such as the experience of childhood or political detention, or the story of a trip to the West. At times, they speak directly in the first person, relating events in chronological order; other times, they invent styles to meet their needs. In contrast, women's creative efforts were directed less at drama, and there are relatively few women playwrights compared to other types of writers. Is this because playwrights need an active theater movement in which they can take part, which exists in only a very few Arab countries? Or did talented women playwrights turn to writing for television?

Arab women's writing has dealt with a diversity of themes addressed in various styles, although historical concerns and an awareness of a double burden remains a basic theme in their writing. With the exception of Palestine, all Arab countries won national independence, but they did not find freedom, justice, or prosperity, and the problems and contradictions grew. The Zionist state has grown more violent, American hegemony fiercer, and national governments have contributed to the internal fractures with their repressive practices and their immobility in the face of fundamental change. Class gaps have widened, and the rift between men and women has deepened. There is an increasing contradiction between appearance and truth, word and deed, hope and illusion. This confused, often chaotic social reality is reflected in both men and women and their relationships with the self, others, and the surrounding environment.

Since the 1970s, Arabic literature has entered the age of doubt, and the question mark has replaced certainty. Arab women novelists have written about war, frustration, the erosion of all preconceptions, and a reality even stranger than fiction. More and more women writers have turned to the literature of exile and marginalization.

Today, the situation is fraught with ambiguity. Women are open to global issues, and they have a keen awareness of their location vis-à-vis language and discourse, and culture and ideology. At the same time, they are being reimprisoned by ideas about particularity and the body disseminated by certain feminist circles. The public and private spheres are increasingly intertwined, and a significant segment of women have learned their rights and duties. They have learned the importance of writing, thought, theory, and practice, which qualifies them to occupy a place in Arab culture distinguished by intense questioning and animated rebellion. Now they must face the challenge of social and intellectual forces that want to return them to their seclusion with weapons that are much more dangerous and deceptive because they replace violence, tyranny, and ideology with reason, praise, and compliment. We will not fall in the trap of praising women's writing *a priori* or sentencing them to the prison of "women's writing" with its predetermined subjects. It is a field open to all experiments and the future.

*

The reader will notice in the essays about the literature of each country, or set of countries, that the social and historical context which shaped women's experience has gradually led them away from cautious, direct, and sentimental writing—and occasionally simplistic moralizing—to more complex texts that convey a desire to capture women's experience. This is a writing that allows political and social questions to be raised and can be either revelatory or reticent. In both cases, there is a space for imagination, experimentation, artistic play; and a sounding of voices absent from the prevailing discourse. As women's writing evolved, women pioneered new creative horizons that met their need to depict their experiences and knowledge.

In our attempt to understand and inform others about Arab women's writing in the modern age, we have tried to consider the historical context, which has seen transformations in ideas about literature and writing. Naturally, the historical differences between one Arab country and another will be reflected in the status of women and their writings, which will in turn help to shape those writings. If this is true for previous decades, we cannot ignore the fact that the current scene is giving us mature, distinguished literature, both from pioneering countries and from those that followed later; there is no difference between the center and the margins. Writing women from various Arab countries are growing

daily more aware of the exigencies of thoughtful, artistic writing, going beyond pure ideological criteria and fragile, direct moralizing or didacticism. The role of the pioneers was important and necessary, and for this reason we have at times focused on them in the analyses, but this does not mean we deny the great strides that Arab women writers have made in quality and quantity, depth and portrayal, structure and texture, playfulness, imagination, technical experimentation, and adventurousness. Every essay on each country or group of countries deals with this in more detail.

In a world in which gains are being eroded and frustrations are mounting, and the crisis of the marginalized—both men and women—deepens, knowledge becomes even more vital, as does the need to reconstruct meaning and value. This reference guide is not part of the fashionable interest in women's literature, but grew out of a concern to increase awareness of women's issues in our societies and provide information about women's literary achievements. This work hopes to add to the creative efforts of Arab intellectuals, both men and women; if it achieves even part of this, it will have attained its objective.

*

This project began as an idea proposed by the Nour Foundation to Dr. Latifa al-Zayyat, who greeted it with enthusiasm, helped draft the preliminary outlines of the project, and proposed the names of researchers. Detailed discussions about the guide began in the early meetings in the home of Latifa al-Zayyat. In later meetings at the Nour Foundation, the idea evolved with the participation of other women and men. We agreed that Latifa al-Zayyat would be the editor in chief and write the introduction, but on September 10, 1996, Latifa al-Zayyat passed away. Work continued on the guide and went through several phases before reaching this draft, which we hope meets both our objectives and the expectations of researchers and readers. The work was collective. All materials, both bibliographical and analytical, were put up for discussion and review, as was the arrangement of the materials. However, each researcher reserved the right to address the materials in accordance with his or her own viewpoint and critical approach.

Initially, we thought that Syria and Lebanon should logically be covered by one essay, since Lebanon was part of Syria until 1923. We also thought Jordan and Palestine should be covered by one essay due to their intertwined nature. Similarly, we thought it appropriate and useful to have one study cover all of Arab North Africa, and another cover the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf area. We were able to follow through on these decisions with the exception of the essay on Syria and Lebanon. There we were forced to distribute responsibility to three critics. It took more time than we expected. Some did the job and others withdrew due

to previous obligations. We had to redistribute responsibility, in some cases more than once.

The bibliography includes the creative writings of twelve hundred women writers from the last third of the nineteenth century through 1999. This task was made more difficult after we discovered that many libraries had huge gaps, and many books had neither date of publication nor names of publishers. In some cases, documentation was inaccurate, and there are few serious studies in the field.

Such is the guide between your hands. Ten critics and several assistant researchers worked on it. It is both a significant and modest effort. Gaps and shortcomings are difficult to avoid completely in a work of this size with these limited capabilities. Nevertheless, we have tried to provide a comprehensive source covering what women from the Arab world have written over 120 years. In the essays, we sought to describe the evolution of Arab women's writing in that geographical area. In the Arabic version of the reference guide, we provided excerpts from women's creative writing from various regions, in addition to bibliographic materials and essays. We hope that this translation of the essays and bibliographies will be followed by another translated volume of selected texts that represent women's literature from the Arab world.

Notes

1 Al-Khansa' (ca. 575–664). Her given name was Tumadir. She was born in the pre-Islamic period and lived to see the arrival of Islam. Her brothers Mu'awiya and Sakhr were killed early, and later her four children died at the battle of al-Qadisiya. She was renowned for her elegies.

2 See Fatma Moussa-Mahmoud, "Turkey and the Arab Middle East," in Claire Buck, ed., *The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 211.

3 Wallada Bint al-Mustakfi (d. 1091) was an Andalusian poet from Cordoba, the seat of literature. She was involved in a fabled romance with the poet and minister Ibn Zaydun.

4 Rabi'a al-'Adawiya (d. 752) was a woman from Basra who started out her life as a singer and musician in pleasure houses and later became a Sufi ascetic. Some say she died in Jerusalem, while others say it was Basra.

5 Abu-l-Faraj al-Isfahani, *al-Ima' al-shawa'ir*, edited by Nuri Hammudi al-Qaysi and Yunus Ahmad al-Samirra'i (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub and Maktabat al-Nahda al-'Arabiya, 1984).

6 Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond* (New York: State University of New York, 1995).

7 Nazli Fadil was the daughter of Mustafa Fadil, the half brother of Khedive Isma'il. Her salon was frequented by men of state, prominent journalists, and foreign and Egyptian writers, but no women attended this salon. She maintained close relations with British occupation officials in Egypt and was a friend of Lord Kitchener.

8 See the appendices in Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*.

9 Nahawand al-Qadiri 'Isa, "Tahrir al-mar'a ma bayn al-sahafa al-nisa'iya al-Lubnaniya wa Qasim Amin: intilaq al-da'wa wa hudud al-waqi'," in *Mi'at 'am 'ala tahrir al-mar'a* (Cairo: Supreme Council for Culture, 2001), part 1, pp. 514–15.

10 Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 2001).

11 Ibid.

12 Beth Baron, *al-Thaqafa wa-l-mujtama' wa-l-sahafa*, trans. by Lamis al-Naqqash (Cairo: Supreme Council for Culture, 1999), p. 50.

13 Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, *al-Murshid al-amin li-l-banat wa-l-banin*, in Muhammad 'Emara, ed., *al-A'mal al-kamila* (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1973), part 2, p. 273.

14 Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, *al-Murshid al-amin*, p. 273.

15 Amin's two books were translated into English and published as a single volume, *The Liberation of Women and The New Woman*, trans. by Samiha Sidhom Peterson (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1992).

16 Beth Baron, *al-Thaqafa wa-l-mujtama'*, p. 24.

1 Lebanon

Yumna al-ʻId

Introduction

As a poet, al-Khansa' was held in high esteem. She had her own place in the 'Ukaz market next to the equally renowned poet al-Nabigha, and the Prophet attested to her poetic superiority by dubbing her "the best poet" (notably, not the best *female* poet). Critic and grammarian al-Mufaddal al-Dabbi (d. 786) was of the opinion that among all the Arabs, al-Khansa' had composed the best line of auto-panegyric, while in his *Kitab al-Aghani* (Book of Songs) tenth-century scholar Abu-l-Faraj al-Isfahani includes her among those poets whose verses were chosen for the one hundred songs sung in the days of Harun al-Rashid. But when the Umayyad poet Jarir was asked who the best poet was, he responded, "Me, were it not for that devious woman."[1] Jarir's description of al-Khansa' as "devious" implicitly attests to her superiority even as he rejects it. Women were not usually superior; therefore, al-Khansa' is devious, or somehow underhanded.

Fuhula, or poetic virility, was a value that inhabited the popular consciousness, referring to that which ensured the continuity and sovereignty of the tribe. Poets who composed satirical lampoons or panegyric, for themselves or others, were valued over those who composed elegiac or lyric poetry, just as those who waged war and fought were held in more esteem than those who lovingly and with a willing spirit produced with their hands, served, educated, and raised children. Such values, grounded in social or historical conditions, sanctify the continuity of power and justify its authority, despite changing conditions and historical developments. The injustice they entail is great for the ruled, and even greater for women, who are twice burdened, once by their sex and again by their social status as part of the ruled.

Realizing the strong links between the political, the literary-cultural, and the social, women at the beginning of the Arab renaissance understood that their own liberation was dependent on liberating the collective consciousness from traditional values that sanctified their inferiority and made them, according to ʻAnbara Salam al-Khalidi (1898–1986) in her memoirs, hostages to "imprisoning walls" and "draping curtains."[2] For the same reason, men of the renaissance also realized that national liberation and societal development were vitally dependent on women's emancipation, which would bring them out of a seclusion that strangled their abilities to a world which they could take part in shaping. In both cases—women's desire for their own liberation and men's desire for national liberation—women were seen as the cornerstone of the construction and advancement of society. The school, as a means of instilling and disseminating knowledge, was thus the starting point of the renaissance in the Arab East. In Lebanon, foreign missions were active in establishing schools early on. The first was the Anglican mission, which established what later became known as the American University in 1820. More schools followed, and by 1860 there were thirty-three, most of them in Beirut.

Beirut was well situated to be the link between East and West, a free space for cultural dialogue, open to the West and its rationalist civilization. With the escalating Druze-Christian sectarian conflict in Mount Lebanon from 1840 and the 1860 massacres, there was a marked increase of foreign communities in Beirut, and Western consulates and the main mission schools relocated there.[3] It was in these foreign, religious schools that most female pioneers were educated. They were Christians, and they represented the minority that came from educated, well-off, enlightened households. Initially, education was not within the reach of the poor and it was not for girls. The few national schools that existed were established for boys, and people saw no good in sending their girls to school.

The first pioneer, Zaynab Fawwaz (1846–1914), did not go to school. Chance alone gave the child—born into a modest, rural home—the opportunity to learn to read and write. Fatima Khalil, the wife of ʻAli Bey al-Asʻad, then the feudal lord of Mount ʻAmil, taught the young Zaynab. With her intelligence and zeal, Zaynab read voraciously and eventually stepped into the spacious world of knowledge in Egypt.

The Christian nature of education at the foreign missions meant that enlightened Muslims who were willing and able to educate their girls refrained from sending them to the foreign schools, fearing that the wider public would accuse them of blasphemy and that their daughters would be harmed or humiliated as a result. Thus, while Warda al-Yaziji (1838–1924), Labiba Mikha'il Sawaya (1876–1916), and Labiba Hashim, for example, went to American missionary schools, ʻAli Salam, a prominent

and enlightened Muslim of Beirut, sent his daughter ‘Anbara to a *shaykha* (learned woman) who taught girls basic reading skills. The writer ‘Anbara Salam al-Khalidi related later how, when she was ten years old, people would shout at her, “Go home!” as she was on her way to her lessons. She spoke of how Professor ‘Abd Allah al-Bustani was persuaded by her father to teach her the principles of Arabic at home and how prominent Muslims convinced one another that “the advancement of the community starts with the education of girls,”[4] which prompted them to establish a girls’ school in Beirut.

It was forbidden for a girl to appear in a public place, and her voice was taboo. The day that ‘Anbara Salam stood on the podium to speak, wearing her full veil, one of the men spoke up, “What an inauspicious disgrace! How can her father allow his daughter to speak before a gathering of men? By God, by God, I’d like to shoot her and spare the world from her.”[5] The young ‘Anbara had to wait until 1928 to remove her face veil, while Warda al-Yaziji, older than her, had left hers behind decades earlier.

There was thus a vital need to establish national schools for girls and awaken public opinion as to the importance of girls’ education. Both Christian and Muslim women pioneers in Lebanon stepped up to the task. In 1881, Emily Sursuq and Labiba Jahshan jointly founded the first institute for girls’ education. It was, as Salma al-Sa’igh said, a model for the establishment of institutes in the East and in “preserving the national language most perfectly.”[6] In addition to schools, pioneering women founded women’s associations and salons to support the women’s awakening, give them a space in society, and contribute to their advancement. In 1914, women in Beirut established a women’s association called the Vigilance of the Arab Woman. In 1917, a girls’ club was opened which soon became a literary and social salon that received distinguished writers, poets, and doctors passing through Beirut. The women were not intimidated by rumors at the time that “mixed dances were constantly held [in the club].”[7] After the First World War, Julia Tu‘ma Dimashqiya, a Christian married to a Muslim, established a women’s association for women of both confessions whose objective was “elevating women’s cultural level.”[8]

Women pioneers of the renaissance in Lebanon were mindful of discrimination between Christians and Muslims, sought to strengthen the Arabic language as part of the liberation project from Ottoman tyranny and Turkization, and took Arab nationalism as their national identity.

In 1928, a number of women’s associations from Syrian and Lebanese cities met to form the Women’s Union, and the union’s first conference was held the same year, achieving its aspirations for religious and national inclusiveness. The conference cemented the literary status of women, embodied in the first female pioneer to revive Arabic poetry, Warda al-Yaziji: to mark the occasion, a commemorative portrait of her was unveiled on a

wall in Beirut's National Library next to other prominent Lebanese writers. 'Anbara Salam was named the representative of women at the conference as an expression of the Muslim-Christian concord: Salma al-Sa'igh commented, "She's a Muslim and al-Yazijiya is a Christian! Literary ties are the strongest bonds, and devotion to knowledge is like devotion to religion. God created people of knowledge, like people of religion, to serve the truth."[9]

Lebanese women also played a notable role in establishing and writing for newspapers and magazines. Alexandra Khuri Averino founded *Anis al-jalis* in 1898, followed by Labiba Hashim's *Fatat al-sharq* in 1906 and 'Afifa Karam's *al-Mar'a al-Suriya* in 1911. Most of them settled in Egypt or the Americas, like many male Lebanese writers and intellectuals, searching for spaces of freedom, and this was a decisive factor in establishing their presence as writing women.

Zaynab Fawwaz, the first to write of women's issues in the Egyptian press, first and foremost in *al-Nil*, considered girls' education "the primary foundation" for the improvement of young people. According to Fawwaz, a child raised by an ignorant mother learns all the faults that stem from this ignorance, and no teacher or school can correct them, just as one cannot shore up an unstable building. Fawwaz concluded that the benefit of educating women accrues to men in particular in "childrearing, housekeeping, and companionship to the husband."[10] In highlighting women's role in social improvement, Zaynab Fawwaz reconsidered the work that women do in the home—work that is deemed worthless and insignificant by men. In her newspaper articles, Fawwaz was keen to stress equality between men and women: "Know that the spirit is an abstract essence, neither male nor female, but it is influenced by the physical form, and thus the capacities of men and women differ. Each one is half the world, and the importance of their positions derives from this equal proportion."[11]

Mayy Ziyada (1886–1941) also made substantial contributions to newspaper writing. Ziyada came to Egypt from a convent school in Nazareth. Since her father was an editor for the Cairo-based *al-Mahrusa*, she met many writers and journalists. After studying Arabic and the Arabic literary tradition, she gave lectures and speeches, and her literary salon attracted intellectuals, writers, and poets. Most of her lectures were published as articles in the press. In her articles and talks, Mayy Ziyada evinced a deep awareness of the right of human beings, particularly women, to freedom and justice. She went beyond the liberation of Arab or Eastern women in her writings to address the institution of human slavery in history, linking it to systems of human governance. She believed that in liberational revolutions, like the French revolution, women found the opportunity to rise "from under the feet of the crushing master."[12] In the family, she maintained, the master is the father; he rules over the

members of the family much as his leader rules over him.[13] Ziyada defined nationalism as a human concept that went beyond religious identity and social and religious differences and gave everyone his or her due.[14] On the basis of this definition, Ziyada engaged those who disregarded the Arabs' rights and saw them only as desert-dwellers who are good at nothing "save plundering, theft, and destruction."[15] She highlighted the value of Arab civilization and its contributions to the world and discussed the importance of Arabic, seeing in its emergence "a link of goodness and light between the empty ages and the modern centuries."[16]

Like other writers of her era, Mayy Ziyada addressed two major issues in her writings: religious identity, and language and national identity. As we shall see, in Lebanon these two issues had a profound impact on literary production.

The novel

The beginnings

It was in the flourishing press of Egypt and the Levant during the last three decades of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries that Arabic fiction saw its renaissance. The Lebanese were active in both writing and translating Western stories, particularly from French. In the Arabic press, several newspapers published original and translated stories including: *al-Janan*, established by Butrus al-Bustani in Beirut in 1870; *al-Mashriq*, established by the Jesuits in Beirut in 1898; *al-Diya'*, established by Ibrahim al-Yaziji in 1898; and *Fatat al-sharq*, established by Labiba Hashim in 1906.

In his history of this period, Dr. Muhammad Yusuf Najm notes that Lebanese writers neglected to mine the folkloric tradition, a copious, varied oral heritage that related "the stories of local heroes and the deeds of the princes and shaykhs who successively ruled the mountain."[17]

Husn al-'awaqib

A reading of the works of women pioneers in fiction reveals that they are characterized by a focus on the local Lebanese context. Zaynab Fawwaz's *Husn al-'awaqib* (Fine Consequences) 1899, for example, tells the story of feudal princes in southern Lebanon and their struggle for power. The conflict is between cousins: Shakib, an orphan raised by his uncle, and Tamir, the son of the same uncle. It is a struggle within the family, not between rulers and the ruled. The ruled have no interest in it; on the contrary, the fighting between local feudal lords will only bring tragedy and loss to the workers, loss of both their livelihoods and children. The values of love and goodness, and a faith that God will punish evil and evildoers, govern the conflict in the novel and emerge as the cause of the victory of the workers on the local prince's lands and in his manor. The

victory of good in the novel seems to illustrate a longing for the peace and stability experienced by the author in the days when her father worked in the local lord's manor and she was blessed with the lady's charity.

The novel combines the social and political. The struggle between Shakib and Tamir over the feudal principality is, at the same time, a struggle for the love and hand of Fari'a. Shakib's goodness is reinforced by his sincere love for Fari'a. The novel is built around these two political-moral values, but it comes out against the tradition that gives the principality to the eldest son. The evil Tamir is older than the good Shakib, and Fari'a, whose love is the object of the struggle, would traditionally go to the lord of the principality. This story, however, breaks with tradition, and the victory of good thus goes hand in hand with the victory of love: Shakib, whose victory represents the victory of goodness, also wins the love of his uncle, Tamir's father, who will leave him the principality and marry him to his beloved Fari'a, who loves him as well. At the end of the novel, positions are handed out to the supporters of the good prince, Shakib. Seen from the perspective of the time in which it was written, the reader, like the peasants and hired hands at the manor, feels reassured about life under the prince: he is good, even if he is a feudalist.

Husn al-'awaqib is grounded in the historical period in which it appeared, describing people's conduct and customs, as well as places and contexts that take the reader to the Lebanese countryside. Stylistically, the novel contains certain aspects of traditional, popular narrative and oral lore. For example, each chapter begins with a note reminding the reader of where the last chapter ended, much like the custom in oral tradition. Like Sheherazade, Fawwaz links her beginnings with where she left off, as if the blank whiteness of the paper between chapters is the white brightness of day between one night and the next. In both white spaces, there is silence and an absence: the absence of women until they resume speaking. Perhaps Zaynab Fawwaz's reminders to the reader, like Sheherazade in her nightly stories, are written to reaffirm her existence and the possibility of life. We have no evidence that Fawwaz read *The Thousand and One Nights* and therefore cannot document the influence of Sheherazade's oral-based narrative; we can conclude, however, that women seem to have a knack for storytelling and that this orality is a vestige of this ancient mode.

Qalb al-rajul

Like *Husn al-'awaqib*, Labiba Hashim's *Qalb al-rajul* (A Man's Heart) 1904, references a local context and events lived by the Lebanese. The author begins her novel like this: "We might not add to the reader's knowledge of the sectarian strife that occurred in Mount Lebanon in 1860, or of the ghastly massacres and the shedding of innocent blood that forced most

Christians to flee from the sword and disperse to the ends of the earth."[18] That is, the author sets her novel in this period not to relate history, but to talk about the fate of the displaced and the tragedy that grew out of the strife. More particularly, the novel is the story of Christians displaced from their villages and towns, and the mountainous areas of Dayr al-Qamar and Bayt al-Din. It is also the story of the places in which they searched for a livelihood: Beirut, the city of trade and hotels, and Egypt, "where business is about advancement and the opportunities in government offices belong to the capable," as Rosa says to 'Aziz.[19]

The novel is not the story of a hero, but the story of people who meet as anyone in Egypt and the Levant might have met at the time. They move, separate, and meet up again, brought together by the circumstances of work, and in the meantime love and friendships develop, along with contradictions. The novel is not, as Dr. Muhammad Yusuf Najm argues, "a defense of women from beginning to end."[20] The love story between 'Aziz and Rosa is, first and foremost, a story of exile and alienation, from oneself and one's country, after events in Mount Lebanon separate 'Aziz from his father and death deprives him of his mother. The tragedies that befall Rosa do not happen because she is a woman, nor are 'Aziz's sufferings specific to his being a man. Rather, they grow out of this beginning, from what happened to 'Aziz's father Habib Nasr Allah and his mother Fatina. In other words, they are linked to conditions in Lebanon, which are represented in relationships between individuals and their conduct, and in the dissolution of these relationships and departures. More than one thread comes together to weave the love story between 'Aziz and Rosa, and later between 'Aziz and Mary, and the fabric of this story is stretched over the novel's deeper, more indirect story of the sectarian strife and what happened to Christians.

The novel begins with the story of Habib Nasr Allah, 'Aziz's father, and how he met Fatina, whom he fell in love with and married. It puts us in the heart of the sectarian strife and sets the love story in that time, making the action between characters a way of explaining the strife even as the developing plot fleshes out the events. The novel's beginning highlights the chaos in Mount Lebanon: armed men attack Habib and Fatina and the two are separated. The beginning refers to events as "strife," but does not attribute them to religious bigotry. Indeed, the novel relates the Druze Junblat family's kind treatment of the Christian Fatina. Sayyid al-Mukhtara takes in Fatina's mother after the death of her husband in Dayr al-Qamar in 1841. When her mother dies, the local lord's family cares for Fatina as their own daughter. Habib, a Christian, falls in love with Fatina as a Druze before he learns that she is, in fact, a Christian.

The love stories in *Qalb al-rajul* use love to construct a story of non-sectarianism. Lovers do not meet by coincidence, as is the case in most

novels of the period, and this marks the text as a pioneer in the history of the Arabic novel. The initial meeting between ʿAziz and Rosa, for example, is largely a product of business meetings between merchants from Egypt and Beirut, who go to France and England to buy goods and fabrics. ʿAziz meets Yusuf Rafa'il on the train between Paris and Marseille; Rosa is returning with her father from Paris, where she studies. The love that is born on the train and grows on the steamship between Marseille and Alexandria is a love marked by diaspora and doomed to separation. The events in the novel intertwine to weave spaces, the characters' identities, and their fates, which are determined by historical circumstances. In this way the narrative exposes the wound in the heart of a man, ʿAziz, who has experienced the loss of his family and his country and gone in search of the self.

Labiba Hashim was a modernist pioneer. She possessed a marked ability to construct a plot, create living characters, and bring together the threads that connect them. At the same time she was keen to highlight the local context and strove to bring it to life in a novel that uses prose grounded in everyday speech.

Badiʿa wa Fu'ad

Two years after *Qalb al-rajul* was published, ʿAfifa Karam's (1883–1924) *Badiʿa wa Fu'ad* (Badiʿa and Fu'ad) appeared in 1906. By this point the contributions of pioneering women writers began to become a phenomenon in their own right: their works had proved able to create readable fictional worlds, enjoyable for their local, living characters who evoke a real world and issues of concern.

Badiʿa wa Fu'ad does not mimic reality; it is not a piece of didactic literature, and it does not use history to talk about history, like most novels of the period, for example, *Dhat al-khidr* (Lady of the Harem) 1884, by Saʿid al-Bustani, filled, according to Dr. Muhammad Yusuf Najm, with "sermons";[21] *al-Din wa-l-ʿilm wa-l-mal* (Religion, Knowledge, and Money) 1903, by Farah Antun, which is, by the author's own admission, "a social, philosophical discourse on the nature of money, knowledge, and religion";[22] and *al-ʿAyn bi-l-ʿayn* (An Eye for an Eye) 1904, by Niqula Haddad, which is dominated by its didacticism. *Badiʿa wa Fu'ad* takes up three themes that stand, even today, at the forefront of Arab culture: class differences, the relationship between East and West or the issue of cultural dialogue, and women's liberation. The novel addresses these themes through the behavior of its characters, their feelings, their words, and their historically conditioned relations to the places where they live.

Badiʿa is the protagonist, and it is in her that the themes of the narrative meet. As a woman, she embodies a critical perspective that sees women as concerned with social issues and as active agents in the process

of reform and change. Badi'a is a poor girl who works as a servant in the home of Fu'ad's wealthy family. Fu'ad's love for her casts a critical, scrutinizing light on relations between two different social classes. It is the human qualities that Badi'a possesses, rather than money, that make her Fu'ad's equal. Badi'a is simple, faithful, and has a sound view of the state of her society. In the novel, she takes issue with her friend, Lucia, who has fallen under the spell of the West. While Badi'a is not anti-West, she opposes blind imitation and the adoption of harmful Western customs such as gambling. The novel's treatment of East-West relations is remarkable for the author's ability to divide the setting of the novel between Lebanon and the U.S. This is accompanied by a portrayal of the customs and traditions of each country, as well as the misery of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in the U.S.

The relationship between Badi'a and Lucia unfolds around the issue of East–West relations and the meaning of freedom. Badi'a tells her friend, who is enchanted by Western civilization, that contrary to Lucia's beliefs, freedom does not mean sexual freedom, but a woman's freedom to work, participate, and assume responsibility. With her character, conduct, and opinions, Badi'a leads the debate among women, ultimately imbuing them with an awareness that they are distinct individuals, rather than people united by their common femaleness.

The narrative leads the reader to a perspective that holds that good, like evil, is not the particular province of one country or sex. They exist both here and there, and in both women and men. This perspective opens up the possibility of real change. The novel ends with Fu'ad's father blessing his son's marriage to Badi'a after having first rejected her and incited his son against her. Love's triumph at the end of the narrative is thus a victory for the humanity of people and an embrace of justice and equality.

After the beginnings

Despite the significant contribution of the renaissance pioneers, literary production in Lebanon declined after the First World War until the early 1950s. For women the decline was, in fact, a complete hiatus. The retreat may be attributable to geopolitical disturbances that affected the Levant and their implications for religious identity in Lebanon.

In 1920, the state of greater Lebanon was established under French mandate after the Syrian provinces of Sidon and Tripoli were annexed to Mount Lebanon. At the same time, Beirut was cut off from Acre, Haifa, and Nablus—cities that had formerly been part of the province—to become the capital of the new Lebanon. The country's identity and structure were redrawn along with its borders. Whereas the name Lebanon had referred to the Druze-Christian mountain area, it now referred as well to former areas of Syria with a majority Muslim

population. The change was not only cartographical, but affected the country's religious and sectarian identity. Although the populations of the annexed or separated territories all demanded independence from the French mandate, the issue of national identity remained contested. The conflict was dormant until after independence in 1943 when the issue of the constitution and the confessional nature of the newly formed nation state came to the fore.

Lebanon, with its new borders and system of governance, required a character. During the battle for independence and the end of the mandate, it seemed to be taking shape by consensus, but this soon gave way to an internal identity conflict that involved both the larger Arab identity and the local national identity, constrained as it was by confessionalism. The conflict would recede momentarily only to come to the surface again every time an Arab country experienced a revolution (the Nasserist revolution, the Algerian revolution) or every time Lebanon entered, or tried to enter, an alliance with the West (the Eisenhower Pact in 1958).

The novel in Lebanon in this fragile period suffered an existential crisis. Only a few novels even by male authors appeared in this period, the most prominent being *al-Raghif* (Loaf of Bread) 1939, by Tawfiq Yusuf 'Awwad. The novel is set in the past, during the First World War, and it tells the story of the resistance of the hero, Sami, to Ottoman rule. With the exception of *Arwa bint al-khutub* (Arwa, Daughter of Woe), 1949, by Widad Sakakini, our research has unearthed no other novel written by a woman in this period. At the time Sakakini was living in Syria, which no longer included Lebanon. With its perspective and general atmosphere, her work marks the end of the didactic novel. As such, it belongs to the previous, early novelistic period and does not reflect the contemporary reality of women and their struggle.

Arwa bint al-khutub addresses one type of oppression: men's view of women as sexual objects. Arwa, the novel's heroine, is falsely accused of adultery after rejecting the advances of her husband's brother, 'Abid. Arwa is a victim, and her beauty and femininity are the sources of her suffering. She wishes that God had created her "a misshapen, ugly thing that repels the eyes and repulses the heart."[23] To save herself, she turns to God's service and becomes a saint, sought out for her blessings and intercessions, even by those who have wronged her. The novel stands in stark contrast to women's struggle in Lebanon to change the predominantly masculine collective consciousness.

Although women did not write novels at this time, they were active in social and national work. After the First World War, Salma al-Sa'igh says they worked "to create national industries to prevent people from emigrating in search of a livelihood, to improve the status of the working classes, to raise literary standards, and revise educational systems to suit

the dignity of the nation and the needs of the age."[24] In addition, many took part in the resistance to the mandate and demonstrations for independence. Some women were shot by occupation soldiers. Women boldly confronted sectarianism and took off their veils; after the massacres of 1948 in Palestine, they took a stance against the Balfour Declaration, which gave the Jewish people a national homeland in Palestine; and they took part in several women's conferences and joined other Arab women in the international peace and disarmament movement.

The true beginnings of the novel in Lebanon

Women returned to the novel in the 1950s, which can be considered the true beginning of the Arabic novel in Lebanon—that is, a novel about a particular context that seeks out forms and styles to elevate the particular to the universal.

The burst of novelistic writing in Lebanon, by both sexes, coincided with several factors: the spread of state-run education along with the establishment of secondary schools and the University of Lebanon in 1952. More girls went to school and enrolled in institutions of higher learning. In 1948, Lebanon signed the Convention on Human Rights, which upheld gender equality. In 1951, the Lebanese government approved a law enshrining full equality between the sexes in elections and representation. Finally, several literary journals were founded in Beirut, which occupied a prominent cultural place among countries in the region. These publications included, for example, *al-Adib* (The Author) 1942, *al-Thaqafa al-wataniya* (National Culture) 1952, *al-Adab* (Belles Lettres) 1953, and *Sh'ir* (Poetry) 1957. These publications were known for their interest in modern culture and literature, and their establishment was accompanied by the founding of publication and printing houses that disseminated Arabic literature and invigorated literary production.

Ana ahya

It was in this climate that Layla Ba'labakki published her first novel, *Ana ahya* (I Live), in 1958.[25] It was a milestone in the development of the Arabic novel in Lebanon, while at the same time it expressed a sophisticated view of the relationship of writing women to what they write about.

Like Sheherazade, the novel's feminine first person possesses the authority of speech, but the first person here does not use an oral storytelling mode or relate the tales of others, but writes and talks about the self, making the act of writing the female equivalent of life: I write, therefore I live. Ba'labakki pulls off the narrator's mask, narrowing the distance between the storyteller and the woman whose story is told. The narrator is the protagonist and the feminine first person. She puts herself in the position of someone speaking about herself, as if she is telling her

own story, giving it a sense of truth and realism. The female writer thus bears responsibility for the possible flaws in her character that might result from the conduct of the female narrator, who merges with the author, her speech, and her bold, critical stance.

Lina Fayyad, the novel's protagonist and narrator, is a bold woman: she chooses, desires, speaks, and acts. She is a character from the modern Beirut that emerged following the Second World War. Lina engages her reality in all its interrelated levels, offering a portrait of what happens—or what might happen—when a woman is possessed of self-awareness. She dreams of a future in which a person's individuality is the symbol of her liberty and the individual's awareness of her right to exercise her will and assume responsibility creates the collective consciousness.

Lina rebels against several male-dominated institutions on the domestic, social, economic, political, and cultural level. In so doing, she wages her two-pronged battle for liberation, as a woman and as an individual in society. Lina rejects society's image of her. The link she makes between free choice, will, and responsibility for one's actions is informed by Sartre's existentialism and springs from a Beirut culture fostered by periodicals and translations. Lina's character is marked by Western culture, but in the novel it is reformulated in relation to her reality from a social, nationalist, liberational perspective. Lina rejects patriarchy and rebels against herself, taking the principles of free choice, will, and responsibility, but she also rebels against the bourgeois class of Beirut that emerged after the Second World War. That is, she rejects an economy that, in Lebanon, did not rely on production, but on exploitation and transit trade. Lina's father, a prominent figure in the city who functions as a middleman and betrays his country, embodies this economy.

Layla Ba'labakki's discourse in the novel is based on a critical, liberational, national, subjective stance, not on a masculine dichotomy. Lina falls in love with Baha', who, as a member of the Communist party, is not an independent individual, but subservient, intellectually at least, to the party. When they disagree on the concept of liberty and revolution, it has an effect on how Baha' views Lina; for him, Lina becomes just a woman he desires, a wrapper he can throw away at will or "an insect on a chair, dead."[26]

The attempts by the protagonist of *Ana ahya* to eradicate gender differences as a value judgment fail, and her hope that women will be seen as individuals who possess a will and freedom is frustrated. The male figure, whether father, the head of an institution, a university professor, or a person who holds power in the social structure, oppresses and obstructs the liberation process; in the novel, he is the cause. It is this complex construct, rather than a simple masculine-feminine dichotomy, on which Layla Ba'labakki's novel is built. The novel ends as Lina's dream is

shattered and she is forced to return to her home, the symbol of closed space and patriarchal authority. Perhaps this is why Mira, the heroine of Ba'labakki's second novel, *al-Aliha al-mamsukha* (The Deformed Gods) 1960, screams, "I've had it up to here with fathers. If he weren't dead, I'd wish he was."[27] It is as if the only way out of the falsity of this collective consciousness is by crushing the image of the father. In this instance, the father is crushed through the use of a bold language that breaks the taboo of the relationship with the father, a powerful symbol of more than one type of authority.

The importance of *Ana ahya* lies in its discourse; language is not used as a container to hold new, alien ideas. Rather, Ba'labakki's language seeks to demolish an authoritarian discourse that reinforces the sanctity of masculine rhetoric. The novel's language seeks a reality that is rejected by the prevailing culture. It gives voice to feminine whispers and repressed thoughts to ask questions. Using brief expressions and truncated, anxious dialogues, it tries to create a language capable of expressing new meanings and produce a discourse with a new rhetoric and aesthetic.

Fatah tafiha

Muna Jabbur's first novel, *Fatah tafiha* (Silly Girl) 1962 sets out from the language forged by Layla Ba'labakki and builds on it aesthetically.[28] In so doing, she sets the Arabic novel written by women in Lebanon on a new path, breaking down the walls of the female subject to reveal its repressed, inner kernel. In modern Beirut, at the time of the arrival and advancement of knowledge and the mixing of men and women, female repression comes out into the light of writing. The discourse points to the subject's capacity for self-awareness and the courage to strip it bare.

Muna Jabbur does not blindly imitate Layla Ba'labakki, but walks in her path to differ from her. Nada, the protagonist of *Fatah tafiha*, uses the language of *Ana ahya*'s Lina to speak, but Nada, the character who endows the novel with its deeper significance, differs. Nada hates men, not as a symbol of authority like Lina, but as men. At the same time, she hates herself as a woman. Nada's complex in the novel is sex, while Lina's is male authority and the structure of society. Thus do the two novels part ways on the new path. The heroine of *Fatah tafiha* has developed a pathological complex because she is deprived of paternal love and her mother's embrace. She emerges in the novel as a seeker, not for work or an external space, but for a non-masculine man who can compensate her for the loss and rescue her from her nightmares and loneliness.

Jabbur's language in her second novel, *al-Ghirban wa-l-musuh al-bayda'* (The Ravens and the White Gowns) 1966, approaches a confessional mode,[29] seeming to confirm the autobiographical elements suggested by the language of the first novel. Explicitly and clearly, Kawthar expresses

her need for her father's love. She leaves aside the language of the objective narrator to adopt a mode of direct address, opening a large parenthetical aside addressed not to us, but directly to her father and her deprivation of his love. She then confesses the truth to herself and to us: "I need love." As if recognizing her neglect of her mother in the first novel, in the same style she says, "How I long to know you, mother." Then she tells us, "How I revere her and to revere her I challenge the nothingness that crushed her and raised me." This deprivation leads her to a lesbian relationship and she confesses, "Paula . . . for the first time in my life, I've known with her that a woman's relationship with a woman can be much more violent and profound than a man's relationship with a man."[30]

Jabbur's novelistic discourse seems constrained and shaped by the gendered body of the female narrator. Talk about the relationship both of Jabbur's protagonists have to their bodies is intimate, interior, and almost confessional, tantamount to a denuding on the level of language. Jabbur's significance lies in the way her narrative is employed to develop the self-consciousness of the protagonist in both novels, using a conversational language that in the first novel finally leads Nada to distinguish between one man and another and one woman and another, and in the second novel leads Kawthar to expose the real cause of her psychological trauma. "I'm a child, a child, a child. Carry me," she tells Hisham. It is as if writing here is a laboratory in which to read one's inner self. It leads Jabbur's heroine, Kawthar, to knowledge and the ability to continue living in the imaginary world of the novel within the bounds of its social logic.

But writing was not able to save the author herself. Muna Jabbur committed suicide even before her second novel was published. It seems that reality was stronger than fiction, which managed to expose the truth but failed to take time backward. Jabbur killed herself after leading her protagonist to the realization of her innocence and the recognition of her incapacity: "I understand how innocent and incapable I am," Kawthar tells Hisham.[31]

Muna Jabbur fell silent—"silence is a god among gods," as Kawthar says[32]—leaving the language of the female body to future generations. There is a lesson here, embodied by the character of Kawthar and her tortured life, that encourages a concern with women's sexual education. Kawthar trembles as she reads about the secrets of sex, after which she dreams that a naked man is chasing her. She cannot run; she screams, but no sound emerges. Her eyes remain fixed on his lower abdomen as he pants. The man becomes every man, the male a nightmare. He runs after her and yells at her to look at his body, but she can only hate him and herself.

Tuyur Aylul

Emily Nasrallah's first novel, *Tuyur Aylul* (The Birds of September) 1962,[33] differs from the novelistic discourse of Layla Ba'labakki and Muna Jabbur. The variation enriches the Arabic novel in Lebanon and reinforces women's presence and their contributions to the novel. *Tuyur Aylul* tells the story of two times: village time, where the present corresponds to the past, and city time, where the present exposes the alienation of its dwellers. Between the two times, writing gives birth to a nostalgic memory, and Emily Nasrallah carves out a space of action and presence in this memory.

Yet the novel's nostalgia is not naive. The novel writes about the past to revive the time of the Lebanese village and hold it up as a mirror to the present. In so doing, Nasrallah posits a cultural consciousness that sees identity as residing in a belonging to the land, and views urbanity as a city that becomes a whale, swallowing everything in its path. Meanwhile the village, as Raji says in the novel, remains "a forgotten point in the world of existence."[34] Within the constraints of this contradiction, Emily Nasrallah creates the village world of her novel, beautiful despite its bitterness.

It is largely women who suffer because of the contradiction. The time of the village has left them prisoner to its traditions and beliefs: they live in the village and the village lives in the past. The novel talks about traditions and beliefs, which, like high walls, prevent girls from learning about love, which the villagers see as "a mortal sin." It speaks about women whose sole value lies in the number of male children they bear, and about love and its victims. Maryam dies a victim of the social difference between her family and her lover's family; Najla is a victim of what the villagers consider "the most distasteful of taboos," a marriage to someone from a different sect. The novel speaks of the migration of young people who are stripped of their land, tortured, leaving behind the village girls they love. For Emily Nasrallah, emigration strips one of memory and threatens one's identity. Ties to the land lie at the root of this Lebanese identity.

Identity and land remain important issues in most of Nasrallah's later novels as well. In *al-Iqla' 'aks al-zaman (Flight Against Time)* 1981, for example, she gives us the village character of Radwan, who clings to his land and to rural Lebanese values. Radwan leaves America, his children, and his grandchildren and flies against time to his village in southern Lebanon, which he hears has been invaded by Israel. He flies toward death, in the face of all those Lebanese who leave their country seeking safety.

Issues of belonging and identity are not merely situations in Nasrallah's novels, but a discourse through which the author creates her own novelistic language. The language is woven from the lexicon of the Lebanese village, from the villagers' modes of speech, the chatter of women, the proverbs of the elders, and the oral tales preserved in the

collective memory. It pulses with the heart of these simple people and the sun's rays over the village plains and mountain peaks. With its poetic, lyrical rhythms, Nasrallah's language creates a framework for Lebanese identity and determines its linguistic features. In this she is drawing on a prose that has distinguished other Lebanese writers, such as Amin Nakhla in *al-Mufakkira al-rifiya* (The Country Notebook) 1945 and Fu'ad Sulayman in *Tammuziyat* (Things of July) 1953. Like them, she gives Lebanon—with its new borders, no longer administratively attached to Greater Syria—a meaning and a shape.

Within this language, novels written by women developed several distinctive characteristics in discourse and characters' diction that enriched Arabic narrative. These staked out the local particularity of the novel while at the same time illustrating Arabic's ability to live and speak in the tongue of more than just one social class.

Lan namut ghadan

Layla 'Ussayran for example, in her novel *Lan namut ghadan* (We Will Not Die Tomorrow) 1962,[35] chooses a narrative mode that reflects the Beirut aristocracy, creating for her characters a language that expresses the emptiness of their lives and the triviality of their conversations. She then uses this to tell us about the sufferings of the novel's heroine, 'A'isha, who travels to Egypt and discovers, in the Dar al-Nahda Press, people with different behavior and ways of life, thought, and conversation, evoking socialist Nasserist Egypt. By identifying with this pan-Arab consciousness and through her love for Ahmad, an Egyptian, 'A'isha finds a way to realize and liberate herself from the trivial life of her own capitalist class.[36]

Arab national identity as a perspective appears in more than one of 'Ussayran's novel. *'Asafir al-fajr* (Dawn Sparrows) 1968 identifies with the Palestinian cause, embodied in the struggle of Maryam and Suhayr, as well as Khalid's death. In these novels, Arab nationalism represents a way to bring the female subject and the city of Beirut out of its vacuum. In tandem with this, the novel rejects a class discourse because this class in 'Ussayran's novels—the capitalist aristocracy—rules the destiny of Lebanon and leads it to emptiness, diverting it from the novel's message of struggle-oriented Arab nationalism.

Hayy al-Lija

Unlike Layla 'Ussayran, Bilqis Humani, in her novel *Hayy al-Lija* (The Lija Quarter) 1967, uses the language of ordinary people and their colloquial speech to reveal a world of the marginalized poor who, because of their language, are absent from literature. At the same time, she reconsiders the logic of male-female relations in this world.

The Lija Quarter is an area of Beirut whose residents emigrated from the southern countryside, not to America, but to poor areas of the capital, created sociologically by an economy based on tourism, services, finance, and agricultural decline, which in the south, unlike Mount Lebanon, has not been compensated for by tourism—since the villages are located near Israel—or by trade, which was disrupted after the occupation of Palestine in 1948.

Fatum, aged fourteen, marries her cousin ‘Abduh. ‘Abduh escapes from his large family, all crowded into one room, to lose himself in gambling, drinking, and whoring. He looks for compensation and makes up for his failure by exercising his male authority over Fatum, mother of his many children. Because of his conduct, he falls ill, and because of poverty and the lack of education, the logic of action-reaction governs Fatum's relationship with her husband. The balance of power shifts, Fatum and ‘Abduh trade places, and she begins to exercise her authority over her sick husband; she is now the stronger partner. Authoritarianism is reproduced even when the roles are reversed. Here, authoritarianism is not a male characteristic, but is related to poverty and people who lack the consciousness to rebel against it. *Hayy al-Lija* is a novel about the misery of migrants from the villages of the Shiite south in a city that is indifferent to the poor, and this misery leads us to reconsider the logic governing the male-female conflict.

Hayy al-Lija was an early, although indirect, allusion to a Lebanese problem that was greatly exacerbated with time: the intersection of social class, sect, and demography. The residents of the Lija Quarter are poor Shiites, and their neighborhood, like the belts of desperation surrounding the capital, is cut off from the body of the city while still part of it. Tawfiq Yusuf ‘Awwad later dealt with the subject of *Hayy al-Lija* in his novel *Tawahin Bayrut (Death in Beirut: a Novel)* 1969. The heroine of his novel, Tamima, a Shiite from the south, engages in a relationship with the city and knowledge through her relationship with Hani, a Christian university student. ‘Awwad thus links the characters' sect and their social and cultural identities. In the novel *Faras al-shaytan* (The Devil's Coach Horse) 1975, Hanan al-Shaykh offers another example of this complex relationship in the form of a conflict experienced by the novel's protagonist, Sara, due to the contradictions between her conservative Shiite environment and the modernity she experiences in school, and the contrast between the city's other quarters and her own neighborhood.

Qualitative leap during the Lebanese civil war

Lebanese writers were always called poets rather than novelists because of the paucity of novels that appeared in the decades after the First World War and before the 1960s, and the flourishing of poetry in the same period. But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a qualitative leap in the novel.

Writers explored the contradictions and complexities of reality and its possible ramifications, and they worked on creating a multi-pronged discourse whose language expressed multiple viewpoints and nuances in diction, mindful of speech variations in a society that was becoming more sharply divided and on the verge of civil war. In this endeavor, they were part of the overall development of the Arabic novel across the Arab world, but they were striving to develop a distinctive style of their own.

Women writers made prominent contributions to what we could call the revival of the Arabic novel in Lebanon, which flourished during the Lebanese civil war. While the beginnings of this leap can be seen in the 1970s, in writers such as Hanan al-Shaykh and her novels *Intihar rajul mayyit* (Suicide of a Dead Man) 1970 and *Faras al-shaytan*, it crystallized in the early 1980s during the peak of the war, in tandem with the creative resurgence embodied by Lebanese male writers such as Elias Khoury, Hasan Dawud, Ahmad al-Zayn, and Rashid al-Daʻif.

Hikayat Zahra

Hanan al-Shaykh's *Hikayat Zahra (The Story of Zahra)* 1980 appeared to offer a rich world in which the fate of an oppressed woman merges with the fate of a society built on contradictions;[37] Zahra's pathology becomes sharper as the contradictions between segments of society are exacerbated, finally reaching an explosive climax: the explosion of Zahra's body and the implosion of civil society. Zahra's trauma is rooted in her childhood, in the time before the war, when she internalized all forms of social authority and patriarchal oppression. As she ages, Zahra absorbs external conflicts into the depths of her self; her suffering mirrors the collective suffering of women and refers to the strong link between women's suffering and war.

Within her small family, Zahra is aware of the gender discrimination that separates her from her brother. She later experiences more heightened forms of discrimination in the larger society in the form of several male types, such as Malik, a friend of her brother Ahmad, to whom Zahra loses her virginity, feeling nothing "but fear."[38] Zahra continues to have sex with Malik, although she is not aroused when he kisses her or flings himself on top of her. He does not mind, and she does not understand why she does not stop herself from going to him. Through this experience, Zahra is a witness to her repeated rape because of the fear ingrained in her since childhood, and this relationship scars all her future relationships with men. Zahra's pathology takes hold of her and leads her to see every man as a rapist, including even those closest to her, in the form of her emigrant uncle in Africa. As soon as the war erupts, Zahra is comforted by the fact that the war has crushed patriarchal authority in the family and exposed society's ills, long hidden under Lebanon's brilliant and beautiful, but deceptive, face.

During the war, Zahra undergoes an internal rebirth, ridding herself of fear and terror, but the irony is that she is engaged in a sexual relationship with a sniper, the god and symbol of the war. This paradox is a condition for Zahra's rebirth and the shattering of the father/authority figure, the symbol of the pre-war era, along with other now obsolete symbols: the treacherous mother, the spoiled brother, and other male figures. Using this paradox, Hanan al-Shaykh articulates a discourse based on an intersection of time: the pre-war and post-war era intersect in Zahra.

Hajar al-dahk

In addition to Hanan al-Shaykh, the works of Hoda Barakat constitute a fine example of the Lebanese novelistic discourse that takes shape after the civil war. The intersection of issues of masculinity and femininity with war, started by Hanan al-Shaykh, comes to the fore, expressed in a cohesive, well-crafted structure that heralds a new form of the novel.

Khalil, the hero of Hoda Barakat's *Hajar al-dahk (The Stone of Laughter)* 1990,[39] has an identity crisis. Khalil is attractive and handsome in a feminine way; he does not desire women, but has repressed homosexual tendencies that emerge subconsciously in sexual dreams. The author makes him different from the other men around him. He is cowardly and inclined to "peace, to safety," and an "inability to stand the sight of blood." For that reason he has never concerned himself with politics although he feels "deeply ashamed of his friends who were rowdy at demonstrations and speeches." When the war breaks out, the hero stakes out a middle ground among his companions, composed of two groups: those younger than him who start managing "people's public and private lives" and are concerned "even with water, with bread, with dreams, with emigration," and men of his own age, who grip "the important things in life . . . holding the tools of understanding, awareness and close attention to theory."[40]

At various intervals the narrator's voice intersects with Khalil's voice, creating a sort of alliance between the two whose objective is to critique the thinkers, politicians, journalists, leaders, and party figures responsible for the war. The novel suggests that all of these intellectuals are opportunistic and questions the integrity of the parties to which they belong. But the transformations experienced by the protagonist during the war—changes in his character and his relationships—embody the symbolic dimensions of the novel's discourse. Khalil, whose femininity stands at odds with the masculinity of war, gradually acquires masculine characteristics, seemingly when the narrator/author is not looking, as if the pacifist hero betrays his authorial creator. Using a sudden narrative device, the narrator moves from outside the text, where she was using the third-person voice, to inside the text, taking up the first person and

mirroring the sudden transformation of Khalil, who becomes a perfect embodiment of the masculine dimension of war. The narrator/author inserts herself into the text directly, commenting, "Khalil is gone, he has become a man who laughs. And I remain a woman who writes."[41]

Hoda Barakat's innovation is that she is able to embody the intersection of masculinity and femininity with war in a male protagonist whose feminine side merges with the author/narrator, suggesting that the integration of these two sides makes a complete human being and that their complete separation leads to gender stratification and, in turn, a society of violence. Before the hero's transformation, Khalil and the author/narrator concur in their opposition to the masculinity of war, which, according to the logic of the text, is a war that has no place for pacifists or innocents and has given rise to sloganeering and false claims about nationalism, patriotism, democracy, and love of one's country. The hero's transformation into the epitome of masculinity, violence, and bloodlust not only signifies his estrangement from the female author/narrator, but also testifies to the truth of the ideological perspective on which the narrator's anti-war stance is based.

Ahl al-hawa

Starting out from the gender dualities contained by one sex, in her second novel, *Ahl al-hawa (Disciples of Passion)* 1993, Barakat sets up a male narrator who knows that his masculinity is also informed by femininity. He is a man who kills the wife he loved—or so he imagines. The novel presents him in a long monologue, reflective and confused, torn between illuminations that give us, the readers, hope and make us reconsider the meaning of madness, sanity, masculinity, and its relationship to femininity, and between ruminations on the relationship between masculine violence and war, and the relationship of the self to others, whether the same or different.

In a crime of passion, the man kills someone who differs from him (a woman) just as in the Lebanese war men killed others who differed from them religiously or ideologically. But in the novel, from the perspective of an implied author, the man who does this sees another man, a person like him, dead, and he can no longer exist but outside himself. This wholly external existence is represented by madness in the novel, and this madness, a reflection of his relationship with a different Other, makes the man exceptional. He sees woman as difference, but he is part of the same difference and thus sees some human resemblance. Femininity is set up as the soul of the madman, existing outside his act of murder. The novel asks a question: does the man realize the meaning of his search for similarity in the difference of the Other? Does he realize the meaning of his exceptionalism and his acceptance of difference?

Ahl al-hawa is a novel about the intertwined relationship of masculinity and femininity, the murder of the Other and the need for it, and a self-absorption that recognizes only the similar and simultaneously rejects and loves the Other. Using the intricate relationship of femininity and masculinity, Hoda Barakat takes the novel to a high aesthetic plane, blazing an important trail for the Lebanese novel, one that firmly grounds women's novels in the larger literary context while creating a distinctive Arabic novelistic discourse. This distinctiveness stems primarily from the creation of a complex, ambiguous character, seemingly insane, whose rich language captures the madness of the man's actions. Madness here is used to create an aesthetic capable of generating a deep sense of the tragedy and oppressive weight of reality.

Hayat wa alam Hamad ibn Silana

With Najwa Barakat, war as death fuses with the contours of a new novelistic language that reflects a trend in fiction that novelist Edwar al-Kharrat called "contemporary myth." "The style turns to legend, myth, and popular traditions while also addressing issues of everyday life, with its cast of characters and scenes, whether set in the past or the present."[42]

In her novel *Hayat wa alam Hamad ibn Silana* (The Life and Pains of Hamad ibn Silana) 1995, Najwa Barakat shows death to be the one true fact of existence. But the fact is not set in a context of pessimism, nihilism, or alienation, but in an unfamiliar novelistic atmosphere that blends fantasy, myth, and realism and uses both poetic language and novelistic narrative.

In this novel, alternately realistic and fantastical, the masculine and the feminine merge completely and the differences between them become negligible. The protagonist, Hamad, is both masculine and feminine. He is the only son among seven daughters, who were raised by their father 'Aql "as if they were males."[43] Hamad is breathtakingly handsome: "troubling and frightening, like the Virgin."[44] His sexual identity crisis is linked to his status as the sole boy among seven girls and his resemblance to his mother, Silana. As a result of their intimacy, everyone calls him "Hamad, the son of his mother,"[45] as if he has no relation at all to his father 'Aql. But ironically, Hamad is not saddened by his mother's sudden death as one would expect—particularly since he grew into adolescence without ever cutting the umbilical cord that bound him to her. After Silana's death, Hamad sets out through three different stories—the stories of Ri'bal, Francis, and Qays—that follow the tale of Silana on a long journey of searching, which symbolizes the development of his consciousness. After the journey is over and he returns to the home he left after his mother's death, death is revealed as a painful existential fact that is finally recognized by Hamad, who had denied and rejected it. Yet

this recognition of death would not have been possible if Hamad's consciousness had not evolved and freed itself from his crisis of identity, which sprang from his childish connection to his mother's womb.

As a representative of the young generation of novelists whose consciousness was formed in the midst of civil war, it is difficult for Najwa Barakat not to bring death into her novels, even if they do not directly address the war. Najwa Barakat pauses at the fact of death for every person, man or woman, a fact that touched the consciousness of her generation as an inevitability that takes precedence over all else. Perhaps for this reason, her second novel, *Bas al-awadim* (A Busload of Folks) 1996, which sets up a distinctly Arab space (the bus) filled with characters with various objectives and proclivities, dramatizes the common characteristics of the passengers on the bus, whose journey symbolizes life itself and how individuals deal with it. In terms of language, *Bas al-awadim* draws on and imitates the narrative style of medieval histories as well as the Sufi tendencies rooted in the Arabic literary tradition, and this style embodies a modern way of reading the individual. The human being in Barakat's text is always complicit; his innocence is the big lie. The novel's technical elements are brought together to serve the tragic end of the passenger characters, signifying one form of collective death.

The novel in the last decade of the twentieth century

Women writers continued to produce novels in the 1990s after the civil war. In some of these novels, female characters are already liberated from oppressive male authority. Women impose their bodies as a fact and live in them heedless of the guilt complex sanctified by male values and far removed from the pathological trauma of the heroines of *Fatah tafiha* or *Hikayat Zahra* or the rebellious conduct of the heroine of *Ana ahya*.

In *Hiba fi rihlat al-jasad: sira thaniya* (Hiba on a Journey of the Body: A Second Story) 1994, Ilham Mansur continues Hiba's journey that she began with *Ila Hiba (sira ula)* (To Hiba: A First Story) 1991. The novel observes the submission of the self to the rhythms of the body and its sensual needs. For Hiba, sex is a need, not a sin or a desecration; it is as if the war, which forms the background of Mansur's two novels, destroyed all sexual taboos along with traditions.

In Raja' Ni'ma's *Maryam al-nur* (Maryam of Light) 1995, the novel leaves behind everything outside of love and human relationships, as if love is the only thing that should be plumbed to the depths. The novel ponders the reality of war and poses an intimate relationship between it and the pathologies of the characters, positing the victory of love as the sole value capable of soothing wounds in the psyche, regardless of gender.

In *Rihlat al-tifla* (The Child's Journey) 1991, by Nadiya Zafir Sha'ban, the reader is struck by the powerful humanism of the text and its elevation

of love. The novel tells the story of a Spanish doctor and a Lebanese student living in Spain who are bound by the heavy memory of the violence of history: his desperate childhood memories of the Spanish civil war and her living, daily memory of the wounds inflicted on her country, which is drowning in a civil war. In love, the doctor finds his lost childhood and the warmth he was deprived of by the icy past; the student finds a well of love and security and a person who teaches her the meaning of joy. The lovers cross civilizations and cultural divides, and love gives them the sense of belonging they have both lost. Both were strangers in their own countries, but love teaches them that exile and alienation are inscribed, first and foremost, in the self and thus much crueler than physical exile from one's homeland. Love in Sha'ban's novel is a human characteristic that rises above social violence and scenes of war that burden memory.

In Iman Hamidan Yunus's *Ba' mithl bayt . . . mithl Bayrut (B as in Beirut)* 1997, the war destroys love: women live the daily grind of war and lose the intimate ties that were all that remained to them after the death and destruction. Talal is injured and loses his arm; as a result he withdraws into himself and he and his wife are estranged. Alienation enters their home and takes up residence in their bed. Forced displacement and migration leave neighbors homeless, windows and balconies lose their function as rooms close in on themselves, shelters are dark and menacing. The author uses a language similar to the daily speech of women, the language of private concerns that is nevertheless rooted in nobility of feeling and the anxiety of women as they take in the world around them.

Shita' mahjur (A Forsaken Winter) 1996, by Renée al-Hayik, creates a different world of war, but it reflects the grief and loneliness of the protagonist, Muna, a forty-something mother, after the marriage of her only daughter. Muna's sense of loneliness is translated into silence and calm. In addition to her daughter, she misses a man as she endures the daily routine of home and work. The novel is about Muna's experience of loss as a woman: she is a mother who represses her sense of motherhood, and a still-young woman living alone. The language in *Shita' mahjur* captures the sense of loneliness in its descriptions of the cold and ice that penetrate the body's extremities. The novel's language reaches an aesthetic level that deepens the meaning of loneliness, which becomes not merely the loneliness of a particular woman, but the loneliness of a human being in a country that is just emerging from the heat of war. It seems that the fighting has created a type of interior estrangement in which questions about the future are even more difficult to face than war itself.

Several general conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing survey. Firstly, in the pioneering period, writing women made valuable contributions

to the evolving Arabic novel. Labiba Hashim's *Qalb al-rajul* was published even before Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal's *Zaynab* (Zaynab), issued in Egypt in 1914 and held by some to be the first Arabic novel. Its literary significance is thus equivalent to that of *Zaynab* and may even surpass it somewhat in the sophistication of its plot, the variety of its settings, and the diversity of characters and their fates. The refusal to recognize the value of women's writings raises questions about literary criticism and history, not about women's writing itself. Women's novelistic production in Lebanon evolved in tandem with the Lebanese novel, helping to articulate it, making qualitative contributions that have distinguished the Arabic novel in general, and giving the Lebanese novel a local flavor. The discourse of women's novels does not address the relationship of masculinity-femininity from a negative stance only, but from the perspective of emancipation of the self and the collective consciousness. In turn, the discourse of women novelists is not an feminist counter-discourse, but one that strives to reach a literary, aesthetic level that can speak about the right of human beings to life and liberty.

The short story

Introduction

The beginnings of the short story written by women are still obscure for several reasons. Most importantly, the word "story" was not used as a precise term, but was applied to all sorts of narrative texts, including long texts that today would be identified as novels.[46] Short texts were closer to tales and were published in newspapers, and most of them were imitations of Western stories.

Collections by authors who are considered pioneers of the short story in Lebanon include Gibran's *al-Arwah al-mutamarrida (Spirits Rebellious)* 1908 and Mikha'il Na'ima's *Kan ma kan* (Once Upon a Time) 1927, both representatives of the Exile School of Arabic literature, and Khalil Taqi al-Din's *'Ashar qisas* (Ten Stories) 1927 and Tawfiq Yusuf 'Awwad's *al-Sabi al-a'raj* (The Lame Boy) 1933. Although we have found no similar collections by women writers, it should be noted that the publication of short-story collections is not the same thing as the actual writing of stories or their publication individually.

The beginning

Some of the stories in the collection *Kan ma kan*, for example, published in 1927, were written during the First World War, which raises questions about the true beginnings of the short story written by women.[47] The first identified collection by a woman dates to 1945, Widad Sakakini's *Maraya al-nas* (People's Mirrors). If the short story began to take shape in Lebanon after the Second World War, after an interruption of some seven years

because of the war, according to novelist Suhayl Idris,[48] Widad Sakakini can be considered a milestone in women's attempts to make short-story writing a craft based on capturing snatches of life and to minimize the didacticism that characterized the early stories from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In her first collection, *Maraya al-nas* (People's Mirrors) 1945, Widad Sakakini employs a descriptive, analytical language that helps her pierce the various psychological levels of her characters. One story in the collection, "Hajir al-'anis" (Hajir the Spinster), is particularly striking in that the author is able to expose Hajir's interior world by following her behavioral transformations, which result not from her nature, but from her family and social surroundings. Hajir does not marry and is thus labeled a spinster, a value-laden term that gives the unmarried woman a lower status than the married one. As a result, despite her education, the people around her view her either with pity or with condescension, which only heightens her sense of inferiority. Hajir despises her father and mother, holding them both responsible for her condition and the fact that they both see her as a spinster. Hajir acts like a child and feels increasingly bitter with the passing of the years; she worries about finding a husband, grieves, and finally loses hope, falling prey to feelings of envy and bitterness. The author captures Hajir's feelings in her negative transformations, portrayed as reactions to an oppressive, male-dominated society. Her description is accompanied by a sophisticated depiction of the physiological changes that Hajir undergoes, a reflection of the impact on her of the value system that surrounds her.

The subjects of Widad Sakakini's stories vary, as do their quality, but they remain, to use her words, "what life dictated and events foreordained."[49] Sakakini's virtue lies in her ability to make the language of the story supple enough to suit real life and her minimal use of heavy, decorative oratorical and rhetorical devices.

After the beginning

During the 1950s and 1960s, several short-story collections written by women appeared, evincing various styles and a distinct expressive language. In *Ma' al-hayah* (With Life) 1956, for example, Salwa Mahmasani Mu'mina uses realism, like Marun 'Abbud, to portray village characters and their lives. In the same period, Rose Ghurayyib published *Khutut wa zilal* (Lines and Shadows) 1958, with women as protagonists. The narrative uses a female first-person narrator, and the narrating subject spans the old and the new. The narrator's question is placed in a transitional period and contains an invitation to absorb the exigencies of contemporary life. We should not simply stand in wonder before the Other (the woman) or the Western culture that brought us this modernity, but face the necessary

challenges to move from the old to the new. The narrator seems to be a mask for the author, who was born in the early part of the century and witnessed a changing reality. She writes about it, registering a stance toward modernity that has few peers among women of her generation, or even among men.

Salwa Safi makes intelligent, fascinating use of a diary-type format in some of her realistic stories, creating short intervals of time similar to diary entries and using a narrative that evokes lived experience. A good example is "al-Qist al-akhir" (The Final Installment), in the collection *Hadiqat al-sukhur* (Rock Garden) 1969.

In her collection *Yabqa al-bahr wa-l-sama'* (The Sea and Sky Remain) 1966, Nur Salman forgoes realism and narrative for a lyrical, poetic language based on confessional, confidential tones, bringing her stories closer to poetic reflections. In some stories, such as "al-Sa'a al-sabi'a" (Seven o'Clock), a celebratory tone gradually recedes to allow the female voice to express its rebellion against man's exploitation of woman.

Modernism and its exceptions

With the appearance of Layla Ba'labakki's collection, *Safinat hanan ila al-qamar* (A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon) 1963, the plot disappears and, with it, psychological judgment. The author distills time into moments of women's interior conversations with the self. In all the stories, a woman divulges her feelings, ideas, and opinions about a man bound to her in a relationship of love, friendship, or marriage.

Layla Ba'labakki's innovation in the collection is not only her creation of a modern form of women's narrative, but her modernization of male-female relationships. In the story, "Hadiqa saghira" (A Small Garden), the reader examines a woman's love for her husband—not because he is a husband, but because the woman/wife loves what is between them, which is informed or enlightened by another, more ambiguous relationship between the woman and another man. The woman does not express her love for the second man, but remembers him with fondness and longing. This second relationship allows for no hatred or jealousy, or anything that may intrude on the first relationship. The story suggests the possibility of a special, triangular relationship: a woman and two men, each of whom has a different kind of relationship to the woman. It presents love as rich and varied—a concept which the woman in the story seems to need. The ambiguity has several functions; most importantly, it puts the reader on the thin line separating pure sex from a relationship in which feelings swing between friendship and the intimacy of love.

As the modern structure of the Arabic short story took shape between the 1970s and 2000, women also gained a firmer foothold in the field. Lebanese women writers, like male writers and women writers from other

Arab countries, rebelled against the traditional story structure, trying to loosen it up by foregoing external psychological characterizations and letting characters express themselves freely, and by moving at will between the narrative past, present, and future, such that they collapsed into one and the time-honored chronology was broken. Time is distilled into the moment, which becomes the alchemy of life, as we shall see.

It should be noted that these modernist tendencies were not universal; not all women writers joined the trend, though most of them skillfully created rich, serious themes. Emily Nasrallah, for example, a novelist first and foremost, did not base her short stories in the immediate moment, but continued to stretch time out much as in her novels. However, she did bring something new to the short story in her collection, *al-Mar'a fi 17 qissa* (Women in 17 Stories) 1984.[50] Though dissimilar, the stories are tangentially related by a common mood. The collection tells the stories of seventeen women of various statuses and personalities, with different reactions and ways of handling the violence of male society. Even so, they form an integrated world that consecrates a particular image and a particular language that reveals something profound about women's status. At the same time, this fictional world aspires to its own aesthetic value, different from the prevailing values by which society continues to subjugate women.

In her collection, *Hibal al-hawa'* (Ropes of Air) 1991, Sunya Bayruti closely follows Nasrallah, addressing various aspects of women's reality in twenty-four stories. Women are mothers, but tradition and custom impose duties on them that exceed their energies; they are wives, and because of marriage, they squander their private lives; they are widows who mourn their widowhood and the lives they spent as anonymous beings next to their late husbands. Bayruti tends to compact narrative time with great craft in her last collection, *Madar al-lahza* (Circuit of the Moment) 1994. But in several stories in the collection, this tendency remains simply a technique that is not fully exploited to intensify time and enrich the discourse.

Rafif Fattuh is striking in her remarkable treatment of male-female relationships and her ability to make them signify on the structural level of the story itself. In her collection, *Tafasil saghira* (Little Details) 1980, she writes about men, making them the subjects of the story, but she is careful not to appear to be writing against them. Although she allows the feminine first person to speak, she does not let that voice appropriate them. Instead, narration shifts from the feminine first person to the third-person masculine to the first-person plural. This movement is matched by the sectional structure of the stories. A perfect example is in the story, "Chez Temporel," in which the author breaks down the boundaries between statements, casting doubt on their provenance. The author, the

female, stands behind what the text says about the man, but the feminine first person declares, almost as a reflex, that she has no knowledge of the cause of the man's misery and, as such, is not responsible for his suicide.[51] The story refers to something beyond the relationship between a man and a woman, to a world in which things between men and women become merely small details and their common suffering refers to what is outside them, namely the war in Lebanon.

In the collection *Bayrut: al-aziqqa wa-l-matar* (Beirut: Alleys and Rain) 1979, written shortly before the war, Fattuh casts her critical eye on local and Arab reality. In the story, "al-'Ubur" (The Crossing) 1973, for example, she takes up the contradiction between Arab liberation and an oblivious Beirut society. In "al-Ghuraba' yabtasimun" (Strangers Smile) 1974 and "Mashhadan wa muhakama" (Two Scenes and a Trial) 1974, she observes national discord. In stories about women's emotions and loss, she links these sentiments with Lebanon's imbalances, as exemplified by the capital, Beirut. What appears clearly in this collection, the author cleverly tries to push into the background without totally eliding it in *Tafasil saghira*; instead of clarity and unambiguous meaning, she seeks to create a structure that uses brevity and absence to allude to more than one meaning.

More than one woman writer turned to public issues in this stage of the short story, and most were led to look for methods and languages that go beyond direct narrative. They were not all equally successful, and some of their stories remain simply attempts. Wisal Khalid, in her collection *Tadhkara li-matahat al-qarya* (A Ticket to the Village Maze) 1973, gives voice to nationalist concerns and rejects Western practices and our corresponding sense of inferiority, experimenting with an ironic, symbolic language. In the collection *Raqiq al-qarn al-'ishrin* (Twentieth-Century Slave) 1979, Najwa Qal'aji rails against the manifestations of a century whose achievements have harmed mankind, using symbolism and fantasy and drawing on religious stories and popular traditions. Su'ad al-As'ad wrote stories about poverty and racial discrimination, collected in *Ghadan sa'a'ud* (Tomorrow I Shall Return) 1983, using a reflective poetic language.

All of these attempts adopted an experimentalism that appeared in Raja' Ni'ma's collection, *al-Sura fi-l-hulm* (The Image in the Dream) 1979. In the story "al-Dukhul fi-l-sura" (Entering the Image) 1974, the author uses mythical allegory, making the sea a symbol of marriage and the whale a boat that carries a girl to her husband. In "Layla wa-l-dhi'b" (Layla and the Wolf) 1977, she attempts a multilayered story that allows her to use material from folktales, such as the story of the wolf and the three goats, to evoke an extensive historical memory in which women are the victims. Giving a twist to the fabled ancient romance of Layla and Qays, she writes a story in which Layla loves Qays, but Qays is busy managing tribal affairs