CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Arabic Romanticism is a literary-cultural phenomenon that deserves a closer revisionary look. It has been summarily rejected as a mindless imitation of English Romanticism by critics and as a result, is often viewed as a movement that can at best furnish a good example of how the West can turn writers of a colonized culture into servile imitators of the West. This study is a modest attempt to offer a corrective view of Arabic Romanticism, a view that would provide the basis for a deeper engagement with literary movement that have attempted to negotiate with the literary production of the colonizer. The main objective of the thesis was to establish the originality of Arabic Romanticism by challenging the views that charged the Arab writers with superficiality, simplicity, and blind imitation of English Romanticism.

Following Furst’s ‘family likeness’ approach the hypothesis of this study was built on three arguments i.e. 1) the universality of Romanticism. The study sought to do this by redefining Romanticism as a trend that had elements that were not determined by the immediate context of English Romanticism. 2) Romanticism as a literary movement is a tendency which can be found all the time in all cultures in specific contexts. In this sense, an overview of the contexts of English and Arabic Romanticsisms has been presented. 3) Arabic Romanticism is a member of the Romantic family tree which carries its own distinguishing features and elements. One chapter has been devoted for each argument and this concluding chapter will sum up the conclusions of these chapters aiming to highlight the main argument of the thesis i.e., the originality of Arabic Romanticism which, though influenced by English Romanticism, has quenched a lot from the rich Arabic literary heritage.
5.1 Romanticism Elsewhere

Chapter two of this study highlighted the different descriptions of Romanticism in order to identify areas of consensus. The focus of this chapter was on the following question: Is Romanticism a concept or a Movement? In other words, is it exclusively European or broadly universal? And if it is restricted to the European Movements in the nineteenth century, how can we understand similar literary attitudes in different non-European places at different times?

Most of the studies on Romanticism, which actually started early in the beginning of the twentieth century focused on presenting a clear and comprehensive definition of the phenomenon which emerged in Europe in around the first half of the nineteenth century. To make the task easier the writers of these studies preferred to deal with it as a pan-European literary and philosophical tendency and thus it has to be considered as a ‘movement’ rather than a ‘concept’.

However, some studies approved, explicitly or implicitly, the universal nature of Romanticism. Swigget, for example, finds the romantic element in the legends of the Celtic tradition and the stories of Sheherazade and Sinbad in Arabic literature. J. G. Robertson generalizes that Romanticism in all lands stands for a conciliation of life and poetry. Kaufman insists that Romanticism cannot be limited to one literature and thus the best way to understand it is through comparative method. Even Morse Peckham who confined himself to historical Romanticism distinguishes it from what he calls ‘general Romanticism’. Similarly, Halsted considers Romanticism as a name for interrelated and similar ideas and attitudes not only in arts but also in religion, history, and politics.
What I have concluded in chapter two is that despite the diversity of views on the Romantic phenomenon, they all agree that there is gravity at its core which joins all the Romantic poets and movements. In my reading of the scholarship of Romanticism I came out with the suggestion that the core of Romanticism is composed of three essential elements which can be found in all Romantic Movements with different degrees: rebellion, Nature, and a vision of the ideal.

5.2 Arabic and English Romanticisms: Contextual Resemblances

Chapter three was devoted to discuss the contexts of both English and Arabic Romanticisms hoping to find out to what extent Arabic Romantic poets experienced political, social, economic, and intellectual conditions similar to their English fellows. My aim in this chapter was to prove that the emergence of Arabic Romanticism was due to internal factors and the English influence was, indeed, subordinate. The result of this investigation showed obvious similarities in the political, socio-economic and intellectual contexts of both movements.

5.2.1 The Political Context

The political situation of the Romantic era in English and Arabic contexts shows a multiple aspects of resemblances, albeit the difference in time. In both cases we find political turmoil, revolutions, and wars which impelled the Romantics into similar experiences of inner and outer conflicts. The British Occupation of Egypt, the 1919 Revolution, and the effect of the World War I in Egypt are experiences analogical to the American Revolution, the French Revolution and Bonaparte’s imperial ambitions in England.

The American War of Independence had a vital role in creating a new language of ‘rights’ in England. The rights of men, women, slaves, and even animals were discussed and America became, in the eyes of British radicals and poets, the land of freedom. It inspired Coleridge and
encouraged him to plan immigration to America where he imagined a commune-style life based on principles of equality, with the community equally sharing wealth and property. But the influence of the French Revolution on the English Romantics was more radical. It first inspired them to address themes of democracy and human rights and to consider the function of revolution as a form of change. As soon as those expectations were frustrated in later years, the Romantic poets used the spirit of revolution to help characterize their poetic philosophies.

The Romantics' reaction towards the political changes, which was mostly marked by a conflict between hope and frustration, has a similar copy in the Arabic scene. The British occupation of Egypt carried out under the promise of saving the country from bankruptcy, reforming the administration, setting up a government working upon human principles, and to withdraw from the country as soon as such a government was made stable and progressive, was a big trick. The situation turned worse during and after World War I and the Egyptians discovered that the British cared exclusively for their selfish interest and their authority was based only on military power. The process of resistance grew rapidly until it reached its climax in the revolution of 1919 led by the Egyptian national leader Sa'ad Zaghloul which very soon failed to achieve the Egyptians' dream of independence. The Arab Romantics were in the heart of these events and deeply influenced by their consequences.

5.2.2 The Socio-economic Context

The investigation of the socio-economic contexts of both English and Arabic Romantic Movements shows at least three points of comparison: the intrusion and development of industry, the growth of the middle class, and the effect of wars on the peoples' life. In England, the Industrial Revolution helped in inventing new means of producing goods more efficiently and
cheaply. It further supported the society with more markets and more employees for a workforce to face the challenge of the steep rise in population. In agriculture the enormous rise in rents and the high price of corn during the French war gave the farmers the chance to share in the prosperity of the landlords which then increased their wealth so fast and as a result represented a great social revolution, a change in the balance of political power and in the relative position of classes. Similarly, a new class of great capitalist employers in the manufacturing world made enormous fortunes. The effect of these changes on the working class was terrible: inadequate wages, long hours of work under harsh discipline in sordid conditions, and the large-scale employment of women and children which compelled them to form labor unions.

Likewise, the growth of industrialization in Egypt was the most influential factor in the economic scene in the beginning of the twentieth century. Just as the Industrial Revolution in England, industrialization had both positive and negative effects on the Arab world. Though it offered more vacancies for jobless people and opened new markets to the farmers, it, at the same time, drastically classified the society into poor labor and rich landlords and investors. The working class struggled hard to improve their cost of living and defend their rights against the unjust treatment of their masters. In both the contexts we find unfairness, cruelty, exploitation resulting in fear, anxiety over the future, among the poorer sections of the society.

5.2.3 The Intellectual Context

The eras of the Romantic Movements in both the English and Arabic contexts were determined by what may be called an ‘intellectual crisis’, despite its different causes and manifestations. The English Romantics pitted themselves as against Enlightenment and Age of Reason which, as they considered, was annoying people by stifling the spirit, passion and
morality. The Enlightenment introduced a new philosophy to the European mind suggesting that people should question the didactic authority even in religion. It, therefore, challenged Christianity, the solid foundation of the European society for centuries, and weakened the impact of the church on individuals. Though the empirical and skeptical approach of the Enlightenment thinkers encompassed many scientific advances and paved the way for the Industrial Revolution, their goal to attain a perfect society could not be achieved. In response to the weakness of the argument of the established religious institutions and the failure of the Enlightenment to give answers to many mysterious questions about human nature, life and the universe, Romanticism created a new vision of reality. Religion has been treated by the Romantics only as a subject for artistic creativity just like other ancient traditions in which they no longer believed. They claimed that reality is being falsified by the mere use of reason and objectivity which, by and large, break it up into disconnected lifeless entities, and the best way to perceive reality is to participate in the subject of knowledge instead of viewing it from outside through intuition, imagination and subjective feeling. The enlightenment's view of the universe as mechanical and run by fixed rules has been replaced by the Romantics' belief that it is in fact organic and grew in accord with acts of will.

In the Arabic context, the intellectual crisis by the turn of the twentieth century was deeper and more complicated. It was related to the question of the cultural identity of the Arab society raised by many Arab thinkers, writers and activists under the pressure of Western colonization, the collapse of Islamic Ottoman Empire and the rise of nationalism. The social conflict between Arabism and Islamism, modernization and traditionalism, Westernization and nationalism, science and religion, influence and originality... etc, was the major element of the literary and cultural scene at that time. The Arab Romantics tried to avoid such kind of polarization by
following the great Arab thinker Muhammad Abduh who maintains that religion must not be made into a barrier, separating men’s spirits from God-given abilities in the knowledge of the truth of the contingent world. He assures that Islam is at the core of Arabs’ culture, a fact which cannot be ignored but it should not be used to hinder the modern culture with its scientific developments. On this basis, the Arab Romantics opened their hearts to Western thoughts and literary productions. They held the view that cultural identity would not be affected negatively by Western influence as it could benefit from it to open a new gate to develop the Arabs’ rich literary heritage in poetry which still was a source of inspiration for them.

5.3 The Arabic Literary Legacy

Despite their attempts at modernizing Arabic poetry to fit with the changes created by the direct encounter with and influence of Western literatures, the Arab Romantics were aware that such difficult process should not lead to any kind of disconnection from their culture, tradition, and literary heritage. In fact, most of them had a good knowledge of old Arabic literature, particularly its golden age in the Abbasid period, which is clearly shown in their critical writings on the major literary figures of that period. Abbas Al-Aqqad, for instance, wrote about Jameel Buthainah, Omar Bin Abi Rabiah, Ibn Al-Roomi, Abu Nuas and many other poets in his series of critical books. His friend in Diwan group Ebrahim Al-Mazini wrote profound critical essays on Al-Mutanabi and Ibn Al-Roomi in his book Hasad Al-Hasheem (Chaff Harvest) (1999). The leader of the group Abdurrahman Shukri published many critical essays on Arabic poetry in different journals and magazines collected after his death in a book entitled Studies in Arabic Poetry in 1994. In the first part of the book we have chapters on Abu Nuas, Al-Mutanabi, Ibn Al-Roomi, Abu Tamam, Al-Buhturi, and Abu Al-Ala’ a Al-Ma’ ari. The second part discusses some themes in old Arabic poetry. Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi lived in a house that could be
considered as a poetic forum where his father used to gather the respected poets and writers to recite poetry and make serious discussions on Arabic literature, past and present (Al-Dusuqi 1970, 148-149). Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabbi's knowledge of Arabic literature is reflected in his famous critical book *The Arab Poetic Imagination*.

Robin C. Ostle admits the evident impact of the Arabic literary heritage on the Arab Romantics despite their ambition of modernizing Arabic poetry. Though the title of his article "Three Egyptian Poets of "Westernization": 'Abd al-Rahman Shukri, Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini, and Mahmud 'Abbas al-'Aqqad" indicates a straightforward accusation of the first generation of the Arab Romantics as being part of the westernization process of Arabic literature, which consequently implies their unquestionable adoption of Western literature, the practical part of proving his assumption derives him at the end to acknowledge the poets' excelling ability of making balance between their respect of tradition and their admiration of the English theory of poetry. One of his last paragraphs says:

The point is that when Shukri, al-Mazini, and al-Aqqad were faced with the ideas of Coleridge, Wordsworth, or Hazlitt, they were able to relate these to their tradition of poetry in meaningful way. When Shukri writes about the imagination, he quotes lines from Abu Al-Ala Al-Ma’arri and al-Buhturi in order to prove his point. When al-Aqqad or al-Mazini achieve passages of inspiring creative criticism to demonstrate the sort of poetry they want to see, they choose their examples from Bashshar or Ibn al-Rumi. The ideas they took over from the West did not lead them to reject their tradition but rather to enrich and deepen it: this Westernization of a valuable, desirable nature. They were able to look back with affection upon their own old poets but to do so in a way that enabled them to feel that they were being modern and progressive. (372)
Accordingly, the rich literary legacy of Arabic poetry enhanced the poetic experience of the Arab Romantic poets and gave them confidence to inaugurate a new trend of poetry showing a subtle balance between the influence of English literature and the inspiration of tradition. The threads of tradition can be traced more easily while dealing with themes like ‘love’ and ‘nature’ which had been glorified in some periods of Arabic literary history.

5.3.1 Nature

Although Nature as a theme in Arabic poetry does not hold the importance it attained in the literatures of the West, it still has a remarkable place in the Arabic literary history, at least during some periods. This study looked at two prominent schools of Nature poetry, namely, Sufi and Al-Andalus (Arab-Spain) poetry.

Under the influence of the Quran, the Sufis introduced a new outlook to Nature determined by mystic and philosophical dimensions. Their poetry expresses the poet’s yearning of a reunion with Allah – the beloved. Nature imagery in the Sufis’ poetry reflects the inspiration of the Quran on the poets who echoed its images in many occasions with their own interpretation of such images. The following lines by Umar Ibn Al-Faridh might be said to echo the Romantic pantheism of Wordsworth:

Even if he be absent; he is in every limb of my body;

In every delicate, clear, joyous essence;

In the tune of the melodic lute and flute

When they blend together in thrilling strain,
And in luxurious pasturage of gazelles in the coolness of twilight

And in the first rays of dawning;

In misty rains falling from a cloud on a carpet woven of flowers.

And where the breeze sweeps her train,

Guiding to me most fragrant attar and sweet dawn.

And when I kiss the lip of the cup, sipping the clear wine in pleasure and joy,

I knew no estrangement from my homeland when he was with me;

My mind was undisturbed where we were –

That place was my homeland while my beloved was present;

When the sloping dune appeared,

That was my halting place. (Al-Faridh, 151)

The poetry of Nature has another dominant stage in the history of Arabic poetry, namely the Andalusian Poetry. When the Arabs settled in Spain, they were fascinated by its endowed charming Nature, its green mountains, beautiful plains, abundant forests, and moderate weather. They have been excited by the twitter of the birds, the murmur of water, and the splendor of the landscape which then inspired their poets to produce the most beautiful Nature poetry of that time. Arabic poetry in Al-Andalus was synonymous with Nature poetry to the extent that whenever an Arab reader comes across Andalusian poetry an image of the beauty of Nature flashes in his mind. It is fair to state that, in terms of Nature, Andalusian poetry was the richest in
Arabic literary heritage and the most influential on the succeeding generations of poets. In the following lines which are used by María Rosa Menocal to introduce her chapter titled ‘Visions of Al-Andalus’ in *The Literature of Al-Andalus* (2000) the Andalusian poet Ibn Gabirol provides a wonderful description of Granada reminds us of Wordsworth’s ‘Daffodils’ or the first part of Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’:

> Come, spend a night in the country with me,
> My friend (you whom the stars above
> Would gladly call their friend),
> For winter’s finally over. Listen
> To the chatter of the doves and swallows!
> We’ll lounge beneath the pomegranates,
> Palm trees, apple trees,
> Under every lovely, leafy thing,
> And walk among the vines,
> Enjoy the splendid faces we will see,
> In a lofty palace built of noble stones.
> ...
> Then there were canals with does planted by them,
Does that were hollow, pouring water,

Sprinkling the plants planted in the garden-beds,

Casting pure water upon them,

Watering the myrtle-garden,

Treetops fresh and sprinkling,

And everything was fragrant as spices,

Everything as if it were perfumed with myrrh.

Birds were singing in the boughs,

Peering through the palm-fronds,

And there were fresh and lovely blossoms –

Rose, narcissus, saffron –

Each one boasting that he was the best,

(Though we thought everyone was beautiful).

The narcissuses said, “We are so white

We rule the sun and moon and stars!”

The doves complained at such talk and said,

“No, we are the princesses here!”
Just see our neck-rings,

With which we charm the hearts of men,

Dearer far than pearls.” (Cited in and translated by Menocal, 1-2)

5.3.2 Love

_Uthari_ love poetry is a significant phenomenon in the history of Arabic literature. _Uthari_ love in Arabic tradition is a chaste love which rarely deals with external physical appearance of the beloved or any sexual gestures. In contemporary Arab society people still call chaste love “_uthari_ love”. It is named after the ‘Utharah’ tribe which supplied this kind of poetry with many famous poets. Members of this tribe were generally said to have tender hearts and to seek after a true love that may lead to death. Similarly, the love stories depicted in _uthari_ poetry usually end up with the death of the lovers.

Though it started with few cases in the pre-Islamic poetry, it matured as a remarkable literary genre during the Umayyad period (7th-8th centuries). The major figures of this genre such as Majnoon Layla, Qais Lubna and Jameel Buthaynah were known for their dramatic love stories and unique poetry.

In the _uthari_ love tradition the lover-poet loves only one woman, devoting his life and poetry to her and rarely composing verses in another sub-genre such as panegyric or satire. He portrayed his beloved as an ideal woman who is incomparable and declares himself as a martyr of love. The recurring theme in _uthari_ love poetry is suffering and torment till death.
The typical components of the uthari poets’ sentimental tales are exquisitely summed up by Al-Harthi in her PhD thesis “I Have Never Touched Her: The Body in Al-Ghazal Al-‘Udhri” (2010):

[T]he lover meets his beloved either during their childhood or when they used to tend their families’ flocks of sheep in the desert, or they meet as adults in a sudden encounter. They fall deeply in a love which continues until death and the lover consequently composes poetry describing his fatal love for his beloved. However, his beloved’s parents turn down his marriage proposal, due to the disgrace that his verses have brought upon both their daughter and themselves – this, in spite of the fact that they are from the same tribe and sometimes from the same family. In some cases, demand for an exorbitant dowry prevents the marriage, so the lover goes to seek wealth while the parents force their daughter to marry another man, who generally has fewer good qualities than her lover. Then the beloved travels away with her husband. Her marriage intensifies her lover’s passion, so the broken heart poet chases his beloved and recites beautiful poetry which circulates far and wide, describing her beauty and his suffering. He continues in his endeavours to visit her after her marriage and they remain faithful to each other until death. As a result of the poet’s insistence on seeing his beloved and composing poetry about her, her parents complain to the ruler who decrees that killing him is permissible. The ruler exiles him and the exiled poet wanders in the desert. In some accounts, his passion leads him into madness, but whenever he remembers his beloved, poetic inspiration comes. Eventually, the lovers die soon after one another and – in some accounts – are buried next to each other. (7)
The uthari love poetry has always been, and still is, one of the most influential traditions in Arabic literature, popular among the erudite and common readers alike. It appeals more to those who are interested in emotional and sentimental poems and stories. Thus, I can guess that the Arab Romantics found in it a wealthy heritage to enrich their romantic tendency and at the same time give them a feeling of independent identity.

5.4 Uniqueness of Arabic Romanticism

Chapter four, which discusses the poetics and poetry of Arabic Romantic Movement in Egypt boldly stakes the claim that Arabic Romanticism occupies a privileged position in the Romantic family tree and accordingly shares the common Romantic features with other remarkable Romanticisms, particularly English Romanticism, which is its spiritual ancestor. However, like any family member, it has exclusive characteristics which distinguish it from other Romanticisms and reflect its uniqueness and originality.

One of the major distinguishing qualities is that Arabic Romanticism was mostly an artistic movement which directed itself from the beginning towards building a new theory of poetry and, in fact, had little to deal with philosophy. Though the Romantics' poetic writings reflect a deep vision of life and numerous philosophical meditations, they did not busy themselves in theorizing their ideas as a new intellectual trend; and, therefore, their impact in the cultural sphere was limited in comparison to the English Romantics. Locke, Kant and Rousseau, without whose epistemological frameworks British Romanticism would have been unimaginable, have no Arab equivalents. Admitting its lack of indigenous philosophical basis, Jayyusi declares that the Romantic Movement in Arabic literature came about without the backing of a philosophy; "it simply happened and it is, in fact, one of the simplest Romantic Movements in the history of any
poetry" (361). Khouri (1971) refers directly to this vital difference. "At the root of European romanticism", he argues, "was the belief or, more precisely, the "religious" enthusiasm for the idea that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities, and if society can be arranged by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will be realized and "progress" will be achieved" (135). In England, and as best illustrated by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron with whose works the Arab Romantics seemed to be acquainted, Romanticism was basically a comprehensive revolt against the established order in all fields of thought, taste, and expression. Its social and literary aspects were for the most part blended together in full harmony. "Transplanted to Egyptian soil," Khouri states, "the European equation of romanticism with comprehensive revolt was changed into a much narrower one of romanticism with literary revolt against the formalism of neoclassical poetry" (135). Thus the Arab Romantic poets and critics confined their revolutionary motivation of change to the reformation of Arabic poetry and the destruction of the rigid principles and constraints of the neoclassical school of poetry.

There is evidence to suggest that the Arab Romantics deliberately avoided the philosophical dimension of English Romanticism and focused on its artistic value. They, for example, acknowledged their admiration of the revolutionary ideas of Shelley but when some of them came to translate some of his works into Arabic they either omitted or mistranslated any of Shelley’s atheist proclamations (see Ra’oof’s Shelley in Arabic Literature in Egypt). This is part of the cultural resistance, an important aspect of any anti-colonialism stance. The Romantics were eager to restrict their new critical views and poetic themes within the paradigm of the Arab culture which has Islam at its core. They held the belief that the intellectual and philosophical ground of English Romanticism could not be accepted in their society and holding such ideas
would destroy core of their identity. Even in the poems which reflect the climax of their rebellious ego, we find the poets’ consistent effort to adhere to the principles of Islam. The poets were anxious to explain away the unavoidable anti-Islamic connotation. Abbas Al-Aqqad, as discussed in chapter four, wrote an introduction to his poem “Story of a Devil” and so did Abdurrahman Shukri for his poem “The Rebellious Angel”. Saleh Jawdat, who was the bravest to attack the established religious attitudes through the mask of a monk, could not end his poem “The Rebellious Monk” without declaring repentance and acceptance of what he has tried to deny:

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 English Romanticism, the Arabic Romantic Movement could not completely replace Neoclassicism in the literary scene due perhaps to the nature of Arabic poetry which always has a distinguished position in the hearts of the Arabs even in its classical form. In this respect, the Arab Romantic poets failed to get rid of the classical mono-rhymed and mono-meteric form of the Arabic poem. Another justification is indicated by Khouri:

It is true that the romanticists rejected in principle the neoclassicists’ concept of the poet’s task as that of searching for recapturing, and dramatizing a specific political or social “occasion” and tried to redefine poetry as the expression of their own personal
experiences. They nevertheless continued to share with the neoclassicists the medieval view of poetry as an intellectual luxury. Furthermore, the contemptuous attitude of the medieval writers and poets to the so-called "popular" or "vulgar" themes seemed to continue to govern the outlook of both the neoclassic and romantic groups of Egyptian poets. (138)

Another difference is that the Arab Romantic critics attached more importance to some minor elements of Romantic poetry. As shown in the section of the poetics of Arabic Romanticism in chapter four, the organic unity of the poem was one of the pet preoccupations of the Arab critics. If we represent their theory of poetry through a pyramid figure, 'the organic unity of the poem' occupies a place which is higher than imagination, creativity, and language. Perhaps they focused on this element because of the nature of Arabic poetry which is usually monorhymed and monometric. They wanted to prove that the unity of the Arabic poem does not only lie in its form, but also in its content.

In conclusion, I am convinced that investigating Arabic Romanticism closely and thoroughly helped establish my hypothesis that it is an autonomous, even original trend in Arab art. It came out of the heart of the Arab society representing its moods, emotions, thoughts, crises, and interaction with the Other. It is a landmark in the history of Arabic literature, rich enough to invite more critical investigations and research. This study has confined itself to Arabic Romanticism of the eastern region and has consciously left out the Arab-American Romantic poets, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Ameen Rihani, Ellia Abu Madhi, and Mikhail Naimi, who established the Pen-Bond Assembly to express themselves and represent their new attitude towards Arabic poetry. A study of these movements was beyond the scope of this thesis. Their attitude to art too was at bottom, what has come to be known as the Romantic view of art. The
claims made in this study are quite likely to be borne out by analyses of these and other parallel movements. The Arab-American Romantics were aware of the Romantic Movement in the Arab World and, to an extent, inspired some of its young poets like Al-Shabbi and Ahmad Zaki Abu Shadi. It would be rewarding to study this school of Arabic Romantic poetry to arrive at a comprehensive view of Arabic Romanticism.