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MLA Citation

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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

Graduate Studies

Negotiating the Canon: Arab Women Romantic Poets Jamila al-ʿAlayli and Zahra al-Hurr

A Thesis Submitted by

Osama Amer

to the

Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations Department

Graduate Program

Fall 2025

Supervised by

Dr. Dina Heshmat

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Arabic Studies (Language and Literature)

Abstract

This thesis examines the engagement of two Arab romantic women poets, Jamila al-‘Alayli and Zahra al-Hurr, with the Arabic literary canon, focusing on how they negotiated their positions within the canon. Despite being active contributors to the Arabic romantic movement, their works remain overlooked in literary histories and anthologies. The study explores the modes of canonization, such as gender essentialism, exceptionalism, and socio-political engagement, by which the canon operates. Through a feminist lens, this research analyzes selected poems, autobiographical texts, articles, interviews, and critical writings by both poets, highlighting their distinct strategies for challenging and reshaping their literary status. Al-‘Alayli emphasized women's innate romantic sensibility and positioned herself within the male-dominated Apollo literary circle, while al-Hurr employed her exceptional status and connected with her socio-political context. This thesis seeks to expand the understanding of Arabic romanticism by critically engaging with their works and reception.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to my academic mentor and advisor, Dina Heshmat, who welcomed me into the department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations Department (ARIC). Thanks for teaching me how to enjoy close-reading literary texts. Thanks for encouraging me to embark on this journey of exploring the contributions of Arab women romantics. Thanks for believing in me in times when I had very little hope and confidence. Thanks for being very accommodating and understanding. I am indebted to your generous guidance and feedback. Thanks to my readers, Samia Mehrez and Tahia Abdel Nasser, for agreeing to serve on the committee. Thanks for your invaluable seminars that taught me how to see the bigger picture. Thanks to Ferial Ghazoul and Shereen Abouelnaga for guiding me through theories and topics that I was not familiar with. Thanks to Amina Elbendary for being supportive and encouraging, and to Marwa Sabri for being generously helpful and kind. Thanks to the faculty and staff of the Women and Memory Forum. Thanks to Hoda Elsadda and Hala Kamal for expanding my understanding of feminist research and publishing my first paper which became a precursor of my research to this thesis. Thanks for your workshops, in which I learnt a lot and met promising young scholars.

Thanks to my late grandmother Hiniyya Hazzā' (1939- 2018), the first storyteller I knew. Firstly, listening to her stories, I began wondering what could have happened if she continued her education and published stories. Then I wondered how many women were not privileged enough to pursue their talents. When I contacted Yahya Nada, Jamila al-'Alayli's grandson, I unintentionally created an analogy between his relationship with his grandmother and my relationship with mine.

Thanks to all the librarians and archivists who helped me through my research journey, at the American University in Cairo, and to Dār al-Kutub and the American University in Beirut.

Thanks to the workers at the Cultural Council for South Lebanon. Thanks to Layla Abdallah for being very helpful and generous, and for the fruitful conversation about the authors of South Lebanon. My heart goes to you for living through the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in 2024 and losing the council's old headquarters in Nabatieh city. Thanks to Yahya Nada for helping me access al-'Alayli's archive.

Thanks to my family and friends who helped me go through the research and writing journey of this thesis. Thanks to my mother and siblings for their support, kindness and prayers. Thanks to my sister Nourhan Amer who always asked: what are you writing today? That way I could start my day. Thanks for our fruitful conversations about translation. Thanks to my siblings: Ahmed, Muhammed and Manal for being supportive and encouraging. Thanks to Sylvia for challenging my ideas while supporting me. Thanks for our fruitful discussions. Thanks to Muhammed Sabri for enlightening my vision with your artistry. Thanks for listening to my long rants about my thesis. Thanks to Al-Zahraa Samy for being unconditionally supportive. Thanks for being a breath of fresh air on long days. Thanks to Muhammed Aly for being a great companion. Thanks for patting me on the back when I needed it. Thanks for being understanding when I am difficult. Thanks to my colleagues and friends in the ARIC department, Caroline Benson, Yomna Neiazy, Walaa Kamal, Yumna Moussa and Karim Guirguis for being supportive, helpful and smart. Thanks to my colleagues and friends in the Department of English and Comparative Literature especially Rania Bedeir.

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Introduction

As a prominent tradition in Arabic poetry, romanticism occupies a significant part of the scholarship on Arabic poetry. Large numbers of anthologies and secondary literature both in Arabic and English excavate the role that romanticism played in the debates around the Arabic poem in the early to mid-twentieth century. Arab women poets, however, are mostly absent from these volumes, although some of them were influential figures of Arabic romanticism. This thesis focuses on the work of two important poets, Jamīla al-‘Alāyī (from now on, Jamila al-‘Alayli) (1907-1991) and Zahra al-Hurr (from now on, Zahra al-Hurr) (1917–2004). Neither forgotten nor canonized; both poets occupy an ambivalent place within the canon. I argue that they actively negotiated their position in the canon. They published their work in literary magazines and poetry collections and maintained a sustained relationship with their literary environments. This thesis uses a feminist approach to analyze how they were received as literary figures in different contexts and how they engaged through their work with modes of canonization trying to better their positions.

My work traces the fluctuating positions that Jamila al-‘Alayli and Zahra al-Hurr occupied in the Arabic literary canon, most often marginalized and sometimes admitted. I argue that they were marginalized from the literary canon for reasons that relate to gender and the political context. Firstly, this thesis reads women poets’ romanticism as *feminine* romanticism that was dismissed by literary criticism. Women poets’ contributions were neglected while critics consistently canonized male authors. Secondly, romanticism’s individual subjectivity conflicted with how historiography imagined the nation formation in the early to mid-twentieth century. I investigate how women poets negotiated their canonicity by appropriating and challenging feminine romanticism. They engaged with different concepts of femininity, presenting it as a

better quality of the romantic poet in the case of al-‘Alayli and sympathizing with all women in the case of al-Hurr. Both women wrote poems that could be categorized as self-praise (*fakhr*), hence presenting themselves as worthy of canonicity.

Before choosing Jamila al-‘Alayli and Zahra al-Hurr, I went through all the issues of the periodical *Apollo* (1932-1934), an Arabic romantic periodical that was published in Egypt, anthologies of writings by Arab women, and bibliographies of Arab women writers and histories of Arabic romanticism by various Arabic literature critics. This preliminary search produced a list of romantic women poets and their contributions in addition to understanding how Arab women poets were represented in histories of Arabic romanticism or, rather, the lack of representation. This work does not aim to represent how Arab women contributed to the Arabic romanticism movement. Instead, it focuses on two authors whose work and engagement with the canon stand out and showcase that women were held to different standards than their male colleagues.

Jamila al-‘Alayli was an Egyptian poet and novelist who started publishing her poems in *Apollo* and was associated with the literary group of the same name. Al-‘Alayli published three poetry collections, 16 novels, a play, three articles collections, and three one-topic books.¹ She was connected to prominent literary figures in the first half of the twentieth century, such as Mayy Ziyāda (1886-1941), a well-known Palestinian-Lebanese author and feminist, and Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī (1892-1955), an Egyptian romantic poet and leader of Apollo romantic group. She was the most published romantic woman writer in *Apollo* literary periodical, with five poems and three articles, in addition to her published poems in *al-Risāla* (1933- 1953) and *al-*

¹ According to the author’s personal archive, shared with the researcher by the author’s grandson, Yahyā Nadā, we communicated through Facebook Messenger from April 29th, 2023, to September 6th, 2023.

Adīb (1942-1983). She was able to publish her first collection shortly after *Apollo*'s closure, *Ṣadā Aḥlāmi* (*Echoes of My Dreams*, 1936), and continued to publish her articles and poems afterward.

Zahra al-Hurr was a Lebanese poet from Jabal 'Āmil (South Lebanon) and was frequently referred to as "The Woman Poet of Jabal 'Āmil." Although al-Hurr did not contribute to *Apollo*, she regularly contributed to literary periodicals such as *al-Adīb* and *al-'Irfān* (1909-) since the 1930s. Al-Hurr did not publish her first poetry collection until 1970. She was presented as an exceptional woman, a rhetoric she used to negotiate her canonicity. I argue that al-Hurr was a distinct romantic poet who connected romanticism to her context and sociopolitical changes.

Jamila al-'Alayli used different modes to negotiate her position in the canon. She used gender essentialism to promote romantic women's contributions to the Arabic romanticism movement. She argued that women are "naturally" better at expressing their feelings; hence, they are better poets.² Al-'Alayli also struggled to break away from a family-designated role to become a housewife. The poet maintains an ambivalent stance towards women's domesticity discourse, sometimes presenting herself as in rupture with it. Earlier in her life, she wrote an accommodating opinion regarding women's domesticity, which aligned her with the Egyptian feminist movement. The poet had a special relationship with Mayy Ziyada, whom she considered a role model. I argue that her presentation of herself as Ziyada's student can be understood as a way to negotiate her position in the Arabic literary canon.

Al-Hurr engaged with different modes of canonization. Claiming that a woman author is an exceptional woman is a mode of canonicity that employs a tokenistic approach to include one

² جميلة العلايلي. "المرأة والشعر العاطفي". مجلة أبولو. عدد 5. يناير 1934. ص 378-383.

woman in the canon while excluding others. Exceptionalism as a mode of canonization typically holds women authors to different standards than their male counterparts. A woman poet's social and political engagement could also be weaponized to admit or forbid women writers from canonicity. Recognizing writing for women's rights as political engagement is another aspect of women's engagement; as explained later, political and social engagement had limited definitions that did not include activism for women's rights. As a romantic woman author, al-Hurr, for instance, was not recognized like Abūl-Qāsim al-Shābbī (1909-1934) who was described as a "true romantic" who was "both romantic and revolutionary."³

In this introduction, I will define the literary canon and discuss the canon of Arabic romanticism. Furthermore, I will survey some works that dealt with the Arabic Literary canon, especially those that studied Arab women writers' canonicity. The introduction surveys several studies and anthologies that historicized Arabic romanticism while tracing women's positions in such histories. Definitions of *fuḥūla* in Arabic literature and feminine romanticism will be illustrated and how both authors used different modes to redefine femininity. Finally, the introduction goes through choosing to read Jamila al-ʿAlayli and Zahra al-Hurr together, selecting their works to be analyzed and exposing the thesis's outline.

³ Robin Ostle, "The Romantic Revolution?" *Journal of Arabic Literature* 26, no. 1-2 (1995): 103.

The Literary Canon

The literary canon is an “informal institution of literature whose inclusions and exclusions [...] are nowhere codified.”⁴ Lillian S. Robinson points out the informality of the literary canon, which is not “set down in a single place,” but for a work to remain “in print for generations” is a sign of canonicity.⁵ There is no precise “institutional arrangement” for literature, the canon’s “concomitant processes [are performed] so much more gentlemanly.”⁶ If the canon is instituted as a *gentlemen’s agreement*, this gentleman is defined as “a member of a privileged class and of the male sex.”⁷ Robinson concludes that the canon is a gentleman’s artifact based on how few works by “non-members of that class and sex make it into the informal agglomeration of course syllabi, anthologies, and widely-commented upon ‘standard authors’.”⁸

Robinson categorizes the different modes that feminist critics and researchers work through to challenge the canon. Although the approach of case-by-case admittance of women authors into the canon was usually criticized, Robinson suggests that in some cases “the work of recovery itself makes one sort of *prima facie* case.”⁹ Establishing a case challenges the “epistemological assumptions” that the canon is based on and offers “pluralist [...] more fully representative literature.”¹⁰ Although the process by which an author or a particular work becomes canonized is challenging to detect, Robinson provides the researcher with a set of codes by which canon could be read and analyzed.

⁴ Maggie Humm, "Canon." In *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Ohio State University Press. 1995. p.29.

⁵ Lillian Robinson, "Treason our text: Feminist challenges to the literary canon." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, no. 2.1.1983. p. 83.

⁶ Ibid. p. 84.

⁷ Ibid. p. 84.

⁸ Ibid. p. 84.

⁹ Ibid. p. 84.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 89.

The canon of Arabic romanticism can be defined by detecting which romantic poetry is in circulation, being taught, and *widely commented upon*. Of these categories, this thesis uses poetry that is in circulation and widely commented upon as signifiers of the canon. Moreover, it proposes the cases of Jamila al-‘Alayli and Zahra al-Hurr as two case studies of women poets’ engagement with modes of canonization. Poetry accessibility can be used as a signifier of poetry circulation. In the preliminary search for this thesis, it was more challenging to find the works of women romantics, as opposed to those of male romantics whose works are primarily digitized and available online. For example, Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī (1892-1955), Ibrāhīm Nājī (1898-1953), and Abūl-Qāsim al-Shābbī’s works are legally accessible through the internet, and copies of their works are available in universities and public libraries. On the other hand, the digitized works of women romantics are mostly their contributions in literary periodicals, whose audiences are more restricted than those of digitized and hard copies of books.

The Arabic literary canon is not a stable structure. This thesis approaches the canon as an unstable construct that is always up for changes and interpretations. The term “negotiation” in the title refers to a metaphoric “confer[ring]” with the institution of the canon “to arrive at the settlement.”¹¹ Although a settlement in the canon is far-fetched, understanding women’s contributions as engagement with the institution problematizes women’s positionality. I do not perceive the literary figures studied in this thesis as passive agents who are forgotten, marginalized, or canonized. I am looking at their part of the story in which they engage with what is written about them and rewrite how they are perceived. Negotiating the canon in this context could signify how women poets could alter their positionality by presenting themselves

¹¹ “Negotiate.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/negotiate>. Accessed 31 Dec. 2024.

in different ways, by engaging with different literary circles, or by engaging with the rhetoric dealing with their lives or writings.

The canon of Arabic literature has been a growing field of literary criticism studies. Hoda Elsadda's book *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel* (2012) explores "issues of canonicity and canon construction in Arabic cultural production."¹² Elsadda's text understands the canon as a "reflect[ion] and construct[ion of] the ideas of nation and national identity in the modern period".¹³ Elsadda revisits the discussion about the first Arabic novel and questions the status of Muḥammad Husāyn Haykal's *Zaynab* (1913). She coins the term *Nahda Hero*, who is read as a "fictional embodiment of the majority of male reformers who imagined the nation in their own masculine image".¹⁴ Elsadda uses the new term in her gender-sensitive reading of *Zaynab* and *Ibrāhīm al-Kātib* (1931) by Ibrāhīm al-Māzinī in the book's second chapter. Elsadda reads prose by women such as 'A'isha Taymūr (1840-1902), Hind Nawfal (1860-1920), Malak Hifnī Nāṣif (1886-1918), and Labība Hāshim (1882-1952), together with Nahda heroes such as Qāsim Amīn (1863-1908). The book, however, focuses on the novelistic tradition for its "privileged status [...] in cultural history."¹⁵

Several works have investigated the canonical status that some women poets hold in the canon. In Michelle Hartman's "An Arab Woman Poet as a Crossover Artist? Reconsidering the Ambivalent Legacy of Al-Khansā'", she investigates the canonical status that Al-Khansā', a well-known pre-Islamic poet, has gained in English-language scholarship. Hartman claims that Al-Khansā' is "referred to and upheld as an exemplary Arab woman poet" providing a critical

¹² Hoda Elsadda, *Gender, Nation and the Arabic Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), XVI.

¹³ Ibid. p. XIII.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. XXXVIII.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. XVI.

reading of the texts and contexts of the knowledge production in English about al-Khansā'.¹⁶ Referring to other reception studies by Mohja Kahf and Amal Amireh, Hartman argues that al-Khansā' "exemplifies a process that Arab women artists who have successfully crossed over into English have undergone."¹⁷ By analyzing al-Khansā's image built by anthologies and literary criticism, Hartman showcases how translation portrays Arab women writers as "exceptions to the Orientalist stereotype of the oppressed woman."¹⁸ Hartman dwells on the idea of a *representative* Arab woman author constructed in anthologies that show the Arab poet as a "solitary female figure within this society [...] singular in her achievements".¹⁹ The idea of representation of Arab women writers not only creates selective and limited lists but also essentializes the claimed scarcity of Arab women poets. Hartman engages with exceptionalism as a mode of canonization, when a woman author is elected to represent a period overlooking many other women authors of the same period.

Other women authors were included in debates about Arab women writers' canonicity such as 'A'isha Taymūr (1840-1902), Nāzik al-Malā'ika (1923-2007) and Fadwā Tūqān (1917-2003). In Mervat Hatem's *Literature, Gender, and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, she uses 'A'isha Taymūr's life and literature as a case study for the book. Hatem highlights how 'A'isha Taymūr's name appears in almost every book in Arabic and English that deals with nineteenth-century Egypt as "one of the pioneering women writers of the time". However, very little attention was given to her views.²⁰ Hatem unearths and analyzes Taymūr's poetry and prose

¹⁶ Michelle Hartman, "An Arab Woman Poet as a Crossover Artist? Reconsidering the Ambivalent Legacy of Al-Khansā'." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. 2011. p. 16.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 16.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 17.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 19.

²⁰ Mervat Hatem, *Literature, Gender, and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Egypt: The Life and Works of A'isha Taymur*. Springer, 2011. p. 2.

and contextualizes her views within the modernist discourse of nineteenth-century Egypt.

Despite the good reception of ‘A’isha Taymūr’s poetry collection, *Hilyat al- ʿIṣṣāz* (1892), Hatem highlights that “modernist literary critics dismissed the reasons behind its good reception sticking with a negative appraisal.”²¹ Hatem relies on Zaynab Fawwāz’s (1860-1914) entry about Taymūr in *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī Ṭabaqāt Rabbāt al-Khudūr* (1891) as a signifier of the immediate good reception, which shifts later due to modernist critics of Taymūr’s traditional poetry forms.²²

Hatem’s analysis of Taymūr’s status in Arabic literature proves the instability of the literary canon and how reviews of authors and reintroducing them affect their status.

²¹ Ibid. p. 152.

²² Ibid. p. 152.

Historiography of Arabic Romanticism

Critics in English and Arabic write differently about the history of Arabic romanticism. I will critically review the anthologies and secondary literature about Arabic romanticism that I have surveyed to investigate the positions of women poets regarding the canon. This section will examine writings by Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Ghaffār, Muhsin al-Musawī, Roger Allen, Mahmoud M. Badawi, Shawqī Ḍayf, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, and Robin Ostle. Additionally, I will review some of the works that deal with al-‘Alayli and al-Hurr.

One of the most recent works dealing with women romantics is Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Ghaffār’s *Al-rūmānsīya al-‘arabīyya bayna al-aṣāla wal-taba‘īyya: dirāsa fī shi‘r maghmūrī Apullu* (2019) of which Jamila al-‘Alayli is the cover of the book. ‘Abd al-Ghaffār works on more than forty poets of the *Apollo* periodical. Three of the poets are women: Jamila al-‘Alayli, Suhayr al-Qalamāwī (1911-1997) and Malaka Maḥmūd al-Sarrāg.²³ Of the three women poets’ works, only al-‘Alayli’s poetry is analyzed. While the book focuses on the theme of fame, primarily through matters of production and consumption of poetry, this thesis focuses on canonicity. Canonicity deals with the institution of literature that admits and omits poets based on uncoded bases. Although fame can be understood as an element of canonicity and *Apollo* can be read as a representative of romanticism, this thesis aims at dealing with gender as a critical element in how the canon works, which is not done yet in the context of Arabic romanticism to the best of my knowledge.

²³ محمود عبد الغفار. الرومانسية العربية بين الأصالة والتبعية: دراسة في شعر مغموري أبولو. الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب. القاهرة. 2019. ص 13.

In Muhsin al-Musawi's *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition*, he explores the engagement of Arab poets and poetry critics with 'modernist poetics and tradition'.²⁴ Al-Musawi reads the Arabic poetry tradition without attention to chronology; however, he is concerned with the thematic appropriations of modernity and tradition throughout all Arabic poetry currents and movements. In doing so, the author reads the Arabic romantics' contributions, relating them to European counterparts as he describes Ahmad Zakī Abu Shadī's poetry as having "sumptuous Keatsian imagery and detail" and Khalīl Muṭrān's (1872-1949) imagery as "Shelleyan aesthetic of powerful natural imagery and human aspiration."²⁵ Arab modernists are no exception in the book, as T. S. Eliot's (1888-1965) influence on many modernist poets is traced and highlighted such as his influence on 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī (1926-1999).²⁶ The author explores a selection of poets, including women poets such as Nāzik al-Malā'ika and Fadwā Ṭūqān.

Al-Musawi's analysis of Ṭūqān's autobiography tracks Ṭūqān's relationship with Arabic poetry tradition for she needed a "strong grounding in classical style" compared to how her brother perceived Apollo's "colorless and weak [...] style."²⁷ According to al-Musawi, Ṭūqān "made use of male scriptoria, but she built up a female lineage."²⁸ Ṭūqān used the help of her brother poet Ibrahīm Ṭūqān (1905-1941) and used Danānīr as a pen name connected to an old Arabic poetic tradition of slave women's poetry. The book follows Ṭūqān's changing allegiances within the Arabic poetry literary community and argues that influenced her position. Ṭūqān's "evolution took a romantic road" writing "poetry of experience" when her poetry was influenced

²⁴ Muhsin J. Al-Musawi, *Arabic Poetry: Trajectories of Modernity and Tradition*. Routledge, 2006.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 8.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 223.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 18-19.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 19.

by the Mahjar and Apollo romantics.²⁹ The author finds that Ṭūqān's associating herself with Nāzik al-Malā'ika is "another rite of passage" as she is moving from "classical prosody to free verse."³⁰ The book recognizes the poet's move from tradition to modernity as convenient and similar to other poets' patterns in Arabic poetry.³¹ The author highlights that Ṭūqān "made her distinct achievement while affiliating herself with strong poets."³² Her association with specific literary figures as a tool to strengthen her canonical status is similar to my discussion of al-'Alayli's association with Ziyada in the first chapter of this thesis.

Roger Allen correlates the emergence of Arabic romanticism with societal changes such as "the emergence of a middle class [and] the changing role of women in society [that] contributed to the emergence of new audiences for poetry."³³ Allen argues that the turn of the twentieth century featured a change in society that allowed for "a very different system of patronage," highlighting a clash between *al-nahḍah* revivalist/ neo-classical poets and an emerging interest in European romanticism.³⁴ The author recognizes the "emigré (*mahjar*) communities" role in developing the Arabic romantic movement as they perceived it as "a reaction against the definitional strictures of classicism."³⁵ In the Arab world, Khalīl Muṭrān performed a "key bridge role" between neoclassical and romantic approaches "to poetry and modernity."³⁶ Allen identifies different currents within the Arabic romantic movement such as *mahjar*, *al-Diwān* and *Apollo*.³⁷ In reading different currents of Arabic romanticism and their

²⁹ Ibid. p. 19.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 20.

³¹ Ibid. p. 20.

³² Ibid. p. 20.

³³ Roger Allen, *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2000. p.123.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 123.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 123-124.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 123.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 125-126.

affiliates' work, Allen provides labels for the romantic Arab authors. Aḥmad Zakī Abu Shādī is "a guiding figure," Abūl-Qāsim al-Shābbī is a "renowned Tunisian poet," Ibrāhīm Nājī and 'Ali Maḥmūd Tāha are "the most significant names."³⁸ While overlooking women's contributions to the Arabic romanticism movement, the text highlights a canonical status for the male poets mapping a gendered canon of Arabic romanticism.

Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Badawī's *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* centralizes romanticism as a significant current of Arabic poetry. The chapter "The Romantics" historicizes romanticism through reading the works of seven romantic male poets. Because of the "lack of space" in the chapter, the author discusses the Apollo group's work through three male poets: Abu Shadī, Nājī and Tāha who are viewed as "representative of certain facets of romantic poetry in Egypt."³⁹ Badawī identifies al-Shābbī as the most commented upon romantic author as "[m]ore books have been written about him than about any other romantic Arab poet."⁴⁰ On the other hand, women characters written by male poets are central to Badawī's analysis and his historiography of romanticism. For instance, in his comparison between Ilyās Abū Shabaka (1903-1947) and Abūl-Qāsim al-Shābbī, he distinguishes between Abu Shabaka's portrayal of women in *The Serpents of Paradise* (1938) as "confined to the world of sensations, of sex and drink" and al-Shābbī's idealization of women, who are "described in religious terms."⁴¹ The text mentions no romantic women poets and reads women's subjectivity only from the perspective of male poets.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 125-126.

³⁹ Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Badawī, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry*. Cambridge University Press. 1975. p. 129.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 157.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 172.

Shawky Dayf historicizes Egypt's modern prose and poetry in his book *Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt* (1957). In the third chapter, “a‘lām al-shi‘r (Canonical Poets)” Dayf analyzes the poetry of ten Arab male poets, four of whom are prominently known for their romantic poetry. Contextualizing the emergence of the Arabic romantic movement, Dayf writes: “A new generation that was deeply cultured in English literature and other Western kinds of literature” appeared at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century.⁴² Arab poets' reception of Western poetry changed with the rising translation movement. He remarks that before the thirties of the twentieth century, Egyptians “regained their freedom after the Unilateral Declaration of Egyptian Independence on 28 February 1922, we inaugurated parliament and liberated women.”⁴³ Dayf correlates the increasing number of poets in the thirties of the twentieth century to the increased opportunities for higher education, such as the inauguration of the Egyptian university, which allows male and female students to enroll.⁴⁴ His selection of poets does not reflect the inclusion of women in the introduction as liberated students since only the work of male romantics is analyzed.

Salma Khadra Jayyusi perceives Arabic romanticism as a minor current in Arabic literature. In contrast, free verse and Committed Poetry are perceived as the main turning point in her chapter “The Break-Through Begins”.⁴⁵ In a section titled “Infiltration of Romanticism”, the author states that Khalīl Muṭrān was “an important link between the neo-Classical school and the more modern poetry written in the twenties and thirties.”⁴⁶ The author recognizes Muṭrān as the

⁴² شوقي ضيف. الأدب العربي المعاصر في مصر. دار المعارف. القاهرة. 1957. ص 58. الأصل بالعربية: "جيل جديد تتقف ثقافة عميقة بالآداب الإنجليزية وغيرها من الآداب الغربية."

All translations are mine unless mentioned otherwise.

⁴³ المرجع نفسه. ص 70. الأصل بالعربية: "نلنا تصريح 28 من فبراير سنة 1922 ورُدت إلينا حريتنا فأنشأنا البرلمان، وحررنا المرأة."

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 70.

⁴⁵ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Contemporary Arabic poetry*. PhD Thesis. University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (United Kingdom), 1970.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 115.

“first poet of his generation [...] to free himself from the rigidity of the old poetic order.”⁴⁷

Jayyusi further promotes the poet’s canonical status as a fore-father to Arabic romanticism by listing the “universal acclaim” that he enjoys in both Arabic and English scholarship.⁴⁸ Other Arab romantic poets are systematically related to his work. However, no woman is mentioned among those other romantic poets, nor does Jayyusi refer to women poets’ relationship to Muṭrān. For example, Al-Hurr found Muṭrān an inspiration and dedicated her poem “He is a Poet” to him.⁴⁹

Robin Ostle writes another version of the history of romanticism in “The Romantic Revolution?” and “The Romantic Poets”. Like previously mentioned critics, Ostle does not include women poets. However, he identifies the canonical status that Badawi and Jayyusi as authorities attribute to al-Shābbi as the true romantic for “his own existence [...] was both reality and metaphor”.⁵⁰ Ostle problematizes Luwis ‘Awad’s claim that Arab romantics had “failed to understand the true nature of Romanticism” as a conjugate to political engagement.⁵¹ The author discusses politicized and de-politicized versions of romanticism and claims that Arabic romanticism was mostly de-politicized. Ostle focuses his analysis on romantics’ engagements with the social and political contexts manifesting ‘true romanticism’ as al- Shābbi. The author also argues that prose romantic author Muḥammad Ḥusāyn Hāykal’s (1888-1956) *Zāynab* (1913) is “a descendant of the sentimental novel of the 18th century.”⁵² Ostle argues that *Zaynab* carried “paradoxical qualities of the intellectual and political ideas of the Jarida group.”⁵³ This thesis is

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 115.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 116.

⁴⁹ زهرة الحر. "إنه شاعر". مجلة الأديب. أرشيف الشارخ للمجلات الأدبية والثقافية. عدد 7. يوليو 1947. ص 16.

⁵⁰ Robin Ostle, "The Romantic Revolution?". *Journal of Arabic Literature* 26.1-2 (1995). p. 103.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 95.

⁵² Ibid. p. 101.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 101.

exploring romantic women poets' interactions with their contexts and their politically engaged writings.

The anthology *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (1987), edited by Jayyusi, is divided into two parts: "Poets Before the Fifties" and "Poets After the Fifties."⁵⁴ The first part includes entries about twenty-two neoclassical, romantic, and symbolist poets, none of whom were women. This anthology confirms a pattern that could be read from scholarship about Arabic romanticism. This pattern could also be read as the recognized literary canon of Arabic romanticism. Except for women poets' entries in Arab women writers' encyclopedias such as *Mawsū'at al-Kātiba al-'Arabiyya* (Arab Women Writers) (2008), edited by 'Āshūr, Raḍwá, et al, the Arabic romantic movement is historicized through its male poets, and women's contributions are ignored.

⁵⁴ Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology*. Columbia University Press, 1987.

Feminine Romanticism and *Fuḥūla*

When al-Khansā' recited her ra'iyya poem to al-Nābigha al-dhubiyānī, a pre-Islamic poet, in 'Ukāz, he praised her abilities saying "Go, for you are the greatest poet among those with breasts." She responded, "the greatest poet among those with testicles, too."⁵⁵ The anecdote is not only telling of al-Khansā's boldness but also a gendered image of the canonical Arab poet, that must be *masculine*. Yumna al-'Id defines the term *fuḥūla* (poetic virility) as "a value that inhabited the popular consciousness, referring to that which ensured the continuity and sovereignty of the tribe."⁵⁶ Al-'Id identifies *fuḥūla* as a standard used to judge the ability of a poet, much like how the modern canon works. She highlights how a warrior poet could be "in more esteem" than a poet who "served, educated, and raised children."⁵⁷ It is a gendered standard that favors masculine characteristics against feminine ones. Zahra al-Hurr and Jamila al-'Alayli challenge the traditional conception of *fuḥūla* by writing in modes that were dominated by male poets such as self-praise (*fakhr*) and satirical (*hijā'*) poems. Additionally, they tried to subvert the image of the canonical poet who is imagined to be masculine.

In "*Ta'nīth al-Qasīda* (Feminizing the Poem)", 'Abd-Allāh al-Ghadhāmī argues that Nāzik al-Malā'ika, "the woman the feminine", leading the revolt against Arabic poetry rules had "destroyed the most important symbol of *fuḥūla* [...] which is 'Amūd al-Shi'r."⁵⁸ Al-Ghadhāmī claims that there are symbols for "a dominant cultural system that is a patriarchal system."⁵⁹ The

⁵⁵ Translated and Qtd in "Introduction" *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999*, edited by Radwa Ashour, et al., American University in Cairo Press, 2007. p.1.

⁵⁶ Yumna Al-'Id, "Lebanon" in *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999*. Edited by Ashour, Radwa, Ferial Jabouri Ghazoul, Hasna Reda-Mekdashī, and Mandy McClure. American University in Cairo Press, 2007. p. 13.

⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 13.

⁵⁸ عبد الله الغدامي. "تأنيث القصيدة". تأنيث القصيدة والقارئ المختلف. المركز الثقافي العربي. الدار البيضاء. 2005. ص 11-28. الأصل بالعربية: "المرأة الأنثى" "حطمت أهم رموز الفحولة [...] وهو عمود الشعر."

⁵⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 16. الأصل العربي: "هيمنة النسق الثقافي، الذي هو نسق ذكوري."

author claims that many women authors including al-Malā'ika bargain with patriarchy to gain benefits in the Arab literary environment quoting a correspondence between Mayy Ziyāda and Malak Hifnī Nāṣif (1886-1918).⁶⁰ Al-Ghadhāmī also argues that al-Malā'ika feminized the Arabic poetry meter while comparing the eight meters that she anointed for al-Shi'r al-Hurr to the rest of the meters, which he describes as “masculine that are not susceptible for contraction and expansion.”⁶¹ While al-Malā'ika's contributions to the Arabic poem are canonical, the contributions of Jamila al-'Alayli and Zahra al-Hurr are not in the canon. Feminizing romanticism could be interpreted as challenging to *fuḥūla*.

Reading romanticism as feminine or masculine is an ongoing practice in literary criticism, which is concerned with European romanticism. In Anne Mellor's *Romanticism & Gender*, she identifies a masculinization of English romanticism and dedicates her book to studying feminine romanticism. Mellor highlights that critics have based their readings of romanticism on a “highly selective group of texts, almost all poetry, almost all written by men.”⁶² The book argues that a paradigm shift occurs to “our conceptual understanding of British literary romanticism” if women's writings were to be studied.⁶³

In “Feminine Romanticism, Masculine History and the Founding of the Modern Liberal State”, Gary Kelly relates the rising of the modern state to feminine romanticism's discourse while reading women's contributions to romanticism. He characterizes feminine romanticism as one that focuses “on female protagonists and the destructive effects of masculine history on

⁶⁰ المرجع نفسه. ص 16.

⁶¹ المرجع نفسه. ص 18. الأصل بالعربية: "المذكر كونه لا يقلل التمدد والتقلص".

⁶² Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism & Gender*. Routledge, 1993. p. 14.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 1.

individual subjectivity and domestic affections.”⁶⁴ Kelly highlights how male authors “took up topics hitherto considered more appropriate to women, especially certain kinds of subjective experience, the 'domestic affections'.”⁶⁵ The appropriation of feminine themes is seen as a reaction to a “progressive feminized masculinity of sensibility” that was widespread before and during the French Revolution.⁶⁶ Kelly argues that male romantics combined the appropriated “feminine' themes, styles, and genres [...] with conventionally 'masculine' discourses.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Gary Kelly, “Feminine Romanticism, Masculine History and the Founding of the Modern Liberal State.” In: Janowitz, A. *Essays and Studies*, 1998. p. 14.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 3.

Selection of Women Poets and Their Works

Although the preliminary research for this thesis revealed a rich history of women authors' contributions to the Arabic romanticism movement, I chose to focus on Jamila al-ʿAlayli and Zahra al-Hurr for their ambivalent position vis-à-vis the canon and their consistent literary production. Some romantic women authors shifted their literary careers to focus on different things such as Suhayr al-Qalamāwī who wrote romantic poetry in the beginning of her career and continued to be a professor and a scholar of literature. Other women poets did not continue writing romantic poetry such as Malak ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (1921-1999) who mainly wrote committed poetry after her first collection. Other women poets' literary careers were shorter for various reasons: Malaka Mahmūd al-Sarrāg published two poems in *Apollo* and Iqbāl Badrān contributed an article and a poem to the magazine. Even though some women romantics contributed only a few poems or articles, their work is understudied.

Nāhid Tāha ʿAbd al-Barr (1920-1950) is another example of a romantic poet whose literary career was stopped. The poet published her works in *al-Risālah*, using her initials as a penname and struggled to continue her higher education.⁶⁸ She committed suicide in 1950, and several critics, including Ragāʾ al-Naqqāsh, reacted in their articles to the young poet's sudden death.⁶⁹ ʿAbd al-Barr tragically died and gained little recognition for her work. Various examples of women authors who ended their literary careers either because they felt neglected by critics or challenged by their family's traditional values exist.

This thesis builds on the work of scholars focused on women's contributions to Arabic literature. The *Arab Women Writers* encyclopedia was a beginning point in my research for

⁶⁸ آمال مخلوف. "شعر ناهد طه عبد البر في ميزان النقد الأدبي". مجلة الدراسات العربية، جامعة المنيا. ص 659-721.

⁶⁹ Ibid. pp. 666-667.

romantic women writers. However, it sometimes fell short in providing information about, or even the name of, a specific author, which discouraged moving in the direction of a woman's work. The book's chapter about Sudan lacked women poets before 1950 describing women's contributions as "meager and weak."⁷⁰ The names of Iqbāl Badrān, Malaka Mahmūd al-Sarrāg, and Nāhid Tāha 'Abdel-Barr are not included in the book's bibliography. While the research was moving forward, I was formulating my argument about "negotiating the canon," so dealing with women authors who had consistently tried to change their literary status was more convincing.

Jamila al-'Alayli and Zahra al-Hurr were Arab romantic women poets from the same generation as they began publishing their work in the thirties of the twentieth century. Although they had no direct link, they grew up reading neo-classical Arabic poetry. Both writers were influenced by women authors such as Mayy Ziyāda and were interested in women's rights issues. As women romantics, they express different aspects of the movement. Al-'Alayli lived in Egypt, publishing in Apollo and connected to prominent male authors. On the other hand, al-Hurr interacted with her political context, showing interest in social change. Reading al-'Alayli and al-Hurr together illustrates their engagement with different modes of canonization through different modes that fit each poet's context and resources.

Selecting the corpus of works that will be analyzed in the thesis was a process that prioritized the authors' main themes and interests which informed my argument. Both poets extensively wrote about women's rights issues differently, which had to be a part of each poet's chapter. In addition, al-Hurr was interested in class struggles and social injustices, while al-'Alayli wrote about her literary circle and her relationship with Mayy Ziyāda.

⁷⁰ Raḍwā 'Āshūr, et al. *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999*. American University in Cairo Press, New York;Cairo, 2008. p. 174.

I will operate a close reading of their literary production, including al-‘Alayli’s *Ṣadā Aḥlāmī* (1936) and al-Hurr’s *Qaṣā’id Mansiyya* (1970) and their non-fiction writing, a contextualization thereof, and a critical reading of the reception of their work. For both poets, I will analyze both fiction and non-fiction writings, including selected poems from their publications in literary periodicals, autobiographical texts, articles and interviews.

The first chapter of this thesis deals with al-‘Alayli and the second chapter deals with Zahra al-Hurr. In the first chapter, I will analyze al-‘Alayli’s modes of negotiating the canon. Al-‘Alayli’s employment of gender essentialism in the context of romantic women’s position in the canon will be analyzed in the first section. I will track the author’s engagement with the concept of women’s domesticity in the second section. In the third section, I will analyze how she portrayed her relationships in her literary environment, and how she took inspiration from the women authors she took as role models to better her position in the literary canon.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I will analyze al-Hurr’s negotiation of two modes of canonization. Al-Hurr was portrayed as an exceptional woman; I will closely read her engagement with the rhetoric of exceptionalism and how different an exceptional woman she has portrayed herself. On the other hand, I will analyze her engagement with her sociopolitical context and how that affected her canonical status.

Chapter One: Jamila Al-‘Alayli

Al-‘Alayli was actively using different modes to change how she was perceived, based on an understanding that the canon is created in a patriarchal way that favors male poets and relegates women poets to the margins. Through a close reading of a selection of her poems, articles and interviews, this chapter argues that she developed strategies to counter how canonicity works to elevate her position. Firstly, she argued that women poets are *innately* better romantics than male poets. Secondly, she engaged with women’s domesticity discourse to portray herself as an early fighter against it although she had an ambivalent position towards it earlier in her career. Thirdly, she weaponized her connections in the literary field, associating herself with canonical figures. More specifically, Al-‘Alayli articulated her relationship with Mayy Ziyāda in terms that presented her as a follower of Ziyāda, hoping to become a canonical woman writer.

Al-‘Alayli negotiated the literary canon and attempted several times to present herself as a canonical romantic woman poet. Through its three sections, the chapter will present and analyze three of those attempts: the first section deals with the idea of feminine romanticism and how Jamila al-‘Alayli views women as essentially better romantics than men. The second section concerns al-‘Alayli’s writing timeline about women’s domesticity and its contexts. Al-‘Alayli presents herself as a fighter against domesticity, however, she adopted traditional discourses of women’s domesticity such as those in her article “The Bride (al-‘Arūsa).” The third section will discuss her relationship with Ziyāda and how she emulates her to leverage her canonical status.

al-Mar'a al-shā'ira: Gendering Arabic Romanticism

Gender Essentialism is the view that “people and objects have properties that are given and unalterable.”⁷¹ Essentialism in gender “refers to the notion that women and men have particular, biological traits that make them different from each other.”⁷² While gender essentialism can be understood as a pivotal concept to read al-‘Alayli’s views on gender, it is not equivocal to say that al-‘Alayli had essentialist views, as discussed later in this chapter. She changes her views on matters such as women's domesticity when she perceives the concepts from different angles in different life stages, which can be understood as relativistic more than essentialist. Discussing essentialism brings al-‘Alayli’s views on “difference,” which connotes that “all women shared the same experiences within patriarchy.”⁷³ However, al-‘Alayli does not assume that all women have the same experiences in patriarchal systems, as discussed later while close-reading her article “The Bride (al-‘Arūsa)” and discussing the targeted audience of her articles, al-‘Alayli addresses diverse and unequal experiences of young Arab women.

Among twelve women writers who published prose and poetry in *Apollo* magazine, al-‘Alayli was the most prolific, with eight articles and poems. In her article “*al-Mar'a wa al-Shi'r al-‘Ātifī* (Women and Romantic Poetry)”, she criticizes the literary environment in the form of fellow male poets monopolizing romantic writing and calls for a women’s convention that is “naturally” more capable of expressing emotions.⁷⁴ Wadī‘ Filastīn (1923- 2022) references that Jamila al-‘Alayli said “She is the only woman poet in this group.”⁷⁵ Al-‘Alayli not only

⁷¹ Gabriele Griffin, "Essentialism." *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Gabriele Griffin, "Difference." *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁷⁴ جميلة العاليلي. "المرأة والشعر العاطفي". مجلة أبولو. عدد 5. يناير 1934. ص 378-383.
⁷⁵ وديع فلسطين. "الشاعرة جميلة العاليلي". وديع فلسطين يتحدث عن أعلام عصره (الجزء الأول). دار القلم. دمشق. ص 149. الأصل بالعربية: "تقول عن نفسها: أنها الشاعرة الوحيدة في هذه الجماعة."

expresses a feeling of loneliness among male poets, but she also identifies a lack of women authors in the group. Alongside positioning herself as the woman poet of the group, I argue that al-‘Alayli essentializes her position in the group to promote her position in the canon of Arabic romanticism. In her theoretical and creative work, al-‘Alayli essentializes a gendered role for women and presents a satiric image of male poets.

In “*al-Mar’a wa al-Shi’r al-‘Ātifi*”, al-‘Alayli identifies as a young woman artist and illustrates her challenges. She presents the young woman as educated, cultured, and aware of her context and challenges. According to al-‘Alayli, the woman artist is always a woman poet (*shā’ira*) who expresses her feelings in all forms of art “on the canvas of a painter, on the stone of a sculptor or the paper of a poet.”⁷⁶ The poet targets two sets of audiences: young women, whom she aims to educate, and the literary environment involving fellow poets and critics. Al-‘Alayli plays with the word *shā’ir* which has several denotations in Arabic, two of which concern the reader here; first, it means poet, which is assumed to be in such a literary magazine context. The root of the term means “having a feeling of”, although she does not specify what such a woman feels, she intentionally makes the word ambivalent to signify that women with their *natural* feelings are poets. She essentializes poetic virtues to women’s nature. Al-‘Alayli argues that women’s “feelings differ according to women’s fiction.”⁷⁷ In the article, she argues that the woman’s fiction and feelings make her a better romantic poet than her male counterpart, an idea which we will focus on later in this section.

⁷⁶ جميلة العلالي. "المرأة والشعر العاطفي". مجلة أبولو. عدد 5. يناير 1934. ص 379. الأصل بالعربية: "فقد تعرضها في شبه صور على لوح رسامة، أو مجسمة على حجر فخارة، أو على ورق بقلم شاعرة فنانة."
⁷⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 379. الأصل بالعربية: تختلف مشاعرها باختلاف أخيلتها."

Al-‘Alayli identifies several challenges which hinder the literary historian from doing their job, which should be “pure justice”⁷⁸. The idea of literary history in this thesis could equate to canonicity as it signifies particular judgment over literary works and retains literature worthy of glory (*majd*), a sentiment that al-‘Alayli iterates in her poems and prose writing. The only difference between such literary glory and the contemporary understanding of canonicity is that al-‘Alayli assumes “pure justice,” which is not valid for a patriarchally constructed canon. In her article, she generally mentions her challenges in the form of arguments that she refutes, but she never mentions whose ideas she is refuting. However, there are hints of a competition between the young female poet and male poets who share the literary space with her, religious thinkers who twist religion in her point of view to prevent women from writing poetry, and literary critics with whom she conceptually disagrees on the basis they judge poetry by.

Al-‘Alayli weaponizes the audience she addresses in her article to convey her views on women's education and writing poetry and to refute arguments against women's poetry writing. She begins her article with a clear distinction between two kinds of women: traditional and modernist. Firstly, she writes about a young woman (*fatā*) who is bound to her household and leans towards “respecting the old, the limited aspects and the limiting of desires.” Al-‘Alayli expands: “These young women rarely receive the needed affection, and they have very little ambition.”⁷⁹ She also adds that these young women grow up to be hands of the patriarchal system as they “help men disempower women.”⁸⁰ On the other hand, other young women are worthy of studying and analyzing to guide them towards “utmost perfection,”⁸¹ the young women who gain enough culture (*thaqāfa*) and intellectual emancipation (*taḥarrur fikri*). Al-

⁷⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 383. الأصل بالعربية: "العدالة المطلقة."

⁷⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 378. الأصل بالعربية: "هذه الفتاة قلما تنال حظها الموفور من العاطفة المرجوة، وهي أبداً تطمع في شيء محدود."

⁸⁰ المرجع نفسه. ص 378. الأصل بالعربية: "حملت الرجال على استضعاف النساء."

⁸¹ المرجع نفسه. ص 378. الأصل بالعربية: "غاية الكمال."

‘Alayli sympathetically writes about both kinds of women, but she is more concerned with the latter. She further defines her target audience by stating that these emancipated women are whom she “think[s] of today” writing the article.⁸² Al-‘Alayli’s categorization creates a dichotomy that aligns with the *Nahda* rhetoric, which calls for a *rupture with the tradition*. At the same time, she uses the dichotomy to identify with a *cultured* audience of women readers.

The idea of guiding young women to become perfect introduces the reader to the article's main theme: Women are creators as goddesses. Al-‘Alayli engages with religious rhetoric that diminishes the woman's ability to feel, she interrogates that rhetoric: “Hence, what religion prohibited women from feelings and permitted men?”⁸³ She claims that “Allah installed the woman as the sole goddess of feeling”⁸⁴ and addresses a different audience, who assume patriarchal positions and fight against women's rights. Al-‘Alayli continues in her article in two directions: firstly, to prove with evidence how women could be goddesses of feeling as creators of meaning, hence better romantic poets, and secondly, to fight back against patriarchal values.

According to Jamila al-‘Alayli, women poets (*al-Mar’a al-shā’ira*) become goddesses when they become creators, creators of meaning, by turning feelings into fiction. For al-‘Alayli, a woman poet “subjects life” to her willpower, which happens when she is subject to “her mighty and free imaginary.”⁸⁵ The woman poet can only liberate her imagination by “transcending her limited world into unlimited space,” and through only that, “she comes across uncharted fictions.”⁸⁶ Al-‘Alayli’s article, in this case, functions in two directions; it showcases her commitment to romanticism tradition by creating ethereal imagery of women poets as goddesses

⁸² المرجع نفسه. ص 378. الأصل بالعربية: "مناط تفكيري اليوم."

⁸³ المرجع نفسه. ص 379. الأصل بالعربية: "ثم أي دين حرم على المرأة الشعور العاطفي وحلله للرجل؟"

⁸⁴ المرجع نفسه. ص 379. الأصل بالعربية: "المرأة التي خلقها الله إلهة للعاطفة وحدها."

⁸⁵ المرجع نفسه. ص 379. الأصل بالعربية: "تخضع الحياة" "خيالها الطليق الجبار."

⁸⁶ المرجع نفسه. ص 380. الأصل بالعربية: "تجتاز حدود دنياها إلى الفضاء اللامحدود." "تمر بأخيلة لا عهد لها بها."

who sometimes control men's position in fiction, elevating them into angels.⁸⁷ The second function is the feminist tone that aims at empowering young women.

The author describes the representative of this patriarchal power as "an elderly thinker (*mufakkir kahl*)", who holds the power of criticism against women poets; she questions how he shames the young woman for writing romantic poetry.⁸⁸ When the author authorizes the women poets' positions as creators and goddesses, she directly addresses those enemies: "No! You are the wrongful ones, if you think that a woman's feelings are sin and defamation (*ithm wa buhtān*)".⁸⁹ Al-ʿAlayli defends the woman's position as a goddess while refuting a religious-based accusation of women's inferiority as emotional beings. On another occasion, al-ʿAlayli writes about authorities in Egyptian literary circles and refuses to submit to such authorities. In her article "Asnām al-Adab (Literature Idols)," she criticizes ʿAbbās al-ʿAqqād (1889-1964), a well-known Egyptian author and literary critic.⁹⁰ Al-ʿAlayli criticizes al-Akkad's authority and claims that other poets are "scared of punishment."⁹¹

The secondary audience becomes primary as al-ʿAlayli continues to prove to the elderly thinkers who are "proud of [their] strength and ingenuity"⁹² that women are not just the sensible gender but also capable of putting this sensibility into writing. Jamila al-ʿAlayli naturalizes women's gender roles and extends them into a literary role as romantic poets. "A woman senses and a man thinks" is the main argument that al-ʿAlayli presents to the elderly thinkers and she extends that argument to state that women should be the writers of this sensibility and logic is

⁸⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 381.

⁸⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 379.

⁸⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 379.

⁹⁰ جميلة العلايلي. "أصنام الأدب". جريدة البلاغ. القاهرة. مايو 1946. ص 4.

⁹¹ المرجع نفسه. ص 4. الأصل بالعربية: "خوفاً من العقاب".

⁹² جميلة العلايلي. "المرأة والشعر العاطفي". مجلة أبولو. عدد 5. يناير 1934. ص 382.

left to men. It is a bargain with patriarchy that al-‘Alayli proposes, as she negotiates the position of women in literature. Finally, the author reminds the critics of romantic poets that they “should read their poetry in the light of his [poet’s] imaginary, not from [the critics’] shortsighted imaginary.”⁹³ In her closing argument, she reminds the elderly thinker that their aesthetics might be outdated, and other perspectives and aesthetics should be considered.

The essentialist tone of Jamila al-‘Alayli in her article about women’s “natural” feelings does not stand alone in the context of late 19th-century and early 20th-century Egyptian women’s magazines. In Hoda Elsadda’s article “Gendered Citizenship: Discourses on Domesticity in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” she traces the “debate on women’s expected roles in the modern [Egyptian] nation to its moment of inception in the nineteenth century.”⁹⁴ Through reading several magazines such as *al-Fatā* and other publications interested in women’s role in the modern Egyptian nation such as *al-Ustādh* and *al-Hilāl*, Elsadda posits a narrative with mainstream ideologies. That mainstream can be understood as built on a dichotomy between a backward past and an enlightened modern future. Such dichotomy influenced modernist views of society’s class order. The modernist *Nahda* elite had a particular definition of labor that only recognized “waged labor [...and] marginalized unwaged women’s contribution to the labor market.”⁹⁵ The modernist ideology propagated powerful discourses that called for women’s domesticity to establish the modern nation. Elsadda highlights that *al-Fatā* showed “little questioning of women’s ‘natural’ roles inside their homes.”

⁹³ المرجع نفسه. ص 382. الأصل بالعربية: "علينا أن نقرأ شعره من ضوء خياله هو، لا من وراء خيالنا القاصر."

⁹⁴ Hoda Elsadda, “Gendered citizenship: Discourses on Domesticity in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century”. *Hawwa*, no. 4(1) (2006), pp. 1-28.

⁹⁵ Ibid. P. 5.

In “From Fiction to Rights,” Mervat Hatem reads ‘A’isha Taymūr’s engagement in “social criticism—that is, the changing gender relations between men and women in the family and its effects on the representation of the national community.”⁹⁶ Hatem reads two publications by Taymūr: *Mir’āt al-Ta’mul fi al-’Umūr*, a prose booklet by Taymūr in addition to her poetry collection. The author distinguishes between Taymūr’s philosophy and *al-Fatā* magazine’s emphasis. While *al-Fatā* “emphasized the modernist ideals that emphasized women’s domestic concerns as part of a sexual division of labor,” Taymūr’s *Mir’āt al-Ta’mul fi al-’Umūr* “sought to initiate public debate on the significant changes in the roles that men and women played in the family.”⁹⁷ Within debates about gender roles at the turn of the twentieth century, Taymūr criticized the new colonial social order. According to Hatem, Taymūr critically read the “corrupting effects of new consumption patterns, [...] continuing divisions among the different classes and among men and women in the new colonial society.”⁹⁸ Taymūr used a literary device that al-‘Alayli uses: “She referred to a hypothetical discourse she had with a scholar of the Islamic tradition (‘*alama*).”⁹⁹ While al-‘Alayli did not address a scholar, she used the same mode in addressing various audiences in her article.

Al-‘Alayli’s gender essentialism is a part of early twentieth-century conversations about gender. In her analysis of Hind Nawfal’s articles Hoda Elsadda argues that some women’s magazines think of naturalizing women’s gender roles as it “has been a strategic decision to gain ground. By not challenging patriarchal control, women have sought to make their demands more

⁹⁶ Mervat Hatem, “From Fiction to Social Criticism.” *Literature, Gender, and Nation-Building in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*. Palgrave Macmillan, United States, 2011. p. 113.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 116.

⁹⁸ Hatem. “From Fiction”. p. 116.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 116.

acceptable.”¹⁰⁰ Had the naturalization of women's gender roles been “a necessary tribute to the existing social order” and a “strategic decision.”¹⁰¹ Such strategic decisions necessitated a foreseeable goal in favor of women's rights. At the same time, in Elsadda's article, many women authors, including Nawfal and others, are part of an existing social order, for which they help produce its domesticity discourse. With the exclusion of Zaynab Fawwaz's question about comparing women's and men's strenuousness,¹⁰² there was not much opposition to the late 19th-century and early 20th-century domesticity discourse.

Al-‘Alayli's gender essentialism could be understood as a continuation of the “existing social order” discourse on women's gender roles and domesticity. If Nawfal's naturalization of women's roles could be understood as “a strategic decision,” then al-‘Alayli could have been doing the same trick. However, in al-‘Alayli's case, the ground that the female author was reaching for was to gain ground as a woman poet to change male poets' domination in the field of romantic poetry. However, both authors base their arguments on the social order and naturalization of women's gender roles; al-‘Alayli's argument had the potential of engaging with how women engage with her public sphere, hence challenging domesticity discourses.

Fuḥūla was used as a standard to judge the abilities of poets and compare them to each other.¹⁰³ By necessitating a romantic woman's superiority against male romantics, al-‘Alayli destabilizes the traditional concept of *fuḥūla* which typically privileges male poets. As early-Islamic perceived inferiority in poets who possessed feminine characteristics like if they “served,

¹⁰⁰ Hoda Elsadda, “Gendered Citizenship: Discourses on Domesticity in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century”. *Hawwa*, 4(1) (2006), pp. 1-28.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. P. 11.

¹⁰² Ibid. P. 12.

¹⁰³ Yumna Al-‘Id, “Lebanon” in *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999*. Edited by Ashour, Radwa, Ferial Jabouri Ghazoul, Hasna Reda-Mekdashy, and Mandy McClure. American Univ in Cairo Press, 2008. pp. 13-59.

educated, and raised children.”¹⁰⁴ Al-‘Alayli uses the same feminine qualities to praise women poets who, acquiring these qualities, will be better romantics. While ‘Abd-Allāh al-Ghadhāmī views Nāzik al-Malā’ika as “destroyed the [...] symbol of *fuḥūla*” for being a “woman” and leading poetry revolutions,¹⁰⁵ *fuḥūla* could be seen differently when romantic women poets are perceived as better than their male colleagues.

The idea of a necessary better woman romantic was not solely expressed in al-‘Alayli’s prose; she expressed similar notions in her poetry. In her poem “*itāb* (Reproach),” al-‘Alayli lends her voice to a woman betrayed by her poet lover. In a pretext between parentheses, she states that she knows the poet and the woman. Al-‘Alayli sympathizes with the woman, saying, “She wept tears, so I wept poetry for her.”¹⁰⁶ Al-‘Alayli highlighted that she presumed that the poet’s love was like “the sure transcendent sincere” love, but he became “bored and abominated her.”¹⁰⁷ The poem can be read as a satirical poem (*hijā’*) against the unnamed romantic male poet. It can also be read more broadly as a *hijā’* to how romantic male poets love, express their love, and eventually betray their lovers, compared to unswerving women who, from al-‘Alayli’s point of view, are the true romantics. In her poem, she says:

"أترى نسيت عواطفى يا هاجر أترى صددت عن الهوى يا شاعر"

In the first verse “See, you forgot my feelings O departer/ See, you relinquished love O poet”,¹⁰⁸ al-‘Alayli sets the poem's tone and associates all the feelings to the female narrator and describes the male poet as forgetful of her feelings and obstructing love. The ambivalent meaning of the word *shā’ir* becomes satirical in this instance, as although the man works as a

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. P. 13.

¹⁰⁵ عبد الله الغدامي. "تأنيث القصيدة". تأنيث القصيدة والقارئ المختلف. المركز الثقافي العربي. الدار البيضاء. 2005. ص 28-11.

¹⁰⁶ جميلة العلايلي. "عتاب". ديوان صدى أحلامي. مطبعة التعاون. الإسكندرية. 1936. ص 27. الأصل بالعربية: "بكت دمعاً فبكيت لها شعراً".

¹⁰⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 27. الأصل بالعربية: "الحب الصادق السامي الأكيد" ولكنه ملها واجتواها.

¹⁰⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 27.

poet, he has no feelings and obstructs love. In contrast to her use of the word when she uses it to describe women poets, she privileges them in her article and plays with the word's double meaning. She uses *taṣṣri* , a literary device that entails using the same rhyme in the first and second hemistiches in the first verse of an Arabic poem. She adds another literary device, namely a *jinās* by repeating two sounds of the same two words *hājir* and *shā'ir*. In that way, the two words are associated. It can be argued that both literary devices strengthen the satiric depiction of the male poet.

In another verse from the same poem:

"أوليتني قد كنت زهرة نرجس تحنو عليها لاثماً وتبادر!"

Al-‘Alayli says “I wish I were a narcissus flower/ that you tend to, kissing and initiating.”¹⁰⁹ The poet thinks if she were a flower, he would have cared for her more than being a woman. She deems the poet’s romantic qualities inconsistent, as he would care for nature figuratively in his poems and not in his own life. Moreover, she wishes to be specifically a *narcissus flower*, which can be interpreted as a signifier for Narcissus as a Greek mythological figure. In Greek mythology narratives, Narcissus falls in love with himself when he sees his reflection in the water, “pined away in despair until he finally died of thirst and starvation” and “his corpse [...] turned into the flowers [which] bore his name”.¹¹⁰ After al-‘Alayli mentioned the flower’s name in the verse, she uses the Arabic word *tahnu* which not only being tender to the flower but also signifies a movement of the body towards the flower, a similar description to that of Narcissus when he sees his reflection in the water. Using this analogy, the narcissus

¹⁰⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 31.

¹¹⁰ Mark Cartwright, "Narcissus." *World History Encyclopedia*. World History Encyclopedia, 05 Mar 2023. Accessed on Web. 21 Jan 2024.

flower becomes a metaphor for the poet's self-obsession and fall, like how Narcissus died. In another version of the Greek mythology about Narcissus written by the Roman writer Ovid, Narcissus is beautiful yet cruel, and he "refuses the advances of Echo." Echo, as a devoted nymph, dies shortly of heartbreak and Narcissus is killed because he neglected her. The narrative of Narcissus as a neglectful lover supports the metaphor because al-'Alayli mentions the poet's neglect in the poem's first verse. Additionally, the Apollo group poets' interest in Greek and Roman mythologies makes interpreting the verse this way likely.

In Jamila al-'Alayli's poem "The Miserable Beauty (al-Hasnā' al-Bā'isa)," she tells the story of a beautiful young woman who falls victim to life, destiny, and time and is betrayed by people. The prose pre-text tells the story of a young woman who meets al-'Alayli, gains her sympathy and inspires her with the poem.¹¹¹ In the poem's second stanza, she focuses on the young woman's relationships and friendships. She portrays an extended image of a sea "turbid with people,"¹¹² the nature imagery in the stanza is disturbed and disorderly. She ends the stanza saying:

"والقدر يفتح جوفه والبنت تقذف للوقود

والدهر يسخر والرجال كأنهم رسل الحمام

والمد يطغى فوق شطآن الحياة والانتقام"

The poet says: "Destiny opens its abdomen, and the girl is thrown to its fire/ and time mocks and men are like death messengers/ while tide covers the shores of life and revenge."¹¹³ In the catastrophic imagery that ends the stanza, the young woman is sent to death and men become

¹¹¹ جميلة العلالي. "الحسنة البائسة". ديوان صدى أحلامي. مطبعة التعاون. الإسكندرية. 1936. ص 23-26.

¹¹² المرجع نفسه. ص 24. الأصل بالعربية: "بحر تعكر بالخلائق."

¹¹³ المرجع نفسه. ص 24.

helpers to deliver the horrific ending. The sea of life, her extended image through the stanza, will continue regardless of the victims. However, the melancholic stanza has an extended image of the sea, which can be read as a metaphor for renewal, the renewal of horrors. In al-‘Alayli’s case, the stanza steps away from that imagery to portray contradicting images. The fire as a death tool to the young woman contradicts the extended imagery of a body of water. The melancholic tone in the stanza could justify the contradiction, and destiny could be read as an overpowering medium that transcends the rules of the sea.

In both poems, “Reproach” and “The Miserable Beauty,” al-‘Alayli portrays women protagonists as victims and survivors of the social order, while men are neglectful, narcissistic lovers and death messengers. In the article “Women and Romantic Poetry,” al-‘Alayli underlines the female poet role as more capable of feeling and expressing those feelings than male poets. In both poetry and prose, al-‘Alayli essentializes the women's and men's gender roles and uses this essentialism to negotiate a better position for women poets within the literary environment. Gender essentialism raises consequent questions about women’s role in society and how she received women’s role in a family.

Ambivalent Standpoint of Women's Domesticity and Work

Jamila al-‘Alayli's engagement with women's domesticity discourses could be characterized by ambivalence as she did not have a steady position towards women's gender role in the family and society from the thirties till the eighties of the twentieth century. However, al-‘Alayli's writings could be understood in the context of an Egyptian feminist movement's waves with which the poet associated herself. I argue that al-‘Alayli associated herself with the Egyptian feminist movement and her writings mirrored the movement's development stages. This section traces al-‘Alayli's publications during that period and argues that she used her statuses as a feminist to better her position in the literary canon.

In “A Century of Egyptian Women's Demands: The Four Waves of the Egyptian Feminist Movement,” Hala Kamal traces various waves of Egyptian feminism and finds features and intersections within the national movement, identifying four waves.¹¹⁴ The author identifies a first wave that extended from the late 19th century until the early 1950s and focused on the women's education and suffrage movement. Women's participation in the public space was an “indirect rebellion against a general prevalent culture that kept middle-class and upper-class women confined within their homes and restricted to domestic concerns.”¹¹⁵ According to Kamal, the second wave extended from the 1950s until the 1970s and could be characterized by “State Feminism and the Working Woman.”¹¹⁶ The Egyptian regime in that period “maintained its monopoly over the feminist realm.”¹¹⁷ With the state obliged by law to “provid[e] work to all

¹¹⁴ Hala Kamal, “A Century of Egyptian Women's Demands: The Four Waves of the Egyptian Feminist Movement.” *Gender and Race Matter: Global Perspectives on Being a Woman*. Vol. 21. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2016. 3-22.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 10.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 10.

citizens [...] women's work in the public sphere was encouraged through family planning policies."¹¹⁸

In June and July 1937, al-ʿAlayli published two articles in *al-Miṣriyya* (The Egyptian Woman), a women's magazine issued by al-Ittiḥād al-Nisāʾi al-Miṣri (the Egyptian Feminist Union or EFU) and owned by Hudā Shaʿrāwī (1879-1949), Egyptian feminist and head of the EFU. In the article "The Bride (al-ʿArūsa)," al-ʿAlayli addresses newlywed young women to educate and remind them: "Today you have proven your femininity and started to record your true message, which you were created for."¹¹⁹ The poet again uses the concept of gender essentialism that she used in her article "The Woman and Romantic Poetry". However, this time she essentializes a specific gender role that a woman must perform at home.

In "The Bride," al-ʿAlayli advises young women to become perfect wives who are, according to her, "lenient, sentimental and sincere."¹²⁰ The woman al-ʿAlayli advises, must acquire a collection of qualities that could be categorized as feminine. Additionally, al-ʿAlayli considers the newlywed woman bearing a child as a "coronation for a queen responsible for a small throne which is the throne of [the young woman's] small home."¹²¹ The author continues to enumerate qualities and practices women must adhere to when married. However, she challenges this gender essentialism twice in the same article.

Al-ʿAlayli provides a context before delving into her words of advice. She says about the bride:

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 10.

¹¹⁹ جميلة العلايلي. "العروسة". مجلة المصرية. 15 يونيو 1937. ص 21-22. الأصل بالعربية: "اليوم أثبتت أنوثتك وبدأت تسجيل رسالتك الحقيقية التي خلقت من أجلها."

¹²⁰ المرجع نفسه. ص 21. الأصل بالعربية: "الينة الجانب رقيقة العاطفة طيبة الضمير."

¹²¹ المرجع نفسه. ص 22. الأصل بالعربية: "تحتفل بتتويجك مليكة مسؤولة على هذا العرش الصغير عرش بيتك المحدود."

"لقد كانت ترجو لنفسها غير هذا المصير وكان أكبر الظن عندها أنها إحدى عذارى الطليعة اللواتي تكرهن حياة القنص وينطلقن إلى عباب الحياة مكافحات دارسات - أما وقد شاءت لها الأقدار غير ما شاءت لنفسها فلا مناص من النزول على إرادته والخضوع لمشيئته"

Al-‘Alayli says about the bride: “She was hoping for another destiny for herself. She would have mostly been one of the vanguard virgins who hated the life of sniping and set out to swirls of life, struggling and studying. Since destiny has decided, unlike what she wished for herself, there is no escape from submitting to its desire.”¹²²

While the bride must submit to destiny’s decisions, the narrator in the poem negotiates her agency and can set herself free from people’s control over her narrative. However, the bride's life seems to be in the article; she adds advice to negotiate the new life after marriage. She addresses the newlywed young woman: “Teach him how to respect, worship and honor you, he is a big child [...] your new life is serious, be more serious than it.”¹²³ In the text, al-‘Alayli creates a power dynamic in which the woman is more powerful and knowledgeable than the husband. Al-‘Alayli also warns the young woman about life after marriage; however, she believes the bride can overcome whichever obstacles she meets. Although she uses “lenient, sentimental, and sincere” to describe the qualities a woman needs to acquire after marriage, she adds “serious” to the list. She challenges the feminine qualities she constructs at the beginning of her article. While advising young women who are about to get married, al-‘Alayli highlights the other option of prioritizing women’s education, significantly becoming a “vanguard virgin” who could be studying or working in any field. Although the article clearly focuses on its targeted audience, al-‘Alayli assumes that a young woman of her time’s first wish was to work or study. Prioritizing

¹²² المرجع نفسه، ص 21.
¹²³ جميلة العاليلي، "العروسة"، مجلة المصرية، 15 يونيو 1937، ص 21-22. الأصل بالعربية: "علميه كيف يحترمك ويقدسك ويجلك فهو طفل كبير [...] حياتك الجديدة خطيرة فكوني أخطر منها."

women's education alongside introducing advice for women's domesticity aligns with Egyptian mainstream feminism's first wave.

In “*Wājibuna nahw al-Mar’ā al-Faqirā* (Our Duty towards Poor Women),” al-‘Alayli identifies with educated middle-class women and invites her class to fulfill their duty in educating Egyptian peasant women.¹²⁴ The author identifies several duties of “modern women” who need to “put the nucleus [...] of the new mature generation.”¹²⁵ The other duty is “to sincerely work on educating (*tahdhīb*) their poor, miserable and peasant sisters to prepare them to -at least- upbringing a good home.”¹²⁶ Al-‘Alayli reminds her social class of many privileges and compares her life to underprivileged women, she describes women who are not willing to help poor women as “selfish.”¹²⁷ The author proposes a two-step plan for the EFU to put forward a “special law” that allows women to contribute in varied amounts that “middle-class women” could afford while “rich women” could double the amount.¹²⁸ The money would be spent to “commute Ladies and Misses Guides” who will pass on their experience to uneducated and poor women.¹²⁹

From the position of an educated middle-class woman in the 1930s, al-‘Alayli sympathizes with women peasants and urges the EFU to educate them. The editorial board of *al-Miṣriyya* thanks al-‘Alayli after her article in paratext that acknowledges previous EFU’s similar programs and efforts. The paratexts also welcome al-‘Alayli’s efforts and invite other women to “guide our women to forfeit this humanitarian purpose to help their miserable sisters.”¹³⁰ The

¹²⁴ جميلة العلايلي، "واجبنا نحو المرأة الفقيرة"، مجلة المصرية، 1 يوليو 1937، ص 12-14.

¹²⁵ المرجع نفسه، ص 12. الأصل بالعربية: "المرأة الحديثة" "تضع بيدها [...] نواة الجيل الجديد الناضج"

¹²⁶ المرجع نفسه، ص 12. الأصل بالعربية: "يعملن بإخلاص على تهذيب إخوتهن الفقيرات البنيسات الفلاحات وتهيئتهن لتنشئة بيت صالح -على الأقل -".

¹²⁷ المرجع نفسه، ص 13. الأصل بالعربية: "الأنانية".

¹²⁸ المرجع نفسه، ص 13. الأصل بالعربية: "قانونًا خاصًا" "المرأة المتوسطة" "الغنية".

¹²⁹ المرجع نفسه، ص 14. الأصل بالعربية: "انتقال السيدات والآنسات المرشدات."

¹³⁰ المرجع نفسه، ص 14. الأصل بالعربية: "لإرشاد سيداتنا لتعويض هذا الغرض الإنساني لمساعدة أخواتهن البائسات."

paratexts include al-‘Alayli in the ongoing efforts of the EFU and identify her as a part of the Egyptian Feminist movement. Both the article and paratext portray the author as a middle-class feminist who shared its first-wave values of Women's Education but prioritized women's domesticity.

In “City Sisters, Country Sisters,” Margot Badran reads the EFU’s “social service framework” and analyzes its contextual discourse in women’s magazines.¹³¹ While “upper-class women [Egyptians in the 1920s till the 1940s] continued to play roles in society through voluntary social service,”¹³² women organizations and feminist groups participated in, and promoted such efforts.¹³³ The author highlights that in the 1930s, a younger generation of upper-class women took new initiatives. In 1936, a group of young “upper-class women” formed the role of creating initiatives targeting health issues such as “to fight tuberculosis.”¹³⁴ Badran finds that 1930s women’s magazines such as *al-Miṣriyya* “used the pages of [the magazine] to raise public consciousness.”¹³⁵ Among many other feminists’ contributions, Badran reads al-‘Alayli’s article “*Wājibuna naḥw al-Mar’ā al-Faqirā*” as a part of a feminist discourse. Badran recognizes al-‘Alayli’s contribution as a call “to abandon the lecture halls of the city and to carry the feminist message to Egypt’s remotest villages where women needed help.”¹³⁶

In her two articles in *al-Miṣriyya*, al-‘Alayli aligned with the Egyptian feminist wave of the first half of the twentieth century and promoted women’s education and domesticity. Twenty years later, al-‘Alayli published an autobiographical text in Muḥamad Khafaga’s *al-Shi‘r wal-*

¹³¹ Margot Badran, “City Sisters, Country Sisters.” *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*. Princeton University Press, 1996. pp. 111-123.

¹³² Ibid. p.111.

¹³³ Ibid. p.113.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p.114.

¹³⁵ Ibid. p.115.

¹³⁶ Ibid. p.119.

Tajdīd (Poetry and Renewal) (1957). In a personal account of her childhood, al-‘Alayli complicates her narrative about women’s education and domesticity, as she reveals her struggle against her family’s desire to make her a housewife.¹³⁷ In February 1986, al-‘Alayli gave three interviews to *Sabāḥ al-khayr* magazine in which she recounted her early life and her relationships with three political and literary figures: Egyptian feminist and head of the EFU Hudā Sha‘rāwī (1879-1949), ; Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī ; and Mayy Ziyāda.¹³⁸ Al-‘Alayli engages in an anti-women-domesticity discourse that aligns with the second Egyptian feminist wave, which prioritized women’s work. The author’s viewpoint becomes more complex when she delves into her relationship with her mother, which could be connected to Tūqān’s autobiographical text.

Al-‘Alayli refers at the beginning of her autobiographical text to her family’s desire to provide her with a traditional upbringing, by which she eventually would become a housewife. The author creates a dichotomy between her and her family’s will in the text. She portrays a journey of struggle, in which her family became aware of her intentions of writing and used several modes to hinder her progress. She recounted about her aunt, who used to be her teacher:

"وكثيراً ما أوحى إلي والدتي لإهانتني وإيذائي لأنني أكتب مثلاً عن حبي لإحدى المدرسات وكراهيتي لأخرى.. وكتابتي عن الشروق والغروب، وعن تهويم الفراش حول الزهرة وإغواء الضوء له.. ووصف أخلاق إحدى المدرسات وعلاقة أخلاقها بجمالها أو دمامتها.. ورغم محاولة الأسرة في إيقاف أختيلتي وكتابتي، كنت أكتب مختبئة في أي مكان.

She [her aunt] frequently encouraged my mother to humiliate and abuse me because I simply wrote about my love for one of my female teachers and my hatred for another, about

¹³⁷ محمد عبد المنعم خفاجة، جميلة العلايلي. "شاعرة من مدرسة أبولو". الشعر والتجديد. رابطة الأدب الحديث. 1957. ص 102-118.

¹³⁸نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلايلي "قصتي مع: هدى هانم شعراوي". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1570. 6 فبراير 1986. ص 112-114. نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلايلي "قصتي مع: مي زيادة". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1571. 13 فبراير 1986. ص 40-42. نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلايلي "قصتي مع: الدكتور أحمد زكي أبو شادي". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1572. 20 فبراير 1986. ص 41-43.

sunshine and sunset, about butterflies fluttering around flowers and being tempted by the light, about the manners of one of the female teachers and how they relate to her beauty or ugliness. Although the family has tried to stop the current of my fiction and writing, I hid anywhere and wrote.”¹³⁹

Her family’s wishes were acted out in consecutive decisions that influenced her childhood and literary career. In the first place, they discouraged her writing; she recounts that her mother’s and aunt’s abuse is connected to her writing.¹⁴⁰ She continues to describe the type of writing she is interested in at the time, which could be interpreted as romantic topics. These include her early interest in nature and her challenge of the school authority represented by her female teachers.

Al-‘Alayli adds that her female teachers, including her aunt, consider her writing “illegitimate audacity (*gar’a ghayr mashrū’a*).”¹⁴¹ Al-‘Alayli explains that her family brought her up by “conserving religion and traditions, preparing [her] to master housekeeping duties.” Her family decided to force al-‘Alayli to study for a home economics diploma.¹⁴² Al-‘Alayli’s family exerted much effort to defer her from literature and force her to be a housewife and inhabit a private sphere, i.e., domesticated. However, al-‘Alayli uses that very tool, the home economics degree, to gain more access to the public sphere by becoming a teacher and not using her degree for its intended purpose.

In an interview, al-‘Alayli recounts that she accompanies her aunt visiting one of her friends interested in literature. Al-‘Alayli browses the aunt’s friend’s collection of magazines, finds *Apollo* magazine, and asks about it. The aunt’s friend offers that al-‘Alayli borrows the

¹³⁹ محمد عبد المنعم خفاجة، جميلة العلايلي. "شاعرة من مدرسة أبولو". الشعر والتجديد. رابطة الأدب الحديث. 1957. ص 103.

¹⁴⁰ Al-‘Alayli’s father died when she was young, so her mother was the only main caregiver.

¹⁴¹ محمد عبد المنعم خفاجة، جميلة العلايلي. "شاعرة من مدرسة أبولو". الشعر والتجديد. رابطة الأدب الحديث. 1957. ص 103.

¹⁴² المرجع نفسه. ص 103.

issues for a week until the aunt's friend's brother comes back from a trip.¹⁴³ Apollo's issues inspired al-ʿAlayli to write one of her first poems,¹⁴⁴ which was leaked in her school -an incident I will analyze later on. After sending the poem to Abū Shādī, he responds with a letter and his poetry collection *Aghāni Abū Shādī*.¹⁴⁵ According to al-ʿAlayli, the letter expressed Abū Shādī's "admiration and appreciation for [her] talent and encouraging [her] to continue trying."¹⁴⁶ Al-ʿAlayli is scared once she receives the collection and the letter and keeps both under her pillow because she is raised in a family that "entailed [her] caution and not to communicate with a foreign man in any way."¹⁴⁷ Other challenges that faced her included her family's plans to make her a housewife, and difficulties to access romantic poetry, to write, and to correspond with poets and literary magazines.

Al-ʿAlayli developed various strategies to continue her literary life against all odds. In another interview with *Sabāḥ al-khayr* magazine, she mentions that a letter from Ziyāda arrived at the headmistress. The headmistress is calling for al-ʿAlayli's presence for another reason: to prohibit her from ever writing letters to Ziyāda again.¹⁴⁸ In addition to al-ʿAlayli's expression that she "hid" to write, she also hides Abū Shādī's collection under the pillow. Hiding writing and books can be interpreted as a sign of resilience in the face of several authorities, negotiating power.

¹⁴³ نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلالي "قصتي مع: الدكتور أحمد زكي أبو شادي". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1572. 20 فبراير 1986. ص 41-43.

¹⁴⁴ Al-ʿAlayli in an interview about her relationship with Ziyāda orders her first poems and corrects that her poem to Abū Shādī was after corresponding with Ziyāda.

نادية خليفة. حوار مع جميلة العلالي "قصتي مع: مي زيادة". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1571. 13 فبراير 1986. ص 40-42.

¹⁴⁵ نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلالي "قصتي مع: الدكتور أحمد زكي أبو شادي". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1572. 20 فبراير 1986. ص 42.

¹⁴⁶ المرجع نفسه. ص 42.

¹⁴⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 42.

¹⁴⁸ It is not clear if this is the same aunt who was her teacher and used to encourage the mother to abuse al-ʿAlayli as a child or another aunt.

At the same time the headmistress was calling for al-‘Alayli, she was busy opposing her English teacher. In the autobiographical text, al-‘Alayli recounted that when she failed English at school, her aunt quickly blamed al-‘Alayli’s love for writing for her academic shortcomings.¹⁴⁹ She was leading a symbolic funeral for her living English teacher, that she used to hate. Al-‘Alayli and her friends collected “branches of a huge tree and covered them with leaves as if it were the English teacher’s body.”¹⁵⁰ The school’s officer catches them before the burial of the symbolic body. The laughable anecdote of the symbolic funeral of a teacher she hated indicates how she viewed authority and how she tried to challenge it.

Al-‘Alayli’s aunt’s work as a teacher could have faded the boundaries of her relationship with her mother/ female teachers and school/ home relationship. She recounts how her female teachers view her writings as an “illegitimate audacity,” and mentions how her headmistress bans her from sending letters to Mayy Ziyāda. Her relationship with her female English teacher is another highlight. Aside from Mayy Ziyāda and al-‘Alayli’s relationship with her, which section 3 will delve more into, al-‘Alayli’s relationship with women caregivers and teachers in her early life was confusing, ranging from figures of power who abused her to how she challenged and negotiated her terms with these figures. Al-‘Alayli’s relationship with these women could be related to another Arab woman poet, who is Fadwā Ṭūqān.

Like al-‘Alayli, Fadwā Ṭūqān has a “problematic and bitter”¹⁵¹ relationship with her mother. In her autobiography, Ṭūqān most often portrays her mother in a negative light, describing recurrent punishments and criticizing the mother’s transference of “caretaking

¹⁴⁹ محمد عبد المنعم خفاجة، جميلة العلايلي. "شاعرة من مدرسة أبولو". الشعر والتجديد. رابطة الأدب الحديث. 1957. ص 103. . نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلايلي "قصتي مع: مي زيادة". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1571. 13 فبراير 1986. ص 40-42.

¹⁵¹ Malti Douglas, Fedwa. “The Problematic Birth: Fadwa Ṭūqān and the Politics of Autobiography” in *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Word, Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. pp. 161-178.

responsibilities to someone else”; Ṭūqān gets nightmares about her mother “even after her death.”¹⁵² Fedwa Malti Douglas describes Ṭūqān’s autobiography as “a matriphobic text”.¹⁵³ However, Douglas highlights that Ṭūqān, textually, has a transformation in her relationship with her mother, that transformation only happens when Ṭūqān accompanies her mother to the public bath.¹⁵⁴ Douglas analyzes that transformation as only possible “outside the confines of the family”.¹⁵⁵ In a public space, Ṭūqān could write her mother positively.

Al-‘Alayli’s autobiographical text can be read in similar terms. Although the narrative does not develop her relationship with her mother, her second poetry collection shows a “transformation” of her relationship with her then-deceased mother and a clarity of her view of domesticity. While al-‘Alayli’s depiction of her mother, aunt, and female teachers in the autobiographical text can be read as a blame for an oppressive upbringing, the introduction and the first part of al-‘Alayli’s second poetry collection tell another part of the story of her relationship with her mother. In the introduction, she recounts why the second collection was published 46 years after her first collection. The poet says she was corresponding with Abū Shādī in 1951 when he wrote the introduction for her second collection as he did for the first one; however, she was busy with her mother’s sickness.¹⁵⁶

Although al-‘Alayli writes an elegy for her mother in the first poetry collection (1936), she resorts to delay in publishing her second poetry collection due to three reasons: firstly, the sickness and death of her mother. Al-‘Alayli describes her mother’s death’s impact on her as follows: “Sadness has overpowered me because I was deprived of her overwhelming affection,

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 166.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 165.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 166.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 166.

¹⁵⁶ جميلة العلايلي. ديوان نبضات شاعرة. الهيئة العامة للكتاب. 1981. ص 3.

which was like a nutritional spring to my poetics.”¹⁵⁷ The turning point between the two depictions of her mother seems to be the mother’s death and the negative depiction in the autobiographical text is switched into an inspiration. In the second poetry collection, al-‘Alayli writes seven more elegies for her mother in addition to another poem about Mother’s Day, in which she expresses great yearning for her mother. Writing eight more poems other than the elegy published 46 years earlier may tell of a change in how she retrospectively viewed her mother’s role after having her son. The poet says in one of her elegies to her mother:

"فإذا قصصت رواية تحكين صوت السامرة
من ذا يظن بأن شذوك وحي شعر الشاعرة"

Al-‘Alayli yearns for the time she spent with her mother when she was young and says to her mother: “When you were storytelling, you were the voice of the woman raconteur/ Who would have thought that your singing will inspire the woman poet.”¹⁵⁸ In the elegy, al-‘Alayli creates a lineage to her poetry, dating back to the stories that she used to listen to from her mother when she was young. Al-‘Alayli treats the death of her mother in this poem nostalgically and views her mother as another ring of a tradition that she inherits. The matriarchal perspective by which al-‘Alayli views her relationship with her mother differs from the matriphobic perspective in her autobiographical text.

In addition to the death of her mother, al-‘Alayli mentions in the introduction to her second poetry collection that after healing from the significant loss of her mother, her husband dies. Dealing with two deaths of two of the closest people to al-‘Alayli, she mentions that she chooses to prioritize her only son’s upbringing so that she could “fulfill [her] intact and

¹⁵⁷المرجع نفسه. ص 3. الأصل بالعربية: "الحزن قد استبد بي لحرمانني من حنانها الغامر الذي كان كالنبع الذي أستقي منه شاعريتي."
¹⁵⁸جميلة العلالي. "يا أمي". ديوان نبضات شاعرة. الهيئة العامة للكتاب. 1981. ص 16.

undiminished message towards [her] son” properly raising him.¹⁵⁹ Although Abū Shādī’s introduction is dated to 1951 when he was in the United States, it means that the three reasons have postponed the release of the second collection by 30 years. Tracing al-‘Alayli’s prose and poetry writing and publications, she did not seem to retire from her literary career entirely, however, it was hugely hindered.

While al-‘Alayli’s autobiographical text can be read as a matrophobic text, it should not be read in isolation from other elements affecting her relationship with her mother when she was alive and retrospectively after her death. It is noticeable how al-‘Alayli blames her aunt and female teachers before blaming her mother for her upbringing. For instance, when she recounts the incident of her mother abusing and offending her, she provides a context of a discouraging aunt's teacher, who had knowledge about her performance in school and encouraged her mother to abuse her.¹⁶⁰ Al-‘Alayli’s relationship with her mother could be better understood in terms of how she perceived domesticity, as it is the main difference between her life while she was living with her mother and her life later when she pursued her literary career.

According to al-‘Alayli, she “chooses” to put her literary career on hold for her son’s upbringing. The situation of the early death of the father and the mother having to step in is similar to what al-‘Alayli experienced herself when she was young. Although al-‘Alayli does not completely abandon her literary career when she focuses on her son’s upbringing, she practically becomes a housewife, or in other words she chooses domesticity.

Al-‘Alayli’s poetry could also trace developments in al-‘Alayli’s views. Al-‘Alayli re-published some of her poems in her second poetry collection (1981), originally published in her

¹⁵⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 4. الأصل بالعربية: " لكي أقوم برسائلي كاملة غير منقوصة نحو ولدي." ¹⁶⁰ محمد عبد المنعم خفاجة، جميلة العلايلي. "شاعرة من مدرسة أبولو". الشعر والتجديد. رابطة الأدب الحديث. 1957. ص 103.

first (1936). One of these poems deals with the theme of domesticity. In “*al-Sajīna* (Woman Prisoner),” al-‘Alayli presents rich romantic imagery as a first-person narrative, with two points of view that the narrator controls. The poem changes from 24 lines in the first publication to 18 lines in the second time, with various alterations in wording. The poem is written in three stanzas with a classical structure of *Qāfyia* and two hemistiches (*Shatr*). While both poems carry similar themes of imprisonment and conversing with personified destiny, they differ in their sentiment.

In both versions, the first stanza narrator similarly depicts her sense of loneliness with vivid and extended nature imagery. She describes herself as a bait (*ti‘ma*) subject to destiny; the tiny fish keeps crashing into sea reefs. The narrator hits the rocks and exclaims in the last *Shatr* of the stanza: “I emerged into a sightless wandering antelope.”¹⁶¹ Al-‘Alayli continues to identify with isolated and abandoned nature metaphors, which she introduces in the third and longest stanza. In this stanza, she employs ethereal imagery, through which she imagines the personified destiny as an angel and a prophet, with “his revelations lightening his face.”¹⁶²

The poet portrays an exchange between herself and the dignified destiny, destiny addresses her:

أنت السجينة – كيف ترجين المنى في ظل شعب عاش رهن إसार

Destiny judges the status of the woman poet: “A woman prisoner! How ‘d your wishes come true, among people who lived captive through”.¹⁶³ In an essentialist revelation, destiny expects nothing for the woman poet but to stay a prisoner as long as her people stay as such. Destiny continues captivating the narrative and questions the morality of the poet asking her if it would

¹⁶¹ جميلة العلايلي. "السجينة". ديوان نبضات شاعرة. الهيئة العامة للكتاب. 1981. ص 110-112. الأصل بالعربية: "غدوت كالطبي الضرير الساري."

¹⁶² المرجع نفسه. ص 111. الأصل بالعربية: "الوحي المنور وجهه."

¹⁶³ المرجع نفسه. ص 111.

be insignificant for her if people (*al-waraa*) portrayed her in the image of a “charming, unveiled woman.”¹⁶⁴ The darkest imagined scenario posted by Destiny in al-‘Alayli’s poem is when she is not an agent of her narrative anymore when other people start to tell her own story. Destiny addresses the narrator in 1981 the last line on a positive note and says: “Maybe your luck’s sun would rise.”¹⁶⁵

Destiny in the 1936 version continues captivating the point of view in the poem's last stanza. It presents a melancholic perception of life and inspires little hope. The narrator submits to destiny and stays a “prisoner of these deceptions.”¹⁶⁶ Additionally, the descriptions of destiny differ in the two versions. After describing it in both versions with “revelations lightening his face”, she changes the description after from

"وعليه أطياف من الأسحار" إلى "وكأنه طيف من الأبرار"

“And upon him are spectra of enchantments” to “as if he were a spectrum of the righteous.”

Al-‘Alayli sees destiny as more virtuous in the later version of the poem, while she describes it as enchanted in the earlier version. The alteration in the description could indicate that the narrator in the later version of the poem favored destiny more or came to terms with it. Al-‘Alayli’s poem and its changes could be read as an allegory to the changes in her views of women’s domesticity as she negotiates her agency with destiny in both versions, she becomes more confident about her victory upon ending the poem on a hopeful note in the later version of the poem.

¹⁶⁴ المرجع نفسه، ص 111. الأصل بالعربية: "في شبه فاتنة بغير ستار."
¹⁶⁵ المرجع نفسه، ص 112. الأصل بالعربية: "ولعل حظك سوف تشرق شمسهُ."
¹⁶⁶ المرجع نفسه، ص 9-12. الأصل بالعربية: "سجينة هاته الأغرار."

Al-‘Alayli uses a relativist approach to engage with domesticity discourses in her writing. She changes her views throughout her life, portraying herself as an Egyptian feminist who changed her priorities. In the 1930s, she promoted women’s education and domesticity, while in the 1950s and 1980s, she revealed more parts of her personal life, portraying domesticity as a danger. Al-‘Alayli had a problematic relationship with her mother. Later in her life, al-‘Alayli resolved her relationship with her mother to view her as an inspiration. At the same time, she chooses to focus on her son’s upbringing and put her literary career on hold. Al-‘Alayli does not view marriage and having children in a binary mode that must hinder her literary career. However, she views herself as a “serious” woman who can negotiate her destiny to gain more agency. In the third section, I will analyze her relationship with her literary circle, focusing on her relationship with Mayy Ziyāda.

Women Mentoring Women: Circles of Support in the 1930s

Jamila al-‘Alayli associated herself with literary figures such as Mayy Ziyāda and Hudā Sha‘rāwī. I will read al-‘Alayli’s relationships with her literary circles through her interviews with Sabāḥ al-khayr magazine and autobiographical text. Al-‘Alayli’s portrayal of herself as a successor to Sha‘rāwī and Ziyāda is a mode to present herself as a canonical feminist and poet. I will examine al-‘Alayli’s mode by reading her interviews and articles.

Although al-‘Alayli did not grow up in Cairo and was raised in Maṣṣūra, an Egyptian city located on the east of Damietta Nile branch, she managed to connect with a network of influential women figures, politically and literary. Al-‘Alayli entertained personal and literary relationships with several women literary figures of various generations, such as Mayy Ziyāda, Hudā Sha‘rāwī, and Widād al-Sakākīnī (1913-1991), a Syrian author and literary critic, which can be read as a women’s support network. According to Widād al-Sakākīnī, al-‘Alayli “gifted some of her valuable books” and established a friendship between them.¹⁶⁷ Al-Sakākīnī wrote a review article (1937) about al-‘Alayli’s first poetry collection, *Sadā Aḥlāmī*, describing it as “maybe the first poetry collection published by an Arab woman in our modern *Nahḍa*.”¹⁶⁸ The article creates a women’s poetry lineage connecting al-‘Alayli to Al-Khansā’, Layla al-Akhyaliyyah, a well-known Umayyad Arab poet, Taymūr, and Warda al-Yāzījī (1838-1924), a Lebanese poet who lived in Egypt and wrote poetry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁶⁹ According to Al-Sakākīnī’s chronology, al-‘Alayli is a modernist stage in an old women’s

¹⁶⁷ وداد السكاكيني. "صدى أحلامي: أدبية سورية تكتب عن شاعرة مصرية." مجلة الحديث الحلبية. عدد 2 شباط 1937. ص 157-161. الأصل بالعربية: "أهدت إلي طائفة من كتبها القيمة."

¹⁶⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 157. الأصل بالعربية: "ربما كان أول ديوان شعري تنشره المرأة العربية في نهضتنا الحديثة."
¹⁶⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 157.

tradition. Al-‘Alayli seeks significant friendships that influence her literary career and how she is perceived.

Another example of al-‘Alayli’s circles of support and influence is her portrayal of her relationship with Hudā Sha‘rāwi in an interview (1986) with Sabāḥ al-khayr. In the interview, al-‘Alayli describes her fascination with Sha‘rāwi’s character and draws parallels between their lives and activism.¹⁷⁰ Al-‘Alayli views Sha‘rāwi as a “role model [from whom she] learned patriotism and social work.”¹⁷¹ Al-‘Alayli sends Sha‘rāwi a poem about Sha‘rāwi’s call for women’s emancipation, so Sha‘rāwi asks al-‘Alayli to write in *al-Miṣriyya* and they publish her “ideas in prose and poetry.”¹⁷² Sha‘rāwi publishes al-‘Alayli’s booklet “*Murshid al-Fatā* (A Young Woman’s Guide)” so that “schoolgirls supervised by EFU could benefit from it.”¹⁷³ Al-‘Alayli was invited to Sha‘rāwi’s literary salon, where she recited a poem “praising her struggle.”¹⁷⁴ There, she meets other poets and literary figures, such as Aḥmad Muḥarram, whom she never meets again, although he will later “write about [her] upon the release of her poetry collection.”¹⁷⁵

Al-‘Alayli was inspired by Sha‘rāwi’s anti-colonial sentiment and mirrored her activism in the 1930s although she lived in Maṣṣūra. Al-‘Alayli fondly recounts Sha‘rāwi’s involvement in the 1919 revolution and states that “women’s courage were not less than men’s” against British colonialism.¹⁷⁶ She exercised anti-colonial politics in Maṣṣūra in the 1930s and early

¹⁷⁰ نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلايلي "قصتي مع: هدى هانم شعراوي". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1570. 6 فبراير 1986. ص 112-114.

¹⁷¹ المرجع نفسه. ص 112. الأصل بالعربية: "مثلي الأعلى" "تعلمت عنها الوطنية والعمل الاجتماعي."

¹⁷² المرجع نفسه. ص 112. الأصل بالعربية: "أفكار شعراً ونثراً."

¹⁷³ المرجع نفسه. ص 112. الأصل بالعربية: "مرشد الفتاة" "للتستفيد منه بنات المدرسة التي يشرف عليها الاتحاد النسائي."

¹⁷⁴ المرجع نفسه. ص 113. الأصل بالعربية: "للإشادة بكفاحها."

¹⁷⁵ المرجع نفسه. ص 113. الأصل بالعربية: "كتب عني عند صدور ديواني."

¹⁷⁶ نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلايلي "قصتي مع: هدى هانم شعراوي". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1570. 6 فبراير 1986. ص 113. الأصل بالعربية: "النساء لسن أقل منكم شجاعة يا معشر الرجال."

1940s. Al-‘Alayli was inspired by Sha‘rāwi to engage in “social and national battles.”¹⁷⁷ The poet recounts similarities between her journey and Sha‘rāwi’s associating herself with Sha‘rāwi. Al-‘Alayli “formed a volunteers’ women association for civil defense and to study necessary aid [in Maṣūra] during wartime [the Second World War].”¹⁷⁸ The poet explains that the association proved useful when the British forces were doing “retaliatory offense on Maṣūra”; the association volunteers defended the Egyptian demonstrators by “remov[ing] electricity wires from poles and putting them on the ground [...] which electrocuted British soldiers.”¹⁷⁹ The poet also founded “The Social Reform Association to help the poor and to transfer beggars to an institution for the elderly.”¹⁸⁰ Al-‘Alayli portrays herself as a follower of Sha‘rāwi, who organized young women and fought against British colonial power.

In a small obituary in *al Ṣabāḥ* magazine’s “Literature in a week” page and surrounded by an article about *Tāha Hussayn* (1889- 1973), Jamila al-‘Alayli writes about Mayy Ziyāda. Al-‘Alayli remembers that Ziyāda was the first person to “inspire [her] to write poetry and the first to read it.”¹⁸¹ In 1941, at the height of her fame, Al-‘Alayli, expresses her gratitude to the recently deceased author, Ziyāda. Al-‘Alayli recites one of the first couplets that she wrote and sent to Ziyāda and recites Ziyāda’s response letter:

"يسرني نترك ويعجبني شعرك على أنك أنت أحب إلي من كل منهما. [...] إن قلب المرأة لا يتأثر لقلب امرأة أخرى تأثيراً صادقاً نفياً

إلا إذا كانت يد الألوهة تلعب في الخفاء"

¹⁷⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 113. الأصل بالعربية: "المعارك الاجتماعية والوطنية."

¹⁷⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 113. الأصل بالعربية: "كونت جمعية من المتطوعات للدفاع المدني ودراسة الإسعافات اللازمة وقت الحرب."

¹⁷⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 113. الأصل بالعربية: "اعتدى الإنجليز على المنصورة انتقاماً" "خلعنا أسلاك الكهرباء من الأعمدة لتكون على الأرض [...] فتساقطوا صرعى بتأثير الكهرباء."

¹⁸⁰ المرجع نفسه. ص 113. الأصل بالعربية: "جمعية الإصلاح الاجتماعي لمساعدة الفقراء وتحويل المتسولين إلى مؤسسة العجزة."

¹⁸¹ جميلة العلايلي. "(مي) وجميلة العلايلي". جريدة الصباح. 14 نوفمبر 1941. ص 13.

"I admire your poetry and your prose delights me, but neither is closer to my heart than you. [...]
A woman's heart is not honestly and purely moved by another woman's heart unless divinity is at
play behind the scenes."¹⁸²

Al-'Alayli reiterates Ziyāda's comments about her early poetry writing but adds that their
relationship was unique and affected both. Al-'Alayli recounts that after her father's death, when
she was in primary school, her uncle "oblige[s] her to read the newspapers for him." Ziyāda's
articles attracted her attention, so she started reading them for herself instead of her uncle and
used his help if she found something difficult.¹⁸³ In another version of the same story,
encountering Ziyāda's writing for the first time, al-'Alayli mentions that she notices that her
uncle is reading one of al-Ahram's pages with great concentration, and when he drops the papers
she takes them.¹⁸⁴ Al-'Alayli asks him, "A man's name Mīyy?" al-'Alayli mispronounces Mayy
Ziyāda's name, and her uncle responds, "It is the name of a great woman author." He fixes her
pronunciation and prays that she will become like her.¹⁸⁵

'Ulfat al-Rūbī analyzes Mayy Ziyāda's relationship with Malak Hifnī Nāṣif in her
analysis of "Women's Writing about Women's Writing."¹⁸⁶ Al-Rūbī argues that "Malak's desire,
advocacy, and call for women's independence supports Mayy's awareness."¹⁸⁷ Ziyāda expresses
her "gratitude towards Malak "the author" twice as a reader and as a writer."¹⁸⁸ According to al-
Rūbī, Ziyāda thanks "her friend" Nāṣif for reinforcing her feminist consciousness by "informing

¹⁸² المرجع نفسه. ص 13.
¹⁸³ محمد عبد المنعم خفاجة، جميلة العلايلي "شاعرة من مدرسة أبولو". الشعر والتجديد. رابطة الأدب الحديث. 1957. ص 102-103. الأصل
بالعربية: "بعد وفاة أبي مرض خالي فألزماني بمطالعة الصحف له".

¹⁸⁴ نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلايلي "قصتي مع: مي زيادة". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1571. 13 فبراير 1986. ص 40-42.
¹⁸⁵ المرجع نفسه. ص 40.

¹⁸⁶ ألفت الروبي. "بحثاً عن بلاغة النساء في كتابة النساء على كتابة النساء" "مي زيادة وباحثة البادية". بلاغة التوصيل وتأسيس النوع. الهيئة العامة
للقصور الثقافية. القاهرة. 2001. ص 445-476.

¹⁸⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 450. الأصل بالعربية: "نزوع ملك ودعوتها إلى استقلال المرأة يدعم وعي مي."

¹⁸⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 450. الأصل بالعربية: "فضل ملك "الكاتبة" عليها مرتين، قارئة وكاتبة."

her [Ziyāda] about women's problems and issues [...] when she read her book *al-Nisāi 'yyāt* for the first time in 1914.”¹⁸⁹ Ziyāda is also thankful for Nāṣif, “after her death”, as Nāṣif “inspired her to write her first book in Arabic.”¹⁹⁰ Al-Rūbī’s portrayal of Ziyāda’s relationship with Hifnī Nāṣif illustrates Ziyāda’s belief in women-women support circles and portrays their relationship as one of learning and gratitude. While al-‘Alayli and Ziyāda’s relationship happens later, similar circles of learning, support and gratitude continue.

In Hala Kamal’s reading of Ziyāda biographical books about Malak Hifnī Nāṣif, ‘A’isha Taymūr and Warda al-Yāzījī, she tracks that Ziyāda had access to “newspapers and magazines whose owners, editors and contributors were mostly Egyptian and Arab women.”¹⁹¹ Ziyāda was also exposed to “Egyptian feminist thought” by attending “women’s lectures at the Egyptian University’s Women’s Section (1909–1912).”¹⁹² Kamal refers to al-Sakākīni’s portrayal of Ziyāda as “a pioneer woman writer, critic, thinker and contributor to the Arab and Egyptian intellectual scene at a critical moment in the history of the Arab world.”¹⁹³ Ziyāda’s life from 1929 until 1941 was a period of suffering for her as following the “deaths of her parents and Gibran”¹⁹⁴ (1883- 1931), a Lebanese author who had a special bond with Ziyāda. While Ziyāda’s “own family forcefully institutionalized her at the Lebanon Hospital for Mental and Nervous Disorders from 1936 to 1937,” Ziyāda led a “successful legal struggle in 1938 against these relatives’ attempts to prevent her from receiving her inheritance.”¹⁹⁵ It is noteworthy that the

¹⁸⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 450. الأصل بالعربية: "صاحبته" "أطلعته على مشكلات النساء وقضاياهن [...] حين قرأت كتابها "النسائيات" لأول مرة في عام 1914."

¹⁹⁰ المرجع نفسه. ص 450. الأصل بالعربية: "بعد وفاتها-" "حفرتها على تأليف أول كتاب لها باللغة العربية."

¹⁹¹ Hala Kamal, ““Women's Writing on Women's Writing”: Mayy Ziyada's Literary Biographies as Egyptian Feminist History.” *Women's Writing: The Elizabethan to Victorian Period*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2018, pp. 268-287.

¹⁹² Ibid. p. 269.

¹⁹³ Ibid. p. 282.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 282.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 282.

period of al-‘Alayli’s correspondence and meeting Ziyāda overlap with Ziyāda period of suffering which influenced al-‘Alayli’s view of literary circles and how they interacted with Ziyāda “tragedy.”

The first time Jamila al-‘Alayli and Mayy Ziyāda meet is when al-‘Alayli is a school student. Al-‘Alayli recalls that Ziyāda visited her school and attended a play al-‘Alayli was the heroine of. According to al-‘Alayli’s autobiographical text, Ziyāda summoned al-‘Alayli before the headmistress and praised her: “You were born a woman poet author (*shā‘ira adība*)” and encouraged her to develop her abilities, predicting a bright future for her.¹⁹⁶ Ziyāda’s words of encouragement push al-‘Alayli to begin a one-sided, long-lasting correspondence. In this correspondence, she sends samples of her poetry and prose and expects a reply from Ziyāda until she receives a response letter from Ziyāda in response to one of her couplets.

During the symbolic funeral incident (see section 2) and while al-‘Alayli is afraid of what the school superintendent might tell the headmistress, the headmistress admonishes al-‘Alayli for corresponding with Mayy Ziyāda - and tells her: “Have you sent a letter to Egypt’s great woman author?”, adding: “You are nothing [...] she [Ziyāda] does not have time to waste on a primary school student.”¹⁹⁷ Shortly after the incident, al-‘Alayli sends another letter to Ziyāda to tell her about the school and headmistress and says to Ziyāda: “I write to you because I love you, whether you accept it or not.”¹⁹⁸ Al-‘Alayli seems to have dropped the school’s address on her letters because, this time, her uncle sees Ziyāda’s letter. However, he encourages al-‘Alayli to continue writing her letters.

¹⁹⁶ محمد عبد المنعم خفاجة، جميلة العلايلي "شاعرة من مدرسة أبولو". "الشعر والتجديد". رابطة الأدب الحديث. 1957. ص 103.
¹⁹⁷ نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلايلي "قصتي مع: مي زيادة". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1571. 13 فبراير 1986. ص 41. الأصل بالعربية: "أنت بعثت خطاباً لأديبة مصر العظيمة (مي)؟ [...] أنت صفر أنت لا شيء [...] هي عندها وقت علشان تضيعه مع بنت لسه يادوبك في ابتدائي."
¹⁹⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 41. الأصل بالعربية: "ساكتب لك لأنني أحبك سواء رضيت أو لم ترض."

When al-‘Alayli graduates from college, she gets invited to Ziyāda’s house “for tea”¹⁹⁹ in what seems like a mentorship relationship. al-‘Alayli begs her family to respond to Ziyāda’s invitation, and after much insistence, her aunt agrees that she goes with her, leaves her at Ziyāda’s house, and picks her up later. Al-‘Alayli’s visit coincides with Mayy Ziyāda’s famous literary salon. What profoundly influences al-‘Alayli is how these “literary figures (*Kibār al-‘udabā’*)” sit in her presence like children seeking inspiration and knowledge from her.”²⁰⁰ According to al-‘Alayli, she realizes at that moment “the greatness of literature, ingenuity and the woman’s inspiring mighty power.”²⁰¹ Just as she realizes that her uncle is captivated by Ziyāda’s writing in *al-Ahrām* newspaper, al-‘Alayli is impressed that Ziyāda has a similar effect on Egypt’s literary figures.

After attending Ziyāda’s literary salon, al-‘Alayli spends time with Ziyāda when she plays the piano to celebrate al-‘Alayli’s graduation. Ziyāda also advises al-‘Alayli not to stop learning after graduating from traditional education and continue studying independently.²⁰² Al-‘Alayli writes a poem about her fascination with Ziyāda’s figure after the visit. She views her as a role model: "I left her house aspiring to be like her."²⁰³ In al-‘Alayli’s interview about Ziyāda, she mentions that she repeated her visits to her; for instance, she took advantage of her uncle’s visit to Cairo to attend the *mawlid* of al-Hussein and called Ziyāda, who arranged an outing for both of them to the Aquarium Grotto Garden.²⁰⁴ Ziyāda introduces al-‘Alayli to a French

199 نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلالي "قصتي مع: مي زيادة". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1571. 13 فبراير 1986. ص 104. الأصل بالعربية: "التناول الشاي".

200 محمد عبد المنعم خفاجة، جميلة العلالي "شاعرة من مدرسة أبولو". الشعر والتجديد. رابطة الأدب الحديث. 1957. ص 104. الأصل بالعربية:

"يؤم صالونها كبار الأدباء وهم في حضرتها كأنهم أطفال صغار يتلمسون منها الوحي والمعرفة".

201 المرجع نفسه. ص 104. الأصل بالعربية: "عظمة الأدب والنبوغ وقوم المرأة الملهمة الجبارة".

202 المرجع نفسه. ص 104 - 105.

203 المرجع نفسه. ص 105. الأصل بالعربية: "وخرجت من عندها أتوق إلى أن أكون مثلها".

204 نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلالي "قصتي مع: مي زيادة". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1571. 13 فبراير 1986. ص 42.

orientalist in her literary salon as a “brilliant and talented young woman ready to appreciate the French language.”²⁰⁵

The French orientalist, who remains unnamed in this narrative, visits al-‘Alayli on a weekly basis in Manṣūra to teach her French. However, his influence on her surpasses the language lessons according to her:

"وكان له الفضل في توجيهي أدبياً أكثر من توجيهي في اللغة الفرنسية إذ أثرى ذهني بما يلقيه علي من محاضرات
عن حرية الفكر وعدم التقليد لكبار الأدباء والشعراء"

“He guided me in literature more than in French, as he enriched my thoughts with lectures about freedom of thought and avoiding imitation of literary figures, and I am grateful to him for that.”²⁰⁶

Al-‘Alayli benefits from Ziyāda's guidance in many ways; at the same time, she meets literary figures of her time and gets introduced to a teacher who guides and follows up with her education every week. In doing so, al-‘Alayli follows in the footsteps of Ziyāda who received some of her education at home. The French orientalist proposes a pathway to al-‘Alayli, suggesting she moves with him to France to continue her education until she receives a Ph.D.²⁰⁷ Although she was in favor of the proposal, her mother rejected the idea.²⁰⁸

Not only does al-‘Alayli follow Ziyāda's advice to continue getting lessons at home, but she also emulates Ziyāda's literary salon by creating her version in Manṣūra. Al-‘Alayli opens

²⁰⁵ المرجع نفسه. ص 42. الأصل بالعربية: "فتاة نابغة موهوبة على استعداد لتذوق الفرنسية."
²⁰⁶ المرجع نفسه. ص 42.

²⁰⁷ In her autobiographical text published nearly 30 years prior to this interview, Abū Shādī, al-‘Alayli recounts him introducing her to a French orientalist named “Peter” who encouraged her to pursue a Ph.D. degree. It is not clear if it is a contradiction between the two narratives as the French orientalist is unnamed in her recounting of her relationship with Ziyāda.

محمد عبد المنعم خفاجة، جميلة العلايلي. "شاعرة من مدرسة أبولو". الشعر والتجديد. رابطة الأدب الحديث. 1957. ص 107.
²⁰⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 42.

the “most famous literary salon [in Mansoura] in the late thirties.”²⁰⁹ Her salon attracted the “young poets of Mansoura, such as Ṣaliḥ Jawdat (1912- 1976) and al-Hamsharī (1908- 1938).”²¹⁰ Although the salon closed when its host moved to Cairo after her marriage in the 1940s, she created another version in her new house in Ain Shams.²¹¹

When Ziyāda is locked up by her cousin in a psychiatric hospital in Beirut, al-‘Alayli tries to visit her. According to al-‘Alayli, she meets the issuer of *al-Makshūf* Lebanese magazine in Beirut and asks for his help visiting Ziyāda. This request is rejected by Ziyāda’s nephew, who responds by issuing orders that Ziyāda does not meet any “Egyptian visitors.”²¹² Al-‘Alayli recounts her frustration for not being able to visit Ziyāda and recounts Ziyāda’s frustration about the lack of support or help she gets from Egyptian journalists and friends who were once frequent visitors to her.²¹³ The frustration towards Egyptian literary figures and journalists may have also been transferred to al-‘Alayli.

Al-‘Alayli associates her literary career with Ziyāda’s and paints a picture of herself as a successor to Ziyāda. In her interview about Ziyāda, she recounts her noticing Mayy Ziyāda in *al-Ahram* and asking her uncle about it. After mentioning her uncle’s wish that she would become like her, al-‘Alayli continues to the interviewer: “After I grew up, I realized that God answered his prayer, even if I did not reach her status.”²¹⁴ While al-‘Alayli tells a similar story about her

²⁰⁹ أماني فريد. "الصالونات الأدبية النسائية في مصر". مجلة الهلال. 1 مايو 1979. ص 118. الأصل بالعربية: "أشهرها صالون الشاعرة جميلة العلالي في الثلاثينات في أواخرها".

²¹⁰ المرجع نفسه. مجلة الهلال. 1 أبريل 1991. ص 107.

²¹¹ المرجع نفسه. ص 118.

²¹² نادية خليفة، حوار مع جميلة العلالي "قصتي مع: مي زيادة". مجلة صباح الخير. عدد 1571. 13 فبراير 1986. ص 42. الأصل بالعربية: "أي مصري بل أي زائر"

²¹³ المرجع نفسه. ص 42.

²¹⁴ المرجع نفسه. ص 40. الأصل بالعربية: "بعد أن كبرت ونضجت أيقنت أن الله استجاب إلى دعائه وإن كنت لم أبلغ مرتبتها"

relationship with Abū Shādī, she gives prominence to her relationship with Ziyāda in her autobiographical text.

Al-‘Alayli’s portrayals of her relationship with Hudā Sha‘rāwi and Mayy Ziyāda reveal a pattern in which she feels inspired by pioneer women figures and mirrors their efforts, treating them as mentors. The poet also portrays herself as a successor to both figures. Al-‘Alayli follows Sha‘rāwi and forms young women's associations. Additionally, she follows in Ziyāda’s footsteps in earning an education, creating a literary salon enhancing her literary connections, and reproducing the narrative of a young woman apprentice of Ziyāda to highlight that image of Ziyāda’s successor. Al-‘Alayli, in both narratives, benefitted from such mentorship by expanding her literary circles and gaining better education opportunities.

Conclusion

I examined al-‘Alayli’s different modes for negotiating the Arabic literature canon in this chapter. Firstly, al-‘Alayli argued that women romantics are naturally better poets than male poets. The poet essentialized her position within the Arabic romantic movement. Secondly, her view of women’s domesticity discourses had changed from the 1930s to the 1950s and 1980s. Al-‘Alayli aligned with the priorities of the Egyptian feminist movement’s priorities. The poet’s portrayal of her relationship with her mother revealed complications in her view of her work in the public sphere. Thirdly, al-‘Alayli approached the friendship and mentorship of pioneer women figures whose help gave the poet several opportunities. Al-‘Alayli portrayed herself as a

successor of these pioneer women which was interpreted as one of the ways to secure a better position in the literary canon.

Chapter Two: Zahra al-Hurr

On May 21st, 2004, the Lebanese newspaper *al-Safir* published a first-page obituary of Zahra al-Hurr, who was described as “a notable woman poet of the first class poets of Jabal ‘Āmil [...] and one of the first southern women to engage with public life.”²¹⁵ In another obituary, the Lebanese journalist Munīr Badawī titles his article “Mother of the Year: the Poet Zahra al-Hurr”²¹⁶; he mourns the death of “the woman poet of Jabal ‘Āmil” by remembering a title she held in 1975. Badawī was not the only one to remind the audience of the poet’s gender role as an ideal mother. In another obituary of al-Hurr, Ḥabīb al-Sādiq (1931- 2023), a Lebanese poet and the president of the Cultural Council for South Lebanon, reminds us of al-Hurr’s status as a pioneer not only in the “field of women’s poetry in Jabal ‘Āmil but also in the field of social and humanitarian work”.²¹⁷ Al-Sādiq highlights al-Hurr’s exceptionalism as the first young woman from Jabal ‘Āmil to graduate from a nursing school and head the Cultural Council for South Lebanon affiliates. Al-Hurr was a politically engaged poet who wrote about poverty in southern Lebanon, the Lebanese Civil War (1975- 1990), and pan-Arabist politics, which influenced her canonical status.

This chapter discusses al-Hurr’s canonical status as an exceptional woman. In the following pages, I argue that al-Hurr was presented as an extraordinary woman to be included in the canon. I present an analysis of articles about Zahra al-Hurr and a close reading of her poems and interviews to analyze how she engaged with her status as an “exceptional” woman to negotiate her position in the literary canon. In addition, I analyze al-Hurr’s politically engaged

²¹⁵ جريدة السفير. بيروت. 12 مايو 2004. ص 1. الأصل بالعربية: "شاعرة مرموقة في الصف الأول من شعراء جبل عامل [...] من أوائل الجنوبيات اللواتي انخرطن في الحياة العامة."

²¹⁶ منير بدوي. "الأم المثالية الشاعرة زهرة الحر." جريدة السفير. السبت 21 فبراير، 2004. بيروت، لبنان. ص 11.

²¹⁷ حبيب الصادق. "الشاعرة زهرة الحر: وسام التأسيس." جريدة السفير. بيروت. 13 مايو 2004. ص 8. الأصل بالعربية: "في حفل الشعر النسوي في جبل عامل [...] بل نالت وسام الريادة أيضا في حفل العمل الاجتماعي والإنساني."

poetry and positions and how they affected her canonicity. The chapter begins with definitions of exceptionalism and discusses Al-Khansa's exceptionalism in classical Arabic literature as an example of the concept and its reflection on canonical Arabic literature. I then illustrate and discuss how al-Hurr has been portrayed as an exceptional woman and how she engages with such rhetoric. In the second section of the chapter, I argue that the poet's committed poetry granted al-Hurr a higher canonical status as she practiced 'true' romanticism better than her contemporaries.

An “Exceptional” Woman Poet

After Zahra al-Hurr’s death, several poets, critics and journalists wrote obituaries about her. “Mother of the Year: the Poet Zahra al-Hurr” portrays al-Hurr as an extraordinary woman who was the first to do several things. The article describes al-Hurr as a visionary and enlightened woman “although she married and gave birth to seven freemen.”²¹⁸ The writer lists the different aspects of the poet’s achievements beginning with her being “the first woman poet in the history of Tyre, Lebanon”, highlighting that she composed poetry when she was thirteen and became famous by the title “Woman Poet of Jabal ‘Āmil.”²¹⁹ The journalist continued to present Zahra al-Hurr as “the first woman teacher in Tyre in 1932”, “the first woman to graduate with a “Diploma in Obstetrics from the French Medical Institute in 1936” and “elected as Mother of the Year representing south Lebanon”.²²⁰ The article portrays her as a pioneer and an exceptional woman who was the first to make several achievements.

Portrayals of al-Hurr as an exceptional woman started before her obituaries in the form of entries and studies about her. In Nādia Nūhaḍ’s entry about al-Hurr in *Nisā’ min Bilādī* (1986) (*Women from My Country*), she highlights al-Hurr’s exceptional environment, her father’s interest in poetry,²²¹ however, he died when al-Hurr was a three-year-old girl. The author claims that “Jabal ‘Āmil knew no other woman poet in the twentieth century.”²²² Nūhaḍ describes al-Hurr’s poem “al-Jū’ (Hunger)” as “the best expression of her nation’s state.”²²³ As a biographer, Nūhaḍ writes a version of al-Hurr’s story, in which she is portrayed as an extraordinary woman

²¹⁸ منير بدوي. “الأم المثالية الشاعرة زهرة الحر”. جريدة السفير. السبت 21 فبراير، 2004. بيروت، لبنان. ص 11. الأصل بالعربية: “برغم زواجها وإنجابها سبعة “أحرار.”

²¹⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 11. الأصل بالعربية: “أول امرأة شاعرة في تاريخ صور” “شاعرة جبل عامل.”

²²⁰ المرجع نفسه. ص 11. الأصل بالعربية: “أول معلمة من صور” “أول امرأة نالت دبلوم الطب النسائي “التوليد” من المعهد الطبي الفرنسي عام 1937” “عام 1975 في السنة العالمية للمرأة تم انتخابها “الأم المثالية” عن جنوب لبنان.”

²²¹ ناديا الجردي نويهض. “الشاعرة زهرة الحر”. نساء من بلادي. المؤسسة العربية للدراسات والنشر. 1986. ص 334-338.

²²² المرجع نفسه. ص 334. الأصل بالعربية: لم يعرف جبل عامل شاعرة سواها خلال القرن العشرين.

²²³ المرجع نفسه. ص 338. الأصل بالعربية: “أفضل تعبير عن حالة بلدها.”

from an extraordinary environment. Al-Hurr is portrayed as a sole woman poet from South Lebanon in the first half of the 20th century.

One of the first studies done on Zahra al-Hurr was a thesis by Zāhid Badr al-Dīn titled *Zahra al-Hurr Shā'ira min Jabal 'Āmil* (1979) (*A Poet from Jabal 'Āmil*); the most recent book about her is a book by Khadīja Shihāb titled *Zahra al-Hurr: Shā'ira Jabal 'Āmil* (2011) (*Jabal 'Āmil's Poet*). Both publications link al-Hurr to Jabal 'Āmil. The change in the title of the article, from “A Poet from Jabal 'Āmil” to “Jabal 'Āmil's Poet”, could be interpreted as a sign of the shift in al-Hurr's canonical status.²²⁴ As a recent publication, the book resulted from a curation process that presented al-Hurr as the sole woman poet from south Lebanon. Although 32 years separate the two studies, they have a lot in common. The two publications read al-Hurr's poetry in terms of themes and poetic purposes for the most part but began with biographical prefaces that differed in length and analysis. The two publications also acknowledged and read both of al-Hurr's poetry collections.²²⁵

The two publications about Zahra al-Hurr significantly differ in their perception of the poet and her legacy. In the first study, Badr al-Dīn perceived al-Hurr as a literary figure from the south and a marginalized poet. Badr al-Dīn described the decision to make his thesis about al-Hurr as an “adventure” as she could belong to sort of modern poets who are “marginalized modernist writer[s]”.²²⁶ Badr al-Dīn added another reason for working on Zahra al-Hurr's poetry which was “the desire to highlight and encourage women's literature.”²²⁷ Although al-Hurr had

²²⁴ زاهد بدر الدين. زهرة الحر: "شاعرة من جبل عامل". رسالة ماجستير بكلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية. جامعة القديس يوسف. بيروت. 1979. خديجة شهاب. زهرة الحر: شاعرة جبل عامل. دار البنان للطباعة والتسجيل والنشر والتوزيع. دير الزهراني، لبنان. 2011.

²²⁵ Although the first publication was written before al-Hurr's second poetry collection publication, but the author claimed that he read the manuscript.

زاهد بدر الدين. "المقدمة". زهرة الحر: "شاعرة من جبل عامل". رسالة ماجستير بكلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية. جامعة القديس يوسف. بيروت. 1979. ص ط.

²²⁶ المرجع نفسه. ص ز. الأصل بالعربية: "مغامرة" "الأديب المحدث المغمور".

²²⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص ح. الأصل بالعربية: "الرغبة في إبراز الأدب النسائي وتشجيعه".

published a poetry collection by the time *Qaṣā'id Mansiyya (Forgotten Poems)* (1970), she was not considered a canonical poet by the researcher.

The second publication was written after al-Hurr's death and celebrated the poet's life and poetry. The book introduced al-Hurr as a one-of-a-kind woman poet. Khadīja Shihāb described her research journey as she was looking for poets from South Lebanon and "among a big number of male poets, there was one woman poet".²²⁸ As an exceptional woman poet, the book introduced the poet to be born to an exceptional environment as she belonged to an "ancient and famous Shi'a family, who were very attached to the inherited customs and traditions."²²⁹ Like Nūhaḍ's entry, the book highlights the author's exceptionalism as an only woman poet; Shihāb references Khalil Shihab al-Din who introduced al-Hurr in a ceremony and described her as "a phenomenon among educated women of Jabal 'Āmil."²³⁰

In contemporary feminist research, exceptionalism has become a heated topic of discussion about women's engagement with the public sphere and the influence of the "first woman to..." rhetoric. Miranda Pillay wonders if the badge of becoming the "first woman to..." could be "a badgering burden for women in light of exceptionalism discourse that valorizes women's capabilities to the benefit of patriarchal institutions".²³¹ According to Pillay, Exceptionalism discourses "[camouflage] second-generation gender bias and [uphold] patriarchal normativity."²³² Pillay argues that exceptionalism discourse could be used to "defend the credibility of the institutions concerned" when the valorized woman is praised without

²²⁸ خديجة شهاب. زهرة الحر: شاعرة جبل عامل. دار البنان للطباعة والتسجيل والنشر والتوزيع. دير الزهراني، لبنان. 2011. ص 8. الأصل بالعربية: "بين أسماء عدد كبير من الشعراء الرجال، ورد اسم امرأة شاعرة."

²²⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 45. الأصل بالعربية: "إلى عائلة شيعية عريقة ومشهورة، متمسكة جدا بالتقاليد والعادات الموروثة."

²³⁰ المرجع نفسه. ص 250. الأصل بالعربية: "ظاهرة بين النساء العاملات المتعلمات."

²³¹ Miranda Pillay, "'First Woman to...' Exceptionalism Discourse: Badge of Honour or Badgering Burden?," *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 29.2. 2023. pp. 56-75.

²³² Ibid. p. 60.

recounting the challenges she has gone through to become a ‘first woman to...’.²³³ Dismissing the challenges a woman has gone through to achieve a certain achievement could happen while writing “without the necessary ‘reflective practice’”.²³⁴ In Nūhaḍ’s entry and Shihāb’s book, al-Hurr’s exceptionalism is portrayed with little attention to the challenges she faced as a woman poet.

Portraying Arab women poets as exceptional to admit them to the canon was not only applied in the case of al-Hurr. Al-Khansa’ and Zahra al-Hurr share similar positions in the canon, as they were portrayed as exceptional women who deserved a canonical status based on their exceptionalism. While al-Khansa’’s exceptionalism was articulated in the 2nd and 3rd Hijri centuries (with the first compilations of classical Arabic literature), the rhetoric about al-Hurr’s exceptionalism appeared while she was still alive and she engaged with it. A “poet by birth” is one of the few quotations the *Arab Women Writers* encyclopedia mentions about Zahra al-Hurr, highlighting her family which “produced many poets”.²³⁵ Yumna al-‘Id connects al-Hurr to other Arab women poets who were born to families with several poet family members creating a chronology of canonical Arab women poets, mentioning Warda al-Yāzījī, Fadwā Ṭūqān and Nāzik al-Malā’ika.

‘Āisha ‘Abd al-Rahmān (1913- 1998), author and professor of literature, claimed that “the Arab woman writer has practiced her artistic activity since Arabs had literary existence [...] historians are the ones who threw her in the shadows”.²³⁶ ‘Abd al-Rahmān argued that literary

²³³ Ibid. p. 61-62.

²³⁴ Ibid. p. 62.

²³⁵ Al-‘Id, Yumna. “Lebanon” in *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999*. Edited by Ashour, Radwa, Ferial Jabouri Ghazoul, Hasna Reda-Mekdashy, and Mandy McClure, eds. American Univ in Cairo Press, 2008. p. 47.

²³⁶ عائشة عبد الرحمن (بنت الشاطي). الشاعرة العربية المعاصرة: محاضرات ألقتها على طلاب قسم الدراسات الأدبية واللغوية. جامعة الدول العربية، معهد الدراسات العربية العالية، 1963. ص 10. الأصل بالعربية: “أن الأدبية العربية مارست نشاطها الفني منذ كان للعرب وجود أدبي [...] ألقى بها المؤرخون في منطقة الظل.”

historians played a huge role in marginalizing Arab women writers, while literary historians picked one poet from the pre-Islamic period and overlooked the rest of what was written by women during the same period. Using the example of al-Khansa', 'Abd al-Rahmān added that the publishers of the first printed edition of al-Khansa's poetry collection were provided with elegies written by 60 other pre-Islamic and early-Islamic women poets, from which they selected some poems to footer the collection with.²³⁷ 'Abd al-Rahmān asked, "Women naturally excel in writing elegies [but] what about other genres?"²³⁸ 'Abd al-Rahmān followed a journey of curation by literary historians to al-Khansa's literary production and traced it back to early historians such as Ibn Salām who only mentioned one Arab woman poet (al-Khansa') as an elegy writer and al-Buḥturī who wrote the last chapter of his book *al-ḥamāsa* on elegies, in which he added selections from 10 Arab women poets and not one male poet.²³⁹

The literary curation process that reduced pre-Islamic and early Islam women's poetry to elegiac poetry and tokenized al-Khansa' is an example of picking a so-called "exceptional woman" as a representative of all women's literature of the period. In English, al-Khansa's work and biography were translated to "activate some of her potent symbolic meanings."²⁴⁰ Michelle Hartman highlights that al-Khansa' has been considered "an exemplary and exceptional Arab woman poet"²⁴¹ in English-language scholarship. Hartman argued that al-Khansa' exemplified a process similar to what had happened to the case of Nawal El Saadawi, portraying these women as "lone feminist crusader for women's rights in the Middle East".²⁴² What happened to these

²³⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 10، 11.

²³⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 11. الأصل بالعربية: "والمرأة بطبيعتها تجيد الرثاء [...] لكن ماذا عن غير الرثاء؟"

²³⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 11.

²⁴⁰ Michelle Hartman, "An Arab Woman Poet as a Crossover Artist? Reconsidering the Ambivalent Legacy of Al-Khansa'." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. 2011. p. 16.

²⁴¹ Ibid. p. 16.

²⁴² Ibid. p. 16.

women's imagery in translation might be different from what has happened to al-Khansa' in Arabic-language scholarship. However, Hartman highlights rhetorics of exceptionalism as a mode of canonization used to admit women poets into the canon.

Fātima al-Muhsin (1950-), an Iraqi author and literary critic, described al-Khansa's canonical status in Arabic literature as "an orphan existence" that was only allowed because the woman poet, in that case, wrote about "not forbidden issues such as mourning the dead and the bride in the tribe".²⁴³ Al-Muhsin linked al-Khansa's exceptionalism to her commitment to elegies. Ibn Qutayba (828 AD- 889 AD) reinstates al-Khansa' in "the form of stories; each one has a clear significance or a moral message."²⁴⁴ Al-Muhsin analyzed Ibn Qutayba's stories and highlighted that they portrayed al-Khansa' as committed to the "most fanatical traditions of the tribe, which is marrying cousins and not strangers."²⁴⁵ 'Āisha 'Abd al-Rahmān argued that Al-Khansa's poetry "cannot express motherhood" and al-Muhsin responds with the likelihood that Al-Khansa's poetry was carried across by her nephew and the men of the tribe, "that is why it is proud of men [...], her poetry enabled her tribe to gain a prestigious status among other tribes."

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While Zahra al-Hurr wrote self-praise (*fakhr*) poems, her portrayal of her life is significantly different from that articulated in her obituaries, dictionary entries and studies about her. Al-Hurr wrote about the challenges she faced as a young woman. In an interview, she acknowledges her exceptional environment, its privileges, and the challenges that accompany

²⁴³ فاطمة المحسن. "مرجعية شعر المرأة العربية: تقاليد الرثاء في القصيدة النسوية". مجلة نزوى. يناير 1999. ص 73. الأصل بالعربية: "وجودها اليتيم" "إلا ما يتعلق بقضايا غير محرمة ومنها نذب الموتى والفخر بالقبيلة."

²⁴⁴ المرجع نفسه. ص 74. الأصل بالعربية: "على هيئة حكايات كل واجدة تحمل دلالة واضحة أو رسالة أخلاقية."

²⁴⁵ المرجع نفسه. ص 75. الأصل بالعربية: "أكثر تقاليد القبيلة تعصباً وهي الزواج بأولاد العم لا الغرباء."

²⁴⁶ المرجع نفسه. ص 75. الأصل بالعربية: "افتقاد شعرها قدرة التعبير عن عاطفة الأمومة" "لذا نجد شعرها يمتلئ بالفخر بالرجال [...] مكنت تلك القبيلة من تبوء مكانة راسخة بين القبائل."

such an environment. The interviewer asked al-Hurr, "Why [was] Jabal 'Āmil's poetry limited to few families? The poet answered

أعتقد أن للوراثة عاملاً أساسياً في ذلك. وبالطبع، فإن الشعر كان يتبرعم ضمن عائلات يعتبر العلم منهلها. وكانت حمى الشعر تنتقل من الآباء إلى الأبناء بالدم. [...] والدي، كان من المولعين بالشعر. كذلك والدتي، كانت تنظم الشعر أحياناً. أنا إذن شاعرة بالوراثة.

I think that heredity is a key element. Of course, poetry has flourished in families that considered knowledge their way. Poetry fever is transmitted from parents to children by blood. [...] My father was passionate about poetry and so was my mother, who occasionally composed poetry. I am a born poet."²⁴⁷

Aside from her class, and maybe because of it, Zahra al-Hurr was exposed to poetry at a young age, which she believed played a big role in her reciting and composing poetry. Born in a small town, Jibā', in southern Lebanon, she connected the city's fame and interest in education to it being the birthplace of the second martyr Zayn al-Dīn al-Jubā'i al-'Āmilī (1506- 1558), who was a Twelver Shi'a Muslim scholar.²⁴⁸ Al-Hurr added, "In that environment, my passion for literature began".²⁴⁹ The poet portrayed her formative years as influenced by several conditions that allowed and encouraged her interest in literature. According to her, being born to al-Hurr family was a natural condition, however, there were other influences on her early formative years. Al-Hurr's family moved to Tyre, Lebanon, and she joined the National School for Girls,

²⁴⁷ علي العجمي، زهرة الحر. "الكفاح العربي تفتح ملف الشعر في جبل عامل (4): الشاعرة زهرة الحر. مجلة الكفاح العربي. 3 ديسمبر 1984. بيروت، لبنان. ملف عالم الثقافة. ص 6-8.

²⁴⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 7.

²⁴⁹ المرجع نفسه. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: "وفي هذا المحيط نشأت عندي محبة الأدب."

where she met her first Arabic literature teacher, whom she remembers as a provider of “care and encouragement”.²⁵⁰

Al-Hurr also introduces the challenges she faced when coming of age as a part of her growing environment, which can be interpreted as the formative challenges she faced besides the ‘care and encouragement’ that are highlighted in the accounts written about her. Zahra al-Hurr describes her society growing up as a “very strict society” where it was “a disgrace to talk to men.”²⁵¹ Hence, “there were no relationships connecting her” with other male poets from Jabal ‘Āmil.”²⁵² Al-Hurr highlights that the “veil was imposed on us [women] since we were young.”²⁵³ The “strict” traditions posed other challenges to her trials to compose and recite poetry. Al-Hurr emphasizes that when men “wanted to take a poem from me [to publish] or if I was invited to recite a poem, I drowned in my shyness and went out enveloped by veil.”²⁵⁴

She describes her family as a “conservative about inherited traditions” family,²⁵⁵ which illustrated how the learning-loving environment treated a woman who wanted to learn and engage with public life. About such challenges, she says, “I faced extreme opposition in the beginning.”²⁵⁶ The poet adds: “I was fought since I took the first step in the journey of the poem, [...] It wasn’t acceptable that a young girl could go against [society’s] will and its traditions.”²⁵⁷ When asked about how she overcame the obstacles that faced her from a young age, she

²⁵⁰ المرجع نفسه. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: “لقيت كل الاهتمام والتشجيع.”
²⁵¹ المرجع نفسه. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: “المجتمع شديد التزمّت” “من العيب أن نتحدث إلى الرجال.”
²⁵² المرجع نفسه. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: “لم تكن هناك من علائق تربطني بهم.”
²⁵³ المرجع نفسه. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: “كان الحجاب يفرض علينا منذ الصغر.”
²⁵⁴ المرجع نفسه. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: “أرادوا أن يأخذوا مني قصيدة، أو إذا دعيت لإلقاء قصيدة، فكنت أغرق في خجلي وأنا أخرج إليهم والحاجب يلفني.”
²⁵⁵ المرجع نفسه. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: محافظة على التقاليد الموروثة.”
²⁵⁶ المرجع نفسه. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: “لقيت معارضة شديدة في بادئ الأمر.”
²⁵⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: “حوربت منذ أن سلكت الخطوة الأولى، في رحلة القصيدة. لم يكن مقبولاً لدى المجتمع، أن يرى فتاة، تخرج عن طوعه، وعن إطار موارثه.”

answered that it was due to her “persistence to continue learning [...] and [her] family’s realization of signs of [her] ingenuity.”²⁵⁸

Al-Hurr writes a free-verse poem “The Idol” about how she faced traditional values growing up:

"أنا حطمت الصنم

وأبي حطمه منذ القدم

وغداً يسحقه ابني بالقدم

I’ve shattered the idol

And my father shattered it before

And tomorrow my son will crush it with his foot”²⁵⁹

While the Idol can be read as a dead metaphor for traditions, the poet, throughout the poem, creates an extended image of a powerful self that shatters the idol without having blood on her hand as she explains how weak it is, as it is made from mud. Al-Hurr creates a genealogy that is exceptional in defying tradition and includes her father and her son whom she could teach to revolt. In another shorter poem “*Mutamarrida* (A Rebel)”, she portrays a proud woman protagonist who breaks free from tradition:

"أنا لست إلا صخرة جثمت لتَهْزَأَ بالرمال

أنا لست إلا أرزة ربضت على صدر التلال”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ المرجع نفسه، ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: "إصراري على متابعة التحصيل العلمي [...] واكتشاف العائلة لعلامات البلوغ التي بدت علي."

²⁵⁹ زهرة الحر. "الصنم". ديوان قصائد منسية. دار غندور للطباعة والنشر. بيروت. 1970. ص 107-109.

²⁶⁰ زهرة الحر. "متمردة". مجلة الأديب. أرشيف الشارخ للمجلات الأدبية والثقافية العربية. أبريل 1946. ص 24.

“I am but a rock came to mock the sand

I am but a strong cedar on the highland”²⁶¹

In these two verses, two figures of speech portray the narrator as strong natural structures.

Inspired by Lebanese nature imagery, she identifies with a rock and a cedar. In both cases, nature is challenged by its surroundings. In an extended image, personified nature elements actively break through their challenges. The rock finds the sand too weak of a challenge and mocks it. While the cedar, a symbol of Lebanon and on the nation’s flag, is on a highland like a proud victorious leader. In both poems, the narrator appears to be a strong and proud individual who liberates herself. The two poems could be read as *fakhr*, a genre that focuses on self-praise, a portrayal of a poet who thinks of herself as deserving of canonicity. In the first-person narrative, al-Hurr challenges the traditional conception of *fuḥūla* by writing in *fakhr* and portraying herself as worthy of canonicity. Al-Hurr acknowledges the privileges she acquired from being born into the al-Hurr family,

Al-Hurr presents her exceptionalism in a more complex way than when others write about her. She leads the life of an ordinary woman. As a young woman, she obtained two higher education degrees; one in education after which she worked as a teacher in Tyre for 4 years and then joined the French Faculty of Medicine in Beirut to graduate as a legal midwife. In her graduation ceremony, the faculty dean announced that al-Hurr was “the first female graduate from Tyre, South Lebanon.”²⁶² Al-Hurr describes her decision to marry after her second graduation as follows: “I went on with my life like all women, got married, settled in Tyre, and

²⁶¹ Translated by Nourhan Amer.

²⁶² علي العجمي، زهرة الحر. الكفاح العربي تفتح ملف الشعر في جبل عامل (4): الشاعرة زهرة الحر. مجلة الكفاح العربي. 3 ديسمبر 1984. بيروت، لبنان. ملف عالم الثقافة. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: "أول خريجة جنوبية سورية".

dedicated my life to establishing a complete family.”²⁶³ Al-Hurr describes getting married and having children as having a “complete family” as her exceptionalism would not be valid until she lives “like all women.”

As an exceptional woman who “like all women” had a big family, as she raised seven children, Al-Hurr became a part of her exceptionalism and influenced her viewpoint of motherhood. In “1975 the International Women’s Year, she [al-Hurr] was elected as Mother of the Year representing south Lebanon”.²⁶⁴ In the ceremony, which was held in Tyre Secondary School, al-Hurr recited a poem commemorating the day and titled it “I am Motherhood.”²⁶⁵ The poem is in a stanzaic form, 3 stanzas, with a unified rhyming pattern (qāfiya). The first stanza presents the metaphoric figure, motherhood, who is personified and has a life of its own where it grows and thinks. The poet recites:

"أنا ابنة القمم الخضراء يا وطني

فالزهر رحب بي، والطير حياني"

“I am the daughter of the high green hills, O my homeland/ flowers have welcomed me and the birds have greeted me.”²⁶⁶ The poet imagines motherhood in a first-person narrative as a part of nature, which greeted motherhood like a welcomed guest. Motherhood is described in similar terms as in her poem “A Rebel” as the first-person narrator identifies with nature elements.

The poet painted the picture of the people that motherhood lived among:

²⁶³ المرجع نفسه. ص 7. الأصل بالعربية: "تابعت حياتي ككل النساء. فتزوجت واستقرت في صور. وتفرغت لإنشاء عائلة كاملة." ²⁶⁴ منير بدوي. "الأم المثالية الشاعرة زهرة الحر." جريدة السفير. السبت 21 فبراير، 2004. بيروت، لبنان. ص 11. الأصل بالعربية: "عام 1975 في السنة العالمية للمرأة تم انتخابها "الأم المثالية" عن جنوب لبنان." ²⁶⁵ زهرة الحر. "أنا الأمومة". ديوان رياح الخريف. المجلس الثقافي للبنان الجنوبي. 1992. بيروت، لبنان. ص 190-193. ²⁶⁶ المرجع نفسه. ص 190.

"أهلي نسور وعقبان مجنحة

بيض السرائر، من أبناء قحطان

My people are winged eagles and vultures/ beaming faces, children of Qaḥtān”²⁶⁷

After describing motherhood as a stagnant and beautiful nature component, she identified people of motherhood as mobile and flying creatures, eagles and vultures. Such creatures are symbolic of freedom and power. She also describes her sense of motherhood as Arab motherhood, referencing Qaḥtān, an Arab tribe that is thought to be a forefather of Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula. The first stanza portrays motherhood as a creature of both serenity and fierce. The second stanza focuses on motherhood’s qualities: affection, purity of heart, sacrifice, dedication, etc. The poet described motherhood as a naturally all-giving and dedicated figure, a traditional vision of motherhood put on the narrator’s tongue in the first-person narrative.

The third stanza portrays motherhood as a symbol of a good nation, a builder of generations and an Islamic symbol for heaven. She continues:

"أنا المعلمة الأولى وصانعة

الأجيال، فالجيل يوم الفصل ميزاني

I’m the first teacher and the maker of/ generations, they will be my salvation on judgment day”²⁶⁸

However, it is through the context of the ceremony and the poet’s life that the poem acquires its full meaning. The ceremony was held in a secondary school, so symbolizing motherhood as “the

²⁶⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 191.

²⁶⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 192.

first teacher” resonated with the audience of teachers and young women attending the ceremony. The poet also worked as a teacher for four years extending the similarities between motherhood and herself. She also uses the word *al-faşl* to mean judgment day while the same word means the classroom as well. At the same time, she is awarded for her motherhood, al-Hurr extends her exceptional status as an extraordinary mother who could represent other mothers.

In her poems of *fakhr* and “I am Motherhood”, al-Hurr portrayed herself as a proud, fierce and exceptional mother. In her interview, al-Hurr provided an insight into the challenges she faced as a young woman. Al-Hurr portrayed herself as a different, exceptional woman who acknowledges her privileges and as a fighter against traditional values. Al-Hurr’s exceptionalism was illustrated by biographers, researchers and herself. Narratives about al-Hurr tended to portray her as a sole woman poet of South Lebanon while she complicated her exceptionalism. Al-Hurr employed the rhetoric about her exceptionalism to present herself as a canonical poet.

Political Engagement: The Canon's Way in the 1960s and 1970s

Although al-Hurr began publishing her poems in the 1930s, she did not publish a poetry collection until 1970. Many of the articles about al-Hurr were published in the 1970s and the 1980s, such as Nādia Nūhaḍ's entry, Zāhid Badr al-Dīn's thesis and al-Kifāḥ al- 'Arabī's interview with her, in addition to many awards some of which were mentioned in the previous discussion. Yumna al- 'Id backs the reason for al-Hurr's late publication is that she "had to wait until 1970 to find someone to help collect her poems and publish them in book form."²⁶⁹ I argue that it was because of al-Hurr's fluctuating canonicity that she was promoted in the 1960s and the 1970s. This section closely reads al-Hurr's interactions with her political context and argues that it was one of her modes of negotiating her literary status. As a romantic rebel, al-Hurr wrote about women's issues, class struggles and the Lebanese Civil War. Al-Hurr also recited her poems on historical occasions calling for Arab unity and revolution.

Al-Hurr was interested in women's rights issues before she wrote about sociopolitical change. However, she did not gain recognition until the latter happened. In Zahra al-Hurr's poem "Ya Mayy fī Qurbinā min Qawminā Ḍararru" "(O Mayy, The Harm lies in the Closeness to Our People)" addresses Mayy Ziyāda and expresses her sympathy and solidarity with Ziyāda as she was suffering personal losses and was about to move to Lebanon. Al-Hurr advises Ziyāda to stay alone as all people will cause her harm.

هم الأفاعي فأنأي عن مواطنهم إن بتنا في مواطنهم لم نأمن الخطرا

²⁶⁹Yumna Al- 'Id, "Lebanon" in *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999*. Edited by Ashour, Radwa, Ferial Jabouri Ghazoul, Hasna Reda-Mekdashy, and Mandy McClure. American Univ in Cairo Press, 2008. p.47.

“They are the serpents, stay away from their nests/ If we inhabited their nests, we are not safe from their danger”²⁷⁰

The woman poet uses the first-person plural pronoun, which designates a community of women writers who at this point (1937) sympathize with Mayy Ziyāda. Jamila al-‘Alayli and Zahra al-Hurr share a common interest in Mayy Ziyāda’s late challenges and both dedicated poetry to her.

Al-Hurr was concerned with women’s rights and wrote several poems that illustrated a woman protagonist’s point of view by calling for various rights and pointing out disordered societal power dynamics between men and women. One example of the poet’s approach is her poem “Divorced Woman Memories,” in which she narrates the story of a resilient wife who endured poverty. When the husband becomes affluent, he cheats on her and divorces her.²⁷¹ The poet illustrates the challenges the woman faced in marrying and how she helped accumulate the husband’s fortune:

"ولبست الثوب مرقوعًا. وما حالفت عارًا

واقترضت القرش. حتى صار مألًا وعقارًا

I wore a patched dress, and I was never disgraced/ I kept every penny until it became wealth and holdings”²⁷²

The poet portrays the poor conditions the wife endured in her marriage through their daily food and clothing. On the other hand, she pictures the economic role that the housewife took part in as the treasurer of the house. When the husband owned estates “the cheap prostitutes owned [him]”

²⁷⁰ زهرة الحر. "يا مي في قربنا من قومنا ضرر". مجلة العرفان. عدد 1. بيروت. مارس 1937. ص 41.
²⁷¹ زهرة الحر. "ذكريات مطلقة". ديوان قصائد منسية. دار غندور للطباعة والنشر. بيروت. 1970. ص 100-102.
²⁷² المرجع نفسه. ص 101.

and she continued to keep the house and children.²⁷³ The poet does not tell the story after the divorce; however, she raises the issue of divorced women's economic autonomy. The poem also tells a story of poverty and the husband's rising social class while the wife and the divorced woman do not enjoy the same advantages.

In al-Hurr's poem "A Prostitute in Agony", she tells the story of a young woman who lost her providing family and becomes controlled by a master to live and die tragically.²⁷⁴ The poet criticizes the oppressive social context that makes a young woman susceptible to modern slavery. The poet portrays Tamāra, the protagonist, as a loving young woman "as if longing never touched her."²⁷⁵ Tamāra is portrayed as a girl who has not experienced life yet, however, life challenges her in ways she was not equipped for. In verse, the poet treats the stigma around sex work and responds to people who call the protagonist a 'prostitute' and says about those who exploit her: "They are the debauchers [...] you are the victim."²⁷⁶ Although the poet uses the term "prostitute" in the title of the poem, she redefines the moral connotation of the word and denotes a moral high ground for the protagonist.

The poet acknowledges the exploitative power dynamics that Tamāra lives through as she tries to make a living in the house of a master where she has no power. She concludes with wisdom while narrating the protagonist's agony:

"وما حيلة الكادحين الحفاة إذا أغضبوا المالك السيدا

What's the barefoot laborious' ploy/ if they angered the owner master?"²⁷⁷

²⁷³ المرجع نفسه. ص 102. الأصل بالعربية: "ملكًا للرخيصات البغايا."
²⁷⁴ زهرة الحر. "بغى تحتضر". ديوان قصائد منسية. دار غندور للطباعة والنشر. بيروت. 1970. ص 95-99.

²⁷⁵ المرجع نفسه. ص 95. الأصل بالعربية: "كان الصباية ما لامستها."

²⁷⁶ المرجع نفسه. ص 95. الأصل بالعربية: "هم الفاسقون [...] وأنت الضحية."

²⁷⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 97.

The poet creates a dichotomy of laborers and owners. The master not only owns the means of production in the narrative, but he may also control the protagonist's destiny. In addition to the class-related awareness that al-Hurr displays, she takes the side of the powerless and lends her voice to the 'prostitute'.

Al-Hurr engages with culturally established concepts of freedom and morality. The poet wraps up the poem with a piece of wisdom:

"هو الجوع. ينهش قلب الفتاة فتنسى الفضيلة والمحتدا
وما حرة يا تمارا تجوع فتأكل ثدياً لها أو يدا

It's hunger. It eats a girl's heart, so she forgets virtue and origins/ O Tamāra, no starving free woman eats a breast of hers or a hand."²⁷⁸

The poet uses intertextuality to engage with the old Arabic proverb "A free woman starves and does not eat from her breast."²⁷⁹ The proverb supposes morality in absolute terms, does not excuse a woman for doing 'immoral' acts in case she starves. On the other hand, al-Hurr problematizes morality and does not perceive it as separate from a woman's economic autonomy. Although the poet does not redefine the forgotten morality in this instance, if a woman faces hunger, she will do 'immoral' acts. The poet sympathizes with her and introduces an 'immoral' context. The poet connects the woman's economic autonomy to her body autonomy as the starved woman in the verse alienates her body parts. When the woman eats a breast or a hand, they are not her breast or her hand like the proverb. Her body parts become detachable, her breast to become a "breast of hers."

²⁷⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 99.

²⁷⁹ الأصل بالعربية: "تجوع الحرة ولا تأكل ثديها." من شرح مقامات الحريري للشريشي. مجلد 1. جامع الكتب الإسلامية. ص 419.

Zahra al-Hurr compares her journey to Nāzik al-Malā'ika's in revolting against literary traditions. In an interview with al-Kifāḥ al-ʿArabī, al-Hurr was asked if she “ever wrote modernist poetry *Shiʿr Ḥadīth*” the poet responded:

"الشعر هو الشعر في أي لبوس أتى. [...] أما شعر التفعيلة الواحدة، فقد كتبتّه. وأذكر أن إحدى رائداته، وهي نازك الملائكة [...] كانت تنشر قصائده في مجلة العرفان في الوقت نفسه الذي كنت أنشر فيه قصائدي. لكن الظروف دفعته إلى الشهرة وظروفنا دفعتني إلى الانزواء في حميمة العائلة."

“Poetry is poetry in whatever form it comes. [...] As for *Shiʿr al-Tafʿīla*, I wrote it. I remember that one of its pioneers, Nāzik al-Malā'ika [...] was publishing its poems in *al-ʿIrfān* magazine at the same time I was publishing my poems. But circumstances pushed her to fame, and our circumstances pushed me to isolate myself in the intimacy of the family.”²⁸⁰

Al-Hurr aligns her literary career with al-Malā'ika highlighting that they were from the same generation. However, al-Hurr tracks the reason that al-Malā'ika gained more recognition than her to “circumstances.” Associating herself with al-Malā'ika was not only because they shared an interest in revolting on Arabic poetry forms but also could be read as to signify their common commitment to pan-Arabism and empathy for their societies.

In “Nazik al-Malā'ika and the Poetics of Pan-Arabism,” Robyn Creswell engages with al-Malā'ika's poem “Cholera” as the poem “entered the canon of Arabic verse.”²⁸¹ Creswell tracks al-Malā'ika's different narratives about writing the poem. Creswell argues that al-Malā'ika's “tale of poetic revolt is a parable of the pan-Arabist imagination.”²⁸² In the article's reading of al-Malā'ika's pan-Arabism, Creswell claims that al-Malā'ika did not perceive pan-Arabism as an

²⁸⁰ علي العجمي، زهرة الحر. “الكفاح العربي تفتح ملف الشعر في جبل عامل (4): الشاعرة زهرة الحر. مجلة الكفاح العربي. 3 ديسمبر 1984. بيروت، لبنان. ملف عالم الثقافة. ص 8.

²⁸¹ Robyn Creswell, “Nazik al-Mala'ika and the Poetics of Pan-Arabism.” *Critical Inquiry* 46.1. 2019. p. 72.

²⁸² Ibid. p. 73.

“ideology of a future state but rather an imagined community that stands as a critique of the existing one.”²⁸³ Creswell reads the “discovery of free verse *al-shi‘r al-hurr*” as a result of “an experience of empathy for a foreign Arab nation whose political situation parallels her own.”²⁸⁴ In al-Malā’ika’s retelling of the story of writing “Cholera”, she “dramatized [the 1948 Palestinian Nakba] as a conflict between generations.”²⁸⁵ In doing so, she aligned with Egyptian president and pan-Arabist leader Gamal Abdel-Nasser (1918- 1970) and Qonstantīn Zurāyq (1909-2000), a Syrian historian and pan-Arabist thinker, views on the crisis. Creswell portrays al-Malā’ika as a poet whose engagement with her political engagement aligned with her contextual catastrophes which could be interpreted as a reason for her canonical status.

Zahra al-Hurr engaged with class issues side by side with women’s issues and sometimes wrote the intersections of both issues like what she did in her poem “A Prostitute in Agony”. On other occasions, she wrote about concepts of poverty and social inequalities separately as in her poems “Hunger” and “Rich and Poor”. In her poem “Hunger”, the poet personifies hunger and writes a satirical poem (*hijā’*) addressing the personified concept.²⁸⁶ The poet says: “Truthful, whoever calls you infidel”, intertextually engaging with an old Arabic saying which is translated to “Hunger is infidel.”²⁸⁷ The narrator lists all sorts of lives, moralities or households that hunger ruins. The author concludes that hunger leads to revolution:

"أي أرضٍ حللت فيها ولم تك
ميداناً لثورة.. ولثائر

What land did you arrive in that has not become a field for revolution and a revolutionary?”²⁸⁸

²⁸³ Ibid. p. 75.

²⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 81.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 83.

²⁸⁶ زهرة الحر. "الجوع". ديوان قصائد منسية. دار غندور للطباعة والنشر. بيروت. 1970. ص 78-79.

²⁸⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 78. الأصل بالعربية: "صديق، من يقول إنك كافر."

²⁸⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 79.

The author finds that revolution is a direct result of social injustice. Calling for revolution is not an alien concept to Zahra al-Hurr as she illustrates different aspects of inequalities that threaten social peace.

In al-Hurr's poem "Rich and Poor", she writes a dialogue between a poor person, the narrator, and a rich person.²⁸⁹ The narrator reminds the rich person of their commonalities yet there remains the social injustice that the narrator is aware of. The narrator addresses the rich person:

"فلماذا أنت مولى، وأنا عبد حقير

Why are you a master, and I am a despicable slave?"²⁹⁰

The poet uses a slavery-specific lexicon as a metaphor for how similar slavery is to exploitative power dynamics, which can be interpreted as modern slavery. The narrator reminds the rich person that "the earth was made for us, a home from the mighty god" Then why does the rich person get more of it?²⁹¹ The narrator acknowledges a competition between the rich person and themselves over the earth's resources, a competition that the poor cannot win. The narrator reminds the rich person that one day things could change a day when the poor person could "wreak havoc on a boiling day."²⁹² Although the narrator recognizes the destruction that a revolution day would bring to the earth, it is a destined event for them.

The poem "Rich and Poor" is a simplified introduction to class struggle which considers a wide audience that could be reached through a simple dialogue between a poor person and a

²⁸⁹ زهرة الحر. "غني وفقير". ديوان قصائد منسية. دار غندور للطباعة والنشر. بيروت. 1970. ص 75-77.

²⁹⁰ المرجع نفسه. "ص 75.

²⁹¹ المرجع نفسه. ص 76. الأصل بالعربية: "هذه الأرض لنا، سكنى من الله القدير".

²⁹² المرجع نفسه. ص 77. الأصل بالعربية: "تحرق الأخضر واليابس في يوم هجير".

rich person. The author does not categorize people into working class and bourgeois; however, she expresses the class struggle and social injustice which is inevitably violent. In the last stanza of the poem, the poet tackles the idea of charity versus social rights. The narrator speaks on behalf of the poor: "I am not requesting charity [...] but I am requesting for my right",²⁹³ the poet engages with rhetoric of changing the social order through charity and asserts that rights should replace charity. In the last two verses, the narrator reminds the rich person of the source of their wealth:

"أنت لولا زندي المنهوك. لم تبين القصور

أنت لولا عرقي المسفوح ما صرت...

Without my exhausted rest, you could have never built the palaces

Without my shed sweat, you could have never been..."²⁹⁴

The last words of the poem are left unsaid as if the narrator grows angrier, addressing the rich person until the end. The narrator understands their role in society as a member of the working class, which according to the poem builds and makes the product, including the rich people themselves who are products of the working class. The poem "Rich and Poor" alongside "Hunger" are a part of Zahra al-Hurr's social awareness work that treats class struggles, unifies with the working class and calls for revolution.

In the opening ceremony of the Cultural Council for South Lebanon (1964), Zahra al-Hurr recited a populist poem titled "Here is the South" in which she spoke about the marginalization of southern Lebanon.²⁹⁵ Although the poet affirms the national belonging to

²⁹³ المرجع نفسه، ص 77. الأصل بالعربية: " أنا لا أطلب إحسانًا [...] إنما أطلب حقًا."

²⁹⁴ المرجع نفسه، ص 77.

²⁹⁵ زهرة الحر. "هنا الجنوب". ديوان قصائد منسية. دار غندور للطباعة والنشر. بيروت. 1970. ص 144-146.

Lebanon, she expresses a great extent of economic and political marginalization that alienates the south from the rest of Lebanon. The poet says:

"أنا من الناس يا لبنان في وطن لم يعترف أننا فيه من الناس

I'm one of the people, O Lebanon, in a country/ that doesn't recognize us, in it, as its people."²⁹⁶

The narrator unifies with the people of South Lebanon, and she continues the poem speaking on behalf of them starting from that verse. She describes scenes of dehumanization from the Lebanese central government in Beirut. The marginalization makes the people of the South "hungry", "naked" and "wounded."²⁹⁷ The poet uses a simplified lexicon that speaks on behalf of and to larger audiences. The poem also creates or acknowledges the presence of division between a suffering South Lebanon and the rest of the country. The narrator explains that the division will cause harm to the whole country:

"إني أعوذ برب الناس من فتن كما أعوذ به، من شر وسواس

I seek refuge in the people's god from strife/ And I seek refuge in him from the whisperer."²⁹⁸

The Islamic wording intertextually borrows from Sūrat al-Nās of the Quran. The whisperer, a metaphor for sectarian strife instigators, becomes linked to the whisperer as a metaphor for the devil through the Quranic text. In the poem "Jabal 'Āmil", the poet writes in a similar vein to "Here is the South", however, she focuses on the unity of Lebanon. The narrator views "dispersion [as] a disappointment" while warning that social injustice will cause the nation's destruction.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ المرجع نفسه. ص 144.

²⁹⁷ المرجع نفسه. ص 144. الأصل بالعربية: "الجياح" "العراة" "لنا الجراح".

²⁹⁸ المرجع نفسه. ص 145.

²⁹⁹ زهرة الحر. "جبل عامل". ديوان قصائد منسية. دار غندور للطباعة والنشر. بيروت. 1970. ص 147-149. الأصل بالعربية: "إن التفرق خذلان".

In Zahra al-Hurr's second poetry collection, published in 1992 after the Lebanese Civil War, she writes about the sectarian strife that had been foreseen in some of her earlier poems. In the poem "Sectarianism", she criticizes the sectarian system and finds it contrary to religion and morality. Written during the Civil War in 1985, the poem addresses the violence that the Lebanese people went through and reminds the audience of the ties that used to bond them. The poet addresses the blame of the Civil War and says:

"ونأبى الاعتراف بأي ذنب ونلقي اللوم فيه على الأجانب

We refuse to admit any sin/ and blame it on the foreigners."³⁰⁰

The poet highlights the responsibility of the Lebanese people regarding the Civil War and rejects the idea that the War was imported. She points out that bearing the responsibility of war atrocities is a part of transitional justice and refusing that responsibility will not end the war.

Al-Hurr's poem "My Country" is an Elegy for Lebanon. written in the same year as "Sectarianism", it describes the destruction, death and defeat that the country went through during the Lebanese Civil War.³⁰¹ In the last stanza of the elegiac poem, the narrator counts the nation's losses:

"لنا وطن ذبحناه/ وأحرقنا بقاياها/ [...] فهيا ندفن القتلى/ أمام بيوتنا الثكلى/ [...] وهيا ندفن الليمون والزيتون/ والنخلا/ وندفن في التراب المستباح- الحق والعدلا

³⁰⁰ زهرة الحر. "الطائفية". ديوان رياح الخريف. المجلس الثقافي للبنان الجنوبي. 1992. بيروت، لبنان. ص 143-146.
³⁰¹ زهرة الحر. "بلادي". ديوان رياح الخريف. المجلس الثقافي للبنان الجنوبي. 1992. بيروت، لبنان. ص 139-142.

We have a homeland that we slaughtered/ and burned its remains/ [...] So let us bury the dead/ in front of our wailing homes/ [...] And let us bury the lemons and olives/ and the palm trees/ and bury in the permissible soil- truth and justice.”³⁰²

The poet personifies their lost homes and trees to say in many ways that the war has exceeded any limits. By losing the nation to war, values such as truth and justice hold no meaning after that. The poet uses the elegiac poem, written in free verse, to mourn everything she is losing while the war continues. Al-Hurr’s poetry remains a mirror of her political context while she remains engaging with it.

In “Fluri ‘Abd al-Malik: The Marginalization of a Woman Romantic Poet in the Sixties,” I trace the canonical status of Fluri ‘Abd al-Malik (1925- 1983), an Egyptian romantic poet.³⁰³ ‘Abd al-Malik was marginalized because “the literary environment in the sixties that encouraged committed literature.”³⁰⁴ In the 1960s, a shift occurred in Arabic poetry dismissing Arabic romanticism in favor of committed poetry which “delivered “a message” for social change.”³⁰⁵ The context that rejected ‘Abd al-Malik might have welcomed Zahra al-Hurr.

Arabic romanticism was criticized for being the product of ‘ivory tower’ poets who were isolated from society and prioritized their individualism. In the early fifties of the twentieth century, as committed literature was formulated in Arabic literature, romantic literature was described as ivory tower literature,³⁰⁶ a derogatory term to describe how romantics were isolated from their societies. On the other hand, al-Hurr engaged with societal issues and defied the

³⁰² المرجع نفسه، ص 143.

³⁰³ Osama Amer, “Fluri Abd al-Malik: The Marginalization of a Woman Romantic Poet in the Sixties”, *Women and Memory Forum*, March 2022.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 1.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 9.

³⁰⁶ محمد مفيد الشوباشي، "الأدب الضال"، مجلة الثقافة، أرفيف الشارخ للمجلات الأدبية والثقافية العربية، عدد 677، ديسمبر 1951، ص 11-9.

normative perception of the Arab romantic poet as isolated from their society. Not only did al-Hurr tackle social injustice and the Lebanese Civil War issues, she also politically participated in political occasions improvising and reciting her poems. Al-Hurr envisioned Pan-Arabism and Arab Unity as the political solution to her people's problems and she voiced these perceptions on many occasions.

When asked about her relationship with Gamal Abdel-Nasser, Zahra al-Hurr recounted a personal and collective affection for him: "We felt great pride in him [Nasser]. I had that great surge towards Pan Arabism."³⁰⁷ On February 17th, 1958, al-Hurr visited Syria with a Lebanese delegation that visited Nasser in the Damascus Guest Palace. Al-Hurr improvised a poem glorifying Arab unity and Nasser as the Arab leader. Her meeting with Nasser and impromptu poem happened during Nasser's historical visit to Syria, in which he celebrated the Egypt-Syria Union treaty and days before his historic address to the Syrian crowd from the balcony of the same palace, Damascus Guest Palace.

The poet titles the poem published later in her collection "Arab Unity" and prefaces it with where and when it was first improvised. She says:

"هنئينا بالوحدة العربية

واسعدينا، في عزة قومية

Cheer us for Arab unity/ and please us with national pride"³⁰⁸ The rhyme between the first two lines correlates Arab unity with nationalism as the new republic of Egypt-Syria is inaugurated

³⁰⁷ علي العجمي، زهرة الحر. "الكفاح العربي تفتح ملف الشعر في جبل عامل (4): الشاعرة زهرة الحر. مجلة الكفاح العربي. 3 ديسمبر 1984. بيروت، لبنان. ملف عالم الثقافة. ص 8. الأصل بالعربية: "كنا نشعر باعتزاز شديد به، وكان لدي ذلك الاندفاع الكبير نحو الوحدة العربية." ³⁰⁸ زهرة الحر. "الوحدة العربية". ديوان قصائد منسية. دار غندور للطباعة والنشر. بيروت. 1970. ص 120-121.

and a new form of national pride is born and shared between Arabs despite their national identities. The poet continues to praise Nasser as the leader of Arabs and the new union:

"قم نبائع جمال في موكب النصر

رئيسا، لخير جمهورية

Let's pledge allegiance to Gamal in the victory parade, a president for the finest Republic."³⁰⁹ Al-Hurr congratulates the hosting state on the new union and considers Nasser a victorious leader for the new republic. The improvised poem was a part of al-Hurr's contribution to pan-Arabist discourse, but it also represented a symbolic incident in the poet's literary career. The anecdote was repeated many times such as in her first poetry collection, Badr al-Dīn's thesis and her interview with al-Kifāh al-'Arabi magazine. The repetition of the anecdote signifies al-Hurr's relevance to the pan-Arabism movement and as a negotiation mode for the poet's canonicity.

Zahra al-Hurr wrote several poems in the same vein. The poet subtitled another poem "a segment of an Epic written in 1958," the same year as the Egypt-Syria Union declaration, and titled it "The Revolution."³¹⁰ In the first-person narrative poem, the narrator is the "daughter of misery, poverty and deprivation."³¹¹ She identifies different problems holding her nation back and calls for a unified Arab revolution against "corruption, injustice and terrorism."³¹² Once again, al-Hurr finds that the solution to the problems facing all Arab countries is a unified front in revolution and governance. The poet says:

"فإذا الحكم للشعوب على الأرض

³⁰⁹ المرجع نفسه، ص 121.

³¹⁰ زهرة الحر. "الثورة". ديوان قصائد منسية. دار غندور للطباعة والنشر. بيروت. 1970. ص 122-124.

³¹¹ المرجع نفسه، ص 123. الأصل بالعربية: "بنت الشقاء والفقر والحرمان".

³¹² المرجع نفسه، ص 123. الأصل بالعربية: "الفساد والظلم والإرهاب".

The rule belongs to the people on earth, and the worst punishment belongs to the oppressors.”³¹³

The poem reflects a revolutionary political stance towards governance in the Arab world influenced by the hardships she expresses and the political context she lived through.

Conclusion

Zahra al-Hurr was written about as an exceptional woman and she engaged with such rhetoric.

The first section analyzed exceptionalism's relationship with the Arabic literary canon and closely read al-Hurr's engagement with the concept and how she interpreted it. Al-Hurr wrote about her challenges as an exceptional woman and how she overcame them, an element that was missing in narratives written about her. Zahra al-Hurr engaged with her society's problems and wrote about women's rights issues, social injustice, the Lebanese Civil War and Pan-Arabism. She also associated herself with al-Malā'ika. Zahra al-Hurr negotiated her position in the literary canon by engaging with her society's problems and relating to pan-Arabism.

³¹³ المرجع نفسه. "الثورة". ص 123.

Conclusion

The journey for this thesis began by writing a term paper about a marginalized Arab romantic woman poet, Fluri ‘Abd al-Malik. I realized that Arab women were almost excluded from the anthologies of Arabic romanticism and began wondering who Arab romantic women poets were. Dr. Dina Heshmat generously provided me with the name of Jamila al-‘Alayli and another journey began. Neither al-‘Alayli’s work nor other romantic women’s work was available on the market nor digitized. I surveyed Arab women's anthologies and bibliographies such as *Arab Women Writers* and went through romantic literary periodicals such as *Apollo* in search of other women's names or poems. The longer the list of women poets has gone, the more questions I had: Why did I only study Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī and Ibrāhīm Nājī in high school, and why did the teacher make fun of romantics?

I visited National and academic archives in Egypt and Lebanon, such as Dār al-Kutub, The American University in Beirut archive, and the Cultural Council for South Lebanon archive, in addition to al-‘Alayli’s personal archive, to which I gained access through the poet’s grandson, Yehia Nada. I remember browsing Dār al-kutub's signed copy of *Sadā Aḥlāmi* to find a dedication from the author that says: “a gift to *Dār al-kutub al-Miṣriyya* from the author,”³¹⁴ and found the pages stuck together because the copy had probably not been read before. I was granted a research grant by the American University in Cairo (AUC) that funded my visit to Lebanon. In Lebanon, I was asked many times by librarians who al-Hurr is and why I didn’t write about Zaynab Fawwāz. As my list of romantic women was narrowed down, I felt closer to

³¹⁴ الأصل بالعربية: "هدية إلى دار الكتب المصرية من المؤلفة."

al-‘Alayli and al-Hurr. Questions such as why they were not canonized became dull, the more I read their work.

Al-‘Alayli and al-Hurr were occupied by women’s issues and social change. Their canonicity question developed from “why” to “How” the more I understood their positions in their circle and how they dealt with such circles. Descriptive studies enrich our understanding of literary periods and could destabilize a mainstream understanding of Arabic Romanticism. Getting closer to both poets, I became more curious about their engagement with their literary circles, their writing and how they were read. They were not passive towards their surrounding contexts and they exerted much effort to better their positions in the literary canon. This approach produced the idea of “negotiating the canon” as a thesis statement of this study.

In this thesis, I surveyed several versions of the history of Arabic romanticism such as the works of Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Ghaffār, Muhsin al-Musawī, Roger Allen, Mahmoud M. Badawi, Shawqī Ḍayf, Salma Khadra Jayyusi and Robin Ostle. Arab women romantics were overlooked in histories that could base the canon of Arabic romanticism. Reading how other women authors, such as Fadwa Tuḡān and Nāzik al-Malā’ika, were canonized and dealt with in secondary literature allowed me to deduce different modes of canonization. Women’s exceptionalism, association with canonical literary figures, and engagement with the author’s sociopolitical context were relevant to my reading of al-‘Alayli and al-Hurr.

This thesis illustrated how Jamila Al-‘Alayli employed varied modes to negotiate the literary canon through her poems, articles and portrayal of her support and influence circles in her interviews. A close reading of al-‘Alayli’s work showed her persistence in extending her influence circles, appropriating women’s domesticity and work discourses and essentializing her position as a woman poet in the Arabic romantic movement. The analysis of al-‘Alayli’s

autobiographical text revealed a development stage in her view of women's domesticity.

Throughout the first chapter of this thesis, I found that al-‘Alayli fiercely tried to create her space through a movement in which male poets were solely recognized. She despised authority and tried to trick it since she was a child.

Zahra al-Hurr's obituaries mourned the death of an exceptional woman poet who represented (and sometimes overshadowed) women poets of South Lebanon. While many portrayals of al-Hurr as an exceptional woman overlooked her challenges, she engaged with the rhetoric of exceptionalizing her, illustrated the oppressive environment in which she was raised, and acknowledged her privileges. Al-Hurr was a distinct romantic poet who engaged with sociopolitical contexts to better her position in the literary canon. Al-Hurr's work showed an intersection between the marginalized gender and underprivileged classes.

This thesis was an attempt to reimagine the history of Arabic romanticism, a more inclusive and expressive history of its currents. Using a feminist lens, I read through the power dynamics of the Arabic literary environment and how al-‘Alayli and al-Hurr navigated their way through an unbalanced male-biased canon. Reading their contributions as active agents who engaged with their modes of canonization hopefully opens more discussions about canonicity and its modes. I hope my work inspires more investigations into the history of Arabic literature and the canon based on gender, race, or class and their intersections.

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