ABSTRACT

The emergence of Arabic Romanticism in the first half of the twentieth century has given Arabic literature a new dimension in the domains of thought and art. It played a significant role in revolutionizing the Arab consciousness, building new channels for cultural exchange and thus pushing the society ahead to accept the principle of change as an indispensable move in the process of modernizing Arabic literature which is considered by the Romantics as a basic means to defend their cultural identity. It undauntingly declared its revolt against the classical form and subject matter of poetry breaking down its resistance to change and, consequently highlighting the necessity for a new view of poetry to cope with the radical socio-cultural changes at that time. Unfortunately, this unprecedented role of Arabic Romanticism has not received satisfactory investigations by critics and scholars. On the contrary, some of them underestimate the contribution of Arabic Romanticism; even endorse the charge that it was a mere imitation of the European Romantic Movement. Paying scant attention to its internal dynamics, they doubt the Movement's uniqueness and originality. The main purpose of this study is to bring Arabic Romanticism into focus by highlighting its feature as an original literary phenomenon coming out of the womb of the Arab society and nurtured by the crucial changes in its social, political and economic contexts in the first half of the twentieth century. In five chapters the thesis explores the Arabic version of Romanticism focusing on the Romantic Movements centered in Egypt, the Diwan School and Apollo Group.

The introductory chapter investigates the importance of Arabic Romanticism in the history of Arabic literature and its significant role in revolutionizing Arabic poetry in releasing it from the classical constraints of form and content. It presents a brief survey of the scholarship of the Arabic Romantic Movement to establish that these studies make little effort to defend its
originality against the charge of being a carbon copy of English Romanticism. The main objective of the thesis is stated in this chapter.

Chapter two is a close reading of the Western understanding and interpretation of 'Romanticism' as a phenomenon prevailing Europe in the nineteenth century. The vagueness and complexity of the term 'Romanticism' has always been a big challenge for scholars to come arrive at a clear and specific definition of the Movement. Though they acknowledge such difficulty, they continue to perform a variety of definitions from different perspectives. The aim of this chapter is to bring into focus the question of the universal nature of 'Romanticism' which exceeds time and place. Unfortunately, the majority of the studies discussed in this chapter spend their energies on defining the phenomenon which emerged in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century paying less attention to the universal dimension or the global relevance of the term 'Romanticism'. Fortunately, scholars do acknowledge that Romanticism has something of a core, concede that it as a 'concept' (universal) rather than a 'movement' (confined to Europe).

Chapter three explores the context of Arabic Romanticism with a view to demonstrating the argument that Romanticism is a literary phenomenon that is born out of the human tendency to negotiate with any major changes in the social and personal realms. For this purpose, it starts with a general overview on the context of English Romanticism holding the assumption that the context of Arabic Romanticism should be discussed alongside that of English to explore the analogous traits in politics, culture, economics and literature in the two societies. Obviously, the discussion shows that the eras of the Romantic Movements in both English and Arabic contexts share a multiple aspects of analogical conditions such as the political turmoil, revolutions, and
wars; the intrusion and development of industry, the growth of the middle class; the cultural and intellectual debates.

Chapter four is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the poetics of Arabic Romanticism which reflects what the Romantics considered as the nature and function of great poetry. It examines the vital changes the Romantic poet-critics introduced into the Arabic classical theory of poetry in both form and content. The second section deals with the poetry of Arabic Romantic Movement in an attempt to show its maturity and originality. It tries to substantiate, through an analysis of the major poetic themes discussed in this chapter like alienation, death, melancholy, rebellion, love, nature, and patriotism, that despite the clear influence of English Romanticism, the Arab Romantics did not fall into the trap of blind imitation and were able to produce original texts which carry the stamp of Arab culture.

Chapter five, the conclusion, attempts to underline the contextual resemblances between the English and Arabic Romantic Movements, on the one hand, and sum up the differential elements of Arabic Romanticism, on the other hand, to maintain its uniqueness and originality upholding the main argument of the thesis. It further sheds light on the significant role of the Arabic literary heritage in the poetic formation of the Romantic canon. It also suggests the direction for further research.