CHAPTER FOUR

THE POETICS AND POETRY OF ARABIC ROMANTICISM

4.1 Introduction

Chapter II sought to establish that considering Romanticism as a pan-European literary tendency of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is far from satisfactory. In this, I am in the august company of Herbert Read. The first sentence of his book *The True Voice of Feeling* reads: “Romanticism was, and is, a universal phenomenon” (15). The Arab critic Lutfi Shararah echoes this view in his book *Al-Shabbi*. He believes that “Romanticism is not exclusive to any particular age, nation, society, or even a group of society. Indeed, it is an emotional and intellectual current which involves individuals of special moods in a particular stage of social development” (5). Chapter II of this study also concluded that there are major elements which are shared by all varied Romanticisms with different degrees. This is best described by Frust in his ‘family likeness’ theory, which I find more helpful in understanding a phenomenon like Romanticism.

This chapter deals with the poetry of Arabic Romantic Movement and its poetics in an attempt to show its originality and maturity. While the focus of the study will be on Arabic Romanticism, I will occasionally compare it to English Romanticism which I plan to use as a point of ready reference to demonstrate my assumption of the essential unity of artistic and poetic experience. The choice of English Romanticism needs to be justified. I have two reasons for choosing the English Romantic movement. Firstly, it has been considered by many critics to be the highest manifestation of the Romantic phenomenon. Secondly, it had a profound influence on Arabic Romanticism in the first half of the twentieth century.
4.2 The Poetics of Arabic Romanticism: An Overview

To some extent, Jayyusi is correct when she states that the Romantic Movement in Arabic literature “is perhaps one of the simplest Romantic movements in the history of any poetry” (361). That is because it “came about without the backing of a philosophy”, “it lacked an indigenous basis similar to the thought and ideas that underlay the European Romantic movement, and it did not formulate its own principles after its development” (361). But her observation that: “It never acquired a poetic creed with defined principles which it was felt that the poets should follow” (361) is not totally accurate. The statement is not convincing for two reasons: firstly, even Western Romanticism is not a body of writing created out of strict adherence to certain pre-established principles. The wide range of themes and concerns and forms in the poetry of such diverse writers as William Wordsworth and A E Houseman suggests that the Romantic Movement was not driven by any particular poetic creed. Again, the revolt against the narrow definition of art, both its form and its function that characterizes the Romantic Movement is echoed by the Arab Romantic poets. Very early in the life of the Movement, the Arab Romantics declared their revolutionary ideas about poetry. In fact, Jayyusi herself has admitted that the poetic theory of the Arab Romantic poets appeared well-ahead of their poetic experiment (416).

Like English Romanticism, Arabic Romanticism was, at first, a revolt against the Neoclassical poetry. It eventually developed its own theory of poetry, mostly under the influence of the European Romantic Movements. The core of the Romantic theory is that poetry should be the expression of the inner self. Therefore, the Arab Romantic poets and critics believed that there should be radical changes in poetic form, language, imagery, attitude and content.
4.2.1  Beginning from the Beginning: What is Poetry?

In the introduction to his volume of verse Azhar Al-Rabie (The Spring's Flowers), Shukri defines poetry as "the words of emotions, imagination, and good taste" (Cited in Al-Sadat 124). To declare this belief, he uses his line of verse "O bird of paradise, poetry is but emotion" to be the epigraph of his first volume Thaw Al-Fajr (The Down's Light) which was published in 1909. He has a strong belief that the poetry of emotions has a tone and a tune which one cannot find in other forms of poetry; and "one day the people will regard it as the only true poetry" (Diwan Shukri 243). He suggests that the right way to differentiate between good and bad poetry is to take the book of verse and carefully read it: "If you find it part of Nature just like the star, the sky, or the sea, it is, then, the best poetry" (324). He condemns those who hold the view that poetry is not essential for life and argues: "We can accept it only if we agree that sensation is not essential for the soul and thought is not essential for the mind" (399).

Just as what Coleridge has done, Shukri discusses his view on poetry by raising the question: Who is the poet? He tries to answer the question in many occasions particularly in his prefaces to three of his volumes of verse. "The great poet", he insists "is not satisfied with only making people understand him, but tries to intoxicate them and forcefully make them drunken with his poetry. He has to blend their feelings and emotions with his own" (243). The poet, in this sense, should not busy himself with the minor things, but fly over the living day, look at the depth of time, and take the future in consideration, so that his poetry turns to be eternal as his vision of life (323). In an answer to the supposed question: 'What is life, then?', he states: "Life in the eyes of the poet, who lives for his sublime art, is a wonderful poem with different tunes in different cases. It has both the tune of distress and misery and the tune of bliss and happiness... The emotions of the great poet must echo the emotions of Nature like the waves, the wind, the
light and the fire” (244). The intimate connection between poetry and life is beautifully captured by Shukri when he claims that “everything in this universe is a poem made by God; and the poet is His most magnificent poem” (323).

For Al-Mazini, “the field of poetry is the heart not the mind, the feelings not the thought” (Cited in Al-Sadat, 143). The poet, he believes, is one who feels, and poetry is the Nature’s inspiration and the soul’s message. In his poem ‘Al-Shir Al-Aziz’ (The Beloved Poetry), Abu Shadi states his understanding of poetry:

People asked what poetry is,

And I said: The best of poetry is

The language of beauty

The evocative image;

It’s a mirror of the innermost thoughts;

And it stands higher than artificiality and illusion. (Cited in Al-Sadat 145)

He assumes that poetry is the kindliness between Nature and human senses. It is the language of fascination with variant expressions (Khour 162).

Al-Aqqad, the major critic of the Romantic Movement, takes poetry as the self-image of the poet. Poetry should be the expression of the poet’s own personality through the verses, even while it deals with other people’s lives. A collection of poetry that does not reveal the poet’s character and his ‘inner life’ is not an expression of a ‘living soul’ (Semah 14). Further, the poet who fails to display the peculiarities of his own nature and life will certainly fail to depict those of others, and he will not be likely to inspire people with a ‘mission in life’ (Egypt Poets 133).
Al-Aqqad lists poets and writers into two categories: those who imitate others and appear as a “replica of their predecessors, and those who have a natural disposition towards literature and follow their native inclinations”. Al-Aqqad maintains that “the poet who cannot be recognized from his poetry does not deserve recognition” (Al-Fusool 105).

Al-Shabbi chooses to express his view on poetry in verse. He clearly declares his rejection of the traditional poetic themes composed by the neo-classical poets at that time:

My poetry is air heaving out of my chest when agitated by my feelings.

Had it not been for poetry,

The grim cloud of life would always persist,

And I’d never discover my sadness or happiness.

...I do not write poetry to satisfy the prince

By a commendation or a lamentation given to him.

It is enough for me to compose a poem

Which satisfies my heart. (Aghani Al-hayyah 26)

He stresses on the individual nature of the poetic creativity by depicting the integration between the poet and his poetry:

O poetry, you are part of my heart which is singing

And part of my existence.
You have an eternal longing to the core of being

As that of my passions.

You have the cry of my thoughts and the songs of my emotions.

You have the silence of my feelings that does not sing

And the immemorial happiness. (Aghani Al-hayah 127)

The deep and profound interaction between the inner-self, the external world (Nature) and poetry is also assured by Al-Shabbi:

O Poetry, you are the mouth of the feeling and the cry of the depressed spirit.

O Poetry, you are the echo of the heartache and the estranged lover.

O Poetry, you are tears hanging in the life’s eyelashes.

O Poetry, you are blood spurting out of the wounds of beings. (Aghani Al-hayah 52)

Good poetry is thus an extension of the poet’s self. Even the world of things represented in poetry is animated by this self.

4.2.2 The Organic Unity of the Poem

Khalil Mutran was, in fact, the first Arab writer who called for the unity of the poem. He criticizes classical Arabic poetry for the absence of any particular order or convention. For instance, the convention of beginning an ode with weeping over the ruins, or with the description of wine or enumerating the beauties of the beloved (Mutran 1034) is not consistently followed by poets writing within the sub-genre. The same need for organic unity in the Arabic poem is
insisted upon by Al-Aqqad in his critical writings on Shawqi’s poetry, and Shukri, who, in the relatively long introduction to volume V of his Collected Works, enunciates a number of principles, including the principle that “the value of a line (bait) consists in the relation between its sense and the subject of the whole poem, since the line is only a component part” (Diwan Shukri 13). In this sense, Al-Zubaidi thinks that Mutran’s view on the organic unity of the poem is not the same as that of the Diwan School. In his view, “the unity of the poem was no more than a mechanic unity of theme” (45). What he demands of the Arabic poet is merely that he should give his poem a unity of theme, and establish some kind of link between the parts of the poem. The conception of the organic structure of the poem is not as simple as this. But in Al-Aqqad writings as in Coleridge’s, “the notion of the organic unity of the poem is a part of a wide philosophy of nature, evolution and imagination. The unity of the poem and the poet’s faithfulness to himself and his age were only two principles among many others advocated by the school” (Al-Zubaidi 45).

Practically, Al-Aqqad applied his theory of the organic unity of the poem on the poetry of Ahmad Shawqi to prove that the unity of the rhyme and meter in the neo-classical poem does not mean that it has an organic unity. To justify his view, he reordered the lines of some of Shawqi’s poems in order to show that they would not be affected in the sense of meaning. It is clear that Al-Aqqad has actually used Coleridge’s statement about the greatness of Shakespeare and Milton, which says that “it would be scarcely more difficult to push a stone out from the Pyramids with the bare hand, than to alter a word, or the position of a word, in Milton or Shakespeare” (B.L 12), to prove the weakness of Shawqi’s poetry for lacking organic unity. In fact, Al-Aqqad refused to call such poetic work a ‘poem’; for him, it is rather a collection of lines. This is exactly what Coleridge meant when he stated in the Biographia Literaria:
The philosophic critics of all ages coincide with the ultimate judgment of all countries, in equally denying the praises of a just poem, on the one hand, to a series of striking lines or distiches, each of which, absorbing the whole attention of the reader itself, becomes disjoined from its context, and forms a separate whole, instead of harmonizing part; and on the other hand, to an unsustained composition, from which the reader collects rapidly the general result unattracted by the component parts. (164-165)

Thus, all the Arab romantics insisted on the necessity of the evaluation of the poem as a whole to get access to its true meaning and value (Al-Sadat 263).

4.2.3 The Poetic Language

The poets of the Diwan group had a common attitude to the language of poetry. They all avoided mere verbiage and the desire to impress their readers by the wide extent of their vocabulary, which drove most of the neoclassicists to the use of archaic and far-fetched words, and which made it necessary for them or their editors to provide glossaries for their poems explaining the meaning of difficult words. The Romantics went a long way towards simplifying the language of poetry. Abu Shadi, the leader of Apollo group of Romantic poets, went further to declare that the poet should use the language of common people in order to be familiar to his audience (Hawi 162). For this reason, he called for replacing the Standard Arabic with the regional dialects in poetry, which, in fact, had not received any response amongst most of the Romantic poets. Undoubtedly, this call reflects Wordworth's influence on Abu Shadi when he also called for a language really spoken by men (Wordsworth 244).
4.2.4 Creativity

The Arab Romantics believed that poetic creativity is a mixture of inspiration and emotions and it comes naturally by unknown forces, at unexpected times and without big efforts. In this case, the poet, as stated by Shukri, is in a situation of 'ebb and flow'. He explains his view when he illustrates: "But in the soul there is ebb and flow. For this, I sometimes find my mind produces meanings and ideas just as the trees produce their flowers and fruits, but sometimes it becomes as a fruitless tree" (Cited in Al-Sadat, 101). Shukri's statement reminds us of what Keats said about poetry: "That if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all" (Cited in Fogle, 220). It also reminds us with Shelley's statement in his 'Defence of Poetry',

Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it that which comprehends all science and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and the blossom of all other systems of thought: it is that from which all spring and, and that which adorns all; and that which if blighted denies the fruit and the seed, and withholds from the barren world the nourishment and the succession of the scion of the tree of life. (Hough 48)

Shukri confesses that he could only write poetry when there is an irresistible passion and profound emotion. He condemns those who write poetry on subjects demanded by others. Echoing Shukri, Al-Mazini believes that emotion is the source of poetic inspiration: "It is well-known that the first motif in writing poetry is the poet’s intensive senses and powerful feelings." (262) In this case, he differentiates between the ordinary man and the poet in expressing these emotions. While the ordinary man "is only able to weep if being sad or laugh in times of
happiness”, the poet “interacts with his feelings to form ideas which will be transformed into poetry.” (262)

4.2.5 Imagination

Like the English Romantics, most of the Arab Romantic poets consider imagination as the core of any good poetry. Shukri, for example, in his Confessions believes that:

Imagination is both the paradise and the hell of our dreams. Do we not spend our life alike in our dreams and our day dreams, alternating between roses and thrones, between angels and demons? At times I feel as if I had been transported to a world other than this, where the air is perfumed and water fragrant and people are perfect in beauty and virtue... I see in my reveries visions so beautiful that I cannot adequately describe them. But at other times I see black dreams of despair and sorrow, and then I fear all the disasters of life which can be pictured by the imagination in its countless different forms.

(Cited in Badawi, 94)

Almazini thinks that ‘imitation’ is “an evidence of the weakness of the imagination and disability of creativity” (Cited in Al-Sadat, 162).

Moreover, Abu Shadi defines imagination as “the soul of poetry” which is very similar to Coleridge’s statement: “Good Sense is the Body of poetic genius, Fancy its Drapery, Motion its life, and Imagination the Soul that is everything, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole” (B.L. 167). But Al-Aqqad is closer to Coleridge’s theory of imagination when he declares that ‘imagination’ is a ‘creator’ which reforms that world by giving nature life, will and feelings. In this sense, Abu Shadi talks about his fond of searching hidden beauty in
everything through imagination. This is also similar to Shelley’s belief that poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world (Defence of Poetry 33).

Coleridge’s attempt to differentiate between fancy and imagination had a direct influence on most of the Arab romantics. In this respect, Al-Aqqad confesses that Shukri was the first to follow Coleridge’s view on imagination: “Perhaps, he [Shukri] was the first who wrote in our language about the difference between ‘imagination’ and ‘fancy’” (Cited in Ra’oof, 55). Ibrahim Al-Mazini approves this difference even though he did not label them ‘fancy’ and ‘imagination’ but merely two different forms of imagination.

It was the young poet Al-Shabi who critically and amply discussed the concept of imagination in the Arabic literary canon in his sole book of criticism Arab Poetic Imagination. The book, which was originally a lecture delivered in 1929 at Al-Khaldunia School in Tunisia, was one of the most controversial and questionable books at the time. In it, Al-Shabbi confidently exposes his set of beliefs on many critical issues such as the definition of imagination, and the place of myths, nature, and woman in the Arab poetic imagination. This critical essay which, comments M.M. Badawi, “understandably shocked his predominantly conservative Tunisian audience, is in many ways impressive performance, coming as it did from a young man of twenty, with no knowledge of a single European language” (158). He believes that whatever be its limitations, which arise from the headiness of youth and its proclivity for making sweeping generalizations, supported only by unconsciously highly selected evidence, two qualities it did not lack: courage and integrity (158). It, as pointed out by Reem Al-Essawi, reflects the critical character of Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi which has been ambiguous for years if compared to his poetic character which received hundreds of researches and studies (3).
In this sense, Jayyusi states that Al-Shabbi’s allegiance, in his lecture ‘The Arab Poetic Imagination’, is clearly seen to be closer to Western poetic methods rather than to any Classical or contemporary poetry in Arabic. She believes that an immature ardor led him to what can be described as the most extreme and damning attack launched at this time against the Arab literary heritage. And it was not only the heritage which was questioned but also the Arab mind, psyche and sensibility. “From now on,” Jayyusi concludes, “other attacks both direct and oblique, were to be directed, with varying emphasis, against Arab creative talent and output by many Arab writers and poets who had fallen under the influence of Western ideas on literature and art” (413).

In *The Arab Poetic Imagination*, Al-Shabbi calls for the need of reestablishing the common and inherited literary concepts among the Arabs and their unquestionable respect and glorification of their poetry and literature. This call echoed what had been declared earlier by Michael Naimy in his book *Al-Girbal* and Abbas Al-Aqqad along with his friends in Egypt i.e. Ibrahim Al-Mazini and Abdulrahman Shukri. But Al-Shabbi’s revolutionary ideas were full of enthusiasm and passion to the extent that they shocked the cultural community not only of Tunisia but also in the whole Arab world at that time. Zain Al-Abideen Al-Sanoosi, for example, in his introduction to AL-Shabbi’s *The Arab Poetic Imagination* (1994), refers to the distinguished case of the ideas represented in that book when he says: “There have been respectable critics in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Tunisia who always put their fingers on the pain and explored the defect positions, but this process is different in the sense that it is not only satisfied with surrounding the ancient buildings with new ones but it directly destroyed certain parts in the holy temple” (51). In this sense, the critic Mohammed Al-Hileewi declares in his book *With Al-Shabbi* that “the Tunisian publishers have not produced up to today an artistic work equals to Al-
Shabbi’s *Arab Poetic Imagination* in its poetic expressions, pure language and subtle style. It is, indeed, an artistic masterpiece rather than a scientific research” (Cited in Al-Essawi 3).

Al-Shabbi divides his book into five small chapters. In the first chapter he explores his own understanding of ‘imagination’. Hence, he confirms that his view on imagination is composed of three prominent points. Firstly, imagination is as essential to the human existence as water, air, and light, simply, because it is part of the human instinct. Secondly, when the first man used imagination in his sentences and structures, he did not mean to create rhetorical and metaphoric expressions, but he, really, believed that whatever he said is completely true. Lastly, Al-Shabbi divides imagination into two parts: “The first part has been used by the human being to understand the cosmos and life; the other part, however, has been used to express himself through abnormal speeches...” (56). The verbal imagination, by which he means the rhetorical and decorative expressions, evolved from the second type due to changes in and development of human civilization. The first type, according to him, is the oldest and the most original. The other chapters are: poetic imagination and the Arab myths, poetic imagination and nature, poetic imagination and the woman, poetic imagination and the story, an overview on Arabic literature, and the Arabic spirit.

In discussing imagination and the Arab myths, Al-Shabbi acknowledges that very few Arabic myths are known in history, and hence, it is difficult to draw a conclusive result on this subject. Actually, they are just fragments in some historical and literary books, and, thus, they cannot be easily collected. This is not what he found in the myths of other nations like Greeks and Romans. Then he divides the Arabic myths into two main categories: the religious myths, which would be the target of his study; and the historical myths which lack, as he thinks, pure imagination (66).
Al-Shabbi believes that the Arabic religious myths lack the brightness and illumination of life, so it is difficult for any researcher to find in them the fertile and beautiful imagination that can be found in the myths of the Greeks and the Romans. Moreover, they lack the philosophical ground like that of the Scandinavians. The Arab gods before Islam (he refers to the exception of the stars), for example, were very simple and did not represent any universal phenomenon, symbol, thought, or human emotion. Being dry and flat, he considers them to be closer to fancy than to imagination (68).

Al-Shabbi reviews the treatment of Nature in Arabic poetry, both pre-Islamic and Islamic, compares it with the European treatment as revealed in two examples from Goethe and Lamartine, and finally concludes that: “Arab poets have not expressed such deep poetic feeling because their attitude to nature lacked reverence for its sublime life; they only looked at it as they looked at a beautiful ornamented garment or pretty embroidery. Their response to it was no more than crude admiration” (93). Poetic imagination according to him is the product of deep emotion, while the Arabs, he claims, “did not feel the current of life flowing in the heart of Nature, except in a crude and superficial manner, devoid of keen sensibility or imaginative ecstasy” (93).

Al-Shabbi does the same thing with the Arab attitude to woman, which he finds superficial and limited to the world of senses (99). Here his condemnation is even more extreme:

The attitude of Arabic literature to woman is base and ignoble, and sinks to the lowest depths of materialism. It only sees in woman a body to be desired and one of the basest pleasures in life to be enjoyed. As for that noble view which combines love and reverence, fondness and worship, as for that deep spiritual attitude which we find in the Aryan poets, it is totally or almost totally absent from Arabic literature...” (100).
Al-Shabbi goes on to point out the irrelevance of old Arabic literature:

Arabic literature no longer suits our present spirit, temperature, inclination or aspirations in life ... We must never look upon Arabic literature as an ideal which we have to follow or whose spirit, style and ideas we have to imitate, but we must consider it simply as one of those ancient literatures which we admire and respect... (122).

Although the audience to whom Al-Shabbi spoke at Al-Khaldooniyya club was not only Muslim but had been reared, in the main time, in the tradition of the Classical Arabic culture, he declared bravely that imagination in Arabic literature belongs to the third type of imagination. He addressed them thus: “My probing into Arabic literature and its spirit has led me to the conclusion that it is, in its entirety and without any exception, a materialistic literature, lacking in spiritual heights, in inspiration and in insight towards either the future or the essence of things.... It is a naïve expression that penetrates no depths and reveals no profound thought” (123). These deficiencies, according to Al-Shabbi, stem from the fact that this literature “was dictated by the Arab spirit,” (125) which was fiery, extemporaneous and oratorical, with no capacity to probe and penetrate the essence of things. It is purely materialistic and treats only the external aspects of things. These two qualities – the oratorical and the materialistic – have weakened the imaginative faculty of the Arabs... and it was these two qualities which made the Arabs regard their poets, not messengers of life, but as orators.... There is no doubt that a great amount of Arabic poetry is nothing but versified oratory (134).

At his best, the Arab poet was merely a photographer who sought to convey the external images of things and not their internal effect on the spirit (128). Arab poets did not feel the sublimity of Nature or any awe towards it, but looked at it as one would look at an embroidered
and beautiful garment. They did not feel the current of life which flows in the heart of Nature except very slightly and naively, never experiencing ecstasy (139). To Al-Shabbi “Arabic poetry is devoid of that lofty outlook [towards woman and love] which combines love with veneration and fondness with worship … that deep spiritual outlook we only find in Aryan poets” (111).

The reasons why Al-Shabbi considers Arabic literature irrelevant are significant: “Everything the Arab mind has produced in all the periods of its history”, he writes, “is monotonous and utterly lacking in poetic imagination”, superficial and “does not penetrate into the reality of things”. The two chief characteristics of the Arab spirit are oratory and materialism. Materialism stops at the level of the senses, while oratory and keen sensibility generally do not go together. The effect of these two tendencies of the Arab spirit is that “the Arabs did not view the poet as we now do, namely as the prophet or messenger who brings life to the children of the world lost in the paths of time; they did not distinguish between him and the orator who defended his tribe and protected its honour with his tongue” (135).

In fact Al-Aqqad holds a similar view in his confession that one of the flaws of Arabic poetry is the method of sensuous description (Al-Fusool 345). The beloved of the Arab poet, as portrayed in his love poetry, has always been passionless and fleshly. He attributes this to the strength of the Arab’s sensuality and the sterility of his imagination. In his comments on imagination he assures that poetic description is not to enumerate the outward qualities of the objects described, but to depict their impact on the poet’s soul and mind (Al-Fusool 269).

4.2.6 Aesthetics

Arabic Romantic Movement, like its English counterpart, glorifies the aesthetic function of poetry. Al-Mazini, for example, thinks that poetry should be dressed with beauty as he believes
that poetic emotion lightens the dark sides of life and gives beauty to life’s ugly spheres (Al-Sadat 189). This expression was very similar to Shelley’s belief that poetry paints everything with beauty when he says: “A story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful: Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted” (Defence 38).

Al-Aqqad adds the philosophical and psychological dimensions to the argument of the origin of beauty. He rejects the Western view which, in his view, considers sexual desire to be the source of man’s love of beauty. On the contrary, he argues that it is our striving for beauty and perfection that creates our sexual emotions. The sexual instinct, though the strongest in human, cannot be the origin of the sense of beauty; in fact, it is subordinate. Love and art are intended to bring about survival and perfection.

Beauty is the utmost end of life; the sexual instinct is one of the means, if not the strongest, towards achieving beauty. This seems sounder than the claim made by the physicians and psychologists who have dealt with the problem of sex, that fine arts are a manifestation of sexual desire diverted from its true course. (Cited in Semah 4)

In his discussion of the nature of beauty, Al-Aqqad creates his own slogan “Beauty is Freedom” to state his disapproval of Schopenhauer’s formula: “Beauty is Idea”. He thinks that the objects which reveal freedom are more enjoyable than those revealing submission. It is freedom of choice which makes mankind superior to animals, animals superior to plants, and plants superior to the inanimate. Similarly, imitation in art is disgustingly ugly because it is a kind of slavery. As the essence of beauty in literature and life is almost identical, Al-Aqqad regards freedom as an essential ingredient of both. But he warns that
freedom cannot be taken as the absence of impediments and rules. He assures that there is no freedom without fetters. The artist’s task is not to ignore “the shackles of compulsion”, but overcome them, to use them as a kind of artistic embellishment. Beauty is the victory of freedom over compulsion (Semah 4).

4.3 The Major Elements of Arabic Romantic Poetry

4.3.1 The Feeling of Isolation

The isolation of the Romantic poets is a phenomenon that can be found both in terms of their personal lives and as a theme running through much of their work. This feeling of isolation or alienation has inward and outward sources and agents, and expresses itself in various ways. It emerges from man’s awareness of being different and terminates in conscious separation from someone or something with whom or with which one should be united. It is often the fate of the intelligent, sensitive poet to be aware of forces and trends in his society before they become apparent to the general public, so he faces difficulty in being understood by the common people and therefore does not find a harmonious unity between his inner and outer worlds.

In his discussion of the issue of alienation in English Romanticism, Harold Bloom in his essay “Internalization of Quest-Romance” states that Romanticism is marked by acute self-consciousness; the Romantics quest proceeds “from nature to the imagination’s freedom,” which “is frequently purgatorial, redemptive in direction but destructive of the social self” (6), and eventually, to the poet-hero’s “own mature powers,” when, having overcome ‘Selfhood’, “the triumphant Imagination” turns “outward” (17). ‘Selfhood’, which is indicated by Hartman as the ‘egotistical sublime’, is one of the primary sources of the English Romantics’ alienation. The Romantic poets’ “self-alienation” and “self-consciousness” are taken for granted, for “mind has
its blissful islands as well as its mountains, its deeps, and the treacherous crossroads" (Hartman 54). Thus, the Romantic predicament is a mere matter personal psychology.

O'Connor believes that the isolation of the artist: “is traceable to the dissociation of sensibility. As a result of the dissociation, all subjective projections, in terms of which ideals are expressible, became to a degree suspect” (29). Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Byron looked upon themselves, in varying degrees, as outcasts, lonely men cut off from their society. Irving Babbitt, on the other hand, looked at the issue from a different angle. He perpetuates the portrait of the English Romantic as a victim of Romantic melancholy, and the inability to act (243).

If one looks for the sources of isolation in Arabic Romantic poetry beside those shared with English Romanticism, one would find as the most conspicuous source of estrangement the unsettled character of the period in which poetry was written. After the failure of Sa’ad Zaghlol’s revolution in 1919 and during the World War I, many concepts and values held by society had disintegrated and everything had become unreliable, irrelevant, a play of rival ideas. The Arab Romantics felt that they were unable to communicate with others and the result was a profound feeling of alienation which caused Shukri to declare:

You’ve surrounded me with a sea unknown to me,

With an endless sorrow.

I spend my life with a soul unknown to me

And unable discern the universe's spheres. (Diwan Shukri g)

He prefers to escape from reality to another world of his own which might work with his despair:
I wish I could foresee a future even that could make me happy

For, perhaps, it may reveal the light of truth;

Though I feel I am a stranger there, it looks like a home to me,

Alas! A stranger who goes there gets lost. (Diwan Shukri g)

Shukri, who never got married and suffered the harshness of his society as he fought for his values which later cost him his job, shared the same feeling of estrangement and isolation of a sad stranger who came to visit him at his home place questioning him:

Have you borrowed your grief from the sky?

Or wearing the cloak of a writer?

Your brother, the writer, is a stranger at home and among the family,

Nothing is there in his cloak except the rags,

Chronic illness and a strange wound;

No human features are there on his face

Except the tearful eyes shining like frost.

Nothing in his heart but love and sorrow, and hate of this doubtful time. (Diwan Shukri 52)

Despite Shukri's feeling of grief and alienation, the 'egotistical sublime' remains in most of his poems. He was proud of his creativity and ignored the common people's misunderstanding of his poetry. He assures:
If the dignified remembrance betrays me,

And the public gets bored of me,

Or even though defeated for now,

One day a poet will water my bones with his tears,

And sprinkle the spring flowers on my grave. (*Diwan Shukri* 189)

Ibrahim Naji’s examination of himself as a poet was honest as it is exhaustive. His loneliness is like that of the prophet who is being attacked by the general public but still holding the hope to guide them to the right path:

I’m a man who spent his life in pain and suspense;

A homeless traveler with no family bonds;

Tired, I walk alone in the wind with my torch-light. (Cited in Farfuri 145)

But sometimes we find him heavy-hearted and emotionally broken. The failure of the society to get his message caused a dark sphere surrounding his soul which once forced him to cry:

O, singer of eternity!

You’ve wasted your life in singing to humans.

No one alive is listening to our songs.

What’s wrong with us?

Why don’t we sing to stones?!
To the inanimate pebbles?

And to the rotten bones in their holes?

Sing them up,

Soon you will see them shake in sympathy for singer's pain

And moan over the melody. (Nights of Cairo 45)

Mutran escapes from the cruelty of reality to a meadow in the tranquility and beauty:

Meadow, be a haven for my heart,

A refuge from the clinging sorrow.

How peaceful are your waters,

How playful the light, and how painful

Are the hovering shades. (Cited in and translated by Ostle 120)

His loneliness in the landscape would enable him to avoid the company of others and be closer to his beloved:

This is my solitude to which I flee from place of grief,

Injustice and its (cruel) course.

Here I discern two images

Abiding in celestial purity behind the clouds.

Here I commune with my beloved shades
Buried in my silent heart. (Cited in and translated by Ostle II)

The major source of alienation for Al-Shabbi, the last, youngest and most short-lived poet of the Romantics, was the amalgamation of his acute, revolutionary and heightened consciousness with the tragic, plaintive and awful conditions he experienced during his short poetic life. On many occasions he expressed his headstrong wish to skip from his community and live with birds in the sky or with trees in the forest. In his “Ode to a Bird”, Al-Shabbi considers the poet as a bird but in a different context:

I am a chirping and singing bird

Whose sound engulfs pains and groans.

I get excited by birds chirping

For it flows in warmth and sanctity,

And contains nothing human that may satisfy my heart

Or please my conscience. (Aghani Al-hayyah 111)

He emotionally reflects his feeling of estrangement in the mass of humans who could not comprehend and digest his rebellious thoughts:

If I’m present in their gatherings,

I find myself as a captive bulbul;

Lonely with my emotions and feelings.

Lonely with my thoughts, sorrow and happiness. (Aghani Al-hayyah 111)
Al-Shabbi’s crucial dilemma was his failure to find a harmonious unity between his inner world of super sensitivity, pure love, acute vision and rebellious spirit and the outer world of cruelty, cold feelings, absurdity and literary ignorance. It caused him to declare his longing for a new life:

I wish I could live in this world

Happy with solitude and loneliness,

Spending my life in the forests and mountains

Amidst the swaying pines. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 65)

In the same poem he justifies that the sense of humanity is rarely found in the society which transforms men into amorphous, spineless creatures, seeking higher position in order to impress others, and lying and fawning to please their superiors. So, he again confirms his wish:

To live far from the city, from people

From the trivial chatter of gatherings

How can they never compare to

The voice of the valley of the stream,

The rustle of branches, filigreed with dew,

... 

This is the life I hold sacred,

Whose splendor I extol. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 65-66)
Dramatically and in a moment of weakness and frustration, Al-Shabbi claims that the reason behind his isolation was neither himself nor the society but the supreme power of God:

Then You left me alone

With the warnings of wind.

You held me over the cliff of sadness,

Made me drink my bitter regret.

You reared me up like

A nervous stranger among my people.

You made me hate life and all it contains;

Made me love the stillness of oblivion. (*Songs of Life*, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 102)

4.3.2 The Theme of Death

Although the theme of death was one of the main problems occupying most of the English Romantic poets who were struggling with the idea of life and death and trying to solve the mystery of death, it had less significance in Arabic Romanticism. It can be assumed that death is rarely found as a main subject in Arabic Romantic poetry. This may be because they were more aesthetic than philosophical in their poetic career. Yet, death is still a primary element in the two major poets Shukri and Al-Shabbi. It held an important place in their thoughts and emotions and they attained different attitudes towards it.
Shukri's approach to death is more didactic and spiritual than emotional; not affected, in any significant manner, by tragic events in his personal life. But it clearly reflects his anxious and disconcerted state of mind:

He was a pessimistic and unsettled person who was painfully aware of Egypt's crippling problems in his time, particularly the problems associated with British colonization of Egypt and the lack of a national and political consensus. Both the British and Khedives exploited the differences which existed at the time to their advantage, ignoring the interest of Egypt and its people. Shukri deeply felt all these problems and they seem to have affected him personally. (Hussein 123)

Shukri believes that life is just like a dream which passes out of our control and thus the human's living turns to be a bird which flies away without return:

Life passes away like a dream
Or a bird which will never return. (Diwan Shukri 563)

In a moment of philosophical meditation he confesses that death might shift him to another peaceful and calm life; but if given a choice, his feeling of fear will make him hesitant as to choose between this life, which is full of miseries and difficulties, and death, which is still a mystery and uncertain future:

I deal with the vicissitudes of time
But without ambition,
And do what the destinies dictate to me.
I hope I may find rest in death
But I get frightened of hearing its footsteps
Or even thinking of it.
Life is nothing but a wolf
Which has murderous fangs and paws.
It is like wine appealing to the drinker
Even though he was deprived of intellect and thought.
So, here I am transfixed between life and death.
Can anyone tell me about my destiny? (Diwan Shukri 247)

The poet expresses his vacillation between hope and despair in this life which promised good fortune but offered more miseries and troubles; only then he comes to prefer death to put an end to the black side of life:

At times, I fall madly in love with life, and then I detest it.
O, how man feels lost between hope and despair.
I was fond of a life full of deceit,
But now I am bored of this inferior life.
Nothing can save me against this boredom
Except a death which can separate
The soul from its corporeal afflictions. (Diwan Shukri 192)

But sometimes, when in a high degree of frustration, the poet acknowledges that death is the only refuge which might give him some respite from the difficulties and problems he has faced in life. In this sore situation he really starts thinking of suicide but then he refrains from putting an end to his life because of his faith in and fear of God:

I'm sure that comfort lies in death
But I avoid it pretending that I didn't know.
Had I not been a pious person, strong enough
To resist the control of despair,
It would have led me down the rough path. (*Diwan Shukri* 58)

In the later stage of his poetic writings, Shukri’s attitude towards death deviated from the romantic atmosphere to the reasonable, religious and didactic realms. Unlike his earlier poetry which was full of pessimism and sadness, he concentrates on the lessons to be drawn from the fact that death is an inevitable human experience. The first lesson the poet focuses on is the necessity to avoid arrogance and false pride as all humans will be buried under the ground. Nothing lasts forever; youth disappears and death overcomes all:

One day you will be a fallen man in the grave
Where you get your mouth and eyes full of dust.
You will become a humiliated corpse,
Causing vomit for anyone who touches it.
So mildly spare your harshness and beware
That a young face will not preserve youth. (*Diwan Shukri* 303)

In his poem “The Aim of Love”, Shukri states his belief that true love is that which lasts even after the death of the beloved. He imagines himself in the grave, and expects the abandonment of his friends to visit him after death, so he gently rebukes them and sends them some messages from under the ground. He requests them to halt for a while and shed tears for the passing of their friend. He reminds them that death has no regard to its victim’s age, wealth or social standing, and thus their attempts to evade death will inevitably fail:

When I die, remember me, and pay a visit to my grave.

Is it strange that people do visit graveyards?
Stop and consider what your eye can see.
Won't every man face the same fate?
Perhaps you will shed a hot tear over me
For death can be the best warning to a young man
Immersed in life's pleasures.
Do not justify. Death shall come;
And every beautiful thing will inevitably perish.
Death will execute the pre-determined destiny,
And then you will see what you tried to avoid.
The maggots will eat what they want of you.
Your face will become repulsive and your bone rotten. (Diwan Shukri 259)

In this poem, Shukri wants to advise his friends that the only way to overcome their fear of
death is to accept its reality and prepare themselves to face it. In this respect he echoes the idea
found in Shelley's poem" On Death":

This world is the nurse of all we know,
This world is the mother of all we feel,
And the coming of death is a fearful blow
To a brain unencompassed with nerves of steel;
When all that we know, or feel, or see,
Shall pass like unreal mystery. (Poems 103)

Shukri refers to two more positive aspects of death. He insists that great people get
acknowledged and gain reputation mostly after their death. Poets, who achieve immortality in
their poetry, Shukri believes, will therefore transcend death. He expects himself to be one of
them. Secondly, he falls back on his religious faith and portrays death as the passage to immortality. In one of his poems, as illustrated by Hussein, the poet talked about immortality in the spiritual sense by using the word *khuld* (eternity). "This is significant because the word *khuld* always occurs with *Jannat* (Paradise) in religious discourse in Islam to describe Heaven or Paradise. We have previously seen that Shukri is a firm believer in Islam. The use of the word *Khuld* provides further evidence of his faith." (214)

Therefore, Shukri positively and genuinely associates death with peace and security. It is, he declares, more compassionate than his friends and acquaintances:

To me,

Death is more comfortable

And grave is more merciful

Than a life of hypocrisy and abandonment. *(Diwan Shukri 256)*

He also refers to its purity which makes it preferable to life, in spite of the connotations of darkness and annihilation:

Death is purer than life's malice,

Even though its outward appearances

Of graves and darkness might be frightening. *(Diwan Shukri 276)*

Death, in this sense, is warmly welcomed by Shukri, who confesses his love of it as it resembles God in its compassion and mercy, albeit being harsh at times:

O Death, come with a delighted and happy face,

For it is the most faithful of friends you will meet.

I love you as a young man loves the face of his beloved.

Your lips should quench my thirst.
You resemble God in His best qualities.

You are merciful, even though you may be harsh. (*Diwan Shukri* 586)

Ironically, the main theme in Al-Shabbi’s verse volume *Songs of Life* is not ‘life’ as implicated by the title but ‘death’. The major tone of most of the poems, including those of love and Nature, is sorrow, melancholy, suffering, and frustration. The personal life of Al-Shabbi, akin to John Keats, which was full of pain, loss, illness and uncertainty, had its profound impact on his poetic writing. He was shocked by the sudden death of his beloved at an early age. Her death was a traumatic experience for him and he continued to remember her long after his marriage to his cousin. The second shock was the death of his father when he was in his early twenties. It was, in fact, more hurting and besides being a most tragic event emotionally, Al-Shabbi had to take more responsibilities on his shoulders as the eldest son of the family. He powerfully and faithfully expresses this traumatic experience in, I may claim, one of the best poems of death in Arabic poetry entitled “O Death”. In his brief introduction to the poem, Al-Shabbi states: “It was just one of the cries of my soul which was full of sorrow and sad memories; one of the fragments of this heart which had been broken on the rock of life. I wrote it on the melancholic days which followed the disaster of the death of my father; May God bless him” (*Aghani Al-hayyah* 139). He addresses his cry directly to death itself:

O death, you have split my chest and broken my back with calamities.

You have thrown me from a very high edge

And then mocked at me. What a mockery!
You’ve left me heart-broken, flying in fear.

You were so harsh when you left me alone

Facing all difficulties in this world.

You shocked me by taking the person I totally love

Whom I used to tell all my secrets.

The one I considered my beautiful dawn

When time covered me with darkness.

The one I considered my roses, my music,

My cup and my wine.

The one I considered my forest, my mihrab

My song and my dawn. (Aghani Al-hayya 139)

After blaming death, the poet starts questioning it about the next step though he becomes unable to cope with his fate:

O death, what else do you want after breaking my heart?

What else do you want after having blackened my thoughts with sorrows,

And left me lonely with my grief amongst the creatures,

Roaming in the desert of life, saying:
“Where on earth is my grave?” (Aghani Al-hayyah 140)

In the climax of the poem, Al-Shabbi shows his disability and weakness to face the toughness and cruel attacks of death. After the death of his father, he loses all his strength and patience as well as his sense of existence:

If you want me, then give me your cup.

I will drink it with patience.

If you plan to take me, then give me the arrow;

I will shot it into my neck.

Take me.

My life has evaporated in the space of dejection. (Aghani Al-hayyah 140)

However, Al-Shabbi’s anger with death did not last long as he comes to believe that it would be the only refuge to get rid of his troubles and sufferings. Death is the antithesis of life. If life hides its bitter reality beneath its surface of happiness and luxury, death, on the contrary, hides peace, security, and eternity behind its ugly and dreadful face. So he advises people who have suffered in this life, like him, to always think of their journey to death which grants eternal 'life' by replacing their existence in this world with a more pleasant and joyful one in another more 'real' world. He likens death in his poem “To Death” to a luxurious cradle, in which human beings lie comfortably:

On, to death! Wretched child of vitality,
In death lies the harmonious voice.

On, to death! Should your days torment you,

Remember: death holds time's compassionate heart.

On, to death! That graceful spirit

Fluttering above these clouds

Alight with the immortal dawn

And legions of stars... (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 83)

He insists that one should not be afraid that death ends up our physical existence in this world because it will take us to the life of delight and luxury:

On, to death! Do not fear its depths.

Within them lies heaven's peaceful light.

Within them, heaven's virgins

Sway naked, intoning a splendid melody.

In their hands, palm fronds ripple in fragrant air.

The heart ignites with smiling!

And the tears - no longer there. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 84)

Al-Shabbi concludes this poem with a highly and distinctively praise of death:

Death is the ongoing spirit,
Life’s other half which does not weep.

There, beyond space,

Death lives on strong and beautiful,

Pulling us to its bosom,

Healing our ancient wounds,

Spreading the radiance

Of a different kind of morning. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 85)

In his comment on the above poem, Hussein refers to Al-Shabbi’s positive attitude towards death which is associated with peace and safety. “Furthermore”, he exclaims, “the above lines evoke an atmosphere of passion and love. The poet addresses death in a manner approaching the way one might address the beloved. Death is described as though it had human qualities: it is compassionate, powerful, smiling, comforting, etc.” (233-234). Al-Shabbi’s conviction that death is ‘life’s other half which does not weep’ calls to mind Keats’ early poem “Can Death Be Sleep, When Life Is But A Dream?”

Al-Shabbi, like Keats, associates death with beauty and happiness. If Keats states, “I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death” (318), Al-Shabbi declares that he would be happily waiting for death to get eternal beauty:

But should my life suddenly end

And the heart’s red torch stops glowing.

I will be happy to turn from

This sinful world of hate
To melt in the eternal dawn of beauty
And drink my fill at the fountain of light. (*Songs of Life*, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 128)

Keats indicates in his poem “Why Did I Laugh Tonight?” that death, when compared to beauty, fame or poetry, is more joyful and closer to his inner self:

‘Yet could I on this very midnight cease,
And the world’s gaudy ensigns see in shreds.

Verse, Fame and Beauty are intense indeed,

But Death intenser --- Death is Life’s high meed.’ (*Poems* 222)

Al-Shabbi refuses to accept death as final. In his poem “The Unknown Prophet” he imagines himself after death as part of Nature. His place will be under the pine trees and the birds will flutter over his grave, singing their immortal songs:

Under elegant pines the torrents will carve
A hollow for my grave.
Forever the birds will chirp over it,
The breeze softly sings above me,
And the seasons continue to whirl about me
As they did in my youth. (*Songs of Life*, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 89)

The above lines echo some of the thoughts and feelings of Wordsworth in his elegy “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal” in which he confirms the eternity of his beloved when being part of nature:

No motion has she now, no force:
She neither hears nor sees,
Rolled round in earth’s diurnal course
Melancholy is one of the inevitable products of the typical Romantic temper due to the complex and various changes in attitudes and conceptions in both poetry and society of the first half of the twentieth century Arab World. At the level of society, that era was marked by sufferings under Western military occupation, economic and political crises, contradictory doctrines in seeking identity, deep conflict between the self and the other, and profound sense of the failure of the traditional literary forms to quench the thirst of the public by faithfully expressing their pains and sorrows, and exploring an eager hope for a better life. Arabic poetry underwent radical changes, as well. Its classical form and traditional thematic scheme has been substituted by the Romantic perspective which is characterized by personal expressions, emotional motives, philosophical imagination and new styles. Because of their powerfully sensitive spirits, the Arab Romantics have produced poems which could represent the misery, sorrow and sufferings of the whole community even though they seem subjective and express personal experiences at first sight. In fact, the dark and inconsistent situations of the society alongside the tragic personal affairs of the poets were the two primary sources of melancholy to be one of the most prominent elements of Arabic Romantic poetry.

Unlike English Romanticism, which inherited melancholy from their precursors, particularly the poetry of sensibility and the graveyard poets, Arabic Romantic Movement inaugurated it as a new trend in Arabic poetry. It is true that the elegiac poetic form was essential in Arabic poetry in all its periods, but the Romantics had new attitudes, completely different from those of their predecessors. Beside the traditional lamentation of the dead, their melancholia went inward as they wrote poems expressing their sorrows and mourning their destiny, alienation, frustration,
and depression. Another distinguishing quality of the melancholy in Arabic Romanticism is the extent of its pessimism. The English Romantic poets were seen, in the ultimate analysis, as optimists. In fact, Arabic Romanticism is very close to Sigmund Freud’s criteria, stated in his essay “Mourning and Melancholy”: “The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling,” (283). Shukri, in this respect, would be a good example. In the following lines he feels himself in an utter solitariness and in deep grief, which is incomparable even to the darkness of the world:

So if darkness as much as what lies inside me,

It will not see any morning.

And grieves have caught me without resistance,

As if they depend on my dream. (Diwan Shukri 72)

Naji is more depressed and pessimistic when he welcomes death to save him from the torture of his melancholic feelings:

In this depressed situation, 

If death calls me I will

Say yes, come on.

Come on; I have no goal on this land,

And see nothing afterwards. (Nights of Cairo 51)
Shukri again is more faithful when he confesses that he is powerless in defending his heart from the attack of frustration and despair and the only thing he could do is mourning:

I will mourn my luck and stray wishes

As if I'm sick who suffers the doctor's alienation.

If the villainous time trifles with a hopeless man,

It's enough for me to get as him.

Since I became frustrated by time,

My heart did blame me as his controller.

I neglected my wishes that got me bored,

And patience renounced me as if I doubted it.

I have been tightened by cheerless conditions

Just as a lover who lost his sweetheart. (Diwan Shukri 83)

Even at times he prefers to keep his sorrows suppressed; he could not resist the call of nature to speak them out:

O crown of the night king! God bless you,

Though my heart is empty of throne.

You lighten sorrows which settled in my ribs.

Be kind and leave them black and hidden.
My soul seems like a night and darkness;
And yet your light reveals its secret to me. (Diwan Shukri 414-415)

To find pleasure in the heart of melancholy is one of the most intensive and exclusive expressions in Romantic poetry. In "Ode on Melancholy" Keats states that joy and pain are inseparable and to experience joy fully we must experience sadness or melancholy fully. Shelley believes that sorrow, terror, anguish, and despair are often the chosen expressions of an approximation to the highest good. He further explains: “Our sympathy in tragic fiction depends on this principle; tragedy delights by affording a shadow of the pleasure which exists in pain. This is the source also of the melancholy which is inseparable from the sweetest melody. The pleasure that is in sorrow is sweeter than the pleasure of pleasure itself” (71). Shukri experiences it but requests common people to understand his perplexed situation:

O my soul, stand up and dance inside my body,

Like a crazy man who dances, gabbles and plays.

(O, people) Don’t blame me but despair has its own dance.

It’s learnt by those who got the grief’s trance. (Diwan Shukri 201)

Mutran is very close to Wordsworth who has been considered as “the poet ‘par excellence’ of melancholy and human suffering that was focused on his outward perception of Nature and man” (Lillian 66). Mutran, for example, sees in the sea his despair and grief:

The sea with all the throbbing sides
Is full of sadness,

Like my heart in the evening hour. (142)

But the younger poet Abu Shadi, though considering Mutran as his master, has a more personal perspective on melancholy in which he drew all his forces of sorrows inward into himself:

I surrender the mournful soul, kneelying,

Anxiously searching my extensive world.

I, silently, fill the glass of grief alone;

As silence is part of the sublime prayer. (Cited in Al-Farfuri 127)

Of the principal Arab Romantic poets it can be said without hesitation that Al-Shabbi was the quintessential poet of melancholy. Of the hundred poems, which formed his volume of verse Songs of Life, at least fifty four poems reveal melancholy as their mood. Most of these poems express the deepest feelings about serious human problems and reflect the poet’s mood when seeking new visions and new realities out of the shattered dreams of the past. Al-Shabbi’s hard and gloomy life, especially after the death of his father, and his super sensitivity to the surrounding events are reflected in themes that evoke an awareness of his own misery and despair, often bordering on hopelessness, beneath a more visible, determined optimism. He is aware of his strangeness and thus declares his unique capacity to suffer distinctively:

I am depressed

I am strange

My melancholy is different from its counterparts;
Abnormal in the worlds of grief.

My melancholy is a tweeting idea

Unknown to the ears of time.

... 

Other people's melancholy is a flame:

It dies down with time.

But mine is an anguish inhabiting my soul

Where it will lodge forever. (*Aghani Al-hayyah* 44-45)

In the beginning he does not find anyone to blame for his sufferings and black destiny except himself:

When life gave me a glass full of hope,

I, alas, didn’t take it.

But when misery offered

I took a number of glasses,

How foolish I was?

There are thorns in the meadow of life

Which nettle the lilies of my soul. (*Aghani Al-hayyah* 70)
In the second stage of his meditation he defends his innocence and assures that it is life itself which has selected him for misery:

Why am I tortured by life as a strange creature?

Why does it break my beautiful heart?

Does my heart have any sin?

“This is accomplished by the heaven’s laws,

And you have no way to escape.” She said. (Aghani Al-hayyah 123)

But in the third stage, in which he is deeply frustrated, he could not write his poem without an introduction. It is not easy for him to blame his God as the main cause of his melancholy, so he justifies his situation while writing his poem “To God” in the following passage:

The inconstant human heart experiences great spiritual crises, in which pain and despair over all life’s truths rage through till every foundation of faith, truth and beauty is rocked. One feels as if the intimate ties of kinship between living beings were being severed. One becomes a sudden stranger in this mysterious world. For a while it is as if life were a terrifying tedium undeserving of either compassion or excellence. But it is if fate’s mercies that such a state lasts only briefly, like a storm at sea. The sea clouds over, its beauty turning ominous, its melodies becoming a wail, its harmony, chaos: then the storm subsides and the sea returns to its clear blue color, its even rhythm, its perpetual grace.

Under the influence of the aforementioned stormy state, I composed the following poem. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 101)

In this spiritual crisis and stormy state, as he calls it, he opens his poem with an apostrophe:
Oh God of existence, my sadness hurls a sob

Into the empty ears of space.

Are you listening?

This is a miserable heart communing with You. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 101)

Then he states his complaints of tragic life in a form of blame to his Lord:

Between my ribs You molded
A huge continent of a heart,
Singular in sorrow,
Saddened by pleasure,
Dogged by sensitivity.
Faithful crowds of sorrow,
Ilness and despair,
Keep following me.
Death keeps snipping off
My dearest wishes,
And wilting my eyes and lips. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 102)

The poet continues his complaint questioning the mercy of God and insisting on the innocence of his soul:

Lord of existence! How is it that

You take no pity on my terrible grief?
I have sighed through so many nights,

Tossing restlessly,

Then sealed my lips in the morning.

I have spoken the praises of life and love,

Sung like a happy, carefree man,

And planted new dreams in my ravaged heart.

I tended them faithfully and then,

When I harvested, reaped only thorns.

What is it I have done wrong?

O Lord?! (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 103)

Unlike the English Romantics who were rebellious against the norms and doctrines of their society including religion, Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi, like all other Arab Romantics, had his revolutionary thoughts within the Islamic faith. This poem is not an exception as it is concluded with the poet's apologies and requesting for forgiveness from God when his stormy state turns to calmness like the clear blue color of the sea:

My weeping heart scatters blasphemy.

Distress has caused it to speak.

Forgive me, Lord!
Desolation trampled on me till I broke.

Forgive these desperate fragments of my heart.

For it is, God, the temple of truth and faith,

The lute of love and beauty.

**But suffering has destroyed it.** *(Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 105)*

4.3.4 **The Rebellious Ego**

The Arab Romantic poets rebelled against the restricted space of traditions which have always been constraining Arabic poetry, and called for the destruction of the barriers built by the school of imitation. Therefore, they rejected the traditional themes which reflect superficiality, triviality and emotional dryness. The poet, as Shukri believes, has to fly over the day he lives on, look deeper at time in all its sides: past, present, and future; only then does his poetry become eternal. He has to declare his refusal of being an ornament in the courtly class or the mouth speaker of the authority. The real poet is the messenger of Nature, provided with its sweet tones *(Diwan Shukri 323)*. Poetry, the Romantics argue, has to be considered not merely as a linguistic value, but as a humanistic value on the basis that it should be the revelation of the human being and his complex and rebellious psyche. In this sense, the individual philosophical meditations play a crucial role in exposing the psyche's truths and resolving the mysteries of life in an attempt to reconcile the human with the cosmos he lives in.

Although some critics condemned the Arab Romantics in Egypt for not being directly engaged in the political context in their poetic writing (see Ostle, 94 and Jayyusi, 36), their
headstrong will of change could not be ignored. Revolution was the flame of their hearts and the light of their souls:

The soul sometimes has a revolution

That seems to lacerate my young body.

O soul, all that you wish will never happen

And so my hopes with you will burn.

....

But in despair there is a despair which makes the revival

Taking the man’s effort into the ultimate end. (Diwan Shukri 200-201)

They had a strong belief that the real change in the society starts from the individual self. Thus, their call for reform was more complex, challengeable and sometimes shocking. In their most intrepid and revolutionary poems, they adapted a persona to prevent themselves from the brutal scrutiny of the society. They thought that the mask or persona would enable them to create their own mythology and embody their own values without getting face to face with the traditionalism of the society. This kind of revolution is called ‘the metaphysical rebellion’ by Al-Azab (92). However, it is relevant to mention here that all the Arab Romantics did not go beyond the realm of Islam even in their most excessive poems. This phenomenon is clearly shown in Al-Aqqad’s “Story of a Devil”, Shukri’s “The Revolutionary Angel” and Saleh Jawdat’s “The Rebellious Monk”. But its mature manifestation is found in Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi, the most outstanding revolutionary poet in Arabic Romanticism (see Ostle, 102).
Al-Aqqad’s poem “Story of a Devil”, though poor in poetic style, reflects the poet’s deep philosophical and critical thinking, and implicitly shows his interred desire for rebellion. He introduces the poem with a brief summary to avoid being pre-judged by those who are not ready to accept ‘Satan’ as a hero in any literary work:

This poem was written after the World War I. It is a story of a devil who decided to repent from his evil deeds. It is more difficult for a devil to leave badness than an angel to disbelieve in goodness. When the angel leaves truth and virtue, he may try practicing bad doings and find some kind of entertainment. But the devil who always fakes truth with his hands cannot get the true meaning of life when he embraces goodness. He will ignore people, both good and bad, and will not care for anyone including himself. (*Eleven Volumes of Al-Aqad's Poetry* 180)

The poem opens with God’s warning to the devil that even though he is now able to deceive humans, the punishment of his bad doings awaits him:

O Satan, betray whoever you want.

The hell will be the last destiny

To you and your followers. (181)

The devil, of course, ignores these warnings and continues his best business in tempting innocent people. He exploits their instinctive desire in seeking the truth to make the first trap and successfully convinces some groups of people using falsehood and cheating:

He succeeded in the first trap,

Which he called the real truth.
On his behalf it cheated the people

And made them soon quarrel and fight. (183)

In his long career, he accompanies thousands of generations and does his best to misguide human beings and encourage them following him in all wrong paths. But he finally decides to repent:

When Satan saw the consequence of his betrayals,

He decided to give up the fruitless evil. (184)

The reward from God is taking him up to the Heaven where the devil himself chooses his place; a green hill full of date trees on a river. There he gets eternal and uncountable blessings of God and is offered whatever he demands. All the residents of the heaven are happy and entirely satisfied except the cursed Satan who rebels against the calmness and stability of his new life:

But Satan stood with infidel dignity

Refusing to obey his God the Almighty.

His eyes were shining with hell’s flame. (188)

He declares his refusal of such cold and routine life and justifies his new disobedience and rebellion against God by stating:

You offer grass for the brave lions

And take their hunger as sort of ungratefulness.

Only the sheep can get the benefit
And thus satisfied with food and eternity.

How many times do we find a king

Who rules the people with things they don’t recognize?

He punishes the one who has a questionable mind,

And gives security to those who don’t usually ask. (190)

He shows an irrational enthusiasm when he requests God to hasten punishment without waiting for his repentance which will never happen:

O God, excuse me.

I don’t request Your forgiveness.

You were too patient with me but now

Show me Your retribution.

I never hope for Your mercy,

So my repentance should not be Your hope at all.

Ask Your creatures to do the worship;

Those who wish Your high eternity.

For me I reject this kind of kneeling

Or I prefer to be a solid rock. (192)
The conclusion of the poem shows the poet's cautious deal with the religious matters in a conservative society:

Some people, who witnessed the devil's death, asked:

Does the Satan's nature change?

Though his fire was faded in the rock

He still deceives and catches the minds. (192)

Hussein confesses that he was wholeheartedly impressed by the poem and its hero 'the Satan' who is, he assumes, Al-Aqqad himself, his poetry, and "his ambitious spirit which has no limit. This spirit which does not have a rest and cannot be satisfied with or convinced by anything..., has an endless motion which causes deep effect on the souls even after her death" (Cited in Al-Azab, 93). In his comment on the poem, Al-Mazini assures that it is the first time in the history of Egyptian, and Arabic, literature that the reader finds a complete artistic work focusing on one single idea but richly discussed by a poet detached from his own self (36). Al-Azab considers it as an epic which formed a turning point in the thematic change in Arabic poetry (95).

Although the persona used by Shukri in his poem "The Rebellious Angel" was totally the opposite of Al-Aqqad's, the aim was almost the same. Like his friend Al-Aqqad, Shukri chooses to introduce the poem with a brief summary:

The story is about an angel who disobeyed his God and fell down to the earth to guide people to the right path and asked them to get rid of evil, but unexpectedly they refused his calls for reform and instead abused and insulted him. Consequently, the angel lost
God’s forgiveness and blessing and at the same time could not earn the people’s love and mercy. (Diwan Shukri 581)

In the opening lines of the poem, the angel expresses sympathy for the sufferings of humans on the earth under the powerful hands of evil:

The earth is the platform and he is the speechmaker.

He is calling the souls to the wrong doings. (581)

This scene encourages the angel, who is obedient by nature, to rebel against his status in the heaven and decide to play a more positive role in helping those innocent people:

I will not think of eternal paradise,

Or being a perfect and sinless,

Unless I see those people have no tears and grief;

With no misery of crimes.

I will fall down to earth to share their sorrows

And help them relieve from the wounds of misfortunes. (582)

God accepts his request and gives him the chance to fall down to earth and face the people with his doctrine of reform:

Go down to humans and guide them to truth.

Take them away from things you think are bad,
And treat the wounds you can relieve. (582)

The poor angel is not aware of the complex nature of human beings which is different from his pure and godly spirit. He is shocked by their fierce and negative reaction against his teachings:

The people revolted against all his advises;

Guided by their most ignorant.

They covered his goodness by their bad morals

And cast the worst insults to him. (583)

Only then he discovers his big mistake in doubting God’s knowledge of His creatures and how much He is great in forgiving them despite their wrong doings.

Shukri’s angel is the Romantic poet who tries to take people to his ideal world of peace, love, faith and freedom but finally fails to cope with the reality of life with its two wings of good and evil. The prophecy of Shukri’s rebellion shows less enthusiasm for rebellion and evokes more sympathy on his community.

In this context, Jawdat’s poem “The Rebellious Monk”, which is assumed to provide the clearest illustration of the ‘metaphysical rebellion’ in which the poet shockingly shook the most consistent set of religious convictions of the Arabic society. In a subtle and elevated dramatic style, he encloses his poem with clouds of doubts through a lofty, honest and frank conversation between the two prominent religious figures in the church, the monk and the priest. The rebellious monk was a perfect mask for Jawdat to reveal all the unanswered questions storming in his mind and easily state his doubts in the religious interpretations of the metaphysical world.
The monk, who gets bored of the church life which is full of instructions and restrictions, decides to make an end to what he thinks is misery:

O priest, this life exhausted me
And made me hate my living here.
Take the oboe away for a while,
You who spent my youth in prayer.
Leave the heart to follow his wishes;
Don't make him lose the rest of his youth. (Diwan Saleh Jawdat 113)

He doubts the religious justifications for those virtuous followers who deprive themselves of the luxury of this life to gain God's best rewards in Heaven:

Whenever I feel frustrated you remind me,
O priest, with God's reward.
Take your afterlife away from me;
It's the world of doubt and uncertainty.
Even if true, give me an hour of pleasure
And then eternity in pain. (114-115)

He continues his debated arguments on the inaccuracy of the preachers' interpretation of God's real statements:
If God – as you said – has created people

Only for devotion and godliness,

Not for love, beauty, or passion,

Do you think he vainly created beauty? (116)

The priest, on the other hand, warns the monk not to follow the steps of the preceding disbelievers who finally faced the truth of death which shifted them to the other world waiting for their determined destiny:

O my son, beware that God hears

Your words and may punish you.

So many people – before – spoke up like you

But death came and pressed them down.

Life is but a deceiving mirage. (118)

He reminds him of the fact that he is too much tiny in a very huge universe created by the Great and Almighty God, so he is almost nothing and thus unable to make any difference in the processing continuity of life:

What is the importance of the individual

And the value of human in this big universe?

Your noisy voice will not effect
The power of God or break the construction down.

When death comes to you, your soul

Will be transformed to the other life.

There you will find that God

Decides the fate you did not believe in. (119)

He tries to get the monk back to the spiritual feelings of the believers and their Sufi's outlook of God:

Many times – in my prayers – I saw God as a wanderer spirit

I imagined His beauty and got sure

That He is the splendor of truth and symbol of majesty (124)

But this does not satisfy the rebellious spirit of the monk who goes further in questioning the justice of God in the priests' religious teachings:

If God – as you told us – predetermined

All events in the book of eternity,

How does He make people responsible of sins.

And after death throw them to the hell? (125-126)

The only way the priest finds it appropriate to reply to the monk's evil thoughts is to compare them to those of Satan:
Oh, this is a result of the Satan's whispering

In the ear of life and the minds of human beings.

Though he was once in paradise,

He continued recommending evil to people.

...

This is not philosophy but a damn thought

And an infidel heart. (126-127)

The monk again raises logical assumptions on the role of human in this world and how he is not supposed to use his mind which is created by God in worshiping Him:

O priest, suppose I'm a disbeliever

Or a retard who pretends to know philosophy,

Then God did not give me mental power

To know Him well (127)

Unexpectedly, the priest himself starts to accept the monk's strange views:

O monk, you uncovered the layers of the universe

And shook my solid belief.

You destroyed the state of my heart

Which has been built by faith for a long time. (135-136)
If the climax of the poem comes logically proper to the high tone of the revolutionary argument, the denouement belays the expectation of the reader as it gives the religious people a chance to hold a deep breath after being strongly tensed and irritated. The poet chooses to withdraw all his objections and allows religious faith a dubious victory may be to escape the anger of the society: “The roof of the abbey cracked and let in rays of light. Then the Angel of death came down and put his hand on the head of the rebellious monk. Silence spread all over the place” (138). The monk discovers his mistake and declares repentance to gain God’s forgiveness:

O Angel of Death, I do believe in death.

O Angel of Death, I do believe in the Resurrection.

O Angel of Death, I believe in the supreme power of God.

O priest, take me to the places of prayer.

The Lord of the universe is calling me to the other life,

Let me spend the remaining seconds with His love. (138)

Unlike the above discussed poets, Al-Shabbi’s rebellion is more social and political than religious or metaphysical. In fact, he is one of the great Arab poets who believe in the necessity of change through revolution. Frustrated by the social and political situation in his country, Tunisia, at the time under the French occupation, he feels that the first move of reform should start with a strong will to change:

The weak will is a grave,
Built by despair and fear,
In its quietness life settles.

But the strong will has a powerful strength
Which can break down a huge mountain.

And people are of two kinds:
One is controlled by frustration,
And the other is guided by hope.

The first goes to death, received by mocking graves;
The other goes to glory, served by all means of life. (*Aghani Al-hayyah* 38)

He bases his call for revolution on the solid belief in freedom as a natural right for all people:

You were born free without fetters,
Like the spirit of a breeze,
Free as the morning light
In the sky. (*Songs of Life*, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 60)

In the same poem “My Mother’s Child”, he condemns those who could not grasp the urging need of freedom and independence:

This is how God created you,

Child of existence,
How life tossed you down

Into this world.

How come you accept the humiliation,

Bending your head to those who bind you? (60)

However, as the poet feels the forces of life stirring invitingly, he encourages his people to strike out:

Get up, arise! Go looking for life.

Do you think it waits for sleepers?

Do not fear what lies beyond the mountains...

There is nothing there but the fresh light of morning,

The green spring of creation

Wearing flowers for its gown. (61)

In his famous poem “The Will of Life” which has been memorized, sung and taught at thousands of schools all over the Arab world, Al-Shabbi asserts his deep trust in the power of people if they once take the decision to change:

If one day people should choose life,

Fate is certain to respond.

The night will surely retreat,
And fetters will be broken! (*Songs of Life*, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 131)

Unfortunately the poet could not find any positive response to his calls that he always wishes. This deeply affects his trust in the society to awaken, so he writes his poem “To the People” trying to evoke the instinctive desire of freedom:

Where, O my people, is your sensitive heart?

Where are the ambitions and dreams,

The spirit of artistry,

The fantasy and inspiration?

Where is your sense of originality,

Your own musical wave?

...

Where is your will to live?

Nothing but silence answers me, (*Songs of Life*, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 76)

He comes eventually to the conclusion that, as stated by Jayyusi, “the entrenched traditionalism of the people stood in the way of any real change” (*Songs of Life* 14). So there are times, many times indeed, when the poet, suffering from frustration and anger, would lash out at the people crying out:

O, my people! I wish I were a woodcutter

To fell these trunks with my axe!
If only I were a flood's
Torrent demolishing graves, one by one,
If only I were a wind
Scattering the evil that jinxes flowers,
Or winter's stiff cold,
Encasing all that autumn has wilted. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 87)

Despite his loss of faith in the people's readiness for change, Al-Shabbi does not lose at least his trust in himself. He reaffirms his conviction that the rebellious spirit cannot be defeated:

When fate accosts me
With its bevy of misfortunes, I will say,
"Your waves cannot extinguish
The flame kindled in my blood!
You think you can destroy this heart?
It is a rock which knows no grief or tears." (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 127)

Indeed, Al-Shabbi's poetry reflects an endless aspiration to transcend and attain faith in the possibility of the victory of will against the common people's resistance of change.
4.3.5 Nature

Though Nature in all its aspects and moods gets pride of place in poetry in general, it is usually associated with Romantic poetry in particular. This is due to the Romantics’ specific vision and treatment of Nature, which is marked by the departure from the traditional description of the external beauty of the natural objects and goes deeper into their core values. The Romantics, as stated by Wright, “elegize and idealize Nature. Nature is seen by romantics to be consoling or morally uplifting; a kind of spiritual healer... Nature is invested with personality; human moods and moral impulses are seen reflected from it” (xv). The common denominator of the Romantic poets is their great respect and admiration for Nature and the unique ability to treat natural objects as human beings. Bowra corroborates this idea when he declares: “In nature all romantic poets found their inspiration. It was not everything to them, but they would have been nothing without it; for through it they found those exalting moments when they passed from sight to vision and pierced, as they thought, to the secrets of the universe” (13).

In fact, the theme of Nature as depicted by the English Romantic poets formed the major element of influence on Arabic Romantic poetry. The Arab Romantics wholeheartedly accepted and interacted with the English Romantic doctrine of Nature which focused on the interpenetration of human mind and nature. The two Romantic Movements share the same view of Nature as an important medium that draws the contemplative poet closer to a state of self-knowledge. In the two Movements we find the same love of mountain, lake and stream, night and silence, the moon and the nightingale. The Romantics, in both contexts, used their imagination to exalt the spiritual and supernatural power of Nature. They all seem to feel and make us feel the eternity of Nature and the passing moment of man. It is worthily important to point out here that within the realm of the Romantics’ collective view of nature, every one of
them has his own attitude towards it. Thus Nature in Romantic poetry comes with a wide range of attributes. This is also applicable to Arabic Romanticism.

Al-Aqqad, the theorist of the Romantics, believes that a moment with Nature can generate visionary powers. With the spirit of the poet, he could get from the sea the inspiration, touch of motherhood, patience, and source of versification:

When you see the sea, you think its water is ink,

And the sky seems to be the depth of my sea.

Here, only here, I break the reins of my grieves;

Mourn myself and sing my verse. (Cited in Al-Farfuri 140)

Shukri is famous for passionately celebrating the oneness of the external Nature that surrounds us and the internal nature of human beings. He believes that

The spirit is like the Universe

Whose top and bottom cannot be seen

Even by the intelligent man. (Diwan Shukri xiii)

He identifies what is going on inside his soul with the changeable phenomena of the external world:

We find in the soul’s sky the same of the outer sky,

We can see in it the full shining moon.

The soul is like nature whose face is landscapes.
It has its own lights and seas.

Therein the sea’s cry with its angry waves.

Therein a soft murmuring and a brook.

It has night and morning;

And planets rolling in their orbits. *(Diwan Shukri 260)*

He tries to prove this philosophy in the same poem when he assures the spontaneous changes in his feelings due to the changes of the environment he lives in:

If I am in a garden, my heart becomes a bird

Singing and flying from its branches.

If I sail on the sea, my heart becomes a wave

Moving and crushing with its waves. *(Diwan Shukri 261)*

In his poem “The Seasons”, Shukri elaborates his view of resemblance between the self and Nature. He declares that the unending changes of the human’s moods and emotions are akin to the continuous changes of the atmosphere in the four seasons of the year. This likeness inspired the poet to deal with Nature as a human being to whom he can reveal his love, joy, anger, and sadness. He once finds himself alone beside the sea and thus does not lose the chance to share with him his sufferings:

One night I stopped near by the sea.

The winds and waves were active there,
And the darkest night spread its grandness.

I broke my heart with weeping and despair;

And the love of death is an exotic disease.

O sea, save me from the injustice and meanness of life,

Since my misery is like your generous depth. (Diwan Shukri 247)

Shukri’s dramatic touch of Nature is reflected in his poem “To the Wind”, whose title reminds us of Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”. The poet addresses the wind as a living human being with soft imagery that makes the reader see not only the form of Nature but also weaves a little story about it:

O wind, you aroused the hidden sorrow of my heart,

The same way you kindle the forest with fire.

O wind, be careful with a burning heart.

O wind, you revealed my worries and secrets.

O wind, why are you lonely in this world

As a stranger who left his family and home land?
May be you are mourning the death of your son
And always thinking of revenge. (*Diwan Shukri* 440)

In a beautiful interaction with Nature, Naji, following the canon of Shukri in personifying and dramatizing the natural phenomena, skillfully relates the coming of night near the sea with his own troubled emotions and sad feelings:

What do the waves say?

What hurt the sun to make her leave yellow and sad?

She went away and left for us

A night of doubt and mute darkness.

As if destiny mocks at me when I weep

Even though I don’t know crying. (*Beyond the Clouds* 74)

Like Shelley, who considers Nature as the mother of the unfathomable world and called her 'the great parent', Abu Shadi, calls upon Nature:

O mother, I find in you the purity of my yearning.

You are the source of my craving and happiness.

I find you a prayer in the side of silence;

And kiss the soil which gives me life. (Cited in Al-Farfuri 40)
Al-Shabbi found in Nature a haven which was to inspire and infuse so much of his work. It, as Jayyusi claims, permeated his imagery, his symbolism, his passion, and, in fact, his whole being (Songs of Life 20). Actually, he is considered by many critics to be the foremost Arab poet to have written about Nature in the first half of the twentieth century (Husni 83). His mythical and mystical view of Nature shows the influence of English Romanticism both through his great model Gibran Khalil Gibran and his reading of the available translated texts of the English Romantic poets. The traits of Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, Keats and Byron can be easily traced in his Nature poems.

Al-Shabbi is an extreme lover of Nature which becomes an essential part of his total vision, of his basic apprehension of experience. “It is the beauty of a flock of sheep, green meadows, laughing sky, the sound of rivers and the singing bird which are sufficient to fill the poet with pleasure and to excite his emotions and feelings” (Husni 85). In some cases, the poet merges himself with the outer nature into a unified entity; in other cases, he deals with her as a living super being with which he communes. All forms of Nature are profoundly subjected in his poetry but the main element is al-ghab (the forest) which he considers as a refuge from the world of evil, aggression, and hatred, a solitary retreat of love, peace and memory. “He found in al-ghab a spiritual intimacy as he took shelter at its breast where he felt the real kindness and affection. He praised its beauty and wrote monologues considering it as a pretty sweetheart or a kind mother to whom he could complain his sufferings and sadness.” (Muttaqi 71)

If Wordsworth shared the daffodils their dancing celebration, Al-Shabbi has a spiritual communication with the wilted lily which seems to him sad and depressed:

O versant lily! Why does the harsh agony embrace you?
Do you have a flaming voice in your fresh heart

Which chants the song of chasm?

Did night make you hear the mourning of the hearts?

Did dawn make you drink the cup of despair? (Aghani Al-hayyah 49)

He finds in her the same sense of loneliness and grief which occupies his soul and thus causes him to feel sympathy upon her and compassionately requests her to embrace him and forget all her sufferings:

If the songs of darkness made you sad,

The songs of gloominess tortured me.

If the daughters of the rain left you alone,

The daughters of the hell embraced me.

...

Come to me...

We are united by the violence of this unjust time. (Aghani Al-hayyah 50-51)

In his poem "The New Morning", Al-Shabbi portrays the beauty of Nature in a high skillful style emulating that of Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" in which he beautifully describes the "Steep and lofty cliffs," the "wild secluded scene," the "quiet of the sky," the "dark sycamore" he sat under, the trees of the orchard, and the "pastoral farms" with "wreaths of smoke" billowing from their chimneys. Al-Shabbi opens the poem with the following lines:
May God bless that charming morning

In the shadow of a beautiful forest.

Its breeze was drunk

And dancing on the roses and wet plants.

The mountains’ haze flew smoothly

On the meadows of the valleys.

The shepherds’ songs were throbbing

In the caves, and hills and valleys.

The broad space was signified by melodies,

And colored by perfumes and beautiful light. (Aghani Al-hayyah 221)

In “A Defence of Poetry,” Shelley states, “A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why” (30). It seems that Al-Shabbi elaborates the same idea in his poem “O Bulbul” which echoes Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”. Like Keats he considers the bird as the representation of happiness and better life. The poet requests the bulbul to sing hoping that it may help him get rid of his sorrows:

O bulbul! O poet of the spring’s dreams,

Sing me up, as your voice carries the dews of tears.
Sing me up, as it shows me the hope of the broken heart.

...

In you, o bird, I found the warbles of life

And heard a voice whose echo had left my heart. (*Aghani Al-hayyah* 91-92)

Al-Shabbi still moves in the shadow of Keats when he likens the bird and its songs to the poet and his poetry and they altogether combine to form the symbol of eternity:

Recite your poetry because it has an eternal spirit.

Whenever it moves over the sleepy flowers,

It awakens in their hearts the beat of eternal life.

...

You are the poet’s heart which is full of true love.

When he gets bored of his sick home,

He embraces, with deep longing, the beautiful light. (*Aghani Al-hayyah* 94-95)

The association of nature with childhood in Al-Shabbi’s poetry is another point of resemblance with Wordsworth. They both praise the visionary experiences they have had in their childhood for their kinship to a purer mind and their influence on their souls. Children with their innocence are usually thought to be closer than adults to Nature. Wordsworth’s “My heart leaps up when I behold” shows that a sense of sublimity is retained when remembering such experiences:
MY heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began,
So is it now I am a man,
So be it when I shall grow old
Or let me die!
The child is father of the man:
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety. (Poems 200)

In Al-Shabbi's poetry, childhood is depicted as a period of simplicity and purity in contrast with adult life which is notorious for cruelty, bitterness and disillusionment:

During the time of childhood, simplicity and purity,
I used to live like nightingales, streams and flowers,
Not caring whether the earth revolves around its orbit or not.
But nowadays my nerves are frayed and my feelings agitated,
My emotions burning, paying attention to the great and the contemptible.
Life tramples on my heart, and the vast universe crawls over it too.
This is my destiny, O human race! How wretched is my destiny! (Cited in and translated by Husni 48-85)

The forest is the main theme in most of Al-Shabbi’s nature poetry. He deeply adores its originality, calmness, and serene atmosphere and regards it as healer and a giver. It is for him:

A home that life built for me

From fragrance and shade, light and song…

To love, to dream in, to receive inspiration.

In the woods, life renews itself year after year. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 94)

He finds in nature the only refuge to escape from the inveterate stupidity of his people who ignored his constant calls for freedom and integrity:

O my people, I am going to the forest

To spend my life alone with my despair;

I am going to the forest, perchance I may

Bury my unhappiness in the heart of the forest,

Forgetting you as much as I can, for you

Don’t deserve my wine and boon companionship. (Cited in and translated by Husni 90)

As he gets frustrated by the corruption of the unscrupulous and uncaring civilized people, who have ghastly distorted all beauties of life, Al-Shabbi declares his ultimate wish:
Would that I were able to live in this world
Happy in my lonely and solitary existence,
Spending my life in the mountains and forests
In the midst of the swaying pine trees.
To sing with the nightingales in the forest
And listen to the purl of the stream
And secretly converse with the stars, the moon
And the birds, the river and the tranquil lights.
I want a life of beauty and art which I wish to spend
Away from my nation and my country,
Divorcing myself from the sadness of my people,
Who live their lives like inanimate being. (Cited in and translated by Husni 1995, 90)

4.3.6 The Theme of Love

The theme of love is one of the distinguishing features of Arabic Romantic poetry which gives it a flavor of confidentiality and a broader sense of originality. The influence of English Romanticism, in this respect, is secondary as major English Romantics wrote very few poems on love. Ferber refers to this issue when stating: “Though the word “romantic” today is closely wedded to “love,” the Romantics wrote less love poetry than one might expect, even in the broad sense, but what they wrote is often beautiful and poignant” (131-132).
But love in Arabic Romantic poetry is an essential and frequent theme. Hence, the question arises: Why? To give an appropriate answer to this question, we need to refer to three key issues which contributed to the Arab Romantic poets’ preference for love poems. Firstly, the political, social, and intellectual issues in Egypt at the time, which had a profound impact on the poets’ sensitive souls, caused them to acknowledge the failure of Arabic poetry in its classical form to cope with all these changes and bravely declare their refusal of the politician’s bold use of poetry as a means to exploit the ordinary people. Hussein alludes to this in his warning that “the octopus of politics has been coiling his arms around the poets and poetry to kill the true poetry and drown it in the flood of panegyric and hypocrisy” (Cited in Da’bais 349). So the Romantic poets decided to take poetry back to its eternal and sublime message, the expression of the self with love at the centre. Though the process was considered by some critics as a kind of escapism (Da’bais called it the escapist love poetry ‘ghaza’l’), they noticeably succeeded in attracting the audience by motivating their bridled feelings of love, pity, fear, and hope and then smoothly prepared them for change and revolution without facing the rough hands of the politicians.

Secondly, love has been a prominent theme in Arabic poetry in all its periods, and in some cases the only vital theme (this will be discussed in detail in the next chapter). Therefore, the Arab Romantics found a rich heritage of subjective and expressive poetry which encouraged them to build upon and inaugurate their reforming process. Thirdly, the direct influence of the English Romantic poetry, in which they found the best alternative model they were looking for, had its impact as well. But though they were intensely excited with its rebellious spirit and the revolutionary themes it evoked, they were unable to follow all its spheres due to their respect to the Islamic and conservative environment they lived in. Only through love they could express their pure emotions and expose their own philosophy of woman, beauty, nature, and ideal life.
The pursuit of a beautiful dream woman is the common subject-matter which tightly joins the Romantics’ love poetry with that of the medieval period. Conventionally, critics divided the Arabic love poetry (Ghazal) into two main schools: chaste (Uthari) and profane. If we exclude some poems of Saleh Jawdat and Ali Mahmoud Taha, the Romantic poetry can be grouped with the first as it portrays the beloved as an ideal woman, and her poet lover as a martyr of love. There is no element of eroticism in their treatment of love. The beauty and magnitude of the Romantics’ love poetry lies in their cunning mixture of the traditional elements rooted in the golden age of Arabic poetry and the new dimensions inspired by the influence of Western Romantic poetry such as imagination, philosophy, and nature. Mutran’s poem “My full Moon and That in the Sky” (1894) would be a good example in this respect. Though the poet associates his beloved with the moon which is highly traditional in Arabic poetry, he concludes the poem with an exciting and imaginative passage:

I did not forget our meeting in the fresh verdant meadow,

When all eyes were sleeping in the dimness of night;

Playfully we complain of love, but many a complainer is thankful,

In the air is a longing, a sighing of love,

In the water a moaning from which melts the stone,

In the breeze is a murmur which rolls o’er the meads,

The flowers have fragrance which tells of their thoughts. (Cited in and translated by Ostle 119)
4.3.6.1 Love, Beauty and Nature

The ‘woman’ has always been considered by the Romantics as a symbol of beauty. They are skillful in describing that beauty in their poems. Al-Aqqad, for instance, portrays the beauty of the beloved as a statue being made by the hopes of the lover:

I look like a sculptor whose statue is your beauty.

We have a strange story of love,

Which had never come to my mind.

Whatever I dreamed to find in you,

Your beauty was able to comply with my hopes. (Eleven Volumes 84)

Naji, when asked by the beloved to describe her beauty, astonishingly replies:

Did you ask me to write, my paradise?

What do you want me to write about?

Though you know what is hidden beneath my ribs

And your heart knows what is concealed,

I will write that you are the spring.

You are the most fascinating in these green lands.

You are the unique beauty, the dawn of youth,

And the boy’s dream.
I praise your name in the morning.

And end the day with my thoughts on you. (*Nights of Cairo* 67)

AL-Shabbi follows Naji in relating the beauty of his beloved to that of the nature. He opens his well-known love poem "Prayers in the Temple of Love" with these unforgettable lines:

You are endearing as childhood's drifting melody,

Limped as morning air.

Like a laughing sky, a moon-rich night,

Like roses, or a newborn smile.

What peace you carry with you!

What luscious tender youth!

What purity makes this stubborn wretch

Fall to his knees. (*Songs of Life*, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 117)

He then goes to the extreme of symbolizing his love as a universe created in his heart:

Aah, beautiful flower, if you only knew

What has happened now to my solitary heart,

In this strange space

Magical galaxies are created.

Glowing suns, stars that emanate light in emptiness...
Inside me, a poet's youthful ecstasy

Keeps dreaming of spring and orchards

Never know the gloom of raging autumn. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 121)

Shukri considers the beauty of the beloved as the mirror of the surrounding universe, so he
invites her to transfer their love to the beauty of Nature:

Let us love the stars, o my darling;
The night is about to leave.
Let us take love from the flowers
To irrigate the nectar and the sweet water.
I see the moon on your face, o moon,
Has an eternal bliss and glazed beauty.
Let us love life, o my darling.
Don't leave me abandoned and alone. (Diwan Shukri 250)

4.3.6.2 Love and the Divine

Love for the Arab Romantic poets is a divine power, a gift from the heaven which falls into
the heart of the lover without knocking at the door:

Love is spellbinding flame

Descends from the sky
Like dawn's clear blaze.

It is a light that rips the veil

From fate's eyes

And twilight's gauze from the profile of the night

Love is divine spirit

Mingles its light

With the shimmer of dawn and dusk. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 43)

And the beloved is not an ordinary woman in the eyes of her lover. Al-Aqqad announces that:

Your Beauty is the highest virtue

In a monk's cloth, if the lovely eye

Is made laugh by its grief. (Eleven Volumes 59)

Naji too makes a spiritual connection between his beloved and the heaven but in a different sense:

You are the secret of genius

And the majesty of perpetuity.

You are the symphony of eternity

And mercy in a miserable land.

You are the wine of the sky
And its holy spirit. (*Beyond the Clouds 5*)

He further refuses the untenable association of love with immorality. Love for him is one of the most virtuous aspects of our life:

You are loved by love and sung

By virtuous hopes, fancy and lips.

What is love but the divine speech,

The immortal song, and our narrations? (*Nights of Cairo 18*)

4.3.6.3 The Beloved

Most of the love poems in Romantic poetry are addressed to the beloved expressing the poets’ feelings, sufferings, jealousy, etc. Unlike the traditional Arabic love poetry in which the poet falls in love with a particular, named woman and is addressed to her to such an extent that makes the audience always attach the poet’s name with the name of his beloved, woman in most of the Romantic poetry is an ideal being, and part of the poet’s imaginative and ideal world. Jayyusi assures that love in Romantic poetry is “idealized beyond limits”, and “a new kind of beloved is depicted, equal to the poet, neither conquered by him nor conquering him, never taunting and coy, never one to put off happiness, as the woman of classical poetry..., she is never treacherous or cruel, but is transparent, and of an almost spectral beauty” (*Songs of Life 24*). Even though some poems might be based on true love stories, the Romantics were eager to generalize their own experiences to give the reader the chance to regard himself as the speaker of the poem.
The first difficulty the lover usually faces is the necessity of confessing his love. Naji beautifully depicts this situation when he insists that love has its own language which can be understood by lovers even without words:

No, it doesn’t have a language except

What was roaming in your and my eyes;

Or a word frozen on your lips

Just as it died on mine. *(The Wounded Bird 27)*

Shukri confesses to his sweetheart, in a powerful and imaginative style, that he is deeply in love with her:

Oh, if the worries of my heart obeys me,

I will poetize them for you.

Don’t you know that I’m your enamored,

Who spent his life loving and weeping? *(Diwan Shukri 57)*

Then he justifies why he had been hesitant for a long time before telling her about his honest love:

When I get closer to you, awe controls me,

So I keep my eyes down with humble and defeat. *(Diwan Shukri 57)*

The memory of love is intensely celebrated by the lover who always tries to remind the beloved with the past pleasant days, hoping that their love will last forever:
Did love see drinkers like us?

How many times we built an imagination around us?

And walked in a moonlit road preceded by our happiness?

When we looked up at the stars,

They fell down to be ours (Naji *Beyond the Clouds* 48-49)

Jawdat wittily links the past of his love with the future. He urges his beloved not to talk about the memory of their love, despite its sweetness, unless it is related to the hope of continuity:

Don’t say that our love is the sweetest memory.

Memory is my yesterday, and you are my tomorrow.

All that past is the dawn’s light of the coming day.

Our yesterday was an elegant vision and familiar impressions.

It was the Pleiades’ longing for good wishes and smiles.

It was the pursuit of meeting

Of the two halves without patience. (*Allah, the Nile, and Love* 42)

Meeting the beloved, for Al-Shabbi, is the moment which clears up all the sad and miserable events the two lovers have faced in their love story:

When I see you, life turns sweet

And my soul is filled with the hope morning;
Smooth roses grow on my chest
Which feel sympathy on my flaming heart.

...  
When I see you, I have been recreated
As if I had not suffered in this life,
Or could not bear the heavy weight
Of the unforgettable memory. (Aghani Al-hayyah, 182)

4.3.7 Imagination

For the Romantic, imagination is the supreme faculty which distinguishes him from those who approach objects empirically through sense impressions. The true Romantic of any age or land asserts on the validity of the inner vision at the expense of the outer reality. For him, “the objects of this world are, as for Blake, no more than an uninteresting frame to be ‘seen through’ on the path towards the only meaningful perception, that presented by the imagination” (Frust 120). In English Romanticism, imagination was at the core. With the exception of Byron, almost all English Romantic poets focused on the vital role of imagination in writing poetry. As they were conscious of a wonderful capacity to create imaginary worlds, they thought that to curb imagination was to deny something vitally necessary to their whole being. They thought that it was just this which made them poets. Because they are poets, Bowra states, they insist that “the most vital activity of the mind is the imagination” (87).
Though the Arab Romantics wrote little about the concept of imagination, their writings show the powerful influence of the theory of imagination stated by the English Romantic Movement. Such influence was reflected in their poetic creativity more than their critical comments. Therefore, I find it necessary to sum up the English Romantics’ view of imagination before dealing with the topic of imagination in Arabic romantic poetry.

For Blake the imaginative life is the only real life, for man’s imagination fully creates reality through an interpretative perception of it. “All things Exist in the Human Imagination,” he states, and “Mental things are alone Real... Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought” (Cited in Engell 244). Coleridge’s theory of imagination is given in its fullest exposition in his *Biographia Literaria* which was written in 1815 and published in 1817. In chapter XIII, he draws a clear distinction between fancy and imagination. For imagination he says:

*The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (202)*

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge find in Nature a sanction or archetype for the poetic fusion of novelty and truth. This movement to nature as guide and authority, so typical of Wordsworth
in all of his thinking, is fundamental to his concept of imagination. He refers to all serious
writing as ‘works of imagination and sentiment’ (F rust 120). Keats understands imagination to
be the supreme active principle in poetic composition. An analysis of his utterances on the
subject reveals that he has reached two significant conclusions as to the nature and function of
the imagination. First, imagination as an instrument of intuitive insight is the most authentic
guide to ultimate truth; second, imagination in its highest form is a generative force, in itself
creative of essential reality. Shelley’s theory of imagination is part of his theory of poetry which
is explored clearly in his Defence of Poetry (1821) in which he distinguishes between reason and
imagination. They both work, according to Shelley, with the materials supplied by sense, but
only imagination has the power of making new combinations, or discovering new truth.
Imagination is the poetic faculty, and by its power the artist creates what is new. He concludes,
“Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow
to the substance” (42).

The focal point in discussing the practice of imagination in Arabic Romantic poetry is the
poets’ genius of image-making which fundamentally distinguishes them from their predecessors.
Arabic poetry in the period that preceded the Romantics had been sunk in a net of decoration and
the image had been regarded primarily as a rhetorical figure added to a poem as an extraneous
ornament. But with the romantic re-orientation image became a central position in the creative
process as the tangible expression of the self. The technique of image-making conducted by the
Romantics can be identified by three chief characteristics: their use of ‘symbol’, their preference
for certain types of imagery such as personification and metaphor, and their focus on the
interplay of nature and soul.
The poetry of Shukri shows his belief in the role of imagination in perceiving not only the surface, but what lies behind the surface, which gives the poet the capacity for seeing and hearing differently. With this imaginative power he draws a unique image of the interrelationship between his beloved and his poetry:

My poetry is a sea whose shore is you,

But it is foreclosed by the stone.

I hope that eternity could give me a glimpse

Of your fresh beauty which got sparks

To lighten the whole life from your donation and face. *(Diwan Shukri 493)*

He portrays the beauty of his beloved as a gift of Nature which carries some of its powerful agents to change the surrounding world:

O sun of our loveliness life!

Our fruits get ripened in the light of your beauty.

...

You perfumed the garment of the whole life

And everything you touch is changed into flower. *(Diwan Shukri 494)*

In a sequence of metaphors, Shukri was successful in fusing the subjective with the objective, the inner with the outer worlds, and the human with the natural to form an unforgettable image of a lover who is waiting for the moment of meeting his sweetheart:
I thought my tears are villages and longing is a resort.

I deemed my heart a flame overcome by melancholy.

I impulsively ran into love with no futility.

What shall I say if I'm passed by the follower?

People go to water source to save themselves

From rancor, but this water comes to me. (*Diwan Shukri* 81)

By his pure imagination, Naji is able to attract us to the secret of the harmony between the spirit of the poet and the phenomena of Nature around him. In the following lines he shows his power in transforming the material world to his personal vision and thus creating a new living world:

The night was purified by horizon

And flowered by God's creativity.

A pleasant breeze spread through it

Oh, it was like a perfumed garden.

"O my God, for whom did you beautify it?" I said.

"For whom those blazing chandeliers?

Then some dimness crossed the horizon;

It was clouds creeping across the moon's face.
I warned the moon: “Pay attention to the portents.

The halo seems to be in danger.

Don’t reveal the light table to them.

Don’t reveal it to the caliginous blackness.”

The thunder giggled and sardonically boomed

As if it is a drunken reveler. (Nights of Cairo 19-20)

Al-Shabbi, who sharply criticizes the way imagination has been used in the history of Arabic poetry, is the closest amongst the Romantics to the theory and practice of imagination in English Romanticism. His poetry is primarily characterized by a net of condensed symbolic images, sometimes with a complex content stratified in several layers which forms difficulty for the reader to enter into the meanings those images convey. In his poem “The Small Eternity”, for instance, he creates a whole universe inside the heart and symbolically embodies the changeability of the human feelings and sensations through discussing the mutability of that universe:

Inside the heart lie worlds within worlds,

Each one like *Irâm*¹ when the dawn reveals it.

How many universes teeming with people

---

¹ The poet indicated that *Irâm* refers to a mythical town built in the tank of the paradise; its palaces are made of gold, pearls and corals.
And suns glowing over them!

...

The heart has forests, mountains,

Its own winds and peaks.

Streams bubble up from caves within you,

Unharnessed, undetained tearing away the blossoming branches

As the flow, the untouched roses,

Singing rain or vagrant bees. *Songs of Life*, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 113)

In the second stanza, the poet uses personification to sanctify his belief in the interference between the external Nature and the human nature:

Heart, how often did the whole world walk across you,

Then disappear, leaving death behind?

How many palaces of song were built around you

Only to crumble down!

The past and present wheel on,

Suns and submits depart.

And the heart is a wide-open ocean

Where joy and pain float, but never remain.
How much the heart has had its fill!

Dancing untiringly with life,

How often it dressed itself in the robes of night,

In mornings hemmed with mist;

How many dreams it wove into gowns

That the nights shredded, smiling. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 114-115)

The poet’s attempt at engendering a phenomenological process of self-transformation in the above lines is reaffirmed in his poem ‘The Poet’s Heart’, almost with similar images. The transplantation of the physical phenomena of Nature in a private world of idealism occupying the human soul shows the poet’s strong sense of perception and imaginative intensity:

Even death and the phantoms of life

Find places to dance

In my deep expansive heart.

Right here, night’s terrors rage,

Here, the fantasies of roses flutter,

Here, echoes of extinction cry out,

Here, melodies of immortality are played.

Right here, dream, love, and sorrow
Walk together in a procession of glorious song.

Here, the dawn awakens and reawakens,

Here, night lasts forever,

Here, a thousand seas tumble,

Ever rebellious, toward unknown shores.

Here, every minute, the images of life

Are erased and reappear. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 131-133)

In his masterpiece ‘The Will of life’, Al-Shabbi requests his mother ‘the earth’ to teach his frustrated and careless fellowships lessons of integrity, freedom and ambition. Hence, ‘the earth’ is depicted as the symbol of force, authority and eternity:

So the sap of youth churned in my heart

As other winds raged within my breast.

I bent my head, listening to the clap of thunder,

The chime of the draft, the cadence of the rain.

When I asked the earth,

“Mother, do you hate mankind?”

She replied, “I bless those with ambition,

Those who brave danger –
I curse the ones not keeping step with time,

Who are content to live a fossil life.

The vibrating universe loves what moves

And despises the dead, forgetting their greatness.

The horizon hugs no stiffened bird

Nor does the bee kiss a withered flower.

Not even graves would hold the dead,

Save for the tenderness in my motherly heart!

Woe to one not longing for life!

Let him beware the curse of extinction!” (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 131-133)

4.3.8 Patriotism

Patriotism or ‘love of one’s country’ is a common sense and an essential part of our humanity. It is natural for any individual once he becomes aware of himself as part of a large national community to develop a sense of belonging and thus concern himself to a certain extent with the fate of his nation as a whole. But when the term is associated with politics it becomes more complicated and may have various explanations. The Arab Romantics avoided the political complications of the term in their writing and adhered to its pure and simple denotation, namely, love and pride of one’s homeland. Though Al-Aqqad wrote two articles in his book Al-Fusool
The Seasons) about patriotism as a concept, his conclusion assures the Romantics' view:

“Whatever said by the historians, there is something common in all nations and lands that is the people’s feeling of pride of their homeland. How does this feeling come to the individual? What are its causes? There are different answers to these questions but they all affirm the fact of the existence of that feeling; and this is only what concerns us” (213). Jayyusi, may be, refers to this when she states; “Arab Romanticism came into being with the rise of Arab nationalism, but is not identified with it” (361).

The Arab Romantic poets did not write much about patriotism. However, their poems on the subject are amazing. Mutran, to start with, sincerely declares his love of his country in beautiful lines:

O my country, my heart is fond of you;

It is, indeed, a burning lovesickness.

Whenever your people have severe situations,

My love gets stronger and stronger. (240)

Shukri addresses his country (Egypt) reminding her of the glorious position she had occupied at ancient times:

You were the origin of sciences when the mind was a child.

You were the mother of heaven when it was newborn.

Will that time of majesty come back?

But how can the past of this life return? (Diwan Shukri 217)
Naji expresses his longing for Egypt, after a long stay abroad, despite the cruel and difficult life he has faced there:

I exclaimed when Egypt appeared to my eyes:

"O friends that is Egypt; O friends.

Does it catch me though it broke my wing?

Does it attract me though it tightened my tie? (Nights of Cairo 66)

He praises those soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their country's independence:

The hero of heroes from the pyramid land

Wore the military uniform, won and gained.

How do you shed your tears after him,

While he has a smiling face?

How does anyone of you mourn

A martyr covered by the national flag. (Nights of Cairo 160-161)

He, then, uses a religious discourse to blame those who are hesitant to fight against the colonizer, claiming:

Yes, this is the day to sacrifice Egypt.

Egypt is the mihrab and the big heaven.

We swear to turn our faces towards her love
And exhaust, for it, our patience, effort and age. (164)

In his late life, Naji emphasizes the role of education in enhancing the patriotic feeling towards Egypt among the new generation:

We demand youths who are clutched to Egypt
And defend it against the strange enemy.

We demand children who are richly fed with patriotism.

The child’s first utterance has to be ‘my home country’,
Like that of my father and mother.

They are fed with the love of their country
When they are in their wombs,
So that ‘Egypt’ will be the birth cry. (*Beyond the Clouds* 143)

Abu Shadi considers his motherland as a real mother who deserves love and sacrifice:

I’m the son of Egypt.

I’m the mourner of her grief.

I give eternity to her secrets with my melodies.

It is me who forgets his sufferings
To express her in my sorrows. (Cited in Al-Farfuri 167)
He declares his support for celebrating all national days because they are good occasions to teach the new generation the meaning of patriotism:

Join the rows in groups with songs;

And leave the youths adorn the festival

Whose hearts are beating with the love of their country.

Who are raising its flag so high in the sky. (Cited in Al-Farfuri 176)

The patriotic enthusiasm of Jawdat prevents him from celebrating his love with his sweetheart. He finds it impossible even to think of such things while the people of his country are fighting for freedom and independence:

Are you asking why my heart is broken?

O darling, no time for love.

Don’t ask me about our love story

And better think of the entire situation.

I lost all feeling of longing

When I saw the people’s adversity.

Is it right to love while my country is under attack

By an enemy deeply inserted like a spine in the arm? (Allah, the Nile, and Love 35)
Has some witchcraft afflicted you?

Or do you see yourself

As a mocking giant? (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 76)

But he continues his struggle against the carelessness and backwardness of his community as he strongly believes that:

He who is not embraced by the longing for life

Will evaporate in vacancy and be forgotten——

Grief to anyone not aroused by the breathing desire for life!

Let him beware the slap of oblivion!

This is what life said to me,

This is how its spirit spoke. (Songs of Life, Trans. Jayyusi and Shihab 131)

4.4 Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, one can safely claim that the eastern version of Romanticism, which is the focus of the present study, coincided with what Jayyusi calls ‘the poetic moment’ and ‘the socio-political moment’ to represent itself, with diligence and confidence, as the Arabic member of the Romantic family; bearing both the major symptoms of the universal Romantic tendency and the distinguishing features which gave it the credit of originality. It shared English Romanticism, as discussed above, with certain characteristics such as the primacy of feeling, the new attitude to nature, the feelings of alienation from society, the veneration of love, the
yearning for harmony and beauty, the spirit of revolution, and the imaginative apprehension of experience. Yet, each movement has its own perspective in theory and practice.

My study of the poetics and poetry of Arabic Romanticism reveals the following. Firstly, the Arabic Romantic Movement began, just as its English counterpart, as a revolt against the flatness, rigidity, and hollow decoration of the neo-classical poem, calling for a new view of poetry. The aim here was to positively react to the changes that were taking place in the Arab World in the first half of the twentieth century. The first generation of the Arab Romantics, i.e. the members of the Diwan group, were highly enthusiastic about the eager need for development in the form and content of Arabic poetry. They initiated the movement with acute and high-pitched critical writings against the imitative school of poetry. Unfortunately, their creative writing did not match the level of change they were looking for; though the Romantic element remains prominent in their poems. Arabic Romanticism grew up rapidly with the poets of Apollo group and reached its maturity with its brilliant figure Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi. Secondly, Arabic Romantic poetry showed notable competence and richness in addressing certain basic needs in the human soul. Thirdly, despite the clear influence of English Romanticism, the Arab Romantics did not fall in the pitfall of blind imitation and were able to produce original texts which carry the culture and nature of Arabic literature.